

How Workplace Incivility Drives Work Alienation: An Explanatory Model

Shweta Ranjan¹, Dr. Pawas Kumar²

¹Research Scholar Department of Commerce and Business Studies, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar, India. Pin code – 824326

²Assistant Professor Department of Commerce and Business Studies, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar, India. Pin code – 824326

Abstract

Work Alienation remains a contentious topic for scholars and academicians throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Therefore, this paper focuses on determining the contemporary antecedents of work alienation by examining how subtle adverse workplace experiences, such as incivility, influence the feeling of alienation. Additionally, the paper aims to investigate the mediating effect of organizational cynicism on the relationship between workplace incivility and work alienation. Drawing on the frameworks of Affective Events Theory (AET) and Social Exchange Theory (SET), the study also explores these relationships. The sample for the study was collected from the employees of the IT sector. A total of 334 responses were analysed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) through AMOS software. The results revealed a significant positive association between uncivil behavior and work alienation. Furthermore, organizational cynicism—measured across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions—partially mediated the relationship between the two variables. The findings will be of interest to organisational behavior scholars, human resource practitioners, and policymakers, offering both theoretical and practical insights into contemporary work culture and the mechanisms by which work disengagement is created within an organizational setting.

Keywords:

Workplace Incivility, Employee Cynicism, Work Alienation, Affective Event Theory, Social Exchange Theory and Information Technology

Introduction

Nair & Vohra (2010) analyzed organizational data and found that approximately 20 percent of IT employees reported being alienated from their work. Work alienation, originally conceptualized by Karl Marx in the 19th century, remains a persistent concern among organizational scholars to explore within organizational studies (Shantz et al., 2014). Work alienation is characterized by disconnectedness and estrangement from duties, responsibilities, colleagues, and organization (Erikson, 1986; Nair & Vohra, 2012). As suggested by Seeman (1959), the term alienation encompasses powerlessness (lack of influence over work environment), meaninglessness (lack of purpose), normlessness (perceives norms and standards no longer valid), isolation (feels excluded), and self-estrangement (losing inner sense of purpose). The concept of work alienation gained further prominence with the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim, who argued that modern industrial societies create a sense of anomie or normlessness that can lead to feelings of alienation among workers. Durkheim believed that the impersonal nature of modern organizations and the division of labor could lead to a lack of social cohesion and a sense of isolation among employees (Emile Durkheim, 2016). Over the past 60 years, there has been a significant increase in interest in exploring the

concept of work alienation, particularly in how modern organizational structures, job design, and interpersonal dynamics contribute to employees' psychological withdrawal and detachment from work (Kanungo, 1983; Podsakoff et al., 1986; Seeman, 1959; Shantz et al., 2014). Moreover, existing research recognizes the critical role of work alienation in shaping employees' psychology and behaviors, especially its connection to decreased job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, absenteeism, and increased withdrawal intentions (Cummings & Manring, 1977; Nair & Vohra, 2010; Chiaburu et al., 2014). Considering its negative repercussions for the organization, it becomes imperative to identify the factors that may inhibit the feelings of alienation among organizational members. Although much has been studied about the antecedents of work alienation, relatively less attention has been given to contemporary workplace stressors such as incivility and cynicism. Workplace incivility is considered a low-intensity deviant behavior, unlike overt workplace phenomena such as workplace bullying or abusive supervision, incivility is nonetheless pervasive and carries significant consequences (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Characterized by ambiguous intent to harm and subtle violations of norms of respect, incivility often goes unaddressed. However, research has shown that it has a cumulative impact on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity (Cortina et al., 2001; Pearson et al., 2001). Likewise, cynicism is also associated with detrimental effects on employees' psychological engagement, trust in organizational leadership, and overall commitment, ultimately contributing to negative work attitudes and withdrawal behaviors (Dean, 1998; Chiaburu et al., 2013).

In addition, little empirical research has investigated the association between work alienation and workplace incivility, as well as the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive these phenomena. This study sought to evaluate the direct interaction between employees experiencing uncivil actions of peers and supervisors and feelings of alienation among workers, as well as the mediating role played by all the dimensions of cynicism between workplace incivility and work alienation. Although, recently Xia et al. (2022) examined the role of interpersonal trust in mediating the connection between workplace incivility and work alienation, along with the moderating influence of career resilience on the relationship between workplace incivility and interpersonal trust among healthcare workers. According to Max Weber (1978), individuals' unfavorable or favorable emotions and behaviors are shaped mainly by the nature and quality of their social engagements. Likewise, uncivil behavior (demeaning remarks, rude responses, and condescending tone) disrupts respectful social exchanges, thereby fostering negative attitudes toward the organization and ultimately diminishing employees' organizational commitment (Cortina et al., 2001). Furthermore, in this paper, we base the argument that incivility positively impacts the feeling of estrangement through the lens of social exchange theory. The evidence for the same can also be drawn from previous investigations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Xia et al., 2022). The underlying psychological mechanism is explained by drawing on affective event theory, wherein any negative event experienced by employees triggers emotional reactions that shape their attitudes and behaviors, such as increased cynicism and unwillingness to associate with assigned work (Baharuddin & Mohd Yusof, 2018; Kengatharan, 2020). Therefore, this paper focuses particularly on unravelling the antecedents of work alienation among IT employees, reporting the factors that contribute to psychological disengagement, such as workplace incivility, and examining the mediating effect of employee cynicism in this relationship. The paper aims to make several contributions; first, it provides an important opportunity to advance the understanding of work alienation and other relevant factors that promote feelings of detachment and hinder the productivity of workers in high-demand sectors that require

interaction with people, such as the information technology industry. In doing so, the study will help to comprehend how interpersonal dynamics within organizations shape employee attitudes, behaviors, and overall workplace outcomes. Second, it is essential to acquire an understanding of the psychological process through which incivility aggravates alienation in the work setting; therefore, this study intends to ascertain the role of all the dimensions of cynicism as a mediating factor in this relationship. Third, we draw on affective event theory and social exchange theory in order to explain the complex dynamics of emotional turmoil caused by uncivil experiences, further provoking cognitive, affective, and behavioral cynicism. It further escalates the alienation among workers towards the employing organization.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

This research highlighted affective event theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to explain the emergence of negative employee outcomes, such as cynicism and alienation, in response to uncivil workplace behaviors. The affective event theory articulates how specific workplace events influence employees' emotions, shaping their attitudes and behaviors over time (Christensen et al., 2023). Workplace incivility consists of low-level behaviors that breach the standards of mutual respect and exhibit an unclear intention to cause harm to others. (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Affective Events Theory conceptualizes workplace incivility as a negative affective event—recurring interpersonal encounters that evoke emotional reactions such as frustration, resentment, or anger (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). These emotional responses, when accumulated, give rise to employee cynicism, a negative attitude that employees develop towards the organization, resulting from mistrust and mistreatment (Dean et al., 1998). When workers are subjected to uncivil behavior, such as rudeness and inconsiderate actions, it can gradually erode their emotional well-being, ultimately leading to burnout (Welbourne et al., 2015). One of the key dimensions of burnout is cynicism, where employees begin to feel detached, distrustful, and emotionally withdrawn from their work and organization. Furthermore, the theory has widespread application in a wide variety of psychology and management fields (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The affective event theory provides a helpful account of how incivility in the workplace acts as a negative emotional stimulus, shaping employees' affective responses and contributing to the development of adverse attitudes, such as cynicism.

When communication between the employer and employee is clear, employees tend to have a positive attitude toward the organization. Meanwhile, the social exchange theory suggests that relationships at work are founded on reciprocity, where employees anticipate receiving fair treatment, respect, and support in return for their commitment, loyalty, and performance. Social exchange theory comprehends the workplace incivility and its effect on work alienation (Xia et al., 2022). Based on the concepts of rational choice and mutual advantage, exchange theory provides a framework for evaluating how people manage social interactions by assessing costs and benefits to optimize their personal interests. Additionally, Negative reciprocity in social exchange is the tendency to counter to negative treatment with negative treatment (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In a work environment, employees may interact with their employers by providing their skills, time, and effort in return for monetary compensation, chances for career growth, or acknowledgement and respect. These exchanges establish the basis of the employment dynamics and influence employees' job satisfaction and commitment (LaGree et al., 2023). Gao-Urhahn et al. (2016) According to social exchange theory, as a worker's emotional connection to the organization grows, they are more likely to

respond positively to its actions. A cynical mindset among employees dampens interpersonal interactions and further accelerates feelings of disconnectedness from the workplace (Petitta & Ghezzi, 2023). However, incivility is a common condition which has a considerable impact on both cynicism and feelings of alienation.

Workplace Incivility and Employee Cynicism

Uncivil behavior triggers negative affect towards the organization as it permits an evaluative judgment where employees begin to condemn the organization and doubt its integrity (Reichers et al., 1997; Miner et al., 2019). Actions like talking down to someone, communicating with someone in an unprofessional manner, or leaving a coworker out of a crucial meeting, through which an individual may experience incivility that gradually undermines satisfaction and increases burnout (Mascaro et al., 2021). Moreover, an individual forms a direct negative attitude towards management after facing such behaviour. In order to assess cynical behaviour, (Megeirhi et al., 2020; Mishra & Afroz, 2024) empirically correlated cynicism with workplace incivility and its detrimental effects on employee well-being. In addition, when passive-aggressive statements are made and reciprocal treatment is disregarded in the workplace, it contributes to the emergence of cynicism (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Workplace incivility catalyzes the development of negative affect and distrust, which breed numerous negative feelings and ultimately lead to the perception that top management lacks integrity and fails to uphold core principles such as fairness, respect, and accountability (Abubakar et al., 2017; Agarwal et al., 2024) highlighted that a negative job-related state of mind is triggered through co-workers' uncivil behavior, and the relationship between them strengthens through cynical attitudes among employees. Research revealed that experiencing incivility and cynicism are important driving factors of job dissatisfaction and low commitment (Spence Laschinger et al., 2009). Employees subjected to workplace incivility often develop a sense of skepticism and engage in knowledge hiding, with organizational cynicism acting as a key psychological mechanism underlying this relationship (Anand et al., 2023). Moreover, findings from a cross-sectional study indicated a significant association between colleague incivility and elevated levels of life stress and job burnout (Viotti et al., 2021). The study suggested that exposure to disrespectful or undermining behavior from peers not only disrupts interpersonal dynamics at work but also contributes to broader psychological strain, manifesting in both personal stress and professional exhaustion. Therefore, characterization of workplace incivility is imperative for our increased understanding of behavioral tendencies that express distrust and unfavorable judgments about the organization.

H1a: Workplace incivility will be positively associated with cognitive cynicism

H1b: Workplace incivility will be positively associated with affective cynicism

H1c: Workplace incivility will be positively associated with behavioral cynicism

Cynicism and Work Alienation

Many recent studies (Li & Chen, 2018; Singh & Randhawa, 2022) have shown that cynical attitude is directly associated to feelings of alienation. Dean et al. (1998) characterize cynicism as “a negative attitude characterised by unfairness and distrust toward the intentions, motives, or actions of others, especially those in positions of authority or institutions such as organizations.” A qualitative study conducted by Yıldız & Şaylıkay (2014) provided insights into the interrelationship between the dimensions of cynicism and those of work alienation, illustrating how cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of cynicism are positively related

to the psychological components of alienation. The study Li & Chen (2018) offers empirical evidence that organizational cynicism significantly contributes to work alienation. Drawing upon Social Exchange Theory, their findings highlight that when employees perceive breaches in their psychological contract, it leads to elevated levels of cynicism, which in turn fosters feelings of alienation from their work roles. Depersonalization, often referred to as “cynicism,” has a significant positive correlation with job dissatisfaction and work alienation (Ilfie & Manthorpe, 2019). Employees who develop a cynical attitude toward their organization tend to exhibit reduced concern for its goals, values, and guiding principles. In addition, Jiang et al. (2019) conceptualized a model in which both cynical mindset and feelings of alienation serve as mediating mechanisms, explaining how authoritarian leadership fosters unsafe behaviors among employees. However, a direct association between cynicism and work alienation has also been identified, although the paper has predominantly emphasized their negative implications as a mediating variable. Durrah (2020) provides valuable empirical evidence on the interrelationship between organizational injustice, employee cynicism, and work alienation, where cynicism is positively associated with work alienation and also cynicism successfully mediates the role between unfairness and alienation. Employees’ strive to distance themselves psychologically when they begin to perceive the organization as lacking integrity, fairness, or authenticity (Abubakar et al., 2017), and this psychological withdrawal often manifests as disengagement. Therefore, these hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: Cognitive cynicism will be positively associated with work alienation

H2b: Affective cynicism will be positively associated with work alienation

H2c: Behavioral cynicism will be positively associated with work alienation

Workplace Incivility and Work Alienation

Xia et al. (2022) revealed a direct and positive linkage between employees experiencing uncivil behavior and their detachment from work. Moreover, job dissatisfaction, low career involvement, and job withdrawal stemming from uncivil actions in the workplace (Cortina et al., 2001) are recognized as critical indicators of deteriorating employee well-being. Collectively, these experiences directly add to the development of work alienation, as workers perceive their roles as meaningless, feel helpless within organizational structures, and experience emotional detachment (Kuriakose & Sreejesh, 2023). The accumulation of negative interpersonal interactions within the workplace attenuates employees’ sense of belonging and engagement, thereby fostering a state of work alienation. However, scholars have pointed out numerous factors may delineate the emergence of work alienation (Mottaz, 1981; Shantz et al., 2015; Nair & Vohra, 2010). In recent years, scholars have increasingly shifted their focus toward incivility as a critical antecedent of isolation and detachment at work (Haq et al., 2023). According to social exchange theory, workers may participate in interpersonal relationships by providing emotional support, sharing resources, or offering assistance to others in exchange for similar benefits in return. When a supervisor engages in workplace mistreatment, such as incivility or disrespectful behavior, this perceived violation of reciprocal norms undermines the foundational trust in the exchange relationship, leading to work alienation (Tam & Hoang, 2025). Additionally, coldness and lack of acknowledgement towards employees are considered prolonged and can have a detrimental effect on employees’ productivity (Hutton & Gates, 2008), commitment (Kabat-Farr et al., 2018), and psychological safety (Liu et al., 2020). Therefore, considering the above, we can conclude

that uncivil behavior in organization amplifies the effects of detachment from work or feelings of alienation. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Workplace Incivility will be positively associated with Work Alienation

Mediating Effect of Employee Cynicism

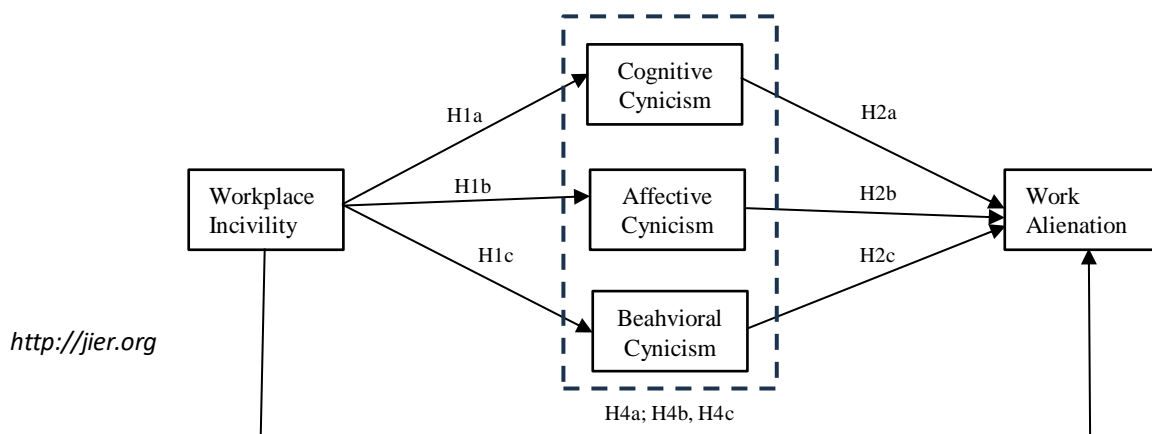
Cynicism is a negative affective state triggered by organizational phenomena, such as workplace politics, aggressive supervision, perceived injustice, and interpersonal incivility (Dean et al., 1998; Chiaburu et al., 2013). Low-intensity deviant behaviors—such as a dismissive attitude toward employees, disregard for their emotions, and belittling remarks—create a sense of betrayal and mistrust among employees toward the organization (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), and are increasingly recognized as salient antecedents of cynical attitude. For example, employees who have been spoken to in a condescending tone or subjected to dismissive remarks (Cortina et al., 2013) often develop a withdrawal mindset, leading to emotional detachment and decreased involvement in workplace activities. Work alienation refers to a psychological detachment from one’s work, typically occurring when employees perceive dishonesty or incivility, which results in feelings of powerlessness, disengagement, and a sense of meaninglessness (Tam & Hoang, 2025). Therefore, cynicism can play a mediating role in translating the adverse emotional experiences generated by workplace incivility into deeper states of work alienation. Furthermore, Uncivil conduct at work plays a major role in fostering cynical attitudes among employees and is linked to increased rates of absenteeism (Odermatt et al., 2018), job dissatisfaction (Sharma & Singh, 2016), and turnover intention (Namin et al., 2021). Research proclaims that a cynical attitude towards an organization mediates between uncivil behavior and knowledge hiding (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018). Manzoor et al. (2020) found that incivility significantly increases employee cynicism among electronic media professionals, and the cynical attitude further serves as an underlying mechanism in the association between incivility and turnover intention. While their study primarily focused on the mediating role of cynicism in the incivility–turnover intention linkage, it is evident that turnover intention has been conceptually and empirically associated with work alienation, as both reflect psychological withdrawal and a reduced feeling of connection within the organization (Aktürk & Yeşiltaş, 2024). Therefore, we formed these hypotheses:

H4a: Cognitive Cynicism will act as a mediator between Workplace Incivility and Work alienation

H4b: Affective Cynicism will act as a mediator between Workplace Incivility and Work Alienation

H4c: Behavioral Cynicism will act as a mediator between Workplace Incivility and Work Alienation

The Research Model



Methodology

Participants and Design of the Study

The present study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to investigate the mediating role of cynicism in the relationship between workplace incivility and work alienation among Information Technology (IT) employees. The NASSCOM report published in 2025 forecasts that the Indian tech industry is on track to reach \$300 billion in revenue by FY 2025–26, making employee well-being in this rapidly growing sector a strategic imperative. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire circulated electronically to IT professionals working in an organization located in the National Capital Region (NCR) via both online and personal visits. A targeted purposive sampling method focused on employees who have a minimum of one year of work experience, ensuring sufficient organizational exposure. The questionnaires were circulated to around 600 employees online and via personal visits to the organizations in January 2025. In total 359 responses were obtained, indicating response rate of 59%. Eighteen data entries were excluded due to receiving common responses with extreme values. Once the outliers were eliminated, we ended up with 334 responses. The demographic details of the respondents are given in Table 1.

Table 1 – Demographic characteristics of the sample

Category	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender		
Male	223	66.7%
Female	111	33.2%
2. Age		
21-25	179	53.5%
26-30	107	32.0%
31-35	39	11.6%
35 and more	9	2.6%
3. Education		
Graduation	200	59.8%
Post-graduation	81	24.2%
Others	53	15.8%
4. Marital status		
Married	95	28.4%
Unmarried	239	71.5%
5. Experience		
1-5	203	60.7%
6-10	108	32.3%
11-15	18	5.3%
15 and more	5	1.4%

(Source: Based on Primary Data)

Control variables

We statistically controlled the effect of age, gender, education, marital status, and experience in the study. These elements were controlled to eliminate their potential confounding

influence to examine the actual impact of the aforementioned relationships (Bernerth and Aguinis, 2016).

Measurement tools

Employees who experienced incivility were assessed using a 12-item scale developed by (Cortina et al., 2013). The scale asked respondents to indicate how often they encountered uncivil behavior from supervisors or colleagues. Sample questions such as, "In the past year, did you encounter a situation where any of your senior or colleagues made comments that were insulting or disrespectful towards you." The Cronbach alpha for this scale is reported to be 0.92. Employee Cynicism or negative attitude towards an organization is measured through a 13-item scale developed by (Brandes, 1997). The scale is considered reliable, as evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91. Further, an eight-item scale was developed by (Nair & Vohra, 2009), which was used to measure the sense of estrangement from the work of employees. A sample question is, "Work to me is more like a chore or burden." The reliability test for the scale yielded a value of 0.90. All questions were asked on a five-point frequency-based scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data Analysis

The study used SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0 in order to analyze data. Initially, the study utilized descriptive statistics and correlation. Subsequently, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was preferred in order to determine the validity and reliability of the study. Further, structural equation modelling was used to evaluate the conceptual model's fitness. SEM is more appropriate for assessing various interconnected dependent associations within a framework of a study (Hair et al., 2006). Additionally, mediation analysis was employed to investigate the underlying mechanism in the paper.

Results

Descriptive and correlation assessment

Table 2 depicts the average values and standard deviation for variables, a correlation matrix, and the square root of AVE ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$). Correlation analysis revealed a significant association between workplace incivility and work alienation ($r = 0.51, p < 0.01$), as well as a positive link between all dimensions of employee cynicism and workplace incivility. Likewise, cognitive cynicism indicated a positive association with work alienation ($r = 0.48, p < 0.01$), affective cynicism showed a favored relationship with alienation ($r = 0.49, p < 0.01$), and behavioral cynicism also showed a positive association with feelings of alienation ($r = 0.53, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the correlation coefficients were satisfactory and revealed the least signs of multicollinearity (Cohen, 1988). Thus, these results established preliminary support for further analysis.

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics and intercorrelation among variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Workplace Incivility	3.41	0.75	0.74				
2. Cognitive Cynicism	3.27	0.99	0.55**	0.80			
3. Affective Cynicism	3.04	0.86	0.53**	0.54**	0.78		
4. Behavioral Cynicism	3.29	1.01	0.62**	0.72**	0.71**	0.79	
5. Work alienation	3.32	0.88	0.51**	0.48**	0.49**	0.53**	0.74

N = 334, ** = correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, Values for AVE square roots are in bold font (Source: Based on Primary Data)

Measurement Model

In order to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs, both convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated using a combination of factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), the square root of AVE (\sqrt{AVE}), HTMT ratio, and fit indices from Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Every item demonstrated factor loadings exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.60, signifying a strong indicator of reliability. The values of Cronbach's alpha varied between 0.83 and 0.92, and Composite Reliability (CR) values were between 0.83 and 0.93, confirming the internal consistency of the constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs was above or close to the acceptable threshold of 0.50, supporting convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model were also within acceptable limits: CMIN/DF = 1.715, TLI = 0.98, CFI = 0.95, and RMSEA = 0.047, indicating an overall good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, discriminant validity was supported by the observation that the inter-construct correlation coefficients were consistently lower than the square roots of their respective AVE values (Table 2). Subsequently, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) supported discriminant validity, with values below the recommended cut-off of 0.79 (Henseler et al., 2015). These results collectively support the adequacy and robustness of the measurement model.

Table 3: Reliability test, CR and AVE of study variables

Variables	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Workplace Incivility		0.93	0.932	0.556
WI1	0.775			
WI2	0.727			
WI3	0.763			
WI4	0.785			
WI5	0.716			
WI6	0.708			
WI7	0.717			
WI8	0.732			
WI10	0.749			
WI11	0.756			
WI12	0.772			
Cognitive Cynicism		0.90	0.902	0.650
CC1	0.821			
CC2	0.844			
CC3	0.834			
CC4	0.803			
CC5	0.729			

Affective Cynicism		0.83	0.912	0.622
AC1	0.786			
AC3	0.810			
AC4	0.793			
Behavioral Cynicism		0.86	0.835	0.628
BC1	0.750			
BC2	0.805			
BC3	0.829			
BC4	0.769			
Work Alienation		0.91	0.908	0.554
WA1	0.815			
WA2	0.791			
WA3	0.685			
WA4	0.713			
WA5	0.728			
WA6	0.734			
WA7	0.732			
WA8	0.749			

WI: Workplace Incivility, CC: Cognitive Cynicism, AC: Affective Cynicism, and OBC: Behavioral Cynicism and WA: Work Alienation (Source:Based om Primary Data)
Structural Model

The Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF, $p < .001$) was 2.136, which falls within the acceptable range of ≤ 3 , indicating a reasonable model fit (Kline, 2016). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.05, suggesting a close approximate fit of the model to the data (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). The other fit indices also supported the model's adequacy: Fit Index (IFI = 0.925), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI = 0.918), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.925)—all of which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0,7, which is acceptable for structural models in social sciences. These indices collectively indicate that the structural model demonstrates acceptable fit with the observed data, providing support for the hypothesized relationships.

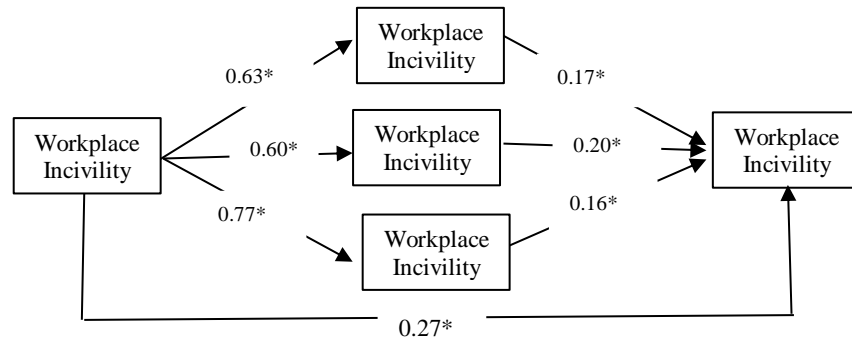
Common Method Bias Analysis

All variables were measured using the same instrument, which posed a risk of common method bias (CMB). We conducted Harman's single-factor test through an unrotated principal component analysis in SPSS to assess this. The findings indicated that the initial factor explained merely 39.30% of the overall variance, which is considerably under the 50% mark. This implies that common method bias is not a major issue in this study.

Hypothesis testing

Workplace incivility has a significant and positive connection with Cognitive cynicism ($b = 0.630$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H1a was accepted. Meanwhile, workplace incivility has a positive association with both affective cynicism ($b = 0.600$, $p < 0.05$) and behavioral cynicism ($b = 0.775$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H1b and H1c were proven. All the dimensions of cynicism established significant positive relationships with work alienation. Moreover, Cognitive cynicism ($b = 0.174$, $p < 0.01$), affective cynicism ($b = 0.204$, $p < 0.001$) and behavioral cynicism ($b = 0.162$, $p < 0.01$) established significant positive relationships with work

alienation. Hence, H2a, H2b and H2c were proven. Likewise, the association between workplace incivility and work alienation was reported to be positive and significant ($b = 0.275, p < 0.01$). Hence, H3 was accepted.



Bootstrapping was used in AMOS to analyse the mediation effects in the research model, with the sample iterated for 5,000 iterations and 95% confidence interval. To begin with, the indirect influence of cognitive cynicism in the association between uncivil actions and work alienation was examined. The indirect and direct paths were found to be significant as the lower and upper bounds do not consist of zero in between ($b = 0.191, 0.099/0.299, p < 0.05$). Hence, the findings depict partial mediation for the mediation path of cognitive cynicism between incivility and work alienation. Thus, H4a was accepted. The role of affective cynicism, another dimension of organizational cynicism, in mediating the relationship between workplace incivility and work alienation was analysed and discovered to have a positive mediated effect on the relationship between incivility and work alienation ($b = 0.202, 0.105/0.324, p < 0.05$). Hence, H4b is also proven. At last, the mediating role of behavioral cynicism was checked. It was found that the last dimension of employee cynicism positively mediated the relationship between workplace incivility and work alienation ($b = 0.262, 0.156/0.379, p < 0.05$). Here, Partial mediation was observed since both direct and indirect effects were significant and pointed in the same direction. Hence, H4c was proven.

Table 4 – Mediation Analysis

Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	95% Confidence Interval	Significance (p-value)	Mediation Type
Workplace Incivility → Cognitive Cynicism → Work Alienation	0.422	0.191	[0.099, 0.299]	< 0.05	Partial Mediation
Workplace Incivility → Affective Cynicism → Work Alienation	0.415	0.202	[0.105, 0.324]	<0.05	Partial Mediation
Workplace Incivility → Behavioral Cynicism → Work Alienation	0.348	0.262	[0.156, 0.379]	<0.05	Partial Mediation

(Source: Results interpreted based on Primary Data)

Discussion

Grounded in Affective Events Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this study evaluated the positive association between workplace incivility and work alienation, with employee cynicism acting as a mediating mechanism. The results of the quantitative analyses supported the hypothesized relationships. The results indicated that all three dimensions of cynicism—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—partially mediate the relationship between incivility and alienation. Collectively, these variables exert a detrimental influence on employees' mental and psychological well-being. Considering high interaction frequency, interpersonal exposure, and emotional investment commonly observed in the service sector (e.g., the IT sector and Banking) (Leidner, 1999), it is imperative to address these variables collectively. Moreover, the study revealed that employees who were frequently subjected to condescending tones, dismissive remarks, or disrespectful behaviors developed strong feelings of cynicism, leading to psychological withdrawal, a lack of engagement, and detachment from their job roles. This aligns with affective event theory, which posits that individuals facing negative social interactions frame a hostile image towards the employing organization or institutions, leading to diminished commitment and detachment from work. Meanwhile, Social Exchange Theory (SET) suggests that when employees sense a breach in the reciprocal norms of respect and trust—such as through experiences of incivility—they are likely to withdraw affective and behavioral investment in the organization, thereby intensifying feelings of isolation, powerlessness, and ultimately, work alienation.

These findings not only supported but also extended previous research (Yıldız & Şaylıkay, 2014) by introducing cognitive, affective, as well as behavioral cynicism as mediators between incivility and alienation. Later, the direct relationship between employees experiencing supervisor's incivility and their feeling of being alienated at work, wherein alienation also played as a mediator between the uncivil behavior and job search (Tam & Hoang, 2025). Additionally, Manzoor et al. (2020) evaluated the relationship between uncivil behavior and turnover intention, and cynicism played a mediating role in the relationship between them. Similarly, cynicism has been found to mediate the effects of various organizational stressors on negative employee outcomes (Bang & Reio Jr, 2017). However, its mediating role in the association between uncivil behavior and work alienation remains underexplored, representing an imperative gap in the existing literature. One of the possible explanations is that it can mediate between incivility and alienation—cynicism is something that arises among workers when their dignity is violated, which, in turn, contributes to employees' underperformance and detachment towards duties and responsibilities. Additionally, the separate interrogation of each dimension of cynicism as a mediating factor between workplace stressors, such as incivility and alienation, is missing. Considering the above, this paper makes a humble attempt to bridge this gap by empirically examining the mediating roles of cognitive, affective, and behavioral cynicism in the relationship between workplace incivility and work alienation.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the growing body of organizational behavior literature. First, it extends the application of Social Exchange Theory and Affective Event Theory by empirically examining how incivility in the workplace, as a form of low-intensity deviant behavior, contributes to work alienation, with organizational cynicism serving as an explanatory mediating mechanism. Second, while much prior scholarship has focused predominantly on positive work attitudes—such as job satisfaction, affective commitment, and job involvement (Teh & Sun, 2012; Ryu & Moon, 2019)—this study shifts

the spotlight to more adverse psychological states, namely organizational cynicism and work alienation. By addressing these negatively valenced constructs, the study addresses an important gap in understanding the darker side of work life. Third, the research adds a novel geographical dimension to the literature. Most existing studies exploring cynicism and alienation have been concentrated in Western settings (Evans et al., 2010; Shantz et al., 2015; Hai et al., 2025). In contrast, the current study provides empirical validation of these associations in the Indian service sector, enhancing the theoretical framework's cross-cultural applicability and offering context-specific insights. Fourth, by positioning organizational cynicism as a mediator between workplace incivility and work alienation, this study extends to a nuanced understanding of the psychological pathways through which uncivil interactions translate into more profound emotional disengagement from work. These findings suggest that reducing cynicism could serve as a strategic intervention to mitigate feelings of alienation and disengagement.

From a practical standpoint, the study urges organizations—particularly in high-pressure service industries such as IT and banking—to proactively address workplace incivility to prevent escalating negative psychological states. Cynicism, which often manifests as adverse attitude generated among employees, can be reduced through transparent communication, ethical leadership, and consistent managerial behavior (Naus et al., 2007). Furthermore, given the rising participation of younger generations in the workforce, organizations must create inclusive platforms where employees feel heard and involved in decision-making processes. Such participatory practices can help foster a perception of trust and diminish the emergence of cynical attitudes (Jiang et al., 2019). Likewise, to counteract work alienation, organizations should prioritize relationship-building efforts among supervisors, peers, and subordinates. Empowering employees through job autonomy, meaningful work assignments, and developmental opportunities can improve their connection to their roles and reduce feelings of estrangement (Li & Chen, 2018). In sectors such as Indian banking and IT, where role overload and emotional fatigue are prevalent, organizations should also invest in regular psychological support, counselling programs, and stress-reduction interventions. Doing so could help alleviate burnout and disengagement, thus curbing the rise of alienation among employees.

Limitations and Future Scope

The study has several limitations and a notable scope for future research. This study is unable to encompass the other sectors, which restricts the generalizability of its findings across diverse organizational settings. Other service sectors also revolve around interpersonal interactions, indicating that the outcomes and implications of this study may also be relevant to these sectors as well, thereby providing scope for future research and practical applications beyond the current context. Moreover, for more reliable results and to minimise the issue of common method bias, a longitudinal approach may be adopted in future research. The current study examined a specific set of variables within a distinct cultural setting; therefore, it may be beneficial to consider other relevant factors pertaining to different cultural and organizational contexts. The current model does not incorporate potential moderating variables that could influence the strength or direction of the relationships among the constructs. Hence, future studies may incorporate moderation analysis to evaluate the model more comprehensively, capturing the boundary effects of the aforementioned relationships.

Conclusion

The work environment has the power to mitigate problems such as alienation, lack of commitment, isolation, and emotional exhaustion by fostering inclusivity, mutual respect, and supportive interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, these issues are prevalent across various service sectors, including healthcare, education, insurance, banking and hospitality, where emotional labor and interpersonal interactions are particularly profound. However, information technology stands out for its demanding work environments, characterized by high attrition rates, unethical approaches in managing employee performance, a dynamic work environment and increased competition (IT sector, TI paper on IT people). Despite all, the issue of being alienated is acute (Nair & Vohra, 2010) and therefore, this paper offers a model that examines the underlying psychological mechanisms linking workplace incivility to work alienation, with employee cynicism serving as a mediating variable. Work alienation is a commonly used notion in psychology, yet its underlying mechanisms, contemporary antecedents, and evolving manifestations in modern workplaces remain insufficiently explored (Chiaburu et al., 2014). Workplace incivility and cynicism emerged as reliable predictors of work alienation, where a direct and significant relationship was established between workplace incivility and work alienation. Moreover, Employee cynicism significantly mediates this relationship, as complementary mediation was demonstrated across all three dimensions—cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Drawing on the Affective Event Theory and Social Exchange Theory, this paper addresses the aforementioned associations by articulating how negative interpersonal experiences engender a cynical attitude and ultimately influence the sense of belongingness. The study suggested that being treated with disrespect or disregard in the workplace significantly contributes to negative emotional outcomes, including cynicism and alienation.

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