



The cynical world of tourism employees in the shadow of toxic leadership

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism among employees in the tourism sector, focusing on interactions between personnel and managers in tourism enterprises. Toxic leadership, characterized by the harmful misuse of authority, is linked to reduced job satisfaction, increased turnover, and diminished organizational trust. Organizational cynicism, a consequence of such leadership, manifests itself in employees' negative attitudes, skepticism, and disengagement toward their work environment, ultimately undermining organizational effectiveness. The research incorporated in this paper investigates how toxic leadership influences employees' perceptions of organizational cynicism, analyzing toxic leadership through five sub-dimensions—abusive supervision, narcissistic behavior, authoritarianism, unpredictability, and self-promotion and organizational cynicism through three sub-dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral cynicism. The study was conducted in Samsun, Turkey, targeting employees from 13 four- and five-star hotels and 7 food and beverage establishments. Due to time and cost constraints, a purposive sample was drawn from 8 licensed accommodation establishments and 7 food and beverage venues in the Ilkadım and Atakum districts. Data were collected via questionnaires, with 272 distributed and 180 valid responses analyzed after excluding incomplete submissions. Employing a quantitative approach, the findings highlight the significant impact of toxic leadership on fostering organizational cynicism and offer actionable recommendations for tourism enterprises. These include leadership training, promoting open communication, and establishing feedback mechanisms to mitigate toxic behaviors, thereby enhancing employee well-being and fostering sustainable organizational practices in the tourism sector.

Contribution/Originality: This study uniquely examines the interplay between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism in the tourism sector, an underexplored area. By analyzing toxic leadership's sub-dimensions and their impact on cynicism's cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects, it fills a critical literature gap, offering theoretical insights and practical strategies for fostering sustainable tourism workplaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the prevailing perspective, leaders are often regarded as life coaches who inspire, positively influence, and guide their employees (Ashfaq & Ahmad, 2023). However, not all leaders consistently evoke positive emotions or influence their followers as effectively as those who exhibit constructive leadership behaviors. Common characteristics of leadership styles typically focus on enhancing employee morale and motivation, fostering a vision, and increasing productivity (Shoukry, Abd El-Halem, & El-Saied Mortada, 2024). In contrast, toxic leadership operates in direct opposition to these attributes. Defined as a destructive leadership style that diminishes employee motivation, adversely affects job satisfaction, and causes disruptions in organizational culture (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), toxic leadership not only undermines employee performance but also erodes organizational commitment and

trust (Aasland, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2008). As a result, toxic leaders contribute to resignations, poor performance, stress, depression, conflict, and workplace bullying, exerting a detrimental impact on both individuals and organizations.

Employees affected by the negative behaviors of leaders within an organization may experience feelings such as a desire to leave their job, indifference toward work, persistent complaints, and hopelessness regarding the future of the workplace, leading to organizational silence (Cleary, West, & Hungerford, 2023). As a result of such negative leadership behaviors, the concept of organizational cynicism emerges, characterized by emotions such as distrust, hopelessness, disappointment, anger, or contempt toward the organization or group (Chaudhry, Hameed, & Ahmed, 2023).

Employees' exposure to organizational cynicism can adversely impact both individual performance and the social dynamics within the organization (Pelit & Pelit, 2014). When managers fail to adopt positive leadership styles in their organizations, it fosters cynicism, resulting in negative attitudes toward the organization and creating a detrimental effect on the organization as a whole (Soomro, Saraih, & Tunku Ahmad, 2022). This negative impact is particularly pronounced in human-centric industries. The tourism sector, a service industry where leadership styles significantly influence employee motivation and job performance, is notably affected. As service quality in the tourism sector largely depends on employee performance, toxic leadership behaviors directly impact the industry. Negative leadership experiences can lead to workplace stress and loss of motivation among employees, potentially reducing service quality in the sector. Consequently, minimizing or entirely eliminating toxic leadership in the tourism industry is a critical necessity for both employee well-being and organizational success (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2016).

While the literature extensively examines toxic leadership (Grunberg, McManigle, & Barry, 2021; Rahmani, Ghanbari, & Ardalan, 2022; Shoukry et al., 2024) and organizational cynicism (Magdy & Salem, 2024; Mohammad, Abd El Rahman, Ali, & Ali, 2022; Pelit & Pelit, 2014) as separate constructs, studies exploring their interplay, particularly in human-centric industries like tourism, remain scarce. Existing research predominantly focuses on sectors such as education (Alanezi, 2024; Ghanbari & Majooni, 2022; Rahmani et al., 2022; Snow, Hickey, Blom, O'Mahony, & Mannix-McNamara, 2021) healthcare (Abdallah & Mostafa, 2021; Eidipour, Yousefy, Eidy, & Zardoshtian, 2020; Mohammad et al., 2022; Mousa, Abdelgaffar, Aboramadan, & Chaouali, 2021) and business (Magdy & Salem, 2024; Rauf, Mahmood, Naveed, & Yen, 2024; Saremi, Mooghali, & Kamani, 2022) with limited awareness to service-oriented industries. Notably, no studies have specifically investigated the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism in the tourism sector, despite its reliance on employee performance for service quality. Previous studies often fail to address the multidimensional nature of toxic leadership encompassing abusive supervision, narcissism, authoritarianism, unpredictability, and self-promotion and its specific impact on cynicism's cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Ahmed, Zhang, Fouad, Mousa, & Nour, 2024; Eidipour et al., 2020; Farghaly Abdelaliem & Abou Zeid, 2023; Rahmani et al., 2022; Saremi et al., 2022). This gap is critical, as toxic leadership in tourism can exacerbate workplace stress, reduce motivation, and compromise service quality, adversely affecting organizational success (Einarsen et al., 2016).

This study addresses these shortcomings by examining the impact of toxic leadership on organizational cynicism among tourism sector employees, focusing on how these constructs interact within organizational contexts. By analyzing toxic leadership's sub-dimensions and their influence on cynicism, the research fills a critical gap in the literature. It offers a nuanced understanding of these phenomena in a human-centric industry, contributing to theoretical advancements and practical strategies for mitigating toxic behaviors. As such, the findings are expected to guide tourism managers and human resource professionals in fostering healthier workplace environments, enhancing employee well-being, and improving service quality, thereby providing actionable insights for both academia and industry.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. *The Rebellion Behind the Smile: Toxic Leadership and Organizational Cynicism in the Tourism Industry*

The tourism industry, characterized by intense human interactions, is particularly susceptible to the pronounced effects of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism. Toxic leaders perceive all employees, except themselves, as lazy, incompetent, and untrustworthy. Defined by narcissistic traits, toxic leaders are described as lacking empathy, arrogant, devaluing subordinates, and devoid of compassion (Semedo, Salvador, Dos Santos, Pais, & Mónico, 2022). They view themselves as exempt from societal norms, exhibiting no remorse while exploiting their subordinates. Consequently, toxic leadership can be characterized as a leadership style that inflicts harm on subordinates, peers, the work environment, and the organization as a whole (Grunberg et al., 2021). Managers exhibiting toxic leadership behaviors diminish employees' work motivation, foster critical and negative attitudes toward the organization. This, in turn, reduces employees' organizational commitment, increases turnover intentions, and weakens organizational culture. Furthermore, it leads to individual and organizational issues such as decreased job satisfaction, feelings of burnout, and alienation from the organization (Diab Ghanem Atalla & Hassan Mostafa, 2023; Dobbs PhD, 2014). In tourism businesses, managers or supervisors displaying toxic behaviors negatively impact the organization's development from the perspective of employees, leading to critical and negative attitudes toward the organization. Particularly in the tourism sector, employees' encounters with toxic leadership can yield more detrimental outcomes due to the industry's inherent high stress and intense workload. Employees' negative attitudes toward their organizations directly influence customer satisfaction and overall organizational performance (Diab Ghanem Atalla, & Hassan Mostafa, 2023). Characterized by distrust and negative attitudes toward the organization, these outcomes of toxic behaviors can adversely affect both employee productivity and customer satisfaction (Shoukry et al., 2024). A significant finding from research on toxic leadership in the tourism sector reveals that toxic leaders employ various strategies to undermine employee motivation. These strategies include neglecting fundamental rights such as wages, insurance, leave, vacation, and rest periods, frequently providing negative feedback, and denying timely promotions (Farghaly Abdelaliem & Abou Zeid, 2023). Such negative leadership behaviors significantly impair employees' job satisfaction and motivation, consequently diminishing their job performance. The violation and disregard of these rights engender downcast feelings, anxiety, and stress among tourism employees. Over time, these employees may develop cynical sentiments, resulting in a loss of motivation. This loss of motivation may inadvertently manifest in behaviors that negatively affect tourists (Pelit & Pelit, 2014). In a globalized and continuously evolving world, effective tourism marketing and management necessitate that managers refrain from toxic behaviors while striving to reduce employees' organizational cynicism and enhance their commitment to the organization. Consequently, efforts to create effective tourism businesses should prioritize eliminating managers' negative behaviors, preventing employees from developing negative beliefs and attitudes, and fostering positive emotional states (Farghaly Abdelaliem & Abou Zeid, 2023). Therefore, developing positive leadership behaviors and minimizing employees' feelings of organizational cynicism in tourism businesses are critical for achieving sustainable success. Adopting management strategies that emphasize effective, employee-centered leadership approaches will contribute to mitigating these adverse outcomes (Ashfaq & Ahmad, 2023). Toxic leadership is characterized by the misuse of authority and power, which undermines employee morale and negatively impacts organizational effectiveness. The cynical attitudes arising from employees' distrust and negative emotions toward the organization, triggered by exposure to such behaviors (Mousa, 2018; Reed, 2004), are likely to affect tourists in the long term. This underscores the importance of understanding how these two phenomena toxic leadership and organizational cynicism, influence tourism employees.

2.2. *The Relationship Between Toxic Leadership and Organizational Cynicism and Hypothesis Development*

Organizational management processes are inherently complex structures (Reed, 2004). Challenges arising during these processes can hinder organizations from operating effectively and achieving their objectives.

Organizations encompass intricate management procedures, and issues within these processes can further impair organizational performance and goal attainment. Consequently, in addition to managerial performance in organizational processes, leadership and management styles are of paramount importance. The leadership style of each manager may vary depending on cultural contexts, organizational objectives, structures, and environments (Rahmani et al., 2022). Leadership styles may also be influenced by employees' characteristics, expectations, and competencies. While benevolent managerial behaviors can foster improved organizational relationships and facilitate the achievement of intended goals, negative leadership attitudes can lead to organizational weakening, deterioration of the work environment, and loss of employee motivation (Eidipour et al., 2020). One such negative leadership style is toxic leadership. For an individual to be considered toxic, they must be exposed to a toxic substance (Milosevic, Maric, & Lončar, 2020). Exposure to toxic substances is a prerequisite for physical poisoning; however, individuals may also experience psychological poisoning through their emotions and thoughts (Grunberg et al., 2021). Psychological poisoning can manifest in various forms and settings, with one of the most prominent being the workplace, where individuals are exposed to toxic behaviors (Aasland et al., 2008).

From this perspective, toxic leadership is recognized as a source of organizational problems. Among the issues observed in organizations, organizational cynicism, which has been studied in relation to various leadership styles, stands out as a significant concern (Fatima & Majeed, 2023). Organizational cynicism is a complex attitude characterized by heightened perceptions of injustice and distrust within or toward an organization. This attitude not only leads to inappropriate actions but also encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes (Durrah, Chaudhary, & Gharib, 2019). Based on these insights, the following hypothesis was developed to examine the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism:

H₁: There is a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and their organizational cynicism attitudes.

Organizational cynicism can also be defined as a psychological process arising from pessimism about the future and the disappointment of unfulfilled expectations (Pelit & Pelit, 2014). Such pessimistic feelings lead individuals to believe that resolving or improving any issue within the organization is impossible (Rahmani et al., 2022). Consequently, these individuals adopt a pessimistic attitude, believing that efforts are futile, often fueled by the perception that even minor issues are insurmountable. This attitude can hinder organizational progress and development (Saremi et al., 2022). Thus, organizational cynicism becomes a factor that impedes organizational advancement and stifles innovation (Mousa, 2018). Given these consequences, it is inevitable that toxic leadership behaviors exhibited by managers will foster cynical attitudes among subordinates and peers.

Researchers have identified five dimensions to measure toxic leadership. These dimensions, also adopted in this study, include the first dimension of self-promotion, characterized by leaders who adopt an optimistic demeanor in the presence of superiors, evade responsibility in unsuccessful environments, and consider any means justifiable for personal advancement (Diab Ghanem Atalla & Hassan Mostafa, 2023). In this context, toxic leaders prioritize their own interests, investing in admirers and devotees only when it benefits them, and appropriating the group's successes as their own. Over time, this self-promotion can lead employees, who bear the actual responsibilities, to feel that their rights are being undermined, thereby fostering cynical attitudes (Magdy & Salem, 2024). Based on this assumption regarding the relationship between the self-promotion dimension of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism, the following hypothesis was developed:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between the self-promotion dimension of employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.

Another dimension exhibited by such leaders is unpredictability, stemming from their lack of emotional control. In this phase, leaders may display sudden outbursts of anger or excessive displays of courtesy. Additionally, their constantly shifting moods, coupled with changing goals and instructions, can drain employees' time and energy (Grunberg et al., 2021). This results in a negative workplace atmosphere and reduced employee motivation.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between the unpredictability dimension of employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.

The dimension of abusiveness is characterized by leaders who constantly belittle, humiliate, and remind subordinates of their mistakes or past failures, making them feel perpetually incompetent and inadequate (Dobbs PhD, 2014). Such leaders suppress employees' creativity, create unrest, and lower motivation within the organization, adversely affecting employee performance. In the long term, this leadership style diminishes employees' commitment and satisfaction, fosters cynical attitudes, and negatively impacts the organization's overall efficiency (Ahmed et al., 2024). Based on the assumption that employees' cynical feelings toward the organization are related to the abusive behaviors exhibited by toxic leaders, the following hypothesis was developed:

H₄: There is a positive relationship between the abusiveness dimension of employees' toxic leadership perceptions and organizational cynicism.

In the fourth dimension, narcissism is characterized by toxic leaders' tendency to view themselves as superior to others, driven by a desire for power (Dobbs & Do, 2019). These leaders, who exhibit excessive self-admiration, lack empathy, derive their authority from their position, expect admiration and praise from subordinates, are resistant to criticism, and respond defensively to feedback, create issues such as distrust, loss of motivation, and team discord among employees (Milosevic et al., 2020). The toxicity resulting from such behaviors gradually leads to employees' cynicism, both individually and organizationally (Farghaly Abdelaliem & Abou Zeid, 2023). Considering these factors and the assumption that narcissistic behaviors exhibited by toxic leaders are related to employees' organizational cynicism, the following hypothesis was developed:

H₅: There is a positive relationship between the narcissism dimension of employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.

Toxic leadership, characterized by an authoritarian dimension where the leader tightly controls subordinates' work and predominantly makes decisions unilaterally, often exhibits strict adherence to corporate policies and procedures while resisting the adoption of new ideas and methods (Semedo et al., 2022). This leadership style, which stifles innovation and team engagement, is generally considered undesirable in modern organizations. Consequently, the extent to which such leaders' personal needs impact the organization's overarching goals and healthy workplace relationships represents a critical issue (Fatima & Majeed, 2023). While the charismatic and ambitious demeanor of these leaders may occasionally yield success, it also poses potential risks to long-term managerial and leadership effectiveness (Pelit & Pelit, 2014; Shoukry et al., 2024). In light of these considerations, the study proposes that the rigid authoritarian behaviors exhibited by toxic leaders may be associated with employees' experiences of organizational cynicism, leading to the following hypothesis:

H₆: There is a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of the authoritarian dimension of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.

Organizational cynicism arises from the interaction of various factors. For example, it may be related to perceptions of injustice caused by leaders, such as unfair or subjective reward systems or the prioritization of personal relationships in promotions (Semedo et al., 2022). Perceptions of distrust, on the other hand, may stem from a lack of transparency in leadership, information withholding, or manipulative behaviors. The cognitive dimension of this attitude involves negative beliefs about the organization, such as the notion that effort is futile because promotions depend solely on personal connections, which serves as an indicator of organizational cynicism (Mousa, 2018). The affective dimension of organizational cynicism is reflected in emotions such as anger, frustration, and hopelessness, which employees experience in response to the leader's narcissistic, self-promoting, authoritarian, abusive, or unpredictable behaviors (Dobbs PhD, 2014). When these affective responses escalate beyond mere expression and translate into actions, they represent the behavioral dimension of organizational cynicism (Ahmed et al., 2024; Dobbs PhD, 2014; Mousa, 2018). Such actions may manifest in various forms, including turnover, disengagement from work, or behaviors that negatively affect intra-organizational social

relationships. In summary, organizational cynicism is a complex attitude associated with perceptions of injustice and distrust within or toward the organization. It encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions and can significantly influence organizational dynamics in the aftermath of toxic leadership behaviors (Chaudhry et al., 2023; Eidipour et al., 2020). Building on this premise, the study assumes that employees' emotions related to the dimensions of organizational cynicism (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) are associated with each dimension of toxic leadership (self-promotion, unpredictability, narcissism, abusiveness, and authoritarianism), leading to the following hypothesis:

H₇: There is a positive relationship between the dimensions of toxic leadership and the dimensions of organizational cynicism.

3. METHODOLOGY

This methodology provides a robust framework for examining the interplay between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism in the tourism sector. While the findings are context-specific, rigorous sampling, data collection, and ethical protocols ensure the study's reliability and validity, offering a foundation for further research in human-centric industries. Ethical issues were meticulously addressed throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ondokuz Mayıs University Institutional Review Board on 23.02.2024, ensuring adherence to ethical standards for human subjects research (Ref. No 2024-127). Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

3.1. Research Model and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether there is a relationship between tourism employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism. To this end, the collected data were analyzed based on the proposed research model outlined below. The model examines whether a relationship exists between toxic leadership, categorized into its sub-dimensions (self-promotion, unpredictability, narcissism, abusiveness, and authoritarianism), and organizational cynicism, divided into its sub-dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral).

Figure 1 illustrates the research model showing the relationship between toxic leadership and cynicism.

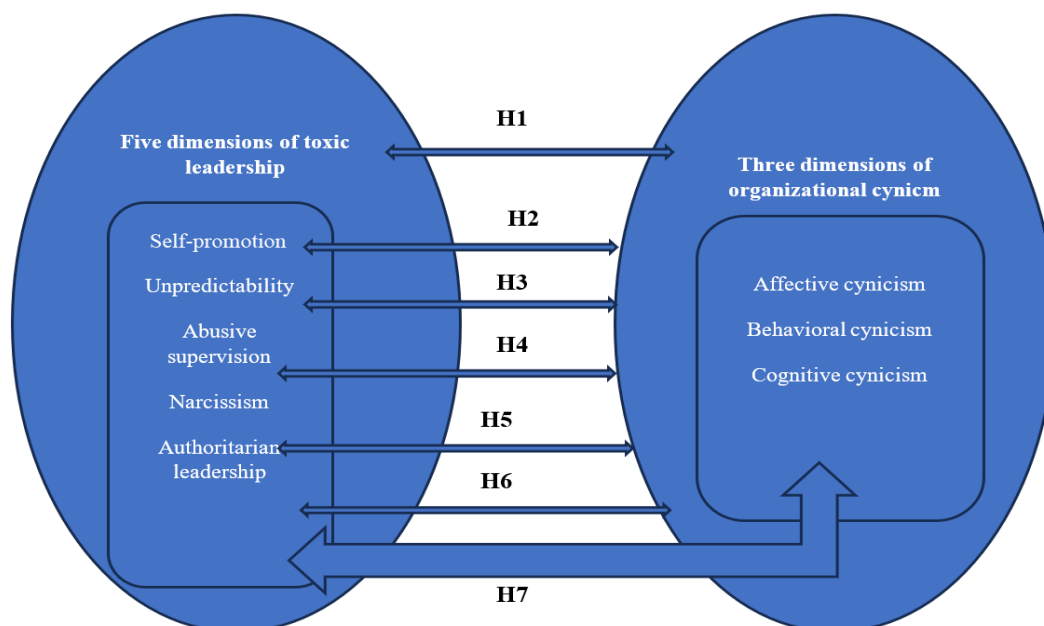


Figure 1. Proposed research model.

3.2. Population and Sample

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism among tourism sector employees in Samsun, Türkiye. The research population comprised personnel employed in 13 four- and five-star hotels and 7 food and beverage establishments, all holding tourism operation licenses according to the records of the [Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism \(2024\)](#). These establishments were selected due to their prominence in Samsun's tourism industry, a key economic driver in the region, and their reliance on human-centric service delivery, which aligns with the study's focus on leadership dynamics and employee attitudes.

Given the logistical constraints of time and cost, accessing the entire population was deemed infeasible. Consequently, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure the inclusion of representative establishments. The sample was drawn from 8 four- and five-star accommodation establishments and 7 food and beverage venues, all located in the İlkadım and Atakum districts of Samsun, which are central hubs for tourism activity. These establishments were chosen based on their operational scale, employee diversity, and accessibility, as verified through the [Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism \(2024\)](#) database. This sampling approach aimed to capture a cross-section of tourism personnel exposed to varying leadership practices, thereby enhancing the study's relevance to the research objectives.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism. The questionnaire was developed based on validated scales from prior literature, with items adapted to the tourism context to ensure cultural and sectoral relevance. A pilot test was conducted with 20 employees from a single hotel to assess the instrument's clarity and reliability, resulting in minor revisions to item wording. The final questionnaire was distributed to 272 employees across the selected establishments between March and May 2024. Of the 272 questionnaires distributed, 194 were returned, yielding a response rate of 71.3%. Following a thorough review, 14 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete or inconsistent responses, resulting in a final sample of 180 valid questionnaires.

The sample size, while constrained by resource limitations, was deemed sufficient for exploratory analysis, given the study's focus on a specific geographic and sectoral context. However, the limited sample size and non-probabilistic sampling method may restrict the generalizability of findings beyond the sampled establishments, a limitation acknowledged in the study.

Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the tourism personnel participating in the study, with the findings presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Findings related to employees' individual characteristics.

Demographic information	Demographic category	Frequency	%
Gender	Female	64	35.6
	Male	116	64.4
Age	20 years and younger	13	7.2
	21–30 years	71	39.4
	31–40 years	77	42.8
	41–55 years	16	8.9
	56 years and older	3	1.7
Marital status	Married	85	47.2
	Single	95	52.8
Education level	Primary education	3	1.7
	High school	113	62.8
	Bachelor's degree	56	31.1
	Master's degree and above	8	4.4
Department	Front office	35	19.4
	Housekeeping	20	11.1
	Food and beverage	125	69.4
Business type	Accommodation business	63	35

Demographic information	Demographic category	Frequency	%
	Food and beverage business	117	65
Working hours at current workplace	1 year or less	57	31.7
	2-5 years	57	31.7
	3-9 years	48	26.7
	10-15 years	13	7.2
	16 years and above	5	2.8
Position	Manager	6	3.3
	Supervisor	26	14.4
	Employee	148	82.2
Duration of employment in the sector	1 year or less	12	6.7
	2-5 years	26	14.4
	3-9 years	40	22.2
	10-15 years	74	41.1
	16 years and above	28	15.6

Upon examining the descriptive statistics, the gender distribution indicates that male employees (64.4%) outnumber female employees (35.6%). The majority of personnel fall within the 21–40 age range (82.2%), while employees aged 20 and younger (7.2%) and those aged 41–55 (8.9%) are less common. Employees aged 56 and older (1.7%) are almost entirely absent. Regarding marital status, the distribution is nearly balanced, with 47.2% married and 52.8% single. Analysis of education levels reveals that the majority of employees have a high school education (62.8%). In terms of department and type of establishment, a significant proportion of employees work in the food and beverage department (69.4%) and food and beverage establishments (65%).

When examining the duration of employment at the current workplace, the majority of employees have been employed for 1–5 years (63.2%), followed by 6–9 years (15.6%), 10–15 years (6.7%), and 16 years or more (2.8%), indicating that long-term employees are relatively rare. Regarding position distribution, the vast majority are non-managerial employees (82.2%). Sector experience predominantly falls within the 6–15-year range (63.3%).

3.3. Data Collection

To establish the theoretical framework of the study, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature was conducted. This study, evaluated using a quantitative approach, employed a questionnaire for data collection. The questionnaire consists of three sections: the first section captures participants' demographic information, the second section includes items related to toxic leadership, and the third section comprises items pertaining to organizational cynicism.

Toxic Leadership Scale: To measure perceptions of toxic leadership, the study utilized the Turkish-adapted version of the scale employed by Kirca (2021) in the study titled “The Effect of Employees’ Perceptions of Toxic Leadership on Organizational Silence and Work Motivation: The Moderating Role of Positive Psychological Capital.” The scale encompasses five dimensions: abusiveness, authoritarianism, narcissism, self-promotion, and unpredictability and consists of 30 items in total.

Organizational Cynicism Scale: To assess organizational cynicism, the study adopted the Turkish-adapted version of the scale used by Kalağan (2009) in the study titled “The Relationship Between Research Assistants’ Perceptions of Organizational Support and Their Organizational Cynicism Attitudes.” This scale comprises three dimensions—cognitive, affective, and behavioral and includes 13 items.

Descriptive analyses were conducted within the scope of the study. Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS, and the relationships between variables will be interpreted. Additionally, various statistical difference tests will be employed as needed to determine the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.

3.3.1. Toxic Leadership Scale

To assess the suitability of the data structure for factor analysis with a sample size of 180 participants, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was calculated. The obtained KMO value of 0.793 indicates that the data are suitable for factor analysis (Novosel, 2022). The results of Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed a chi-square value significant at the 0.01 level, supporting the assumption that the data follow a multivariate normal distribution. Consequently, it was deemed appropriate to proceed with the examination of the factor analysis results.

An examination of the total variance explained showed that five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 accounted for 71.769% of the variance in the exploratory factor analysis. To determine the factor structure of the Toxic Leadership Scale, principal component analysis was employed. The varimax rotation method, an orthogonal rotation technique, was selected to maximize variance. The items were grouped into five distinct dimensions, with the mean values of all items in the Toxic Leadership Scale generally exceeding 0.32. However, one item (Item 27) yielded a value below the desired threshold and was consequently excluded from the analysis. The resulting factor structure following the item removal is presented in the Table 2.

Table 2. Rotated components matrix table with items removed.

	1	2	3	4	5
T1	0.819	0.342	0.179	0.048	0.288
T7	0.813	0.137	0.076	0.366	0.046
T4	0.793	0.184	-0.128	-0.087	-0.136
T5	0.775	0.325	0.144	-0.094	0.324
T6	0.774	0.006	-0.022	0.493	0.038
T3	0.769	0.069	0.114	0.467	-0.011
T2	0.767	0.357	0.170	-0.094	0.323
T10	0.219	0.823	0.072	0.113	0.326
T9	0.339	0.811	0.071	-0.172	-0.175
T8	0.044	0.790	-0.097	0.119	-0.223
T13	0.219	0.739	0.047	0.047	-0.051
T12	0.277	0.738	0.113	0.161	0.334
T11	0.241	0.668	0.046	0.117	0.344
T15	0.200	0.189	0.819	0.366	0.310
T16	0.209	0.120	0.813	0.236	0.034
T14	0.150	0.345	0.771	0.132	-0.284
T18	0.166	0.211	0.763	0.544	0.280
T17	0.024	0.114	0.704	0.213	0.291
T22	0.146	0.151	0.076	0.802	0.381
T19	0.135	0.122	0.020	0.790	0.350
T20	0.049	0.023	0.183	0.786	0.340
T23	-0.014	0.173	0.142	0.763	-0.187
T21	-0.035	-0.056	0.055	0.704	-0.026
T24	0.201	0.449	0.015	0.011	0.801
T26	0.200	0.566	-0.002	0.256	0.770
T25	0.193	0.499	0.119	0.114	0.728
T30	-0.035	0.079	0.095	0.166	0.694
T29	0.024	0.156	0.274	-0.022	0.690
T28	0.088	0.041	0.250	-0.244	0.603

The items were observed to align with the theoretically determined constructs. Following the exclusion of the item, an evaluation revealed that the five factors accounted for 74.109% of the variance. This indicates that, even with the removal of certain items (previously 71.769%), the model retained its explanatory power. Consequently, the exclusion of the item did not compromise the integrity or reliability of the factor structure. This finding supports the overall validity and robustness of the identified factors.

3.3.2. Organizational Cynicism Scale

To evaluate the suitability of the data structure for factor analysis based on a sample size of 180 participants, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was calculated, yielding a value of 0.717. This suggests that the data are appropriate for factor analysis (Novosel, 2022).

An examination of Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that the chi-square value was significant at the 0.01 level, supporting the assumption of a multivariate normal distribution. Consequently, it was deemed appropriate to proceed with the analysis of the factor analysis results. The total variance explained revealed that three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 accounted for 79.035% of the variance in the exploratory factor analysis. To determine the factor structure of the Organizational Cynicism Scale, principal component analysis was employed as the factorial method, with the varimax rotation method selected for orthogonal rotation.

Table 3 illustrates the rotated component matrix related to the organizational cynicism scale.

Table 3. Rotated component matrix.

	1	2	3
S1	0.918	0.200	-0.003
S3	0.881	0.158	-0.042
S4	0.874	0.245	0.033
S5	0.869	0.218	0.035
S2	0.852	0.239	0.046
S9	0.244	0.886	-0.035
S7	0.274	0.858	-0.018
S6	0.216	0.831	-0.034
S8	0.181	0.830	0.004
S12	0.125	0.127	0.902
S11	0.079	-0.057	0.875
S13	-0.072	0.083	0.868
S10	0.037	-0.029	0.824

As shown in the table, the items were grouped into three distinct dimensions, with the mean values of all items in the Organizational Cynicism Scale exceeding 0.32. To assess the reliability of the Toxic Leadership Scale, which consists of thirty items, and the Organizational Cynicism Scale, comprising thirteen items, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilized.

Table 4 illustrates reliability analysis results related to toxic leadership and cynicism.

Table 4. Reliability analysis results.

Scale	Alpha coefficient (α)
Toxic leadership	0.927
Organizational cynicism	0.878

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients exceeding 0.60 are interpreted as indicating high reliability.

3.4. Data Analysis

Various statistical methods were employed to analyze the data collected through the survey. The SPSS 21 program was utilized for data analysis, leveraging its statistical tools and techniques to test the reliability and validity of the data. To start with, data analysis was conducted using statistical software, employing descriptive statistics to profile the sample and inferential techniques, including correlation and regression analyses, also to examine the relationships between toxic leadership's sub-dimensions (abusive supervision, narcissism, authoritarianism, unpredictability, and self-promotion) and finally to indicate organizational cynicism's dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral).

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the results and interpretations of the surveys conducted to determine the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism among employees of 4- and 5-star accommodation and food-and-beverage establishments operating in Samsun.

To investigate the relationship between the perceptions of toxic leadership among employees of tourism enterprises and organizational cynicism, correlation coefficients were calculated and are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation analysis of the relationship between toxic leadership perceptions and organizational cynicism among participating employees.

Scales		Toxic leadership	Organizational cynicism
Toxic leadership	Correlation coefficient	1	0.645**
	Significance level	0.000	0.000
	Sample size	180	180
Organizational cynicism	Correlation coefficient	0.645**	1
	Significance level	0.000	0.000
	Sample size	180	180

Note: ** p< 0.01 significance level (Two-sided).

The correlation analysis between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism revealed a statistically significant, positive, moderate-level relationship at the p<0.01 significance level (r=0.645**).

To examine the relationship between the perceptions of toxic leadership among tourism enterprise employees (including self-promotion, abusiveness, narcissism, unpredictability, and authoritarianism) and organizational cynicism, correlation coefficients were calculated and are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Correlation analysis of the relationship between toxic leadership sub-dimensions and organizational cynicism among participating employees.

Scales		1	2	3	4	5	6
Organizational cynicism	r	1	0.233**	0.271**	0.198**	0.371**	0.435**
	sig		0.002	0.000	0.008	0.000	0.000
Abusive supervision	r		1	0.683**	0.503**	0.346**	0.351**
	sig			0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Authoritarian leadership	r			1	0.398**	0.371**	0.117
	sig				0.000	0.000	0.117
Narcissism	r				1	0.556**	0.237**
	sig					0.000	0.001
Self-promotion	r					1	0.090
	sig						0.230
Unpredictability	r						1
	sig						0.000

Note: ** p< 0.01 significance level (Two-sided).

The correlation analysis between organizational cynicism and the sub-dimensions of toxic leadership revealed statistically significant relationships at the p<0.01 significance level. Specifically, weak positive correlations were observed between organizational cynicism and the toxic leadership sub-dimensions of abusive supervision (r=0.233**), authoritarian leadership (r=0.271**), and narcissism (r=0.198**). Additionally, moderate positive correlations were identified between organizational cynicism and the toxic leadership sub-dimensions of self-promotion (r=0.371**) and unpredictability (r=0.435**) at the p<0.01 significance level.

To investigate the relationship between the perceptions of toxic leadership among tourism enterprise employees (including self-promotion, abusive supervision, narcissism, unpredictability, and authoritarian leadership) and organizational cynicism (comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions), correlation coefficients were calculated and are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Correlation analysis of the relationship between toxic leadership sub-dimensions and organizational cynicism dimensions among participating employees.

Scales		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Abusive supervision	r	1	0.361**	0.601**	0.501**	0.511**	0.435**	0.207**	0.420**
	sig		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.005	0.000
Authoritarian leadership	r		1	0.525**	0.521**	0.446**	0.464**	0.137	0.414**
	sig			0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.066	0.000
Narcissism	r			1	0.526**	0.516**	0.567**	0.249**	0.531**
	sig				0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000
Self-promotion	r				1	0.504**	0.496**	0.221**	0.424**
	sig					0.000	0.000	0.003	0.000
Unpredictability	r					1	0.560**	0.220**	0.526**
	sig						0.000	0.000	0.000
Cognitive	r						1	0.146	0.641**
	sig							0.050	0.000
Affective	r							1	0.124
	sig								0.042
Behavioral	r								1
	sig								0.000

Note: ** p< 0.01 significance level (Two-sided).

The correlation analysis between the sub-dimensions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism revealed the following relationships:

- Abusive Supervision: A moderate positive correlation was observed with the cognitive dimension ($r=0.435^{**}$) and behavioral dimension ($r=0.420^{**}$) of organizational cynicism at the $p<0.01$ significance level. A weak positive correlation was found with the affective dimension ($r=0.207^{**}$).
- Authoritarian Leadership: A moderate positive correlation was identified with the cognitive dimension ($r=0.464^{**}$) and behavioral dimension ($r=0.414^{**}$) of organizational cynicism at the $p<0.01$ significance level. No significant correlation was found with the affective dimension ($r=-0.137$).
- Narcissism: A moderate positive correlation was observed with the cognitive dimension ($r=0.567^{**}$) and behavioral dimension ($r=0.531^{**}$) of organizational cynicism at the $p<0.01$ significance level. A weak positive correlation was found with the affective dimension ($r=0.249^{**}$).
- Self-Promotion: A moderate positive correlation was identified with the cognitive dimension ($r=0.496^{**}$) and behavioral dimension ($r=0.424^{**}$) of organizational cynicism at the $p<0.01$ significance level. A weak positive correlation was found with the affective dimension ($r=0.221^{**}$).
- Unpredictability: A moderate positive correlation was observed with the cognitive dimension ($r=0.560^{**}$) and behavioral dimension ($r=0.526^{**}$) of organizational cynicism at the $p<0.01$ significance level. A weak positive correlation was found with the affective dimension ($r=0.220^{**}$).

A summary of the hypothesis evaluations based on the above test results is presented in [Table 8](#).

Table 8. Research hypotheses results table.

Hypotheses	Situation
H1: There is a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and their organizational cynicism attitudes.	Accepted.
H2: There is a positive relationship between the self-promotion dimension of employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.	Accepted.
H3: There is a positive relationship between the unpredictability dimension of employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.	Accepted.
H4: There is a positive relationship between the abusiveness dimension of employees' toxic leadership perceptions and organizational cynicism.	Accepted.
H5: There is a positive relationship between the narcissism dimension of employees' perceptions of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.	Accepted.
H6: There is a positive relationship between employees' perceptions of the authoritarian dimension of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism.	Accepted.
H7: There is a positive relationship between the dimensions of toxic leadership and the dimensions of organizational cynicism.	Partially accepted.

These findings play a significant role in confirming the hypotheses. An interpretation of [Table 8](#) indicates that all hypotheses H1 through H6 (inclusive) formulated within the study were fully accepted, while hypothesis H7 was partially accepted.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study, designed to explore the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism a relationship not previously examined in the tourism sector confirmed the hypotheses related to the variables and their sub-dimensions through the conducted analyses. Only the hypothesis stating that “there is a positive relationship between the sub-dimensions of toxic leadership and the sub-dimensions of organizational cynicism” (H7) was partially accepted. The research results clearly demonstrate that the behaviors of toxic leaders in managerial positions within tourism enterprises negatively impact employees, leading to an increase in organizational cynicism ([Table 8](#)). This finding underscores the critical role of leadership style in shaping employees’ attitudes and behaviors in a sector like tourism, where human relationships and customer satisfaction are of paramount importance.

The results indicate that each sub-dimension of toxic leadership perceptions exhibits significant positive relationships with organizational cynicism. These findings highlight that organizational cynicism is strongly influenced by employees’ perceptions of leadership, emphasizing the critical importance of understanding these relationships to comprehend their impact on organizational dynamics. In this context, future research examining the effects of leadership styles on employees’ perceptions could provide deeper insights into how toxic leadership behaviors shape organizational cynicism. Thus, this study makes significant contributions to the organizational behavior and leadership literature, enhancing our understanding of how leadership dynamics influence employees’ attitudes within organizations.

Research conducted among employees in the tourism sector has revealed intriguing findings regarding the relationship between toxic leadership and married managers. Studies suggest that leaders' family lives spill over into the workplace, negatively affecting employees' motivation and productivity ([Kasalak, Yurcu, Akinci, & Kasalak, 2019](#)). It is a reality in Turkey that individuals often exhibit strong emotional tendencies, and the number of professionals with a professional outlook in the tourism sector remains limited. This makes it challenging to separate personal and work environments. Enhancing an individual’s motivation reduces the likelihood of negative behaviors and improves performance. Efforts to enhance performance within an organization directly impact emotional engagement and increased productivity ([Farghaly Abdelaliem & Abou Zeid, 2023](#)).

This study has established that the behaviors exhibited by toxic leaders trigger organizational cynicism, particularly in the tourism sector, where employees are considered internal customers. Given the literature’s portrayal of organizational cynicism as a negative phenomenon, it is crucial to eliminate or minimize its presence in the tourism sector. The findings of this study, which confirm the adverse impact of toxic leaders on tourism employees, underscore the importance of theoretical and practical recommendations to mitigate negative emotions. This should not be overlooked for the future of the tourism industry. Employees in this sector should put on a welcoming, happy face, not “despite everything,” but because they are genuinely happy and content when interacting with tourists. Recognizing that the success of the tourism sector hinges primarily on employee satisfaction will lead tourism enterprises that prioritize this goal to long-term success.

5.1. Contributions to Theory and Practice

Identifying toxic leaders is both challenging and costly ([Reed, 2004](#)). However, organizational culture and management policies can inadvertently support toxic leaders, contributing to their creation and retention. People, preferring to live in a fantasy world rather than confront their fears, often fall under the spell of toxic leaders who make unfulfilled promises ([Lipman-Blumen, 2005](#)). As evident from this study, toxic leadership emerges as a

prevalent and serious issue in the business world. This leadership style undermines employee morale, reduces job performance, and damages the overall organizational culture (Milosevic et al., 2020). The analyses conducted in this study demonstrate that toxic leadership generates significant negative outcomes at both individual and organizational levels, fostering organizational cynicism.

From a theoretical perspective, this study primarily addresses a call for research in a previously underexplored stream within the tourism domain. It examines organizational cynicism among tourism sector employees in response to their managers' toxic leadership behaviors, positioning itself as one of the few studies in the literature to tackle this issue from this perspective.

A review of the relevant literature reveals that the concepts of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism have been studied both independently (Grunberg et al., 2021; Magdy & Salem, 2024; Pelit & Pelit, 2014; Shoukry et al., 2024) and in conjunction across various fields (Ahmed et al., 2024; Eidipour et al., 2020; Farghaly Abdelaliam & Abou Zeid, 2023; Rahmani et al., 2022). The limited studies exploring these two concepts together typically focus on sectors such as education (Ahmed et al., 2024; Rahmani et al., 2022), sports (Eidipour et al., 2020), healthcare (Farghaly Abdelaliam & Abou Zeid, 2023),

and business (Saremi et al., 2022). Consequently, the tourism sector, where the human factor is particularly critical, has been largely overlooked in these investigations. The framework of the propositions in this study supports the literature on the perception of toxic leadership and organizational cynicism within the tourism sector. Accordingly, this study aims to encourage and serve as a model for future research specific to the tourism industry, distinct from other sectors previously examined.

Secondarily, addressing the prevalence and ripple effects of toxic leadership by studying these concepts in the human-centric tourism sector is crucial for minimizing such behaviors and fostering a sustainable organizational culture. It is evident that this study will make valuable contributions to the literature in this regard. Finally, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature for future generations entering the workforce by shedding light on how employees in the tourism sector, who encounter toxic behaviors, are shaped over time.

Given the demotivating effects of toxic leadership (Ahmed et al., 2024) tourism sector enterprises, aware of their reliance on employees, should treat their staff as internal customers and develop policies aligned with their needs and expectations. This approach is critical for fostering a more motivated work environment, which in turn reduces organizational cynicism and supports both employee and business success. Protecting employees' fundamental rights, providing positive feedback, and supporting career development can positively influence employee motivation. To enhance employee motivation and reduce perceptions of toxic leadership in the tourism sector, leaders should adopt a more empathetic and supportive approach, which would also contribute to reducing organizational cynicism. In a sector where employees' psychological well-being is paramount, leaders can mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership and boost motivation by being sensitive, fair, and supportive (Fatima & Majeed, 2023).

Given that managers' marital status can negatively impact overall work life (Kasalak et al., 2019), leaders who maintain a balance between their personal and professional lives can positively influence employee motivation and foster a more productive work environment. Increasing employee motivation can reduce organizational cynicism, thereby enhancing employee performance.

In the tourism sector, where employee emotions are critical, the absence of prior studies examining these two variables underscores the significance of this research, which contributes to both theory and practice. Future studies could further clarify perceptions in the tourism sector by exploring toxic leadership and organizational cynicism using different methods and analyses.

This research is considered a valuable resource for understanding the relationship between leader behaviors and employee attitudes in the process of building effective tourism enterprises. It is also expected to contribute to the literature in this regard. The study aims to support tourism enterprises in creating sustainable and healthy

work environments through the theoretical and practical recommendations outlined above. Based on the findings, preventing managerial manipulation and fostering a transparent organizational culture are deemed essential for enhancing employee satisfaction in the tourism sector. In the long term, eliminating organizational discrimination is vital for individual employee well-being and organizational productivity. This, in turn, can enhance businesses' competitive advantage, leading to sustainable success.

5.2. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study, designed to explore the previously unexamined relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism in the tourism sector, lays the groundwork for future research that could yield diverse outcomes through varied theoretical approaches. For instance, employing different sample groups, measurement techniques, or tourist destinations could lead to novel and compelling results. Investigating the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism can contribute to developing new approaches in business management and leadership, as well as formulating more effective management strategies. In this context, future studies focusing on these areas would help address gaps in the literature and enhance business practices.

A key limitation of this study is that it was conducted solely with employees of 4- and 5-star accommodation and food-beverage establishments in Samsun to examine the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism. Extending the survey to accommodation establishments in other destination centers beyond Samsun could yield different results. Additionally, while the sample size was representative, applying the study to a larger number of employees could produce more generalizable findings.

Managers should strive to avoid toxic behaviors, while employees should work to reduce organizational cynicism and increase their commitment to the organization. Therefore, efforts to create effective tourism enterprises should prioritize eliminating managers' negative behaviors, preventing employees from developing negative beliefs and attitudes, and fostering positive emotional states (Magdy & Salem, 2024). From this perspective, toxic leadership and organizational cynicism highlight that not all management practices are positive and that these concepts are interconnected. Greater emphasis on such studies, along with comparative analyses of existing research, would add new dimensions to the field and make significant contributions to the literature.

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