

**Technology and Trust in the Workplace: A literature Review on the Benefits and
Challenges on Workplace Relationships**

Assignment, Option E

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Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology has significantly transformed how we communicate, work, and maintain relationships within the workplace. In professional environments, technology plays a pivotal role in shaping trust between colleagues and within teams. This paper explores the dual nature of technology's impact on trust in close workplace relationships, highlighting both its potential to foster trust through enhanced communication and flexibility, and its capacity to undermine trust through miscommunication and overreliance on digital interactions. By examining these positive and negative impacts, along with a theoretical comparison based on attachment theory, this literature review aims to provide a nuanced understanding of technology's role in workplace relationships.

Positive Impacts: Virtual Collaboration and Employee Autonomy

One of the primary benefits of technology in professional relationships is the increased flexibility it offers through remote work. Virtual collaboration tools such as video conferencing, instant messaging, and project management software have become integral to remote work environments. These tools not only facilitate efficient communication and collaboration but also contribute to employees' performance and well-being. A 2020 Australian study of 522 employees indicated that the social support garnered via these technology tools is positively correlated with lower levels of remote working challenges, thereby fostering a sense of trust among colleagues (Wang et. al., 2021).

Moreover, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to work away from traditional workplaces can give employees a greater sense of autonomy. This autonomy allows employees to manage their work-life balance better and tailor their work environments to their preferences. However, it also places new constraints on the way they conduct themselves in

settings previously beyond managerial control. Despite these constraints, the autonomy granted by ICTs can enhance trust as employees feel more empowered and trusted by their employers to manage their tasks independently (Sewell & Taskin, 2015).

Negative Impacts: Limitations and Poor Communication

Despite its benefits, technology can also introduce significant challenges, particularly in the realm of workplace communication. Digital communication often lacks the nonverbal cues present in face-to-face interactions, which can lead to misunderstandings and reduced trust. Research has shown that the receivers' personalities significantly influence their perceptions of the e-mail sender, both directly and indirectly through perceptions of nonverbal cues. This finding underscores the contextual nature of nonverbal communication and highlights how digital communication limitations can result in miscommunication and trust issues among colleagues (Byron & Baldridge, 2007).

Furthermore, poor communication exacerbated by digital tools can impair professional relationships and increase work stress. Studies have indicated that poor communication not only hinders performance but also negatively impacts professional relationships and increases stress levels among workers. These findings highlight the need for high-quality virtual communication practices to mitigate the adverse effects of digital miscommunication on trust within the workplace (Wang et. al., 2021).

Mixed Impacts: Communication and Performance Evaluations

Technology's impact on work-life balance presents a complex picture. While telecommuting and digital communication tools offer flexibility, they also alter traditional communication dynamics. Many employee-supervisor interactions now occur via technology tools and alternate communication platforms, which can lead to performance appraisal errors.

This error in performance appraisal occurs because supervisors have a tendency to downplay indirect feedback about their subordinates when they telework, potentially affecting trust levels and performance evaluation assessments (Levy, 2020, p. 130).

Theoretical Comparison: Attachment Theory

Attachment theory provides valuable insights into how technology affects trust in workplace relationships. Developed by Bowlby and Ainsworth in the 1970s and 1980s, attachment theory explores the dynamics of long-term relationships between humans, positing that early attachment behaviors influence one's ability to form secure relationships and explore the environment. The theory identifies three primary attachment styles: secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant. Securely attached individuals tend to adapt better to technological changes and use technology to enhance trust and collaboration. In contrast, those with anxious/ambivalent attachment may feel overwhelmed by technology, leading to trust issues, while avoidant individuals might use technology to isolate themselves, reducing opportunities for trust-building (Hazan & Shaver, 1990).

Conclusion

In summary, technology plays a multifaceted role in fostering or undermining trust in close relationships within the workplace. While it offers significant benefits in terms of flexibility and autonomy, it also presents challenges related to miscommunication and altered work-life balance dynamics. Understanding these impacts through the lens of attachment theory provides valuable insights into how individuals' attachment styles influence their interactions with technology and, consequently, their levels of trust in workplace relationships. Future research should further explore these dynamics, considering the rapid pace of technological advancements and their implications for trust in close workplace relationships. For example,

future research can examine how different communication platforms (e.g., email, instant messaging, video conferencing) affect individuals with varying attachment styles. For instance, investigate whether securely attached individuals feel more comfortable and maintain trust through video calls compared to those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles who might prefer text-based communication. Additionally, further studies can investigate how technology influences conflict resolution in workplace relationships. For example, explore if video conferencing or face-to-face meetings lead to more effective conflict resolution and trust rebuilding than email or instant messaging, particularly for individuals with different attachment styles. With the recent evolution of artificial intelligence (AI), studies can also explore the role of AI and automation in workplace relationships, particularly how trust is developed and maintained in human-AI collaborations and whether securely attached individuals are more likely to trust AI-driven decisions compared to those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles. By exploring these areas, future research can provide a deeper understanding of how technology impacts trust in workplace relationships.

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