Colleagues and Friends: A Theoretical Framework of Workplace Friendship

Tal G. Zarankin
Radford University

Danylle Kunkel
Radford University

Friendships in general, and workplace friendships in particular, are among the most valued interpersonal relationships for individuals. Despite the prevalence and great importance of workplace friendships, there isn't much research about the theoretical underpinnings of this phenomenon. In this paper we suggest a typology for workplace friendships. We propose looking at this construct as a function of two factors: The Quality of the friendship and its Scope. Consequently, we propose four types of workplace friendships and discuss their likely antecedents and outcomes. Finally, we discuss avenues for future research in this area.

Keywords: Workplace Friendships, Interpersonal Relations, Social Ties, Social Networks, Employee Behavior

INTRODUCTION

> *"Friendship marks a life even more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession, friendship is never anything but sharing."* ― *Elie Wiesel*

As the words of the Nobel Laureate and writer Elie Wiesel indicate, friendship is one of the most valuable assets to humankind. Friends serve as a lending hand, a support system, a source of happiness, and much more. Indeed, when people are asked what gives happiness and meaning in their life, they state friendship as a top factor (Rawlins, 1992; Dickie, 2009). Moreover, individuals are motivated to form meaningful relationships with others due to the "need for belonging", which is a psychological need of individuals to be affiliated to others (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000).

Individuals acquire friends from the very early stages of life and throughout life, in various contexts. Children acquire friends in the school system and in their various after-school social activities. Most adults spend most of their waking hours at work and acquire friends in that setting. In this article we focus on friendships which originate within the workplace context.

As with friendships in general, workplace friendships are extremely common (Ingram & Zou, 2008; Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2013). According to a Gallup study, roughly 30% of employees report having a "best friend" at work (Rath, 2006; Rath & Harter, 2010). Many more have friends at work who

are not "best" friends. Based on that statistic, the understanding of workplace friendship is relevant to more than 125 million people in the U.S. alone (based on United States Department of Labor statistics).

Workplace friendship is an important research topic not only because it is common in the workplace, but mainly because it impacts workplaces in several important ways. For example, organizations are increasingly adopting the team work format, which increases interdependence and interaction. Friendships are also associated with various positive attitudes and outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance (Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000). We will discuss friendship's outcomes in greater detail later.

Workplace relationships in general are important to study because they impact many fundamental issues in organizations, such as citizenship behavior, workplace socialization and adaptation, team performance, leader-member exchange, and more (Ferris et al., 2009). Despite the importance of workplace relations, they are relatively understudied (Raggins & Dutton, 2007; Farris et.al. 2009).

Ferris et.al. (2009) noted there is a gap in the literature when it comes to identifying key underlying dimensions of dyadic work relationships. Since then, this gap has still not been addressed in the sub-area of workplace friendships. Also, as our literature review will demonstrate, despite the prevalence and great importance of workplace friendship it has mostly been treated as a static and unidimensional construct; that is – a friendship (or a perception of it) either exists or not. In some cases friendship was measured as a continuous perceptual variable (e.g. one's degree of perceived friendship). However, this complex construct is treated as unidimensional. Therefore, our main contribution in this paper is to suggest a typology for the construct of workplace friendship. Specifically, we propose looking at this construct as a function of two factors: the *quality* of the friendship and its *scope*. Consequently, we propose four types of workplace friendships and discuss their likely antecedents and outcomes based on previous research.

We will next turn to a discussion on the current literature focusing on the definition and scope of the term workplace friendship. Then we review its main antecedents and outcomes. Subsequently, we discuss the difference between workplace friendships and other close constructs, such as social networks and mentoring relations. Finally, we discuss our proposed typology of workplace friendship and its impact on our understanding of its main antecedents and outcomes.

DEFINITION AND SCOPE

Friendship is so omnipresent in our lives that we all believe we know its meaning. Nonetheless, scholars have noted it is difficult to define (Francis & Sandberg, 2000). This difficulty may stem from the fact that people's subjective perception of friendship may depend on each person's value system (Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010). What to one person is a friend may not be so to another.

In addition, the term "friend" can imply many different types of relationships. For example, one person's perception of friendship may be shaped by the amount of time spent with another person, whereas another's perception could be shaped on the quality of the interactions in the relationship, and yet another might determine a friendship status based on the amount of benefits or advantages in the relationship.

Researchers studying friendship have traditionally avoided studying workplace friendships because of the mixture of the workplace setting and the personal relationship which characterizes friendship (Grey & Sturdy, 2007). Those who did study relationships in the workplace focused, for the most part, on formal ones, such as supervisor-subordinate, co-workers, and leader-follower (Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010).

While scholars have provided various different definition for workplace friendship, most agree that it is an informal and voluntary relationship (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018; Rawlings, 1992; Wright, 1984) between two or more individuals in a workplace, who are interested in one another as whole individuals, not just as colleagues (Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010; Wright, 1978; Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003; Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2017).

As for the first element (informal and voluntary), scholars agree that co-workers who become friends do so voluntarily and are not formally asked or instructed to do so by any other member of the organization. This is contrary to some other workplace relationships, such as one between a mentor and a protégé, that are formally initiated by the organization. As for the second element, scholars agree that

what sets friendship apart from other workplace relations is that the parties involved are interested in one another for who they are as whole individuals, independently of their role in the workplace. Literature refers to this feature as "personalistic" (Litchman & Hunt, 1971).

Having a broad definition of workplace relationship is important, but it is also important to identify the dimensions workplace friendship is comprised of, for both theoretical and empirical considerations. Delineating dimensions for this construct will enable us to understand it better, to build a more comprehensive theory with its antecedents and outcomes, and to measure it for empirical research.

In order to identify the dimensions of workplace friendship we reviewed research on workplace relations in general and on workplace friendships in particular. In a comprehensive review article on various workplace relationships, Ferris and colleagues (2009) examine the following workplace relationships: mentoring, employee-organization relations, leader-member exchange, social networks, and a general category, labeled positive connections.

Friendship as a distinct type of relationship was not discussed but is probably closest to the category labeled positive connections, because of how it is conceptualized (e.g. it is the only informal and personalistic category of dyadic relationships). In discussing the dimensions underlying positive relations in general, Ferris et al. (2009) note the following: trust, commitment to the relationship, positive affect (e.g. liking), accountability (each friend is held accountable for his/her part in maintaining the relationship), and instrumentality (the tangible benefits each party gets from the relationship).

Research dealing specifically with workplace friendships has some overlap with the more general stream of research discussed above, and it adds some additional elements. As for the overlap, workplace friendship research also states trust, support, and affect as dimensions in those relationships (e.g. see Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2017). Trust motivates individuals to share personal information with each other reviling their true opinions, agendas, emotions, etc. Friends usually support and help each other. They like each other and enjoy each other's company, and they reciprocate beneficial deeds for each other.

In addition to those elements, the literature identifies the dimension of reciprocity or mutuality (Amichai-Hamburger, Kingsbury, & Schneider, 2013; Bagwell & Schmidt, 2011; Schneider, 2000; Rawlings, 1992). Co-workers become friends when they are mutually interested in each other beyond just being co-workers. This mutual interest may stem from shared values or other features which may or may not be work related (Winstead, Derlega, Montgomery, & Pikington, 1995). On the other hand, instrumentality and accountability are not mentioned in this context. Perhaps because friendship is not always viewed as instrumental for a specific end, but rather as a psychological need or as a pleasurable aspect of life. And accountability is perhaps viewed as too formal in most friendships, which as noted above, are informal relationships in this context.

In sum, based on the extant literature on workplace relations in general and on workplace friendship specifically, we define a workplace friendship as a *voluntary* relationship between co-workers based on a *reciprocity, commitment, trust*, and *positive affect*.

It is important to note that numerous types of interpersonal relationships exist in the workplace context, which include some elements of workplace friendship but do not amount to workplace friendships. Therefore, it is important to discuss some of those relationships, highlighting their similarities and dissimilarities from friendship.

WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP VS. OTHER WORKPLACE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Friendships vs. Social Networks

There is a large body of literature focused on social networks in organizations, finding such networks are associated with various beneficial outcomes, such as career success and organizational commitment (Bozionelos, 2008). A Social network is comprised of all the interpersonal ties one has, some of which are strong and some of which are weak (Bozionelos, 2008).

As Brass and colleagues note (2004), social networks exist at the individual level and at the group (unit and whole organization) level. At the individual level, such interpersonal networks include various

types of relationships such as: strategic alliances, flows of information, influence, and friendships. Individuals may have several different types of relationships with different people within their organization and social network. When such ties are successful, they are associated with positive outcomes such as: better performance, greater work satisfaction, and greater organizational commitment. So some networks include friendships, but others do not (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Bozionelos, 2008).

Another important distinction in the network literature is between instrumental and expressive relationships, where instrumental relationships focus on career interests (e.g. keeping a tie with someone who can help you get a promotion), and expressive ones focus on social support and interaction (Bozionelos, 2008; Kram & Issabella, 1985). Of those two categories of network ties, it seems that the expressive ties are more similar to friendships, whether within the workplace setting or elsewhere. As we noted earlier, friendships are typically not instrumental, but rather based on a more wholistic attraction to another person.

In sum, social networks may include workplace friendships, but they are much broader, and may include relationships that are very formal. Social ties may also include relationships based on narrow interests, which is directly opposed to the holistic and personalistic nature of friendships. For example, one can include another in a social network because of a specific skill or status that person has in the organization (e.g. one's manager or mentor).

Friendship vs. Mentoring

Another interpersonal relationship common in organizations is the mentoring relationship. As with organizational networks, mentoring relationships also have received a great deal of emphasis in research, and are also associated with various beneficial outcomes, mainly for the protégé, but also for the mentor.

Mentoring relationships are typically defined as a relationship between two individuals of unequal status within an organization, which is mainly focused on providing the protégé with career advice and development (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Bozionelos, 2008; Kram & Issabella, 1985). This is very different from the definition of workplace friendship, as we discussed earlier. In addition, mentoring relationships are sometimes formal when they are initiated, and sometimes mandated by the organization, which is contrary to the voluntary and informal nature of friendships.

In sum, mentoring relationships are mostly professional relationships, many times formal, which are instrumental to the professional success of the protégé. When mentoring relationships are successful the mentor and protégé may develop a friendship, in addition to their professional relationship. So mentoring can be also a friendship but is not so by default.

Workplace Friendship vs. Leader Member Exchange (LMX)

Leader Member Exchange theory is the only theory of leadership that focuses on dyadic relationships between a leader and another member of that organization. A close examination of LMX theory reveals it has some overlap with friendship, but is fundamentally different from it.

As in workplace friendship, LMX theory highlights the features of reciprocity (or exchange in LMX terminology) and trust (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to LMX, leaders form unique social exchange relationships with other individuals in their organization based on perceptions of similarity, competence, and potential benefit (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997).

As with workplace friendship, a high quality (successful and meaningful) LMX relationship is voluntary and involves trust and affect. However, there are some key differences between LMX and friendships. The main difference stems from the different roles in this relationship.

LMX is, by definition, limited to a relationship between a leader and a subordinate. While friendships may also develop between leaders and followers, they are not limited to that context at all. Because friendships are not role-dependent, they are seen as a relationship between equals. This implies each party in the relationship is as likely to initiate the relationship, and both parties are expected to roughly equally benefit from it, and put effort in maintaining it. However, in LMX, the relationship is mostly initiated by

the leader, who is the main driving force of the relationship. And often the subordinate is the main beneficiary of the relationship.

Not surprisingly, most research on the benefits of LMX centers on the benefit to the member rather than for the leader. For example, scholars agree that successful LMX relationships results in *member* outcomes, such as: improved job performance, increased job satisfaction, satisfaction with supervisor, increased job commitment, and reduces job conflict (Dulebohn, 2012; Grestner & Day, 1997; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). However, the benefits to the leader are considerable less diverse and center around increased loyalty and support from members.

In sum, despite sharing some common elements with friendships, LMX is fundamentally different from a friendship. Rather than a holistic and equally beneficial relationship between equals, it is a relationship typically between a superior and a subordinate, initiated by the superior for mutual benefit.

WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP ANTECEDENTS

Research focused on the factors that generate or encourage workplace friendship, indicates some of those are in the control of the organization and some are not. Even though workplace friendships are voluntary, by definition, organizations can systemically *facilitate* their creation. Some examples of organizational factors which may facilitate friendships include: a physical workspace which places co-workers in close proximity (Griffin & Sparks, 1990), a culture and climate which values and encourages elements such as supervisor support, employee participation, and collaboration (Ibrahim & Dickie, 2010). Specifically, research finds that individual's perceptions of their organizational support correlates with those individual's tendency to form friendships. Similarly, individuals who have collaborative tasks with others form friendships more frequently that counterparts who work more independently.

Other factors which encourage friendship but are not in the control of the organization are related to personality and perceived similarity (Sias & Cahill, 1998; Sias, et. al, 2012). Specifically, when individuals view others as having similar traits as they do, they are more likely to initiate a friendship (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Sias et. al, 2012).

The phenomenon of attraction to similar others is well established in the field of social psychology. In the organizational context, the well supported Attraction-Selections-Attrition framework (Schneider, 1987), posits that individuals are attracted to organizations with individuals perceived as similar in attributes such as personality, values, and culture. Organizations select those individuals who are perceived as a good fit with the organization's culture, values, etc. Finally, those individuals who prove to be a good fit with the culture and values of the organization and its members remain in the organization over time.

Wright (1978, 1984) developed a view of friendship based on the idea of rewards. He called these friendship values. Friends are motivated to build and nurture friendships as a way to affirm personal identities and secure various rewards. This can be seen in the friendship values. For example, ego support and self-affirmation values are two of the friendship values where individuals reflect and support each other's self-views and positive impressions. This can happen simultaneously if each offers the other similar views. Security values exists when friends can trust one another, feel safe and comfortable around each other and can act spontaneously without fear. Finally, friends provide utility value if they help each other meet goals and accomplish everyday tasks. Wright's perspective helps understand the motivation for friendships at various levels in the workplace.

Sias and Cahill (1998) combined a developmental framework with workplace friendship to explore how coworkers build this type of relationship over a period of time. Their developmental perspective describes a series of three relational transitions through which workplace friendships evolve: acquaintance to friend, friend to close friend, and close friend to *almost* best friend. Coworkers advance through the acquaintance to friend as they learn about and take interest in each other's lives outside of particular work boundaries. This transition is characterized by an increase in personal discussion, not just work. Personal and professional relationships begin to merge as workers move from friend to close friend. Help is offered

for both work and personal significant events. Moving to *almost* best friend, coworkers often social in extra-organizational events, such as birthday parties and sporting events, supporting each other.

WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP OUTCOMES

Research on the outcomes of workplace friendship points to both positive and negative outcomes (for example Methot et al., 2016), but overall, indicates it is a beneficial phenomenon for individuals and organizations (Sias et al., 2012). Over the years an abundance of research has accumulated regarding the benefits of workplace friendships. Some of those benefits are, improved performance (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002; Methot, Lepine, Podsakoff, & Christian, 2016) reduced stress, and improved employee overall well-being, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Morrison, 2004; Rawlings, 1992), Job involvement (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995), and team performance (Jehn & Shah, 1997). Further, workplace friendship has a positive impact on emotions in the workplace (Colbert, Bono, & Purvaniva, 2016), as well as on turnover intentions (Morrison, 2004; Kram & Isabella, 1985).

A more recent reserach trend involves studying the detrimental effects of workplace friendships. In general, studies indicate that workplace friendships can lead to negative gossip, decreased loyalty, and negative organizational politics (Song & Olshfski, 2008). More recent studies suggest more systemic dangers of the phenomenon. For example, Methot et al. (2016) studied multiplex workplace friendships, which involve friendships both independent from the workplace and intertwined within it. They call this versatile construct "a mixed blessing" (p. 311), finding it has both beneficial and detrimental outcomes.

The authors conclude that if plotted graphically, the relationship between workplace friendships and performance creates an inverted "U" shape. Up to a certain point additional friendships correlate with better performance; but at that point performance starts to decline due to the emotional labor and possible exhaustion from maintaining all these friendships.

In a more recent publication, Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) argue that the detriments of workplace friendships may be systemic due to tensions between several key aspects of friendships, such as informality and voluntariness, and opposite features of the organization within which the friendship is embedded.

In sum, it is quite clear by now that workplace friendship can be a positive phenomenon but has, potentially, some significant drawbacks. We note that there still isn't a comprehensive theory of the advantages and disadvantages of workplace friendships, perhaps because of the gap in explaining the construct itself.

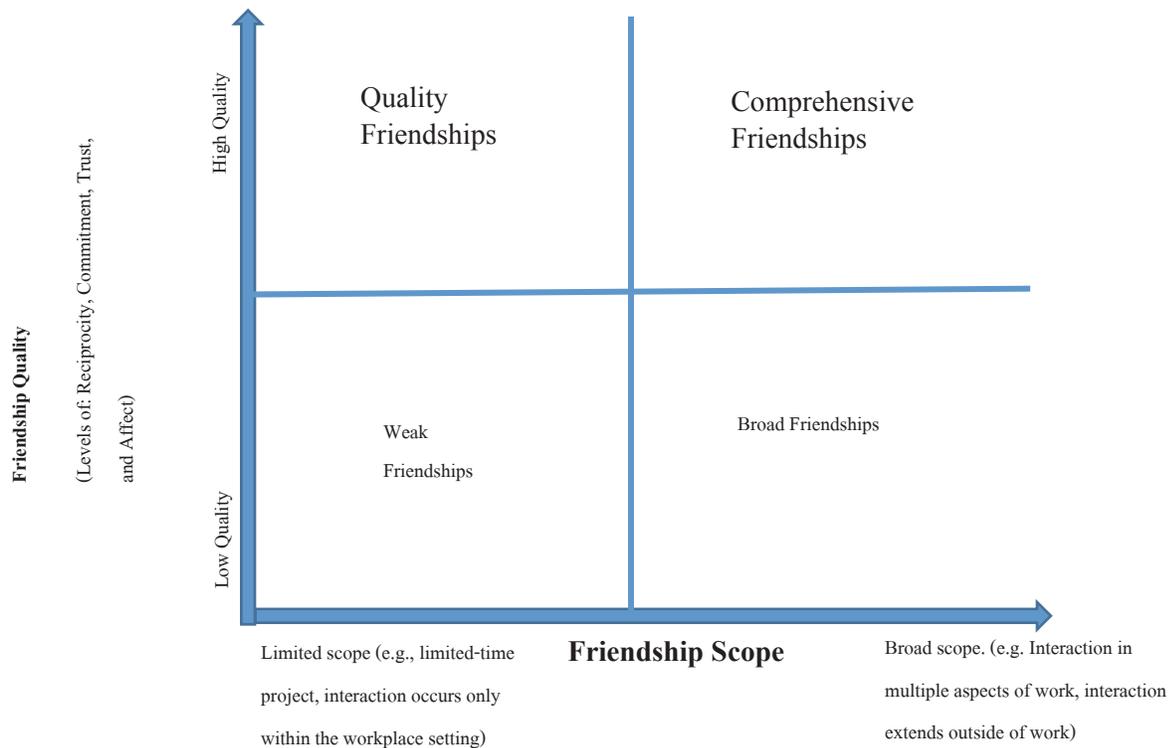## FILLING THE GAP – THE WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP TYPOLOGY

After discussing the present state of the relevant literature, we now turn to delineating a new workplace friendship typology. We suggest that workplace friendship should be viewed as a multidimensional concept rather than a dichotomous one. As our review of workplace friendship and other positive workplace relations demonstrates, scholars agree *reciprocity, commitment, trust*, and *positive affect* are elements of each friendship. Therefore, we propose the degree of each of those elements will determine the quality of the relationship.

In addition to the quality of a relationship we propose looking at its quantity or scope. Theoretically it is possible to have a friendship with high degrees of *reciprocity, commitment, trust*, and *positive affect* but at the same time with very brief, rare, or limited encounters (i.e. narrow scope). We also note that in the general area of interpersonal relations, researchers have found a unique influence of the quality of a relationship (degree of the perceived closeness to another person and the degree of meaningfulness of that relationship) and its quantity (operationalized as amount of time spent with another person) upon individuals' sense of happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2002). This important distinction was never applied in the context of workplace friendship and this is our main contribution in this paper.

Consequently, we propose workplace friendships vary on two dimensions: *Friendship Quality* and *Friendship Scope*. These two factors create four distinct friendship types we label: Weak Friendships,

Quality Friendships, Broad Friendships, and Comprehensive Friendships (See Figure 1). We now turn to a discussion on the two factors and on the four types they create.

FIGURE 1
THE WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP TYPOLOGY

The Two Factors: Friendship Quality and Friendship Scope
Friendship Quality

The first factor we identify relates to the quality of the friendship. A high-quality relationship is one which is valuable to all individuals involved. Earlier, we identified the following elements of high-quality friendships (also common to other high-quality workplace relationships): reciprocity, commitment, trust, and positive affect. The more abundant these elements in a given relationship, the higher the quality of that relationship, and vice versa. We now turn to a more detailed description of each of those elements in the context of workplace friendship.

Trust. Trust is commonly defined as one's willingness to assume vulnerability or risk due to attributing integrity and benevolence to another person (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). One's appraisal of another's positive intention and benevolence may stem from positive affect (affect-based trust) or from demonstrated past behavior (cognition-based trust) (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Mayer & Gavin, 2005; McAllister, 1995). Consequently, an individual who trusts another is more likely to seek that person's help, thereby increasing her/his success prospects. They are also more likely to share with that person important and even sensitive information, such as thoughts and emotions (Kong, Dirks, & Ferrin, 2014).

Sharing information and building cooperative relationships are potentially very beneficial and therefore it is not surprising that trust appears as a feature of numerous positive workplace relations, as reviewed above (e.g. high LMX and mentoring). Therefore we propose that trust is also a feature of high quality workplace friendships.

Proposition 1: *Higher quality workplace friendships involve a higher degree of trust than lower quality friendships do.*

Commitment. A friendship requires individuals to invest certain resources, such as time and emotional labor, because it involves interaction and exchange. This interaction may involve exchanging thoughts, ideas, and/or simply socializing. It also may involve helping or collaborating on various tasks. Without committing some resources, a friendship cannot flourish, or, in the extreme case, it cannot exist. And vice versa, the more committed the friends the higher the quality of the friendship. Therefore, we propose high quality workplace friendships involve a high degree of mutual commitment.

Proposition 2: *Higher quality workplace friendships involve a higher degree of commitment than lower quality friendships do.*

Affect. Researchers agree that one of the key differentiating factors between workplace friendship and other workplace relations is that in friendship there is a significantly greater personal liking and mutual genuine caring. Specifically, in workplace friendships individuals form an emotional bond and like various attributes of another individual, such as their personality, value system, and attitudes (Berman, West, Maurice, & Richter, 2002; Ferris, et al. 2009; Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2017).

Positive emotions such as liking and caring have numerous positive outcomes and potentially several negative ones. Perhaps the main positive outcome of such emotions is trust. As we mentioned earlier affect based trust is a beneficial state among individuals, which facilitates collaboration, information sharing and enjoyment.

In addition to these positive outcomes of trust, there may be some negative outcomes too. One such outcome is the emotional labor which accompanies one's feeling of obligation to maintaining such important relationships (Methot, Lepine, Podsakoff, & Christian, 2016). Another potential negative outcome is fear of giving honest feedback. Individuals have a positive emotional connection they typically also care about each other's feelings. This may be a barrier for providing accurate feedback in a workplace setting, when the feedback is negative. Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 3: *Higher quality workplace friendships involve a higher degree of Positive Affect than lower quality friendships do.*

Reciprocity. Reciprocity is a societal norm and exists, at some level, among all individuals (even among strangers) in the context of the society they are a part of. For example, consistent with the norm of reciprocity, individuals expect others to reciprocate a gesture (Gouldner, 1960), such as holding the door at an entrance to a public building for someone who just held it for you. Violating this social norm has negative consequences, in most cases, and is frowned upon.

If such a norm exists between strangers it should be amplified in high quality friendships. Friends expect more from each other than strangers do. Violating this norm in society in general, and in friendships in particular, may lead to a decline in trust, a lack of cooperation, and even the termination of the relationship. Therefore, reciprocity seems a central tenet for workplace friendship.

Reciprocity also relates to the level of mutuality in the friendship. A highly reciprocal friendship involves a similar level of effort (either high or low) from both parties and a meaningful gain for both parties. A non-reciprocal friendship is more one-sided, whereby one person is invested and acts significantly more than the other. Consequently, one party will benefit more than the other.

The literature identifies four dimensions of mutuality in positive workplace relationships (Roberts, 2007), and those should apply also to workplace friendships. The dimensions are: mutual benefit, mutual influence, mutual expectations, and mutual understanding.

Even though in general, having a reciprocal relationship is mutually beneficial, it may also present a liability. With time, as individuals mutually invest in the relationship, they may feel increasingly

committed to it even if it is no longer beneficial. This is consistent with the psychological phenomenon known as escalation of commitment, according to which individuals continue to invest valuable resources (time, effort, etc.) in a failing course of action (Bazerman, Giuliano, & Appelman, 1984; Brockner, 1992). This may result in negative outcomes as reviewed above.

Proposition 4: High quality workplace friendships include a high degree of reciprocity compared to lower quality friendships.

In sum, higher quality friendships involve a higher degree of reciprocity, trust, commitment, and positive affect. These are all beneficial factors as explained above and therefore we propose that, in general, high quality friendships will benefit the parties involved more than low quality ones would.

Proposition 5: *Higher quality workplace friendships are more mutually beneficial that lower quality relationships.*

Attaining high levels of these factors requires significant effort. For example, trust, is gained over time and is based on people's appraisal of other's intentions, skills, and values. So individuals have to put in effort over time to demonstrate they are trustworthy. Reciprocity also requires effort because it requires action. Therefore, we propose that higher quality friendships (Quality and Comprehensive friendships) require more effort to establish and to maintain than lower quality friendships (Weak and Broad Friendships).

Proposition 6: *Higher quality workplace friendships require more effort to establish and to maintain than lower quality friendships do.*

Friendship Scope

As noted earlier, workplace friendships can also vary by scope. Theoretically, two co-workers can have a high quality friendship but only work with each other in a very limited context. Workplace friends may either collaborate on many work related tasks or on very few work related tasks. Their relationship may be restricted to the workplace setting or it may extend outside of it. For example, a Chef and a Bartender in a restaurant who have a strong friendship but almost have no overlap in a typical workday. Similarly, a personal banker and a mortgage loan specialist working at a local branch of a bank may have very little overlap in their positions but nonetheless a strong bond that was created in the orientation which followed their hiring. And such co-workers, despite spending very little time together at work, may spend a lot more time together outside of work.

We propose that workplace friendships with a broad scope, whether within the workplace setting or in combination with other settings has potential to offer the individuals a deeper mutual understanding. When individuals interact in multiple settings, they learn more about each other than they do by only working in a particular setting. For example, when employees collaborate on several different projects, they showcase different skills, which enables their counterpart to learn more about them. Conversely, when individuals work in one limited context, they are exposed to a limited skill set of their counterpart.

Proposition 7: *Workplace friendships that are broader in scope enable individuals to learn more about each other, which, in turn, will enable them to make decisions about whether to maintain the relationship.*

Proposition 8: *Broader friendships require more effort to establish and to maintain than narrower friendships do.*

The Four Friendship Types: Weak Friendships, Quality Friendships, Broad Friendships, and Comprehensive Friendships.

Weak Friendships

Weak friendships are characterized by a low degree of quality and a narrow scope. This means the relationship has low levels of the quality factors (reciprocity, commitment, trust, and positive affect) and is limited to the workplace setting only (rather than applying to out of work contexts) and/or to a limited scope within the workplace setting (e.g. one-time interaction or several focused interactions).

An example of a weak friendship is one between two individuals who have grown close after some meaningful interaction at work but find they only interact several times a year in a meeting or a task force and their relationship is not mutually beneficial, or may involve significantly unequal amounts of effort invested by one of the parties. Their level of commitment to the friendship is low, and as a result, the individuals may put less effort over time to maintain the relationship. Each party may opt out of the relationship upon finding one that would appear more beneficial. They also don't have a great degree of trust in each other and may be hesitant to share important information with each other, to seek each other's advice, etc. Given all the above, we suggest this type of friendship will not be as beneficial to the parties involved as the other types of friendships may be. Consequently, they will invest less resources in it, and it will last a shorter amount of time compared to other types of friendships.

Proposition 9: *Weak Friendships are the least beneficial to the parties compared to the other types of friendships.*

Proposition 10: *Weak Friendships are more limited in time than other types of workplace friendships are.*

Quality Friendships

Quality friendships are characterized by moderate to high levels of quality but a narrow scope. Specifically, in this type of friendships, the individuals enjoy the elements of trust, commitment, reciprocity and affect, but their interactions are limited to a certain aspect of work, such as a specific, limited time project, or focus on a narrow set of ongoing tasks. Or, they may be limited to a certain context, such as the workplace setting. In this case, the friends will only have meaningful interactions in the workplace.

We propose that Quality friendships benefit individuals more than weak friendships do, because they have a significant degree of quality. Thus, we suggest individuals will be more motivated to maintain such friendships and they will last longer than weak friendships.

Proposition 11: *Quality Friendships benefit their members more than Weak Friendships do.*

Proposition 12: *Quality Friendships benefit the workplace more than Weak Friendships do.*

Proposition 13: *Quality Friendships last longer than Weak Friendships do.*

Broad Friendships

These friendships are characterized by relatively low levels of quality but a relatively high scope. Individuals in broad friendships interact in different workplace settings, or even outside of the workplace. For example, members of a broad friendship may work on multiple projects, or on an ongoing task which includes and ongoing interaction. Alternatively they may interact a bit at work but also socially outside of the workplace setting, which offers them an opportunity to know other facets of each other and overall to know each other better. However, despite the varied interaction, the individuals involved did not develop a reciprocal relationship, based on high commitment, trust, and positive affect.

We suggest that Broad Friendships are overall more beneficial for the members than weak friendships but less beneficial than Quality friendships. The relatively high volume of interactions between members

of a broad friendships will enable them to know each other and work more effectively together. This is an advantage over weak friendships which do not offer that opportunity.

However, with low quality, this relationship will not provide the level of benefits which reciprocity, commitment, trust, and affect may provide. For example, despite the fact two individuals collaborate extensively, without a significant level of trust, they are more likely to hold information from each other, which may hinder their effectiveness as a team. Lacking in reciprocity may result in resentment and conflict, which may also lead to lower performance.

Proposition 14: Broad friendships are overall more beneficial than Weak Friendships.

Proposition 15: Broad friendships are overall less beneficial than Quality Friendships.

Comprehensive Friendships

These workplace friendships are characterized by relatively high levels of *both* quality and scope. Specifically, in comprehensive friendships the individuals enjoy relatively high levels of trust, mutuality, commitment, and positive affect. In addition, those individuals interact in multiple different contexts both at work and possibly outside of work. For example, the individuals work on multiple projects or on one project for an extended period of time, *and* they can work together and spend time together during weekends and/or holidays.

The combination of high quality and a broad scope of interaction gives this type of workplace friendship the potential to yield the benefits of both Quality and Broad friendships, as we discussed above, and thus are the most beneficial for those individuals. In addition, when individuals interact over time and/or in multiple settings, they are more motivated to maintain their friendship and enjoy its beneficial outcomes. Therefore we propose:

Proposition 16: Comprehensive workplace friendships are potentially the most beneficial for the individuals involved, combining the benefits of Quality and Broad friendships.

Proposition 17: Individuals in Comprehensive workplace friendships will be motivated to maintain their friendship more so than individuals in other types of friendships.

Along with the benefits and motivation associated with comprehensive friendships, we also suggest this type of friendship will involve more emotional labor, which may have some detrimental effect in the workplace setting. The effort and other resources involved in maintaining comprehensive friendships may detract from individuals' ability to face other workplace challenges and stresses.

Proposition 18: While Comprehensive Friendships are potentially the most beneficial for the employees involved, they may also have some detrimental effects on their performance as employees due to the emotional labor involved in maintaining this relationship.

DISCUSSION

As our literature review demonstrates it is quite clear that workplace friendship is a very important phenomenon in organizations. Individuals, for the most part, still have psychological needs to have friends and enjoy the comfort, joy, and instrumental benefits such relationships can offer. However, we also see that friendships also have some significant potential downsides which stem from the contrast between the voluntary and informal nature of friendships and the professional setting in some organizations.

Despite the great importance of workplace friendship, there has been considerable confusion as to the scope of this phenomenon. As a result, researchers have studied it from different perspectives. Most problematically, research by enlarge, treated the phenomenon as unidimensional. In this paper we

addressed this major gap by offering a new typology according to which there are different types of friendships based on their quality and scope. These two factors create four types of workplace friendships we label Weak Friendships (having low quality and a narrow scope), Comprehensive Friendships (having high quality and high scope), Broad Friendships (having a broad scope but low quality), and Quality Friendships (having high quality but a narrow scope).

Given the characteristics of each one of the four types we suggest comprehensive friendships are potentially the most beneficial for the individuals involved and for the organization as a whole, even though they also involve significant liabilities (e.g. resources required for maintaining the friendship). On the other hand, weak friendships have the weakest potential and may not be worth the effort invested in them.

Implications for Organizations and Future Research

Given our understanding of the extant literature about workplace relationships in general, and workplace friendships in particular, we have proposed a new framework for understanding the complex and somewhat vague concept of workplace friendship. Based on our understanding and theoretical propositions we suggest different kinds of friendships have potentially different kinds of benefits. Also, we keep in mind workplace friendships have liabilities. Building friendships and maintaining them requires resources such as time and effort. Therefore, we believe it is wise to give managers and employees tools to invest in the kinds of friendships which have potential to yield the results they value, and therefore would be worth the effort and resources invested in them.

Consider the following examples: In a workplace with ongoing long projects which involve teams of individuals with different skills and backgrounds, such as in a construction site, it may be worth investing in high quality but focused friendships, which we label Quality Friendships. That way individuals build reciprocal friendships based on trust commitment and affect, and focus their relationship in the aspect of the work they share together. In contrast, in a job that is done mostly individually, such as the job of a call center representative, it may be worth investing in weak friendships. That way individuals enjoy some benefits of friendships, which at the very minimum would consist of a positive relationship at work with at least one other person, and at the same time will not have to invest significant resources in building and maintaining a higher quality relationship.

Future empirical research is needed in order to develop valid and reliable measures for the typology we suggest and in order to test the antecedents and outcomes for each of the four friendship types.

Future research should also explore workplace friendship as a process. As mentioned earlier the extant literature treats workplace friendship largely as a static phenomenon. The only exception we found is Sias and Cahill's (1998) article which examined transitions in workplace friendships over time. These authors focused on three main transitions in the life cycle of workplace friendships: from co-workers to friends, from friends to close friends, and from close friends to best friends.

While Sias and Cahill's (1998) examination of friendship as a process is very important, it ignores the characteristics of each phase in the process. We suggest investigating what factors change over time when a friendship evolves. For example, does positive affect become more or less important over time? Does commitment become paramount over time, etc. Applying our suggested model to this issue, we ask if a friendship that begins as a weak friendship can transition over time to a broad friendship. And if so, what would be the antecedents for that process?

CONCLUSION

Workplace friendships are without a doubt a prevalent and important phenomenon which impacts all members of an organization in some way or another. Those who are a part of a friendship enjoy some significant benefits and, at the same time, face some potential difficulties associated with maintaining that friendship. Theoretical advancement of this phenomenon is vital because it is clear friendship is a complex phenomenon rather than unidimensional as studies so far. We hope our suggested typology will help the exploration of this important phenomenon including revealing its antecedents and outcomes. This will help individuals manage their expectations from friendships and the resources they invest in them. It will also help organizations decide which type of friendships to facilitate in different circumstances.

REFERENCES

Allen, T. D., Eby, L. T., Poteet, M. L., Lentz, E., & Lima, L. (2004). Career Benefits Associated with mentoring for protégés: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 127-36.

Amichai-Hamburger, Y., Kingsbury, M., & Schneider, B. (2013). Friendship: An Old Concept with a New Meaning? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 33-39.

Bagwell, C. L., & Schmidt, M. E. (2011). The Friendship Quality of Overtly and Relationally Victimized Children. *Merrell-Palmer Quarterly*, 57, 158-183.

Bazerman, M. H., Giuliano T., & Appelman A. (1984). Escalation of Commitment in Individual and Group Decision Making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 33(2), 141-152.

Berman, E. M., West, J. P., Maurice, W., & Richter, N. (2002). Workplace Relations: Friendship Patterns and Consequences (According to Managers). *Public Administration Review*, 62(2), 217-230.

Bozionelos, N. (2008). Intra-Organizational Network Resources. How They Relate to Career Success and Organizational Commitment. *Personnel Review*, 37(3), 249-263.

Brass, D. J., Galaskiewicz, J., Greve, H. R., & Tsai, W. (2004). Taking Stock of Networks and Organizations: A Multilevel Perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(6), 795–817.

Brockner, J. (1992). The Escalation of Commitment to A Failing Course of Action: Toward Theoretical Progress. *Academy of Management Review*, 17(1), 39-61.

Colbert, A. E., Bono, J. E., & Purvanova, R. K. (2016). Flourishing Via Workplace Relationships: Moving Beyond Instrumental Support. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(4), 1199-1223.

Dickie, C. (2009). Exploring Workplace Friendships in Business: Cultural Variations of Employee Behaviour. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, 17(1), 128-137.

Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13, 81–84.

Dulebohn, J., Bommer, W., Liden, R., Brouer, R., & Ferris, G. (2012). A Meta-Analysis of Antecedents and Consequences of Leader-Member Exchange: Integrating the Past with an Eye toward the Future. *Journal of Management*, 36(6), 1715–1759.

Ferris, G. R., Liden, R. C., Munyon, T. P., Summers, J. K. Basik, K. J., & Buckley, R. (2009). Relationships at Work: Toward A Multidimensional Conceptualization Dyadic of Work Relationships. *Journal of Management*, 35(6), 1379-1403. DOI: 10.1177/0149206309344741

Francis, D., & Sandberg, W. (2000). Friendship within Entrepreneurial Teams and Its Association with Team and Venture Performance. *Entrepreneurship, Theory & Practice*, 25(2), 5-26.

Gerstner, C. R., & Day, D.V. (1997). Meta-Analytic Review of Leader-Member Exchange Theory: Correlates And Construct Issues. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 8(6), 827-844.

Gouldner, A. (1960). The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25(2), 161-178.

Graen, G. B., & Uhl-Bien, M. (1995). Relationship-based approach to leadership: Development of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership over 25 years: Applying a multi-level multi-domain perspective. *Leadership Quarterly*, 6(2), 219–247.

Grey, C., & Sturdy, A. (2007). Friendship and Organizational Analysis toward a Research Agenda. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16(2), 157-172.

Griffin, E., & Sparks, G. G. (1990). Friends forever: A longitudinal exploration of intimacy in same-sex friends and platonic pairs. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 7, 29–46.

Ibrahim, E., & Dickie, C. (2010). A Conceptual Model of The Human Resource Climate Dimensions That Influence the Development Of Workplace Relationships. *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, 18(2), 47 – 60.

Ingram, P., & Zou, X. (2008). Business Friendships. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 28, 167–184. Doi:10.1016/J.Riob.2008.04.006

Jehn, K. A., & Shah, P. P. (1997). Interpersonal relationships and task performance: An examination of mediating processes in friendship and acquaintance groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(4), 775-790.

Kong, D. T., Dirks, K. T., & Ferrin, D. L. (2014). Interpersonal Trust within Negotiations: Metaanalytic Evidence, Critical Contingencies, and Directions for Future Research. *Academy Of Management Journal*, 57(5), 1235-1255.

Kram, K. E., & Isabella, L. A. (1985). Mentoring Alternatives: The Role of Peer Relationships in Career Development. *Academy of Management Journal*, 28, 110-132.

Liden, R. C., Sparrowe, R. T., & Wayne, S. J. (1997). Leader-member exchange theory: The past and potential for the future. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 15, 47–119.

Lichtman, C. M., & Hunt, R. G. (1971). Personality and organization theory: A review of some conceptual literature. *Psychological Bulletin*, 76(4), 271-294.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 20, 709–734.

Mayer, R. C., & Gavin, M. (2005). Trust for management and performance: Who minds the shop while the employees watch the boss? *Academy of Management Journal*, 48, 874–888.

McAllister, D. J. (1995). Affect-based and cognition-based trust as foundations for interpersonal cooperation in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38, 24–59.

McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Cook, J. M. (2001). Birds of a Feather: Homophily in Social Networks. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 415–44.

Methot, J. R., Lepine, J. A., Podsakoff, N. P., & Christian, J. S. (2016). Are Workplace Friendships A Mixed Blessing? Exploring Tradeoffs Of Multiplex Relationships And Their Associations With Job Performance. *Personnel Psychology*, 69, 311–355.

Morrison, R. L. (2004). Informal Relationships in the Workplace: Associations with Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment and Turnover Intentions. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 33, 114–128.

Morrison, R. L., & Cooper-Thomas, H. D. (2013). *Relationships in Organizations: A Work Psychology Perspective*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Morrison, R. L., & Cooper-Thomas, H. D. (2017). Friendship among Coworkers. In M. Hojjat & A. Moyer (Eds.). *The Psychology of Friendship*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nielsen, I. K., Jex, S. M., & Adams, G. A. (2000). Development and Validation of Scores On A Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 60(4), 628-643.

Pillemer, J., & Rothbard, N. P. (2018). Friends Without Benefits: Understanding the Dark Sides of Workplace Friendship. *Academy of Management Review*, 43(4), 635-660. http://doi-org.lib-proxy.radford.edu/10.5465/amr.2016.0309

Raggins, B. R., & Dutton, J. E. (2007). Positive Relationships at Work: An Introduction and Invitation. In J. E. Dutton & B. R. Ragins (Eds.), *Exploring Positive Relationships At Work: Building A Theoretical And Research Foundation*, 1-25. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Rath, T. (2006). *Vital Friends: The People You Can't Afford To Live Without*. New York: Gallup Press.

Rath, T., & Harter, J. (2010). Your friends and your social wellbeing. *Gallup Business Journal*, August. Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/127043/Friends-Social-Wellbeing.aspx

Rawlins, W. K. (1992). *Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics, and the life course*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Rawlings, W. K. (1992). *Friendship Matters*. Hawthorn, NY: Aldine de Gruyter Press.

Reis, H. T., Collins, W. A., & Berscheid, E. (2000). The relationship context of human behavior and development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 844-872.

Riordan, C. M., & Griffeth, R. W. (1995). The opportunity for friendship in the workplace: An underexplored construct. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 10(2), 141-154.

Roberts, L. M. (2007). From Proving to Becoming: How Positive Relationships Create A Context for Self-Discovery And Self-Actualization. In J. Dutton And B. R. Ragins (Eds.), *Exploring Positive Relationships at Work: Building A Theoretical And Research Foundation*, 29-45. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., & Camerer, C. (1998). Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 393– 404.

Sias, P. M., & Cahill, D. J. (1998). From Co-Workers to Friends: The Development of Peer Friendships in The Workplace. *Western Journal of Communication*, 62(3), 273-299.

Sias, P. M., Smith, G., & Avdeyeva, T. (2003). Sex and sex-composition differences and similarities in peer workplace friendship development. *Communication Studies*, 54, 322–340. doi:10.1080/10510970309363289

Sias, P. M., Pedersen, H., Gallagher E. B., & Kopaneva, I. (2012). Workplace Friendship in The Electronically Connected Organization. *Human Communication Research*, 38, 253–279.

Schneider, B. (1987). The People Make the Place. *Personnel Psychology*, 40(3), 437-453.

Schneider, B. H. (2000). *Friends and Enemies: Peer Relations in Childhood*. London: Arnold.

Schriesheim, C. A., Castro, S.L., & Cogliser C. C. (1999). Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Research: A Comprehensive Review of Theory, Measurement, and Data-Analytic Practices. *Leadership Quarterly*, 10, 63-113.

Song, S-H., & Olshfski, D. (2008). Friends at Work: A Comparative Study of Work Attitudes in Seoul City Government and New Jersey State Government. *Administration & Society*, 40(2), 147-169.

Tasselli, S., & Kilduff, M. (2018). When Brokerage Between Friendship Cliques Endangers Trust: A Personality–Network Fit Perspective. *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(3), 802–825. https://doi-org.lib-proxy.radford.edu/10.5465/amj.2015.0856

Winstead, B., Derlega, V. J., Montgomery, M. J., & Pikington, C. (1995). The Quality of Friendships at Work and Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 12, 199-215.

Wright, P. H. (1978). Toward a Theory of Friendship based on the conception of self. *Human Communication Research*, 4, 196-207.

Wright, P. H. (1984). Self-Referent Motivation and the Intrinsic Quality of Friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 1, 115-130.