

The role of cynicism in follower championing behavior: the moderating effect of empowering leadership

Cynicism in
follower
championing
behavior

Sabar

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Abstract

Purpose – This study investigates how, in the context of organizational change initiatives, the adoption of empowering leadership can foster positive social exchange relationships between leaders and subordinates, in turn, neutralizing cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) and allowing follower championing behavior (FCB) to emerge.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors analyzed data from 908 faculty members from 11 top-rated public universities in Indonesia. The data used in this research are multisource, so the data processing steps are rwg and ICC tests, data quality testing, and hypothesis testing.

Findings – The authors found that CAOC among these members had a negative effect on their FCB, but this negative effect was buffered by the presence of empowering leadership.



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Research limitations/implications – The authors' research captures perceptions at one point in time. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to simulate empowering leadership stimuli and investigate the impacts of FCB.

Practical implications – This study contributes to Indonesian business management, which exhibits a culture of high power distance. The findings suggest that managers should improve managers' interpersonal communication with subordinates and consider managers' feelings toward change in the organization so that managers' subordinates will provide feedback in the form of decreasing cynicism and will exhibit FCB.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the understanding of why CAOC may not be expressed explicitly in Asian countries due to Asian collectivist and high power-distance values that discourage subordinates from voicing their disagreement with change initiatives.

Keywords CAOC, Follower championing behavior, Higher education, Indonesia

Paper type Research paper

The success or failure of an organization's attempts to manage change is very much dependent on follower involvement and follower championing behavior (FCB) versus follower cynicism or other forms of change resistance (Herold *et al.*, 2008; Tai-Gyu *et al.*, 2011). Positive follower attitudes and behaviors (change supportive behavior) are important conditions for achieving the success of intended organizational changes (Bakari *et al.*, 2017; Herold *et al.*, 2008). Where follower championing behavior is associated with change-supportive behavior, employees invest maximum initiative, effort, and energy into the change initiative (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002; Lysova *et al.*, 2015). Such follower support is necessary to ensure that subordinates exert the effort necessary to implement change in accordance with the spirit of the intended change program (Alfes *et al.*, 2019).

Several studies have examined the factors influencing employee levels of change-supportive behavior (Kim *et al.*, 2011; Lorinkova and Perry, 2017; Meyer *et al.*, 2007). Such studies have identified positive factors for beneficial outcomes such as formal involvement in the design and implementation of the change, attractive anticipated benefits of the change, and quality of the employment relationship (Kim *et al.*, 2011; Lamm and Gordon, 2010; Oreg *et al.*, 2011). One crucial negative factor is cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) (Lamm and Gordon, 2010; Stanley *et al.*, 2005). CAOC is described as "a pessimistic viewpoint about change efforts being successful because those responsible for making changes are blamed for being unmotivated, incompetent, or both" (Wanous *et al.*, 2000, p. 133). Followers adopting cynical attitudes towards change can be very damaging and may even precipitate sabotage behavior (DeCelles *et al.*, 2013; Tesluk *et al.*, 1999).

Due to the risk of CAOC and the associated negative repercussions, it is important to understand the managerial action that can discourage CAOC (DeCelles *et al.*, 2013; Reichers *et al.*, 1997). One of the managerial actions that can reduce CAOC is empowering leadership. Empowering leadership can potentially play a central role in neutralizing the adverse impacts of negative attitudes and behaviors of followers (Huy, 2002; Kanter and Mirvis, 1989), especially CAOC (Lorinkova and Perry, 2017). Empowering leadership involves sharing power with subordinates, giving subordinates the authority to make decisions, and expressing confidence in employees' abilities to perform their jobs (Lorinkova and Perry, 2017; Spreitzer, 1996).

This study draws on Social Exchange Theory (SET), which may explain the relationship between leadership behavior and CAOC (Blau, 1964). SET describes the actions of individuals who are motivated by the need to maintain a relationship of reciprocity in which there is a general expectation of future returns for assistance provided (Lorinkova and Perry, 2017). According to SET, negative attitudes among subordinates, such as CAOC, often stem from a history of unsatisfactory social exchanges in which subordinates perceived that they made sacrifices and/or bore burdens without receiving adequate reciprocation in terms of rewards or recognition from management.

SET implies that leaders should build and honor exchange relationships with their subordinates and reward them to gain their support for the initiation of planned change (Bagger and Li, 2011; Colquitt *et al.*, 2014). A good social exchange relationship between leaders and followers will make followers feel valued; followers who feel valued, in turn, will provide maximum cooperation and performance in implementing organizational change (Thakur and Srivastava, 2014). An important aspect of an optimal dyadic relationship between leaders and followers is the adoption of an empowering leadership approach characterized by individual support and consideration as well as intellectual stimulation (Thoonen *et al.*, 2011). This approach may buffer against CAOC among followers in facing organizational change (Jung *et al.*, 2020; Thakur and Srivastava, 2014). The current study investigates how, in the context of organizational change initiatives, the adoption of empowering leadership can foster positive social exchange relationships between leaders and subordinates, in turn, neutralizing CAOC and allowing FCB to emerge.

This study focuses on organizational change in higher education in Southeast Asia with a focus on Indonesia. The study shows how CAOC was reduced and FCB was increased with an increase in empowering leadership. This research is important because Indonesia has a high power-distance culture (Hofstede Insights, 2021), adheres to the value of politeness (Sendjaya *et al.*, 2019), and members typically do not engage in confrontation (Schmitz *et al.*, 2018). When change is initiated, if there is disagreement with the change, organizational members prefer to remain silent. This tendency towards member silence renders CAOC difficult for superiors to detect (Milliken *et al.*, 2003).

This research makes several contributions. First, by investigating the effect of reduced cynicism on FCB, which is strengthened by empowering leadership, this study complements social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Specifically, this study responds to the recommendations of Thundiyl *et al.* (2015) to explore in detail the impact of cynicism on positive behavior in the form of FCB. Second, we complement previous research that places cynicism only as an outcome variable or mediator (Bakari *et al.*, 2019; Meyer *et al.*, 2007). In this study, we treat cynicism as a determinant. Third, studies related to cynicism have been carried out in several contexts, including developed countries (Burton, 2005; Jiang *et al.*, 2019) and developing countries (Rayan *et al.*, 2018). This study is conducted in Indonesia, where high power distance is the norm, and politeness is highly valued (Sendjaya *et al.*, 2019). Cynicism in different cultures requires different treatments, and different approaches to handling cynicism may have different outcomes depending on the context; the context of change thus impacts the practical implications of this study (Rayan *et al.*, 2018).

Theory and hypothesis development

Social exchange theory

SET posits that employees believe their organizations should reward them equitably for their work efforts (Bagger and Li, 2011). This is social exchange and inspires employees to form positive relationships with their organizations (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2016). Employees thus expect that the relationship between them and their employing organizations should be a reciprocal one in which both parties exchange resources based on perceived fairness (Thacker, 2015). SET assumes that employees orient their work efforts according to their perceptions of whether they have previously been treated fairly by their organizations (Eisenberger and Huntington, 1986). If they perceive that they have been treated fairly, they are likely to develop organizational commitment and be inclined to support organizational change initiatives (Thacker, 2015). However, if employees perceive that there is an absence of reciprocity and equity from their organizations, their work efforts and levels of cooperation are likely to be reduced (Grama and Todericui, 2016; Lorinkova and Perry, 2017), they are likely to oppose any change initiatives (Lawler, 2001), and more likely to demonstrate CAOC (Wanous *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, Blau (1964) states that the unfulfilled obligations distort the balance in a relationship

of reciprocal exchange and lead to negative consequences for both parties. Based on SET, the quality of relationships influences subordinate attitudes and behaviors, which tend to be commensurate with the treatment received from leadership (Colquitt *et al.*, 2014; Lorinkova and Perry, 2017). When this influence is positive, the result is termed championing behavior (Melton and Cunningham, 2014). Individuals who engage in championing behaviors are likely to be cooperative and to comply with behavioral requirements (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002).

SET suggests that leaders should build exchange relationships with their subordinates to gain support for the initiation of planned change (Bagger and Li, 2011; Colquitt *et al.*, 2013). A good relationship between leaders and followers makes followers feel valued, and feeling valued is likely to lead followers to do their utmost to support organizational change (Thakur and Srivastava, 2018). An important aspect of an optimal dyadic relationship is the provision of individual support and consideration as well as to meet their personal need by role-based obligations (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2012). In addition, a psychological approach is also important to minimize cynicism among followers facing organizational change (Jung *et al.*, 2020; Thakur and Srivastava, 2018).

Cynicism about organizational change and follower championing behavior

Wanous *et al.* (2000) defined CAOC as the absence of trust in a change initiative and the change leader in reaction to a history of change efforts that have not been fully or clearly successful. FCB is defined as the positive behavior of followers that indicates support for an organizational change initiative in the form of extra performance efforts and a commitment to supporting the change process (Faupel and Süß, 2018). Based on social exchange theory, employees who perceive unfavorable treatment by their organization will have negative attitudes and behaviors (Lorinkova and Perry, 2017). Islam, Furuoka, and Idris (2020) found that employee negative attitudes toward change, cynicism, and unsupportive behavior toward change cause deviant behavior that affects organizational commitments (Aslam *et al.*, 2016).

FCB includes commitments to change, readiness to change, willingness to change, and making extra contributions to support change-related activities in the organization (Kim *et al.*, 2011). Beer and Eisenstart (2000) state that most cases of failure in organizational change initiatives are caused by the behavior of those followers who do not support the proposed change. Organizational changes increase uncertainty for followers, making CAOC more likely to increase. Thus, uncertainty can become a major source of followers' reluctance to participate in the associated changes (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Islam *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, Naseer *et al.* (2020) stated that CAOC causes counter-productive work behavior and cynical subordinates will engage in less organizational citizenship behavior (Scott and Zweig, 2020).

Employees who demonstrate high cynicism are typically pessimistic, quick to fault the organization, liberal in blaming others for poor work or procedural outcomes, and highly critical of organizational processes (Enciso *et al.*, 2017; Smith *et al.*, 2021). This kind of negative behavior stifles change (Stanley *et al.*, 2005) and results in a reduction in championing behavior (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002). In the context of Autonomous Higher Education Institutions (AHEIs) in Indonesia, a series of changes in regulations appears to have been perceived as arbitrary and ineffective by many academics, possibly leading to an increase in CAOC, as academics perceived that they were required to invest extra effort to little avail. CAOC involves a set of beliefs and perceptions centering around the belief that top management lack integrity and cannot be trusted. Cynical employees typically have a sense of injustice, disappointment, and frustration (Abraham, 2000) and report low levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Bernerth *et al.*, 2016; Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003).

Cynical employees may engage in negative behavior such as badmouthing (Wilkerson *et al.*, 2008) and have decreased levels of performance (Neves, 2012). When the members of an organization are more cynical towards the organization, they tend to be less committed and are less supportive of organizational initiatives, including change programs. Thus, there is a

negative relationship between CAOC and follower championing behavior (Lamm and Gordon, 2010; Stanley *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H1. The higher the cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) among followers, the lower the follower championing behavior (FCB).

Cynicism in
follower
championing
behavior

Cynicism about organizational change and follower championing behavior moderated by empowering leadership

Wanous *et al.* (2000) argue that CAOC among subordinates, as a syndrome of pessimistic attitudes toward change efforts, can be reduced by providing motivation and credible information about change. A key source of motivation for subordinates is empowering leadership (Kim *et al.*, 2018b; Srivastava *et al.*, 2006). Empowering leaders are defined as those leaders who provide followers with greater environmental resources, including devolved responsibility, autonomy, authority, and support for follower development. These resources increase the followers' sense of competence, control, meaning, and impact (Bakker, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2018a; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Social exchange theory suggests that when parties enter an exchange relationship, they strive to benefit each other (Blau, 1964; Lorinkova and Perry, 2017) through reciprocity norms (Gouldner, 1960).

When individuals perceive unfavorable treatment by another party it may compel them to reciprocate in the same way with negative or poor behavior (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004; Huang *et al.*, 2016). When subordinates are given authority, encouraged to question their prior beliefs and assumptions, to take risks when needed, and are given the room to make mistakes in the process of change (Griffioen *et al.*, 2017; Thoonen *et al.*, 2011; Griffioen *et al.*, 2017) their involvement in organizational change is taken seriously (Thoonen *et al.*, 2011). Empowering leadership supports the development of leadership skills and intrinsic motivation among subordinates which can result in greater creativity, increased work effort, and improved work performance (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2018b; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). SET states that the parties in an exchange relationship can offer one another both tangible and intangible benefits (Blau, 1964). This exchange relationship follows the norm of reciprocity. The reciprocal norm means that when an individual gets favorable treatment by one party, then it is required of him or her to offer favorable treatment in return (Gouldner, 1960).

This also applies when one party receives unfavorable treatment from the other. When an individual perceives unfavorable treatment, the individual may reciprocate with negative treatment or poor behavior (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004; Huang *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, according to Li and Chen (2018), negative behavior follows negative attitudes and cynicism is positively related to counterproductive work behavior (Ewis, 2014). In addition, as per social exchange theory, employees with a high level of organizational cynicism are frustrated, believing that their organization is exploitive and self-centered and think they are treated unfairly. Studies by Wanous *et al.* (2004) and Lorinkova and Perry (2017) have demonstrated the role of empowering leadership in reducing the negative impact of cynicism among subordinates. Cynicism is greatly reduced if followers feel empowered, while followers also enjoy a higher level of intrinsic motivation if they work for an empowering organization or leader (Chen and Klimoski, 2003). Furthermore, Stanley *et al.* (2005) found that, in the context of organizational change initiatives, leaders can reduce levels of cynicism among subordinates by involving them in planning the next change, conducting joint evaluations, and openly acknowledging failures in implementation.

Empowering leadership can improve the relationship between leaders and members to foster empowerment toward creativity and innovation (Muafi *et al.*, 2019; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Empowered followers tend to behave proactively and productively (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). In the context of AHEIs in Indonesia, empowering leadership by the dean can entail openly acknowledging the presence of CAOC and its organizational causes and the

adoption of measures designed to devolve greater responsibility, autonomy, and authority to followers. In addition, it is important to demonstrate acknowledgment of followers' competence to suppress CAOC and inspire FCB. If deans do not display empowering leadership behavior, subordinates may retaliate by increasing their CAOC and using organizational time for non-work-related pursuits (Andersson, 1996; Dean *et al.*, 1998). Conversely, empowering leadership boosts followers' sense of confidence and security within the organization, enabling followers to work independently and generating support for capacity building (Arnold *et al.*, 2000; Jung *et al.*, 2020). In empowering leadership, any mistakes or failures incurred by subordinates are framed as learning opportunities, which encourages subordinates to continue to take risks and try new initiatives. When leaders exhibit empowering behavior (high benefits) and employees experience a psychological state of empowerment (strong exchange relationships), the level of cynicism decreases (Anderson *et al.*, 1998; Dean *et al.*, 1998; Lorinkova and Perry, 2017). Specifically, the greater the rate of exchange, the lower the levels of reported cynicism (Schraeder *et al.*, 2016). Apart from that, leaders who empower organizational members act as buffers for the negative effects of CAOC on FCB, because empowering leaders can induce favorable employee responses in periods of rapid change and uncertainty (Bish *et al.*, 2015). When employees are empowered, they often become self-motivated and committed individuals who will expend maximum effort in their work (Idris *et al.*, 2018; Ke and Zhang, 2011). Based on the discussion above, a second hypothesis is proposed.

H2. Empowering leadership suppresses or buffers the negative impact of cynicism about organizational change (CAOC) that would otherwise reduce levels of follower championing behavior.

Methods

Sampling plan

This study uses a purposive sampling approach (Singh, 2000) where the respondents used are leaders of departments at public universities with legal entities in Indonesia and have direct supervisors. These Department Heads are responsible for the performance of the departments they lead. The head of a department is directly responsible to the head of the faculty; in this case, the Vice Dean. The Vice Dean is responsible for the performance of the department chair. This study distributed a questionnaire through online and offline channels to 415 Deputy (Vice) Deans and 493 Department Heads at 11 public universities with legal entities in Indonesia: Airlangga University, Bandung Institute of Technology, Bogor Agricultural Institute, Brawijaya University, Diponegoro University, Gadjah Mada University, Hasanuddin University, Padjajaran University, Sebelas Maret State University, Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology, and the University of Indonesia. In accordance with this mandate of the Indonesian Government that was legalized.

Through the Decree of the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Number 522b/M/Kp/IX/2015, in 2019, the 11 AHEIs were given the target of entering the ranks of the 500 Top World Class Universities (Lestari *et al.*, 2021; Sukoco *et al.*, 2021). The online questionnaire was distributed using Google Forms or email attachments, while the offline questionnaire was distributed by post. The use of both offline and online methods was intended to maximize the response rate. This data was analyzed using several methods. Because the data used in this study is multisource, the first step in data processing was data aggregation (r_{wg} and ICC tests) followed by data quality tests and hypothesis testing.

Data aggregation and analysis

In the data aggregation process, we adopted a group level analysis approach in which the data obtained from individual respondents was aggregated into scores for 51 teams at each of the 11 state universities. The process of merging individual-level data into team-level data

was carried out with the r_{wg} approach (James *et al.*, 1984; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2018). A minimum value of 0.7 was used. The process of converting individual-level data to team-level data was conducted using within-group range (r_{wg}) and reliability among members (ICC1 and ICC2). In addition, we tested whether the mean scores differed significantly across work units, as indicated by an F-test from using-way analysis of variance.

We noticed that different group levels were emerging. It was therefore important to look at the reliability of group-level variables in order to consider differences within groups, relative to differences between groups. Accordingly, we conducted the r_{wg} test to determine the reliability of each variable. The higher the r_{wg} value, the stronger the construct agreement in the group. Generally, r_{wg} greater than 0.70 is desirable (James *et al.*, 1984; Newman and Sin, 2018). In addition, two forms of interclass correlation (ICC) scores were used to reliably differentiate individual ratings from group-level predictors. Bliese (2000) suggested that an ICC1 value that differs from zero is desirable, with a value close to 0.20, which indicates a good value for group-level analysis. Glick (1985) suggested that the ICC2 value should be greater than 0.60. Thus the test values of r_{wg} and ICC1 and ICC2 in this study are all above the threshold.

We compared the scores from the online and offline questionnaires to ensure that there were no differences in the characteristics of the respondents between the online and offline methods. The results showed that there was no difference in the pattern of the responses to the online and offline questionnaires according to age ($F = 0.273$; Sig = 0.604), academic position ($F = 1.360$; Sig = 0.249), or gender ($F = 1.799$; Sig = 1.860).

Partial least square

We used the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) method using the SmartPLS 3.0 tool (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Henseler *et al.*, 2009). The reasons for using PLS-SEM as an analytical tool are: (1) this research does not meet the requirements for a normality test on individual sub-constructs with Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test which requires P -value of significance >0.05 , but the results of P -value in this research are <0.000 (Hair *et al.*, 2017); (2) the chi-square value is 379,035 with a p value of 0.000 so it can be concluded that the model does not fit. Furthermore, the authors dismiss multicollinearity concerns using the variance inflation factors (VIF) statistics (Kalinins, 2018). The rule of thumb is that if the maximum VIF is less than 10 then multicollinearity problems are not likely to exist (Stine, 1995). The VIF value in this study was (CAOC = 74.832; EL = 21.888; Interaction (CAOC * EL) = 101.070) > 10 , so it was decided that there were symptoms of multicollinearity. Therefore, this model does not meet the assumption of covariance-based SEM.

The use of SmartPLS 3.0 as a data processing tool is considered appropriate because this approach can measure complex models with multiple variables and latent indicators (Henseler *et al.*, 2009), is suitable for testing interaction effects (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2016), and does not require normally distributed data (Chin, 1998; Sirén, Kohtamäki and Kuckertz, 2012). The SmartPLS 3.0 tool uses the bootstrapping method to estimate the significance of path coefficients (Bollen and Stine, 2016) so that the data are coherent with the model factor as a representation of confirmatory factor analysis (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). SmartPLS 3.0 allows for explicit estimation of latent variable scores, and a bootstrap resampling method was used to test the proposed model (Chin, 1998). This procedure entails generating a randomly selected sub-sample of 300 cases, with replacement, from the original data. Path coefficients are then generated for each randomly selected subsample. The t -statistic was calculated for all coefficients based on their stability across the subsample, indicating which relationships were statistically significant.

The data collected was perceptual and from one source at the same time. Therefore, to avoid the common method bias (CMB), we also tested general method biases. First, the order of the questionnaire was arranged randomly. Second, we followed the Harman single factor method (Podsakof *et al.*, 2003) to test general method biases. The results showed that the first

construct accounted for 28.006% of the variance (Siemsen *et al.*, 2009). Hence, the results are unlikely to be contaminated by CMB.

Cynicism about organizational change

CAOC is defined as a pessimistic point of view about activities that are designed to transform current organizational conditions from ineffective to effective (Wanous *et al.*, 2000). Measurement of CAOC was adapted from a scale of Wanous *et al.* (2000) who identified three sub-scales: cynicism/pessimism (4 items, $\alpha = 0.935$), dispositional attribution/cynicism (4 items, $\alpha = 0.958$), and situational attribution/cynicism (4 items, $\alpha = 0.909$) subsumed under an overall scale (12 items, $\alpha = 0.970$).

Follower championing behavior

Behavioral support change was identified by FCB, while FCB is defined as the expression of enthusiasm for change that goes beyond what is formally required, directed at ensuring the success of a proposed program of change by promoting the change program to others (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002; Islam *et al.*, 2020) while participating actively in facilitating and promulgating the change (Kim *et al.*, 2009). The FCB scale is comprised of six items: encouraging others to participate in change, talking positively about change to colleagues, talking positively about change to outsiders, trying to find ways to overcome difficulties related to change, enduring change to achieve goals, and trying to overcome co-worker resistance to change. Cronbach's alpha for the FCB scale was $\alpha = 0.974$.

Empowering leadership

Developmental support is a key dimension of empowering leadership. Developmental support is defined as leadership that gives responsibility, autonomy, authority, and support for follower self-development, thereby increasing followers' sense of competence, control, meaning, and impact (Bakker, 2017; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). In this study, developmental support was measured using a six-item scale (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014). After testing the validity of the data, four items were obtained that had a loading value below 0.7, and these data were eliminated from the calculation ($\alpha = 0.976$).

Results

This study uses a partial least squares (SmartPls 3.0) approach to determine the value of structural parameters in structural equation modeling (SEM). The approach in this study uses reflective indicators in each research variable, after which the model is analyzed to indicate its validity and reliability. The validity measurement refers to the outer loading value. According to Hair *et al.* (2010), the outer loading value has a cut-off of 0.500. Reliability measurement uses the reference value for composite reliability and the AVE value, where the value for CR is recommended to be in the range of 0.700 and the AVE value is suggested to be > 0.500 (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Tables 1 and 2 show that the overall value of outer loading is not below the 0.500 standard and that the AVE value is above 0.5. Thus the data used in this study fulfills the validity assumption. In addition, the value of composite reliability is also > 0.700 , indicating that the data are reliable. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that empowering leadership is highly correlated with cynicism.

In Figure 1, we also checked for the potential impact of control variables on FCB. There was no difference in FCB between male and female respondents ($t = 0.957$; $\beta = -0.119$), between respondents in various age groups ($t = 0.501$; $\beta = 0.048$), or among respondents in various academic positions ($t = 1.795$; $\beta = 0.184$). In Hypothesis 1, we proposed that CAOC

Code	Item	Outer Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cynicism in follower championing behavior
<i>Empowering leadership</i>					
EL14	Planning work together	0.856	0.776	0.811	
EL18	Give information how to manage work	0.943			
<i>Pessimism Cynicism</i>					
PESS1	Change program did not help	0.944	0.935	0.841	
PESS2	Attempt to change did not work	0.795			
PESS3	Advice that was given did not make any real change	0.959			
PESS4	Plan to change did not work	0.960			
<i>Dispositional Cynicism</i>					
DISP1	Interested parties do not try hard enough	0.943	0.958	0.889	
DISP2	Interested parties do not care	0.907			
DISP3	Interested parties know nothing	0.970			
DISP4	Interested parties are not capable	0.949			
<i>Situational Cynicism</i>					
SIT1	Interested parties are not to blame	0.870	0.909	0.786	
SIT2	Workload of interest parties is too heavy	0.901			
SIT3	Limited resources	0.894			
SIT4	There is no support from others	0.880			
<i>Follower Championing Behavior</i>					
FCB1	Accept a role change	0.960	0.958	0.886	
FCB2	Willing to adjust the working behavior	0.961			
FCB3	Consistent effort to change	0.986			
FCB4	Optimistic about organizational change	0.945			
FCB5	Avoiding job	0.931			
FCB6	Willing to engage in changing	0.882			

Table 1.
Validity and reliability results

will negatively influence FCB. **Hypothesis 1** is supported by a value of $t = 5.109$ and a value of $\beta = -0.775$. Thus, **Hypothesis 1** is confirmed.

In **Hypothesis 2**, we proposed that empowering leadership will weaken the negative influence of CAOC on FCB. In **Figure 2**, the moderating effect of empowering leadership on the relationship between CAOC and FCB is shown to be significant with $t = 1.987$ and $\beta = 0.407$. Thus, **Hypothesis 2** is confirmed. The role of empowering leadership in buffering the relationship between CAOC and FCB is represented in **Figure 2**. When CAOC is low and empowering leadership is low, the value of FCB is also low (FCB = 4.644). When CAOC is low, but empowering leadership is high, FCB will be high (FCB = 5.301). When CAOC is high and the empowering leadership is low, the FCB score is low (FCB = 4.616). When CAOC is high, and empowering leadership is also high, the FCB score increases (FCB = 5.156). **Figure 2** also shows that even though CAOC is high, empowerment by leaders reduces the negative impact on FCB ($5.156 - 4.616 = 0.54$). In fact, the difference between high and low CAOC is not large ($5.301 - 5.156 = 0.145$) when leaders empower their followers.

Discussion

This study emphasizes the relationship between CAOC and FCB in the context of higher education, with empowering leadership as a moderating mechanism. Several studies have associated CAOC with three dimensions: pessimism, disposition, and situation (Reichers *et al.*, 1997). The results of this study indicated a significant negative effect of follower CAOC on

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics
correlation

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
EL	3.745	0.595	0.811	0.013	0.005	0.003	0.778	0.000	0.020	0.063	0.000
PESS	2.725	1.021	0.113	0.841	0.638	0.750	0.616	0.298	0.049	0.026	0.020
DISP	3.000	0.980	0.069	0.798***	0.889	0.569	0.729	0.138	0.138	0.031	0.000
SIT	3.157	0.704	0.050	0.866***	0.754***	0.786	0.748	0.267	0.042	0.005	0.000
CAOC	2.980	0.860	0.882***	0.785***	0.854***	0.865***	-0.756***	0.318	0.066	0.011	0.002
FCB	4.000	0.825	0.000	-0.546***	-0.371	-0.517***	-0.564***	0.886	0.009	0.022	0.014
Gender	1.451	0.502	-0.143	-0.222	-0.371	-0.204	-0.257	0.097	1.000	0.000	0.008
Age	2.235	0.814	0.250	-0.161	-0.175	0.074	-0.107	0.149	-0.020	1.000	0.041
AP	2.568	0.831	0.016	-0.141	0.000	-0.019	-0.040	0.117	0.092	-0.202	1.000

Note(s): Values on the diagonal are AVE. Values below the diagonal are inter-factor correlation. *** Correlation values are significant at $p < 0.05$, ** correlation values are significant at $p < 0.01$.

Cynicism in follower championing behavior

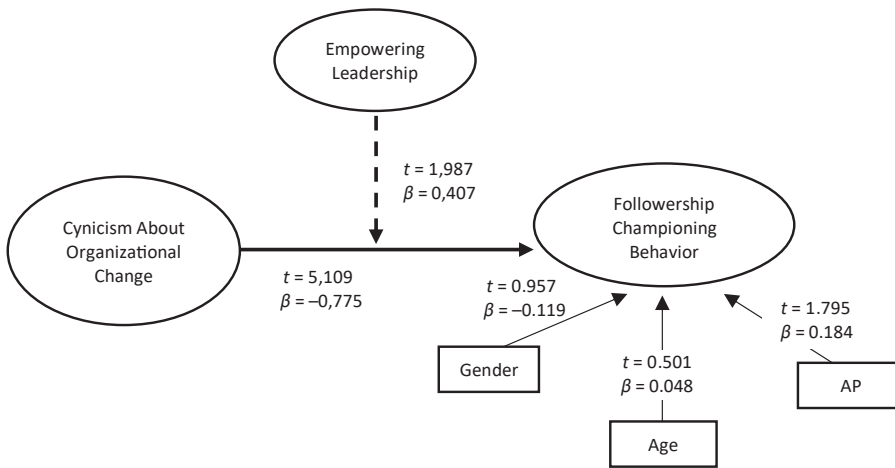


Figure 1.
Hypothesis testing results

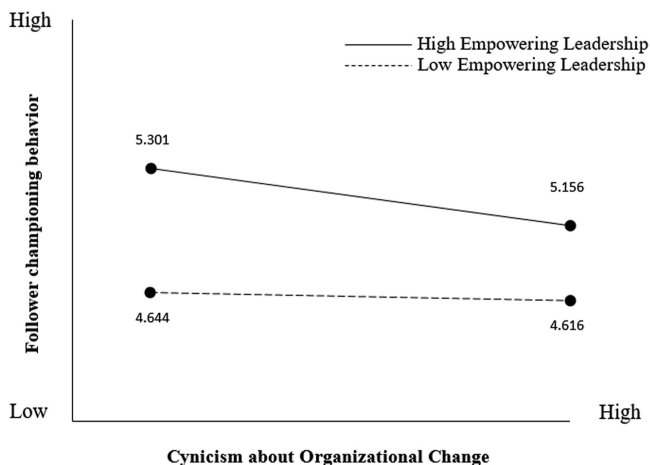


Figure 2.
Follower championing behavior graph

FCB. This can occur because cynicism is destructive. Cynical followers have a tendency to engage in sabotage (DeCelles *et al.*, 2013; Tesluk *et al.*, 1999) and are reluctant to participate in organizational change (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Islam *et al.*, 2020). Follower CAOC diminishes the likelihood that they will support change. This finding is consistent with the results of research conducted by Stanley *et al.* (2005) and Lamm and Gordon (2010) which show that CAOC and behavior in support of change were confirmed to have a negative relationship. The context for changes in higher education in this study comes from external forces (government) (Bakari *et al.*, 2017, 2019; Durrah *et al.*, 2019; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018). This also makes the CAOC attitude in public tertiary institutions difficult to see, because, in Indonesian culture, the collegial system is more prominent than the managerial system, so that the cynicism that exists in employees becomes difficult to measure (Boffo, 1997).

The benefit of empowering leadership to suppress the effects of CAOC is seen when leaders delegate authority to subordinates and when leaders increase motivation by giving

subordinates more responsibility and autonomy in their work (Jung *et al.*, 2020; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Empowering leadership is also a way of increasing the meaningfulness of work, fostering participation in decision making, expressing confidence in high performance, and providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints (Kundu *et al.*, 2019). Empowering leadership has a positive impact on proactive change behavior (Lee *et al.*, 2015). This mechanism is in accordance with the SET concept where there is an exchange between superiors and subordinates. When leaders provide developmental support by involving followers and providing accurate and clear information related to work, subordinates react positively to leadership empowerment in the form of FCB (Blau, 1964; Lorinkova and Perry, 2017). In the context of social exchange, leaders who can empower subordinates increase their trust and can quickly reduce their levels of cynicism. Employees who have trust in the organization and its leaders take risks to accommodate others and improve organizational performance in the process. Empowering leadership makes employees feel confident and secure in the organization by supporting them to work independently and to build capacity (Jung *et al.*, 2020; Naseer *et al.*, 2020).

Theoretical implications

This study complements existing research on leadership using SET (Blau (1964) by indicating the buffering effect of empowering leadership in moderating the relationship between CAOC and FCB. Empowering leadership grants authority to subordinates while providing developmental support to improve their abilities (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014). Subordinates with delegated authority will be empowered to complete assigned tasks and those who receive developmental support will be more likely to complete the assigned work, thus reducing the negative impact of CAOC. The methods of reducing cynicism used by leadership can occur in both profit and non-profit organizations. For example, in the context of non-profit organizations, authentic leadership and transformational leadership are more likely to be carried out when employee cynicism is low (Bakari *et al.*, 2019; Rehmana *et al.*, 2021; Williams *et al.*, 2012). Likewise, in for-profit organizations, empowering leadership and transformational leadership show the same correlation (e.g. Lorinkova and Perry, 2017; Wu *et al.*, 2016). This study complements previous research in the context of non-profit organizations, especially higher education organizations, which shows that empowering leadership suppresses employee cynicism when institutions of higher education make changes.

This study also expands on previous research related to behavior supporting change, such as research conducted by Jimmieson *et al.* (2008), and Ahmad *et al.* (2020) who explained the elements of planned behavior as a determinant of change supportive behavior. In that context, change supportive behavior refers to the intention to support behavior and not to any specific behavior. In addition, other studies show the antecedents of change supportive behavior such as commitment (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002; Neubert and Cady (2001) and attitude (Elias, 2007). In this study, CSB was not identified as positive or negative (Kim *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, this study shows a difference because the determinant of actors supporting change is cynicism over change that must be strengthened by empowering leadership. Change supportive behavior refers to active behavior in support of change.

Practical implications

This study offers several practical implications. First, we recommend that leaders adopt empowering leadership to improve employee psychology and reduce cynicism. It is important for leaders to provide information to all employees in the early stages of change and offer suggestions on how to deal with these changes, including how to do the work most affected by the changes. Leaders should provide guidance through delegating authority and

encouraging initiatives from subordinates (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014), especially for employees who support the change, so that the optimism of supportive employees will be transmitted to employees who have cynical attitudes. This will make the transition to a new climate easier to realize (Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999). Second, the study also contributes to countries that have high power-distance cultures such as Indonesia in which gaps between superiors and subordinates are very high and the character of cynicism tends to be silent and invisible when changes occur in the organization. Such situations require special treatment in detecting and responding to this cynicism. Managers should promote autonomy of subordinates through coordinating and sharing of information, encouraging initiatives, and inspiring two-way communication. Moreover, managers should also facilitate subordinates by demonstrating leadership behavior and developmental support to promote continuous learning, competence, and skills. This can be accomplished through teaching, coaching, and guidance (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014) which results in subordinates feeling more valued, making them more willing to participate in change by decreasing cynicism and increasing support for change (Lorinkova and Perry, 2017). In the context of non-profit organizations (civil servants), leaders should do more to motivate and encourage autonomy of employees so that they are more prepared for organizational change (Muafi *et al.*, 2019). In the context of higher education, leaders should adopt autonomous support through more open dialogs that generate a sense of collegiality and through developmental support by motivating, encouraging, and coaching to increase academic productivity (Amundsen and Martinsen, 2014; Helland *et al.*, 2019). The granting of autonomy and provision of developmental support can neutralize the impact of CAOC and allow FCB to emerge (Griffioen *et al.*, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2011).

Limitations and directions for future research

This study has limitations in that it does not distinguish among different styles of empowering leadership. Thus, future research could explore the implementation of empowering leadership through a variety of leadership styles. Our research was cross-sectional, only capturing perceptions and attitudes at one point in time. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach or use experimental methods to simulate empowering leadership stimuli to investigate the impacts on FCB. Another limitation is that our research obtained data only from deputy deans and heads of departments; it did not obtain data from deans at a higher level of seniority or from additional parties at subordinate levels, such as heads of study programs or rank and file lecturers. Finally, this study was carried out in only one Asian country. Future studies could involve cross-cultural comparisons.

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