

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

WWW.CIKD.CA

journal homepage: <https://www.ijol.cikd.ca>



Effect of Dimensions of Cynicism about Organization Change on Job Motivation, Job Involvement, and Turnover Intentions

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Keywords:

Pessimism, Dispositional attribution, Situational attribution, Job motivation, Job involvement, Turnover intentions

Received

10 June 2024

Received in revised form

16 October 2024

Accepted

18 October 2024

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ABSTRACT

Cynicism is an important parameter of resistance to change and an important factor that may hinder the success of any change initiative. This study examines the impact of the three dimensions of Cynicism About Organization Change (CAOC) – namely, situational attribution, dispositional attribution, and pessimism – on job involvement, job motivation, and turnover intentions. Data were collected from 361 employees of one division of an Indian information technology organization using a questionnaire. A proposed model representing various hypotheses was analyzed through structural equation modeling. Results indicate that pessimism about change had a negative linkage with job motivation. Cynicism due to dispositional attribution had a negative impact on job motivation and job involvement and a positive impact on turnover intentions of employees. Cynicism due to situational factors was positively linked with turnover intentions. The major contribution of our work is to illustrate that cynicism is a multidimensional construct, and each dimension of cynicism has a different impact on outcome variables of job involvement, job motivation, and turnover intentions. Managers need to consider the distinct impact of different dimensions of cynicism while countering their impact on increasing the job involvement and job motivation of employees, and reducing turnover intentions.

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Indian business organizations grapple with a dynamic environment intensified by factors like heightened competition from local and global counterparts, technological advancements, demographic shifts, and evolving customer and employee expectations (Lahiri, 2013; Mathur et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2022). This is especially relevant in the context of the Indian

information technology industry, which is one of the most globally exposed sectors in India (Noronha & D'Cruz, 2020). This challenging landscape necessitates continuous adaptation through various change initiative. Frequent introduction of change efforts, sometimes yielding questionable results, tends to foster cynicism among employees toward the entire change process (Ouedraogo & Ouakouak, 2021). In the Indian context, managers have observed instances of employee cynicism, manifesting as distrust in managerial goals, frustrating disagreements over managerial actions, and attributions of unscrupulous behavior and dishonest intentions to managers (Dhar, 2009). Executives express frustration in addressing this pervasive distrust, which hampers their ability to persuade employees to actively engage in the change process.

Workplace cynicism entails employees believing that managers prioritize self-interest over the employees' well-being, leading to a negative attitude toward management and the organization (Dean et al., 1998). Extensively examined from diverse perspectives such as personality, social and institutional, occupational, and employee and organizational change (Dean et al., 1998, p. 343), our study specifically focuses on cynicism emerging from organizational change. From this perspective, employees develop cynical attitudes toward organizational change, shaped by managerial actions and organizational factors, leading to pessimism about the success of the change effort (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Reichers et al., 1997; Stanley et al., 2005). These attitudes have implications for employee job involvement, job motivation, and intentions to persist with the organization (Chiaburu et al., 2013).

In the context of management's efforts to bring about changes in organizations, Reichers et al. (1997) have defined Cynicism Against Organizational Change (CAOC) as involving 'a real loss of faith in the leaders of change and is a response to a history of change attempts that are not entirely or clearly successful. It arises in spite of the best intentions of those responsible for the change, even rational decision-makers who care about the well-being of employees and value their own reputations.' (p.48). Such resistance against change might be the result of negative impressions of past attempts to change, distrust in the abilities of leaders to change organizations successfully, lack of participation in change effort, and lack of transparency in the manner in which management is trying to bring about change (Stanley et al, 2005). These factors lead employees to become aloof towards organizational efforts to change and try to sabotage efforts to change (Bernerth et al., 2007).

Studies in the Indian context have shown that cynicism can have a detrimental impact on job motivation and job involvement, as disillusioned employees may feel disengaged from their work and lack the drive to perform at their best (Divya & Seranmadevi, 2022; Sandhu, 2024; Singh & Randhawa, 2022). It can also increase turnover intentions, with cynical employees more likely to consider leaving the organization, further complicating managerial efforts to drive successful change (Nair & Kamalanabhan, 2010).

Wanous et al. (2000) highlighted the significance of operationalizing CAOC in three dimensions—situational attribution, dispositional attribution, and pessimism about change success. Given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of cynicism, Stanley et al. (2005) suggest studying employee perceptions of the various components of CAOC rather than using cynicism as a uni-dimensional construct and their impact on outcome variables.

While prior studies related to cynicism (Fauzan, 2019; Sheel & Vohra, 2016) have treated cynicism and CAOC scale as a singular dimension, our contribution lies in scrutinizing the

managerial behaviors encapsulated in its three dimensions independently. This novel approach allows us to model their individual impacts on crucial outcome variables for successful organizational change initiatives, namely, job involvement (Brown & Cregan, 2008; Divya & Seranmadevi, 2022; Hussain et al., 2018), job motivation (Radojević et al., 2020), and turnover intentions (Nair & Kamalanabhan, 2010; Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020). We have selected these outcome variables because they are important for the success of an organizational change initiative.

Our methodology begins with a comprehensive review of the literature that underpins the constructs in our model. Following this, we outline the research design and approach used for testing the model before moving on to the presentation of our results. We then discuss the practical implications for management and conclude by addressing the study's limitations offering directions for future research.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Cynicism in Organizations

Cynicism at the workplace is a natural response to dissatisfaction experienced due to perceived distrust, disparity, and dejection. Cynicism has been characterized as ‘a general and specific attitude characterized by frustration, hopelessness, and disillusionment, as well as contempt toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution’ (Anderson, 1996, pp.1397-98). Further, employee cynicism may be directed towards ‘features of the workplace, such as top management and/or particular business organization’ (Anderson, 1996, p.1398). Organizational management has an important role in influencing organizational factors that cause cynicism to prevent disruption of efforts being made to change (DeCelles et al., 2013).

Dean et al. (1998) have highlighted the various aspects of cynicism based on individual, institutional, occupational, and contextual perspective and conceptualized cynicism as comprising three dimensions (p. 345-346): a) The cognitive dimension reflects a belief that the organization lacks honesty, fairness, and sincerity based on employees' observations and past experiences. Employees may attribute these beliefs to individual misconduct, inconsistent processes, or external situational factors beyond managerial control. This can lead to employee disengagement and dissatisfaction with organizational systems, policies, and members. b) The affective dimension involves negative emotions toward the organization. When employees attribute organizational dysfunction to management or flawed processes, their emotional reactions, such as disbelief, anger, contempt, or shame, tend to be stronger than when dysfunction is seen as situational. These emotions can lead to detachment, dissatisfaction, and disengagement from the job and organization. c) The behavioral dimension refers to actions harmful to the organization. Beliefs and emotions may lead employees to criticize the organization, view events negatively, and express pessimism about its actions and future, depending on their personal and organizational context.

Wanous et al. (2004) suggested that employees' perceptions of organizational events operate cognitively and lead to attributions shaped by personality and prior experiences (Oreg, 2006). Cognitive and affective dimensions together create pessimism toward change. When employees believe managerial actions will not lead to beneficial changes, it triggers emotional responses and feelings of pessimism about the organization's direction. Employees often discuss these

perceptions with colleagues, seeking validation and being influenced by group dynamics like groupthink or group potency (Hu & Liden, 2011). These processes impact work-related behaviors at cognitive, behavioral, and affective levels. While pessimism may be personality-driven, management styles can shape dispositional attributions, and situational attributions may arise from external factors. Thus, cognitive and emotional dimensions more strongly impact pessimism, while cognitive and behavioral dimensions affect dispositional and situational aspects of cynicism.

Cynicism may be experienced due to organizational as well as individual-level factors. Researchers have highlighted organizational factors such as breach of psychological contract (Nadim et al., 2019), job strain (Abugre, 2017), work overload (Abraham, 2012), increase in conflicts with co-workers (Watt & Piotrowski, 2008), low social support (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008), unsatisfactory promotion or career growth (Altınöz et al., 2011), organizational injustice (Afghan et al., 2018), and perceived organizational politics (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2010) as being responsible for cynicism. Apart from these, individual-level factors may also lead a person to experience cynicism, such as positive and negative affect (Avey et al., 2008), high trait cynicism (Singelis et al., 2003), and emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano et al., 2023).

Increased job insecurity, unclear goals, and lack of development opportunities contribute to cynicism, which in turn reduces employee engagement and productivity while increasing turnover (Berry & Morris, 2008; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). High workplace politics further exacerbate cynicism, but positive leader-member exchange relationships can mitigate this effect (Davis & Gardner, 2004). Similarly, empowering leadership reduces cynicism, especially with high-quality leader-member exchange (Lorinkova & Perry, 2017). Bernerth et al. (2007) highlight the role of justice perceptions in reducing cynicism and fostering commitment during organizational change. Procedural and interactional justice positively influence affective commitment and reduce cynicism. Transformational leadership and group cohesion, when perceived as fair, also decrease cynicism about organizational change (Wu et al., 2007).

Cynicism leads to reduced job satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Dean et al., 1998). Emotional exhaustion, driven by high job demands and low control, further fuels cynicism, completing the burnout cycle (Leiter & Maslach, 2005). Cynicism also moderates the relationship between workplace stressors and health outcomes, as seen in high-stress environments like policing (Richardson et al., 2006). High levels of employee cynicism are linked to increased resistance to organizational change, often due to distrust in management's intentions (Stanley et al., 2005). In the IT industry, high affective cynicism, driven by job stress and overwork, negatively correlates with performance, while cognitive and behavioral cynicism shows weaker associations (Aishwarya et al., 2021).

Studies consistently show a negative relationship between cynicism and job engagement. Higher levels of cynicism across its affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions result in decreased employee engagement (Sandhu, 2024). Cynical employees, marked by skepticism, are more prone to stress, absenteeism, and exhaustion, further diminishing well-being and productivity (Bakker et al., 2008). Therefore, cynicism plays a critical role in mitigating burnout and improving workplace outcomes.

Organizational cynicism moderates the relationship between knowledge hiding and thriving, as higher cynicism intensifies the negative effects of incivility on knowledge-sharing behaviors (Agarwal et al., 2024). Leaders who foster meaningful work and psychological safety can

reduce cynicism and improve employee performance (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008). Transformational leadership and emotional intelligence also play key roles in managing cynicism, enhancing engagement, and minimizing resistance to change (Avey et al., 2008; Sahoo et al., 2023).

Most studies treat CAOC as unidimensional (Fauzan, 2019), but Reichers et al. (1997) argue for a multi-dimensional approach, identifying distinct dimensions like pessimism and dispositional attribution. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how various aspects of cynicism affect employee responses to change. By treating these dimensions separately, we aim to better understand their specific effects on employee behavior and provide targeted strategies to manage cynicism, thereby reducing its negative impact on organizational outcomes.

Cynicism about Organizational Change

We draw on expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), attribution theory (Malle, 2022), and psychological contract theory to link Cynicism About Organizational Change (CAOC) with employee outcomes (Blau, 1964; Rousseau & Parks, 1993; Wanous et al., 2000). During change efforts, employees expect managers to clarify the vision, roles, and expected outcomes, forming a psychological contract based on these managerial promises (Blau, 1964; Rousseau & Parks, 1993). Employees anticipate rewards or benefits in return for their contributions (Anderson, 1996).

However, when managers fail to meet these expectations through poor communication or lack of updates, employees attribute failures to managerial incompetence or insincerity (Ford & Ford, 2020). These attributions, reinforced by group discussions, lead to collective beliefs about the failure of change efforts (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2022). Repeated failures signal a breach of the psychological contract, evoking feelings of unfairness and distrust (Yang et al., 2020), which contribute to growing cynicism and pessimism about future changes (Cropanzano et al., 2023).

This cycle of unmet expectations and failed change initiatives foster a cynical attitude toward all organizational changes (Reichers et al., 1997). Employees' cynicism, rooted in past experiences, reflects pessimism, distrust of managers, and diminished belief in change success (Stanley et al., 2005). These negative beliefs and emotions lead to disengagement and withdrawal from the organization (Dean et al., 1998), further weakening the employee-manager relationship.

Stanley et al. (2005) highlight that cynicism is multi-faceted, encompassing pessimism, dispositional, and situational attributions, which may have distinct impacts on organizational outcomes. Grouping these components together risks oversimplifying employee attitudes, potentially misrepresenting their effects (Law et al., 1998). For example, pessimism reflects a negative outlook, while dispositional attribution links failure to managerial incompetence, and situational attribution blames broader organizational conditions (Wanous et al., 2000). Research on cynicism encompasses a broad spectrum, from general cynicism to forms specific to organizations, leaders, and occupations (Dean et al., 1998). Our focus was on employee behaviors and their responses to organizational change efforts. To capture this, we utilized the Cynicism About Organizational Change scale developed by Wanous et al. (2000), selecting it over other available scales (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Brandes, 1997; Niederhoffer, 1967;

Reichers et al., 1997; Wrightsman, 1991). Additionally, this scale has been previously applied in studies conducted in India (e.g., Sahoo et al., 2023).

Wanous et al. (2000) proposed a 12-item scale for measuring CAOC, distinguishing it from other concepts by identifying three components: pessimism about change, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution. Pessimism is linked to past failed change efforts, dispositional attribution refers to management's ineffectiveness in implementing change, and situational attribution involves external circumstances beyond management's control. Building on this framework, our paper models these individual components of CAOC against outcomes like motivation, involvement, and turnover intention.

Impact of Cynicism on Job Motivation

Traditionally, job motivation is seen as a response to job characteristics like pay, promotion opportunities, and supervisory relationships (Smith et al., 1969) and is generally stable over time (Bowling et al., 2005). However, this stability can be disrupted by heightened sensitivity to negative events, particularly through organizational cynicism. Judge et al. (1997) describe cynicism as a stable trait reflecting negative feelings and distrust toward others. Highly cynical employees often react negatively to organizational changes, lowering job motivation. Job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation partially mediate the link between cynicism and turnover intention, and cynicism negatively affects commitment, satisfaction, and motivation (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Reichers et al., 1997).

Pessimism, a key component of cynicism, undermines job motivation. Employees who believe that change efforts will fail often feel disengaged and demotivated. Nafei (2013) found that cynicism leads to lower job motivation, as pessimistic employees feel disconnected from their work and less satisfied with their jobs.

Dispositional attribution worsens the relationship between cynicism and job motivation. Employees who attribute failures to managerial incompetence or insincerity may feel betrayed, experiencing a psychological contract violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This leads to lower motivation, as employees feel undervalued. Naus et al. (2007) note that misalignment between personal and organizational values intensifies negative emotions, further lowering job motivation.

Situational attribution, where employees blame external factors for organizational dysfunction, fosters helplessness and frustration, eroding job motivation. When external circumstances contribute to organizational issues, employees often disengage, resulting in lower motivation (Clark et al., 1996).

In summary, the components of cynicism—pessimism, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution—negatively influence job motivation by spilling over negative emotions from perceptions of failed change, poor management, and external circumstances. This highlights the need to address cynicism to improve employee well-being and motivation (Judge et al., 2001).

We suggest that cynicism rooted in pessimism and dispositional attributions has a stronger negative impact on job motivation than situational attribution. Thus, we hypothesize that pessimism and dispositional attribution more significantly undermine job motivation than situational attribution. Based on this, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1a: Pessimism about change is negatively related to job motivation.

H1b: Dispositional attribution of the failure of change efforts is negatively related to job motivation.

H1c: Situational attribution of failure of change efforts is negatively related to job motivation.

Impact of Cynicism on Job Involvement

Management plays a crucial role in motivating employees to engage in change initiatives (Farahnak et al., 2020). Job involvement, defined as an individual's connection to their work, is linked to reduced absenteeism (Hngoi et al., 2023), lower turnover (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021), less stress (Paoline & Lambert, 2012), and improved well-being and job satisfaction (Akhtar et al., 2016). Moynihan and Pandey (2007) note that job involvement is more influenced by employee attitudes than organizational characteristics.

Cynicism about organizational change negatively impacts job involvement through its subscales: pessimism, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution. Pessimism, or negative expectations about change success, weakens commitment and reduces job involvement as employees detach from their roles (Chao et al., 2011; Prajogo et al., 2020).

Dispositional attribution, where cynicism is directed at managers' incompetence or insincerity, also reduces job involvement. Employees who distrust leadership disengage from their work, feeling unsupported and uninspired (Dean et al., 1998; Yasin & Khalid, 2015), leading to reduced innovation and fulfillment (Kumara & Fasana, 2018).

Situational attribution, which blames external factors for organizational failure, fosters a sense of futility, further reducing employees' commitment and engagement (Prajogo et al., 2020).

In summary, the subscales of cynicism—pessimism, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution—undermine job involvement by eroding trust, motivation, and belief in the effectiveness of one's efforts. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2a: Pessimism about change is negatively related to job involvement.

H2b: Dispositional attribution of the failure of change efforts is negatively related to job involvement.

H2c: Situational attribution of failure of change efforts is negatively related to job involvement.

Impact of Cynicism on Turnover Intention

Turnover intentions, defined as an employee's desire to leave an organization typically follow stages from considering quitting to actively seeking new employment (Griffeth et al., 2000). These intentions are strong predictors of actual turnover and are influenced by organizational cynicism, particularly its subscales: pessimism, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution (Allen et al., 2010).

Pessimism, marked by negative expectations about organizational change, leads employees to disengage and consider leaving. As they lose faith in the organization's ability to improve, they mentally and emotionally detach, increasing turnover intentions (Alexander et al., 1994).

Dispositional attribution, where cynicism is directed at managers' incompetence or insincerity, further drives turnover intentions. Employees feel betrayed by leadership, leading

to psychological contract violations and fostering a desire to leave for better opportunities (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Situational attribution, which blames external factors for organizational issues, also contributes to turnover intentions. Employees perceiving insurmountable external challenges may feel helpless and seek jobs elsewhere, believing the organization's decline is inevitable (Shahnawaz & Goswami, 2011).

In sum, cynicism—whether stemming from pessimism, distrust in leadership, or external attribution—significantly influences turnover intentions, driving employees to seek employment elsewhere. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H_{3a}: Pessimism about change is positively related to turnover intentions.

H_{3b}: Dispositional attribution of the failure of change efforts is positively related to turnover intentions.

H_{3c}: Situational attribution of failure of change efforts is positively related to turnover intentions.

Method

Research Setting

Our study took place in a South Indian Information Technology (IT) services organization undergoing significant change, grappling with issues related to employee engagement and turnover. Invited by the division's leadership, we administered an employee survey in a globally oriented organization facing intense competition, necessitating system and process changes. Data collection occurred before the change process, providing input for the impending transformation. However, our role was limited to data collection, and we were not involved in designing or implementing the change process, which was managed internally by the human resources team.

Constructs and their Measurement

We employed established scales to measure our constructs. Cynicism About Organization Change (CAOC) used Wanous et al.'s (2000) 12-item scale, assessing dimensions of (a) pessimism (4 items) with sample item 'Attempts to make things better around here will not produce good results', (b) dispositional attribution (4 items) with sample item 'The people responsible for making improvements do not know enough about what they are doing', and (c) situational attribution (4 items) with sample item 'The people responsible for fixing problems around here cannot really be blamed if things do not improve'. Higher ratings indicate increased cynicism.

Job motivation was measured using three items, with sample items being 'I feel personal satisfaction when doing my job well' and 'I take pride in performing my job excellently'. The items for job motivation were adopted from the intrinsic motivation scale proposed by Amabile et al. (1994). Job involvement was measured using two items, 'I am absorbed in my present job' and 'I get so involved that I forget about other things'. The items for job involvement were taken from Kanungo (1982). Turnover intention was measured using two items, 'I frequently contemplate quitting this job' and 'People around me consider leaving their job'. The items for

turnover intention were taken from Hackman & Oldham (1974). All constructs were rated on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 signifies low agreement, and 5 indicates higher agreement with the item.

Data Collection Procedure and Sample

The organization's internal data collection platform facilitated questionnaire distribution and response collection, ensuring anonymity, as assured by the senior manager. Survey participation was voluntary, and participant anonymity was maintained by restricting access to researchers.

Loaded onto the internal survey portal, the questionnaire was emailed to 985 department employees, with a seven-day response window and reminders on the fifth and sixth days. We collected cross-sectional data from 361 respondents across nine sites, representing various hierarchical levels. The 36% survey return rate aligns with online questionnaire expectations (Manfreda et al., 2008). Respondents completed all items, and SPSS v.23 calculated descriptive statistics and scale reliabilities. Demographic data provided by the organization showed an average tenure of four years, an average age of 31.8 years, and 70% of respondents being team or junior managers. Female respondents accounted for 11.9%, in line with expected IT organization demographics (Budhwar et al., 2005).

Results

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of our constructs was measured using Cronbach's alpha. The correlation matrix among constructs, along with means, standard deviations, and scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are given in Table 1. The reliabilities of our constructs ranged from .59 to .88, with job involvement being the lowest at .59.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix Among Construct [Scale Reliabilities (Cronbach Alpha) on Diagonal]

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Pessimism	Dispositional	Situational	Job Involvement	Job Motivation	Turnover intention
Cynicism-Pessimism	2.68	.74	.81					
Cynicism-Dispositional	2.74	.85	.53**	.88				
Cynicism-Situational	2.93	.69	.27**	.19**	.74			
Job Involvement	3.37	.88	-.11*	-.17**	-.02	.59		
Job Motivation	4.28	.61	-.21**	-.24**	-.09	.18**	.74	
Turnover intention	3.38	.51066	.02	.004	.21**	-.05	.10*	.82

Note. ** $p \leq .01$ (2-tailed). * $p \leq .05$ (2-tailed). Sample size = 361; Scale reliabilities are given in the diagonal; Source: Survey data

Besides the measure of Cronbach's alpha, construct validity was established by calculating the composite reliability of all constructs (Table 2). Composite reliability measures for our constructs were all above .70, ranging from .76 (job involvement) to .89 (dispositional attribution). This shows the internal consistency of the items on our scales and indicates that the items measured the constructs they were supposed to measure.

Table 2*Average Variance Extracted and Composite Reliability for the Constructs*

Construct	AVE	Composite reliability	AVE square root
Pessimism	.56	.83	.75
Situational attribution	.55	.83	.74
Dispositional attribution	.67	.89	.82
Job involvement	.62	.76	.78
Job motivation	.67	.86	.82
Turnover intention	.68	.80	.82

The discriminant validity between our constructs was established by calculating the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and the positive square root of AVE for all constructs (Table 2). Values of AVE for all our constructs were over .50, with a range from .55 (situational attribution) to .68 (turnover intention). These values indicate convergent validity, namely, that the constructs' items adequately captured the construct's variance relative to the measurement error. The positive square root of AVE for all constructs (Table 2) is higher than the highest correlation of all latent variables (Table 1). These values meet the Fornell–Larcker criterion and thus establish discriminant validity for our constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

Common Method Variance

Since employees were the single data source for this study, Harman's single-factor test was used to check for common method variance. All items across the constructs were entered simultaneously. The principal component method was used for extraction, with the number of factors to be extracted being limited to one. The percentage of variance extracted for one factor was 35.00%. Since the total variance extracted was less than 50%, it indicated that common method bias was not a concern for our data, hence confirming that the results were not due to the instrument used but due to the actual dispositions of the respondents (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Data Analysis Process

Individual employee responses served as input data, and with a sample size of 361, our model complexity was adequately addressed, meeting the recommendation of 10 respondents per estimated parameter (Hair et al., 2019). Despite using cross-sectional data, the structural equation model fitting in AMOS v.26 assumed a causal research design. We employed the maximum likelihood method, known for yielding valid results even with limited samples. For goodness-of-fit evaluation, CMIN/DF, recommended by Hair et al. (2019), indicated values below 2, affirming model-data fit. Despite using established scales and ensuring construct and discriminant validity, typical issues in empirical studies arose (Deng et al., 2018; Hair et al., 2019). Notably, the covariance between pessimism about change and dispositional attribution of change was .31 ($p = .00$), and the correlation was .53 ($p = .01$). Model fit required allowing covariance between these constructs, suggesting refinement of items related to pessimism and dispositional attitude.

Wanous et al. (2004) found a robust link between dispositional attribution and pessimism, a weaker link between situational attribution and pessimism, and no connection between dispositional and situational attribution. Albrecht (2008) suggested treating dispositional attribution and pessimism as distinct dimensions, but modifying the CAOC scale did not enhance model fit.

Model Fit and Discriminant Validity

Examination of modification indices revealed paths that may improve the model fit. One of the paths indicated in the modification indices was allowing two error terms associated with dispositional attribution to covary. Examination of the items indicated that this might be due to the similar wording of the items. Since this was a within-construct error variance, we allowed the error terms between items represented by e1 and e2 to covary. This led to an improvement in our model from $\chi^2 = 343.91$ (df = 142, N = 361) to $\chi^2 = 323.01$ (df = 141, N = 361), with CMIN/df = 2.29. A second modification recommended was to allow the error terms between the endogenous variables job involvement and turnover intention to covary. This was a between-constructs error variance. It indicated that the constructs might be related to each other, and there might be issues related to discriminant validity. Accepting this as a limitation, we added this to the model. This modification improved the fit to $\chi^2 = 283.27$ (df = 140, N = 361), with CMIN/df = 2.02. The next modification suggested was to covary the error terms between the endogenous variables of job motivation and job involvement. Once again, this was a between-constructs error variance. It indicated that the constructs might be related to each other, and there might be issues related to discriminant validity. Accepting this as a limitation, we added this to the model. The modification further improved the fit to $\chi^2 = 270.75$ (df = 139, N = 361), with CMIN/df = 1.94. These modifications improved the model fit, but it indicates that there might be issues related to measurement in our data (Hair et al., 2019). We tried an alternate model combining job involvement and job motivation, but this did not improve model fit.

The above modification indices point to issues related to discriminant validity between our endogenous constructs of job involvement and turnover intention and between the endogenous constructs of job motivation and job involvement. In addition to the discriminant validity tests already performed, we decided to conduct the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) test, as proposed by Henseler et al. (2015), to establish discriminant validity between these constructs. HTMT is an estimate of the inter-construct correlation assuming a tau-equivalent measurement. Values of an HTMT estimate can range between +1 and -1 depending on the relationship between the constructs. Discriminant validity may be inferred if the HTMT estimate is clearly different from ± 1 . The HTMT value for the constructs of job involvement and turnover intention was -.53, while it was .27 for the constructs of job motivation and job involvement. Both these values are clearly very different from ± 1 ; thus, we may infer that these constructs are indeed different.

Structural Model

The result of our structural model is given in Table 3. Some of the model fit indices for our final model show that our hypothesised model fits the data well (CMIN/df = 1.94, CFI = .94, GFI = .92, RMSEA = .05, RMR = .06).

Table 3
Regression Weights (Structural model)

				Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
H1a	Cyn_Pes	--->	Job_Motivation	-.15	.08	-1.77	.07	
H1b	Cyn_Dis	--->	Job_Motivation	-.13	.06	-2.00	.04	Supported
H1c	Cyn_Sit	--->	Job_Motivation	-.01	.07	-.18	.85	
H2a	Cyn_Pes	--->	Job_Involvement	-.04	.11	-.39	.69	
H2b	Cyn_Dis	--->	Job_Involvement	-.29	.09	-3.09	.00	Supported
H2c	Cyn_Sit	--->	Job_Involvement	-.12	.10	-1.14	.25	
H3a	Cyn_Pes	--->	Turnover_Intention	.14	.10	1.38	.16	
H3b	Cyn_Dis	--->	Turnover_Intention	.59	.08	6.61	***	Supported
H3c	Cyn_Sit	--->	Turnover_Intention	.22	.09	2.38	.01	Supported

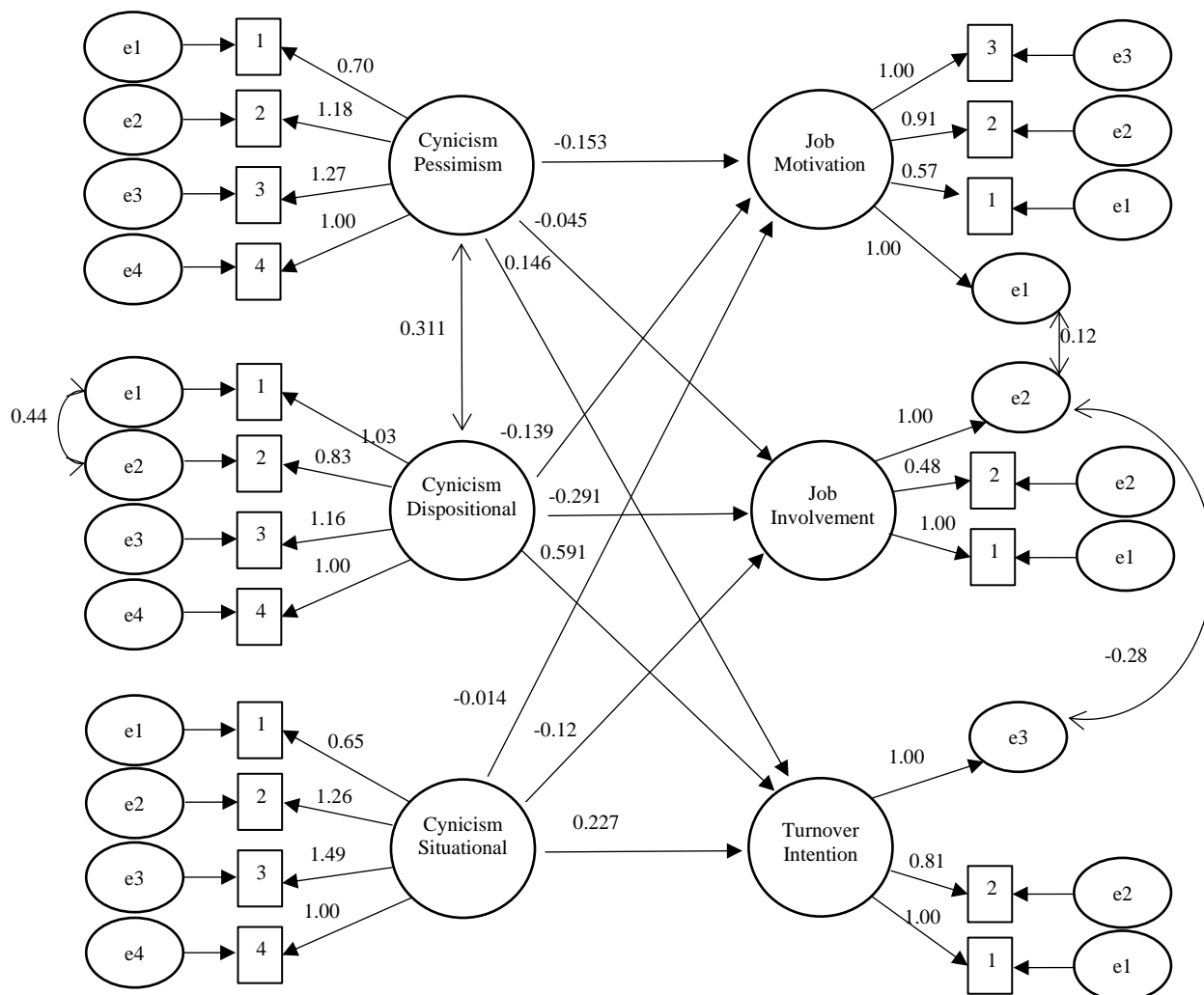
Hypothesis 1a was supported at a 90% confidence interval, with pessimism about change negatively affecting job motivation ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .07$) (Ganesh & Cave, 2018). Hypothesis 1b was supported, with dispositional attribution of failure in change efforts being negatively linked to job motivation ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .04$). Also, dispositional attribution had a higher coefficient ($\beta = -.13$) than pessimism about change ($\beta = -.15$). Hypothesis 1c, positing a negative relationship between situational attribution of failure in change efforts and job motivation, was not supported ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .85$).

Hypothesis 2b was supported, as a negative relation was found between job involvement and dispositional attribution of failure in change efforts ($\beta = -.29$, $p = .002$). Hypotheses 2a and 2c, positing a negative relationship between pessimism about change ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .11$) and situational attribution of failure in change efforts ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .25$) with job involvement, were not supported.

Hypotheses 3b and 3c were supported. Turnover intentions were found to be positively linked with dispositional attribution ($\beta = .59$, $p = .001$) and situational attribution ($\beta = .22$, $p = .01$). Hypothesis 3a, positing a positive relationship between pessimism about change and turnover intention, was not supported ($\beta = .14$, $p = .16$). The magnitudes of the coefficients of dispositional and situational attribution of failure in change efforts with turnover intention were the highest among all coefficients obtained in the model, thus showing a strong relationship among these variables. Figure 1 gives the final model with path coefficients for both the structural and the measurement models.

Figure 1

Final Model with Path Coefficients for Both the Structural and the Measurement Model



Discussion

Our findings align with broader research on cynicism discussed earlier, demonstrating its harmful effects on employee motivation, involvement, and turnover intentions. This study advances the understanding of Cynicism About Organizational Change (CAOC) by examining the distinct effects of pessimism, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution on employee motivation, involvement, and turnover intentions. Drawing on expectancy theory, attribution theory, and psychological contract theory, we demonstrate how these dimensions influence employee responses to change efforts.

Our findings show that dispositional attribution, which reflects perceptions of managerial incompetence, is a key driver of cynicism. It negatively impacts job motivation and involvement while increasing turnover intentions, particularly in contexts where autocratic management, favoritism, and poor communication are prevalent (Davis & Gardner, 2004). Employees who perceive managers as insincere or ineffective feel disengaged, leading to cynicism and reduced expectations of rewards, which erodes motivation and heightens turnover intentions (Stanley et al., 2005; Wu et al., 2007).

Pessimism, shaped by past failures, has a weak negative effect on job motivation but does not strongly influence turnover intentions. Employees may go through the motions while remaining disconnected. When they attribute change failures to external factors (situational attribution), they may consider leaving, driven by low engagement and better perceived opportunities elsewhere (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Griffeth et al., 2000; Berry & Morris, 2008).

Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) suggests that cynicism, particularly when tied to managerial failure, diminishes the belief that effort will lead to rewards, lowering motivation. Employees who experience repeated breaches of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989) lose motivation and disengage, as our findings corroborate. Attribution theory (Malle, 2022) further explains how internal (managerial) attributions trigger stronger emotional responses, like distrust, compared to external attributions, which evoke less intense reactions. Our results confirm that dispositional attributions lead to more negative outcomes than situational attributions (Ford & Ford, 2020).

Empirical Implications

This research advances the literature by demonstrating that CAOC is not a single construct but comprises distinct dimensions, each with unique effects on employee behavior. Aligning with Stanley et al. (2005), our findings show that a multidimensional approach offers a deeper understanding of how cynicism operates within organizations. While pessimism is seen as a general attitude, its impact on job motivation is weaker than that of dispositional attribution, suggesting that pessimism may reflect passive resignation rather than active disengagement.

Dispositional attribution, tied to perceived managerial incompetence, is closely associated with psychological contract violations (Rousseau & Parks, 1993), reducing motivation and involvement while increasing turnover intentions. This highlights the need to differentiate between cynicism types in future research, as a unidimensional view may miss key behavioral insights.

The weaker link between situational attribution and job outcomes suggests that employees may be more forgiving when failures are due to external factors. However, the significant relationship between situational attribution and turnover intentions shows that employees may still leave if they see external challenges as insurmountable. This emphasizes the importance of open communication and support systems to address employee concerns about organizational change.

Theoretical Implications

This study advances the theoretical understanding of Cynicism About Organizational Change (CAOC) by framing it as a multidimensional construct, not a unidimensional one. By distinguishing the effects of pessimism, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution, it encourages scholars to refine models of organizational cynicism. The integration of expectancy, attribution, and psychological contract theories offers a comprehensive framework for understanding employee reactions to change, emphasizing the need for multidisciplinary approaches in future research.

The findings underscore the critical role of dispositional attribution in shaping cynicism, motivation, and turnover intentions, suggesting a deeper exploration of how employees attribute

organizational failures to managerial incompetence. This highlights the connection between psychological contract violations and cynicism and calls for research into managerial practices that reduce cynicism.

The study also opens up opportunities to explore how employees cope with cynicism, enhancing the discourse on employee well-being. It stresses the influence of cultural and contextual factors on cynicism, inviting future research to investigate these dynamics further. Overall, this research lays the groundwork for exploring employee perceptions during organizational change and informing change management theory.

Managerial Implications

Our study highlights the diverse impacts of cynicism dimensions on job motivation, involvement, and turnover intentions, necessitating tailored managerial strategies. To enhance job motivation, managers must address pessimism related to past change failures and perceived managerial incompetence. Strategies should include transparent communication about change outcomes, acknowledging both successes and failures and clarifying the role of situational factors (Weick, 1984). Leaders should also take responsibility for failures, seek forgiveness, and emphasize external factors affecting outcomes.

Managers should focus on social exchange and psychological contract issues to improve job involvement and reduce withdrawal from change efforts. Encouraging genuine employee participation, fostering a partnership mindset, and incorporating employee feedback into change processes are essential for maintaining commitment.

Turnover intentions often stem from perceived managerial incompetence (dispositional attribution) and doubts about the organization's ability to change (situational attribution). To mitigate turnover, managers should highlight the importance of change, demonstrate sincerity in addressing challenges, and alleviate concerns about nonroutine tasks associated with change (Oreg, 2018).

In summary, addressing dispositional attributions requires transparent communication, timely feedback, and demonstrated competence. By focusing on these areas, managers can combat negative perceptions and maintain job motivation and involvement. Targeted interventions, such as training and leadership development, can effectively address specific cynicism dimensions and enhance overall employee outcomes.

Limitations and Future Research

Data analysis is a complex process with unforeseen challenges, requiring researchers to adapt for results, as illustrated in our study. While we replicated the relationship between pessimism and dispositional attribution subscales noted by Wanous et al. (2004), attempts to modify the scale based on Albrecht's (2008) suggestions were unsuccessful. Although the subscales demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity, our analysis indicates a need for refinement to eliminate covariance and potential biases in estimates and p-values. Future research should focus on improving the CAOC scale's measurement for better discriminant validity.

Our survey included sufficient representation from lower-level managers, but limited responses from frontline employees may introduce bias. Lower-level frontline managers play a crucial role in translating upper management's change efforts and motivating employee participation.

Despite establishing construct and divergent validity, covariances among job motivation, job involvement, and turnover intentions persist, indicating potential item-related relationships. While HTMT analysis verified discriminant validity, these issues may stem from item limitations or questionnaire structure (Bollen & Lennox, 1991). Future research should address these challenges with more comprehensive scales.

Our model, based on CAOC literature, could benefit from exploring alternative models that examine mediating and moderating relationships among constructs, such as Stanley et al.'s (2005) proposed cycle of cynicism. Investigating these alternatives may provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the CAOC framework.

Conducted within a single organization, this study should be replicated in diverse contexts and industries to enhance generalizability and external validity. Although cynicism has been discussed in the Indian context, limited studies exist, highlighting the need for replication in different organizations (e.g., Biswas & Kapil, 2017; Dhar, 2009; Nair & Kamalanabhan, 2010; Sheel & Vohra, 2016). Additionally, exploring relationships between CAOC sub-dimensions and various outcome variables, such as work engagement, job insecurity, employee-management relationships, LMX, TMX, employee participation, learned helplessness, and personality traits, will provide a comprehensive understanding of organizational cynicism.

Conclusion

Creating conditions that support organizational change in response to evolving business environments is crucial for success (Vakola et al., 2021). Our study highlights the adverse impact of cynicism, measured by the Cynicism About Organizational Change (CAOC) scale, on employees' job motivation, job involvement, and turnover intentions—key factors for organizational success. A notable contribution of our research is the independent examination of the three dimensions of cynicism about organizational change and their distinct effects. Unlike previous studies that treated CAOC as a single scale or focused on one or two dimensions (Aslam et al., 2015; Yim et al., 2017), our findings reveal that dispositional attribution cynicism affects all three outcome variables, pessimism cynicism has a weak influence on job motivation, and situational cynicism primarily impacts turnover intentions.

For managerial implications, fostering a positive relationship with employees, actively involving them during change efforts, and implementing strategies that motivate and engage are essential (Ford & Ford, 2020). Managers should focus on relationship-oriented practices, including open communication, encouraging feedback and involvement in problem-solving, and promoting mutual respect and trust among team members. Addressing dispositional cynicism requires sustained effort and a consistent demonstration of these behaviors. Implementing such practices is likely to reduce cynicism about change, enhance job motivation and job involvement, and decrease turnover intentions (Amarantou et al., 2018; Oreg, 2018).

Declarations

Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

Funding Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Citation to this article

Gupta, A., & Mishra, P. (2024). Effect of dimensions of cynicism about organization change on job motivation, job involvement, and turnover intentions. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 13(4), 757-777. <https://doi.org/10.33844/ijol.2024.60442>

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