THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM IN CAUSING WORK ALIENATION IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the mediating role of organizational cynicism in instigating work alienation with constructs such as perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational politics. The study is descriptive research and quantitative approach was utilized to conduct the study. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire from full time faculty members employed in private universities of Karachi. It was found that although organizational cynicism can significantly be predicted by perceived supervisor support and perceived organization politics; however, organization cynicism failed to play a mediating role in establishing the relationship between the perceptions and work alienation. This study will help the heads of the universities to identify the level of organizational cynicism in their institutions, to overcome the problem and eliminate it.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, with intensifying competition and a rapidly changing environment, employees have become a valuable asset for the organizations. Keeping in view the volatility of the environment, the top management should be on the lookout for the negative tendencies that can cause employees to respond to work settings in an indifferent and unenthusiastic manner. In literature, the term used to reflect such state is regarded as "work alienation".

For more than sixty years, this general attitude has been a subject of profound interest in organizational sciences (e.g. Chiaburu, Thundiyil, Wang, 2014; Shantz, Alfes & Truss, 2014; Podsakoff, Williams, & Todor, 1986; Argyris, 2017; Seeman, 1959; Fromm & Anderson, 2017). Since

such a negative attitude is formed by an employee's work-related experiences, therefore they can presumably cause a devastating impact on organizational and work outcomes such as task performance (Shantz, Alfes, Bailey, & Soane, 2015; Banai & Reisel, 2003; Chisholm & Cummings, 1979) and citizenship behaviors (Shantz, Alfes, Bailey & Soane, 2015; Jesús Suárez-Mendoza, & Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2008; Suarez-Mendoza & Zoghbi-Manrique- de-Lara, 2007). Keeping in view the devastating consequences of work alienation, Shantz, Alfes, Bailey, and Soane (2015) recently recognized the need to identify other drivers of work alienation apart from task variety, task identity, social support, and autonomy to make decisions. Thus, this paper focuses on how "organizational cynicism" may lead to alienation. Apart from this, the purpose of this paper is to explore the role of organizational cynicism as a mediator towards work alienation. Thus, organizational cynicism will be tested as a mediator between two perceptions (perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational politics) and work alienation. This is done to further attend a call by Chiaburu et al. (2013) where they highlighted a need to assess organizational cynicism as a mediator between its predictors and outcomes. Application of mediation tool will also assess a direct impact of perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational politics with alienation as its first step, thus increasing the literature by identifying and evaluating two other drivers of work alienation.

The propositions claimed in this study will be tested in higher education institutional setting as education is one of the fields which is most affected by alienation (Caglar, 2013). Moreover, perceived supervisor support, perception of organizational politics (Munir, Khan, Khalifah, Asif, & Khan, 2014), organizational cynicism (Ahmet, 2015; Munir, Khan, Khalifah, Asif, & Khan, 2014; Karadağ, Kiliçoğlu, & Yilmaz, 2014; Mete, 2013; Konakli, Özyılmaz, & Çörtük, 2013; Qian & Daniels, 2008) and work alienation (Jesús Suárez-Mendoza & Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, 2008) are important issues faced by faculty members.

Following research questions are developed to achieve the purpose of the present study:

I. How perceived supervisor support is related to organizational cynicism and does organizational cynicism mediate the relationship between perceived supervisor support & work alienation.

II. How perceived organizational politics is related to organizational cynicism and does organizational cynicism mediate the relationship between perceived organizational politics & work alienation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Cynicism

Cynicism is a concept that has attracted researchers' attention for a long time. Review of the literature indicated that the wealth of research work is available on the subject matter. A number of researchers have looked at the concept by using various lenses. For instance, a group of researchers looked at cynicism as a concept having negative consequences and causing contempt, frustration, negative attitudes towards organization and objects, and distrust (Abraham, 2000; Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 1994; Andersson, 1996; Buzan, 1980). Contrary to this view, few authors have also highlighted its positive impact stating that cynical employees are most likely to blow the whistle on any unethical practice that is being adopted by the management. Such employees are likely to question various poor choices made by the organization under various conditions (Dean et al. 1998; Cutler 2000). Further it is seen that a group of researchers theorized cynicism as a personality trait (Smith et al. 1988; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Singelis et al. 2003) while other researchers are of the view that situational factors play an important role in the development of cynical behavior (Andersson, 1996; Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997; Wanous Reichers, & Austin, 2000; Pugh, Skarlicki, & Passell, 2003). However, Dean et. al. (1998) conceived cynicism as having both personal and situational components. Moreover, they provided a tripartite attitude framework of organizational cynicism where they suggested that the development of an individual's negative attitude towards the organization is based on three dimensions. The cognitive dimension of organizational cynicism is the feeling that the organization and the individuals who work there lack honesty and clarity (Brandes & Das, 2006). Affective dimension relates to increased emotional reactions to the organization while behavioral dimension denotes to negative attitudes and tendencies. This dimension also considers strong criticisms, pessimistic judgments as well as critical statements about the organization (Yıldız & Şaylıkay, 2014). Many recent researchers have adopted the same definition and conceptualization of cynicism in their study such as Nafei (2013); Kuang-Man (2013); Konakli, Özyılmaz, and Çörtük (2013); Mantere & Martinsuo (2001); Chiaburu et

al. (2013). Organizational cynicism can be detrimental to the organization. The employees who are cynical can influence the entire organization and can hinder the organization from reaching its goals (Nafei & Kaifi, 2013). The term is therefore focal point for researchers in this era.

Perceived Supervisor Support

Research conducted by Greller and Herold (1975), has traditionally recognized that employees are more receptive and tend to appreciate feedback from those who are in close relationship to them. Such employee beliefs are based on the feelings of how they are being treated by their supervisors when they require help and recognition of their efforts when they perform extraordinarily (Edmondson, Boyer, & Artis, 2012). In the literature, the term that is used to refer to such perception as known as perceived supervisory support (PSS). As defined by scholars (DeConinck, 2010; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988), perceived supervisor support is a worldwide employee notion regarding the extent to which the employee efforts are, and their welfare is recognized by the supervisors. A recent empirical study by Zhou and Liu (2013) have described the concept of perceived supervisor support by referring supervisors as an agent of the organization and the actions of the agent will be taken as the intentions of the organization.

With reference to the effect of perceived supervisor support, concepts related to social exchange theory have previously demonstrated that employee cynicism can be shaped by beliefs regarding the extent to which the organization cares about their future and prosperity (Treadway et al., 2004). Therefore, as agents of the organization, it is believed that supervisors' negative treatment of the employees will also have a negative impact in terms of an increased level of cynicism. Scholars such as Neves (2012); Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly (2003), have also mentioned organizational cynicism as the main violator of social exchanges in an organization. In accordance with this line of research, it can be predicted that employees having low-quality exchanges with their supervisors will experience negative suffer from an increased level of cynicism.

Another rationale behind choosing perceived supervisor support as an antecedent of cynicism is also supported by Chiaburu et al. (2013) where they highlighted the possibility that supervisors support can be one of the factors that may interact with organizational cynicism in determining outcomes. Based on the above evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Perceived Supervisor Support is negatively related to organizational cynicism.

Perceived Organizational Politics

Organizational politics is a common component in almost all work environments these days and its effects have been realized across various work environments (Kacmar & Baron, 1999). Hochwater James, Johnson, and Ferris (2004) have identified that sensing political activity at the workplace is mainly perceptual in nature. In another empirical study, Ferris et al. (2002) found that political workplace signifies a non-prosperous, inequitable, and unfair workplace where procedural guidelines of proper conduct are unstable to a great extent.

Over the past decade, most research in the area of organizational politics has singled out perceptions of organizational politics as a central component in creating stress at work environment (Ferris, Russ & Fandt, 1989; Jex & Beehr, 1991). Moreover, Hardy and Smith (1988) also suggest that cynical employees are likely to react when faced with stressful situations including perceived politics in an organizational setting. Earlier studies in Organizational cynicism showed that threatening and disruptive organizational environments promote cynical attitudes towards both the organization and the management (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006).

The theoretical perspective of Leader-Member exchange can be brought into consideration, which posits that high-quality leader and subordinate relationships are less likely to produce a perception of politics and vice versa (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). The fundamental reason behind selecting this particular relationship is also in part prompted by the preliminary work done by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995). They proposed that when employees perceive organizations to be bias in their own favor instead of supporting the employees, a feeling of suspicion is generated which eventually promotes distrust and cynical attitude by the employees towards the organization.

A number of studies have found that perceived organizational politics enhance cynical behavior and reduce organizational citizenship behavior at the workplace as individuals suffer from increased stress and interpersonal conflicts because of Organizational cynicism (Dyne & Graham, 1994). Chiaburu et al. (2013) stated that employee perceptions towards the organization regarding lack of trustworthiness will subsequently lead employees towards the development of cynical behavior

toward the organization. Hence, it can be concluded that perceived organizational politics can be positively related to organizational cynicism. Furthermore, perceptions of organizational politics force employees to formulate cynical behavior which weakens their faith in the organization. Perceptions of organizational politics affect employees negatively characterized by cynicism, dissatisfaction, stress, and intentions to quit (Miller, Rutherford, & Kolodinsky, 2008; Poon, 2003; Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, & Toth, 1997). Considering the above literature, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₂: Perceived organizational politics is positively related to organizational cynicism.

Work Alienation

Latin in origin, Alienation is a term that has a long history. Hegel and Marx are considered to be "founding fathers" of alienation. The conceptualization of the term started when Hegel introduced two German words to describe different meanings of alienation. The first one *Entfremdung* meant "a state of separation" whereas *Entäußerung* meant "surrender". He talked about spiritual alienation in his writings (Kanungo, 1982). However, Marx and Engels (2009) started his conceptualization from the same terms meaning "surrender" and "separation" but he talked in the context of economic and social life. He was more focused on speaking of alienation in the context of labor. He believed that all sources of alienation are apparent in labor such as division of labor, wage labor. According to him, capitalism is the root cause of alienation. He believed that in the process of manufacturing products, the labor achieves the sense of well-being. They tend to become attached to it and could see their own reflection in it. Thus, under the capitalist society, when a worker's labor is detached from him and can be bought/sold in the market, he takes his work only as a means of survival and thus becomes alienated.

Building upon the initial conceptualizations as developed by Hegel and Marx, the concept is used in the studies of various disciplines. As a consequence, the term is attributed to several different meanings. To consolidate various meanings, Seeman (1959) classified the meanings into five distinct dimensions. As a result of which many scholars view it as a multidimensional concept. These dimensions include social isolation, meaninglessness, powerlessness, normlessness, and self-estrangement. It is seen that many scholars have employed different combinations of these

dimensions in their studies that best fit their research context. For e.g. Mau (1992) used four dimensions to study student alienation, Rayce, Holstein, and Kreiner (2008) utilized three dimensions to study adolescent alienation while Tummers (2011), made use of only two dimensions to study police alienation. Contrary to this view, there are other groups of researchers who declared self-estrangement (alienation from work) to be the heart of alienation. Thus, they viewed the concept to be uni-dimensional (Nair & Vohra, 2009; Mottaz, 1981; Kanungo, 1982). As this perspective is consistent with Marx theory as well as the definition provided by other researchers (such as Sulu, Ceylan & Kaynak, 2010; Brandes, 1997; Cheung, 2008) who view the term work alienation to be associated with working condition that isolates employees from work, the uni-dimensional concept is adopted in this study.

Alienation has previously been linked to its various predictors. Few of them include poor job conditions (Banai & Reisel, 2007), unsupportive leadership (Banai & Reisel, 2007; Sarros et al., 2002), task variety (Shantz, Alfes, Bailey, & Soane, 2015; Nair & Vohra, 2010; Ramaswami, Agarwal & Bhargava,1993). The current paper focuses on its relationship with organizational cynicism.

Organizational cynicism as a Mediator

The role of organizational cynicism as a mediator between various predictors and work outcomes has been analyzed by many researchers. For instance, Scott and Zweig (2008) positioned organizational cynicism as a mediator in the relationship between dispositional variables (negative affectivity & core self-evaluation) and job satisfaction. Evans, Goodman & Davis (2010) analyzed the mediating role of organizational cynicism in the relationship between perceived corporate citizenship and job-related behaviors such as OCB and employee deviance. More recently, Aküzüm (2014) investigated its mediating role in the impact of organizational justice on commitment. Chiaburu et al. (2013) have also highlighted the grounds that Supervisory support and Coworker support can determine employee outcome as a result of their interaction with cynicism. Relying on the above-mentioned evidence as well as the central role of organizational cynicism in influencing employee's attitudes and behaviors, it is reasonable to assume that organizational cynicism may mediate relationships between few other predictors and outcomes.

H3: Organizational cynicism mediates the relationship between perceived

supervisor support and work alienation

H₄: Organizational cynicism mediates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and work alienation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

The participants in the study consisted of faculty members who responded to the survey. The sample consisted of full-time faculty members working in private higher education universities of Karachi. Since education is declared as one of the fields that are influenced by alienation the most, therefore, for the purpose of this study, a sample of faculty members from higher educational universities was considered to be suitable. The survey was self-administered in nature and was distributed through in-person and also online. An online link was also prepared through Google Docs to approach a larger number of respondents. The respondents were also briefed about the purpose of the study as well as the confidentiality of their identity. Despite this, only a response rate of 47.14% was received. 52% of the participants were female and 48% were males. 46% were single while 54% were married. The study was cross-sectional in nature that is the data was collected on a single point in time.

Measures

The response scales for all measures under study ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Perceived supervisor support was measured with a 4 item scale adapted from Rhoades, Eisenberger, and Armeli (2001). The sample item was labelled as, "My supervisor really cares about my well-being". The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.713. Perception of Organizational Politics was measured with a six-item scale adapted from Hochwarter, Kacmar, Perrewe, and Johnson (2003) labeled as "There is a lot of self-serving behavior going on". The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.857. Organizational Cynicism was measured with a nine-item scale adapted from Dean et al. (1998), with item labelled item as "I believe that my organization says one thing and does other". The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.922. Work Alienation was measured with an eight-item scale adapted from Nair and Vohra (2009). The sample item label was "I do not enjoy my work". The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.957.

Moreover, the control variables that were part of the overall

questionnaire include gender, age, name of institution, teaching department, position level and marital status. In order to test the hypothesis, mediated regression analysis was run through SPSS 16.0 and to check for the mediation effects, the procedure was followed as described by Baron and Kenny (1986).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The variables under the study were tested using SPSS 16.0 software to identify various statistical findings. Table 1 presented below reveals the mean and standard deviations. Moreover, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to evaluate interactions between the variables. The results of the correlation matrix revealed that all the variables are significantly related to each other except correlation between perceived organizational politics and work alienation which shows positive weak and insignificant correlation (r=0.209, p > 0.10).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables (N = 33)

	M	*SD*	1	2	3
1. Perceived supervisor support	3.02	0.81			
2. Perception of organizational politics	3.61	0.83	-.380*		
3. Organizational cynicism	3.23	0.94	-.593**	.612**	
4. Work alienation	2.68	1.10	-.480**	0.209	.496**

*. p < 0.05 **. p < 0.01

Additionally, in order to determine the mediating effects, a regression analysis was applied as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). The approach suggests three steps to identify whether a variable is a mediator between a relationship or not. Table 2 shows the mediating role of organizational cynicism (OC) in the relationship between perceived supervisor support (PSS) and work alienation (WA). Table 3 shows the mediating role of organizational cynicism (OC) in the relationship between perceived organizational politics (POPS) and work alienation (WA).

Table 2 checks hypothesis 1 and 3. Hypothesis 1 claimed that perceived supervisor support is negatively related to organizational cynicism. As shown in the step-2 of the table, hypothesis 1 is supported for the predictor (perceived supervisor support) in the hypothesized direction (b= -0.692, *p* < 0.001).

Hypothesis 3 claimed that Organizational cynicism mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work alienation. As

can be seen in table 2, at step-1, the relationship remained significant when work alienation (as a dependent variable) was regressed with perceived supervisor support and also with organizational cynicism at step-2. However, the results became insignificant at step-3 which shows that cynicism is not playing a mediating role in the relationship with perceived supervisor support and work alienation. Thus, we reject hypothesis 4 and suggests that although perceived supervisor support has a significant impact on work alienation (b= -0.653, $p < 0.01$) as well as on organizational cynicism (b= -0.692, $p < 0.001$), when organizational cynicism is added to the model, it does not perform any role as a mediator in the relationship between perceived supervisor support and work alienation.

Table 2. Step Regression Analysis- PSS, OC, WA

Step-1 Regression Analysis			
Dependent Variable: Work Alienation			
Independent Variable:	**Beta**	**t**	**p**
Perceived Supervisor Support	-0.653	-3.044	0.005
R= 0.480	**Adjusted R² =0.205**	**F= 9.266**	
Step-2 Regression Analysis			
Dependent Variable: Organizational Cynicism			
Independent Variable:	**Beta**	**t**	**p**
Perceived supervisor support	-0.692	-4.102	0.000
R=0.593	**Adjusted R² =0.331**	**F=16.825**	
Step-3 Regression Analysis			
Dependent Variable: Work Alienation			
Independent Variable:	**Beta**	**t**	**p**
Organizational Cynicism	0.380	1.714	0.097
Perceived Supervisor Support	-0.39	-1.509	0.142
R=0.547	**Adjusted R² =0.252**	**F=6.392**	

Table 3 checks hypothesis 2 and 4. Hypothesis 2 claimed that perceived organizational politics is positively related to organizational cynicism. As shown in the step-2 of Table, hypothesis 2 is supported for the predictor (perceived organizational politics) in the hypothesized direction (b= 0.698, $p <0 .001$).

Hypothesis 4 claimed that Organizational cynicism mediates the relationship between perceived organizational politics and work

alienation**. As can be seen in table 2, the mediation testing failed to pass even the first Step of checking mediation impacts and the results became non-significant at step-1 only (b= 0.278, $p > 0.10$), so step-2 and 3 were not performed to check the mediating role of cynicism in the relationship between perceived organizational politics and work Alienation. It should be noted that step-2 is performed only to check hypothesis 2**. Thus, hypothesis 4 is rejected.

Further insight into the analysis of table 3 reveal that perceived organizational politics is not a significant predictor of work alienation as can be shown in step-1 of mediation (b= 0.278, $p > 0.1$). This is also supported by the correlation matrix as presented in table 1 that suggests that they have an insignificant association (r=0.209, p > 0.10).

Table 3. Step Regression Analysis-POPS, OC, WA

Step-1 Regression Analysis				
Dependent Variable: Work Alienation				
Independent Variable:		**Beta**	**t**	**p**
Perceived organizational politics		0.278	1.191	0.243
R=0.209	**Adjusted R² =0.013**	**F=1.419**		
Step-2 Regression Analysis				
Dependent Variable: Organizational cynicism				
Independent Variable:		**Beta**	**t**	**p**
Perceived Organizational Politics		0.698	4.311	0.00
R= 0.612	**Adjusted R² =0.355**	**F=18.582**		

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Since work alienation and organizational cynicism both reflect negative behaviours, therefore this study was designed to check the mediating role of one of the negative attitudes to cause the other one. The purpose of this paper was to explore the role of organizational cynicism as a mediator to work alienation. This study has identified that although perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational politics are significant predictors to organizational cynicism, these factors did not support in identifying the role of cynicism as a mediator to work alienation. However, in the process of mediation, perceived supervisor support was identified to be a significant predictor of work alienation.

The key implication of this study is that the issue of work alienation, as faced by the full-time faculty member of higher education universities is not because of perceptions of politics at all. This suggests that politics may be viewed as a healthy exercise and may lead employees to work harder to strive and be successful rather than causing alienation in them. Moreover, the practical implications to this research suggest, that more support should be provided to employees as this study has interestingly identified it to be the cause of work alienation. Besides this, providing more support can also lead to a decrease in organizational cynicism.

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