The impact of personality traits on organizational cynicism in the education sector

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Abstract

Purpose – Today's organizations try to keep their employees loyalty but employees may still feel unsatisfied and adopt negative attitudes. Cynicism, as a negative attitude of employees toward their organization, leads to unwanted outputs such as lower performance or lower loyalties that can appear in every kind of sector. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to determine the effects of personality traits on organizational cynicism in the education sector.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used the survey method to collect data and survey forms were distributed to teachers from various private schools in Istanbul, Turkey. With the e-mail survey method, the authors received 254 healthy survey forms from teachers. For personality traits, the five-factor model of personality traits that was developed by McCrae and Costa (1987) was preferred and the organizational cynicism model was evaluated with three basic dimensions as based on Brandes's (1997) model.

Findings – Based on data from 254 teachers of various private schools in Istanbul, interrelationships amongst personality traits and organizational cynicism were tested. On the basis of the partial least-squares method, the authors found that agreeableness had a negative effect on cognitive cynicism and affective cynicism, conscientiousness had a negative effect on cognitive cynicism and affective cynicism, neuroticism had a negative effect on cognitive cynicism and behavior cynicism, and openness to experience had a positive effect on cognitive cynicism and affective cynicism. Thus, it can be said that personality traits of teachers had a significant effect on organizational cynicism as a result of this study.

Research limitations/implications – This study used two main scales: the scale of McCrae and Costa (1987) for personality traits and the scale of Brandes (1997) for organizational cynicism. The authors adapted both the scales for Turkish culture and the education sector that the results can be considered valid for only this study.

Originality/value – This study shows a significant effect of personality traits on cynicism in the education sector and thus can be considered to be useful for future studies.

Keywords Personality, Personality traits, Organizational cynicism, Cynicism, Education sector

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Organizations try to sustain their lives with adaptation for new developments and changes. Accordingly, organizations should design their organizational structure carefully to reach their main goal and aim. This is why organizations cannot be viewed as without employees and so employees who are a basic part of organizations or businesses should be a focus issue in the organization. If organizations want to improve organizational performance by achieving sustainable competitive advantage, it is necessary to improve employees' work conditions, job performance or job satisfaction, etc. Every employee has some expectations of the job and they will maintain successful performance and have positive attitudes of the business as long as they are satisfied (Nelson and Quick, 2001). When there is disappointment, employees have negative attitudes (Qian, 2007) and they begin to leave the organization as soon as possible (Kirjonen and Hanninen, 1984). With increasing researches on organizational behavior such as job satisfaction, employee relations, job change, organizational commitment, etc., the term cynicism has been receiving attention recently (Bommer *et al.*, 2005). The concept of cynicism is similar to concepts such as skepticism,

distrust, disbelief and pessimism and it is also used to describe people who are hard to please and are faultfinders (Erdost *et al.*, 2007; Özler and Atalay, 2011; Karacaoğlu and İnce, 2012). Especially, it can be said that disappointment reflects cynicism in general because cynicism occurs when employees' expectations such as justice, honesty, and sincerity are not met (Brandes *et al.*, 1999). Cynicism includes a general attitude of having negative feelings toward social groups or organizations (Andersson, 1996, p. 154). Abraham (2000) defines organizational cynicism as a kind of belief that occurs when "one organization lost its honesty." This loss can result with a decrease in the businesses' image and prestige. According to Brandes *et al.* (1999), cynicism has three basic dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral cynicism. These dimensions are explained below:

- Cognitive cynicism: the first dimension of cynicism is a belief and anger that arises from negative feelings of being underestimated and criticized. In this approach, employees have a belief that the organization betrays them (Brandes, 1997; Özler and Atalay, 2011; Dean *et al.*, 1998).

- Affective cynicism: the negative attitude leads to negative emotional reflections (Dean *et al.*, 1998) including strong feelings such as anger and shame (Abraham, 2000; Brandes, 1997; Özler and Atalay, 2011; Dean *et al.*, 1998).

- Behavioral cynicism: the negative attitude leads the employees to provide negative information about organizations to the outsiders. For instance, they complain about or criticize their organizations (Dean *et al.*, 1998). There are strong criticisms, ironic humors, and pessimistic predictions about organizations in general (Özler and Atalay, 2011).

There are many determinants of organizational cynicism; some are individual, while some are organizational. The most significant ones among the many are wrong management task (Wanous *et al.*, 1994), lack of organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Nafei, 2013), low payment, low organizational performance, high dismissal (Andersson and Bateman, 1997), high role conflict (Naus *et al.*, 2007), organizational injustice (Kutanis and Çetinel, 2009), psychological agreement invasion (Johnson and O'leary-Kelly, 2003; Aydin Tükeltürk *et al.*, 2013), mistrust (Özler and Atalay, 2011), and low organizational support (Kasalak and Aksu, 2014). Other studies have shown that organizational cynicism was related to experiences in the organizations (Wanous *et al.*, 1994; Nafei, 2013; Andersson and Bateman, 1997; Naus *et al.*, 2007; Kutanis and Çetinel, 2009; Johnson and O'leary-Kelly, 2003; Aydin Tükeltürk *et al.*, 2013; Özler and Atalay, 2011; Kasalak and Aksu, 2014). In addition to these organizational factors and organizational experiences, personality is believed to be related with organizational cynicism. As people have different emotions, different attitudes, and so different behaviors in every area of human life (Eren, 1984), the reasons for these differences are mostly related to personalities. Personality presents a significant set of consistent behaviors and it is observable in any case and any time. For example, if a person is an extrovert today, we can expect him/her to be an extrovert tomorrow (Burger, 2006, p. 220). Many researchers from a variety of disciplines such as organizational behavior, marketing, psychology, and sociology have attempted to understand and analyze the concept of personality and personality traits (Aytaç, 2001). Some researches define personality as a set of a person's qualifications; on the other hand, others emphasize the reflection for various situations (Kolasa, 1969, p. 278). Personality is an important factor that influences every kind of attitudes and behaviors in social life. Accordingly, personality traits have been investigated in various areas of organizational behavior. For example, some researchers found that personality had a significant relationship with organizational citizenship behavior (Mount *et al.*, 1998; Borman *et al.*, 2001; Witt *et al.*, 2002; Tan and Tan, 2008; Singh and Singh, 2009; Mahdiuon *et al.*, 2010; Yetim and Ceylan, 2011; Purba *et al.*, 2015; Mushraf *et al.*, 2015). There have been proofs for a relationship between personality and

organizational commitment in the literature that personality traits have been used to understand the degree of organizational commitment (Erdheim *et al.*, 2006; Kumar and Bakhshi, 2010; Panaccio and Vandenberghe, 2012; Spagnoli and Caetano, 2012; Syed *et al.*, 2015). Recently, some researchers investigated personality traits and organizational cynicism or burnout to understand employees' behavior in various types of organizations (Guastelloa *et al.*, 1992; Allen and Mellor, 2002; Bakker *et al.*, 2006; Kim *et al.*, 2007; Alarcon *et al.*, 2009; Morgan and De Bruin, 2010; Özler and Atalay, 2011). Especially, cynicism and organizational cynicism behavior are mostly investigated in the education sector that there are some cases that have investigated employees' perception of cynicism in the education sector. James (2005) studied the organizational cynicism behavior of employees in the education sector and he found some relationships between job strain, organizational citizenship behavior, workplace deviance, and job performance. Kalağan and Aksu (2010) investigated organizational cynicism behavior of research assistants and they found that demographics of research assistants influences the degree of organizational cynicism. Helvacı and Çetin (2012) studied organizational cynicism behavior of teachers and found that years of experience had a significant effect on the degree of organizational cynicism. Karadağ *et al.* (2014) found that organizational cynicism could affect school culture and academic achievement. Akın (2015) found that there was a significant relationship between organizational cynicism and trust factor in the educations sector. In this context, this study investigated whether personality traits had a significant effect on organizational cynicism in the education sector. Accordingly, it is considered to be useful for the related literature with the results of this paper.

2. Research methodology

This study investigated the impact of personality traits of employees and organizational cynicism in the education sector. We used the survey method to collect data from teachers in Istanbul, Turkey; thus, survey forms were sent to them via e-mail. In total, we received 254 healthy survey forms from returned e-mails. In survey forms, there were three basic parts: demographics, personality traits, and organizational cynicism dimensions. To determine personality traits of teachers, we used the five-factor personality scale of McCrae and Costa (1987) and the organizational cynicism was measured using the scale of Brandes (1997). In the personality traits scale, there were five basic factors with 25 items (statements) which were adapted in Turkish by Somer *et al.* (2004) and an organizational cynicism scale that included three basic factors with 13 items (statements) in the survey form. Every item of the scales was evaluated via a five-item Likert scale (1: absolutely disagree; 5: absolutely agree).

In the organizational cynicism scale, cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions were investigated based on Brandes's (1997) original scale and then we adapted these dimensions with sub-variables for the education sector in Turkey. According to prior researches, we determined dimensions of organizational cynicism as follows:

- Cognitive cynicism: this dimension indicates that employees are disbelief for the organization in general (Brandes, 1997; Dean *et al.*, 1998; Abraham, 2000). Seven statements were used to determine belief and thoughts about school as negative and skeptic.

- Affective cynicism: this dimension dimension is related to employees' negative such as anger, exasperation, or anxiety (Brandes, 1997; Dean *et al.*, 1998). Four statements express teachers' angry emotions about their school as a negative attitude.

- Behavioral cynicism: in this dimension, there is a focus on negative behaviors that employees show, resulting in negative attitudes for organization. Thus, employees

mostly complain about their organization with negative attitudes (Brandes, 1997; Dean *et al.*, 1998). Four statements are used to determine the dimension of behavioral cynicism in the scale and critics and complaints were expressed here.

For personality traits, the five-factor personality scale of McCrae and Costa (1987) was preferred in this study. We included personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience in the scale. Prior studies guided this study for dimensions of personality traits in organizational behavior and we have explained every dimension follows:

- Extraversion: this personality trait expresses people who are mostly social, positive, and ambitious, their mental activities are mostly extraversion and they are mostly accessible (Myers and Myers, 1997). Extraversion can be evaluated by certain specific traits such as being active and sociable in general (Barrick and Mount, 1991). Extraversion trait was found to be a significant factor in some cases of organizational behavior studies. For example, Erdheim *et al.* (2006) found that extraversion had a correlation with organizational commitment. Also, some studies showed that there was a negative relationship between extraversion and job burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly, it can be stated that there will be a weak or no relationship between organizational cynicism and extraversion. We will test *H1-H3* to understand whether there was a significant effect of extraversion trait on organizational cynicism in this study.

- Agreeableness: this personality trait expresses positive traits such as trust, agreeableness and compatibility (McCrae and Costa, 1986) generally and these people show cooperative behavior (Barrick and Mount, 1991) in business life. According to the wellness degree of social environment of work, agreeable people can be expected to show less burnout behavior (Alarcon *et al.*, 2009). *H4-H6* will be tested to find out whether agreeableness had a significant effect on organizational cynicism in this study.

- Conscientiousness: these kinds of people are generally organized, responsible, and careful (Barrick and Mount, 1991) and they are expected to be successful and skilled (McCrae and Costa, 1986) in a business life. Accordingly, conscientiousness has been found to be related to job performance and also some studies showed that there was a significant relationship between organizational commitment (Bakker *et al.*, 2006) and conscientiousness (Watrous and Bergman, 2004). On the other hand, job burnout behavior has a weak or no relationship with the conscientiousness trait in general that it is expected that the conscientiousness trait had a weak or no effect on organizational cynicism and *H7-H9* will be tested.

- Neuroticism: this type can be examined with traits such as introversion, anxiety, and lack of confident (Costa and McCrae, 1995). Introverted people's behaviors are mostly different from those of extroverted people that some studies found out that introvert people were more likely to develop job burnout behavior (Bakker *et al.*, 2006). Neurotic people have more negative emotions than others in business life (Erdheim *et al.*, 2006). At this point, we will expect to find out that neuroticism had a significant effect on organizational cynicism and *H10-H13* will be tested.

- Openness to experience: these people who are mostly open-wided, changeable and innovative are known to be open to experiences (Costa and McCrae, 1995). *H13-H15* will be tested in this study to observe whether the openness to experience trait had a significant effect on organizational cynicism.

In Figure 1, the research model is presented and the below hypotheses were tested according
to the model:

H1. Extraversion has a significant effect on cognitive cynicism.

H2. Extraversion has a significant effect on affective cynicism.

H3. Extraversion has a significant effect on behavioral cynicism.

H4. Agreeableness has a significant effect on cognitive cynicism.

H5. Agreeableness has a significant effect on affective cynicism.

H6. Agreeableness has a significant effect on behavioral cynicism.

H7. Conscientiousness has a significant effect on cognitive cynicism.

H8. Conscientiousness has a significant effect on affective cynicism.

H9. Conscientiousness has a significant effect on behavioral cynicism.

H10. Neuroticism has a significant effect on cognitive cynicism.

H11. Neuroticism has a significant effect on affective cynicism.

H12. Neuroticism has a significant effect on behavioral cynicism.

H13. Openness to experience has a significant effect on cognitive cynicism.

H14. Openness to experience has a significant effect on affective cynicism.

H15. Openness to experience has a significant effect on behavioral cynicism.

3. Analyses and results
We analyzed the variables and the model using SEM and partial least squares (PLS Graph 3.0,
Chin, 2001). In Table I, the demographics of participants (teachers) are presented.

Table I shows information on the demographics of participants responding to the
questionnaire. Accordingly, 70 percent of participants were female and 30 percent of
participants were male; 64 percent of participants were between 26 and 35 years of age;
51 percent of participants were married; 92 percent of teachers were university graduates;
46 percent of participants had been working in this school between one and five years; and
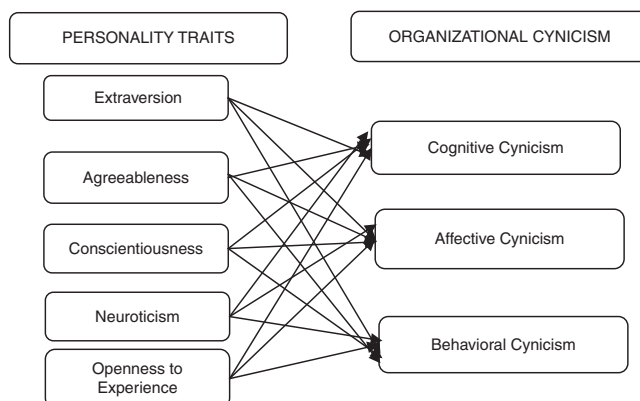36 percent of participants had been working in the school between one and five years.

Figure 1.
Research model

Variables	Frequency	%
Age		
25 years old and younger	38	0.15
26-35	168	0.66
36-45	30	0.12
46-55	15	0.06
56 years old and older	3	0.01
Gender		
Female	177	0.70
Male	77	0.30
Marital status		
Single	121	0.48
Married	129	0.51
Divorced	4	0.01
Education		
University	234	0.92
Master	20	0.08
Total working time in this school		
Less than 1 year	97	0.38
1-5	117	0.46
6-10	27	0.11
11 years and over	13	0.05
The total working time		
Less than 1 year	29	0.11
1-5	90	0.36
6-10	79	0.31
11-20	44	0.17
20 years and over	12	0.05
Total	254	100.0

Table I.
Demographics of
the participants

In this study, we evaluated reliability by means of composite scale reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). For all measures, PLS-based CR was well above the cut-off value of 0.70 and AVE exceeded the 0.50 cut-off value (conscientiousness AVE was 0.493 and this value can be accepted for measurement) (see Table II).

In the personality traits scale, Q2, Q6, Q8, Q9, Q15, Q19, Q24, and Q25 items were not included because these variables did not match with the model. In addition, the results of personality traits and organizational cynicism's confirmatory factor analysis are presented in Tables III and IV. In Table III, the results of factor analysis of personality traits are presented.

Variables	CR	AVE
Extraversion	0.816	0.530
Agreeableness	0.702	0.570
Conscientiousness	0.792	0.493
Neuroticism	0.815	0.528
Openness to experience	0.750	0.526
Cognitive cynicism	0.917	0.689
Affective cynicism	0.931	0.772
Behavioral cynicism	0.807	0.517

Table II.
The results
of reliability

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Extraversion					
Q1: I see myself as a talkative, cheerful, lively, sociable person and as a person who likes to be in the community	0.779				
Q3: I see myself as an enterprising person	0.736				
Q4: I see myself as a social, comfortable person and as a person who is not bothered by attracting attention	0.554				
Q5: I see myself as a shy, quiet, distance, solitude-loving, individualistic person and as a person who likes being alone	0.815				
Agreeableness					
Q7: I see myself as a person open to criticism		0.456			
Q10: I see myself as a stubborn, vindictive, argumentative person		0.966			
Conscientiousness					
Q11: I see myself as a tidy, careful, meticulous person			0.566		
Q12: I see myself as a responsible and reliable person			0.616		
Q13: I see myself as a motivated person			0.812		
Q14: I see myself as a person that cautious and connected with the rules			0.782		
Neuroticism					
Q16: I see myself as worried, tense, and anxious and a person who needs the approval of others				0.799	
Q17: I see myself as an unstable, insecure, resentful person				0.800	
Q18: I see myself as a person who is not satisfied with me				0.603	
Q20: I see myself as a person who can be patient, even in the most difficult situations				0.684	
Openness to experience					
Q21: I see myself as an analytical thinking, researching person					0.368
Q22: I see myself as a person who loves the changes, open to different ideas, and who is free-thinking					0.849
Q23: I see myself as an intelligent person					0.851
Variance exp. %	14.405	12.818	12.296	10.856	8.178
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.791				
Bartlett's test of sphericity approx. χ^2	1,041,268				
df	136				
Sig.	0.000				

Table III.
Factor loadings of
personality traits

As expected, we obtained five basic factors of "Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience" that included 17 variables. The results of factor analysis of organizational cynicism are presented in Table IV. Three basic factors of "Cognitive, Affective and Behavioral" cynicism were determined.

The correlation between factors is presented in Table V; this result supported the study's validity and reliability.

We used PLS path modeling which allows for explicit estimation of latent variable scores to estimate the main effects in our model (see Figure 1). We used PLS Graph 3.0 and the bootstrapping resampling method to test their statistical significance. T-statistics were calculated for all coefficients, based on their stability across the subsamples, indicating which links were statistically significant. With regard to antecedents, our findings showed that our hypotheses were largely confirmed. We found that extraversion was not associated with the dynamics of cognitive cynicism, affective cynicism, and behavioral cynicism. In this context, *H1-H3* were not supported. Agreeableness had a negative effect on the dynamics of cognitive cynicism ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.10$) and affective cynicism

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Cognitive cynicism			
Q26: I believe that my school says one thing and does another	0.836		
Q27: My school's policies, goals, and practices seem to have little in common	0.821		
Q28: If an application was said to be done in my school, I had be more sceptical whether it would happen or not	0.871		
Q29: my school expects one thing of its employees, but rewards another	0.816		
Q30: in my school I see very little resemblance between the events that are going to be done and the events which are done	0.807		
Affective cynicism			
Q31: when I think about my school, I get angry		0.885	
Q32: when I think about my school, I get furious		0.911	
Q33: when I think about my school, I experience tension		0.894	
Q34: when I think about my school, I feel a sense of anxiety		0.823	
Behavioral cynicism			
Q35: I complain about the things that happened in my school to my friends outside the school			0.811
Q36: we look at each other in a meaningful way with my colleagues when my school and its employees are mentioned			0.748
Q37: I talk with others about how work is being carried out in the school			0.541
Q38: I criticize the practices and policies of my school to people outside the school			0.746
Variance exp. %	27.212	25.951	15.141
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.921		
Bartlett's test of sphericity approx. χ^2	1,829,074		
df	78		
Sig.	0.000		

Table IV.
Factor loadings of organizational cynicism

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Extraversion	–							
Agreeableness	0.186**	–						
Conscientiousness	0.288**	0.133*	–					
Neuroticism	0.288**	0.319**	0.274**	–				
Openness to experience	0.343**	0.204**	0.389**	0.299**	–			
Cognitive cynicism	0.018	−0.130*	−0.111	−0.155*	0.062	–		
Affective cynicism	−0.020	−0.152*	−0.086	−0.142*	0.076	0.695**	–	
Behavioral cynicism	0.080	−0.084	−0.001	−0.129*	0.079	0.501**	0.483**	–
Mean	3.8081	3.7402	4.0541	3.8356	3.9987	2.8134	2.2598	3.1604
SD	0.7976	0.7785	0.6041	0.6996	0.5924	0.9257	0.9632	0.8222

Note: *,**Correlations are significant at 0.01 and 0.05 level (two-tailed), respectively

Table V.
Means, standard deviations, and partial correlations

($\beta = -0.17$, $p < 0.01$), but agreeableness was not associated with the dynamics of behavioral cynicism. In this context, *H4* and *H5* were supported, but *H6* was not supported. Conscientiousness had a negative effect dynamics of cognitive cynicism ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.10$) and affective cynicism ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.01$), but conscientiousness was not associated with the dynamics of behavioral cynicism. In this context, *H7* and *H8* were supported, but *H9* was not supported. Neuroticism had a negative effect on the dynamics of cognitive cynicism ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.10$) and behavioral cynicism ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.10$), but neuroticism was not associated with the dynamics of affective cynicism. In this context, *H10* and *H12* were supported, while *H11* was not supported. Openness to experience had a

positive effect dynamics of cognitive ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.10$) and affective cynicism ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.10$), but openness to experience was not associated with the dynamics of behavioral cynicism. In this context, *H13* and *H14* were supported; however, *H15* was not supported. Finally, the antecedent variables, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, the model presented, explained 7.9 percent of variance ($R^2 = 0.079$) in cognitive cynicism, 8.4 percent of variance ($R^2 = 0.084$) in affective cynicism and 6.4 percent of variance ($R^2 = 0.064$) in behavior cynicism.

4. Conclusion
The findings of this study demonstrate that scales which are developed in Western countries are appropriate for an emerging economy and Eastern country such as Turkey. In addition, we found out that teachers' characteristics were highlighting a responsible personality while demonstrating less agreeableness. In organizational cynicism dimensions, behavioral cynicism dimension had the highest value, while affective cynicism had the lowest one. This result was consistent with the extant literature. Considering the interrelation, this study provides no empirical evidence in support of the relationship between extraversion and organizational cynicism. Agreeableness and conscientiousness are found to have negative effects on cognitive and affective cynicism while it is only neuroticism that is negatively associated with behavioral cynicism. On the other hand, openness to new experience strengthens teachers' cognitive and affective cynicism attitudes. As open-minded people are the ones with artistic skills and high perception power, their expectations may be harder to meet than the others. Thus, they are more likely to develop cognitive and affective cynicism attitudes. Even though the findings of this study contribute to the organizational behavior literature, several limitations to the study results deserve commentary. First, the results reported here are from a local area in Istanbul, Turkey; results may differ for employees located in different areas who operate in different cultural, environmental, and political conditions. Second, our sampling is based on teachers of a private school chain. Results may differ for employees of other industries, even for teachers of public schools. Despite these limitations, this study provides important implications from theoretical and practical perspectives. This study is one of the very few that reveals the link between personality traits and organizational cynicism in the education sector.

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