UNDERSTANDING AFFECTIONAL TIES TO GROUPS
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ATTACHMENT THEORY

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Abstract

Substantial developmental psychology research on attachment theory documents that children with secure affectional ties (attachments) to caregivers are more likely to excel in psychosocial and behavioral performance than their peers with insecure attachments. We review attachment theory and research in the developmental psychology literature and propose causes of secure short-term attachments to workgroups. Whereas traditional attachment research has documented social-emotional antecedents, we propose social-emotional and task-related antecedents of secure attachment to workgroups. Suggestive data are presented to illustrate our propositions. We discuss theoretical and practical contributions of our attachment theory-based perspective on workgroups, as well as areas for future research.

High-performing groups tend to have an open atmosphere in which members trust and respect one another and feel comfortable sharing different views (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Unfortunately, creating such a positive social environment is a challenge for most groups. For example, in many groups, members avoid disclosing unpopular views, and such withholding can undermine group performance (Phillips, 2003; Phillips et al., 2004; Wittenbaum & Stasser 1996). To achieve optimal performance, groups must nurture each member's willingness to trust, take personal risks, and share potentially self-damaging information. Most groups face multiple barriers when attempting to establish such nurturance.

In this paper we propose conditions under which individuals should feel more secure in workgroups. In doing so we explore the construct of 'attachment to groups' as an extension of the broader attachment theory from developmental psychology (Smith et al., 1999, 2001; c.f., Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Attachment to groups is embodied in individuals' beliefs about themselves as valuable or less valuable group members, along with their beliefs about the group's acceptance or rejection of them (Smith et al., 1999, 2001). More specifically, when individuals have positive beliefs about themselves as worthy members of a group and view the group as accepting them, they are referred to as having secure affectional bonds to the group. Just as children with secure affectional ties to their caregivers feel less threatened when engaging in risky actions (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969), group members whose affectional ties to groups are secure feel less threatened undertaking potentially unsafe actions (Lee, 2005). Here we review attachment theory and research and propose conditions under which individuals are more likely to feel securely attached to new workgroups. We also present suggestive data that illustrate our propositions. Thus, we limit the scope of our conceptual formulation and data

description to antecedents (as opposed to consequences) of secure attachments to newly constituted groups.

In the context of this study, it is important to delineate how attachment to groups departs from alternate constructs. For example, attachment to groups is related to yet distinct from group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Whereas group identification is an individual's *depersonalized cognitive self-identity* based on an overlapping of her personal attributes with those of her group (Turner et al., 1987; Dutton et al., 1994; Smith & Henry, 1996), attachment to groups is a *personalized affect-driven relationship tie* to the group. For example, a person may believe that her self-identity is based on her occupational group (i.e., 'I am a professor in this management department'); however, that person may not necessarily feel secure in regard to her relationships within the specific occupational group (i.e., 'I worry about whether my management department colleagues value me and my work').

Attachment to groups is also differentiated from team psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Team psychological safety is a *group*-level construct that involves a shared belief among team members that individual failure will not be punished by the team (Edmondson, 1999). Whereas team psychological safety does not specify individuals' attachment to groups as the source of safety, attachment to groups, as an *individual*-level construct, stresses an individual's relationship to a group as the root of security. However, this contrast does not imply that attachment to groups and team psychological safety are orthogonal; rather, the two constructs may be related. In particular, team psychological safety may be a bi-dimensional construct that involves tasks and relationships within a group. Knowing that a team's acceptance is unconditional even in face of a failed experimentation with new ideas (i.e. the task dimension of group-level psychological safety) may promote an individual's secure attachment to the team as

the individual is reassured of her value and acceptance as a team member. Considering that attachment security is a fundamental psychological underpinning of almost all positive relationships (Reis & Patrick, 1996), individual members' increased secure attachment to the team may in turn enhance the relationship dimension of group-level psychological safety (e.g., interpersonal relationships within the team). Thus, it is plausible that individual-level secure attachment to groups may mediate the association between the task dimension and the relationship dimension of group-level psychological safety.

Our paper extends organizational behavior perspectives on workgroups by forwarding a new viewpoint based on attachment theory. In doing so, we hope to stimulate a new stream of research that applies attachment theory to organizational behavior in general and to workgroups specifically. Previous research on organizational groups has emphasized group-level dynamics and experiences and has thus paid less attention to the distinctive experiences of individuals embedded in groups—especially how the quality of their affectional ties (attachments) to groups influences these experiences. Attachment theory is rooted in the notion of humans' motivation to survive, and therefore may be used to explain a wide range of human behaviors in myriad contexts (Ainsworth, 1990; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969). As such, attachment theory has become one of the most influential theories for explaining human development across the life span (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). As part of its general applicability to human development, the theory has great potential for predicting and explaining managerial behavior. Despite this potential, attachment theory has not, until recently (Brodt & Korsgaard, 2003; Korsgaard, Brodt & Sapienza, 2003; Lee, 2005), played a significant role in research on organizational groups.

We also extend attachment theory by investigating attachment to groups as an endogenous (as opposed to exogenous) variable. Although attachment to groups is dependent on

the dispositional attachment styles of the individuals involved (Bowlby, 1969), it is not a fixed trait (Baldwin, 1992; Collins & Read, 1994; Pierce & Lydon, 2001). Recent research has shown that secure and insecure attachment may co-exist within a single individual, and that regardless of dispositional attachment style, strong caregiving environments can cause either a secure or insecure attachment to be *temporarily dominant* (Collins & Read, 1994; Cozzarelli et al., 2000; Fraley, 2002; Shaver et al., 1996). Although the antecedent conditions for secure attachment have been researched in the childhood or romantic attachment literature (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Crowell et al., 2002; Davila & Sargent., 2003), there is no research into the conditions that may induce individuals to feel securely attached to *workgroups* at a given moment.

Based on recent developments in attachment theory, our view is that although individuals may bring specific dispositional attachment styles to workgroups, both dispositionally secure and insecure individuals are more likely to feel securely attached to their groups *at a particular moment* when the groups clearly provide secure caregiving environments. We do not downplay the carryover effect of dispositional attachment. Nor do we claim that dispositionally insecure individuals will transform into dispositionally secure individuals under these conditions. Rather, we argue that it is *possible* to induce secure short-term attachments among individuals in the context of specific group conditions at a given point in time. Our view, then, focuses on secure-attachment-inducing conditions. We conjecture that the proposed conditions will have stronger influences on dispositionally insecure (versus secure) individuals because dispositionally secure individuals are subject to a high 'ceiling effect' (i.e., they have strong attachment security to begin with) and are also unlikely to feel *in*securely attached under the proposed *secure* attachment conditions. Thus, we do not explore the interaction effects between dispositionally

secure and insecure attachments and our proposed conditions. Instead, we focus narrowly on developing propositions related to the conditions that promote secure short-term attachment.

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND RESEARCH

Attachment Theory Overview

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1980, 1988) is the synthesis of John Bowlby's clinical observations of homeless children. Initially interested in child psychiatry, Bowlby found that a warm and loving relationship with a caregiver was essential to a young child's mental health. Subsequently, Ainsworth et al. (1978) categorized attachment styles into three types: (a) a child with an *anxious attachment* style seeks excessive closeness to her caregiver, (b) a child with an *avoidant attachment* style prefers to keep distance from her caregiver and to maintain self-reliance, and (c) a child with a *secure attachment* style feels comfortable being *both* close to her caregiver *and* self-reliant. More so than insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxious and avoidant), secure attachment to a caregiver in early childhood is related to a child's psychological well-being and predicts many aspects of healthy functioning. For example, securely attached children are more likely to develop a pro-social orientation (van Lange et al., 1997), are better at sharing and expressing emotions (Laible & Thompson, 1998), and have better communication, task engagement, persistence, and mastery motivation than children with anxious or avoidant attachment (Moss & St-Laurent, 2001).

There are two competing conceptualizations of attachment. One view is that attachment style represents a stable psychological difference. Individuals thus carry their childhood attachment styles into all subsequent social relationships. Therefore, attachment patterns and related dynamics mirroring those of the child-caregiver dyad can appear in one's relationships with peers, social groups, or relationship partners (Bowlby, 1969). Consistent with this view,

Hazan and Shaver (1987) linked attachment theory to the literature on romantic relationships, reconceptualizing romantic love as an attachment dynamic. They found that adults with secure childhood attachment styles showed greater trust, satisfaction, and commitment in their romantic relationships.

Although these findings may suggest that childhood attachment style is stable over the lifespan, scholars have debated this point (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley, 2002; Kagan, 1996; Kobak, 1994; Lewis, 1997; Thompson et al., 1982; Waters, 1978). A recent point of view is that situational demands may temporarily induce attachment styles in conflict with disposition. This line of research conceptualizes attachment style as a network of relationship schema-based cognitive structures (Baldwin, 1992; Baldwin et al., 1996; Collins & Read, 1994). Importantly, proponents of this view do not dispute that childhood attachment styles are carried into later life. Instead, attachment styles are seen as relatively dynamic schemas, each of which is *temporarily* more or less *dominant* based on situational demands at the time. To the extent that humans interact with various others throughout life, individuals will have both global (i.e., dispositional) and context-specific attachment styles (Pierce & Lydon, 2001). Thus, secure caregiving environments can temporarily induce a secure attachment among dispositionally insecure individuals. Once induced, psychological processes ('internal working models'; Bowlby, 1969) associated with the activated attachment style influence one's attitudes and behaviors.

As an example, consider the following scenario. Sally may have had an insecure attachment to her mother. Thus Sally may have been predisposed to feel insecurely attached to her new project team at work. However, because Sally subsequently learned that the team, in contrast to her mother, makes her feel welcome, values her competence, and supports her, Sally has developed a secure attachment to the project team. Thus the attachment style manifested is

situation-dependent: in her mother's presence, Sally's dispositionally insecure attachment from childhood is activated, but when she returns to her team, her secure attachment resurfaces.

In support of this dynamic view, Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) demonstrated that when secure attachment was temporarily induced by experimental priming, both dispositionally secure and insecure individuals demonstrated attitudes and behaviors consistent with dispositionally secure attachment styles. Most notably, the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2006) conducted longitudinal observations of more than 1,000 U.S. children during preschool, kindergarten, and first grade and examined the associations among early infant attachment styles, children's later social competency, and behavior under stable or changing maternal parenting quality. As expected, early infant attachment styles predicted children's later social competency and behavior; interestingly, however, this stable association disappeared when the researchers controlled for maternal parenting quality. According to the authors:

> Had this research only examined early attachment classification and not looked at subsequent changes in parenting behavior, the effects of intervening parenting behavior would have been missed (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2006, p. 53).

In conclusion, multiple sources of evidence suggest that childhood attachment style is stable as long as the caregiving environment is stable; however, if caregiving quality changes significantly, the affected individual could feel attachment that is dispositionally non-dominant (Belsky & Fearon, 2002; Collins & Read, 1994; Fraley, 2002; Lamb & Bornstein, 1982; Maccoby, 1980; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2006; Pierce & Lydon, 2001).

In this paper, we use the dynamic view of attachment style to examine the qualities of the workgroup (i.e., caregiving environment) that may momentarily induce secure attachments irrespective of individuals' dispositional attachment styles.

Attachment in the workplace

Attachment theory can be extended to the workplace to explain various employee and managerial behaviors. Most research in this area is based on the dispositional attachment view (Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Kahn & Kram, 1994; Popper et al., 2000). For example, Hazan and Shaver (1990) found that dispositionally secure adults show positive work attitudes and performance, whereas dispositionally insecure adults reported that they preferred to work alone, worried about their work performance, were easily distracted at work, and had difficulty meeting deadlines.

Dispositional attachment styles also influence how individuals interpret authority at work (Kahn & Kram, 1994). People authorize and de-authorize themselves and others based on their internal models of authority, which can include dependence, counter-dependence, or interdependence. Kahn and Kram (1994) argue that childhood (dispositional) attachment styles underlie these adult internal models of authority. Attachment styles developed in infancy are based on the pattern by which a caregiver regulates an infant's experiences of power and powerlessness. These internal models developed in childhood are carried into adulthood, such that adults authorize and de-authorize themselves in patterns similar to those experienced with their caregivers (Hirschhorn, 1990). Because dispositionally insecure, anxious individuals are uncertain about the availability or reliability of help, they prefer to work in hierarchical organizations, reflecting their dependency on the role of authority. In contrast, dispositionally avoidant individuals adopt a counter-dependent stance toward authority because their ongoing

quest for emotional self-sufficiency leads them to dismiss status and withdraw from authority relations. Finally, dispositionally secure individuals view their relationship with authority as a collaborative process, one in which they feel comfortable in *both* dependent *and* independent roles (Kahn & Kram, 1994).

Similarly, leadership styles are associated with dispositional attachment patterns. Recent research shows positive correlations between transformational leadership and dispositionally secure attachment style. In turn, such dispositionally secure leaders demonstrated secure attachment to their subordinates, investing empathetic and emotional efforts in their followers (Popper et al., 2000). For example, transformational leaders provide individualized attention, intellectual stimulation, and support of growth potential to subordinates (Bass, 1985).

Apart from dispositional attachment style, individuals in work settings can develop distinct multiple attachments to colleagues because they work in disparate hierarchies, roles, and tasks (e.g., attachments between managers and employees or between marketers and manufacturers in collaboration). Kahn (1998) conceptualizes secure attachment to a work colleague as a functional relational system, and insecure attachment to a work colleague as a dysfunctional relational system. In work relationships, insecure attachment (dysfunctional relational system) tends to be more prevalent than secure attachment (functional relational system). For example, research conducted at Project Hope revealed that most administrators showed insecure attachment behaviors, isolating their social worker colleagues by maintaining physical (e.g., separate workspaces) or emotional distance (e.g., avoiding the topic of social workers' emotional difficulties in conversation). Because the majority of social workers lacked the status or authority to influence this process, their relationships with administrators were mired in insecure attachment and dysfunction. Conversely, the few social workers who felt

secure in their attachments to administrators demonstrated less burnout and more functional job-related behaviors (Kahn, 1998).

Attachment to Groups

Recently, Smith and colleagues (Smith et al., 1999, 2001) extended attachment theory to the domain of groups. The attachment to groups construct is based on the recent, dynamic view of attachment theory. The argument was that situational conditions generate attachments to groups that may depart temporarily from dispositional attachment styles established in childhood, while still reflecting these childhood attachment styles at some level. Attachment to groups is thus an individual's affect-driven relationship to a group (Smith et al., 1999, 2001). Attachment to groups is an individual-level construct based on *both* an individual's positive or negative 'working model of the self' *and* positive or negative 'working model of the group.' For example, an individual can feel securely attached to her workgroup when she has a positive working model of *the self* (her belief that she is a worthy member of the group) *as well as* a positive working model of *the group* (her belief that the group accepts her). Importantly, the combination of the two working models is critical to defining distinctive styles of attachment to groups. That is, she cannot feel securely attached to her group unless her working models of both the self and the group are positive. For example, if she has a positive working model of the self (i.e., confidence in her ability) but a negative working model of the group (i.e., doubt regarding the group's acceptance of her), she would be referred to as having an avoidant attachment to the group. Conversely, if she has a positive working model of the group (i.e., trust that the group accepts her) but a negative working model of the self (i.e., doubt regarding her ability and competence), she would be seen as having an anxious attachment to the group.

Attachment is also a target-specific construct (Bowlby, 1969). As such, attachment to groups is distinct from attachments to particular individuals (e.g., significant others or specific group members). In this regard, Smith et al. (1999, 2001) argue that attachment to groups has non-redundant effects over those of attachment to a significant other or another specific person. For example, an individual might carry over an attachment style from her marital relationship to her group at work. Or she might feel different qualities of attachment to her workgroup and spouse as a result of the processes that take place in each relationship. This dissociation may occur wholly within the work context, as well. For example, an individual may feel securely attached to a colleague in a university department of management. Yet she may feel insecurely attached to the management department as a whole when she is about to go up for tenure.

The points of distinction among attachment to groups, group identification, and team psychological safety have been covered earlier in this chapter. In this section we briefly discuss the differences among attachment to groups, 'superordinate group identification,' 'social support' (or 'perceived organizational support'), and 'group (or organizational) commitment.' First, *superordinate group identification* is one's cognitive representation of multiple groups as one common group that results from cooperative interdependence such as a common goal, shared interests, or a communal fate related to the joint effort of multiple groups (Gaertner et al., 1990). Superordinate group identification is similar to group identification: both are based on cognitive self-identity. However, as noted earlier, attachment to groups is an affect-driven relationship tie. Also, superordinate group identification by definition involves two or more groups. In contrast, attachment to groups can occur in the context of a single group. Second, while *social support* (or *perceived organizational support*) shares some features with attachment to groups (as one of our propositions in the following sections will suggest), attachment theorists argue that the social

support literature has focused on one general type of support (i.e., comfort and assistance), whereas attachment theory is broader and more comprehensive in scope (Feeney, 2004). Thus attachment to groups encompasses social support within groups but goes beyond it to offer an explanation for more complex relationship dynamics, such as bonding within groups, relationship maintenance within groups, and group task performance (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Finally, *group* (or *organizational*) *commitment* is one outcome of attachment to groups: individuals securely attached to their groups are more committed to working for the group (Smith et al., 1999, 2001). Yet group commitment is not part of the definition of the attachment to groups construct.

Attachment to groups is the most recent development in attachment theory, so the literature in this area is scarce. Nonetheless, emerging research on attachment to groups has documented functions of secure attachment to groups. For example, Brodt and Korsgaard (2003) show that attachment to groups influences trust development and cooperation in workgroups (see also Korsgaard et al., 2003). Thus research in this area is particularly important because it demonstrates the usefulness of attachment theory on predicting behaviors in workgroups.

ANTECEDENTS OF SECURE ATTACHMENT TO WORKGROUPS

The functions of secure attachment to groups, as illustrated above, attest to the importance of better delineation of this construct and its implications. Not only is there very limited research on the functions of secure attachment to groups, there is also no existing literature on the conditions under which individuals feel secure short-term attachment to workgroups—in particular, the social and other contextual characteristics of workgroups that induce secure workgroup attachment in members. Again, our view is that situational conditions can generate momentary attachments to groups that reflect but also depart temporarily from

dispositional attachment styles. Therefore, we seek to identify the group characteristics that may temporarily induce secure attachments among individuals, irrespective of their dispositional attachment styles.

Although antecedents of secure attachments to parents or romantic partners have been presented in the developmental psychology literature (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1980; Crowell et al., 2002; Davila & Sargent, 2003), we found no previous research regarding the antecedent workgroup conditions that lead to temporary induction of secure attachments among group members. Thus we draw on the existing developmental psychology literature to extrapolate antecedents of secure attachment to workgroups. However, because attachment to groups and attachment to parents or romantic partners are distinct (Smith et al., 1999, 2001), and no empirical research is yet available on secure-attachment-inducing workgroup conditions, it would be too ambitious to propose an exhaustive list of such antecedents. Indeed, the mechanisms generating attachment are complex, involving multiple psychosocial or physiological causes (Bowlby, 1969). The details of these mechanisms are still esoteric even in the developmental psychology literature. Thus, here we have the modest goal of only beginning to propose some individually necessary or sufficient conditions for inducing secure short-term attachment to workgroups, with the hope that future research will modify or supplement the insights here.

In early formulations of attachment theory, Bowlby (1969) emphasized the role of emotional exchange between a child and caregiver in the child's development of a specific attachment style. However, Bowlby did not address attachment dynamics in the context of workgroup relationships. Unlike the interpersonal relationships on which attachment theory was based—such as the mother-child dyad—workgroups by definition include a component of task

performance, in addition to emotional exchange. Thus, to advance propositions on the conditions under which individuals' secure attachments to workgroups may be induced, we extend attachment theory from its original focus on social-emotional dynamics to also include task-related dynamics in groups by considering both types of conditions (i.e., social-emotional and task-related) as important in inducing secure short-term attachments to workgroups. Note that in the context of specific goals and tasks, some of the proposed social–emotional conditions might be related to how the groups perform their task. Thus social–emotional conditions may not be entirely unrelated to task conditions.

Social–emotional conditions

Physical proximity. Bowlby (1980) suggests that physical proximity is the basic necessary condition for attachment. Thus attachment behaviors include actions that increase physical proximity between children and their caregivers. A primary function of secure attachment is to maintain proximity: staying near and resisting separations from caregivers. In the face of prolonged separations from their caregivers, children experience despair and detachment. Ainsworth et al. (1978) demonstrated that when subjects' mothers exited the experiment room the children began to feel anxious and detached—they felt insecurely attached to their mothers. Without physical proximity, then, individuals do not experience secure affectional bonds to relationship partners. Interestingly, Bowlby (1969) posits that individuals might feel attached to objects, such as dolls. To maintain the attachment, however, individuals must have physical proximity to the object. Also, although couples in long-distance relationships can feel attached to each other by viewing photographs of each other, this is likely based on past physical proximity (e.g., those couples had maintained physical proximity in the past). Similarly, photographs alone

cannot sustain attachment in the face of prolonged separation. In sum, physical proximity is a requirement for ongoing secure attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Our view is that although physical proximity does not determine secure attachment to workgroups, it is a necessary condition for secure attachment to workgroups. Indeed, physical proximity is the feature that differentiates the attachment to groups construct from the related ones discussed here. For example, group identification can occur without actual interaction with the group (Turner et al., 1987). Conversely, one cannot feel attached to the group unless there is physical proximity. The importance of physical proximity for inducing a secure attachment to a group implies that certain types of workgroups might face heightened challenges in making individuals feel securely attached. Such groups would include virtual teams, in which members rarely or never meet face-to-face. This leads to the following proposition:

> *Proposition 1: When individuals work in closer physical proximity to workgroups, they are more likely to feel securely attached to the groups.*

Sensitive responses to members' expressed negative affect. The major function of attachment is protection from danger; thus, attachment is activated by anything alarming or threatening (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). The sources of such physical or psychological threats include: (1) internal conditions (fatigue, illness, hunger, pain); (2) caregivers' whereabouts (mother's general absence or inconsistent presence); (3) environmental conditions (unfamiliar situations and strangers). As such, attachment is intensely activated when there is negative affect that signals discomfort, frustration, anxiety, or fear (Bowlby, 1969). At these moments, sensitive and emotional communication between care-seekers and caregivers can make care-seekers feel securely attached. When caregivers respond and attend sensitively to care-seekers' negative affect, the care-seekers become assured of the caregivers' support and acceptance and believe

that they are worthy individuals (i.e., they come to have positive working models of the self and others). That is, to activate secure attachment among care-seekers, (1) care-seekers should be able and willing to express their negative affect, and (2) caregivers should recognize and interpret care-seekers' negative affect accurately (Crowell et al., 2002).

In support of this postulation, recent longitudinal research found that even dispositionally insecure children developed secure attachments when their mothers' caregiving became more sensitive and responsive over time (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2006). In contrast, when caregivers were observed to sometimes behave kindly and sometimes harshly, care-seekers came to believe that the caregivers were inconsistent and unpredictable and were thus more likely to become insecurely attached and worried about the caregivers' support and responsiveness (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999).

By analogy, we posit that conditions related to negative affect are necessary and sufficient for inducing secure attachment to workgroups (Bowlby, 1969). Specifically, groups that encourage expression of negative affect and sensitive responses to it are likely to induce secure attachments among members. Importantly, accurate recognition of others' negative affects alone may be insufficient and even detrimental to the inducement of secure attachments. For example, whereas individuals who recognized colleagues' positive affects correctly received higher performance ratings from their teammates and supervisors, those who identified others' negative affects received lower ratings (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). In the workplace, employees often avoid expressing negative affects because they wish to convey an image of competence to their peers and management. This tendency may impede secure attachments to workgroups. However, when group norms encourage members to share their negative affect and respond to other

members' negative affect sensitively and sympathetically, instead of ignoring or punishing, members are more likely to share their negative affect and respond to that of others supportively, resulting in a higher likelihood of secure attachment.

These negative-affect-related group characteristics tend to be manifested in groups that have low levels of relationship conflicts (i.e., few personality clashes). Importantly, low levels of relationship conflict can appear either when members resolve negative affects harmoniously by expressing and responding sensitively (as we argue) or when members do not share negative affects at all and simply avoid relationship conflict. To the extent that sensitively expressing and responding to negative affect is the key necessary and sufficient condition for secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969), we argue that it is only when members express and respond to negative affects that the low levels of relationship conflict activate secure attachment to the groups. This feature also distinguishes the attachment construct from other related ones. For example, groups that have low levels of relationship conflict but do not share or respond sensitively to negative affect may appear to be highly cohesive groups or have positive group experiences; yet this general positivity in group dynamics is different from secure attachment to the group. Thus we propose that secure attachment to the workgroup is likely to be induced by the presence of all of the following multiple conditions:

> *Proposition 2: When the group has low levels of relationship conflict <u>and</u> individuals express negative affect <u>and</u> the group responds sensitively, those individuals are likely to feel securely attached to the workgroup.*

Task-related conditions

Helping and supporting. Related to the proposal above (i.e., regarding the expression of negative affect and responses to it), help with and the support of task-related activities are

important conditions for secure attachment. Because secure individuals are confident in others'

benevolence and supportiveness (Bowlby, 1969), they seek support as a habitual coping strategy,

whereas anxious and avoidant individuals, who doubt others' supportiveness, avoid seeking

support (Birnbaum et al., 1997). Thus, it appears that without help and support secure attachment

may not be induced. We argue that although the presence of help and support does not determine

secure attachment, it is a necessary condition for secure attachment to workgroups. In secure

workgroups, members who receive help may be more likely to feel that the group accepts them

and that they are worthy members of the group. Members who provide help to others in the group

may, by doing so, enhance their perception that they are valuable members of the group. Thus

both offering and receiving help appear to promote secure attachments to workgroups among

members. If a group member feels threatened or likely to be embarrassed by a workgroup, he or

she will tend to avoid communicating about difficult issues or asking for help with a problem

(Argyris, 1993), but a group norm of providing mutual help and support on tasks might weaken

this barrier, leading individuals to feel more securely attached.

In line with this, the groups literature has documented that a cooperative orientation

among members enhances team relationships and performance (Deutsch, 1968; Guzzo & Shea,

1992; Hackman, 1990). This finding is consistent with the view that coaching interventions

focused specifically on team knowledge and skills facilitate team effectiveness more so than do

interventions focused only on members' interpersonal relationships (Hackman & Wageman,

2005). Similarly, research on perceived organizational support reveals that support from

organizations and leaders is one antecedent to team psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999),

which may contribute to secure attachment to workgroups.

Proposition 3: When group members help and support one another on task-related matters, individuals are likely to feel securely attached to workgroups.

Fair work process. In task relationships such as workgroups, fairness is a necessary condition for the promotion of secure attachment between individuals and their workgroups. Fair division of labor signals that each member will receive equitable treatment by the group, and that his or her contribution to the group (e.g., thorough and timely handling of tasks) is respected because it facilitates the completion of higher-order tasks. The group value model (Tyler et al., 1996) stresses that such fair treatment is important because it communicates that the fairly treated member is a respected and valued member by the group. This is consistent with the positive working model of the self in attachment theory; that is, members with a positive working model believe that they are worthy members of the group. Also, fair treatment is likely to engender a positive working model of the group; that is, members receiving fair treatment will tend to believe that they may depend on the group to fulfil important needs. In turn, such perceptions of fairness promote individuals' commitment and loyalty to their groups, along with their efforts on behalf of it (Phillips et al., 2001). Thus, we posit that group members are more likely to feel valued by the group and think that the group accepts them (i.e., develop a secure attachment to it) if they feel that they are treated fairly as part of it.

A fair division of roles and responsibilities is also likely to mitigate process conflict in groups, which often revolves around disagreements related specifically to the distribution of labor within them. Predictably, members of groups with high levels of process conflict are less satisfied with their groups (Jehn, 1997; Jehn et al., 1999). Moreover, process conflict during early group interactions exacerbates later-stage conflicts (Behfar et al., 2002). Higher process conflict levels would impede the formation of secure attachment. However, it should be noted that a low

level of process conflict does not guarantee that members perceive themselves as treated equitably; they just may not *voice* the perception of unfair treatment. Thus we believe that it is only when members feel equitably treated by the group that the low levels of process conflict within groups generate secure group-related attachment. We propose that secure attachment to workgroups is likely to be induced when all of the following conditions are present:

> *Proposition 4: When workgroups have low levels of process conflict <u>and</u> divide workload equitably among members, individuals are likely to feel securely attached to the groups.*

> ***Valuing each member's contribution***. The task-related competency of members and their contributions to the group's achievement of its goal are important in giving each member a sense of security with respect to his or her position within the group. Individuals appear to feel securely attached to workgroups if their task competency is acknowledged and especially if they are viewed by others experts. High-performing individuals generally feel securely attached to their groups. Conversely, those who perceive themselves as underperforming may feel insecurely attached to the group.

Unlike interactions within the personal relationships upon which attachment theory was originally based—such as mother-child dyads (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969), and romantic ties (Hazan & Shaver, 1987)—involvement in workgroups can influence members' perceptions of their social status (Anderson et al., in press). Social comparisons of task performance are likely to occur between workgroup members, and the resulting inferiority some members might feel may prevent them from feeling securely attached to the group. One strategy to reduce this potential impediment to attachment would be to assign different responsibilities to members based on each one's distinct expertise, thus allowing members to recognize their own

competence and that of others. Coordinating the interests and contributions of members in groups is extremely important (Homans, 1950).

It was previously noted that secure attachment arises when members hold positive working models of both the self and the group. Thus, if individuals believe that the group accepts them as members, but are unsure if the group values their contributions, they are likely to only have a positive working model of the group. Without the group's valuing a given member's talents and skills, such that the member feels like a worthy member of the group, the valence of that individual's working model of the self will remain in question. This asymmetry is likely to induce anxious attachment to the group, whereby members feel positive about the group (i.e., assured of group acceptance) but negative about the self (i.e., unsure of one's worthiness). This is an important dimension, because in organizational groups low-status members may be particularly vulnerable to feelings of insecure attachment because their contributions, often relatively minor, are not respected. We conjecture, therefore, that low-status members are more likely to feel insecurely attached than securely attached. However, *if* groups value and respect even the minor contribution of low-status members, such members might believe not only that their membership in the group is unquestionable (i.e., positive working model of the group) but also that they are worthy members of the group (i.e., positive working model of the self), leading to secure attachment. We are aware that this pattern may be rare in organizations where minor contributions tend to be unappreciated, implying that secure workgroups in such organizations may be few, given the likely dearth of secure attachment to work colleagues (Kahn, 1998). Nonetheless, we propose that both accepting members' expertise and clearly valuing each member's expected contribution (regardless of its size) are critical to inducing secure attachment to workgroups.

Proposition 5: When workgroups match the expertise and competence of each member with that person's role and responsibility <u>and</u> value that member's contribution (whether it is major or minor), individuals are likely to feel securely attached to the groups.

SUGGESTIVE DATA

We developed the propositions here with the guidance of the existing attachment theory literature and the groups literature. In this section, we detail some preliminary evidence for our proposals, for illustrative purposes only. It should be noted that this study is qualitative in nature and, as such, we present no control data or comparison groups. Thus our data-related conclusions must be viewed with caution. Nonetheless, our data suggest meaningful potential relationships in line with our propositions: the themes proposed here arose repeatedly in individuals' descriptions of their secure workgroups. Due to the lack of controls, we cannot assert that these data reveal unique antecedents of secure workgroup attachment or attest to the effects of specific behaviors and beliefs on attachment quality. Nonetheless, our findings suggest potential support for our hypotheses.

The participants in this study were 70 undergraduate students (mean age = 19.7 years) enrolled in an introductory business and management course at a northeastern university. Each participant received a bonus course credit and entry in a lottery for a $50 gift certificate.

We used a priming method for the construct of secure attachment to groups (Lee, 2005). For our priming method we adapted material from previous research on adult developmental attachment (Baldwin, 1992; Baldwin et al., 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001) to a workgroup setting. Participants were brought to a laboratory and asked to think about their past experiences in study groups, without regard for group size, group composition (homogeneity or heterogeneity), how the groups were formed, or

how long the groups existed. Participants were explicitly instructed to recall a task group (rather than a social group) experience where the group had a clear goal of completing a task (e.g., preparing for a test or working on a project). Based on the attachment literature, we asked participants to recall a very specific incident related to secure attachment (versus generally positive group experiences). Specifically, we asked them to reflect on instances when their team members had helped them solve problems that they couldn't solve individually, and they felt secure, accepted, supported, and comfortable depending on the team. In accordance with previous research on adult developmental attachment, participants were asked to close their eyes and visualize this type of team experience. Next they were invited to characterize this interaction with brief open-ended responses, detailing when it occurred (one blank line) and a sample of specific episodes from it (three blank lines).

Proposition 1 suggested that physical proximity is an antecedent condition for secure attachment to workgroups. Participants described spending significant time getting to know each other personally outside of their task-related work. Typical comments included: 'My team would work late and then hang out after, which brought us closer together'; 'We all ordered in food to pull an all-nighter'; 'We spent many Saturdays working together'; 'The team was very close; we hung out together'; 'We went out to eat lunch after discussing the ideas'; '[I received] calls a week after the group project was over to get together and party'; 'Before a test, we got together to do some last-minute studying, then played a game of kickball to de-stress.' These comments all relate to social interactions that occur when members are in close physical proximity.

Proposition 2 asserted that low levels of relationship conflict and sensitive responses to members' expressed negative affect induce secure attachment to workgroups. Reflecting this, members of secure workgroups described minimal levels of 'negativity' in their groups. Our

participants' statements implied that team-members in secure workgroups did not demonstrate impatience, condescension, or anger. Rather, they appeared to use potential sources of negativity to enhance positive elements of the group. For example, members of secure workgroups often shared their personal problems, but there were no negative relationship conflicts. Examples of comments embodying these trends included: 'I was late one time because of an incident, but nobody got mad'; 'In moments of stress, they were extremely helpful'; 'We all talked about the problem we were having with the course'; 'I was mad that I didn't do well on a part of a project, so my team comforted me'; 'I got news [that] my mother was ill and my group took me out for ice cream'; 'I had a track meet. Instead of being mad at me for having to miss our meeting, they said 'Good luck''; 'There were no big problems within the group—but when there were [smaller problems], everybody discussed them efficiently'; 'When I felt down about an upcoming test, they tried to assure me that I would do fine'; 'When I was down the group leader made me feel respectable.'

With respect to task-related conditions, group members' contribution and competence levels are important factors in inducing their secure attachments to workgroups, and the formation of secure attachment is abetted when individuals in tight-knit groups help fellow members who are not succeeding at work, as revealed by the comments of several of our participants: more competent members frequently helped less capable members, and, in doing so, the more capable members found personal enjoyment, often increasing their efforts in this regard. Typical comments included: 'I missed a day of my class and they backed me up by getting the assignments for me'; 'I was overloaded with work in other classes, so someone took my responsibilities for a while'; 'They knew that I didn't understand something, and [they] refused to move on'; 'I felt comfortable depending on the team because I knew I could go to them [for

the answers I needed]'; 'They knew that I need visuals to help me study, so they [assisted] me with pictures'; '[They] always welcomed me and offered to study together—even when I was confused'; 'I wanted to give up, but the team motivated me and helped me through'; 'No matter how long it took … to explain a concept to me, they were always willing to do it'; 'When there was a group member less capable, I received satisfaction in helping them.'

Another task-related condition of secure attachment we proposed involved fair work processes and low levels of process conflict (Proposition 4). Secure workgroups divide and perform administrative and task-related components of the workload equitably, such that all group members contribute significantly to group tasks and generally meet their assignment deadlines. Typical comments included: 'We divided up the work, and everyone did their part'; 'We shared goals and split responsibilities'; 'Team members completed work early so the others could double-check it and make suggestions'; 'I work well on a [task] as long as everyone is doing what they should be doing'; 'Team members volunteered to do specific parts of the assignment without having to be asked'; 'Teammates always were fair and honest about the task'; '[We made] an acceptable time for all to meet'; '[We divided] the work up equally among members'; '[We found a] time and place to meet that all were happy with'; '[Our] group could be counted on to be on time for meetings'; 'There were agreements between all members about where we would meet and at what time.'

Finally, we proposed that valuing each member's contribution is another task-related antecedent of secure attachment to workgroups (Proposition 5). Several examples from participants' descriptions illustrate behaviors consistent with the proposition. Typical comments included: 'They told me I did a good job on my part of the presentation'; 'My part of the work assignment was received well'; 'Fellow students had faith in my work'; '[The] group commented

on my ability to do a difficult problem'; 'When I proposed an idea, everyone complimented me';

'I made a smart suggestion and everyone congratulated me on it'; '[The] group complimented my

part of the speech'; 'I feel accepted when my inputs are used in the group's task'; 'When

contributing a good idea, people would praise me for it'; 'Team members distributed the work so

that everybody did the part of the work that he [or she] is best at.'

DISCUSSION

By extending developmental psychology's attachment theory (Ainsworth et al., 1978;

Bowlby, 1969) to the groups literature in organizational behavior, we have developed an

attachment-theoretical perspective on workgroups. We presuppose that just as children's secure

attachment to caregivers serves multiple positive functions (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby,

1969), individuals' secure attachment to workgroups enhances group processes and performance.

Thus, we explored the conditions under which individuals are more likely to feel securely

attached to workgroups. Attachment theory places great weight on the influence of caregiving

environment (Bowlby, 1969; Fraley, 2002). Recent longitudinal research demonstrates that early

childhood attachment style can vary with caregiving quality over time (NICHD Early Child Care

Research Network, 2006). In accordance with this view, we explored how the caregiving

environment (i.e., group characteristics) can induce secure attachment to groups regardless of

individuals' dispositional attachment. We also presented some suggestive data that illustrate that

workgroups are likely to induce secure attachment under specific social-emotional (i.e., physical

proximity; sensitive responses to members' expressed negative affect) and task-related

conditions (i.e., helping and supporting; fair work process; valuing each member's contribution).

Theoretical contributions

Our view builds on the groups literature by suggesting a mechanism potentially underlying high-performing group outcomes. Our focus is on identifying antecedent conditions (non-exhaustive) that induce secure short-term attachment to workgroups. The existing literature shows that the conditions proposed in this paper are also positively related to high-performing group outcomes. For example, groups that have low levels of relationship conflict outperform those with higher levels (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). High-performing and relationally satisfying teams divide work assignments based on member expertise and skills and demonstrate low levels of process conflict (Behfar et al., 2002). High-performing groups demonstrate a culture of respect toward members (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). A plausible conjecture is that these beneficial factors enhance team performance independently and also through members' secure attachments to the group. If such mediation does occur, the connection between attachment theory and the groups literature reveals why these well-known group characteristics enhance group performance: because they promote the universally important and valuable secure attachment.

This paper extends attachment theory, originally applied to the child-parent dyadic relationship (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969), by investigating how the theory relates to task-focused relationships in groups. We proposed that beyond the social-emotional interactions in which attachment theory was initially rooted, task-related interactions also contribute to the inducement of secure affectional ties to workgroups. Although attachments to groups appear to be social-emotional in nature, we formulated propositions and presented preliminary data suggesting that task-related interactions contributed to inducing such attachments. However, it is also plausible that task-related interactions share a correlational relationship, rather than a causal one, with social-emotional interactions at work. To illustrate, in work relationships it is often

difficult to distinguish task-related from social-emotional components. How task instruction is communicated and how individuals interpret communicated messages (e.g., as having either encouraging or attacking tones) can provoke social-emotional *interpretations* of task-related matters. Thus, regardless of whether a given interaction is truly social-emotional or task-related, it may have the potential to create affectional ties to the group—secure or insecure—depending on the social meaning it is assigned. So it may be the individuals' subjective perception of interactions or tasks, rather than the inherent qualities of these, that generate affectional ties to groups (Davila & Sargent, 2003). Another possibility is that the influence of task and social–emotional interactions on attachment may be circular. For example, task (in)competence might induce (in)secure attachment, which can lead to an upward (downward) spiral of positive (negative) social-emotional personal interactions and, in turn, enhance (degrade) task competence.

Managerial implications

This chapter draws the attention of management to the importance of creating a positive and supportive workgroup environment. Attachment theory suggests an intuitive but fundamental managerial takeaway: human beings perform at their best when they are securely attached in relationships with others (Bowlby, 1969). We began this chapter by noting that although creating a positive group environment is important for group process and performance, this has been a persistent challenge for most groups. In line with this, the propositions explored here may not appear all that surprising; what *is* surprising is that the secure-attachment-related behaviors we discuss are not well implemented in organizations. For example, Kahn's (1998) study with social workers demonstrated that most work relationships in organizations tend to mirror insecure attachment (and are thus dysfunctional). Thus we suggest that management avoid taking the

proposed positive and supportive behaviors for granted, actively cultivating them within workgroups whenever possible. If teams and organizations are to realize the benefits that can accrue from teamwork, the group should function as a supportive and caring environment to which its members will be more likely to feel securely attached.

Recent theories on attachment research reveal that if caregiving environments change, dispositionally insecure individuals can develop secure attachment (Collins & Read, 1994; Fraley, 2002; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2006; Pierce & Lydon, 2001). That is, regardless of an individual's dispositional attachment style, his or her group environment has an important influence on situational attachment. The process mechanisms we proposed in this chapter suggest non-exhaustive conditions under which workgroups can be environments where members feel secure affectional ties to their groups. Promoting tactics that create these conditions should enable groups to enhance working relationships and performance on multiple levels.

Although based on our current research we cannot firmly conclude that the conditions we propose enable secure attachments to groups over the course of the group's life, we suggest that the best time to intervene in regard to group processes may be very early. Recent research shows that teams that did not resolve process issues during initial interactions were more likely to develop dysfunctional routines at a later stage (Behfar et al., 2002). Thus we argue that to prevent dysfunctional processes from arising at a later stage, teams should establish secure workgroups early on by facilitating the conditions we proposed. Although establishing such conditions may sound out of reach given the routine conflicts of everyday interactions, norms established very quickly can have powerful effects on subsequent behaviors in groups (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985). Even if groups fail in establishing such norms in the beginning, they may

induce more secure attachments among members by subsequently shifting their norms. Recent research shows that children who moved from insecure to secure attachment styles responded not to absolute levels of parenting quality but rather to often gradual changes in relative levels over time (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2006). Altering group characteristics toward those associated with secure environments may thus induce secure attachments among individual members.

Future research

We suggest three areas of future research on secure attachment to workgroups: (1) further exploration of its antecedents, (2) associated performance outcomes, and (3) possible downsides. Each area is explored below.

In this chapter we focused on the conditions under which secure attachment to workgroups may be temporarily induced. Future research should investigate how the conditions we propose influence one another in inducing secure attachments over the course of a group's life. For example, groups working more proximally are better able to perceive non-verbal and verbal cues that signal negative affect. To the extent that proximity enhances communication, members may be more motivated to share their negative affect and respond more sensitively to the display of it by others. The data this chapter presented are only preliminary and illustrative (without control data or comparison groups). Thus our data-related conclusions must be viewed with caution, and future work should undertake a more systematic research. For example, future longitudinal research could track how and when each condition we have proposed has a stronger or weaker main effect or interacts with another condition. In this research we focused on secure-attachment-inducing conditions; thus we presuppose that because a ceiling effect may limit positive shifts in the beliefs of dispositionally secure individuals (i.e., because they already have

attachment security), dispositionally insecure individuals would be more influenced by these conditions to feel securely attached to workgroups. This assumption should also be tested in future research. Observational methods may also be useful for identifying the secure-attachment-inducing conditions of which individuals are less consciously aware (e.g., mimicry).

Future research related to antecedents of secure attachment could also examine how team leaders influence the emergence of secure attachments to workgroups. Popper et al. (2000) found that dispositionally secure attachment style was positively correlated with transformational leadership. Such securely attached transformational leaders may in turn establish themselves as caregivers in teams and thus induce secure attachments for dispositionally insecure members. For dispositionally anxious members who de-authorize themselves in task performance (Kahn & Kram, 1994), the transformational leader may emphasize the role of authority by setting challenging goals. For dispositionally avoidant members who adopt the counter-dependent role of authority (Kahn & Kram, 1994), leaders may choose to de-authorize themselves to improve collaboration. To the extent that transformational leaders have dispositionally secure attachment (Popper et al., 2000) and construe authority as a collaborative process (Kahn & Kram, 1994), they may create team environments where members feel comfortable simultaneously depending on and remaining independent of hierarchical relationships within the team, which is the hallmark of secure attachment style. Future studies could investigate these links.

Another extension of our model would be an examination of how culturally or demographically diverse teams develop secure attachments. This question is particularly important because of the elevated frequency of cross-cultural teams in an increasingly global economy (Brett, 2001; Von Glinow et al., 2004). Attachment is viewed as a basic human motive (Bowlby, 1969); yet each culture has its own norms and practices associated with caregiving

behaviors, which may be reflected in distinctive patterns of attachment development. We speculate, then, that although the underlying motivation for attachment may be pan-cultural, the paths through which secure attachments develop may be distinctive across cultures. Thus, individuals' cultural backgrounds may serve to moderate some or all of the proposed antecedents of secure attachment. To the extent that affective experience, expression, and recognition vary subtly by culture (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Oishi et al., 2004; Soto et al., 2005), developing secure attachments to culturally diverse groups appears to be a significant challenge.

Another area for future research is the effects of secure workgroup attachment on performance. An important phenomenon that may be an outcome rather than an antecedent of secure workgroup attachments is positive group affect. The groups literature shows that positive affect in groups engenders cooperation, reduces conflict, and improves perceptions of task performance (Barsade, 2002). Experimental studies on attachment have found that secure attachment prime generates positive affective reactions to neutral stimuli rather than vice versa (Mikulincer et al., 2001). Secure individuals express positive emotions frequently (Feeney & Cassidy, 2003; Fraley et al., 2000); similarly, secure children showed relaxed and mutually enjoyable interactions with parents (Main & Cassidy, 1988). In contrast, insecure individuals showed emotionally neutral or low-level affective expressiveness in interpersonal communications (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Belsky et al., 1984). Insecure individuals also engaged in more conflicts with caregivers (Main & Cassidy, 1988). Thus, positive group affect may be an outcome of secure attachment to workgroups; if so, secure-attachment-induced positive affect may, in turn, enhance group performance.

Another important outcome of secure attachment to workgroups is task conflict. The groups literature demonstrates that groups that encourage and utilize dissenting opinions reach

higher-quality group decisions (Phillips, 2003; Phillips et al., 2004; Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996). Importantly, research by Phillips (2003, 2004) has shown that members who belong to the same group respond to one another favorably when the in-group members share conforming views and unfavorably when the in-group members share dissenting views. The group conflict literature also shows that individuals often interpret task conflict personally (Simon & Peterson, 2000) and task conflict is negatively related to members' levels of satisfaction with the group (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Thus, in the early phase of group interactions, sharing dissenting views and having high levels of task conflicts may inhibit the inducement of secure attachment to the workgroup (i.e., the in-group). After feeling securely attached to the group, however, members are assured of the group's support and responsiveness to them, such that they may feel more comfortable respecting the different views and opinions of others and feel secure enough to share their own dissenting views while constructively challenging other members' ideas. This would help the group reach satisfactory solutions to task problems. In contrast, members insecurely attached to the group may still be more disposed to voice conforming views in the group to receive acceptance, thereby generating suboptimal performance.

Although we believe that secure group attachments among members are crucial to healthy group functioning, we recommend a balanced view of the construct, one that considers both its upsides and disadvantages. Substantial developmental psychology research has documented the positive functions of secure attachment. However, attachment to an individual (i.e., that of the developmental psychology literature) and attachment to a group may differ on critical psychological dimensions. Social psychological research shows that inter-individual relations differ from inter-group relations, the latter being more competitive (Insko et al., 1990). Thus, our speculation is that secure attachment to workgroups, consistent with the findings of

developmental psychology, may have multiple positive functions in regard to *intragroup* process and performance; however, it may not always serve inter-group relations positively. For example, Lee (2005) found that when members with secure attachment to a workgroup experience a threat to their task performance relative to a member of another group, members in the secure-attachment condition showed more unfavorable attitudes toward the other group than members in the neutral condition. This research suggests the presence of specific conditions under which the positive effects of secure attachment to workgroups might be limited.

Also, one might conjecture that those who receive help and support from fellow members in secure groups (as considered by Proposition 3) may ultimately demonstrate suboptimal performance because they might not fully develop adequate skill levels to perform on their own. We speculate that this pattern is plausible when the help hinders the work process—for instance, when intervening members take a micro-management approach. Given that dependency in work relationships is associated with anxious attachment (Kahn & Kram, 1994), micro-managing help may ultimately promote anxious (versus secure) attachment to the group. In contrast, a coaching-based approach by which intervening members not only provide low-performing members with necessary skills and knowledge but also encourage them to develop related competencies (Hackman & Wageman, 2005) may engender secure (versus anxious) attachment. Developmental psychology research has consistently demonstrated that securely attached individuals tend to be higher-performing than their insecurely attached counterparts (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). In light of this considerable evidence, we posit that *if* attachment security is successfully generated among specific low-performing members (i.e., those who have received help and support), these individuals should become higher-performing. Future research should

explore the specific help-related conditions that generate attachment security or attachment anxiety, along with associated performance outcomes.

As these areas for future inquiry suggest, additional research can only enhance our understanding of the complex interplay among secure attachment to workgroups, group process, and performance.

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