



The Role of Workplace Friendship among Employees in Selected Universities, Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract: *There is downplay of interpersonal relationship in bureaucratic system of management around which most organisations are built, as popularized by Max Weber. But Human Relations thought led by Elton Mayo has been able to successfully advocate the recognition of interpersonal relationships as very important in employees' work experience. From this reflection, came the urge to conduct a study about the "Factors of friendship formation and benefits as well as risks of workplace friendship using two tertiary institutions in Ibadan, Nigeria as case studies". The theoretical framework of this study was social action theory. A descriptive design was adopted while a multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select samples. Survey and In-depth interviews were combined in gathering data for the study. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques while qualitative data were content analyzed. Results from the study revealed that, respondents, most of which were Yoruba (78%), Christians (82%) and married 82%, were neither influenced by their sex and occupational status nor by age ($p=.40$, $.33$ and $.08$ respectively Sig at $.05$ level) about having workplace friendship. Friendship opportunity was discovered to be established in the public university much more than the private University (Sig $.001$) counterpart. Although, motivational and facilitating factors influenced formation of friendship at work, the benefits acted as main magnetic pull for friendships. Policy makers and management of organisation should embrace workplace friendship by creating opportunities for such and integrate it with formal relationship at workplaces.*

Keywords: *Workplace friendship, Job performance, Turnover intention, Commitment, Attitude.*

INTRODUCTION

In all organisations, there are formal relationships well defined and established through policies with a view to ensuring organisational functioning and efficiency. However, alongside such formal relationships, social or informal relationships also exist and they play significant roles in employees work experience. Therefore, apart from superior-subordinate, mentor-protégé etc. relationships at workplace, informal category of workplace relationships permeates organisations. Accordingly, instances such as family (or blood) relationship, collegiate, dating/courtship and workplace friendship (WPF) do exist with their powerful influence on the activities of employees. Informal friendship within employees is a common and universal variable which forms part of social relations in workplaces. The above therefore underscores the popularity of Human Relation school of thought about organisational management standard which was spearheaded by Elton Mayo. The school considered a worker as "a social man" rather than "a machine man" (Mayo, 1953; Olabode, 2017). Human Relations perspective advocates participatory management where management should engage the work groups and informal leaders within the organisation in order to arrive at popular decisions and consensus. This therefore gives workers opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them and grow a sense of participation in the workplace. It also creates a cohesive work environment, prevents the alienation of workers from the management, facilitates the acceptance of

organisational goals by the workers and above all, yields higher productivity. Therefore, to the school, informal social relations among workers are quintessential (Winstead, 1986; Hodgetts, 2002; Olabode, 2007).

Job relationships are unique interpersonal relationships with prominent consequences for individuals in those relationships, and organisations in which the relationships exist and grow. However, workers in such informal friendships do not attach equal level of importance to such friendships: while some see it as an ordinary relationship that mildly affects their social lives at work, others see it as quintessential in enjoying certain organisational benefits such as promotion, social security, job security and job satisfaction at work. Furthermore, it should also be noted that as beneficial as informal friendships are in the workplace, they also constitute risks to both employees and the organisations (Olabode, 2017). In some circumstances where dyadic workers' relationship turned sour, such experience can discourage the victims to have further interest in friendship with others, owing to the unfavorable incidence that had occurred and such victims can even go further to discourage other new entrants from engaging in co-worker relationships. Most empirical studies in Nigeria have focused largely on the formal relationships in the workplace. There is a dearth of studies on informal workplace friendships. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the role of informal friendships and the risks associated with such friendships using workers of two selected tertiary institutions in Ibadan, Nigeria as case studies.

Benefits of Workplace Friendship on Organisation Outcomes

Research readings have put forward that workplace friendship may enhance organisational performance because employees in friendships like to support each other in tasks, communicate with morale-building behaviors, have few communication worries and thus can increase their effort and scale of production, (Bandura, 1982). Furthermore, research has shown that individuals who have a close friend at work are less likely to be absent or leave the organisation than individuals who do not, because they gain a sense of belonging and obligation to the workplace friends who have accepted, understood, and helped them at work (Sias and Cahill, 1998; Morrison, 2004).

Morrison, (2004) conducted a couple of studies on the affiliation amid workplace friendship and organisational outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment and turnover intentions. In his first study, majority of the respondents were from predominantly female occupations; nurses and clerical staff which made up 84.7% of the sample. As a result, the sample was almost entirely female (95%). In addition, most were older than 40 years (75.8%), the mean age was 44; most were of European descent (89.2%). The first research question focused on relationship between friendships and the outcome variables, the hypothesized relationships were supported by the data analysis with the "friendship opportunities" variable being antecedent to "job satisfaction". In addition, although no direct relationship between friendship opportunities and organisational commitment was discovered, these variables were correlated at the simple bi-variate level, indicating that the connection is mediated by job satisfaction. The mediated relationship suggests that having better friendship opportunities at work will have an impact on organisational commitment only if an individual is satisfied with his/her job. Furthermore, both satisfaction and commitment impact on intention to leave. Accordingly, the friendship prevalence variable is hypothesized to impact directly on intention to leave because having friendships gives employees an added incentive to stay put on their jobs; this was supported by qualitative response. In short, friendship prevalence is adversely related to intention to leave according to the study.

The study presented above has shortcomings. The sample was predominantly women, who are generally found to be more relationship focused than men (Winstead, 1986; Wright and Scanlon, 1991; Markiewicz, Devine, and Kausilas, 2000). It is perhaps not startling that most respondents in the sample were found to have many relationships and also rated such relationships as being a very important aspect of their work life. Moreover, another reason significant results may have been obtained is because research shows that nurses, as a group, have a higher than average need for affiliation, and that nursing is distinguished from other occupations primarily by affiliation opportunities. Possibly, individuals from other professions would have answered differently.

A second study, with a superior sample size, was intended to add statistical power to the research. Hence, data were collected from 412 individuals among which were tertiary education sector from which largest report was derived. With robust coverage in terms of professions involved, data were gathered using a self-administered internet-based questionnaire, which included the same instruments and survey enquiries used in the previous study. Although there are resemblances found in both studies, there are few significant differences. Among which is that the significant regression weight leading from 'friendship prevalence' to 'intention to leave' found in Study 1, is not present in Study 2. This might have resulted from the discrepancy in the sample size of the two studies and the data collection method adopted.

Furthermore, job satisfaction and more importantly, success in one's career are manifestations of workplace friendship according to Markiewicz, (2000). More so, in exploring the reimbursement of employees' closeness at work, Nielson, (2000) found out that an inverse reflection of workplace friendship is associated with reduced turnover intention. This does not end there because, workplace camaraderie is a weapon of cooperation and survival against grim superiors at work especially where workers perceive that they are being treated unfairly (Sias and Jablin, 1995, cited in Morrison, 2007). In finding a nexus between commitment and informal communication among co-workers, Anderson and Martin, (1995) came to the conclusion that commitment is increased when employees engage in rap sessions at work. A more relevant suggestion supporting that with respect to the relationship between friendship and commitment, is propelled in the early work of Becker, (1960) where it is suggested that workplace associates help produce commitment to an individual's job. Besides, informal relationships and socially supportive environments at workplace reduce work stress and increase organisational commitment of the employees (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, and Avci, 2003; Morrison, 2004). All these have pointed out the essence of friendship to, not only actors within the network, but also to atmospheric performance of organisations where such blossoms.

Theoretical Framework: Social Action Theory

According to Weber, the decision to act in a definite way is always the product of the actor's value, understanding, meaning and interpretative judgment within a given society or social group. In categorizing types of social action, Weber identified; Traditional action which refers to a kind of action based on habitual response to the way of life and the degree to which these responses are set by routine with little or no idiosyncratic judgment of the actor, (Olutayo and Akanle, 2013). Emotional action is when an actor's action is a reaction to what induces emotional outburst. A loss of temper which results in verbal abuse or physical violence is an example of affective action, i.e. emotional action. Value rational action is the one in which ultimate value or specific goal directs action. The last type is instrumental rational action which has to do with weighing of means and end and the systematic taking into account of the alternative means to an end, (Olutayo and Akanle, 2013).

The traditional action can be equated with the ingrained action and behaviors that individual workers adopted in their relation with others within the organisation. Such actions are predetermined by the immediate organisation for which the workers work and these are commonly defined and documented in the organisation's code of conduct guiding formal relationship which workers learn during induction, training and development. The emotional actions even though are sometimes controlled by individual workers and also instrumentally by organisation, it is natural and cannot be absolutely removed by either actor. Sometimes workers react emotionally to relationship outcomes. Friends in workplace breed exchange of emotional actions and inactions between and among friends and also others with which the friends relate with either formally or informally. Furthermore, the value rational actions by workplace friends can be observed when friends help one another in the performance of job as a show of belief in helping others in need. As for instrumental rational action, it is unarguable that individuals working in organisations do compare the pros and cons of alternative actions to take when making decisions that are especially not subject to anyone's ratification.

In other words, aspects of workplace friendship among employees are elaborately explained by Social Action Theory because it covers all forms of motives whether value rational action or instrumental social action which propel workers to form friendship at workplaces. In fact, any friendship product outside the

two stated above can be situated within traditional and emotional social actions. Thus, Social Action Theory is the theoretical framework on which the current study is based.

Methodology

The research design for this study rested on cross sectional approach with the application of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and management approaches. The study area was Ibadan where two universities, one public and one private, were purposively selected as study areas. For ethical purposes, the public university is labelled "Organisation A" while the private university is labelled "Organisation B". The population of study included both academic and non-academic, as well as senior and junior cadre staff of the institutions from where samples were drawn. The total sample size for the survey method in this study was 300 (200 from Organisation A and 100 from Organisation B), while the sample size for in-depth interviews was 18 participants from both institutions with a share of 9 from each.

For the survey, multi-stage sampling technique was used for selection of the study respondents: The staff were first clustered into (Academic and Non-academic) in various faculties. This was followed by systematically selecting the respondents in each faculty that made up the population from each university. For the academic staff, effort was made to cover all ranks from assistant lecturer to professors, as well as senior and junior for the non-academic staff. The participants for the in-depth interviews were purposively selected. Data collected through survey were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques where Standard regression, Pearson correlation, one and two-way ANOVA and chi-square together were applied to analyze the data obtained from the survey conducted. The data from the In-depth interviews were content analyzed. The researchers ensured adequate compliance to relevant ethical issues to protect the study participants as well as the information obtained from them.

Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Majority of the respondents (82%) were Christians while the rest belonged to Islam. In addition, most of them were married (82%) while the mean age recorded was 41.7 years with most workers found in the middle age range of 47-48 years (24.7%). The youngest age and the oldest age reported were 21 and 63 years respectively. Most of the respondents (29.3%) had Master's degree, with another 28.7% possessing PhD degree. This of course was expected considering the point that the study locations were tertiary institutions. There was a prominent gap between the population indexes of academic staff (56.7%) and non-academic staff (43.3%), and most of the academic staff members were in the position of senior lecturer (13.3%). Similarly, senior staff (35.3%) were more than junior staff (20.0%) in number within the non-academic category. Furthermore, the public tertiary institution was more represented in the sample (66.7%) because it was larger and more populated in terms of staff capacity than the private counterpart.

Benefits of Workplace Friendship

All the respondents indicated that Work Place Friendship (WPF) cannot but exist in organisations as it is very vital to workers and central to their performance. They responded that they belonged to various WPF among themselves ranging from religious affiliation, to political reasons, family relationship, ethnic relationships, work association up to dating/social relationships. These relationships make them happy, keep them going and enhance their performance at work. To them, WPF is not something any management or leader can discourage or stop because the fundamental reasons for such friendship are central to them as employees of their organisations.

The table below presents data on the benefits derivable from WPF.

The table below shows on each row, the count of respondents "N" with the associated number of respondents that agreed with "YES" response, to the perceived benefit of workplace friendship as suggested in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Opinions on Each Benefit of Workplace friendship

S/N	ITEM	N	YES	
			Count	%
1	Workplace friendship helps employees obtain mutual support.	290	228	78.6
2	Workplace friendship improves the workplace atmosphere and communication.	284	248	87.3
3	Workplace friendship makes difficult jobs simple.	288	232	80.6
4	Employees get their job done through workplace friendship.	288	168	58.3
5	Workplace friendship promotes acceptance of racial difference	284	194	68.3
6	Workplace friendship increases employee productivity.	288	210	72.9
7	Good supervisor–subordinate relationship is ensured.	290	224	77.2
8	Workplace friendship helps employees get ahead.	286	226	79.0
9	Workplace friendship is a source of career advancement.	284	198	69.7

Source: Field work 2017

The spread of respondents’ opinion from both organisations, on the benefits of workplace friendship were asked and that “it created good workplace atmosphere and communication” among co-workers, was largely agreed on by 87.3% of the respondents. This is followed by the fact that workplace friendship made difficult job simple for friends at work according to 80.6% of the respondents. Moreover, that friendship in organisation helped employee get ahead at work was supported by majority 79% of the workers. About 78.6% agreed that mutual supports were established through workplace friendship among the employees. This is obtained when friends at work render help when a friend in need finds difficulty in the job task ahead of him or her. This is a kind of credence to saying that, “A problem shared, is a problem half-solved”. Meanwhile, a total of 224 (77.2%) confirmed that good supervisor–subordinate relationship was part of the benefits one can achieve from having workplace friends. Most importantly from the result is the fact that about 72.9% of the respondents affirmed that workplace friendship improved employee productivity. That workplace friendship boosts career development for friends in the workplace, received a majority nod from about 69.7% of the respondents. While about 68.3% of workers affirmed the role of dyadic relationship in erasing the lines of racial difference, employees got their job done at the right time because of existing workplace friendship with workmates, according to about 58.3% of the respondents. Some of the above results also featured and were expressed by participants during in-depth interviews, some of which are given below;

My Oga (i.e. immediate boss) and I have become so close because we see ourselves as friends. This has made our task very easy to do every time. (IDI/Non-Academic Staff/Organisation A/May, 2017)

Another interviewee had this said:

Benefit is job satisfaction, because it makes jobs easy to do, it makes the job environment pleasant to be in, what the psychologists will call the intrinsic value of the work environment. As a scholar, you are opportune to collaborate with friends in the department. It has eased intellectual collaboration; it also aids mutual help. (IDI/Academic Staff/Organisation B/May, 2017)

Findings revealed that all ages and majority of the staff of both organisations benefitted relatively well from workplace friendship. This may be outstanding to the fact that the factors stimulating workplace friendship within co-workers were not missing and that benefits of friendship were always the magnetic pool to engage in dyadic relationships; the result from the current study shows that almost equal variance of all age categories indicated significant great score on friendship benefits.

In the table below, the correlation existing among workplace friendship, motivational factor, facilitating factor and perceived risks are presented. The value representing the level of each pair of relationship is “r” value indicating the significant level, strength and direction of the relationships. The purpose of the table is to test relevant variables associated with the study.

Correlations

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Workplace Friendship, Friendship Benefits, Motivational Factors and Facilitating Factors.

Variables	1	2	3	4
Workplace friendship	.451**			
Motivational factors	.523**	.404**		
Facilitating factors	.559**	.359**	.742**	
Friendship Risk score	-.019	-.019	-.069	-.019

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2tailed)

1= Friendship benefit scale; 2 = Workplace friendship scale; 3 = Motivational factor scale; 4 = Facilitating factor scale

The correlation table matrix above displays direction and strength of relationships between sets of variables regarding workplace friendship. From the result, the values with negative signs mean high score in one variable is associated with low score on the other. But, for “r” values without any sign, the point is that high score on one variable is also associated with high score on the other. Moreover, in determining the strength of relationships, a correlation of 0 indicates no relationship at all while a correlation of 1.0 indicates a perfect positive correlation. To determine the level of variance explained of two variables shared, the coefficient of determination is calculated by squaring the r value (multiplied by it). To convert this to percentage of variance, the value will be multiplied by 100 (shifting the decimal place two columns to the right). Hence the following conclusion can be derived;

- There is a significant positive and large relationship between motivational factors and workplace friendship. The correlation of $r = .404$ however means 16.32% shared variance. Motivational factors instigating friendship explain about 16% of the variance in respondents’ score on workplace friendship.
- There is a significant positive and medium relationship (.359) between facilitating factors and workplace friendship. About 12.89% is explained by the variable on respondents for their workplace friendship.
- There is no relationship between risk variable and workplace friendship. This is pointing to the fact that risk encountered in friendship did not have any influence on the decision of workers to engage in workplace friendship.

This table is showing the comparison of the strength of relationships between friendship benefits and workplace friendship with and without motivational factor. The first row labeled “None” shows relationship of the variables without removing the influence of friendship benefits while the second row labeled “motivational factor” shows the relationship level after controlling for motivational factor.

Table 3: Partial Correlation Result Scores of Friendship benefit and Workplace Friendship while controlling for Motivational Factor

Control Variables	Test variables	1	2	3
None	Friendship Benefits	1.000	.451	.523
	Workplace Friendship	.451	1.000	.404
	Motivational factor	.523	.404	1.000
Motivational factor	Friendship Benefits	1.000	.307	
	Workplace Friendship	.307	1.000	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Partial correlation was used to explore relationship between friendship benefit and workplace friendship, while controlling for motivational factor score. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. There was a strong, positive, partial correlation between friendship benefits and workplace friendship ($r = .451$, $n = 288$, $< .0005$), with high level of friendship benefit being associated with workplace friendship. An inspection of the zero order correlation ($r = .307$) suggested that controlling for motivational factor had very no significant effect on the strength of the relationship between these two variables.

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Table 4: Partial Correlation Result Scores of Friendship Benefit and Workplace Friendship while controlling for Facilitating Factor

Control Variables	Test Variables	1	2	3
None	Friendship Benefits	1.000	.451	.559
	Workplace Friendship	.451	1.000	.359
	Facilitating factor	.559	.359	1.000
Facilitating factor	Friendship Benefits	1.000	.324	
	Workplace Friendship	.324	1.000	

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Below is an illustration of influence of friendship benefits and motivational factors on workplace friendship. This was derived from the regression analysis piloted to study the individual capacity of influence exerted by motivating factors of friendship and benefits of friendship, on workplace friendship as a dependent variable.

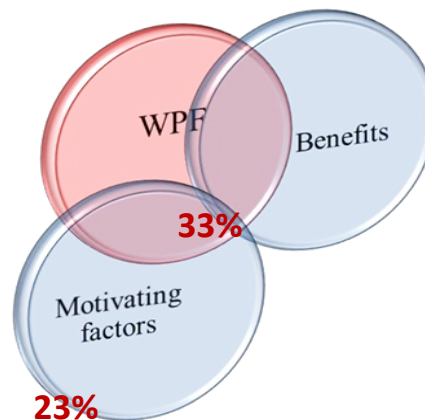


Figure 1: Venn Diagram Illustrating the degree of Influence on Workplace friendship (WPF) by Benefit factors and Motivating factors (Source: Field Work, 2017)

The above diagram shows that the potential benefits that people look forward to enjoying, determine workplace friendship existence by 33%. This is by far greater than 23% of workplace friendship stimulation by motivational factors. Inferably, many of the friendships created in workplaces were predominantly wedged by the benefits members expect from engaging in such social attachments.

The following table displays the division of respondents into occupational status (academic and non-academic) with the corresponding number their nature workplace friendship experience, thus; “Positive”, “Negative” and “Both experiences”. The percentage of each count, total row and column counts are also included in the table.

Table 5: Workplace Friendship Experience across Occupational Category
 $\chi^2 = 7.652; df = 2; p (.022)$

Variable	Attributes	WKF experience			Total
		Positive	Negative	Both	
Occupation	Academic	72 36.7%	4 2.0%	14 7.1%	90 45.9%
	Non-academic	78 39.8%	0 0.0%	28 14.3%	106 54.1%
Total		150 76.5%	4 2.0%	42 21.4%	196 100.0%

The percentage of academic and non-academic staff whose workplace friendship experience were positive were 76.5% against the little 18.4% of respondents who had had negative experience with workplace friendship. But, just 2.0% had either experiences at one time or the other in their relationship. In fact, none of the non-academic staff indicated absolute negative experience with their workplace friendship. This is suggesting a very strong cooperation among non-academic staff in the institutions studied. According to the chi-square result, the Pearson value (.022) < .05 alpha values means that the result is significant. Therefore, the proportion of staff that had positive workplace friendship is significantly different from the proportion of staff that had negative or either experiences of workplace friendship.

Risks of Workplace friendship to Employees and Work Environment

The table below shows on each row, the count of respondents “N” with the associated number of respondents divided on whether they agreed “YES”, “Undecided” or not “NO” to the risk of workplace friendship.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Opinions on each Risk of Workplace friendship

S/N	ITEM	N	YES	
			No.	%
1	Workplace friendship is a cause of office gossip.	284	166	58.5
2	Workplace friendship can cause office romances.	288	184	63.9
3	Workplace friendship can distract work-related activities.	288	188	65.3
4	Workplace friendship is used to condone inappropriate conduct.	288	166	57.6
5	Workplace friendship undermines merit-based decision making.	288	158	54.9
6	Workplace friendship subordinates organisational loyalty to friends.	286	142	49.7
7	Workplace friendship is a threat to the line of command.	290	112	38.6
8	Workplace friendship creates conflict of interest in situations.	288	146	50.7
9	Authority of managers can be threatened through workplace friendship.	288	154	53.5

Source: Field work, 2017

According to the study result indicated above, respondents agreed to some extent on the risks that can be encountered while engaging in workplace friendship. That is why largest percentages among perceived predisposition to risks were recorded on all the items identified above. Thus, the smallest percentage (38.6%) is on the risk that workplace friendship threatens line of command. Respondents were divided on this and therefore, no specific pattern could be reported on this. Yet the percentage is larger than for those who disagreed (36.6%) and the undecided set (24.8%). What can be deciphered from the above is that workers were victims of these negative social behaviors. An in-depth interview participant gave her experience to underscore the fact that workplace friendship downplays line of command. Thus:

I never knew Mr. Sunday could bluntly stand against my decision until when I asked him to prepare a query letter expected to be answered by who by circumstance happened to be his close friend. Instead, he started avoiding having encounter with him while the victim continued to pester me for forgiveness. It was very annoying. (IDI/Non-academic Staff/Organisation A/May, 2017)

This table displays the count of respondents who had experienced quarrel in workplace friendship and those who had not.



Figure 2: Workplace Friendship Conflict Frequency among Respondents (Source: Field work, 2017)

The figure above was designed to illustrate result of the level of peaceful friendship experienced by workers. Hence, about 46.7% (128) confirmed that they had once had quarrel with their workplace friends. But this figure was less than the number that indicated “No” to the question, 146 (53.3%). Therefore, upon all the indications, strong workplace friendship together with its benefits and other factors (intrinsic and extrinsic), disagreement cannot be avoided. Thus, workplace is indispensable largely because the benefits overshadow the risks and challenges experienced while engaging in it. The next figure shows how clashes in friendship were treated when they occurred between and among workers who saw themselves as friends.

For the set of respondents who had experienced quarrel with their friends in workplace, the following diagram illustrates respondents’ distribution along different ways in which they managed the quarrel. These were coping strategies mentioned by the victims. Considering the similarities in many of them, the strategies were contrasted into the following different groups, thus;

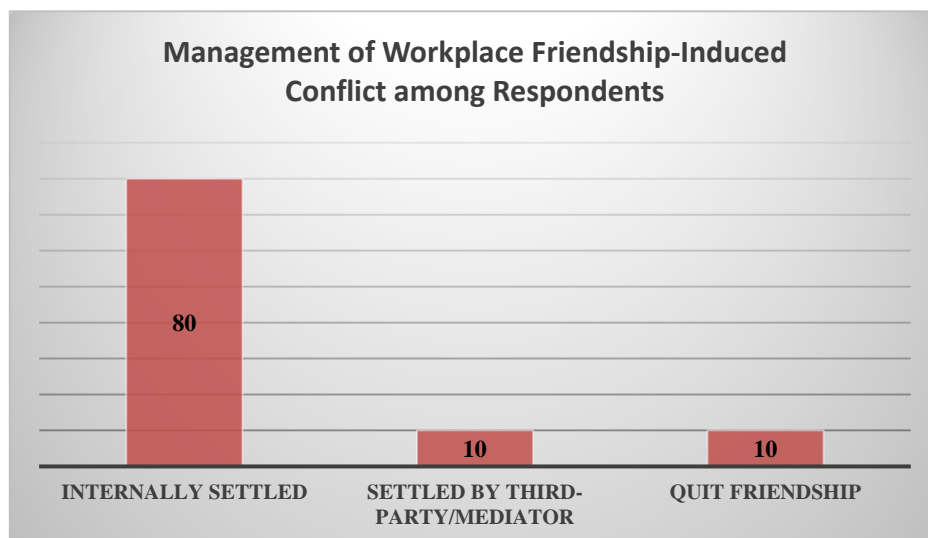


Figure 3: How Disagreements were managed by Quarrelling Friends among Respondents (Source: Field work 2017)

It can be concluded from the above chart that about 80.0% (96) of respondents internally settled workplace friendship quarrel amicably with mutual understanding between the actors. Just about 10.0% resolution of workplace friendship quarrel involved the intervention of mediator or any third party. However, there were few occurrences where quitting the friendship totally was adopted by 10% of the respondents and led to parties parting ways.

Discussion of Findings

With the objective of finding out the benefits of workplace friendship to individual actors, part of discoveries in this study is that almost all members of staff irrespective of age group difference had benefitted from workplace friendship. These are that; workplace friendship ensured mutual support between actors, it increased workplace atmosphere and communication, and difficult jobs were made simple, workplace friendship promoted acceptance of racial difference, it more importantly increased productivity, smoothed supervisor-subordinate relationship and helped workers get ahead because it was a source of career advancement. In fact, risks of engaging in friendship did not discourage friendships inasmuch as the benefits outweighed the risks. An interviewee explained the indispensability of workplace friendship in the excerpt.

It is not about the school management; it is about the socialization process right from the beginning. We know that as an individual, you can't live in isolation...people are socialized to interact right from the beginning, and those who do not do that are not properly integrated into the larger community and they develop some deformities...so it is almost natural that people will interact, it is part of socialization process and it is internalized that you have friends... (IDI/Non-academic Staff/Organisation B/May, 2017)

... For instance, I stay with friends for companionship, to relieve tension, to tune off from academic seriousness ... some people go to the club because they have some political ambitions...

(IDI/Academic staff/Organisation A/May, 2017)

In a similar way, another interviewee supported the above saying,

I have a lot of friends in the faculty, in the department and in the university community...I will say that within my work environment, I have been able to interact, associate, relate with people especially people that we have common ground and even those that we don't have common grounds with each other, there are still other levels of interaction.

(IDI/Non-academic Staff/Organisation A/May, 2017)

The above results are in harmony with a research report stating that friendship relations involve heightened norms of sincerity, casualness, and generality. These, increasingly are part of contemporary management strategies (such as notions of teamwork) and are also shared by most recent rookies, (Tulgan, 1995; Guy and Newman 1998; Jurckiewicz and Brown 1998). Some of the literature on the benefits of workplace friendship as regards individual sentiment state that workplace friendship reduces workplace stress, increases communication, helps employees and managers accomplish their tasks, and assists in the process of accepting organisational change. Its presence increases support and resources that help individuals to get their jobs done. Workplace friendship increases support and information that helps individuals do their jobs, in turn, reducing stress (for instance, by eliminating barriers to success) and refining the quality of work. Friendships are also a source of support and it can build bridges of trust and increased commitment. In fact, organisations benefit from supportive and novel climates that, in turn, are concomitant to increased productivity (West and Berman 1997; Berman and West 1998; Shadur and Kienzle 1999).

Furthermore, the current study revealed that even without each of motivational and facilitating stimulants spurning friendship, the benefits associated with friendship were strong enough in attracting workers to each other as workplace friends. This is because the benefits made a significant contribution to forming workers' camaraderie. Most importantly, majority of the respondents who had workplace friends enjoyed positive experience. This is where social action theory is relevant in trying to understand friendship within co-workers. As such, it has been established that "benefits" have an overarching influence over intrinsic factors in stimulating workers' twosomes and multiple friendships. Workers

obviously extend hands of friendship with the goal of achieving benefits specially stated in the current study. In social action theory terms, such action is referred to as value rational action. Lastly, it is apparent from this study that a lot of friendship goals were instrumental in nature because, for those with political ambition within staff union, or intellectual collaboration, their actions can be classified under instrumental social action, (Olutayo and Akanle, 2013).

The study results also indicate that majority of the workers were not much discouraged by the existence and possible victimization risks of friendship such as gossiping, work distraction, inappropriate conduct, nepotism, subordination of organisation commitment to friendship commitment, threat to line of command, conflict of interest and dangers posed to the authority of managers or superiors. In fact, workers had a peculiar way of tackling such issues in case their friendship stumbled on any of the risks, and where such led to quarrel, majority of the circumstances were fixed cordially in a context of mutual understanding (Turton and Campbell, 2005). This justifies that friendship is a relationship involving voluntary interaction where in the commitment of the individuals to one another usually takes precedence over their commitment to the contexts in which the interaction takes place. Thus the opinion of a participant in an in-depth interview is right as stated below;

You can resolve an issue but it is supposing to give you a better understanding of how to relate with that person...it is a new level of understanding... the person you thought is your enemy, might be the person that will help you tomorrow.

(IDI/Academic Staff/Organisation B/May, 2017)

A supporting idea to the position stated above was offered by another interviewee thus;

That (quarrel) is normal, peace and conflict are present in every relationship, but as individuals with normative values, you should be able to manage your differences. In terms of intellectual ideology, we could have hot argument, but it has nothing to do with personal relationship.

(IDI/Academic Staff/Organisation A/May, 2017)

Another issue relevant to this is that even when friends at work were hit externally by any of the risks pointed above, the cordiality became strengthened as friends joined strengths to combat the challenge.

A question that arose at this juncture is that couldn't it be that staff have been using dyadic relationships as mechanism to combat any threat from management, stakeholders and individuals who happened to have posed danger to their comfort at work? Perhaps that is a part of forces behind the popularity of the Human Relations pioneered by Elton Mayo who believed that organisations always encompass interrelationships among members and that, it is the manager's role to see that relationships are as conflict-free as possible, in order to accomplish the organisation's objectives. They believed that the human aspects of business organisations had been largely ignored, and that gratification of psychological needs should be the primary concern of the management.

Conclusion

Workplace friendship is very crucial among employees because it facilitates significant positive impact regarding organisational outcomes such as performance, satisfaction and commitment with its negative effect on intention to leave job. The benefits of workplace friendships go beyond this because they also serve as instruments for workers' social development which is indispensable for human survival. Finally, based on the study findings, it is justifiable to accept the ideas of Mayo and his colleagues that existence of strong informal groups in organisations is inevitable and that employees' behavior at work is affected by non-economic factors. Policy makers and management of organisations should therefore, embrace workplace friendship by creating opportunities for such and integrate it with the ceremonial relationships in the workplace.

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