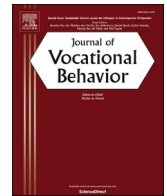




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Organizational nostalgia facilitates prioritization of important personal work goals

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ABSTRACT

To be successful, organizations cannot rely only on prescribing which goals employees should pursue; they must also support employees' pursuit of personal work goals. For sustained wellbeing and performance, employees need to prioritize goals they perceive as important. Based on self-regulation models, we propose that organizational nostalgia—a sentimental longing or wistful affection for past events in, and aspects of, an organization—facilitates employees' prioritization of important personal work goals, which may not necessarily align with goals prescribed by the organization. We obtained support for our hypotheses in (a) a two-wave field investigation in which we assessed individual differences in organizational nostalgia (Study 1), (b) a daily diary investigation in which we assessed momentarily experienced organizational nostalgia (Study 2), and (c) an experiment in which we demonstrated that recalling nostalgic organizational experiences aids employees in prioritizing important personal work goals, due to such experiences being appraised as more unique to employees than ordinary organizational experiences (Study 3). In all, organizations can facilitate employees' prioritization of important personal work goals by leveraging organizational nostalgia.

Organizational environments are increasingly dynamic, and the nature of work is growing more complex and diverse. Under such conditions, organizations face limitations in achieving high performance solely by prescribing standardized goals for employees. Indeed, across a widening range of industries, there is growing recognition of the value in employees' unique contributions (Goffee & Jones, 2015; Lifshitz-Assaf, 2018). This shift includes an appreciation of the idiosyncratic goals employees set for themselves in their work and careers, that is, their personal work goals (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Montani et al., 2019).

Personal work goals are defined as employees' "self-imposed intentions and demands within their own work environment" (Hyvönen et al., 2009, p. 83). These goals are relatively concrete and typically pertain to the development of skills, the improvement of performance, or the advancement of one's earnings, career, wellbeing, or the organization's interests (Huhtala et al., 2013). Enabling employees to pursue their personal work goals can yield benefits for both the individual and the organization. Specifically, opportunities to engage with such goals have been linked to greater employee well-being (Harris et al., 2003; Kehr, 2003; Maier & Brunstein, 2001) and reduced burnout (Hyvönen et al., 2009; ter Doest et al., 2006; Welsh et al., 2020). Conversely, when organizations hinder the pursuit of personal work goals, declines in employee wellbeing and organizational commitment are observed (Maier & Brunstein,

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2001).

Employees hold multiple personal work goals and perceive some of them as more important than others. It is particularly the pursuit of more important (rather than less important) personal work goals that fosters improved performance and well-being (Harris et al., 2003; ter Doest et al., 2006). Consequently, prioritizing the pursuit of important personal work goals is essential for positive outcomes (Morisano et al., 2010; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). In contrast, lack of such goal prioritization may contribute to decreased performance and wellbeing (Emmons & King, 1988; Hyvönen et al., 2009, 2010; Kehr, 2003; Locke et al., 1994).

However, a host of factors can interfere with employees' ability to prioritize their important personal work goals, including distractions, temptations, and habits (Brandstätter & Bernecker, 2022; Chauhan et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2002). Furthermore, the subjective importance of relatively concrete personal work goals often derives from their connection to core aspects of employees' self-concept, in particular to abstract and self-defining aspirations, that is, enduring personal strivings "aimed at the acquiring of a desired identity" (Brunstein, 2000, p. 342; see also: Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Yet, individuals frequently struggle to access self-relevant information that could guide such prioritization (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Sugiyama et al., 2022). In the context of organizational life—characterized by time pressure, multitasking, and shifting priorities—these challenges are exacerbated (Schmidt & DeShon, 2007; Vancouver, 2000). Accordingly, identifying variables that support employees in prioritizing their most important personal work goals is both of theoretical and practical relevance.

We propose that experiencing *organizational nostalgia* facilitates this prioritization. Organizational nostalgia is defined as "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for past events in, and aspects of, one's organizational life" (Leunissen et al., 2018, p. 44). Nostalgia is a frequently experienced emotion (Newman et al., 2020; Turner & Stanley, 2021; Wildschut et al., 2006) and enables individuals to cope with challenging circumstances (Sedikides et al., 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2023)—a function likely shared by its organizational variant (van Dijke & Leunissen, 2023). We argue that, because organizational nostalgia involves recollections of momentous and self-relevant work experiences, typically linked to self-defining aspirations, it can promote the prioritization of important personal work goals by activating reflection on aspects of the self that underlie those goals (Abeyta, Routledge, & Juhl, 2015).

Our research makes two primary contributions to the literature. *First*, although the benefits of prioritizing important personal work goals for both employees and organizations have been acknowledged (Morisano et al., 2010; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998), the mechanisms underlying such prioritization remain under-theorized. Existing research has largely focused on goals prescribed by organizations (Ballard et al., 2016; Vancouver et al., 2010), the relative importance of which is typically reinforced through job descriptions, performance evaluations, and incentive systems (Ashford & Northcraft, 2003; Schmidt & DeShon, 2007). In contrast, we draw on self-regulation models to investigate how employees prioritize their important personal work goals, which lack such external reinforcement.

Second, we advance the organizational nostalgia literature. In a pioneering study, Gabriel (1993, p. 119) concluded that "organizational nostalgia is not a marginal phenomenon, but a pervasive one, dominating the outlook of numerous organizational members." Subsequent qualitative research has emphasized organizational nostalgia as a collective phenomenon, focusing on its role in constructing shared identities amid organizational change (McDonald et al., 2006; Ybema, 2004; Ylijoki, 2005). We demonstrate that, outside the immediate context of organizational change, nostalgic organizational experiences are appraised as more unique by employees than routine organizational experiences. This subjective sense of uniqueness underscores the relevance of organizational nostalgia to the prioritization of important personal work goals.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Organizational nostalgia

The New Oxford Dictionary of English (1988, p. 1266) defines nostalgia as "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past." Nostalgia is a social emotion that is also self-relevant: Nostalgic recollections usually involve treasured events or objects from one's past, including childhood experiences or close interpersonal relationships (e.g., toys, birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, university reunions; Abeyta, Routledge, Roylance, et al., 2015; Batcho, 1995; Green et al., 2021). These recollections are personally meaningful (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018) and atypical (van Tilburg et al., 2018). In nostalgic reverie, individuals tend to idealize these moments, experiencing both warmth and a yearning to relive or reclaim aspects of the past (Evans et al., 2021; Hepper et al., 2012). Nostalgia is frequent; recall-based (Hepper et al., 2021; Wildschut et al., 2006) and experience-sampling (Newman et al., 2020; Turner & Stanley, 2021) studies indicate that individuals experience nostalgia several times per week. Nostalgia is experienced across cultures (Hepper et al., 2014; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022) and throughout the life span (Hepper et al., 2021; Juhl et al., 2020). Its hedonic tone is bittersweet, involving a blend of positive and negative affect (Leunissen, 2023; Leunissen et al., 2021; Methot et al., 2025; Newman et al., 2020; Turner & Stanley, 2021). Further, nostalgia has relevance in organizational contexts. For instance, it sustains cooperation under conditions of low procedural justice (van Dijke et al., 2015) and preserves intrinsic motivation when interactional justice is low (van Dijke et al., 2019).

These studies, however, have focused on personal nostalgia, namely, fond recollections of momentous events in one's private life. Our interest lies in organizational nostalgia, namely, fond recollections of momentous event from one's work life. The distinction between personal and organizational nostalgia is rooted in the conceptual separation of work and non-work domains (Gabriel, 1993; Greenhaus et al., 2003), which are typically experienced in different temporal and spatial contexts (e.g., weekdays vs. weekends; office vs. home). Organizational nostalgia is thus defined by its focus on events from the work domain, such as tender memories of team-building events or meaningful work achievements (Gabriel, 1993). This distinction is critical, because nostalgia is a self-relevant

emotion (van Tilburg et al., 2018), and the self is not a singular, unified entity but rather a context-sensitive constellation of self-views (Sedikides et al., 2013). Accordingly, organizational nostalgia operates within the work-related self-concept and predicts work-specific outcomes, such as organizational citizenship behavior and engagement, whereas personal nostalgia does not (Leunissen et al., 2024).

The literature has primarily examined organizational nostalgia as a collective phenomenon. Collectively experienced organizational nostalgia can foster shared organizational or professional identities, helping groups to navigate change and preserve continuity. Organizational nostalgia, then, may facilitate identity continuity (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; McDonald et al., 2006; Ylijoki, 2005). At the same time, it can reinforce group boundaries between employees who share pre-change memories and newcomers who do not (Milligan, 2003; Ybema, 2004). Organizational nostalgia may also be strategically leveraged by managers to frame change initiatives as a return to valued traditions (Strangleman, 1999).

Experimental work by Leunissen et al. (2018) demonstrated that inducing organizational nostalgia reduced turnover intentions by enhancing perceived work meaningfulness. In subsequent studies, Leunissen et al. (2024) found that dispositional organizational nostalgia predicted improved job performance and a greater willingness to explore novel experiences. In these studies, nostalgic recollections typically centered on close relationships with colleagues or leaders, or formative social events (i.e., communal organizational nostalgia), or professional achievements (i.e., agentic organizational nostalgia); communal organizational nostalgia predicted relatedness need satisfaction whereas agentic organizational nostalgia predicted autonomy need satisfaction. Whether these memories were shared among colleagues was not assessed.

Although we acknowledge the collective dimension of organizational nostalgia, particularly in response to shared events such as organizational change (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Gabriel, 1993; McDonald et al., 2006; Ylijoki, 2005), we argue that nostalgic organizational experiences are often appraised as personally meaningful in ways that extend beyond their collective context. That is, even when rooted in shared events, nostalgic recollections can be integrated into the self in ways that shape individual identity and motivation. In the following sections, we build on theories of self-regulation to argue that organizational nostalgia facilitates the prioritization of important personal work goals by providing access to self-defining memories that shape work-related identity. We further propose that this facilitative effect is specific to personal work goals (not organizationally mandated goals) due to the uniquely self-relevant nature of nostalgic recollections.

1.2. Self-regulation and prioritization of personal work goals

Goals are conceptualized as “internally represented (i.e., within the self) desired states” (Vancouver & Day, 2005, p. 158). The processes by which individuals pursue their goals while managing competing demands and avoiding unwanted outcomes is referred to as self-regulation (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; DeShon & Rench, 2009; Neal et al., 2017). Central to most self-regulation theories is the notion that individuals monitor their progress toward goal attainment and make adjustments—such as refining or altering their plans—when discrepancies arise between their current state and the desired end state, a process known as a negative feedback loop (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; DeShon & Rench, 2009).

Two key variables that jointly influence goal prioritization are expectancy and importance (i.e., value) of a goal (Vancouver et al., 2010). In most self-regulation theories, the expected utility of a goal is conceptualized as the product of the expectancy that particular actions will lead to goal attainment and the subjective importance ascribed to the goal. A goal associated with low expectancy remains unattractive even if it is highly valued, whereas a goal associated with high expectancy is only compelling when it is also deemed important. Crucially, when expectancy is held constant, individuals prioritize goals perceived as more (vs. less) important (Kernan & Lord, 1990; Schmidt & DeShon, 2007; Schmidt & Dolis, 2009). Relatedly, goals that elicit positive affect, an emotional signature of goal importance, are more likely to be prioritized (Custers & Aarts, 2005).

According to self-regulation theories, goal prioritization is grounded in the hierarchical ordering of goals (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 2002; Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). At the top of this hierarchy are abstract, long-term goals that are often self-defining (Brunstein, 2000), whereas lower levels contain more concrete, short-term goals (including personal work goals). Concrete goals may pertain to specific achievements (e.g., developing skills, forming a good relationship with supervisors) or to discrete actions (e.g., entering an office, logging into a computer, responding to emails). The perceived importance of these more concrete work-related goals is contingent upon their alignment with higher-order, self-defining aspirations (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; Ferris et al., 2018; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998).

Given that self-defining aspirations imbue more concrete goals with meaning and importance, they play a pivotal role in determining which specific personal work goals individuals prioritize (Carver & Scheier, 2002; Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). However, workplace environments are typically characterized by competing demands and distractions, which can lead individuals to inadvertently focus on less important goals. Compounding this issue, individuals often lack conscious access to self-relevant information, including self-defining aspirations (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019). Providing individuals with access to such information may therefore enhance their ability to prioritize important personal work goals by clarifying which concrete goals align with their higher-order aspirations. In the sections that follow, we propose that organizational nostalgia can facilitate the prioritization of important personal work goals (though not necessarily goals imposed by the organization) by increasing access to self-defining aspirations and the personally meaningful interpretations that connect them to concrete work goals.

1.3. Organizational nostalgia and goal prioritization: Toward hypothesis generation

Reflection has been conceptualized as a process through which individuals make sense of who they have become (Warhurst et al., 2025). Reflection facilitates the articulation of self-defining aspirations that serve to interpret past experiences, preserve identity

continuity, and structure the self as a coherent narrative (Singer & Salovey, 2010). The nostalgia literature corroborates this view, suggesting that nostalgic reflection grants access to self-defining aspirations (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016, 2023). For instance, participants regard personal nostalgic memories as reflective of the person they truly are (Kelley et al., 2022; Stephan et al., 2012). In a work context, organizational nostalgia provides access to self-defining aspirations that are specific to the occupational domain. Supporting this assertion, organizational nostalgia has been shown to engender work meaningfulness (Leunissen et al., 2018). As self-defining aspirations function to reinforce identity continuity and provide personal meaning (Davis et al., 2016), their activation through organizational nostalgia shapes the prioritization of concrete personal work goals (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999). Indeed, nostalgia strengthens motivation to pursue more (than less) important goals (Sedikides et al., 2018; Stephan et al., 2015). Consistent with autobiographical-memory research showing that socially embedded experiences can be integrated into the self in personally distinctive ways (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Pasupathi, 2001), such reflection can render certain work experiences especially self-defining. Based on this reasoning, we proposed our first hypothesis:

H1. *Employees prioritize important (vs. less important) personal work goals more strongly when experiencing high (vs. low) organizational nostalgia.*

Although abstract self-defining aspirations are instrumental in shaping more concrete personal work goal prioritization (Brett & VandeWalle, 1999), organizations also prescribe goals for employees. Goal-setting theory indicates that organizationally assigned goals, especially those that are specific and challenging, can prompt individuals to adopt more ambitious personal work goals (Austin, 1989; Fan et al., 2020; Locke et al., 1984; Locke & Latham, 2015). However, research also underscores critical differences between organizational and personal work goals. Whereas both types can influence behavior, employees are more committed to personal work goals (Erez et al., 1990; Hollenbeck et al., 1989; Welsh et al., 2020). Given that such goals are not entirely independent of organizational goals, despite each being guided by distinct regulatory processes, we included organizational goals in our investigation to examine a theoretically meaningful boundary condition of the mechanisms we propose.

Organizations provide a robust infrastructure (e.g., performance evaluations, incentive systems, formal feedback mechanisms) to help employees prioritize organizationally-set goals (Ashford & Northcraft, 2003; Schmidt & DeShon, 2007). By contrast, personal work goals, which are often personally meaningful and rooted in self-defining aspirations that reflect one's core identity goals, typically lack such external regulation. Given that organizational nostalgia facilitates access to self-defining aspirations, and that personal work goals are more closely linked to self-defining aspirations than are organizationally-set goals, we posit that organizational nostalgia selectively facilitates prioritization of personal, rather than organizational, goals. This logic underpins our second hypothesis:

H2. *Employees prioritize important (vs. less important) personal work goals more strongly when experiencing high (vs. low) organizational nostalgia; however, their prioritization of important (vs. less important) organizationally-assigned goals does not vary with organizational nostalgia.*

We further investigated the mechanism through which organizational nostalgia influences the prioritization of important personal work goals. In being driven by self-defining aspirations, personal work goals frequently reflect the unique identities employees bring into the workplace (Christiansen et al., 1999; see also Brett & VandeWalle, 1999), just as nostalgic memories frequently reflect individual identity strivings (i.e., self-defining aspirations; Baldwin et al., 2015; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2020; Stephan et al., 2012; Vess et al., 2012). We propose that the appraised uniqueness of a nostalgic memory (i.e., the extent to which its meaning is experienced as personally distinctive) mediates the relation between organizational nostalgia and prioritization of important personal work goals. Unlike everyday work experiences, which are often processed in a routine manner, organizational nostalgia is more likely to center on events that resonate deeply with one's occupational identity and are experienced as personally meaningful. These personally meaningful experiences serve to reinforce self-defining aspirations and inform the selection of related personal work goals. Hence, the appraised uniqueness of the nostalgic experience should explain its capacity to foster goal prioritization. This reasoning leads to our third hypothesis:

H3. *The positive influence of organizational nostalgia (vs. control) on the prioritization of important (vs. less important) personal work goals is mediated by the appraised uniqueness (vs. sharedness) of the remembered experience.*

We tested these hypotheses across three studies. Organizational nostalgia, while a transient state (Leunissen et al., 2018), also exhibits reliable individual differences (Leunissen et al., 2024), as is typical of many emotions (Scherer, 2021). Accordingly, in Study 1 we assessed dispositional differences in organizational nostalgia. In Study 2, we measured momentary fluctuations in the experience of organizational nostalgia. In Study 3, we experimentally induced organizational nostalgia to examine its causal influence. In all three studies, we included measures of positive affect and conducted analyses controlling for this variable. We did this to determine whether the observed effects of organizational nostalgia on personal goal prioritization are attributable to its affective tone or whether they reflect a distinct motivational mechanism.

1.4. Transparency and openness

We did not use generative AI in writing this manuscript. We observed the privacy rights of all participants and obtained informed consent from them. We have not included the data presented in this article in any previously published or submitted articles, nor will we use them in any future manuscript. The studies were approved by the Ethics Research Board at the first author's university (Study 1: 2019/02/06-46616mvd; Study 2: 2019/09/30-46616mvd; Study 3: ETH2324-0302). We describe our sampling plan, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures. All data, analysis code, research materials, supplemental analyses, and additional

measures are available at https://osf.io/wj3dg/overview?view_only=7c6a9aa57b714377a4b1223be4d76d6f.

2. Study 1

Study 1 was a two-wave field investigation. In addition to testing H1–H2, we explored which component of organizational nostalgia facilitates prioritization of important personal work goals. Organizational nostalgia can refer to moments when one felt a sense of achievement and personal growth (i.e., agentic organizational nostalgia), but also to moments when one felt included in the organization or had a strong bond with co-workers (i.e., communal organizational nostalgia; Leunissen et al., 2024). Both agency and communion may facilitate prioritization of important personal work goals. Agency enables individuals to resist external pressures and initiate behavior aligned with their self-defining aspirations, whereas communion provides a socially supportive context in which individuals feel safe to express and pursue self-defining aspirations (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998).

We also examined whether prioritization of important (vs. less important) personal work goals is uniquely associated with organizational nostalgia. Although prior research has predominantly focused on personal nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022a), we anticipated that organizational nostalgia would be more influential, as it arguably offers more direct access to self-defining aspirations situated in the workplace context.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Design and participants

Organizational nostalgia was a continuous, between-subjects variable. Goal source (personal vs. organizational) and goal importance (most important vs. least important goal) were within-subjects variables.

We conducted power analysis to determine the minimum number of participants needed to detect a small effect (i.e., $f = 0.10$, $\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.95), given a design with one continuous predictor, two within-subjects variables, and a correlation of 0.50 between the two levels of the within-subjects factors (GPower 3; Faul et al., 2007). This number was 216. We invited, via Prolific, 299 US-based participants, who were employed full-time or part-time in an organization (i.e., not self-employed), to complete the Time 1 assessments. We re-invited them for Time 2. Of them, 245 (82%) provided valid responses at Time 2. They received compensation directly after Wave 1 (for taking part in Wave 1) and directly after Wave 2 (for taking part in Wave 2).^{1,2}

Of the 245 respondents at Time 2, 127 were women and 118 were men. The average age was 34.51 years ($SD = 9.82$). They had worked on average for 7.11 years ($SD = 8.99$) for their current organization, and for 4.85 years ($SD = 10.02$) under their current supervisor. Further, they worked an average of 34.51 h per week ($SD = 9.67$). Seventy percent of them worked in a non-management position, 16% in line management, 10% in middle management, and 3% in senior/executive management. In terms of highest completed education, 20% indicated secondary education, 16% vocational training, 39% a bachelor's degree, 20% a Master's degree, and 3% a PhD.

2.1.2. Procedure

At Time 1, we invited employees to take part in a study on their “experiences at work,” informed them that the study would comprise two sessions, three weeks apart, and recorded demographic information. Then, we asked them to list and describe three personal and three organizational goals. Next, participants completed measures of organizational nostalgia, personal nostalgia, and positive affect.

At Time 2, three weeks later, we invited the same participants to the goal pursuit phase. For their most and least important personal work goal, and their most and least important organizational goal, we asked them: “Please describe how (or if) you have strived toward achieving this goal in the past three weeks. Describe what exactly you did and in which context (e.g., who else was/were involved).” We excluded the middle-ranked goal, as it was theoretically uninteresting and expanded unnecessarily the study time, although we had included it in the goal description stage to increase the likelihood of finding meaningful differences in importance between participants' most and least important goal.

2.1.3. Measures

A coder, unaware of the study's hypotheses, coded the goal pursuit descriptions on whether they referred to goal pursuit (e.g., “I

¹ Of the 300 participants invited to complete the Time 2 assessment, 268 responded (87%). Following this wave of data collection, we detected a coding error in the goal presentation procedure. Specifically, our study design required that participants be presented with their most and least important personal and organizational goals, as identified in Time 1. However, due to the error, some participants were instead shown incorrect goals (e.g., those of intermediate importance) at Time 2. We excluded these cases, resulting in a final sample of 247 participants.

² We tested the mean differences in organizational nostalgia, age and gender between participants who completed the Wave 1 survey only ($n = 31$) and participants who completed both the Wave 1 and 2 surveys ($n = 268$). For gender we excluded one participant who used the “other” option. Organizational nostalgia scores did not differ between participants who completed Wave 1 only ($M = 4.9758$, $SD = 1.24$) and participants who completed both Waves ($M = 4.9752$, $SD = 1.23$), $t(37.20) = 0.002$, $p = .998$. Age did not differ between participants who completed Wave 1 only ($M = 31.74$, $SD = 8.22$) and participants completed both Wave 1 and 2 ($M = 34.29$, $SD = 9.76$), $t(40.44) = -1.60$, $p = .118$. Also, gender composition did not differ between participants who completed Wave 1 only (18 men, 12 women) and those who completed Wave 1 and 2 (130 men, 138 women), $\chi^2(1) = 1.00$, $p = 317$.

have taken on the role as a project manager in the last two weeks with a team of 5 people working for me”) or not (e.g., “My work has been so busy and frenetic that I haven’t been able to dedicate any time toward this goal. In fact, the fast pace had led to me being even less organized”). Goal pursuit, then, was a dichotomous variable: yes ($n = 640$; 1 = participants strove toward their goal) or no ($n = 181$; 0 = participants did not strive toward their goal). A second coder, also unaware of hypotheses, coded a random subset (20%) of goal pursuit descriptions. Interrater reliability was good: Spearman-Brown corrected $r = 0.90$, $p < .001$. Taken together, we coded the pursuit of four goals per participant: personal and organizational goals that were either important or less important. In alignment with prior research (Kernan & Lord, 1990; Schmidt & DeShon, 2007; Schmidt & Dolis, 2009), we indexed goal prioritization as the comparative likelihood of pursuing important versus less important goals.

The coder also coded the goal descriptions in terms of whether the goal referred to the employee’s performance, skill development, wellbeing, or valued outcomes (e.g., career improvement). We describe analyses in which we included goal type in Online Appendix A.

We assessed *organizational nostalgia* with the 8-item Organizational Nostalgia Scale (ONS), developed and validated by Leunissen et al. (2024). Each item was preceded by the stem: “When I think about the past in my organization, I remember...” The ONS comprises two 4-item subscales: (a) communal organizational nostalgia, which refers to moments when employees felt close and part of the organization as well as the people in it (e.g., “good times I had with people from my organization”; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*); and (b) agentic organizational nostalgia, which refers to moments when employees felt a sense of achievement and personal growth in their work (e.g., “times when I felt my achievements were recognized by my organization”).

We assessed *personal nostalgia* with the 7-item Southampton Nostalgia Scale (SNS; Sedikides et al., 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022b). Three items pertain to the personal importance of nostalgic engagement (e.g., “How valuable is nostalgia for you?”), and four to the frequency of nostalgic engagement (e.g., “How prone are you to feeling nostalgic”), with response options ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Confirmatory factor analyses (Online Appendix B) established that the SNS is essentially unidimensional, meaning that almost all reliable variance (94%) in the total score is accounted for by a general factor (Rodriguez et al., 2016).³ The SNS items do not explicitly refer to personal nostalgia. However, previous research revealed that the vast majority (86%) of spontaneously generated nostalgic recollections by employees refer to the personal rather than work sphere (van Dijke et al., 2019). We assumed, then, that participants’ mindset when responding to that scale would reflect personal nostalgia.

We assessed *positive affect* with the 10-item Positive Affect subscale of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). To match the level of specificity of the positive affect items with that of the organizational nostalgia items, we instructed participants to indicate how they “generally feel” when responding (e.g., “interested,” “excited”; 1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 7 = *extremely*).

2.2. Results and discussion

We present in Table 1 scale means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients (where appropriate), and inter-correlations.

2.2.1. Hypotheses testing

We fitted linear mixed models using the R package lme4. Our models included a random intercept to account for nesting of four goal pursuit measurements within participants. We used two within-subjects (level 1) variables: goal source (−1 = organizational goal, 1 = personal work goal) and goal importance (−1 = least important goal, 1 = most important goal). We also used a continuous between-subjects (level 2) variable: organizational nostalgia. We included all interactions among the predictor variables (and their constituent main effects). We provide the model description in Online Appendix C. Given that goal pursuit was a dichotomous variable, we used a binomial link function. We present the results in Table 2 (top panel). Of greatest relevance, the Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction was significant.

We proceeded by fitting a model that included both ONS subscales as separate predictors as well as their interactions with goal source and goal importance. The Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction was significant $b = 0.28$ [0.05, 0.51], $Z = 2.39$, $p = .017$ (Fig. 1), but the Agentic Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction was not significant ($b = -0.12$ [−0.36, 0.13], $Z = -0.91$, $p = .363$).

We focused our subsequent analyses on the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction only (Table 2, bottom panel). We probed this interaction by testing the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction separately for personal and organizational work goals. For *personal work goals*, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction was significant, $b = 0.45$, 95% CI = [0.21, 0.69], $Z = 3.64$, $p < .001$. Tests of simple goal-importance effects revealed that participants high in communal organizational nostalgia (+1 *SD*) prioritized important over less important personal work goals, $b = 0.78$, 95% CI = [0.35, 1.20], $Z = 3.56$, $p < .001$. However, participants low in communal organizational nostalgia (−1 *SD*) did not prioritize important over less important personal work goals, $b = -0.43$, 95% CI = [−0.88, 0.01], $Z = -1.92$, $p = .055$. For *organizational goals*, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction was not significant, $b = 0.02$, 95% CI = [−0.16, 0.20], $Z = 0.22$, $p = .829$. Here, the effect of goal importance was significant (i.e., important goals prioritized over less important ones), $b = 0.77$, 95% CI = [0.48, 1.05], $Z = 5.21$, $p < .001$, and unqualified by organizational nostalgia. These results are

³ For the 1-factor model: Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2(14) = 132.21$, $p < .001$; CFI = 0.914, RMSEA = 0.186; SRMR = 0.054. For a 2-factor model with separate (albeit highly correlated) factors for importance and frequency, Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2(13) = 30.48$, $p = .004$; CFI = 0.987, RMSEA = 0.078; SRMR = 0.025. For a bi-factor model, which includes a general factor for all SNS items and two specific factors—one for the importance items and one for the frequency items, Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2(7) = 9.61$, $p = .212$; CFI = 0.998, RMSEA = 0.039; SRMR = 0.014.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables in Study 1.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Organizational Nostalgia Scale	4.97	1.26	1.25–7.00	0.93	–	0.94***	0.95***	0.10**	0.46***	0.04
2. Agentic Organizational Nostalgia	5.03	1.27	1.50–7.00	0.87	[0.93, 0.96]	–	0.80***	0.09**	0.46***	0.02
3. Communal Organizational Nostalgia	4.92	1.39	1.00–7.00	0.91	[0.94, 0.96]	[0.75, 0.84]	–	0.10	0.41***	0.06
4. Personal Nostalgia	4.46	1.35	1.00–6.86	0.94	[–0.03, 0.22]	[–0.04, 0.21]	[–0.03, 0.51]	–	0.11	0.16*
5. Positive Affect	3.45	0.70	1.10–5.00	0.91	[0.35, 0.55]	[0.35, 0.55]	[0.31, 0.51]	[–0.02, 0.23]	–	0.02
6. Goal pursuit	0.76	0.43	0.00–1.00	–	[–0.08, 0.17]	[–0.10, 0.15]	[–0.07, 0.18]	[0.03, 0.28]	[–0.11, 0.14]	–

Note: *r* above the main diagonal, 95% CI of *r* below the main diagonal.

* *p* < .05.

** *p* < .01.

*** *p* < .001.

Table 2
Linear Mixed Model Results for Goal Prioritization in Study 1.

Predictor	Goal pursuit		
	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Full Organizational Nostalgia Scale</i>			
ON	0.06 [–0.13, 0.24]	0.60	0.548
Goal source	0.25 [0.05, 0.44]	2.49	0.013
Goal importance	0.46 [0.27, 0.65]	4.73	< 0.001
ON × Goal Source	–0.17 [–0.33, –0.01]	–2.15	0.032
ON × Goal Importance	0.21 [0.06, 0.36]	2.69	0.007
Goal Source × Goal Importance	–0.30 [–0.49, –0.11]	–3.11	0.002
ON × Goal Source × Goal Importance	0.18 [0.03, 0.34]	2.38	0.017
<i>Communal Organizational Nostalgia Subscale</i>			
CN	0.07 [–0.10, 0.24]	0.81	0.418
Goal source	0.25 [0.06, 0.45]	2.53	0.011
Goal importance	0.46 [0.27, 0.66]	4.69	< 0.001
CN × Goal Source	–0.17 [–0.32, –0.03]	–2.35	0.019
CN × Goal Importance	0.22 [0.08, 0.36]	3.07	0.002
Goal Source × Goal Importance	–0.31 [–0.50, –0.12]	–3.14	0.002
CN × Goal Source × Goal Importance	0.20 [0.06, 0.34]	2.74	0.006

Note. ON = Organizational Nostalgia. CN = Communal Organizational Nostalgia.

consistent with hypotheses H1–H2.⁴

2.2.2. Supplementary analyses

We next turned to the relative roles of organizational and personal nostalgia. Based on our reasoning, the role of nostalgia in goal prioritization should be specific to organizational nostalgia. The results supported this reasoning. In an analysis in which we included both the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction and the Personal Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction (along with all constituent lower-order effects), the latter interaction was not significant, *b* = 0.04 [–0.09, 0.18], *Z* = 0.60, *p* = .552. However, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction remained significant, *b* = 0.19 [0.05, 0.34], *Z* = 2.70, *p* = .007. In Online Appendix D, we describe supplementary analyses where we included a 4-item version of the SNS comprising only the items assessing frequency of nostalgic engagement or a 3-item version comprising only the items assessing importance of nostalgic engagement. The results of both analyses were practically identical to the reported ones that were based on the full 7-item SNS.

We tested whether the association between communal organizational nostalgia and prioritization of important (vs. less important) personal work goals is accounted for by positive affect. The results ruled out this possibility. We fitted a model with the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction and added the Positive Affect × Goal Source × Goal Importance

⁴ We examined the Organizational Nostalgia (full scale) × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction using the same analytic approach as for the Communal Organizational Nostalgia subscale. The pattern of simple effects was equivalent across both analyses.

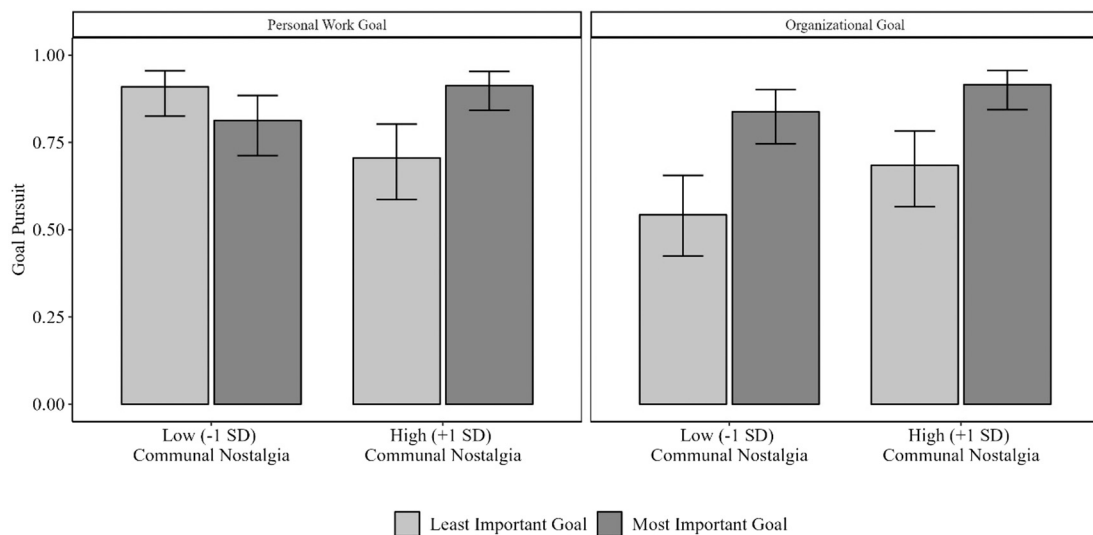


Fig. 1. The Role of Organizational Nostalgia in Prioritization of Important Goals in Study 1. Error Bars Represent 95% CIs.

interaction (along with all lower order effects). Crucially, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Source \times Goal Importance interaction remained significant, $b = 0.20$ [0.04, 0.35], $Z = 2.52$, $p = .012$. The Positive Affect \times Goal Source \times Goal Importance interaction was not significant, $b = 0.00$ [-0.29, 0.30], $Z = 0.03$, $p = .973$.

Finally, in Online Appendix E, we describe tests of an alternative explanation, namely that the role of organizational nostalgia in goal prioritization reflects a strong employee-organization bond. Results did not support this explanation.

3. Study 2

We designed Study 2 to test H1–H2 in a setting where we could assess daily fluctuations in organizational nostalgia and goal prioritization. Specifically, we carried out a diary study among employees of various organizations. They first listed important and less important personal and organizational goals. A week intervened. Then, participants reported their daily organizational nostalgia and daily pursuit of one personal and one organizational goal, on each workday and for two consecutive work weeks.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Design and participants

The design resembled that of Study 1, with minor exceptions (see below). To our knowledge, there is currently no established guidance for determining a priori power to detect a three-way interaction in a multilevel design. We therefore relied on a week-long diary study that detected a cross-level moderating effect of personal nostalgia in organizational contexts (van Dijke et al., 2019, Study 1, $N = 146$). As we were interested in within-person associations between our predictor variables and goal prioritization, we increased the number of measurement occasions per participant to 10 (i.e., two work weeks). This practice balanced the higher number of observations required to detect a three-way interaction with our budget constraints.

We collected the data via a Dutch research agency, Flycatcher. It boasts the ISO-26362 certification for online panels, which meets the quality requirements of the International Organization for Standardization regarding social scientific research, market research, and opinion polls. Flycatcher has a membership of approximately 16,000 Dutch citizens. In return for their voluntary involvement as research participants, panel members are rewarded with points that they can convert into vouchers of their choice (e.g., movie tickets). We invited employees from a variety of companies and asked them to complete a daily survey on each of 10 workdays. In contrast to Study 1, where we recruited both part-time and full-time employees, we recruited individuals who were employed full-time in organizations and had regular working hours (i.e., between 8:00 am and 6:00 pm).⁵

A total of 222 participants (83 women, 139 men) completed at least one daily survey. We excluded 32 daily surveys, because participants indicated that they did not work on those days due to illness or having a day off. Of participants, 13% were 20–29 years of age, 25% were 30–39 years, 26% were 40–49 years, 28% were 50–59 years, and 9% were older than 60 years. Of them, 53% had completed secondary education, 23% vocational education or a Bachelor's Degree, and 23% a Master's Degree or higher. In total, we collected 1616 daily surveys (73% response rate), nested within 222 participants. Participants completed on average 7.28 surveys (SD

⁵ Owing to the procedural requirements of the daily diary study, participants standardized prompt via email from Flycatcher at a fixed time each day. Including part-time employees would have introduced procedural inconsistencies and was therefore avoided.

= 2.82; range = 1–10). Further, 43 (19%) of them completed all 10 surveys, and 182 (82%) completed at least five surveys. Prior research suggests that a minimum of 6–8 repeated observations is necessary to reliably model within-person variability in daily diary studies. Fewer entries can lead to unstable individual slopes and inflated error variance (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013; Nezlek, 2012). We therefore included only participants who completed at least 8 out of 10 daily surveys (137 out of 222 participants: 1229 out of 1616 daily surveys).⁶

3.1.2. Procedure and measures

In the initial data collection, participants listed and described three personal and three organizational goals. Then, they ranked both types of goals for importance and answered demographic questions, as in Study 1.

A week later, and for each of 10 consecutive workdays, Flycatcher sent participants a link to the daily survey near the end of their workday (4:00 pm), asking them to respond to the survey before midnight. Subsequently, participants were presented randomly with either their most or least important personal work goal, and with either their most or least important organizational goal, and were asked to report their pursuit of each of the two goals. In all, the main difference with Study 1 was that here we assessed goal pursuit during a given day rather than over the past three weeks. Additionally, participants reported on their pursuit of two goals per day, rather than four, to increase response rates.

We assessed *organizational nostalgia* with the 4-item Communal Organizational Nostalgia subscale of the ONS, with the stem adapted to refer specifically to the current day. We selected this subscale over the full ONS for two reasons: (a) to reduce the length of the daily survey and thereby promote higher response rates, and (b) because this subscale yielded the strongest effects in Study 1, indicating it is both empirically robust and theoretically most pertinent to our research aims.

We measured *positive affect* with the 5-item short form of the PANAS (Thompson, 2007). We asked participants how they had felt that day at work: “alert,” “inspired,” “determined,” “attentive,” “active” (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). We averaged responses to form a positive-affect index.

We measured *goal pursuit* with two items that we constructed: “I did something today that concretely contributes to attaining the above-described goal” and “I did nothing today that concretely contributes to attaining the above-described goal” (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). The response scale could have been binary (yes, no). However, we expected that participants would conceptualize their goal-directed behavior in more nuanced terms—specifically, distinguishing between minimal and substantial efforts toward goal attainment. Accordingly, we used the 7-point response scale to capture this variability. After reverse-coding the second item, we averaged responses to create a composite index, with higher scores reflecting stronger goal pursuit. This procedure yielded four goal pursuit variables, corresponding to personal versus organizational goals that were either important or less important. Consistent with Study 1 and in line with prior research (Kernan & Lord, 1990; Schmidt & DeShon, 2007; Schmidt & Dolis, 2009), we operationalized goal prioritization as the relative strength of pursuit across these goal categories. We describe supplemental analyses where we include goal type in Online Appendix F.

3.2. Results and discussion

We present in Table 3 scale means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and correlations. Our data had a 3-level structure, with goal pursuit (level 1 units) nested within days (level 2 units), and days nested within participants (level 3 units). Communal organizational nostalgia was a day-level (i.e., level 2) predictor (i.e., we measured it once each day). Goal source and goal importance were goal-level (i.e., level 1) predictors.

We fitted a linear mixed model using the R package lme4, with communal organizational nostalgia, goal source (−1 = organizational goal, 1 = personal work goal), and goal importance (−1 = least important goal, 1 = most important goal) as predictors. Goal pursuit was the outcome variable. We included random intercepts for days and participants. We also included a random slope for communal organizational nostalgia. We present the model description in Online Appendix G. We centered communal organizational nostalgia within subjects (i.e., centering within context), and fitted a model that included the three-way interaction and all lower-order effects. We present results in Table 4. Of greatest relevance, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction was significant. We depict the interaction in Fig. 2. We again probed this interaction by testing the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction separately for personal and organizational work goals.

For *personal work goals*, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction was significant, $b = 0.08$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.16], $Z = 2.00$, $p = .046$. Simple slope analyses revealed that, on days when participants experienced higher-than-usual communal organizational nostalgia (+1 SD), they prioritized important over less important personal work goals, $b = 0.13$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.25], $Z = 2.02$, $p = .043$. On days when participants experienced lower-than-usual communal organizational nostalgia (−1 SD), they did not prioritize important over less important personal work goals, $b = -0.05$, 95% CI = [−0.18, 0.07], $Z = -0.86$, $p = .391$. For *organizational goals*, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction was not significant, $b = -0.07$, 95% CI = [−0.16, 0.01], $Z = -1.74$, $p = .083$. Regardless of communal organizational nostalgia levels, participants consistently prioritized important over less important organizational goals, $b = 0.18$, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.27], $Z = 4.04$, $p < .001$. Together, these findings provide further support for our hypotheses, particularly regarding the role of communal organizational nostalgia in shaping the prioritization of personal work goals.

⁶ Supplementary analyses including all participants who completed at least one daily survey also revealed a significant Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction, $b = 0.05$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.10], $Z = 2.09$, $p = .037$.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables in Study 2.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α	1.	2.	3.
1. Organizational nostalgia	4.00	1.64	1.00–7.00	0.96	–	0.13	0.27
2. Goal pursuit	5.04	1.73	1.00–7.00	0.74	[0.09, 0.17]	–	0.24
3. Positive affect	3.90	0.76	1.00–5.00	0.91	[0.23, 0.31]	[0.20, 0.27]	–

Note: *r* above the main diagonal, 95% CI of *r* below the main diagonal. All correlations were significant at $p < .001$.

Table 4
Linear Mixed Model Results for Goal Prioritization in Study 2.

Predictor	Goal pursuit		
	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
CN	0.22 [0.14, 0.29]	5.64	< 0.001
Goal source	0.10 [0.05, 0.16]	3.64	< 0.001
Goal importance	0.10 [0.04, 0.16]	3.32	< 0.001
CN × Goal Source	0.03 [–0.02, 0.08]	1.02	0.309
CN × Goal Importance	–0.00 [–0.06, 0.05]	–0.28	0.782
Goal Source × Goal Importance	–0.06 [–0.13, 0.00]	–2.03	0.043
CN × Goal Source × Goal Importance	0.07 [0.01, 0.13]	2.46	0.014

Note. CN = Communal Organizational Nostalgia.

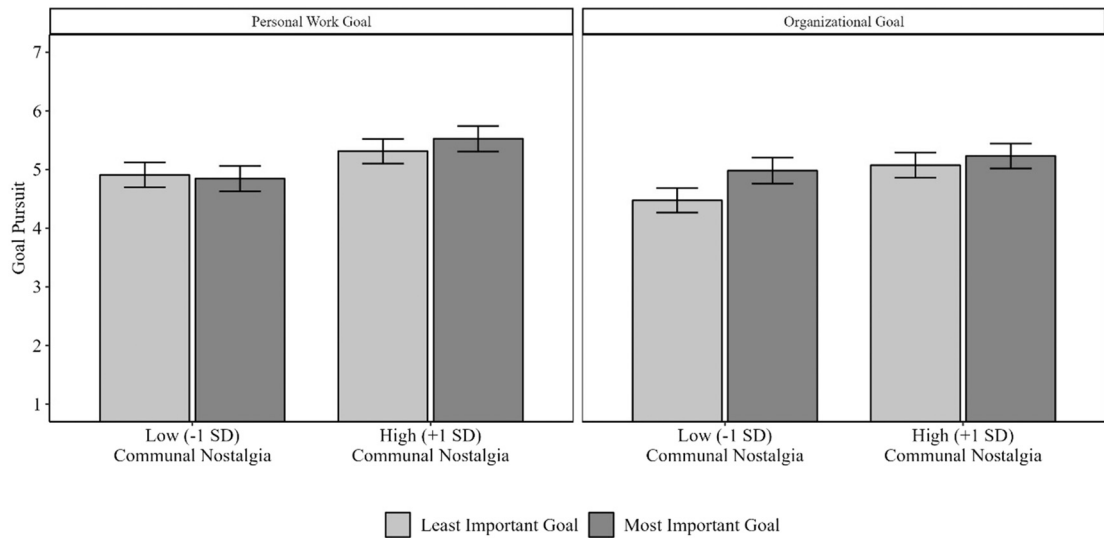


Fig. 2. The Role of Organizational Nostalgia in Prioritization of Important Goals in Study 2. Error Bars Represent 95% CIs.

3.2.1. Controlling for affect

As in Study 1, we obtained little evidence that communal organizational nostalgia facilitates the prioritization of important personal work goals through increased positive affect. We fitted a model with the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction as well as the Positive Affect × Goal Source × Goal Importance interaction, and all lower-order effects. We centered positive affect within subjects and we added a random slope for positive affect at the participant level. The three-way interaction involving positive affect was significant, $b = 0.13$ [0.01, 0.25], $Z = 2.11$, $p = .035$, and the three-way interaction involving communal organizational nostalgia was trending, $b = 0.05$ [–0.01, 0.11], $Z = 1.71$, $p = .087$.

In this model, the three-way interaction pattern involving communal organizational nostalgia closely resembled the pattern in the model without positive affect. For *personal work* goals, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction was trending, $b = 0.07$, 95% CI = [–0.01, 0.16], $Z = 1.75$, $p = .080$. On days when participants experienced higher-than-usual communal organizational nostalgia (+1 *SD*), they tended to prioritize important over less important personal work goals, $b = 0.12$, 95% CI = [0.00, 0.24], $Z = 1.90$, $p = .058$. On days when participants experienced lower-than-usual communal organizational nostalgia (–1 *SD*), they did not prioritize important over less important personal work goals, $b = –0.04$, 95% CI = [–0.16, 0.08], $Z = –0.68$, $p = .499$. For *organizational goals*, the Communal Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Importance interaction was not significant, $b = –0.04$, 95% CI = [–0.13, 0.04], $Z = –1.01$, $p = .311$.

We next probed the three-way interaction involving positive affect to determine if it matched the Communal Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Source \times Goal Importance interaction and, hence, could account for it. It did not. For *personal work goals*, the Positive Affect \times Goal Importance interaction was not significant, $b = -0.04$ [$-0.22, 0.13$], $Z = -0.51$, $p = .613$. For *organizational goals*, however, the Positive Affect \times Goal Importance interaction was significant, $b = -0.24$ [$-0.41, -0.06$], $Z = -2.63$, $p = .009$. On days when participants experienced higher-than-usual positive affect ($+1$ *SD*), they did not prioritize important over less important personal work goals, $b = 0.06$, 95% CI = [$-0.07, 0.19$], $Z = 0.93$, $p = .351$. On days when participants experienced lower-than-usual positive affect (-1 *SD*), they prioritized important over less important personal work goals, $b = 0.33$, 95% CI = [$0.20, 0.46$], $Z = 4.90$, $p < .001$.

Controlling for positive affect, then, left the Communal Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Source \times Goal Importance essentially intact, although trending instead of significant. We attribute this minor diminution to increased multicollinearity among the predictor set resulting from the positive correlation between communal organizational nostalgia and positive affect (Table 3).

4. Study 3

In experimental Study 3, we tested the causal effect of organizational nostalgia on goal prioritization. In Studies 1–2, we instructed participants to describe personal and/or organizational goals. However, articulating specific types of goals may be challenging for some individuals, raising questions about the generalizability of our findings to real-world organizational contexts. To address this concern, in Study 3, we asked participants (a) to describe and rank three work-related goals in terms of importance, and (b) indicate whether each goal was personal, organizational, or participative. The latter category, participative goals, typically involves both employee input and organizational endorsement through mechanisms such as rewards and performance monitoring (Ashford & Northcraft, 2003; see also Online Appendix H). Given their organizational support, we did not expect organizational nostalgia to enhance the prioritization of important participative goals.

We randomly assigned participants to the organizational nostalgia versus control condition (Leunissen et al., 2018). Following the induction, participants developed action plans for pursuing their most and least important goals. Planning is considered a core component of goal pursuit in self-regulation models (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; DeShon & Rench, 2009; Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006), including in the domain of personal work goals (Feldman et al., 2009). As in Studies 1–2, we operationalized goal prioritization as the relative intensity of planning for important versus less important goals (Schmidt & Dolis, 2009).

In H3, we proposed that organizational nostalgia benefits the prioritization of important over less important personal work goals, because nostalgic organizational recollections are appraised as uniquely personal in their meaning. In Study 3, we tested this mechanism by assessing appraised uniqueness (vs. sharedness) of nostalgic experiences as a mediator.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Design and participants

We used a 2 (organizational nostalgia: organizational nostalgia vs. control) \times 2 (goal source: personal work goal vs. organizational/participative goal) \times 2 (goal importance: most important vs. least important) factorial design. The first two factors were between-subjects, and the third was within-subjects.

We recruited 500 U.S.-based part-time or full-time employees via Prolific. Of them, 427 (206 women, 217 men, four identified with another gender or preferred not to say) provided usable data by listing and ranking goals they held at work. On average, participants had 17.04 years of work experience ($SD = 10.87$), with a mean tenure of 6.01 years in their current organization ($SD = 6.73$), and worked 35.38 h per week ($SD = 9.57$). Regarding job roles, 58% were in non-management positions, 18% in line management, 20% in middle management, and 4% in senior or executive management. Educational backgrounds included 14% with secondary education, 16% vocational training, 44% a Bachelor's degree, 23% a Master's degree, and 3% a PhD.

4.1.2. Procedure

The procedure mirrored that of Studies 1–2, with three exceptions. *First*, rather than assigning participants to describe personal or organizational goals, we instructed them to list three work-related goals and rank them in order of importance. After listing the goals, participants indicated the source of each by selecting one of the following: “I have set this goal for myself” (personal work goal; $n = 482$, 56%), “The organization I work in has set this goal for me” (organizational goal; $n = 120$, 14%), or “This goal was set by myself and my organization” (participative goal; $n = 252$, 30%). This approach reduced potential demand effects and accommodated participants who might struggle to articulate a particular type of goal. Given the strong similarity in coding results across Studies 1 and 2, we did not code the goals in Study 3. Instead, we assessed the motivations associated with each goal using self-report measures. We describe these analyses in Online Appendix H.

However, this first procedural departure from Study 1 introduced a confound: for participants whose most and least important goals were from different sources (e.g., a personal goal and an organizational goal; $n = 136$), goal source and importance were not independent. To preserve interpretive clarity, we decided a priori to retain only participants whose most and least important goals came from the same source.⁷ A preliminary analysis revealed no significant differences between participants whose goals were organizational versus participative. We therefore combined these into a single organizational/participative category. The final sample

⁷ Analyses including participants for whom goal source and goal importance were confounded yielded virtually identical results (online Appendix J).

comprised 291 participants whose most and least important goal were exclusively personal ($n = 173$) or organizational/participative ($n = 118$). Exclusion rates did not significantly differ between the organizational nostalgia ($n = 64$) and control ($n = 72$) conditions, $\chi^2(1) = 1.84, p = .175$.

Second, instead of measuring organizational nostalgia, we experimentally induced it using a validated method (Leunissen et al., 2018). After having described and classified their goals, participants in the organizational nostalgia condition read: "According to the Oxford Dictionary, 'nostalgia' is defined as a 'sentimental longing for the past.' Please bring to mind a nostalgic event that you have experienced in your organization. Specifically, try to think of a past event you experienced in your organization that makes you feel most nostalgic." Participants in the control condition read: "Please bring to mind an ordinary event that you have experienced in your organization. Specifically, try to think of a past event you experienced in your organization that is ordinary." All participants proceeded to list four keywords that captured the gist of their recollection and to describe it in a brief (5-min) narrative. Afterward, they completed a 3-item manipulation check (e.g., "Right now I am feeling quite nostalgic about my organization"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 4.01, SD = 1.80, \text{range} = 1-7; \alpha = 0.98$). Next, we assessed positive affect using the 5-item short form of the PANAS (as in Study 2; $M = 4.97, SD = 1.28; \alpha = 0.90$).

The *third* difference between Study 3 and Studies 1–2 was that, following the PANAS, we measured the appraised uniqueness (vs. sharedness) of the described event with three items that we constructed: "The way I feel about the event that I just described is widely shared in my organization," "Most members of my organization feel similarly about the event that I just described," "Most of my colleagues in this organization feel the same about the event I just described" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). We reverse-scored the responses, so that higher scores reflected greater appraised uniqueness of the described event ($M = 3.02, SD = 1.50, \text{range} = 1-7; \alpha = 0.95$).

The goal pursuit phase (i.e., planning) followed. Participants learned: "... we are interested in the plans that people make to achieve goals in the organization they work in. We know from previous research that planning ahead helps people to achieve goals, but we know very little about what those plans actually are. We therefore ask you to write a plan for two of the goals you have identified above." We randomized the order in which participants wrote plans for their most and least important goal.

Whereas prior experiments have used time-on-task as a proxy for goal pursuit (Schmidt & DeShon, 2007; Schmidt & Dolis, 2009), such a measure is less reliable in online contexts where task engagement cannot be monitored. Accordingly, we operationalized goal pursuit as the length (word count) of each written plan (Meriac et al., 2015). We indexed goal prioritization as the difference in word count between plans for the most important goal ($M = 57.73, SD = 38.99, \text{range} = 4-265$) and the least important goal ($M = 55.14, SD = 40.65, \text{range} = 6-283$).

4.2. Results and discussion

4.2.1. Manipulation check

We conducted a 2 (organizational nostalgia) \times 2 (goal source) between-subjects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the manipulation check. Participants in the organizational nostalgia condition ($M = 4.51, SD = 1.58$) reported feeling more nostalgic than those in the control condition ($M = 3.41, SD = 1.86$), $F(1, 287) = 29.15, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.09$. Neither the goal source main effect, $F(1, 287) = 0.33, p = .567, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$, nor the Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Source interaction, $F(1, 287) = 0.03, p = .872, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$, was significant.

4.2.2. Hypothesis testing: H1 and H2

We fitted linear mixed models using the R package glmmTMB to test H1 and H2. These models included random intercepts to account for the nesting of the goal importance factor (least important goal vs. most important goal) within subjects. We provide the model description in Online Appendix I. Because goal pursuit was a count variable that could not have 0 as value (participants had to write something for each plan), we used a zero-truncated Poisson distribution with a log link function. We first tested if organizational nostalgia moderates the effect of goal importance on goal pursuit, depending on goal source. The predictors were organizational nostalgia ($-1 = \text{control}, 1 = \text{organizational nostalgia}$), goal source ($-1 = \text{organizational/participative goal}, 1 = \text{personal work goal}$), and goal importance ($-1 = \text{least important goal}, 1 = \text{most important goal}$). We included a random intercept for participants to account for the nesting of the word count measures in participants. We included all interactions among the predictor variables (and their constituent main effects). The Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Source \times Goal Importance interaction was significant (Table 5; Fig. 3).

We probed this interaction by testing the Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Importance interaction separately for personal and organizational/participative goals. For *personal work goals*, the two-way interaction was significant, $b = 0.06, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.04, 0.09], Z = 4.79, p < .001$. Simple effects analyses showed that participants in the organizational nostalgia condition prioritized important over less important personal work goals, $b = 0.09, 95\% \text{ CI} = [0.06, 0.13], Z = 5.21, p < .001$. In contrast, participants in the control condition did not prioritize important over less important personal work goals, $b = -0.04, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.08, 0.00], Z = -1.80, p = .071$. For *organizational/participative goals*, the Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Importance interaction was not significant, $b = 0.00, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.03, 0.03], Z = 0.18, p = .856$. Although participants generally reported higher pursuit of important versus less important organizational/participative goals, this difference was not significant, $b = 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.02, 0.03], Z = 0.40, p = .687$. These results are consistent with H1.

4.2.3. Mediation by appraised uniqueness: Hypothesis 3

Next, we examined whether the beneficial effect of organizational nostalgia on the prioritization of important over less important

Table 5
Linear Mixed Model Results for Goal Prioritization in Study 3.

Predictor	Goal pursuit		
	b [95% CI]	Z	p
Org. nostalgia manipulation	0.05 [-0.08, 0.17]	0.70	0.485
Goal source	-0.09 [-0.22, 0.04]	-1.40	0.161
Goal importance	0.02 [-0.00, 0.04]	1.69	0.090
Org. Nostalgia × Goal Source	-0.00 [-0.13, 0.13]	-0.04	0.967
Org. Nostalgia × Goal Importance	0.03 [0.01, 0.05]	3.36	0.001
Goal Source × Goal Importance	0.01 [-0.01, 0.03]	1.10	0.272
Org. Nostalgia × Goal Source × Goal Importance	0.03 [0.01, 0.05]	3.09	0.002

Note. Org. = Organizational.

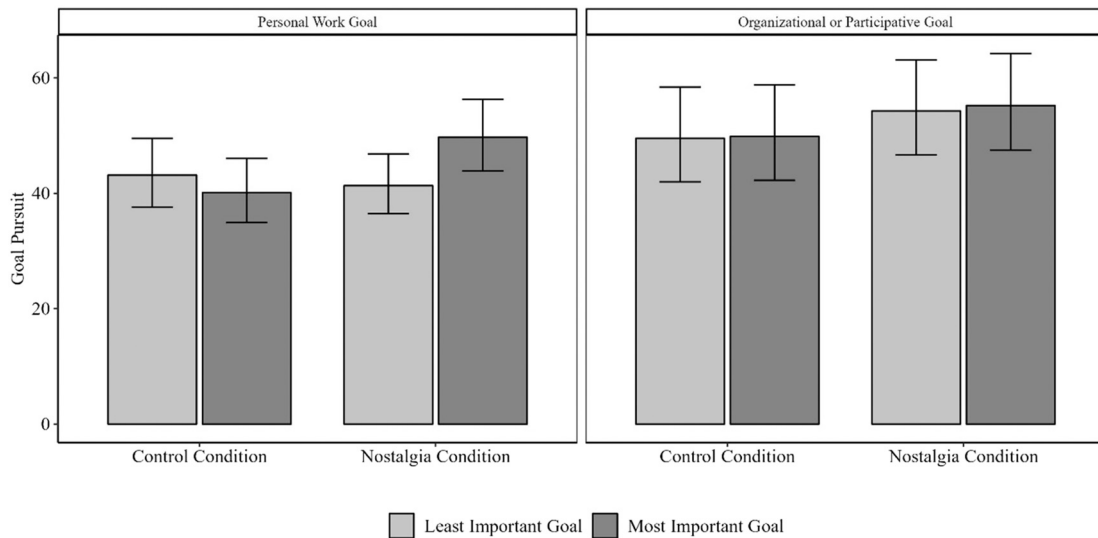


Fig. 3. The Role of Organizational Nostalgia in Prioritization of Important Goals in Study 3. Error Bars Represent 95% CIs.

personal work goals was mediated by the appraised uniqueness of the remembered experience (H3). To facilitate these mediation analyses, we calculated a difference score indexing the within-subjects effect of goal importance (Judd & Kenny, 2010). Specifically, we subtracted the word count for the plan associated with the least important goal from that of the most important goal, such that higher scores reflected prioritization of the most important goal (prioritization index = most important goal – least important goal; $M = 2.58, SD = 29.76$).

We first conducted a 2 (organizational nostalgia) × 2 (goal source) between-subjects ANOVA on uniqueness. As hypothesized, participants in the organizational nostalgia condition ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.68$) appraised the recalled event as more unique to themselves (i.e., less shared with other employees) than those in the control condition ($M = 2.66, SD = 1.18$), $F(1, 287) = 16.29, p < .001$. This finding established the effect of organizational nostalgia on the proposed mediator, setting the stage for mediation analysis. Neither the main effect of goal source, $F(1, 287) = 0.31, p = .577$, nor the Organizational Nostalgia × Goal Source interaction, $F(1, 287) = 2.76, p = .098$, reached significance.

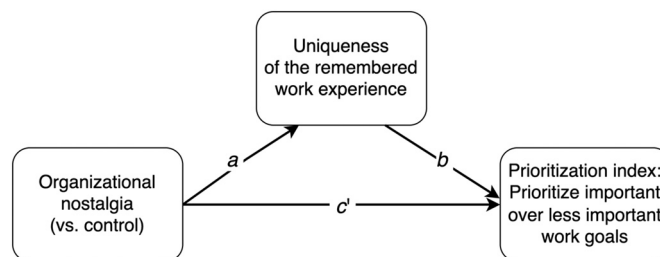


Fig. 4. Process Model Depicting the Indirect Effect of Organizational Nostalgia on Prioritization of Important Over Less Important Goals Via Appraised Uniqueness.

Mediation is supported when organizational nostalgia exerts a significant indirect effect on the prioritization index via appraised uniqueness. We present the hypothesized process model in Fig. 4. The indirect effect is computed as the product of path *a* (i.e., the effect of organizational nostalgia on uniqueness) and path *b* (i.e., the association between appraised uniqueness and the prioritization index, controlling for organizational nostalgia). We employed Hayes's (2022) PROCESS macro (Model 4, 10,000 bootstrap samples) to estimate this indirect effect. PROCESS uses bootstrapping to generate a sampling distribution of the indirect effect *ab* and derives a 95% confidence interval (CI); an indirect effect is considered significant if the CI excludes zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Given that H3 specifically pertains to personal work goals, we report results separately for the *personal work goals* and *organizational/participative goals* conditions (see Online Appendix J for additional analyses). In the *personal work goals* condition, appraised uniqueness was positively associated with the prioritization index, controlling for organizational nostalgia, $b = 4.097$, $S.E. = 1.295$, $t(170) = 3.16$, $p = .002$. Crucially, the indirect effect of organizational nostalgia on the prioritization index via appraised uniqueness was significant, standardized $ab = 0.032$, bootstrap $S.E. = 0.020$, 95% CI = [0.002, 0.082]. The direct effect of organizational nostalgia on prioritization (i.e., controlling for uniqueness; path *c'* in Fig. 4) was also significant, $b = 5.906$, $S.E. = 1.967$, $t(170) = 3.00$, $p = .003$, indicating partial mediation. In the *organizational/participative goals* condition, uniqueness did not significantly predict the prioritization index, $b = 1.700$, $S.E. = 2.218$, $t(170) = 0.77$, $p = .445$, nor was the indirect effect significant, standardized $ab = 0.025$, bootstrap $S.E. = 0.026$, 95% CI = [-0.022, 0.082], standardized $ab = 0.025$. The direct effect of organizational nostalgia was also non-significant, $b = -0.476$, $S.E. = 3.306$, $t(115) = -0.144$, $p = .886$. In summary, the findings support H3. Organizational nostalgia strengthens the prioritization of important over less important *personal* (but not organizational/participative) work goals in part due to nostalgic organizational recollections being appraised as more unique.

4.2.4. Controlling for positive affect

We next examined whether the effect of organizational nostalgia on goal prioritization was attributable to increased positive affect. A 2 (organizational nostalgia) \times 2 (goal source) between-subjects ANOVA on positive affect revealed a significant main effect of goal source, $F(1, 286) = 5.14$, $p = .024$. Participants who reflected on organizational/participative goals ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.16$) reported more positive affect than those who reflected on personal work goals ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.35$). However, neither the main effect of organizational nostalgia, $F(1, 286) = 1.89$, $p = .170$, nor the Organizational Nostalgia \times Goal Source interaction, $F(1, 286) = 2.41$, $p = .121$, was significant. We re-estimated the mediation model for uniqueness, this time including positive affect as a covariate on both the *a*- and *b*-path. The indirect effect of organizational nostalgia on prioritization via uniqueness in the *personal work goals* condition remained significant, standardized $ab = 0.032$, bootstrap $S.E. = -0.020$, 95% CI = [0.002, 0.084]. The indirect effect in the *organizational/participative goals* condition remained non-significant, standardized $ab = 0.023$, bootstrap $S.E. = 0.026$, 95% CI = [-0.026, 0.078]. Thus, the effect of organizational nostalgia on prioritization of important over less important personal work was not attributable to elevated positive affect.

5. General discussion

Across three studies conducted in the U.S. and The Netherlands, we found consistent evidence that organizational nostalgia facilitates employees' prioritization of important over less important personal work goals. In contrast, organizational nostalgia did not promote prioritization of important over less important organizational goals (Studies 1–3), or participative goals (Study 3). Support for our hypotheses emerged across diverse methodological approaches: when organizational nostalgia was experimentally induced (Study 3), measured as a trait (Study 1), or assessed as a daily experience (Study 2). Furthermore, our findings were robust across multiple operationalizations of goal pursuit: whether indexed by the extensiveness of written goal-pursuit plans (Study 3), coded content of goal pursuit descriptions (Study 1), or self-reports (Study 2). These effects also held when goal source was defined a priori (Studies 1–2) or determined post hoc by participants (Study 3). Finally, we identified a key mechanism underlying these effects: organizational nostalgia facilitates the prioritization of important (over less important) personal work goals in part due to nostalgic organizational recollections being appraised as more unique to employees than ordinary experiences.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Personal work goals represent a promising yet understudied lens for understanding employee well-being and performance (Hyvönen et al., 2009, 2010; Kehr, 2003; Pomaki et al., 2004; Pomaki & Maes, 2002). Yet, the question remains: How do employees prioritize their important personal work goals, and what supports this process? Research on goal prioritization has traditionally focused on organizational goals (Ballard et al., 2016; Kernan & Lord, 1990; Klein et al., 2008; Schmidt & DeShon, 2007; Vancouver et al., 2010). Although organizational feedback and incentive systems effectively promote prioritization of organizational goals, they may be less effective in the case of personal work goals. Adopting a self-regulation perspective, we proposed that the significance of relatively concrete personal work goals stems from their alignment with more abstract self-defining aspirations. This proposal allowed us to identify organizational nostalgia as a catalyst for the prioritization of important personal work goals.

Goals associated with positive affect are more likely to be prioritized, because they are linked to desired states (Custers & Aarts, 2005). In our research, organizational nostalgia facilitated prioritization of important personal work goals independently of positive affect, underscoring the value of examining precise mechanisms involved in goal prioritization that stem from concrete emotions (i.e., organizational nostalgia) rather than from general affect.

The findings contribute to the literature on organizational nostalgia. Almost all prior studies have conceptualized organizational nostalgia as a collective phenomenon that reinforces shared identity, particularly during periods of organizational change (Brown &

Humphreys, 2002; McDonald et al., 2006; Milligan, 2003; Ybema, 2004; Ylijoki, 2005). We advanced a complementary perspective by showing that, in many contexts, nostalgic organizational experiences are appraised as uniquely meaningful to employees. We developed and tested a theoretical framework explicating that such experienced uniqueness is central to the prioritization of important personal work goals. Importantly, this experienced uniqueness pertains to the personal meaning attached to nostalgic events, even when those events may have been shared with others. This aligns with the nature of both organizational nostalgic experiences and personal work goals.

Lastly, our findings reinforce the discriminant validity of organizational nostalgia. The observed effects were specific to nostalgia for organizational experiences rather than to personal nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2015; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2020). This distinction reflects the compartmentalized nature of self-concept across domains: individuals maintain distinct self-representations for work and non-work contexts (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Sedikides et al., 2013).

5.2. Practical implications

Although organizational nostalgia may initially appear antithetical to managerial strategies that emphasize future-oriented thinking (e.g., planning, forecasting, and vision-setting; Ybema, 2004), our findings suggest that nostalgia can paradoxically support forward momentum. Specifically, organizations may benefit from fostering organizational nostalgia to help employees prioritize their most important personal work goals. This possibility has practical implications. Prior research has shown that pursuing important personal work goals benefits both individuals and organizations (Harris et al., 2003; Hyvönen et al., 2009; Kehr, 2003; Maier & Brunstein, 2001; ter Doest et al., 2006; Welsh et al., 2020). Our findings indicate that organizations might promote such prioritization by encouraging employees to reflect on personally important experiences from their organizational past and the significance those experiences hold for them. This practice could be implemented during onboarding processes, professional development programs, career coaching, or mentoring sessions.

5.3. Implications for future investigations

In Study 1, communal, but not agentic, organizational nostalgia facilitated the prioritization of important personal work goals. This finding aligns with theoretical accounts suggesting that agentic goals often serve relational goals, such as striving to gain approval (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Nonetheless, future research could identify conditions under which agentic organizational nostalgia benefits prioritization of important personal work goals.

Another promising avenue is to explore how collectively shared organizational nostalgia might shape self-regulation at the group level. Future work could test whether shared nostalgic experiences can promote alignment around collective goals, particularly in contexts involving shared challenges such as organizational change or restructuring. In such settings, nostalgia might help organizations answer the question of which goals “we,” as a collective, deem most important to pursue, while allowing individual members to derive personally meaningful interpretations from those shared experiences.

5.4. Concluding remarks

Employees and organizations alike benefit when individuals can pursue their important personal work goals. However, organizations frequently lack effective mechanisms to facilitate this form of goal prioritization. Our research suggests that organizational nostalgia can function as a valuable psychological resource in this regard. Rather than being solely retrospective, organizational nostalgia may represent a forward-oriented tool that enables employees to navigate their goals with greater clarity and purpose.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Marius van Dijke: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Joost M. Leunissen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Tim Wildschut:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Constantine Sedikides:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary materials

Supplementary materials to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2026.104231>.

Data availability

All data is available at the following link: <https://osf.io/wj3dg>.

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