The influence of organizational death on work priorities and the moderating role of attachment internal working models

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Abstract

Downturns in the global economy have caused even large organizations to cease to operate; a phenomenon often dubbed "organizational death". Two studies focused on individual coping strategies in times of organizational death and the possible moderating role of attachment as a personality factor. Experiment 1 ($N = 162$) explored the effects of the saliency of organizational death on work priorities, and the moderating role of dispositional attachment orientation. Experiment 2 ($N = 119$) examined the interaction between dispositional attachment and the recall of an attachment event on work priorities. Participants reported their work priorities after being primed to imagine that their organization must either shut down or undergo an organizational crisis (or were assigned to a neutral control group), and completed the Experiences in Close Relationships scale to determine their attachment orientation. In Experiment 2, participants were also asked to recall a secure/insecure event after organizational death (or organizational crisis) priming to test the impact of external attachment event recall saliency and its interaction with dispositional attachment on work priorities. Dispositional avoidance (but not anxiety) moderated the effects of the organizational priming condition on work priorities. Recall of an attachment event interacted with dispositional avoidance (but not anxiety) on work priorities after organizational death priming. The saliency of organizational death mitigated the moderating role of individual differences on the effects of both dispositional orientation and priming of an attachment event on work priorities. Thus, a significant event that undermines one of the pillars of security in adulthood may lessen individual differences in work priorities following this exposure.

Keywords Attachment · Organizational death · Personality · Stress · Work priorities · COVID-19 · Motivation

Recent crises in the global economy have infused a growing sense of uncertainty into the workplace. Entire organizations have been forced to close their doors (Bell & Taylor, 2011; Gerstrøm & Isabella, 2015; Samuel, 2011; Walsh & Bartunek, 2009; Zacher & Rudolph, 2020), a phenomenon often termed "organizational death" (Bell & Taylor, 2011; Blau, 2008; Samuel, 2011; Sutton, 1987; Walsh & Bartunek, 2009), which can lead to the simultaneous layoff of millions of workers (Gerstrøm & Isabella, 2015; Samuel, 2011; Sverke et al., 2002; Zacher & Rudolph, 2020). Here, Sutton's (1987) definition of organizational death as complete closure of an organization was applied. Sutton used the term because it clearly marks the permanent cessation of activity, and the death metaphor best describes how people experience this transition (see also Kibler et al., 2021).

The phenomenon of organizational death differs considerably from other forms of organizational crisis. Empirical evidence has identified opposing psychological differences between closedowns and other forms of restructuring. Regardless of the reasons for initiating organizational change such as promoting a new organizational identity or reducing hierarchies, it has often been associated with a variety of negative outcomes including resistance to change (Jones et al., 2008), the centralization of decision-making (Mishra, 1996), perceptions of uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004), as well as decreased work climate, health and performance (Carr et al., 2003). By contrast, organizational death has been associated with positive outcomes such as increased productivity and employee performance (e.g., Hansson & Wigblad, 2006a), the surfacing of informal leadership and informal work groups, increased job autonomy (Hansson & Wigblad, 2006b), decentralized decision-making (Bergman & Wigblad, 1999) and diminishing managerial control (Sutton,

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1987). Another obvious difference between closures and other types of organizational restructuring is that cessation of activity affects all hierarchies equally in terms of the certainty of job loss. Samuel (2011) differentiated between organizational death and organizational crisis, and argued that these two organizational phenomena are significantly different in various ways. Whereas an organizational crisis reflects a deterioration that can be reflected in resource reduction, organizational death expresses processes leading to disbandment and complete cessation of organizational activity. He noted that an organizational crisis represents a reversible phenomenon, but organizational death is irreversible.

Research on organizational downsizing and/or layoffs has tended to focus on the coping strategies of employees (Blau, 2008; Harney et al., 2018; Klotz et al., 2020; Paulsen et al., 2005; Richter et al., 2016; Tsai & Yen, 2020; Uchitelle, 2006). The few articles relating to organizational death itself have dealt with the process of grief after the death of an organization (Bell & Taylor, 2011), the antecedents of individual grieving stages during an anticipated worksite closure (Blau, 2008), the relationship between loss of legitimacy and the sudden death of an organization (Hamilton, 2006), and the mechanisms evoked to minimize the negative consequences of organizational death (e.g., Marks & Vansteenkiste, 2008; Sutton, 1987). Less attention has been paid to how organizational death and its salience affect all those exposed (Wigblad et al., 2012). Similarly, scant empirical attention has been paid to the frequency and influence of complete organizational death on employees in the workplace as a whole, let alone the influence of organizational death salience on work priorities. Work priorities are defined as the importance employees ascribe to different goals that can be achieved though work, and primarily include salary, self-fulfillment and stabilization.

Organizational Death

Various criteria have been suggested to define the death of an organization, including the date an organization shuts down, the moment it becomes insolvent, files for bankruptcy, is dismantled, collapses, undergoes a massive turnover, experiences significant changes as part of a merger and acquisition, or is re-oriented and re-engineered (Samuel, 2011(. The shutdown of an organization is a traumatic event for employees and management alike (Bell & Taylor, 2011; Cunningham, 1997; Samuel, 2011; Sutton, 1987). This process and the grieving stages have been paralleled to the death of a person (Bell & Taylor, 2011; Blau, 2008) and in some cases are more psychologically difficult than the death of a loved one (Cunningham, 1997; Samuel, 2011; Sutton, 1987(. One reason that organizational death causes such increased levels of stress is because individual unemployment is coupled with collective unemployment, and thus often

has large-scale negative consequences (Samuel, 2011). It also leads to a substantive fear of losing one's livelihood and the inability to provide for one's basic needs. The effects of organizational death can involve short and long lasting effects on work priorities.

General Work Motivations, Goals and Priorities

Motivational processes energize, orient and select behavior toward anticipated goal states (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018; Rheinberg & Vollmeyer, 2018) and are often classified as either extrinsic or intrinsic (Locke & Schattke, 2019; Pinder, 2011). Extrinsically motivated behaviors are related to instrumental gains and losses (e.g., incentives, salary and work stability). By contrast, intrinsically motivated behaviors are enacted for their own sake, for the pleasure and enjoyment derived from an activity (e.g., task enjoyment, self-fulfillment at work). Locke and Schattke (2019) defined intrinsic motivation as "liking the doing" whereas extrinsic motivation was defined as doing something as a means to an end. Meta-analyses have shown that the extrinsic driver of financial incentives is associated with higher performance (Condly et al., 2003; Jenkins Jr. et al., 1998). Intrinsic motivators have been found to predict both the quality of performance (Bakker et al., 2008; Simpson, 2009), perseverance on tasks (Grant, 2008) and performance in general (Christian et al., 2011). Studies that have compared extrinsic and intrinsic motivators have shown that individuals who generally enjoy their jobs tend to outperform those who do not (Judge et al., 2001).

When the dramatic experience of organizational death is made more salient, extrinsic motivators, and especially the need for income, may be more powerful than other extrinsic goals such as work stability or more intrinsic ones (e.g. work-fulfillment) and may prompt individuals to focus on their threatened basic needs such as salary. In particular, organizational death salience is likely to be experienced as an existential threat (Samuel, 2011). In such circumstances, people may primarily want a secure income if they fear that they are going to lose their main source of financial wellbeing in the near future. The way individuals cope with stressful events such as organizational death is also personality dependent.

Attachment Theory

Attachment orientations are one of the best-established personality constructs that have consistently been shown to be associated with affect regulation coping strategies in stressful situations including individuals' fear of personal death and fear of negative evaluation (e.g., Elliot & Church, 2002; Mikulincer & Florian, 1995, Mikulincer & Florian, 1998;

Mikulincer et al., 1990; Yaakobi, 2019; for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory highlights the importance of internal working models developed in early childhood that guide the individual's social perceptions, goals, thoughts, expectations, beliefs, emotions, behavior and affect regulation strategies (Feeney et al., 2008; Ronen & Mikulincer, 2014; for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scale is a validated measure of individual differences in attachment orientation. It assumes two roughly orthogonal dimensions: (i) attachment-related avoidance and (ii) attachment-related anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998). The Mikulincer and Shaver's (2016) conceptualization of this two-dimensional space theorizes that the avoidance dimension represents the extent to which individuals lack trust in their partner's goodwill and consequently strive to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance from them. The anxiety dimension represents the extent to which an individual is concerned that a partner will not be available and responsive during times of need.

There is vast empirical evidence that attachment orientations are associated with the ways different individuals interpret stressful situations and the strategies they use to regulate and cope with them (Altan-Atalay & Sohtorik İlkmen, 2020; Mikulincer & Florian, 1995; for a review see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). The dramatic experience of organizational death is clearly representative of a major stressful situation in adulthood which is likely to be moderated by attachment orientation.

Studies have confirmed that both attachment avoidance and anxiety are associated with reliance on less constructive ways of coping with stress (e.g., denial, mental rumination and cognitive distancing), emotional problems and less affective regulation of distress (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Elliot & Reis, 2003; Mikulincer, 1998; Ronen & Mikulincer, 2009, 2014). However, individuals who are high on the avoidance dimension tend to take defensive steps to "de-activate" the attachment system from threatening indicators (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988; Kobak et al., 1993). Their coping strategies include a strong sense of self-reliance and independence (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). By contrast, individuals scoring high on anxiety were found to deal with threatening events with continuous tension, an intensified negative emotional state, negative thoughts and memories, and a tendency to exaggerate the threatening aspect of an event (Florian & Mikulincer, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). These coping mechanisms should moderate the way organizational death affects individuals' working goal priorities. Thus, individuals' attachment working models should affect their beliefs in their ability to cope, construe and interpret events such as organizational death and may lead to a reassignment of working goal priorities.

It has also been suggested that adult exploration in terms of achievement motivations and goals is impacted by a generalized set of mental representations about attachment figures which has both dispositional (i.e. trait-like) as well as partner-specific (i.e. reflecting the person's experience with particular partners) components (Reis et al., 2002; Shaver et al., 1996). This implies that organizational death may have a significant impact on individuals' perceptions of the (un)availability of support from their main caregivers in adulthood (such as their hierarchical superiors).

To account for the relationship between attachment orientation and individuals' work priorities, Ronen and Mikulincer (2014) proposed the construct of a "secure work base", which they defined as a psychological mechanism that shapes autonomous motivation in the workplace. This construct arises from a context-specific sense of security that emerges from interactions with the organization or its members, where employees feel that support is available when needed, that their capabilities and efforts are affirmed and appreciated, and where their actions and initiatives are not interfered with or interrupted. Ronen and Mikulincer (2014) posited that a secure work base facilitates autonomous task engagement. By extension, organizational death may destabilize this representation and alter the priorities of these motivations while augmenting individuals' need for income, independent of their dispositional attachment orientation. This is because workers are likely to want to guarantee their income if they feel they are going to lose their jobs in the near future. Under such circumstances (i.e. organizational death), individual differences should have less impact on work priorities.

Overview of the Present Experiments

The goal of the two experiments presented below was to examine the influence of organizational death saliency on individuals' work priorities, and the moderating role of attachment orientation on these effects. It also explored the ways in which these effects could be moderated by attachment priming elicited by the recall of an attachment event (for a review see Gillath & Karantzas, 2019). The central premise is that when people are faced with a major threat (e.g, organizational death), they become more extrinsically oriented and salary-focused. It was hypothesized that the saliency of organizational death (compared to other stressful organizational contexts that are not related to organizational death such as an organizational crisis) or a neutral condition would augment people's more existential needs, which should be manifested in assigning a higher priority to a guaranteed income if job loss is imminent. The priority of salary was expected to be higher than that of self-fulfillment and work stability. This led to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: The organizational death saliency condition should lead to a higher prioritization of salary over self-fulfillment at work than in the organizational crisis or neutral conditions.

Hypothesis 1b: The organizational death saliency condition should lead to a higher prioritization of salary over work stability than in the organizational crisis or neutral conditions.

The two experiments also examined whether individual differences in attachment orientation would moderate these effects. Since attachment orientation was shown to be related to strategies individuals use to cope with threats (for a review see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), attachment orientation was expected to have a moderating role on the effects. Attachment avoidance (but not anxiety) was found to be associated with achievement motivation (Elliot & Reis, 2003) and positively associated with avoidance-goals and lower achievement motivation. Ronen and Mikulincer's (2014) secure work base assumption suggests that high avoidants should differ from low avoidants. This led to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Attachment avoidance should moderate the effects of organizational death saliency on work priorities. Specifically, whereas high avoidants are more likely to prioritize a higher salary over both self-fulfillment and work stability in the organizational death and organization crisis conditions, low avoidants should prioritize salary over self-fulfillment and work stability in the organizational death saliency condition but not in the organizational crisis condition.

Experiment 2 tested whether an external intervention in the form of recalling an attachment event would interact with dispositional attachment orientation and thus affect work priorities. It was hypothesized that individuals' recall of a secure attachment event ("security priming") should mitigate the effects of the saliency of organizational death, based on the assumption that the recall of a secure event can make the secure base and safe haven provided by attachment figures more accessible to individuals' cognitions, and as such relieve some of their distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Pan et al., 2017). Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) found that temporarily activating mental representations of attachment figures could make these figures symbolically available, augment a person's sense of felt security, and thus contribute to maintaining the person's emotional balance and adaptability, even under fairly stressful circumstances. Specifically, priming a secure attachment event was reported to lead to positive affect, even among depressed individuals (Liao et al., 2017). By contrast, recalling an insecure attachment event ("insecure priming") would be likely to lead to higher prioritization of salary and other external motivators in the case of organizational death

saliency among low avoidant individuals. Since high avoidant individuals prioritize salary and other external motivators to a greater extent (Elliot & Reis, 2003) they should be less affected by security/insecurity priming. This led to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: Recalling a secure attachment event should lead to lower prioritization of salary (in comparison to self-fulfillment) in low but not high attachment avoidant employees after the priming of organizational death saliency (vs. organizational crisis).

Hypothesis 3b: Recalling an insecure attachment should lead to a higher prioritization of salary (in comparison to self-fulfillment) in low but not high attachment avoidant employees after the priming of organizational death saliency (vs. organizational crisis).

Hypothesis 3c: Recalling a secure attachment should lead lower prioritization of external motivators in low but not high attachment avoidant employees after priming of organizational death saliency (vs. organizational crisis saliency).

Hypothesis 3d: Recalling an insecure attachment should lead to higher prioritization of external motivators in low but not high attachment avoidant employees after the priming of organizational death saliency (vs. organizational crisis saliency).

Finally, possible gender differences with respect to these effects were examined in exploratory fashion since previous findings have reported gender differences with respect to work goals, work stress coping mechanisms, and work aspirations and goals (Cocchiara & Bell, 2009; Hakim, 2002; Maume, 2006). However, other studies have found similarities between men's and women's typical work goals such as the significance attributed to having a supportive work environment (Nichols et al., 1995). Thus no directional hypotheses for gender were made.

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 examined the effects of organizational death saliency on work priorities and the moderating role of attachment orientations on these effects. Methodology developed in Terror Management Theory (TMT; Greenberg, 2012; Greenberg et al., 1997) was used to examine the effects of organizational death as a parallel to the fear of one's own death. Organizational death salience was manipulated by asking the participants to imagine that their organization had failed ("died") and would be shut down. This was done to mimic the effects of awareness of their own increased potential exposure to organizational death.

Method

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Participants One hundred and sixty-two employees (73 men and 89 women, aged 20 to 57, mdn = 25) volunteered to take part in the study. All participants were enrolled in M.B.A. or executive M.B.A. programs on weekends in academic institutions. All were working toward a degree geared at achieving job-oriented goals and would therefore be affected by obstacles such as organizational death that might threaten their job security. Only participants who perceived their job as a career were included, to make sure the participants were attached to their organization. All participants filled in the questionnaires; for a response rate of 100%. Most were working in the high-tech sector. No monetary compensation was provided.

Materials and Procedure Employees were invited to take part in a study on personality and social psychology. They were told that they would complete two questionnaires and were instructed to work through the packet at their own pace but in the order of presentation. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and were told that only the researchers would see their completed questionnaires.

After completing a brief socio-demographic sheet, participants were randomly divided into three experimental conditions (organizational death, organizational crisis, and the neutral condition of watching TV) and were asked two open-ended questions designed to prime specific thoughts. 1) In the organizational death salience condition, participants were given the following instructions: "Imagine that the organization where you are employed has failed and must shut down"; "Write down in detail what you think will happen to you if your current workplace has to shut down"; and "Describe in brief your feelings at the thought of the shutdown of your workplace." 2) Participants in the organizational crisis salience condition were asked parallel questions, replacing references to organizational shutdown with "experiencing an organizational crisis." ("Write down in detail what you think will happen to you if your workplace experiences a crisis" and "Describe in brief your feelings at the thought of a workplace crisis."). In the neutral salience condition participants were asked parallel questions, replacing all references to death with "watching TV." ("Write down in detail what you think will happen to you as you watch TV" and "Describe in brief how you feel when thinking about yourself watching TV"), as used in numerous previous studies (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1994) within the framework of Terror Management Theory. In all the conditions, the questionnaires consisted of two items with a space provided below each for one paragraph of response.

Immediately afterwards, the participants were asked to complete two questions about their work priorities on a semantic differential scale ranging from 1 to 8. The first contrasted their preferences for a high salary vs. self-fulfillment at work from (1) a low paying but fulfilling job to (8) a high paying but unfulfilling job. The second contrasted preferences for a high salary vs. job stability from (1) a low salary with high job stability (1) to (8) a high salary with low job stability. Higher scores represented a higher priority ascribed to salary on both scales. This scale examined the relative importance of salary vs. a fulfilling job (or job stability) and encouraged the participants to compare these two needs by evaluating the relative importance they ascribed to both simultaneously.[1]

Then, participants completed the ECR scale to assess their attachment orientation (Brennan et al., 1998) by rating the extent to which each item described their feelings and behaviors in close relationships on a 7-point scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to "very much" (7). Eighteen items assessed attachment anxiety (e.g., "I worry about being abandoned") and 18 assessed avoidance (e.g., "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down"). Low scores indicated more secure attachment orientations. The reliability and validity of the scales have been demonstrated repeatedly (Brennan et al., 1998; for a review see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016); in the current study these were $\alpha = .88$ for the anxiety items and $\alpha = .86$ for the avoidance items. Mean scores were computed for each participant on each scale. The two scales were essentially uncorrelated, $r(153) = .12$, as indicated by Brennan et al. (1998). After completing the ECR scale, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

Statistical analyses revealed no significant differences across conditions in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, marital status, working status), or length of text responses (number of words). However, to control further

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[1] Supplementary analyses were conducted by recruiting a similar sample of 166 participants to compare the semantic differential scale values with the values on items measuring the weight ascribed to the different work needs separately on a Likert-like scale where the participants were asked to weight the importance they ascribed to salary and six extrinsic work needs, drawn from the meta-analyses reported in Cerasoli et al. (2014) and Pinder (2011) (see Appendix 1). The results indicated positive correlation between the values in the differential semantic question of salary vs. self-fulfillment at work and the Likert-like scale for the weight ascribed to high salary ($r = .21$, $p = .007$) and a negative correlation between the differential semantic question of salary vs. self-fulfillment at work values and the Likert-like scale values ($r = -.23$, $p = .003$). There was no correlation between the values for the differential semantic question of salary vs. job security and the Likert-like scale for the weight ascribed to high salary ($r = -.03$, $p = .663$) and with the weight ascribed to self-fulfilling at work ($r = -.05$, $p = .489$). The scores on the semantic differential scale represented the sole evaluations on both measures regarding the weight ascribed to salary and self-fulfillment at work.

whether the participants differentiated between organizational death and organizational crisis, the participants' open ended responses were subjected to a textual analysis. The analyses indicated that none of the participants in the organizational crisis or TV conditions wrote or related explicitly to organizational closure or organizational death, and instead, consistent with Samuel (2011), all related to the reversibility of the phenomenon (or related themes). By contrast, in the organizational death condition, the themes related to irreversibility were very frequent and certain participants wrote explicitly about mourning.

Then, the data were analyzed in two steps. The first step examined the effects of organizational death salience and gender on self-reports of preferences at work. A 3 × 2 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) (organizational death salience, organizational crisis salience, neutral salience) × gender (men, women) was conducted on the work priority scores as the dependent variables (i.e. prioritization of salary vs. self-fulfillment or vs. work stability).[i] The full model was significant, as assessed by Wilks' lambda for organizational death salience ($F(4,308) = 6.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .080$). There was no significant effect for gender ($F(2,154) = 2.52$, $p = .084$, $\eta p^2 = .032$) and no effect for the interaction between work salience X gender ($F(4,308) = .47$, $p = .76$, $\eta p^2 = .006$). A test of between-subjects effects indicated that the organizational death salience groups differed on the salary vs. self-fulfillment measure ($F(2,155) = 10.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .114$) as well on the salary vs. work stability measure ($F(2,155) = 8.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .102$). Bonferroni post-hoc tests revealed that participants in the organizational death salience condition prioritized a higher salary over self-fulfillment at work or work stability more than participants in the neutral control ($p < .001$ for both measures) and organizational crisis salience conditions ($p$salary-self-fulfillment = .011; $p$salary-work stability = .032) (see means in Table 1).

No significant difference was found between the neutral control and organizational crisis salience conditions for either measure. Thus, Hypothesis 1a and 1b were supported. The test

of between-subjects effects also revealed that men vs. women differed on the salary vs. self-fulfillment measure ($F(1,155) = 4.43$, $p = .037$, $\eta p^2 = .028$) but not on the salary vs. work stability measure ($F(1,155) = 2.12$, $p = .147$, $\eta p^2 = .014$): men prioritized salary to a higher extent than women when compared to self-fulfillment at work but not when compared to work stability. There was no interaction between the organizational death manipulation × gender for either of the dependent measures.

The second analytical step examined the extent to which attachment avoidance or anxiety moderated the observed organizational death salience effects on work priorities after controlling for the effects of gender. Specifically, a 3-step hierarchical regression was conducted on work priorities. In each regression, the participants' gender was entered in the first regression step of the equation to assess whether attachment measures contributed to predicting the dependent measures beyond the contribution of gender. The second regression assessed the main effects of organizational death salience (two dummy variables contrasting the organizational death salience condition to the crisis and the neutral control conditions where the organizational death group was contrasted with each) and attachment avoidance and anxiety (treated as Z-scores). Finally, the third regression step added the interactions between each attachment score and the organizational death salience variables and between the avoidance and anxiety scores. The regression revealed a significant main effect for gender, $\beta = -.22$, $p = .01$ [$-.75$, $-.11$] for the salary vs. self-fulfillment measure, but not for the salary vs. work stability measures $\beta = -.10$, $p = .24$ [$-.53$, $.13$]. Thus, men prioritized salary over self-fulfillment more than women. The regression also revealed a significant main effect for organizational death salience, β(death-crisis) = $-.30$, $p = .001$ [$-.99$, $-.24$] and β(death-tv) = $-.19$, $p = .045$ [$-.81$, $-.01$] for the salary vs. self-fulfillment measure and β(death-crisis) = $-.31$, $p = .001$ [-1.01, $-.26$] and β(death-tv) = $-.20$, $p = .042$ [$-.83$, $-.02$] for the salary vs. work stability measures. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction for

Table 1 (Experiment 1) Means and standard deviations of work priorities as a function of organizational death salience and gender

Work Priorities		Organizational Death Salience		Organizational Crisis Salience		Control Group		Total	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Salary vs. Self-fulfillment	Men	5.61	1.86	4.53	1.77	4.07	1.86	4.82	1.95
	Women	4.90	2.09	3.72	1.70	3.53	1.90	4.04	2.06
	Total	5.26	1.99	4.03	1.92	3.77	1.88	4.40	2.04
Salary vs. Work Stability	Men	6.13	1.67	4.80	1.94	4.78	1.70	5.36	1.84
	Women	5.41	1.74	4.88	1.42	4.18	1.91	4.78	1.79
	Total	5.78	1.73	4.85	1.61	4.44	1.83	5.04	1.83

Note: Higher scores indicate a higher priority ascribed to salary (vs. self-fulfillment; work stability)

organizational death salience (compared to organizational crisis salience) and attachment avoidance $\beta = .26$, $p = .015$ [.09, .82] for the salary vs. work stability measures. There was also a significant interaction for organizational death salience (compared to organizational crisis salience) and attachment avoidance $\beta = .35$, $p = .001$ [.24, .95]) for the salary vs. self-fulfillment measures (see Table 2).

With respect to the interaction between organizational death salience and avoidance, simple slope tests (Aiken & West, 1991) revealed that the effect of organizational death salience (compared to organizational crisis salience) on work salary vs. work stability priorities was significant only when attachment avoidance was relatively low (−1 SD), $\beta = -.42$, $p < .001$ [−.65, −.19], but not when attachment avoidance was high (+1 SD), $\beta = .01$, $p = .92$ [−.21, .24] (see Fig. 1). As can be seen in Fig. 1, whereas high avoidants prioritized high salary over work stability, low avoidants only preferred high salary over work stability under organizational death saliency but not under organizational crisis saliency.

With respect to the salary vs. self-fulfillment measures, simple slope tests revealed that the effect of organizational death salience (compared to organizational crisis salience) on salary vs. self-fulfillment priorities was only significant when attachment avoidance was relatively low (−1 SD), $\beta = -.51$, $p < .001$ [−.73, −.28],

but not when attachment avoidance was high (+1 SD), $\beta = .09$, $p = .44$ [−.13, .31] (see Fig. 2). As can be seen in Fig. 2, whereas high avoidants prioritized high salary over self-fulfillment at work, low avoidants only preferred high salary over self-fulfillment under organizational death saliency but not under organizational crisis saliency. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Moreover, as can be seen in Figs. 1 and 2, organizational death saliency eliminated the dispositional differences on the prioritization of external (i.e. salary) motivators in comparison to organizational crisis.

Overall, the results indicated that when compared to the organizational crisis condition or to the neutral control TV condition, the introduction of an organizational death prime led to increased prioritization of salary over that of self-fulfillment at work or work stability. With respect to the two potential moderators tested, gender did not moderate these results. Attachment avoidance, on the other hand, was found to moderate these results such that they appeared mainly among less avoidant individuals.

However, it remained unclear whether the moderating role of attachment orientation on the effects of the saliency of organizational death on work priorities could be influenced by an external intervention. Experiment 2 was conducted to examine this eventuality.

Table 2 (Experiment 1) Hierarchical regression analysis predicting work priorities by attachment dimensions and organizational death salience

Effects	Salary vs. Self-fulfillment β	Salary vs. Work Stability β
Step 1		
Gender	−.22**	−.10
R^2 Change	.05*	.01
Step 2		
Death Crisis	−.30**	−.31***
Death TV	−.19*	−.20*
Anxiety	.02	.10
Avoidance	.10	.12
R^2 Change	.08*	.10**
Step 3		
Anxiety X Avoidance	.13	−.12
Death Crisis X Anxiety	.24	.17
Death Crisis X Avoidance	.35***	.26*
Death TV X Anxiety	.08	−.08
Death TV X Avoidance	.08	.04
R^2 Change	.12**	.09*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

* Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female; Marital status: 1 = not married, 2 = married; Death Crisis – dummy variable representing the contrast between organizational death and organizational crisis salience; Death TV - dummy variable representing the contrast between organizational death and TV salience
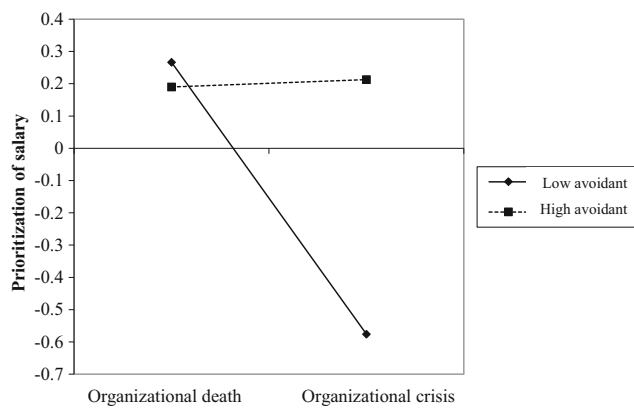
Fig. 1 Prioritization of salary (vs. work stability) in low and high attachment-avoidant participants

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 examined whether an external intervention based on attachment theory would interact with the effects of attachment orientations on work priorities given the results for organizational death saliency in Experiment 1. Specifically, Experiment 2 examined whether being asked to recall a secure or an insecure attachment event would moderate the priority ascribed to salary as found in Experiment 1 in different attachment orientations. The sample this time was a specific population of employees (teachers in elementary schools), all of whom were presented with the same scenario of organizational death/crisis as in Experiment 1 but relating to the school where they were working. This was done as a way to achieve higher internal validity.

Method

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.
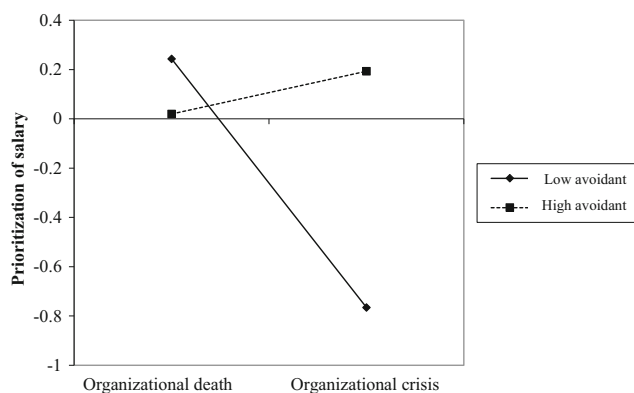
Fig. 2 Prioritization of salary (vs. self-fulfillment at work) in low and high attachment-avoidant participants in organizational death and organizational crisis conditions

Participants One hundred and nineteen teachers (57 men and 62 women, aged 23 to 51, mdn = 33) volunteered to take part in the experiment. All worked full time. Their tenure ranged from 1 to 28 years. Their mean tenure in the school where they were working was 7.46 years. All were enrolled on weekends in a continuing education program in management that would earn them pay-scale points as teachers and would therefore be affected by obstacles such as organizational death that might threaten their job security.[2] Eighty-one percent perceived their work as a career. No monetary compensation was provided. All participants filled in the questionnaires modified to reflect salary and fulfillment as teachers, for a response rate of 100%.

Materials and Procedure

Attachment Event Recall Manipulation After the organizational death/crisis priming, participants were randomly assigned to one of two recall conditions. In the secure recall condition ("security priming"), participants were asked to "imagine someone who is very close to you (e.g., a good friend, a spouse, or a close relative) who has been, over a fairly long period of time, consistently available to you, sensitive to your needs, and highly reliable and who clearly has your best interests at heart and supporting you in every way he/she can." Participants in the insecure condition ("insecure priming") were asked to "imagine someone who is very close to you (e.g., good friend, a spouse, a close relative), who over a fairly long period of time, has been unreliable, not always very sensitive to your needs and not always as supportive as one would expect from a friend/partner." Participants in both conditions were then asked to list a few adjectives about how this would make them feel (as used by Yaakobi & Williams, 2016).

Following these two manipulations, participants were asked to answer two questions about their work priorities on a semantic differential scale ranging from 1 to 8 (the same as in Experiment 1). The first contrasted their preferences for a high salary vs. self-fulfillment at work. The second contrasted preferences for a high salary vs. job stability.

Because the results of Experiment 1 suggested that after organizational death priming employees gave more weight to salary, in this experiment the weight ascribed to salary was also measured using a Likert-like scale. Moreover, additional extrinsic aspects at work were examined. Specifically, participants were asked to weight the importance they ascribed to salary and to 6 other questions on the importance they would attribute to six other extrinsic work needs, drawn from the meta-analyses reported in Cerasoli et al. (2014) and

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[2] A preliminary interview was conducted with ten teachers to examine whether their schools could close. All said that this was possible under certain circumstances.

Pinder (2011) (see Appendix 1). On each item they were asked to indicate the importance they would ascribe to each at work on a Likert-like scale ranging from 1 to 8 (1 – not important at all to 8 – very important). A new measure was calculated combining the teachers' evaluations of the importance of extrinsic work needs, and their preferences for a high salary vs. self-fulfillment at work, and another measure contrasting their preferences for a high salary vs. self-fulfillment at work (as in Experiment 1).

Results

To examine the main hypotheses, the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) Model 3 was used. To test the significance of the effects, and calculate the 95% CI for indirect effects, bootstrapping with 5000 resamples (Hayes, 2013) was used (see Tables 3 and 4).[3]

There was a significant three-way interaction between the saliency of organizational condition (death vs. crisis), dispositional avoidance level, and recalling a secure/insecure attachment event on teachers' work priorities. This was found for prioritization of salary (vs. self-fulfillment at work) and the weight ascribed to salary and the other external motivators (Tables 3 and 4). To probe the essence of these interactions, simple slope analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) were used for each interaction. In each analysis, the moderator was analyzed at plus/minus one SD from the mean.

The organizational condition predicted higher prioritization of salary after the organizational death saliency prime (compared to the organizational crisis saliency prime) only when attachment avoidance was low (-1SD) and teachers recalled an insecure attachment event $\beta = .47$ $p = .011$ [.11, .83] but not when low attachment avoidant teachers recalled a secure attachment event $\beta = .04$ $p = .756$ [−.22, .30] or when high avoidant teachers recalled an insecure $\beta = .22$ $p = .100$ [−.04, .48] or a secure event $\beta = .22$ $p = .256$ [−.16, .60] (see Fig. 3). Thus, Hypothesis 3a was not supported but Hypothesis 3b was confirmed.

Similar results were found when examining the weight ascribed to salary independent of self-fulfillment at work and the other external motivators (Tables 3 and 4). Specifically, the organizational condition predicted higher prioritization of salary after the organizational death saliency prime only when attachment avoidance was low (-1SD) and teachers recalled a secure attachment event $\beta = .39$ $p = .033$ [−.75, −.03] but not when low attachment avoidant teachers recalled an insecure attachment event $\beta = .10$ $p = .623$ [−.29, .48] or when high avoidant teachers recalled an insecure $\beta = -.11$ $p = .591$

[−.50, .29] or a secure event $\beta = .29$ $p = .227$ [−.18, .75] (see Fig. 4). Thus, Hypothesis 3a was supported but Hypothesis 3b was not supported.

Moreover, as can be seen in Fig. 5, organizational death saliency moderated the dispositional and situational attachment differences in the prioritization of external motivators (listed in Appendix 1) in comparison to other stressful events such as the saliency of organizational crisis. This finding is consistent with the effects of the prioritization of salary compared to self-fulfillment at work, the weight ascribed to salary independent of other work needs, or other external motivators in this experiment, and the effects of attachment avoidance on the prioritization of salary compared to the prioritization of self-fulfillment at work as well as work stability found in Experiment 1.[4]

Specifically, the organizational condition predicted higher prioritization of high external motivators after an organizational death saliency prime only when avoidance was low (-1SD) and teachers recalled an insecure attachment event $\beta = -.38$ $p = .042$ [−.74, −.01] but not when low attachment avoidant teachers recalled a secure attachment event $\beta = .13$ $p = .468$ [−.23, .50] or when high dispositional avoidant teachers recalled an insecure $\beta = .11$ $p = .579$ [−.29, .52] or a secure event $\beta = -.24$ $p = .249$ [−.66, .17] (see Fig. 5). Thus, Hypothesis 3c was not supported but Hypothesis 3d was confirmed.

General Discussion

These two experiments analyzed the influence of organizational death saliency on individuals' work priorities and tested the potential moderating roles of attachment orientation and its interaction with an attachment event elicited externally. In so doing, these experiments contribute to the scant literature on organizational death, an economic event which has become more frequent worldwide due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global economy (Kazak, 2020; Spurk & Straub, 2020). This may in part be the result of the steps taken by governments worldwide which have forced nonessential businesses to close their doors to halt the spread of the pandemic (e.g., Zacher & Rudolph, 2020). Thus, the current COVID-19 era has led to even more organizational deaths.

It was hypothesized that organizational death saliency would cause individuals to prioritize monetary and other extrinsic motivating factors to a greater extent than after priming with another stressor (organizational crisis) or a neutral event that was not related to an organizational death. This was

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[3] The same analysis was conducted when entering gender as an additional dependent variable. Since no significant main effect or interaction with the other variable were found, the reported results do not include gender.

[4] The same analyses as for attachment avoidance were also examined for the attachment anxiety orientation. As hypothesized, and found for the anxiety orientation, no significant main effect or interactions were found for attachment anxiety; thus, only the results for avoidance effects are reported.

Table 3 β, SE, t, p and 95% confidence interval values for the analysis of work priorities as a function of the organizational death saliency condition on ±1 SD of dispositional attachment avoidance and recall of an attachment event (Experiment 2)

Predictor	Prioritization of salary vs. self-fulfillment at work						Weight ascribed to salary					
	β	SE	t	p	95%LCI	95%UCI	β	SE	t	p	95%LCI	95%UCI
Organizational Death condition (OD)	.13	.09	1.43	.157	-.051	.314	-.04	.10	-.36	.718	-.226	.156
Recall of an Attachment event (RA)*	.09	.09	.94	.352	-.097	.270	.06	.09	.69	.492	-.121	.249
Avoidance	-.05	.10	-.54	.590	-.240	.137	.14	.10	1.41	.163	-.059	.343
OD×RA	-.09	.09	-.99	.323	-.275	.092	-.03	.10	-.35	.727	-.226	.158
OD×Avoidance	-.04	.09	-.42	.672	-.222	.144	.12	.10	1.13	.262	-.089	.324
RA×Avoidance	-.02	.10	-.18	.856	-.207	.172	.07	.10	.67	.503	-.133	.270
OD×RA×Avoidance	.22	.09	2.32	.022	.031	.340	.22	.11	2.06	.042	.008	.429

Prioritization of salary vs. self-fulfillment at work

RAE	Avoidance	β	SE	t	p	95%LCI	95%UCI
-1	-1	.47	.18	2.60	.011	.113	.833
-1	0	-.14	.18	-.76	.451	-.496	.222
-1	+1	.22	.13	1.69	.100	-.039	.479
1	-1	.04	.13	.31	.756	-.217	.300
1	0	-.03	.19	-.18	.852	-.402	.337
1	1	.22	.19	1.15	.256	-.160	.596

Weight ascribed to salary

RAE	Avoidance	β	SE	t	p	95%LCI	95%UCI
-1	-1	.10	.19	.49	.623	-.289	.480
-1	0	.02	.14	.11	.913	-.257	.287
-1	+1	-.11	.20	-.54	.591	-.501	.287
1	-1	-.39	.18	-2.16	.033	-.752	-.032
1	0	-.12	.14	-.91	.364	-.390	.145
1	1	.29	.24	1.22	.227	-.180	.751

Organizational Death condition: 0 = organizational crisis, 1 = organizational death *pooled

Recall attachment event (RAE): 0 = insecure, 1 = secure

Table 4 β, SE, t, p and 95% confidence interval values for the analysis of work priorities as a function of the organizational death saliency condition on ±1 SD of dispositional attachment avoidance and recall of an attachment event (Experiment 2)

		Weight ascribed to external motivators					
Predictor		β	SE	t	p	95% LCI	95% UCI
Organizational Death condition (OD)		−.10	.09	−1.05	.298	−.279	.086
Recall of an Attachment event (RA)*		.06	.09	.61	.544	−.128	.241
Avoidance		−.09	.09	−.61	.542	−.243	.128
OD×RA		−.06	.10	−.89	.374	−.277	.105
OD×Avoidance		.03	.09	−.30	.763	−.155	.211
RA×Avoidance		−.02	.10	−.24	.813	−.213	.167
OD×RA×Avoidance		−.20	.09	−2.12	.036	−.381	−.013
Weight ascribed to external motivators							
RAE	Avoidance	β	SE	t	p	95% LCI	95% UCI
−1	−1	−.38	.18	−2.06	.042	−.744	−.014
−1	0	−.19	.13	−1.43	.157	−.450	.074
−1	+1	.11	.20	.56	.579	−.291	.518
1	−1	.13	.18	.73	.468	−.230	.497
1	0	−.01	.13	−.09	.926	−.272	.247
1	1	−.24	.21	−1.16	.249	−.658	.172

Organizational Death condition: 0 = organizational crisis, 1 = organizational death*pooled

Recall attachment event (RAE): 0 = insecure, 1 = secure

hypothesized because under conditions of organizational death, employees are likely to want to fulfill basic needs such as salary. Since previous studies have shown that attachment avoidance was the main attachment orientation associated with approach-based measures of achievement motivation (e.g., need for achievement, mastery-approach goals) (Elliot & Reis, 2003) it was hypothesized that attachment avoidance would moderate these effects. Thus, under a real threat (i.e. organizational death) individuals are more likely to strive and prioritize means that can better enable their survival (e.g., income).

Overall, the findings supported the hypothesized association between organizational death salience and work priorities. The results indicated that when compared to the control group (watching TV), and even to organizational crisis

saliency, the introduction of an organizational death prime led to increased prioritization of salary over self-fulfillment at work or work stability, and augmented the weight given to the other extrinsic motivators. The findings also suggest that work priorities are dynamic rather than static and can be affected by external factors.

The current findings demonstrate the importance of the influence of personality (as manifested by an individual's attachment orientation), which acted as a significant moderator of the effects of organizational death saliency on work priorities. They also underscore the association suggested by Bowlby (1969) between attachment theory and new social situations over the course of the lifespan. Specifically they provide additional evidence for the way attachment internal working models impact individuals' social perceptions, goals, thoughts, expectations, beliefs, emotions, behavior and affect
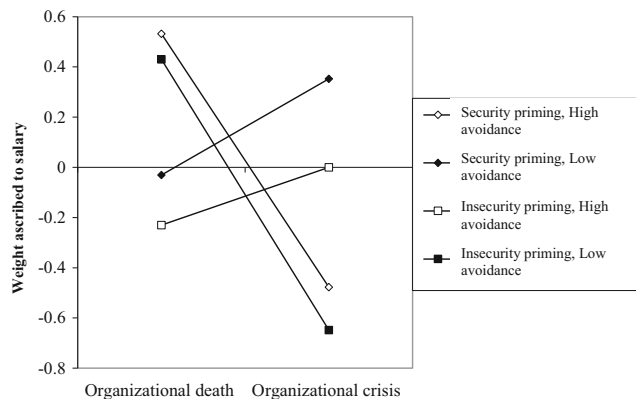
Fig. 3 Prioritization of salary (vs. self-fulfillment at work) in low and high attachment-avoidants in security and insecurity priming event recall conditions
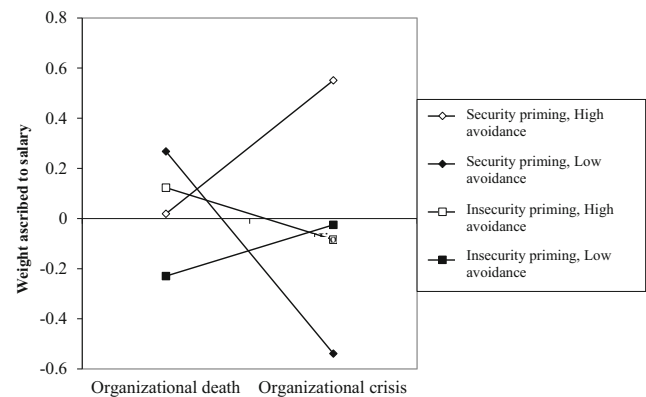
Fig. 4 Prioritization of salary in low and high attachment-avoidants in security and insecurity priming event recall conditions
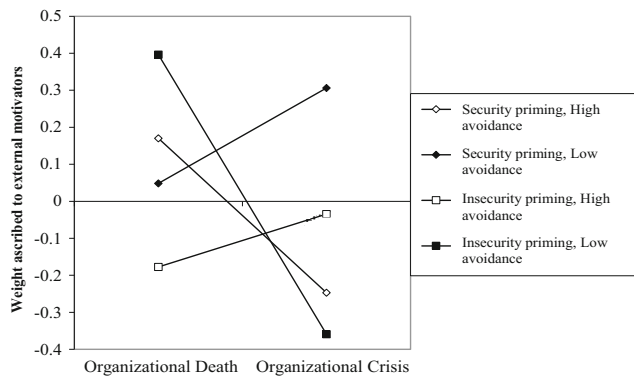
Fig. 5 Prioritization of external motivators in low and high attachment-avoidant and attachment recall condition

regulation strategies associated with the working environment (Elliot & Reis, 2003; Feeney et al., 2008; Ronen & Mikulincer, 2014; for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016) and extend them to events such as organizational death.

These two experiments thus enable a better understanding of the ways in which attachment orientation may moderate responses to crises such as COVID-19. The findings showed that attachment avoidance, but not anxiety moderated the results such that they appeared mainly among less avoidant individuals. This result is consistent with previous attachment regulation studies that have emphasized the importance of an individual's inner resources in moderating the mechanisms for coping with stressful events (for a review see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). They are also consistent with Elliot and Reis (2003) who reported that in contrast to secure individuals, insecure attachment and notably the avoidance orientation is associated with an avoidance-oriented achievement motivation profile, which here was further applied to organizational death effects. It is also in line with their findings that attachment avoidance (but not anxiety) is associated with achievement-motivation (Elliot & Reis, 2003). The current findings also revealed that the avoidant dimension, which represents the extent to which individuals lack trust in their partners' goodwill and efforts to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance from them, can emerge in an organizational context. Together, these results strengthen indications that the anxiety dimension, in contrast to the avoidant dimension, may be less permeable to appetitive achievement motivation. The findings also suggest that external mechanisms, such as recalling an attachment event that interacts with dispositional attachment orientation, can moderate individuals' tendency to prioritize external motivational needs.

As suggested by Davidovitz et al. (2007), there may be context-specific attachment figures; namely, real or potential sources of comfort and support in specific milieus, such as leaders in organizational settings (Popper & Mayseless, 2003) groups and institutions that act as safe havens and secure bases (Rom & Mikulincer, 2003). These potential

sources disappear in the case of an organizational death event. Future research should examine whether dispositional individual differences or external interventions are more efficient when coping strategies come to the fore.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

These findings have theoretical and practical contributions. They contribute to the literature that associates attachment theory with organizational settings and behaviors (e.g. Davidovitz et al., 2007; Geller & Bamberger, 2009; Harms et al., 2016; Rom & Mikulincer, 2003; Sumer & Knight, 2001). They also reinforce previous findings on the moderating role of attachment priming on stressful events including the fear of personal death (Mikulincer & Florian, 2000; Yaakobi et al., 2014; Yaakobi & Williams, 2016) including in the work context (Yaakobi, 2015). Here, attachment theory was found to be associated with organizational death salience and its effect on work priorities, a phenomenon that is increasingly becoming more of a reality in contemporary organizations. In addition, the findings of a positive association between the prioritization of salary vs. self-fulfillment at work, the weight ascribed to high salary, the absence of an association between the prioritization of salary vs. job security, and the weight ascribed to high salary all support the differentiation between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators (Locke & Schattke, 2019; Pinder, 2011).

Employees who have been exposed to organizational death saliency and therefore their own job fragility may adjust their work priorities in a different way than those who have not been exposed to or made aware of such an event. Hence, the current findings may help employers predict the priorities of their prospective candidates and adjust their respective recruiting and employee retention techniques. The current experiments also provide additional insights into how individuals might set their future work priorities (post-organizational death exposure). It is important for future research to examine the longer-term effects of exposure to organizational death saliency as well as the extent to which the current results can be generalized to longer exposures to real organizational death crises and its effects on work priorities. The findings here respond to Elliot and Reis's (2003) call for studies to examine the generalizability of the findings on achievement motivations to other achievement contexts. It also adheres to Main's (1999) call for integrative work to explore the potential of attachment theory and other fields of psychological inquiry.

Limitation and Future Suggested Studies

These experiments have some limitations that call for comment. First, they only examined immediate responses after the manipulation of organizational death salience. The lasting effects of such an experience should be empirically examined in

future studies to further validate the results. Another limitation is that these studies were based on an experimental design. On the one hand, this augments the findings' internal validity. However, it would be useful to examine actual cases of organizational death exposure and/or experiences on individuals' work priorities both immediately and in the long term. Moreover, the second experiment included participants who were teachers in elementary schools. This was done to eliminate possible alternative explanations for the results. However, future studies should examine these effects among other employees from other sectors. Finally, the use of both a differential semantic scale examining prioritization between different needs and a Likert-like scale on a range of samples augments the external and construct validity of the results.

Conclusion

These experiments are the first to provide empirical support for the impact of organizational death saliency on work priorities among employees and showed that organizational death saliency leads to increased prioritization of salary over that of self-fulfillment at work or work stability. Organizational death saliency also led to a higher prioritization of other external motivators. In addition, the findings also pointed to an important moderator – attachment orientation – that significantly impacted responses after the organizational death saliency prime. Specifically, both dispositional attachment avoidance and its interaction with the recall of an attachment event moderated the organizational death saliency effects on work priorities.

Appendix 1: Items on the Motivational Questionnaire (Experiment 2)

1. Contribute my qualities on the job.
   2. I need work stability.
   3. I work according to the rules.
   4. I want occupational security.
   5. I adhere to what I achieve at work.
   6. I value being accurate in my work.

Data Availability The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the Ono Academic College institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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