

## Perspectives of Turkish Academics Working in Europe and USA on Organizational Cynicism

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### Abstract

Organizational cynicism can stem from differences in organizational practices and behaviors, as well as individual differences (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Bommer et al., 2005). Studies reveal that the experiences of educational employees with organizational cynicism are significantly influenced by factors such as psychological contract violation, workload, organizational justice, organizational stress, ethical leadership, job security, political discrimination, organizational silence, organizational culture, organizational communication, organizational trust, and organizational exclusion and isolation.

The aim of this research is to uncover the perspectives on organizational cynicism of academics who have held similar positions both in Turkey and in Europe or USA. In this study, qualitative research methods were employed to conduct interviews with 12 participating academics. The codes and anecdotes obtained were analyzed under three themes, forming the findings. According to the research results, the organizational situations experienced by academics during their duties in Turkey differ from those they encounter in organizations in Europe or USA.

**Keywords:** Organizational cynicism, academic cynicism, organizational commitment, organizational leadership

### INTRODUCTION

In today's evolving business world, where various sectors can work in an integrated manner, organizations that invest in human resources, the most crucial asset, in various dimensions are known to achieve success. The attitudes of employees towards their organization directly affect the organization's performance. Therefore, identifying problems related to human resources within organizations and finding solutions to these problems is seen as a crucial factor in increasing efficiency in achieving organizational goals. In this context, human relations and employee relations are extremely important for both managers and organizational members. A working environment with complete trust within the organization should be established. An environment where the sense of justice is developed and ethical principles are observed also stands out in terms of trust and creates an atmosphere where employees are less likely to exhibit cynical behavior (Özler et al., 2010, 707).

Cynicism is defined by the Turkish Language Association (TDK) in its Turkish dictionary as: "The doctrine of Antisthenes, advocating that a person can achieve virtue and happiness without being attached to any values, by freeing oneself from all needs, cynicism" (TDK, 2022). Cynicism is the development of a negative attitude by an individual towards the community they are part of. This negative attitude of the individual results in a negative impact on the organization, neglect of organizational interests, and a tendency to adopt a critical and disdainful attitude towards the organization (Brandes, 1997, 30-32). Although cynicism is generally defined as a lack of trust in others, those who developed the cynicism movement have approached it from different perspectives, such as disappointment and distrust towards a community (Wanous, Reicher, and Austin, 2000).

### Organizational Cynicism

Achieving the organization's goals, uniting under common objectives, and maintaining systematic progress are crucial for its success. An organization can advance through mutual interests and exchanges between employers and employees. In this context, organizational members have expectations from their employers and the organizational structure. The concept of organizational cynicism arises when these expectations are not met. Organizational cynicism refers to the attitudes developed by organizational members towards the organization, institution, event, or individual. These attitudes are negative, resulting from lost hopes for justice and honesty within the organization (Nafei, 2013, 53). At its core, organizational cynicism involves individuals possessing negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors towards the organization, leading to a predominantly negative outlook over time (Dean et al., 1998, 345).

Organizational cynicism is also approached from various perspectives, such as organizational alienation, distrust in the organization, and negative organizational climate. Despite the longstanding history of cynicism philosophy, the term organizational cynicism has only recently begun to appear in the literature (Kalağan, 2009, 40-41). Although researchers define organizational cynicism differently, they converge on the notion that it encompasses

all negative attitudes developed by organizational members as a result of unmet expectations (Bateman, Sakano, and Fujita, 1992; Kanter, Mirvis, 1989).

Cynical individuals often use a unique form of humor to express their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors within the organization. They view humor as the most effective communication tool for reflecting their criticisms within the organization. Organizational cynicism leads to negative attitudes and a lack of motivation among other organizational members, adversely affecting organizational commitment (Abraham, 2000, 128-129). Individuals experiencing organizational cynicism tend to distrust the organizational leader and perceive them as incompetent (Dean et al., 1998, 345). To fully understand cynicism, it is essential to grasp its reflections within the organization and evaluate the situations it creates.

### **Causes of Cynicism**

Various studies have been conducted to identify the most common causes of organizational cynicism (Ferres and Connell, 2007; Cartwright and Holmes, 2006; Özgener et al., 2008). The primary cause of organizational cynicism is employees' unmet expectations. These expectations include unresolved injustices within the organization, violations of psychological contracts, neglect of ethical principles in favor of traditional values, dominant managerial attitudes, lack of employee benefits, and income inequality (Ferres and Connell, 2007, 67).

Psychological contract violations vary according to the values and ethical standards of society and are not universal. In this context, psychological contract violations have emerged as the leading cause of organizational cynicism in research (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006, 200-202):

- The occurrence of unethical behaviors within the organization,
- Imbalances in practices and assignments,
- Insufficient wage policies and disparities among organizational members,
- Weak social responsibilities,
- Weaknesses in communication among employees,
- Problems arising from the organizational climate,
- Conflicts caused by variability in roles and workload.

In educational organizations, situations such as the reflection of personal interests contrary to organizational goals, loss of trust in management among organizational members, biased favoritism, unfair attitudes, and deteriorating working conditions lead to organizational cynicism (Bashir and Nasir, 2013, 38).

### **Symptoms of Cynicism**

The characteristics of cynical attitudes in individuals are largely developed in a negative direction. In this context, the symptoms of cynicism are addressed in a study by Çetinkaya (2014) as follows:

- Cynical individuals see exploiting other members within the organization as a trait.
- Cynical individuals have a higher tendency to lie.
- Cynical individuals avoid showing natural behaviors.
- Cynical individuals strive to find different meanings behind the behaviors and words of other organizational members.
- Cynical individuals believe that people are untrustworthy.
- Cynical individuals exhibit inconsistent behaviors.
- Cynical individuals are convinced that there is no sincerity and honesty in the psychology of other people.
- Cynical individuals feel discomfort and shame towards society, the organization, and various communities.
- Cynical individuals exhibit a critical attitude, inclined to take out their anger and frustration.
- Cynical individuals tend to distrust the practices of their managers within organizations (Çetinkaya, 2014, 37).

### **Types of Cynicism**

The imbalance between the individual and the organization is crucial in the formation of cynicism. Regardless of an organization's goals, every organization establishes a system to achieve specific targets. There can be discrepancies between the expectations of individuals and what the organization offers them within this system. In such cases, organizational cynicism arises, subsequently affecting organizational commitment. For instance, when the material and moral benefits promised by the organization during the job interview are not provided after employment or over time, or when an individual realizes that the brand perception of the organization differs after joining, cynicism can develop (Polat and Meydan, 2010, 148). In this context, four different types of cynicism can be identified:

**Personality Cynicism:** Individuals hold negative thoughts and behaviors towards all people in society and the organization. They are distrustful and suspicious of others (Polat, 2014, 40).

**Employee Cynicism:** This type is related to the communication between the manager and the organizational member, and between the employee and the employer. It involves the loss of trust in the manager and a decrease in faith in the organization. It is a significant form of cynicism within organizations (Kabataş, 2010, 16-18).

**Professional Cynicism:** This type leads individuals to distance themselves from their work. Over time, individuals place obstacles in the way of their professional development. Professional cynicism also brings about insensitivity and burnout towards the profession (Kabataş, 2010, 16-18).

**Social/Societal Cynicism:** When the expectations between the individual and society are not aligned, the individual experiences a sense of victimization. This victimization results in the destruction of trust towards society and alienation from it (Polat, 2014, 39-41).

### **The Impact of Organizational Cynicism in University Education**

Organizational cynicism, characterized by negative attitudes and distrust towards an institution, has become increasingly prevalent in university education. This pervasive skepticism can significantly affect both the educational environment and the broader goals of higher education. Understanding its impact is crucial for educators, administrators, and policymakers aiming to foster a more positive and effective educational setting.

Firstly, organizational cynicism among faculty and staff can lead to decreased job satisfaction and commitment. When educators feel disillusioned by bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of support, or perceived inequities within the university, their motivation to engage with students and invest in their teaching roles diminishes. This detachment can result in lower teaching quality, as disheartened faculty members may not fully dedicate themselves to their instructional responsibilities. Consequently, students receive a subpar education, hindering their academic development and overall university experience. Additionally, students themselves are not immune to the effects of organizational cynicism. When they observe or experience cynicism among their professors and university staff, they are likely to develop similar attitudes. This skepticism can manifest in disengagement, decreased participation in campus activities, and a general disinterest in their studies. A cynical student body undermines the collaborative and vibrant academic community essential for intellectual growth and innovation. Moreover, pervasive cynicism can erode students' trust in the institution, leading to lower retention rates and a weakened sense of alumni loyalty.

The administrative functions of a university are also impacted by organizational cynicism. Cynical attitudes can foster a culture of resistance to change, making it challenging to implement necessary reforms or new initiatives. When faculty and staff view administrative decisions with suspicion, they are less likely to support policies, even those designed to improve the educational environment. This resistance can stall progress and maintain the status quo, preventing the institution from adapting to evolving educational demands and technological advancements. Furthermore, organizational cynicism can damage the university's reputation, affecting its ability to attract prospective students and faculty. A negative perception of the institution, whether communicated through word of mouth or online reviews, can deter talented individuals from associating with the university. This reputation risk extends beyond just enrollment numbers; it can impact funding opportunities, partnerships, and overall community support, which are vital for a university's growth and sustainability.

Addressing organizational cynicism requires a multifaceted approach. Transparent communication from university leadership is essential to build trust and demonstrate a commitment to addressing concerns. Providing professional development opportunities and recognizing the achievements of faculty and staff can also mitigate feelings of undervaluation. Encouraging a culture of collaboration and shared governance ensures that all stakeholders feel their voices are heard and respected, fostering a more positive and inclusive environment.

In conclusion, organizational cynicism poses a significant threat to the effectiveness and vitality of university education. Its impact on faculty, students, administration, and the institution's reputation underscores the need for proactive measures to cultivate a more optimistic and engaged academic community. By addressing the root causes of cynicism, universities can enhance their educational mission and create a more supportive and dynamic environment for all members.

The research aims to understand the perspectives on organizational cynicism of academics who have previously worked in Turkey and later in various regions of Europe and USA. Academics were asked to compare their experiences at universities in Turkey with those in their current positions abroad through various anecdotes.

The main research question is: "What are the views of academics working in their home country and abroad on organizational cynicism?" The sub-questions explored are: "What are the organizational cynicism situations

experienced by academics in their home country?", "What are the academic and organizational processes experienced by academics during the country change?", and "What are the organizational cynicism situations experienced by academics during their tenures in different countries?"

**Method**

The research method chosen for this study is a case study, which is one of the qualitative research methods. In qualitative research, techniques such as observation, document analysis, and interviews are used to collect data, either individually or in combination, to examine the subject in depth and to address events holistically through examples. The comprehensive use of these techniques is crucial for data collection in qualitative research processes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

The study group consists of academics who, after serving as university professors in Turkey for a certain period, continued their academic careers at universities in Europe and USA for various reasons. The limitation of the study group is that these academics must have worked for a minimum of five academic years both domestically and abroad. The academic specialties of the participants vary (Table 2.1). The demographic characteristics of the participants are provided in Table 2.1. To maintain confidentiality, the names of the countries or regions where the participants are currently working are not disclosed, nor are their specific fields of study. A total of 12 voluntary participants were reached for the research.

Table 2.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	<b>Age</b>	<b>Field Of Study</b>	<b>Region</b>
<b>K1</b>	33	Educational Sciences	Europe
<b>K2</b>	42	Medicine	Europe
<b>K3</b>	35	Computer Engineering	USA
<b>K4</b>	44	Sociology	Europe
<b>K5</b>	47	Psychology	Europe
<b>K6</b>	34	Medicine	USA
<b>K7</b>	36	Educational Sciences	Europe
<b>K8</b>	34	Engineering	USA
<b>K9</b>	37	Mathematics	Europe
<b>K10</b>	42	Mathematics	Europe
<b>K11</b>	40	History	USA
<b>K12</b>	39	Psychology	Europe

In the research, data was collected using a semi-structured interview form. Research questions were developed based on a literature review focused on organizational cynicism. These questions include comparisons of academics' awareness of organizational cynicism and their experiences of it domestically and internationally. Due to participants being in different countries, the interviews were conducted online and recorded via video. Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes, resulting in a total of 190 minutes of data. The collected data was analyzed through content analysis, interpreting codes and anecdotes within various themes to derive findings.

**Findings and Interpretations**

After transcribing the qualitative data, obtained codes and themes were analyzed under three main themes through content analysis. The findings derived from the content analysis were interpreted in an explanatory manner. Language editing was performed while remaining faithful to participants' statements in the anecdotes.

**3.1. Pre-Migration Period Organizational Cynicism**

Initially, academics were asked whether they knew the meaning of "organizational cynicism" in the study. A brief explanatory briefing was provided to those who had not previously heard of the concept or were unsure of its exact definition. The answers to this question are presented in Table 3.1. Following this, academics were asked about their direct encounters with "organizational cynicism" based on their understanding. The answers to this question are provided in Table 3.2.

Table 3.1. Do you know what organizational cynicism means?

Answer	Participant	f	%
Yes	K1, K4, K5, K7, K9, K10, K11, K12	8	66.6
No	K2, K3, K6, K8	4	33.3

Out of the 12 academics participating in the research, 8 (f: 8, %66.6) indicated that they knew the concept of organizational cynicism, while 4 (f: 4, %33.3) stated that they did not know the concept.

Table 3.2. Have you experienced organizational cynicism at the university where you worked in Turkey?

Answer	Participant	f	%
Yes	K1, K4, K5, K6, K7, K8, K9, K10, K11, K12	10	83.3
No	K2, K3	2	16.6

Out of the 12 academics participating in the study, 10 (f: 10, %83.3) reported experiencing organizational cynicism at their workplaces before their changes. Two academics (f: 2, %16.6) stated that they did not encounter organizational cynicism or similar situations at their universities. Participants were asked to provide narratives supporting their yes or no responses. Some notable anecdotes include:

*"I started my career as a teacher due to my field and later transitioned to academia. I always volunteered to take responsibilities both at the school where I taught and at the university where I worked as a research assistant. After a while, these voluntary situations turned into obligations for me. I was forced to do everything and was given tasks that I couldn't handle. I was compelled to do burdensome tasks that hindered my main job." (K1)*

*"It's very difficult for someone in our fields to find a position in our country. I had to work at a private university. I was required to teach many courses outside my field. I don't even want to think about the environment right now." (K4)*

*"I started as an assistant right after graduation, but it has become a tradition to overwhelm assistants and involve them in unnecessary tasks. I realized this wasn't the norm when I stepped out of it." (K6)*

*"While I could have earned very high salaries in the industry, I chose to pursue postgraduate education and work at the university because of my idealism and desire for an academic career. I experienced disappointment many times. Almost all of these disappointments were related to organizational leaders. I wasn't supported in terms of my professional development." (K8)*

*"I didn't receive any support during my adaptation period for my role; on the contrary, their behaviors and communications were always aimed at discouraging me. I still get angry when I think about it." (K10)*

*"I worked at a foundation university in Turkey. I am conscientious in my duties and enjoyed my work, but the most common issue I faced was that what the managers said did not match their actions. Because of this, I faced many upsetting incidents and was mobbed." (K12)*

*"After completing my doctorate at a private university, I found it very difficult to find a position. It started nicely and with dignity, but after a while, I found myself criticizing every practice. There was always something wrong and disturbing to me in my department, and it bothered me more every day." (K11)*

These anecdotes reveal that academics experience problems within the organization, and these problems are directly related to organizational leaders. The majority of academics provided anecdotes that could serve as examples of organizational cynicism.

### 3.2. Decision and Migration Process of Academics

Factors leading academics to work in other countries, their decision-making processes regarding migration, and the situations they experienced were explored under this theme by posing questions and collecting responses. The answers to the question posed to academics, "What were the reasons for your decision to work as an academic in a different country?" are provided in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Reasons for deciding to work as an academic in a different country

Code	Participant	Sample Expression	f	%
Experienced mobbing	K4, K12	"I experienced mobbing from my manager, and instead of leaving academia, I chose to leave."	2	16.6
Faced academic position issues	K4, K5, K11, K12	"I needed a connection to enter academic positions, and I faced issues with positions."	4	33.3
Pursued better opportunities	K2, K3, K7, K8	"I researched opportunities offered to academics and went for it."	4	33.3



<b>Moved to be a postdoctoral researcher</b>	K2, K9, K10	"I came to continue my academic career as a postdoctoral researcher. I can return after I finish."	3	25
<b>Chose for professional development</b>	K1, K6, K8	"I chose to reach companies where I can develop myself and establish university coordination."	3	25
<b>Viewed as an experience</b>	K5, K6	"I wanted to experience international life, and academia was the best way for me."	2	16.6

Under this theme, significant codes from the responses to the question, along with their frequencies and percentages of recurrence by associated expressions, were provided. This approach revealed that each participant had different reasons for continuing their academic careers abroad. Among the findings were issues related to participants' expectations not being met within their organizations and problems with the academic appointment process. Additionally, motivations such as support for professional development, desire for living and professional experiences in a different location, and gaining sectoral experience were influential factors in academics' decisions to work abroad.

Secondly, participants were asked the question "What kind of problems did you experience during the academic migration process?" The responses to this question are presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. What kind of problems did you experience during the academic migration process?

<b>Code</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Sample Expression</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Language problem</b>	K1, K4, K7, K11	"Foreign language proficiency in education faculties is very inadequate, which caused me a lot of problems in learning the language academically later on."	4	<b>33.3</b>
<b>Separation from family and social environment</b>	K6, K8	"I completed university and my post-university academic and professional career always in the city where my family and friends live. Therefore, this change of environment was very difficult for me."	2	<b>16.6</b>
<b>Being solely work-focused</b>	K5, K10, K11, K12	"Outside of working hours, there's no discussion or sharing about anything other than work. This aloofness is something I'm not accustomed to from my home country."	4	<b>33.3</b>
<b>Issues related to faculty positions</b>	K2, K6	"There are various procedures that need to be completed for our field, so I experienced a time of both financial and spiritual loss."	2	<b>16.6</b>
<b>Adjusting to a new culture</b>	K1, K4, K5, K7	"It took time for me to adapt to the structure, order, habits, and rules of society. I faced challenges during this process."	4	<b>33.3</b>
<b>Academic belonging issues</b>	K10, K11	"There were times when I experienced issues of belonging, even though I changed universities and environments. But now, after being here for a long time, I have somehow adapted."	2	<b>16.6</b>

The table presents significant codes from the responses to the question, along with the frequencies and percentages of repetition by associated expressions. These codes and anecdotes explain some prominent problems experienced by academics during their process of working in a different country. The issues encountered by academics during this process are expressed in quite general terms, without being overly personalized. These include processes of integrating into different cultures, adhering to local regulations, issues of belonging, and broadly defined faculty problems.

### 3.3. Organizational Cynicism in the Post-Migration Period

Attention was given to academic participants who had served both in Turkey and in a city in Europe or USA, based on the sample's characteristics. While the first two themes examined organizational cynicism, migration reasons, and processes, this theme focuses on instances of organizational cynicism experienced in the country where academic careers were pursued.

Within this theme, academics were asked, "Have you experienced organizational cynicism at the university where you worked abroad?" The findings are presented in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5. Have you experienced organizational cynicism at the university where you worked abroad?

Answer	Participant	f	%
Yes	K1, K5, K7, K8, K11	5	41.6
No	K2, K3, K4, K6, K9, K10, K12	7	58.3

The number of academics who have experienced organizational cynicism and those who have not during their tenure abroad (in Europe or USA) are very close in count, and the percentages are also similar. These findings are supported with anecdotes from academics who answered "Yes (f:5, %41.6)" to the question:

*"I had a lot of difficulties adapting to the rules within the organization, even for simple tasks like making photocopies, we need to ask for permission. I often tell my friends in Turkey about the negatives in the work environment here." (K1)*

*"I was trying to prove myself especially in the initial period in the institution, but after a while, no one sees anyone, so there was no need for me to prove myself. I felt very isolated during this process." (K5)*

*"Every place has its own problems. The problem here where I am now is the environment of ambitious people. Everyone is focused on making money, the ambition to turn more money into more money. In such a situation, even the smallest mistake becomes terrifyingly huge in people's eyes." (K8)*

*"My ideas and suggestions are not taken into consideration within the organization because I come from a different country." (K11)*

Similarly, anecdotes supporting the academics who answered "No (f:7, %58.3)" to the question are:

*"I work in a relaxed environment, everyone's views are taken in meetings and joint decisions are implemented." (K2)*

*"Since I come from a different country, they are particularly interested in my perspective and culture, and this interest makes me happy." (K3)*

*"I believe there is merit in our team, everyone is very competent and effective in their roles, especially we produce good teamwork and projects." (K6)*

*"The team accepted me, helped me adapt to my role. The career opportunities offered to me, professional supports are more valuable than financial income." (K10)*

*"I was provided with mentoring support. When I conveyed some of the issues I was complaining about to my mentor, he clarified every issue I saw as a problem with reasons." (K12)*

The results indicate that academics faced various adjustment problems within the organizations at their universities abroad. Academics who did not experience adjustment problems and integrated into the organizational culture expressed satisfaction with their positions.

### Conclusion

Cynicism affects not only social life but also organizational life, leading to the emergence of the concept of organizational cynicism. Studies on organizational cynicism began to develop in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Kalağan, 2009). This concept is significant in expressing employees' negative attitudes towards their organization or any of its components (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998). In this context, negative attitudes and behaviors such as anger, resentment, distrust, contempt, and belittlement towards the organization are often evaluated within the scope of cynicism (Dean et al., 1998). Organizational cynicism is based on the assumption that organizations lack principles such as truth, honesty, justice, fairness, and sincerity (Torun & Üçok, 2014). Believing that the organization lacks honesty leads employees to harbor negative feelings and makes them more prone to negative attitudes and behaviors (Naus, 2007).

Organizational cynicism has been previously defined as a combination of two components: (a) pessimism about the success of future organizational changes and (b) internal attributions such as viewing those responsible for past change failures as unmotivated, incompetent, or both. This definition particularly excludes situational attributions because organizational leaders must be perceived as responsible for change failures for cynicism to develop; if leaders are not blamed, the development of mistrust is less likely attributed to situational factors like bad luck. Previous studies on organizational cynicism have focused on investigating the logic of combining pessimism and

internal attributions into a single scale (Wanous et al., 1994). This was followed by a study examining how this criterion is associated with specific job-related attitudes and behaviors (Reichers et al., 1997).

The findings obtained from the content analysis of qualitative data in this study were obtained through anecdotes and codes under three themes. Answers were sought for relevant sub-problems. Examining the research data revealed that academics experience organizational cynicism more in their positions and within the higher education system in their own countries. Organizational problems such as management issues, staffing problems, and mobbing have driven academics to seek opportunities in different countries. Despite facing some problems framed within organizational cynicism, academics who secured positions abroad after extensive financial and spiritual efforts mostly expressed satisfaction with their new settings.

Some academics mentioned receiving mentoring support during the process and assistance from people who shared a common language helped ease their adjustment to the environment. This spiritual support facilitated academics' adaptation to the environment. Individuals experiencing organizational cynicism are supported by the literature in their intentions to leave the organization, institution, or environment (Chiaburu et al., 2013). However, no research has been found on the impact of mentoring support as a coping mechanism for organizational cynicism. Based on this finding, future research could expand in this framework.

The results indicate that some academics are dissatisfied with their affiliated organizations and criticize the functioning of the organization both domestically and internationally, developing a mocking attitude towards what the organization can achieve. Another result obtained is that the most important factor leading participants to organizational cynicism is a lack of trust in organizational management and the belief that justice cannot be achieved. Serious biases against justice emerged as a result of the research.

## Resources

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