

A contextual study of co-worker relationship and turnover intentions: the mediating role of employee cynicism

Employee
cynicism

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the study is to evidently examine how employee cynicism mediates the relationship between co-worker relationship and employee turnover intentions in organizations in Ghana.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a cross-sectional survey of employees from both public and private organizations, the authors tested our hypotheses with a sample of 288 employees by means of structural equation modelling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation with LISREL 9.2 and bootstrapping procedures.

Findings – Findings showed that co-worker relationship is negatively associated with employee cynicism. The findings further revealed that employee cynicism is positively associated with employees' intention to leave. Additionally, employee cynicism negatively mediated the relationship between co-worker relationship and employee intention to leave their organizations.

Practical implications – The work recommends that organizations become aware of employee cynicism which can adversely affects co-worker relationship and consequently organizational performance. Therefore, organizations ought to reduce employee cynicism and rather encourage positive co-worker relations through interpersonal relationship and support for employees.

Originality/value – An investigation of co-worker relationship in organization and employee intentions to leave or turnover is a significant micro-level analysis for contemporary Human Resource Management (HRM) research. This study gives us a scarce opportunity to understand how employee cynicism negatively mediates the relationship between co-worker relationship and turnover intentions of employees.

Keywords Co-worker relationship, Employee cynicism, Intentions to leave, Work organizations, Ghana

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

When workers quit or leave their jobs, a condition of turnover sets in, and when there is a perceived and conscious determination to abandon or quit a job by an employee, turnover intentions are manifested. Worker turnover can be injurious to organizational development and performance (Glebbeek and Bax, 2004) due to a possible organizational setback. Moreover, costs of replacing employees resulting from turnover are often very high (Hinkin and Tracey, 2000). According to Ghosh *et al.* (2013b), worker or employee turnover is a painful psychological process endured by both the organization and other workers who decide to stay back. Turnover intentions of employees are a critical management problem and have thus become a much-studied phenomenon (Yousaf, 2008). In spite of this, most studies on turnover and turnover intentions have focused only on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, leader effect, stressor-hindrance and stressor effect, job attitudes and organizational climate using mostly correlational analysis. However, the impact of co-working relationships on turnover intentions of employees has been scarcely investigated. To the best of our knowledge, only one study has looked at turnover intentions and



relationship at work using conceptual reviews as investigation (Abugre, 2017). Accordingly, this study fills the gap by empirically investigating co-worker relationship and turnover intentions of employees in a developing context.

Moreover, contemporary researchers are more and more focusing on the psychology and motivation of what makes employees to stay rather than to leave (Hom *et al.*, 2012; Steel and Lounsbury, 2009). This is in consonance with the core of human resource management since the retention of talented employees is the focus of all firms and HR managers (Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001). To address the current interest in employee turnover and retention studies which explain that pull-to-stay motives can best explain the distinctive variance in turnover intentions of employees beyond the typical job satisfaction and job alternatives forces (Burton *et al.*, 2010; Ramesh and Gelfand, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2011), this work builds on this emerging argument by examining how co-worker relationship and employee cynicism may influence turnover intentions.

Our motivation is that the harmonious relationship between co-workers and the support they get from their workmates in organizations can be a critical determinant of their attitude to work and consequently, an orientation to their citizenship behavior (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013a). Thus, co-worker relations in organizations focus on different characteristics of social exchanges between colleagues or workmates which may define both employee and organizational outcomes (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). In this case, positive co-worker relations would be associated with positive organizational outcomes whilst, negative relationship between co-workers can be linked to organizational cynicism (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013b).

Besides, there is scant research on how employee cynicism can mediate both positive and negative co-worker relationships and employee intentions to leave. Intention to leave is a behavioral decision of an individual employee motivated by his/her attitude and influenced by the social context (Ajzen, 2011). Intentions are supposed to explain the motivational reasons for individual attitudes and behaviors, and the relationships between their expressed intent and actual behaviors (Ajzen, 2011). Given that organizational socialization can generate either positive or negative co-worker relationships at the workplace, it is necessary to explore employees' intentions to remain or leave an organization, as these intentions are differently determined by the dimensions of co-worker relationships. Additionally, it is important to establish whether cynicism can mediate the relationship between co-worker relationships and intentions to leave an organization. Thus, the contribution of this work is threefold: first, understanding how cynicism mediates the relationship between co-worker relationships at the workplace and intentions to leave will provide management in organizations the directions on how to deal with outcomes of negative co-worker relations at the workplace. Second, the study provides empirical evidence of co-worker relationship and employees' behavioral intention to leave or to stay. By this, it adds to the growing evidence regarding turnover implications of employee relations (Rahim and Cosby, 2016) but goes further to identify how co-worker relationship is vital in the Ghanaian work environment.

Third, the study addresses the call in the literature for research into co-worker relations and their turnover intentions (Ghosha *et al.*, 2013a). In fact, Abugre (2017) advocates for future research that should assess actual observable social behaviors of co-workers in terms of relationships in work organizations by testing their conceptual framework to complement existing research on co-worker reciprocity. Therefore, by focusing on a contextual study of various employees from multiple organizations constituting both public and private sector organizations in Ghana, this work provides knowledge and theory on the link between dimensions of co-worker relations and turnover intentions in a scarcely studied context. Additionally, the work enhances our understanding of cynicism as mediator of co-worker relations and employees' intentions to leave.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Co-worker relations

The nature of employee relationships that exists at the workplace determines the work atmosphere or climate of the organization. Accordingly, co-worker relationships affect the work atmosphere or the climate of the organization (Bäckström *et al.*, 2016). Existing research has demonstrated the significance of innovative and exciting work environment on the nature and behavioral engagement of employees (Macey and Schneider, 2008). The reason is that an exciting work environment is made up of workers who relate positively as co-workers, and this can be a major driver that impacts work engagement in organizations (Macey and Schneider, 2008). A work environment is made up of employees who work together as co-workers, managers and assistants, and an effective affiliation among them can arouse a good working environment. Consequently, a positive work climate is preferable than a negative work environment if organizations are determined to improve their workers' commitment to the organization (Szamosi *et al.*, 2004). This positive work climate has the potential of reducing employee turnover. In fact, an engaged workplace can promote a positive environment that sustains positive co-worker relations leading to a significant emotional bond shared between the workers (Hodson, 2001; McGuire, 2007). This is because employees who relate well at work are able to share their personal and social experiences with their co-workers on workplace policies and performance drivers. The shared experiences can therefore create a unique ability for co-workers to empathize with each other and to develop close relationships (Rumens, 2010; Thoits, 2011).

Co-worker relationships can be manifested in two basic dimensions, namely positive co-worker relationships and negative co-worker relationships. A positive co-worker relation describes employees' helping behavior and attitude towards their colleagues and subordinates (Frenkel and Sanders, 2007). On the other hand, a negative co-worker relation depicts the unfavorable and harmful behaviors displayed towards colleagues and subordinates in work organizations. Consequently, co-worker relations define the behavioral exchanges in the form of support or non-support among workers in organizations. While positive relationships with co-workers can promote employee empowerment by building their skills, and enhancing their self-efficacy through social networks, negative co-worker relations can fuel high levels of job dissatisfaction, withdrawal of cooperation and high labor turnover (Hodson, 2001).

When there is a cordial or harmonious relationship among workers such that it encourages positive job outcomes, a positive co-worker relationship is said to exist. On the other hand, when the workplace is characterized by contention among workers where this is detrimental to employee performance, it suggests the existence of negative co-worker relationship. As such, the essence of building and maintaining a positive co-worker relationship is of much importance to both the organization and employees. Thus, co-worker relationship has demonstrated the link between several organizational factors and employee performance. For example, Abugre (2017) argued that co-workers are usually in relationships which involve the exchange of economic and socio-emotional resources within work organizations. Consequently, he stated that positive co-worker relations in organizations will lead to employee job satisfaction, employee commitment to workmates; and therefore, psychological safety of workers. Likewise, negative co-worker relations in organizations will lead to employee cynicism, diminished loyalty of employees to their workmates and the organization; and therefore, a psychological threat to workers.

Employee cynicism

Employee cynicism is an instinctive individual's behavior that reflects a generally negative emotion like frustration about human behavior, and it has a very serious negative impact on

one's employing organization. In fact, cynicism is an employee's skeptical attitude resulting from a critical appraisal of motives, actions and values of his/her organization (Bedian, 2007). When workers believe that the behaviors of co-workers or workmates toward them are negative, they become cynical and respond with a negative attitude toward these workmates and toward their organization as a whole.

Cynicism among employees has been attributed to negative consequences both at the individual and organizational levels. For instance at the individual level, excessive stress, role overload frustration and absenteeism are identified (Abraham, 2000). At the organizational level, poor performance at workplace, increase in conflicts with co-workers and then high job turnover are recognized (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993). This means cynicism at workplace results in the disconnection of intended co-worker relations which includes the psychological connection the person shares with colleagues (May *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, when a co-worker fails to meet one or more of his/her obligations towards a fellow employee, there is a breach or violation of this psychological connection leading to employee cynicism. This violation can result in serious consequences in terms of employee's attitude towards work and behaviors (Morrison and Robinson, 1997), including the intention to leave or turnover.

Employee turnover can be a challenge and a huge loss to many organizations. The reason is that, management does not only suffer from the loss of valuable skills, talent and competencies, but top management in organizations would have to bear additional costs in terms of recruitment and orientation of the new hire. Existing literature advocates that intentions to leave is one of the most important predictors of employee turnover (Griffeth *et al.*, 2000; Loi *et al.*, 2006). Employees' intentions to leave have been prevalent in the HRM literature and refers to an employee's thoughts on voluntarily leaving the organization (Whitman, 1999). These thoughts of leaving the organizations may result from the employees' cynical behaviors and intentions they hold about their organizations.

In the earlier works of Kahn (1990), he suggested that if an employee is not getting along with co-workers, he/she is likely to get frustrated (Maslach *et al.*, 2001; Bakker, 2008) and cynical, which would eventually lead to a higher intention to leave the organization. In fact, excessive stress, dissatisfaction with organizational expectations, low social support, conflict at work, lack of communication among co-workers and psychological contract violations (Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Jordan *et al.*, 2007) are all causes of employee cynicism. Cynicism therefore brings about negative consequences on employees in the organization as it decreases employee commitment, employee motivation and esprit de corps in work organizations (Bedeian, 2007; Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Watt and Piotrowski, 2008). Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H1. Co-worker relationships will be negatively associated with employee cynicism.

Employees' intentions to leave

The most identifiable precursor to actual turnover in organizations is turnover intentions. Intentions to leave, also known as turnover intentions, suggest how workers have planned to leave their jobs or organizations. A lot of factors influence workers' decision to either continue working with their employers or leave. Research has revealed how physical, psychological and environmental factors can influence workers' decisions to leave their firms. The kind of work performed, the work environment, attitude of colleagues, bosses and at times customers, can create intentions to leave in workers (Rahim and Cosby, 2016). Poddar and Madupalli (2012) revealed that worrisome client attitudes emotionally drain customer service staff leading to the latter's emotional exhaustion which is negatively related to their job satisfaction and subsequently their intentions to leave. What about co-workers who can also frustrate each other triggering emotional fatigue and cynicism, and consequently intention to turnover?

The relationship between emotional exhaustion, organizational prestige and turnover intentions have been highlighted in organizational behavior literature. Using a sample of call center staff, [Kraemer and Gouthier \(2014\)](#) examined factors that influence turnover intentions and reported that whilst emotional exhaustion had a significant positive relationship with turnover intentions, organizational pride had a significant negative relationship with turnover intentions. Additionally, workers' decisions to leave or stay in their organizations are dependent on their perceived institutional support mostly from workmates. Studies by [Tuzun and Kalemci \(2012\)](#) showed a relationship between perceived organizational support and intentions to leave, and this was moderated by perceived co-worker support. According to the authors, workers who view their co-workers' level of support to be high when institutional support is low are less likely to leave. However, when institutional support is high, but co-worker support is low, workers are more likely to leave. This could be because workers have a direct relationship with their workmates on a daily basis in the organization.

Similarly, [Avanzi et al. \(2014\)](#) revealed that social identification enhances perceived organizational support which in turn lessens emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Also, the relationship between organizational support and intentions to leave the organization was moderated by social identification. The assumption is that when co-workers provide the needed support for their colleague workers, they will be less likely to think about leaving the organization. Driven by this assertion, the ensuing hypothesis is framed:

H2. Co-worker relationships will be negatively related to employees' intentions to leave.

Co-worker relations, cynicism and intention to leave: the relationship linkage

Our reviews above demonstrate that, the relationship between co-workers is an important predictor of both positive and negative employee outcomes. When workers have good working relationship, the work atmosphere will generate trust, co-worker support, teamwork, commitment and improved performance ([Nafei, 2013; Abugre, 2017](#)). On the other hand, poor co-worker relationship can lead to negative outcomes such as turnover intentions, apathy, distrust, cynicism and counterproductive behaviors. The nature of relationship between and among workers can determine how cynic they will be or otherwise. This is because when workers do not have a good working relationship, they are likely to perceive their colleagues to be self-interested and opportunists. Similarly, even before a worker will think of leaving his or her job, the person might consider the sort of relationship between him or her and the colleagues. According to [Kosmala and Richards \(2009\)](#), cynicism can evolve over time when workers perceive a gap between organizational discourse and the actual task for the subject taken by the job holder. Hence, increased level of organizational cynicism leads to increased levels of perceived job insecurity and intentions to leave among workers ([Çınara et al., 2014](#)). This suggests that when cynicism amongst employee increases, there will be an increase in the perception of workers losing their jobs and intention to leave one's job. Again, [Brandes and Das \(2015\)](#) indicated that even though cynicism is important in the behavioral sciences, it has a non-linear effect on employee performance. Thus, workers can use cynicism as a good coping approach, thereby serving as a moderator between work stress and worker performance.

Some researchers have examined how the relationship between co-workers can affect their intentions to leave ([Ferres et al., 2004; Maynard et al., 2006](#)). [Balkan et al. \(2014\)](#) for instance reported that co-worker trust in management significantly affects workers' intention to leave. Specifically, they suggested that co-worker trust had a significant negative effect on turnover intentions. Coupled with that, the amount of time spent with other workers can influence how employees perceive the work environment; and this can trigger other employee outcomes such as intentions to leave. The regularity of how teleworkers interact relates to satisfaction among

co-workers, and is dependent on how long they interact, whether it is face to face, as well as the level of autonomy associated with the work. Satisfaction with co-workers also negatively relates to intentions to leave (Golden, 2007). Furthermore, Lee *et al.* (2014) found co-worker relationships to be a predictor of job stress, turnover intentions, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Using a cross-section of US restaurant workers, Tews *et al.* (2014) found that co-worker socialization and management support for fun had a significant relationship with turnover intentions. This implies that when workers do not have cordial relationship with their colleagues at work, it can influence their decision to leave and vice versa.

In support of the above theoretical arguments, it is proposed that an employee's perceived relations with co-workers may have behavioral implication such as cynicism, which could be an intervening stage between the perception of relations at workplace and intention to leave an organization. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed on the basis of our argument above:

- H3. Employee cynicism will be positively associated with employees' intention to leave.
- H4. Employee cynicism will negatively mediate the relationship between co-worker relationships and employee intention to leave.

Method

Sample and procedure for data collection

In this study, we used a quantitative design approach to survey full-time employees from both public and private sector organizations in Ghana—a sub-Saharan African context. Invitations were sought from all HR managers/administrators of the various organizations visited before handing over the survey instrument to a participant. To be included in the study, participants must have been full-time employees in either a private organization or public organization within the Accra Metropolis—the capital city of Ghana. The participants should have worked with colleagues or should have worked in a team before. This resulted in a convenience sample of 300 employees from public and private organizations. Convenience samples are considered suitable for elaborated research designs in many disciplines. Accordingly, the most conveniently available employee who is a full-time worker and whose job is linked to other colleagues was sampled for this study. Hence, 300 survey questionnaires were personally distributed to individuals working in public and private organizations in Ghana. Addresses of volunteered participants were taken by the researchers in order to trace them for the returned completed questionnaires. The sampled employees constituted the three levels of management: junior level, middle level and senior level management. The entire process of data collection lasted for about three months when the final batch of completed questionnaires was collected.

After excluding questionnaires that had missing values and outliers, a total of 288 useable questionnaires were obtained, representing a response rate of 96% which is very good after the three months' period of data collection. On gender, there were 172 male respondents representing 52.7%, while there were 116 female respondents representing 40.3%. Respondents from the public organization are 203 constituting 70.4%, while respondents from the private organizations are 84 respondents constituting 29.2%. Major areas of work of the respondents include: administration 105 respondents representing 36.5%; academic 31 respondents representing 10.8%; accounts 55 respondents representing 19.1%; technical/ICT 39 respondents representing 13.5%; and others 58 respondents representing 20.1%. In terms of work experience of the respondents, those with 1–5 years of experience are 167 respondents constituting 58.0%; 6–10 years are 51 respondents constituting 17.7%; 11–15 years are 37 respondents constituting 12.8%; and those with 16 years and above are 33 respondents representing 11.55% of the total number of respondents for the study.

Measurement of variables, validity and reliability

The items used to measure the dependent, independent and mediator variables are provided in Table 1. All the items used for the variables were based on previously validated measures. For the items used to measure the dependent, independent and mediator variables, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements addressing the variables using a five-point Likert scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). *Co-worker relationship* was measured with four items which were adapted from Saks (2006). *Cynicism* was measured with six items which was adapted from Andersson (1996), while *intentions to leave* was measured with three items adapted from Saks (2006) and Soane et al. (2012). Control variables used in the study were gender, age, educational level and professional experience.

Data analysis

We used multiple analytical techniques as means of reinforcing the robustness of the data analysis. We employed structural equation modelling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation with LISREL 9.2 and the bootstrap method suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004) for the mediation hypothesis. Additionally, we applied correlation analysis to establish preliminary relationship between the study's variables. Common method bias is a potential problem with self-reported data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We checked for the presence of common method variance (CMV) by performing Harman's (1967) one-factor test. An exploratory factor analysis of all the items used to measure the *co-worker relationship*, *cynicism* and *intentions to leave* variables was conducted, and it yielded three factors with

Constructs and items	Standardized loadings	t-value
<i>Co-worker relationships</i> ($\alpha = 0.770$; $CR = 0.754$; $AVE = 0.438$)		
My colleague/s cares about my opinions	0.61*	
My colleague/s really cares about my well-being	0.82	7.83
My colleague/s shows very little concern for me	0.65	8.02
My colleague/s would forgive an honest mistake on my part	0.54	8.37
<i>Goodness-of-fit statistics:</i> $\chi^2 = 3.53$ (d.f. = 1); $p = 0.060$; GFI = 0.994 CFI = 0.993; IFI = 0.993; SRMR = 0.018; RMSEA = 0.094		
<i>Cynicism</i> ($\alpha = 0.806$; $CR = 0.$; $AVE = 0.375$)		
I believe that the management does not care enough about the employees	0.60*	
I believe that the management exhibits self-interested approach	0.50	8.56
I love my job but I do not feel like coming to work	0.61	7.45
At times, I feel betrayed by the management	0.75	8.41
I have become less enthusiastic about my work	0.63	7.63
At times, I have noticed people mentally withdrawing at my workplace	0.61	7.64
<i>Goodness-of-fit statistics:</i> $\chi^2 = 8.03$ (d.f. = 6); $p = 0.236$; GFI = 0.991 CFI = 0.997; IFI = 0.997; SRMR = 0.019; RMSEA = 0.034		
<i>Intentions to leave</i> ($\alpha = 0.834$; $CR = 0.835$; $AVE = 0.629$)		
I frequently think of quitting my job	0.78*	
I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months	0.79	12.38
If I have my own way, I will NOT be working for this employer/organization one year from now	0.80	12.40
<i>Goodness-of-fit statistics:</i> The fit is perfect		
Note(s): *Fixed		

Table 1.
CFA of constructs

eigenvalues greater than 1. Together the three factors explained about 60% of the variance with the first factor accounting for about 24% of the variance. This indicated that CMV is minimized (Harman, 1967).

Convergent validity, discriminant validity and reliability of the major constructs in the study—*co-worker relationship*, *cynicism* and *intentions to leave*—were evaluated using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We examined convergent validity of the constructs by evaluating the item’s loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the constructs. The items loaded heavily on their respective constructs with values greater than 0.50 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013) with all the t-values greater than 7.80. Two of the three constructs had AVE that were less than 0.50, the minimum threshold suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), however, in totality, the values support the convergent validity of the constructs. To determine the discriminant validity of the constructs by examining the fit indices and the AVE, first, the fit indices for all the constructs were examined to make sure they satisfy the recommended minimum or maximum values. All the models used for the constructs suggested that the fit indices were good—the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and the non-normed fit index (NNFI) were all greater than the recommended minimum, while the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardized root mean error of residuals (SRMR) were also lower than the recommended maximum. Second, we compared the correlations between each pair of the constructs with the square root of the AVE. The information in Table 2 shows that the correlations between each pair of the constructs are smaller than the square root of the AVE for each of the constructs. This indicates that discriminant validity is achieved (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). We assessed the reliability of the constructs by using both the Cronbach alpha (α) coefficient and the composite reliability (CR) score. The Cronbach α for the constructs are all greater than 0.70, while all the CR are also greater than 0.70 indicating sufficient reliability.

Methodological limitation

In spite of the fact that coworker relationship may include the relationship between supervisor and subordinate affiliation in organizations, this current work only focused on

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Co-worker relationship (RELN)	<i>0.68</i>							
2. Cynicism (CYN)	-0.20**	<i>0.64</i>						
3. Intentions to leave (ITL)	-0.16**	0.50**	<i>0.79</i>					
4. Gender ¹	-0.03	0.05	-0.02					
5. Age ²	-0.03	0.05	-0.05	-0.17**				
6. Education ³	0.04	0.10+	-0.05	0.02	-0.05			
7. Experience ⁴	-0.06	0.07	-0.03	-0.16**	0.72**	0.08		
8. Work	0.00	0.09	0.02	-0.13*	-0.05	-0.11+	0.04	
Mean	3.74	2.85	2.86	0.40	2.22	2.10	1.78	2.70
Standard Deviation	0.74	0.86	1.13	0.49	0.88	1.29	1.06	1.56
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00

Note(s): Significance level: + $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Values in diagonal (italic) are the square root of AVE

¹Gender: Male = 0; Female = 1

²Age: 18–25 = 1; 26–35 = 2; 36–45 = 3; 46+ = 4

³Educational level

⁴Experience: 1–5 years = 1; 6–10 years = 2; 11–15 years = 3; 16+ years = 4

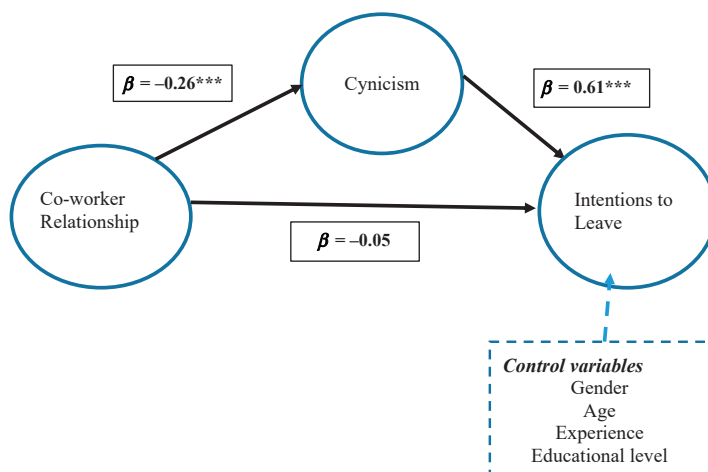
Table 2.
Descriptive statistics
and correlations

coworker relationship in terms of the relationships that exist between employees and their workmates in organizations and not at the supervisory level of relationship. The reason is that, the context of the research as collectivist and high-power distant country, relationship between supervisors and subordinates are mostly top-down and skewed to negative relations. But the aim of this work is to look at how employee cynicism will mediate the relationship between work colleagues in a lateral relation and turnover intentions in organizations.

Results

The hypotheses were tested by means of SEM using maximum likelihood estimation with LISREL 9.2 and the bootstrap method suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2004) for the mediation hypothesis. SEM analysis involves a two-stage procedure—estimation of the measurement model and then the structural model. The measurement model was estimated using CFA to examine the validity and reliability of the constructs. The results from the measurement model are shown in Table 1. The structural model is estimated to determine the fit of the data and to test the hypotheses. The results from the structural model are shown in Figure 1 and Table 3. In addition to the paths shown in Figure 1, we also included all the control variables as exogenous factors that could affect the dependent variable (*Intentions to leave*) in the model. The descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum) and the correlations among the variables are shown in Table 2. There are significant correlations among the hypothesized variables. While *co-worker relationship* is negatively related to both *employees' cynicism* and *intentions to leave*, *cynicism* is positively related to *intentions to leave* as expected. However, the correlations among the variables are not large enough to pose collinearity problems.

Table 3 provides the standardized path coefficients from the SEM analysis to test Hypothesis 1 and 2. The results indicates that *educational level* is the only control variable that is associated with *intentions to leave* ($\beta = -0.09, p < 0.10$). The other control variables—*age*, *gender* and *experience*—were not related to *intentions to leave*. The results indicate that highly



Source(s): All the control variables except Educational level was significant at the 10% level. $***p < 0.001$

Figure 1.
Results from the
structural model

Table 3.
SEM results

Description of path	Standardized path coefficient
Gender → Intentions to leave	n.s
Age → Intentions to leave	n.s
Professional experience → Intentions to leave	n.s
Educational level → Intentions to leave	-0.09*
Co-worker relationships → Cynicism	-0.26***
Co-worker relationships → Intentions to leave	n.s
Cynicism → Intentions to leave	0.61***

Note(s): n.s. = not significant
Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

educated people are less likely to develop intentions to leave their organizations, all things being equal. [Hypothesis 1](#) states that *co-worker relationships* will be negatively associated with *employees' cynicism*. The result from the SEM analysis corroborates the prediction ($\beta = -0.26, p < 0.001$). [Hypothesis 2](#) states that *co-worker relationships* will be negatively related to *intentions to leave*. The SEM result shows that though the standardized coefficient of *co-worker relationships* is negative, it is not significantly related to intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.05, p > 0.10$). Thus, [Hypothesis 2](#) is not supported. [Hypothesis 3](#) posits that *employee cynicism* will be positively related to *intentions to leave*. The findings from the SEM analysis confirms this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.61, p < 0.001$).

To test [Hypothesis 4](#), which focuses on the mediating role of *employee cynicism* on *co-worker relationships* and *intentions to leave*, we use the bootstrap procedure recommended by [Preacher and Hayes \(2008\)](#) and [Zhao et al. \(2010\)](#). [Zhao et al. \(2010\)](#) state that if the confidence interval estimate of the mediating effect does not include zero, then it can be concluded that the mediating effect is significant, and mediation is established. We used the [Preacher and Hayes's \(2008\)](#) script in SPSS for the bootstrap analysis. [Hayes \(2009\)](#) recommends the use of at least 5,000 bootstrap data samples to conduct the analysis so we used 10,000 bootstrap data samples generated by randomly sampling with replacement from the original data set of 288 observations. The result is provided in [Table 4](#). It should be noted that the results for the [Hypotheses 1 to 3](#) are consistent with that from the SEM analysis. The findings from [Table 4](#) indicate that *employees' cynicism* negatively mediates the relationship between *co-worker relationships* and *intentions to leave*. The confidence interval of the mediation coefficient does not include zero ($CI = -0.1458$ to -0.0347). The findings indicate that *employee cynicism* fully mediates *co-worker relationships and intentions to leave* since there is no direct relationship between *co-worker relationships* and *intentions to leave*.

Discussion of findings

Theoretical implications. In this study, we examined the extent to which co-worker relationship is linked to turnover intentions of employees and whether employee cynicism has a mediation effect on co-worker relationship and employees' intention to leave in the context of Ghanaian organizations. Consequently, by testing four hypotheses of our results, we found significant main effects of co-worker relationship in work organizations on employees' intention to leave (see results above). Our primary theoretical contribution is that we have identified co-worker relationship in work organizations as a significant predictor of positive employees' outcomes and a negative predictor of employee cynicism. Cynicism is a counterproductive behavior that results from employee dissatisfaction and disassociation of a member or team relationship. Thus, our finding explains that when employees relate positively in work organizations, they build a cultural bond of relationship by engaging each other usefully for teamwork and collaboration. Generally, the importance of co-worker

Independent Variables	Mediator variables	Dependent variables	β direct effect	β indirect effect	β Mean indirect effect ²	SE of mean	95% Confidence interval	
							Lower	Upper
Gender →		CYN	0.057			0.059		
Age →		CYN	0.027			0.084		
Experience →		CYN	0.042			0.052		
Education →		CYN	0.109*			0.059		
RELN →		CYN	-0.201*			0.058		
Gender →		ITL	-0.052			0.044		
Age →		ITL	-0.064			0.063		
Experience →		ITL	-0.017			0.063		
Education →		ITL	-0.084*			0.044		
CYN		ITL	0.430***			0.044		
RELN →		ITL	-0.046			0.044		
RELN →	CYN →	ITL		(-0.201 × 0.430) = -0.08664***	-0.0866***	0.028	-0.1458	-0.0347
Model: DV = ITL								
Adjusted R ²			0.257					
F-Statistics			17.55***					

Note(s): ¹Standardized coefficients are shown
²These are the mean effect estimates calculated across all bootstrap samples (10,000 bootstrap samples)
 Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. Bootstrap analysis of mediation effects of cynicism on co-worker relationship-intentions to leave relationship¹

relationship with employee cynicism and employees' intention to leave plays a major role in predicting organizational outcomes. Thus, our findings show the significance of employee relationship in organizations as the basic unit of close social ties among people working together. Our study findings thus validate [Bäckström et al. \(2016\)](#), [Macey and Schneider \(2008\)](#) and [Abugre \(2017\)](#), who proposed co-worker relationship as an exciting work environment that is made up of employees who relate positively well as co-workers in order to enhance their engagement for organizational performance. Co-worker relationships are very critical to organizational socialization and interactional processes because, employees are then able to communicate their progress, request feedback and engage in conversations about their tasks. These processes are linked to organizational outcomes, such as increased production, worker satisfaction and worker retention ([Abugre, 2017](#)) instead of worker intention to leave.

Our second theoretical implication is that unlike the employee relations literature which seems to suggest a strong exchange relationship between co-workers in organizational settings, our unique findings however suggest a more nuanced relationship by revealing the intentions of workers to possibly leave the organization when they do not get the friendly support from workmates. This is probably because of the threshold effects of individual employee values and behaviors in the work setting. Most workers may hold the view that once a negative relationship is created and becomes intensified, then it becomes difficult to restore the values of intimate behavior that originally existed among co-workers; therefore, the only option may be to leave the organization if the opportunity is there.

Third, this work has demonstrated that employees' cynicism fully mediates co-worker relationship in work organizations and their intentions to leave. Employee cynicism is derived from employee's suspicious attitude regarding negative relationship in the organization. Cynicism is a negative emotional variant that triggers a separation of an individual or individuals from their colleagues or the status quo due to excessive stress and frustration they suffer resulting in alienation of the individual. Thus, when employees feel that the conduct and relationship of management and co-workers toward them are negative, they become cynical and return same with a negative attitude toward their organization ([Abugre, 2017](#)). By validating employee cynicism as a mediator between co-worker relationship at work and employee intention to turnover, this work reveals that the manner in which workers relate with each other in organizations can influence their cynical behaviors and consequently their intentions to leave the organization. Our work further provides evidence of the link between co-worker relations and cynicism by suggesting that cynicism is a process through which employees may go through. Thus, the process begins with co-workers or managerial interactions ([Abugre, 2012](#)), and goes through the internal behavioral and actions which are basically harmful and damaging to other co-workers or workmates before emerging as cynicism. The presence of employee cynicism denotes the absence of collegial ability or managerial interaction that communicates progress, requests feedback from one another, and engages in conversations about tasks and performance that are pertinent to individual employee and the organization as a whole.

Managerial implications. Practically, our findings underscore the nature of employee relations at work, and suggest that positive co-worker relations strengthen interpersonal perspective on employee healthy relations. While negative co-worker relations emphasize how problems in interpersonal relations may predispose, precipitate and perpetuate employees' toxicity. Hence, positive or good co-worker relations can motivate employees' retention, while negative or bad co-worker relationship can generate employee cynicism leading to employee intention to leave. Managers and practitioners of HR must therefore appreciate the essence of co-worker relationship at work and its impact on the human resource management of the organization. Second, the study contributes to managerial lessons for organizational socialization that would deal with employee cynicism in the workplace. The significance of

good co-worker relations is derived from effective organizational socialization and perceived organizational support associated with higher levels of employee engagement. High levels of employee engagement in the workplace can remedy employee cynicism which is a negative variant. Thus, management must enforce positive social interactions among all levels of workers through strong cultural ties initiated by HR departments. Additionally, the fact that employee cynicism can mediate the relationship between co-worker relationship at work and employees' intentions to leave should be a lesson for practicing managers. This awareness can offset the cost implications resulting from employee turnover and other deviant behaviors of employees in organizational management. The reason is that, employee cynicism is a behavioral process which management can stop before it escalates to an outcome of cynicism which can be damaging to the individual and the organization. Therefore, organizations ought to reduce employee cynicism and rather encourage positive co-worker relations through interpersonal relationship and support for employees.

Limitations and future research

Despite these contributions and implications, the study has a few limitations that can be corrected in future. First, co-worker relationship in this study is measured from employee-level perspective and not at the organizational level. As a preliminary investigation, we sought to understand the phenomena at the individual employee level but not at the overall organizational level. Therefore, future research should extend the effect of co-worker relations on organization's outcomes especially its impact on turnover.

Second, the study is limited to how employee cynicism will mediate the relationship between work colleagues in a lateral relation and turnover intentions in organizations. We therefore suggest future research to incorporate supervisory level of co-worker relations that would determine the extent to which supervisors' behaviors affect employee cynicism and employee intention to leave.

Lastly, like many other studies on employee relations and employee turnover intentions, the survey was carried out at one point in time (a cross-sectional design). Though a significant number of studies examining the outcomes of co-worker relations have utilized cross-sectional designs, and self-reports have been the conventional method for collecting data, future studies could improve on this by adopting a longitudinal approach to data collection or even mixed methods of data gathering. In addition to examining the mediating variable, future research needs to address potential moderating role of power distance culture in the relationship between co-worker relationship, employee cynicism and performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we examined co-worker relations and employee intention to leave, and the mediating role of employee cynicism. Co-worker relationship at work plays a major role in the management of organizational human resource management, and consequently drives employee intentions to leave or to perform. An outcome of co-worker relations is employee cynicism, and this can damage worker relationships. We hope future research builds on these preliminary findings to expand the emerging HR field of study, particularly in understudied economies.

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