

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT, PERCEIVED MEANINGFULNESS OF WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

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Abstract

The present study aims to evaluate the relationships between perceived organizational support, organizational cynicism, meaningful work, and organizational commitment using an integrated, multidimensional model. The research confirms that a lack of organizational support increases the likelihood of forming organizational cynicism. Perceived organizational support plays a significant role in explaining the variance in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral cynicism scores. In the relationship between organizational cynicism and organizational commitment, meaningful work serves as a mediator. The more meaningful the work is, the lower the chance of developing organizational cynicism; also, the weaker is the negative impact of organizational cynicism on organizational commitment. Additionally, meaningful work helps maintain the sense of commitment to the organization, even in the presence of organizational cynicism. The relationship between organizational support and organizational commitment is consistently mediated by two factors (organizational cynicism and meaningful work) through serial mediation. The results of the study are analyzed from the perspective of conservation of resources theory, viewing organizational cynicism as a response to perceived or actual resource loss within the organization. 288 employees participated in the study.

Key words: *organizational cynicism, perceived organizational support, meaningful work, organizational commitment, conservation of resources theory*

Introduction

Prompt reaction to the requirements of changeable environment and the introduction of innovations is a permanent necessity for modern organizations. Employees are often resistant to such changes and cynically respond to them. Cynicism goes viral in the organization. It impedes its effective functioning, successful introduction of innovations and organizational development (Davis, Evans & Wilkerson, 2008). Despite its strong counter-productive effect on employee efficiency, organizational cynicism has been devoted very little attention.

The concept of cynicism is quite old. It originated in Ancient Greece in the 5th century BC. (Dean et al., 1998). In that period Diogenes of Sinope founded the school of cynicism (Anderson, 1996), they used obscene words and opposed the widely held opinions and public institutions in a dramatic way (Mack, 1993, cited in Dean et al., 1998). The cynics

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believed that people, in general, are not sincere (Bedük, 2015). Throughout the centuries, the terms 'cynic' and 'cynicism' established their place in everyday spoken language. Today, 'cynic' denotes the person who is always critical and dissatisfied and full of negative thoughts (Torun and Çetin, 2015, cited in Akar, 2019).

Cynicism is a wide-spread phenomenon and might be found in any country, culture or organization (Dean et al., 1998). In the late 1990s researchers started to examine the factors, characteristics and outcomes of cynicism. The studies show that organizational cynicism affects employees' performance, intention to leave the job, work alienation, and, life satisfaction, in general (Akar, 2019). The present study concerns organizational cynicism. The integrative model of the study attempts to find out which organizational factors contribute to the development of organizational cynicism and what kind of impact it has on the employee relations and behavior.

Conceptualization of organizational cynicism

According to the earliest and the most influential studies on organizational cynicism (Dean et al., 1998; Anderson, 1996; Brandes, 1997), cynicism is defined as an attitude which implies that all organizational problems are caused by management's personal interests. It is a belief that the existing conditions are impossible to change (Bedük, 2015).

Organizational cynicism is described as employees' negative attitude to the employer organization. It is believed that employer organizations lack ethical integrity and that the organization's benefits are more important than justice, honesty and sincerity (Bedük, 2015). Cynicism is differently conceptualized in the existing studies. The present study uses a three-dimensional model and includes cognitive, affective and behavioral cynicism which are defined as follows: *cognitive cynicism* – negative beliefs and attitudes towards the employer; belief that the organization lacks integrity, justice and sincerity; *affective cynicism* – negative feelings about the organization, such as fear, anger, hatred, embarrassment; *behavioral cynicism* – employees' negative beliefs and feelings are expressed in behavior such as sarcasm, insincere actions, disrespect for the organization's policy (Dean et al., 1998; Akar, 2019). The preconditions of organizational cynicism could be negative work experience as well as individual differences (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Our study focuses on the organizational predictors of cynicism and its outcomes.

Research conducted in this field demonstrates that the individuals high on organizational cynicism score low on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job performance and are less involved in organizational citizenship behavior (Dean et al., 1998; Chiaburu et al., 2013; Song et al., 2007). Organizational cynicism positively correlates with the violation of the psychological contract and stress, is related to perceived organizational policy, lack of organizational sport and the perception of organizational injustice (Akar, 2019). Cynicism spreads to the whole organization and impedes its development and success (Dulnik, 2018; Davis, Evans & Wilkerson, 2008).

How can our study contribute to the knowledge accumulated in this field of research? The answer to this question can be drawn from the description of the model presented below.

The research model: the constructs involved and their relationship

The research model

The multidimensional integrative model of the study helps us understand how the involved constructs (organizational support, meaningful work, organizational commitment) interact with organizational cynicism and each other, and how their interaction affects the development and outcomes of organizational cynicism. In particular, the research model emphasizes the role of organizational cynicism in the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment. Organizational support is conceptualized as a variable explaining organizational cynicism (predictor) and organizational commitment as an outcome variable. In addition, meaningful work and organizational cynicism are mediators of the relationship between organizational support and organizational commitment. It should be noted that the studies evaluating organizational cynicism and its dimensions using the above variables are very scarce. We used the conservation of resources theory as a framework which emphasizes the importance of the acquisition, conservation and defense of resources by employees (Hobfoll, Tirone & Holmgreen, 2016). It is a valuable framework which helps understand the development of cynicism, its effects and influence. The major assumption is that organizational cynicism develops when the organization does not provide adequate support to the employees. Cynicism can be regarded as employees' response to the exhaustion of psychological and other resources and burnout. The interpretation of the results given below is carried out within the framework of the above theory.

Other variables

In this section, we discuss the involved variables as well as the preconditions for their inclusion in the research model.

Perceived organizational support is employees' generalized perception of the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Kurtessi et al., 2017). The meaning of such a perception is that the relationship between employees and the company brings important benefits for both the employers and the employed (Sun, 2019). Studies show that perceived organizational support evokes affective attachment to the organization and increases employees' efforts (Eisenberger & Huntington, 1986), is positively related with organizational performance (Eisenberger, 2011), employees' well-being (Kurtessi et al., 2015) and the perception of organizational commitment (Wu, 2014; Wayne et al., 2002). The studies also demonstrate that the perception of organizational support results in organizational trust (Chen et al, 2010) and organizational

identity (Edwards, 2009; Fu et al., 2010; Wang & Sun, 2011, cited in Sun, 2019). These findings lead to the following assumptions: perceived organizational support decreases the risk of organizational cynicism. The studies support the existence of negative correlation between these two variables (Kasalak, 2014; Akar, 2019), however, in our study this kind of relationship has been examined with the involvement of mediating variables.

Organizational commitment which is included in the model as a dependent variable is described as (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; (2) willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Porter, 1979). A certain level of trust and belief that the organization will take an employee's interests into consideration is important for establishing a deep affective attachment to the organization, whereas mistrust contributes to the formation of negative attitude to the organization and results in cynicism (Aydin & Akdag, 2016; Audenaert, 2020). The novelty of our research is in the attempt to explain the above relationship with the introduction of meaningful work as a mediating variable in the context of three dimensions of organizational cynicism.

Meaningful work is defined as *employees' perception* that their activity at the workplace is useful and valuable (Barrick, Mount & Li, 2012). It is related to the Self, goal, needs and the willingness to contribute to important events (Savvides & Stavrou, 2020). The meaning of work which reflects the willingness to maintain one's own identity is formed on the basis of three major needs: self-development, self-efficacy and resilience. Self-development is related with the formation of a positive effect and cognitions about oneself, self-efficacy reflects the belief in one's own abilities and resilience is the person's ability to endure difficulties (Savvides & Stavrou, 2020). Correspondingly, the meaning of work is derived from the perception of oneself in a *specific situation/environment (including organizational environment)*. The perceived organizational support as a variety of organizational environment should be reflected in the perception of the meaningful work. In addition, meaningful work evokes the sense of commitment which helps the employee perceive the organization as an important mechanism in the achievement of the goals that correspond to the employee's values (Kahn, 1990) and identity¹. Stemming from the content of the construct, we can hypothesize that the role of meaningful work is crucial in the development of organizational cynicism as well as in the relationship between organizational cynicism and organizational commitment.

The sample and methods

The sample: Stemming from the study objectives, the applicant's employment was identified as the main selection criterion. The data were collected through convenience sampling, which can be considered a study limitation. At the initial stage the data were weighted by gender². Number of participants was 288.

¹ The positive effect experienced by employees might strengthen emotional attachment to one's organization and career (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Meyer et al., 2002).

² The data were weighted using the indicators from the National Statistics Office (first half of 2023).

Four methods were used to measure the main constructs.¹

Methods	Significance level
1. Dean Organizational Cynicism Scale (OCS) (Dean et al., 1998)	cognitive: $\alpha = 0.84$. behavioral: $\alpha = 0.84$, affective: $\alpha = 0.93$; OCS: $\alpha = 0.93$
2. Eisenberg perceived organizational support survey (1986); two-factor model	support: $\alpha = 0.85$, neglect: $\alpha = 0.9$
3. Porter organizational commitment questionnaire (1974)	$\alpha = 0.8$
4. Georgian version of the Work as Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger, 2012; კუტალაძე, ფარჯიანი, 2021).	$\alpha = 0.91$

Results

Relationship between the constructs: The hypothesized relationships between study variables and organizational cynicism were tested first, as well as the relationship between its dimensions. It was confirmed that the lack of organizational support is associated with a high score on organizational cynicism ($r = -0.717, p < 0.01$), and the increase in organizational cynicism with the decrease in organizational commitment ($r = -0.51, p < 0.01$)²; in addition, the increase in perceived meaningfulness of work is related to the decrease in organizational cynicism ($r = -.514^*$, $p < 0.01$). At the same time, the perceived meaningfulness of work is positively associated with organizational commitment ($r = 0.66, p < 0.01$) and negatively with organizational cynicism ($r = -0.45, p < 0.01$).

The tendencies described above are revealed in each dimension (cognitive, affective behavioral) of OCS.

The role of organizational support in the development of organizational cynicism. The perceived organizational support and neglect explain 61% of the variance in organizational cynicism ($r^2 = 0.61, F(2,285) = 225.2, p < 0.001$). 1 standard unit increase in support was associated with 0.44 standard unit decrease in organizational cynicism ($\beta = -0.44, p < 0.001$), while 1 standard unit increase in neglect was associated with the 0.42 increase in organizational cynicism ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$).

A strong association was observed between the organizational cynicism and organizational commitment. Organizational cynicism explains 53% of the variance in the organizational commitment ($r^2 = 0.53, F(1,286) = 318.45, p < 0.001$). 1 standard unit increase in organizational cynicism predicts 0.73 standard unit decrease in organizational commit-

¹ Part of the methods was adapted within the framework of the given study. The factor analysis was conducted, and reliability and other psychometric parameters were assessed.

² It should be noted that organizational support and organizational neglect exhibit approximately equal strength of relationship (magnitude) with other variables involved in the study; the only difference is in the direction of the effect (for example, organizational support has a positive effect on organizational commitment, while neglect has a negative effect).

ment ($\beta = -0.73, p < 0.001$). This kind of relationship is identical for all three components of the organizational cynicism construct (see Table 1).

Table 1. Dimensions of organizational cynicism as a predictor of organizational commitment (results of the regression analysis)

Cognitive cynicism	$r^2 = 0.41$ (95% C.I. $r^2 = 0.41$), $F(1,286) = 201.64, \beta = -0.64, p < 0.001$.
Behavioral cynicism	$r^2 = 0.41$, $F(1,286) = 199.43, p < 0.001; \beta = -0.64, p < 0.001$.
Affective cynicism	$r^2 = 0.39$, $F(1,286) = 201.64, p < 0.001; (\beta = -0.62, p < 0.001$

Relationship between the constructs by demographic variables: Simple moderation model¹ confirms that the status, measured by a dichotomic variable (has or does not have a subordinate) moderates the relationship between the behavioral cynicism and the organizational commitment ($b = -.30$, 95% C.I. (LLCI = $-.573$, ULCI = $-.020$), $t(284) = -2.11$, $p < .05$), as well as the relationship between the cognitive cynicism and the organizational commitment ($b = -.29$, 95% C.I. (LLCI = $-.574$, ULCI = $-.006$), $t(284) = -2.01$, $p < .05$; ($b = -.30$, 95% C.I. (LLCI = $-.573$, ULCI = $-.020$), $t(284) = -2.11$, $p < .05$)). This result shows that in the case of insufficient organizational support or organizational neglect, the organizational cynicism is most manifested by those employees who do not have subordinates. In the case of a strong organizational support, the managers with status are more cynical than their subordinates. The managers, usually, have more resource (higher salaries, more autonomy, influence, etc.), but they also hold higher expectations which, potentially, explains a higher risk of the development of organizational cynicism.

As for the effect of the organizational cynicism on the organizational commitment, a *negative effect* of organizational cynicism on organizational commitment (reduced organizational commitment) is more evident in the employees without subordinates. In this case, the status (managerial position) serves the function of buffering moderator in this relationship; in particular, even when the cognitive cynicism increases, managers still feel responsible to the organization which means that a high status (i.e., managerial position) reduces a negative effect of cynicism on the organizational commitment. Simple moderation model also confirmed that women are more vulnerable to the organizational neglect, which means that **gender** is a moderator in the relationship between *organizational neglect and affective cynicism* ($b = -.11$, 95% C.I. (LLCI = $-.199$, ULCI = $-.010$), $t(284) = -2.18$, $p < .05$).

Mediation analysis: As already said, the main purpose of the study is to examine the role of organizational cynicism in the relationship between perceived organizational support, perceived meaningfulness of work and organizational commitment. Consequently, our study focuses on the interaction of these variables, as well as on the role of these interactions. Before moving to the discussion of the key issue, we present below the empirical evidence for the relationship between organizational cynicism, perceived meaningfulness of work and organizational commitment.

¹ PROCESS by Andrew F. Hayes (Procedure for SPSS Release 4.2)

Simple mediation analysis proves that meaningful work mediates the relationship between the dimensions of organizational cynicism and organizational commitment. The mediating variable (that is meaningful work) weakens the direct relationship between organizational cynicism and organizational commitment; despite this, the relationship still remains statistically significant ($b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < 0.001$); a partial mediation is observed in the case of all the three dimensions of organizational cynicism (see Table 2). It seems that when the level of organizational cynicism is high, some alienation from work takes place and employees develop perception that the job they are doing is less valuable, which has a negative impact on the organizational commitment.

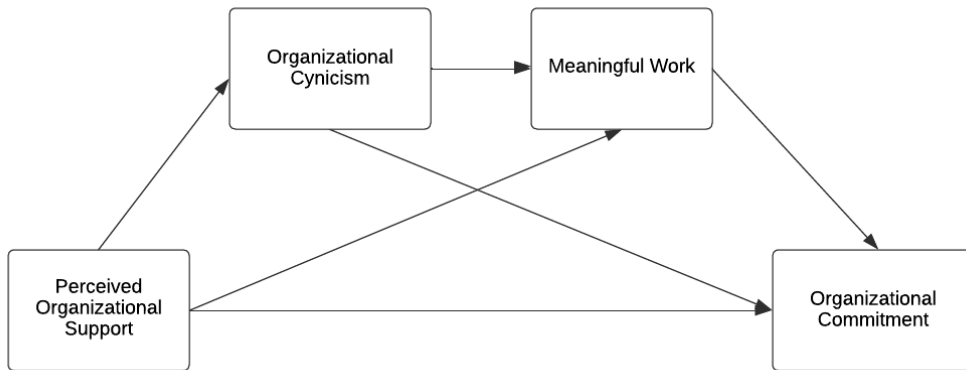
Table 2. Simple mediation model: The perception of the meaningfulness of work as a mediator of the relationship between the dimensions of organizational cynicism and organizational commitment

<i>Dependent variable: Organizational commitment</i>					
$R^2 = .58$, $F(2,285) = 199.81$, $p < .001$					
Variables	8	SE	T	p	95% CI
Predictor (direct effect): Cognitive cynicism	-.59	.05	-10.8	.00	[-.69, -.48]
Mediator: Perceived meaningfulness of work	.29	.03	10.81	.00	[.24, .34]
<i>Indirect effect</i>	Effect	BootSE			Boot 95%CI
Indirect effect: Cognitive cynicism – Perceived meaningfulness of work – Organizational commitment	-.24	.04			[-.34, -.17]
$R^2 = .60$, $F(2,285) = 213.77$, $p < .001$					
Variables	B	SE	T	p	95% CI
Predictor (direct effect): Behavioral cynicism	-.65	.06	-11.53	.00	[-.76, -.54]
Mediator: Perceived meaningfulness of work	.29	.03	11.16	.00	[.24, .34]
<i>Indirect effect</i>	Effect	BootSE			Boot 95%CI
Indirect effect: Behavioral cynicism – Perceived meaningfulness of work – Organizational commitment	-.25	.05			[-.35, -.16]
$R^2 = .55$, $F(2,285) = 171.95$, $p < .001$					
Variables	B	SE	T	p	95% CI
Predictor (direct effect): Affective cynicism	-.54	.06	-9.16	0	[-.66, -.431]
Mediator: Perceived meaningfulness of work	.29	.03	10.26	0	[.23, .35]
<i>Indirect effect</i>	Effect	BootSE			Boot 95%a
Indirect effect: Affective cynicism – Perceived meaningfulness of work – Organizational commitment	-.28	.05			[-.39, -.19]
A. F. Hayes 3finet5.58) PROCESS, ammo') N24; (N = 288)					

The main model of the study: serial mediation: At the next step we tested the hypothesis that the serial mediation analysis would reveal a chain between perceived organizational support, perceived meaningfulness of work, organizational cynicism and organizational commitment (**PROCESS** by Andrew F. Hayes (Procedure for SPSS Release 4.2; model 6)).

Variables in the model: independent variable (X) – organizational support; first mediator (M1) – organizational cynicism; second mediator (M2) – meaningful work; dependent variable (Y) – organizational commitment. We hypothesized that the effect of the organizational support would be transmitted to the organizational commitment through two mediators: organizational cynicism and meaningful work (in the sequence described above). The model assesses how and in what sequence each moderator affects the result and in what way each of them relates the independent variable to the dependent variable.

The diagram of serial mediation



In the given study the serial mediation hypothesis was tested as follows:

- Perceived organizational support → organizational cynicism → organizational commitment: assessment of the indirect effect only through the mediation of organizational cynicism;
- Organizational support → meaningful work → organizational commitment: indirect effect only through the mediation of perceived meaningful work;
- Organizational support → organizational cynicism → meaningful work → organizational commitment: calculation of full serial mediation effect mediated by organizational cynicism and perception of meaningful work;
- The role of serial mediation was confirmed not only when the perceived organizational support was introduced as a predictor (Table 3), but also when the organizational neglect was incorporated into the model as an independent variable/predictor.

Table 3. Serial mediation. The relationship between organizational support and organizational commitment

	Effect SE LLCI ULCI
Total effect	0.2142 0.0232 0.1697 0.2599
<i>Ind1 – perceived organizational support – organizational cynicism – organizational commitment</i>	0.1303 0.0205 0.0904 0.1704
<i>Ind2 – perceived organizational support – perceived meaningfulness of work – organizational commitment</i>	0.0643 0.0140 0.0403 0.0954
<i>Ind3 – perceived organizational support – organizational cynicism – perceived meaningfulness of work – organizational commitment</i>	0.0196 0.0092 0.0029 0.0393

The relationship between organizational neglect and organizational commitment (through the transmission of two mediators) is only described as a total effect:

<i>Total effect</i>			
Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
-0.4592	0.0403	-0.5379	-0.3806

The main finding of the study: The organizational cynicism, mainly described as a negative attitude to organization, mistrust and the sense of betrayal, together with the meaningfulness of work serially mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational commitment. In addition, organizational support is a strong predictor of the development of the organizational cynicism and the meaningfulness of work.

Summary and discussion

In this section the study results are analyzed from the perspective of the conservation of resources model: the organizational cynicism is considered a response to the actual or perceived loss of organizational resources.

According to the above model, individuals try to obtain, preserve and protect their valuable resources (Holmgreen, Tirone & Gerhart, 2017). The organizational support is just one of such valuable resources because it helps employees to cope with challenges and stressful situations. To free themselves from disappointment and negative emotions, caused, in this case, by an insufficient organizational support, employees resort to cynicism, sabotage and other counterproductive behavior and even deviant behavior.

Cynicism can be regarded as a defense strategy aimed to reduce future frustration and loss of resources. According to the conservation of resources model, an employee tries to protect oneself and for this purpose she/he reduces expectations related to the organization, emotional investment and effort. Such an attempt to conserve resources has, clearly, a negative effect on the organizational commitment. It should also be taken into consideration that the negative emotions caused by lack of organizational support reduce

and exhaust psychological and emotional resources and, consequently, create a deficit of resources needed for job performance (Naseer, 2021). The deficit of resources weakens the organizational commitment. Therefore, together with the conservation of resources, a precondition for weakened organizational commitment could be a deficit of resources in the stressful environment marked with organizational losses.

What is the role of meaningful work in the entire picture described above? According to the conservation of resources model, people who lose resources are more susceptible to future losses (Holmgren, Tirone & Gerhart, 2017). Such a cumulative loss might increase organizational cynicism and alienation from work. The present study also confirms that a lack of perceived organizational support and the frustration caused by the loss of resources contribute to the devaluation of the meaning of work and alienation. The findings of the study demonstrate once again that organizations play a critical role in how important meaningful work will be for employees (Savvides & Stavrou, 2020).

The meaningful work can also be viewed from a different perspective, as an important resource. Such an approach is supported by a number of studies according to which the meaningful work has a high value for employees (Savvides & Stavrou, 2020). The employees who perceive their work as important are more motivated (Steger, 2016). The present study also illustrates that the meaningful work is an important resource because, as a mediator, it reduces a negative effect of cynicism on the organizational commitment (partial mediation). To protect oneself from the loss of resources and compensate for the loss, an employee might look for other resources and/or start to invest them. In the situation like this, the meaningful work or the employee's perception that his/her activity is valuable and beneficial for organization could be a significant compensatory resource.

The study also showed that the status (managerial position) moderates the relationship between the organizational cynicism (cognitive and behavioral) and commitment. Employees with subordinates score higher on organizational commitment even in the presence of the organizational cynicism. Stemming from the conservation of resources model, we could assume that the loss of resources is compensated by status, i.e., the employee knows that she/he has lost something, but, at the same time, has received something from the organization, which diminishes the negative effect of organizational support (loss of resources) on the organizational commitment.

Our study also showed that in the presence of organizational neglect, the low status employees manifest a higher level of organizational cynicism than managers, which could be explained by the fact that they are more susceptible to the loss of resources than managers. Anyway, low status employees are less protected because a smaller amount of resources is available for them. Consequently, the probability of organizational cynicism as a reaction to potential loss is higher. In general, according to the model, the resource loss has a stronger impact on employees than resource gain. However, the present study shows that the resource gain along with the resource loss diminishes a negative effect of the loss of resources.

To conclude, the organizations which create stressful environment due to neglect of

the employees' interests, motivation and attitudes, contribute to the exhaustion of employees' resources and the development of cynical attitude. The exhaustion of resources triggers employees to use self-defense strategies, which, mainly, precludes them from the resource conservation and the investment of emotional resources, and, finally, results in the reduction of the organizational commitment. The study shows that by creating the organizational support culture and offering meaningful work to employees, the organization can reduce the probability of the spread of organizational cynicism and/or a counterproductive effect of organizational cynicism on the organizational processes and employee efficacy.

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