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Abstract
The current study investigated supervisors’ and non-supervisors’ perceptions of cynicism about organizational change as well as whether organizational trust moderates the relationship between job level and cynicism. A total of 358 people participated in this study, but 146 surveys were discarded after data cleaning, resulting in a final sample size of 212. It was hypothesized that supervisors and non-supervisors would hold different views regarding pessimism toward organizational change, dispositional attributions made about those responsible for change, as well as situational attributions made about those responsible for change. However, results revealed no significant differences between the two groups regarding any of these variables. Given that no significant relations were found between job level and the three dimensions, it was not surprising that organizational trust did not moderate any of these relations. Although the main hypotheses were not supported, future research should examine if job level might predict cynicism by differentiating among managerial levels (as opposed to just having one supervisory group). Results also showed that organizational trust significantly and negatively predicted both pessimism toward organizational change and dispositional attributions (the main dimensions of cynicism about organizational change), but it did not significantly predict situational attributions. Therefore, companies should strive to enhance organizational trust and reduce cynicism among their employees.

Keywords: job level, cynicism about organizational change, organizational trust
Chapter I

Review of the Literature

Because organizations are constantly changing, cynicism about organizational change may be a consistent concern for business leaders. In fact, Mirvis and Kanter (1989) stated that 43% of the American workforce is cynical. Cynics tend to distrust the motives of their leaders because they believe those leaders may exploit employee contributions (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989).

Moreover, employees at every level can be cynical toward and resist organizational change. People may be reluctant to change for a variety of reasons. For example, the increased pressure and uncertainty associated with change may cause employees to respond negatively toward change and resist change efforts (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Jones et al. (2008) suggested that those responsible for change should take into account the needs of different organizational groups in order to bring about fruitful change. Albrecht (2002) also suggested that future research should investigate levels of cynicism toward organizational change among different organizational groups, more specifically between management and non-management. The purpose of the current study, therefore, was to investigate the relationship between job level and cynicism about organizational change. Specifically, this study examined if there are differences between supervisors’ and non-supervisors’ levels of cynicism about organizational change.
Organizational Cynicism

Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998) defined organizational cynicism as “a negative attitude toward one’s employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect” (p. 345). Dean et al. framed cynicism as a state, rather than a trait, as they defined it as an aspect that could change over time. They also viewed it as a continuum, such that people could have varying degrees of cynicism toward their organizations.

Cynics (or people high on cynicism) may believe that organizational practices do not represent principles such as fairness, honesty, and sincerity. These cynics may also believe that such principles are often sacrificed for convenience and that dishonest behavior is the norm (Dean et al., 1998). Furthermore, they may believe that choices concerning the direction of the company are based purely in self-interest (Goldner, Ritti, & Ference, 1977). Cynics’ affect also plays a role in how they express cynicism. For example, cynics may show disapproval for and anger toward their organization, as well as feel worry, hatred, and even embarrassment as a result of their organization (Dean et al., 1998). With these findings, Dean et al. (1998) concluded that cynicism is often associated with a variety of negative emotions and viewed it as a negative characteristic. However, although organizational cynicism may generally be considered harmful to organizations, there are instances in which organizational cynicism is beneficial (Dean et al., 1998). At the individual level, people who believe in others’ integrity are vulnerable to being tricked or cheated by those who lack integrity (Dean et al., 1998). Therefore,
cynics may provide much-needed doubt and uncertainty because they believe that hidden motives underlie actions and are unlikely to accept the official word on why things are the way they are (Goldner et al., 1977). In a way, cynics may be seen as the vocal conscience of an organization, helping those who are more trusting of others filter out unhelpful information, advice, or instruction (Dean et al., 1998).

Those with cynical attitudes express strong criticisms about their organization. These expressions include explicit statements about a lack of trustworthy people in the organization (Dean et al., 1998), use of sarcasm and uncertainty about careers and roles (Ashford, 1988), fear and anxiety (Terry, Carey, & Callan, 2001), negative communication (Lewis, 2000), and pessimism toward acquiring new roles, relationships, and skills (Rubenstein, Lammers, Yano, Tabbarah, & Robbins, 1996). Furthermore, organizational cynics also tend to make pessimistic predictions about the future of the organization and use non-verbal behaviors such as eye rolling, smirking, and sneering (Dean et al., 1998). The present study focused on cynicism that can occur during times of organizational change.

**Cynicism about Organizational Change**

As previously mentioned, the current study focused on cynicism toward organizational change. Wanous, Reichers, and Austin (2000) defined cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) as “a pessimistic viewpoint about change efforts being successful because those responsible for making change are blamed for being unmotivated, incompetent, or both” (p. 133). Reichers, Wanous, and Austin (1997) and Wanous, Austin, and Reichers (1994) conceptualized CAOC as having two components: a general situational pessimism about the likelihood that change will be successful and a
set of dispositional attributions made about those responsible for bringing about
successful change (as cited in Wanous et al., 2000). When measuring CAOC, they also
included four items about situational attributions, which were also included in this study.
As previously stated, cynicism tends to be associated with a variety of negative emotions
and is conceptualized as a state. Therefore, cynicism seems similar to negative affect or
affectivity (NA) as a state or mood, as opposed to NA as a trait. However, NA
encompasses a variety of emotions and is not typically directed at a specific target.
Specifically, Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) defined NA as a “general dimension of
subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive
mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness, with low
NA being a state of calmness and serenity” (p. 1063). On the other hand, CAOC focuses
on pessimism and is directed toward an organization.

Wanous et al. (2000) found that CAOC is often exhibited when employees realize
that past change has been insignificant, either due to ineffective leadership practices or a
lack of participation in decision making. Additionally, employees exhibiting CAOC do
not confine their cynicism to past change; these employees are also pessimistic regarding
the likelihood that change will be successful in the future. In general, CAOC is negatively
related to employee motivation and perceptions about the processes, instruments, and
protocols by which change is brought about (Wanous et al., 2000). Both a lack of
participation in the change process and being limited to receiving sparse information
about change may reduce openness to change (Oreg, 2006) and possibly increase
cynicism. Indeed, Bordia, Rustebog, Jimmieson, and Irmer (2011) investigated the effects
of past change management on employees’ willingness to accept future change and
proposed that a history of ineffective change management will not only create cynicism about the likelihood that future change will be successful, but that it will also sour general organizational attitudes (e.g., trust in management). They found that distrust in management develops over time as a result of ineffective change management, and that because of this distrust, employees become less willing to be vulnerable to future change.

Wanous et al. (2000) proposed a link between cynicism about organizational change and trust in management. More specifically, the less involved employees perceive themselves in orchestrating organizational change, the more likely they are to be cynical about the likelihood of the success of that change. As a result, employees without a lot of responsibility in the organization may be more susceptible to cynicism about change. Wanous et al.’s (2004) addition to the CAOC theory includes the role that ineffective supervisors play in promoting employee CAOC. Not only are employees less likely to perceive change favorably if they are not involved, the acceptance of change is negatively related to irritation at work (the tendency to become annoyed or angry; \( r = -0.29, p < .05 \)) and intentions to quit (\( r = -0.31, p < .05 \); Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Furthermore, Wanous et al. found that CAOC was negatively correlated with organizational commitment (\( r = -0.46, p < .01 \)), employee motivation to make a change successful (\( r = -0.40, p < .01 \)), and positively correlated with grievance filing (\( r = 0.13, p < .01 \)). Therefore, it is important to examine what factors may increase CAOC in organizations in order to try to reduce CAOC.

Management can counteract employee helplessness concerning change and potentially reduce the likelihood and severity of CAOC. For example, Reichers et al. (1997) recommended getting people involved with the change process in some way (e.g.,
participative decision making), increasing management credibility, and rewarding managers who nurture collaboration when developing change. As a result, employees may feel more committed to the organization and less likely to develop CAOC. Similarly, Albrecht (2002) recommended addressing past mistakes publically, limiting the amount of surprise change that occurs within the organization, regularly informing employees of ongoing changes, celebrating successes and giving credit where credit is due, understanding change as the employee sees it, and providing freedom for employees to express their thoughts and concerns in a validating – rather than a condescending – way.

All of the above efforts to reduce CAOC may not be equally effective, however. After all, the perceptions that employees harbor about change may vary according to their position within the organization (Jones et al., 2008). Jones et al. (2008) stated that “change poses special challenges at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, as different aspects of the change process may be salient to employees and may be evaluated quite differently” (p. 297). Because organizations are complex, change affects many different aspects of the organization. Therefore, it is important to investigate any potential differences in CAOC among employees at different organizational levels.

**Job Level**

Kanter, Stein, and Jick (1992) found that three key groups differentiate themselves within organizations during change: those who strategize change, those who manage change, and those who are generally targeted by change. Furthermore, Kanter et al. concluded that change managers and recipients are more threatened by the consequences of organizational change than strategists because they are most likely to be
affected by change, either through an alteration of their status, responsibilities, or even by losing their job entirely.

Using the three groups identified by Kanter et al. (1992), Jones et al. (2008) conducted interviews of executives, supervisors, and non-supervisors at a major hospital concerning positive and negative aspects of a current organizational change initiative. Jones et al. concluded that executives view change much broader than others, with organization-wide issues such as the implications of change on training, organizational development, and communication during change taking precedence over emotional or attitudinal issues. Jones et al. also concluded that supervisors may be more concerned with intra-organizational and departmental issues, such as employee participation in change and the effect that change has on employees’ roles in the organization. Additionally, executives considered the positive and negative aspects of change equally, whereas supervisors were more concerned with the uncertainty that comes with change rather than the worthwhile products of successful change. Thus, even though executives were generally more positive about change, they were still susceptible to negative feelings toward change.

Regarding non-supervisors, Jones et al. (2008) concluded that they may be more concerned about emotions and attitudes about the change itself and how it will affect their own job, as opposed to organization-wide (i.e., executive) or intra-organizational and departmental (i.e., supervisor) issues. Non-supervisors were more focused on negative aspects of change, particularly relating to the personal characteristics of those who strategize change. Also, non-supervisors viewed change very personally, typically without regard for how the change affected the organization as a whole or even inter-
departmentally. The key distinction between non-supervisors and executives or supervisors is that non-supervisors tend to blame “those responsible for lacking the motivation and/or ability to effect successful change” (Wanous et al., 2000, p. 135). Because non-supervisors seem less concerned with and most likely have less influence on organization-wide change-making than both executives and supervisors, they are more likely to feel helpless in the face of organizational change. In sum, Jones et al. (2008) found that supervisors focused more on processes, planning, and staff workloads during times of change, whereas non-supervisors focused more on their attitudes and emotions about change. Because of the difference in their perceptions of change, it may prove valuable to investigate differences in CAOC between supervisors and non-supervisors.

As found by Wanous et al. (2000), a lack of participation in decision making is a key distinction between non-supervisors’ and supervisors’ perceptions of change. Wanous et al. (2000) state that a dispositional attribution about the failure of change manifests as blame for “those responsible” for change, which is “based on a lack of motivation, a lack of ability, or both” (Wanous et al., 2000, p. 136). The fundamental attribution error is the tendency “to underestimate the impact of situational factors and to overestimate the role of dispositional factors” when making attributions about other people’s behaviors (Ross, 1977, p. 183). However, people tend to attribute the causes of their own behaviors to situational factors, as opposed to dispositions (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). Therefore, non-supervisors may make internal (personal) attributions for why the change has failed, blaming the ability or motivation of those responsible for change. On the other hand, because supervisors are unlikely to place blame on themselves for failed change, it was hypothesized that supervisors would be more likely to attribute failed
change to external (situational) constraints instead of dispositional (internal) attributions (i.e., placing blame for failed change on events beyond their control; Wanous et al., 2000). However, non-supervisors’ pessimism, dispositional attributions, and situational attributions might be different for employees who trust their supervisors (Albrecht, 2002; Bordia et al., 2011). Therefore, the current study examined the moderating role of trust in these relations.

**Organizational Trust**

In organizations, employee experiences form their views of vulnerability and risk, and as a result, their general trust in the organization and trust in management (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). Trust has been defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). Subordinates who trust their supervisors or organizations may be less skeptical about change because they trust that their supervisor or employer is looking out for their well-being. Experiencing vulnerability as a result of change, therefore, may affect employee trust in management. Moreover, because supervisors and non-supervisors both experience organizational change simultaneously, the degree to which non-supervisors trust their supervisors may influence their cynicism about organizational change.

During change, leaders play a crucial role: They provide a vision for change, support employees during change, and act as role models for appropriate behavior (Jones et al., 2008). These actions establish stability and increase employees’ commitment to change (Covin & Kilmann, 1990; Schweiger et al., 1987). Albrecht (2002) found that employees who perceived senior management as truthful, competent, and trustworthy
were more likely to be positively predisposed toward organizational change. Additionally, Kramer (1996), Reichers et al. (1997), and Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999) stated that employees reacted more positively toward change initiatives if they viewed the change agents as dependable and responsible. However, Bordia et al. (2011) suggested that if employees perceive that change has been mismanaged in some way, they will naturally develop beliefs that the organization is bad at managing change.

If change is perceived as poorly managed, it may lead to low levels of trust in the organization (e.g., Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). For example, Morgan and Zeffane (2003) found that the number of occurrences of change was negatively related to trust in management. Similarly, Kiefer (2005) found that emotional distress from change resulted in lower trust in management and in the organization as a whole. People who were negatively affected by change were less likely to trust management. With low trust in the organization, an employee will be unsure of whether his or her job-related interests will be important to the organization.

Axtell et al. (2002) found that employees were, however, more open to change after having been exposed to similar change in the past that both increased their knowledge and familiarity with the change process itself. Similarly, Wanous at al. (2000) noted that employees were less cynical about change if they recognized similarities between the current change and change that had been successful in the past. Because change can increase employee knowledge and familiarity with the change process, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) concluded that management that has a history of involving employees in decision making and enacting fair procedures may promote trust in management.
Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999) argued that trust in management should lead to acceptance of organizational change. Because trust is comprised of a belief that the other person is truthful (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004), it is important to recognize that trust in management may modify how supervisors and non-supervisors view change. Any past changes in an organization, for example, may affect the current levels of cynicism toward change in that organization. In other words, if a past change is perceived as well-managed, Bordia et al. (2011) attribute a perception of well-managed change to high levels of organizational trust and low levels of cynicism about organizational change. Therefore, because trust in organizations may reduce cynicism about organizational change, this study examined the moderating role of trust in the job level-CAOC relation.
Although change is an everyday component of organizational life, employees at every level can be cynical toward and resist organizational change. Additionally, the increased pressure and uncertainty associated with change may cause employees to respond negatively toward change and resist change efforts (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Because organizations are constantly changing, organizational cynicism may be a consistent concern for business leaders.

Wanous et al. (2000) defined CAOC as “a pessimistic viewpoint about change efforts being successful because those responsible for making change are blamed for being unmotivated, incompetent, or both” (p. 133). Reichers et al. (1997) and Wanous et al. (1994) conceptualized CAOC as having two components: a set of dispositional attributions made about those responsible for bringing about successful change, and a general situational pessimism about the likelihood that change will be successful (as cited in Wanous et al., 2000). When measuring CAOC, they also included four items about situational attributions. The present study investigated how cynicism about organizational change relates to job level (operationalized as supervisors vs. non-supervisors).

Albrecht (2002) suggested that future research should investigate differences between management and non-management employees’ cynicism toward organizational change. Jones et al. (2008) stated that the perceptions employees harbor about
organizational change may vary according to their position within the organization. More specifically, they found that supervisors may be more concerned with organization-wide issues and less concerned with employees’ emotions or attitudes. On the other hand, non-supervisors may focus more on the emotions and attitudes about the change itself. Because non-supervisors are most likely less concerned with and typically have less influence on organization-wide change, it was hypothesized that non-supervisors would be significantly more cynical than supervisors. As previously mentioned, Reichers et al. (1997) and Wanous et al. (1994) stated that a general situational pessimism about the likelihood that change will be successful was one of the two primary CAOC components. Therefore, the following was hypothesized:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Non-supervisors will score significantly higher than supervisors on pessimism toward organizational change.

Furthermore, because supervisors and non-supervisors differ in how they view organizational change, it is likely they will score differently on whether they will attribute any unsuccessful changes in the future to dispositional characteristics (the second primary CAOC component) or situational constraints. Because non-supervisors’ cynicism about change is likely to be attributed to dispositional aspects of those responsible for change (i.e., supervisors), the following hypothesis was proposed:

*Hypothesis 1b:* Non-supervisors will score significantly higher than supervisors on dispositional attributions made about those responsible for making change.
On the other hand, because supervisors are less likely to place blame for unsuccessful change on themselves, and instead are more likely to place blame for unsuccessful change on events beyond their control, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*Hypothesis 1c*: Non-supervisors will score significantly lower than supervisors on situational attributions made about those responsible for making change.

Although it is expected that, overall, non-supervisors would be cynical toward organizational change, their cynicism might differ based on organizational trust (Albrecht, 2002; Bordia et al., 2011), such that employees who trust their organizations may be less cynical than employees who do not trust their organizations (Albrecht, 2002; Bordia et al., 2011). Therefore, it is expected that trust would moderate the relationship between job level and each component of CAOC as well as the relationship between job level and situational attributions. Specifically, the following hypotheses were proposed:

*Hypothesis 2a*: Organizational trust will moderate the relationship between job level and pessimism toward organizational change, such that the relation between job level and pessimism will be stronger when organizational trust is low.

*Hypothesis 2b*: Organizational trust will moderate the relationship between job level and dispositional attributions made about those responsible for making change, such that the relation between job level and dispositional attributions will be stronger when organizational trust is low.

*Hypothesis 2c*: Organizational trust will moderate the relationship between job level and situational attributions made about those responsible for making change, such that the relation between job level and situational attributions will be stronger when organizational trust is high.
Chapter III

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an internet marketplace in which participants receive monetary payment for performing Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs). To qualify for participating, participants had to be at least 18 years old, live in the United States, and have a HIT approval rate of at least 95%. Both supervisors and non-supervisors were recruited. A total of 358 people participated in this study, with an average completion time of 5 minutes and 47 seconds. Participants were paid $0.25 for participating, even if they failed the quality checks. A total of 146 surveys were discarded prior to running the analyses. These surveys included 34 entries without worker IDs, 7 surveys with failed quality checks, 19 surveys with duplicate MTurk IDs as a result of posting multiple batches on MTurk, 73 surveys indicating an “Unemployed” job status, and 13 surveys indicating “Other” for their job level (rather than selecting a supervisory or a non-supervisory role). Although one person reported living in Thailand and another person reported living in both the United States and Korea, their responses were retained because they both indicated that their nationality was American.

This resulted in a final sample size of 212 participants, of whom 55.2% were male and 43.9% were female; two people did not report their gender. The mean age of participants was 33.61 years ($SD = 10.82$ years). Eighty-three percent of the participants
were White or Caucasian, 8.0% were Black or African American, 4.7% were Asian, 2.8% were Hispanic or Latino, and 0.9% were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and one person did not report race/ethnicity. About 71% of the participants indicated that they were working part-time, and 29% indicated that they were working full-time. Moreover, 80.2% indicated they had only one job, 17.0% stated they had two jobs, and 2.8% reported they had three or more jobs.

**Measures**

**Cynicism about organizational change.** Participants were asked to complete a CAOC measure consisting of four items for overall pessimism and four items for the dispositional component of CAOC, and they were also asked to complete four items about situational attributions (Wanous et al., 1994; see Appendix A). Wanous et al. (1994) reported coefficient alphas of .86, .86, and .61 for overall pessimism, dispositional attributions, and situational attributions, respectively. In the current study, coefficient alphas of these subscales were .91, .85, and .70 for overall pessimism, dispositional attributions, and situational attributions, respectively. Wanous et al. (2000) operationalized CAOC as consisting of the pessimism and dispositional components, whereas they conceptualized the situational attributions measure as separate from the CAOC construct. The authors reported a correlation of .83 between the pessimism and dispositional attribution subscales (the correlation was .74 in the current study), arguing for why they should be considered one dimension, and reported a correlation of .20 between the 8-item CAOC measure and the 4-item situational attribution measure (the correlation was .37 in the current study). However, it should be noted that although Wanous and colleagues stated that their results supported a two-factor model (with the
situational component functioning as a check on discriminant validity), the goodness-of-fit indices suggested that both a three-factor model and a two-factor model were plausible. Therefore, in the current study, those dimensions were treated separately, as reflected in the hypotheses of this study. For these measures, the respondents rated each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*. A sample pessimism item is “Most of the programs that are supposed to solve problems at my company will not do much good.” A sample dispositional attribution item is “The people responsible for solving problems at my company do not try hard enough to solve them.” Finally, a sample situational attribution item is “The people responsible for fixing problems at my company do not have the resources they need to get the job done.”

**Organizational trust.** Participants were also asked to complete a seven-item measure reflecting the dimensions of organizational trust identified by Gabarro and Athos (1976) and administered by Robinson (1996; see Appendix B). Three items were reverse-scored. The respondents rated each item using a 5-point response format with 1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 5 = *Strongly Agree*. A sample item is “I believe my employer has high integrity.” Robinson (1996) reported coefficient alphas of .82 and .87 for organizational trust at two different times. Coefficient alpha for organizational trust in this study was .91.

**Procedure**

Approval to conduct this study was sought from Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board (please see Appendix C for the IRB Approval Letter). The survey was uploaded to surveygizmo.com and posted on MTurk (see Appendix D for the MTurk interface). Once participants accessed the survey, they were directed to the informed
consent form (see Appendix E). Participants were then asked to complete the main scales, and a demographic form (see Appendix F). Participants were asked to focus on one job when completing the measures, in case they had more than one job (about 20% reported having more than one job). In order to ensure that participants were attentive, two quality checks were included. Once participants submitted their responses, they were debriefed (see Appendix G).
Chapter IV

Results

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the continuous study measures are provided in Table 1. Analyses were conducted to examine the relations between job level and the following dimensions relevant to cynicism: pessimism, dispositional attribution, and situational attribution. Analyses were also conducted to investigate whether trust moderates the relation between job level and each of these dimensions. Participants who selected the “non-supervisor” job level were classified as Non-Supervisors, whereas participants who selected any other level were classified as Supervisors. A total of 144 participants reported that they were in a non-supervisory role, and 68 participants reported they were in a supervisory role (see Table 2).

Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c were tested using independent-samples t-tests. Given that Levene’s test was statistically significant for both pessimism and situational attributions, the t-values and degrees of freedom when equal variances are not assumed are reported. Results showed that there was no significant difference between supervisors ($M = 2.67, SD = 1.09$) and non-supervisors ($M = 2.77, SD = 0.90$) on pessimism toward organizational change; $t(111.77) = 0.65, p = .514$. Results also showed that there was no significant difference between supervisors ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.03$) and non-supervisors ($M = 2.75, SD = 0.97$) on dispositional attributions toward those responsible for organizational change; $t(210) = 1.22, p = .225$. In addition, results showed that there was
Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations of Continuous Study Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overall Pessimism</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dispositional Attributions</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>.74*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Situational Attributions</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>.36*</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organizational Trust</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-.61*</td>
<td>-.61*</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 212. Coefficient alphas are shown along the diagonal.  
*p < .001.*
Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages for Job Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Supervisory</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Line manager</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower-Level manager</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-Level Manager, Executive, or Division Head</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N = 212.
no significant difference between supervisors ($M = 2.77, SD = 0.89$) and non-supervisors ($M = 2.68, SD = 0.72$) on situational attributions made about those responsible for making change; $t(109.89) = -0.77, p = .443$. Therefore, Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c were not supported.

Given that the first three hypotheses were not supported, it was not expected that the second set of hypotheses would be supported. However, to be complete, Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c were tested using moderated regression (see Tables 3, 4, and 5). Organizational trust was mean centered prior to computing the product term. Moreover, because job level is a nominal variable, it was dummy coded prior to running the analyses. As shown in Table 3, job level and organizational trust were entered in the first step of the regression analysis, and the interaction term between job level and organizational trust was entered in the second step of the analysis. In Table 4, job level and organizational trust were entered in the first step of the regression analysis, and the interaction term between job level and organizational trust was entered in the second step of the analysis. In Table 5, job level and organizational trust were entered in the first step of the regression analysis, and the interaction term between job level and organizational trust was entered in the second step of the analysis. Results showed that organizational trust did not moderate the relationship between job level and pessimism toward organizational change, $\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .495$. Organizational trust also did not moderate the relationship between job level and dispositional attributions, $\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .226$. Lastly, organizational trust did not moderate the relationship between job level and situational attributions, $\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .798$. Therefore, Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c were also not supported. Although not a focus of the current study, it is interesting to note that
organizational trust significantly and negatively predicted both pessimism toward organizational change and dispositional attributions (the two dimensions of CAOC), but it did not significantly predict situational attributions.

Given the unequal sample sizes, a new data set that had the same number of supervisors and non-supervisors was created. Because there were 68 supervisors, 68 cases were randomly selected from the sample of 144 non-supervisors. A random number generator was used to create a set of 144 random positive integers ranging from 1-144. This list was then matched to the existing list of 144 non-supervisors. After each non-supervisor was matched to a random positive integer from 1-144, the first 76 cases were removed, resulting in 68 non-supervisors. The main analyses were conducted on this new data set that had equal sample sizes, and the same pattern of results emerged.
Table 3

*Moderated Regression Analysis for Testing Hypothesis 2a*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$b$</th>
<th>$SE_b$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$\Delta R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Level</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Trust</td>
<td>-.66*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.61*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Level</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Trust</td>
<td>-.63*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.58*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level*Trust</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 212. The criterion in this analysis was pessimism. *$p < .001$.}
Table 4

*Moderated Regression Analysis for Testing Hypothesis 2b*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE b</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Level</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Trust</td>
<td>-.67*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.61*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Level</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Trust</td>
<td>-.63*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.57*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level*Trust</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 212. The criterion in this analysis was dispositional attributions. *p < .001.*
Table 5

*Moderated Regression Analysis for Testing Hypothesis 2c*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE b</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Level</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Trust</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Level</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Trust</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level*Trust</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 212. The criterion in this analysis was situational attributions.*
Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationship between job level and cynicism. Because supervisors and non-supervisors contribute in different ways to organizations through their work, through others, and through their decisions, it was hypothesized that they would hold different views of organizational change. More specifically, it was hypothesized that there would be significant differences between the two groups in levels of pessimism toward organizational change, in the dispositional attributions toward those responsible for change, as well as in the situational attributions made about those responsible for change. However, results revealed no significant differences between the two groups regarding any of these variables.

This study also examined if organizational trust moderated the relations between job level and pessimism toward organizational change, dispositional attributions made about those responsible for change, as well as situational attributions made about those responsible for change. Given that no relation was found between job level and each component of cynicism (as well as situational attributions), it was not surprising that organizational trust did not moderate any of these relations. Therefore, overall, none of the hypotheses were supported, suggesting that job level is not related to organizational cynicism. Although not a focus of this study, results showed that organizational trust
significantly and negatively predicted both pessimism and dispositional attributions, but it did not significantly predict situational attributions.

As previously mentioned, Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c were not supported. One explanation for these results could be related to the overall level of CAOC experienced by the participants in this study. For example, when participants were asked about their most recent major organizational change, only 22% stated that the change was unsuccessful (17%) or very unsuccessful (5%), 43% reported the change as successful (38%) or very successful (5%), and 36% reported the change as neither unsuccessful nor successful. Given that the majority of the participants did not indicate that the most recent change at their company was unsuccessful, and because CAOC is more related to unsuccessful changes than it is related to successful changes, CAOC may have not been a major factor for the sample used in the current study. Along similar lines, the overall means on the CAOC (pessimism and dispositional attributions) suggest that, on average, this sample scored below the CAOC scale’s midpoint.

Another explanation for these findings could be related to how job level was operationalized in the current study. Specifically, all managerial levels were included in the supervisory group, but the majority of the participants in this group self-identified as first-line, lower-level, or middle managers, and only six participants (out of 68 supervisors) reported their job as upper-level manager, executive, or division head. In other words, the majority of the participants in the supervisory group had lower managerial levels, which may have resulted in the lack of a statistically significant difference in cynicism between supervisors and non-supervisors. Furthermore, Kanter et al. (1992) found that three key groups differentiate themselves within organizations
during change: those who strategize change, those who manage change, and those who are targeted by change. Kanter and colleagues also stated that change managers and recipients are more threatened by the consequences of organizational change than strategists because they are most likely to be affected by change. Given that strategists usually have higher-level positions, only six participants in the supervisory group may have been strategists, which could have reduced the likelihood of finding a significant difference in CAOC between the supervisors and non-supervisors in this study.

Furthermore, this study did not ask participants if they were involved or had a voice in the most recent change that occurred in their companies. Reichers et al. (1997) recommended getting people involved with the change process in some way (e.g., participative decision making), increasing management credibility, and rewarding managers who nurture collaboration when developing change. As a result of being involved, employees may feel more committed to the organization and less likely to develop cynicism. Therefore, future research should measure level of involvement in the most recent change, as it may have affected the findings of the current study.

Although Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c, were not supported, it is important to note that organizational trust was significantly and negatively correlated with the primary CAOC dimensions (i.e., pessimism and dispositional attributions). The current findings are similar to Albrecht’s (2002) results, which showed that employees who perceived senior management as truthful, competent, and trustworthy were more likely to be positively predisposed toward organizational change. On average, participants in this study scored above the scale midpoint on organizational trust ($M = 3.46$) and below the scale midpoint on pessimism ($M = 2.74$) and dispositional attributions ($M = 2.69$).
Therefore, overall, these findings provide further evidence of the importance of maintaining high organizational trust, given its negative relationship with CAOC.

**Theoretical and Practical Implications**

*Theoretical implications.* As previously mentioned, organizational trust was significantly and negatively correlated with pessimism and dispositional attributions (the main dimensions of CAOC). In the literature, trust has been defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). The current results support Albrecht’s (2002) findings, which showed that employees who perceived senior management as truthful, competent, and trustworthy were more likely to be positively predisposed toward organizational change. Along similar lines, Kramer (1996), Reichers et al. (1997), and Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1999) stated that employees reacted more positively toward change initiatives if they viewed the change agents as dependable and responsible. Therefore, this study added to the literature by providing more evidence of the negative relationship between organizational trust and CAOC.

As previously mentioned, the lack of a significant difference in CAOC levels between supervisors and non-supervisors could have been affected by how job level was operationalized in the current study. Specifically, all managerial levels were included in the supervisory group, but the majority of the participants in this group self-identified as first-line, lower-level, or middle managers, and only six participants reported their job level as upper-level managerial, executive, or division head. As suggested by Kanter et al. (1992), strategists may differ from other groups in an organization. Given that strategists usually have higher-level positions, this could have reduced the likelihood of
finding a significant difference in CAOC between the supervisors and non-supervisors in this study. Therefore, although the main hypotheses regarding the relation between job level and CAOC were not supported, more research should be conducted to investigate if job level may predict CAOC when more fine-grained distinctions among supervisory levels are made.

**Practical implications.** Although the main hypotheses were not supported, this study has a few practical implications. Given that organizational trust was significantly and negatively correlated with CAOC (i.e., pessimism and dispositional attributions), organizations should try to enhance organizational trust among all employees. Trust has been found to predict strong employee relationships that in turn predict successful change implementation (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999), as well as reduce anxiety toward change and increase comfort with change initiatives (Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000). Trust in management should enhance the likelihood that employees perceive that their organization is capable of organizational change (Armenakis, 1993; Mcmanus, Russell, Freeman, & Rohricht, 1995). A company can enhance its level of organizational trust by reducing the amount of harmful employee conflicts in the organization as well as responding effectively to crises as they arise (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998).

In addition to increasing trust, companies should employ other strategies to reduce cynicism. This may be accomplished by emphasizing similarities between a new proposed change and a change that has been successful in the past (Wanous at al., 2000), increasing employee participation in the change process (Reichers et al., 1997), rewarding managers who nurture collaboration when developing change (Reichers et al., 1997), and increasing employees’ knowledge about upcoming change (Oreg, 2006).
Companies should also try to build a history of enacting fair procedures (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) as well as a history of fulfilling proposed obligations (Kramer, 1999).

To increase the odds of an organization overcoming obstacles to change, leaders should garner internal support and build pride in the organization based on past success (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006) as well as minimize resistance by providing rewards and other efforts to build loyalty and legitimacy while making a case for a new way of doing things (Judson, 1991). Companies should also try to remove barriers to organizational change. For example, research has shown that organizational hierarchies can harbor barriers between departments, shifts, and functions than can serve as inhibitors of teamwork and cooperation across functions (Buchanan et al., 2005). Therefore, organizations should try to reduce the number of established hierarchies within their structure, if possible.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has a few limitations that should be mentioned. The first and primary limitation of this study is the use of self-report data. Self-report data assume accuracy and honesty on behalf of the participants. Using the same method to measure variables may also be problematic because common method variance may increase the correlations among those variables, which is a concern because variance may be attributed to the measurement method rather than the constructs being measured (Spector, 2006). However, some researchers have stated that common method variance may not be very problematic (e.g., Lance, Dawson, Birkelbach, & Hoffman, 2010). Moreover, self-report seems to be the most feasible way to measure cynicism as well as organizational trust, given that they are based on perceptions.
A second limitation pertains to using MTurk workers as participants. For example, relying on MTurk responses (as opposed to obtaining responses from employees within a single organization) may not have been ideal because participants likely recalled events that differed in scope and that took place in different organizations. Moreover, some participants may have recalled a change from the distant past, whereas others may have recalled a more recent change that occurred at their company. Obtaining responses from participants employed at the same organization may have been a better approach because their attributions would have been based on shared experiences as well as a shared managerial structure. However, given the sensitive nature of the topic of cynicism, having non-supervisors and supervisors from different organizations participate may have been beneficial, as non-supervisors should have felt comfortable providing honest responses. In other words, using MTurk may have decreased any biases related to social desirability concerns. Nevertheless, future research examining cynicism could ask participants employed at the same organization to think of a specific change that occurred at their company. A final limitation related to using this sample is that, as previously mentioned, participants scored below the CAOC scale’s midpoint, on average. This could be due to the fact that participants were able to complete the study online at any location. In other words, they may have completed this study at home instead of at work, which may have altered their perceptions. Specifically, participants’ perceptions of their companies from the comfort of their own homes may not have been as negative as they would have been had they completed the study at work. Given that there is no way to determine where participants completed this study, future research should further examine this issue.
Finally, as previously discussed, the way job level was operationalized in the current study may have been problematic. Specifically, all managerial levels were included in the supervisory group, but the majority of the participants in this group identified as first-line, lower-level, or middle managers, and only six participants reported they were upper-level managers, executives, or division heads. In other words, the majority of the participants in the supervisory group had lower managerial levels, which may have resulted in the lack of a statistically significant difference in CAOC between supervisors and non-supervisors. Therefore, future research should investigate if job level predicts CAOC if more fine-grained distinctions among managerial levels are made.

Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between job level and cynicism about organizational change. Although the main hypotheses were not supported, future research should examine if job level might predict cynicism by differentiating among managerial levels, as opposed to just having one supervisory group. Moreover, results showed that organizational trust significantly and negatively predicted pessimism toward organizational change and dispositional attributions (the two main dimensions of CAOC). Therefore, companies should strive to enhance organizational trust among their employees.
Chapter VI

Summary

Because organizations are constantly changing, cynicism about organizational change may be a concern for business leaders. In fact, Mirvis and Kanter (1989) stated that 43% of the American workforce is cynical. Cynics tend to distrust the motives of their leaders because they believe those leaders may exploit employee contributions (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989). People may be reluctant to change for a variety of reasons. For example, the increased pressure and uncertainty associated with change may cause employees to respond negatively toward change and resist change efforts (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Moreover, employees at every level can be cynical toward organizational change. Jones et al. (2008) suggested that those responsible for change should take into account the needs of different organizational groups in order to bring about fruitful change. Albrecht (2002) also suggested that future research should investigate levels of cynicism toward organizational change among different organizational groups, more specifically between management and non-management. The purpose of the current study, therefore, was to examine the relationship between job level and cynicism about organizational change. Specifically, this study examined if there were differences between supervisors’ and non-supervisors’ levels of cynicism about organizational change.
Organizational Cynicism

Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998) defined organizational cynicism as “a negative attitude toward one’s employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect” (p. 345). Dean et al. framed cynicism as a state, rather than a trait, as they defined it as an aspect that could change over time. They also viewed it as a continuum, such that people could have varying degrees of cynicism toward their organizations. In addition, cynics (or people high on cynicism) may believe that organizational practices do not represent principles such as fairness, honesty, and sincerity. These cynics may also believe that such principles are often sacrificed for convenience and that dishonest behavior is the norm (Dean et al., 1998).

Cynicism about Organizational Change

As previously mentioned, the current study focused on cynicism toward organizational change. Wanous, Reichers, and Austin (2000) defined cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) as “a pessimistic viewpoint about change efforts being successful because those responsible for making change are blamed for being unmotivated, incompetent, or both” (p. 133). Reichers, Wanous, and Austin (1997) and Wanous, Austin, and Reichers (1994) conceptualized CAOC as having two components: a general situational pessimism about the likelihood that change will be successful and a set of dispositional attributions made about those responsible for bringing about successful change (as cited in Wanous et al., 2000). When measuring CAOC, they also
asked participants to complete four items about situational attributions, which were included in this study.

Wanous et al. (2000) found that CAOC is often exhibited when employees realize that past change has been insignificant, either due to ineffective leadership practices or a lack of participation in decision making. Additionally, employees exhibiting CAOC do not confine their cynicism to past change; these employees are also pessimistic regarding the likelihood that change will be successful in the future. In general, CAOC is negatively related to employee motivation and perceptions about the processes, instruments, and protocols by which change is brought about (Wanous et al., 2000). Both a lack of participation in the change process and being limited to receiving sparse information about change may reduce openness to change (Oreg, 2006) and possibly increase cynicism. Indeed, Bordia, Rustebog, Jimmieson, and Irmer (2011) investigated the effects of past change management on employees’ willingness to accept future change and proposed that a history of ineffective change management will not only create cynicism about the likelihood that future change will be successful, but that it will also sour general organizational attitudes (e.g., trust in management). They found that distrust in management develops over time as a result of ineffective change management, and that because of this distrust, employees become less willing to be vulnerable to future change.

**Job Level**

Kanter, Stein, and Jick (1992) found that three key groups differentiate themselves within organizations during change: those who strategize change, those who manage change, and those who are generally targeted by change. Furthermore, Kanter et al. concluded that change managers and recipients are more threatened by the
consequences of organizational change than strategists because they are most likely to be affected by change – either through an alteration of their status, responsibilities, or even by losing their job entirely.

Because non-supervisors seem less concerned with and most likely have less influence on organization-wide change-making than both executives and supervisors, they are more likely to feel helpless in the face of organizational change. In sum, Jones et al. (2008) found that supervisors focused more on processes, planning, and staff workloads during times of change, whereas non-supervisors focused more on their attitudes and emotions about change. Because of the difference in their perceptions of change, it may prove valuable to investigate differences in cynicism between supervisors and non-supervisors.

**Organizational Trust**

In organizations, employee experiences form their views of vulnerability and risk, and as a result, their general trust in the organization and trust in management (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). Trust has been defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). Subordinates who trust their supervisors or organizations may be less skeptical about change because they trust that their supervisor or employer is looking out for their well-being. Experiencing vulnerability as a result of change, therefore, may affect employee trust in management. Moreover, because supervisors and non-supervisors both experience organizational change simultaneously, the degree to which non-supervisors trust their supervisors may influence their cynicism about organizational change.
If change is perceived as poorly managed, it may lead to low levels of trust in the organization (e.g., Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). For example, Morgan and Zeffane (2003) found that the number of occurrences of change was negatively related to trust in management. Similarly, Kiefer (2005) found that emotional distress from change resulted in lower trust in management and in the organization as a whole. People who were negatively affected by change were less likely to trust management. With low trust in the organization, an employee will be unsure of whether his or her job-related interests will be important to the organization.

**Hypotheses**

Albrecht (2002) suggested that future research should investigate differences between management and non-management employees’ cynicism toward organizational change. Jones et al. (2008) stated that the perceptions employees harbor about organizational change may vary according to their position within the organization. Because non-supervisors are most likely less concerned with and typically have less influence on organization-wide change, it was hypothesized that non-supervisors would be significantly more pessimistic than supervisors. Furthermore, because supervisors and non-supervisors differ in how they view organizational change, it is likely that differ in whether they attribute any unsuccessful changes to dispositional characteristics or situational constraints. Specifically, it was expected that non-supervisors would be more likely to attribute any unsuccessful change to dispositional aspects of those responsible for change (i.e., supervisors). On the other hand, because supervisors are less likely to place blame for unsuccessful change on themselves, and instead are more likely to place
blame on events beyond their control. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Non-supervisors will score significantly higher than supervisors on pessimism toward organizational change.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Non-supervisors will score significantly higher than supervisors on dispositional attributions made about those responsible for making change.

*Hypothesis 1c:* Non-supervisors will score significantly lower than supervisors on situational attributions made about those responsible for making change.

Although it is expected that, overall, non-supervisors would be more cynical toward organizational change, non-supervisors’ cynicism might be different for employees who trust their organizations (Albrecht, 2002; Bordia et al., 2011), such that employees who trust their organizations may be less cynical about change than employees who trust their organizations (Albrecht, 2002; Bordia et al., 2011). Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

*Hypothesis 2a:* Organizational trust will moderate the relationship between job level and pessimism toward organizational change, such that the relation between job level and pessimism will be stronger when organizational trust is low.

*Hypothesis 2b:* Organizational trust will moderate the relationship between job level and dispositional attributions made about those responsible for making change, such that the relation between job level and dispositional attributions will be stronger when organizational trust is low.

*Hypothesis 2c:* Organizational trust will moderate the relationship between job level and situational attributions made about those responsible for making change,
such that the relation between job level and situational attributions will be
stronger when organizational trust is high.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an internet
marketplace in which participants receive monetary payment for performing Human
Intelligence Tasks (HITs). To qualify for participating, participants had to be at least 18
years old, live in the United States, and have a HIT approval rate of at least 95%. Both
supervisors and non-supervisors were recruited. A total of 358 people participated in this
study and were paid $0.25 for participating, even if they failed the quality checks. After
data cleaning, a total of 146 surveys were discarded. This resulted in a final sample size
of 212 participants, of whom 55.2% were male and 43.9% were female; two people did
not report their gender. The mean age of participants was 33.61 years ($SD = 10.82$ years).
Eighty-three percent of the participants were White or Caucasian, 8.0% were Black or
African American, 4.7% were Asian, 2.8% were Hispanic or Latino, and 0.9% were
American Indian or Alaskan Native, and one person did not report race/ethnicity. About
71% of the participants indicated that they were working part-time, and 29% indicated
that they were working full-time. Moreover, 80.2% indicated they had only one job,
17.0% stated they had two jobs, and 2.8% reported they had three or more jobs.

Measures

Cynicism about organizational change. Participants were asked to complete a
CAOC measure consisting of four items for overall pessimism and four items for the
dispositional component of CAOC, and they were also asked to complete four items
about situational attributions (Wanous et al., 1994; see Appendix A). In the current study, coefficient alphas were .91, .85, and .70 for overall pessimism, dispositional attributions, and situational attributions, respectively.

**Organizational trust.** Participants were also asked to complete a seven-item measure reflecting the dimensions of organizational trust identified by Gabarro and Athos (1976) and administered by Robinson (1996; see Appendix B). Three items were reverse-scored. The respondents rated each item using a 5-point response format with 1 = *Strongly Disagree* and 5 = *Strongly Agree*. Coefficient alpha for organizational trust in this study was .91.

**Procedure**

Approval to conduct this study was sought from Xavier University's Institutional Review Board (please see Appendix C for the IRB Approval Letter). The survey was uploaded to surveygizmo.com and posted on MTurk (see Appendix D for the MTurk interface). Once participants accessed the survey, they were directed to the informed consent form (see Appendix E). They were then asked to complete the main measures and a demographic form (see Appendix F). Participants were asked to focus on one job when completing the measures, in case they had more than one job (about 20% reported having more than one job). In order to ensure that participants were attentive, two quality checks were included. Once participants submitted their responses, they were debriefed (see Appendix G).

**Results**

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the continuous study measures are provided in Table 1. Analyses were conducted to examine the relation
between job level and the following dimensions relevant to cynicism: pessimism, dispositional attributions, and situational attributions, as well as to investigate whether trust moderates the relation between job level and each of these three dimensions. Participants who selected the “non-supervisor” job level were classified as Non-Supervisors, whereas participants who selected any other level were classified as Supervisors. A total of 144 participants reported that they were in a non-supervisory role, and 68 participants reported they were in a supervisory role (see Table 2 for the frequencies and percentages).

Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c were tested using independent-samples t-tests. Given that Levene’s test was statistically significant for both pessimism and situational attributions, the t-values and degrees of freedom when equal variances are not assumed are reported. Results showed that there was no significant difference between supervisors ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.09$) and non-supervisors ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.90$) on pessimism toward organizational change; $t(111.77) = 0.65, p = .514$. Results also showed that there was no significant difference between supervisors ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.03$) and non-supervisors ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.97$) on dispositional attributions toward those responsible for organizational change; $t(210) = 1.22, p = .225$. In addition, results showed that there was no significant difference between supervisors ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.89$) and non-supervisors ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.72$) on situational attributions made about those responsible for making change; $t(109.89) = -0.77, p = .443$. Therefore, Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c were not supported.

Given that the first three hypotheses were not supported, it was not expected that the second set of hypotheses would be supported. However, to be complete, Hypotheses
2a, 2b, and 2c were tested using moderated regression (see Tables 3, 4, and 5). Organizational trust was mean centered prior to computing the product term. Moreover, because job level is a nominal variable, it was dummy coded prior to running the analyses. Results showed that organizational trust did not moderate the relationship between job level and pessimism toward organizational change, $\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .495$. Organizational trust also did not moderate the relationship between job level and dispositional attributions, $\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .226$. Lastly, organizational trust did not moderate the relationship between job level and situational attributions, $\Delta R^2 = .00, p = .798$. Therefore, Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c were also not supported. Although not a focus of the current study, it is interesting to note that organizational trust significantly and negatively predicted both pessimism toward organizational change and dispositional attributions, but it did not significantly predict situational attributions.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationship between job level and cynicism. Because supervisors and non-supervisors contribute in different ways to organizations through their work, through others, and through their decisions, it was hypothesized that there would be significant differences between the two groups in levels of pessimism toward organizational change, in the dispositional attributions toward those responsible for change, as well as in the situational attributions made about those responsible for change. However, results revealed no significant differences between the two groups regarding any of these variables. One explanation for these results could be related to the overall level of CAOC experienced by the participants in this study. Specifically, the overall means on the CAOC (pessimism and dispositional attributions)
suggest that, on average, this sample scored below the CAOC scale’s midpoint on CAOC. Another explanation for these findings could be related to how job level was operationalized in the current study. Specifically, all managerial levels were included in the supervisory group, but the majority of the participants in this group self-identified as first-line, lower-level, or middle managers, and only six participants (out of 68 supervisors) reported their job as upper-level manager, executive, or division head. In other words, the majority of the participants in the supervisory group had lower managerial levels, which may have resulted in the lack of a statistically significant difference in cynicism between supervisors and non-supervisors.

This study also examined if organizational trust moderated the relation between job level and pessimism toward organizational change, dispositional attributions made about those responsible for change, as well as situational attributions made about those responsible for change. Given that no relation was found between job level and cynicism, it was not surprising that organizational trust did not moderate any of these relations. Although not a focus of this study, it is important to note that organizational trust was significantly and negatively correlated with the primary CAOC dimensions (i.e., pessimism and dispositional attributions). Therefore, overall, these findings provide further evidence of the importance of maintaining high organizational trust, given its negative relationship with cynicism.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

As previously mentioned, organizational trust was significantly and negatively correlated with pessimism and dispositional attributions (the main dimensions of CAOC). The current results support Albrecht’s (2002) findings, which showed that employees
who perceived senior management as truthful, competent, and trustworthy were more likely to be positively predisposed toward organizational change. Therefore, this study added to the literature by providing more evidence of the negative relationship between organizational trust and cynicism.

Given that organizational trust was significantly and negatively correlated with pessimism and dispositional attributions, companies should try to enhance organizational trust among all employees. Trust has been found to predict strong employee relationships that in turn predict successful change implementation (Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999) as well as reduce anxiety toward change and increase comfort with change initiatives (Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000). Trust in management should enhance the likelihood that employees perceive that their organization is capable of organizational change (Armenakis, 1993; Mcmanus, Russell, Freeman, & Rohricht, 1995). In addition to increasing trust, companies should employ other strategies to reduce CAOC. This may be accomplished by emphasizing similarities between a new proposed change and a change that has been successful in the past (Wanous at al., 2000), increasing employee participation in the change process (Reichers et al., 1997), rewarding managers who nurture collaboration when developing change (Reichers et al., 1997), and increasing employees’ knowledge about upcoming change (Oreg, 2006). Companies should also try to build a history of enacting fair procedures (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) as well as a history of fulfilling proposed obligations (Kramer, 1999).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has a few limitations that should be mentioned. The first and primary limitation of this study is using self-report data. Using the same method to measure
variables may also be problematic because common method variance may increase the correlations among those variables, which is a concern because variance may be attributed to the measurement method rather than the constructs being measured (Spector, 2006). However, some researchers have stated that common method variance may not be very problematic (e.g., Lance, Dawson, Birkelbach, & Hoffman, 2010). Moreover, self-report seems to be the most feasible way to measure cynicism as well as organizational trust, given that they are based on perceptions.

A second limitation pertains to using MTurk workers as participants. For example, relying on MTurk responses (as opposed to obtaining responses from employees within a single organization) may not have been ideal because participants likely recalled events that differed in scope and that took place in different organizations. Moreover, some participants may have recalled a change from the distant past, whereas others may have recalled a more recent change that occurred at their company. However, given the sensitive nature of the topic of cynicism, having non-supervisors and supervisors from different organizations participate was beneficial, as non-supervisors should have felt more comfortable giving honest responses when completing the survey. Nevertheless, future research examining cynicism could ask participants employed at the same organization to think of a specific change that occurred at their company.

Finally, the way job level was operationalized may have been problematic. Specifically, all managerial levels were included in the supervisory group, but the majority of the supervisory participants identified as first-line, lower-level, or middle managers, and only six participants reported they were upper-level managers, executives, or division heads. In other words, the majority of the participants in the supervisory group
had lower managerial levels, which may have resulted in the lack of a statistically significant difference in CAOC between supervisors and non-supervisors. Future research should investigate if job level predicts CAOC if more fine-grained distinctions among managerial levels are made.

Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between job level and cynicism about organizational change. Although the main hypotheses were not supported, future research should examine if job level might predict cynicism by differentiating among managerial levels, as opposed to just having a supervisory group. Moreover, results showed that organizational trust significantly and negatively predicted pessimism toward organizational change and dispositional attributions (the two main dimensions of CAOC). Therefore, companies should strive to enhance organizational trust among their employees.
References


Appendix A

Cynicism about Organizational Change (CAOC)

The CAOC scale is not reproduced for copyright reasons, but below is the reference for this measure:

Appendix B

Organizational Trust

The Organizational Trust scale is not reproduced for copyright reasons, but below is the reference for this measure:

Appendix C

IRB Approval

January 31, 2014

Ben Gerstle

Re: Protocol #13-052, *Job Level and Cynicism about Organizational Change*

Dear Mr. Gerstle:

The IRB has reviewed the materials regarding your study, referenced above, and has determined that it meets the criteria for the Exempt from Review category under Federal Regulation 45CFR46. Your protocol is approved as exempt research, and therefore requires no further oversight by the IRB. We appreciate your thorough treatment of the issues raised and your timely response.

If you wish to modify your study, including the addition of data collection sites, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

Please contact our office if you have any questions. We wish you success with your project!

Sincerely,

Morell E. Mullins, Jr., Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University

MEM/sb

C: Dalia Diab, Advisor
Appendix D

MTurk Interface

Please note that you will have to enter your unique ID TWICE, once HERE and once at the END of the study in order to be compensated, if eligible.

1. Please enter your unique identifier located on the MTurk Dashboard. You must enter your MTurk ID HERE:

[Box for ID number was included here]

Also, please SAVE your unique identifier because you will be required to enter it once again AT THE END OF THE STUDY.

2. Please click the following link in order to access the survey.

[Survey link was included here]

After you complete the survey, click the “Submit” button below.

[SUBMIT]
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

You are being given the opportunity to participate in a master’s thesis project conducted by Ben Gerstle through Xavier University. The purpose of this study is to examine perceptions of organizational change.

In this study, you will be asked to complete three scales and a few demographic items. The total time to complete this task is approximately 15 minutes, but you will be given 1 hour to complete the entire survey.

There are no known risks associated with this study. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from Xavier University. You will be paid $.25 for participating in this study. However, please note that if you do not complete all required items or if you do not pass the quality checks, you may not be eligible for compensation. You have to be at least 18 years old to participate in this study.

Although you will be required to enter your MTurk unique worker ID at the end of the survey to receive compensation if eligible, the researchers will not be able to access any identifying information you provided to Amazon or MTurk. Moreover, the researchers will not release any of your survey responses to Amazon or MTurk, and only the researchers conducting this study will have access to your responses. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. Finally, no analyses of any kind will be conducted prior to the removal of all MTurk ID numbers from the data set.

If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact the principal investigator, Ben Gerstle at gerstleb@xavier.edu, or the faculty advisor, Dr. Dalia Diab at diabd@xavier.edu. Questions about your right as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870.

By clicking “Next,” you agree to the following statement: I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and have had the opportunity to ask questions and to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I freely give my consent to participate in this research project.
Appendix F

Demographics

Please respond to the following items regarding information about yourself. This information will not be used for identification purposes, and will only be reported on an aggregated basis.

Age _____

Gender
• Male
• Female
• Prefer to not respond

Nationality (e.g., American) ______________

What country do you live in? (e.g., USA) ______________

Race/Ethnicity
• White or Caucasian
• Black or African American
• American Indian or Alaska Native
• Asian
• Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
• Hispanic or Latino
• Other ______________
• Prefer to not respond

Level of Education
• Below High School
• High School Diploma or equivalent
• Some college, no degree
• Associate’s Degree
• Bachelor’s Degree (e.g., BA)
• Master’s Degree (e.g., MBA)
• Doctoral Degree (e.g., PhD, JD)
• Prefer to not respond

Have you ever been previously employed?
• Yes
• No
Are you currently employed?
- Yes
- No

Are you currently employed part-time or full-time? If you are currently unemployed, please refer to your most recent job, as provided in the options below.
- I am currently employed part-time
- I am currently employed full-time
- I am currently unemployed, but my most recent employment was part-time
- I am currently unemployed, but my most recent employment was full-time
- Not applicable because I am currently unemployed, and I have never been employed

What is your current job level OR most recent job level, if you are currently unemployed?
- Non-supervisory
- First-line manager
- Lower-level manager
- Middle manager
- Upper-level manager, Executive, or Division head
- Other ______________
- Not applicable because I am currently unemployed, and I have never been employed

Please think of the most recent major change (e.g., a merger or acquisition, major layoffs) that happened at your current or most recent employer (if you are currently unemployed). How successful was that change? Please respond using the following 5-point response format, with 1 = Very Unsuccessful and 5 = Very Successful.

How many jobs do you currently have?
- I have 1 job
- I have 2 jobs
- I have 3 or more jobs
- I have no job, as I am currently unemployed

Years of work experience at current or most recent organization (if in months, please write the word “months” after the number): ______________

Years of overall work experience (if in months, please write the word “months” after the number): ______________

Please type your unique worker ID to receive payment, if eligible: ______________
Appendix G

Debriefing Form

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between organizational level (supervisors vs. non-supervisors) and cynicism about organizational change, and to examine if organizational trust moderates that relationship.

Please do not discuss the specifics of this study with anyone or distribute this form to any potential participants, as data collection is ongoing. If you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like to inquire about the results of this study, please contact the principal investigator, Ben Gerstle at gerstleb@xavier.edu, or the faculty advisor, Dr. Dalia Diab at diabd@xavier.edu.