Mixed Feelings? Negative Effects of Workplace Friendships: Theoretical Mechanisms and Boundary Conditions

Shuai Wang [1, *], Yicheng Li [2]

[1] School of Business Administration, Shandong Women's University, Jinan 250100, China

[2] School of Art, Shandong Management University, Jinan 250100, China

* Correspondence:

Shuai Wang

wangshuai@sdwu.edu.cn

Abstract

Workplace friendship is a kind of special intimate relationship in the workplace, which has attracted much attention in recent years because of its complexity. Previous studies have mainly focused on the positive effects of workplace friendships. However, recent research has shown that workplace friendships can also lead to potentially negative effects, serving employees' relationship needs while also causing problems such as infighting and cliques, and existing research has failed to provide a systematic understanding of this negative effect. In order to solve this problem, the concept of workplace friendship and its core characteristics are first defined. Secondly, based on the theory of conservation of resources, role theory and social identity theory, this paper expounds the psychological mechanism of the negative effect of workplace friendship, and further analyzes the conditions of the negative effect of workplace friendship. Finally, based on the above summary and conclusion, this paper puts forward the future research direction of the negative effects of workplace friendship.

Keywords: Workplace Friendship; Negative Effect; Theoretical Mechanism; Boundary Condition

1. Introduction

As a positive interpersonal network in organizations, workplace friendship has attracted extensive attention from both theoretical and practical areas (Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2016; Khaleel, Chelliah, Khalid Jamil, & Manzoor, 2016). Many studies have shown that workplace friendships can not only bring many benefits to individuals, such as enhancing career happiness (Ferreira, 2019; Craig & Kuykendall, 2019), provide emotional support (Akin, Akin, & Uğur, 2016) and promoting employee flourishing (Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016) but also benefit

teams and organizations by enhancing cohesion and promoting positive work attitudes and behaviors of employees (Morrison & Wright, 2009).

Although many studies have confirmed the positive effects of workplace friendships, a number of studies in recent years have found that workplace friendships are not all good, but can also have negative consequences. First, although workplace friendships are freely chosen by employees, they are often accompanied by competitive relationships or organizational complications, which can lead to potential negative effects (Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva, & Fix, 2004; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). For example, some studies have suggested that workplace friendships may lead to a favoritism culture (Morrison & Nolan, 2007), gossip, and sexual harassment among employees (Khaleel et al., 2016). Second, building and maintaining friendships requires an investment in support and attention, and over time, these additional investments can distract individuals and make them less productive (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), which will further affect job performance (Berman, West, Richter, & Maurice, 2002; Teimouri & Hamid, 2011; Methot et al., 2016). Finally, because workplace friendships and work roles are based on emotional and instrumental norms and expectations respectively (Bridge & Baxter, 1992) leading to inter-role conflict, such conflicts and contradictions can be exacerbated in key situations such as the promotion of colleagues, resulting in negative effects (Hommelhoff, 2019). The previous research found that the conflict between roles brought by workplace friendship would lead to the depletion of individual resources, and then the uncivilized behavior towards colleagues (Fasbender et al., 2023).

The above studies indicate that the impact of workplace friendships on organizations is an important issue. If research focuses on the contradictory and conflicting characteristics of workplace friendships and organizational work (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), then workplace friendships may bring negative effects. More and more research is also beginning to attention to the negative effects of workplace friendships and their mechanisms, and the number of relevant studies is growing. At present, however, it is unclear whether the effects of workplace friendships are good or bad, and the mechanisms involved. At the same time, the relevant research on workplace friendship is still relatively scattered and in the initial stage, and there are problems such as inconsistent research paradigm, unclear theory and unclear mechanism. This is not conducive to the comparison and communication between existing studies, nor is it conducive to the follow-up studies to form a systematic understanding and reference of workplace friendship.

Accordingly, this paper systematically combs the relevant research on the negative effects of workplace friendship, summarizes the negative effects of workplace friendship and its theoretical mechanism and boundary conditions. First of all, this article clarifies the concept connotation and extension of workplace friendship. Secondly, combining the existing theories and empirical studies, the negative effects and boundary conditions of workplace friendship on individuals and organizations are systematically summarized, and the research framework of the negative effects of workplace friendship is constructed. Next, we introduce and summarize the existing theoretical mechanisms of negative effects of workplace friendship that are commonly used or have far-reaching implications. Finally, on this basis, the future research direction with scientific value and

practical significance is put forward. Through the summary of the above content, this paper hopes to comprehensively expand the concept of friendship in the workplace.

This study has three important theoretical contributions. First, it systematically summarize the definition of workplace friendship from different perspectives, pays attention to the complexity of workplace friendship in the workplace, and further refines the concept connotation and extension of workplace friendship, so that the definition of workplace friendship is more in line with the characteristics of the workplace, which enriches the prominent deficiency of dialectical thinking in the definition proposed by Pillemer and Rothbard (2018). Second, by systematically sorting out the outcome variables, mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions of negative effects of workplace friendship, this paper provides a clear theoretical perspective and framework for future research, and proposes five important future research directions of negative effects of workplace friendship with scientific value and practical significance. Third, this study refines and summarizes the common theoretical mechanisms of negative effects of workplace friendship or has far-reaching implications. These theories not only help the scholars and practitioners to comprehensively understand the principle of the existence of negative effects of workplace friendship, but also provide reference and inspiration for future research and construction of new theories. These theories not only help academics and practitioners to comprehensively understand how negative effects of workplace friendships occur, but also provide reference and inspiration for future research to construct new theories.

2. Workplace Friendship Based on Different Perspectives

Workplace friendship, a special form of friendship, is an informal, intimate relationship formed by interpersonal communication in the workplace. At present, scholars have different understandings of workplace friendship, so the definition of workplace friendship is also different, failing to form a unified concept definition. Based on different perspectives, we summarize and generalize existing scholars' definitions of workplace friendship, which can be roughly divided into positive perspectives and multi-role mixed perspectives. The relevant definitions are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Definition of workplace friendship based on different lens

Lens		Origin	Definition
Positive lens	Formation lens	Wright (1974); Jehn & Shah (1997); Dobel (2001)	"a voluntary interaction between colleagues in the workplace in order to bring emotional satisfaction to both partners."
		Donna, Gordon, & Paul (2011); Sharma (2016)	"a personal relationships that are formed naturally between two or more employees through mutual relationships and expectations, shared beliefs and ideas, and cooperation to accomplish work and achieve business goals."

		Gordon & Hartman (2009)	"Developed through activities outside of work, a shared sense of humor, mutual trust, and working on projects together."
	Evolution lens	Morrison & Nolan (2009)	"An intimate relationship that grows out of an existing formal relationship in the workplace."
	Function lens	Pederson & Lewis (2012); Tasselli (2018)	"a informal relationships between employees that support each other in various ways and are mutually beneficial."
	Essential feature lens	Berman et al. (2002)	"a non-exclusive workplace relationship involving mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal hobbies and shared interests or values."
		Pillemer & Rothbard (2018)	"a non-romantic, consensual, informal relationships between colleagues who currently work in the same unit, characterized by communal norms and socio-emotional goals."
Dialectical lens		Bridge & Baxter (1992)	Workplace friendship is defined as a blended friendship, that is, a mixed interpersonal relationship with both a friendship component and a work role component.
		Ingram & Zou(2008)	Workplace friendship is defined as a business friendship, dovetailing with a business relationship, in which they provide useful business information to each other.
		Methot et al. (2016)	Workplace friendship is defined as a multiplex workplace friendship, a relationship in which a personal relationship and a work relationship occur simultaneously.

2.1. Workplace Friendship from a Positive Lens

Workplace friendship from a positive perspective, is defined as a completely positive workplace interpersonal relationship. We summarize and generalize the existing definitions of workplace friendship from the four aspects of the formation mode, evolution mode, function, and essential feature of workplace friendship. First, from the lens of formation mode, Wright (1974), based on the definition of friendship, added the description of workplace factors and defined workplace friendship as a voluntary interactive relationship between colleagues in the workplace, so as to achieve emotional satisfaction for both friends (Jehn & Shah, 1997; Dobel, 2001). In other words, workplace friendships between coworkers are developed through working together or activities outside of work, and because of shared beliefs, ideas, and a sense of humor, mutual trust, and cooperation to accomplish work and achieve business goals (Donna, Gordon, & Paul, 2011; Sharma, 2016; Gordon & Hartman, 2009). Second, from the lens of evolution mode,

Morrison and Nolan (2009) pointed out that workplace friendship refers to an intimate relationship that grows out of an existing formal relationship in the workplace. Furthermore, from the lens of function, workplace friendship is considered an interpersonal system for making decisions, mobilizing resources, hiding or transmitting information, and performing other functions closely related to work behavior and interaction, in which coworkers support and benefit each other in various ways (Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Pederson & Lewis, 2012; Tasselli, 2018).

Finally, based on the essential features of workplace friendship, Berman et al. (2002) defined it as a non-exclusive workplace relationship including mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal love, and common interests or values, which has been accepted and widely used by scholars. In order to distinguish them from other similar workplace relationships in organizations, Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) further concluded that workplace friendships have four core characteristics: voluntary, informal, communal norms, and social-emotional goal-driven.

2.2. Workplace Friendship from a Dialectical Lens

The above definition of workplace friendship focuses on individual and interpersonal perspective and fail to embed them in the organizational context. Unlike friendships, workplace friendships arise in the workplace, which urges to focus on both friendship and work roles and to define workplace friendship considering the embedded organizational context.

The four characteristics that exist in an organizational context include formal roles, involuntary relationships, exchange norms, and instrumental goals (Ingram & Zou, 2008), which conflict with these key characteristics of friendship (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). In other words, workplace friendships contain both emotional and instrumental elements, which means that the friendship role may suffer from the conflict of the work role (Berman et al., 2002; Ingram & Zou, 2008; Methot et al., 2016). Based on this conflict, Bridge and Baxter (1992) consider workplace friendship as blended friendship, a mixed interpersonal relationship with both a friendship component and a work role component, and propose five pairs of contradiction between these two components of the blended friendship: instrumentality versus affection, impartiality versus favoritism, openness versus closedness, autonomy versus connection, judgment versus acceptance.

Additionally, Ingram and Zou (2008) define workplace friendship as a business friendship that coincides with a business relationship in which they provide useful business information to each other. Furthermore, Methot et al. (2016) argue that existing research confuses single-dimensional interpersonal relationships (i.e., work-focused communication or friendship-focused communication) and multiple workplace friendships (which include both friendship-focused and work-focused communication). Based on this, workplace friendship is defined as an interpersonal relationship in which a personal emotional relationship and a professional relationship occur simultaneously (Methot et al., 2016).

To sum up, different scholars have defined workplace friendship from different perspectives. In this regard, most studies that define workplace friendships as completely positive interpersonal relationships focus on the positive effects of workplace friendships. Other studies that consider both friendship and job roles and define workplace friendship as mixed workplace friendship

begin to explore the negative effects of workplace friendships. Unfortunately, the current research blended pure friendships and mixed friendships, which makes it impossible to distinguish whether the effects of workplace friendships are due to the friendships themselves or to the friendships intertwined with instrumental components and exchange norms (Methot et al., 2016). The ambiguity of the definition of workplace friendship may cause differences in the consequences of workplace friendship. Therefore, how to define workplace friendship is the key to empirically studying the consequences of workplace friendship.

Accordingly, based on the complexity and contradiction of the characteristics of workplace friendship, we define workplace friendship as a compound interpersonal relationship that includes emotional relationship and utilitarian relationship developed in the professional environment. In other words, it contains elements of informal friendships based on personal emotion and spiritual resonance, as well as formal and functional interactions arising from work roles and career goals. While these relationships provide emotional support and enhance job satisfaction, they also involve utilitarian factors such as power dynamics, resource allocation, and career development, making workplace friendships that promote teamwork and personal growth at the same time can be complicated by conflicts of interest and role expectations.

3. Measurement of Workplace Friendships

At present, the empirical research on workplace friendship adopts the questionnaire measurement method. We summarize the existing scales into those developed from the perspective of opportunities and intensity of workplace friendships and those developed from the perspective of the social environment in which workplace friendships are embedded and reveal the limitations of the scales under the two perspectives. The relevant measurement are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Measurement of workplace friendship

Lens	Origin	Dimension	Example Items
Single dimension	Hackman & Lawler (1971)	Friendship Opportunity	"a voluntary interaction between colleagues in the workplace in order to bring emotional satisfaction to both partners."
	Colbert et al. (2016)	Friendship Prevalence	"I spend time with my coworkers outside of work."
Multiple dimensions	Nielsen (2000)	Friendship Opportunity/ Friendship Prevalence	"I have the opportunity to get to know my coworkers."; "I have formed strong friendships at work."
	Omuris (2019)	Trustworthiness/ Competence/ Having someone's back/ Value-Life Interest Similarity/Caring Personal Relationship/ Socio-	"It does not disturb me to talk about personal subjects with him/her"; "I trust his/her work-related knowledge"; "To protect me, s/he ignores my work-related mistakes"; "Our

		Demographic Similarity	sense of humor is similar"; "S/He makes surprises for me on special days"; "Our educational background is similar"
	Bridge & Baxter (1992)	Overall Dual-Role Tension / Selection strategy / Integration strategy.	"Overall, the friendship half and the work half of our relationship interfere with each other, creating problems for us."; "When we feel that we must choose between what is expected at work and what is expected by our friendship, we usually give priority to the friendship"; "We give each other a lot of "room to maneuver" in both our friendship and work roles in order to allow the roles to exist together"

Initially, workplace friendship was regarded as a job characteristic. Hackman and Lawler (1971) put forward the dimension of "friendship opportunity" and included it into the dimension of job characteristics to form six-dimensional job characteristics. They defined friendship opportunities as "the extent to which the organization provides opportunities for employees to interact and establish informal relationships with other employees at work." Taking workplace friendship as a job characteristic, this type of measurement scale only focuses on the extent to which workplace friendship exists in the organization and fails to measure the nature and characteristics of friendship or focus on the extent of influence on employees. In 2000, Nielsen began to focus on the strength and quality of workplace friendships and developed a dimensions scale of workplace friendship. Among the scale, friendship opportunities refer to how many opportunities an individual has in an organization to establish and develop friendships with colleagues. Friendship quality refers to the quality of friendship between colleagues in the workplace, which can be embodied in the spiritual comfort that individuals can obtain in friendship. This scale is thought to be closely related to individual behavior, interpersonal quality, and job satisfaction and performance. Because of its good reliability and validity, the measurement scale has been widely used in empirical studies. Colbert et al. (2016) used three items to measure workplace friendship from the perspective of friendship prevalence.

Although Nielsen's (2000) scale is widely used, it still has some limitations. Specifically, it obscures the causal relationship of workplace friendship and fails to fully explain the formation and establishment of workplace friendship as well as its content and structure. However, based on meaning, needs, and expectations in different social contexts, friendship relationships may have different antecedents and contents (Descharmes et al., 2011). The structure, culture, and features of an organization create a specific environment by determining the interactions between team members. Therefore, based on the embedded social environment of workplace friendship, Omuris (2019) developed a measurement scale of workplace friendship based on the background of tourism and revealed the causes of friendship in tourism organizations. The six dimensions of the

workplace friendship scale include trust, ability, strong support, values-interest similarity, socio-demographic information similarity, and concern for personal relationships.

In addition, workplace friendship occurs in a complex and contradictory organizational environment, and the above scale does not reflect the duplicity and complexity of workplace friendship. Bridge and Baxter (1992) explored the dual role pressure caused by the contradiction between the roles of friend and work in mixed friendships, as well as three basic strategies for the communication and management of tension between the two parties in the relationship, from the perspective of relationship dialectics and the social environment embedded by both parties in the workplace friendship. Accordingly, they developed the dual role stress scale, which includes overall dual role stress as well as communication strategies for facing relationship tension, such as choice, separation, and integration.

To sum up, on the one hand, Nielsen et al. (2000) scale is widely used in the current research on workplace friendship. This scale not only blurred the causal relationship of workplace friendship but also failed to consider factors such as organizational environment and fully revealed its content and structure. On the other hand, although the scale developed by Omuris (2019) and Bridge et al. (1992) both considered the social environment embedded in workplace friendship, the former only considered the tourism context and whether it can be universally applied to any organization context remains to be verified. The latter only considers the dual role stress caused by workplace friendship and its coping strategies but does not reveal the composition and structure of workplace friendship. Due to different types of workplace friendships, different functions, levels of intimacy, and the difficulties experienced in maintaining them at work, these factors can lead to differences in the impact of workplace friendships on organizations. Existing measurements of workplace friendships simply do not adequately reflect the complexity of workplace friendships. Therefore, in order to better measure the possible consequences of having a friendship at work, it is necessary first to evaluate all aspects of the relationship (Morrison & Wright, 2009).

4. Negative Effects of Workplace Friendship

Friendship in the workplace is a dialectic tension that results from the integration of the roles of "employee" and "friend" into one relationship, because the normative and expected role needs associated with the roles of employee and friend may be incompatible or even contradictory (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Based on the dialectical perspective of workplace friendship, existing studies have mainly explored the negative effects of workplace friendship from the individual level and the organizational or team level.

First of all, workplace friendships may lead to the depletion of individual resources such as time and energy. In order to maintain friendship, individuals need to devote additional resources to meeting the needs and expectations of their friends while working (Clark & Reis, 1988). Even more, individuals may need to switch between meeting the demands of work and those of friends, expending more self-control resources (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). From the perspective of burnout, the investment of these additional resources may diminish time and energy spent on

work, leading to depletion of individual resources, which in turn negatively affects individual task performance (Methot et al., 2016).

Second, workplace friendships can lead to individuals in the choice of "work" or "friend" dilemma. Because the expectations and normss of work and friends are opposite, individuals often face a choice between one and the other (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). If job role expectations are chosen, this can lead to the deterioration and breakdown of friendships (Sias et al., 2004). If you choose the friend role expectation, it can lead to gossip, favoritism, etc. (Song & Olshfski, 2008).

Furthermore, based on this dilemma, workplace friendships can lead to negative consequences due to role conflict. Hommelhoff (2019) coded different resource conflicts through the critical event method, and then explored the potential conflicts of work and friendship norms among workplace friendships caused by resource conflict types. It is found that status conflict and information conflict are important resource factors that cause the conflict between the roles of workplace friendship. At the individual level, role conflict, as a stressor, will lead individuals to experience negative emotions or resource depletion, and then produce work withdrawal behavior (Wang et al., 2023) or incivility directed toward coworkers (Fasbender et al., 2023). Research has found that in areas related to self-concept, people may be more threatened by the success of friends than by strangers (Ingram & Zou, 2008). At the team level, when formal job roles conflict with informal friend roles, team members will choose to pay attention to common or similar information and are unlikely to express different opinions, which may lead to a decline in decision-making quality (Hood, Cruz, & Bachrach, 2017; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018).

Finally, workplace friendships can have some negative consequences in interpersonal interactions. On the one hand, due to the high similarity and self-disclosure of individuals in workplace friendships, they form a small group, which leads to "cliquish culture" and "factionalism" (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). Based on this, within friendship cliques, individuals will reduce voice behavior because they are concerned about other people's face (Wang et al., 2024). Outside friendship cliques, because each clique highly identifies with the insiders, the outsider may perceived exclusion. The existence of such friendship cliques will result in poor information communication within the organization and further Inhibition of knowledge sharing behavior within the organization (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). And it also bring about organizational politics (O 'Connor & Morrison, 2001), and the sense of organizational injustice, which will reduce organizational commitment and organizational performance (Teimouri & Hamid, 2011). On the other hand, the universal "guanxi-oriented" relationship in enterprises may aggravate employees' use of factionalism for personal gain and conduct behaviors conducive to the development of the friendship circle but harmful to the organization (Ingram & Zou, 2008). Previous research has found that workplace friendships maintained based on controlled motives can lead to compulsory citizenship behaviors through a sense of compulsory obligation (Wang et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this series of studies explored the complexity of workplace friendships from the perspectives of how workplace friendships affect individuals' subjective psychological feelings and cognition, and how to produce role and resource conflicts, thus revealing the negative effects of workplace friendships on individuals and teams. Different friendship relationship

characteristics (e.g., relationship closeness, friendship maturity: Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), relationship motivation (e.g., autonomous relationship motivation vs. controlled relationship motivation: Wang et al., 2023), individual characteristics (friendship self-efficacy: Fasbender et al., 2023; emotional reactivity: Wang et al., 2023), status characteristics (status conflict: Hommelhoff, 2019), task characteristics (task interdependence: Wang et al., 2023), situation characteristics (e.g., competitive climate: Wang et al., 2024) plays a moderating role in the above-mentioned negative effect mechanism and influences the outcome variables.

Combined with the above literature review, this paper summarizes the mechanism, boundary conditions and influence of the negative effect of workplace friendship, as shown in Figure 1.
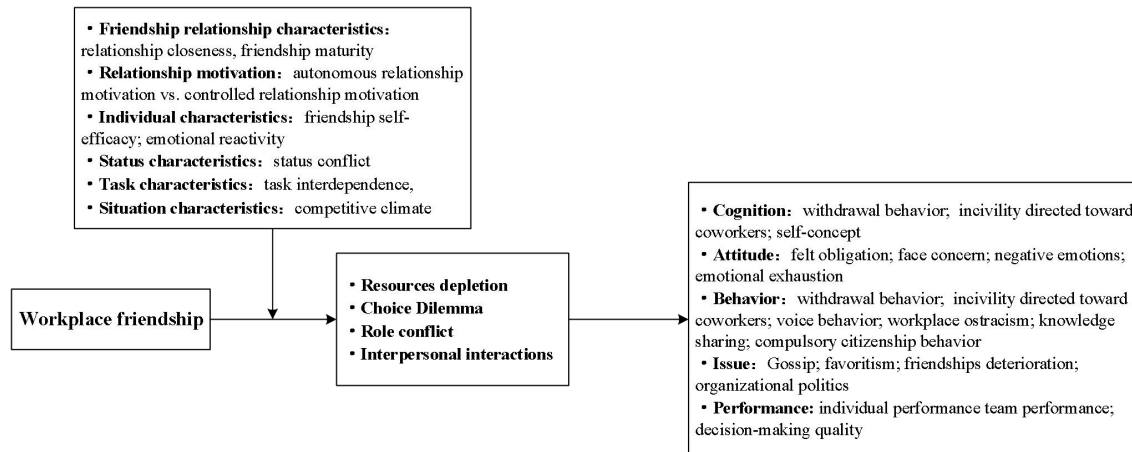

Figure 1. Negative effects of workplace friendship

5. Theoretical mechanism of negative effects of workplace friendship

On the basis of literature review, we extract the relevant theoretical mechanisms of the negative effects of workplace friendship. As the current research on the negative effects of workplace friendship is in the initial stage, the empirical research is relatively scattered, and there are still relatively few hypotheses explicitly established and interpreted by theories in the existing research. Therefore, this paper focuses on the theoretical mechanism behind the negative effects of workplace friendship, and provides future research directions for subsequent exploration. Based on this, from the perspectives of resources and cognition, this paper focuses on the common or far-reaching theoretical mechanisms (see Table 3), in order to provide some inspiration for future research.

Table 3. Theoretical mechanism of negative effects of workplace friendship

Theoretical Perspective	Theory	Theoretical Mechanism Interpretation	Examples of Theoretical Mechanism Application
Resource Perspective	Conservation of resource theory	People strive to preserve, protect, and build valuable resources such as time and energy (Hobfoll, 1989)	Methot et al. (2016) found in their empirical study that although workplace friendship has a positive effect on work performance, this positive effect will be offset by the

			energy and attention consumption brought by workplace friendship, which will lead to the decrease of individual work performance and affect career development.
	Self-control theory	Individuals consciously regulating their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions to make them conform to social expectations and standards in order to achieve the purpose of self-regulation (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999).	Pillemer & Rothbard (2018) suggest that after the interaction with friends, it is difficult to quickly devote oneself to work, so it is necessary to consume (self-control) resources to concentrate oneself, regulate and manage emotions, and change the way of thinking.
	Stressor-emotion model	Being exposed to stressors may lead to individual negative emotions and subsequent counterproductive behaviour (Fida et al., 2014)	Wang et al. (2023) found that workplace friendship may be considered as a role stressor, whcih further trigger negative emotion and withdrawal behavior.
Ccognitive Perspective	Role theory	An individual playing a certain role needs to meet the expectations and requirements of others for that role. When individuals cannot bear the expectations and requirements given by the role, it is difficult for them to play their role well, resulting in inconsistent expectation behavior, which further increases their role pressure (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964).	Fasbender et al. (2023) argue that believed that workplace friendships would lead to uncivilized behavior toward colleagues, because employees would experience inter-role conflict between the roles of "employee" and "friend", resulting in resource depletion.
	Social identity theory	Social classification in social identity theory means that individuals automatically categorize things into categories, resulting in in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).	Teimouri & Hamid (2011) suggest that workplace friendships lead to gossip, harassment, favoritism, and other issues that negatively affect organizational commitment and performance.
	Social exchange theory	Social exchange is regarded as a series of continuous and reciprocal behaviors of both parties, and reciprocity is an important principle of social exchange. (Blau, 1964)	Wang et al. (2023) suggest that when employees have controlled relationship motivation, workplace friendship is positively related to employees' felt obligation, which triggers compulsory citizenship behavior.

5.1. Resource Perspective

5.1.1. Conservation of Resource Theory

Theoretically, from the perspective of the essential characteristics of workplace friendship, workplace friendship is both a process of resource gain and a process of resource loss. Therefore, resource conservation theory helps to explain the double-edged sword effect of workplace friendship, especially its negative effects. Conservation of resource (COR) theory proposes that people strive to preserve, protect, and build valuable resources such as time and energy (Hobfoll, 1989).

Based on COR theory, workplace friendship has a negative effect on individuals. First, expectations generated by the friendship role require individuals to invest time and energy to maintain, which leads to physical and mental exhaustion and consumes the resources originally used directly to complete their core work process. For example, Clark and Reis (1988) found that interruptions between close friends make it difficult for individuals to focus on work-related tasks and undermine work goals. Similarly, Methot et al. (2016) empirically proved that although workplace friendship had a positive effect on work performance, such a positive effect would be offset by the consumption of energy and attention brought by workplace friendship, which would lead to a decrease in job performance and weaken career development. Second, due to the non-exclusivity of time, the competition for limited resources between work roles and friend roles will cause psychological pressure and burden to individuals. Previous studies have shown that complex workplace friendships can cause individual fatigue and emotional exhaustion and reduce the sense of responsibility to colleagues (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Martinez-Inigo, Poerio, & Totterdell, 2013). Wang et al. (2024) found that employees with workplace friendships may also be concerned about the loss of resources due to the deterioration of friendships, in which case employees are more likely to maintain friendships by caring for others, further reducing voice behavior.

5.1.2. Self-control Theory

Self-control refers to individuals consciously regulating their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions to make them conform to social expectations and standards in order to achieve the purpose of self-regulation (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). In order to meet the social norms and expectations of friendship, individuals in workplace friendships consciously regulate their behaviors and emotions to achieve the purpose of maintaining friendship (Tangney et al., 2018). In this process, the ego may consume its own resources in order to achieve the regulation of behavior (Baumeister et al., 2007).

Similar to the perspective of high-quality interpersonal relationships, workplace friendships have positive features such as trust and reciprocity and are an important way for individuals to obtain supportive interactions, such as reliable feedback and emotional and instrumental support, which in turn helps to increase individuals' psychological and social resources (Koopman et al., 2016). However, in order to maintain workplace friendships, individuals will care and worry about their friends' happiness and feelings and express concern for the needs of friends at work. In this regard, individuals need to invest time, energy, emotional and cognitive resources to meet

friend expectations in order to maintain and improve friendships, which can lead to a loss of self-control resources. For example, when a friend is depressed and needs to talk to them, even though an individual is occupied with work, he/she needs to put down his/her work to accompany and comfort the friend out of the social norm of friendship, which directly occupies the time and energy of the individual (Suliman, & Uneby, 2019). Not only that, after the interaction with friends, it is difficult to quickly devote oneself to work, so it is necessary to consume (self-control) resources to concentrate oneself, regulate and manage emotions, and change the way of thinking (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018).

5.1.3. Stressor-emotion Model

The core principle of Stressor-emotion model is that exposure to stressors may lead to individual negative emotions and subsequent counter-productive behaviors (Fida et al., 2014), which is particularly appropriate and useful for investigating the mechanism of influence of role stressors - negative emotional counter - productive behaviors (Fida et al., 2014, 2015). Workplace friendships are perceived as a stressor because its role conflict or role ambiguity is caused by conflicting roles, norms, and expectations. in this situation, individuals may develop negative emotions and counterproductive behaviors. For example, Wang et al. (2023) found that in the case of task interdependence, individuals with high emotional reactivity will experience negative emotions when facing the invisible role conflict caused by workplace friendship, and then conduct withdrawal behavior.

5.2. Cognitive Perspective

5.2.1. Role Theory

Workplace friendship includes both the role of work and the role of friends. Thus, role theory helps us to essentially explain why workplace friendships have negative effects. Role theory states that an individual playing a certain role needs to meet the expectations and requirements of others for that role. When individuals cannot bear the expectations and requirements given by the role, it is difficult for them to play their role well, resulting in inconsistent expectation behavior, which further increases their role pressure (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Among them, role conflict is one of the important sources of role stress (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), which refers to the conflicting expectations, norms, and goals of different roles experienced by individuals (Halpern, 1996). There are work roles and friend roles in workplace friendship, and these two roles have contradictory and conflicting role characteristics and role expectations. Thus, workplace friendships increase the stress between the informal nature of friendships and the formal nature of organizational work roles, thereby increasing the likelihood of inter-role conflict (Grayson, 2007; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018).

At the individual level, conflict between job roles and friend roles is associated with decreased satisfaction and may cause problems with task-based performance (Hirsch & Rapkin, 1986; Sias et al., 2004; Bamberger, Geller, & Doveh, 2017). For example, Fasbender et al. (2023) combined the dialectical perspective and self-regulation perspective of workplace friendship and found that workplace friendship would lead to employees' uncivilized behavior toward colleagues, because employees experienced inter-role conflict between the roles of "employee" and "friend", resulting

in resource depletion. Hommelhoff (2019) coded different resource conflicts through the critical event method and then explored the potential conflicts of work and friendship norms among workplace friendships caused by conflict types. The results have shown that status conflict is the most common cause of workplace friendship role conflict. When two friends compete for a position at the same time, the individual's socio-emotional goals and instrumental goals will conflict, further damaging the friendship, with adverse consequences. In addition, information conflict is also a resource factor that may cause conflicts between roles. When an individual keeps a business secret from a friend, the friend would be disappointed, which leads to conflict between the roles, stimulates the generation of relationship rift, and even promotes the betrayal of the friend.

At the team level, the conflict between the friend role and the work role is associated with the team decision-making process and can lead to problems such as reduced decision quality (Loyd, Wang, Phillips, & Lount, 2013; Hood, Cruz, & Bachrach, 2017). For example, Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) suggest that teams with workplace friendships have a lower quality of decision-making when individuals hold the same word. When formal work roles conflict with informal friend roles, team members will choose to focus on common or similar information and are unlikely to express different opinions in order to avoid the deterioration or discomfort of the relationship caused by differences of opinion (De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012; Loyd et al., 2013). Further, this behavior increases team homogeneity, resulting in a lack of diversity among collaborators (Phillips & Loyd, 2006). Homogenous teams may spend less time discussing and processing different perspectives and information than heterogeneous groups (Hoever, Van Knippenberg, Van Ginkel, & Barkema, 2012; Galinsky, 2015), which leads to a decline in decision-making quality.

5.2.2. Social Identity Theory

Workplace friendships can affect both the individual or team who has the friendship and the bystander who is excluded from the friendship. As one of the important theories in the field of group behavior research, social identity theory helps us to explore the negative effects of workplace friendships on organizations from the perspective of outsiders. Among them, social classification in social identity theory means that individuals automatically categorize things into categories, resulting in in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals tend to make positive evaluations of in-group members and perform friendly, while they tend to have prejudices against out-group members and tend to produce negative evaluations and behaviors (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

From an outsider's perspective, it is difficult for them to get involved in the friendship group due to the similarity perception and self-disclosure characteristics of the friendship group (Kahn, Barton, Fisher, Heaphy, Reid, & Rouse, 2018), which makes them feel a strong sense of ostracism, thus inhibiting their sense of belonging and self-esteem, and forming a negative cognition of the friendship group (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008; Ozelcik & Barsade, 2011). Additionally, based on social identity theory, the phenomenon of "cliquing" formed by workplace friendships will have a negative impact on organizations (Chen & Chen, 2009). it is inevitable to trigger cliques, giving rise to various workplace factions caused by workplace friendships. Each group is

highly identified with its insiders and only willing to share information and resources with those within the group (Hansen, Mors, & Lovas, 2005), which results in poor information communication and deceased knowledge-sharing behavior within the organization. Furthermore, based on the social identity theory, members within the friendship group will have prejudices against members outside the group and are more inclined to produce negative and negative evaluations. Each group is highly identified with its insiders and only willing to share information and resources with those within the group (Hansen, Mors, & Lovas, 2005), which results in poor information communication and deceased knowledge-sharing behavior within the organization. For example, some studies have found that workplace friendships can lead to problems such as gossip, harassment, favoritism, leading to conflicts and cliquing among employees, which have a negative impact on organizational commitment and performance (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Ingram & Zou, 2008; Teimouri & Hamid, 2011).

5.2.3. Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is an important theory that reveals the emergence of exchange relations among people and the change and development of attitudes and behaviors of all parties (Blau,1964). Social exchange is regarded as a series of continuous and reciprocal behaviors of both parties, and reciprocity is an important principle of social exchange. Reciprocity norm refers to the criterion recognized by both parties in the process of exchange, that is, when one party gets help or resources from the other party, the former has the obligation to return them.

Based on the social exchange theory, compared with simple colleague relationship or simple friendship relationship, workplace friendship relationship, as a strong colleague relationship, will bring more resources and emotional exchange (Mossholder et al., 2005). In this regards, Wang et al. (2023) found that when individuals are driven by controlled relationship motivation to maintain friendship, the reciprocity norm implied by workplace friendship is more likely to drive individuals to bear "perceived obligation". Since the maintenance of this kind of friendship relationship is not voluntarily chosen and self-determined, it can only carry a compulsory felt obligation in the process of social exchange to complete the reciprocal process of compulsory citizenship behavior.

6. Future Research Direction

Through a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the negative effects of workplace friendship and a review of the theoretical mechanisms, it can be found that some meaningful research results have been initially produced around the topic of negative effects of workplace friendship, and has been widely concerned by the scholars and practitioner. However, the existing research on the negative effects of workplace friendship is still relatively loose, lack of systematic, and there are many research limitations. On the basis of reviewing the existing literature, this paper summarizes and proposes the following future research directions that need to be discussed, aiming to provide valuable inspiration for the research on the negative effects of workplace friendship.

First, to change the research perspective, we encourage future research to fully consider the

interpersonal interaction characteristics of workplace friendship, and expand the empirical study of workplace friendship from the perspective of dyadic interaction. For example, workplace friendships contain both work roles and friendship roles, with the question of choosing between work expectations and friendship expectations. We suggest that future research could explore the differentiated effects arising from the expectation matching of workplace friendships from the perspective of dyadic relationships. Specifically, when expectations fail to match, such as individuals choosing friendship expectations and friends choosing job expectations, workplace friendships can lead to relationship betrayal, which can have negative effects on individuals so that the work of achieving organizational goals together may become more difficult. When expectations are matched, such as individuals and friends choosing friendship expectations simultaneously, workplace friendships may have positive effects on individuals, but they may have negative effects on organizations, such as breeding cliques, mutual shields, and reducing whistle-blowing behaviors that are conducive to organizational development.

Second, we encourage future research to enrich the explanation mechanism of the negative effect of workplace friendship. Prior research on the negative effects are focused on COR theory, role theory, and social identity theory. In the future, the theoretical mechanism of workplace friendship can be further explored and deepened from other theoretical perspectives. Future research directions can explore the affective and emotional mechanism of the double-edged sword effect of workplace friendship. For example, according to the Emotional contagion theory, individuals automatically pick up the emotions of others during their interactions, synchronizing and mimicking their gestures, expressions, or behaviors, which is called the emotional contagion process. Previous research found that perceived similarity and self-disclosure are key processes in the formation of workplace friendships (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), and self-disclosure may lead to workplace friendships among employees. In this regards, when friends disclose negative work events to individuals, employees may be infected by their friends' negative emotions, which will lead to negative effects.

Third, further research on the double-edged sword effect of workplace friendships, especially the boundary conditions for negative effects, should be encouraged. Future research could strengthen or further expand the boundary conditions for the negative effects of workplace friendships from different levels. In terms of individual level, future studies can explore the boundary conditions for individual differences to trigger negative effects of workplace friendships. For example, explore the moderating effect of role segmentation preference in workplace friendships. Individuals can choose between work life and non-work life by dividing cognitive, behavioral, and physical objects into mutually exclusive role traits, or they can choose integration by allowing these role traits to mix in the work and personal domains (Methot et al., 2016). Those who prefer role segmentation will separate work roles and friendship roles, which may reduce the negative effects of workplace friendships due to role conflict (Methot et al., 2017).

In terms of organizational level, future research could explore the negative effects of workplace friendships under different organizational climates and cultures. For example, workplace friendships have different consequences in competitive and cooperative environments. On the other hand, the cooperative climate emphasizes the learning of employees and improves their

skills through sharing and cooperation (Nerstad et al., 2013). In this context, workplace friendship between individuals is conducive to promoting communication and exchange of employees as well as knowledge sharing, which has a positive effect. On the contrary, the competitive climate emphasizes that the compensation reward and promotion of the organization depend on the comparison between colleagues, so employees will suppress colleagues for their own interests (Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1998; Nerstad et al., 2013). Workplace friendship in a competitive climate may trigger employees to compare with their close friends, and this upward comparison will stimulate negative emotions such as jealousy and lead to a series of negative effects such as betrayal.

Fourth, multi-method and multi-culture can be explored in the future. Specifically, the existing research mainly conduct time-segment research (Fasbender et al., 2023), cross-sectional research (Methot et al., 2016) or qualitative research methods (Hommelhoff, 2019). The maintenance and development of workplace friendship is a dynamic process (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018; Sias et al., 2004). Future studies can use cross-lagged panel designs or dynamic tracking method to investigate how the relationship between workplace friendship and individual psychology and behavior changes over time. Additionaly, it is necessary to strengthen localization and cross-cultural multi-scenario comparative research. Due to cultural differences such as Chinese and Western cultural traditions and values, the concept of friendship is different according to cultural norms, so there are significant differences between Chinese and Western attitudes and cognition towards friendship (Hommelhoff, 2019). For example, Eastern culture values human feelings, relationships and face, while Western culture puts more emphasis on individualism, rules and fair competition, which may lead to different or even completely opposite findings in the study of workplace friendship in Chinese and Western cultural contexts.

Finally, fully considering the embedded environment factors, based on the complexity of workplace friendship and multiple role characteristics, further improves the measurement of workplace friendship. The Nielsen (2000) scale, which is widely used in current research, fails to fully reveal the content and structure of friendships, and it also obscures the causal relationship of workplace friendships. In order to better measure the possible consequences of friendships at work, we would first assess the content structure and causality of workplace friendships (Morrison & Wright, 2009). Therefore, in order to reveal the complexity of workplace friendship and expand the empirical research on the negative effects of workplace friendship, future studies need to improve the measurement scale of workplace friendship.

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