

## Workplace Friendship: Advantages and Challenges

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Given that people spend a lot of time with their co-workers, good job relations are becoming increasingly important, as we are social beings and we are connected with each other, and thus through time passing, job colleagues become friends. The more time they spend together, the better they get to know each other, so it is quite common for them to develop close personal relationships, as this stems from natural desires of individuals, and consequently, colleagues to feel close to each other and to help each other. However, not all managers are overly enthusiastic about close friendships. Some line of research and common opinions of managers namely show that workplace friendships may also cause problems.

Morrison and Nolan (2007); Mainiero and Jones (2013); Berman, West and Richter (2002) have defined workplace friendship as a negative factor, which affects the business results. However, numerous studies also exist which see workplace friendship as something positive: Riordan and Griffeth (1995); Milam (2012); Song (2014); Bowler in Brass (2006); Kram and Isabella (1985); Winstead and dr. (1995); Denmark and Paludi (2008); Sias and J. Cahill (1998). The purpose of this study was to examine the outcomes of *workplace friendships* in relation to the *employee engagement*. Finally, this study explored whether difficulties with *friendship maintenance* would weaken the relationship between *workplace friendship* and *employee engagement*. Therefore, in our study, we try to answer the following research questions: Is workplace friendship positively related to the employee engagement?, and, How can workplace friendship be managed by the management to maximize the benefits it brings, and at the same time to reduce the risks thereof?

This study was carried out in the logistics company, with the data collected using a survey questionnaire, based on the workplace friendship scale (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova 2006), the employee engagement scale (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova 2006) and the friendship maintenance difficulty scale (Milam 2012). The survey also included the following independent variables: hierarchical position, education, duration and mode of employment, gender and age. In total, 97 questionnaires were distributed, and 86 returned in response. The response rate is 88.65 %.

The results indicate that workplace friendship has a positive relationship with employee engagement; that difficulty with friendship maintenance can not weaken the relationship between workplace friendship and employee engagement; and that workplace friendship can be regarded as a characteristic of workplace, which contributes to a higher employee engagement. The research can however not be generalized, as it is a reflection of the current situation in a single organization. Nevertheless, we have outlined recommendations for the management of the organization, which must take care, in particular, to remove obstacles for making friendships. Our research thus implies that organizations and managers should abandon negative attitudes towards workplace friendship since workplace friendship positively correlates with employee engagement. Many opportunities still remain for future research, since friendship can be explored also with respect to job burnout, job demands, job embeddedness, motivation, job fluctuation, other workplace groups and different cultural groups.

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