

I INTRODUCTION

"I am not at all cynical, I have merely got experience, which, however, is very much the same thing." (Oscar Wilde)

When change is announced in organizations, employees often feel that quite a fuss is made about what according to their personal experience usually just comes along with additional workloads and frequently deteriorates work conditions, but hardly ever seems to bring about true improvement or really profound change, and therefore is a waste of time and effort. Their executives, in contrast, commonly seek to convey the impression of boldly going revolutionary new ways by introducing particular changes, and are frequently astonished by most reserved and reluctant responses on the part of their subordinates, or think of them as unavoidable. However, such negative attitudes to change among today's workforce usually have little to do with a general unwillingness to change. Much rather, they are the product of great uncertainty, deep frustration and disillusionment – emotions which are typically rooted in employees' prior unfortunate experiences with corporate changes that may take their toll here (Andersson, 1996; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000). Specifically, many employees feel that they witnessed far too many changes where initial excitement and enthusiasm vanished all too quickly once first obstacles were encountered or which, from their very subjective point of view, turned out to be 'all pain, but little gain', falling short of expectations and ever so often just being tacitly abandoned. Such experiences are then generalized towards future changes, making people conclude that these new transitions shall be no better – and that once it has proven unsuccessful or is simply 'forgotten', today's revolutionary change initiative will also just be replaced by another 'fad of the day', i.e. by another ostensibly innovative change program which then, at some point, is likely to suffer the same fate of falling into oblivion, too (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Connell & Waring, 2002).

Naturally, a point has to be made in this regard that such fatal assessments of corporate changes are highly subjective in nature, and that they do not necessarily have to be accurate, or that in some instances, executives' evaluations of the success of particular change measures may well differ from their subordinates' assessments, for example. Nonetheless, whether objectively true or not, their negative assessments of change are true to employees (Bedeian, 2007), which is why many of them cease to 'embrace' new changes the way their executives expect them to, sighing and shrugging their heads instead, or simply making fun of today's 'fad' – a response which is characteristic of what has recently been referred to as 'organizational cynicism' (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998), and to which the thesis at hand shall be devoted.

In its essence, this modern, workplace-related type of cynicism draws on basic ideas originally pursued by the ancient Greek Cynics¹ (e.g., Andersson, 1996; Brandes & Das, 2006). Most famously represented by Antisthenes and Diogenes of Sinope, the ancient Cynics emphasized the animalistic nature of human beings, reasoning that a virtuous life was a life in accordance with nature rather than in accordance with religious commands or societal etiquette. From this core thought, they derived the privilege to behave like animals, feeling free from any kind of obligation and duty. As a result, they lived simple lives in the streets, claiming the right to express their animalistic nature (e.g., by defecating or masturbating in public, activities which their Athenian contemporaries would always have performed in private). At the same time, this 'naturalistic' behavior was also a manifestation of the Cynics' ideal of a highly ascetic lifestyle which was characterized by restricting one's needs and interests to those required by nature – a type of self-sufficiency ('autarkeia')

¹ Following the example of Cutler (2005), throughout this dissertation, the terms 'Cynic/Cynicism' shall be written with a capital 'C' when referring to the ancient Greek Cynicism tradition, whereas lower case letters as in 'cynic/cynicism' shall be used when addressing more recent forms of cynicism.

most prominently acted out by Diogenes whose belongings were limited to his famous barrel, a cloak, and a walking stick. While little surprisingly, most Athenians strongly disapproved of this most peculiar, animal-like behavior and depreciatingly coined the name ‘Cynics’ for Antisthenes and his ‘dog-like’ followers (after the Greek ‘kunikos’ for ‘dog’), the Cynics presumably even enjoyed so much attention and irritation on the part of their contemporaries, not even shying away from disrespectfully provoking their most powerful leaders. In this respect, Diogenes, for instance, is said to have proudly introduced himself as “*Diogenes, the dog*” when Alexander the Great approached him claiming that he was “*Alexander, the great king*”, and, according to a yet more popular anecdote, even advised his king to move aside to let the sun shine through on another occasion. Indeed, rather than bowing to kings or leaders, the Cynics promoted ‘cosmopolitanism’, holding the remarkable ideal of an egalitarian community of ‘citizens of the world’ in which, being animals after all, all men and women should be equal, regardless of their age, origin, ethnicity, etc. Moreover, the Cynics did not only reject kingship, but more generally despised any societal institution, for such institutions always bred what they conceived of as highly unnatural, arbitrary, or absurd and therefore most questionable conventions or laws. In consequence, they seized every opportunity to express their disdain for such allegedly ridiculous, man-made conventions or customs and to discredit their fellow Athenians who submitted themselves to such societal rules. In this respect, they were particularly merciless towards those constantly aspiring to superiority, power, or material possession and luxury – values the Cynics deemed most questionable and misleading when striving for a life in accordance with nature as the core road to virtue. Claiming total freedom of speech and frankness, the Cynics’ core ‘weapon’ when attacking their contemporaries was a particularly harsh form of criticism, which often took on a highly sarcastic tone and could therefore even prove most amusing – at least for those who were not its immediate targets to whom such scorn could obviously be most vicious and offending (Cutler, 2005).

Today, some 2400 years later, this latter tendency towards blatant, sarcastic, and highly ‘politically incorrect’ (as one might nowadays put it) criticism arguably still represents one of the most striking features commonly associated with cynicism (Brandes & Das, 2006), and it also plays an important role in connection with the notion of cynicism in organizations which stands in the focus of this thesis.

Generally, such corporate cynicism as explored in this thesis evidently takes on a considerably more subtle tone than ancient Cynicism does, however, with organizational cynics obviously no longer creating nuisances by living ‘dog-like’ lives in the streets, by bluntly advising their kings (or, rather, their CEOs as their modern equivalents) to step away from the sun as Diogenes did, or by generally defeating man-made institutions like the state or corporations. What today’s workplace cynics do have in common with their ancient predecessors, though, is a sense of contempt for contemporaries who, from the their point of view, have proven to hold and pursue some rather questionable ideals, and who have therefore become the target of their scorn and criticism (Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005; Wilkerson, Evans, & Davis, 2008). In the case of organizational cynicism, this cynical attitude is directed towards one’s employing organization and its executives and is rooted in frustrating, disenchanting experiences (Andersson, 1996). On the behavioral level, it is typically marked by more or less secretly mocking corporate slogans, practices, and of course change programs with like-minded colleagues and peers (Brandes & Das, 2006), but for instance also by playing ‘bullshit bingo’ during meetings and presentations or by worshipping ‘Dilbert’ (Feldman, 2000) – a comic character created by US-cartoonist Scott Adams who has become a cult figure among millions of employees who apparently feel similarly disillusioned by corporate life:

Focusing on the workplace adventures of Silicon-Valley-based engineer ‘Dilbert’ and his colleagues who constantly find themselves at the mercy of their apparently most simple-minded, unscrupulous, and profit-greedy leaders and their ludicrous and crazy ideas, Dilbert comics are all about exposing the corporate world and its executives by mocking absurd management and leadership practices, by making

fun of silly rituals, disastrous communication processes – and, not least, by ridiculing corporate change practice (cf. figure 1).



*DILBERT © 2012 Scott Adams. Used By permission of ANDREWS MCMEEL SYNDICATION.
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Figure 1. Example of a Dilbert Cartoon Strip Mocking Corporate Change Practice

While like any kind of satire, Dilbert cartoons are obviously exaggerated in many ways, their enormous popularity with over 2,000 newspapers in 65 countries currently publishing Dilbert's adventures is certainly quite revealing and indicates that they do seem to hit a nerve among today's workforce. In this vein, laughter may stick in one's throat once one learns that most of Adams' cartoons are based on real-life encounters from his readers which are submitted to him in dozens of emails every day (e.g., Greilsamer, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 2005; Naus, 2007). And sadly, a growing number of empirical findings well suggests that the above shown cartoon strip on employee responses to change does not seem to be too far from reality either, with corporate changes attracting so much cynicism among the workforce that a whole body of research has been devoted to this specific notion of 'organizational change cynicism' during the past two decades (cf. e.g. Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 1994). In this vein, hitherto existing findings on this change-oriented type of workplace cynicism clearly indicate that the above-shown Dilbert comic strip does capture some core beliefs typically held by change cynics: While much like Dilbert, they do not reject the notion of change as such, they do wish for more elaborate changes which bring about true improvements (e.g., Tesluk, Vance, & Mathieu,

1999) instead of constantly finding themselves confronted with alleged ‘revolutions’ which only look like superficial makeovers as they tend to see it, or with strategies that just do not seem to “*make sense*” at all, as Dilbert puts it, proving to be nothing but hassles and burdens for their recipients. Also, with regards to Dilbert’s example, the unflattering impression we get of his boss unfortunately very much seems to reflect what change cynics frequently think of their responsible change agents whom they blame for failing to give sufficient, careful thought about the changes they introduce (Wanous et al., 1994; 2000). Specifically, cynical employees frequently reproach their managers for trying to take the easy road when it comes to change, for instance, accusing them of not thinking change programs through but of just following management ‘fashion’ trends or of simply introducing changes for the sake of doing so, respectively – regardless of whether these transitions make sense for their respective organization after all. Likewise, managerial attempts to shift the responsibility for unpopular changes to ‘experts’ like external consultants (or to “*directors of change management*” as in Dilbert’s example), and thus to third parties who may serve as ‘scapegoats’ for particular decisions, may often attract employees’ cynicism since employees all too readily think of them as deception or camouflage tactics which are taken as a sign of managerial hypocrisy or insincerity. And eventually, organizational executives shall obviously not make themselves very popular among their subordinates either when promoting changes which require major sacrifices from employees while their own privileges and compensations remain largely unaffected or are even increased, which inevitably conveys the impression that managers only act in a highly self-interested manner (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Naus, 2007).

Thus, in short, whether justified or not, there may be numerous different reasons why employees often end up feeling deeply disappointed by their superiors when it comes to organizational changes and why they may develop a strong sense of animosity towards these leaders. Nonetheless, in many instances, employees shall find that they are not in a position to openly express their emotions, concerns, or

more generally their disapproval unless they are willing to risk negative consequences for their position or career. Ever so often, they may also conclude that quitting their job is not a viable option either, which is why many of them shall end up grudgingly tolerating things the way they are. In an effort to distance themselves from a corporate reality which has so little in common with their personal expectations and ideals, however, they may lapse into cynical scorn and contempt, often at least symbolically pointing at what they disapprove of by means of cynical mockery and ridicule – and thus by referring to a usually rather ‘safe’ type of criticism in so far as the use of satirical humor is commonly socially accepted and therefore vastly unsanctionable (Collinson, 2002; Fleming, 2005; Greilsamer, 1995). Evidently, though, this sarcastic or even humorous tone should not tempt us to overlook the disillusionment and deep frustration which such employee cynicism may inhere, and which may well leave some marks among the workforce (e.g., Andersson, 1996; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003).

While change cynicism hence clearly entails affective elements and behavioral tendencies, the existing scholarly literature on the construct has vastly neglected these realms, however, largely focusing on the beliefs and convictions typically held by change cynics instead (e.g., Stanley et al., 2005; Wanous et al., 1994; 2000). In an effort to contribute to a better understanding of employees’ cynical responses to change, this dissertation shall address this current gap in research by offering a new, tripartite approach to change cynicism which also captures its affective and behavioral realms as one core objective. This extended approach to the change cynicism construct shall be validated in a first empirical study. Additionally, this thesis aims to provide some new insights regarding the antecedents and consequences of such change-oriented cynicism, an objective to be addressed in a second field study. To this end, possible effects of contextual features on employees’ responses to change shall be explored in more detail, factors like an organization’s underlying culture as well as its conduct towards employees in terms of communication policies, in terms of involvement, or in terms of providing support among them. Moreo-

ver, the impact of peer attitudes to change as well as the role of individual appraisals and emotions for the development of change cynicism shall be examined more carefully. Instead of solely focusing on the potential determinants of change cynicism, however, a research focus shall also be laid on its outcomes. As regards these latter implications of change cynicism, an emphasis shall be placed on its possible links to other change-related behaviors like resistance and engagement to see whether employees' cynical responses to change can indeed pose a threat to the successful implementation of change as has often been suspected (Stanley et al., 2005; Wanous et al., 2000). Eventually, to provide new insights for an ongoing scholarly debate which has argued over the possible implications of employee cynicism for stress perceptions and health-related outcomes, its relationships to burnout and withdrawal shall also be studied in more detail.

Before addressing these core research objectives, though, the upcoming second chapter shall explore the current literature on cynicism in the workplace in more detail: First, its possible targets and its actual substance shall be analyzed in sections 2.1 and 2.2. Then, it shall be dealt with the phenomenon of organizational change as such in section 2.3.1. In section 2.3.2, existing approaches to change cynicism shall be examined before exploring the (dis)similarities of change cynicism and other constructs in section 2.3.3. Afterwards, in section 2.3.4, some basic assumptions about the emergence of change cynicism and its implications for organizational practice shall be presented, and eventually, a meta-analytic overview of empirical findings on change cynicism shall be provided in section 2.3.5. All this shall not only broaden our understanding of the construct, but shall also serve as a basis for advancing an extended new approach to the construct in chapter III.

II CYNICISM IN ORGANIZATIONS

Despite more than two decades of research on cynicism in organizations and despite several reports of increasing cynicism in the workplace (cf. e.g. Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008; Feldman, 2000; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989), a phenomenon which has not only been observed in the US and Europe, in countries like China (e.g., Wu, Neubert, & Yi, 2007) and Taiwan (e.g., Simha, Elloy, & Huang, 2014), the Philippines (e.g., Bordia, Restubog, Jimmieson, & Irmer, 2011), Iran (e.g., Tabatabaei & Bigdelli, 2015) or Egypt (e.g., Nafei, 2013) the number of empirical studies dealing with organizational cynicism still is relatively limited. Besides, lacking a widely accepted definition of organizational cynicism, many scholars have advanced their own definitions and measures (cf. table 1), which has resulted in a plethora of scales that focus on multiple facets of the construct. The following sections therefore seek to provide an overview of the current state of research on cynicism in the workplace, analyzing conceptual and content-related similarities and differences between the most influential approaches to the construct and summarizing hitherto existing empirical findings.

2.1 Types of Cynicism in the Workplace

Unlike traditional views of cynicism as a stable personality trait in the tradition of Cook and Medley's (1954) work on cynical hostility, with few exceptions (e.g. Guastello et al., 1992; Hochwarter, James, Johnson, & Ferris, 2004; Jordan et al., 2007), scholars define workplace-related cynicism as an attitude. This has several implications for both research and practice: For one thing, given that attitudes can be directed towards different attitude objects, cynicism as an attitude may obviously have different targets, too. Currently, the scholarly literature therefore distinguishes between three major types of work-related attitudinal cynicism, namely between occupational or work cynicism, organizational or employee cynicism, and organizational change cynicism, respectively (cf. Abraham, 2000; Dean et al., 1998). Of these, the notion of occupational cynicism has the longest research tradition in the or-

ganizational sciences and is rooted in the work of Niederhoffer (1967), who observed how policemen developed cynical attitudes towards their profession. Later on, scholars who dealt with this type of cynicism (e.g., Blau, 1974; Hochschild, 1983; Meyerson, 1990; O'Connell, Holzman, & Armandi, 1986) generalized their research from the police domain towards employees who worked in service occupations like healthcare professionals, social workers, or flight attendants (Abraham, 2000; Naus, 2007) – and thus to groups whose professional life is equally characterized by stressful and often emotionally draining social interactions with patients, customers, or clients. They observed that employees who hold a cynical attitude towards their profession typically adopt cognitive, affective, and behavioral strategies which for instance involve an internal withdrawal or a lack of emotion, minimizing contact with one's clients or customers, or secretly addressing them by the use of pejorative terms to distance oneself. When looking for the causes of such occupational cynicism, scholars often borrow from the burnout research and argue that this kind of cynicism could serve as a coping mechanism which was meant to protect oneself from otherwise overwhelming, negative affect (Abraham, 2000) – an assumption which has recently also been transferred to other forms of workplace cynicism as shall be outlined in the subsequent sections. In this vein, there indeed is considerable overlap between the notion of occupational cynicism and (parts of) the burnout construct as introduced by Christina Maslach (1978), which, originally, was limited to people-oriented professions, too. As such, the construct included a dimension named 'depersonalization' which captured in how far workers distanced themselves both emotionally and cognitively from their patients, clients, etc. This depersonalization facet of the burnout construct was defined as a "*negative, cynical, or excessively detached response to other people, which often includes a loss of idealism*" (Maslach, 2000, p. 69) and was said to follow from continuing emotional exhaustion (cf. also section 5.2.6.2). Later on, with the publication of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS) in 1996 (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996), however, the notion of burnout was extended to other, i.e. to not exclusively people-oriented professions, too, and ever since, its depersonalization dimension

has been referred to as the ‘cynicism’ dimension of burnout once it is dealt with employees outside people-oriented occupations.

Defined as a cynical attitude towards one’s job which is marked by mental distancing (Salanova, Llorens, Garcia-Renedo, & Burriel, 2005), the cynicism aspect of burnout thus vastly corresponds to the notion of occupational or work cynicism as described by organizational scholars like Abraham (2000). However, one may note that authors who stem from the burnout research tend to assess the role of cynicism as a coping mechanism much more negatively than those who are rooted in the field of occupational cynicism research.

Specifically, while burnout researchers like Maslach (2000) typically emphasize the risks of depersonalization/cynicism as a possible concomitant of dehumanization, withdrawal, and further symptoms, scholars who focus on occupational or workplace cynicism commonly think of such cynicism as a self-protective form of coping which may prove beneficial for organization and employee alike (e.g. Naus, 2007). Seeking to integrate both views, Meyerson (1990) concluded from the results of an interview study with social workers in hospitals that it might be recommendable to distinguish deleterious, malignant, and passive cynicism marked by “*self-defeat and apathy*” as in the depersonalization/cynicism dimension associated with burnout from more healthful types of cynicism which could serve as a defense-mechanism that represented a “*way of expressing frustration and relinquishing responsibility for aspects [...] beyond control without renouncing all hope*” (p. 303). As such, this latter form of cynicism is more closely related to another major type of workplace-related cynicism which is also of greater relevance for the study at hand, namely to the notion of organizational or employee cynicism. This form of cynicism refers to a cynical attitude towards one’s employing organization (Davis & Gardner, 2004), and following a more comprehensive approach to organizational/ employee cynicism originally introduced by Andersson (1996), many researchers now think of this type of cynicism as of an overarching, integrative concept which addresses cynicism towards the organization as a whole.

Table 1
Definitions of Workplace-Related Cynicism

Source	Construct	Definition
Andersson (1996)	Cynicism	"[...] both a general and specific attitude, characterized by frustration and disillusionment as well as negative feelings toward and distrust of a person, group, ideology, social convention, or institution. In the case of employee cynicism, features of the workplace such as top management and/or particular business organizations are the objects toward which cynicism is directed." (p. 1397f)
Bedeian (2007)	Faculty Cynicism	"[...] an attitude resulting from a critical appraisal of the motives, actions, and values of one's employing organization. As used here, the word critical is not meant to denote a readiness to find fault, but rather to imply careful evaluation and judgment. Hence, by this definition, cynicism is taken to be an evaluative judgment stemming from an individual's employment experiences." (p. 11)
Bommer, Rich, & Rubin (2005)	Organizational Cynicism	"[...] a complex attitude that includes cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects resulting in increased beliefs of unfairness, feelings of distrust, and related actions about and against organizations." (p. 736)
Connell & Waring (2002)	Employee Cynicism	"[...] we define as uncertainty, doubt, skepticism and distrust." (p. 349)
Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar (1998)	Organizational Cynicism	"[...] a negative attitude towards 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)
James (2005)	Organizational Cynicism	"[...] attitudes related to one's employing organization, characterized by negative beliefs, feelings, and related behaviors. Additionally, it is a response to a history of personal and/or social experiences that are susceptible to change by environmental influences." (p. 7)

Source	Construct	Definition
Mantere & Martinsuo (2001)	Organizational Cynicism	"[...] (1) a belief that there is a gap between desired and observed organizational identity; (2) a negative affect toward the organization or organizational change (strategy); and (3) tendencies to disparaging and/or critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with those beliefs and affect." (p. 5)
McCarthy & Garavan (2007)	Employee Cynicism	"[...] generally defined as a negative personal attitude, and may include a number of dimensions: A belief that the organization lacks integrity, a belief that problems exist in the workplace and a belief that the organization is implementing the initiative for control purposes." (p. 905)
Naus, van Iterson, & Roe (2007a)	Organizational Cynicism	"[...] a self-defensive attitude, aiming to preserve, defend, or live up to values, traits, and competencies, central to the self in situations of potential discrepancy." (p. 197)
Naus (2007)	Cynicism Towards the Organization	"[...] the belief that the organization lacks integrity, and that official motives for actions and decisions cannot be trusted." (p. 105)
Qian & Daniels (2008)	Change-Specific Cynicism	"[...] a negative attitude toward a specific organizational change consisting of three dimensions: a disbelief in management's stated or implied motives for the change; a feeling of pessimism and frustration about the change efforts; and tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the specific organizational change." (p. 321)
Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky (2005)	Employee Cynicism	"disbelief of another's stated or implied motives for a decision or action. [...] This definition can be applied broadly (e.g., to people in general) or narrowly (e.g., to a particular person in a specific situation)." (p. 436)
Tesluk, Farr, Mathieu, & Vance (1995)	Organizational Cynicism	"[...] consists of two major components: (a) general cynicism, the belief that improvements will not be made and problems will not be solved due to the failure of others (e.g., management, co-workers), and (b) belief in improvability, the belief that improvements could be made and problems could be solved, if the necessary support for projects and solutions were provided." (p. 612)

In line with core predictions made by attitude researchers (Fabrigar, MacDonald, & Wegener, 2005), such organizational or employee cynicism may therefore also be influenced by cynical attitudes towards more specific workplace features like corporate executives or corporate changes and their leaders (Abhari, 2007; Andersson, 1996; Bateman, Sakano & Fujita, 1992; Hartl, 2008).

One of these yet more specific types of cynicism is the notion of change cynicism, which shall also stand in the focus of this thesis and which shall be dealt with in more detail in section 2.3. Beforehand, though, the view shall still be turned towards a more thorough analysis of the attitudinal nature of cynicism in organizations.

2.2 Organizational Cynicism as a Tripartite Attitude

Recalling what was said about the nature of cynicism in organizations in section 2.1, a point was made that most scholars construed workplace-related cynicism as an attitude. Attitudes, by definition, represent evaluative tendencies towards a particular entity such as an object, issue, other persons and so forth (Eagly & Chaiken, 2005), with evaluation, at a most basic level, implying a categorization in terms of good or bad, i.e. in terms of an underlying valence. As a clearly disapproving, pejorative, and critical view of its respective target, the notion of cynicism therefore implies a negative evaluation – despite its occasionally slightly humorous undertone, which may at least at times somewhat attenuate this impression.

Secondly, in many instances, attitudes stem from relevant experiences with a particular object, entity, or party, and usually being rooted in prior encounters with particular workplace issues or features like organizational change (Bedeian, 2007), organizational (change) cynicism is no exception here. Also, because people tend to generalize these former experiences with the respective target of an attitude to future confrontations with this or similar issues, attitudes may often take on an anticipatory, forward-looking component, which clearly is the case with regards to organizational (change) cynicism, too (Wilkerson et al., 2008).

Thirdly, according to one of the most influential theoretical approaches to attitude

structure, namely the so-called ‘tripartite model’, attitudes comprise of three core sub-components, entailing affect (i.e. feelings aroused by an attitude object), behaviors (i.e. behavioral intentions or actual behavioral responses tied to this very attitude object), and cognitions (i.e. beliefs, thoughts, and attributes associated with this object). These attitudinal sub-components are frequently also referred to as the ‘ABC’ of attitudes (Maio & Haddock, 2010; Weiss, 2002), although recently, scholars have begun to think of these ABC-aspects as of distinguishable ‘domains’ of attitudes that may represent both the causes and consequences of the overall underlying evaluative tendency named attitude (Olson & Zanna, 1993) instead referring to them as to the ‘components’ of an attitude. According to such views, an overall attitude may thus be predicted by either of the ABC-domains and it may be expressed on either of them, i.e. on the affective, on the behavioral, and/or on the cognitive level (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). In support of this view, factor-analytic studies indicate that attitudinal affect, behavior, and cognition typically load on separate factors (e.g., Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty 1994) which are often, but not necessarily, interrelated and subject to mutual influence, i.e. to ‘synergism’ (Maio & Haddock, 2010). Also, some scholars have argued that there might be a certain chronological order in this interplay between the affective, the behavioral, and the cognitive underpinnings of attitudes, especially during initial attitude formation. In this respect, views according to which attitudinal affect is said to slightly precede attitudinal cognition currently prevail in the literature. This position has for instance been advanced by Zajonc (1984) or by Clore and Schnall (2005) in their ‘affect-as-information’ approach which claims that people shall often infer their opinion about a particular attitude object from their spontaneous emotional responses to this very object. Both attitudinal affect and cognition are then typically assumed to shape people’s behavior towards that attitude object (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Eventually getting back to the notion of organizational (change) cynicism as an attitude, the tripartite approach to attitudes may obviously also be transferred to this type of cynicism and has already been incorporated into scholarly approaches to general organizational cynicism (e.g., Davis & Gardner, 2004; Dean et al., 1998).

Also, there is initial evidence which suggests that affective, behavioral, and cognitive employee cynicism do seem to have slightly different antecedents and outcomes (Abhari, 2007; Mehlmann, 2008). As regards the more specific notion of change cynicism, however such insights are still pending. Therefore, to fill this current gap in research, a first core aim of the thesis at hand is to advance an extended, tripartite approach to the change cynicism construct. To this end, in the upcoming sections, some core reflections about cynical affect (section 2.2.1), cynical behaviors (section 2.2.2), and cynical thinking (section 2.2.3) in the workplace shall be presented from which a new definitional approach to the change cynicism construct shall then be derived in section 2.3.

2.2.1 Affective Organizational Cynicism

As regards the affective underpinnings of organizational (change) cynicism, scholars have identified several negative emotions which are said to be characteristic of cynicism. In this vein, Andersson (1996), for instance, describes cynics as frustrated, hopeless, disillusioned, and/or holding contempt towards their organization, its management, or its strategies (p. 1398). Elsewhere, they are said to experience affect like distress, disgust, or shame (Brandes, Dharwadkar, and Dean, 1999) as well as tension and anxiety (Kim et al., 2009), and/or to feel emotionally detached from their work environment (Abraham, 2000). Still, scholars emphasize that employee cynicism did not necessarily represent a "*dispassionate judgment*", but argue that it could also involve more "*powerful emotional reactions*" such as aggravation and, ultimately, anger (Dean et al., 1998, p. 346). Also, Dean et al reason that it might occasionally even bring about a secret sense of enjoyment in so far as cynics tended to feel superior to the organization and its agents, respectively. Thus, by and large, many scholars do seem to have a clear picture of the emotions which accompany cynicism, although few of them have advanced empirical measures which actually address such cynical affect. However, some exceptions can be found in the work of Dean et al. (1998) or Eaton (2006) whose cynicism scales capture at least some of the aforementioned cynical affect states, and the use of these very

measures in just a handful of empirical studies already indicates that such cynical affect could indeed have somewhat different correlates than the other cynicism sub-dimensions. In this vein, Abhari (2007) and Mehlmann (2008) for instance both observed a strong positive association between affective cynicism and stress-related outcomes like irritation, a state which is marked by perceptions of emotional and cognitive strain in response to workplace distress and which is known to be a precursor of more severe mental impairments like depression (Mohr, Rigotti, & Müller, 2005). Similarly, Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly (2003) found affective cynicism to be positively related to the burnout sub-dimension of emotional exhaustion, therefore concluding that the negative emotions tied to organizational cynicism could take a "*personal toll*" (p. 633), resulting in emotional fatigue and burnout. And last not least, observations made by Kim et al. (2009) and by Mehlmann (2008) indicate that affective change cynicism might also be linked to lower levels of in-role performance.

2.2.2 Behavioral Organizational Cynicism

Much like the notion of cynical affect, the behavioral realm of organizational (change) cynicism has attracted relatively little scholarly interest in the past. Specifically, although researchers commonly agree that organizational cynicism is tied to certain behavioral tendencies (e.g. Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008; Davis & Gardner, 2004) or that it shall be followed by particular cynical behaviors (Stanley et al., 2005), respectively, remarkably few of them address this behavioral domain of organizational cynicism in their construct definitions, and those who have done so often simply quote Dean et al.'s (1998) definition of behavioral cynicism as "*tendencies to disparaging and/or critical behaviors*" towards the organization, its agents, or towards organizational change, respectively (e.g., Mantere & Martinsuo, 2001; Qian & Daniels, 2008). Others remain even more vague like James (2005) when claiming that organizational cynicism was characterized by "*(negative beliefs, feelings, and) related behaviors*" (p. 7, brackets added) or that it was accompanied by "*behavioral aspects*" (Bommer et al., 2005, p. 736), respectively. Therefore, it should not come

as too much of a surprise that few researchers have advanced measures of cynical behavior in the workplace, and that empirical findings as to its possibly specific correlates are accordingly very sparse, with no particularly striking or unique pattern of associations emerging here thus far. In this vein, behavioral cynicism has been linked to slightly lower levels of managerial trust, of workplace justice, of commitment, and of extra-role and in-role behaviors in former studies (Abhari, 2007; Mehlmann, 2008) – but that is about all we know about its correlates at this point in time.

As regards contents, cynical behavior in the workplace is first and foremost about voicing disapproval and criticism which target the organization, its procedures and policies, and/or its agents. This may occur both nonverbally, for instance when organizational cynics exchange “*knowing*” looks with their coworkers, when they roll their eyes, or smirk and sneer (Dean et al., 1998, p. 346), as well as verbally, for instance when offering their very own, alternative explanations for organizational projects, occurrences, or developments which often allude to a lack of integrity within their company or among managers, or when they make pessimistic predictions about organizational projects (Brandes et al., 1999). Then, a major distinction is commonly made between cynical behaviors which solely express cynical criticism and those cynical behaviors which are characterized by the use of cynical humor (e.g. Brandes & Das, 2006), respectively. Of these, the former behaviors which solely express cynical criticism typically include harsh attacks, insults, or badmouthing which target the organization, its strategies, and its agents. Therefore, they are much about mere complaining and nagging and unfortunately seldom constructive in nature. Instead, they often convey a sense of learned helplessness and resigned pessimism which may cause employees to renounce all hopes. The latter behaviors which involve the use of cynical humor, on the other hand, usually involve making sarcastical jokes (e.g. mocking the organization’s slogans, procedures, or managers) which debunk their respective target’s “*foolishness, partisanship and/or hypocrisy*” (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999, p. 111). On this account, they may hence un-

questionably convey serious criticism, too. At the same time, though, such cynical joking is considered to be more of an expression of critical thinking and of an actual desire for improvement rather than of mere negativism and excessive pessimism as it is the case with cynical criticism (Brandes & Das, 2006). Further, Brandes and Das reason that the use of cynical humor could also serve as a vehicle which allowed employees to express dissent and criticism of their leaders in a usually socially accepted (and thus rather ‘safe’ and unsanctionable way) here. Thus, much like an equivalent of the medieval jester in today’s corporate world, “*a [cynical] joker voices underlying frustrations, anxieties, or conflicts, which expressed differently, might indicate a lack of commitment, loyalty, or team spirit*” (Barsoux, 1996, p. 502). Hence, in short, referring to the use of cynical humor could allow employees to voice criticism within the organizational context which, otherwise, they might not dare to express for fear of negative consequences. Still, at least at times, this type of criticism may well be justified and constructive in contents, and therefore deserves to be taken seriously by organizational leaders (Brandes & Das, 2006).

A second possible benefit of the use of cynical humor within the workplace is often seen in its functioning as a coping strategy (e.g., Abhari, 2007; Abraham, 2000; Brandes & Das, 2006; Mehlmann, 2008) – an assumption which relies on the usually ameliorating effect of the use of humor on perceived stress which is well documented across the scholarly literature (cf. e.g. Herzog & Strevey, 2008, for an overview). Empirical evidence for this link is still pending, though, and it remains to be seen whether and in how far existing findings about the use of coping humor may indeed be transferrable to the specific notion of cynical humor. Yet, there certainly are several good reasons why the use of cynical humor could serve coping purposes:

For one thing, such cynical humor clearly exhibits some overlap with what scientific humor taxonomies (e.g., Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003) refer to as ‘aggressive humor’, which refers to a type of humor which is marked by tendencies towards sarcasm or towards criticizing and teasing others. In the tradition of

psychodynamic perspectives, such expressions of humor are considered to be a way of venting underlying aggressive impulses. Hence, they may serve cathartic purposes (Freud, 1950) – a core thought which has prompted scholars who deal with the issue of workplace cynicism to acknowledge a liberating purpose of the use of cynical humor which could serve as a vehicle to “*let off steam*” (Naus, 2007, p. 96) or as a “*safety valve*” (Brandes & Das, 2006, p. 257) that allowed for the occasional release of stress and tensions (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). At the same time, cynical humor also entails elements of what Martin et al. (2003) refer to as ‘affiliative humor’, since it is often conveyed towards one’s peers and colleagues rather than towards its actual targets and is typically meant to serve entertaining purposes in this context. Therefore, it may help to create bonds with coworkers and may thus foster cohesion among the members of a (work)group (Cooper, 2008). On this account, cynical humor could hence well facilitate the development of supportive, like-minded networks that may help employees cope with difficult and taxing situations such as changes. Thirdly, one may also wonder whether the use of cynical humor could help reduce adverse affective states and relieve tensions or contribute to more positive moods and emotions through what Martin et al. (2003) describe as the ‘self-enhancing’, comforting component of humor. This facet of humor is marked by a more inwardly directed strategy of cheering oneself up by amusing oneself about the “*absurdities of life*” (p. 58), which organizational cynics might do by ridiculing what is going on in their work environment. And finally, resorting to cynical humor might also fulfill self-enhancing purposes by conveying a perceived sense of intellectual and/or moral superiority over others (Cooper, 2008) – a core thought which takes us to the question what organizational cynics actually think of their leaders, an issue which shall be dealt with in more detail in the following section.

2.2.3 Cognitive Organizational Cynicism

Eventually turning towards the cognitive realm of organizational cynicism, most scholars readily agree that what lies at its core is the belief in a lack of integrity within one’s employing organization and/or among its agents, respectively (e.g.,

Dean et al., 1998; McCarthy & Garavan, 2007; Naus, 2007; Qian & Daniels, 2008; Stanley et al., 2005). When it comes to specifying in more detail what such a lack of integrity actually stands for, though, no further definition is usually provided. In the psychological and the management literature, however, two core definitional approaches to the notion of integrity can be found, the first of which defines the concept in terms of behavioral adherence to espoused values in the sense of ‘walking the talk’. When screening existing approaches to the notion of employee cynicism more carefully, this understanding of integrity is for instance reflected in indicators like “*I believe that my organization says one thing and does another*” (Brandes et al., 1999, p. 33). Thus, from an organizational cynic’s point of view, one important manifestation of lacking integrity within his/her organization is that its agents do not always seem to practice what they preach. Importantly, though, such an understanding of integrity in terms of mere word-deed alignment may not suffice to capture all of its features or facets, which becomes apparent when turning towards the second core definitional approach to the notion of integrity as “*a coherent integration of [...] moral values and fidelity or adherence to those values in [...] action*” (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994, p. 63). According to this latter definition, integrity is hence also inextricably linked to the adherence to some specific, namely to so-called ‘moral’ values. Being derived from the Latin ‘mos’ (or ‘mores’ in the plural) which translates into custom(s), the label ‘moral’ signifies that a specific value is held and endorsed by particular societies, cultures, or groups, respectively (Zelé, 2005). Thus, it may depend on the respective social or cultural context which values people tend to classify as ‘moral’ or, simply put, as particularly desirable. Nevertheless, there are several core values which are considered ‘moral’ across various cultural backgrounds and eras, namely values which are deemed particularly beneficial to societal welfare (Rohan, 2000). Typically, these values include kindness, loyalty, justness, honesty, modesty, selflessness, altruism, courtesy, or self-restraint (Dahlsgaard, Peterson & Seligman, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001) – and hence ideals which organizational cynics often seem to miss in their superiors as becomes apparent when turning towards further approaches to

the employee cynicism construct: In this vein, many workplace cynics bemoan that organizational decision-makers adhered to contemptible, immoral values when having intentions other than those officially stated, which is for instance reflected in statements like “*I believe that there are ulterior motives for most of the decisions made by management*” (Stanley et al., 2005; p. 444) or “*my organization will tell a lie if it can gain by it*” (Naus, van Iterson and Roe, 2007b, p. 202). Moreover, organizational cynics are typically convinced that their organizational agents act in a self-interested manner (“*company management is more interested in its goals and needs than in its employees' welfare*”, Wilkerson et al., 2008, p. 2292) or that they are dishonest and try to conceal their true intentions and goals (“*I wonder about the real purpose behind company decisions*”, Bedeian, 2007, p. 17). Similarly, organizational cynics often believe that they are purposefully exploited or generally disadvantaged by their executives, which is for instance mirrored in statements like “*management will take advantage of you if you give them the chance*” (Andersson & Bateman, 1997, p. 458) or “*when changes are made in this organization, the employees usually lose out in the end*” (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 8), respectively.

Hence, in short, the belief in a lack of integrity among organizational agents is the first core manifestation of cognitive cynicism, and it may have different facets which range from mere perceptions of a mismatch between those values which are officially espoused within an organization and those which are actually lived up to an apparent ignorance or violation of ‘morally sound’ values. At the same time, though, organizational cynics do not only seem to think of their leaders as lacking integrity, but also consider them to be “*unmotivated, incompetent, or both*” (Wanous et al., 2000, p. 133), as a series of interview studies conducted by Wanous et al. (1994; 2000; 2004) revealed. This core thought is for instance reflected in statements like “*the people responsible for making things better around here do not care enough about their jobs*” (Wanous et al., 2000, p. 150), “*the people responsible for making improvements do not know enough about what they are doing*” (p. 150), or “*the people responsible for making changes around here do not have the skills needed*

to do their jobs" (p. 151), respectively. Thus, many organizational cynics also consider their leaders to be lazy, undedicated, or incompetent, concluding that these superiors lacked the willingness and/or core abilities, skills, or the necessary background knowledge that was needed to adequately perform their managerial tasks.

Obviously, at this juncture, it should once again be emphasized that such unfavorable employee assessments of organizational leaders vastly rely on individual reasoning and attributional processes. Therefore, these views are highly subjective in nature and may be subject to various perception or attributional biases and shall hence not necessarily reflect the truth (Bedeian, 2007). Importantly, though, whether these beliefs are objectively accurate or not, they are true to employees, which is why they shall inevitably be reflected in their subsequent attitudes towards organizational leaders and their respective decisions and actions. In the case of organizational change cynicism, for instance, such basic cynical convictions are said to add to a distinct sense of pessimism regarding the outcomes of organizational change projects by making change cynics conclude that under the given unfortunate circumstances, organizational improvements cannot be realized due to the failures and shortcomings of the responsible change agents (Qian, 2007; Tesluk, Farr, Mathieu, & Robert, 1995; Wanous et al., 2000). Therefore, existing approaches to the notion of change cynicism also explicitly consider major doubts regarding the viability of future change projects to be a part of the overall change cynicism syndrome. This is for example reflected in statements or indicators like "*Most of the change initiatives in the past did not do much good, and this change is no difference*" (Qian, 2007, p. 81) or "*most of the programs that are supposed to solve problems around here will not do much good*" (Wanous et al., 1994, p. 270) – an issue yet to be taken on again in more detail in section 2.3.2 on the change cynicism construct.

Finally turning towards the possible outcomes of cognitive organizational cynicism, it is once again only a handful of studies which have treated cognitive cynicism as a separate dimension thus far. However, the findings of these few studies already

underline that such cognitive cynicism may have severe implications for various work attitudes and behaviors which are known to enable effective organizational functioning. In this vein, cognitive cynicism for instance shows high negative correlations with commitment (Abhari, 2007; Brandes et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2009) or with perceived organizational support (Brandes et al., 2006), respectively. Also, Abhari (2007) reported a moderate negative effect of job-related self-efficacy on cognitive cynicism. Furthermore, cognitive cynicism has been linked to lower levels of Leader-Member-Exchange (Brandes et al., 2006) as well as to lower levels of trust in management (Abhari, 2007; Brandes et al., 2006) or perceived managerial trustworthiness, respectively (Kim et al., 2009). Similarly, perceived justice in the workplace (both distributive and procedural) shows an inverse relationship with cognitive cynicism (Abhari, 2007; Mehlmann, 2008), and so does organizational citizenship behavior (Mehlmann, 2008).

2.3 Organizational Change Cynicism

Having presented core theoretical assumptions and existing findings about general organizational cynicism and its affective, behavioral, and cognitive domains, the view shall now be turned towards the change cynicism construct as a yet more specific attitude which stands in the very focus of interest of this thesis. Before analyzing this particular type of employee cynicism in more detail, though, it may helpful to briefly address two issues first, namely the questions what the notion of 'organizational change' actually stands for and why it seems to attract so much cynicism among the workforce, respectively.

2.3.1 Some Facts and Figures About Organizational Change

At a most general level, the notion of organizational change has been defined in rather broad and abstract terms as a particular type of workplace event which is marked by the occurrence of empirically observable "*differences in form, quality, or state over time in an organizational entity*" (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p. 512).