

Organizational Cynicism as a Predictor of Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour Among Local Government Employees in Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of organizational cynicism on counterproductive workplace behaviour among employees of local government councils in Delta State, Nigeria, focusing specifically on how the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of cynicism predict counterproductive work behaviour. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 1,398 employees drawn from three local government councils representing each senatorial district in Delta State (Delta North, Delta Centre and Delta South). Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample of 311 respondents was proportionately drawn and selected through simple random sampling. A structured questionnaire, validated by experts and found reliable with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.86, was administered, yielding a 100 percent response rate. Data were analysed using multiple regression analysis in EViews. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between cognitive cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour ($\beta = 0.4099$, $p = 0.0179 < 0.05$) and between affective cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour ($\beta = 1.2985$, $p = 0.0000 < 0.05$), while behavioural cynicism exhibited a significant negative relationship with counterproductive workplace behaviour ($\beta = -0.6990$, $p = 0.0146 < 0.05$). The study concludes that organizational cynicism significantly shapes employee conduct in local government councils and recommends improved transparency between policy and practice, the establishment of employee wellness and emotional support systems, and the creation of constructive channels through which employees can voice dissatisfaction.

Keywords: Organizational cynicism, cognitive cynicism, affective cynicism, behavioural cynicism, counterproductive workplace behaviour, local government, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Organizational cynicism is a negative attitude toward one's employing organization that combines a belief in its lack of integrity, negative affect toward it, and a tendency toward disparaging and critical behaviour, and it has attracted growing attention in organizational behaviour research. In Nigeria, studies have documented its prevalence across sectors such as healthcare, logistics, and public service; Ike et al. (2020), for instance, found that cognitive and behavioural cynicism positively predicted turnover intention among employees in Enugu State, while Dimgba et al. (2022) reported a significant relationship between workplace bullying, a component of cynicism, and employee turnover in logistics firms in south-west Nigeria.

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), comprising intentional employee actions that harm the organization or its members, has repeatedly been linked to organizational cynicism. Ezech and Etodike (2020) found that abusive supervision and cynicism significantly predicted cyber-loafing among federal civil servants in Anambra State, while Ugwu et al. (2023) showed that perceived organizational politics fosters cynicism, which in turn drives CWB in Nigerian universities. Within local government councils specifically, bureaucratic bottlenecks, political interference, favouritism, delayed salaries, and inconsistent management create fertile conditions for cynicism, and employees frequently respond with lateness, absenteeism, gossip, and deliberate work slowdowns (Eruvwe et al, 2024; Okolie, 2024; Omoye et al, 2024; Omodia, 2022). Ike et al. (2024) further demonstrated

that perceived organizational support moderates the cynicism-turnover relationship among Nigerian nurses, while Hamzah (2023) linked toxic leadership to cynicism and, ultimately, deviant work behaviour.

Despite this growing evidence, empirical investigation of how the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of cynicism specifically predict CWB within Nigeria's local government system, and Delta State in particular, remains sparse. This gap limits the capacity of policymakers and administrators to design evidence-based interventions that curb workplace deviance and strengthen public trust in local governance (Omoye et al, 2026; Tom et al, 2025). Consequently, this study examined the relationship between organizational cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour among local government council employees in Delta State, Nigeria, with specific objectives to investigate the association between cognitive cynicism, affective cynicism, and behavioural cynicism respectively, and counterproductive workplace behaviour. Correspondingly, three hypotheses were tested: H₁, there is no significant relationship between cognitive cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour; H₂, there is no significant relationship between affective cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour; and H₃, there is no significant relationship between behavioural cynicism and counterproductive workplace behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Cognitive cynicism refers to an employee's belief that the organization lacks integrity, that its policies, promises, and practices are inconsistent, and that leadership acts in a manner contrary to its stated principles. This belief-based dimension often develops through repeated exposure to broken promises and perceived hypocrisy and manifests in scepticism toward organizational communication and decisions.

Affective cynicism captures the emotional reactions, such as frustration, irritation, aggravation, and anxiety, that employees experience when they contemplate their organization. Unlike the belief-based cognitive dimension, affective cynicism is emotion-laden and often intensifies when perceived organizational inconsistency is sustained over time, deepening employees' emotional disengagement (Omoye, 2026; Akpomimie et al., 2026; Ugbehene & Eromafuru, 2026).

Behavioural cynicism denotes the outward expression of cynical beliefs and feelings through criticism, complaints, and disparaging remarks about the organization made to colleagues or outsiders. It represents the most visible dimension of cynicism and can serve either as a catalyst for further deviance or, in some contexts, as an outlet that diffuses more damaging misconduct.

Counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) comprises voluntary employee actions that violate organizational norms and harm the organization or its members, ranging from minor acts such as tardiness and gossip to more severe actions such as theft, sabotage, and aggression (Dalal et al., 2020; Spector et al., 2021; Aruoren & Ugbehene, 2023). CWB is often classified into behaviours directed at the organization and those directed at co-workers, and its root causes include perceived injustice, job dissatisfaction, workplace stress, and poor leadership (Marcus et al., 2019; Lehmann et al., 2021; Omoye et al, 2024). Public institutions in developing economies, including Nigerian local government councils, are particularly susceptible because bureaucratic inefficiency, delayed remuneration, and unclear performance metrics compound employee frustration, prompting behaviours that erode both productivity and public trust (Obi & Okafor, 2021; Ezenwaka et al., 2020; Vardi & Wiener, 2022; Omoye., 2025).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationship between the three dimensions of organizational cynicism, cognitive, affective, and behavioural, as independent variables, and counterproductive workplace behaviour as the dependent variable.

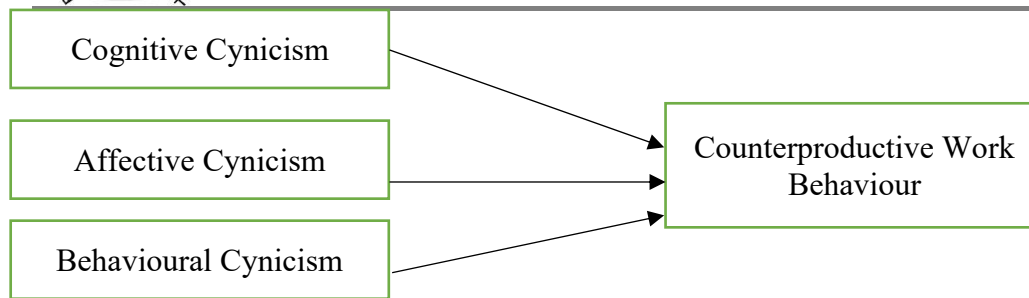


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher's Conceptualization, 2026

Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on the Social Exchange Theory (SET) propounded by Blau (1964), which posits that workplace relationships are governed by reciprocity: employees who perceive fairness, trust, and support from their organization reciprocate with loyalty and positive behaviour, while perceived breaches of this psychological contract, such as injustice or managerial hypocrisy, prompt the withdrawal of positive behaviour and the emergence of cynicism and, ultimately, counterproductive acts (Abubakar et al., 2023; Chughtai, 2022; Ike et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2021; Ugwu et al., 2023). SET is particularly apt for this study because it foregrounds the relational and reciprocal dynamics between local government employees and their institutions, implying that interventions aimed at reducing CWB must first restore fairness, transparency, and trust.

The study is further complemented by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which explains behaviour as a function of intentions shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Applied to this study, cynical attitudes shape employees' intentions to act out through non-compliance, absenteeism, or passive resistance, offering a cognitive lens through which the link between cynicism and CWB can be understood (Oyeleye et al., 2022; Iwuoha & Okere, 2023; Akinbode & Adedoyin, 2021).

Empirical Review

Abubakar et al. (2023) examined the role of ethical leadership in reducing cynicism and deviance among public sector employees in sub-Saharan Africa and found that cynicism significantly predicted workplace deviance where ethical leadership was weak, though the study did not focus specifically on local government institutions. Ugwu et al. (2023) investigated the mediating roles of cynicism and ostracism between perceived organizational politics and CWB among Nigerian university staff and found a strong positive relationship between cynicism and CWB, but within a tertiary rather than local government context.

Ahmad et al. (2021) found that job stress mediates the relationship between organizational cynicism and deviant behaviour among Pakistani public and private sector employees, while Iwuoha and Okere (2023), studying local government employees in south-eastern Nigeria, established that perceived corruption and favouritism breed behavioural cynicism that culminates in sabotage and withdrawal, though without statistically modelling the link to CWB. Chughtai (2022) demonstrated that moral disengagement mediates the cynicism-deviance relationship among South Asian banking employees, and Akinbode and Adedoyin (2021) found that perceived inequity among Lagos State civil servants predicted cognitive and affective cynicism and, subsequently, withdrawal behaviours.

Oyeleye et al. (2022) reported a strong inverse relationship between organizational trust and cynicism among Nigerian civil servants, while Ike et al. (2024) found that cognitive and affective cynicism predicted turnover intention and absenteeism among nurses in government hospitals. Yusuff and Adegoke (2023) found that all three dimensions of cynicism negatively affected commitment among teachers in Nigerian public secondary schools, with behavioural cynicism the strongest predictor, and Eze and Onwuka (2024), examining local government secretariats in Anambra State, confirmed that cynicism, particularly its behavioural dimension, significantly predicts CWB, a finding directly aligned with the present study.

In a related vein, Chukwuma and Okolie (2022) found that employee engagement significantly predicts lower levels of counterproductive work behaviour among local government council staff in south-eastern Nigeria, underscoring the protective role of engagement against cynicism-driven deviance. Similarly, Adebayo and Onuoha (2023) examined employee grievances and behavioural outcomes within the Nigerian local government system and found that unresolved grievances significantly predicted absenteeism, passive resistance, and reduced service commitment, reinforcing the argument that structural and relational deficits within local government administration are strongly implicated in the emergence of counterproductive conduct.

Collectively, the reviewed studies indicate that organizational cynicism plays a significant role in predicting CWB, with cognitive cynicism associated with passive resistance, affective cynicism with interpersonal conflict and hostility, and behavioural cynicism with overt deviance and rule-breaking (Akinbode & Adedoyin, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2021; Ugwu et al., 2023). However, most existing studies are situated in private, educational, or healthcare settings, isolate individual dimensions of cynicism, and vary widely in methodology, leaving a context-specific gap regarding how the three dimensions of cynicism jointly predict CWB among local government employees in Delta State, Nigeria, a gap the present study addresses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, considered appropriate for examining the predictive relationship between organizational cynicism (cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions) and counterproductive workplace behaviour among local government council employees in Delta State, Nigeria.

The population of the study comprised 1,398 employees of three local government councils in Delta State, one drawn from each senatorial district, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Population of the Study

S/N	Senatorial District	Local Government Area	No. of Employees
1	Delta North	Oshimili South	460
2	Delta Central	Sapele	458
3	Delta South	Warri South	480
Total			1,398

Source: Local Government Commission of Delta State, 2026

The sample size for the study was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = Sample size
- N = Population size (1,398)
- e = Level of precision (0.05)

Substituting the values into the formula:

$$n = \frac{1,398}{1 + 1,398(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1,398}{1 + 1,398(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1,398}{1 + 3.495}$$

$$n = \frac{1,398}{4.495}$$

$$n = 311.01 \approx 311$$

Therefore, the required sample size for the study was 311 respondent

The sample of 311 was proportionately distributed across the three local government areas, as presented in Table 1a, and simple random sampling was applied within each area to select individual respondents, ensuring representativeness and minimizing bias.

Table 1a: Proportionate Distribution of Sample

S/N	Local Government Area	No. of Employees	Proportionate Sample
1	Oshimili South	460	102
2	Sapele	458	102
3	Warri South	480	107
Total		1,398	311

Source: Researcher's Compilation, 2026

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the "Organizational Cynicism and Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour Scale (OCCWBS)," comprising items corresponding to the three dimensions of cynicism and to counterproductive workplace behaviour, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). Face and content validity were established through expert review by three lecturers in the Department of Business Administration, and reliability was assessed through a pilot test of 30 respondents outside the main sample, yielding a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency. The questionnaire was administered in person with the assistance of trained research assistants over a two-week period, and data were analysed using EVIEWS 9.0, employing descriptive statistics to summarize demographic data and correlation and multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses.

The regression model is specified as:

$$CWB = \beta_0 + \beta_1CC + \beta_2AC + \beta_3BC + \varepsilon$$

Where CWB is Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour (dependent variable); CC, AC, and BC are Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioural Cynicism respectively (independent variables); β_0 is the constant; β_1 to β_3 are regression coefficients; and ε is the error term.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 311 copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents at their places of work, all 311 were properly completed and retrieved, yielding a 100 percent response rate.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 311)

S/N	Variable	Category	Freq. (f)	Percentage(%)
1	Gender	Male	174	55.9
		Female	137	44.1
2	Age	20–29 years	52	16.7
		30–39 years	108	34.7

		40–49 years	94	30.2
		Above 50 years	57	18.3
3	Marital Status	Single	86	27.7
		Married	179	57.6
		Divorced	17	5.5
		Widowed	21	6.8
		Separated	8	2.6
4	Education	O'Level/Diploma	48	15.4
		Bachelor's Degree	174	55.9
		Postgraduate Degree	89	28.6
5	Work Experience	Below 10 years	83	26.7
		10–19 years	114	36.7
		20–29 years	78	25.1
		Above 30 years	36	11.6

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 shows that male respondents (55.9%) slightly outnumbered female respondents (44.1%). Most respondents fell within the 30–39 years (34.7%) and 40–49 years (30.2%) age brackets, indicating a relatively experienced workforce, while the majority were married (57.6%), reflecting a predominantly family-oriented staff. In terms of education, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (55.9%), and 36.7% had between 10 and 19 years of work experience, underscoring a workforce with substantial institutional knowledge.

Table 2a: Respondents' Rate of Responses on Organizational Cynicism and CWB Items

S/N	Item	Mean	Std.	Remark
Organizational Cynicism Items				
1	I believe that my organization says one thing and does another.	3.55	1.22	Agree
2	I see little similarity between what my organization says it will do and what it actually does.	3.63	1.18	Agree
3	The organization's policies, goals, and practices seem to have little in common.	3.46	1.23	Agree
4	When my organization says it's going to do something, I wonder if it will really happen.	3.60	1.18	Agree
5	My organization expects one thing of its employees, but rewards another.	3.49	1.26	Agree
6	When I think about my organization, I feel aggravation.	3.41	1.27	Agree
7	When I think about my organization, I feel irritation.	3.48	1.23	Agree
8	When I think about my organization, I feel tension.	3.51	1.21	Agree
9	When I think about my organization, I feel anxiety.	3.46	1.23	Agree
10	I criticize organizational practices and policies with others.	3.47	1.22	Agree
11	I complain about how things happen at my organization to friends outside the organization.	3.54	1.20	Agree

12	I often talk to others about the way things are run at my organization.	3.49	1.23	Agree
Counterproductive Work Behaviour Items				
13	Purposely wasted your employer's materials/supplies.	2.32	1.41	Rarely
14	Complained about insignificant things at work.	3.12	1.31	Frequently
15	Told people outside the job what a lousy place you work for.	3.03	1.36	Frequently
16	Came to work late without permission.	2.93	1.34	Rarely
17	Stayed home from work and said you were sick when you weren't.	2.71	1.43	Rarely
18	Insulted someone about their job performance.	2.59	1.40	Rarely
19	Made fun of someone's personal life.	2.51	1.41	Rarely
20	Ignored someone at work.	2.86	1.40	Rarely
21	Started an argument with someone at work.	2.62	1.37	Rarely
22	Insulted or made fun of someone at work.	2.58	1.39	Rarely

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2a shows general agreement across the organizational cynicism items, with the highest mean recorded for the perception that “there is little similarity between what my organization says it will do and what it actually does” (3.63), reflecting a strong sense of inconsistency between organizational promises and actions. Correspondingly, counterproductive work behaviour items recorded comparatively lower mean scores, with “complaining about insignificant things at work” (3.12) and “telling people outside the job what a lousy place you work for” (3.03) occurring most frequently, while more overt acts such as insults and sabotage of materials occurred only rarely, suggesting that CWB in this context manifests mainly through mild, low-intensity behaviours rather than severe misconduct.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of the Study Variables

Statistic Parameter	CC	AC	BC	CWB
Mean	3.53	3.47	3.50	2.73
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	2.50
Std. Dev.	1.22	1.24	1.22	1.35
Skewness	-0.61	-0.53	-0.58	0.26
Jarque-Bera (Sig.)	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.05$

Source: EViews 9.0 Output, 2026

Table 3 shows that cognitive cynicism (CC), affective cynicism (AC), and behavioural cynicism (BC) all recorded mean scores above the midpoint (3.53, 3.47, and 3.50 respectively), indicating a moderately high level of cynicism among respondents, while CWB recorded a lower mean of 2.73, suggesting that counterproductive behaviours occur only occasionally. The negative skewness of the cynicism variables reflects a clustering of responses toward agreement, whereas the slight positive skew of CWB reflects a clustering toward lower frequency options. Jarque-Bera statistics were significant for all variables ($p < 0.05$), confirming that none of the distributions are normal.

Table 4: Variable Correlation Matrix

Variance	CC	AC	BC	CWB
CC	1.0000			
AC	0.7956	1.0000		
BC	0.4650	0.5756	1.0000	
CWB	0.3780	0.1420	0.6350	1.0000

Source: EViews 9.0 Output, 2026

The correlation matrix in Table 4 shows that cognitive cynicism has a moderate positive correlation with CWB ($r = 0.3780$), affective cynicism a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.1420$), and behavioural cynicism the strongest correlation ($r = 0.6350$), while the strong intercorrelations among the cynicism dimensions (e.g., CC-AC, $r = 0.7956$) confirm that they are interlinked while contributing differently to CWB.

Table 5: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Hypotheses 1 to 3

Variable	Coefficient	t-Statistic	Prob.
C (Constant)	-0.8020	-8.1041	0.0000
CC	0.4099	2.3813	0.0179
AC	1.2985	4.7481	0.0000
BC	-0.6990	-2.4551	0.0146
R-squared = 0.8491		Adj. R-squared = 0.7477	
F-statistic = 576.02		Prob(F-stat) = 0.0000	
Durbin-Watson = 1.8312			

Source: EViews 9.0 Output, 2026

The regression results in Table 5 show that cognitive cynicism ($\beta = 0.4099$, $p = 0.0179$) and affective cynicism ($\beta = 1.2985$, $p = 0.0000$) exert positive and statistically significant effects on CWB, implying that employees with strong cynical beliefs and emotional negativity toward the organization are more likely to exhibit counterproductive behaviour. Behavioural cynicism, however, shows a significant negative relationship with CWB ($\beta = -0.6990$, $p = 0.0146$), suggesting that overt expressions of cynicism may serve as a release mechanism that reduces the enactment of more damaging counterproductive acts. The R-squared value of 0.8491 indicates that approximately 84.9 percent of the variance in CWB is jointly explained by the three cynicism dimensions, and the model is statistically significant overall ($F = 576.02$, $p = 0.000000$).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Cognitive Cynicism and Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour: The finding rejects H_1 and confirms a significant positive relationship between cognitive cynicism and CWB ($\beta = 0.4099$, $p = 0.0179 < 0.05$), implying that employees who perceive inconsistency between their organization's stated values and its actions are more prone to absenteeism, lateness, and reduced productivity. This aligns with Kuo et al. (2021) and Kiyani and Afsar (2020), who found that cognitive judgments of organizational deceit strongly predict withdrawal and deviance, and with Sahoo and Sia (2022), who linked perceived hypocrisy to destructive work behaviour. However, Zhang and Chen (2021) and Mensah and Adjei (2020) contend that cognitive cynicism may remain passive unless reinforced by emotional discontent or organizational stressors, while Okoro and Akinbode (2023) suggest that highly cognitively cynical employees may disengage silently rather than act out.

Affective Cynicism and Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour: H_2 was also rejected, revealing a strong positive relationship between affective cynicism and CWB ($\beta = 1.2985$, $p = 0.0000 < 0.05$), indicating that emotional reactions such as anger and resentment significantly fuel negative employee actions. This corroborates Akram et al. (2022) and Ortega-Parra and Sastre-Castillo (2020), who found that emotional exhaustion and disillusionment drive retaliatory CWB, and Rana and Sharma (2021), who linked affective cynicism to emotional dissonance and norm violation. Conversely, Nasir and Ghumman (2021) argue that emotional cynicism can be

buffered by strong social support, while Hossain and Rahman (2020) and Obi and Eze (2022) suggest that emotional detachment may produce apathy rather than active misbehaviour, particularly in collectivist cultures.

Behavioural Cynicism and Counterproductive Workplace Behaviour: H_3 was rejected as well, but the relationship was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.6990$, $p = 0.0146 < 0.05$), suggesting that openly voicing dissatisfaction through mockery or criticism may act as a release valve that reduces more covert or damaging misconduct. This is consistent with Bedeian (2021) and Rathi and Lee (2022), who argue that expressive cynicism can foster camaraderie and reduce toxic silence, and with Chou and Choi (2020), who found that expressive norms redirect negative energy away from CWB. In contrast, Adeyemi and Sule (2021) and Ogunleye and Folarin (2023) found behavioural cynicism to be a precursor of deviance and conflict, while Aryee and Boateng (2020) maintain that cynical expression erodes trust and escalates workplace hostility.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined organizational cynicism as a predictor of counterproductive workplace behaviour among local government council employees in Delta State, Nigeria. The findings show that cognitive and affective cynicism positively predict CWB, indicating that inconsistencies, unfairness, and emotional dissatisfaction perceived within the organization heighten the likelihood of counterproductive acts, while behavioural cynicism exerts a negative influence, suggesting that vocalized dissatisfaction may serve as a coping mechanism that reduces deeper misconduct. It is therefore concluded that organizational cynicism significantly shapes employee conduct within the local government system, and that addressing employees' beliefs, emotions, and expressions about their organization is crucial to curbing counterproductive workplace behaviour.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that:

- i. Management should ensure closer alignment between stated policies and actual practice to reduce cognitive cynicism and rebuild employee trust and organizational transparency.
- ii. Local government councils should institute employee wellness and emotional support programmes to address the affective dimensions of cynicism, such as irritation, anxiety, and frustration.
- iii. Rather than suppressing criticism, organizations should establish formal channels through which employees can voice concerns constructively, converting behavioural cynicism into a catalyst for positive organizational change.

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