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Workplace Relations: Friendship Patterns and Consequences (According to Managers)

This article examines orientations toward workplace friendship. Based on a survey of senior managers in cities with populations over 50,000, it addresses the following questions: Do senior managers promote, condone, or discourage workplace friendship? What risks and benefits of workplace friendships do these managers perceive? What policies and strategies that affect workplace friendship are found in organizations? How do these organizational efforts affect perceptions of employee performance? This article finds that, despite the risks, orientations in favor of workplace friendships are widespread, and many jurisdictions engage in efforts to promote them.

New ideas are routinely proposed about what "bureaucracies" should be (Considine and Lewis 1999; Bruce and Novinson 1999; Comeau-Kirschner and Wah 1999; Hesselbein 1997). One such notion is that organizations should condone or even promote workplace friendship. Workplace friendships involve mutual commitment, trust, and shared values or interests between people at work, in ways that go beyond mere acquaintanceship but that exclude romance. These relations involve heightened norms of openness, informality, and inclusiveness, which increasingly are part of modern management strategies (such as notions of teamwork) and are also shared by most recent job entrants (Guy and Newman 1998; Tulgan 1995; Jurckiewicz and Brown 1998). Workplace friendship is said to reduce workplace stress, increase communication, help employees and managers accomplish their tasks, and assist in the process of accepting organizational change. Despite possible adverse consequences that may also occur (workplace friendship resulting in conflict-of-interest or harassment allegations, for instance), successful managers frequently develop friendships with others in their own organizations. While some employees and managers choose not to have such relationships, those who do often find that it makes both good and bad jobs better (Shadur and Kienzle 1999; Kets de Vries and Balazs 1999; Lu 1999;

Van Wart and Berman 1999).

This article examines the notion of workplace friendship and reports on a survey of senior managers in U.S. cities with populations over 50,000 about their views on workplace friendship. Do these top managers promote, condone, or discourage workplace friendship? What risks and benefits of workplace friendship do they perceive? What poli-

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cies and strategies do managers use to promote or discourage friendship in their organizations, and with what consequences? The views of these managers are important because their policies and examples affect the climate for friendship and other relationships in their organizations.

This study has some limitations. It does not observe actual workplace relations, but only the perceptions of managers. Neither does it examine the views of respondent groups other than managers, which might also be of interest. Further, this study only examines attitudes of managers toward workplace friendship in general, acknowledging that workplace friendships have different features in different situations. Evidence is presented that managerial orientations in favor of friendship are widespread and that they are associated with important organizational rewards.

Risks and Rewards of Workplace Friendship

Workplace friendship, obviously, is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. Workplace friendships vary—they are as unique as the people that are involved—yet share some common features. Workplace friendships are defined as *nonexclusive workplace relations that involve mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal liking and shared interests or values* (see also Dobel 1999, 2001; Ambrose 1999; Blieszner and Adams 1992; Hallowell 1999). Workplace friendship involves more than people merely acting in friendly ways or being mutual acquaintances:[1] There must be trust, liking, and shared interests or values, too. Workplace friendships are sometimes limited to certain spheres of work or work-related leisure (such as having a "lunch" friend). Workplace friends usually are able to articulate what they like about another person or what they enjoy doing together ("What I like most about [working with] you is that ..."), even though the relationship includes instrumental considerations as well ("I like you, and I need you, too"). Friendships vary in intensity ("We like each other a lot/little"), thrive on generosity and symmetry of contribution ("We find nice things to do for each other"), and have manifest and latent functions ("Just knowing that someone cares is a source of support"). While workplace friendship is decidedly different from acquaintanceship, it is also different from romance in two important ways: Romance involves a relationship between two individuals from which others ordinarily are excluded, and romance is also more intense than friendship (involving, for example, passionate affection or enduring commitments. See Adams and Allan 1998; Werking 1997).

Classical "ideals" of friendship often presuppose enduring relations among equals (Konstan 1997).[2] This notion has had a lasting impact from the ancient world through the present. However, workplace friendships often transcend this consideration (Jurckiewicz and Brown 1998; Fehr 1996; Holladay and Kerns 1999). They are fleeting when solely based on work-related interests, such as a project or shared location; when these factors cease, so, too, do the friendships, unless the actors develop new common grounds. Workplace friendships often involve relations between people of unequal age, status, or gender, thereby transcending traditional notions of friendship. For example, friendships between supervisors and subordinates are frequently mentioned (Cole 1993; Valerius 1998; Boyd and Taylor 1998), as are friendships between younger and older workers, including mentor/ protégé relations (Crampton and Mishra 1999; Matheson 1999; Ibarra 1993; Simonetti and Ariss 1999; Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass 1998). Workplace friendships are increasingly common between men and women, too (Eyler and Baridon 1992; Grove 1991; Lobel et al. 1994; Powers 1998). This study's definition allows for a broad range of specific friendship relationships.

Many potential benefits can be derived from workplace friendships, both for individuals and for organizations. The benefits of workplace friendship further "social" system models of organizations that emphasize formal and informal, horizontal and vertical interactions with open styles of communication and fluid task structures for accomplishment (Argyris 1996; Simon 1977; Gouldner 1959; Burns and Stalker 1961). Specifically, workplace friendship increases support and resources that help individuals to get their jobs done. Through friendship, individuals obtain support from others; managers find allies, instill loyalty, and stand up for people who support them (Ingraham, Thompson, and Sanders 1998; Shalala 1998; Palmer 1998; Terry 1993). The support that people need cannot be obtained merely by focusing on narrow, material self-interests ("I'll support you because your project benefits me") or even relatively broader material self-interests ("I'll help you with your work if you help me with mine"). This is because both outcomes and future opportunities to reciprocate are often uncertain. Instead, support needs to be based on other appeals, such as shared values ("we both want to make this a more diverse organization") or shared experiences ("we have been through so much together, can I ask for your support once more?"), as well as shared perceptions of trust, which are found in friendship. Workplace friendship increases support and information that helps individuals do their jobs, in turn, reducing stress (for instance, by eliminating barriers to success) and improving the quality of work. While these outcomes are not unique to friendship, workplace friendship does further them. Organizations benefit from supportive and innovative climates that, in turn, are linked to increased productivity (Shadur and Kienzle 1999; Berman and West 1998; West and Berman 1997).

Some authors also describe the *lack* of social relations, including friendships, as being symptomatic of what is wrong with organizations. Normative theories of traditional, "legal-rational" bureaucracies, such as those described by Adams and Balfour (1998), Merton (1957), and Jaques (1980), discuss impersonal styles of position-bound interaction. These views hold that loyalty should be to the organization and its mission; human relations should be limited to those that are functionally required for fulfilling official duties. This view has little place for friendship, apart from organizationally sanctioned relationships such as mentoring. Psychoanalytic critiques suggest the absence of close relations may induce anxiety and, in extreme cases, sociopathic behavior (Hummel 1994; Sievers 1999). Bureaucracies promise to compensate for the resulting feelings of emptiness at work through, for example, formal rewards and recognition. Apart from the problem that these are poor substitutes for social interaction, some individuals become dependent on them in ways that cause anxiety, depression, neurotic, and even sociopathic behavior. These outcomes may induce absenteeism and turnover and decrease morale and motivation. This occurs among the inflicted as well as those affected by them. The opportunity to form friendships is one way to make these negative outcomes less likely.

Despite these considerations, there are risks from friendship. First, the risk of friendships resulting in romantic liaisons and sexual harassment allegations has been well-researched (Bayes and Kelly 1994; Gutek 1985; Paul 1994; Pellicciotti 1993).[3] However, friendship leads to such allegations less frequently than some might expect (Powers 1998; Markert 1999; Seglin 2000). Second, some managers are staunchly opposed to workplace friendship, fearing that it may undermine employees' loyalty to the organization, strain independent judgment, create conflict of interest situations, and give the appearance of favoritism. Third, friendship sometimes is seen as naïve. It creates political vulnerability because friends share confidences that may be used against them later. Workplace friendship is often also seen as impractical because of employee turnover. In sum, friendship has both risks and rewards.

Friendship Processes in Organizations

Workplaces often have features that may facilitate friendship making (Pogrebin 1987). Workplaces are sites where people meet others, including co-workers, clients, members of other departments or organizations, and supervisors. Friendships develop because of proximity and shared experience. People pursue common interests, such as the advancement of projects, as well as goals that concern the general welfare of the organization (Sias and Cahill 1998; Jurckiewicz and Massey 1996). They often rely on each other for problem solving—for example, to interpret new events or to manage relationships with others in the organization (Myers et al. 1999; Moore 1999). Friendships are also a source of support. Depending on their level of comfort, friends often use each other to improve their personal or home lives, too, such as by sharing notes on problem behavior of teenagers or spouses, discussing medical and retirement options, and improving physical fitness by joint exercise (Lu 1999). Friendships often grow from these interactions through continuity and mutual respect or need. Friendship making can be a deliberate act, and people vary in the extent to which they choose to engage in it.

Organizations can do numerous things to create opportunities for friendship making—although, of course, they cannot force people to become friends. Teamwork often thrusts individuals into close working relationships with each other, causing them to share information about past experiences and likes that may be a seed for friendship. Managers can be instructed to promote a climate of openness and friendship among staff and to set examples of interactions that their organizations seek to promote (Rousseau 1995). Quite often, new managers are unaware of how openness can build bridges of trust and increased commitment; they need to be taught how to establish trusting relations with subordinates, and some organizations provide this training to their supervisors. Such bridge building is becoming an endangered art form (Hallowell 1999), and the lack of relevant skills may affect the number and nature of friendships that individuals form.

While it may be impossible for an organization to prevent friendships that are based on homogenous factors (same sex, race, age), organizations can discourage homogenous groupings (Marelich 1996). It should be noted that in recent years many organizations have promoted "dress down" Fridays and social events to create more informal connections. But these actions may fail when norms of openness and friendliness are not promoted as well. Finally, as in all relations, workplace friends must work through the unique challenges of their relationships, which may involve envy, competition, instrumental purposes, and physical attraction. It is unclear whether organizations can or should have any impact on overcoming these challenges to friendship, but they may assist through training that emphasizes active listening, the appropriateness of expressing thoughts and emotions, and acknowledgement of others' feelings.

The above-mentioned risks associated with friendships appear to be quite manageable by training that sensitizes individuals to potential conflicts of interest (Bar-on 1992). These risks are minimized by developing a workplace policy regarding office romances (for example, "coworkers involved in romantic relations must work in different

offices"). People can be told to clarify their roles ("I am now speaking to you as a manager/friend"), and to be aware that events outside the realm of friendship may impact them (such as, negative feedback regarding performance). Other strategies might include training to help supervisors avoid the dangers of playing favorites, manipulating co-workers, fostering extreme dependency, creating emotional disruptions, and posing as false friends. Employees can be shown how they can place commitment to work goals above loyalty to peers without losing friendships. They can also be informed of ways to avoid the dangers associated with on-the-job friendships while encouraging the benefits. While we do not know the extent to which such practices occur, it seems feasible for organizations to manage the risks of friendship in ways that are similar to dealing with the challenge of sexual harassment, for example.

Finally, this study also examines broader conditions that affect organizations' ability to develop friendship-making strategies. For example, when organizations are occupied with addressing the problems of favoritism or emphasize traditional, impersonal relations, they may be less inclined to undertake efforts that promote workplace friendship. Workplace cultures of fear and self-interest may also prove problematic. Although friendship occurs in such settings, organizational efforts to promote friendships are deterred. We also examine whether orientations toward friendship making are associated with managers' perceptions of employee absenteeism, turnover, and employee stress. Finally, we consider whether orientations toward workplace friendship are associated with perceptions of employee productivity, especially as related to modern management efforts. Many of these efforts require heightened management trust in employee performance, as well as support among employees to overcome barriers to increased performance.

Methods

In the spring of 2000, a national survey was mailed to city managers and chief administrative officers (CAOs) in 544 U.S. cities with populations over 50,000. Following a pilot survey, three rounds of mailings were undertaken, which provided 222 responses for a response rate of 40.8 percent. Most questionnaires were completed either by the addressee or by the director of human resources (61.1 percent); almost all of the remainder were completed by their direct subordinates (with such titles as deputy or assistant city manager, chief of staff, employee relations administrator, etc). We refer to the respondents as "senior managers" because of their varying positions. Respondents were provided with our definition of friendship.[4] Pilot surveys and interviews suggest this definition is clear, unambiguous, specific, and helpful to respon-

dents as they addressed the survey items. Among respondents, 66.0 percent are male; 33.9 percent are younger than 45 years; 47.8 percent are between 45 and 54 years; and 18.3 percent are over 54 years. Table 1 compares the sample and population demographics. We complemented the survey with qualitative in-depth telephone interviews among those who indicated either very high or very low preferences for workplace friendship. These interviews of extreme cases, along with written responses to open-ended survey questions, provided further insight into attitudes concerning workplace friendship.

Table 1   Demographics: Sample and Population

Size	Sample (percent)	Population (percent)
Over 250,000	9.7	12.0
100,000–249,999	23.0	24.6
50,000–99,999	67.3	63.4
Region		
Northeast	10.6	18.2
South	25.3	23.5
Midwest	30.4	25.9
West	33.6	32.5
Form of government		
Council-manager	67.3	60.2
Mayor-council	31.3	37.9
Other	1.4	1.9

Note: Source of population statistics is the *Municipal Yearbook 1999* (Washington, DC: ICMA).

Overall, respondents are quite knowledgeable about employee relations in their jurisdictions. For example, 83.8 percent stated that problems of workplace relations are regularly brought to their attention, 85.8 percent are regularly involved in shaping policies that affect workplace relations, and 83.0 percent regularly discuss matters of workplace relations with other managers. The mean length of time that respondents had worked in local government is 17.5 years (the median is 18 years).

To explore the possibility of sample bias, we examined whether addressees (city managers and CAOs) differed from other respondents in their level of familiarity with workplace problems. However, there were no significant differences in this respect. We also examined other differences, discussed below, but concluded that the mix of respondents did not affect the results. The possibility of nonresponse bias was also examined, that is, the possibility that those who did not respond hold significantly different views from those who did respond. To this end, we conducted 50 phone interviews among a random sample of nonrespondents, and we asked them questions from the mail survey. Comparing responses, we found no evidence of nonresponse bias.

The following statistics are used in subsequent analysis. *Tau-c* is a measure of association between two ordinal

variables. A statistically significant value (as indicated by $p < .01$ or $p < .05$ in the text) indicates that two variables are associated with each other. Cronbach alpha is used to validate index variables; it measures the extent to which variables are correlated with each other. Values above 0.70 indicate adequate correlation among the variables that constitute an index variable. Regression analysis, shown in table 7, examines the impact of independent variables on a dependent variable. Significant regression coefficients (indicated by $p < .01$ or $p < .05$) imply that a variable is significantly associated with the dependent variable, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Findings

Friendship Orientations

Table 2 reports managerial attitudes toward friendships of different types. Overall, the findings show favorable views toward workplace friendship: On average, 76.4 percent approve or strongly approve of the various forms shown. Managers especially support friendships among co-workers and themselves. Very few senior managers disapprove of such relations, even when different genders are involved. Somewhat less support exists for friendships between managers and their subordinates (47.7 percent) and between employees and their support staff (65.3 percent); these "vertical" relationships are thought to be problematic by some respondents. While most managers support workplace friendship, no more than 20 percent "strongly approve" of any item, which is reflected in the low overall mean (3.79). These results are further indicated by responses to the open-ended question: "On balance, do you encourage, condone or discourage friendships among coworkers?" Among those who answered this question (73 percent), 90.1 percent indicated favorable views about workplace friendship. Among respondents who explicitly

distinguished among encouraging, condoning, and discouraging friendship, the ratio is 4.4: 2.7: 1.

Among respondents, 64.8 percent approve or strongly approve of friendships involving different genders, co-workers in the same department or workgroup, and at least one friendship that involves a "vertical" relationship mentioned in table 2. In this study, respondents who exhibited positive orientations toward a broad range of work friendships are defined as having a "high" orientation toward friendship. Any standard of high orientation is, of course, somewhat arbitrary.[5] Only 7.8 percent of respondents strongly approve of the above-mentioned items (suggesting a "very high" orientation toward workplace friendship), reflecting the fact that most respondents approve but do not strongly approve of the items in table 2. Also, 13.4 percent of respondents have a "low" orientation toward workplace friendship, defined as disapproving of friendship among employees of different genders, any form of vertical friendship, and at least one form of friendship among co-workers. Only two respondents disapproved of each form of friendship. Among the remaining 21.7 percent of respondents (defined as having "moderate" orientations toward workplace friendship), the areas of greatest disapproval are relationships between managers and their subordinates and between employees and their support staffs (61.7 percent and 40.4 percent, respectively, disapprove or strongly disapprove). In addition, 48.9 percent of respondents with moderate opinions about workplace friendship stated that they have no opinion of friendships involving employees of different genders.

On balance, then, managers have a *positive orientation* toward workplace friendship. These orientations are robust by respondents' and jurisdictional characteristics. Orientations also do not vary significantly by whether the respondent is the city manager/CAO or some other senior manager; nor do they vary significantly by gender or educational attainment of the respondent; nor are there significant differences among respondents of different regions or among those who work in jurisdictions of differing size or form of government. The only significant difference among respondents in different categories is that those over 45 years are more likely than younger respondents to *strongly* approve friendships among co-workers in different departments (22.1 percent versus 12.7 percent, $p < .05$) and among managers (24.3 percent versus 9.9 percent, $p < .05$).

One of the most frequently mentioned advantages of friendship reported in table 3 is that it helps employees to obtain mutual support, improves the workplace atmosphere, and improves communication. Many also see a benefit in furthering acceptance of racial differences. Many re-

Table 2 Attitudes toward Workplace Friendship

	Approve or strongly approve[1,2] (percent)	Mean
Co-workers in different departments developing friendships	88.5	4.05
Managers developing friendship with other managers	87.5	4.01
Co-workers in the same department developing friendships	85.7	3.98
Co-workers in the same workgroup developing friendships	85.2	3.97
Employees of different genders developing friendships	75.9	3.81
Employees developing friendships with support staff in other departments	75.5	3.80
Employees developing friendships with their support staff	65.3	3.56
Managers developing friendships with their subordinates	47.7	3.15
Mean =	**76.4**	**3.79**

[1]Responses are on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 = strongly approve; 4 = approve; 3 = don't know or can't say; 2 = disapprove; 1 = strongly disapprove

[2]The Cronbach measure of internal reliability of the index measure of friendship (composed of the above eight items) is 0.92, indicating high reliability. St. dev. = 0.61, n = 216.

spondents commented that friendships may "foster better working relationships," "improve team effectiveness and a sense of purpose," and "convey a sense of family, which is important to workplace productivity." About one in three respondents agree or strongly agree that "Workplace friendships improve supervisor-subordinate relationships." Among those who responded in this way, 70.8 percent noted the above-mentioned benefits, compared to only 11.0 percent of those who disapprove of such relations (tau-c = .51, $p < .01$). About one-quarter of respondents regard workplace friendship as a source of career advancement and otherwise helping employees to get ahead. Finally, some respondents also commented on benefits to human fulfillment: "A significant portion of one's life is spent at the office. There is no reason to keep enjoyable aspects out of it," and "I see no harm—we have too few friends in society as it is."

Table 3   Risks and Rewards of Workplace Friendship

	Agree or strongly agree[1] (percent)	Mean
A. Rewards		
Help employees obtain mutual support	84.2	3.92
Improve the workplace atmosphere	78.3	3.91
Improve communication	76.4	3.87
Make difficult jobs better	72.3	3.75
Help employees get their job done	70.4	3.68
Further acceptance of racial differences	60.2	3.53
Increase employee productivity	57.8	3.56
Improve supervisor–subordinate relationships	42.1	3.27
Help employees get ahead	30.1	3.11
Are a source of career advancement	25.0	2.94
Mean =	**59.7**	**3.55**
B. Risks		
Cause office gossip	52.8	3.32
Are a cause of office romances	25.7	2.94
Distract from work-related activities	17.6	2.53
Are used to excuse or condone inappropriate conduct	16.2	2.46
Undermine merit-based decision making (e.g., hiring)	15.8	2.47
Subordinate organizational loyalty to friends	14.0	2.58
Are a threat to the line of command	7.9	2.13
Are inappropriate in most organizations	6.5	2.13
Are a threat to the authority of managers	5.6	2.06
Mean =	**18.0**	**2.51**

[1]Responses are on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = don't know or can't say; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree
[2]The Cronbach measure of the index measure of rewards is 0.85 (st.dev. = 0.49), and of risks is 0.84 (st. dev. = 0.55).

The most frequently mentioned risk is added office gossip (52.8 percent), followed by increases in office romances (25.7 percent), distractions from work-related activities (17.6 percent), using friendship to excuse or condone inappropriate conduct (16.2 percent), and problems of subordinated loyalty (14.0 percent). Just over a third identified two or more of these problems. Comments by respondents who discourage friendship are especially con-

cerned about personal entanglements that become non-productive or intimate. For example, "I encourage friendship, but we must respect our professional relationship first. Friendships cannot get in the way of carrying out the sometimes difficult aspects of our jobs," and "friendships are fine and healthy—with exception of office romances." Relatively few managers believe that workplace friendship threatens the authority of managers (5.6 percent) or the line of command (7.9 percent). These negative outcomes could result from cliques forming among subordinates ("friends ganging up on their manager") or misplaced loyalties—such as caused by friendships between supervisors and subordinates—but managers say that they seldom do.[6] On balance, respondents noted positive outcomes by a margin of 4:1 over negative ones.

Our interviews among respondents with high and low orientations show a range of opinions about the matters under discussion here. One city manager does not want friendships within his organization because he thinks this will lead to romances, which he wants to discourage because they are "disruptive." Another city manager is also opposed to romances, but this does not prevent him from encouraging friendships because workplace friendships make workers more effective and "everyone has been told what the limits are." A third interviewee not only favors friendships but also thinks that romances are fine as long as they do not lead to sexual harassment; he points out that "there are many happily married couples who met in a work situation." A fourth city manager declined to express any opinion about workplace romance because he considers this to be a strictly private matter between the individuals involved, and therefore outside the scope of his concern.

As might be expected, respondents with positive orientations toward workplace friendship have low assessments of its risks. For example, 48.2 percent of managers with low orientations toward workplace friendship believe these relations distract from work-related activities, compared with only 9.3 percent of respondents with high or very high orientations (tau-c = $-.329, p < .01$). A negative relationship also exists between those who identified favorable consequences and those who identify unfavorable ones ($r = -.28, p < .01$).[7] Thus, those who view friendship as having positive implications are less likely to emphasize its negative impacts. Yet, achieving positive outcomes requires close attention to the downsides. For example, workplace friendship improves communication, but not without the risk of unwanted communication, too (such as gossip). Among those who agree or strongly agree that friendship improves commu-

nication, 52.8 percent also agree or strongly agree that it may increase gossip, 27.0 percent disagree or strongly disagree, and 20.2 percent have no opinion about whether it increases gossip. The possibility of avoiding the downside may depend on how well the situation is managed. Likewise, friendship helps employees to obtain mutual support (thereby making difficult jobs better), but not without the risk that friendship may also be used to condone inappropriate conduct. One implication, then, is that efforts to promote or condone friendship may be more successful when such efforts simultaneously and vigilantly discourage inappropriate forms of increased communication and collaboration. As one respondent noted: "Friendships will happen in any case. [We need to] stress limitations and responsibilities."

Workplace Strategies

As previously stated, employers cannot force people to become friends—but they can affect the climate in which friendship is encouraged or inhibited. Similarly, they can do much to discourage friendships or its potential downsides—but they cannot prevent these outcomes, either. Table 4 shows various actions that may affect the climate for workplace friendship, as discussed above.[8]

The results show that organizations commonly provide a broad range of strategies that favor friendship formation. For example, two-thirds of organizations provide opportunities in at least half of their departments for employees to socialize. It is also common for organizations to instruct their members to respect employee confidences with each other, to train employees to establish positive relations with each other, and to train supervisors in establishing positive relations with their employees. About one-third of respondents' organizations provide examples of appropriate friendship relations and help employees with similar interests to meet each other.

As might be expected, a positive relationship exists between the orientation of senior managers toward friendship and the range of strategies that their organizations undertake, as shown in table 4 (tau-c = .201, $p < .01$). For example, organizations of senior managers with very positive orientations toward workplace friendship undertake 9.1 of the 12 strategies identified in table 3, compared to only 5.5 strategies in organizations where the respondent has a low orientation toward friendship ($t = 3.52, p < .01$). Organizations in which respondents have a highly positive orientation are more likely to provide examples of appropriate friendship (69.3 percent versus 30.1 percent), instruct their managers to let employees know they care about their needs (92.1 percent versus 64.0 percent), and encourage employees to seek each other out for support

Table 4 Strategies

	More than half of units[1] (percent)
A. Promoting the climate for friendship, and its benefits:[2]	
Promoting a climate of openness and friendship among staff	84.4
Encouraging employees to act friendly towards each other	83.3
Training supervisors to establish positive relationships with their employees	75.2
Encouraging employees to seek each other out for support	71.2
Acknowledging and respecting employee confidences to each other	70.4
Helping employees deal with problems of interpersonal relations on the job	70.4
Instructing managers to let employees know how they care about their needs	70.1
Training employees to establish positive relations with each other	68.8
Providing opportunities for employees to socialize	66.9
Ensuring that work retreats include social activities	48.4
Providing examples of appropriate friendship relations among employees	34.6
Helping employees with similar interests to meet each other	27.8
B. Addressing possible risks/downsides of friendship:[2]	
Ensuring managers avoid favoritism in compensation and rewards	89.8
Training supervisors to avoid the dangers of playing favorites	81.3
Ensuring that friends of job candidates are not involved in selection processes	81.2
Ensuring that friends of employees are not involved in awards processes	72.0
Eliminating the appearance or reality of good old boy/girl networks	69.2
Making supervisors alert to the dangers of clique forming in the workplace	43.9
Reminding employees that work time must only be used for work	39.9
Training employees to deal with the dangers of on-the-job friendships	37.1
Informing co-workers that loyalty to organization comes above friendship	27.5
Informing employees of the dangers of friendships beyond the work sphere	23.8
Admonishing employees on the dangers of workplace friendships	12.0

[1] 3 = efforts undertaken in all or most departments; 2 = efforts undertaken in about half of the departments; 1 = efforts undertaken in a few departments; 0 = efforts are not undertaken in my jurisdiction; DK/CS = don't know or can't say. Results show respondents who indicated either a 2 or 3 (DK/CS excluded from analysis).

[2] The Cronbach measure of the index measure of promotion is 0.91 (mean = 1.90; st. dev. = 0.49), and of addressing risks 0.81 (mean = 1.52; st. dev. = 0.66).

(88.6 percent versus 54.6 percent). All of these differences are significant at the 1 percent level. Although orientations toward friendship are not associated with providing training to supervisors and employees with regard to establishing positive relations, interviewees with a positive orientation toward workplace friendship frequently commented that they use team building as a vehicle for fostering closer workplace relations. Going beyond this, one city manager, who also has a positive view of workplace friendship, schedules picnics during working hours in which senior managers do the cooking for employees, and he has dinner with his managers and staff before each council meeting.

Table 4 also shows strategies that address possible risks of friendship. Ensuring that managers avoid favoritism in compensation (89.8 percent), that friends of job candidates are not involved in selection (81.2 percent) or awards processes (72.0 percent) are well-established dicta of public administration, and these strategies find widespread use. But other strategies are also common, although not as pervasive. Alerting supervisors to the dangers of cliques forming in the workplace is used in about half of organizations. About one-third of organizations train employees in deal-

ing with the dangers of on-the-job friendships and inform employees that loyalty to the organization must be placed above friendship. Interestingly, orientations in favor of workplace friendship are *not* associated with efforts to avoid the risks associated with friendship. The only significant difference in this respect is that managers with *low* orientations toward friendship are more likely to remind employees that work time must only be used for work (48.0 percent versus 18.8 percent, tau-c = $-.104$, $p <. 05$).

One explanation is that these "risk-reduction" efforts are already common in organizations, perhaps especially those that emphasize traditional, bureaucratic values and impersonal relations. Such efforts need not be amplified in organizations that now strive to have modern workplace climates. Risk-reduction efforts are significantly associated with respondents who describe departments in their organization as having a strong hierarchical structure ($t = 2.74$, $p <.01$) and policies emphasizing impersonal relations ($t = 3.10$, $p < .01$). This interpretation is further strengthened by the fact that 29.7 percent of respondents indicated their jurisdictions have policies regarding workplace friendship. But when asked during interviews about these policies, most replied with examples of avoiding conflict of interests, sexual harassment, and examples drawn from the risk-reduction strategies of table 4. Finally, a strong, positive relationship exists between the index measures of positive and risk-reduction efforts (tau-c = $.323$, $p < .01$): Efforts that encourage workplace friendships are accompanied by other efforts that reduce the risk of unwanted consequences.

What distinguishes organizations in which senior managers have a positive orientation toward workplace friendship is the presence of a broad range of efforts to promote it, including efforts to reduce unwanted risks. Efforts to promote workplace friendships are not associated with city size within the range studied here, or with region or form of government, nor are they associated with the age, gender, or education of respondents. Apart from the orientation of managers themselves toward workplace friendship (tau-c = $.201$, $p < .01$), other factors associated with the use of these efforts are related to certain features of organizational culture, such as "encouraging employees to take risks" (tau-c = $.311$, $p < .01$) and "employees just act busy, rather than doing meaningful work" (tau-c = $-.216$, $p < .01$), as well as providing diversity training (tau-c = $.210$, $p < .01$), and ethics training (tau-c = $.315$, $p < .01$).

Do Workplace Friendship Efforts and Orientations Matter?

Table 5 shows some measures of the perceived incidence of friendship and employee productivity. Workplace friendships appear to be quite common, even between supervisors and their employees (59.2 percent) and between em-

ployees and their support staff (57.4 percent), despite concerns about this. These findings are quite consistent with those of table 2. The mean number of different types of friendships is 3.8. Further analysis reveals that respondents who indicated that friendships between supervisors and employees are common in their organization often indicated a broad range of other friendships (each occurs 65 percent to 90 percent). Among respondents, 43.7 percent stated that five or six forms of friendships are commonly present, suggesting a high level of friendship in about half of organizations. However, about one-quarter of organizations (24.3 percent) reported two or fewer forms of friendships, indicating very low levels of friendship: Among these organizations, vertical friendships are most uncommon (4.0 percent–8.0 percent). Most frequently, friendships occur among workers in different departments (44.0 percent), rather than within workgroups (23.3 percent) or among managers (28.0 percent).

One expects that, in many cases, the leadership orientation of senior managers is reflected in organizational practices, and this is indeed the case. Table 5 shows that these self-reported perceptions of workplace friendship are significantly associated with senior managers' orientations toward workplace friendship (tau-c = $.370$, $p < .01$), as are a broad range of efforts to promote it (tau-c = $.231$, $p < .01$). Further analysis of the items in table 5 finds that providing relevant examples of appropriate friendship relations with other employees is highly associated with furthering a broad range of friendship types in organizations (tau-c = $.251$, $p < .01$).[9] This strategy is also associated with perceived friendships between supervisors and employees and among employees and their support staff (respectively, tau-c = $.206$ and $.146$, both $p < .01$). Alerting supervisors to the danger of cliques forming in the workplace is also positively associated with the perceived breadth of friendship in organizations (tau-c = $.180$, $p < .01$) and is associated with perceived friendships between supervisors and employees (tau-c = $.144$, $p <. 01$) and between employees and their support staff (tau-c = $.139$, $p <. 01$) However, most of the other risk-reduction strategies are not associated with workplace friendship (either positively or negatively).

Table 5 also shows perceptions of employee productivity. The item "commitment to serving customers and clients" is surveyed because it is a hallmark of Total Quality Management. "Commitment to being accountable" and "using feedback" reflect key goals of performance measurement, and the "willingness to take new risks" is associated with empowerment. Table 5 shows that many senior managers have a positive view of employee productivity: More than three-quarters agree or strongly agree that employees are committed to serving customers and clients, are driven by a sense of accomplishment, and

Table 5 Consequences of Workplace Friendship

	Agree or strongly agree[1] (percent)	Association with—Friendship strategies[2]	Friendship orientation	Friendship incidence	Friendship incidence (percent) Low	High[4]
A. Perception of incidence of friendship:[3]						
"In our jurisdiction it is quite common to find ..."						
That many employees have friends in other departments	80.3	.018	.114**	—	—	—
Friendships among employees in most work groups	75.7	.047	.231**	—	—	—
Most managers having friendships with other managers	67.4	.123*	.275**	—	—	—
That many supervisors have friendships with their employees	59.2	.162**	.238**	—	—	—
Friendships among employees and their immediate support staff	57.4	.214**	.289**	—	—	—
Friendships among employees and support staff in other departments	49.3	.277**	.361**	—	—	—
Mean =	64.4	.231**	.370**	—	—	—
B. Perception of employee productivity:						
"In our jurisdiction, employees and managers ..."						
Are committed to serving customers and clients	94.4	.232**	.091	.135**	89.8	98.5
Are driven by a sense of accomplishment	78.9	.268**	.152**	.186**	71.4	89.3
Are highly motivated to achieve their goals	70.4	.295**	.122*	.188**	64.6	84.6
Are committed to being accountable	66.8	.325**	.186**	.218**	50.0	81.3
Are committed to seeking and using feedback	60.6	.297**	.148**	.224**	44.0	78.1
Are willing to take new risks	56.3	.320**	.158**	.216**	48.0	71.9
Mean =	71.2	.372**	.178**	.247**	61.3	84.0

[1]Responses are on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = don't know or can't say; 2 = disagree; 1= strongly disagree
[2]Tau-c measures shown. Association with positive strategies shown (table 3). ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.
[3]The Cronbach measure of the index measure of incidence of friendship is 0.78 (mean = 3.60; st. dev. = 0.48), and of productivity 0.84 (mean = 3.67; st. dev. = 0.62).
[4]Friendship incidence high/low defined as the top/bottom 20 percent of aggregate score of friendship incidence. Percentages show those that agree or strongly agree with statement.

are highly motivated. About half also agree or strongly agree that employees are willing to take risks. It should be noted, however, that agreement with these statements is not strong: For example, 68.0 percent agree but only 10.9 percent strongly agree that employees are driven by a sense of accomplishment. Only 5.1 percent strongly agree that employees are willing to take new risks, while 22.3 percent disagree and 1.4 percent strongly disagree with this statement. Perceptions of employee productivity do not vary by city size or form of government.

These perceived productivity orientations of employees are found to be associated with workplace friendship. As previously stated, friendship can help employees to get their jobs done, provide a climate of openness and support, and increase cooperation and acceptance of change. Managers' perceptions of employee productivity are significantly higher in organizations that also have a high level of perceived workplace friendship (84.0 percent versus 61.3 percent in organizations with low levels of friendship): The relationship between perceptions of friendship and perceptions of employee productivity is significant and positive (tau-c = .247, $p < .01$). Perceptions of high levels of workplace friendship increase the perceived willingness of employees to take risks by almost 50 percent (from 48.0 percent to 71.9 percent), the perceived willingness to be accountable increases 62 percent (from 50 percent to 81.3 percent), and perceptions of high employee motivation in-

crease 31.0 percent (from 64.6 percent to 84.6 percent). Many interviewees provided supporting comments, such as "I believe (friendships) to be a sign of a good work environment" and "employees will work better if friendly relations prevail among them." Indeed, a strong association exists between these measures of productivity and employee discussions of ways to help each other out (tau-c = .18, $p < .01$). Not surprisingly, a productive employee orientation is also associated with efforts to promote workplace friendship, as is the orientation of respondents toward workplace friendship (tau-c = .372 and .178, respectively, both $p < .01$).

Table 6 shows conditions that might be associated with efforts to promote workplace friendship. The use of work teams is associated with such efforts (tau-c = .263, $p < .01$), and interviews confirmed that jurisdictions use team building as an important opportunity for fostering closer relations among all levels of staff and managers. These efforts are also strongly associated with ethics training (tau-c = .315, $p < .01$). The survey included questions about managers' perceptions of employee stress and absenteeism. Organizations that attempt to foster a climate of openness and friendship in a majority of units reported significantly less employee stress (tau-c = $-.104, p < .01$) and lower employee absenteeism (tau-c = $-.281, p < .01$). Perceived stress, in turn, is associated with perceived absenteeism (tau-c = .235, $p < .01$), and both negatively

Table 6 Conditions

	Agree or strongly agree[1] (percent)	Association with friendship strategies[2]
"In our jurisdiction, ..."		
We are under pressure to reduce costs[3]	78.2	-.078
We emphasize the use of teams	77.5	.263**
Office layouts include spaces for staff to mingle	72.4	.075
Most departments have a strongly hierarchical structure	62.4	-.117*
Employees receive ethics training	52.6	.315**
Employees are encouraged to take risks	47.6	.311**
Our jurisdiction uses telecommuting[3]	39.9	.318**
Employees experience high levels of stress	34.9	-.104*
We use many temporary workers	31.6	.080
Employees are generally careful what they say around here	31.4	-.084
We need to reconcile different ethnic or racial backgrounds of employees	30.7	-.083
Employees have so much job security that they don't have to earn their rewards	30.3	-.239**
Our policies emphasize impersonal workplace relations	29.5	.060
A problem is dealing with managers who play favorites	19.0	-.161**
A generation gap exists among employees	18.6	-.009
Office layouts often cause employees to work in isolation	14.2	.033
There is a lack of professional norms among staff	17.5	-.254**
There is considerable staff turnover	9.7	.012
Absenteeism is high	9.7	-.281**

[1]Responses are on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = don't know or can't say; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree. See also note 3.
[2]Tau-c measures shown. Association with positive strategies shown (table 3). ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.
[3]Response: 1 = yes; 0 = no (these items, only).

impact employee productivity (tau-c = $-.105$, $p < .05$, and tau-c = $-.281$, $p < .01$, respectively). The results further show that efforts to promote workplace friendship are negatively associated with a lack of professional norms and with playing favorites. This is further evidence that workplace friendship has positive organizational impacts.

Finally, table 7 shows regression models that explain the friendship orientations of respondents and their assessment of employee productivity. The best predictors of managers' orientation toward workplace friendship are their perception of its risks and rewards (both $p < .01$). Thus, factors that affect these perceptions matter. The other model, in which perceived levels of productivity is a dependent variable, shows that efforts to promote workplace friendship are also associated with employee productivity, even when controlled for perceptions of risk taking, concerns about social skills, and job security, which also affect productivity. The perceived incidence of workplace friendship is also significantly associated with perceptions of employee productivity.

Conclusion and Discussion

As organizations continue to be transformed through workforce diversity and the absorption of workers with different values (Generation X, for instance), a need exists to reflect on and develop new ways for people to relate to each other. This study finds that a majority of senior managers in local government have a positive orientation toward workplace friendships, even vertical relations involving employees and their support staff. Overwhelmingly, they feel that workplace friendships improve communication and help employees get their jobs done. While there is some concern that workplace friendships lead to office gossip and romances, these outcomes are also perceived as manageable (for example, through workplace training and policy development). This study finds that positive orientations toward workplace friendship are reflected in organizational efforts to foster closer workplace relations. These, in turn, are associated with perceptions of increased employee productivity as well as assessments of lower stress and employee absenteeism.

American managers would probably not establish rules like those of a pre–World War II Austrian bank, which told its employees that "[t]he management looks unfavorably upon personal social relations of its employees outside the Bank" (Dreyfuss 1938). While traditional, bureaucratic emphases on impersonal relationships have given way to those of greater understanding and support—consistent with expectations of heightened productivity and workforce diversity—our present definitions of what constitutes "appropriate" and "preferred" workplace relations are ill-developed. The concept of friendship is a not a central concern in the literatures of public administration or even sociology. For example, there is no entry under "friendship" in the *International Encyclopedia of Public Policy and Administration* (Shafritz 1998), or in the *Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Borgatta and Borgatta 1992). Given the evidence suggesting that these relations affect productivity, it now seems imperative that the concept of "workplace friendship" be developed further.

Emphasis on workplace friendship can easily upset the separation that traditional bureaucracies have created between the "private aspects" and "work aspects" of an employee's life. The question "CAN we be friends?" can easily become "MUST we be friends?" For example, when workers are expected to be friendly to one another, potential employees may be discriminated against in the hiring process if they are well-qualified but are unlikely to "fit in" with the prevailing workplace cliques. This outcome, one suspects, is quite common today. However, while increased openness, trust, and mutual commitment to shared goals is beneficial, friendship is one of many ways to promote these positive outcomes. Friendship, or even acting

Table 7 Regression		
Dependent variable	Friendship orientation	Productivity
Intercept	3.268** (0.420)	2.944** (0.366)
Employees are encouraged to take risk	0.007 (0.037)	0.179** (0.038)
Employees have much job security	−0.005 (0.036)	−0.150** (0.036)
Young workers lack social skills	−0.008 (0.009)	−0.106* (0.041)
Perception of positive benefits	0.457** (0.074)	—
Perception of risks	−0.452** (0.067)	—
Promoting friendship	—	0.179** (0.055)
Reducing risks of friendship	—	−0.037 (0.053)
Incidence of friendship	—	0.144* (0.072)
City size	0.010 (0.043)	−0.008 (0.040)
Form of government	−0.052 (0.080)	−0.057 (0.080)
Northeast	0.033 (0.123)	−0.232 (0.125)
South	0.101 (0.091)	0.212* (0.089)
West	0.022 (0.087)	0.050 (0.083)
Adjusted R^2	.424	.451
N	190	195

** = $p < .01$
* = $p < .05$

in friendly ways, is no panacea. Rather, it is obvious that managers need a broader range of approaches to promote openness, trust, and mutual commitment in the workplace. In short, openness, but not friendship, can be required.

When a wall is breached, there may be movement across in both directions. What was once regarded as a purely private matter now becomes imported into the workplace, giving employers potentially greater control over these aspects. Things that historically have been centered outside the workplace now become work relevant, such as interest in foreign travel, where one's children go to school, and the types of movies that one watches. This broadens the scope of existing employer controls, as matters of personal grooming and off-duty drug use are already subject to employer policies. While judicial standards of "job relatedness" make it difficult for employers to adopt many formal policies on these matters, informal practices may exist. One suspects that the cost of conformity to such practices may be high. For example, some talented employees will be lost, and the intrusion into private spheres is likely to be heavily resented by some and cause reduced openness, trust, and commitment. There is nothing wrong with employees having shared personal likes, but they should not be required to have them.

It is said that Eskimos have many different words for snow because it plays such a significant role in their life. We barely have enough words to distinguish different forms of "workplace friendship." Surely the distinction from "romance" helps, as does the distinction of "casual," "close," and "best" friends (Yager 1999). Casual friendships require less maintenance and involve fewer distractions than close or best friends, affording the advantages of providing a sounding board, promoting teamwork, and helping to accomplish work-related tasks. It is possible for managers to encourage casual friendships that promote productivity, while still avoiding the downside that might be associated with more intimate "close" or "best" friend relationships. But it would be useful to have different names for the types of friends who regularly assist us with our work, friends to whom we turn in times of need, and those who occasionally make inessential contributions to us. It is also helpful to distinguish between those who help with work itself and those who provide us with much-needed relief and entertainment. By naming the phenomenon, managing it (both promotion and discouragement) becomes possible. It might be instructive to reflect on the nature or purpose of friendships: a lunch or movie friend, a bail-me-out friend, a blowing-off-steam friend, a work partner, a soul mate friend, a computer techie friend, a sounding board friend, a support friend, or an occasional friend. Managers, then, can encourage employees to develop a broader range of workplace relations, thereby helping themselves and improving productivity.

One can espouse support for "workplace humanism" and "organizational effectiveness," but in the end, it is what is done that matters. This study suggests that many managers encourage employees to seek each other out for support and that a few managers help employees with similar interests to meet each other. In an era of diversity and with children who are largely raised by television, the significance of teaching people how to be friends must not be overlooked. People may lack social skills and differ culturally with regard to friendship norms and practices. Yet, the above discussion suggests that further improvement may occur by defining specific forms of workplace relations. Rather than encouraging a general climate of openness, further progress may depend on identifying specific types of friendship to be encouraged or discouraged as appropriate or inappropriate in the workplace. The issue is not to "social engineer" friendship, but rather to encourage specific types of friendships that might spontaneously develop among employees. Some managers remain who adhere to strict traditional norms of impersonal relations and who have poor communication skills. These managers and supervisors can benefit from training in the importance and art of friendship making.

Notes

1. Many authors distinguish between casual friendships (acquaintances) and deeper friendships. Reisman (1984) calls these, respectively, "associative friends" (convenient due to proximity) and "reciprocal friends."

2. The importance of friendship was well-established in the ancient world. Epicurus observed that "of all the things that wisdom provides to help live one's life in happiness, the greatest by far is the possession of friendship" (quoted in De Botton 2000). Aristotle believed that friendship requires equality, thus excluding the possibility of friendship between rulers and the ruled. Cicero, however, believed that people who are different or unequal in some ways can still be friends by focusing on the total aspect of their friendship or the areas in which their friendship plays out (Dobel 2001). Thus, friendship between superiors and their employees is possible. However, friendship can be severely tested by events outside the realm in which friendship occurs. For example, work friendship between two co-workers may be strained by one receiving a promotion or recognition not granted to the other.

3. An anonymous reviewer suggested that we should more clearly condemn sexual harassment as illegal, inappropriate in the workplace, and dysfunctional and counter-productive to legitimate friendship. While we agree that sexual harassment is all of this, the issue is whether workplace friendship causes it. The cited studies find that workplace friendship seldom does, and we suspect this outcome may occur because many friends develop patterns of increased communication that prevent allegations from occurring.

4. Specifically, respondents were provided with the following definition: "Friendship involves more than people merely acting in friendly ways or being acquaintances of each other. Rather, friendship involves frequent interactions, mutual liking of another person, a commitment to maintaining the relationship, and trust. Friendships vary in intensity, can occur outside the workplace, and involve any member of the organization. Friendship can exist regardless of any instrumental interest or co-responsibility for work projects that might simultaneously occur." Pilot respondents found this definition clear and clearly different from romance.

5. If, alternatively, orientations toward workplace friendship are defined based on mean responses to the items in table 1, then 14.4 percent have a low orientation (defined as, on average, disapproving of the items in table 1), 37.5 percent have a moderate orientation (neither approving nor disapproving on average), 43.0 percent have a high orientation (approving but not strongly approving) and 5.1 percent have a very high orientation.

6. A principled position against workplace friendship was mentioned as well: "I discourage friendships. Meaningful relationships should be developed away from the workplace to allow for balance in one's life. If the workplace becomes the primary social network, a person is too narrowly focused." Of course, a counterargument is that making workplace friends does not imply a lack of balance in life or making friends in nonwork settings.

7. This is the correlation between two index measures. One index measure is the number of benefits with which respondents agree or strongly agree; the other is the number of risks with which they agree or strongly agree. These measures are also strongly associated with the overall orientation toward friendship (table 1): .61 and $-.51$, respectively (both $p < .01$).

8. These strategies are assumed to be representative, but not exhaustive of all such strategies that might be used.

9. As is also providing a climate of openness and friendship among staff (tau-c = .248, $p < .01$).

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