The Determinants of Organizational Cynicism: An Exploration with Perceived Workload, Perceived Fairness and Control

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Extensive Summary

Introduction

Organizational cynicism is conceptualized as a negative attitude toward one's employing organization (Dean, Bhardes and Dharwadkar, 1998).It is a multidimensional construct composed of affect, beliefs and behavioral dimensions, which has attracted increasing attention due to its detrimental effect on work and employee outcomes. The literature pertaining to organizational cynicism outcomes has been associated with a number of negative work and employee outcomes including poor performance, alienation, distrust of others, lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and high levels of intention to quit (Chiaburu, Peng, Oh, Banks, and Lomeli, 2013). Regarding its determinants, researchers discuss that cynicism in employees has been cultivated by a variety of factors, including individual, demographic, sociological variables. However existing literature has relatively ignored the organizational determinants of cynicism.

In this vein, the current study explores the possible organizational determinants of cynicism underthe framework of 'Areas of work life'(Leiter and Maslach, 1999).Six areas of work lifein an organizational context- namely workload, fairness, control, community, reward and values- are described by Leiter and Maslach (1999) in encompassing major organizational antecedents of burnout. To better comprehend with cynicism, this study first utilizes perceived control, fairness, and workload as the major determinants of organizational cynicism. Then, it investigates the mediating roles of perceived workload and fairness on the relationship between perceived control and cynicism.

Perceived control is regarded as one of the most important organizational factors in areas of work life domain. The lack of control is believed to occur when employees have insufficient authority over work or unable to shape their work environment to be consistent with their values. Perceived ***workload*** refers to individuals' expended energy and consumed time in work. In other words, it is the perception of job demands relative to one's limits. Whereas, f***airness,*** emerging from the literature on equity and social

justice, is defined as the perception of fair decisions and respectful treatment at work. It refers the extent to whether the organization has consistent and equitable rules, shows respect and justice for every working individual (Leiter &Maslach, 2004)

In the present study, we base our propositions mainly upon the job demand resources (JD-R) model of burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer &Schaufeli, 2003) and psychological contract breach (Rousseau, 1989) to explain how perceptions of academicians regarding control affect perceived workload and fairness thereby academicians level of cynicism. More specifically, individuals who have sense of control over the work activities, are believed to feel their workload more manageable and feel less unfairness concerning work environment. Such positive feeling is expected to reduce one's cynic attitudes toward the organization.

Method

Participants and procedure

Prior to data collection, informed consent was given to every participant prior to inclusion. The authorization of University Ethical Board was taken for the study. The study sample consisted of academicians working at two public universities located in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed by convenience sampling. Among the 201 useable questionnaires (57.4 % response rate), the majority of the participants are women and between the ages of 25 and 35 followed by 18 and 25. The final sample included 70 % research assistants, 17 % instructors and assistant professors and 13% associate professors and professors.

Measures

The self-report survey included the measures of organizational cynicism, areas of worklife and demographics (gender, title, position, and age). Responses to all of the following multi-item scales were averaged to form composite variables.

Organizational Cynicism scale (OCS): The organizational cynicism levels of the respondents is measured with the Organizational Cynicism Scale developed by Brandes, Dharwadkar ve Dean (1999). The scale included 13 items. The response format was ranging from 1= never to 5= always. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the organizational cynicism scale is .93.

Areas of worklife scale (AWS): AWS assesses six areas of worklife domains including workload, fairness, community, control, value and reward (Leiter & Maslach, 2006). For the purpose of this study, only the subscales of workload (5 items), control (4 items) and fairness (6 items) were used. Respondents indicate their agreement with these statements on 5-point Likert type scale. Higher scores indicate high degree of perceived alignment (fit) between the workplace and the academicians' expectations. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of the AWS dimensions are reported as .70 for control, .85 for fairness and .60 for workload.

Findings and Discussion

Prior to analysis all the study variables were examined using various statistical programs to ensure accurate data entry and normality while at the same time searching for missing values. Missing values were replaced with the mean values of their respective variables. After data screening, we conducted a latent variable path analyses to examine the factorial structures of the scales as well as a path analysis to test the

hypotheses. Following Shrout and Bolger's (2002) suggestions, we also examined our model using the bootstrap resampling method to establish confidence intervals for testing the statistical significance of the mediation.

Based on the data collected from 201 academicians, the results of the analysis showed that perceived fairness and workload act as mediators on perceived control-cynicism relationship. More specifically, perceived control was found to be positively associated with perceived fairness (b= .80; SE (b) = .23; β = 55; p <.01) and workload (b= 1.42; SE (b) = .33; β = .81; p <.01). As expected, the direct effects of the mediator variables, that is, perceived fairness (b= -1.12; SE (b) = .24; β = -.95; p <.01) and workload (b= -.30; SE (b) = .12; β = -.25; p <.01) on organizational cynicism were negative and statistically significant. Although, the the direct effects of mediators reduced the predictive power of perceived control (from β= -.61 to β= -.53), perceived control had still significant and negative direct effect on cynicism, suggesting the existence of partial mediation (b= -1.09; SE (b) = .47; β = -.53; p <.01) among variables.

Regarding the aforementioned findings, it seems that in line with the assertions of JDR (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1989), academicians who perceive control over the decisions and practices in their workplace, believe the fairness of those decisions and practices as well as the manageability of workload. Subsequently, such positive beliefs mitigate the negative and cynic attitudes toward their organizations. This result reveals that perceived control plays a critical role in regulating the attitudes toward their attitudes toward their work environment. Given the prominent role of perceived control on workload, fairness and cynicism, managers are suggested to make them responsible for planning and organizing their works.