

## **Attachment Style, Leadership Behavior, and Perceptions of Leader Effectiveness in Academic Management**

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### **Abstract**

The quality of organizational leadership can have a significant impact on organizational success and employee well-being. Some research has shown that leaders with secure attachment styles are more effective leaders, but the connection between different attachment styles and different leadership styles is unclear. Relationships between attachment styles and leadership styles were examined in this study. University personnel completed the Relationship Questionnaire and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses revealed positive correlations between transformational leadership and secure attachment and negative relationships between transformational leadership and insecure attachment styles. Results of this study may help leaders recognize the relationship between their attachment style and their ability to increase organizational effectiveness and to decrease turnover.

### **Introduction**

The effectiveness of any organization is impacted by the effectiveness of its leaders (Boeckmann & Tyler, 2002; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008; Lind & Tyler, 1988). The demands for leadership in organizations have increased due to technological advances and global changes in the workplace (De Hoogh, Hartog, & Koopman, 2005; Gilley, McMillan, & Gilley, 2009). Today's leaders need to inspire and motivate subordinates, create synergistic team environments, and foster positive job attitudes (Gilley et al., 2009) to respond to these changes.

Although many styles of leadership exist and many theories of leadership have been identified, the most effective leaders are those who communicate visions to their subordinates and organization (Amneric, Craig, & Tourish, 2007; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Jandaghi, Matin, & Farmami, 2009), who are friendly, willing to help followers develop individual strengths, and comfortable taking risks (DeRue, Nahrang, Wellmann & Humphrey, 2011; Humphrey, Hollenbeck, Meyer, & Ilgen, 2007). All of these behaviors are associated with transformational

and charismatic leadership styles (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; De Hoogh et al., 2005). Research has also shown that transformational and charismatic leadership is related to follower commitment, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation (Avolio, Routundo, & Wulumbwa, 2009; Goleman, 2000; Ismail, Zainuddin, & Ibrahim, 2010; Jacobson & House, 2001; Shamir, 1991). Conversely, laissez-faire leadership correlates negatively with subordinate psychological health, job performance, and productivity (Ashforth, 1994; Ashforth, 1997; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Tepper, 2000) and positively with turnover rates (Ashforth, 1994; Ashforth, 1997; Padilla et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000).

Research in organizations has shown that leadership style is related to attachment style. Attachment style refers to ways in which one attaches to or relates to others, and is based on early experiences with caregivers (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Attachment styles may influence how personality traits manifest in individuals and their interactions with others. Thus, it follows that the attachment styles of leaders influence their leadership styles. The four different styles of adult attachment identified in the literature are secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful attachment (as described by Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). People with a secure attachment style are individuals who display high levels of warmth and balance of control. Dismissing individuals are self-confident but are low in emotional expressiveness. Preoccupied individuals are likely to display extreme anger and discomfort in friendships. Lastly, fearful individuals display low self-confidence, self-image, and balance of control. Dismissive, preoccupied, and fearful attachment styles are collectively referred to as insecure attachment styles.

Although some research examines the relationship between leaders' attachment and leadership styles, most research has been limited to the relationship between one attachment style—secure attachment—and one leadership style—transformational leadership (e.g., Mikulincer & Florian, 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Popper, Mayseless, & Castenovo, 2000). The attachment theory was the foundation for the hypothesis of the respective study. For example, several studies have reported significant correlational relationships between secure attachment style and transformational leadership (Berson, Dan, & Yammarino, 2006; Popper, et al., 2000; Popper & Amit, 2000; Popper & Mayseless, 2003). Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991), Lopez and Brennan (2000), and Simmons, Gooty, Nelson, and Little (2009) proposed that a securely attached adult displays high levels of warmth, confidence, and balance of control that facilitates flexible and reciprocal social relationships and the ability to work effectively with others. Transformational leaders with a secure attachment style were more available to their followers, giving, encouraging, and empowering in leadership relations compared to leaders with an insecure attachment style (Popper et al., 2000).

Little research has examined the relationships between other attachment styles and leadership styles. Adults with an insecure attachment style are generally seen as less favorable in terms of work relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). One specific example of research on the relationship between insecure attachment and professional effectiveness involved an analysis of mentoring relationships between senior and junior faculty (Banjeree-Batist, 2014). Individuals with insecure attachment styles had difficulty establishing relationships with their mentors and struggled to seek help from mentors. They were also more likely to give lower ratings of mentoring relationships (Banjeree-Batist, 2014). More broadly, individuals who struggle to

develop a secure attachment style in early life struggle with developing effective adult relationships (Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998).

Given the recognized benefits of effective leadership, it is important to consider the interrelationships between leadership and attachment styles. In this paper, four different styles of adult attachment are considered as they relate to leadership style and behavior. Although the attachment theory and its relationship with effective leadership presents with strong empirical evidence, alternative theories such as the personality theory might also help explain differences in leadership styles.

Research has shown that individuals with an insecure attachment style have difficulty maintaining high levels of hope, are unable to work effectively with others, and are less likely to form useful relationships (Welch & Houser, 2010). While connections have not been drawn specifically between insecure attachment styles and leadership, insecure attachment is related to personality traits and other elements relevant to interpersonal relationships. Secure individuals are more resilient and less neurotic than individuals with dismissing and preoccupied attachment styles (Kobak & Sceery, 1988), and score higher on dimensions of agreeableness, conscientious, extraversion, and openness to experience (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; De Hoogh et al., 2005; McCrae & Costa, 1987). Preoccupied and fearful attachment styles are correlated with extreme anger and relationship discomfort (Furman, 2001).

Research has shown that leaders with different leadership styles tend to manifest different personality traits (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Judge et al, 2002; Neustadt et al., 2006). Because individuals with different attachment styles also tend to have different personality traits, it follows that those leaders will be characterized by different attachment styles. For example, leaders with high ethical beliefs and confidence, traits often seen in transformational and charismatic leaders, tend to have a secure attachment style (Bass, 1985; Howell, 1988; Shamir, House, & Arthor, 1993). Furthermore, leaders with a laissez-faire leadership style have been found to be untrustworthy (Davidovitz, Mikulincer, Shaver, Izsak, & Popper, 2007).

To date, no research has examined the different leadership styles and their relationships to the different styles of attachment (secure, fearful, dismissing, and preoccupied). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how and whether attachment style(s) relate to different leadership styles. Specifically, I predict that secure attachment style will be positively related to transformational and charismatic leadership styles and negatively related to laissez-faire leadership. Conversely, insecure attachment style will be negatively related to transformational and charismatic leadership and positively related to laissez-faire leadership.

## Methods

An online survey investigated the relationship between secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful attachment and perceptions of leader effectiveness. A convenience sample of university personnel from the academic staff (college deans, chairpersons, provosts, and instructors) of several colleges in the Northeast USA was recruited. Three of the four colleges were public universities, and the other private. All participants were full time employees 18 years of age or older and had been employed with the college for a minimum of one year.

A description of the study and purpose of the research was emailed to human resource directors for each department at the college. The directors were then asked to e-mail the link to the surveys to the deans, chairpersons, provost and instructors of their respective colleges. The consent form was presented at the beginning of the survey and included all information required by the University IRB, including contact information for the researcher and the university. Participants were directed to a secure online survey site to complete the study.

### **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

**Attachment style.** Attachment was measured using the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), a 4-item questionnaire in which respondents place a checkmark next to statement that best reflects their attachment style (secure, dismissing preoccupied, and fearful) using a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (not all like me) to 7 (very much like me). Respondents are then asked to rate how well each of the descriptions corresponds to their general relationship style, and to select the one statement that best describes them. While the RQ can be used as a categorical measure or continuous measure, changes in the field toward dimensional measures of adult attachment encourage the use of the RQ as a continuous measure. Attachment was therefore conceptualized as continuous for this study. The wording of the questions was modified slightly to accommodate the target population. The RQ shows high test-retest reliability (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994) and internal consistency reliability (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), with alpha coefficients ranging from .87 to .95.

**Leadership styles.** Leadership styles were measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire Short Form (Form 5X-Short; Bass, 1985). The MLQ measures three major components of leadership styles: transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990, 2000). The three components provide 12 sub-scores as follows: Transformational (Idealized Attributes, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration), Transactional (Contingent Reward, Management-by-Exception, Active Management-by Exception, Passive, and Laissez-faire and Outcomes of Leadership, Extra Effort, Effectiveness, and Satisfaction with Leadership). Participants were asked to evaluate how frequently (0=Not at all; 1=Once in a while; 2= Sometimes; 3= Fairly often; and 4=Frequently if not always) they have seen their leader engage in a given leadership behavior (Bass, 1985, 2000). The MLQ asks participants to provide ratings for self and for others. For this study, participants in leadership positions were asked to rate themselves, and those not in leadership positions were asked to rate their leader. The manual for the MLQ provides substantial validity and reliability evidence (Avolio & Bass, 2000). Chronbach's alpha reliability range from .67 to .94 across studies (Heinitz, Liepmann, & Felfe, 2005, Sadeghi & Lope Pihie, 2012). Construct validity estimates range from .65-.85 (Eagly, Johannensen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). , and it predicts between 45% and 60% of the variance of organizational performance and satisfaction (Avolio & Bass, 2000).

### **Leadership Effectiveness**

Leadership Effectiveness was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass & Avolio, 1989, 2000). In addition to the MLQ measuring the different leadership styles (i.e. transformational, transactional, laissez-faire leadership), the MLQ also measures leadership effectiveness. The Cronbach's alpha for leadership effectiveness ranges from .67 to

.94 (Bass & Avolio, 1985, 2000). As mentioned earlier, the MLQ consists of 45-items. From the 45-items, 36 of them represent nine leadership factors: five of the factors are for transformational, three factors are for the transactional, and one factor for the laissez-faire leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990, 2000). Nine items of the scale assess leadership outcomes, of which 4 items assess leadership effectiveness, 3 items assess extra effort, and 2 items assess satisfaction (Bass & Avolio, 1990, 2000).

## **Results**

### **Sample Characteristics**

Two-hundred and fifty people were initially contacted for the study. Out of the 250 potential participants, 83 responses were recorded. However, 17 of those cases were removed from the analysis because they began the survey (which generated a participant record) but did not answer any questions, leaving 66 participants. Of the remaining 66 participants, 12 answered demographic questions only. Thus, the final sample of participants who completed the full study was 54 participants. This was an effective response rate of 21.6% (54/250). The majority of the sample (n=36, 67.7%) was comprised of faculty in a non-supervisory role while the rest of the sample (n=18, 33.3%) was comprised of faculty in a supervisory role. The most common educational level was Master's degree (N=24, 45.3%), followed by professional degree (N=15, 28.3%), and doctorate (N=13, 24.5%). One person reported having only a bachelor's degree (1.9%). Respondents had been working at the university for an average of 3.33 years (SD=1.43).

### **Measures**

Means, reliabilities, and standard deviations for subscales and composites for each of these scales are given in Table 1. Overall, reliabilities were good (above .75), though some fell slightly below that threshold.

Table 1  
*Reliability, Means, and SDs for all Scale Variables, N = 54.*

Scale Name	Reliability	Mean	SD
Effectiveness	.91	4.97	1.03
Extra Effort	.94	3.77	1.17
Individualized Consideration	.79	3.80	.96
Idealized Influence (Attributed)	.88	3.81	1.05
Idealized Influence (Behavior)	.88	3.87	.98
Inspirational Motivation	.92	4.01	1.00
Intellectual Stimulation	.85	3.70	.93
Laissez-faire	.80	1.69	.84
Management by Exception (Active)	.72	2.56	.92
Management by Exception (Passive)	.79	2.02	.86
Contingent Reward	.85	3.68	.99
Leadership Satisfaction	.94	3.93	1.17

### Correlations Between Attachment Styles and Leadership Styles

Table 2 presents correlations between attachment styles and leadership styles. Transformational leadership correlated statistically significantly with secure attachment style,  $r=.32$ ,  $p < .05$ . Charismatic leadership was also found to correlate statistically significantly with secure attachment style,  $r=.35$ ,  $p < .01$ . Laissez-faire leadership did not relate statistically significantly with secure attachment style,  $r= -.15$ .

Fearful attachment style was negatively correlated with charismatic leadership,  $r= -.36$ ,  $p < .05$ . Laissez-faire leadership correlated positively with dismissing attachment style (insecure attachment),  $r=.48$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Table 2  
*Correlations between Attachment Styles and Leadership Scales (n=54)*

	Secure	Fearful	Preoccupied	Dismissing
Transformational leadership	.32*	-.28	-.22	-.26
Charismatic leadership	.36*	-.31*	-.21	-.26
Laissez Faire	-.15	.09	-.07	.48**
Effectiveness	.24	-.16	-.16	-.21

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

## Regression Analysis for Research Questions 1 and 2

In order to explore the relationships among the attachment styles as they explain variation in leadership styles, attachment styles were examined as predictors of each leadership style. Results indicated that attachment style did not significantly predict Transformational Leadership style, but did predict Charismatic Leadership and Laissez-Faire leadership. For charismatic leadership, the overall model was significant, but none of the individual predictors was significant. This may be because the attachment styles correlate with each other (multicollinearity), or because there are two coefficients (for secure and preoccupied attachment) that are larger, but do not reach significance. For Laissez-Faire Leadership, the dismissing attachment style was the only significant predictor. All three models and the beta coefficients for all predictors are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Results of Multiple Regression for Continuous Attachment Styles Predicting Leadership Styles*

	Transformational Leadership	Charismatic Leadership	Laissez-Faire Leadership
	Unstandardized Beta Weights (Std Error)		
Intercept	4.03 (1.12)	4.33 (1.28)	.51 (.97)
Secure Attachment	.14 (1.08)	.15 (.14)	.03 (.11)
Fearful Attachment	-.04 (.12)	-.00 (.15)	.03 (.11)
Preoccupied Attachment	-.13 (.10)	-.13 (.12)	-.01 (.09)
Dismissing Attachment	-.09 (.09)	-.09 (.11)	.23** (.08)
F	2.34	2.63*	2.63*
Df	4, 40	4, 39	4, 39
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.19	.21	.21

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

## Attachment Styles and Perceptions of Leader Effectiveness

No significant correlations were found between instructor perceptions of leader effectiveness and secure attachment style,  $r = .24$ , ( $p = .11$ ), fearful attachment style,  $r = -.16$ , ( $p = .31$ ), preoccupied attachment style,  $r = -.16$ , ( $p = .29$ ), or dismissing attachment style,  $r = -.21$ , ( $p = .17$ ). Regression analysis yielded similar results, with attachment styles failing to predict effectiveness ( $F(4, 39) = 1.04$ ,  $p = .40$ ) (Table 4).

Table 4

*Results of Multiple Regression for Continuous Attachment Styles Predicting Leader Effectiveness*

Leadership Effectiveness (unstandardized beta, std. error)	
Intercept	4.33 (1.28)
Secure Attachment	.10 (.13)
Fearful Attachment	-.00 (.15)
Preoccupied Attachment	-.11 (.12)
Dismissing Attachment	-.11 (.11)
F	1.04
Df	4, 39
Model R <sup>2</sup>	.10

\*p&lt;.05, \*\*p&lt;.01

### Discussion

Effective leaders of organizations have difficult responsibilities and duties to fulfill, which include inspiring and motivating subordinates, encouraging positive job attitudes, creating a synergistic team environment, and responding to changes prompted by technological advances (Boeckmann & Tyler 2002; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008; DeHoogh et al., 2005; Gilley et al., 2009; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Unfortunately, leaders who do not embrace such responsibilities have been known to express more negativity, promote coercive behaviors towards subordinates, and lack the ability to make effective decisions (Einarson, 1999; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Giessner et al., 2013; Skogstad et al., 2007). Further, ineffective leadership can lead to poor staff satisfaction (Avolio et al., 1999; House et al., 1991; Howell & Frost, 1989). In turn, poor staff satisfaction can influence the quality of an organization, which affects overall staff satisfaction (Ashforth, 1994; Ashforth, 1997; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Padilla et al., 2007). Thus, it is critical that we have a comprehensive understanding of the personal variables that contribute to effective leadership.

In this study, secure attachment style was significantly related to transformational and charismatic leadership styles. Fearful attachment was significantly negatively related to charismatic leadership, and dismissing attachment was positively related to Laissez Faire leadership. Other correlations were not significant, but were in the expected direction. Interestingly, perceptions of leader effectiveness were not significantly correlated with attachment style.

### Interpretation of Findings

Consistent with previous research, my study found that transformational and charismatic leadership were related to secure attachment style (Berson et al., 2006; Boatwright et al., 2010; Choi, 2006; Manning, 2003; Popper et al., 2000; Popper & Amit, 2002; Popper & Mayseless, 2003; Towler, 2005). In other words, transformational and charismatic leaders are likely to have trusting relationships with others as well as a positive view of themselves compared to insecure leaders such as laissez-leaders. Additionally, consistent with previous research, laissez-faire



leadership style related positively with dismissing attachment style (Boatwright, Lopez, Sauer, VanDerWege, & Huber, 2010; Manning, 2003). This suggests that leaders who have a hard time trusting others but feel good about themselves may have little faith in their subordinates' abilities and skills. They may not value subordinates' input or involve them in decisions, which may result in low morale.

In addition to the significant findings, the results of the study also showed non-significant findings. For example, laissez-faire leadership did not correlate statistically significantly with secure attachment style. This non-significant finding could be due to the small number of participants indicating a laissez-faire leadership style. Additionally, a regression analysis indicated that none of the four attachment styles was a significant predictor of transactional or charismatic leadership. The reason(s) for these non-significant predictors could again, be due to participants not identifying themselves as a transactional or charismatic leader, or due to the small sample size in general. Correlations and relationships were observed in the predicted direction, but were not statistically significant.

### **Practical Implications**

The results of this study allow for a better perspective on the role attachment style plays in impacting leadership behavior in a workplace. Specifically, leaders with a secure attachment style are more likely to be transformational leaders (Boatwright, Lopez, Sauer, VanDerWege, & Huber, 2010; Manning, 2003). Organizations could offer potential leaders an assessment that measures relationships with others, thus, provide a better perspective on how their relationships will be towards others. A possible assessment that could be used would be The Multimethod Assessment Battery (AAP; George & West, 2001) which is an assessment that involves participants responding to a set of seven drawn picture stimuli. Participants are then asked to create a story for each of the stimuli. The responses are then used to evaluate the four different types of attachment styles each participant might be exhibiting.

Practically speaking, there may be ways to increase transformational and charismatic leadership within an organization. This may be done through hiring and recruiting candidates in management positions who are attracted to organization's mission and vision, encourage followers to focus on the team and organizations, and help promote job satisfaction, group cohesiveness, and commitment (Amneric et al., 2007; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Choi, 2006; Jandaghi et al., 2009; Pillai et al., 2003; Yukl, 2002). Organizations may not be financially capable of replacing their managers with transformational and charismatic leaders, but may have resources to devote to training and development of transformational and charismatic leaders.

Research has shown that training leaders on elements of transformational and charismatic can be effective. For example, Howell and Frost (1989) found that employees who were trained with regard to transformational and/or charismatic leadership styles demonstrated a higher task performance compared to employees who were not directed on such leadership styles. Hence, both selecting for positive leadership traits and training existing leaders can be strategies to improve leadership quality in organizations.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

The primary limitation in this study is small sample size and non-response bias. Given the small sample size, we can conclude that non-response bias is a likely problem. We have no way to know if those who responded are different in significant ways from those who did not. A related limitation is the small sample size used for analyses in this study. Although it was adequate for correlational analyses, the small sample became a liability when doing regression analyses. Several relationships among variables were in the predicted direction but were not statistically significant. A larger sample size would strengthen the ability to make a solid test of the hypotheses. In the future, it would be interesting to replicate this research with a larger, more representative sample.

It is unclear why the response rate to the request for participation was so low. Given that the target population was made of individuals with very involved jobs, it would be reasonable to speculate that they were simply too busy. They also may have been concerned with confidentiality of information, and so opted not to participate. If this study were attempted in the future, it would be better to be able to offer some kind of incentive to participate. A longer timeline with more reminders might also be helpful, especially if some of those reminders were given personally (over the phone, perhaps).

### **Recommendations**

The results of this study prompt several interesting questions and possibilities for future research. Aside from the sampling recommendations above, the use of a different population (non-academic, perhaps) would be interesting. It is also possible that there are cultural differences in the relationship between attachment style and different styles of leadership, and with perceptions with leader effectiveness in management. For example, Burris, Ayman, Che, and Min (2013) found that Caucasian Americans perceived Asian Americans as being less transformational and less authentic than Caucasians. Thus, it would be interesting to repeat this study with a more culturally diverse sample.

Another interesting direction for future research is to train managers in both transformational and charismatic leadership skills, and then examine whether and how the training impacts leadership effectiveness, workplace stress, job satisfaction, and turnover among employees. This may provide more insight into the possibilities of training managers for leadership skills

### **Conclusion**

Given the long-established links between transformational leadership and secure attachment, it is interesting to explore the relationships between other leadership styles and other attachment styles. This study adds to the literature that shows a relationship between secure attachment styles and positive leadership attributes, which provides a basis for both developing and selecting strong leaders in an organizational context.

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