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CYNICISM IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Theoretical article

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Abstract

The dynamic features of the labour market outline the perfect background in which organizations are constantly dealing with the necessity to implement change in strategy, structure, processes or culture. On this background the factors that can damage the process of organizational change receive more and more attention. Cynicism in organizational change is a possible source of resistance which starts to capture researchers' interests. Organizational cynicism research represents a new subject in the specialized literature of Romania. Research on this topic show that organizational cynicism is the result of attitudes made out of beliefs, affects and behaviour toward organization. On the basis of the reviews and conceptualization, we propose a research agenda of cynicism on organizational change.

Introduction

The dynamic nature of the labour market has helped create an environment in which organizations are continually facing the need to implement various changes in terms of strategy, structure, processes, and culture. Accordingly, actual organizations increasingly rely more on employee's adaptability to change in an attempt to cope with the economic, technological, and social environment and so, the factors that may affect the implementation of such changes receive more and more attention. Cynicism is a possible source of resistance that began to attract more and more interest. The fact that cynicism is present in organizations around the world makes it a very important phenomenon worldwide.

Conceptual delimitations

After an extensive review of the literature that examines this concept, Andersson (1996) and Dean (1998) defined cynicism as a negative attitude with a broader focus and specific at the same time, containing cognitive, affective and behavioural ingredients - both in their definitions shaping this consensus. Anderson (1996) defines cynicism as "an attitude both general and specific, characterized by frustration, hopelessness and disillusionment and contempt, mistrust towards a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution". For Dean (1998) Organizational cynicism: "a negative attitude directed towards employing organization" with cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. More specifically, the cynicism is "the belief in the lack of integrity of an organization", accompanied by feelings of "shame, disgust and high stress" and contributing to "the tendency towards negative behaviour". The unfulfilled promises or violated, the violation of the psychological contract (Abraham, 2000), organizational policies that are power games released over the integrity of the organization (Davis, 2004), feelings of not being taken into account by the organization and not to be treated with dignity and respect (Fleming, 2005), the lack of significance for the work done (Cartwright, 2006), the history of attempts to change unfeasible or managerial incompetence (Stanley, 2005) are precursors of organizational cynicism. Thus, Andersson (1996) and Dean and colleagues' (1998) general definition of cynicism is assuming that others lack integrity and cannot be trusted.

Cynicism has been associated with a number of negative factors such as apathy, resignation, alienation, hopelessness, lack of trust in others, suspicion, delusion or weak performance, interpersonal conflicts, absenteeism, burnout (Andersson, 1996). It may also be

understood as a form of self-defence of employees, a way to cope with enigmatic or disappointing events (Reichers, 1997). However, not all employees are similarly affected by the same circumstances. Situational characteristics of the organization interact with dispositional characteristics of employees in the development of cynicism. People with significant work ethic or other similar values tend to work harder and expect the employing organization to treat them with respect and dignity, and to be honest with others too. The failure of the organization to satisfying these expectations causes disappointment and disillusionment, making the employees susceptible to a cynic attitude. On the other hand, people who care less, or not at all, about the lack of honesty or sincerity, or have learned over time to deal with them, most likely they will not become cynical, as a result of their experiences.

Organizational cynicism can bring confusion, irritability or antagonism among those who fail to perceive cynicism as something that can be developed in the context of the work done by each. Employee cynicism toward the employing organization (organizational cynicism) is a two-sided phenomenon. On one side, there was argued that cynicism has a negative connotation and is generally regarded as an undesirable attitude or emotion, on the other hand, it is considered an adaptive response, and sometimes positive (Reichers, 1997).

Many managers of organizations have considered employee's cynical attitude as a real problem and attempts were made to reduce them. A general feature in this respect was the fact that most of them are focused on the problem of basic cynicism (Reichers 1997). The proposed solutions for reducing or eliminating cynicism included items such as encouraging employees to have a positive attitude, to see opportunities where others see threats.

A construct that is easily mistaken for cynicism is scepticism. According to

the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), scepticism is a "disposition to doubt or mistrust in general." Although some authors (eg, Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Reichers et al., 1997) specifically sought to differentiate these two constructs, however, there is no consensus about how they differ. Kanter and Mirvis (1989) described the scepticism as doubting the communication, foreshadowing the desire to be convinced by facts. In contrast, it was suggested that cynical people not only question the essence of communication, but also the reasons behind it. Thus, the two constructs were seen as being qualitatively different – cynicism involves doubt and reasons. Reichers et al. (1997) described the scepticism as to question the likelihood of success while still being confident that a good change will occur. Cynical people were seen as far less optimistic about the success-related changes due to previous changes that have repeatedly failed. So in this case, cynicism and scepticism were seen as being qualitatively similar, but different when it comes to the level of optimism about success. (Stanley et al, 2005).

As consequences of cynicism we can mention lower organizational commitment, motivation and satisfaction at work (Abraham, 2000), an increase in suspicion and distrust and contempt for the organization and other forms of disengagement and psychological detachment. Fleming (2005) shows that cynicism is associated with a decrease in self-esteem, while Pugh et al. (2003) argue that even new employees can feel cynicism among other employees as a result of negative attitudes of the former employer. In response to psychological contract breach or violation, these consequences can be attributed to a re-evaluation of the psychological contract by the employee.

Cynicism specific to organizational change

Specific change cynicism predicts intentions to resist to organizational change. Employees who believe that the management plans that change for reasons other than those stated, or those who do not understand why change occurs will wonder why this change occurs and will not be willing to comply with the requirement of change coming from the management. If, however, they trust that management is able to implement this change, they will not doubt that change will be made as desired. Attempts to make employees understand why change is needed can be summarized to explain them why the change will work.

Specific to organizational change, organizational cynicism involves actual loss of confidence in leaders of change and it can be the response of some attempts to change that are not fully clear and successful. Cynicism about organizational change is a reaction to the failed change efforts, consisting of pessimism regarding the success of future efforts and conviction that change agents are lazy and incompetent.

Reichers (1997) states that organizational change efforts are the most appropriate target for cynicism. More specifically, he describes cynicism as an attitude determined by the futility of change; cynicism is a potential barrier factor in organizational change. He also suggests some ways to avoid organizational cynicism, including employee involvement in decisions that affect them, management enhanced credibility and avoiding changes that occur surprisingly. He conceptualized cynicism about organizational change as a combination of "pessimism about the possibility of organizational changes due to the persons responsible for change, who are believed to be incompetent and lazy" - a definition that captures both change itself and change leaders.

Although successful implementation of organizational change has become an issue of increasing importance, until recently most paradigm changes were characterized by an approach which is characteristic to macrosystems. However, over the last decade it has been emphasized the importance of individual reactions to organizational changes (Stanley, 2005). In addition, employees' support towards organizational change has been suggested as a prerequisite for successful change. Consistent with the increased interest in personal variables, cynicism has received attention, although limited, as a potential antecedent of resistance to change (Reichers et al., 1997).

Stanley (2005) suggests that specific cynicism change will be a predictor of resistance to change. Employees who appreciate that management is involved in a change that has as reasons other than those established (or implied) will not want to meet management application to change their behaviour. This emphasis on cynicism specific change is consistent with attitudinal studies stating that optimal prediction is obtained when the predictor and criterion can be compared in terms of their specifics. The validity of this approach was recently illustrated in the context of organizational change, where it was found that while organizational commitment is a good predictor of resistance to change, the first predictor was obtained by the attachment of specific changes. Therefore, we consider that specific changes constructs (eg, specific changes cynicism, scepticism) will be better predictors than more general constructs (eg specific cynicism management, trust).

However Stanley's research findings (2005) provide some suggestions for managing change attitudes. Employees tend to be more cynical in relation to organizational change when they were cynical towards management in general. Surprisingly, dispositional cynicism did

not relate significantly with the cynicism of the specific change. So cynicism about a change seems to be a reaction to experiences within the organization rather than one in general. Specific employee attitudes toward change are formed by organizational experience. The fact that cynicism and scepticism were both negatively related to employee perceptions about the adequacy of communication about change, provide support of faith as a key component in the efficiency of initiation of any organizational change communication. Stanley (2005) making reference to cynicism defined it as "questioning one's implicit and explicit motives" and organizational cynicism, as "questioning the management integrity", specific change cynicism deems the cynicism felt by employees that are going through a period of uncertainty due to a change in the organizational level. To capture the specific change cynicism, Stanley (1998) defined the specific cynicism change as questioning the implicit or explicit motives of management in relation to a specific change. This conceptualization of cynicism has important implications for predicting the resistance to change. Therefore, specific cynicism change is preferable to predict resistance to change than the general cynicism.

Discutions

The research of Organizational cynicism and cynicism specific to change is a current theme, with very few references of these concepts carried out among the Romanian population. Regarding the development, construction or adaptation of tools to measure cynicism as a resistance response to organizational change, there were made very few requests of the Romanian population, yet an under-researched construct in Romania. In this context we are in a process of cultural adaptation to the specific Romanian population scale "Change Specific

Cynicism" elaborated by David J. Stanley in 1998, as a need to elaborate valid tools that are useful in measuring the construct of "Cynicism specific Change". The objective of this research is the cultural adaptation of the instrument to the specific Cynicism Specific Change, specific to Romanian population thinking at its future usage in practice and psychological research.

In addition to the data presented, there are steps that can ensure the possibility of future investigations. Also, we invite you to more competitive testing conceptualization and measurement of cynicism. Without doubt one of the reasons why cynicism is difficult to control is that cynical beliefs are accompanied by strong negative emotions (eg, anger, resentment, disappointment). Future research is expected to determine how cognitive and affective components of cynicism are related, and how the two combine to influence behaviour.

However the results of research conducted to date suggest that employees' cynicism is bound and can influence employees' intention to resist change. Consequently, those responsible for the control of organizational change should be advised to take cynicism, especially of specific changes, into account.

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