

# The right thing to do or the smart thing to do? How communicating moral or business motives for diversity affects the employment image of Dutch public and private sector organizations

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## Abstract

Many organizations have diversity statements in place in which they publicly declare their appreciation of and commitment to workforce diversity. These statements can either contain moral motives (e.g., “diversity reduces social inequalities”), business motives (e.g., “diversity enhances innovation”), or a combination of moral and business motives. In a desk study involving 182 Dutch organizations, we found that (a) private sector organizations more often than public sector organizations communicate business motives, (b) that public and private sector organizations are equally likely to communicate moral motives, and (c) that public sector organizations more frequently than private sector organizations communicate a combination of moral and business motives. Next, we used an experimental design to examine the causal influence of communicating different diversity motives on organizations' employment image (i.e., perceptions of organizational morality, competence, and attractiveness) among prospective employees ( $n = 393$ ). Here, we used a scenario in which a healthcare organization was portrayed as either a public or a private sector organization and communicated either only moral motives, only business motives or a combination of moral and business motives for diversity. We found that for a public sector organization communicating moral instead of business motives for valuing diversity induced a more favorable employment image. For a private sector organization, there were no differences in employment image depending on the motive communicated. Together, these two studies shed new light on the role of diversity motives in establishing a positive employment image.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

At Walmart, we believe we are best equipped to help our associates, customers, and the communities we serve live better when we really know them. That means understanding, respecting, and valuing

diversity—unique styles, experiences, identities, ideas, and opinions—while being inclusive of all people.<sup>1</sup>

—Corporate Diversity Statement of Walmart

<sup>1</sup>Retrieved from <https://careers.walmart.com/diversity-inclusion>, January 21, 2021.

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Like Walmart, many organizations publicly state their appreciation of workforce diversity. Commonplace among large organizations (Gündemir et al., 2017; Point & Singh, 2003), diversity statements convey an organization's ideological stance on workforce diversity. Diversity statements intend to set the stage for organizational norms and values concerning diversity and are seen as a means to improve the organization's employment image in the eyes of prospective employees (Avery & McKay, 2006; Leslie, 2019).

Indeed, there is evidence that jobseekers consider diversity statements when deciding whether to apply for a position at a particular organization (Avery & McKay, 2006; Edwards & Kelan, 2011; Jonsen et al., 2021; Williams & Bauer, 1994). For example, a recent report of PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015) showed that 86% of female and 74% of male millennials consider employers' policies on diversity, equality, and inclusion when deciding which company to work for. In addition, other studies have found that merely stating that diversity is valued positively affects organizations' perceived attractiveness among prospective employees (Madera et al., 2016; Ng & Burke, 2005; Rau & Hyland, 2003).

While this research provides considerable evidence that the use of diversity statements can positively affect organizations' employment image, much less scholarly attention has been devoted to the prevalence and the effects of the specific motives that are mentioned in these statements. That is, it is currently unknown which reasons for investing in diversity (moral or business) are (a) most often communicated by organizations and (b) most effective in creating a positive employment image. In addition, to date, it has not yet been established whether public and private sector organizations communicate different motives and whether this has similar effects on the employment image of both types of organizations. Addressing these questions is important from both a scientific and applied perspective. It will deepen our scholarly understanding of the effects of diversity statements as well as offer diversity and inclusion practitioners a more tailored advice on how to best communicate about diversity.

The current research will shed light on these issues in two studies situated in the Dutch context. First, in a desk study, we assess which specific motives Dutch public and private sector organizations use in their diversity statements. Second, in a scenario study, we reveal how communicating these motives in diversity statements affects the employment image of public and private sector organizations.

## 2 | THE MORAL AND THE BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY

Two types of motives to invest in diversity efforts are most frequently communicated by organizations (Olsen & Martins, 2012; Singh & Point, 2004). First, some organizations refer to moral reasons for initiating diversity policies (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012; Johns et al., 2012). In this perspective, diversity initiatives are

launched because they enhance equality and social justice. In other words, investing in diversity is framed as “the right thing to do”. This has been labeled the Equal Opportunities Approach (EOA; Van Ewijk, 2011; Verbeek, 2011), which we here refer to as the moral case for diversity.

Second, some organizations motivate their commitment to diversity for business-related reasons (Singh & Point, 2004). In this perspective, diversity initiatives are set up because they are thought to lead to higher levels of innovation and creativity and improve decision-making quality and performance (O'Leary & Weathington, 2006). In other words, investing in diversity is framed as “the smart thing to do”. This has been labeled the Managing Diversity Approach (MDA; Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010; McDougal, 1996; Thomas & Ely, 1996; Verbeek, 2011; Wise & Tschirhart, 2000), which we here refer to as the business case for diversity.

## 3 | SECTORAL DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATED DIVERSITY MOTIVES

To the best of our knowledge, there is no prior work that has directly assessed and compared the motives public and private sector organizations publicly communicate in their diversity statements. Yet, previous studies have provided at least two clues suggesting differences between public and private sector organizations in their *internal* motivation to invest in diversity initiatives.

First, scholars have argued that public and private sector organizations may differ in their internal motivation to invest in diversity, because they differ in their primary mission and goal orientation (Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010; Johns et al., 2012; Willem et al. 2010; Willems et al., 2006). The reasoning is that, because the primary mission of public organizations is to serve societal interests, they tend to strive for workforce diversity to establish legitimacy and to improve social equality and justice. Hence, it is argued that public organizations are more likely than private sector organizations to value diversity for moral reasons. In contrast, because private organizations are assumed to be primarily concerned with serving their own interests, they are thought to focus on diversity primarily to improve their performance. Even if reporting standards for Corporate Social Responsibility activities (CSR) nowadays expect private organizations to adopt diversity goals, this prompts such organizations to set diversity goals as a way to improve their (financial) performance (Motel, 2016). Indeed, the majority of assessment and certification standards target investors as the key audience, and rarely highlight social goals as an important outcome in its own right (Veenstra & Ellemers, 2020). Hence, the rationale is that private sector organizations are more likely than public sector organizations to value diversity for business-related reasons.

Second, there is evidence that public and private sector organizations differ in the number and type of diversity policies they implement, which can reflect differences in their internal motivation

to invest in diversity initiatives (Boyne et al., 1999; Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). For example, Boyne et al. (1999) found that, in the United Kingdom, public sector organizations more often than private sector organizations employed activities to promote an equal opportunities culture. In a similar vein, Groeneveld and Verbeek (2012) analyzed the annual reports of 8,283 Dutch organizations and found that public sector organizations more often than private sector organizations had diversity policies in place that were designed to improve the influx of minority employees (e.g., affirmative action policies). These type of policies are thought to be generally instigated for moral reasons (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012; Soni, 1999; Steijn & Groeneveld, 2010). However, Groeneveld and Verbeek (2012) also found that public sector organizations more often than private sector organizations had diversity policies in place that aimed to improve the management of a diverse workforce (e.g., diversity training programs), which are thought to be typically instigated for business reasons.

Based on the above, we would tentatively conclude that public sector organizations are more internally motivated than private sector organizations to invest in diversity effort because of moral reasons. And we infer from the above that public sector organizations more often than private sector organizations may value diversity for a *combination* of moral and business motives. If this is the case, this might also be reflected in their publicly communicated diversity statements. Hence, we will assess in our empirical investigations how often organizations use a combination of moral and business motives in their diversity statements.

Yet, even if public and private sector organizations may differ in their *internal* motivation to value diversity, this is not necessarily reflected in their *external* communication. In an attempt to improve their employment image, organizations may strategically choose their arguments (Avery & McKay, 2006; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Williamson et al., 2008; Windscheid et al., 2016, 2018). Thus, while organizations may launch diversity initiatives for moral reasons, they may publicly claim to do so for business reasons, or vice versa. For example, it has been noted that communicating business instead of moral motives will be more effective in leveraging support for diversity initiatives (Robinson & Dechant, 1997), while others have maintained that replacing business arguments with moral arguments will be more convincing (Jones et al., 2013; Mayer et al., 2019).

In sum, it is not fully clear whether public and private sector organizations will communicate different motives in their diversity statements. Hence, in our first study, we aimed to identify the motives that are used in diversity statements of public and private sector organizations in the Netherlands.

## 4 | STUDY 1

### 4.1 | Method

We collected and analyzed the diversity statements from the websites of all 195 organizations that have signed the Dutch Diversity

Charter ([www.diversiteitinbedrijf.nl](http://www.diversiteitinbedrijf.nl)), which is a declaration of intent to invest in diversity and inclusion efforts. We used this particular sample of organizations because we assume they are most likely to have diversity statements in place. This assumption rests on two arguments. First, by signing the diversity charter, these organizations have publicly expressed to value diversity and to commit themselves to achieve self-chosen diversity goals. Hence, out of the entire population of Dutch organizations, we assume that these organizations are more likely than others to be involved in diversity efforts and therefore to have diversity statements in place (Dagevos, 2020). Second, organizations that have signed the Dutch Diversity Charter are on average larger in size (75% of these have 250 or more employees) than the average Dutch organization (99% of these have 50 or fewer employees; Statistics Netherlands, 2021). Similar to others (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011; Heres & Benschop, 2010; Jonsen et al., 2021; Meriläinen et al., 2009; Point & Singh, 2003; Singh & Point, 2004, 2006; Vasconcelos, 2017; Windscheid et al., 2018), we assume that this enables them to more often communicate initiatives and policies related to diversity and inclusion. Sixteen of the 195 organizations in our sample were subsidiaries of three different organizations and therefore communicated the same diversity statements. We counted these only once for our analyses. Hence, in total the dataset consisted of 182 unique organizations. Of these 182 organizations, 99 (54.40%) had no diversity statement on their websites. This left us with 83 diversity statements, of which 28 (33.73%) belonged to public and 55 (66.27%) belonged to private sector organizations.

### 4.2 | Coding procedure

We instructed two independent coders to classify the statements into one of four categories: (1) no arguments; (2) moral arguments; (3) business arguments; and (4) a combination of moral and business arguments. We based our coding scheme on a similar study conducted by Apfelbaum et al. (2016, Study 5). Coders categorized statements into the “no arguments” category when they could not discern any motives. They placed statements into the “moral” category when, according to their judgment, the majority of the arguments presented in these statements were moral arguments (e.g., arguments related to fairness, social justice, equal opportunity, or moral responsibility). In a similar vein, coders categorized statements into the “business” category when they thought the majority of the arguments listed in these statements were business motives (e.g., improvements in flexibility, creativity, innovation, and decision-making processes, and an increased ability to connect with suppliers and clients). Finally, coders were instructed to place statements into the “combined moral and business-case” category, when they thought there was a fair balance in the amount of moral and business motives.

Initially, our approach was to let the two coders code the statements independently, calculate their interrater reliability, and let them resolve any inconsistencies through discussion. However, the coding scheme turned out to require further fine-tuning before independent

**TABLE 1** Communicated diversity motives by sector

Diversity motive	Statistic	Sector		
		Public	Private	Total
No motive	n (%)	8 (28.57%)	11 (20.00%)	19 (22.89%)
	Adjusted residual	.88	-.88	
Moral motive	n (%)	2 (7.14%)	12 (21.82%)	14 (16.87%)
	Adjusted residual	-1.69	1.69	
Business motive	n (%)	6 (21.43%)	26 (47.27%)	32 (38.55%)
	Adjusted residual	-2.29	2.29	
Combination	n (%)	12 (42.86%)	6 (10.91%)	18 (21.69%)
	Adjusted residual	3.34	-3.34	
Total	n (%)	28 (100%)	55 (100%)	83 (100%)

coding was possible. Hence, the two coders consulted with each other in developing a more elaborate coding scheme and collaborated in coding the statements. Next, they briefed one-third coder on the coding scheme, after which the third coder coded all statements. The interrater reliability between the first two coders and the third coder was moderate ( $\kappa = 0.68$ , 95% CI [.57; .79]; McHugh, 2012). Any remaining disagreements were resolved through discussion.

### 4.3 | Results

Table 1 displays the prevalence (percentages and counts) of each combination of sector and motive as well as the adjusted residuals. A chi-square analysis indicated a significant association between organizational sector and communicated diversity motive,  $\chi^2(3, N = 83) = 14.91, p = .002$ , showing that the diversity statements of public and private sector organizations contained different motives. In particular, we found that private sector organizations more frequently had diversity statements in place with predominantly business arguments (47.27%; 26 out of 55 organizations) than public sector organizations (21.43%; 6 out of 28 organizations),  $\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 5.24, p = .022$ . In addition, results indicated that public sector organizations (42.86%; 12 out of 28 organizations) more frequently used a combination of moral and business arguments in their diversity statements than private sector organizations (10.91%; 6 out of 55 organizations),  $\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 11.16, p < .001$ .

We found no differences between public and private sector organizations in the use of statements that included no motives at all,  $\chi^2(1, N = 83) = .77, p = .379$ . Similarly, there were no differences between public and private sector organizations in the use of statements with predominantly moral motives,  $\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 2.86, p = .091$ .

### 4.4 | Conclusions and discussion

Our results indicate that Dutch public and private sector organizations communicate different motives in their diversity statements.

Our finding that private sector organizations more often used business motives in diversity statements than public sector organizations resonates with the idea postulated in prior work (Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010; Johns et al., 2012; Willem et al. 2010; Willems et al., 2006) that private sector organizations are more focused on serving their own interest than public sector organizations. Our study shows that this presumed internal motivation is also reflected in private sector organizations' external communication. Yet, we did not find that Dutch public sector organizations were more likely than Dutch private sector organizations to have diversity statements in place with predominantly moral motives. This can be explained by our finding that Dutch public sector organizations more often than Dutch private sector organizations combine moral motives with business motives. This latter result corresponds to research showing that Dutch public sector organizations have more diversity policies in place that are launched for moral and business reasons than Dutch private sector organizations (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012).

Study 1 identified differences between Dutch public and private sector organization in their communicated diversity motives. But do these constitute effective strategies for organizations to attract new employees? In Study 2 we investigate how and why communicating moral, business-related, or a combination of these motives affects perceived organizational attractiveness among prospective employees.

## 5 | STUDY 2

Prior research has established that organizations that have a gender diversity program signal potential for advancement and hence are more attractive to women (Olsen et al., 2016). Likewise, the motives that public and private sector organizations communicate in their diversity statements are likely to signal the organization's *morality* and *competence* that impact ratings of attractiveness among prospective employees (Ashforth et al., 2020; Van Prooijen & Ellemers, 2014). It is probable that communicating business motives for diversity increases perceptions of organizational competence, whereas communicating moral motives may increase perceptions of organizational

morality. Yet, in line with others (Mayer et al., 2019), we believe that the extent to which is the case will depend on whether the espoused diversity motive of the organization fits with the prospective employees' expected motive. Previous work (e.g., Willem et al. 2010; Willems et al., 2006) has shown that private sector organizations are expected to be more directed at serving their own interests (e.g., maximizing profits) than at addressing societal interests (e.g., reducing social inequalities), whereas public sector organizations are expected to be more concerned with serving societal interest than self-interest.

Hence, our prediction is that for public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organizations, communicating moral instead of business motives will result in a higher ratings of morality. There is preliminary support for this line of reasoning from experimental research showing that a university (i.e., a public sector organization) was evaluated more positively when moral reasons for diversity were communicated than when business reasons were communicated (Smith et al., 2004). Similarly, we predict that for private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations, communicating business instead of moral motives will result in higher ratings of competence. Together, this leads us to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1.** *For public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organizations, communicating moral motives instead of business motives results in higher perceived morality.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *For private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations, communicating business motives instead of moral motives results in higher perceived competence.*

In turn, we expect that the degree to which public and private sector organizations are seen as moral and competent will determine how attractive they are to prospective employees. Drawing from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it has been proposed and empirically demonstrated that morality and competence are both important predictors of organizational attractiveness (Leach et al., 2007; Van Prooijen & Ellemers, 2014). Because competence and morality are thought to be bases for a positive evaluation of *all* types of groups (Leach et al., 2007), we expect that perceived competence and morality are positively related to perceived attractiveness for both public and private sector organizations. This leads us to our third hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3.** *For both private and public sector organizations, perceived competence and perceived morality are positively related to perceived attractiveness.*

Linking this line of reasoning with Hypotheses 1 and 2, we expect that for public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organizations, communicating moral instead of business motives will

result in higher rating of attractiveness through higher perceived morality. Similarly, we expect that for private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations, communicating business instead of moral motives will result in higher ratings of attractiveness though higher perceived competence. This leads us to our last two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4.** *For public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organizations, communicating moral instead of business motives will result in a higher rating of attractiveness through higher perceived morality.*

**Hypothesis 5.** *For private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations, communicating business instead of moral motives will result in higher ratings of attractiveness though higher perceived competence.*

Finally, we will exploratively test whether combining moral and business motives will result in different ratings of morality, competence, and attractiveness than communicating only moral or only business motives. There are two competing arguments in this regard. On the one hand, it can be argued that combining moral and business-case arguments for diversity will strengthen the communicated message, as would be reflected in higher ratings of perceived morality and competence. In line with this argument, Van Prooijen and Ellemers (2014) have, for instance, maintained that (regarding organizational attractiveness in general) "moral conduct can sometimes complement competence by promoting competitive business success (...)" (p. 226). On the other hand, one could argue that combining arguments for diversity may also dilute the strength of the message, resulting in lower levels of perceived morality and competence.

## 5.1 | Method

### 5.1.1 | Design

We adopted a 2 (sector: public/private) × 3 (motive: only moral/only business /both moral and business) between-subjects design. To determine the appropriate sample size, we conducted a priori power analysis using G\*power. Based on prior manipulations of diversity statements (Jansen et al., 2015), we expected a small to medium effect size ( $f = 0.20$ ). Combining this with a power of .90, the analysis indicated a minimum sample size of 320 participants.

### 5.1.2 | Participants and procedure

Using a participant pool set up by a Dutch university, we recruited 443 Dutch nationals to participate in our online vignette study, which was presented as a study about the determinants of organizational

**TABLE 2** Distribution of participants across experimental conditions

	Moral	Business	Combination	Total
Public	66	67	67	200
Private	65	66	62	193
Total	131	133	129	393

attractiveness in the eyes of prospective employees. We excluded 50 participants who did not complete the study, leaving us with a sample size of 393. Participants were compensated with 2 euros for their participation. The majority of respondents were female (67%). Their mean age was 26.04 years ( $SD = 8.52$  years). After providing informed consent, the participants were told to imagine they were looking for a new job and had found a job offer online. Next, they were informed that they could find more information about the organization and its vision regarding diversity on the next page they could visit. This information on the next page contained our manipulations of diversity motive and sector (see below). Participants were randomly assigned to one of our six conditions (see Table 2). After displaying the vignettes, we conducted a manipulation check and asked respondents to indicate their impression of the organization in a brief questionnaire. Finally, respondents were thanked for their participation and were debriefed.

### 5.1.3 | Stimulus materials

We presented participants with information about the organization. This included information about the organizational sector and its diversity motive(s).<sup>2</sup>

#### *Sector manipulation*

First, we manipulated the sector of the organization. We choose to use a healthcare organization for our scenario because in the Dutch context of our study this type of organization can either be public or private. In the public sector conditions participants read the following [the text within brackets was shown to participants in the private sector conditions]:

The job you are considering to apply for is at Livens, a public [private] healthcare organization that provides medical services to patients with a variety of physical problems. Livens is part of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports [a larger consortium of privately-owned healthcare organizations].

<sup>2</sup>To test the appropriateness of our manipulations, we conducted a pilot study in which we asked 20 volunteers to read through this information and indicate to which sector the organization belongs and which motives for diversity were mentioned. The results confirmed the effectiveness of our manipulations. That is, 18 out of 20 raters correctly identified the organization's sector and 16 out of 20 raters correctly identified the communicated diversity motives.

#### *Diversity motive manipulation*

After this brief description, we manipulated the organization's diversity motive. The diversity statements we encountered in Study 1 inspired the formulation of these motives. Participants in the "moral motive" condition read the following:

When visiting the website you come across the following diversity statement: "Our organization has strong norms and beliefs around diversity. At Livens, we believe that developing and sustaining a diverse workforce is a moral imperative. We are devoted to establishing a respectful, collegial, and equal-opportunity work environment that is free of discrimination and prejudice. Our mission is to create equal and fair access to all aspects of firm life and to ensure that our organization promotes social justice by mirroring our diverse society. This is why Livens is actively committed to recruiting, retaining, and promoting employees from diverse backgrounds."

We attempted to present participants in the "business motive" condition with a diversity statement that provided the same amount of arguments as in the "moral motive" condition and was similar in length. They read the following:

When visiting the website you come across the following diversity statement: "Our organization has strong norms and beliefs around diversity. At Livens, we believe that developing and sustaining a diverse workforce is essential for the success of our organization. It is our conviction that everyone benefits from broad, creative thinking and the perspectives that result from understanding and utilizing the knowledge and experience of diverse employees. Our goal is to use the diversity of our employees to improve decision-making processes, enhance innovation and to better connect with our clients and suppliers. This is why Livens is actively committed to recruiting, retaining, and promoting employees from diverse backgrounds."

Finally, participants in the "both moral and business motives" condition were presented with a combination of the two diversity statements above. Here, we counterbalanced the order of the moral motive and the business motive. That is, half of the participants first read the moral motive and then the business motive and the other half of the participants read these motives the other way around.

### 5.1.4 | Measures

Unless mentioned otherwise, all measures were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**TABLE 3** Descriptive statistics of study variables

Variable	M (SD)	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5
1. Morality	4.83 (1.02)	.88	-				
2. Competence	4.90 (1.02)	.88	.38**	-			
3. Attractiveness	4.77 (1.15)	.89	.31**	.43**	-		
4. Skepticism	4.14 (1.17)	.89	-.44**	-.22**	-.18**	-	
5. Gender (1 = male; 2 = female)	1.69 (.49)	-	-.06ns	.18*	.12*	.03ns	-

Abbreviation: ns, non-significant.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

agree). Participants responded to the questions in the order indicated below.

#### Manipulation checks

To determine the success of our manipulations, we asked respondents two questions. First, we asked: "To which sector does the organization you just read about belong to?" Participants could respond with one of two answers: (1) "public sector" or (2) "private sector". Second, we asked respondents to indicate the motive of the diversity statement: "Which reason(s) did the organization mention to justify their appreciation of diversity"? Respondents could answer with one of three responses: (1) only moral reasons, (2) only business reasons, and (3) a combination of moral and business reasons.

#### Perceived morality

Perceived morality was measured by asking respondents to rate the organization on the following traits: "honest", "sincere", "trustworthy". These traits were taken from Leach et al. (2007). The internal consistency was very good ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

#### Perceived competence

We measured perceived competence by asking respondents to rate the organization on the following traits "intelligent", "competent", "skillful" (Leach et al., 2007;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

#### Organizational attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness was assessed with five items (Highhouse et al., 2003). An example item was "For me, this organization would be a good place to work" ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

#### Control variables

Based on prior work showing that women have a more favorable stance towards diversity statements than men (Hofhuis et al., 2013; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Van Oudenhoven-van et al., 2009), we controlled for participants' gender in our analyses. In addition, we controlled for participants' dispositional skepticism towards organizational communications, because previous research has shown that the more skeptical people are, the less favorable they are towards diversity statements (De Vries et al., 2015). We measured dispositional skepticism towards organizational communications with four items based on De Vries et al. (2015;  $\alpha = .89$ ). An example item was:

"Organizational communications are a reliable source of information" (reverse coded). Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics of our study variables.

### 5.1.5 | Analytic approach

We first assessed the presence of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003) by adding an unmeasured latent factor to our measurement model in Amos 25 (Arbuckle, 2017). This model only included the constructs we assessed with Likert scales (i.e., morality, competence, and dispositional skepticism). Next, we built a structural model with the hypothesized relationships. To assess which of the relations differed depending on whether the organization was portrayed as being public or private sector we estimated a multi-group model (Byrne, 1998; Vandenberg, 2002). This is a two-step procedure. First, effect sizes are estimated separately for responses to the public and private sector descriptions of the organization. Second, the differences between these estimates are tested for statistical significance.

Next, we determined whether a full mediation model, in which morality and competence mediated the relationships between diversity motives and attractiveness, fitted the data better than a partial mediation model which also included direct effects from the diversity motives to attractiveness.

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, stating our expectations regarding the differences between public and private sector organizations in the effects of diversity motives on morality and competence, we assessed whether the path coefficients of the relationships between diversity motives, on the one hand, and morality and competence on the other hand differed between participants who had read about the organization as being public or private sector. To test Hypothesis 3, stating that for both public and private sector organizations morality and competence are positively related to perceived attractiveness, we examined the path coefficients of the relationships between morality and competence on the one hand and attractiveness on the other hand for responses to the public sector and the private sector organization. Finally, to test Hypotheses 4 and 5, stating our expectations regarding the differences between public and private sector organizations in the indirect effects of diversity motives on attractiveness through morality and competence, we used moderated mediation analysis with a bootstrapping procedure (2,000 samples).

**TABLE 4** Results of multigroup analysis

Predictor	Sector	Morality	Competence	Attractiveness
Business (ref. cat. moral)	Public	-.40 (.15)	.00 (.16)	
	Private	.24 (.17)	.20 (.17)	
Combination (ref. cat. moral)	Public	-.13 (.15)	.05 (.16)	
	Private	.18 (.17)	.24 (.17)	
Business (ref. cat. combination)	Public	-.27 (.15)	-.05 (.16)	
	Private	.06 (.17)	-.04 (.17)	
Gender (0 = male; 1 = female)	Public	.05 (.13)	.68 (.14)**	.37 (.16)
	Private	-.29 (.14)*	.10 (.14)	.02 (.15)
Dispositional skepticism	Public	-.31 (.05)**	-.19 (.06)**	.35 (.08)
	Private	-.46 (.06)**	-.23 (.06)**	.04 (.07)
Morality	Public			.19 (.08)*
	Private			.21 (.07)**
Competence	Public			.41 (.08)**
	Private			.40 (.08)**

Note: *B* (*SE*) estimates.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

Because we wanted to test for differences between all pairs of our motive conditions, we estimated two separate models: one with the “moral motive” as the reference category and one with the “business motive” as the reference category. Importantly, these analyses allowed us to test all of our hypotheses with the same statistical model.

## 5.2 | Results

### 5.2.1 | Manipulation check

First, we checked the success of our sector manipulation. A chi-square analysis indicated a significant association between our manipulation of organizational sector and its manipulation check,  $\chi^2(1) = 143.77, p < .001$ . The majority of participants in the public sector conditions (85%) reported they read information about a public sector organization. Likewise, most participants in the private sector conditions (75%) indicated they read information about a private sector organization. Second, we assessed whether our diversity motive manipulation was successful. We found a significant association between our diversity motive manipulation and its manipulation check,  $\chi^2(4) = 165.79, p < .001$ . Of the participants in the “only moral motive” condition, 82% correctly responded to the manipulation check. For the “only business motives” condition this was 51% and for the “both moral and business motives” condition this was 56%.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Because we did not want to undermine the random assignment to conditions, we decided to include the data of all participants in our analyses, including data from participants who did not pass our manipulation checks. With one exception, the results were the same when we ran our analyses without the data of these participants. The only exception was that in the data with only participants who passed the manipulation check, we found no significant positive effect of morality on attractiveness for private sector organizations ( $b = .11, p = .298$ ), whereas we did find this in the dataset with all participants. Appendix A provides the full results.

### 5.2.2 | Common method variance

We investigated the presence of common method variance by adding an unmeasured latent factor to our measurement model. The latent factor did not significantly improve model fit ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 75.58, \Delta df = 355, p = 1.000$ ), indicating that there was no substantial common method variance.

### 5.2.3 | Model fit

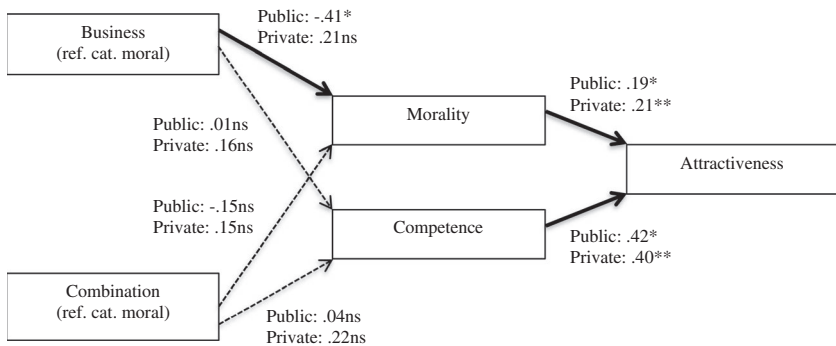
We found that our hypothesized full mediation model provided excellent fit to the data  $\chi^2/df = 1.37, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .99$ . In addition, the more complex partial mediation model (with  $\chi^2/df = 1.94, RMSEA = .05, CFI = .99$ ) did not improve model fit,  $\Delta\chi^2 = 3.18, \Delta df = 2, p = .530$ .

### 5.2.4 | Hypotheses testing

Table 4 shows the results of the multigroup analyses. Figure 1 is the corresponding path model in which the results for responses to the public and private sector organization are depicted separately. For ease of interpretation, the relationships between the control variables and the study variables are not depicted.

We found support for Hypothesis 1, stating that, for public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organizations, communicating moral motives instead of business motives results in higher perceived morality. For the public sector organization, communicating moral instead of business motives led to higher ratings of morality than was the case for the private sector organization,  $b = -.64, p < .001$ . More specifically, we found that for the public





**FIGURE 1** Multigroup path model. Unbroken lines represent significant relationships. Dotted lines represent non-significant relationships. Relationships between control variables and study variables are not shown.  $^{**}p < .01$ ,  $^*p < .05$ , ns non-significant

sector organization, perceived morality was higher in the “moral motive” condition ( $M = 5.05$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) than in the “business motive” condition ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ),  $t = 2.67$ ,  $p < .001$ . For the private sector organization, we found no differences in perceived morality between the “moral motive” condition ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) and the “business motive” condition ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ),  $t = 1.44$ ,  $p = .149$ .

We did not find support in our data for Hypothesis 2, stating that, for private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations, communicating business motives instead of moral motives results in higher perceived competence. We found that communicating business instead of moral motives led to comparable ratings of competence for the public and private sector organizations,  $b = -.20$ ,  $p = .410$ . More specifically, for both public and private sector organizations we found no differences (public:  $t = -.01$ ,  $p = .996$ ; private:  $t = 1.15$ ,  $p = .251$ ) in perceived competence between the “business motive” (public:  $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ; private:  $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) condition and the “moral motive” (public:  $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = .87$ ; private:  $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) condition.

Our results did support Hypothesis 3, stating that, for both private and public sector organizations, perceived competence and perceived morality are positively related to perceived attractiveness. We found that perceived morality was positively related to perceived attractiveness regardless of whether the organization was portrayed as a public ( $b = .19$ ,  $p = .023$ ) or private ( $b = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ ) sector organization. The same pattern of results was found for perceived competence. We found a positive relationship between perceived competence and perceived attractiveness for the organization regardless of whether it was portrayed as a public ( $b = .41$ ,  $p < .001$ ) or private ( $b = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) sector organization.

In addition, Hypothesis 4 was supported, stating that for public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organization, communicating moral instead of business motives results in higher ratings of attractiveness though higher perceived morality. The results of the moderated mediation analysis with the bootstrapping procedure (2,000 samples) indicated that the indirect effect of communicating moral instead of business motives on perceived attractiveness through perceived morality was stronger for the public sector organization than for the private sector organization,  $b = -.12$ ,  $p = .014$ , 95% CI  $[-.29, -.02]$ .

As would be expected from the rejection of Hypothesis 2, we did not find support in our data for Hypothesis 5, stating that for

private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations communicating business motives instead of moral motives results in higher ratings of attractiveness through higher perceived competence. The results of the moderated mediation analysis with the bootstrapping procedure (2,000 samples) indicated that the indirect effect of communicating moral instead of business motives on perceived attractiveness through perceived morality did not differ depending on whether the organization was portrayed as being between public or private,  $b = -.08$ ,  $p = .342$ , 95% CI  $[-.26, .08]$ .

Finally, we explored whether combining moral and business motives resulted in different ratings of morality, competence, and attractiveness than communicating only moral or only business motives. This was not the case, regardless of whether the organization was portrayed as public or private sector.

### 5.3 | Conclusions and discussion

We revealed that when a public sector organization communicates business instead of moral motives in its diversity statement, it is perceived as less moral and, indirectly, also less attractive to prospective employees. A possible explanation for this finding is that solely providing business arguments to invest in diversity efforts is at odds with people’s belief that public sector organizations should primarily serve societal interests. In other words, the mismatch between the espoused and expected diversity motives of the public sector organization could have induced lower ratings of morality and attractiveness. This result is of particular importance, considering that findings from Study 1 showed that Dutch public sector organizations more often communicate business motives than moral motives. Hence, combining the two studies, these findings suggest that public sector organizations that communicate solely business motives for diversity are running the risk of being perceived as a less attractive employer.

In contrast to our predictions, we found no effects of communicating different diversity motives on perceived morality, competence, and attractiveness when the organization was portrayed as being private sector. This suggests that, for private sector organizations, it does not matter as much which particular reason is provided to value diversity.

## 6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Many organizations have diversity statements in place in which they publicly declare their commitment to diversity. In this research, we examined how frequently Dutch public and private sector organizations communicate moral and business motives in these statements and assessed how this affects their employment image as perceived by prospective employees.

### 6.1 | Implications

The present research extends prior work in at least two ways. First, to the best of our knowledge, this research is one of the first to offer a systematic analysis of the diversity motives that public and private sector organizations publicly communicate in their diversity statements. Previous work in this area has focused on the difference between public and private sector organizations in their *internal* motivation to invest in diversity efforts. This was done either by arguing that public and private sector organization differ in their goal orientation (Groeneveld & Van de Walle, 2010; Johns et al., 2012; Willem et al. 2010; Willems et al., 2006) or by assessing the differences between public and private sector organizations in the prevalence and type of diversity policies they implement (e.g., Boyne et al., 1999; Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012). Yet, because organizations can be strategic in framing their reasons to invest in diversity (Avery & McKay, 2006), their internal motivation is not necessarily reflected in their external communication. Our analyses revealed (a) that private sector organizations more often use business motives in diversity statements than public sector organizations and (b) that public sector organizations are more likely than private sector organizations to combine moral and business motives.

Second, our research deepens our understanding of how and under which conditions diversity statements affect organizational employment image. While prior work (e.g., Madera et al., 2016; Ng & Burke, 2005; Rau & Hyland, 2003; Williams & Bauer, 1994) has shown that the use of diversity statements can enhance organizational employment image, the current research provides a more nuanced perspective on this by showing that this effect is dependent on both its content (motives) and context (organizational sector). In particular, we showed that for public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organizations, communicating moral motives instead of business motives results in higher perceived morality and indirectly in greater attractiveness.

### 6.2 | Limitations and directions for future research

More research is needed to establish the robustness of our findings. Both our studies were conducted in the Dutch context. While we do not necessarily expect any cross-country differences in our results, future work could examine whether our findings generalize to other

national contexts. This would offer a valuable contribution to existing cross-national comparisons of diversity statements (e.g., Jonsen et al., 2021; Point & Singh, 2003). In addition, whether our findings of Study 1 generalize to all Dutch public and private sector organizations cannot be determined with complete certainty, considering we had a limited sample of diversity statements. As explained in our method section of Study 1, we made a deliberate choice to focus on the diversity statements of organizations that have signed the Dutch Diversity Charter. Because these organizations have signed the charter and are on average large in size, our rationale was that they are more likely than other Dutch organizations to have diversity statements in place. Yet, while it is highly likely that the organizations in our sample more often communicate about the value of diversity than other organizations, we do not have reason to expect that they will communicate different motives for valuing diversity. Nevertheless, whether our findings generalize to the statements of other Dutch organizations cannot be determined with full certainty and needs to be a focus of follow-up studies.

The effect sizes obtained in Study 2 were relatively small. One possible explanation for this is that we used a text-based, and therefore rather superficial, manipulation of organizational sector and diversity motive. Future studies could use a more immersive manipulation by embedding the diversity statement within a fictitious web page. Such a manipulation would more closely reflect how diversity statements are communicated in real life (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011) and is therefore likely to yield a larger effect size.

Another explanation for the small effect size in Study 2 is that our study was scenario-based and focused on prospective employees. It is likely that effects would be larger in field studies with current employees. That is, we anticipate that diversity statements of real-life organizations have far greater consequences for sitting employees than that diversity statements of fictitious organizations have for prospective employees. In this regard, it is important to consider that diversity statements are not only intended to boost the organization's employment image to the outside world, but also signal the organizational stance on diversity to existing organizational members (Gündemir et al., 2017; Leslie, 2019). Hence, it would be interesting and important for follow-up studies to investigate how the use of different motives in diversity statements are received by current employees. We would speculate that the degree to which the communicated motive matches organizations' actual diversity practices determines their effectiveness, as would be reflected in employees' work outcomes such as diversity climate perceptions (Dwertmann et al., 2016), experienced inclusion (Jansen et al., 2014), and ratings of organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). For organizations in both sectors, this may mean that to remain attractive to employees, there ought to be coherence between the motives communicated in a diversity statement and their implementation in practice. Making sure that 'you practice what you preach' would entail that the motives expressed in diversity statements are also truly part of organizational culture and sincerely valued by its leaders and employees.

### 6.3 | Concluding remarks

Together, this research sheds new light on the role of communicated diversity motives in establishing a positive employment image for prospective employees. We demonstrated that Dutch public and private sector organizations differ in the degree to which they communicate moral and business motives in their external diversity statements. In addition, we showed that framing the organization's commitment to diversity as 'the right thing to do' or as 'the smart thing to do' can have very different consequences for the external image of the organization in the eyes of prospective employees, and also depends on whether it is a public or a private sector organization.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this manuscript.

#### ETHICS APPROVAL

The two studies reported in this manuscript were approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Utrecht University and were conducted in full compliance with ethical standards.

#### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

We archived electronic copies of the anonymized raw data, coding information, and all materials in DataverseNL, a secure public data repository (<https://hdl.handle.net/10411/UCFN3U>).

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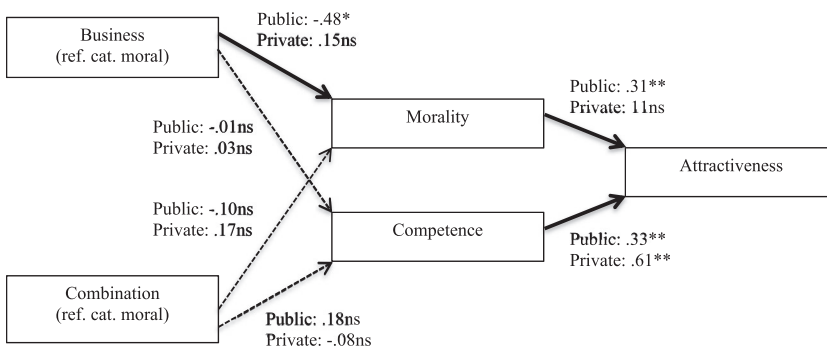
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## APPENDIX A

### RESULTS OF STUDY 2 WITHOUT PARTICIPANTS WHO FAILED THE MANIPULATION CHECK

In our results section of Study 2, we report the results of the analyses in which we included the data of all participants, including those



**FIGURE A1** Multigroup path model. Dotted lines represent non-significant relationships. Relationships between control variables and study variables are not shown. \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , ns, non-significant

who failed one or both of our manipulation checks. This was done to safeguard the random assignment of participants to our experimental conditions. Here, we present the results of our analyses when we only include the participants who passed both of our manipulation checks.

### Model fit

Similar to the model reported in the main text, we found that the hypothesized full mediation model with only data from participants who passed both of our manipulation checks provided excellent fit to the data  $\chi^2/df = 2.13$ , RMSEA = .08, CFI = .98. In addition, the more complex partial mediation model (with  $\chi^2/df = 1.81$ , RMSEA = .06, CFI = .992) did not improve model fit,  $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.90$ ,  $\Delta df = 2$ ,  $p = .086$ .

### Hypotheses testing

Table A1 shows the results of the multigroup analyses. Figure A1 is the corresponding path model in which the results for public and private sector organizations are depicted separately. For ease of interpretation, the relationships between the control variables and the study variables are not depicted.

Again, we found support for Hypothesis 1, stating that, for public sector organizations, more so than for private sector organizations, communicating moral motives instead of business motives results in higher perceived morality. For public sector organizations communicating moral instead of business motives led to higher ratings of morality than was the case for private sector organizations,  $b = -.63$ ,  $p < .01$ . More specifically, we found that for public sector organizations, perceived morality was higher in the “moral motive” condition ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) than in the “business motive” condition ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = .92$ ),  $t = -2.42$ ,  $p = .016$ . For private sector organizations, we found no differences in perceived morality between the “moral motive” condition ( $M = 4.69$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) and the “business motive” condition ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ),  $t = .62$ ,  $p = .534$ . Furthermore, just as in the results reported in the main text, the moderated mediation analysis with the bootstrapping procedure (2,000 samples) indicated that the indirect effect of communicating moral instead of business motives on perceived attractiveness through perceived morality was stronger for public sector organizations than for private sector organizations,  $b = -.17$ ,  $p = .028$ , 95% CI  $[-.47, -.02]$ .

**TABLE A1** Results of multigroup analysis

Predictor	Sector	Morality	Competence	Attractiveness
Business (ref. cat. only moral)	Public	-.48 (.20)*	-.01 (.23)	
	Private	.15 (.25)	.03 (.27)	
Combination (ref. cat. moral)	Public	-.10 (.20)	.18 (.23)	
	Private	.17 (.24)	-.08 (.26)	
Business (ref. cat. combination)	Public	-.37 (.22)	-.19 (.26)	
	Private	-.01 (.26)	.11 (.28)	
Gender (0 = male; 1 = female)	Public	-.14 (.17)	.72 (.20)**	.44 (.22)*
	Private	-.09 (.21)	.18 (.22)	-.24 (.19)
Dispositional skepticism	Public	-.34 (.07)**	-.11 (.08)	-.14 (.09)
	Private	-.46 (.09)**	-.17 (.10)	.12 (.18)
Morality	Public			.31 (.12)**
	Private			.11 (.11)
Competence	Public			.33 (.11)**
	Private			.61 (.10)**

Note: *B* (*SE*) estimates.

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

Also similar to the results based on the data of all participants, we did not find support in our data for Hypothesis 2, stating that, for private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations, communicating business motives instead of moral motives results in higher perceived competence. We found that communicating business instead of moral motives led to comparable ratings of competence for public and private sector organizations,  $b = .12$ ,  $p = .41$ . More specifically, for both public and private sector organizations we found no differences (public:  $t = -.04$ ,  $p = .969$ ; private:  $t = .12$ ,  $p = .906$ ) in perceived competence between the “business motive” (public:  $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ; private:  $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) condition and the “moral motive” (public:  $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = .89$ ; private:  $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) condition.

Our results partially supported Hypothesis 3, stating that, for both private and public sector organizations, perceived competence and perceived morality are positively related to perceived attractiveness. Similar as in our original analysis, we found that perceived morality was positively related to perceived attractiveness for public sector organizations ( $b = .31$ ,  $p = .010$ ). Yet, this time, we found no effect of morality on attractiveness for private sector organizations ( $b = .11$ ,  $p = .298$ ). In addition, again similar to the results of our original analysis, we found a positive relationship between perceived competence and perceived attractiveness for public ( $b = .33$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and private ( $b = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ) sector organizations.

In addition, Hypothesis 4 was again supported, stating that for public sector organizations, more so than for private sector

organization, communicating moral instead of business motives results in higher ratings of attractiveness though higher perceived morality. The results of the moderated mediation analysis with the bootstrapping procedure (2,000 samples) indicated that the indirect effect of communicating moral instead of business motives on perceived attractiveness through perceived morality was stronger for public sector organizations than for private sector organizations,  $b = -.17$ ,  $p = .028$ , 95% CI  $[-.41, -.04]$ .

Again, as can be expected from the rejection of Hypothesis 2, we did not find support in our data for Hypothesis 5, stating that for private sector organizations, more so than for public sector organizations communicating business motives instead of moral motives results in higher ratings of attractiveness through higher perceived competence. The results of the moderated mediation analysis with the bootstrapping procedure (2,000 samples) indicated that the indirect effect of communicating moral instead of business motives on perceived attractiveness through perceived morality did not differ between public and private sector organizations,  $b = -.02$ ,  $p = .887$ , 95% CI  $[-.33, .33]$ .

Finally, we explored whether combining moral and business motives resulted in different ratings of morality, competence, and attractiveness than communicating only moral or only business motives. This was not the case, neither for public nor for private sector organizations. This was similar to the results of our analysis with the data from all participants that we reported in our main text.