

Relationship between Workplace Attachment and Communication Style among Private School Staff in Phnom Penh

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Abstract.

The present research is the inaugural application of the conceptual framework of attachment theory to investigate the correlation between adult attachment styles in professional settings and employee communication methods. For over fifty years, researchers have utilized attachment theory as the preferred framework for analyzing attachment relationships throughout the lifespan and for comprehending attachment as a relational style that can be classified as secure (SEC), avoidant (AVO), ambivalent (AMB), disorganized (DIS)—in essence. The Adult Attachment in the Workplace (AAW) Scale categorized adult attachment styles in the workplace as secure, avoidant, and ambivalent; concurrently, employee communication styles were delineated into six domains—expressiveness (EXP), preciseness (PRE), verbal aggressiveness (VEA), questioningness (QES), emotionality (EMO), and impression manipulateness (IMM)—assessed via the Communication Styles Inventory (CSI). Numerous regression models indicated that workplace connection substantially forecasted certain communication patterns. Nevertheless, the corresponding R² values indicate that professionals ought not to depend on these results for organizational decision-making. Findings further revealed that Cronbach's alpha for both the AAW Scale and CSI fell below the values documented in the existing literature. The influence of cross-cultural equivalence and the use of negative phrasing in Likert-scale items may have played a role in this discovery. Ultimately, the erratic factor structure of the AAW Scale evidenced by previous studies, together with the poor internal consistency of the AAW Scale subscales identified in the present research, could indicate an emerging paradigm change in attachment studies. Consequently, it will be particularly beneficial for scholars to ascertain in subsequent studies whether the bond with work associates differs qualitatively from that with family and love relationships.

Keywords: Relationship, Workplace Attachment Style and Employee Communication Style Private School Teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

According to studies (Berson et al., 2006; Davidovitz et al., 2007; Harms, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Neustadt et al., 2011; Scrima, 2015; Scrima et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2018), attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1979; Bowlby, 1969, 1980, 1988) functions as a useful framework for analyzing the quality of work relationships. Research demonstrates that each attachment style provides a distinct functioning model of self in connection to others, which is consistent with attachment theory (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). A positive functional model of self that incorporates a sense of security in interpersonal relationships is indicative of secure adult attachment (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Unlike secure adult attachment, insecure adult attachment (i.e., avoidant and ambivalent) is characterized by a negative working model of relationship and self-security (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Ambivalently attached adults exhibit a working model of self that is marked by a sense of unworthiness, fear of rejection, and high relational anxiety, in contrast to avoidantly attached adults who exhibit a positive image of themselves and a negative perception of others that includes feeling uneasy with closeness and intimacy (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Working models of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent adult attachment serve as reliable predictors of leader and follower behavior, according to the social science literature (e.g., Davidovitz et al., 2007; Harms, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Popper & Castelnovo, 2019; Scrima, 2015; Thompson et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2018). Research on the relationship between employee communication style and attachment style in the workplace is currently lacking from the body of existing literature. The numerous studies that support the importance of effective communication for organizational constructs like organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and other work outcomes demonstrate how important this relationship is (e.g., Brown et al., 2019; Fan & Han, 2018; Men, 2014; Pološki Vokić et al., 2021; Sargeant et al., 2011; Smollan & Morrison,

2019; Stich et al., 2015; Yue et al., 2021). The current study responds to the following research question in order to close the gap in the literature about the relationship between workplace attachment and employee communication style among private school teachers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia: “*Does the attachment style in a professional setting (secure, avoidant, and ambivalent) forecast six aspects of employee communication style (expressiveness, precision, verbal aggression, inquisitiveness, emotionality, and impression management)?*”

The present study used attachment theory as its conceptual foundation (Ainsworth et al., 1979; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980, 1988). According to the social science literature (Anders & Tucker, 2000; Arseth et al., 2009; Berson et al., 2006; Davidovitz et al., 2007; Harms, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Pistole et al., 2010; Riggs et al., 2019; Sessa et al., 2020). The literature refers to this idea as the continuity of attachment styles. A review of pertinent research on communication styles follows the presentation of evidence supporting the persistence of adulthood attachment types into adulthood. The current study investigated the connection between adult attachment at work and employee communication style, building on the work of Nikic et al. (2014). The Adult Attachment in the Workplace (AAW) Scale (Neustadt et al., 2006, 2011), modified by Scrima et al. (2014), was used to measure the three independent variables of secure attachment at work, avoidant attachment at work, and ambivalent attachment at work. Using the CSI, the six communication style dimensions—expressiveness, precision, verbal aggression, questioningness, emotionality, and impression manipulativeness—served as the six dependent variables (De Vries et al., 2009, 2010, 2013). Based on the literature mentioned above that demonstrates the applicability of attachment theory, hypotheses were developed to investigate the connection between employee communication style and attachment style at work.

Reviews of the Related Concepts

Concepts of the Secure Adult Attachment Working Model

A positive functional model of self that incorporates a sense of security in interpersonal relationships is indicative of secure adult attachment (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). According to Feeney & Van Vleet (2010), Guerrero (1996), Guerrero & Jones (2005), and others, secure attachment in adulthood fosters a strong sense of self-esteem, confidence, self-efficacy, healthy dependency in relationships, autonomy, and happy mood. For instance, according to Hazan and Shaver (1990), securely attached people say they feel deserving of the affection they receive from others and anticipate that others would welcome their attempts to connect. In romantic relationships, for instance, secure attachment is linked to healthy emotional expression, intimacy, and adaptable and responsive communication patterns (Abaied & Rudolph, 2010; Anders & Tucker, 2000; Jang et al., 2002; Pistole et al., 2010; Weger & Polcar, 2000; Wegner et al., 2018).

Concepts of the Avoidant Adult Attachment Working Model

A negative working model of relationship and self-security is indicative of avoidant adult attachment (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) claim that avoidant attachment in adulthood fosters a good self-image but a negative view of others, leading to a relational dynamic associated with discomfort with intimacy and closeness. Despite feeling deserving of love, avoidantly attached adults exhibit a negative attitude toward others. Arseth et al. (2009) state that avoidantly attached persons prefer not to feel obligated to or dependent on others and perceive others as needy and dependent. Additionally, avoidantly attached adults use behavioral disengagement coping strategies, distance themselves from stress-related stimuli, and conceal their negative emotions to cope with the discomfort of thoughts of intimacy and dependency (Abaied & Rudolph, 2010; Anders & Tucker, 2000; Jang et al., 2002; Pistole et al., 2010; Weger & Polcar, 2000; Wegner et al., 2018).

Concepts of the Ambivalent Working Model Adult Attachment

A negative working model of relationship and self-security is indicative of ambivalent adult attachment (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Adults who are ambivalently attached believe they are unworthy of love from others and exhibit a strong need for intimacy and closeness with important people, which is linked to a strong fear of rejection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Feeney & Van Vleet, 2010; Guerrero, 1996; Guerrero & Jones, 2005; Hazan & Shaver, 1990). The

ambivalently attached adult experiences high relational anxiety due to a combination of a strong need for connection and a fear of rejection (Arseth et al., 2009; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Jang et al., 2002; Pistole et al., 2010; Weger & Polcar, 2000; Wegner et al., 2018).

Concepts of Communication Style

According to academics, communication style is a "particular form of adaptation" that combines personality and behavior (Diotaiuti et al., 2020, p. 1421). However, Diotaiuti et al. (2020) warned that while communication styles are associated with personality, they are not personality traits in and of themselves; rather, they develop as a result of the interaction between personality and environment. Accordingly, De Vries et al. (2013), who created the Communication Styles Inventory (CSI), discovered that academics frequently use the Big Five model of personality to examine the relationship between communication styles and personality.

For individuals who exhibit various functioning models of attachment, Diotaiuti et al. (2020) further highlighted the significance of investigating the role of self-concept in relation to the development of communication style. Kirtley and Weaver (2010) provided evidence to support this claim by demonstrating that self-concept, or gender role self-perception, predicts variations in communication style. In particular, the researchers discovered that those who thought of themselves as autonomous, self-governing, and self-directed (i.e., agentic) spoke more assertively than people who thought of themselves as vocally and emotionally expressive (i.e., communal).

Research that explicitly describes the relationship between attachment and employee communication style is almost nonexistent, despite the fact that the body of existing literature supports the significant association between adult attachment and communication style for populations such as college students, romantic partners, and couples facing a potentially terminal medical diagnosis (Morey et al., 2013; Pizzano et al., 2013; Ramos et al., 2020; Riggs et al., 2019; Wegner et al., 2018). According to a review of the literature, Nikic et al. (2014) was the only study that particularly examined attachment in relation to employee communication.

Nikic et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between personality traits, social emotional competence, and attachment style and the quality of business communications. However, the form of attachment that was measured was attachment to family rather than connection to employment. The affiliative communication style, self-enhancing humor, sociability, and life satisfaction all showed a strong positive link with stable familial attachment, according to the study. The findings also showed a modest correlation between anxious attachment and aggressive humor, sociability, and general living, and a favorable correlation with self-defeating humor. When considered collectively, these results demonstrate the importance of the connection between communication style and adult attachment in an organizational setting.

II. METHODS

An online sample of people who satisfied the following study requirements was made available by Qualtrics: (1) working more than 20 hours per week; (2) speaking English; and (3) giving their agreement to participate in the study. Hair et al. (2019) state that in order to detect a statistical difference at the 0.05 level of significance 80% of the time, a minimum sample size of 60 participants is required. The study had 226 participants, which satisfied the sample size criteria for statistical significance.

The participants filled out a demographic questionnaire, the CSI (De Vries et al., 2009, 2013), and the AAW Scale (Neustadt et al., 2006, 2011) as modified by Scrima et al. (2014). Participant age, gender, ethnicity, current job title, weekly hours worked, and duration of employment at current job were among the demographic factors. The study sample was characterized using the demographic information. Neustadt et al. (2006) modified the Collins and Read (1990) romantic attachment scale to create the AAW Scale. Neustadt et al. found two factors using exploratory factor analysis: insecure attachment at work (IAW) and secure/autonomous attachment at work (SAAW). Using the AAW Scale to investigate the relationship between self-reported attachment orientation at work and personality, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, career potential, and job performance, the researchers discovered this similar two-factor structure once more

(Neustadt et al., 2011). Scrima (2015) and Scrima et al. (2014, 2015) discovered a three-factor solution for the AAW Scale that was compatible with the attachment styles initially reported by Ainsworth et al. (1979) and later discovered by Collins and Read (1990), in contrast to the results of Neustadt et al. (2006, 2011). These results, which align with earlier attachment style research and theory (e.g., Ainsworth et al., 1979; Collins & Read, 1990), led to the current study using the three-factor solution (secure, avoidant, ambivalent) for the AAW Scale.

Scrima (2015) and Scrima et al. (2014, 2015) updated two items from the original AAW Scale (Neustadt et al., 2006, 2011) to make all of the items focused on coworkers. “Work mates” replaced “top management” in the first edited item. “Work mates” replaced “boss” in the second edited item. The AAW Scale (Scrima, 2015; Scrima et al., 2014, 2015) was changed so that all of the items were focused on coworkers in order to assess attachment style at work. A seven-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting “strongly disagree” and 7 denoting “strongly agree,” is used to rate each of the six items that load on each of the three criteria. Items like “I am comfortable having others depend on me at work” and “I find it reasonably simple to get close to people at work” are part of the Secure Attachment at Work subscale. Items like “I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others at work” and “I am somewhat uncomfortable confiding in others at work” are part of the Avoidant Attachment at Work subscale. Items like “I often fear that work colleagues do not trust me” and “I often worry that people would not want to continue in my work team” are part of the Ambivalent Attachment at Work subscale. The secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment at work subscales have Cronbach’s coefficient alpha values of 0.74, 0.73, and 0.78, respectively (Scrima, 2015). Based on De Vries et al.’s (2009) definition, the 96-item CSI (De Vries et al., 2013) assesses six communication style domains: expressiveness, precision, verbal aggression, questioningness, emotionality, and impression manipulateness.

There are four, four-item facets in each communication domain. Talkativeness, conversational dominance, humor, and informality make up expressiveness, which assesses the capacity to sustain a casual and enjoyable dialogue (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2021). Structuredness, thoughtfulness, substantiveness, and conciseness are the components of precision, which assesses the capacity to focus on key ideas and organize the conversation to highlight them (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2021). Anger, authoritarianism, derogation, and no supportiveness are all components of verbal aggression, which also measures hostile, disrespectful, or dissimilar speech (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2021). Unconventionality, philosophicalness, inquisitiveness, and argumentativeness are the components of questioningness, which is the pursuit of details in the conversation (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2021). Sentimentality, worry, tension, and defensiveness make up emotionality, which is a measure of an individual’s emotional activation brought on by verbal engagement (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2021). Comprising ingratiation, charm, inscrutability, and concealingness, impression manipulateness assesses the capacity to positively change the other person’s feelings during the conversation (Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2021). A 5-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting “totally disagree” and 5 denoting “absolutely agree,” is used to rate each item. There are twenty-seven reverse-scored items. According to De Vries et al. (2013), the six domains’ Cronbach’s coefficient reliabilities range from 0.82 to 0.88.

Using SPSS Version 28.0, regression analysis was used to investigate the connection between employee communication style and attachment type at work. The three independent variables were ambivalent attachment at work, avoidant attachment at work, and secure attachment at work. The six dependent variables were the communication domains of expressiveness, precision, verbal aggression, questioning, emotionality, and impression manipulateness. The degree of connection at work was used as a predictor to test hypotheses for each of the six dependent variables.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results of Adjusting AAW Scale and CSI Subscale Alphas

Secure work attachment and ambivalent work attachment had poor internal consistency, while avoidant work attachment had adequate internal consistency, according to preliminary examination of subscale coefficient alphas for subscales of the AAW Scale. After eliminating one of the six criteria, a secure work attachment coefficient alpha of 0.60 improved to 0.65 (questionable). After eliminating two of the six items,

the coefficient alpha for avoidant work attachment increased from 0.71 to 0.75 (acceptable). Lastly, eliminating one of the six items increased the ambivalent work attachment coefficient alpha from 0.51 to 0.66 (questionable).

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha, both Original and Modified, for the AAW Scale and CSI

Scale and Sub-scale	Cronbach's Alpha	
	Original	Modified
AAW		
SEC	0.60	0.65
AVO	0.71	0.75
AMB	0.51	0.66
CSI		
EXP	0.59	0.74
PRE	0.75	0.80
VEA	0.67	0.76
QES	0.64	0.69
EMO	0.58	0.69
IMM	0.58	0.71

For each of the CSI's subscales, Table 1 displays both the original and adjusted coefficient alphas. Poor internal consistency for expressiveness, emotionality, and impression manipulateness; questionable internal consistency for verbal aggression and questioningness; and acceptable internal consistency for precision were the findings of the initial analysis of subscale coefficient alphas for the CSI subscales. After eliminating seven of the sixteen subscale items, the expressiveness coefficient alpha, which was 0.59, increased to 0.74 (acceptable). Six of the seven eliminated items had their scores reversed. Removing two of the sixteen subscale items increased the precision coefficient alpha from 0.75 to 0.80 (marginally good). The two eliminated items received a reversal score. After eliminating two of the sixteen subscale items, the verbal aggression coefficient alpha of 0.67 increased to 0.76 (acceptable). Once more, the two eliminated items had their scores reversed. After eliminating three of the sixteen subscale items, the questioningness coefficient alpha of 0.64 increased to 0.69 (questionable). Each of the three eliminated items received a reverse score. After eliminating three of the sixteen subscale items, the emotionality coefficient alpha of 0.58 increased to 0.69 (questionable). Once more, the scores for all three eliminated items were inverted. Lastly, eliminating four of the sixteen subscale items raised the impression manipulateness coefficient alpha from 0.58 to 0.71 (marginally acceptable). Three of the four items had their scores reversed. Ninety percent of the eliminated items (19/21) had reversal scores. Furthermore, removing 70% of the survey's total reverse-scored items (19/27) led to greater subscale coefficient alphas.

The only study that particularly looked at adult attachment in the workplace in relation to employee communication was Nikic et al. (2014), according to a review of the literature. However, the researchers examined attachment to family rather than attachment to job. This study is the first to look at the connection between employee communication and attachment at work. Scrima et al. (2014) updated the AAW Scale (Neustadt et al., 2006, 2011) to measure the three attachment styles at work: ambivalent, avoidant, and secure. The six aspects of communication style—expressiveness, precision, verbal aggression, questioningness, emotionality, and impression manipulation—were assessed by the CSI (De Vries et al., 2009, 2010, 2013). De Vries et al. (2013) found that all six subscales of the CSI had good alphas, ranging from 0.82 to 0.88. However, five of the six subscales in the current study had alphas that ranged from bad to doubtful. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha only improved to questionable for questioningness and emotionality, acceptable for expressiveness, verbal aggression, and impression manipulateness, and marginally good for preciseness even after removing items that were inconsistent with the dimension of interest (i.e., communication style). All of these results point to the necessity for further scale development for both the CSI and the AAW Scale.

Results of Multiple-linear Regression Assumptions

Multiple linear regression assumptions (normality, homoscedasticity, and linearity) were examined and met. The first assumption was tested for the normality of the residuals for each of the six dependent variables. The second premise was tested and homoscedasticity was accepted. That is, the distribution of the

residuals was evenly distributed for each of the 6 dependent variables. Finally, the third assumption was tested and showed linearity between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 2: Study Variable Descriptive Statistics

Study Variable	M	S.D.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
ATS						
SEC	24	4.98	-0.155	0.162	0.802	0.322
AVO	15	5.19	0.121	0.162	-0.219	0.322
AMB	16	5.00	0.171	0.162	0.416	0.322
COS						
EXP	27	5.54	-0.347	0.162	1.066	0.322
PRE	42	8.17	-1.155	0.162	1.619	0.322
VEA	43	8.60	0.468	0.162	0.112	0.322
QES	39	6.58	-0.528	0.162	1.256	0.322
EMO	39	6.79	0.008	0.162	1.266	0.322
IMM	36	7.00	0.485	0.162	0.664	0.322

Table 3: Independent and Dependent Variable Correlations

Study Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 SEC	1								
2 AVO	-.52**	1							
3 AMB	-.41**	.67**	1						
4 EXP	-.14*	.16*	.11	1					
5 PRE	-.18**	.01	.09	.15*	1				
6 VEA	.15	-.05	-.23**	.18**	-.51**	1			
7 QES	-.06	-.06	-.14*	.39**	.21**	.19**	1		
8 EMO	-.00	-.06	-.15*	.23**	-.04	.19*	.40**	1	
9 IMM	-.12	.19**	-.03	.41**	-.17*	.44**	.35**	.47**	1

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

The descriptive statistics for each study variable are displayed in Table 2. Table 3 displays the correlations between the study variables that are independent and dependent. In particular, the findings showed substantial weak associations between secure attachment at work and expressiveness ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$), precision ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$), and verbal aggression ($r = .15$, $p < .05$). There were substantial weak associations between avoidant attachment at work and impression manipulativeness ($r = .19$, $p < .01$) and expressiveness ($r = .16$, $p < .05$). Lastly, there were significant weak associations between ambivalent attachment at work and emotionality ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$), questioningness ($r = -.14$, $p < .05$), and verbal aggression ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$).

Working models of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent adult attachment function as reliable predictors of leader and follower behavior, according to the body of existing research (e.g., Davidovitz et al., 2007; Harms, 2011; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Popper & Castelnovo, 2019; Scrima, 2015; Thompson et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2018). Research on the relationship between employee communication style and adult attachment type in the workplace, however, is sparse in the literature. The numerous studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2019; Fan & Han, 2018; Men, 2014; Pološki Vokić et al., 2021; Sargeant et al., 2011; Smollan & Morrison, 2019; Yue et al., 2021) that support the critical role of effective communication for a variety of organizational outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational commitment).

IV. CONCLUSION

The present research is the inaugural application of the conceptual framework of attachment theory to investigate the correlation between adult attachment styles in professional settings and six facets of employee communication. For over fifty years, researchers have utilized attachment theory as the preferred framework for analyzing attachment relationships throughout the lifespan and for comprehending attachment as a relational style that can be classified as secure or insecure (e.g., avoidant, ambivalent, disorganized). The findings of the present research indicated that workplace attachment notably forecasted certain communication patterns. The corresponding R^2 values from the regression studies indicate that professionals should refrain from depending on these results for organizational decision-making. The findings indicated

that Cronbach's alpha for both the AAW Scale and CSI was inferior to the values documented in the existing literature. The influence of cross-cultural equivalence and the use of negative phrasing in Likert-scale items may have had a role in this outcome. The AAW Scale's unstable factor structure and the subscales' poor internal consistency may point to a developing paradigm change in attachment research (Kuhn, 2012). Therefore, determining if attachment to coworkers differs qualitatively from attachment to family or romantic partners will be very helpful for researchers in subsequent studies. In the event that further studies demonstrate the existence of qualitative distinctions, this dissertation will have significantly added to the body of literature.

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