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Organizational attractiveness after identity threats of crises: how potential employees anticipate social identity

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how organizations shape potential employees' social identity prior to joining the organization. This is relevant in light of growing demands for knowledge workers together with a lack of knowledge about the determinants of employer attractiveness for this group. Our study uses different organizational crises as identity-threatening events and extends current research by showing *how* such events influence potential employees' anticipations about social identity, as well as their perceptions of the organization's attractiveness. Empirical evidence from our scenario-based experiments in the United Kingdom and the United States shows that identity changes occurring from organizational crises reduce organizational attractiveness and that anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem mediate this relationship. The effects become stronger with increasing crisis responsibility. More surprisingly, our qualitative data indicate that certain forms of crises can also attract certain types of employees by triggering organizational compassion, engagement to help the organization recover, and beliefs in learning and future improvements.

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Introduction

In recent years, scholars have increasingly discussed social identification in organizations (Ashforth et al., 2008; Brickson, 2013) showing how individuals derive part of their social identity from their employers (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals tend to classify themselves and others in social categories. This classification contributes to individuals' personal self-concept, i.e., to their identity definition. As the organization that one works for is an important basis for categorization and thus strongly influences one's self-concept (Dutton et al., 1994), individuals aim to work for organizations that are worthy targets of identification and thus positively influence their social identity (Brickson, 2013). Organizational identification, defined as a shared set of perceptions of *individuals* about an *organization*, is associated with increased job involvement, job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment and in- and extra-role-performance (Lee et al., 2015).

Banks et al. (2016) argue that social identity concerns also influence the attraction to organizations, as not only instrumental attributes of the job such as the perceived quality of its pay determine organizational attractiveness for job seekers but also more symbolic meanings such as the anticipated organizational identity that job seekers attach to potential employers. Due to the widespread shortage of talent that recruiters face in our knowledge-based economy (Mawdsley & Somaya, 2016), understanding the determinants of organizational attractiveness to job seekers including the role of anticipated social identity is crucial.

Our study uses different organizational crises as identity-threatening events to test *how* such events influence potential employees' anticipations about social identity, and their perceptions of the organization's attractiveness. While organizational identity was originally defined as the shared set of statements individuals perceive to be "core, distinctive, and *enduring* about the character of an organization" (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 63), our study considers organizational identity to be a *dynamic* notion, which organization members continuously redefine under conditions of change (Schultz & Hernes, 2013). The view of organizational identity as unstable over time seems ever more accurate considering recent crises that many well-known organizations with seemingly stable identities have been suffering from. For example, Volkswagen's core characteristics have long been safety, quality, and reliability (Nason et al., 2018). However, the emission scandal of 2015 (Davenport & Ewing, 2015) posed an identity threat by revealing actions that were inconsistent with Volkswagen's identity (Nason et al., 2018). Such identity threats have proven to change the perceived identity of organizations, with negative spillovers onto organization members' social identity (Brickson, 2013; Nason et al., 2018). Petriglieri (2015) found that the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil rig explosion and spill destabilized BP executives' identification with BP during and after the crisis, and that their reidentification was only effective if they had been involved in BP's response to the incident.

While these studies examine identity spillovers of organizational crises for in-group members, we test these effects on *potential* in-group members, i.e., individuals who are at the boundary of organizations. Unlike employees, job seekers have

not yet decided to become part of the organization. This positioning could lead to either larger or smaller effect sizes of organizational crises on (anticipated) organizational identity for job seekers than for employees. While employees identify more strongly with the organization than job seekers, which makes the effect of a crisis worse, they are also involved in organizational activities to respond to the crisis, which might weaken the negative influence of the identity threat (Petriglieri, 2015). Unlike employees, job seekers are outsiders with limited information about the characteristics of the potential employer and often rely on inference and signals to fill the knowledge gap (Banks et al., 2016).

This study examines how identity threats caused by organizational crises affect *potential* employees' perceptions of organizational attractiveness. We suggest that job seekers as potential employees consider the impact of the organizational crisis on their *anticipated* social identity – i.e., the social identity that they would expect for themselves if they enter an organization. Extending the work of Brickson (2013), according to which employees assess their self-continuity and self-esteem to determine the value of their membership in an organization for their social identity, we argue that an organizational crisis decreases potential employees' *anticipated* self-continuity and *anticipated* self-esteem, which ultimately decreases their perceptions of the organization's attractiveness as potential employer. We differentiate among three crisis types with increasing degrees of organizational responsibility: victim, accidental, and intentional crises. This differentiation is important, as we assume that the extent of the identity change will vary according to the type of the crisis.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Identity threats of organizational crises

According to Albert and Whetten (1985) and similar studies, the attributes within an organizational identity are central, enduring, and distinctive. However, there is a controversial debate about how enduring an organizational identity really is (Ashforth et al., 2008). Taking into account the internal and external stimuli (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), such as turbulent environments and interrelationships of identity and image, Gioia et al. (2000) have re-conceptualized organizational identity as a relatively dynamic notion that organization members can redefine. Given the increasing relevance of identity change (Clark et al., 2010) and identity threats (Piening et al., 2020) caused by events that “*call into question members' beliefs about central and distinctive attributes of an organization*” (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 433), we, too, understand an organization's identity as something that can be redefined by its members. Organizational identity is defined as organization members' shared cognitions of what the organization is based on its current features and behaviour (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Reger et al., 1994). Thus, organizational identity is the answer to “who we are as an organization” (Ashforth et al., 2008; Clark et al., 2010).

As this study is about identity threats arising from organizational crises, we define an organizational crisis as the perception of an event that threatens the expectations of relevant

stakeholders of the organization, influences the organization's performance (Bundy et al., 2017; Pfarrer et al., 2008), and reduces the organizations' perceived legitimacy (Coombs, 2010; Pfarrer et al., 2008). The extent to which a crisis influences the perceptions of stakeholders and damages its reputation depends on the degree of crisis responsibility that stakeholders attribute to the organization (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs, 2007).

Within his Situational Crisis Communication Theory, Coombs (2007) classifies crises into three categories, i.e., victim, accidental, and intentional crises. In victim crises, there is weak attribution of crisis responsibility, and the organization is also the victim of the crisis (e.g., product tampering by external parties or a natural disaster). In accidental crises, the attribution of crisis responsibility is moderate, and unintentional or imprudent actions on behalf of the organization are the triggers (e.g., technical-error accidents or recalls) (Coombs, 2010). In intentional crises, the attribution of crisis responsibility is strong. Here, the event occurs purposely, as the organization knowingly performs a job improperly, thereby, exposing stakeholders to risk and/or violating the law (e.g., organizational misdeed such as corruption) (Coombs, 2007; Pfarrer et al., 2008).

Social identity approach

The social identity approach is a theoretical framework that is based on the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). According to the self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), individuals categorize themselves and others as belonging to certain groups based on characteristics such as gender, nationality, and age. This social classification thus contributes to individuals' self-concepts. Accordingly, Tajfel (1978, p. 63) defines social identity as “*that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.*” Organizations can indeed serve as a basis for categorization, and influence their employees' social identity and thus self-concepts (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Brickson (2013) developed a framework according to which employees evaluate how valuable their organization is as a social identification target, using two parallel and iterative comparison processes. The underlying notion is that employees assess the value of their organizational membership by considering the extent to which an organization can satisfy their two identity motives of self-continuity and self-esteem. Figure 1 shows these processes.

First, employees evaluate the congruence between their own personal identity and the current organizational identity (Brickson, 2013). High congruence allows employees to express their key values and use qualities of their self-concepts at work. This enables their sense of *self-continuity*, i.e., the desire to perceive themselves as consistent over time and across situations, avoiding behaviours or decisions that would be incompatible with their sense of self (Dutton et al., 1994; Vignoles et al., 2006). Organizations determine their goals and actions

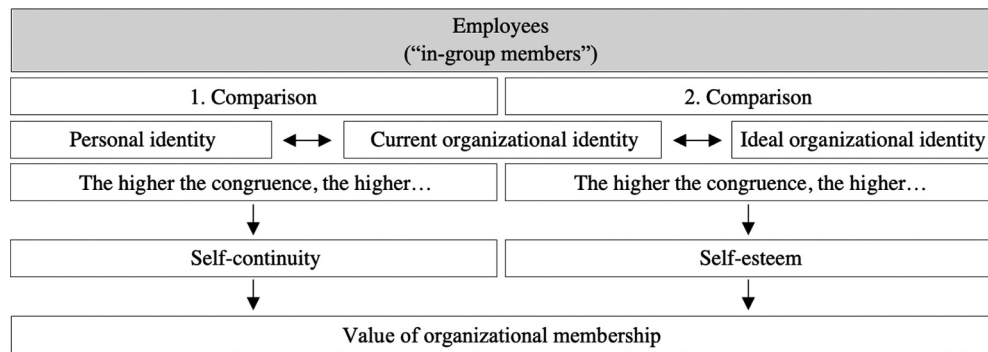


Figure 1. Comparison processes of employees.

independently of their members' individual needs, which makes it important for employees to enact roles consistent with their own sense of self (Brickson, 2013).

Second, employees assess the congruence between the current organizational identity of their employer and their ideal organizational identity (Brickson, 2013), i.e., their vision of what they want their perfect employer to be (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Foreman & Whetten, 2002). Thereby, they evaluate the organization's ability to meet their expectations and ideals for an employer, which would improve their *self-esteem*, i.e., their overall subjective emotional evaluation of their own worth (Hewitt, 2009). In doing so, the extent to which employees believe that the organization is highly valued by outsiders, i.e., employees' construed external image of the organization (Dutton et al., 1994), reflects back on their own self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brickson, 2013). Finally, the higher the congruence in each of the two comparison processes, i.e., the better the employees' sense of self-continuity and self-esteem, the greater the value of organizational membership for employees' self-concepts (Brickson, 2013).

Potential employees' anticipated organizational identity

While seeking a job, individuals usually have imperfect information about potential employers (Rynes & Miller, 1983). Signalling theory (Spence, 1973) suggests that potential employees interpret observable characteristics of the organization as indicators for non-observable information, i.e., as signals about what it would be like to work for that particular organization (Celani & Singh, 2011; Turban & Greening, 1996).

Thereby, they use specific characteristics, such as salaries for making inferences about more general themes, such as organizational culture (Connelly et al., 2011; Highhouse et al., 2007). While employees can assess the value of organizational membership for their self-concepts through *perceiving* self-continuity and self-esteem (Brickson, 2013), potential employees can only *anticipate* what the value of organizational membership would be. Nonetheless, we argue that potential employees follow a routine similar to the one of employees to anticipate this value, which we depict in Figure 2.

Employees determine the organizational identity based on their shared cognitions about the organization (Gioia et al., 2000) and in relation to their personal identity and ideal organizational identity (Brickson, 2013). In comparison, potential employees anticipate how the organizational identity might be by using signals. Thus, they compare their personal identity and ideal organizational identity with a signal-based *anticipated* organizational identity to determine *anticipated* self-continuity and *anticipated* self-esteem in the event of becoming organization members. As individuals strive for self-continuity and self-esteem (Brickson, 2013), we assume that an organization's anticipated ability to meet these identity motives increases its attractiveness, as potential employees will thus anticipate a higher value for their self-concepts.

The idea that identifying with an organization and drawing self-continuity and self-esteem from it even when they are not members is not new. Schuh et al. (2012) show that employees who strongly identify with their organization have a greater customer-orientation, which positively affects customers' identification with the organization.

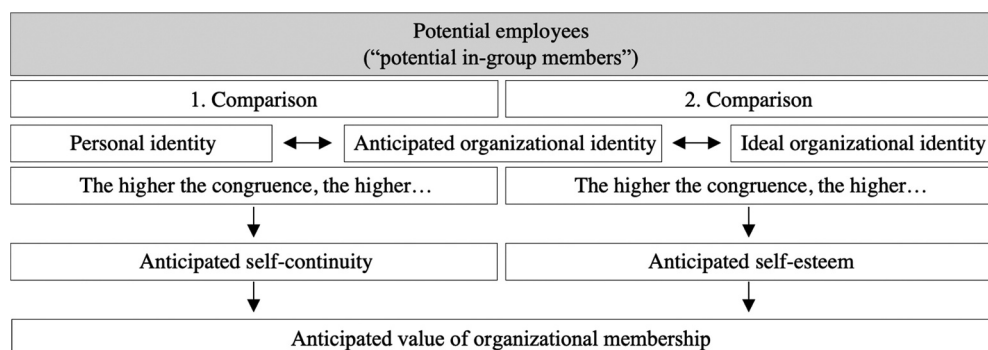


Figure 2. Comparison processes of potential employees.

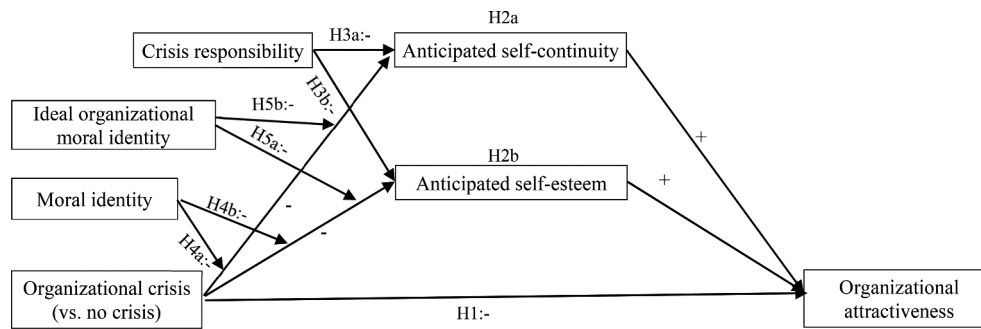


Figure 3. Research model and hypotheses.

Crises and organizational attractiveness

Although organizations try to send only positive signals to potential employees (Allen et al., 2007; Carpentier & Van Hoye, 2021; Rau & Adams, 2005), third parties like the media and social media platforms are likely to send also negative signals about the organization once an incident is detected (Connelly et al., 2011; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). We assume that identity threats influence not only employees' perceptions of organizational identity (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), but also potential employees' anticipations about organizational identity. As employees derive part of their social identity from their employers (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), organizational crises can have negative spillovers onto their own identities (Ellemers et al., 2002; Kreiner et al., 2006; Piening et al., 2020). Threats for the legitimacy of organizations' identities thus affect the legitimacy of their employees' identities, too (Petriglieri & Devine, 2016). For example, BP's Gulf of Mexico oil rig explosion and spill in 2010, which threatened the organization's identity as being environmentally conscious and technologically adept, also jeopardized its employees' identities as being environmentally conscious and technologically adept (Petriglieri, 2015; Petriglieri & Devine, 2016). Hence, crises as signals that call into question organizational moral integrity, competence, or reliability, similarly threaten employees' identities (Petriglieri, 2015; Petriglieri & Devine, 2016; Piening et al., 2020).

We assume that not only employees but also potential employees perceive an organization in this situation as being less socially desirable than before (Piening et al., 2020). Employees, as in-group members, are involuntarily confronted with the situation and may nevertheless feel loyal to the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, potential employees are not yet tied to the organization. In the light of imperfect information about an organization's identity (Rynes & Miller, 1983), negative signals emitted by a crisis can have particularly strong effects on those who are more free to decide if they want to enter the organization. Besides anticipating negative spillovers onto their own identity, we assume that potential employees interpret crises that affect organizational culture (Campbell & Göritz, 2014), social norms and values within the organization (Turban & Greening, 1996), or employee well-being and atmosphere (Sanchez et al., 1995) as signals for a

less-than-desirable working environment. Further, a crisis indicates a long-run threat to reputation and performance (Bundy et al., 2017; Marcus & Goodman, 1991).

Hypothesis 1. Organizational crises have a negative effect on organizational attractiveness for potential employees.

Anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem as mediators

Organizational crises are signals that call into question an organization's attributes of moral integrity, competence, or reliability (Petriglieri, 2015; Piening et al., 2020) and, thereby, change the anticipated organizational identity of potential employees. Most individuals perceive themselves as being moral, competent, and trustworthy (Tappin & McKay, 2017). As a whole, we assume that potential employees tend to perceive a larger difference between their personal identity and their anticipated organizational identity after a crisis than before, which would jeopardize value expression and compatibility with their own sense of self (Yu, 2014). In the BP example, employees reported that their behaviour felt atypical (Petriglieri, 2015), indicating low self-continuity through a lack of typical enthusiasm and energy during the crisis.

Besides this consistent, integrated sense of self across contexts, self-continuity further entails being continuant over time (Petriglieri & Devine, 2016). If employees experience projected continuity, organizational identification can be maintained under conditions of substantial changes such as mergers and acquisitions. Ullrich et al. (2005) and Lupina-Wegener et al. (2014) show that projected continuity is positively related to the post-merger identification. After crises, like after mergers and acquisitions, there are ambivalent emotions and there is a destabilization of the organizational identity. The BP employees, for example, felt destabilized after the oil spill incident (Petriglieri, 2015). Potential employees might anticipate this identity destabilization, for example, through several media reports with many information contradicting each other (Zavyalova et al., 2016). As self-continuity is an important identity motive for individuals at work (Brickson, 2013), a lower anticipated self-continuity decreases the value that potential employees anticipate from this membership for their self-concepts, and thus decreases organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 2a. Anticipated self-continuity partially mediates the negative relationship between organizational crises and organizational attractiveness for potential employees.

When potential employees assess their anticipated self-esteem after receiving the signal of a crisis, they compare their adjusted anticipations about organizational identity with their ideal organizational identity. Potential employees typically expect their ideal employers to hold high ethical standards (Jones et al., 2014), competence (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), stability (Jain & Bhatt, 2015), and reputation (Turban & Cable, 2003). As most organizational crises signal the opposites of such characteristics (Piening et al., 2020), we assume that there will be less congruence between the anticipated organizational identity and the ideal organizational identity, i.e., lower anticipated self-esteem. Based on literature about employees, we expect that potential employees include anticipations of other peoples' opinions about them in their expectations about their ideal employer (Brickson, 2013). Expecting that other individuals perceive a potential employer as valuable would increase potential employees' expectations about their self-esteem (Dutton et al., 1994; Petriglieri & Devine, 2016). Hence, identity threats of crises also impair anticipated self-esteem (Ferris et al., 2009; Petriglieri & Devine, 2016), because the anticipated organizational identity is drifting away from the ideal organizational identity. Potential employees might anticipate that they would feel shame, embarrassment, or even disgrace similar to current employees (Dutton et al., 1994; Petriglieri & Devine, 2016), such as in the BP example (Petriglieri, 2015). Lower anticipated self-esteem decreases the value that organizational membership would add to the self-concept and thus organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 2b. Anticipated self-esteem partially mediates the negative relationship between organizational crises and organizational attractiveness for potential employees.

Comparison of crisis types

Identity changes have different degrees of intensity (Clark et al., 2010). Each organizational crisis as a particular form of identity threat has its features such as crisis type (Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2007) categorizes crises with increasing crisis responsibility on behalf of the organization as victim crises, accidental crises, and intentional crises. Different degrees of responsibility send different signals. For example, potential employees may interpret a victim crisis just as bad luck, whereas an accidental crisis additionally provokes doubts about competence within the organization (Petriglieri, 2015), and an intentional crisis is an indicator for unethical values (Pfarrer et al., 2008). Those different kinds of signals can trigger diverse emotions. For example, the higher the crisis responsibility, the higher the level of anger, schadenfreude, and reputation damage among stakeholders and the lower their sympathy (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Wei et al., 2017). Consequently, the more crisis responsibility stakeholders attribute to an organization, the greater the threat that the derived information imposes to the organization's identity (Coombs, 2007; Wei et al., 2017).

Signals with increasing perceptions of an organization's responsibility for a mishap lead to worse stakeholder perceptions (Wei et al., 2017), i.e., to a worse anticipated organizational identity. Hence, we interpret increasing crisis responsibility as an increasing degree of identity change, resulting in different anticipated organizational identities. Comparing victim, accidental, and intentional crises, we assume that as the crisis responsibility increases, the anticipated organizational identity drifts away from, first, personal identity and, second, ideal organizational identity. Growing incongruences in identities further decrease anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem. Hence, potential employees' reactions to crises might become more severe as perceived responsibility increases.

Hypothesis 3. The higher crisis responsibility, the lower a) anticipated self-continuity and b) anticipated self-esteem, and organizational attractiveness for potential employees.

Moral identity and ideal organizational moral identity as moderators

When comparing their own personal identity with the anticipated organizational identity, individuals draw upon specific identity features (Brickson, 2013). Therefore, differences in those gaps occur according to the considered features of individuals' personal identity. After a crisis, the exact width of the gap for each individual depends on those features within each personal identity that correspond to the altered features of the anticipated organizational identity (Brickson, 2013). We expect that a main identity feature that individuals compare in themselves and in the organization after a crisis is moral identity.

Moral identity is the degree to which an individual defines him or herself as a moral person (Matherne et al., 2018). It is that part of personal identity that motivates moral actions (Aquino & Freeman, 2009; Aquino & Reed, 2002). Morality-related individual differences influence how strongly reactions to injustices are (Colquitt et al., 2006; Rupp et al., 2013). For individuals with high moral identity, moral values are central to their self-definition, and they react negatively to perceived violations of moral norms, whereas for individuals with low moral identity, moral values are not that relevant when processing social information (Rupp et al., 2013; Skarlicki et al., 2008). For example, potential employees with high (low) moral identity are very (not very) sensitive to organizations' actions in support of corporate social responsibility (Rupp et al., 2013).

The identity motive of self-continuity and self-esteem requires finding social contexts that provide self-verifying feedback (Vignoles et al., 2006). Similarity between personal identity and anticipated organizational identity makes an employer attractive, because working there would enable potential employees to exhibit more of themselves and to implement a wider range of traits and values in their self-concepts (Dutton et al., 1994). Crises are signals that can question the moral integrity of an organization (Piening et al., 2020). They can indicate more general attributes such as unethical managerial behaviour, bad norms, or undesired social values (Turban & Greening, 1996; Zavyalova et al., 2016). Potential employees

with high moral identity may expect not to feel internally coherent and not be able to behave in accordance with their own values if entering the organization. Therefore, we assume that crises increase the incongruences between personal and anticipated organizational identities, and thus decrease anticipated self-continuity, anticipated self-esteem and organizational attractiveness, more strongly for potential employees with high moral identity than for those with low moral identity.

Hypothesis 4. Moral identity strengthens (a) the negative relationship between organizational crises and anticipated self-continuity, (b) the negative relationship between organizational crises and anticipated self-esteem and the indirect negative relationship of organizational crises with organizational attractiveness for potential employees.

In contrast to moral identity, which is an individual's internal self-conceptualization, organizational moral identity is an externalized conceptualization (Matherne et al., 2018). It is the organization members' perceptions of the distinctive moral traits exhibited by that organization (Matherne et al., 2018). Following this understanding, we define ideal organizational moral identity as the organizational moral identity that each potential employee wishes for his or her ideal employer. Individuals can enhance their self-continuity and self-esteem through self-enhancement or self-improvement, which can be achieved by joining an organization they admire (Vignoles et al., 2006). The more similar an organization is to an individual's ideal employer, the higher is the organization's ability to increase the individual's self-continuity and self-esteem (Brickson, 2013). After the negative signal of a crisis (Piening et al., 2020), potential employees with high levels of ideal organizational moral identity are likely to perceive the gap between organizational identity and their ideal organizational moral identity to be wider and thus anticipated self-continuity and self-esteem and organizational attractiveness to be lower than potential employees with low levels of ideal organizational moral identity.

Hypothesis 5. Ideal organizational moral identity strengthens (a) the negative relationship between organizational crises and anticipated self-continuity, (b) the negative relationship between organizational crises and anticipated self-esteem, and the indirect negative relationship of organizational crises with organizational attractiveness for potential employees.

Figure 3 summarizes the previously hypothesized influences of organizational crises, crisis responsibility, and organizational attractiveness through anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem, and the moderating role of moral identity and ideal organizational moral identity.

Methods

Procedure and participants

To test our hypotheses, we conducted an online scenario-based experiment, which allowed us to manipulate the content of all information sources. We followed a between-subject design

and differentiated among four randomly distributed test groups, i.e. (1) no crisis, (2) victim crisis, (3) accidental crisis, and (4) intentional crisis. We obtained informed consent for the experiment of the participants. In the beginning, we surveyed respondents regarding socio-demographic, work-related, and general identity-related questions. Then, in a two-step procedure, we presented our manipulations. First, we showed the careers webpage of a fictitious company. Second, the three crisis treatment groups read a newspaper article about the company affected by either a victim, accidental, or intentional crisis. Then we compared the effects of the crises among the different groups.

We collected data from the UK and the US to create two independent samples. Our data collection in the UK took place in February 2019. 870 participants completed the survey, 62 of whom failed at least one of two control questions. Hence, the final sample consisted of 808 participants. We collected the data for the US sample in December 2019. 809 out of 854 participants passed the control questions and were included in the final US sample. In both samples, the average age was 34 years and almost half of the participants were male. Just over half of the participants in both samples were employees. In the UK, 38% indicated having an undergraduate degree as their highest educational degree, while 37% in the US reported to have a bachelor's degree. About one third of the UK and US participants had work experience of more than 15 years. One quarter of the UK participants and 32% of the US participants were looking for a (new) job.

In addition to our quantitative data, we also collected 3,376 answers to three open-ended narrative questions that were part of the surveys collected in our two samples. After responding on a 7-point Likert scale to the statement "Based on the received information, Amplico AG would be an attractive employer", the participants in the UK sample were asked "Why?" Answers to this question sparked interest into certain reoccurring themes, such as organizational compassion and engagement to help rebuild the company expressed by some in the victim group as well as expectations towards future improvements in light of a crisis. To further explore these themes, we added two extra questions to the US sample: "How would working for Amplico AG fit or break with my personality?" and "How would working for Amplico AG be good or bad for my self-esteem?" In their answers to these questions, the participants elaborated on their personal assessment of the organization and its attractiveness in relation to their self-concepts as well as elaborated on their perceptions of the crisis.

Stimuli

Fictitious company webpage

At first, we asked the participants to put themselves in the position of a job seeker and introduced them to our fictitious company, Amplico AG. They should imagine that Amplico's general employer attributes (e.g., industry type, company location) had already aroused their interest, and that they wanted to find out what the employer offers beyond that. Then we showed Amplico's fictitious careers webpage to all test groups (Figure A1 in the Appendix).

Table 1. Survey items (measured on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 “strongly agree” to 7 “strongly disagree”).

<i>Organizational attractiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003)</i>	
1	For me, this company would be a good place to work.
2	I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort. (R)
3	This company is attractive to me as a place for employment.
4	I am interested in learning more about this company.
5	A job at this company is very appealing to me.
<i>Organizational attractiveness (Open field)</i>	
Based on the received information, Amplico AG would be an attractive employer for me. (Likert Scale)	
Why? (Open Response Field)	
How would working for Amplico AG fit or break with my personality? (Open Response Field, only US sample)	
How would working for Amplico AG be good or bad for my self-esteem? (Open Response Field, only US sample)	
<i>Anticipated self-esteem (own survey items based on Rosenberg (1965)</i>	
1	On the whole, I would be satisfied with myself when working for Amplico AG.
2	At times I would think I am no good at all when working for Amplico AG. (R)
3	I would feel that I have a number of good qualities when working for Amplico AG.
4	I would be able to do things as well as most other people when working for Amplico AG.
5	I would feel I do not have much to be proud of when working for Amplico AG. (R)
6	I would certainly feel useless at times when working for Amplico AG. (R)
7	I would feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others when working for Amplico AG.
8	I would wish to have more respect for myself when working for Amplico AG. (R)
9	All in all, I would be inclined to feel that I am a failure when working for Amplico AG. (R)
10	I would take a positive attitude towards myself when working for Amplico AG.
<i>Anticipated self-continuity (own survey items based on Sedikides et al., 2015)</i>	
1	I would feel connected with my past when working for Amplico AG.
2	I would feel connected with who I was in the past when working for Amplico AG.
3	There would be continuity in my life when working for Amplico AG.
4	Important aspects of my personality would remain the same across time when working for Amplico AG.
<i>Moral Identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002)</i>	
Characteristics: Honest, ethical, honourable, fair trustworthy, principled, compassionate, caring, charitable.	
1	It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics.
2	Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am.
3	I would be ashamed to be a person who has these characteristics. (R)
4	Having these characteristics is not really important to me. (R)
5	I strongly desire to have these characteristics.
<i>Ideal organizational moral identity (own survey items based on Aquino & Reed, 2002)</i>	
Characteristics: Honest, ethical, honourable, fair trustworthy, principled, compassionate, caring, charitable.	
1	Being an organization that has these characteristics is an important part of who my ideal organization is.
2	Having these characteristics is an important part of my ideal organization's sense of self.
3	My ideal organization strongly desires to have these characteristics.
4	Behaviour in line with these characteristics is the norm in my ideal organization.
5	These characteristics guide decision-making in my ideal organization

Organizational crises

In a second step, we manipulated different organizational crises for the three crisis treatment groups (groups 2, 3, and 4). The remaining group (group 1) was the crisis control group, which only saw the careers webpage. We showed a newspaper article with breaking news about a crisis to each of the crisis treatment groups. The crisis contained the collapse of Amplico's conference building, in which several people were injured, and others even died. Like the webpage, the articles gave no indication of the industry context. The three articles were identical except for the crisis responsibility attributed to Amplico, more precisely, to its management. They provided information about (1) Amplico becoming the victim of a natural disaster (group 2: victim crisis; Figure A2 in the Appendix), (2) an imprudent managerial decision that leads to a terrible accident (group 3: accidental crisis; Figure A3 in the Appendix), or (3) a management that knowingly placed employees at risk due to personal greed for money (group 4: intentional crisis; Figure A4 in the Appendix).

Evaluations, control questions, and manipulation checks

After the treatments, we asked participants in all groups to assess Amplico's organizational attractiveness. We also asked them to justify their assessment in an open response field. With the help of two yes-or-no-control questions, we filtered out those participants who were not able to indicate correctly whether they had read an article about the collapse of a building and what the reason for the collapse was. We asked them to indicate whether they had tried to answer the survey from a job seeker's point of view (97% agreed in the UK and 93% in the US), and if Amplico's webpage could exist in real life (92% agreed in the UK and 99% in the US). As manipulation checks, we asked participants if Amplico was in a difficult situation (7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”). Regarding crisis responsibility, we asked if the management of Amplico AG was responsible for the collapse of the building (7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”).

Measures

Dependent variable

We used 7-point Likert scales (from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”) with items in randomized order for all variables but demographics, unless noted otherwise. For measuring *organizational attractiveness*, we used the general attractiveness scale of Highhouse et al. (2003), which consisted of five items (e.g., “For me, this company would be a good place to work”); Cronbach’s alpha .97 in the UK and the US).

Independent variables

Our manipulations represented our measures of *organizational crisis* (yes = 1 or no = 0) and *crisis responsibility* (no crises = 0, victim = 1, accidental = 2, or intentional = 3). We assessed *moral identity* using Aquino and Reed (2002) scales of internalized moral identity. For this purpose, we listed some stimulus descriptors – honest, ethical, honourable, fair, trustworthy, principled, compassionate, caring, charitable – that Aquino and Reed (2002) inductively derived. In line with their instructions, we helped the respondents with some introductory phrases to visualize a person with those characteristics and to imagine that this person was themselves. Then they rated how strongly they agreed with statements like “[i]t would make me feel good to be a person who has these traits” (Cronbach’s alpha .76 in UK and .82 in US).

We measured *ideal organizational moral identity* with the help of Matherne et al.’s (2018) five-item organizational moral identity scale. They developed this based on Aquino and Reed (2002) internal moral identity scale. As we wanted to measure participants’ ideal organizational moral identity, instead of employees’ perspectives on their employers’ organizational moral identity, we adapted the scale. Before using it, we defined the concept of an ideal organization for the participants as their vision of their perfect employer. An example item of our ideal organizational moral identity scale was: “My ideal organization strongly desires to have these characteristics” (Cronbach’s alpha .90 in UK and .91 in US). The specific survey items for organizational attractiveness, anticipated self-esteem, anticipated self-continuity, moral identity, ideal organizational moral identity are shown in Table 1.

Mediator variables

There were no pre-existing scales of *anticipated self-continuity* or *anticipated self-esteem*. Casper and Buffardi (2004) developed a scale of anticipated organizational support based on a scale of perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 1997) to measure potential employees’ expectations. Accordingly, we based our scales for anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem on established scales for self-continuity and self-esteem, changing the perspective from current employees (who “perceive”) to potential employees (who “anticipate”). Our measure of anticipated self-continuity is based on Sedikides et al. (2015), who assess self-continuity with a four-item scale. One exemplary item was: “I would feel connected with who I was in the past when working for Amplico AG.” Rosenberg (1965) measured self-esteem with a ten-item scale. One of our adapted items was: “On the whole, I would be

satisfied with myself when working for Amplico AG.” The Cronbach’s alphas for our novel scales were .81 and .90 in the UK and .87 and .93 in the US.

Controls

In line with research on organizational attractiveness (Rau & Adams, 2005; Turban, 2001), we included demographic and work-related variables as controls, in particular, gender, age, educational degree, current employment status, job or study field, and job seeker (yes = 1 or no = 0). Further, we included work involvement using Kanungo’s (1982) six-item scale. It describes individuals’ general importance of work in life, for example, “[w]ork should be considered central to life” (Cronbach’s alpha .80 in UK and .86 in US). With regard to our mediators, identity specific controls were necessary. We controlled for individuals’ self-continuity and self-esteem prior to manipulations using the original versions of scales by Sedikides et al. (2015) for self-continuity (e.g., “I feel connected with who I was in the past”) and by Rosenberg (1965) for self-esteem (e.g., “[o]n the whole, I am satisfied with myself”). The Cronbach’s alphas were .79 and .93 in the UK and .82 and .94 in the US. We also controlled for individuals’ general importance of social groups to identity. After defining social groups, we used Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) four-item scale with items like “[i]n general, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image.” Our Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .81 in the UK and .86 in the US. Finally, we included dummies for employment status and job or study field as controls.

Analysis of the quantitative data

To test our hypotheses, we conducted multiple regression analyses. To test the mediation effects, we followed the approach of Baron and Kenny (1986) and estimated three different models. First, we conducted a regression analysis with our explanatory and control variables, for predicting organizational attractiveness. Second, we used a regression analysis with our explanatory and control variables predicting our mediators anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem. Third, we conducted a regression analysis with our explanatory variables, control variables and the mediators predicting organizational attractiveness. Our results would not change in any significant way, if we used the alternative estimation approach by Hayes (2013) to test for mediation effects.

Analysis of the qualitative responses

As part of our qualitative analysis, we evaluated the answers to the open-ended questions to identify different themes within each group of the different crisis types. Two independent coders classified the participants into those identified themes. We assessed interrater reliability by calculating correlations of their ratings (Cohen, 1960) with interrater reliabilities of .93 for victim, .83 for accidental, and .72 for intentional crises. We used our qualitative findings to enhance the discussion of our quantitative results, and provide in-depth insights on the participants’ underlying motives for their assessment of the organization and the crisis.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
United Kingdom																			
1 Gender	0.47	0.50	0	1															
2 Age	34.45	12.31	18	72	-0.05														
3 Highest educational degree	3.64	0.98	1	6	0.00	-0.03													
4 Work experience	4.31	2.25	1	7	-0.02	0.78	* -0.01												
5 Job seeker	0.25	0.43	0	1	0.11	* -0.21	* 0.01	-0.22	*										
6 Work involvement	2.97	1.00	1	7	0.05	-0.08	0.01	-0.09	* 0.04										
7 Self-continuity	4.69	1.14	1	7	0.06	0.16	* 0.05	0.17	* -0.04	0.09									
8 Self-esteem	4.30	0.51	3	7	0.04	0.21	* 0.03	-0.14	* 0.14	* 0.02	-0.01								
9 Importance to identity	4.03	0.65	1	7	0.04	-0.09	-0.08	-0.09	* 0.02	0.17	* 0.07	0.10	*						
10 Organizational crisis	0.60	0.49	0	1	-0.05	-0.03	0.01	-0.03	0.01	0.04	-0.02	0.00	0.02						
11 Anticipated self-continuity	4.47	1.18	1	7	0.06	0.13	* 0.03	0.13	* -0.02	0.01	0.36	* 0.05	0.04	-0.17	*				
12 Anticipated self-esteem	5.11	1.07	2	7	-0.03	0.21	* 0.00	0.21	* -0.08	-0.13	* 0.17	* -0.15	* -0.08	-0.31	* 0.52	*			
13 Crisis responsibility	1.20	1.17	0	3	-0.03	-0.02	-0.02	0.01	0.00	0.05	-0.03	-0.04	0.03	0.84	* -0.33	* -0.48	*		
14 Moral identity	6.13	0.80	3	7	-0.10	* 0.13	* 0.00	0.11	* -0.04	-0.14	* 0.17	* -0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.16	* 0.24	* -0.02		
15 Ideal organizational moral identity	5.91	0.99	1	7	-0.15	* 0.03	-0.05	0.01	0.01	-0.12	* 0.15	* 0.10	* 0.08	0.02	0.15	* 0.16	* 0.01	0.54	*
16 Organizational attractiveness	4.65	1.94	1	7	-0.02	0.12	* 0.02	0.09	* -0.05	-0.10	* 0.09	0.02	-0.07	-0.55	* 0.46	* 0.62	* -0.74	* 0.11	* 0.10
United States of America																			
1 Gender	0.52	0.50	0	1															
2 Age	34.40	12.14	18	74	-0.08														
3 Highest educational degree	4.27	1.38	1	7	-0.01	0.20	*												
4 Work experience	4.36	2.16	1	7	-0.05	0.77	* 0.18	*											
5 Job seeker	0.32	0.47	0	1	0.03	-0.20	* -0.06	-0.22	*										
6 Work involvement	2.94	1.16	1	7	0.11	* 0.00	0.02	-0.04	0.01										
7 Self-continuity	4.81	1.23	1	7	0.11	* 0.12	* 0.12	0.14	* -0.06	0.09									
8 Self-esteem	4.83	1.42	1	7	0.07	0.28	* 0.20	* 0.30	* -0.22	* 0.10	* 0.44	*							
9 Importance to identity	4.30	1.49	1	7	-0.07	0.01	0.12	0.00	-0.08	0.11	* 0.17	* 0.13	*						
10 Organizational crisis	0.59	0.49	0	1	-0.01	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.03	-0.02	0.00	-0.04	-0.05	-0.30	*				
11 Anticipated self-continuity	4.55	1.41	1	7	0.05	0.10	* 0.04	0.14	* -0.10	* 0.02	0.33	* 0.21	0.16	-0.40	* 0.63	*			
12 Anticipated self-esteem	5.17	1.33	1	7	0.00	0.16	* 0.03	0.19	* -0.09	0.00	0.21	* 0.40	0.09	-0.40	* -0.46	*			
13 Crisis responsibility	1.18	1.18	0	3	-0.04	-0.01	0.04	-0.01	0.04	-0.03	0.00	-0.04	-0.06	0.84	* -0.56	*			
14 Moral identity	6.21	0.93	1	7	-0.12	* 0.14	* 0.04	0.18	* -0.06	-0.07	0.24	* 0.22	* 0.25	-0.01	0.17	* 0.21	* -0.01		
15 Ideal organizational moral identity	6.09	1.00	1	7	-0.10	* 0.03	0.00	0.08	-0.08	-0.10	* 0.12	* 0.10	* 0.15	-0.01	0.14	* 0.13	* 0.00	0.47	*
16 Organizational attractiveness	4.54	2.10	1	7	-0.01	0.06	0.06	0.09	* -0.03	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.09	-0.63	* 0.56	* 0.68	* -0.78	* 0.10	* 0.06

N_{UK1} = 808; N_{US1} = 809; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; gender = male; * p < .01.

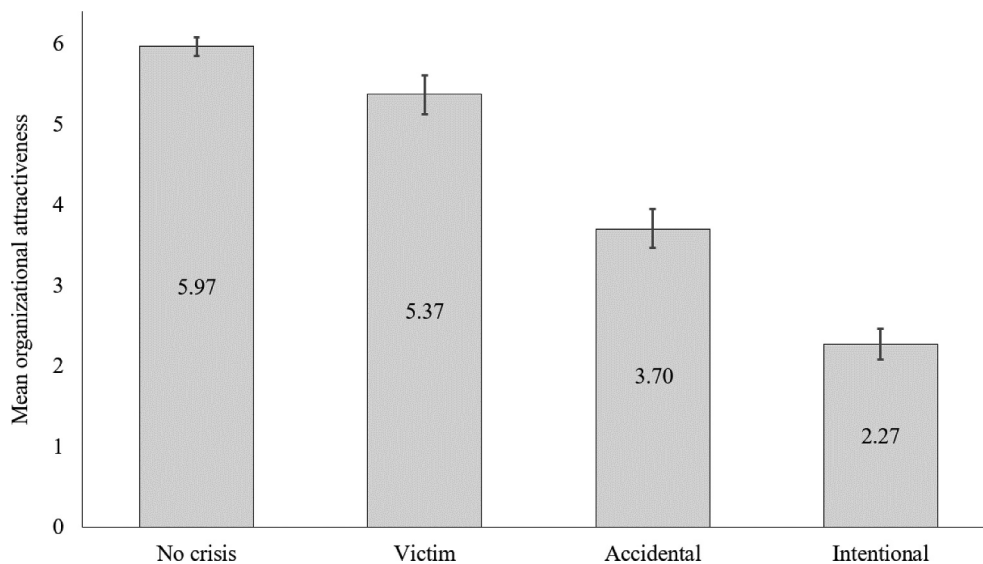


Figure 4. Mean organizational attractiveness and 95% confidence intervals of the different treatment groups in the UK.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of the UK and the US sample. Across both samples, women tend to report higher moral identity and ideal organizational moral identity than men. Older individuals tend to perceive higher self-continuity and self-esteem. Among job seekers, self-esteem is particularly low. Organizational crises and crisis responsibility correlate highly negatively with anticipated self-continuity, anticipated self-esteem, and organizational attractiveness, which indicates initial support for our assumptions. Figure 4 (UK) and Figure 5 (US) present the mean organizational

attractiveness of the different treatment groups and show that there is a statistically significant (95% confidence intervals) decline of organizational attractiveness for growing levels of crisis responsibility.

Manipulation checks

We conduct one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) for our manipulation checks. In the UK sample, participants in the crisis condition score significantly higher ($F[1, 806] = 956.60, p < .001$) in the crisis manipulation check question ($M = 5.87, SD = 1.37$) than those in the non-crisis condition ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.29$). The ANOVA for the manipulation check of crisis responsibility reveals

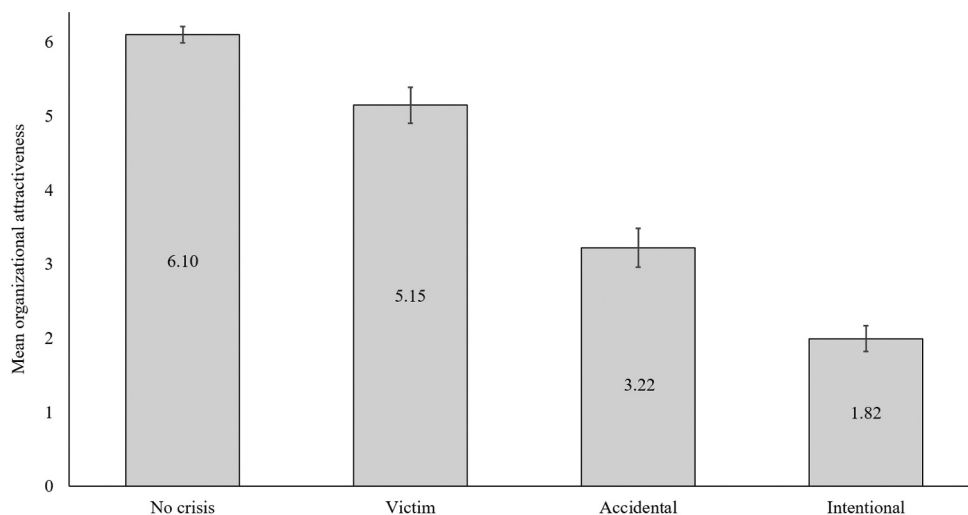


Figure 5. Mean organizational attractiveness and 95% confidence intervals of the different treatment groups in the US.

Table 3. Results from regression analyses in the UK sample.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8		Model 9				
	Organizational attractiveness		Anticipated self-continuity		Anticipated self-esteem		Organizational attractiveness		Anticipated self-continuity		Anticipated self-esteem		Organizational attractiveness		Anticipated self-continuity		Anticipated self-esteem				
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE			
<i>Controls</i>																					
Gender	-0.12	(0.122)	0.10	(0.082)	-0.07	(0.073)	-0.11	(0.099)	0.12	(0.077)	-0.05	(0.066)	-0.07	(0.087)	0.14	(0.083)	-0.02	(0.072)			
Age	0.01	(0.009)	0.00	(0.006)	0.00	(0.005)	0.01	(0.007)	0.00	(0.005)	0.00	(0.005)	0.01	(0.006)	0.00	(0.006)	0.00	(0.005)			
Highest educational degree	0.02	(0.066)	0.02	(0.044)	-0.01	(0.039)	0.02	(0.053)	0.01	(0.041)	-0.02	(0.035)	-0.01	(0.047)	0.03	(0.044)	0.00	(0.039)			
Work experience	0.03	(0.046)	0.02	(0.031)	0.06	(0.028)	-0.02	(0.037)	0.04	(0.029)	0.08	(0.025)	0.03	(0.033)	0.02	(0.031)	0.06	(0.027)	*		
Job seeker	-0.13	(0.143)	0.01	(0.096)	-0.06	(0.086)	-0.09	(0.115)	0.02	(0.090)	-0.06	(0.077)	-0.09	(0.101)	0.01	(0.096)	-0.04	(0.084)			
Work involvement	-0.14	(0.059)	-0.02	(0.040)	-0.13	(0.035)	-0.04	(0.048)	0.00	(0.037)	-0.10	(0.032)	-0.04	(0.042)	0.00	(0.040)	-0.09	(0.035)	*		
Self-continuity	0.13	(0.052)	0.35	(0.035)	0.13	(0.031)	-0.09	(0.045)	0.34	(0.033)	0.12	(0.028)	0.12	(0.040)	0.33	(0.036)	0.09	(0.031)	**		
Self-esteem	0.18	(0.115)	0.16	(0.077)	-0.25	(0.069)	0.31	(0.094)	0.11	(0.072)	-0.31	(0.062)	0.18	(0.083)	0.14	(0.077)	-0.26	(0.067)	***		
Importance of social groups	-0.12	(0.090)	0.06	(0.061)	-0.04	(0.054)	-0.11	(0.073)	0.07	(0.057)	-0.03	(0.049)	-0.09	(0.064)	0.04	(0.061)	-0.07	(0.053)	***		
<i>Main effects</i>																					
Organizational crisis	-2.17	(0.117)	***	-0.38	(0.079)	***	-0.67	(0.070)	***	0.86	(0.136)	***	0.45	(0.158)	**	0.06	(0.622)	1.13	(0.543)	*	
Anticipated self-continuity							0.34	(0.049)	***				0.22	(0.044)	***						
Anticipated self-esteem							0.75	(0.055)	***				0.49	(0.051)	***						
Crisis responsibility																					
Moral identity																					
Ideal																					
organizational moral identity																					
Interaction effects																					
Crisis x moral identity																					
Crisis x ideal																					
organizational moral identity																					
organizational moral identity																					
Intercept	4.15	(1.246)	***	1.20	(0.840)	6.29	(0.749)	***	-0.94	(1.052)	1.39	(0.784)	***	1.15	(0.938)	0.85	(0.679)	3.46	(0.594)	***	
R ²	0.341		0.189		0.212		0.58		0.3		0.368		0.67		0.204		0.256				
F	15.55	***	7.01	***	8.06	***	37.6	***	12.1	***	16.85	***	54.54	***	6.65	***	8.90	***			

N = 808; Additionally controlled for (1) employment status and (2) job or study field; SE = standard errors; gender = male; *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Table 4. Results from regression analyses in the US sample.

	Model 10		Model 11		Model 12		Model 13		Model 14		Model 15		Model 16		Model 17		Model 18	
	Organizational attractiveness		Anticipatedself-continuity		Anticipatedself-esteem		Organizational attractiveness		Anticipatedself-continuity		Anticipatedself-esteem		Organizational attractiveness		Anticipatedself-continuity		Anticipatedself-esteem	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
<i>Controls</i>																		
Gender	-0.04 (0.123)		0.09 (0.096)		-0.05 (0.084)		-0.03 (0.092)		0.01 (0.087)		-0.12 (0.072)		-0.11 (0.084)		0.11 (0.096)		-0.02 (0.083)	
Age	-0.01 (0.009)		0.00 (0.007)		0.00 (0.006)		-0.01 (0.006)		0.00 (0.006)		0.00 (0.005)		-0.01 (0.006)		0.00 (0.007)		0.00 (0.006)	
Highest educational degree	0.10 (0.050)		-0.04 (0.039)		-0.05 (0.034)		0.15 (0.037) ***		-0.03 (0.035)		-0.04 (0.029)		0.15 (0.034) ***		-0.05 (0.039)		-0.06 (0.034)	
Work experience	0.17 (0.046) ***		0.07 (0.036)		0.07 (0.031) *		0.09 (0.034) **		0.04 (0.033)		0.04 (0.027)		0.08 (0.031) **		0.05 (0.036)		0.05 (0.031)	
Job seeker	0.13 (0.134)		-0.07 (0.105)		0.13 (0.091)		0.06 (0.100)		-0.06 (0.095)		0.14 (0.079)		0.09 (0.091)		-0.08 (0.104)		0.12 (0.090)	
Work involvement	-0.01 (0.051)		-0.01 (0.040)		-0.04 (0.035)		0.02 (0.038)		-0.02 (0.036)		-0.05 (0.030)		0.00 (0.035)		0.00 (0.040)		-0.02 (0.035)	
Self-continuity	0.01 (0.053)		0.34 (0.041) ***		0.04 (0.036)		-0.13 (0.041) **		0.34 (0.037) ***		0.05 (0.031)		-0.08 (0.038) *		0.32 (0.041) ***		0.02 (0.036)	
Self-esteem	0.02 (0.049)		0.03 (0.038)		0.34 (0.033) ***		-0.24 (0.040) ***		0.03 (0.035)		0.34 (0.029) ***		-0.17 (0.037) ***		0.02 (0.038)		0.32 (0.033) ***	
Importance of social groups	0.07 (0.040)		0.07 (0.032) *		0.01 (0.028)		0.04 (0.030)		0.06 (0.029) *		0.00 (0.024)		0.04 (0.028)		0.05 (0.032)		-0.02 (0.028)	
<i>Main effects</i>																		
Organizational crisis	-2.69 (0.117) ***		-0.85 (0.091) ***		-1.05 (0.080) ***		-1.65 (0.096) ***		0.83 (0.153) ***		0.72 (0.127) ***		-0.10 (0.151)		0.90 (0.687)		0.91 (0.596)	
Anticipated self-continuity							(0.041) ***						0.20 (0.038) ***					
Anticipated self-esteem							(0.047) ***						0.55 (0.046) ***					
Crisis responsibility													-0.83 (0.064) ***					
Moral identity																		
Ideal organizational moral identity																		
<i>Interaction effects</i>																		
Crisis x moral identity																		
Crisis x ideal organizational moral identity																		
Intercept	3.60 (1.337) **		1.34 (1.041)		1.93 (0.909) *		1.74 (0.996)		1.66 (0.944)		2.27 (0.784) **		2.62 (0.911) **		1.54 (0.643) *		2.11 (0.558) ***	
R ²	0.43		0.24		0.34		0.69		0.37		0.51		0.74		0.25		0.36	
F	22.47 ***		9.30 ***		15.30 ***		60.63 ***		17.19 ***		29.87 ***		75.88 ***		8.69 ***		14.46 ***	

N = 809; Additionally controlled for (1) employment status and (2) job or study field; SE = standard errors; gender = male; *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Table 5. Results from regression analyses explaining crisis responsibility in the UK sample.

	Model 19		Model 20		Model 21		Model 22		
	Organizational attractiveness		Anticipatedself-continuity		Anticipatedself-esteem		Organizational attractiveness		
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	
<i>Controls</i>									
Gender	-0.07	(0.096)	0.13	(0.077)	-0.04	(0.066)	-0.08	(0.087)	
Age	0.01	(0.007)	0.00	(0.005)	0.00	(0.005)	0.01	(0.006)	
Highest educational degree	-0.01	(0.052)	0.01	(0.041)	-0.02	(0.035)	-0.01	(0.047)	
Work experience	0.08	(0.037) *	0.04	(0.029)	0.08	(0.025)**	0.03	(0.033)	
Job seeker	-0.11	(0.113)	0.01	(0.090)	-0.06	(0.077)	-0.09	(0.101)	
Work involvement	-0.09	(0.046)	0.00	(0.037)	-0.10	(0.032)**	-0.04	(0.042)	
Self-continuity	0.10	(0.041) *	0.34	(0.033)***	0.12	(0.028)***	-0.04	(0.040)	
Self-esteem	0.05	(0.090)	0.10	(0.072)	-0.31	(0.062)***	0.18	(0.083)	*
Importance of social groups	-0.08	(0.071)	0.07	(0.057)	-0.03	(0.049)	-0.09	(0.064)	
<i>Main effects</i>									
Victim crisis	-0.57	(0.123)***	0.21	(0.099) *	-0.02	(0.084)	-0.61	(0.112)	***
Accidental crisis	-2.18	(0.125)***	-0.31	(0.100)**	-0.60	(0.085)***	-1.81	(0.116)	***
Intentional crisis	-3.70	(0.123)***	-1.03	(0.098)***	-1.37	(0.084)***	-2.79	(0.129)	***
Anticipated self-continuity							0.22	(0.044)	***
Anticipated self-esteem							0.49	(0.051)	***
<i>Intercept</i>	4.65	(0.981)***	1.40	(0.784)	6.51	(0.671)***	1.13	(0.938)	
R ²	0.593		0.296		0.369		0.671		
F	40.52	***	11.72	***	16.29	***	52.76	***	

N = 808; Additionally controlled for (1) employment status and (2) job or study field; SE = standard errors; gender = male; *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Table 6. Results from regression analyses explaining crisis responsibility in the US sample.

	Model 23		Model 24		Model 25		Model 26		
	Organizational attractiveness		Anticipatedself-continuity		Anticipatedself-esteem		Organizational attractiveness		
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	
<i>Controls</i>									
Gender	-0.17	(0.097)	0.01	(0.087)	-0.13	(0.073)	-0.10	(0.083)	
Age	-0.01	(0.007)	0.00	(0.006)	0.00	(0.005)	-0.01	(0.006)	
Highest educational degree	0.12	(0.039) **	-0.02	(0.035)	-0.04	(0.029)	0.14	(0.034)	***
Work experience	0.12	(0.036) **	0.04	(0.033)	0.04	(0.027)	0.09	(0.031)	**
Job seeker	0.16	(0.105)	-0.07	(0.095)	0.14	(0.079)	0.10	(0.091)	
Work involvement	-0.03	(0.040)	-0.02	(0.036)	-0.05	(0.030)	0.00	(0.034)	
Self-continuity	0.01	(0.042)	0.35	(0.037)***	0.05	(0.031)	-0.09	(0.038)	*
Self-esteem	0.03	(0.039)	0.03	(0.035)	0.34	(0.029)***	-0.16	(0.036)	***
Importance of social groups	0.05	(0.032)	0.06	(0.029) *	0.00	(0.024)	0.04	(0.027)	
<i>Main effects</i>									
Victim crisis	-0.99	(0.123)***	-0.05	(0.111)	-0.16	(0.092)	-0.89	(0.106)	***
Accidental crisis	-2.91	(0.127)***	-0.73	(0.114)***	-1.01	(0.095)***	-2.21	(0.117)	***
Intentional crisis	-4.11	(0.121)***	-1.71	(0.109)***	-1.91	(0.091)***	-2.71	(0.133)	***
Anticipated self-continuity							0.21	(0.038)	***
Anticipated self-esteem							0.54	(0.046)	***
<i>Intercept</i>	4.19	(1.049)***	1.66	(0.944)	2.27	(0.784) **	2.61	(0.903)	**
R ²	0.649		0.374		0.508		0.743		
F	51.46	***	16.66	***	28.78	***	75.06	***	

N = 809; Additionally controlled for (1) employment status and (2) job or study field; SE = standard errors; gender = male; *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

a significant main effect ($F[2, 482] = 523.79, p < .001$). Pairwise comparisons show that participants in the victim condition reported significantly lower perceived crisis responsibility ($M = 1.86, SD = 1.30$) than those in the accidental condition ($M = 5.70, SD = 1.34$), $F[1, 319] = 682.55, p < .001$ and those in the intentional condition ($M = 6.01, SD = 1.22$), $F[1, 324] = 883.59, p < .001$). The difference between the accidental and intentional condition is also significant ($F[1, 321] = 4.66, p < .05$). The results of the US sample are fully robust indicating a successful manipulation for both samples.

Regression results

Table 3 shows the regression results when using the UK sample and Table 4 show the regression results when using the US sample. Model 1 (Table 3, UK) and Model 10 (Table 4, US) report a statistically significant negative effect of organizational crisis on organizational attractiveness for the UK and US sample, which confirms Hypothesis 1.

We further hypothesized that anticipated self-continuity (Hypothesis 2a) and anticipated self-esteem (Hypothesis 2b) would partially mediate the negative relationship between

organizational crisis and organizational attractiveness. Models 3 and 4 (Table 3; UK) and Models 11 and 12 (Table 4; US) confirm that crises significantly decrease anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem. Model 4 (Table 3; UK) and Model 13 (Table 4; US) show that anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem significantly increase organizational attractiveness and that the negative effects of organizational crisis on organizational attractiveness are still significantly negative but that the effect sizes are lower in both samples, which confirms the Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

In Hypotheses 3a and 3b, we expected crisis responsibility to have a negative influence on anticipated self-continuity (Hypothesis 3a) and anticipated self-esteem (Hypothesis 3b), which in turn decreases organizational attractiveness. As shown in Models 5 and 6 (Table 3; UK) and Models 14 and 15 (Table 4; US), crisis responsibility significantly reduces anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem. Model 7 (Table 3; UK) and Model 16 (Table 4; US) show that anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem significantly increase organizational attractiveness and that crisis responsibility significantly decreases organizational attractiveness in both samples. Hypotheses 3a and 3b are thus confirmed in both samples.

We suggested that moral identity strengthens the negative effect of organizational crisis on anticipated self-continuity (Hypothesis 4a) and the negative effect of organizational crisis on anticipated self-esteem (Hypothesis 4b). The interacting effects of organizational crisis and moral identity on anticipated self-continuity in Model 8 (Table 3; UK) and Model 17 (Table 4; US) and the interaction effects of organizational crisis and moral identity on anticipated self-esteem in Model 9 (Table 3; UK) and Model 18 (Table 4; US) are not statistically significant. Thus, we have to reject Hypotheses 4a and 4b. We also suggested that that ideal organizational moral identity strengthens the negative effect of organizational crisis on anticipated self-continuity (Hypothesis 5a) and the negative effect of organizational crisis on anticipated self-esteem (Hypothesis 5b). The interacting effect of organizational crisis and ideal organizational moral identity on anticipated self-continuity is insignificant when using the UK sample (see Model 8 in Table 3) and significantly negative when using the US sample (see Model 17 in Table 4). Thus, we have no conclusive evidence to confirm Hypothesis 5a. The interacting effects of organizational crisis and ideal organizational moral identity on anticipated self-esteem in Model 9 (Table 3; UK) and Model 18 (Table 4; US) are insignificant. Thus, we have to reject Hypothesis 5b.

Robustness check

As a robustness check for our measure of crisis responsibility, we estimated separate regression coefficients for victim, accidental, and intentional crises (see Tables 5 and 6). We find statistically significant negative effects for all three crises on organizational attractiveness in both samples. Pairwise comparisons of the coefficients confirm our prior results that the negative effects increase with higher crisis responsibility, i.e., the effects are the significantly lowest for victim crises and the significantly highest for intentional crises. Beyond that, our mediators, accidental crises and intentional crises significantly

decrease anticipated self-continuity in both samples, whereas victim crises have a small but significant positive effect in the UK sample and no significant effect in the US sample. Accidental and intentional crises significantly reduce anticipated self-esteem in both samples, in contrast to victim crises, which do not have a significant effect. Again, pairwise comparisons support the measure of crisis responsibility that we used.

Our qualitative material supports the quantitative data and offers some further elaboration of the responses, see also Table A1 in the Appendix for illustrative quotes. For the victim crisis, some participants expressed concerns regarding future work environment and safety, but the large majority (70 and 80%, respectively) indicated indifference towards the crisis emphasizing both favourable employee benefits and that management cannot be blamed for this situation: *“Amplico AG appears to offer wonderful employee benefits and seems to care deeply about their employees’ welfare. The tragic incident was not the fault of the company and would not deter me from working there.”* More surprisingly, some participants even felt encouraged by the crisis and their potential role in helping rebuild the company. For example, two participants explained how such role could contribute to their self-concepts in a positive way:

I feel that I am called to step in and help rebuild the company and help maintain its standards that I admire.

They have great qualities and offer good benefits to the employees. I would also work to help the company get over this disaster ... It would increase my self-esteem.

For the accidental crisis, most participants expressed anger towards the management for being careless and exposing their employees to safety hazards, see Table A1 in the Appendix. Yet, like the victim group, some also indicated indifference towards the accident stressing that *“the company still has values and care about the employees more than the average company, despite the unfortunate incident that doesn’t relate to these values at all but could have happened to any company.”* As illustrated in Table A1 in the Appendix, some participants even showed confidence in future learning from the crisis explaining how work conditions and buildings are likely to improve in light of such situation: *“The accident was a one-time event, and most likely even more unlikely to occur again. Wages, benefits, and bonuses may even be better now that a dangerous event like this happened and they are looking to hire in a difficult time when many people may not be interested.”*

Compared to the other two crisis types, the intentional crisis triggered more homogenous responses, all being rather hostile and directed towards the management, see Table A1 in the Appendix. For example, participants in this group explained how working for this company would conflict with their values, thereby, negatively affect their self-concepts as two participants explained:

They are unethical, and they do not stick to their word ... Amplico AG would not fit my personality at all. I would be ashamed to keep a job there.”

They place financial gain over the well-being of their employees. Despite claiming to offer a good work environment and benefits, I would not want to work for an organization that refuses to shell out money for something as simple as repairs ... It would break me because they claim to take care of their employees but are negligent

at best. It is a simple mismatch because an organization that cannot be fair and forthright does not deserve to be in business. I believe in fairness, communication, and loyalty. Amplico AG would make me feel like I will betray who I am if I ever worked there.

Across all three groups, a similar number of participants described how they would need more information to judge the company, such as how the management responds to the crisis as well as considering other (potentially less biased) sources than the newspaper article provided, see Table A1 in the Appendix.

Discussion

In this study, we set out to answer if and how potential in-group members anticipate the influence of working for a particular employer on their social identity, which influences their preference to work there. We expected that potential employees interpret signals about the organization to anticipate its identity, and to imagine whether joining it would contribute to their self-concepts in a positive or negative way. In order to isolate the underlying effects empirically, we conducted a scenario-based experiment and simulated identity changes of a fictitious organization. We used organizational crises as identity threats to demonstrate that such changes in the anticipated organizational identity worsen anticipations about social identity in the crisis groups compared to the control group. Drawing on self-continuity and self-esteem, which determine the value of membership for in-group members' social identity (Brickson, 2013), we introduced anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem as two similar motives among potential in-group members.

Our findings suggest that crises reduce anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem, which results in lower organizational attractiveness for potential employees. In line with prior research (Wei et al., 2017), we find that the degree of organizations' crises responsibility enhances the damage to the image of the organization. Stronger effects on anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem with higher crisis responsibility confirm that there are higher incongruences of anticipated organizational identity with personal identity and ideal organizational identity under those conditions. Our findings show that our three crises simulated increasing degrees of identity change, resulting in three unique anticipated organizational identities.

Our qualitative analysis of the participants' open-ended narrative answers for explaining their perceptions of organizational attractiveness offers insights into these different anticipations. Victim and accidental crises can trigger ambiguous feelings among potential employees, including safety concerns, indifference, and support expressed through organizational compassion and beliefs in future learning. In the accidental crisis group, responses are, however, more unified around a negative perception of management as being careless and negligent of safety issues. As for the intentional group, responses are more homogeneous and the general tone is rough, indicating the anger and indignation of the participants. They denounce wrong priorities, bad values, and

unethical behaviour comparing more explicitly to their own self-concepts. These findings confirm our presumptions concerning different signals about organizational identity occurring from different crisis types that potential employees, yet, still outsiders of the organization, receive and interpret.

Our proposed mediating effects are valid only for accidental and intentional crises. Victim crises do not have an influence on anticipated self-esteem in both samples and on anticipated self-continuity in the US sample, and even increase anticipated self-continuity with a small but positive significant indirect effect on organizational attractiveness in the UK sample. Again, our qualitative analysis yields some patterns of explanation. First, victim crises do not send signals about bad values or imprudent behaviour, because the crisis is generally not perceived as a result of any managerial fault. Second, some individuals, such as those that defend the organization, might feel a kind of compassion for the organization as indicated in some of the responses. Those, who feel high levels of helpfulness or sense of justice might anticipate even higher continuity with their own sense of self if joining the organization, because they could express those characteristics through helping after the incident (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010).

We find no moderating effects of moral identity on the relationships between organizational crises and anticipated self-continuity and self-esteem and no consistent moderating effects of ideal organizational moral identity on the relationship between organizational crises and anticipated self-esteem. When inspecting our data, we register high means and low variation within the variables moral identity and ideal organizational moral identity. Tappin and McKay (2017) describe this phenomenon as the irrationality of moral superiority. Whereas natural conditions in an experiment already make it difficult to find interaction effects (McClelland & Judd, 1993), the detected low variance further reduces statistical power. In addition, we tested the moderating effects in the first step in a multiple mediator model, where the indirect effects are not that high. Altogether, we interpret the statistical power in our moderated mediation analysis as a possible reason for our rejection of Hypotheses 4a, 4b, 5a and 5b.

Theoretical and practical implications

Our study makes three main contributions to the social identity approach, identity change, and signalling theory. First, we introduce the concepts of anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem and demonstrate that potential in-group members also deal with the question of employers' potential impact on their social identity as they interpret signals about organizational identity. Hence, we respond to Banks et al.'s (2016) call for a better understanding of how social identity relates to organizational attractiveness by simulating an abrupt organizational identity-changing event. Our results prove that anticipations about social identity, i.e., anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem, influence potential employees' reactions to organizational crises. Our qualitative analysis reveals that participants tend to refer to more obvious reasons such as safety, employee care, or bad management than

explicitly using terms related to social identity. However, on closer examination, we can identify some answers where we could suspect underlying motives of anticipated self-continuity (e.g., “*Good culture but under massive change*”; “*Company seems to have values that I don’t share*”) and anticipated self-esteem (e.g., “*I wouldn’t want to work for a company that is all about greed for the shareholders and management*”; “*Working for them would compromise my integrity*”). Nevertheless, changes in anticipations about social identity seem to occur rather unconsciously, whereas other reasons are more obvious to potential employees at first sight.

Second, we contribute to research on organizational identity change by simulating three degrees of identity changes within the same crisis context. Literature on identity change already views crises in general as identity changes with the highest degree, so-called third-order changes, which “*call into question basic assumptions about organizational identity*” (Clark et al., 2010, p. 398). The negative effects of crises that we find, which become stronger as crisis responsibility increases, indicate that the existing classification is rather rough and that these third-order changes can again have different classifiable degrees and effects.

Third, established research on signalling theory shows that observable information, e.g., organizational characteristics as shown on the website, signals what potential employees can expect if working for a particular employer, which influences their interest in working there (Celani & Singh, 2011). However, recent studies point to a lack of understanding of how exactly the signalling process occurs (Banks et al., 2016; Celani & Singh, 2011). Our study provides insights into the underlying cognitive processes of individuals that result in a more positive and/or negative perception of the employer after receiving certain signals.

Our findings also offer several practical implications. First, besides several bad influences of organizational crises (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Yu et al., 2008), managers should be aware that crises also reduce organizational attractiveness for potential employees, beyond affecting employees as other researchers have discussed in previous studies (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Piening et al., 2020). Second, our results indicate that potential employees are very sensitive to identity-related signals. Thus, a note on the careers webpage about how the employer could contribute to its employees’ social identity may be helpful and may even compensate for some of the negative consequences of a crisis. Third, victim, accidental, and intentional crises send different kinds of signals producing stronger negative reactions as crisis responsibility increases. Victim crises can even trigger positive emotions for some individuals. This is why we would suggest that after such crises, organizations should clarify the victim role for outsiders and not hold back from arousing compassion. After accidental crises, organizations should point out that the incident was not intentional as well as point to the learning generated from this situation. The crisis type is only one attribute framing a crisis. The results indicate that each specific crisis, with its idiosyncratic features, has its own effects on potential employees, and requires individual handling.

Limitations and future research

Even though our method simulates realism with high internal validity, it may restrict the generalizability of our findings. Crisis situations are complex with multiple overlapping effects (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2000). We isolate one of those effects, their influence on organizational attractiveness for potential employees. Thereby, we take only a short-term perspective. Although short-term reactions form the basis for long-term behaviour (Andrade & Ariely, 2009), in reality, more information becomes public after a crisis from different sources such as the media, which can change individuals’ first perceptions (Zavalyova et al., 2012). Across all three crisis groups, some participants expressed a need for additional information. Reputational damage can again cause intentional identity change, which we do not take into account (Martin, 2005). Further, as the experiment creates a fictitious set-up, we facilitate a form of *double* anticipation, when we ask the participants to *imagine* being job seekers and to *anticipate* identity-related variables if they join the organization. Facing these limitations, we encourage researchers to conduct long-term field studies about the effects of organizational crises in the recruiting context. For example, it would be interesting to examine changes in the applicant pool before and at different points in time after a crisis, while controlling for interfering influences such as media coverage.

Furthermore, studies have examined crisis responses, which influence how much damage the crisis causes (Pearson & Clair, 1998). In our qualitative analysis and shown in Table A1 in the Appendix, we identified themes that highlight the importance of the crisis response for the ultimate reaction in the victim group (e.g., “*It would be the rebuild I would look at to judge them on, so I would still keep it on my radar for now*”) and the accidental group (e.g., “*The worth of an organization is in how it reacts after a mistake*”). Prior literature shows different effects of varying crisis responses across different contexts (Kim et al., 2004), while there is a shortage of related research in recruiting. We encourage future recruiting studies to examine different crisis responses and the way they might attenuate the negative effects of crises on organizational attractiveness.

Conclusion

Results from our scenario-based experiment with 808 participants from the UK and 809 participants from the US show that organizational crises are associated with lower organizational attractiveness for potential employees. By introducing anticipated self-continuity and anticipated self-esteem as two novel concepts that mediate this relationship, we can confirm our suggestions that potential in-group members can already anticipate negative influences on their social identity if they join an organization currently exposed to a crisis. The effects become stronger with higher crisis responsibility. Differences in reactions can occur according to the idiosyncratic nature of each individual, in particular, in the event of victim crises. Here, crises can also trigger positive emotions.

Disclosure statement

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