

WHY COMMIT WHEN THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT? THE INTERACTIVE EFFECTS OF FUTURE TIME PERSPECTIVE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM

Joseph M. GOODMAN*
Illinois State University, USA

Grant C. CORSER
Southern Utah University, USA

Nathan HARTMAN
Illinois State University, USA

Abstract. An employee's organizational commitment is essential to a firm's success and performance. Past research reports mixed relationships between future time perspective and commitment. Recently, research has supported several moderating variables for this relationship. The current study tested organizational cynicism as a potential moderator. The sample consisted of 301 university alumni working in a variety of industries. The cross-sectional data supports an interaction between future time perspective and organizational cynicism on an individual's affective and continuance commitment level. Data failed to support an interaction effect on the employee's normative commitment.

JEL classification: M12, M54, Z13.

Keywords: Future Time Perspective, Organizational Cynicism, Organizational Commitment.

1. Introduction

*"Time, why you punish me? Like a wave crashing into the shore,
you wash away my dreams." (Hootie & the Blowfish, 1995)*

Time, within our daily schedules, is a fixed commodity encumbered with opportunity costs for the choices we make. Engagement in the social exchange of labor does not reduce those opportunity costs. Individuals embark in this social exchange of labor for a variety of goals but most importantly, it is a necessity for

* Corresponding author. Address: Illinois State University; Campus Box 5580 Normal, Illinois, USA 61790. Tel: +1 309 438 7205, Email: jgoodma@ilstu.edu

organizational survival. The industrialized economies have long shifted from the agrarian landscape. Thus, this social exchange of labor between individuals and organizations is mutually beneficial. The one item neither the organization nor individual can control, though, is the fixed commodity of time. Both entities are bound by the accepted premise of 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 52 weeks per year, and in the United States, 2080 compensable, work hours per year. Of course, organizations can entice one into additional work hours and purchase extra time from their employees at the rate of 150% beyond their hourly wage rate (*Fair Labor and Standards Act of 1938*). Nevertheless, the individual engages in the social exchange relationship as an opportunity cost for a better future. As Bandura (1986) proposed, social-cognitive and goal-based motivation theories contribute to one's anticipated future self.

Future time perspective was defined by Lewin (1951) as, "the totality of the individual's views of his psychological future and psychological past existing as a given time" (p. 75). Employee future time perspective is a growing body of literature for human resource managers seeking to reduce employee stress, improve employee well-being, and increase productivity (Gagne & Bhave, 2011). Investigation of future time perspective orientation, although well established in developmental psychology literature, is relatively recent for organizational scholars (Kooij, Kanfer, Betts, & Rudolph, 2018). As Kooij et al. (2018) noted, organizational scholars are conceptualizing the proper nomological network and operationalization of future time perspective. The purpose of this study is to extend our knowledge about the outcomes of the future time perspective orientation. Specifically, data from 301 business school alumni are analyzed to test the interaction of future time perspective and organization cynicism on employees self-reported level of organizational commitment. This research report provides brief descriptions of the pertinent variables, data collection, statistical analyses, and extensions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Future Time Perspective

Carstensen (1992) proposed socioemotional selectivity theory as a life span theory of motivation wherein individuals perceive a shrinking timeline and selectively invest their resources into meaningful goals and activities. As described by socioemotional selectivity theory, future time perspective is a critical aspect in determining the motivational goals of aging employees. From this operationalization, employees with a deep or long future time perspective perceive their time in role to be limitless. These individuals would focus their energy on broadening and increasing the social capital within their networks. In contrast, employees with shallow or short future time perspectives view their time as limited and will focus their energies on maximizing the emotional aspects of their lives rather than setting and developing long-range goals within their organizations (Carstensen et al., 2000).

The extant literature for future time perspective is found mostly in the fields of developmental psychology. However, a growing body of literature is developing within the organizational sciences. For example, Park, Rie, Kim, and Park (2020) found that understanding one's future time perspective served as a positive intervention for

career decision making. Fasbender, Wohrmann, Wang, and Klehe (2019) found that future time perspective mediated the relationship between older employee's career adaptability and late career planning. Korff, Bieman, and Voelpel (2017) investigated future time perspective in a multilevel model between human resource management systems and employee work attitudes. Specifically, the authors found that future time perspective mediated the relationship between HRM systems and employee self-reported job satisfaction and organizational commitment levels. Treadway, Duke, Perrewé, Breland, and Goodman (2011) found that work-family and family-work conflicts moderated the relationship between future time perspective and organizational commitment. Specifically, those with shallow future time perspective and high levels of work-family conflict reported lower continuance commitment. Those with a deep future time perspective expressed lower levels of affective commitment when experiencing family to work conflict. Finally, two recent meta-analyses provided an extensive literature review and expanded the nomological network for the organizational sciences (Kooij et al., 2018; Andre, van Vianen, Peetsma, & Oort, 2018). Of importance to this study, Kooij et al. (2018) established that future time perspective explained more variance than personality traits on Grade Point Average and risk behavior (p. 882).

2.2 Organizational Cynicism

Organizational cynicism is “a negative attitude toward one's employing organization in general, and toward its procedures, processes, and management, that is based on a conviction that these elements generally work against the employee's best interests” (Wilkerson, 2002, p. 533). Organizational cynics believe their employers are self-serving, putting the economic well-being of management above employee interests. Furthermore, a central aspect of cynicism at the workplace is the belief that an organization will take advantage of and exploit employees. Organizational cynics believe their employers operate unfairly and lack sincerity and that “unscrupulous behavior is the norm” (Dean et al., 1998, p. 346). Because attitudes represent a summary evaluation of a particular object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), organization cynics report lower job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, and organizational commitment (Evans, Goodman, & Davis, 2011).

2.3 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment can be defined as one's strong belief and acceptance of the organization's goals and values and a desire to remain with the organization (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) offered three types of commitment employees may experience. First, *affective commitment* refers to the extent to which employees identify with the organization. Second, *normative commitment* refers to the extent that the employee feels some social pressures or moral obligations to remain with the organization. Finally, *continuance commitment* refers to the employee's perception of some cost-benefit analysis with the organization. Firms are concerned with the level of commitment to their specific organization. Higher levels of organizational commitment equate to reduced employee turnover, increased task and contextual performance, and employee well-being (Cohen, 2007).

3. Research Hypotheses

Placing future time perspective into its proper nomological network remains of utmost importance to organizational scholars. Whereas other studies sought to understand specific antecedents, the current study addresses future time perspective, organizational cynicism, and the interaction effects upon the three levels of organizational commitment. Socioemotional theory posits individuals with a deep future time perspective foresee time as open-ended and therefore, new or interesting opportunities remain available. However, those with a shallow future time perspective foresee a shirking time and invest their energies into present-oriented goals. In reference to this study, the opportunity costs to switch employers far exceed the benefits of remaining with one's current organization. Furthermore, cognitive dissonance theory posits that one must maintain equilibrium between their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Festinger, 1975). We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H1a: Individuals reporting a deep future time perspective and high organizational cynicism will express lower levels of organizational commitment.

H1b: Individuals reporting a shallow future time perspective and high organizational commitment will express higher levels of organizational commitment.

4. Research Method

4.1 Data Collection Procedure

An electronic survey was distributed through the alumni mailing list of a large southeastern university. Business School Alumni were solicited for participation if they had graduated between the calendar years 1968 through 2000. In sum, 5,179 emails were distributed. Finally, data for this study were collected prior to the 2020 worldwide coronavirus pandemic which resulted in alternate working arrangements (Bick, Blandin, & Mertens, 2020).

4.2 Survey Measures

Future time perspective. Future time perspective ($\alpha = .90$) was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Carstensen and Lang (1996). Each item is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from "very good" to "not at all." Sample items include "Many opportunities await me in the future" and "My future is filled with possibilities."

Organizational cynicism. Organizational cynicism ($\alpha = .90$) was measured with a seven-item scale developed by Wilkerson, Evans, and Davis (2008). Employees were asked to think about their employing organization when responding to each of the items. Items were scored on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Sample items include "Company management is more interested in its goals and needs than in its employees' welfare" and "Overall, I expect more success than disappointment in working with this company" (reverse scored).

Organizational commitment. Affective ($\alpha = .75$), Continuance ($\alpha = .72$) and Normative ($\alpha = .66$) organizational commitment was measured using the 16-item scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). Each item is scored on a 7-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Control variables. Positive ($\alpha = .89$) and negative affect ($\alpha = .82$) were measured using the PANAS scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced 10 positive (e.g., interested and determined) and 10 negative (e.g., distressed and hostile) emotions. Responses ranged from 1=*very little or not at all* to 5=*extremely*. Finally, the respondents were asked to indicate their age, organizational tenure, and job tenure in years. Gender was coded as 1 for males and 0 for females.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Demographic Results

Forty-seven percent or 2,434 electronic surveys were returned as undeliverable; thus, 2,745 alumni remained. A total of 652 or 23.8 percent of alumni responded to the email request. Of the alumni responding, only 301 responses provided sufficient information for analyses. Twenty-one percent of the participants identified themselves as female. The majority of the sample was Caucasian (60%) with an average age of 41.39 years (s.d. = 12.99). Approximately two percent reported an annual salary range of \$25-40,000, six percent reported a salary range of \$40-60,000, 20 percent reported a salary range of \$60-80,000, 12 percent reported a salary range of \$80-100,000 annually, 13.8 percent reported a salary range of \$100-125,000 annually, 16 percent reported a salary range of \$125-150,000 annually, and 22 percent reported a salary range greater than \$150,000.

5.2 Multiple Regression Analyses

A moderated multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the interaction of future time perspective and organizational cynicism on affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In the first step, age, negative and positive affect were entered as control variables. In the second step, the main effects of future time perspective and organizational cynicism were regressed on the dependent variables. The final step included the cross-product term representing the interaction of future time perspective and organizational cynicism. Table 1 reports the bi-variate correlation coefficients and Table 2 reports the multiple regression analyses.

Three separate moderated multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the interactive effects. For the moderated regression results upon affective commitment, age was positively correlated ($\beta = .25$ $p < .01$). The future time perspective main effect was not significant but organizational cynicism was ($\beta = -.13$ $p < .05$). The interaction term was significant ($\beta = -.67$, $p < .10$) and explained significant variance ($\Delta R^2 = .013$, $p < .10$) in the final step. For the moderated regression results upon normative commitment, organizational cynicism main effect was significant ($\beta = -.47$ $p < .01$). The interaction term was not significant ($\beta = .05$, $p = .69$) in the final step.

For the moderated regression results upon continuance commitment, age was positively correlated ($\beta = .16$ $p < .01$). Neither the future time perspective main effect nor organizational cynicism was significant in the second step. The interaction term was significant ($\beta = -.75$, $p < .05$) and explained significant variance ($\Delta R^2 = .017$, $p < .05$) in the final step.

Table 1. Bivariate Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Affective Commitment	----							
2. Normative Commitment	.19**							
3. Continuance Commitment	.29**	.28**						
4. Positive Affect	-.04	.22**	-.16*					
5. Negative Affect	.08	-.10	.12	-.31**				
6. Future Time Perspective	-.16*	.21**	-.19**	.41**	-.12*			
7. Organizational Cynicism	-.07	-.62**	.05	-.34**	.30**	-.30**		
8. Age	.18*	.09	.010	.05	-.23**	-.44**	.00	
9. Gender	.16*	-.01	-.05	.01	.01	-.10	.03	.31**

Note: Significance Level ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 2. Regression Analysis

Variables	Affective Commitment			Normative Commitment			Continuance Commitment		
	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β	Step 1 β	Step 2 β	Step 3 β
Age	.25**	.24**	.26**	.07	.14*	.14*	.19*	.14†	.14†
Gender	.03	.03	.04	-.04	-.03	-.03	-.10	-.09	-.09
Positive Affectivity	-.05	-.08	-.07	.22**	.02	.02	-.18*	-.16*	-.15*
Negative Affectivity	.13*	.15*	.14*	-.07	.07	.07	.14*	.13†	.12†
Future Time Perspective (A)		-.02	.34†		.08	.12		-.10	.30
Organizational Cynicism (B)		-.13*	.54		-.60**	-.54†		-.05	.69*
A x B			-.67†			-.07			-.74*
R ²	.07	.09	.10†	.07**	.40**	.40	.09**	.09	.11*
ΔR^2		.02	.01†		.32**	.00		.01	.02*
F	3.15**	2.56*	2.56*	3.29**	18.20**	15.51	4.03**	2.91**	2.97**

Note: Significance Level ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; † $p < .10$

5.3 Signification Interaction Plots

The significant future time perspective x organizational cynicism interaction terms were plotted across three levels of organizational cynicism. Following past research (Stone & Hollenbeck, 1989), three levels of perceived accountability scores were plotted at one standard deviation above the mean, at the mean, and at one standard deviation below the mean (See Figures 1 and 2). Each graph depicts interactions found to be significant.

Figure 1. Interaction: Future Time Perspective and Organizational Cynicism on Affective Commitment

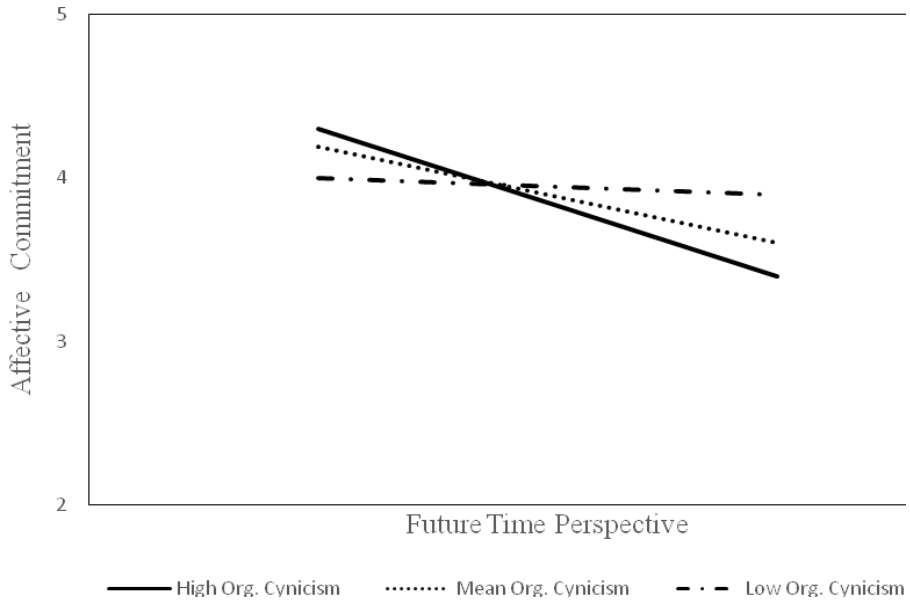
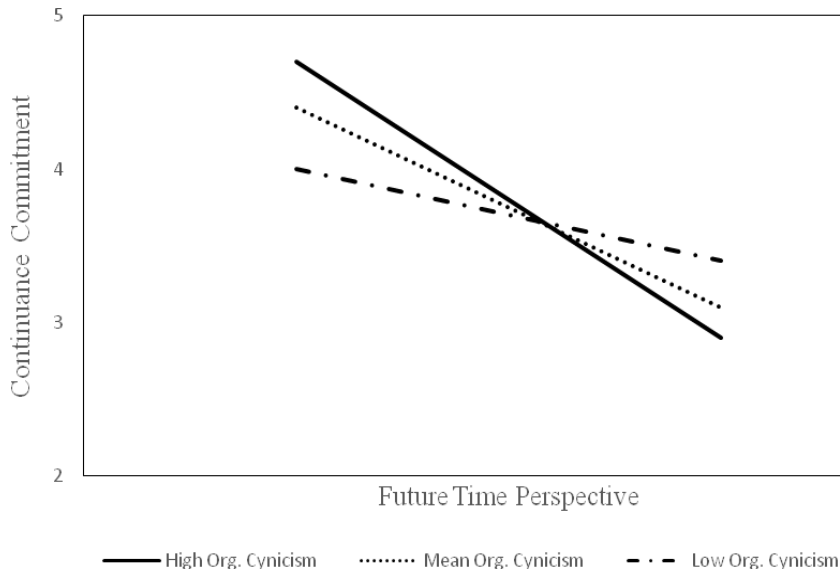


Figure 2. Interaction: Future Time Perspective and Organizational Cynicism on Continuance Commitment



6. Discussion

The objective of the current study was to provide theoretical and empirical support for the interactive effect of organizational cynicism on the future time perspective-organizational commitment relationship. To that end, we found support for two types of commitment: affective and continuance. The interaction was strongest for continuance commitment, whereas the interaction was only marginally significant for affective commitment. Data did not support a moderating effect for normative commitment. These findings suggest that individuals with deep levels of future time perspective and high levels of organizational cynicism reported lower levels of affective and continuance commitment. Interestingly, the highest levels of affective and continuance commitment came from individuals reporting shallow future time perspective and high organizational cynicism. In short, the results of the study indicate that employees with a shallower time perspective were more attached to the organization when their cynicism increased. The results of the current study provide several conceptual and practical implications, as well as, avenues for future research.

6.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Despite the increasing prevalence of older workers, organizational scientists still know little about the organizational experiences of older workers (Lawrence, 1996). The current study offers evidence that age-related research within the organizational sciences can benefit from moving away from traditional, linear treatments of the

aging process. Indeed, by encompassing the age-related changes in motivational foci, inherent in socioemotional selectivity theory, the current study provides a glimpse into the dynamics of the aging process. As such, future research within the organizational sciences may benefit from more accurate modeling of the role of motivation predicting of the attitudes and behaviors of older workers. Furthermore, Bersin and Chamorro-Premuzic (2019) argue that older workers are a competitive advantage for organizations. In light of our findings, it may be plausible that those with shallow future time perspective are more likely to have stronger commitment attitudes. Future research is necessary to determine if this translates into greater performance.

The growing future time perspective research continues to expand the literature. Park et al. (2020) reported that those with a deep future time perspective also possessed high levels of self-efficacy. The current data suggest that these individuals are less committed to the organization and potentially perceive that there is still sufficient time to find better employment opportunities. As such, they are less committed to the organization. Future research is necessary to determine if this translates to actual employee turnover and to what type, functional or dysfunctional turnover.

At the organizational level, practices that promote and express fairness and equity in policies and procedures may help mitigate the impact of cynical attitudes and repair negative organizational perceptions. Korff et al. (2016) argue that through signaling theory, organizations shape employee attitudes. Those with a deeper future time perspectives and higher organizational cynicism may observe apathetic signals before reporting lower commitment levels. Recent research has found that lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment negatively impact employee's organizational loyalty (Pandey & Khare, 2021). Our results demonstrate that coupled with high organizational cynicism, employees lack of commitment and longer time horizon may lead them to miss opportunities to develop impactful relationships with agents of the organization. For example, it is possible that cynicism not only leads to lower-quality LMX relationships, but also to negative reciprocity (e.g., Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003). If so, negative performance outcomes could be even more pronounced. Future research should incorporate data from both supervisors and subordinates to allow for a more complete understanding of how organizational cynicism and future time perspective impact dyadic relationships

6.2 Study Limitations

The findings do have at least two limitations. First, participants were selected from a university alumni database. The nature of this method limits some of the controls we had concerning the accuracy of the survey responses. However, this method is consistent with other studies (Treadway, Perrewé, Ferris, Hochwarter, Witt, & Goodman, 2005) and preliminary validation checks support participant accuracy. Second, this study relied upon a single method of self-reported data gathering. While self-reports may not produce completely objective data due to employee moods or other biases, this method is generally the proper choice for measuring perceptions and other internal states (Spector, 1994).

7. Conclusion

Both future time perspective and organizational cynicism have predicted organizational commitment in past research. The current study investigated the interactive effects of these two constructs on affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Theory and data support an interactive effect; yet, a clearer understanding would benefit from longitudinal examinations or a single organizational source. Our findings also indicate, from an applied perspective, that the expected benefits of future time perspective are altered through employee attitudinal perceptions, i.e., organizational cynicism. Thus, our research study offers future avenues to develop and place future time perspective within its nomological network.

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