Examining the role of change cynicism and organizational commitment to change: A public sector organizational change study in Pakistan.
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A B S T R A C T

Organizational change cynicism is a deprecatory attitude of employees that has gained significant attention in today's rapidly changing organizational environment. It has multiple behavioral consequences however, this study tried to investigate its effect on three dimensions of organizational change commitment (i-e affective, normative and continuance change commitment). Present article has contributed in existing body of knowledge by investigating the novel relationship of variables at the time of change. This cross-sectional study used convenient sampling to route the questionnaires among 408 employees in three public sector organizations (PIA, Power Distribution Companies and Livestock and Dairy development Punjab), which were undergoing restructuring process. Structural Equation Modeling technique was used with the help of AMOS on the proposed model. Findings showed significant negative relationship among change cynicism, affective and normative change commitment. However, a positive relationship also existed between change cynicism and continuance change commitment. Moreover, results indicated that employees expressed distrust on change program due to lake of fairness, absence of merit and hidden negative implications. Results also helped to determine the reasons for positive relationship between change cynicism and continuance change commitment. The findings of present study can also be utilized to lessen the gravity of change cynicism which impacts organizational commitment to change.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary public sector organizations have sustained unprecedented pressure to adopt change strategy for competitiveness, advancement in technology, and efficiency in organizational systems. The prime recipients of change program are the members of organizations thus negativity, stress and uncertainty emerge in their behaviors. In these circumstances, employees become cynical about the entire change program (Burke, 2017; Probst et al., 2005; Piderit, 2000). Cynicism is an attribute of a person that closely explains disbelief, pessimism, disappointment and skepticism which results in anger, embracement and resentment (Mete, 2013; Erdost et al., 2007). Although, this concept can be traced back in ancient Greek literature (Dean et al., 1998) however the last decade has witnessed plenty of academic and organizational research on this topic (Johnson & O''Leary-Kelly, 2003; Stanley et al., 2005; Pitre, 2004; Wanous et al., 2000; Qian, 2007). According to İşçi & Arı (2018), organizational cynicism has five categories, i.e. personality cynicism, social cynicism, occupational cynicism, employee cynicism and organizational change cynicism. Researchers have invested their time to understand these forms of cynicism but very few studies have unearthed the phenomenon of organizational change cynicism. Organizational change cynicism is an employee's negative thought and attitude, which emerges at the time of organizational change initiative, whose consequences needs to be explored (Ozler & Atalay, 2011). Reichers et al., (1997) have argued that organizational change cynicism

is a new outcome which emerges due to low faith of employees on the architects of organizational change. Organizational change cynicism can be a major hurdle in execution of successful change. This phenomenon can exert detrimental consequences, which includes low level of job satisfaction, decrease organizational commitment and increase turnover intentions (Bernerth et al., 2007; Dean et al., 1998). Varity of researches focused on the macro aspect of cynicism and its impact on organizations. However, behavioral aspect especially commitment to change of workforce received little attention.

Organizational behavior literature has long been emphasized that organizational change commitment is linked with employees' positive attitude towards change (Peccei et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2002). It has also regarded as one of the critical factors to manage successful change. Organizational commitment to change is defined as a mindset that binds an individual with the course of action, which is essential for successful implementation of change program (Meyer et al., 1993). Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) is credited to make the first endeavor to test and validate this construct.

Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) has proposed three component model of commitment to change, i.e. Affective commitment to change (desire to support change process), continuance commitment to change (cost associated with change) and normative commitment to change (moral obligation to support change). There remains a paramount importance to understand the effects of organizational change cynicism on organizational commitment to change. To address this gap, this study has tested the relation between organizational change cynicism and three dimensions of organizational commitment to change (Affective, continuance and normative commitment to change). The relationship of the constructs present in the proposed research model was tested in three public sector organizations of Pakistan, where organizational change was in progress.

Present study has focused particularly on the public sector organizations of Pakistan which are less productive due to multiple administrative and legislative issues. Besides other factors organizational cynicism towards change is critical element that develops resistance against change and causes unfavorable impact against the steps taken for the betterment of organizations. This study has significance in two ways. First, the proposed model has tired to contribute in the public sector organizational literature of change in Pakistan which is also a less researched area. Second, the results between the relationship of cynicism towards change and organizational commitment to change will provide deep insights to the researchers and practical implication to the industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cynicism

Cynicism has historical roots in ancient Greek literature. The term first derived from Greek word "Kyon" used to resemble as a dog (Dean et al., 1998). The cynics of this old civilization emphasized the society to practice high moral standards and they expressed their insolent views for power and status seekers (Arslan, 2018; Dean et al., 1998). Over the years, this concept was presented with variety of conceptualization and characteristics. This elucidates a general or specific attitude which exhibits disillusionment, hopelessness and frustration against an individual, group or organization (Andersson & Bateman, 1997). Recent description of cynicism manifests in skepticism, disbelief, negativity and suspiciousness (Schraeder et al., 2016; Erdost et al., 2007). Although, cynicism has historical perspective but it is a less researched phenomenon in present organizational settings. It is a complex construct which contains three aspects of human behavior (Affective, cognitive and behavioral) (Arslan, 2018). Affective dimension of cynicism consists of negative beliefs and negative emotions such as anger disrespect and shame (Abraham, 2000; Dean et al., 1998). Cognitive side of cynicism explains that a person experiencing cynicism displays unreliable behavior (Dean et al., 1998). That person can tell lie and exhibit negative tricks (Brown & Gregan, 2008). The behavioral features of cynicism instigate

pessimism, which results in complete hopelessness. This proclivity promotes aggressive and abusive behavior which negatively impacts motivation and organizational commitment (Reichers et al., 1997; Dean et al., 1998). Behavioral consequences of cynicism can also promote absenteeism at workplace (Brown & Gregan, 2008). It is evident from an empirical study that consequences of behavioral dimension of cynicism aggravate due to perception of biased and unfair feeling at work settings (Bommer et al., 2005). The concept of cynicism has evolved with the passage of time. So far, research has categorized organizational cynicism into five groups. İşçi & Arı (2018) have proposed five classes of cynicism; personality cynicism, social cynicism, occupational cynicism, employee cynicism and organizational change cynicism. Very few researches are available on the subject of organizational change cynicism in Pakistan. Present study has focused that how change process produces change related cynicism.

Organizational Change Cynicism

Some empirical researches have guided that change cynicism is an attitude of a person that comes on surface at the beginning of change program (James, 2005; Davis & Gardner, 2004; Pugh et al., 2003; Wanous et al., 2000). However, organizational cynicism towards change is defined as an attitude of employee who displays low faith on the designers and implementer of change program and considers these activities fruitless for performance improvement (Pelit & Pelit, 2014; Reichers et al., 1997). It is evident that employees cannot escape from cynicism during change and gradually it becomes an integral part of their attitude (Bordia et al., 2011; Stanley et al., 2005; Johnson & O"Leary-Kelly, 2003; Reichers et al., 1997). Wanous et al., (2000) conceptualized this concept with the help of expectancy theory and attribution theory and defined its two components. The first component is pessimism about change and second blaming others who are responsible to execute it. Change specific cynicism can become a predictor to resist change (Stanley et al., 2005).

Organizational Change Commitment

Organizational change commitment is a mindset or binding force of a person with specific course of action, which deems it crucial to implement successful change program (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Researches on this subject found that organizational change commitment is one of the core components for successful organizational change (Pitts, 2006; Coetsee, 1999; Kotter, 1995). Organizations face heavy resistance in the wake of change. Cohen (2007) has found that organizational change commitment is a critical factor to eliminate resistance against change strategies. If employees show positive propensity for change related activities then it may be considered an encouraging sign of organizational change commitment (Kalyal, 2009; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Nadler & Tushman, 1995). However, lack of organizational change commitment produces detrimental effect on the change program (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) is credited to test and validate organizational commitment to change which is relatively a new construct. There are three dimensions of this construct; affective change commitment, normative change commitment and continuance change commitment. Affective commitment to change is the desire to support change activities whereas normative change commitment is the moral responsibility to reinforce it (Jaros, 2010; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). However, continuance change commitment is the perception of employees that if they do not support change it may cost them negatively (Pitts, 2006; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Based on three dimensions Herscovitch & Meyer (2002) have proposed three component model of change

commitment. Cumming & Worley (2009) have the opinion that employee commitment is an essential factor to increase the momentum of execution of change.

Cynicism towards change and commitment to change

A research posits that persons with change cynicism demonstrate skeptical feelings and negative approach against commitment of organization (Chiaburu et al, 2013). Wanous et al. (2000) have found that change cynicism causes negative behavioral consequences such as low commitment, turnover intention and low productivity. Change oriented cynicism also develops hostility against organizational citizenship and organizational commitment (Ozdem, & Sezer, 2019). Lack of trust deteriorates the relationship between employees and organization which leads to cynicism and eventually employees bear low commitment of change (Eaton, 2000). The influence of change cynicism adversely affects to normative commitment because employees do not regard their moral obligation to facilitate organizational change (Stanley, 1998). A cynical attitude at the time of change causes adverse impact on all facets of commitment and leads employee towards isolation which also destabilizes organizational citizenship behavior (Abraham, 2000; Brandes, 1997). Dean et al. (1998) have put forward that cynicism is one of the major factors to deteriorate commitment of employees and performance. Following hypotheses are developed to test the organizational change cynicism and three dimensions of commitment to change.

H1: Organizational change cynicism has negative relationship with affective commitment to change
H2: Organizational change cynicism has negative relationship with normative commitment to change
H3: Organizational change cynicism has positive relationship with continuance commitment to change.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Settings and Sample

The present research study tested the hypothesis in three public sector service provider organizations which were undergoing restructuring process in Pakistan. Two organizations with strong unions had offices all over the country. whereas third organization was a provincial subject.

Government was striving to introduce new working standards however employees were highly cynical about this approach of change. Employees were anxiously uncertain about their future and perceived the reform package a threat to their job security. According to reform recommendations, performances of these public entities were less satisfactory. Employees staged protest and tried to halt the service delivery. The cynicism, which emerged solely due to organizational change activity severely impacted the organizational commitment to change. This is a quantitative study with a cross sectional design. A survey was administrated to collect the data from these public sector organizations having offices all over Pakistan. Higher management was approached to access the employees' responses for participation in survey whereas a maximum level of anonymity and confidentiality was maintained.

A sample of 408 employees was collected through convenience sampling from selected organizations with 58.3% response rate. The research took four months to measure the responses of individuals serving in change related organizations. The average age of respondents was measured 34.57 with standard deviation 7.32 having at least four years of employment record in the same organization. On gender

perspective, 58.3% male and 15% female were part of research sample. Qualification was one of main demographic element of data collection. The survey participants possessed M. Phil, Masters, Graduation and under graduation qualification with response rate 10%, 39.5%, 42.2% and 8.3% respectively.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Participants of the survey were part in three organizations. The results of descriptive statistics were computed through the use of SPSS; however, structural equation modeling was employed with help of AMOS to analyze the regression analysis between variables. Moreover, Crounbach's alpha evaluated Internal consistency and Inter-correlations of the constructs.

Measures

Based on previous empirical researches, present study utilized pre-tested and validated items for current research work. The survey instrument comprised on two variables i.e. organizational change cynicism and organizational commitment to change. Organization change cynicism is the primary variable of this study. The researcher employed organization change cynicism scale developed by Stanley (1998). The scale of this construct is uni-dimensional and contains 8 validated items with alpha coefficient 0.94. A likert scale "strongly Disagree=1" to "Strongly Agree=5" was utilized to measure the responses. Confirmatory factor analysis of the reported items received a good fit $x^2(32)=98.45$, p <.01, cmn/df =3.25, CFI=0.965, TLI=0.848, IFI=0.945 and RMSEA=0.093.

Organizational change commitment utilized as a dependent variable in this study. This construct contained 18-items which were developed by Herscovitch & Meyer (2002). The variable comprised of three dimensions, i.e. affective commitment to change, normative commitment to change and continuance commitment to change, with internal consistency values 0.94, 0.94 and 0.86 respectively. Every dimension of the organization commitment to change has six items. Since all items were measured on five point likert scale (Strongly Disagree =1 to Strongly Agree =5) had acceptable level of reliability. The CFA calculated for organizational commitment to change provided good fit $x^2(59)$ =113.53, p <.01, cmn/df =1.92, CFI=0.925, TLI=0.898, IFI=0.925 and RMSEA=0.090. The demographic variables age, gender, education, designation pay scale of the respondents had also impact on organizational commitment to change but these were controlled in present study.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Mean, standard deviation and correlation analysis of the constructs present in the model were analyzed through SPSS. The regression effects of these constructs and their dimensions were evaluated with the use of structural equation modeling by applying path analysis techniques. Table 1 demonstrates mean standard deviations of the constructs and their subdimensions. Organization change cynicism has mean score (x=3.92), however affective change commitment received highest score (x=3.46) and continuance change commitment (x=3.02), which is lowest.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for organizational change cynicism scale and organizational commitment to change scale (n=408)

Scale of construct	Sub dimensions	Items	X	S
Organizational change cynicism	Organizational change cynicism	08	3.92	1.72
Organizational change commitment	Affective change commitment	06	3.46	1.52
	Normative change commitment	06	3.31	1.60
	Continuance change commitment	06	3.02	1.26

Path analysis was conducted with the help of Structural Equation Modeling to identify the hypothesized relationship between organizational change cynicism and three dimensions of commitment to change (Affective, Normative and Continuance). SEM is a suitable technique to estimate the effect of several predictors on various outcomes. This process is carried out in two casual steps while controlling the errors of measurement (Bollen, 1989). Based upon two steps analytical strategy, we first verified all measures by the use of confirmatory factor analysis and found their results satisfactory for further investigation. In the second step we proceeded to test the structural model of the proposed measures. The results provided good fit for the present data x^2 (171)=22, p <.000, cmn/df =3.198, CFI=0.0895, TLI=0.889, GFI=0.972, AGFI=0.877, NFI= 0.914 and RMSEA=0.096. The results of all indices were within the stipulated standard limit suggested by (Hair et al., 2006; Roh et al., 2005).
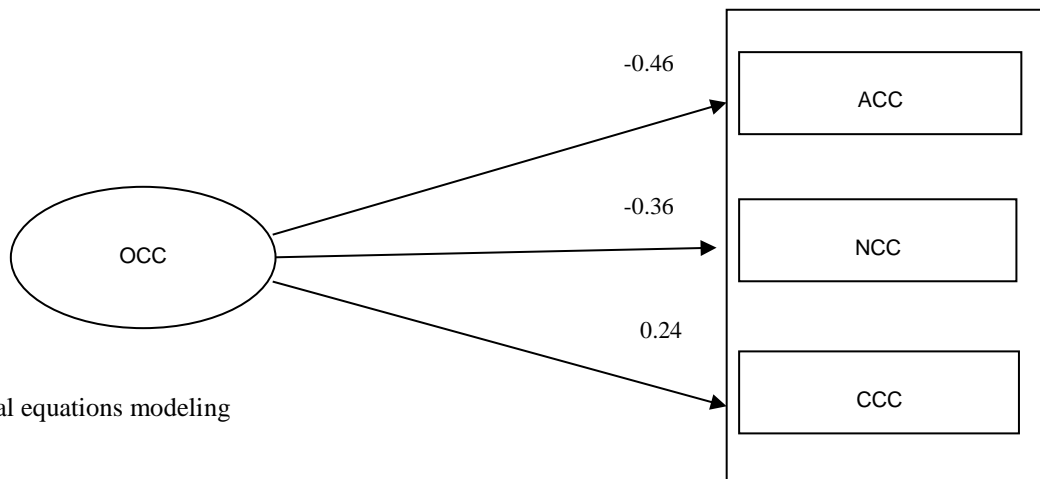

Figure 2 structural equations modeling

OCC= (Organization cynicism towards change), ACC= (Affective Commitment to Change), NCC= (Normative Commitment to Change), CCC= (Continuance Commitment to Change)

Initial results provided evidence that fitness of the model met the set criteria. Now, it was essential to estimate the relationship of variables through application of the weights of coefficients of regression. To proceed on direct effect of independent variable was measured on dependent variables (see figure1). The results derived from SEM postulated that organizational cynicism to change (OCC) had a moderate

negative relation with Affective commitment to change (ACC) having beta value -0.46 at p < 0.05. Based on the following findings H1is accepted. The relationship between organization cynicism to change and normative commitment to change produced beta value -0.36 at p < 0.05. This showed a week negative effect between the relationship, which provided the foundation to accept H2. SEM derived beta value 0.24 between organization cynicism to change and continuance commitment to change with p <0.05. This displays a positive relationship that becomes a reason to accept H3.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Focus of this paper was to understand how organizational change cynicism influenced three dimensions of commitment to change. Earlier studies examined the role of cynicism and organizational commitment (Scott & Zweig, 2016; Mete, 2013). However, this research article specifically investigated both constructs and their dimensions with respect to change.

Cynical behavior is rampant in turbulent economic conditions, which ultimately impacts on all forms of commitment. Jobs in public sector organizations deem relatively more secure as compare to corporate sector in less develop countries. The move of privatization is perceived a major threat to job security thus causes employee resistance (Beer & Nohria, 2000). The findings of the study revealed that change cynicism adversely impacts affective commitment to change. The investigation further indicated that respondents did not believe on transparency of change program due to lack of their confidence on government policies. Promotions and incentives are not delivered on merit which is the main cause of low organizational performance. These skeptical thoughts generate cynicism that cause negative impact on affective commitment to change.

Change cynicism had also negative relation with normative commitment to change. During survey, employees revealed that organizational change is beneficial for all stakeholders and everyone in this process should support it. However counterproductive political culture and meritless organizational policies promote immoral practices and corruption, which leads to cynicism. Findings revealed that individual are less inclined to fulfill their obligations towards change because they perceive organizational change harmful for their job and career development.

However, organizational cynicism has negative impact on affective and normative change commitment but it has positive effect on continuance change commitment. Despite negative belief and perception toward change program, cynical employees preferred to stay with organization due to deteriorating economic conditions of the country. Many of the government institutions have suffered significant loss and government considers the option of downsizing. In this scenario no better job alternatives exist which forces the cynical workforce to support the organizational activities for the sack of employment. During survey respondent provided the insight that openness, transparency and culture of merit can reduce the impact of cynicism on all three facets of commitment to change.

limitations and directions for future research

A rigorous and comprehensive methodology was followed in this research investigation to report the findings. However, present study is still subject to several limitations and offers insights for future researches. The first limitation is embedded in the nature of cross-sectional design of data, which violates

the important assumption of causality (Bollen, 1989). A longitudinal design may leads to some valuable contributions in the literature of cynicism and organizational commitment to change. Self-report measure is the second limitation of the study which develops common method bias. Podsakoff & Organ (1986) has the opinion that common method variance can distort and exaggerate the relationship among associated variables. To avoid this issue, future research should focus to gather multisource of data. Organizational change cynicism emerges at the time of change and impacts organizational change commitment of employees. It will be interesting to probe how change cynicism impacts change related behaviors e.g compliance, championing and cooperation. Nevertheless, organizational cynicism has significant impact on organizational commitment to change but mediating role of organizational change commitment between cynicisms and change related behaviors will provide some interesting findings. Finally, data from public and private organizations will demonstrate the severity of cynicism and its impact on organization commitment.

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