



ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM AND ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

It is known that employees who generally hold negative attitudes toward their managers and jobs tend to exhibit more negative behavioral work intentions. Organizational cynicism refers to employees having negative feelings and emotions towards the organization, managers, co-workers and clients/customers. When a worker believes that his/her efforts are not relevant to solve the different problems of the organization, such an employee can result to cynicism. The first measure of cynicism is Cognitive cynicism (belief), the second measure is Affective cynicism (affect), and the final measure is Behavioural cynicism (behaviour). The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between organizational cynicism and organizational health. Precisely, the objectives are to identify and measure organizational cynicism among employees; to study the effect of organizational cynicism on the organizational health. First, the pertinent theory and research on cynicism was reviewed. The empirical literature reveals that factors, such as high salary packages for executives, retrenchment of employees and failure of the organization to achieve set objectives, generate dissatisfaction and, subsequently, disillusionment towards the organization itself and this creates a high level of cynicism. It is concluded amongst others that Organizations with feedback mechanisms would regularly observe behaviours formed towards cynicism and nip them, to promote much needed organizational health.

Keywords: *Organizational Cynicism, Organizational Health, Cognitive Cynicism, Affective Cynicism, Behavioural Cynicism.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers have suggested that organisational cynicism is increasing among employees. In fact, this is taking an alarming proportion. According Zweig et al., (2008), the realities of organisational life are changing; as individuals no longer expect to be employed by one organisation for their entire working lives [1]. In the views of Cole, et al., (2006), employees can develop the intention to quit their job whenever they start having negative feelings about the organisation based on their perceived unequal treatment from the organisation compared to the treatment received by other employees in similar situation [2]. At this point, it is clear that, Cynicism prompts negative elements, such as contempt, anger, shame and boredom [3]. It therefore becomes imperative that effort must be made to understand how cynicism develops and manifests in organisations; because studies suggested that, although many employees are cynical, younger employees may be the most cynical. To this extent, we will assert that, this is also a major challenge to managing in today's workplace.

Organizational cynicism is an old phenomenon, despite the modernity of dealing with it by researchers and practitioners, organizational cynicism is a feeling of dissatisfaction towards the organization, and employees believe that the organization's management lacks honesty, justice, and transparency. Organizational cynicism is a negative attitude (negative attitude of aggravation) towards the organization [4]. There are other studies which explored other dimensions of organizational cynicism like an attitude of unfriendliness, lack of honesty by organization, disturbance, dissatisfaction, and hopelessness about the organization. Organizational cynicism is widespread among organizations globally. Cynicism can be seen as a person being negative and pessimistic about others. Employees who are cynical can influence the whole organization and hamstring the organization from arriving at its goals. Employees who are cynical have the belief that their confederates are selfish and self-centred [5]. According to Dean et al., (1998), organizational cynicism is seen as one expressing a negative demeanour towards the organization they work for and it incorporates three measures [4]: (1) a belief that the organization has no integrity; (2) negative affect towards the organization; and (3) tendencies of derogative and detracting behaviours toward the organization that are uniform with these beliefs and affect. According to Dean et al., (1998), the first measure of cynicism is Cognitive cynicism (belief), the second measure is Affective cynicism (affect), and the final measure is behavioural cynicism (behaviour) [4].

The first measure which is cognitive cynicism is the employees' belief that the organizations they work for is not being honest with them, are unfair in their practices, and are not straightforward with them.

The purpose of this paper is to find out the relationship between organizational cynicism and organizational health. Precisely, the objectives are to identify and measure organizational cynicism among employees; to study the effect of organizational cynicism on the organizational health. First, the pertinent theory and research on cynicism will be reviewed. Specific domains of research are discussed in terms of their relevance to cynicism in an organizational setting. Next, the literature on organizational health is presented. A conceptual framework for the study of organizational cynicism is set forth thus:

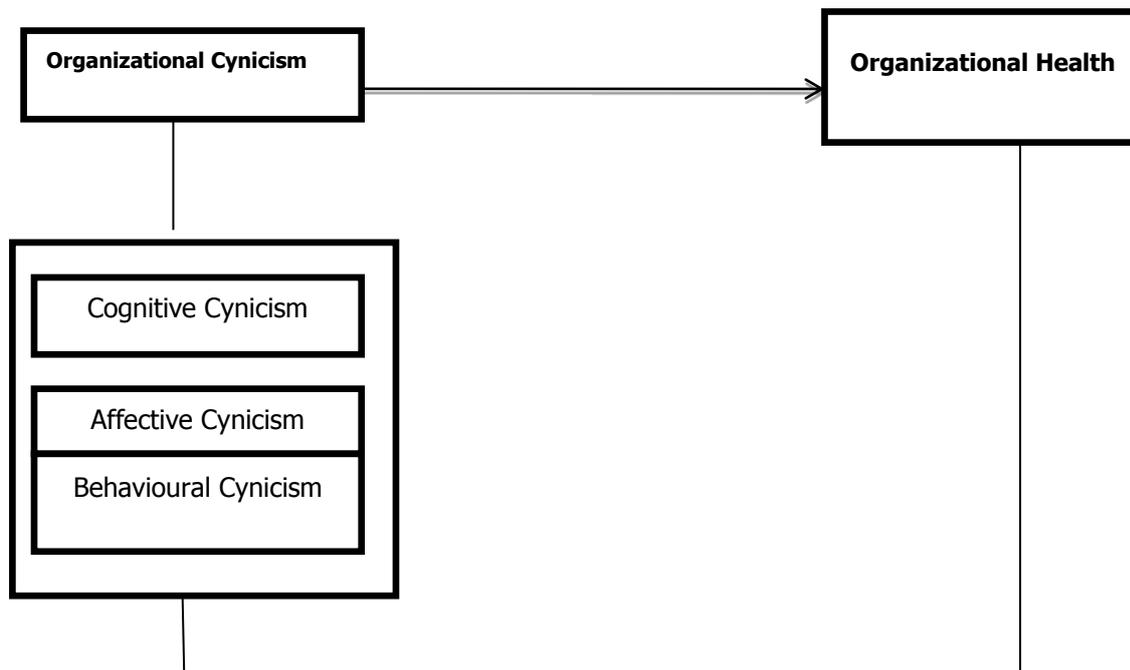


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the study of Organizational cynicism.(Source: Researchers desk)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Frustration-Aggression Theory Presented by Dollard et al., (1989), comes in handy at this point. The frustration aggression theory suggests that frustration results in aggressive behavior [6]. The aggression exhibited depends on the punishment associated with this behavior. If individual finds that there are no chances of being held/caught, he can indulge in violent behaviors, otherwise frustration results in negative outcomes which are psychological in nature. When this theory was applied with-in a workplace setting, a number of negative attitudes and counter productive workplace behaviors were associated with frustration. Spector, (1939) argued that frustration at workplace can lead to negative emotions and workplace behaviors [7].

Later Fox and Spector (1999) used specific organizational factors like training, resources and policies to establish that if these activities are not managed properly, it can result into frustration [8]. Apart from other studies, the roots of organizational cynicism are firmly embedded in frustration aggression theory. If we look at the definition of organizational cynicism, it is as an integral part of this definition. This frustration comes as a result of employee's perception or actual experience of some negative workplace events. As explained in frustration aggression theory, employee can react in diverse manners as a result of these frustrations, generally referred to as organizational cynicism in literature.

Organizational Cynicism

According to Hozoor et al., (2011) defined employee cynicism as "...a pessimistic view of change efforts as unsuccessful because of the weakness of the leaders of change" [9]. Employee cynicism was also defined as poor attitude, doubtful beliefs and negative behaviour as a result of work experiences and work affection [4]. Abraham (2000) viewed it as a negative attitude towards one's organization or its management while Dean et al., (1998) saw it as a negative judgement based on poor work experiences and failed promises [3, 4]. Other researchers viewed employee cynicism as an internal feeling of dissatisfaction with external expressions like defensive responses [4].

Theoretically, employee cynicism was explained by psychological contract theory and affective events theory. Out of work experience, employees had expectations from the work environment and if the expectations were not met then the psychological contract was breached / violated leading to negative attitudes, behaviour and actions against the expected by the management [10]. Affective events theory stated that employees work events created negative or positive affections leading to development of work related attitudes. According to Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) supervisory support and mental state of an employee influenced the level of employee cynicism [11].

Dimensions of Organizational Cynicism

Organizational cynicism essentially has three dimensions. These are cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of organizational cynicism:

Cognitive Dimension of organizational

Cynicism is referred to as ideational approach based on the belief. In this context, workers think that organization do not keep to fundamental principles like justice, honesty and sincerity in cognitive dimension of organizational cynicism [4]. In this regard, the belief is based on the premise that, there are unprincipled practices in organization that has a role on the cognitive approach [12]. Cognitive item, the first dimension of the organizational cynicism, includes all manner of knowledge, experiment, belief and thoughts [13] and it is the belief in deprivation of honesty in the organization according to institutional state of affairs [4]. In cognitive dimension; individuals focus on believes, deprivation of principle, getting short shift of their solemn declaration, possibility of contradictoriness and insecurity, lie and trick, sacrifice of value judgments such as sincerity for interest, frankness, honesty and truth, possibility of behaving remorselessly and indecently. This belief causes negative emotions such as anger, underrating and condemnation [4].

Cognitive organizational cynicism also shapes cynical attitudes or behaviors [14]. Thus, there is a sceptic position that makes workers think altruistic actions or decisions related job process of organization service, to create authority legitimacy and to preserve bureaucratic hierarch [4]. Indeed, according to workers; managers or co-workers frequently tries to derive benefit via their behaviors seen as altruistic [15]. That is to say, it is quested secret a goal in decisions and actions, which may affect workers negatively. It can be seen that some unprincipled practices like injustice, deceit and insincerity, gaining advantage, being unethical are routinized in cognitive organizational cynicism [16].

Emotional Organizational Cynicism

Emotional organizational cynicism can be referred to as negative emotions felt towards organization worked. For example, disdain, feeling anger, disgust, feel ashamed for organization are most specific ones. Also there are emotions like hopeless, disillusionment in this kind of organizational cynicism [17]. Emotional items, second dimension of the organizational cynicism, are emotional experiments qualified as positive or negative by individual. Emotional items consist of strong emotional reactions such as pride and anxiety [18], disrespect, anger, distress and embarrassment [3], self-concern, insecurity and disappointment [4]. These negative emotions develop because of perception for superiority in frame of own standards or values that worker demands from organization (Dean *et. al*, 1998). However, these cynical emotions are not disclosed to not lose wage or statue easily [12].

Behavioural Organizational Cynicism

Workers criticizes the approach style of organization by saying snippy words in Behavioural Organizational Cynicism. This critical behavior is performed by estimating the future of organization pessimistically [4]. To illustrate, the worker in this position can behave cynically by expressing that any investment would be unsuccessful. Main reason of why worker behave like this is that he/she perceives for superiority oneself than organization worked in terms of knowledge and ability. In addition, wry smile or grins are other cynical behaviors wordlessly [18]. Behavioural items, the last dimension of the organizational cynicism, are identified as observable behaviours formed by the attitude. Employees adopt common purposes, attitudes, believes and rules of the organization [19] and pursuant thereto they direct their behaviours. Accordingly cynic employees are able to act pessimistic, negative and mostly for humiliation [4], and also they are able to mock at objectives of the organization, rewrite duty statements and make interpretation mordaciously [18].

Perception of Politics and Organizational Cynicism

Perceptions of politics usually reflect employees' views about the level of power and influence used by other organizational members to gain advantages and secure their interests in conflicting situations [20]. Conflict is a strong predictor of perception of politics as without conflict people don't need to use political tactics to affect decisions [21]. Perception of politics is the extent to which an individual assesses the conditions or actions in the organization's environment as political [22]. A political environment is the one in which individuals make small groups and tend to be completely negligent and harmful towards the needs of others [23].

Perception of politics depends on the observer's analysis of the conduct of others that is likely to control his or her own actions and the boss's analysis of those actions [24]. This analysis is not the same for all individuals. Some consider these actions to be more negative as compared to others [25, 26]. The examples of such actions include defaming co-workers in order to be at the top, hiding information to maintain supremacy on others, restricting oneself to help others and giving special treatment to superiors to get pay raises [27, 28]. Lack of justice in the organization is the main cause of perception of politics [29]. It is also linked with low expectations regarding the effort-reward

relationship because rewards are not given on the basis of competence but on the skill level of individuals to behave politically [30, 28]. Perception of politics compels employees to develop cynical attitudes which decrease their trust in the organization [25]. Perception of politics is related to disadvantageous impact on employees such as stress, dissatisfaction and intentions to quit [27, 31] as well as organizational effectiveness [32].

Breach of Psychological Contract and Organizational Cynicism

Most of the earlier studies have not focused on the breach of psychological contract at all [33]. A few have explored the reasons leading to it while some have studied employee reactions to psychological contract breach [34]. Few studies have indicated that the contract violation does affect the employee's belief and ultimately causes changes in attitude and behaviour [35]. Andersson (1996) was probably the first researcher who presented a comprehensive model and suggested that breach of psychological contract can result in development of organizational cynicism [17]. His work attracted attention of many behavioural scientists towards this important aspect of organizational behaviour. Later Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly (2003) in their study analyzed effects of psychological contract breach on organizational cynicism [10]. The breach results in employee's feeling that organization lacks integrity, for which organizational cynicism is an eminent outcome [36, 4]. Though these studies examined relationship between two variables, still no study analyzed a sample from a developing country and public sector organizations, for which present study will attempt to add new findings in this important relationship. Other outcomes that this violation can result are deviant workplace behaviours [37] lower contribution [38] and poor performance [39].

Job Autonomy and Organizational Cynicism

Most of the studies have shown that autonomy is a key organizational necessity not just to facilitate success but also because refusal to provide autonomy to employees force them to develop negative feelings (cynicism) towards the organization as Avey, et al., (2008) found out that more empowered employees report small level cynicism towards the organization [40]. Absence of autonomy creates ill feelings and could frustrate employees resulting to misbehaviour and felony which could create serious problems for the organization. Though studies specifically analyzing the relationship between job autonomy and organizational cynicism are limited, yet the few studies which used the Job Characteristics Model as the basis for determining the nature of relationship [41] found support for their hypothesis that job autonomy will be negatively associated with organizational cynicism.

Organizational Cynicism and Counterproductive Workplace Behavior

Organizational cynicism represents a negative attitude [4] while deviant workplace behaviour represents as negative behaviour which attempts to harm the organization [42]. According to attitude behaviour relationship, negative attitude is generally followed by negative behaviour. Thus theoretically organizational cynicism which is a negative attitude can be linked with deviant workplace behaviour. Earlier studies found a negative relationship between cynicism and positive behaviours like organizational citizenship behaviour [43] and positive relationship between organizational cynicism and deviant workplace behavior [44].

Lawler (1994) argued that job dissatisfaction is experienced when the employee receives less than what he has expected out of the particular outcome [45]. When received outcomes consist of feelings of being wronged, of thwarted competence, of the absence of conditions that permit effective delivery of service, and of the need to be inauthentic, personal resentment towards the job is manifested in the form of job dissatisfaction. Negative emotions have been linked with job dissatisfaction [46]. Job dissatisfaction can range anywhere from poor work performance to the ultimate act of suicide. Smith et al., (1998) found that highly hostile individuals reported major negative life events and daily hassles than their low hostility counterparts. It follows that a negative view of the world extends to job, leading to dissatisfaction with task, people, pay and promotion [47]. Where employees are satisfied on the job, self-confidence is boosted; an atmosphere of decreased self-confidence and lack of job satisfaction may cause a person to exhibit aggressive behavior towards other employees and the organization as a whole.

Relationship between Organizational Cynicism and Organizational Health

From a theoretical perspective, organizational cynicism has a negative influence on job performance. However, researchers argue that cynical employees can be a positive force for change by challenging ineffective policies and routines and, consequently, influencing work effectiveness in a positive way [18] while some studies found that society developed negative attitudes towards those firms and their management [48]. Similarly, when a company fails to produce a profit, the employees and public tends to put the blame on the executives of that company. Consequently, poor decision of company can cause cynicism towards both the management and the company [49].

Researchers also argued that if a company pays its executives very high salary levels in poor trading conditions, the level of cynicism towards management and the organization seems to be stronger than when it is performing well [50]. Correspondingly, when a public institution is seen to be failing to deliver services that it ought to, employees generally feel ashamed of being associated with the institution and cultivate cynicism towards the institution and its management. In the literature, several studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between

organizational cynicism, job burnout and job-related outcomes [51, 49]. Some researchers did not find any association between level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment to enhance performance [52].

However, Zweig et al., (2008) found a positive association between organizational cynicism and job dissatisfaction and alienation and with a negative association with organizational commitment and organizational behavior [3]. Pelit and Pelit (2014) found strong and positive correlation between mobbing and organizational cynicism among hotel employees in Turkey [12]. In addition, Aslam, et al., (2015) conducted a study to investigate the impact of organizational cynicism and privatization and found interactive effect of Behavioural resistance in the relation among dispositional resistance, employee's intent to quit and organizational contextual factors [50]. The empirical literature also reveals that factors, such as high salary packages for executives, retrenchment of employees and failure of the organization to achieve set objectives, generate dissatisfaction and, subsequently, disillusionment towards the organization itself and this creates a high level of cynicism [50,53].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion the study has extensively looked at the relationship between organizational cynicism and organizational health. Cynicism is stated as a negative attitude that can be general or specific and has cognitive, affective and behavioural components. The impact of organizational cynicism on organizational health cannot be over emphasized by both employees and the employer. For individual managers, the practical implications begin with the recognition that organizational cynicism is an important attitude with significant consequences.

The following managerial actions are recommended:

- 1) In order to avoid negative emotions in organisation, and improve organizational health, negative individual focus based on beliefs, possibility of contradiction, lie and trick, sacrifice of value judgments amongst others must give way to such positives; as sincerity for interest, frankness, honesty and truth, to checkmate the Cognitive dimension.
- 2) Emotional organizational dimension which propagate negative emotions felt towards organization work leading to; disdain, feeling of anger, disgust, feeling ashamed for organization, could be eliminated or minimized to increase organizational health and progress.
- 3) Organizations with feedback mechanisms would regularly observe behaviours formed by attitude, where employees are nurtured to perceive and adopt common purposes, attitudes, believes and rules of the organization in a positive way in order to check behavioural organizational cynicism and work towards goal achievement for healthy organizational growth.

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