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ABSTRACT

We propose to extend the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect (EVLN) model of employees' responses to adverse organizational circumstances with the construct of Organizational Cynicism. Structural equation modeling was used to fit the data provided by 159 office employees of a large Dutch trade union, who were involved in a restructuring program at the time of the research, to the postulated five-factor model. Results indicated that the model showed an acceptable fit, providing support for including organizational cynicism as a distinct response in the model. Multiple regression analysis was used for the differential prediction of the five responses, using two situational variables (role conflict and autonomy), two personality variables (assertiveness and rigidity), and selected interactions. The best predictions are obtained for exit, cynicism and loyalty. Loyalty is predicted by low role conflict and high autonomy, whereas cynicism and exit are about equally predicted by high role conflict, low autonomy, and low assertiveness.

KEYWORDS

cynicism ■ employee cynicism ■ employee disengagement ■ exit
■ loyalty ■ organizational cynicism

The nature of the employment relationship is changing fundamentally. Sweeping trends like globalization and privatization, and the corresponding emphasis on competitive 'lean and mean' organizations with high levels of productivity, efficiency and control, have a pervasive influence on the contemporary workplace and on employees' work experiences. Organizations and employees have to find ways to respond to the new realities in the workplace so that work continues to provide meaning and organizational success. One such sense-making response is employee cynicism toward the employing organization. In the present study we pursue two aims. First, we seek to distinguish cynicism from alternative responses. Second, we aim to identify the conditions under which employees may exhibit cynicism or alternative responses.

The changing workplace

Cartwright and Holmes (2006) describe the evolution of human relations at work as a transition process. In their view, the 'traditional deal' stands for the workplace of 20 years ago as a place where employees offered loyalty, trust, and commitment in exchange for job security, training, promotion, and support from their employer. Over time, traditional deals have come to be substituted by 'new deals', whereby employees are expected to work longer hours, accept greater responsibility, be more flexible and to tolerate continual change and ambiguity. The authors conclude that organizations have expected more from their workforce and provided little in return, other than simply a job or employability. Others go even further, claiming that the excessive control measures aiming to discipline the workers can be regarded as the instruments used to colonize their affect and subjectivity (Gabriel, 1999), a perspective reminiscent of Gareth Morgan's image of the organization as an instrument of domination (Morgan, 1998). Employees may be expected to respond in sense-making ways to these changes in the work environment. From a social exchange perspective, they may be expected to somehow seek a new balance in the relationship with the employing organization, by scaling down their contribution and becoming wary of reciprocation (Cotterell et al., 1992; Eisenberger et al., 1987, 2001; Levinson, 1965; Lynch et al., 1999; Settoon et al., 1996). Self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970, 1976, 2001) would predict various forms of resistance and self-defense by employees who are motivated to live up to their traits, competencies, and key values, thereby seeking to maintain positive self-images (Leonard et al., 1999). Hodson, speaking of worker dignity as 'the ability to establish a sense of self-worth and self-respect and to appreciate the respect of others', essentially means the

same (Hodson, 2001: 3). In the organizational literature, employee cynicism or organizational cynicism is described as a self-defensive attitude directed against the employing organization (Abraham, 2000a; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Reichers et al., 1997). Hence, organizational cynicism could be one of the 'alternative avenues to achieving dignity' in the work environment, referred to by Hodson (2001: 3).

To counteract uneasy disparities in the employment relationship, organizations go to great lengths to foster favorable work attitudes among their employees. To this end, an extensive (and expensive!) repertoire of employee initiatives and organizational rhetoric, emphasizing unity and harmony through the use of metaphors like 'family' and 'team' (Casey, 1999), has been employed to enhance organizational success through employee engagement and motivation programs. At the same time, however, organizational strategies that bring job insecurity through outsourcing, downsizing, and firings, seem to almost invariably work against the interests of employees. This apparent inconsistency between words and deeds raises the crucial question whether organizational success and worker well-being and dignity are complementary or contradictory (Hodson & Roscigno, 2004). If the interests of organizations and workers can be aligned, the long-term effectiveness and well-being of both can be secured, and employees may be expected to develop favorable attitudes toward the organization. However, if these interests turn out to be irreconcilable, stormy weather may lie ahead, both in terms of organizational success and employee attitudes and well-being. Hodson and Roscigno (2004) have investigated the requirements for complementarity between organizational success and worker well-being. Based on data gathered from 204 organizational ethnographies, describing workplaces and workplace relations, they come to the conclusion that 'workers want to work effectively and to be productive. When they are allowed the opportunity to do so by coherent organizational practices and by the solicitation of employee involvement, organizations prosper and dignity at work is maximized' (Hodson & Roscigno, 2004: 701).

In practice, organizations appear not to be very successful in soliciting their employees' involvement. A study in 2003 by the Gallup Organization shows disturbing levels of employee engagement across 11 countries. In some of the world's major economies, the percentages of engaged employees who are 'loyal, productive, and find their work satisfying' versus actively disengaged employees are 27/17 in the United States, 19/20 in the United Kingdom, 12/18 in Germany, 12/31 in France, and 9/19 in Japan. In between these categories we find large percentages of workers who are described by Gallup as not psychologically committed to their roles. Many respondents indicated that 'they don't know what is expected of them, their managers

don't care about them as people, their jobs aren't a good fit for their talents, and their views count for little' (Flade, 2003). Two years later, a large scale study ($N = 86,000$) by US-based professional services firm Towers Perrin across 16 countries yielded comparable results (Towers Perrin, 2005). In this study, the levels of engagement versus disengagement for the above-mentioned major economies were 21/16 in the United States, 12/23 in the United Kingdom, 15/15 in Germany, 9/23 in France, and a stunning 2/41 in Japan. Although comparisons between both studies can only be made tentatively, because it is unclear whether both measured the same engagement construct, the figures seem to indicate that organizations have not made much progress in soliciting their employees' engagement.

A typology of employee responses to adverse circumstances at work

In the light of the preceding discussion, the purpose of this article is twofold. First, workers who are becoming increasingly frustrated and disenchanted with work, while looking for opportunities for self-expression and self-fulfillment, may respond to adverse organizational circumstances in various ways. Engagement can be seen as a generic term for employee reactions, but the Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect (EVLN) model (Farrell, 1983; Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1982, 1986, 1988) offers a typology of four specific responses that employees may exhibit: to leave the organization, speak up, patiently and confidently hope for a better future, or to be lax and disregardful.

In general, a typology serves to simplify and order diverse empirical data about a particular phenomenon, so that these data may be described in terms that make them comparable (McKinney, 1966). The typology can then be used to generate hypotheses about relationships between antecedent conditions and resulting outcomes. In this study the typology serves to order various ways in which employees may react to adverse circumstances at work. If a certain subset of reactions can be identified as indicators of a distinct response which is not in the typology, an extension of the typology would allow for generating and testing more accurate hypotheses about relationships between predictors and consequences of responses. Thus, our understanding of the impact of workplace and personality characteristics on work attitudes and behavior would be enhanced. On the other hand, if these reactions would be unduly classified as indicators of the other responses, erroneous conclusions might be drawn.

Because recent research has shown that substantial numbers of employees respond with cynicism toward the organization (Kanter & Mirvis,

1989, 1991; Reichers et al., 1997), and that cynicism may be conceptually different from exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003), we propose to include organizational cynicism as a fifth response in the model. For this approach to be justified, the following conditions have to be met. First, it has to be shown that cynicism can be distinguished from the other responses through a set of correlated indicators all loading on the cynicism construct, without cross-loading on the other constructs. This is the first aim of the present study, to be accomplished by analyzing within-scales and between-scales item-intercorrelations, followed by confirmatory factor analysis. Second, cynicism should add explanatory power to the model by predicting relevant outcomes over and above exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. In the context of ordinary regression analysis, this is usually interpreted as a significant amount of unique variance in the dependent variable, accounted for by adding an extra independent variable. In this case, however, the responses are the dependent variables. In the present study and with the available data, we will therefore not be able to demonstrate the additional explanatory power of cynicism. However, prior research by Wanous et al. (1994) suggests that cynicism will indeed be capable of adding explanatory power to the model. This point will be addressed in the discussion section of this article. Third, cynicism should predict outcomes over and above similar constructs. One of the constructs which is frequently believed to be similar to cynicism, is negative affectivity. However, Wanous et al. (1994, 2000) found only weak associations between negative affectivity and cynicism ($r = .21$ and $r = .14$), and in a third study the association between both constructs was almost completely absent with a correlation near zero (Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003). Fourth, apart from predicting different consequences, the justification for inclusion of cynicism in the model can also be found in its causes being different from exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. In the past, efforts have been made to predict responses. Building on these studies (Rusbult et al., 1986, 1988; Withey & Cooper, 1989), we aim to use a set of workplace and personality characteristics that have not been used before, to predict each of the five responses. This is the second aim of this study.

Albert Hirschman originally conceived of his seminal exit, voice, and loyalty model to explain customers' and employees' responses to 'lapses from efficient, rational, law-abiding, virtuous, or otherwise functional organizational behavior' (1970: 1). Hirschman's account has made its way into various research areas, such as comparative politics, labor economics, marketing, political sciences, and social and even intimate relationships, to capture and structure the various ways in which actors may respond to sources of dissatisfaction (Dowding et al., 2000). In the organizational literature it has acquired a position as a model that allows for and differentiates a variety of

employees' responses to adverse conditions in the workplace (Farrell, 1983; Hagedoorn et al., 1999; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1982, 1986, 1988; Turnley & Feldman, 1999; Withey & Cooper, 1989).

Exit, Voice, Loyalty, and Neglect responses

Hirschman initially described *exit* as 'some customers stop buying the firm's products or some members leave the organization: this is the exit option' (1970: 4). In Hirschman's view, the function of exit was to signal discontent with a firm's performance. A conceptual broadening of the exit option was suggested by Rusbult et al. (1988), who conceived of the exit option not only as actually quitting the job or leaving the organization voluntarily, but also as searching for a different job and thinking about quitting. In this view, it seems that exit is as much a psychological propensity to leave (turnover intent), that can vary in strength over time, as a dichotomous decision to actually leave or not. The psychological form of exit constituted an important broadening of the original exit option. Whereas actually leaving the organization may not always be a viable option, due to real or perceived barriers to exit, leaving the organization in a psychological sense is something over which the employee has more control.

Voice was defined by Hirschman as 'any attempt at all to change an objectionable state of affairs, not only by petitioning to management or higher authorities, but also through protests including the mobilization of the public opinion' (1970: 30). As the original model accounts primarily for customers' dissatisfaction toward organizations, this conceptualization makes sense. Especially when customers have multiple options and when barriers to exit are low, they need not be concerned very much about the way they voice their grievances. However, when the model is employed to describe the employment relationship, voice necessarily takes on a different meaning, defined by Rusbult et al. (1988) as 'actively and constructively trying to improve conditions', a form of voice also referred to as pro-social voice (Van Dyne et al., 2003). In the present study, voice is operationalized as pro-social voice.

As Hirschman set out to develop a theory of *loyalty*, he first somewhat loosely referred to it as '... that special attachment to an organization known as loyalty' (1970: 77). Later on he outlines the loyalist as 'the member who cares, who leaves no stone unturned before he resigns himself to the painful decision to withdraw or switch' (p. 83). According to Hirschman, 'the importance of loyalty . . . is that it can neutralize within certain limits the tendency of the most quality-conscious customers or members to be the first to exit' (p. 79). Thus, loyalty constitutes to the loyalist a psychological

barrier to exit, thereby strengthening the propensity to voice. In the organizational literature, loyalty was defined by Rusbult and colleagues as passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve, by giving public and private support to the organization, waiting and hoping for improvement, or practicing good citizenship (Rusbult et al., 1988). This form of loyal behavior has prevailed in the literature. For instance, Hagedoorn et al. (1999) used items such as ‘assume that in the end everything will work out’ and ‘optimistically wait for better times’ to operationalize loyalty in their study.

In the context of responses to dissatisfaction in romantic relationships, *neglect* was identified as a distinct response, described as the kind of behavior shown by partners who passively allow their relationship to atrophy. Typically, they would ignore their partner, spend less time together, refuse to discuss problems, treat the partner badly emotionally or physically, or criticize the partner for things unrelated to the problem (Rusbult et al., 1982, 1986). As organizations and employees had already been conceived of as partners in exchange relationships long before the work of Rusbult and her colleagues (Levinson, 1965), the assumption that neglect behavior would also occur in the work environment appeared to be a logical step. Here, neglect was described as lax and disregarding behavior, exemplified by lateness, absenteeism, error rates and using company time for personal business (Farrell, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1988). This conceptualization of neglect has prevailed in the literature, as it was unanimously adopted by all researchers who used the EVLN model in their studies.

Organizational cynicism: An alternative response

Discussing the conclusions of their study, Rusbult and colleagues (1988) suggest that the EVLN model may serve as a common framework, into which researchers may incorporate additional responses to dissatisfaction. In this article, we propose to extend the model with Organizational Cynicism (OC), a response 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 *behavior* toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect’ (Dean et al., 1998: 345, emphases in original). Cynicism serves as a form of self-defense, to cope with unpleasant thoughts and feelings of disappointment about actions taken by the organization and its management (Reichers et al., 1997). It is an important response that may have profound implications for both the individual and the organization.

Key to organizational cynicism is the belief that the organization lacks integrity. The *Oxford English dictionary online* defines integrity as

'soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue, especially in relation to truth and fair dealing; uprightness, honesty, and sincerity.' In other words, beliefs formed about the organization due to perceptions or experiences of untruthful or unfair dealing, a lack of uprightness, dishonesty, or insincerity, may give rise to organizational cynicism. The literature provides an impressive account of organizational characteristics, practices, and events that may be perceived or experienced as such, for instance unmet or broken promises leading to perceptions of violation or breach of the psychological contract (Abraham, 2000a; Andersson, 1996; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Pugh et al., 2003), organizational politics in which self-serving behavior may go at the expense of uprightness (Davis & Gardner, 2004), the feeling of being disregarded by the organization and not being treated with respect and dignity (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; O'Brien et al., 2004), the absence of meaning in work (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006), a lack of sincere participation in decision-making processes and the absence of genuine support by management (Fleming, 2005; O'Brien et al., 2004; Wanous et al., 2000), the deficient quality of leader-member exchange (Bommer et al., 2005; Cole et al., 2006; Davis & Gardner, 2004), a history of failed change attempts (Reichers et al., 1997; Wanous et al., 1994, 2000, 2004), managerial incompetence (Stanley et al., 2005) in combination with lofty salaries (Andersson & Bateman, 1997), institutionalized organizational hypocrisy (Feldman, 2000; Fleming, 2005; Goldner et al., 1977; Urbany, 2005; Valentine & Elias, 2005), and everyday workplace events and practices such as excessively high executive compensation, restructurings, downsizings and layoffs (Abraham, 2000a; Andersson, 1996; Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Bateman et al., 1992).

These experiences are suggested to result in unmet expectations of meaningfulness, and an unmet need for self-fulfillment and growth, bringing about disappointment and disillusionment. Confronted with these practices, employees may be hard put to discern coherence between organizational words emphasizing unity and harmony, and deeds. It may be virtually impossible for them to comply with such practices, without having to compromise their self-images as worthy persons. Typically, cynical employees refuse to believe what appears to be unbelievable. By doing so, they may be able to maintain positive self-images. However, cynical employees generally do not make things easy for themselves. In the literature cynicism is associated with a host of negative effects, such as apathy, resignation, alienation, hopelessness, distrust of others, suspicion, contempt, disillusionment, and scorn, as well as poor performance, interpersonal conflict, absenteeism, job turnover, and burnout (Abraham, 2000a; Andersson, 1996; Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Dean et al., 1998). On the other hand, it is argued that cynics may act as the voice of conscience for the organization and that cynicism is

neither an unalloyed good nor an unalloyed evil for organizations (Dean et al., 1998). Moreover, 'cynics care deeply about their organization and make careful and systematic recommendations of organizational problems' (Bommer et al., 2005).

Hence, although at first sight organizational cynicism may appear to be a negative response, cynical people are at the same time motivated to care about the well-being of their organization. It seems that the nature of cynicism is not readily captured by exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect, and that cynicism can be conceptualized as a distinct response to adverse circumstances in the workplace. A second reason why we believe cynicism should be considered for inclusion in the model is its prevalence. In 1989, Kanter and Mirvis categorized 43 percent of American workers as cynical (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989), in 1991 they found that the percentage had increased to 48 percent (Kanter & Mirvis, 1991), and Bommer et al. (2005) suggest that, given the recent series of corporate scandals in the United States, it is likely that workers' cynicism toward the organization has only increased. As Europe has also had its share of corporate scandals, for example, Parmalat and Ahold, we have no reason to believe that cynicism is confined to the United States only. In our view, this combination of consequences and prevalence provides a compelling argument why cynicism should be considered for inclusion in the EVLN model.

In summary, we propose that there are five, not four, ways in which employees may respond to adverse organizational circumstances. We will set out to demonstrate by means of confirmatory factor analysis that organizational cynicism is a distinct response that can be differentiated from exit, voice, loyalty and neglect.

Predicting exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, and cynicism

Prior research on the EVLN model has not only dealt with the identification of different types of employee responses, but also with their prediction. In the studies mentioned earlier, exchange theory has been the dominant theoretical perspective. On the whole, these studies have shown mixed support for the general hypothesis that rational exchange arguments drive and, accordingly, predict employees' choices between exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect responses. For example, the level of employee investment in the relationship with the employing organization was found to be moderately related to exit ($r = -.29, p < .01$), loyalty ($r = .15, p < .01$), and neglect ($r = -.14, p < .01$), and not significantly ($r = .08, NS$) to voice (Rusbult et al., 1988). In another study (Withey & Cooper, 1989), sunk costs and investment in the relationship significantly predicted exit ($r = -.21, p < .001$,

and $r = -.14, p < .05$), loyalty ($r = .08, p < .05$, and $r = -.14, p < .01$), neglect was only predicted by investment ($r = -.13, p < .05$) and voice was unrelated to both in a sample of graduates, whereas in an accounting-firm sample neither significantly predicted voice and loyalty, sunk costs only predicted exit ($r = -.20, p < .05$), and investment only predicted neglect ($r = -.26, p < .01$). Despite these results, the rational exchange perspective seems to offer a promising framework for understanding and predicting responses, because the results obtained by Rusbult et al. (1988) were generally consistent with predictions based on exchange theory. However, new perspectives may also be fruitfully developed.

A limitation of previous research aiming to predict employee responses in the EVLN model is that the adverse conditions to which the employees were supposed to respond were not explicitly included in the research design. They are typically addressed in the introduction to the questionnaire measuring employee responses. Thus, they constitute an unmeasured background variable that implicitly contributes to the prediction of the responses. In order to overcome this limitation, and to include the perceived seriousness of the adverse conditions, some studies have incorporated a predictor variable that serves as a proxy for adverse conditions in the workplace. In most studies this predictor was job satisfaction. However, the use of job satisfaction has two major disadvantages. First, satisfaction can be conceived as a consequence of good or bad circumstances, but it may also predict perceptions of circumstances, because satisfied employees may be inclined to have more positive perceptions and experiences than dissatisfied employees. The risk of confounding satisfaction with the employee's reaction to adverse circumstances makes it unsuited as a proxy for those circumstances, just like subjective measures of stressors are inadequate as they are confounded by the strain produced (Spector et al., 2000a). Second, job satisfaction has been found to be, at least in part, dispositionally based (Judge, 2001; Judge et al., 1998) and related to negative affectivity (Spector, 1994; Spector & O'Connell, 1994; Spector et al., 2000a, 2000b), which could produce spurious relationships with responses to adverse circumstances. For these reasons, we prefer to use role conflict as a proxy for adverse circumstances, because it is less biased by negative affectivity than job satisfaction (Spector et al., 2000a).

Hypothesis development

In the present study we build on research which has shown that people's reactions to stressful conditions depend to some extent on the control they have over their work situation, and also to some extent on their personality. Thus, we focus on two situational job characteristics, that is, role conflict

and job autonomy, and two personality traits, that is, assertiveness and rigidity, as factors that may predict employees' reactions to adverse organizational circumstances.

Role conflict, our proxy of adverse circumstances, was defined by Katz and Kahn (1978) as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations in such a way, that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult. Katz and Kahn stated that the experience of role conflict in the work situation was widespread, and they described it as a stressful experience for the employees involved. In addition, it is argued that role conflict is most often chronic, rather than unique or temporary (Perrewé et al., 2004). For the present study, it is important to note that when role conflict is experienced as consequential to incoherent organizational policies and practices that are controllable by the organization, it will reduce perceived organizational support and the feeling of being neglected by the organization may develop (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). For example, in social services work the organization officially requires employees to give personal attention to the clients 'because that's what we are here for', but in practice the employees are required to spend most of their time on paperwork to feed the control system. Situations like these, by no means limited to social services work only, can indeed be very demanding for employees as they are torn between their clients and the employing organization. In their meta-analysis of research on role conflict and role ambiguity in work settings, Jackson and Schuler (1985) report negative correlations between role conflict and general satisfaction (-.48), satisfaction with work itself (-.49), and satisfaction with supervision (-.53). Because job satisfaction was found to promote constructive responses and discourage destructive responses (Rusbult et al., 1988), we expect role conflict to be negatively associated with loyalty, and positively with exit, neglect, and cynicism. Voice is expected to be differentially related to role conflict, because in prior research voice was found to be at best moderately, and sometimes insignificantly, related to job satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1988; Withey & Cooper, 1989). Given the strong correlations between role conflict and job satisfaction, we also expected role conflict not to have an immediate impact on voice.

Job autonomy has been defined as 'the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out' (Oldham et al., 1976: 395). There is a large body of research showing that job autonomy is related to positive work outcomes and that it constitutes an effective buffer against negative impacts from the work situation. At the individual level employees who have more job autonomy show more

positive affect, internal motivation, and self-confidence (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Oldham et al., 1976), more creativity (Oldham & Cummings, 1996), less mental strain (Karasek, 1979), and satisfaction with different aspects of the work context (Oldham & Hackman, 1981), and less emotional dissonance (Abraham, 2000b), compared with those who have little job autonomy. Also, autonomy will likely be associated with greater opportunities for employees to influence their environment and to withdraw from unpleasant circumstances. For these reasons, we propose job autonomy as a factor predicting employees' reactions to adverse circumstances, both independently and in interaction with role conflict. We expect that autonomy will be positively associated with voice and loyalty, and negatively with exit, neglect and cynicism.

As personality factors that might play a role in predicting the responses in the extended EVLNC model we propose assertiveness and rigidity. Both of these variables can influence the choice for a particular type of behavior, independently as well as in interaction with the circumstances. A common definition of *assertiveness* is standing up for one's legitimate personal rights (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). Therefore, one would expect assertive employees to somehow express their concern over unfavorable circumstances. They are likely to speak up, that is, opt for voice. At the same time they are less likely to resort to exit, or express discontent by neglectful behavior. It is also argued that, as a subtrait of the 'Big Five' extraversion dimension, assertiveness is associated with being sociable and gregarious (Barrick & Mount, 1991), which might make the assertive employees more inclined to stay loyal to the employing organization. As the definition of organizational cynicism specifically refers to critically speaking up, we expect assertiveness to be positively related to cynicism.

Rigidity is a personality trait associated with tendencies toward behavioral consistency, to follow routines, to be inflexible and set in one's ways, and a general tendency to be skeptical of change in any form (Mudrack, 2004; Oreg, 2003). Employees scoring high on rigidity may be expected to be less adaptive, and hence not to show acquiescent loyalty. Also, they are not expected to voice suggestions for constructive solutions. Rather, they may express themselves through exit, cynicism, or neglect.

On the basis of the foregoing, the following direct associations between predictors and responses are hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: Exit will be positively associated with rigidity and role conflict, and negatively associated with assertiveness and autonomy.

Hypothesis 2: Voice will be positively associated with assertiveness and autonomy, and negatively associated with rigidity.

Hypothesis 3: Loyalty will be positively associated with assertiveness and autonomy, and negatively associated with rigidity and role conflict.

Hypothesis 4: Neglect will be positively associated with rigidity and role conflict, and negatively associated with assertiveness and autonomy.

Hypothesis 5: Cynicism will be positively associated with assertiveness, rigidity and role conflict, and negatively associated with autonomy.

As was already mentioned above, the predictors may also interact in predicting the different responses. With four predicting variables, six two-way interactions may be hypothesized. As the literature provided no compelling reasons to expect interactions among the situational variables or among the personality variables, we confine ourselves to the four different person–situation interactions. Our expectation is that role conflict and rigidity, and autonomy and assertiveness, will reinforce each other, with opposite effects on employee responses. The employee who is subject to the stressful experience of not being able to meet conflicting demands, while lacking the psychological resilience to resolve the conflict, will most likely not respond with pro-social voice or loyalty, or with critical yet caring cynicism, but rather with the urge to escape the situation, that is, exit or neglect. On the other hand, the assertive and (relatively) autonomous employee can be expected to respond to adverse circumstances with voice, loyalty, or cynicism, instead of exit or neglect. The other person–situation interactions are between role conflict and assertiveness, and between autonomy and rigidity. The assertive person experiencing role conflict can be expected to take a pragmatic stand, that is, to somehow find a way to cope with the situation. This can be accomplished either through voice, making suggestions for alternative solutions or urging the organization to consider an alternative course of action, through psychological withdrawal from the situation by keeping a cynical distance, or by exit in case a solution cannot be found. In this case, patient loyalty or neglect behavior are unlikely options. Finally, the rigid person who has considerable autonomy to cling to privately held ideas will most likely not respond with voice or loyalty to unpleasant circumstances, but rather with distant cynicism (‘you have your way, I have mine’), neglect or exit. Based on these expectations, we offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 6: Exit will be positively associated with the interactions between role conflict and rigidity, between role conflict and assertiveness, and between autonomy and rigidity, and will be negatively associated with the interaction between autonomy and assertiveness.

Hypothesis 7: Voice will be positively associated with the interactions between autonomy and assertiveness, and between role conflict and assertiveness, and will be negatively associated with the interactions between role conflict and rigidity, and between autonomy and rigidity.

Hypothesis 8: Loyalty will be positively associated with the interaction between autonomy and assertiveness, and will be negatively associated with the interactions between role conflict and rigidity, between role conflict and assertiveness, and between autonomy and rigidity.

Hypothesis 9: Neglect will be positively associated with the interactions between role conflict and rigidity, and between autonomy and rigidity, and will be negatively associated with the interactions between autonomy and assertiveness, and between role conflict and assertiveness.

Hypothesis 10: Cynicism will be positively associated with the interactions between autonomy and assertiveness, between role conflict and assertiveness, and between autonomy and rigidity, and will be negatively associated with the interaction between role conflict and rigidity.

All hypothesized relationships are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Hypothesized relationships between predictors and EVLNC responses

	Exit	Voice	Loyalty	Neglect	Cynicism
RC	+	0	-	+	+
AUT	-	+	+	-	-
RIGID	+	-	-	+	+
ASS	-	+	+	-	+
RC*AUT	0	0	0	0	0
RC*ASS	+	+	-	-	+
RC*RIGID	+	-	-	+	-
AUT*ASS	-	+	+	-	+
AUT*RIGID	+	-	-	+	+
ASS*RIGID	0	0	0	0	0

Note: RC = Role Conflict. AUT = Autonomy. RIGID = Rigidity. ASS = Assertiveness.

+ = Positive relationship hypothesized. - = Negative relationship hypothesized. 0 = No relationship hypothesized.

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants in this study were employees from a large Dutch trade union. In 2003 this organization announced a major restructuring to combat the financial worries resulting from a significant decline in membership. The measures included cutting costs and the prospective loss of jobs. In many organizations such measures have come to be part of everyday organizational life, but in this case they are of particular interest to evaluate our sample. Whereas the usual core business of a trade union is to critically evaluate the necessity of reorganizations elsewhere, and to act in the interest of its membership by making every possible effort to prevent the loss of jobs, in this case the union itself was the subject of reorganization. At the time of our research, the restructuring project was still in operation. Hence, while the sample comprises ordinary employees doing regular office work, this particular aspect gives our sample an unusual, albeit interesting, extra. Conceivably, under these circumstances the employees' belief in the integrity of the employing organization was put to a serious test. The employees were approached through an internal email from the public relations department, encouraging them to participate in the study. The email message contained a link to an online questionnaire. In the questionnaire instructions, the topic of the study was explained as an investigation into work experiences, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Completed questionnaires were received from 159 employees, for a response rate of about 30 percent.¹ Respondents' ages ranged from 17 to 62, with an average of 38.5 years ($SD = 10.1$ years), and tenure in the present job ranged from 0 to 32 years, with an average of 7.1 years ($SD = 7.6$ years). The sample consisted of 58 men and 101 women, 89 participants held full-time jobs and 70 held part-time jobs.

Dependent variables

It is important to note that the dependent variables in this study represent employee *behaviors*, rather than attitudes, beliefs, or affects. The behavioral manifestations of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect were measured with self-descriptive items used by Hagedoorn and colleagues (1999). Through personal communication with the first author of their study, we obtained a slightly abbreviated version of the exit, voice (named 'considerate voice'), loyalty (named 'patience'), and neglect scales used in their study. Prior to being presented with the items measuring EVLN, respondents were asked to read a brief introduction, containing a few examples of adverse organizational

circumstances and asking them how they would most likely respond to these sources of potential dissatisfaction.

The exit and neglect constructs were conceptualized alike in all studies working with the EVLN model and this conceptualization was adopted in the present study. The voice construct resembles what was earlier termed pro-social voice, that is, the items are reflective of cooperative and constructive behavior that will likely be perceived as such by those representing the organization. Loyalty, renamed patience by Hagedoorn and colleagues, may not actually measure what laypeople mean by loyalty (Withey & Cooper, 1989), but this conceptualization of loyalty has prevailed in the literature to date and was therefore also adopted in this study. To measure cynicism, six items were written to reflect behavioral expressions of cynicism in the workplace, such as lack of trust, frustration, hopelessness, disillusionment, contempt, or scorn (Abraham, 2000a; Andersson, 1996). Examples of cynicism items are 'I shrug my shoulders at what management requires me to do' (contempt), and 'I hold back suggestions for improvements, because nothing is going to change anyway' (hopelessness/frustration). All items were measured on a seven-point scale with endpoints *definitely* and *definitely not*. The introduction and the full list of items are provided in the Appendix. Their reliability coefficients will be given in the analysis section of this article.

Independent variables

Role conflict was measured with items from House et al. (1983) on a five-point scale with endpoints *never* and *very often*. Representative items were 'I often get myself involved in situations in which there are conflicting requirements' and 'There are unreasonable pressures for better performance.' With a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .87 the items demonstrated good internal consistency.

Job autonomy was measured with two items from a scale developed by Bacharach et al. (1990) measuring job formalization, and three items from a scale by Karasek (1979) measuring decision latitude. Together, they measure the degree to which the employee has discretion to make work-related decisions on the job. Representative items were 'The organization checks my work carefully and keeps a written record of my job performance' and 'I have the freedom to decide how to organize my work.' Job autonomy was measured on a five-point scale with endpoints *does not apply at all* and *applies completely*. With a Cronbach's alpha of .71 the scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency.

Assertiveness is a personality trait that is associated with standing up for one's rights, freely expressing opinions and feelings, being sure of

oneself, and being a leader (Twenge, 2001), and being sociable, gregarious, talkative and active (Barrick & Mount, 1991). It seems that the assertive person approaches others with an open mind and does not hesitate to 'take a stand'. Six items were written to measure this personality trait. Representative items were 'I often say yes, when I should have said no' (reverse coded), and 'expressing disagreement with something makes me feel uncomfortable' (reverse coded). Items were measured on a seven-point scale with endpoints *definitely disagree* and *definitely agree*. All items loaded on the same underlying factor, that accounted for 63.8 percent of the variance, and with a Cronbach's alpha of .85 these items made for an internally consistent scale.

Rigidity is a personality trait, associated with strong tendencies toward behavioral consistency, to follow routines, to be inflexible and set in one's ways, and a general tendency to be skeptical of change in any form (Mudrack, 2004). We used two items from a three-item scale developed by Oreg (2003), and wrote three additional items. Items were measured on a seven-point scale with endpoints *definitely disagree* and *definitely agree*. Two representative items written for this study were 'when people frequently change their mind, they apparently have no principles', and 'sometimes it is better to change one's mind than to stick to one's opinion' (reverse coded). Dropping one item resulted in a uni-dimensional solution, with the underlying factor accounting for 48.4 percent of the variance in the resulting items. With a Cronbach's alpha of .63 the internal consistency of the rigidity scale was relatively low, yet exceeded the threshold of .60 for exploratory research (Hair et al., 1998).

Analyses

Factor analysis of the exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, and cynicism items. Our suggestion that the EVLN model should be extended with cynicism calls for an analysis, capable of demonstrating that cynicism indeed stands out as a complementary, yet distinct, construct. First, we followed the procedure earlier applied by Rusbult et al. (1988) to examine the convergent validity of the response items, by calculating average inter-item correlations for the items within the scales. For the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect scales, all average inter-item correlations were in excess of .60. As such, these scales demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity. With .34, the cynicism items performed less satisfactorily. One cynicism-item (Cynicism1, see Appendix) showed below average correlations with the remaining five items, ranging from a negligible .03 to .32, and was therefore dropped. As a result, the average correlation between the five remaining items within the cynicism

scale increased to .41. We find this acceptable, given the fact that the average correlation for items within scales, as reported by Rusbult et al. (1988), was .42.

The discriminant validity of the items was assessed by calculating average inter-item correlations for items between the scales. For instance, the five remaining items comprising the cynicism scale were correlated with the five loyalty items, to form a matrix of 25 correlations, which we then averaged. With five (EVLNC) scales, we obtained the following 10 averaged between-scales correlations: EV = $-.147$; EL = $-.342$; EN = $.300$; EC = $.276$; VL = $.111$; VN = $-.098$; VC = $-.041$; LN = $-.222$; LC = $-.196$; NC = $.286$. Given our earlier discussion of loyalty as a barrier to exit, it is interesting to see that the strongest (negative) association is between these constructs. Furthermore, associations between voice and the other responses are relatively weak, which is in line with prior research, and cynicism is strongest associated with exit. These associations exceeded the range of $-.24$ to $.18$, reported by Rusbult and colleagues, but they are low enough for the constructs to be regarded as distinct. On the whole, we judged these results to be indicative of acceptable convergent and discriminant validity of the items used in this study.

Next, we used Lisrel 8.72 to test the degree to which the sample covariance matrix was accurately represented by the covariance matrix implied by the hypothesized model. In the first step, and in a strictly confirmatory mode, the most restrictive version of the full first-order measurement model was tested, comprising 25 (after Cynicism1 had been omitted) observed indicators, measuring five latent constructs. Each of these indicators was allowed to load on its corresponding latent construct only, and errors were posited to be uncorrelated. Hence, out of a total of 125 possible factor loadings, 100 loadings were fixed at zero and the remaining 25 were freely estimated parameters. For scaling purposes, the loading of the first indicator of each latent construct was fixed at 1. Maximum likelihood was used for parameter estimation, because most of the items showed skewness and kurtosis between -1 and $+1$ while none of them showed values exceeding -2 or $+2$, and with a mean skewness of $.20$ and a mean kurtosis of $-.58$ the data did not strongly violate multivariate normality assumptions.

The analysis of the first-order model revealed no offending estimates, such as correlations > 1 , negative variances, or not-positive-definite matrices, and it took only 18 iterations for the model to converge to a proper solution. All factor loadings exceeded the $.45$ threshold, also applied by Hagedoorn et al. (1999), and they were highly significant with reasonable standard errors. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the baseline model (Model 1A) are presented in Table 2. With d.f. $> N$, the GFI and AGFI are biased downward

Table 2 Results of Lisrel analyses: Modifications and goodness-of-fit statistics

Model description	Reason for model modification	χ^2	d.f.	$\Delta\chi^2_{(d.f.)}$	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	GFI	AGFI	SRMR
<i>Model 1A:</i>										
5-Factor model with 25 indicators		480.05	265		.072	.96	.95	.80 (.90)	.76 (.88)	.084
<i>Model 1B:</i>										
Model 1A ex Loyalty1	High cross-loadings with Cynicism and Exit	410.59	242	69.46 ₍₂₃₎ ***	.066	.96	.96	.82 (.92)	.78 (.90)	.078
<i>Model 1C:</i>										
Model 1B ex Cynicism2	High cross-loading with Voice	345.97	220	64.62 ₍₂₂₎ ***	.060	.97	.96	.84 (.93)	.80 (.92)	.070
<i>Model 1D:</i>										
Model 1C ex Voice2	High cross-loadings with Cynicism and Neglect	310.05	199	35.92 ₍₂₁₎ *	.059	.97	.96	.85 (.94)	.81 (.92)	.063
<i>Model 2</i>										
1-Factor model with 25 indicators		2326.43	275		.217	.71	.68	.46	.36	.170
<i>Model 3A</i>										
2-Factor model with 25 indicators, cynicism loading with exit and neglect		2001.96	274		.200	.76	.73	.50	.40	.200
<i>Model 3B</i>										
2-Factor model with 25 indicators, cynicism loading with voice and loyalty		2337.58	274		.218	.74	.72	.46	.36	.220

Note: Values in parentheses represent Steiger's correction to the GFI and AGFI (Steiger & Fouladi, 1997).
 *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

quite substantially (Ed Rigdon, message to SEMNET, 28 October 2003). We therefore applied Steiger's correction to the GFI and AGFI (Steiger & Fouladi, 1997). The adjusted GFI and AGFI values are given in parentheses.

In the SEM literature, several 'rules of thumb' cutoff criteria have been suggested to evaluate model fit. None of these criteria has been universally accepted, due to the lack of a compelling theoretical rationale and empirical evidence (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985). Addressing these issues, Hu and Bentler have suggested several alternatives for cutoff criteria. They argue that cutoff values close to .95 for TLI and CFI, close to .06 for RMSEA and close to .08 for RSMR, would justify the conclusion of a relatively good fit between the hypothesized model and the data. Given these recommendations and the results presented in Table 2, the baseline model (model 1A) is reasonably good, but it seems possible to find a better representation of the covariance structure in the data.

Leaving the confirmatory mode of analysis, we set out on an exploratory specification search, seeking empirical clues to improve the measuring instrument. Especially items with high cross-loadings would require closer scrutiny, as they confound the unidimensionality of the scales. Furthermore, in each step only one modification at a time was addressed, because modification index values are calculated univariately and thus they can fluctuate from one estimation to another (Byrne, 1998). After each modification, the model's fit with the data was re-assessed, until no more additional modifications could be justified. In this particular case, we believe that consulting the diagnostics to improve the model's fit with the data is a legitimate course of action, because the scales used to measure the responses have not been validated extensively in prior research. For each intermediate solution the reason for model modification and the fit statistics are provided in Table 2. The final version of the first-order model (Model 1D) appears to provide an acceptable description of the covariance structure in the sample. Removing items resulted in a slight improvement of the average inter-correlation of the cynicism items to .43, and only minor changes for the other average correlations of items within scales and between scales were observed. In addition to the five-factor model, we also estimated two alternative models: A one-factor model, and two two-factor models, one with cynicism loading on the same factor as exit and neglect, the other with cynicism loading on the same factor as voice and loyalty. Table 2 shows that by far the best fitting model is the five-factor model. Table 3 presents the standardized factor loadings and the individual scales' composite reliabilities for the final model. From this, it may be concluded that cynicism has been established as a response mode that can be distinguished from the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect responses. Taken together, these results (i.e. fit statistics,

Table 3 Standardized factor loadings for final EVLNC model (Table 2: Model ID)

Item	Exit (.90)	Voice (.86)	Loyalty (.87)	Neglect (.90)	Cynicism (.75)
Exit1	.98				
Exit2	.95				
Exit3	.46				
Exit4	.81				
Exit5	.80				
Voice1		.75			
Voice3		.82			
Voice4		.79			
Voice5		.80			
Loyalty2			.84		
Loyalty3			.90		
Loyalty4			.82		
Loyalty5			.65		
Neglect1				.78	
Neglect2				.79	
Neglect3				.94	
Neglect4				.81	
Neglect5				.73	
Cynicism3					.45
Cynicism4					.71
Cynicism5					.70
Cynicism6					.78

Note: Composite reliabilities (Hair et al., 1998) are given in parentheses. Factor loadings not shown in this table were posited equal to zero.

reliabilities, and factor intercorrelations) indicate that cynicism can be regarded as a distinct construct.

Predicting exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, and cynicism. The second aim of this study was to predict each response as a function of the job characteristics autonomy and role conflict, the personality variables assertiveness and rigidity, and their interactions. To this end, summated scales of predictors and outcome variables were constructed. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations are given in Table 4. As they were not measured on the same scales, and to avoid multicollinearity between predictors and their interaction terms, the independent variables were standardized. Gender, age, tenure and type of contract (full-time, part-time) were specified as control variables. Table 4 shows moderate correlations between some of the control variables and outcomes, especially between age and exit, and tenure and voice/cynicism.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations ($N = 159$)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender ^a	.64	.48												
2. Age	38.51	10.09	-.05											
3. Tenure	7.10	7.63	-.26**	.52**										
4. Contract ^b	.44	.49	.48**	.10	-.22**									
5. Exit	3.51	1.66	-.01	-.17*	-.16*	-.01								
6. Voice	5.32	1.29	-.13	.22**	.23**	-.10	-.18*							
7. Loyalty	3.48	1.39	.06	-.04	-.02	.01	-.46**	.16*						
8. Neglect	2.13	1.27	.03	-.10	-.00	.03	.41**	-.17*	-.29**					
9. Cynicism	3.68	1.28	-.05	.05	.16*	-.05	.46**	-.21**	-.24**	.48**				
10. Role conflict	2.46	.88	-.14	.01	.04	-.16*	.50**	-.11	-.32**	.34**	.40**			
11. Autonomy	3.31	.77	-.11	.00	.05	.05	-.34**	.18*	.32**	-.20*	-.35**	-.23**		
12. Rigidity	4.70	1.06	.05	.02	.01	.18*	-.06	-.09	-.03	.02	.10	.08	.01	
13. Assertiveness	4.98	1.36	-.04	.09	.14	-.07	-.23**	.14*	.08	-.14	-.18*	-.04	.23**	.21**

Note: ^a 0 = male, 1 = female. ^b 0 = full-time contract, 1 = part-time contract.

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

These effects were partialled out, before conducting hierarchical regression analyses.

Table 4 shows positive inter-relationships between cynicism, neglect, and exit, with correlations between .40 and .50. Although factor analysis has indicated that these responses are conceptually distinct, they also appear to have something in common. Loyalty is only moderately related to neglect ($r = -.29$) and cynicism ($r = -.24$), but the stronger and negative association between loyalty and exit ($r = -.46$) seems to empirically support Hirschman's theory of loyalty as a psychological barrier to exit. Voice is only weakly related to the other responses.

Hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analysis. Main effects were entered at the first level, and all interaction effects at the second level. Regression results are presented in Table 5. In this table the coefficients of the full model are presented, that is, with all variables in the equation. It is important to note that for the interpretation of statistically significant

Table 5 Moderated hierarchical regression results for Exit, Voice, Loyalty, Neglect, and Cynicism

	<i>Exit</i>	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Loyalty</i>	<i>Neglect</i>	<i>Cynicism</i>
RC	<u>.392</u> ***	-.104	-.249***	<u>.321</u> ***	<u>.347</u> ***
AUT	-.219**	<u>.112</u>	<u>.253</u> ***	-.095	-.221**
RIGID	-.035	-.069	.032	<u>.010</u>	<u>.091</u>
ASS	-.183**	<u>.151</u> *	<u>.007</u>	-.115	-.150*
Multiple R	.56	.22	.40	.38	.48
RC*AUT	-.038	.076	.133*	-.115	-.026
RC*ASS	-.102	-.157	.001	.117	<u>.167</u> *
RC*RIGID	<u>.184</u> *	.232*	-.057	<u>.041</u>	-.002
AUT*ASS	-.071	<u>.036</u>	-.150*	<u>.148</u> *	<u>.035</u>
AUT*RIGID	<u>.094</u>	.090	.156*	-.004	-.012
ASS*RIGID	.060	-.131	-.036	<u>.047</u>	-.041
Δ Multiple R	.21	.05	.09	.08	.16
R ² for total equation	.363	.113	.217	.188	.277
F for total equation	8.422***	1.866†	4.095***	3.452**	5.659***

Note: Values for RC, AUT, RIGID, ASS, and their interaction terms are β coefficients, with all variables and interaction terms included in the regression equation. Underlined coefficients indicate relationships in the hypothesized direction. Multiple R and Δ multiple R are composed of relationships in the hypothesized direction only.

RC = Role Conflict. AUT = Autonomy. RIGID = Rigidity. ASS = Assertiveness.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .06$.

coefficients, a significant overall F -value is not a prerequisite (Bedeian & Mossholder, 1994).

Hypotheses 1–5 predict exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, and cynicism as a function of the *direct effects* of the situational variables autonomy and role conflict, and the personality variables assertiveness and rigidity. As expected, exit was positively related to role conflict and negatively to autonomy. Also, assertiveness was associated with a lower propensity to exit. It seems that being able to speak up prevents employees from leaving the organization. We found no significant relationship between rigidity and exit. On the whole, with a multiple correlation of .56 hypothesis 1 was supported. Consistent with prior research findings, voice could not be predicted from workplace characteristics. In our study, however, there was a link with assertiveness. With a multiple correlation of .22, support for hypothesis 2 was moderate. As expected, loyalty was negatively associated with role conflict and positively with autonomy. Although the expected associations with personality variables were insignificant, these results lend moderate support to hypothesis 3, with a multiple correlation of .40. Support for hypothesis 4 was somewhat weaker, showing a significant relation between neglect and role conflict only, and a multiple correlation of .38. Finally, cynicism was associated with both situational variables in the expected direction. Contrary to what we expected, assertiveness was inversely related to cynicism. Apparently, cynical behavior is expressed by employees with little autonomy, who experience role conflict, but who generally feel inhibited to express their grievances by speaking up freely. With a multiple correlation of .48, these results nevertheless provide good support for hypothesis 5. In conclusion, the matrix of direct associations between predictors and responses shows that situational predictors clearly outperform personality predictors, that rigidity was not directly related to any of the responses, and that exit and cynicism have very similar antecedents.

As for the hypothesized *interactive effects* of predictors on responses, it is argued that ‘robust main effects are much easier to find than are replicable two-way (not to mention higher order) interactions’ (Funder, 2006: 29). Also, interaction effects tend to be weak and generally require large sample sizes for detection. Nevertheless, we were able to detect a number of significant interaction effects. Perhaps the most interesting finding is that on the basis of direct effects we could not distinguish between exit and cynicism, whereas the interaction effects enable us to make this distinction. The interaction between role conflict and rigidity is positively related to exit, indicating that employees experiencing role conflict and who are unwilling or unable to give up on fixed ideas about right and wrong, are

inclined to leave the organization. On the other hand, the interaction between role conflict and assertiveness is positively related to cynicism. While the direct effect suggests that assertiveness helps avoid cynicism, in combination with role conflict assertiveness seems to take the form of cynically speaking up. Thus, it appears that, conditional on role conflict, rigidity accounts for exit and assertiveness accounts for cynicism. Both interactive effects were in line with expectations, formulated in hypotheses 6 and 10. No support was found for the remaining interactions, which all had unexpected signs.

Discussion

Although many employees are still dedicated to their work, many others appear to have lost their sense of engagement. The central theme in our research is that in a workplace demanding ever more from its employees while giving little in return other than a job and pay, employees will develop and employ means of self-defense to maintain a positive self-image and a sense of dignity, in an attempt to make sense of the new terms of employment that characterize the contemporary workplace. One of the self-defensive behaviors employees may exhibit is cynicism directed at the employing organization. Key to cynicism is the belief that the organization falls short of integrity by not living up in practice to principles of truth and fair dealing, uprightness, honesty, and sincerity. Experiences of non-alignment between words and deeds result in the belief that the organization lacks integrity, triggering various forms of cynical affect and behavior, such as distrust, disappointment, frustration, and disillusionment.

Cynicism is not the only way in which employees may respond to adverse circumstances. The exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (EVLN) model offers a typology of four distinct alternative responses. In this research we found support for our claim that the EVLN model could benefit from an extension with cynicism, to make the EVLN typology a more comprehensive model of employee responses, and to more accurately hypothesize and test relationships between antecedents and consequences of these responses. Factor analysis indicated that cynicism is not the same as exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect, and we conclude that cynicism potentially constitutes a valuable extension of the EVLN typology.

Apart from its distinctiveness, the added value of cynicism in the EVLNC model can also be demonstrated by its ability to help us better understand relationships between personal and workplace characteristics, and work outcomes in terms of engagement and work motivation. Discovering these relationships can be seen as a two-stage process: characteristics of the

workplace and of the person may be related, individually or in combination, in predictable ways to employee responses, and these responses may be related in predictable ways to outcomes. In this study we concentrated on the first stage, that is, on the relationships between workplace and personality characteristics, and responses. To this end, the adverse circumstances brought about by organizational practices and growing organizational demands were operationalized as role conflict. More than many other constructs, role conflict denotes situations in which employees are required by others, but frequently not assisted by them, to sometimes make 'impossible' choices. For instance, what should the social service workers in our example do? Attending more to their clients will bring them into conflict with the organization, and devoting more time and energy to paperwork as required by the organization will bring them into conflict with their clients and their own professional values. Where the traditional workplace offered ways to resolve or alleviate the stressful experience of such incompatible demands, for instance through social support by the organization or by colleagues, the contemporary workplace tends to be less benevolent. Thus, persistent role conflict will likely be experienced as an unpleasant aspect of work, thereby triggering employees' responses.

In this study, the stressful experience of role conflict was found to especially promote cynical disengagement, quitting and intent to leave (exit), and putting less effort in the job than might be expected (neglect), and to a smaller extent role conflict attenuated loyalty. These reactions can be understood as attempts to become less involved, to escape from the situation, or to restore the balance in the exchange relationship with the employing organization by scaling down one's contribution. In keeping with the self-consistency perspective, these reactions can also be seen as ways to avoid being taken advantage of by the organization, thereby maintaining a positive self-image. Obviously, the effectiveness of these responses is a different matter. Especially the neglect response is bound to evoke punitive measures by the organization and disapproval by colleagues. In addition to role conflict, we also investigated the impact on responses of the task characteristic job autonomy, and of the personal characteristics assertiveness and rigidity. From these relationships two consistent patterns emerged. First, rigidity did not predict any of the responses. Second, exit and cynicism were very similar. In both cases, autonomy and assertiveness made up for the effect of role conflict. Both can be seen as opportunities to escape adverse circumstances and to let off steam. As strict behavioral control may be perceived as a lack of autonomy and the implicit organizational message that the employee is not capable to self-regulate, this finding also demonstrates the high impact of organizational control systems on people's work experience.

Apparently, it is the combination of the psychological strain and anxiety caused by role conflict, the absence of freedom, independence, and discretion in the job, and personal impediments to stand up for one's rights and freely express one's opinions and feelings, that makes employees particularly prone to either leave the organization or to resort to self-defensive cynicism. However, although exit and cynicism appear to share the same antecedents, they are not the same constructs and the major part of the variance in both responses remains to be explained. Obviously, many more antecedent variables could have been used, and some of them might have differentially predicted exit and cynicism. For instance, work ethic seems to be a strong ($r = .79$) predictor of cynicism (Guastello et al., 1992), but it may not be a strong predictor of exit. Also, adverse circumstances other than role conflict may elicit responses, and the attribution of adverse circumstances to specific persons or elements in the work environment is suggested as an important antecedent specific of cynicism (Wanous et al., 2004). These are challenging and largely unexplored areas for future research.

As we mentioned earlier, the added value of cynicism to the model can also be inferred from its ability to predict outcomes over and above other responses, but in this study cynicism and the other responses were not predictors. However, the predictive power of cynicism was demonstrated in a study by Wanous et al. (1994). In this study, negative affectivity accounted for an average of 1.7 percent of the variance across four motivational variables, and cynicism accounted for 12.6 percent when it was added after negative affectivity. Even when job satisfaction and organizational commitment were added after negative affectivity as additional control variables, cynicism still accounted for an increment of 2.9 percent. This result may be an indication that cynicism is a strong predictor of work outcomes, over and above similar predictor variables. This was confirmed in a study by Naus, van Iterson and Roe (unpublished data) who related exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, and cynicism to outcomes related to the organization (affective organizational commitment, in-role behavior, and organizational citizenship behavior), to the job (job involvement and service orientation), and to the individual (organization-based self-esteem and stress), and found that cynicism added significantly to the prediction of affective commitment toward the organization and organization-based self-esteem, over and above exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. Another outcome of this study was that exit was related to deteriorated work performance, but cynicism was not related to work performance. The latter result is consistent with an earlier finding by Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly (2003), who concluded that 'employees' cynical attitudes toward the employer did not influence their work performance, their organizational citizenship behaviors, or their absence levels'

(Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003: 641). This goes to show that not predicting outcomes over and above other responses can also denote an important research finding.

In conclusion, the situational workplace characteristics appeared to be better predictors of responses than personality characteristics. Although the latter helped make more accurate predictions in interaction with the situation, we were not able to identify a unique and complete set of predictors for each response. All in all, our results compare well against predictions made by others, such as Rusbult et al. (1988; see Table 4 on p. 610). In their study, multiple *R* for the prediction of exit and voice was somewhat higher than in the present study (.58 and .29 respectively), whereas for the prediction of loyalty it was somewhat lower (.35) and for the prediction of neglect it was considerably lower (.17). In addition, we were able to predict cynicism fairly well, and the additional predictions made on the basis of interaction effects offer a promising perspective to achieve even better results in future research, given that these effects were found with only a moderate sample size. However, it has to be noted that the significant interactions did not reveal a consistent pattern.

Our findings may have important implications for management. For organizations, there is a lot at stake to predict how their employees would likely respond to intended or unintended unpleasant events. We consider the main strength of this study the advancement of a new research design to make such predictions. In addition, incorporating organizational cynicism into the EVLN framework makes it a more comprehensive typology of responses. Surely, cynicism is not a desirable response. It is potentially noxious for the individual as demonstrated by the repeatedly found association with burnout, and widespread cynicism can intoxicate the working atmosphere in organizational units or even entire organizations. The belief that the organization falls short of integrity undermines trust in the organization and its management and can eventually corrode the foundation of the relationship between employee and employing organization. This may have a detrimental impact on organizational effectiveness. Organizations are therefore well advised to take organizational cynicism seriously as a warning sign, and to understand, contain and prevent cynicism where possible before it develops into something beyond repair. The insights gained from the present study may help organizations to do so. The remedy is very simple. For employees to develop perceptions of coherent organizational practices and to become or stay involved, organizations and their management need to live up to principles of truth and fair dealing, uprightness, honesty, and sincerity, not just in words but also in deeds. This will create an atmosphere in which all employees share the ability to establish a sense of self-worth and self-respect and to

appreciate the respect of others (Hodson, 2001; Hodson & Roscigno, 2004) which is then seen as authentic and sincere.

The main limitation of this study was its cross-sectional design with all self-reported data, implying the complete absence of any causal inferences. In structural equation modeling the assumption is made that the latent variable 'causes' the observed indicators. However, no matter how intuitively appealing as it might be to, for instance, regard role conflict as the underlying cause for employees to become cynical, the inverse relationship, that is, being cynical for whatever reason and thereby experiencing more role conflict than non-cynical colleagues, cannot be ruled out. Only longitudinal research can resolve this issue of the direction of causality. Despite these shortcomings, we concur with Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly (2003), who argue that cynicism is not simply a feeling that 'negative' people bring into the organization, but that it has to be regarded as something shaped by experiences in the work context. Also, employees do not respond in an either or fashion. Rather, they will demonstrate signs of all responses, but in varying degrees. It would be interesting to see how individuals dynamically develop their own personal way of responding. Again, this issue can only be addressed in longitudinal or experimental research. Also, factor analysis results should be interpreted with caution, because they may reflect structural characteristics idiosyncratic to the sample, rather than a general phenomenon. It is therefore imperative that factor analysis results be replicated in future research, to show whether the results are consistent and generalizable. Yet another limitation of this study is its relatively small sample size. As interaction effects tend to be weak, detecting such effects requires the statistical power provided by large samples. The fact that we did find a number of statistically significant interaction effects was indeed very encouraging, indicating that our research design has potential to detect even more interactions with larger samples.

In this discussion, we have already indicated a number of promising areas for future research. In addition, replications of the factor analysis and the regression results in this study should add to the reliability and generalizability of our results and possibly help develop a complete set of unique predictors for each response. Moreover, relationships between responses and outcomes need to be investigated to eventually understand the relationships between workplace and personality characteristics and work outcomes.

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Note

- 1 It is unclear whether non-response is distributed evenly across the employees. Accordingly, the representativeness of the achieved sample and the generalizability of the findings may be subject to non-response bias and have to be assessed with due caution.

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Appendix

In the questionnaire, the items used to measure exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, and cynicism, were introduced as follows:

Work has many positive sides, such as income or social contacts, but work may also have less favorable sides. At times, you may feel annoyed at certain things, experience stress or a lack of support, or you may be required to meet contradictory demands. People tend to respond differently to aspects of work experienced as less favorable. Would you please indicate how likely you would respond in the following manner:

Items measuring Exit:

Exit1 = Consider the possibility to change jobs

Exit2 = Intend to change employers

Exit3 = Actively look for a job elsewhere within the same industry

Exit4 = Look for job advertisements in the newspapers to which you could apply

Exit5 = Intend to change your field of work

Items measuring Voice:

Voice1 = Try to work out solutions the organization might benefit from

Voice2 = Come up with suggestions how to prevent these circumstances

Voice3 = Try to work out a solution to the benefit of everyone

Voice4 = Discuss the problem with your superior and try to work out a solution together

Voice5 = In, for instance, work meetings express your point of view to suggest improvements

Items measuring Loyalty:

Loyalty1 = Trust the decision-making process of the organization without your interference

Loyalty2 = Trust the organization to solve the problem without your help

Loyalty3 = Remain confident that the situation will be taken care of, without you actively contributing to the decision-making process

Loyalty4 = Assume that in the end everything will work out fine

Loyalty5 = Optimistically wait for better times

Items measuring Neglect:

Neglect1 = Report sick because you do not feel like working

Neglect2 = Come in late because you do not feel like working

Neglect3 = Put less effort into your work than may be expected of you

Neglect4 = Every now and then do not put enough effort into your work

Neglect5 = Miss out on meetings because you do not feel like attending them

Items measuring Cynicism:

Cynicism1 = Express your confidence in the sincerity of your organization (R)

Cynicism2 = Express the feeling that you are not taken seriously by the organization

Cynicism3 = Use cynical humor to 'let off steam'

Cynicism4 = Withhold suggestions for improvements, because you think nothing is going to change anyway

Cynicism5 = Talk to your colleagues about your management's incompetence

Cynicism6 = Shrug your shoulders at what management requires you to do

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