



# Umbrella Summary

## Organizational Cynicism

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

### What is organizational cynicism?

Organizational cynicism is defined as “a negative attitude toward one's employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect” (Dean et al., 1998, p. 345). Measures of organizational cynicism include statements such as “I've pretty much given up trying to make suggestions for improvements around here” (Tesluk et al., 1990, p. 283) and “I believe that [the organization] says one thing and does another” (Brandes et al., 1999, as cited in Thundiyl et al., 2015, p. 431). A similar concept, organizational trust, is strongly related to organizational cynicism but has been found to be conceptually distinct. Thus, feelings of cynicism are not simply a lack of trust (Chiaburu et al., 2013).

### Why is organizational cynicism important?

Organizational cynicism has a strong negative correlation with job satisfaction and organizational commitment and a moderate, positive association with intent to quit. Staff with higher levels of organizational cynicism therefore have lower job satisfaction, lower organizational commitment, and slightly elevated intentions to quit. It has a weaker but negative association with job performance, such that higher organizational cynicism is associated with lower levels of job performance (Chiaburu et al., 2013).

### What contributes to organizational cynicism?

Work environment and individual dispositional differences are associated with organizational cynicism, but a causal relationship has not been established (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Work environments can be characterized positively by experiential factors such as organizational support or organizational fairness. They can also be characterized negatively via factors such as injustice, psychological contract violations, perceived organizational politics, or psychological strain (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Individual dispositional differences associated with organizational cynicism include positive or negative affect and trait cynicism. Positive affect is characterized as someone being alert, active and enthusiastic whereas negative affect is characterized by persistent anger, disgust, guilt, distress, and unpleasant engagement (Chiaburu et al., 2013). People who harbor a fundamental mistrust of others and believe people are fundamentally dishonest or self-serving exhibit trait cynicism (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Each of these dispositions can be characterized along a continuum ranging from low to high levels of the disposition.

Higher levels of negative affect and trait cynicism are associated with higher levels of organizational cynicism, while higher levels of positive affect are associated with lower levels of organizational cynicism. Still, aspects of one's work environment have a stronger relationship with organizational cynicism compared to its associations with individual dispositional differences. Perceptions of organizational support and organizational justice (whether distributive, procedural or interactional) have a negative relationship with organizational cynicism, such that positive perceptions of justice are associated with lower feelings of cynicism (Chiaburu et al., 2013).

## QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Organizational cynicism is strongly associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment, moderately associated with intent to quit, and weakly associated with job performance.
- ▶ Personal and work environment factors are associated with organizational cynicism.
- ▶ Organizational support, organizational fairness or justice, psychological contract violations, perceived organizational politics, or psychological strain are dimensions of a work environment that have an association with organizational cynicism.
- ▶ Personal traits, such as positive or negative affect, and trait cynicism have an association with organizational cynicism.
- ▶ Work environment has a stronger association with organizational cynicism than personal traits.

## References

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