

Baylor researchers link job satisfaction and attachment to God

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WACO—People who see God as a “secure base” for intimacy and attachment are more likely to be emotionally committed to their workplace and satisfied with their jobs, Baylor University researchers concluded.

They also tend to see their work as a calling from God, which correlates to higher levels of job commitment and satisfaction, according to a study of working American adults.



Blake Kent, Baylor University researcher “Attachment to God may relate to a sense of safety and confidence that encourages exploration of the world—and as adults, our primary form of exploration is work,” said Blake V. Kent, lead author and a doctoral candidate in sociology at Baylor. Kent’s co-researchers from Baylor were Matt Bradshaw, assistant professor of sociology, and Kevin Dougherty, associate professor of sociology.

The study, “Attachment to God, Vocational Calling and Worker Contentment,” is published online in the journal *Review of Religious*

Research.

The research is an analysis of data from Baylor Religion Survey 2011, a national random survey about Americans' religious attitudes, beliefs and values conducted by the Gallup Organization. Respondents in this study included 860 adults who are full- or part-time employees or volunteers and who believe in God or a higher power.

While other studies have found a link between job commitment and such religious influences as faith-work integration beliefs and congregational involvement, the Baylor research differs in that it suggests inner feelings of attachment to God rather than statements about God may relate to attachments elsewhere—as in the workplace.

'Divine attachment' a workplace factor

From a management perspective, research has shown employees' work experiences in previous jobs generally trump personal characteristics—such as age, race/ethnicity and gender—when it comes to managing them effectively. The Baylor study, however, suggests “divine attachment” may be viewed as a personal characteristic that should be taken into account in the workplace.

“Research suggests that workplaces which allow their employees to engage in spiritual activity at work—even if it's just 15 minutes a day of meditation—tend to see boosts in employee satisfaction,” Kent said. “What we're doing here is providing evidence that how people relate to God matters for their commitment and satisfaction at work.”

For the research, “affective commitment” was measured by individuals' responses to such statements as “I really feel this organization's problems are my own” and “I do not feel a strong sense of 'belonging' to my organization,” with answers ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

“This type of commitment is a measure of the emotional bond between a person and an organization, in which employees keep their jobs because they want to rather than because they need or ought to,” Kent said.

Such commitment is linked to lower absenteeism and conflict, lower turnover rates, and higher performance and productivity, previous studies have found.

The measure of “job satisfaction” as used in other published research is broader because many factors can affect satisfaction—among them pay, benefits, co-workers and bosses. Respondents considered two statements: “In general, I do not like my job” and “All in all, I am satisfied with my job.” Their responses range from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

Spillover effect of attachment to God

Attachment to God may have a “spillover effect,” serving as a buffer against negative emotions and experiences and helping people cope with workplace challenges, Kent said.

In the study, a “calling” was defined as “a sense of work as a ‘transcendent summons’ for meaning and purpose in the workplace,” he said. “The work may be seen as a ‘mission from God’ or as serving God, even if it is a very commonplace job without religious orientation.”

Previous research indicates a sense of vocational calling might sustain people amid difficult circumstances, Kent said. Individuals who feel called show higher levels of motivation, stronger coping skills, lower absenteeism and higher work satisfaction.

Varieties of attachment formed early

Types of attachments generally are formed in the first three to five years of life and affect an individual in relationships with family, friends, romantic

partners, God and work.

They include:

- **Secure attachment.** “This is when the child knows the primary caretaker—usually a mother—is available to hug and hold you. That creates a certain confidence in the child to explore his or her surroundings but still be confident that the caretaker will be there when the child returns,” Kent said.
- **Insecure attachment.** “This is formed when the primary attachment figure seems cold or distant and is often unavailable for emotional connection,” Kent said.
- **Anxious attachment.** “These attachments are ambivalent,” Kent said. “You feel that the caretaker is sometimes there for you with a lot of love to give, but sometimes they’re not.”

Theories differ about how a person’s concept of God—“the ultimate attachment figure”—is developed. One theory is that one’s view of God as caring, personal and responsive—or as impersonal and indifferent—mirrors the relationship with the main childhood caregiver. Another theory holds that a person’s notion of God can change over time and compensate for a lack of attachment to others in early life.