

Cynical towards What? Cynicism towards Management and Cynicism towards Diversity Training Differentially Relate to Post-Diversity-Training Measures

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Introduction

Although U.S. organizations heavily invest in diversity training programs, little is known about factors that affect its effectiveness. We examined the role of organizational cynicism, that is, the belief that the management of an organization lacks integrity and cannot be trusted to provide truthful information (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998), which has been shown to be highly prevalent in the workforce (Kanter & Mirvis, 1991). Preliminary work conducted in our lab has indicated that diversity training is less effective among individuals who are more cynical of management (Simmons, Cerizo, Folberg, & Ryan, 2015). In the present research, we further developed our measure of cynicism, distinguishing between cynicism towards management and cynicism towards diversity training.

Method

Participants. White participants ($N = 198$; 55% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.57$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.52$) were recruited via MTurk.

Procedure. Participants completed a cynicism measure and then were randomly assigned to read one of 4 corporate memos: 2 (diverse vs. homogenous management) x 2 (proximity of event; proximal vs. distal). Participants then completed a 28-slide diversity training that emphasized multiculturalism followed by post-training measures.

Cynicism

- Cynicism towards Management (8 items; $\alpha = .91$; e.g., “management is usually out of touch with employees”)
- Cynicism towards Diversity Training (4 items, $\alpha = .87$; e.g., “workplace diversity training is generally effective”)

Training Knowledge

- 13 items; $\alpha = .79$; e.g., “microaggressions or subtle ‘put-downs’ directed towards ethnic groups rarely occurs”

Symbolic Racism (Sears & Henry, 2005)

- 7 items; $\alpha = .92$; e.g., “generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class”

Racial Argument Scale (adapted from Saucier & Miller, 2003)

- 13 items; $\alpha = .81$; indicated whether arguments supported conclusions that were either positive or negative towards Blacks

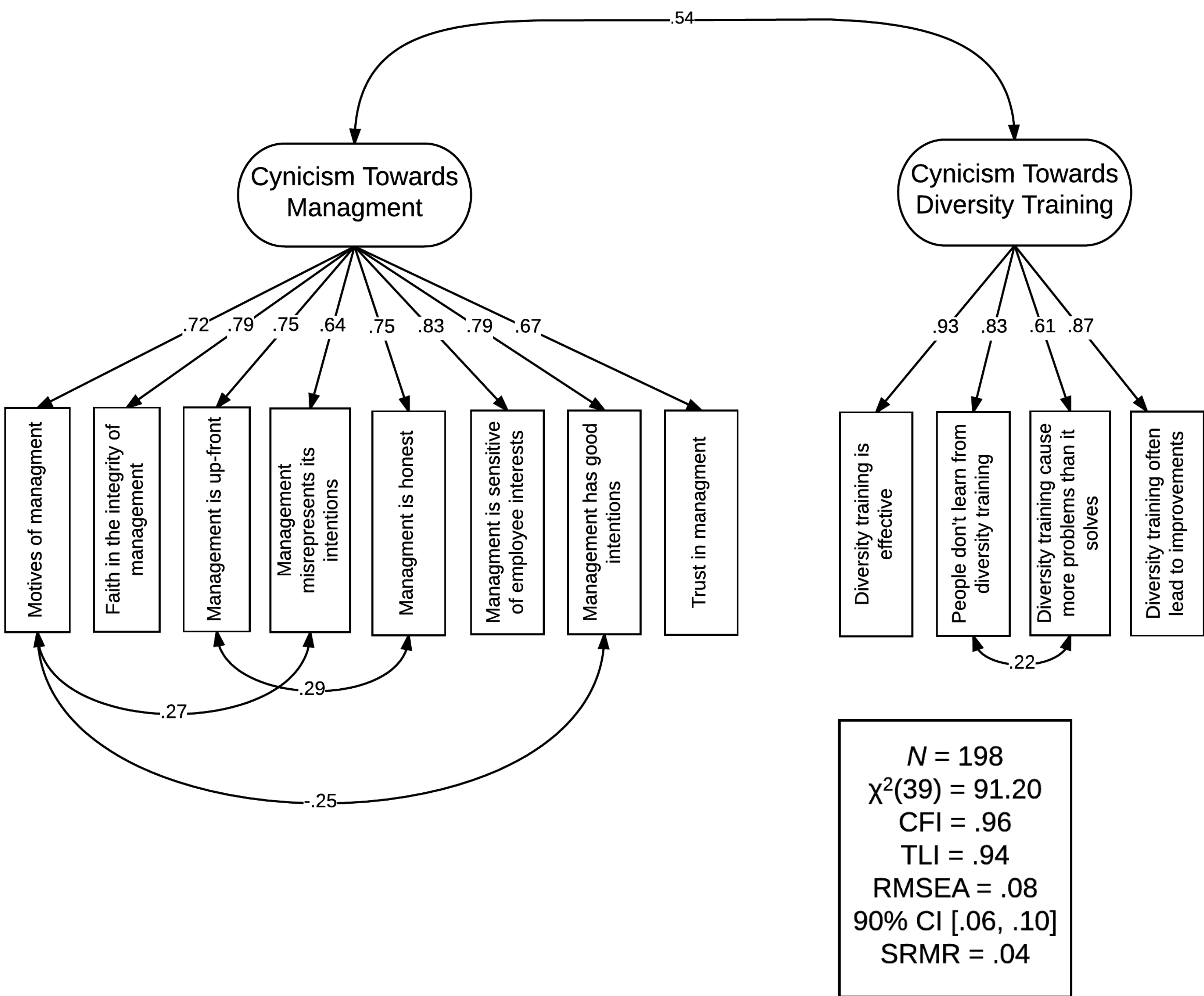
Colorblind and Multicultural Ideology (Ryan et al., 2007)

- Colorblind Ideology (4 items; $\alpha = .72$; e.g., “it is important to judge one another as individuals rather than of an ethnic group”)
- Multicultural Ideology (4 items; $\alpha = .85$; e.g., “it is valuable to appreciate differences between ethnic groups”)
Higher multiculturalism indicates a view that is more consistent with the diversity training

Table 1: Correlations among Variables Controlling for Condition

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Management Cynicism		.43*	.08	-.08	-.01	-.11	-.08	-.02
2. Training Cynicism			-.16*	.39*	.51*	-.44*	-.21*	-.21*
3. Knowledge				-.22*	-.31*	.32*	.12	.18*
4. Symbolic Racism					.74*	-.36*	.12	-.33*
5. Racial Argument Scale						-.50*	-.08	-.37*
6. Multiculturalism							.35*	.58*
7. Colorblindness								-.56*
8. MC - CB Difference								

Figure 1: ESEM of Cynicism Measure



Results

Exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) indicated that, as expected, our cynicism measure assessed two factors (Figure 1): cynicism towards management and cynicism towards diversity training. The factors were moderately correlated ($r = .43$).

Correlations, partialing out condition (see Table 1), indicated that management cynicism was unrelated to post-training measures, whereas training cynicism was related to all post-training measures in the expected directions.

A series of 2 (diverse vs. homogenous management) X 2 (proximal vs. distal event) ANCOVA with management cynicism and training cynicism included as continuous (centered) predictors revealed that participants who were more cynical of management exhibited:

- Greater post-training knowledge, $F(1,192) = 5.49$, $p = .02$
- Less prejudice on the symbolic racism scale, $F(1,192) = 19.69$, $p < .001$, and the racial argument scale, $F(1,192) = 19.83$, $p < .000$
- In contrast, those who were more cynical toward diversity training exhibited:
- Lower post-training knowledge, $F(1,192) = 9.42$, $p = .003$
- More prejudice on the symbolic racism scale, $F(1,192) = 56.67$, $p < .000$, and the racial argument scale $F(1, 192) = 94.94$, $p < .000$
- More strongly endorsed colorblind versus multicultural ideology, $F(1, 192) = 9.71$, $p = .002$

These relationships did not depend on management diversity or proximity of the event. (None of the effects involving management diversity and proximity were significant.)

Discussion

Cynicism towards management appears to be associated with more effective diversity training. Perhaps cynicism towards management reflects a generally less positive or cynical view of authority, leading participants to be more receptive to diversity training.

In contrast, cynicism towards diversity training is associated with less effective training. People who were more cynical of training not only exhibited greater prejudice, they learned less from the training and were less likely to endorse the multicultural message of training. These findings are consistent with research on the effects of cynicism on sexual harassment training (Kath et al., 2014).

Pre-diversity training interventions may increase training readiness (Plant & Butz, 2006). Addressing employee cynicism towards diversity training prior to training, for example, by conveying information about training quality, may lessen cynicism towards diversity training and ultimately improve training outcomes.

