

WORKPLACE ATTACHEMENT AND REQUEST FOR PROFESSIONAL TRANSFER. STUDY ON A POPULATION OF FRENCH EMPLOYEES

Liliane RIOUX¹

Abstract: *The current research aims at analysing the impact of the workplace attachment, that the National Education employees manifest, on their decision to request professional mutation. 150 French employees were asked to respond to a questionnaire which comprised three scales, evaluating the workplace attachment, professional life satisfaction, and the organisational affective involvement, as well as a free item evaluating the perceived distance between the employees' home and their workplace. The results show that the attachment to the workplace is a predictor of the intention to change the working place, which proves to be, furthermore, more important than both the level of organisational affective involvement and the satisfaction of one's professional life.*

Key words: *workplace attachment, professional life satisfaction, organisational affective involvement, request for professional transfer.*

1. Introduction

The researches treating the subject of place attachment constitute a major preoccupation of environmental psychology nowadays. Following the now classic works of Fried and Gleisher [11], the researches have increased, and since the 1980's, this topic has become more and more frequent in the environmental literature [18], [21], [8], [25], thus progressively favouring the social dimension of place attachment [22]. Despite a certain terminological and methodological confusion, that has, very likely, blocked the advancement in this research field [19], [13], the concept of place attachment has established itself in

the theoretical field, as the excellent synthesis of Giuliani [14] proves, and it can reasonably be defined as a positive affective bond between people and specific places. More precisely, and at the same time referring to the works of Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall [1] and Bowlby [7], which state that the main feature of attachment is the desire to maintain proximity to the object of the attachment, place attachment would be defined as a positive affective bond between an individual and the space where he lives, its main feature being that of the individual wanting to transform that space into a personal one. The affective dimension of the attachment, little researched upon up to the present, as compared to the cognitive

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Paris Ouest Nanterre-La Défense, France.

and social dimensions of this concept, is more and more frequently approached. Consequently, we may quote, among others, the works that concentrate particularly on the lodging [15], the neighbourhood [5], the city [12] or natural or wild places [27].

In spite of the rich literature on the topic, the works dealing particularly with workplace attachment still scarce [16-17], [20], [24], and to the best of our knowledge, no empirical research has thoroughly treated the impact of the workplace attachment on the decision to request a transfer.

2. Objectives

Our research takes on an environmental approach and builds particularly on the 'Theory of Place Attachment' elaborated by Shumaker & Taylor [26] and enriched by Giuliani [14], and Altman & Low [3], which apprehends this process through the affective components which bond the individual to a given space [6]. Thus, the research aims to fulfil a double objective:

- a) To evaluate the attachment that the National Education employees manifest regarding their workplace.
- b) To show that the workplace attachment constitutes one of the predictors of the decision to request a transfer.

3. Method

Participants

To limit the impact of organizational pressure, we chose to center on a population of National Education employees. Indeed, in France, changes of appointment are usually made at the request of the employee and using well-understood criteria. The input of the head master has relatively moderate influence.

Our sample is composed of 150 National Education employees, being employed in a

high-school of the central region. 62% are female and 38% are male. 67% of them are teachers and 33% are not (administrative employees, cleaners....). They are aged between 25 and 58 (M = 42; ET = 16.29). 12% have less than one year length of service in the high-school, 32% have between one and five years of length of service, and 56% have been working there for more than five years.

Research Instruments

The designed questionnaire is made of five parts:

- An identification part, allowing us to distinguish the socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, educational level) and the organisational characteristics (length of service in the National Education, length of service in the high-school, status) of the researched population.
- The Workplace Attachment Scale (WAS/EALT²), validated by Rioux [23] is one-dimensional in structure and comprises seven items. In the version used for the present research, the word 'enterprise' has been replaced by 'high-school', and the version was tested before its use.
- The Professional Life Satisfaction Scale (PLSS/ESVP³) by Fouquereau and Rioux [10] consists in five items corresponding to the adaptation to the professional world of the initial life satisfaction scale of Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin [9], translated in French and validated by Blais, Vallerand, Pelletier & Brière [4].
- The Scale for Commitment to Organizations and Occupations of Allen, Meyer & Smith [2] is divided

² EALT – Echelee d'Attachement au Lieu de Travail

³ ESVP – Echelle de Satisfaction de Vie Professionnelle

into three subscales, named ‘*calculated involvement*’, ‘*affective involvement*’ and ‘*normative involvement*’. In the current research we have only used the ‘*affective involvement*’ subscale, which comprises six items.

For these three scales, the evaluation of every item is made on a five-point Likert scale. A free item, evaluating the perceived distance between the employees’ home and their workplace (‘The distance which separates your home from your workplace seems to you: *excessive- way too long – acceptable - entirely right*’).

Procedure

After having obtained the acceptance of the high-school principal, the psychologist intervened before the end of the first school trimester in order to present the research on the occasion of two reunions, a pedagogical reunion, for the teaching personnel, and a maintenance reunion for the non-teaching personnel. Every employee received a numbered questionnaire, having a bill with the number attached to it. The respondent had to cut the bill, stick it on a sealed personalised envelope and afterwards put the envelope in a bowl. Afterwards, (s)he

had to give the questionnaire back to the psychologist at the end of the reunion. Two non-teaching employees chose not to take part in the research.

In April, every envelope was given back to its initial owner. The latter had to attach the bill with the answer to the item ‘I am considering asking for my mutation for the next school year’ (answer to be given on a five-point Likert scale) and put everything in a bowl. Three questionnaires could not be matched, consequently, they were eliminated.

4. Results

• Descriptive analysis of the workplace attachment

The global attachment is moderately high (M = 3.42 on a five point scale), and is associated to a relatively high dispersion of the answers ($\sigma = 1,07$). Although all employees get attached to their workplace, the attachment appears to be more or less intense. The results on every item are presented in table 1.

Average and standard deviations and factorial contributions of the workplace attachment scale items Table 1

Items	AFC	M	σ	N
1. I am attached to my workplace	0.77	3.47	1.45	150
2. It would be very difficult for me to forever quit this high-school.	0.58	3.60	1.13	149
3. There are certain places in the high-school to which I am particularly attached.	0.83	3.69	0.42	150
4. If the high-school had to move, I would regret my current workplace.	0.69	3.19	0.87	150
5. This workplace is part of my inner-self	0.57	2.89	1.12	144
6. There are places in this high-school which bring back memories.	0.85	3.58	0.67	150
7. After a holiday, I am happy to go back to my workplace.	0.74	3.50	1.52	148

GFI = 0.93; AGFI = 0.89; Chi2 (dl = 21) = 142.15.

When one looks at the average and standard deviations obtained on every item, it is noticeable that the items '*there are certain places in this high-school to which I am particularly attached*' and '*there are places in this high-school which bring back memories*' get the highest average score ($M = 3.69$ and 3.58), at the same time getting the lowest dispersion (namely 0.42 and 0.67). This relatively consensual results lead towards a differential attachment depending on the given places.

A confirming factorial analysis was afterwards conducted, in order to check the one-dimensional character of the place attachment scale in the case of our population (first column of Table 1). The value of G.F.I. is of .93, that of A.G.F.I. is of .89 and the Chi2 is of 142.15 ($df = 21$). All the model parameters are significant of .05. This results allow us to reasonably conclude that our data were adequate to the model.

• The predictors of the decision to request a transfer

We have conducted an incremental regression (step-by-step), analysis considering the decision to ask for a mutation as a criterion. The predictors corresponding to the variables correlated to the decision of asking for a mutation, namely the workplace attachment ($r = -.26$, $p < .05$), the affective organisational involvement ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$) and the perceived distance between home and work ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). The overall results, regrouped in table 2 show a convenient coefficient of multiple determination ($R^2 = .22$).

Three variables explaining the decision to ask for a mutation have therefore been identified. They correspond to the items identifying (a) the attachment to the workplace ($\beta = -.33$) (b) the affective

involvement ($\beta = -.20$), and (c) the distance between home and high-school ($\beta = .16$). Consequently, the lesser the agent is attached to the high-school, the lesser he feels involved, the more important the distance between home and high-school becomes, and the greater the desire to ask for a mutation ($R = .47$; R^2 adjusted = .22; $F(3,146) = 13.44$, $p < 0,0001$).

The predictors of the decision to request a transfer Table 2

Predictors	β	R^2	σ	p
Workplace attachment	-.33	.16	27.91	.0001
Affective involvement	-.20	.20	8.14	.005
Distance home-high-school	.12	.22	2.53	.011

5. Conclusions

Concluding this research, we can state that every agent shows a different degree of workplace attachment. Moreover, the multiple regression analysis shows that place attachment constitutes a predictor of the decision to ask for a transfer, which is even more powerful than the level of organisational affective involvement. It is also worth noticing that neither the socio-demographic and organisational characteristics, nor the professional satisfaction constitute a significant predictor of the decision to ask for a transfer.

Attachment appears, thus, as an element of organisational culture which participates in and favours the integration of the employee in the organisation. This is why it seems important to us that the human resources specialists treat it with greater vigilance.

Other information may be obtained from the address: lrioux@u-paris10.fr

References

1. Ainsworth, M.S., Blehar, M.C., Waters, E., et al.: *Patterns of attachment. A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale. Lawrence Erlbaum, 1978.
2. Allen, N.J., Meyer, J.P., Smith, C.A.: *Commitment to Organizations and Occupations: Extension and Test of a Three-Component Conceptualization*. In: *Journal of Applied Psychology* **78** (1993), p. 538-551.
3. Altman, I., Low, S.M.: *Place attachment*. New York. Plenum Press, 1992.
4. Blais, M.R., Vallerand, R.J., Pelletier, L.G., et al.: *L'échelle de satisfaction de vie: validation canadienne-française du "Satisfaction with Life Scale"*. In: *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* **21** (1989) No. 2, p. 210-223.
5. Bonaiuto, M., Aiello, A., Perugini, M., et al.: *Multidimensional perception of residential environment. Quality and neighborhood attachment in the urban environment*. In: *Journal of Environmental Psychology* **19** (1999), p. 331-352.
6. Bonnes, M., Secchiaroli, G.: *Environmental psychology. A psychological introduction*. London, Sage, 1995.
7. Bowlby, J.: *Attachment and loss. Vol. 3: Loss: sadness and depression*. London. The Hogarth Press and the institute of psycho-analysis, 1980.
8. Carp, F., Carp, A.: *Perceived environmental quality of neighborhoods: Development of assessment scales and their relation to age and gender*. In: *Journal of Environmental Psychology* **2** (1982), p. 245-312.
9. Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J., et al.: *The Satisfaction with Life Scale*. In: *Journal of Personality Assessment* **49** (1985), p. 71-76.
10. Fouquereau, E., Rioux, L.: *Élaboration de l'échelle de satisfaction de vie professionnelle (ÉSVP) en langue française: une démarche exploratoire*. In: *Revue Canadienne des Sciences du Comportement* **34** (2002) No. 3, p. 210-215.
11. Fried, M., Gleisher, P.: *Some sources of residential satisfaction in a urban slum*. In: *Journal of the American Institute of planners* **27** (1961) No. 4, p. 307-325.
12. Giuliani, M.V., Ferrara, F., Barabotti, S.: *One attachment or more?* In: *People, Places, and Sustainability: 21st Century Metropolis*, Moser, G., Pol, E., Bernard, Y., et al. (eds.). Hogrefe & Huber, Göttingen, 2003, p. 111-122.
13. Giuliani, M.V.: *Theory of attachment and place attachment*. In: *Psychological theories for environmental issues*, Bonnes, M., Lee, T., Bonaiuto, M. (eds.). Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003, p. 137-170.
14. Giuliani, M.V.: *Toward an analysis of mental representations of attachment to the home*. In: *The Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* **8** (2001) No. 2, p. 133-146.
15. Hidalgo, M.C., Hernandez, B.: *Place attachment: Conceptual and empirical questions*. In: *Journal of Environmental Psychology* **21** (2001), p. 273-281.
16. Inalhan, G., Finch, E.: *Place attachment and sense of belonging*. In: *Facilities* **22** (2004), p. 5-6.
17. Inalhan, G.: *The role of place attachment on employees' resistance to change in workplace accommodation projects*. In: PhD. Thesis, University of Reading, Reading, 2006.
18. Kasarda, J., Janowitz, M.: *Community attachment in mass society*. In: *American Sociological Review* **39**

- (1974), p. 328-339.
19. Lalli, M.: *Urban-related identity: Theory, measurement, and empirical findings*. In: *Journal of Environmental Psychology* **12** (1992), p. 285-303.
 20. Milligan, M.: *Interactional past and potential*. In: *Symbolic Interaction* **21** (1998), p. 1-33.
 21. Riger, S., Lavraskas, P.J.: *Community ties: Attachment and social interaction in urban neighborhoods*. In: *American Journal of Community Psychology* **9** (1981), p. 55-66.
 22. Ringel, N.B., Finkelstein, J.C.: *Differentiating neighborhood satisfaction and neighborhood attachment among urban residents*. In: *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* **12** (1991), p. 177-193.
 23. Rioux, L.: *Construction d'une échelle d'attachement au lieu de travail. Une démarche exploratoire [Construction of a workplace attachment scale. An exploratory research]*. In: *Canadian Journal of Behaviour Science* **38** (2006), No. 4, p. 325-336.
 24. Rioux, L.: *Quelques prédicteurs de l'attachement aux lieux de travail. Etude auprès des agents hospitaliers (Some predictors of workplace attachment. A study carried out among hospital staff)*. In: *Psihologie organizational-manageriala (Organizational – managerial Psychology)*, Avram, E. (ed.). Editura Universitară, Bucureşti, 2007, p. 48-61.
 25. Sampson, R.: *Local friendship ties and community attachment in mass society: a multilevel systemic level*. In: *American Sociological Review* **53** (1988), p. 766-779.
 26. Shumaker, S., Taylor, R.: *Toward a clarification of people-place relationships: A model of attachment to place*. In: *Environmental Psychology. Directions and Perspectives*, Feimer, N., Geller, S. (eds.). Praeger, New-York, 1983, p. 219-251.
 27. Vitterso, J., Vorkinn, M., Vistad, O.: *Congruence between recreational mode and actual behavior: A prerequisite for optimal experiences?* In: *Journal of Leisure Research* **33** (2001), p. 137-159.