

# Perception of Organizational Sycophancy in Universities: A Research on Academicians

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## ABSTRACT

Today, it is seen that unethical behaviors are diversifying in universities, which are accepted as value-based organizations. Sycophancy, which is an unethical behavior in universities where the hierarchical structure is evident, emerges as an important issue in academic circles. The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of organizational sycophancy in universities. In the study, 36 academicians were interviewed within the scope of qualitative research method. The answers given by the academics were processed in depth within the scope of the themes determined in accordance with the content analysis technique. The results of the study showed that sycophantic behavior is quite common in universities, that it leads to various negative consequences in the academic environment, and that there are many factors that lead to sycophantic behavior. In conclusion, organizational sycophancy is a phenomenon intertwined with academic success, cooperation and organizational culture in universities. The role of sycophantic behaviors, the attitudes of academics towards managers and the place of these attitudes in organizational structures is a topic that requires more research in academic circles. In this context, studies on sycophancy in universities provide important information for academic success and improvement of the work environment.

**Keywords:** Ethics, Organizational Sycophancy, Academic Sycophancy, University, Academician.

**JEL Classification Codes:** D23, M10, M12

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## INTRODUCTION

Organizational life is an integral part of employees' daily lives. Employees should not only strive to achieve their individual goals but also take responsibility for contributing to organizational objectives. In this context, there is a psychological contract between the organization and the employee based on mutual expectations. Maintaining this contract on the basis of loyalty contributes to reducing organizational problems (Özdevecioğlu & Aksoy, 2005, p. 96).

Every organization needs the support and active participation of its employees to achieve its goals. The adaptation of employees to the organization enables increased efficiency and productivity (Köse, Tetik & Ercan, 2001, p. 222). In this process, the role of employees in the formation of organizational culture should not be overlooked. Individuals with different cultural backgrounds are not only influenced by the culture of the institutions they work for, but also play an effective role in shaping this culture (Kaynak, 2020, p. 137). Organizational culture encompasses the values, norms,

and concepts that emerge within an institution. In other words, it is the totality of abstract and concrete elements constructed within the organization (Gül & Gökçe, 2008, p. 385).

A dynamic organizational behavior structure that views employees as the fundamental resource of organizations and corporate ethical practices lay the groundwork for the establishment of ethical rules (Agbim, Ayatse & Oriarewo, 2013, p. 79). Ethical behavior has been a social concern since ancient times; it has evolved over time and has become a decisive factor in the success of organizations today (Geeta, Pooja & PN, 2016, p. 1). In this context, it is of great importance for organizational managers to clearly distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior and to build an organizational culture that prevents employees from making decisions based solely on their personal intuition. In such structures, where ethical boundaries are clearly defined, the risk of both managers and employees unknowingly engaging in unethical behavior is significantly reduced. Furthermore, this clarity emphasizes the importance of ethical standards

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at the corporate level, thereby reducing the likelihood of such standards being violated (Kaptein, 2011, p. 847). The management of unethical behavior in organizations can be achieved by explaining elements such as what these behaviors are, which types are considered unethical, how often they occur in organizations, whether their frequency varies according to the type of organization, sector, and country, their causes and consequences, and what effective interventions and actions are (Kaptein, 2008, p. 979).

One of the most common unethical behaviors seen in organizations is sycophancy. Some employees aim to gain personal advantage by excessively praising their managers. This attitude can disrupt organizational balance and lead to condescending behavior toward lower-status employees. Even if sycophants reach positions of power, they struggle to earn the genuine respect of their colleagues (Dalton, 2008, p. 360).

Universities are institutions that promote academic freedom, transparency, autonomy, and critical thinking, and are at the center of knowledge production (Kadioğulları & Ensari, 2020, p. 410). Their assumption of broad responsibilities through education, teaching, and social interaction is an important feature that distinguishes them from other institutions (Gülcemal, 2020, p. 3). However, unethical behaviors such as sycophancy can sometimes be observed in this ideal structure. Therefore, research on the causes, consequences, and prevention of sycophancy in universities is of great importance.

This study is carried out to examine sycophancy behavior, which is an unethical behavior in organizations and negatively affects employee performance, productivity, job satisfaction, the relationships between employees and their managers, and causes a loss of trust, on academics serving in universities. Another purpose of the research is to determine the prevalence of sycophancy perception in universities, the determinants of this perception, and the effects of this perception on job performance and job satisfaction. In line with these objectives, a qualitative research was conducted on academics using the interview technique, and based on the findings, evaluations were made on whether academics and academic administrators show sycophantic behavior. Since there are limited studies on sycophancy in the literature, it is predicted that this study will contribute to the related literature. In addition, it is thought that the research findings will contribute to the development of a more transparent and fair management approach in universities.

This study consists of four sections. The first section provides the theoretical background on organizational sycophancy, the second section describes the methodology, the third section presents the results and discussion, and the final section presents the conclusions and recommendations.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In this section, ethics, organizational sycophancy and organizational sycophancy in universities are explained.

### **Ethics**

Ethics is an interdisciplinary field that evaluates interpersonal relationships and social behavior in accordance with moral principles. The concept of ethics, which has developed hand in hand with philosophy and economics throughout history, has gained importance in the context of value conflicts and decision-making processes encountered in business life. In this regard, business ethics has been institutionalized as an academic discipline since the 1980s and has taken its place in organizational behavior literature (Monis, Çalışkan & Köroğlu, 2024, pp. 69-70). When examining the history of ethics and its current applications, it is evident that those working in this field primarily focus on moral dichotomies such as good-bad, right-wrong, and fair-unfair. This situation shows that ethical principles not only govern individual behavior but also serve the function of investigating the source of moral attitudes deemed necessary for the construction of social order (Gül & Gökçe, 2008, p. 278). Therefore, ethics can be defined as a way of thinking that enables individuals and institutions to make value-based distinctions in their decision-making processes (Agbim, Ayatse & Oriarewo, 2013, p. 79).

If organizational managers expect high productivity, job satisfaction, and loyalty from their employees, they must understand the importance of ethical behavior. In this regard, adhering to ethical principles increases employee loyalty, performance, and satisfaction, making the organization more attractive to both customers and employees and providing a competitive advantage. The prerequisite for encouraging ethical behavior is that information about fundamental ethical principles and the factors influencing such behavior is shared openly and accessibly with all managers and employees (Strazovska & Sulikova, 2019, pp. 335-336).

In order to create an ethical culture within the organization, managers have great duties. These duties include serving as an ethical role model for employees,

establishing corporate ethical rules to clearly define expectations, organizing training programs to raise ethical awareness throughout the organization, determining the level of compliance with rules by encouraging ethical behavior and warning against unethical attitudes, and developing protective mechanisms where employees can share their ethical concerns and confidently report ethical violations (Sivakci, 2016, p. 45).

Unethical behaviors are an expression of a disease that needs to be treated in organizations. However, organizations acting alone on the issue cannot create a solution (Gül, 2006, pp. 68-69). If there is no effective communication between the employees, management and the organization, it is difficult to prevent unethical practices and therefore it is not successful in revealing ethical violations and unethical behaviors (Tonus & Oruç, 2012, pp. 154-155). In an organizational context, unethical behavior is defined as actions that violate moral principles or ethical standards and often harm individuals, groups, or the organization itself. Such behavior can take many forms and can be exhibited by anyone in the organization, including both employees and managers (Ayal & Kahveci, 2023, p. 273).

Identifying unethical behavior that occurs or is likely to occur in organizations is critical to the effective implementation of the management ethics process. Such behaviors can be observed in the relationships between employees and the organization, as well as in the organization's relationships with customers, suppliers, competitors, shareholders, the government, society, and the natural environment (Tepe Küçükoğlu, 2012, p. 183). The behaviors of organizational members are not only a reflection of environmental interactions but also of personal characteristics. Unethical attitudes such as aggression, violence, avoidance of responsibility, gossip, interference in private life, complaining, lying, selfishness, jealousy, exclusion, and flattery exhibited by managers and employees negatively affect the organizational climate (Kıral & Karaman Kepenekci, 2021, p. 21).

In universities, ethical violations are serious problems that threaten the reliability of academic activities and the healthy development of organizational culture. These violations reflect not only a lack of individual responsibility but also the inadequacy of institutional control mechanisms. Academic ethical violations are defined in the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Guidelines (Council of Higher Education, 2015, p.2-3):

- *Plagiarism*: Using someone else's ideas or work without citing the source. Quoting without citing the source, etc.
- *Falsification*: Producing false data or distorting results. Publishing the results of an experiment that was never conducted, etc.
- *Duplication*: Publishing the same work in multiple places. Presenting a previously published article as new, etc.
- *Unfair authorship*: Adding individuals who did not contribute to the work as authors. Listing an academic who did not contribute to the article as an author, etc.
- *Ethics committee violation*: Conducting research without obtaining ethics committee approval. Not obtaining ethical approval for studies involving human subjects, etc.
- *Publishing in predatory journals*: Publishing in journals that do not meet scientific standards. Publishing articles in journals that do not have a peer review process and charge fees for publication, etc.

### Organizational Sycophancy

The word "sycophant" comes from the Classical Greek word "sykophantia" and entered English in the 16th century with the meaning 'informer'; over time, it has acquired meanings such as "flatterer, sycophant, parasite." Sycophancy refers to the practice of exhibiting excessively obsequious and flattering behavior toward someone in order to gain personal advantage. Employees who engage in such behavior often display exaggerated respect toward managers, believing it will grant them an advantage within the organization. Sycophantic individuals are typically characterized by traits such as obedience, subservience, spinelessness, and sycophancy (Poonam & Chahal, 2019, pp. 118-119).

In general, people with high economic power or authority are more exposed to sycophancy. In organizations, managers can reduce sycophancy by basing their decisions on merit rather than personal preferences and by working with employees who are confident, competent, honest, and sincere. In Türkiye, sycophancy has become a significant problem in the last quarter century; it has been observed that inadequate employees are promoted to higher positions in this way (Kıral & Dilmaç, 2021, p. 107). Opportunism, power inequalities, income polarization, and the re-

legitimization of traditional notions of obedience form the economic, social, and political basis of the culture of sycophancy. Although this transformation has become particularly evident in the public sector, it is not unique to Türkiye (Özbilgin, Küçükaltan & Açar, 2019, p. 2831). Sycophancy reflects the desire to gain status by getting close to authority, so it is often preferred by individuals who seek power and are dependent on authority (Taş, 2023, p. 89).

Organizational sycophancy refers to the sycophantic behavior exhibited by employees to achieve their goals within the organization. This behavior is no different from traditional sycophancy; however, it is more pronounced in an organizational context and is directed toward strategic goals (Business NLP Academy, 2019, p. 1). Organizational sycophancy is examined in two dimensions: manager-focused and coworker-focused. In both cases, the main goal is to gain the trust of managers or coworkers and make them like oneself in order to achieve personal gain (Konay & Kiral, 2023, p. 300). Being popular within an organization not only makes individuals feel better psychologically, but can also positively influence the views of upper management. This situation can provide individuals with material gains as well as intangible benefits such as access to social opportunities, acceptance, and respect (Gülcemal, 2020, p. 47).

Organizational sycophancy can lead to a decline in the quality of education, weakening of communication between employees, and a decrease in the efficiency of the academic environment (Özbilgin, Küçükaltan & Açar, 2019, p. 2832). Ignoring such behaviors and rewarding sycophantic employees, especially in performance evaluation processes, can create unrest, anger, and a tendency toward silent resignation among other employees. This situation can reduce employee performance, cause them to question their contribution to the job and the organization, and lead them to stop working efficiently by viewing their work as meaningless and worthless (Taş, 2023, p. 92).

Sycophancy undermines honesty, one of the fundamental principles of organizations; it disrupts a fair working environment and shakes employees' trust in the organization (Esmer & Yüksel, 2019, p. 899). Such behaviors reduce workplace productivity, create tension among employees, and prevent the development of a merit-based management approach. Although it may seem to encourage positive communication at first, the spread of sycophancy creates a negative working atmosphere in the long run (Ayal & Kahveci, 2023, p. 275).

The existing literature reveals that the phenomenon of organizational sycophancy has been examined in different sectors and contexts, but it also shows that comprehensive and comparative analyses of this behavior are still limited. Ferris et al. (2007) examined the effects of excessive conformity behavior toward managers in the private sector on individuals' career development, revealing how sycophancy is related to the pursuit of individual benefits. Özkalp and Kirel (2010) evaluated the effects of sycophantic behavior in public bureaucracy on organizational commitment and decision-making processes, demonstrating how this behavior can weaken decision quality in public administration. Kartolo and Kwantes (2019) have stated that organizational culture shapes employees' perceptions of organizational discrimination and that individuals' attitudes and beliefs in a social context are carried over into the workplace. They suggest that in organizations where cultural norms based on individual security needs prevail, behaviors such as organizational discrimination and sycophancy may be more prevalent. Chong (2022) states that organizational justice has a significant effect on employee commitment, and that in environments where the perception of justice is weak, employees develop different strategies. One of these strategies is to engage in sycophantic behavior in order to establish good relationships with managers and protect themselves from possible negativity. Ayal and Kahveci (2023) examined the relationship between organizational sycophancy and favoritism through teacher perceptions in the education sector, revealing how these two unethical behaviors can reinforce each other. The common point of these studies is that sycophancy behavior is considered an unethical strategy that negatively affects the functioning of organizational structures. However, the gaps in the literature are also noteworthy. In this context, Esmer and Yüksel (2019) focus on the historical origins and cultural context of sycophancy, discussing how this behavior has evolved from the Ottoman Empire to the present day and how it has become intertwined with organizational cultures. This historical perspective shows that sycophancy is not only an individual but also a systemic problem.

### **Sycophancy in Universities**

Universities are institutions that aim to serve society and contribute to the development of younger generations by bringing together different disciplines and perspectives. In today's information age, the primary function of universities is to produce knowledge. It is of great importance that this knowledge is accurate, impartial, and reliable, and that it is produced in a

manner appropriate to the needs of the age. For this reason, universities must adhere to ethical principles in the knowledge production process.

Academics, administrators, and other staff members must perform their duties within the framework of ethical rules. Ethical principles are fundamental rules that regulate social life, and failure to comply with these rules can lead to various problems. In this context, it is critically important for academics to fulfill their scientific and social responsibilities in accordance with ethical principles for the reliability of scientific studies and the health of the academic environment (Demir, 2023, pp. 404–411).

Universities are institutions based on scientific and human values. Scientific values such as valuing knowledge and striving to produce knowledge, and human values such as respecting students and valuing their personalities are at the forefront of university culture. In addition, universities, which undertake the tasks of education, research, and community service, are expected to adhere to ethical values such as honesty, accuracy, and trust (Erdem, 2003, p. 59). However, research shows that behavior contrary to ethical principles is increasing in universities. One of these negative behaviors is sycophancy.

According to Özbilgin, Küçükaltan, and Açar (2019), there are three types of sycophancy in academic institutions: individual, institutional, and environmental. Sycophancy, which is often seen at the individual level, becomes widespread and institutionalized over time. In this process, behaviors that begin at the micro level become systematic at the macro level. Institutionalized sycophancy is presented to new academics as a legitimate culture, and expectations at the top shape individuals' behavior.

Gülcemal (2020) stated that there are five reasons for sycophantic behavior in academic organizations: academic, economic, personal, social and institutional. Academic reasons are manifested in issues such as tenure expectation, administrative task expectation, advancement, thesis and publication. Economic reasons include academic incentives, exam task fees, course fees, travel fees, project fees, revolving funds, congress support and earning income outside the university. Personal reasons include personality traits, protecting or consolidating one's current position, achieving status, psychological satisfaction, ambition, desire to stand out, desire to be close to power, academic incompetence and comfort. Social reasons include cultural codes, providing job opportunities for relatives and looking good to a

group. Institutional reasons are the existing order and disregard for the principle of merit.

Sycophancy can cause serious ethical problems in merit-based institutions such as universities. Sycophancy can render unethical behavior invisible. This is because sycophants suppress critical thinking by behaving in ways that please senior management. This situation paves the way for the restriction of academic freedom, the exclusion of critical voices, and institutional corruption. In particular, sycophantic relationships in academic promotion, task distribution, and decision-making processes undermine organizational justice and academic ethics. Ethical violations related to sycophancy in universities include the following (Gönülaçar, 2022, p.26-58):

- *Unqualified appointment:* Appointing someone based on personal connections rather than knowledge, experience, and academic achievement. For example, appointing someone who does not fully meet academic criteria as department chair.
- *Unfair academic promotion:* Promoting someone based on personal loyalty rather than scientific production. For example, promoting someone who is inadequate in terms of publications to the rank of professor.
- *Favoritism in advisory relationships:* Students or researchers gaining advantages through sycophancy. Obtaining privileges in thesis defense by constantly praising one's advisor, etc.
- *Influence in decision-making mechanisms:* Making decisions based on personal loyalty rather than scientific merit. Giving priority to flatterers in project or budget distribution, etc.
- *Inequity in representation on scientific committees:* Gaining representation rights through sycophancy rather than scientific merit. Selecting unqualified but influential flatterers for membership on ethics committees, etc.

## METHOD

The purpose of this study is to examine the perception of organizational sycophancy, which is an unethical behavior in universities. In this context, how academics define organizational sycophancy, how they react to sycophantic behavior, what they think about the consequences of sycophancy, and how sycophantic behavior affects their job satisfaction and performance

were investigated. Qualitative research method was used in the study. Qualitative research is a form of knowledge generation that is shaped by the researcher's own efforts and developed to explore the basis and structure of social systems. The aim of this method is to reveal the closed and hidden content of the discourse instead of the content that is easily determined and identified in the first stage (Özdemir, 2010, p. 326; Bilgin, 2014, p. 1). In this context, interview was preferred as the data collection technique in the study and the data were collected with a semi-structured interview form prepared based on the relevant literature. The researches of Gülcemal (2020) and Ayal (2022) were utilized in the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of a total of 15 questions, including 7 questions about the demographic characteristics of academics such as age, gender, marital status, title, union membership, administrative duty, professional experience, and 8 questions to determine the perception of sycophancy of academics such as the characteristics of sycophancy behaviors, the effects of sycophancy behaviors on job performance and job satisfaction, the causes and consequences of sycophancy (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Organizational sycophancy scale questions

Order No	Questions
1	What do you understand by the term 'sycophancy' when you think about your communication with other employees and administrators at your university?
2	What are the general characteristics of behaviors that you can call sycophancy?
3	Why do you think people sycophantic?
4	Which behaviors do you perceive as sycophancy at your university?
5	How do you react when you encounter so-called sycophantic behavior at your university?
6	What do you think are the effects of so-called sycophantic behaviors on job performance and job satisfaction?
7	What would you say about managers' reactions to sycophants?
8	What are your thoughts on the consequences of sycophancy?

The study population consists of academics working as professors, associate professors, doctors, and lecturers in the fields of health, engineering, social sciences, humanities, and administrative sciences at state and foundation universities in the Marmara, Black Sea, Aegean, Central Anatolia, and Mediterranean regions of Türkiye. The sample of the study consists of 36 individuals who agreed to participate in the research and were selected using convenience sampling. According to the literature, it can be said that this number is sufficient in terms of

sample size and data saturation for in-depth interviews and represents the universe (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022, p. 1; Başkale, 2016, p. 27). The main reason for choosing the population is the assumption that sycophantic behaviors are encountered in universities. Information regarding appointment processes was compiled based on participants' statements and supported by institutional guidelines. This diversity enhances the contextual validity of the study and provides a multidimensional perspective on academic appointment processes. During the interview process, information about the research was given and academics were asked to convey their perceptions about sycophancy. The research was conducted in March 2025 and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. The responses given by the academics were processed in depth within the scope of the themes determined in accordance with the content analysis technique and the perception of organizational sycophancy in universities was tried to be determined (Table 2) (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 89).

In order to conduct this study, approval was obtained from "Ondokuz Mayıs University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee" (Decision Date: February 28, 2025, Decision No: 2025-16). Ethical principles were fully adhered to during the research process. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. The consent process was conducted by providing participants with clear information about the purpose, duration, data usage, and confidentiality principles of the study. Participant

**Table 2.** Themes of analysis

Order No	Theme Name
Theme 1	Meaning of sycophancy
Theme 2	Characteristics of sycophantic behavior
Theme 3	Causes of sycophancy
Theme 4	Types of sycophantic behavior
Theme 5	Academics' reactions to sycophancy
Theme 6	Effect of sycophancy on job performance and job satisfaction
Theme 7	Managers' reactions to sycophancy
Theme 8	Consequences of sycophancy

information was anonymized, and personal data was not shared with third parties in any way. The data was used solely for research purposes. Interviews were recorded in audio/written format, and these recordings were securely stored in encrypted digital environments. All data was protected in a manner accessible only to researchers and processed in accordance with ethical guidelines.

In this study, the phenomenon of sycophancy is examined solely in the context of universities. Assessments of how this concept emerges in different organizational structures, such as public institutions and the private sector, are excluded from the scope of this study. This may limit the generalizability of the results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, results on demographic characteristics of academics and content analysis results are presented.

### Demographic Results

The results regarding the demographic characteristics of the 36 academicians whose data were collected through the interview technique within the scope of the research are given in Table 3.

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that 41.7% of the participants are female, 58.3% are male, 80.6% are married and 19.4% are single. This result shows that more male academics and married academics participated

**Table 3.** Demographic results

Variables		Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>	Man	15	41.7
	Woman	21	58.3
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	29	80.6
	Single	7	19.4
<b>Age</b>	30-49	9	25
	40-49	22	61.1
	50-59	5	13.9
<b>Title</b>	Prof. Dr.	4	11.1
	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	13	36.1
	Asst. Prof. Dr.	7	19.5
	Lec. Dr.	3	8.3
	Lec	9	25
<b>Professional Experience (Years)</b>	1-5	6	16.7
	6-10	4	11.1
	11-15	15	41.6
	16-20	4	11.1
	21-25	3	8.3
	25+	4	11.1
<b>Administrative Duty</b>	Yes	14	38.9
	No	22	61.1
<b>Union Membership</b>	Yes	16	44.4
	No	20	55.6

in the study. It is also understood that 61.1% of the participants are between the ages of 40-49, 36.1% have the title of Assoc. Prof. Dr., 41.6% have professional experience in the range of 11-15 years, 61.1% do not have administrative duties, and 55.6% are not union members. These results show that the sample is suitable in terms of scientific and objective data on sycophancy. The research sample represents mid-career academics in terms of age, academic title, and professional experience, which allows for an objective examination of the phenomenon of sycophancy in an institutional context. The fact that the majority of participants are male, married, and not in administrative positions contributes to a more balanced and professional assessment of power dynamics in organizational relationships.

**Content Analysis Results**

The codes that form the analysis themes determined based on the participants’ responses and scale questions, excerpts from the participants’ responses, and the evaluations made are presented below in order. Codes that appear at least 5 times have been added to the tables.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P3: *“Sycophancy is the attitude and behavior of people in the work environment by prioritizing their interests.”*

P9: *“It is a conscious effort to look cute, sometimes overdoing it, in order to influence others, especially managers, in line with the individual goals of employees in the workplace.”*

P11: *“Sycophancy is called an effort to show oneself and to be liked and it is a behavior that should not be in professional communication.”*

P20: *“It is the insincere behavior of subordinates towards their superiors and the unrealistic statements they say.”*

P33: *“A sycophant is a person who can do anything to gain favor with the manager. Sycophancy is the situation where managers and employees prioritize their own interests instead of corrupt relationships and the requirements of the job.”* It is seen that they gave answers as follows.

Based on the participants’ responses, many positive and negative definitions of the concept of sycophancy can be made. For example, while an employee’s efforts to impress or inspire admiration in their manager are positive, insincere behavior and unrealistic statements displayed by employees toward their managers, as well as unethical and artificial attitudes and behaviors displayed by employees in order to influence their managers to achieve their own interests, are negative. According to Esmir and Yüksel (2019), similar to these results, sycophancy is a situation in which an individual shows false respect and admiration for certain authorities, such as managers and politicians, in order to benefit themselves in an organization or work environment. This is positive for the individual but negative for the organization.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P4: *“Being too sincere, supporting every behavior and discourse, praising, not criticizing and not objecting.”*

**Table 4.** Meaning of sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
Meaning of sycophancy	<b>Positive</b> Effort to look good, showing more attention than necessary, exaggerated praise, trying to be close to the management.
	<b>Negative</b> Flattery, favoritism, unrealistic admiration, behaving as the managers want for self-interest, ignoring misbehavior, not expressing personal opinions, false sincerity, appearing different from what you are.

**Table 5.** Characteristics of sycophantic behavior

Theme Name	Codes
Characteristics of sycophantic behavior	<b>Opportunistic-manipulative</b> Supporting every behavior and discourse without objection, lying, hypocrisy, making oneself appear different from oneself, unnecessary and exaggerated praise, acting like a chameleon, hiding true thoughts, glorifying managers, exaggerated obedience, behaving as the manager wants.
	<b>Personal weaknesses-toxic traits</b> Being too sincere, busybody, inconsistency, linguistic rudeness, cowardice, lack of self-confidence, mistreating subordinates.

**Table 6.** Causes of sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
Causes of sycophancy	<b>Individual</b> To secure oneself and one's job, to avoid responsibility, to be promoted quickly/easily, to obtain office and position, to do one's job freely and without supervision, to protect one's own interests in the political environment of the workplace, to benefit from organizational rewards, to escape from organizational punishments, to cover up shortcomings and failures, to achieve goals in an easy way, fear of losing one's job.
	<b>Social</b> To be constantly in the public eye, to be adopted (by others or the organization), to gain power and advantage, to give the appearance of working hard.

**Table 7.** Types of sycophantic behavior

Theme Name	Codes
Types of sycophantic behavior	<b>Manager-oriented</b> Being closer and more sincere than they should be, buying gifts for managers, not being like oneself, undertaking tasks that are not one's duty, labeling and referring to managers, being of the view that management is always right, giving importance to obedience rather than merit.
	<b>Colleague-oriented</b> Turning a blind eye to wrongdoing, ignoring injustices.

P12: "Not expressing the thought clearly, constantly trying to do something to stand out even if there is no responsibility, and approving and constantly praising all the behaviors of people in management."

P16: "The general characteristics of sycophantic behaviors are: insincerity, excessive praise, establishing intimacy for gain, avoiding criticism and constantly seeking approval."

P24: "Hiding one's true thoughts, acting different from one's true thoughts."

P36: "Hypocrisy, changing thoughts, fear, expectation, lack of self-confidence." It is seen that they gave answers as follows.

When the participants' answers are examined, it is seen that the characteristics of sycophantic behavior observed in organizations are opportunistic-manipulative and personal-toxic. For example, unquestioningly supporting every behavior and statement of managers is a opportunistic behavior, while being overly friendly in an inappropriate manner is a toxic behavior. In line with this result, Okutan (2005) states that the characteristics of sycophantic behavior are manipulative and deceptive, including being hypocritical, flattering, intrusive, scheming, and cunning.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P4: "To be comfortable in their jobs, to escape from responsibilities, to feel power behind them due to their

insecurity, and to rise in their positions."

P8: "To get the positions they want, to do their jobs freely and without supervision, and not to disturb their comfort at work."

P19: "To gain benefits, to work less but appear to be doing more work, to gain status and authority in an easy way."

P28: "To facilitate their work, to gain benefits and to be accepted"

P35: "For self-interest, seat ambition, material, social and administrative opportunities."

When analyzing the participants' responses, it is evident that there are individual and social reasons for sycophancy. Individual reasons are shaped by the person's desire for self-protection, advancement, and psychological needs. Social reasons stem from the desire to be accepted, recognized, and influential within the organization. Similarly, Kırıl and Dilan Dilmaç (2021) stated that the reasons for sycophancy are "individual reasons" (laziness, getting one's job done, lack of self-confidence, desire for favoritism, fear, feeling powerful, ignoring one's mistakes, facilitating one's work, gaining benefits) and "social reasons" (status, acceptance).

Personal reasons may cause academics to behave opportunistically or strategically in order to secure their positions and maximize their personal interests. Social reasons, on the other hand, lead academics to develop behaviors that focus on image management, conformity,

and relational advantages.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P7: *“Behaviors such as sycophancy, displaying fake behavior, not being like oneself can be perceived as sycophancy in my opinion.”*

P10: *“Constantly establishing relations with superiors, turning a blind eye to wrongdoing, undertaking tasks that are not your duty in order to gain favor, protecting superiors without distinguishing between the right and the wrong.”*

**Table 8.** Academics’ reactions to sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
Academics’ reactions to sycophancy	<b>Positive</b> Stating that it is wrong and not in line with business ethics, warning, disapproving, telling to your face, expressing discomfort, complaining.
	<b>Negative</b> Not taking seriously, ignoring, cutting off communication, remaining silent, smiling, condemning, being disappointed, snapping, avoiding, being irritated, not responding, not reacting in any way.
	<b>Neutral</b> Surprised, distancing, pretending to be normal.

P16: *“Behaviors such as constantly praising managers at the workplace, giving unquestioning approval to every decision, ignoring injustices and showing excessive compliance just to gain benefits can be perceived as sycophancy.”*

P22: *“Giving labels and references.”*

P33: *“Approving every decision of superiors without looking at right and wrong, supporting them even though they know it is wrong, being unfair in promotion and advancement, not giving importance to merit.”*

When the participants’ responses are examined, it is seen that there are two types of sycophancy: manager-oriented and colleague-oriented. Manager-oriented behaviors reflect the compliant and often artificial attitudes that individuals display in order to obtain promotion, protection, or privileges. Such behaviors are characterized by unquestioning loyalty to authority and the suppression of personal identity. Colleague-oriented behaviors, on the other hand, manifest themselves in the form of remaining silent in the face of injustices or turning a blind eye to wrongdoing. This situation indicates that the individual has pushed their ethical responsibilities to the background in order to avoid disrupting organizational balance. According to Esm

and Yüksel (2019), sycophants are individuals who agree with everything their managers/colleagues say in order to further their own interests. They are individuals who can say that winter is hot, summer is cold, white is black, and black is white.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

P8: *“First of all, I keep my distance from people to prevent such behavior from occurring, and in case of possible sycophancy, I warn them not to engage in such behavior again.”*

P11: *“I state that this is wrong and not in line with business ethics. If the sycophantic behavior continues, I show my reaction by not dealing with that person much.”*

P16: *“When I encounter sycophancy, I usually distance myself from this behavior and try to evaluate the situation objectively. When necessary, I do not hesitate to express the situation in a constructive way.”*

P25: *“I state that I feel uncomfortable with the attitude and then limit my relationship.”*

P36: *“I stay away from those people. In our one-on-one conversations, I tell them what they did was wrong.”*

When the participants’ responses were examined, it was observed that academics reacted in three ways to sycophantic behavior: positive (constructive), negative (destructive/passive), and neutral (ambiguous/context-dependent). Positive reactions indicate that the individual has a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior. These attitudes strengthen the organizational ethical culture. Negative reactions indicate that the individual has a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior. These attitudes strengthen the organizational ethical culture. Negative reactions indicate that the individual has a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior.

**Table 9.** Effects of sycophancy on job performance and job satisfaction

Theme Name	Codes
<b>Effects of sycophancy on job performance and job satisfaction</b>	<b>Individual-level</b> Decrease in work performance, decrease in motivation and job satisfaction, unwillingness to work, lack of enjoyment, not taking responsibility, low morale, decrease in perception of organizational justice, decrease in perception of organizational trust, decrease in sense of belonging, disengagement from profession/work.
	<b>Organizational-level</b> Restless working environment, decrease in productivity and quality, deterioration of social relations, disruption of works

These Positive responses indicate that the individual has taken a conscious, open, and corrective stance against unethical behavior. These strengthen the organizational ethical culture. Negative responses are characterized by suppression, ignoring, or emotional detachment. These undermine both the individual’s ethical sensitivity and organizational trust. Neutral responses are shaped by context. In some cases, they create strategic distance, while in others, they can mean passive acceptance or indifference. According to Kiral and Dilan Dilmaç (2021), sycophancy, which is seen as a way for individuals to obtain a position or keep their jobs, is considered an unacceptable behavior by society, but it can be said that individuals who are promoted through this behavior remain silent/neutral depending on the circumstances they are in.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

*P3: “Motivation and job satisfaction decrease, work becomes reluctant and no one enjoys their work. Therefore, performance also decreases.”*

*P7: “I think it is effective in the promotion of the person who flatters, but the job performance and satisfaction of others decreases because they think that they are wasting their time and working for nothing.”*

*P18: “When the employee who thinks that their work will progress more easily receives a positive approach from their manager, they will continue to maintain this behavior. This situation can be a source of motivation for him/her. It can*

*increase performance and satisfaction.”*

*P28: “While those who flatter are happy and promoted in business life, the job satisfaction and performance of other employees decrease in the face of this situation.”*

*P36: “It disrupts relations between employees. It destroys inner peace. It causes working and deserving people to get disenchanted with their profession. Since undeserving people become managers, things do not progress correctly. It sets a bad example and causes sycophancy to spread.”*

When participants’ responses are examined, it can be predicted that sycophantic behavior may affect job performance and job satisfaction at both the individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, declines in psychological and professional areas such as motivation, belonging, responsibility, and job satisfaction lead to alienation from work and loss of performance. At the organizational level, the deterioration of social relationships, the disruption of the work environment, and the decline in overall productivity directly affect organizational functioning. In this context, Özbilgin, Küçükaltan, and Açar (2019) emphasize that sycophancy causes psychological damage in organizations, negatively affecting performance and job satisfaction, and that it has organizational and environmental effects as an element that erodes meritocracy. On the other hand, participants’ responses indicated that sycophancy may have a positive effect on job performance and job satisfaction for those who engage in flattering behavior, but may have a negative effect on other employees.

**Table 10.** Managers’ reactions to sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
<b>Managers’ reactions to sycophancy</b>	<b>Positive</b> Enjoying the behavior, standing by (in a supportive sense), supporting, protecting, paving the way for, tolerating, rewarding, giving authority, giving recognition, sympathizing, being satisfied, being happy, being fair, and not discriminating.
	<b>Negative</b> Disliking, not welcoming, being an obstacle, distancing, not allowing, hating, warning (in a critical or punitive sense), not reacting (as passive neglect), keeping silent (as avoidance or complicity), and standing by (in a passive or indifferent manner).

**Table 11.** Consequences of sycophancy

Theme Name	Codes
	<b>Individual-level</b> Dissatisfaction, organizational exclusion, organizational loneliness, insecurity, low motivation, low performance, disrepute.
<b>Consequences of sycophancy</b>	<b>Organizational-level</b> Organizational injustice, organizational failure, organizational conflict, inefficiency, poor quality, unhealthy relationships, unrest, meritlessness, negative organizational culture, corruption.
	<b>Managerial-level</b> Managerial failure and incapacity.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

*P1: "It may vary depending on the characteristics of the managers. Some of them like it very much and can keep those who behave in this way with them all the time. So the situation can change according to individual differences. If it is a behavior that should not be for some managers, they may not keep such people close to them."*

*P6: "It varies from manager to manager, while managers who continue their existence with sycophants are satisfied with this situation, managers who have merit and attach importance to merit in other employees will be uncomfortable with sycophants."*

*P16: "Managers' reactions to sycophants may vary; some may notice sycophancy and keep their distance, while others may not notice such behaviors and reward them."*

*P20: "Every manager has different styles and reactions. Some like it and some hate it."*

*P32: "They act in a supportive way."*

According to the participants' responses, managers' reactions to sycophancy vary (positively or negatively) from manager to manager. Some managers, especially those who do not value merit, respond positively to this situation by welcoming and supporting sycophants, giving them positions and rewarding them. Some managers, on the other hand, are uncomfortable with this situation and respond negatively by distancing themselves from sycophants, not allowing such behavior, and trying to be fair. In parallel with this result, according to Gülcemal (2020), the reactions of managers to sycophancy are rejection, approval and unawareness. Rejecting reactions are warning, scolding, distancing, not including in decision-making mechanism, not taking seriously and blocking. Approving reactions are pleasing, making concessions for the functioning of the organization and turning a blind eye. Unawareness is not being aware of the sycophantic behavior while

in a managerial position. These reactions clearly reveal whether the attitude of individuals or organizations towards a behavior is supportive or obstructive. Negative (rejection) reactions strengthen relationships and increase psychological security, while positive reactions (acceptance) can lead to exclusion, conflict, and loss of motivation.

Within the scope of this theme, the participants gave responses as follows:

*P4: "It causes injustice in the workplace, conflicts may occur between employees, productivity decreases, and as a result, success and quality decrease."*

*P13: "An unfair working environment, a management style without merit, and dissatisfaction may result."*

*P16: "Sycophancy leads to loss of trust in the workplace, conflicts within the team and a sense of injustice. In the long run, it decreases work performance, negatively affects employee motivation and can lead to a negative culture in the workplace."*

*P27: "Covering up the facts, a virtual state of well-being postpones the inevitable."*

*P36: "Managers cannot see their mistakes, after a while managers believe that they are perfect. They become unable to take criticism. As sycophants occupy positions, the quality of work decreases rapidly. Efficiency cannot be achieved."*

Based on the participants' responses, it can be said that sycophancy has many negative consequences at the individual, organizational, and management levels. At the individual level, outcomes such as injustice, exclusion, and insecurity weaken employee motivation and performance, while insincere behavior and loneliness seriously erode organizational commitment. At the organizational level, structural problems such as conflict, inefficiency, and negative culture both reduce quality and threaten corporate reputation and sustainability. At the management level, leadership deficiencies and managerial failures lay



basic education to higher education. Higher education institutions in Türkiye, where academic and vocational skills acquisition activities are carried out, carry out education and training activities with units such as faculties, colleges, conservatories and institutes within universities (Mengi, 2019, p. 150). It is important to carry out activities in an ethical working environment in these institutions, and it is seen that unethical behaviors have diversified and increased in universities in recent years. In this context, sycophancy, which is an unethical behavior in universities where the hierarchical structure is evident, emerges as an important issue in academic circles. In the university context, sycophancy can be defined as excessively positive behaviors exhibited by academic or administrative staff towards managers or people in higher positions. Research on how such behaviors are perceived and their effects in the academic environment is important for understanding the internal dynamics of universities. In this study, the characteristics, types, causes, effects, consequences of sycophantic behaviors in universities and the reactions of administrators and academics to such behaviors are examined.

Research results show that sycophancy leads to various negative consequences in the academic environment. It has been determined that sycophantic behaviors negatively affect academic performance and cooperation and damage the perception of organizational justice. This situation creates pressure on academic achievement and personal development and negatively affects organizational culture in universities in the long term. Akbay and Delibalta (2020) stated that factors such as academic procrastination, locus of control and perfectionism affect risk-taking behaviors in universities. In this context, the effects of sycophantic behaviors on academic risk-taking and achievement can be considered as an important factor shaping the academic culture in universities. Konay and Kırıl (2023) found that sycophancy behaviors did not vary according to demographic factors such as gender, age and marital status. This situation suggests that sycophancy is more of a reflection of an organizational culture, independent of individual characteristics. It can be said that the sycophantic behaviors exhibited by academics in universities towards administrators are directly related to organizational culture and work environment. Therefore, considering the impact of sycophantic behavior on academic achievement and organizational culture, merit-based, transparent, and ethical regulations should be implemented within the organization. For example, when certain individuals in an academic institution obtain promotions or project support by excessively

praising and conforming to managers, this both overshadows real success and reinforces the perception of injustice in the organizational culture. When such behavior becomes widespread, manipulation replaces competition among employees, and individual self-interest replaces cooperation. This undermines both academic productivity and institutional reputation.

Research results show that sycophantic behaviors are quite common in universities. In particular, factors such as academic appointment processes and benefiting from organizational rewards lead academics to sycophantic behavior. Eisenberger et al. (1986)'s result that the perception of organizational injustice can trigger sycophantic behaviors supports this situation. Oyal and Kahveci (2023) found a positive relationship between manager-oriented sycophancy and general favoritism. Sycophancy is not only about the behaviors of individuals towards managers, but also about how these behaviors are shaped within institutional structures. However, it can be said that some administrators reward sycophantic behaviors. In this context, higher education institutions and university administrators should consider how behavioral patterns such as internal sycophancy, incompetence, and injustice affect academic achievement and institutional culture. In academic appointment, promotion, and reward processes, criteria based not only on quantitative outputs but also on ethical stance, original contribution, and scientific responsibility should be adopted. For example, the quality, originality, and contribution to the academic community of an academic's publications should be integrated into the evaluation process, as well as the number of publications. It is believed that this will bring true merit to the forefront, replacing artificial achievements obtained through sycophancy.

In the study, many factors that lead to sycophantic behavior were identified. Among these, fast/easy promotion, gaining status and authority, gaining power and advantage can be counted. In addition, it is seen that sycophantic behaviors in universities are also related to social dynamics in the work environment. Bourdieu (1977) emphasized that social capital is a value that individuals obtain from their relationship networks. In this context, Özbilgin, Küçükaltan, and Açar (2019) stated that sycophancy can be an important strategy for individual career development in a university environment where systematic and institutionalized sycophancy is not punished, is taken for granted, and has become a cultural necessity. In addition, Kırıl and Dilan Dilmaç (2021) stated that individuals may use sycophancy as a tool or a way to

gain benefits, gain a position, or maintain their position. However, systematic measures must be taken to combat sycophantic behavior in order to protect academic merit and strengthen institutional trust in universities. To this end, transparent evaluation criteria, ethical oversight mechanisms, and regulations that increase managerial accountability must be implemented.

Universities, both as an academic and a social structure, provide a suitable environment for the emergence of organizational sycophancy. Academics who want to climb the academic career ladder face factors such as access to limited resources, pressure to publish, and the need to prove themselves in a competitive environment. This situation may lead some individuals to engage in behaviors such as sycophancy, even if it may have undesirable consequences. At this point, as Confucius stated, it can be said that ruling by punishment and coercion will dull people's sense of honor and shame, and instead, people should be ruled by virtue and ethical rules so that they will have a sense of honor and shame and will behave correctly and avoid such behaviors. This situation can also be possible by creating an ethical climate in universities. Aydın (2016) stated that in order to create an ethical climate, university administrators should exhibit an ethical management approach at every stage of academic life. Esmer and Yüksel (2023), on the other hand, suggested ethical leadership (leadership that adopts ethical principles and values) as an important solution to transform the current climate in universities into an ethical climate and to ensure that employees engage in positive behaviors. Therefore, it is important for all university administrators, especially rectors, to pay attention to being ethical both in their private and professional lives. On the other hand, it is possible to say that sycophancy is a poison that affects the entire university organization. In this regard, it is observed that individuals who have made sycophancy a way of life in the university environment not only undermine their own ethical stance but also set a bad example for other employees by negatively affecting the organizational culture. The spread of such behavior erodes the merit system, artificializes academic competition, and leads to a chain of consequences such as injustice, distrust, and loss of motivation within the organization. Therefore, it is believed that the application of clear and deterrent sanctions based on ethical codes against such individuals will both create a mechanism to prevent sycophancy and provide a normative framework that encourages ethical behavior within the organization.

As a result, it can be said that sycophancy in universities

is a phenomenon intertwined with academic success, cooperation and organizational culture. Sycophantic behaviors, the attitudes of academics towards managers and the place of these attitudes in organizational structures is a subject that requires more research in academic circles, and it is thought that studies on sycophancy in universities provide important information for academic success and improvement of the work environment. In this context, future research should examine in depth the interaction between sycophantic behavior and academic leadership styles, as well as the effects of this interaction on the organizational ethical climate.

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