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## An Examination of Organizational Cynicism from a Strategic Management Perspective

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*Abstract. Strategic management is a management technique that outlines what an organization does, its reason for existence, and the goals it wants to achieve in the future. When creating strategies to achieve goals in an organization, the first stage involves planning these strategies within the framework of the company's vision, then implementing these planned strategies, and finally, reviewing and monitoring the results of the implementation. Strategic management is a management technique used in making future-oriented decisions in an organization. (Aktan, 2003; Karakaş, 2003; Dinçer, 2003). A person who believes that individuals only look out for their own interests and therefore views everyone around them as self-serving is called a "cynic," and the school of thought that describes cynical individuals is called "cynicism." It is stated that many of the main beliefs associated with cynicism, such as honesty, fairness, and sincerity, are abused for individual gain. The words "skepticism," "doubt," "distrust," "unbelief," "pessimism," and "negativity," which are cited as synonyms for cynicism, also encompass, in a civilized interpretation, the human tendency to "find faults, be hard to please, and be critical" (Erdost, 2007). This study will examine the concept of organizational cynicism from a strategic management perspective and evaluate its positive or negative contributions to the organization)*

**Keywords:** Strategic Management, Organizational Cynicism, Strategic Management Perspective

**JEL Codes:** M10, M12, M16

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### 1. Introduction

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Strategic management is a systematic planning, implementation, and monitoring process that enables organizations to achieve their long-term goals. The success of this process depends not only on the formal preparation of strategies but also on employees adopting these strategies and integrating them with organizational goals (Zekioğlu, 2024, p. 65). Weak communication in strategic management damages the flow of information and trust within the organization, leading to detachment and loss of motivation among employees (Gülay, 2022).

When sufficient communication cannot be established within the organization, employee participation in decision-making processes decreases; this weakens the sense of belonging and creates a basis for the formation of negative beliefs towards the organization (Gülay, 2022). Lack of trust and participation prevents employees from internalizing organizational goals, and this situation leads to the emergence of cynical attitudes over time. Cynicism is the sum of negative beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that employees develop towards their organizations (Özler, Atalay & Şahin, 2010, p. 47). As the perception of distrust and injustice increases, employees lose faith in the organization's sincerity, and this leads to emotional distancing (Erdost, Karacaoğlu & Reyhanoğlu, 2007, p. 514). In organizations where cynical attitudes become widespread, cooperation and productivity decrease; the bond between employees and management weakens. These trust and communication problems that arise in the strategic management process become elements that threaten organizational integrity. Lack of communication, deterioration in the perception of justice, and weakness of trust form the basis of cynicism in organizations (Gülay, 2022). Therefore, organizational cynicism is not only an individual attitude but also a risk factor that must be considered in terms of the sustainability of strategic management (Özler, Atalay & Şahin, 2010, p. 50).

## **2. The Relationship Between the Concept of Strategic Management and Organizational Behavior**

Strategic management is a dynamic management approach that analyzes environmental conditions, sets goals, develops plans to achieve these goals, and continuously monitors the implementation process in order to secure the long-term success of an organization. This process is defined as a holistic approach that requires the contribution of all employees, not just managers. Indeed, Gülay (2022: 1-5) considers strategic management as a system that guides the future of the organization and places the human element at the center of the decision-making process.

The success of strategic management practices is directly related to the quality of internal communication within the organization. An effective communication network facilitates employees' understanding and adoption of strategic goals, while a lack of communication leads to the failure of strategic management. The exclusion of employees from strategic decisions causes them to feel excluded and develop negative



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feelings towards the organization. This situation lays the groundwork for the emergence of cynical attitudes in the context of organizational behavior (Uçar and Kızılaslan, 2017: 182).

The role of internal communication in the strategic management process directly affects the levels of belonging, trust, and motivation of employees. It is emphasized that communication acts as a bridge in the strategic management process, and if this bridge is destroyed, the feelings of trust and commitment within the organization will be damaged (Tümuroğlu and Balkaya, 2016: 96-97). Therefore, strategic management is not only about planning and implementation, but also a process that encompasses the psychological dimensions of organizational behavior. In this context, strategic management is not only the process of determining business policies, but also a fundamental tool in guiding internal organizational behaviors and ensuring the emotional commitment of employees. This structure, where strategic communication, leadership, and trust are united under one roof, is of key importance in preventing organizational cynicism.

### **3. The Concept and Dimensions of Organizational Cynicism**

Organizational cynicism refers to the sum of negative beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that employees develop towards their organizations (Andersson, 1996, pp. 1397–1398). This concept is considered a general attitude that arises as a result of perceiving organizations as structures lacking sincerity, justice, and honesty. When distrust increases, suspicion rises within the organization, and individuals exhibit distant and prejudiced behaviors towards both management and colleagues (Özler, Atalay & Şahin, 2010, p. 49).

Organizational cynicism consists of three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive dimension expresses the individual's negative beliefs about their organization; the affective dimension expresses feelings such as anger, disappointment, and distrust developed towards the organization; and the behavioral dimension expresses the outward expression of these negative feelings (Ayhan, 2019, pp. 23–27). This tripartite structure shows that individuals distance themselves from the organization not only at the intellectual level, but also emotionally and behaviorally.

It is stated that cynical attitudes are more frequently observed in organizations lacking ethical leadership and where the perception of justice is weak. The decrease in honesty and transparency in management undermines employees' trust in the organization, and this situation gradually turns into permanent cynicism (Abay, 2019, pp. 83–85). In environments where trust is weak, organizational commitment also decreases; employees become indifferent to the organization's goals (Özler et al., 2010, p. 49).

In conclusion, organizational cynicism is considered a multifaceted phenomenon consisting of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. This phenomenon is closely related to elements such as intra-organizational trust, justice, ethical leadership, and communication. Cynical attitudes are strengthened in



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environments where justice is compromised, communication is weak, and ethical values are disregarded (Ayhan, 2019, p. 28; Abay, 2019, p. 87; Özler et al., 2010, p. 50).

#### **4. Determinants of Organizational Cynicism from a Strategic Management Perspective**

The strategic management process is a management approach that encompasses not only the planning and implementation phases but also the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of employees within the organization. In this process, elements such as communication, leadership, fairness, and human resources practices are fundamental factors determining strategic success (Aydın and Aksoy, 2007: 298). When strategic communication weakens in organizations, employees tend to distance themselves from management; this leads to the emergence of organizational cynicism. According to Gülay (2022: 40), the lack of employee participation in decision-making and insufficient information sharing in the strategic management process cause individuals to develop suspicion and distrust towards the organization. This situation shows that strategic communication is not only about information transfer but also about establishing an emotional connection. One of the important determinants of cynicism in organizations is leadership style. Özgenel and Hıdıroğlu (2019: 1004-1005) examined the effect of leadership styles on employees' levels of organizational cynicism and revealed that transformational leadership, in particular, reduces cynicism. According to the research, transformational leaders motivate employees and strengthen the sense of trust in the organization, while authoritarian or permissive leadership styles increase employees' negative feelings towards the organization. This finding, when evaluated from a strategic management perspective, shows that leadership style is as decisive in the psychological climate of employees as it is in the success of strategic goals.

Abay (2019) emphasizes that ethical leadership and the perception of justice are at the root of organizational cynicism. According to the research results, a leadership approach based on ethical values facilitates the achievement of organizational justice and contributes to the reduction of cynical attitudes (pp. 83–85). Conversely, the unfair decisions and inconsistent behaviors of managers cause a crisis of trust in strategic management processes. Such environments weaken employees' sense of belonging to the organization and undermine their belief in strategic goals (Abay, 2019: 86).

Human resources practices are also important determinants of organizational cynicism. Yılmaz (2023) revealed that human resources management activities, particularly wage management and reward systems, have a significant and negative effect on cynicism (pp. 3330–3331). Accordingly, fair wage and transparent reward systems strengthen employees' trust in the organization and reduce cynical behavior.



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Conversely, the perception of injustice or incompetence in the performance evaluation process increases organizational cynicism (Yılmaz, 2023: 3331).

From a strategic management perspective, lack of communication, leadership style, weak ethical values, and injustices in human resources policies stand out as key determinants of organizational cynicism. Gülay (2022: 40) states that these factors create a chain reaction in the failure of strategic management; in particular, a lack of communication leads to a loss of trust, and a loss of trust leads to cynical attitudes. Therefore, the strategic management process in organizations should be carried out not only through economic or structural planning, but also with a leadership approach that takes into account the psychological needs of employees (Abay, 2019: 87; Özgenel & Hıdıroğlu, 2019: 1006; Yılmaz, 2023: 3332).

## **5. The role of trust, Fairness and Communication in Strategic Management**

The success of strategic management is closely related to the foundation of trust established within the organization. Trust fosters mutual understanding, open communication, and cooperation among members (Özler, Atalay, and Şahin, 2010: 48-49). As Özler and colleagues emphasize, in environments lacking trust, individuals behave prejudicially, distantly, and suspiciously towards each other; this, in turn, leads to an increase in organizational cynicism over time. The failure to establish trust in strategic management processes makes it difficult for employees to believe in the organization's goals and hinders the effective implementation of strategic decisions.

Güçlü, Koşar, and Şahin (2017) state that strategic leadership plays a significant role in establishing intra-organizational trust. In their research, they found that when strategic leaders adopt a management approach based on open communication, participation, and a visionary perspective, negative attitudes such as silence or cynicism among employees decrease. Strategic leaders view communication not only as a means of information transfer but also as an interaction process that strengthens organizational commitment. This perspective allows employees to contribute more willingly to strategic goals by fostering mutual trust within the organization.

The element of justice is also critically important for the sustainability of strategic management. Abay (2019: 80-85) states that in situations where organizational justice is not ensured, employees develop negative feelings towards their organizations and cynical behavior increases. Accordingly, when employees perceive injustice in rewards, promotions, or task distribution, they lose trust in the organization; this also weakens their belief in strategic goals. In organizations where justice is established, the feeling of trust strengthens, communication becomes more open, and cynical tendencies decrease significantly.

Özler, Atalay, and Şahin (2010: 50) also state that organizational trust is based on reciprocity and that trust affects cynicism in the strategic management process through both cause and effect relationships.



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According to their research, positive feelings prevail in organizations where trust exists, while cynical attitudes spread in structures where distrust prevails. Therefore, trust is not only a “human relations” element of the strategic management process, but also a factor that determines the strategic success of the organization. Consequently, from a strategic management perspective, trust, justice, and communication are three fundamental elements that complement each other. In an organization lacking trust, the perception of justice weakens, and in environments where justice is compromised, communication breakdowns occur. This cycle leads to the failure of strategic management and an increase in organizational cynicism (Özler et al., 2010: 49–50; Abay, 2019: 85; Güçlü et al., 2017: 7). Strategic leaders must manage these three elements together to ensure the sustainability of organizational commitment, motivation, and corporate reputation.

## 6. **Human Resources Practices and Organizational Cynicism as a Strategic Management Tool**

In the strategic management approach, human resources management (HRM) is seen as a tool that directly affects organizational success. Yılmaz (2023: 3330-3331) states that HRM practices have significant effects on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of organizational cynicism, and these effects are generally negative. In the research, it was found that wage management and reward systems, in particular, reduce organizational cynicism. Fair wage policies and systems that properly reward employee performance strengthen trust in the organization and prevent cynical attitudes (Yılmaz, 2023:).

Conversely, the perception of injustice in performance evaluation processes creates negative feelings in employees and increases organizational cynicism. Yılmaz (2023: 3331–3332) emphasizes that in organizations where performance criteria are not clearly shared and the process is not transparent, employees' trust in management decreases, and this is one of the strongest determinants of organizational cynicism. This finding shows that human resources practices within the scope of strategic management have not only an operational but also an emotional and psychological aspect.

Ayhan (2019), on the other hand, emphasized the relationship between organizational cynicism and corporate reputation, revealing that HR policies directly affect the organizational image. According to the study, employees' perception of the organization—especially in terms of fairness, merit, and trust—also shapes the judgments of external stakeholders about the institution. Strengthening corporate reputation is possible not only through external communication strategies but also through the strategic management of internal resources (Ayhan, 2019: 27). Therefore, human resources practices undertake a dual function in terms of strategic management, shaping both internal commitment and external reputation.

In conclusion, human resources practices as a strategic management tool serve the function of reducing organizational cynicism and strengthening organizational trust. Fair, transparent, and merit-based policies



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reinforce employees' belief in the organization; Practices involving uncertainty and inequality increase cynical tendencies (Yılmaz, 2023: 3332; Ayhan, 2019: 28). Therefore, from a strategic management perspective, human resources systems should be considered not only as personnel management but also as a strategic investment that ensures the sustainability of organizational commitment.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Studies show that the strategic management approach affects not only the structural integrity of organizations but also their psychological and cultural integrity. Lack of communication, distortion of the perception of justice, and inconsistencies in leadership styles within the strategic management process weaken employees' trust in the organization and lead to the spread of cynical attitudes (Gülay, 2022: 56; Özler, Atalay & Şahin, 2010: 49–50). This situation reveals that strategic success depends not only on planning but also on employees' beliefs and attitudes towards the organization.

Research shows that trust is of strategic importance in organizations, both as a cause and an effect. According to Özler et al. (2010: 48–49), a lack of trust forms the basis of cynicism; cynical behaviors make it difficult to rebuild trust. Abay (2019: 83–85) states that ethical leadership and a management approach based on justice can break this cycle, and that fair behavior strengthens intra-organizational trust. The findings highlighted by Yılmaz (2023: 3331–3332) also show that human resources management is an effective tool in preventing cynicism at the strategic level. Fair performance evaluation, transparent reward systems, and merit-based recruitment processes strengthen employees' trust in the organization, thereby reducing cynical attitudes. At this point, it can be said that strategic human resources policies are not only operational but also an element that ensures the sustainability of organizational culture.

When evaluated in terms of leadership styles, Özgenel and Hıdıroğlu (2019: 1005) state that transformational leadership reduces organizational cynicism because these leaders strengthen employees' beliefs, feelings, and motivations. Similarly, Güçlü et al. (2017: 5-6) have shown that strategic leadership prevents negative attitudes such as silence and cynicism by creating an organizational culture based on open communication and trust.

In conclusion, from the perspective of strategic management, organizational cynicism should be seen as a combination of a lack of communication, distortion in the perception of justice, unethical leadership attitudes, and loss of trust. To ensure sustainable strategic success in organizations, it is recommended that leaders and managers pay attention to the following points:

- A participatory communication culture should be established; employees should be involved in strategic decision-making processes.



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- An ethical leadership approach should be adopted; managers should act in accordance with the principles of justice, transparency, and accountability.
- Human resources policies should be based on fair performance evaluation and merit-based reward.
- Corporate trust should be considered as part of strategic goals; trust should be seen as both a value and a strategic resource.

Implementing these recommendations will strengthen the human-centered aspect of strategic management; it will contribute to reducing cynicism in organizations, increasing motivation, and enhancing corporate reputation (Gülay, 2022: 58-59; Abay, 2019: 86; Yılmaz, 2023: 3332; Özler et al., 2010: 50; Özgenel & Hıdıroğlu, 2019: 1006).

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