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*The Life Quality Quarterly*

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## Questions:

*How does the way we view ourselves influence:*

*-how we engage at work?*

*-how we form attachments to the workplace?*

*-the effect of the workplace and its culture on our individual well-being?*

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## Workplace Attachment & Well-being

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- **Workplace Attachment:** An enduring emotional bond between a person and their workspace and/or the organizations they work for
  - **Well-being:** An emotional state that derives from the perception that one's needs are being met and will likely be met in the future
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Human beings are an organized compilation of molecules and an incredibly complex set of biochemical reactions. From our first breath to our last, we process oxygen, water and food needed to fuel the cellular functions underlying the thoughts, feelings and actions that constitute our existence. We are constantly adapting to our environment and responding to other people. We are born fully dependent on adult care givers to survive; our earliest interactions with them guided by a combination of instinct and learning. Those early experiences prime our neuropathways.

We learn that having unmet needs makes us feel vulnerable and that getting our needs met, makes us feel safe and secure. An ongoing positive association with someone supportive can conjure up feelings of safety even when they are absent. That sense of security leads us to seek them in times of need, to tolerate separation from them and eventually to protect them once we can. **Attachments appear to form when a person, place or thing, is understood as a reliable supply of something that satisfies our needs.**

When we are young, unconditional love, care and acceptance are the instruments of attachments and the architects of self-worth that culminate in an understanding that we are intrinsically valuable and worthy of support from others. Such experiences also serve to teach us how to recognize and respond to the needs of others. Experiencing abuse or neglect undermines attachment whereas conditional care leads to the expectation that support must be earned. In such cases, self-esteem becomes a weapon against vulnerability. The ability to take care of one's own needs or produce

something valuable to our caregivers becomes a form of self-defense. These experiences can lead to a strong desire for success and external validation in adulthood. The same can be true for those who are unconditionally cared for but are also prized and praised for their contributions: caring for others, quiet compliance or athletic, academic or other talents. These experiences may cause them to replace feelings of intrinsic value with conditional ones and they seek status to maintain their sense of security. **Nature, nurture and culture set the stage for our early childhood attachments and influence the way we behave as adults.**

Attachment can perhaps be considered an outcome of trust. Trust results from the validation of a set of assumptions about the reliability of others. The capacity to trust may be influenced by childhood experiences and have implications for the workplace and its role in well-being. For example, someone with high self-worth, may have a corresponding expectation that their boss or the organization has genuine concern for their well-being. Such employees will be engaged and capable of servant leadership forming strong relationships with their co-workers and establishing healthy boundaries to protect their personal well-being if necessary.

In contrast, someone with low self-worth, might form an attachment to the workplace if they are rewarded in ways that bolster their self-esteem such as title or compensation. These individuals are also engaged but may be driven to prove themselves worthy at all costs. As leaders, they may be more demanding and manipulative. They may also be vulnerable to burnout because they are compulsively self-reliant and do not trust easily. They might be more inclined to measure their worth in terms of the pay and the authority they are given rather than by attachment to people. Either way, a positive perception of the experiences at the workplace is what mediates an attachment to it. **Attachment to the workplace is more likely to form if the psychological and physical resources of the organization satisfy the needs of an individual.**

Those with high self-worth may be more likely to form workplace attachment through ties to specific people. Those with low self-worth but high self-esteem might form attachment to place through its association with objective measures of their success. Those with low self-worth and low self-esteem may be more prone to depression and might withdraw more easily and disengage when they feel threatened or overwhelmed. They may feel insecure and find it difficult to form any workplace attachment. The degree of workforce attachment can have an impact on the overall morale. Employees with high self-worth are more likely to speak up but will also leave when they are dissatisfied. **Burnout and turnover can be a telltale sign of a workplace culture that interferes with attachment and may be an indicator of the types of people who stay in it.**

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### *Questions for Introspection, Analysis and Discussion*

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- Do you agree or disagree with the bolded statements? For what reasons?
- Do you view self-worth (intrinsic value) and self-esteem (capability) as separate concepts?
- Do you believe that different people get different kinds of needs met through work?
- Which has a greater influence on burnout, the psychological framework of an employee or the workplace culture?