

The Relationship between Perceived Organizational Support and Organizational Cynicism of Research Assistants*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to ascertain to what extent organizational cynicism may be predicted based on the level of perceived organizational support by determining the relationship between research assistants' perceived organizational support and organizational cynicism. The population of the study consists of 214 research assistants working as 50/d staff in Akdeniz University, Turkey. 50/d position provides a graduate student only a temporary job with a limited salary seen as a scholarship until he/she completes his/her thesis/dissertation. Data were obtained using the "Perceived Organizational Support Scale (POSS)," which was developed by researchers, and using the "Organizational Cynicism Scale (OCS)," which was developed by Brandes, Dhartwadkar, and Dean (1999) and then adapted into Turkish by the researchers. As a result of an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) applied on the scales, four dimensions in POSS and three dimensions in OCS were specified. To perform the data analysis, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression analyses were used; according to whose findings, there are significant moderate negative relationships between all dimensions of the POSS and OCS. The conclusion was reached that the perceived level of organizational support by the research assistants is a significant variable in predicting organizational cynicism. In addition, perceived interaction support was found to be the most significant dimension affecting organizational cynicism.

Key Words

Cynicism, Higher Education, Organizational Cynicism, Perceived Organizational Support, Research Assistant.

The concept of cynicism based on the word "cynic" whose origin is based in ancient Greek philosophy, stemming from approximately 500 BC both as a way of thinking and a way of life (Brandes, 1997; Mantere & Martinsuo, 2001; Metzger, 2004). The concept of cynicism is the subject of a

variety of disciplines within the social sciences, such as philosophy (Ulaş, 2002, p. 827), religion (Hançerlioğlu, 1993), political sciences (Schyns & Koop, 2007), sociology (Goldner, Ritti, & Ference, 1977), psychology (Barefoot, Dodge, Peterson, Dahlstrom, & Williams, 1989), and administration.

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The theoretical bases of organizational cynicism, whose development began in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the field of administration (James, 2005), consist of the theories of expectancy (Vance, Brooks, & Tesluk, 1996 as cited in Stanley, 1998), attribution (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997), attitude (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998), social exchange (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003), emotional events (Brown & Cregan, 2008), and social motivation (Eaton, 2000).

The concept of organizational cynicism is defined by Dean et al. (1998) as: a negative attitude toward one's employing organization: *i) a belief* that the organization lacks integrity; *ii) negative affect* toward one's employing organization; *iii) tendencies* to disparaging and critical *behaviors* toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect (p. 345).

Bedian's (2007) definition, however, is "an attitude resulting from a critical appraisal of the motives, actions, and values of one's employing organization" (p. 11). While according to Andersson and Bateman (1997, "cynicism is a general and specific attitude, characterized by frustration and disillusionment as well as negative feelings toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution." (p. 450). These three definitions show that cynicism is considered to be an attitude by the researchers. In this study, the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of organizational cynicism developed by Brandes, Dharwadkar, and Dean (1999) have been investigated such as the following researches (Arabacı, 2010; Arslan, 2012; Bobbio, Manganelli Rattazzi, & Spadaro, 2006; Brandes, 1997; Brandes et al., 1999; Erdost, Karacaoğlu, & Reyhanoğlu, 2007; Findik & Eryeşil, 2012; FitzGerald, 2002; Ince & Turan, 2011; James, 2005, Johnson & O'Leary-Kell, 2003; Özler & Atalay, 2011; Qian & Daniels, 2008; Tokgöz & Yılmaz, 2008).

Because cynicism is seen as an organizational problem, the university as an academic organization may also encounter cynicism in its staff. Academic organizations are more likely to experience cynicism in their staff when academic culture regulations begin to collapse, when academicians' benefits are given more importance the profession's ideals (Qian & Daniels, 2008; Ramaley, 2002), when responsibilities increase (Bok, 2003), and when individuals are simply more inclined to cynicism. Both the culture of the workplace and the popular words/phrases characteristic to the institution may also be a cause for increased

cynicism (Birnbaum, 2000; Kanter & Mirvis 1989; Ramaley, 2002). Moreover, organizational cynicism in academic organizations is negatively correlated with organizational identification, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship whereas it is positively correlated with the intended turnover and perception of unfaithfulness (Barnes, 2010; Bedian, 2007; Kutanis & Çetinel, 2009; Özgan, Külekçi, & Özkan, 2012; Taylor, 2012).

On the other hand, the concept of organizational support is defined by Yoshimura (2003, p. 10) as "a perception or judgment of how much support an employee feels or thinks an organization provides to him or her" and by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986, p. 500) as "employees' perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well being" (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 500). Since perceived organizational support reflects the quality of the relationship between the employees and the organization (Yürür, 2005) organizational support describes the attitudes and behaviors of employees (Yüksel, 2006). One of the organizations where organizational support should be felt is in universities (Dee, 1999). If organizational support is not provided sufficiently by a university, its instructors are more likely to display negative behaviors toward the institute for which they work. In the literature, there are relationships between organizational cynicism and organizational politics, organizational justice, psychological contract violation, perceived organizational support, organizational stress, organizational citizenship behavior, performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, alienation, and emotional burnout (Brandes, 1997; Brandes, Das, & Hadeni, 2006; Byrne & Hochwarter, 2007; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Cole, Bruch, & Vogel, 2006; James, 2005; Treadway et al., 2004; Tokgöz, 2011).

The first step in educating academics and scientists for their future in the Turkish higher education system lies in the employment of research assistants (Yükseköğretim Kurulu [YÖK], 2013). In Turkey, research assistants are employed under one of four different statuses; one of them being "50d staff" who, because they may find themselves unemployed after defending their master's theses or dissertation, work without employment security. In addition, research assistants may be considered as temporary employees by their superiors thereby acting to diminish the organizational commitment level of research assistants to an insufficient level.

Therefore, an employee may have a negative attitude toward his/her own organization. As such, the researchers of the current study wanted to discover whether perceived organizational support is one of the significant variables of organizational cynicism for the research assistants.

The main purpose of this study is to explore to what extent organizational cynicism may be predicted by perceived organizational support. Two research questions were developed in order to achieve this purpose; they are as follows:

1. Is there a significant correlation between organizational cynicism and perceived organizational support by the research assistants?
2. Are all dimensions of organizational support (in the dimensions: distribution of tasks, academic consultancy, opportunity to develop, and interaction) significant predictors of organizational cynicism (in the dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral)?

Method

Research Design

This study may be classified as a descriptive research project using a correlational survey method. This kind of research has two purposes: (1) to describe the relationship that exists among variables and (2) to use the known correlation to predict from one variable to another (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1990, p. 387).

Participants

The target population is composed of research assistants employed as scholars in the 50/d position in Turkish universities. The accessible population consists of 305 research assistants working at Akdeniz University in four graduate schools during the 2007-2008 academic year. Although all 305 research assistants were given the research instruments, only 214 participated in the study by responding to the instruments properly. The demographic data obtained from the research assistants participating in this study are as follows: The gender ratio is 52.7% for female and 48.3% for male participants. The mean of the ages was 28. The participants have worked, or were working during the time of the study, at the institute of social sciences (28.5%), the institute of natural and applied sciences (47.7%), the institute of medical sciences (21.5%), and the institute of fine arts

(2.3%). The ratio of the participants attending the doctoral program was 66.4% while for the master's program, this value was 33.6%.

Instruments

The data in this study were collected using the perceived organizational support scale (POSS) and the organizational cynicism scale (OCS). The Perceived Organizational Support Scale (POSS) was developed by Kalağan and Aksu (2009). While developing the POSS was developed by Kalağan and Aksu (2009) (researchers), the studies performed by Eisenberger et al. (1986), Kraimer and Wayne (2004), and Yoshimura (2003) were examined. The POSS is a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "completely agree (5)" to "completely disagree (1)", consisting of 19 items within four dimensions called "distribution of tasks (3 items)", "academic consultancy (6 items)", "opportunity to develop", and "interaction." Higher scores computed for each dimensions denote a higher level of organizational support. Coefficients of internal consistency were .789 for the first dimension "distribution of tasks", .846 for the second dimension "academic consultancy", .780 for the third dimension "opportunity to develop", .905 for the fourth dimension "interaction", and .930 for the overall scale. The Organizational Cynicism Scale (OCS) developed by Brandes et al. (1999) is a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "completely agree (5)" to "completely disagree (1)", consisting of 13 items within three dimensions called "cognitive", "affective", and "behavioral." The OCS was translated and adapted into Turkish by Kalağan (2009) (researcher). Higher scores computed for each dimensions denote a higher level of organizational cynicism. The scale's coefficient of internal consistence was .86 for the first dimension "cognitive", .80 for the second dimension "affective", .78 for the third dimension "behavioral", and .93 for the overall scale. The OCS scales can be used confidently in Turkish culture because of its satisfactory bilingual equivalence (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973), reliability, and validity coefficients.

Data Analysis

Data were collected in June and September of 2008 from research assistants employed as scholars in the 50/d position in Akdeniz University, Turkey. The SPSS 13.0 and LISREL 8.54 statistical package programs have been used to perform data analyses. The relationships between perceived organizational support and organizational cynicism were tested

using the Pearson Moments two tailed correlation coefficient analysis. A multiple linear regression analysis with enter model was used to predict the dependent variables (dimensions of organizational cynicism) by the independent variables (dimensions of perceived organizational support). All the predictor variables were simultaneously entered into the regression analysis to determine the independent influence. The multiple correlations were used to show the combined contributions of the independent variables (Hair, Anderson, Tahtam, & Black, 1998; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000).

Results

Organizational cynicism is the strongest ($M = 3.14$) in the *cognitive* dimension while it is the weakest ($M = 2.59$) in the *affective* dimension. Perceived organizational support is the strongest ($M = 3.14$) in the *academic consultancy* dimension while it is the weakest ($M = 2.31$) in the *opportunity to develop* dimension.

All dimensions of perceived organizational support were related to all dimensions of organizational cynicism. The correlations indicated that the cognitive dimension of organizational cynicism construct was negative in relation to distribution of tasks ($r = 0.625, p < .001$), academic consultancy ($r = -0.593, p < .01$), opportunity to develop ($r = -0.487, p < .01$), and interaction ($r = -0.681, p < .01$); the affective dimension of the organizational cynicism construct was negative in relation to distribution of tasks ($r = -0.462, p < .001$), academic consultancy ($r = -0.655, p < .01$), opportunity to develop ($r = -0.449, p < .01$), and interaction ($r = -0.683, p < .01$); and the behavioral dimension of organizational cynicism construct was negative in relation to distribution of tasks (GD) ($r = -0.420, p < .001$), academic consultancy ($r = -0.327, p < .01$), opportunity to develop ($r = -0.347, p < .01$), and interaction ($r = -0.484, p < .01$).

A high level and significant relationship between the all dimensions of POSS and cognitive dimension of organizational cynicism ($R = .736, p < .01$) was also found. These factors together explained 54.1% of the variance in the research assistants' cognitive dimension of organizational cynicism. According to the t-test results on the significance of regression coefficients, it can be seen that all other factors, except *opportunity to develop*, exerted a significant effect on the research assistants' cognitive dimension of organizational cynicism.

Moreover, both a high level of and a significant relationship between all the dimensions of POSS and the affective dimension of organizational cynicism ($R = .718, p < .01$) was found. These factors together explained 51.6% of the variance in affective dimension of organizational cynicism. According to the t-test results on the significance of regression coefficients, it can be seen that *academic consultancy* and *interaction* had a significant effect on the affective dimension of organizational cynicism.

As for the behavioral dimension of organization cynicism, a moderate level and significant relationship between the all dimensions of POSS and behavioral dimension of organizational cynicism ($R = .515, p < .01$) was found. These factors together explained 26.5% of the variance in behavioral dimension of organizational cynicism. According to the t-test results on the significance of regression coefficients, it can be seen that *distribution of tasks* and *interaction* had a significant effect on the behavioral dimension of organizational cynicism.

Discussion

Organizational cynicism is the stronger in the *cognitive* dimension than it is in the behavioral and affective dimensions. This finding is consistent with those of FitzGerald (2002) and Altınöz, Çöp, and Sığındı (2011). However, this finding is incompatible with those of Brandes (1997) and Johnson & O'Leary-Kell (2003). According to the findings of the related researches, the lowest level of organizational cynicism was generally obtained from the *behavioral* dimension although the other findings differed for the highest levels of organizational cynicism. (Brandes, 1997; Efiltili, Gönen, & Öztürk, 2008; FitzGerald, 2002). Perceived organizational support is the strongest in the *academic consultancy* dimension while it is the weakest in the *opportunity to develop* dimension.

It was found that research assistants perceived organizational support to be at its highest level in terms of *academic consultancy* dimension. Similar to this finding, Şahal (2005) stated that those research assistants who sought support from their supervisors regarding the problems that they were facing and received help from them commented that their academic consultants were fair and honest people who supported their assistants and who protected both the organization's and the employees' benefits. Korkut, Yalçınkaya, and Mustan (1999)

stated that academic consultancy is important for research assistants. The organizational support perceived by the research assistants was obtained at the lowest level for the *opportunity to develop* dimension. This situation can be caused by a lack of career opportunities provided to research assistants. For these reasons, research assistants are in need of both education and research abilities (Wheeler, 1992; Yasan, 2011) and career development (Kabakçı, 2005; Özasan, 2010).

Research assistants' perception of organizational support (academic consultancy, distribution of tasks, the opportunity to develop, and interaction) is a variable that predicts the level of cynicism they experience in their organizations. Byrne and Hochwarter (2007) stated that the employee who perceives a low level of organizational support does not accept the advantages of the organization, thinking instead that his socio-emotional needs are not being taken into account and therefore does not expect the organization to offer concrete support (equipment, extra employees, etc) when necessary. It is thought that research assistants' level of expectations may be low when they do not perceive a sufficient level of support from their organizations. This situation may also affect their decisions on whether they will be an academic or not in the future. Therefore, it is possible that research assistants may experience organizational cynicism in an environment where they perceive their intellectual development faces impediment, and in such organization whose educational facilities (foreign language, research techniques, etc.) are not developed. Moreover, their cynicism may grow due to the lack of support available to allow for participation in scientific meetings and when professional development opportunities are not provided by their seniors. Furthermore, in intuitions where organizational support is perceived to be at a low level, the relationship between the individuals in the institute may manifest itself in both an inconsistent and unreliable way. This negative belief can also manifest itself in the form of rivalry, instilling competitive behaviors between employees. Despite the fact that competition is aimed to work to improve quality in universities (YÖK, 2012), this can result in negative attitudes between research assistants who are competing against each other in the process of becoming academics.

Regression analysis showed that the *distribution of tasks, academic consultancy, and interaction* support perceived by research assistants were significant predictors for the *cognitive* dimension

of organizational cynicism. Those individuals who experience organizational cynicism at the cognitive level hold beliefs that the institution's procedures lack organizational principles, which declarations are not taken seriously, that people's behaviors are inconsistent and unreliable, and that organizational relationships depend on achieving individual benefits (Brandes, 1997; Brandes & Das, 2006; Dean et al., 1998). Hence, when the distribution of tasks, academic consultancy, and interaction support are perceived to be at a high level, a decrease can be expected in the level of cognitive cynicism of research assistants. Brandes et al. (2006) remarked that employees who hold the common belief that sufficient support will not be able to be given by their administrators have a higher tendency to feel cynicism toward their institution. Among the perceptions that may lead to a severe level of cynicism in employees is the perception that inadequate support is provided to employees and that employers ignore their employees' needs for relaxing, recreation, welfare, goals, and values. Moreover, a feeling of being offended may manifest itself in employees when they perceive that their employer is not acting to protect employees' needs and that they are receiving complicated messages about the organization's values. Such perceptions may also provoke employees to question their organization's stated mission and vision. Furthermore, if an employee holds an opinion or belief that administrators do not attach importance to their personnel, then it is possible for organizational cynicism to occur. For this reason, academic environments where adequate support is provided for the distribution of tasks, academic consultancy, and interaction support are needed to be implemented since they are seen as important in decreasing the level of cynicism in research assistants.

Regression analysis showed that *academic consultancy and interaction* support perceived by research assistants were significant predictors for the *affective* dimension of organizational cynicism. Although the research assistants are employed as staff members of their department in the institution, most of their interaction is with their supervisors and receive their academic counseling support from only their own supervisors. When the research assistants do not perceive the existence of these two supporting methods in a sufficient way, feelings of indignity toward the organization such as rage, anger, suffering, feeling shame, loathing, arrogance, moral corruption, disappointment, and lack of confidence (Abraham, 2000; Brandes & Das, 2006; James, 2005) may appear. Moreover, Ayan (2011) stated in his study that research assistants are psychologically harassed mostly by their own

academic supervisors. All of these conditions may act to increase levels of cynicism.

Yet another finding of the data analysis showed that *distribution of tasks and interaction* support perceived by research assistants were significant predictors for the *behavioral* dimension of organizational cynicism. However, Ergöl, Koç, Eroğlu, and Taşkın (2012) have stated that one of the most frequently experienced problems of female research assistants is that they felt that they were given responsibilities irrelevant to their position. Therefore, it can be concluded that not assigning tasks which bring out a research assistant's inner potential will act to incur a further loss of motivation in an already dissatisfied research assistant (Özaslan, 2010). For this reason, both fairness in the distribution of tasks shared between research assistants as well as high quality interaction support may decrease research assistants' tendency to display verbal and/or non-verbal cynical behaviors.

As this study only analyzes the perception of research assistants employed in the 50/d position and has been conducted in a state university, the ability to generalize its findings is limited. Without ignoring these limitations, suggestions to improve future research are presented below:

- An academic environment in which research assistants may change their own negative beliefs should be provided.
- While higher education and university strategic plans are being formed, the goal of providing development opportunities support should also be included in the planning process.
- Recruitment policies in the employment process of research assistants should be rearranged, their payments should be satisfactory, and interaction support should be provided by shaping a common environment of sharing with other personnel both within and without the organization.
- Support for the distribution of tasks should be provided within the organization by applying a fair distribution of tasks and by providing both effective interaction and coordination.
- Giving foundation support that universities provide for academicians to participate in scientific meetings in the university's home country and/or abroad will foster deeper ties to the scientific career.
- Academic administrators' own opinions and assessments in regards to research assistants' perceived level of organizational support and attitudes toward organizational cynicism may be researched. In this vein, scientific studies can be designed with goals to reduce research assistants' level of organizational cynicism.
- Comparative research projects similar to this one may be carried out which include research assistants from different statuses; that is, other than only 50/d employees.
- In this study, organizational cynicism has only been determined based on research assistants' personal perceptions. Other factors that may cause organizational cynicism, as well as cynicism's effect on the individual, are among those subjects requiring research.
- This study is designed under the positivist paradigm. By performing different studies under the post-positivist paradigm, research assistants' problems may be more deeply analyzed.

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