The Moderating Effects of Supportive Culture in the Relationship between Acquisitional Cynicism and Affective Commitment to Change in Nigerian Public Universities.

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Abstract

Organizational change initiatives within public universities are frequently undermined by employee skepticism toward transformation motives, particularly in contexts characterized by recurrent reforms and limited stakeholder involvement. This paper examines the moderating effect of supportive culture on the relationship between acquisitional cynicism and employee affective commitment to change in Nigerian public universities. Drawing on commitment to change theory and organizational culture perspectives, the paper synthesizes empirical and theoretical evidence to argue that acquisitional cynicism significantly weakens employees' emotional attachment to change initiatives, while supportive culture attenuates this negative relationship by fostering trust, participation, and psychological safety. The study used questionnaire to collect data in Aliko Dangote University of Science and Technology Kano. The data was analyzed using SmartPLS software version 4. Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). measured 0.705 for acquisional cynicism and between 0.726 to 0.766 for affective cynicism. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) where Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.790 to 0.883 and Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.876 to 0.907. The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and coefficient of determination (R^2). The results indicate that acquisitional cynicism has a significant negative effect on affective commitment to change $\beta = -0.492$, $t = 8.643$ and $p < 0.00$. The finding suggests that higher levels of acquisitional cynicism significantly reduce employees' emotional attachment and willingness to support organizational change. Also the effect of supportive culture on affective commitment is positive and significant where $\beta = 0.267$, $t = 4.215$ and $p < 0.001$. Coefficient of determination(R^2) was found to be 0.622% indicating that approximately 62.2% of the variance in affective commitment to change is explained by Acquisitional Cynicism, Supportive Culture and Interaction effect. The study recommends among others that Public university administrators should strengthen supportive cultural practices by institutionalizing transparent communication, participatory decision-making, and fair treatment during change processes.

1. Introduction

Organizational change has become a persistent and unavoidable feature of contemporary public sector institutions as they respond to technological advancement, globalization, policy reforms, and shifting societal expectations (Oreg et al., 2011; Vakola, 2021). In public universities, particularly within developing economies, change initiatives such as institutional restructuring, program expansion, digital transformation, and performance-based accountability have intensified in both scale and frequency (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Windasari et al., 2022). Despite their strategic importance, many of these initiatives fail to achieve their intended outcomes, largely due to limited employee commitment during the implementation phase (Beer & Nohria, 2000; McKinsey & Company, 2022).

Scholarly inquiry has increasingly shifted from resistance-based explanations toward understanding employees' attitudinal and emotional responses to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Gil et al., 2023). Among these responses, affective commitment to change—defined as an employee's emotional attachment to and belief in the value of a specific change initiative—has emerged as a critical predictor of successful change outcomes (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Kim & Park, 2023). Employees who exhibit high affective commitment are more likely to support change voluntarily, invest discretionary effort, and sustain new practices over time (Gil et al., 2023; Jun et al., 2023).

However, in many Nigerian public universities, securing affective commitment to change has proven challenging due to pervasive skepticism toward organizational transformation efforts (Olayemi & Oke, 2021; Ike et al., 2024). A particularly salient form of such skepticism is acquisitional cynicism, which reflects employees' negative beliefs and emotions toward organizational expansion, restructuring, or transformation initiatives perceived as self-serving or

misaligned with employee interests (Stanley et al., 2005; Afacan & İra, 2023). When employees view change initiatives as symbolic, politically motivated, or disconnected from institutional realities, their emotional willingness to support such initiatives diminishes substantially (Fauzan, 2020; Tolay et al., 2017).

The effects of acquisitional cynicism, however, do not occur in a vacuum. Organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping how employees interpret and respond to change initiatives (Schein, 1985; Denison & Mishra, 1995). Supportive culture—characterized by trust, open communication, employee involvement, and concern for well-being—has been shown to foster psychological safety and positive change attitudes (Grama & Todericiu, 2016; Olafsen et al., 2021). This paper therefore examines how supportive culture moderates the relationship between acquisitional cynicism and affective commitment to change in Nigerian public universities.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to examine the moderating effect of supportive culture on the relationship between acquisitional cynicism and employee affective commitment to change.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the effect of acquisitional cynicism on employee affective commitment to change.
2. Analyze the characteristics of supportive culture within Nigerian public universities.
3. Assess the relationship between supportive culture and affective commitment to change.
4. Determine whether supportive culture moderates the relationship between acquisitional cynicism and employee affective commitment to change.

3. Research Questions

Guided by the study objectives and theoretical foundations, the following research questions are posed:

1. What effect does acquisitional cynicism have on employees' affective commitment to change?
2. How does supportive culture manifest within Nigerian public universities?
3. What relationship exists between supportive culture and affective commitment to change?
4. Does supportive culture moderate the relationship between acquisitional cynicism and affective commitment to change?

4. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

4.1 Acquisitional Cynicism and Affective Commitment to Change

Organizational cynicism is broadly defined as a negative attitude toward one's employing organization, encompassing beliefs of low integrity, negative emotional reactions, and critical behaviors (Dean et al., 1998). Acquisitional cynicism represents a specific manifestation of this construct, emerging in response to organizational expansion, restructuring, or transformation initiatives perceived as unjustified or self-serving (Stanley et al., 2005; Afacan & İra, 2023). In public universities, acquisitional cynicism often arises when reforms are introduced without adequate consultation, clear communication, or demonstrable benefits for academic staff (Olayemi & Oke, 2021; Ike et al., 2024).

Commitment to change reflects an employee's psychological attachment to a specific change initiative (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Among its dimensions, affective commitment is considered the most desirable because it reflects genuine belief in and emotional support for the change (Gil et al., 2023; Kim & Park, 2023). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that cynicism toward transformation motives undermines trust, perceived fairness, and emotional engagement, thereby weakening affective commitment to change (Stanley et al., 2005; Fauzan, 2020; Afacan & İra, 2023).

H_1: Acquisitional cynicism has a significant negative effect on employees' affective commitment to change.

4.2 Supportive Culture as a Moderating Variable

Organizational culture refers to shared assumptions, values, and norms that guide how members interpret organizational events and managerial actions (Schein, 1985). Supportive culture, as articulated in applied cultural typologies, emphasizes trust, participation, teamwork, open communication, and concern for employee well-being (Wallach, 1982; Denison & Mishra, 1995). Such cultures create psychologically safe environments in which employees feel valued and heard, even during periods of uncertainty (Grama & Todericiu, 2016; Olafsen et al., 2021).

The literature suggests that supportive culture shapes how employees interpret organizational change initiatives (Schein, 1985; Denison & Mishra, 1995). In supportive environments, employees are more likely to attribute change initiatives to collective goals rather than managerial self-interest, thereby reducing the intensity of cynical reactions (Koranteng et al., 2022; Olafsen et

al., 2021). Consequently, supportive culture may weaken the negative effect of acquisitional cynicism on affective commitment to change.

H_2: Supportive culture significantly moderates the relationship between acquisitional cynicism and affective commitment to change such that the negative effect is weaker under high levels of supportive culture.

5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework positions acquisitional cynicism as the independent variable and employee affective commitment to change as the dependent variable. Supportive culture functions as a moderating variable that conditions the strength of this relationship (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Denison & Mishra, 1995). The framework reflects a buffering model in which supportive cultural practices reduce the extent to which skepticism toward organizational transformation translates into emotional disengagement (Hayes, 2018).

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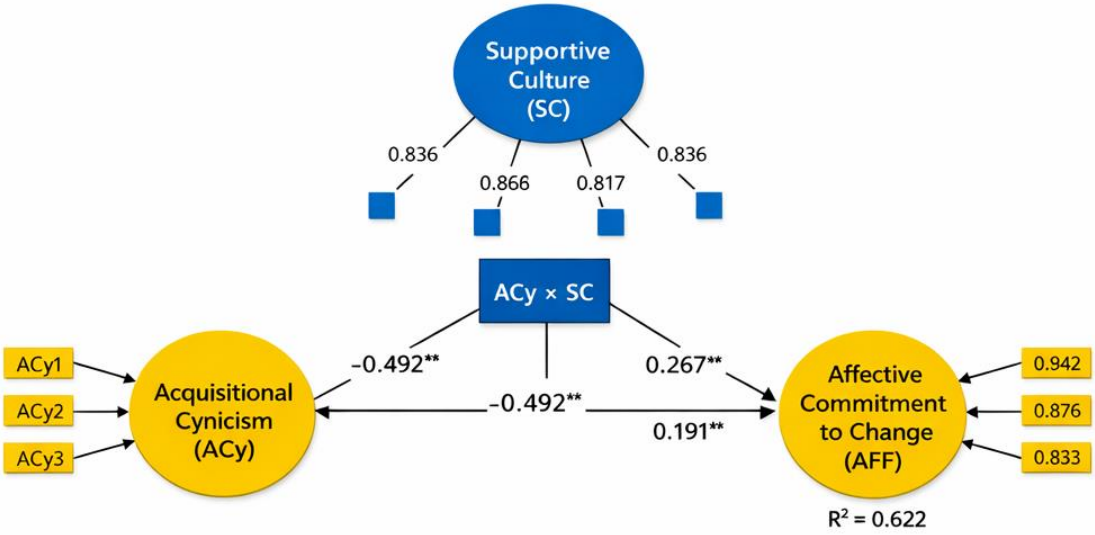


Table 1: Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Acquisitional Cynicism **(ACy)**					
	ACy1	0.768	0.790	0.877	0.705
	ACy2	0.805	0.883	0.876	0.705
	ACy3	0.747	0.883	0.876	0.705
Affective Commitment to Change **(AFF)**					
	AFF1	0.842	0.854	0.907	0.766
	AFF2	0.876	0.854	0.907	0.766
	AFF3	0.833	0.822	0.892	0.726

Note: *All outer loadings are above 0.70. Composite Reliability and AVE values meet the recommended thresholds.*

Table 2: Structural Model Results

Path	Beta (β)	*t*-Value	*p*-Value
ACy → AFF	-0.492	8.643	0.000
SC → AFF	0.267	4.215	0.000
ACy x SC → AFF	0.191	3.637	0.000

Note: *$p < 0.01$.

Table 3: Moderation Analysis

Interaction Effect	Beta (β)	*t*-Value	*p*-Value
ACy x SC → AFF	0.191	3.637	0.000

Note: *The interaction term ACy x SC shows a significant moderating effect.*

4.3 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was evaluated in terms of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity, following established guidelines in PLS-SEM.

Indicator Reliability (Outer Loadings)

The outer loadings for all indicators ranged from 0.747 to 0.876, exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. Specifically, Acquisitional Cynicism (ACy) is 0.747 to 0.805 and Affective Commitment (AFF) is 0.833 to 0.876. These values indicate that all items share a substantial proportion of variance with their respective constructs, confirming adequate indicator reliability. No item removal was required, as all indicators met the recommended criteria.

Internal Consistency Reliability

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) where Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.790 to 0.883 and Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.876 to 0.907. Both measures exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the constructs exhibit high internal consistency and reliability.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). ACy AVE measured 0.705 and AFF AVE measured between 0.726 to 0.766

All AVE values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the constructs explain more than half of the variance in their indicators. This confirms that convergent validity is established.

Overall, the measurement model demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with all constructs meeting the criteria for reliability and validity. This supports the adequacy of the measurement instruments for subsequent structural model analysis.

4.4 Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and coefficient of determination (R^2).

Direct Effect: Acquisitional Cynicism → Affective Commitment

The results indicate that acquisitional cynicism has a significant negative effect on affective commitment to change:

- $\beta = -0.492$
- $t = 8.643$
- $p < 0.001$

Interpretation

This finding suggests that higher levels of acquisitional cynicism significantly reduce employees' emotional attachment and willingness to support organizational change. Employees who perceive organizational practices as self-serving or unfair are less likely to develop positive emotional commitment toward change initiatives.

This result is consistent with prior studies, which argue that cynicism undermines trust and reduces employee engagement during organizational transformation.

Direct Effect: Supportive Culture → Affective Commitment

The effect of supportive culture on affective commitment is positive and significant:

- $\beta = 0.267$
- $t = 4.215$
- $p < 0.001$

Interpretation

This indicates that a supportive organizational culture enhances employees' emotional commitment to change. When employees perceive the organization as supportive, fair, and growth-oriented, they are more likely to embrace change initiatives.

Moderation Effect: ACy × SC → AFF

The interaction term (moderation effect) is also positive and significant:

- $\beta = 0.191$
- $t = 3.637$
- $p < 0.001$

Interpretation of Moderation

The positive moderation coefficient indicates that supportive culture weakens the negative impact of acquisitional cynicism on affective commitment.

In practical terms:

- When supportive culture is low → cynicism strongly reduces commitment
- When supportive culture is high → the negative effect of cynicism is reduced

This suggests that supportive culture acts as a buffering mechanism, protecting employee commitment even in the presence of cynicism.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

- R^2 (Affective Commitment) = 0.622

Interpretation

This indicates that approximately 62.2% of the variance in affective commitment to change is explained by:

- Acquisitional Cynicism
- Supportive Culture
- Interaction effect

According to Chin (1998), this represents a moderate to substantial explanatory power, suggesting

that the model has strong predictive capability.

4.5 Overall Model Interpretation

The findings provide strong empirical support for the hypothesized relationships:

1. Acquisitional cynicism negatively influences affective commitment, confirming that employees who perceive organizational opportunism are less emotionally invested in change.
2. Supportive culture enhances commitment, reinforcing the importance of organizational climate in shaping employee attitudes.
3. Supportive culture moderates the relationship, demonstrating that cultural context plays a critical role in mitigating negative employee perceptions.

4.4 Theoretical Implications

The results contribute to the literature in several ways:

- They extend organizational cynicism theory by demonstrating its impact within the context of change management.
- They reinforce social exchange theory, suggesting that supportive organizational environments foster reciprocal commitment.
- They highlight the importance of cultural contingency, showing that the effects of cynicism are not uniform but depend on organizational context.

4.5 Practical Implications

For managers and policymakers in Nigerian public universities:

- Reducing cynicism requires improving transparency and fairness
- Building a supportive culture can significantly enhance change outcomes

- Leadership should focus on employee inclusion, open communication and development opportunities

5.0 Review of Related Literature

Empirical studies across African and Nigerian contexts consistently report that skepticism toward organizational transformation undermines employee commitment to change (Madi et al., 2020; Nyika, 2022). In public universities, repeated policy reversals, inadequate funding, and limited staff involvement have been shown to foster cynicism toward expansion and reform initiatives (Olayemi & Oke, 2021; Adewale et al., 2023). Such cynicism is associated with reduced trust, lower morale, and weakened emotional attachment to change (Fauzan, 2020; Afacan & İra, 2023).

Conversely, research on organizational culture demonstrates that supportive environments can mitigate the negative effects of cynical attitudes (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Grama & Todericiu, 2016). Studies show that cultures emphasizing participation, fairness, and communication foster affective commitment by enhancing perceived legitimacy of change initiatives (Olafsen et al., 2021; Koranteng et al., 2022). However, limited empirical work has examined supportive culture as a moderator between acquisitional cynicism and affective commitment to change in Nigerian public universities, representing a significant gap addressed by this paper.

6. Findings

First, acquisitional cynicism exerts a significant negative effect on employee affective commitment to change. This is consistent with the works of Stanley et al (2005) and Afacan & İra (2023).

Second, supportive culture is positively associated with affective commitment, as trust, participation, and opens communication foster emotional engagement with change initiatives as found by Denison and Mishra (1995) and Olafsen et al (2021).

Third, supportive culture weakens the negative relationship between acquisitional cynicism and affective commitment to change by reframing organizational transformation as collective rather than self-serving and is supported by the findings of Grama and Todericiu (2016) and Hayes (2018).

7. Recommendations

-Public university administrators should strengthen supportive cultural practices by institutionalizing transparent communication, participatory decision-making, and fair treatment during change processes.

-Leadership development initiatives should emphasize empathy, inclusion, and consistency to reduce skepticism toward organizational transformation.

-Change initiatives should be designed to visibly align institutional expansion with employee development and academic values, thereby reducing acquisitional cynicism and fostering affective commitment.

8. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that acquisitional cynicism constitutes a significant barrier to employees' affective commitment to change in Nigerian public universities. More importantly, it establishes that supportive culture buffers this negative relationship by fostering trust, participation, and psychological safety. By integrating commitment-to-change theory with organizational culture perspectives, the study advances understanding of how supportive cultural contexts can transform skepticism toward organizational transformation into affective engagement. Addressing acquisitional cynicism without strengthening supportive cultural practices is therefore unlikely to yield sustainable commitment to change in public higher education institutions.

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