

Organizational Cynicism and Counterproductive Work Behaviors: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to test the relationship between the organizational cynicism (OC) of the employees and the Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB) exhibited by employees at work. This study was conducted on a stratified random sample consisting of (327) employees of Asyut University in the Arab Republic of Egypt. The data collected by the questionnaire prepared based on the organizational cynicism scale of Brandes, et al (1999) and the counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) scale of Fox (2001).The study found that the organizational cynicism (OC) was positively correlated with the Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB), where the significant correlation of the Behavioral dimension was followed by Affective dimension. However, the third dimension of organizational cynicism (belief dimension) has no relationship with the counterproductive behaviors at work. Based on these findings, the study reached some concluding remarks concerning organizational cynicism and counterproductive behaviors.

Keywords: Organizational Cynicism, Counterproductive Work Behaviors, Assiut University, Egypt

1. Introduction

Studies on employees' behavior have taken considerable part of managerial literature because employees represent the core element in organizations. Researchers continued their work to explore employees' behaviors that might affect the work of organizations and efforts to achieve organizational goals. Employees' behaviors can be classified into those that benefit the organization and those that harm it. The former contributes positively towards organizational performance; whereas, the latter is detrimental to the organizations (Spector & Fox, 2002). These negative behaviors (theft, valiance, mobbing etc.) are labeled differently by different researchers, but they are all relate to what we call counterproductive work behaviors (Anjum & Parvez, 2013). These negative behaviors affect both organizations and individuals (Hassanein, 2011 a: 13).

The Egyptian context studies showed that counterproductive behaviors are attributed to cynicism and these behaviors were ranging from 3.4 to 3.6 (out of 5 points scale) (Hassanein, 2011, 2013).

Organizational cynicism studies in Egypt are novel and in its rudimentary stages (Nafie & Kaifi, 2013:121). Also, many of the organizational cynicism studies have been conducted in the developed countries, while there are very limited discussion on this issue in other developing countries (Bashir, Nasir, Saeed & Ahmed, 2011). This means that more research is needed to understand organizational cynicism and its consequences in the Egyptian context. Most of the prior literature in organizational cynicism has been devoted towards understanding of its impact on organizational change efforts (e.g., Brooks & Vance, 1991; Vance, Brooks, & Tesluk, 1995; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000; Stanley, Mayer & Topolnytsky, 2005; Williams, Pillai, Deptula & Lowe, 2012). It is very important for both academician and practitioners to investigate the impact of organizational cynicism on employees' attitudes and behaviors (Shaharruddin & Ahmed, 2015).

On the other hand, the study of counterproductive work behaviors has recently gained increasing attention among researchers because of the diffusion of these behaviors at the workplace as well as the enormous costs associated with the practice of these behaviors (Fox, 2001; Atwi, 2011).

In this study we will examine the relationship between organizational cynicism and counterproductive work behaviors among Assiut University employees. In Assiut University, statistics obtained from the legal affairs department showed that counterproductive work behaviors are frequent as shown on the table below:

Table (1) Statistics of counterproductive and cynicism behaviors among Assiut University employees

Behaviors	2013	%	2014	%	2015	%	2016	%	2017	%	Total	%
Absenteeism	405	42	539	46.6	715	61.6	575	59.2	325	37.7	2559	50
Theft	20	2.1	30	2.6	25	2.2	15	1.5	13	1.5	103	2
Attacking Colleague	60	6	85	7.3	50	4.3	-	-	20	2.3	215	4.2
Leave work	200	20.8	250	21.7	125	10.8	200	20.6	100	11.6	875	17
Criticism of work policies	3	0.5	1	0.8	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	0.8
not following Instructions	125	13	72	6	45	3.9	41	4.2	230	26.6	513	10
Others	150	15.6	175	15	200	17.2	140	14.5	177	20.4	842	16
Total	963	100	1152	100	1160	100	971	100	865	100	5111	100

Source: Legal Affairs Department Statistics, Assiut University (2013-2017).

The results shown above indicate that negative behaviors are frequently happened within this period (2013-2017) with total of 5111 cases. Absenteeism is the most frequent behavior followed by leaving work and other negative behaviors (such as destroying equipment, laxity and slow progress in the tasks, insulting and criticizing coworkers, ridiculing the administration and colleagues, threat, and verbal abuse).

Based on the previous studies of the Egyptian context and statistics shown in the above noted table, the researchers are motivated to examine the relationship between the organizational cynicism and counterproductive behaviors at Assiut University.

2. Prior literature

2.1 Organizational Cynicism (OC)

Based on the Psychological Contract Theory (Argyris, 1960), organizational cynicism can be attributed to the violation of the psychological contract between the organization and the employee. This case may happen when the organization does not fulfill its promises to the employees. This in turn may depress the employees and result in cynicism behaviors (Bashir, 2011:19).

Organizational cynicism can be attributed to the expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). This theory indicates that work attitudes are results of expectations. So, the researchers attributed organizational cynicism to the negative expectations of employees that resulted from comparing employees' inputs to their outputs (James, 2005: 11).

On the other hand, organizational cynicism may be happened as a result of work events. That may affect the employee emotional tendencies and in turn may affect his/her work attitudes (Brown & Cregan 2008: 669).

Organizational cynicism has its effects on both individuals and organizations. The cynical employee is prone to anger, pain, hatred, lack of trust in others, disappointment, frustration, suspicion, indifference, alienation, stress and exhaustion, burning, and other mental and physical illness (Proefschrift,2007; Naus, Iterson, and Roe 2007; Brown, and Cregan, 2008; Bashir,2011; Stavrova,2015).

In organizations, cynicism leads to lower morale and productivity, increasing absenteeism rates, conflict, counterproductive behaviors and intentions to quit, the lack of access to human capital, and the exchange of caution among workers (Stanley, et al, 2005; ; Proefschrift,2007; Rubin et al.,2009; Nair and Kamalanabhan, 2010; Bashir,2011; Chiaburu et al.,2013; Çınara , Karcıoğlu , and Aslan and Şerife,2014).

Despite the negative effects of organizational cynicism, there are researchers (Dean, Brandes,, and Dharwadkar, 1998; Chiaburu et al., 2013) who stated that organizational cynicism has other positive effects such as: It represents the voice of conscience within the organization; The cynicism helps employees to innovate; Organizational cynicism may help improve performance, especially when there is a need to challenge and change ineffective procedures.

Andersson, (1996) has dealt with the concept of organizational cynicism as a unidimensional variable, the current trend highlights organizational cynicism as a three-dimensional concept (e.g., Dean et al., 1998; Brandes et al., 1999; Proefschrift, 2007, Atwi, 2012) as follows:

- Cognitive dimension: The employee's belief that principles such as justice, credibility and sincerity sacrificed to achieve the interests of the organization (Atawi, 2012: 20).
- Affective dimension: represents the emotional and sentimental responses to the state of awareness of the dishonesty and credibility of the actions and practices of the organization (Ince and Turan, 2011: 106).
- Behavioral dimension: represents the negative behavior of employees towards the organization, which degrades the value and importance of the organization (Dean et al., 1998).

In spite of the importance of studying cynicism behaviors at work, this topic has not been fully examined (Chiaburu, et al, 2013; Bashir, 2011) especially in the Arab context (Hassan, 2015:494).

2.2 Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB):

Counterproductive work behavior is defined by Khokhar and Ziaur-Rehman (2017: 327) "as a voluntary behavior that violates Organization standards and threatens the welfare of members or the organization or both".

There are many reasons why organizations are interested in these behaviors, for example: the prevalence of these behaviors in the workplace, the perpetrators of these behaviors are at all levels in the organization, the multiple forms of these behaviors, many of which have not yet been discovered, and the enormous costs that may result from \$ 400 billion annually (Ali, 2012, Fine et al., 2010).

Counterproductive work behaviors can be attributed to individuals and organizational factors, which can be classified as follows (James, 2005, Bashir, 2011, Kanten, 2013):

- Attitudes and perceptions of employees, including: sense of injustice and inequality, feeling of social isolation or contempt, humiliation and disrespect, the sense of breach of psychological contract, the lack of awareness of organizational support, and negative attitudes of employees toward the organizational policies.
- Contingent and organizational factors, such as: work pressure, leadership style, excessive control, lack of policies to deter these behaviors, employee knowledge of the organization's rules and standards, type and characteristics of work, organizational climate and organizational jargon.

Robinson's (1995) classification of the dimensions of the counterproductive work behaviors is one of the most important classifications on which most studies have been based (e.g. Goh, 2007; Shahzad, 2012; Kanten, 2013, Atwi, 2011). He classified these behaviors into two dimensions:

- The first dimension: the counterproductive work behaviors that are directed to individuals within the organization; and start from the simple "like spreading rumors" and reach the serious "threats and physical abuse" (eg, Bashir, 2011; Ahmed, et al, 2013; Kanten, 2013).
- The second dimension: the counterproductive work behaviors which are directed to the organization, and start from the simple form that causes the production process to slow down and impede the production process such as delay to reach the serious form that harms the property of the organization, such as the theft of the organization (Bashir, 2011). ; Shahzad, 2012; Ahmed, Kiyani, and Hashmi, 2013; Kanten, 2013).

Counterproductive work behaviors have their effects on both individuals and organizations (Bashir, Nasir, Qayyum. Bashir, 2012):

- Effects on individuals: Individuals working in public organizations suffer from many negative outcomes, especially those who show these behaviors, such as: low morale, increased feeling: frustration and aggression, tension, depression and anxiety, low self-esteem and self-confidence, and job dissatisfaction, sometimes extending to include physical reactions and symptoms.
- The organization may suffer from a range of negative outcomes due to the presence of such behaviors, such as: poor quality of work, increased insurance premiums, high absenteeism and turnover rates, increased desire to leave work, lower job performance rates, low productivity, and ultimately lead to organizational failure.

Despite the consensus of the researchers on the existence of negative outputs of counterproductive work behaviors, but this did not prevent the emergence of a contrary opinion advocating the existence of positive outcomes of these behaviors, arguing that employees may participate in these behaviors in order to attract the attention of those who have the decision-making power of organizations, Example: when they find a conflict between the interests of management with the objectives of the organization, or perhaps to detect the imbalances in the organization. From this point of view, these employees can be seen as having violated regulations but are involved in the public interest of the organization (Galperin, 2002).

2.3 The relationship between organizational cynicism and counterproductive work behaviors:

James, (2005); Bashir, (2011); and Chiaburu et al., (2013) indicate that organizational cynicism has many negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes on employees including counterproductive work behaviors. In this context, both organizational cynicism and counterproductive work behaviors are negative in nature. The organizational cynicism is a negative attitude and the counterproductive work behaviors is a negative behavior that attempts to undermine the organization; and, in relation to behavior, the negative attitude is usually followed by negative behavior (Bashir, 2011; Ahmed, et al 2013). Since organizational cynicism is a negative attitude, it can be linked to the workplace counterproductive behavior. The previous studies (e.g. Stavrova, 2015) proved the existence of a positive relationship between the organizational cynicism and the counterproductive work behaviors, so the existence of organizational cynicism may lead to increased repetition of the counterproductive work behaviors.

Based on the prior literature, the main question of this study is to what extent the organizational cynicism contributes to the counterproductive work behaviors? Are the organizational cynicism dimensions (cognitive, behavioral and affective) affecting the counterproductive work behaviors and its dimensions (CWB directed to organization and CWB directed to individuals)? Based on these questions the study model and hypotheses are formulated.

3. Study model and hypotheses:

Based on the previous studies and the aim of the study, the study model and its hypotheses were proposed as follows:

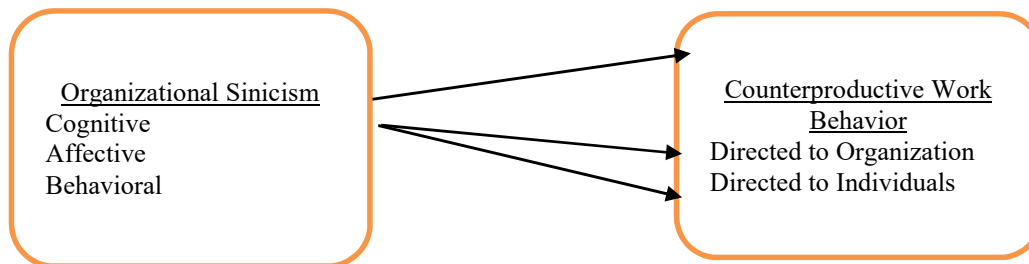


Figure (1): the study model

This model illustrates the expected relationships between the variables of the study. Organizational cynicism with its three dimensions: cognitive, feeling or emotion, and behavior will directly affect the involvement of employees in the counterproductive work behaviors in their dimensions (CWB directed to organization and CWB directed to individuals).

Based on the study model and prior literature the hypotheses of the study will be as follows:

H1: "Organizational cynicism dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions) is significantly correlated with counterproductive work behaviors."

H2: "Organizational cynicism dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions) is significantly correlated with counterproductive work behaviors directed to the organization."

H3: "Organizational cynicism dimensions (cognitive affective, and behavioral dimensions) is significantly correlated with counterproductive work behaviors directed to the individuals."

4. Study variables and methods:

4.1 Organizational cynicism (OC):

As defined earlier, the organizational cynicism, the independent variable, is a negative attitude towards the organization and consists of three dimensions: the belief that the organization lacks integrity and impartiality, negative feelings and emotions towards the organization, and the tendency toward the organizations belittling.

A 5 point Likert scale is used to measure organizational cynicism. The Brandes et al. (1999) scale used and adopted by several studies (e, g, James, 2005; Bashir, 2011; Aslan and Şerife, 2014; Shahzad, 2012; 2013, Nafei, 2013) is used to measure organizational cynicism. This measure is characterized by its reliability and high validity, as translated and used by a number of Arab studies (eg Al-Atawi, 2012, Hassanein, 2011a, 2013). This measure consists of three parts containing (14) items. The first section includes items (1-5) measuring the cognitive dimension. Examples of these items include: I believe that my organization says one thing and does another, and my organization's policies, goals, and practices seem to have little in common.

The second part includes items (6-10) measuring affective dimension. Examples include: When I think about my organization, I experience tension, and finally the third part includes items (11-14) measuring the behavioral dimension. Examples include: I often talk to others about the way things are run at my organization, and I criticize my organization's practices and policies with others.

4.2 Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB):

The dependent variable in the study, the counterproductive work behaviors, is the employee's behaviors that harm the organization or its members or both, includes many forms, such as theft, vandalism, verbal abuse, withholding effort, lying, refusal to cooperate, and physical assault. It was measured using the questionnaire designed by Fox (2001) and used by other studies (e g, Khan, 2013). It includes 45 items (1-25) counterproductive work behaviors directed to the organization, and items (26-45) that measure counterproductive behaviors directed to individuals.

Examples of CWB directed to organization include: Came to work late without permission, Purposely damaged a piece of equipment or property and Refused to take on an assignment when asked. Examples of CWB directed to individuals include: Did something to make someone at work look bad, Said something obscene to someone at work to make them feel bad and Threatened someone at work, but not physically.

Questionnaire statements (items) are written in an indirect way asking the respondents about their opinions on the behaviors made by their colleagues in order to avoid biased responses. A 5 point Likert scale is used to collect data.

Table (2) shows the Cronbach Alpha coefficients and items of organizational cynicism and counterproductive behaviors scales.

Table (2): Cronbach Alpha Coefficients

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	# of items
Organizational cynicism:	0.89	14
- Cognitive dimension	0.84	5
- Affective dimension	0.86	5
- Behavioral dimension	0.73	4
Counterproductive behaviors	0.96	45
- Directed to organization	0.93	25
- Directed to individuals	0.94	20

4.3 Population and study sample

The study population consists of the administrative employees at Assiut University faculties. The total number of administrative employees in the university faculties is 2048 (class (1) 309 + class (2) 822+ class (3) 917) as shown in table (3) below. A stratified Random Sample of 327 employees was selected at 95% confidence level and significance level of 5%. The sample units are distributed according to the percentages of employees at the university faculties and administrative classes as shown in table (3). The sample units were asked to complete the questionnaire made for data collection.

Table (3): population and study sample

Faculty	Class (1)	Sample	Class (2)	Sample	Class (3)	Sample	Total (sample)	%
Science	35	5	104	17	91	14	37	11
Engineering	23	3	55	9	69	11	24	7
Agriculture	30	5	51	8	87	14	27	11
Medicine	40	7	65	10	88	14	31	9.5
Pharmacy	16	2	33	5	45	7	15	4.5
Vt. Medicine	9	1	48	8	31	5	14	4
Commerce	14	2	45	7	50	8	17	5
Education	22	3	95	15	86	13	32	10
Law	10	2	38	6	54	8	16	5
Physical Edu	17	3	42	7	20	3	13	4
Nursing	4	1	15	2	38	6	9	3
Social work	17	3	42	7	20	3	13	4
Specific Edu	15	2	38	6	55	8	17	5
Arts	34	5	84	14	104	16	36	11
Computer & Information	9	2	33	5	40	6	13	4
Dentistry	6	1	19	3	21	3	7	2
Kindergarten	4	1	8	1	5	1	3	1
Fine Arts	4	1	7	1	3	1	3	1
Total	309	49	822	131	917	147	327	100

Source: Assiut University statistics (2017).

4.4 Methods of data analysis:

- Data is analyzed using the statistical package SPSS / PC (21)
- Analysis of reliability using Alpha-Cronbach Analysis coefficients.
- Descriptive statistics: mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients.
- Step-wise Multiple Regression Analysis.

5. Study results

As shown in table (4) below, there is a significant positive correlation between organizational cynicism (independent variable) and its three dimensions of belief, feeling and behavior and the counterproductive work behaviors (dependent variable) at the level of significance (0.01).

There is a significant positive correlation between organizational cynicism (the independent variable) and its three dimensions of belief, feeling, behavior and the anti-productivity behaviors directed against the organization (dependent variable) at the level of significance (0.01).

There is a significant positive correlation between organizational mutation (the independent variable) and its three dimensions of belief, feeling, and behavior and the anti-productivity behaviors directed against individuals (dependent variable) at the level of significance (0.01).

Table (4): Mean, Standard Deviation and correlation coefficients

Variables	Mean	SD	OC	Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral	CWB (total)	To Org	To Individuals
OC (total)	2.57	1.60	1						
Cognitive	2.88	.99	.860**	1					
Affective	2.46	.92	.885**	.612**	1				
Behavioral	2.34	.86	.806**	.517**	.639**	1			
CWB (total)	1.50	1.23	.386**	.245**	.374**	.392**	1		
To Organization	1.53	1.21	.413**	.382**	.384**	.412**	.809**	1	
To Individuals	1.48	1.22	.312**	.173**	.323**	.325**	.960**	.941**	1

OC= organizational cynicism, CWB= counterproductive work behaviors.

All correlations are significant at $p < .01$.

Results of regression analysis shown in table (5) indicate that only two dimensions of organizational cynicism (the behavioral dimension and affective dimension) have an effect on the counterproductive work behaviors (total), where the determination coefficients (R^2) are 15.3% and 2.6% ,with Beta 0.285 and 0.210 respectively. The third dimension of organizational cynicism, the cognitive dimension has no effect on counterproductive work behaviors. This result is partially supporting the first hypothesis of the study.

The relationship between the organizational cynicism dimensions and counterproductive work behaviors directed towards the organization is tested as shown in the table below. Both behavioral and affective dimensions of organizational cynicism are found to be positively correlated with counterproductive work behaviors directed to the organization, where R^2 values are 17% and 2.4%, with Beta 0.287 and 0.204 respectively. These findings are partially supporting the second hypothesis of the study.

Also, both dimensions (behavioral and affective) have their impact on the counterproductive work behaviors directed to individuals, where R^2 values are 10.6% and 2.2% with Beta 0,201 and 0,194 respectively as shown in the table below. These findings are partially supporting the third hypothesis of the study. F values of the three regression models are 35.436 with $p < 0.001$, 39.0526 with $p < 0.01$, and 23,824 respectively with $p < 0.01$.

Table (5) Step-wise Regression of Counterproductive Work Behavior on Organizational Cynicism

Variables	R^2	ΔR^2	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	-	-	0.874	-	10.999	0.000***
Behavioral Dimension	0.153	-	0.150	0.285	3.940	0.000***
Affective Dimension	0,179	0.026	0.115	0.210	3.205	0.000***

*** P >0.001

Step-wise reg. of CWB (organization) on OC dimensions

Variables	R^2	ΔR^2	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	-	-	0.849	-	10.393	0.000***
Behavioral Dimension	0.170	-	0.170	0.287	4.345	0.000***
Affective Dimension	0.194	0.024	0.116	0.204	3.142	0.002**

** P >0.01 *** P >0.001

Step-wise reg. of CWB (individuals) on OC dimensions

Variables	R^2	ΔR^2	B	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	-	-	0,906	-	352,01	0.000***
Behavioral Dimension	0.106	-	0,125	0.201	2,981	0.003**
Affective Dimension	0.128	0.022	0,114	0,194	2,883	0.004**

** P >0.01 *** P >0.001

6. Discussion

The study hypotheses are based on the results of some previous studies that indicated a positive relationship between organizational cynicism and counterproductive work behaviors (e.g., James, 2005; Bashir, 2011; Hassanein, 2011a, 2013, Ahmed et al, 2013). Results of testing these hypotheses are in the line with previous studies.

The determination coefficients (R^2) shown in table (5) are relatively low. This may be because of the nature of both organizational cynicism and counterproductive behaviors as negative attitude and negative behavior. The two dimensions which have effect on CWB (in general), CWB directed to organization, and that directed to individuals are behavioral and affective dimensions. The first has more effect (15.3%, 17.9%, and 10.6% consequently) compared to the later (2.6%, 2.4% and 2.2% consequently). This may be related to the nature of CWB as a consequence of personal traits, personality traits ((Penney & Spector, 2002; Anjum & Parvez, 2013), negative emotions (Krischer, Penney & Hunter, 2010; Khan, Peretti & Quratulain, 2010), lack of motivation (Osezua et al; 2009), abusive supervision (Shoss et al., 2013) and other variables related to work environment and some other stimulus of CWB (Anjum & Parvez, 2013).

This discussion may clarify what we try to conclude about the relationship between OC and CWB. That is to say, although the organizational cynicism is one of the predictors of work deviance behaviors (including CWB) its contribution to explain the counterproductive work behaviors is relatively low. This result is not surprising because, as stated earlier, counterproductive work behaviors are attributed to both individuals and organizational factors. At the same time, in some of previous studies (Ahmed et al, 2013), organizational cynicism was found to have no effect on work deviance behaviors. The variables mentioned above in this discussion (including individuals and organization) may contribute to the counterproductive behaviors. Thus more research is needed in the Egyptian context for deepening our understanding of CWB.

7. Conclusion and implications

In spite of the previous discussion concerning the nature of counterproductive work behaviors and its predictors, this study on contrary of previous studies in the Egyptian context, has dealt with organizational cynicism as multi-dimensional concept. At the same time, having the behavioral dimension as relatively prevailing dimension in affecting CWB is logical. That is to say that the ability of behavior to influence behavior is stronger than that of attitudes or emotions. In this sense, organizational cynicism in its behavioral dimension has relatively a strong and significant effect on the counterproductive work behaviors for both the organization and the individuals compared to that of the affective dimension. This may explain why the cognitive dimension has no effect on CWB. Although the averages of organizational cynicism and counterproductive work behaviors are relatively low (2.57 and 1.50 respectively) compared to the previous studies in the Egyptian context (Hassanein, 2011, 2013), the administration at Assiut University should keep an eye on both of them. That is to say that the open door policy is required to reduce the tendency of cynicism among its employees. This will give the opportunity to the employees to freely express their views to managers and administrators without being reprimanded (Nafie and Kaifi, 2013:144). At the same time, transparency, code of ethics, and employees' empowerment are needed to reduce the counterproductive work behaviors. In this regard, managers can play an important role in providing the ethical model to be followed at the university. Transformational leadership behaviors can help reducing counterproductive behaviors at the university (Ali, 2012).

Also, the findings of this study highlight some human resource management implications. First: at the earliest stages of recruitment and selection process, human resource managers should use personality-based integrity testing (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, (1993) as a preventive measure to reduce the counterproductive work behaviors. This applies also to the selection of supervisors and manageress in the promotion process (Yu, (2014). Second: human resource managers at Assiut University faculties should emphasize the values of fair treatment, fair wages and salaries, equal opportunities and integrity.

Finally, this study was limited to the relationship between organizational cynicism and counterproductive work behaviors. Other negative behaviors at Assiut University, referred to earlier in this study are not fully studied or explained such as absenteeism and leaving work. These and other negative behaviors need to be investigated in future studies.

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