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The Ties That Bind: Friendship Development in an Information Technology Work Environment

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THE TIES THAT BIND: FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN AN
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WORK ENVIRONMENT

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THE TIES THAT BIND: FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WORK ENVIRONMENT

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Examination of workplace friendship development is currently an important emerging research area. This study investigated the factors and communication changes that impacted workplace friendship development in an information technology organization. Additionally, the level to which relationship partners agreed about the factors and communication changes their relationship had experienced was also examined. Findings suggested proximity, shared tasks, perceived similarity, and increased openness were important in early friendship development. Further sharing of personal information, such as life experiences and spending time together outside of work, brought friends even closer. Increased closeness over time lead relationship partners to be considered almost best friends. The reported level of agreement regarding the communication changes that impacted relationships was not as high as the levels of agreement for the factors that impacted relationships.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Someone once said, "a friend is a gift you give yourself," and it is true. I am thankful for the friendships I have and wonder sometimes what I would do without my good friends. This is also true regarding the friendships I have developed in the workplace. In today's hustle and bustle world, people are working more and more hours and the lines between one's work life and one's personal life are blurred.

In my experience, workplace friendships not only make work fun, but also help a person to deal with the day to day pressures and stresses of their job. So when I began researching the area of workplace friendships, I was surprised to learn this was a newly emerging research field. A great deal of research has been conducted regarding the importance of friendships in our lives; however, only a limited number of studies focused on the importance and impact of workplace friendships. Of the studies available, even fewer focus on friendship formation in a technical organization. My goal with this study is to add to this emerging research field by illustrating the impact workplace friendships have in a technical work environment.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Friendships can bring us great joy and satisfaction in our lives. According to Suttles (1970), "What gives friendship its most desired features; however, is its ability to assure people of their mutual reality, dependability, or sincerity" (p.132). True friends like us for who we are, not what we have. Adult friendships compete with many outside factors such as work and family; however, "…crucial events in one's adult life usually involve one's 'true' friends" (Rawlins, 1992, p.204).

Reohr (1991) suggests friendships are made up of three parts. The two people in the relationship make up two of the parts while the relationship the two people have makes up the third part. The third part of the friendship, the relationship, cannot exist if one of the people in the relationship exits. Therefore, the relationship can exist only if both parties participate. Furthermore, what makes friendships unique is only the two friends in the relationship can determine what the expectations of that relationship are (Reohr, 1991). People have different friends and chances are the expectations of each friendship are different, causing each relationship to be unique. While friendships serve a social need, they also provide

emotional and practical support in our day to day lives

(Allan, 1991). Friends can be there for us in a variety of

situations; they can be there for us when we are sad and

they can pick us up from work when our car is in the shop.

While these are two very different scenarios, these

examples demonstrate some of the many roles we play in a

friendship.

Components of Friendship

There are many different reasons and ideas

surrounding why we develop friendships. However, several

have emerged as common in reviewing the literature:

friendships are voluntary and they are largely based on

proximity, similarity, and self-disclosure (Pogrebin, 1987;

Rawlins, 1992; Kurth, 1970; Reohr, 1991; Monge & Kirste,

1980; Nahemow & Lawton, 1975; Wright, 1978).

Friendship as Voluntary

Friendship is viewed as a voluntary action between two

people (Kurth, 1970; Wright, 1978; Reohr, 1991).

Therefore, we choose who we want to be friends with.

According to Reohr (1991), "Friendship must be a matter of

desire; coercion can not create real friendship" (p.32).

Friendships are there because the two people involved in

the relationship desire to keep it going. Friends make an

effort to see each other despite what might be going on in their lives (Wright, 1978). However, we do not have to be friends with everyone we come in contact with. It is important to note a voluntary action is necessary for what is known as friendly relations and friendship. According to Kurth (1970), "In friendly relations, however, such interaction is more limited than it is in friendship" (p. 139). Kurth (1970) points out that if one only interacts with another during their formal role relationship (i.e. work), that person is more than likely just a friendly relation. As with friendships, we do choose who we have as friendly relations. Friendships on the other hand, involve interacting with someone outside our formal role positions (Kurth, 1970). The role of friendship is, "more unambiguously voluntary" and would continue even if the formal role relationship (i.e. coworker) were not there any longer (Kurth, 1970, p.139). Therefore, one of the key components of friendship is the voluntary nature on the part of the participants.

Proximity

Proximity is another key component in the development of friendships (Nahemow & Lawton, 1975; Monge & Kirstie, 1980; Pogrebin, 1987; Reohr, 1991). While it is clearly

not the only indicator of whether or not a friendship will evolve, proximity does play a role (Reohr, 1991). Regarding friendship development, Pogrebin (1987) states, "at some point there has to have been physical proximity for the seeds of intimacy to germinate" (p. 56). In a qualitative similarity and proximity study conducted by Nahemow & Lawton (1975), tenants in a public housing project were interviewed regarding the friends they had in the project. Proximity did demonstrate its importance in friendship formation as eighty-eight percent of friends lived in the same building and almost half lived on the same floor.

Similar findings have occurred in college dormitory situations. One study found college freshman that lived in a dorm developed more friendships than those who did not (Ross, 1979, cited in Pogrebin, 1987).

A 1980 study conducted by Monge & Kirste examined proximity in human organizations. The researchers posed proximity related questions to the participants at a naval training center and found individuals who were in closer proximity communicated with each other more than those who were not. The researchers also found respondents liked communicating with those in closer proximity more than

those who were not (Monge & Kirstie, 1980). This finding makes sense, as we seem to get along better with someone once we have put a name to a face. If we only speak on the phone with someone, we may not develop the affect for that individual that we may build for someone we speak with in person regularly. Thus, support exists for proximity as a condition needed in initial friendship formation.

Similarity

Another key component in friendship formation is similarity (Kurth, 1970; Nahemow & Lawton, 1975; Pogrebin, 1987; Rawlins, 1992). What is considered similarity can vary across the literature; however, it primarily deals with age, sex, status, and values. The concept of homophily involves the degree to which we are similar (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). Therefore, homophily deals with seeking out individuals who are similar to ourselves in areas such as age, status, and ethnicity (Pogrebin, 1987). In a previously mentioned study conducted by Nahemow & Lawton (1975) regarding similarity and proximity, residents of a public housing project were interviewed regarding their friends in the project. Findings reflected sixty percent of the friends were in the same age category and seventy-two percent of the friends were the same race.

Seeking out a person who has similar values leads one to believe that that person will agree with his/her view, causing the individual to feel more certain in the relationship (Pogrebin, 1987). Age is a branch of similarity that plays a role in friendship development as well. As children we play with other children primarily our own age. Once we finish school, we are often still limited to friends in our own age range (Kurth, 1970). The sex of our friends also plays a role in friendship formation. Friendships develop between same sex individuals because outside of dating, there remains a taboo of sorts regarding cross-sex friendships (Kurth, 1970). However, more cross-sex friendships appear to have developed as time has passed. In fact, some researchers deem cross-sex friendships as beneficial (Johnson, 1984). Overall, single adults are more likely to have cross-sex friendships. Once a person is married, he/she tends to have less cross-sex friendships (Rawlins, 1991). While cross-sex friendships appear to be more acceptable today, they can still carry a negative stigma, especially when one or both parties are married.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is an aspect of friendship which can bring individuals closer (Miell & Duck, 1986; Pogrebin, 1987; Leatham & Duck, 1990;). In determining whether or not to self disclose to someone, we are often torn between stating what we feel and being too forthright (Rawlins, 1983). This thought process could be our way of protecting ourselves from possible rejection. Also, different friendships require differing levels of self-disclosure (Pogrebin, 1986). Clearly, some friendships are closer than others throughout our lives. According to Leatham & Duck (1990):

> The bones of our personal relationships namely, talk and (shared) memories – give form and meaning to instances of support, while the unique rules and rituals enacted within our personal relationships helps us to decide how to provide or request support and how to interpret and react to it. (p. 3)

Therefore, our daily interactions and support impact how we deal with other larger issues that could come up in a friendship involving self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure is seen as a mechanism to impact relationships and entails far more than just the idea of reciprocity (Meille & Duck, 1986). The idea of reciprocity is seen throughout friendship literature; however, it's definition varies depending on the discipline and the author (Reohr, 1991). At a very high level, reciprocity involves "give and take" yet it is far more complex than that (Reohr, 1991, p.49). For that purpose, we will not be further expanding on reciprocity as it relates to self-disclosure in this review. Self-disclosure, on the other hand, can be used to get to know others better. However, one needs to gauge his/her self-disclosures so they do not make the other person uncomfortable (Johnson, 1978).

Based on the research, friendships are viewed as voluntary and are impacted by components such as proximity, similarity, and self-disclosure. Friendships we develop in the workplace are impacted by the very same components, just under the umbrella of the workplace.

Workplace Friendships

With individuals spending more and more time at their workplace, the importance of the relationships we build there has increased. Just as friendships outside of the workplace are based on a voluntary nature and entail

proximity, similarity, and self-disclosure, so do friendships built within the workplace. Individuals can choose whether or not to make friends with their coworkers; however, the nature of the workplace warrants the development of relationships since employees are often together during the work day (Fine, 1986).

Peer relationship development is seen as valuable in the workplace for both emotional and career support on a day-to-day basis (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Roy (1960) describes the use of humor and lightheartedness among coworkers as a need for "psychological survival" (p.158). Our friends help us to cope with issues occurring in the workplace and sometimes in our personal lives. However, they also serve as a source of fun and laughter. Lincoln & Miller (1979) state, "Friendship networks in organizations are not merely sets of linked friends. They are systems for making decisions, mobilizing resources, concealing or transmitting information, and performing other functions closely allied with work behavior and interaction" (p.196).

While the literature regarding workplace friendships is still emerging, this review will attempt to demonstrate the importance workplace friendships have on people and

organizations. Studies focusing specifically on workplace friendships are reviewed in the section below.

In a study conducted by Bell, Roloff, Van Camp, & Karol (1990), it was hypothesized that individuals who were successful in their job would be more likely to be lonely and have fewer friends than those who were less successful. It was also hypothesized that self-employed individuals would be lonely and have fewer friends. Telephone surveys were conducted in a variety of areas within Chicago to reach a range of employment levels. The interviewers requested participation in the study regarding employment if the respondent whom they were speaking to was employed. Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants. Of the six hundred forty-eight calls placed to residences, four hundred sixteen resulted in a contact with an employed individual who completed the interview. During the survey, demographic information was gathered, as well as questions about the respondent's job, job duties, hours worked, organizational commitment, number of friends, how often the respondent saw his/her friends and family, and whether the respondent was self-employed or employed by an organization. Respondents were also asked to place

themselves on the ladder of their organization - i.e. the top, middle, or bottom of the ladder.

Findings indicated women worked fewer hours, had less job satisfaction, and had less commitment to their organization than men did. Men were more likely than women to hold a high position in an organization and claimed to have more friends through work than women. The study did not support the hypothesized idea that the higher you are in a corporation, the lonelier you are. In fact, the study supported the finding that those at the top of an organization are less lonely than those at lower levels in the organization. Additionally, no support was found to indicate self-employed people were lonelier than those employed by organizations. The researchers suggested these findings could have been a result of higher-level employee resources:

> People at or near the top have greater access to resources that should make them attractive relational partners. They are better educated, have higher family incomes, and have higher occupational prestige. Hence, it is not surprising that despite longer hours at work, they are just as likely to have attracted a

spouse and have as many friends as those at lower

organizational ranks. (Bell, et. al, 1990, p.19)

The researchers went on to suggest the idea of the lonely

executive was perpetuated due to media misrepresentation

and a false idea of authority figures in general (Bell, et.

al, 1990).

Kram & Isabella's 1985 study, which looked at the role

peer relationships had on career development, was

frequently referenced in the workplace friendship

literature. They believed that peer relationships had as

much or more of an impact on individual careers than

mentoring relationships. The researchers requested further

study to focus on other relationships in the workplace

outside of mentoring. Kram & Isabella's (1985) study took

place in a large manufacturing company and possible study

participants were identified by four criteria. The first

criterion was age. Possible study participants were

grouped into three age categories of 25-35, 36-45, and 46-

65, which split the possible participants up into early,

middle, and late stages of their career. The second

criterion required was an equal balance of gender in the

study. The third and fourth criteria were tenure in the

organization, and willingness to participate. The human resources staff of the manufacturing company put together an initial list of potential participants and the researchers randomly selected five people from each category. The selected possible participants were sent a letter explaining the study and were asked for their participation. Potential participants were also called to determine if they had any questions regarding the study. The study ended up with a total of fifteen participants spread among the three categories.

The fifteen participants were asked to name two supportive relationships they had at work. Some of the participants named two relationships, some named one relationship and one participant indicated no significant relationship in the workplace.

Each participant was interviewed twice in order to understand his or her career history as well as the significant relationship(s) that person had with his or her coworker(s). The significant coworker(s) were also interviewed, with the participant's permission. Interview data was categorized, and themes were generated based on the categories.

Results supported peer relationships as an alternative to mentoring relationships in career development and support. Three types of friendships emerged from the friendship pairs studied: information peers, collegial peers, and special peers. Information peers were primarily involved in an exchange of information regarding the organization, with little or no other interaction. Collegial peers also engaged in information sharing, but this peer level went one step further to include actual friendship. Collegial peers provided career and personal support and guidance. Special peer relationships were not as common as the previously mentioned categories because special peer relationships took a longer time to develop and involved a deeper sense of intimacy and support than collegial peers.

In the early career phase, career development was the primary participant concern. As an individual moved forward in his or her career, thoughts regarding advancement in the organization came into play. The middle-career group was interested in "re-evaluation and rethinking" past issues and events to go forward in a different manner (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p.127). The late-

career group looked toward retirement and may have felt more exposed in their work position.

Overall, the study suggested peer relationships offered substantial benefits in career development from beginning to end. They were based on equality, involved two-way communication, and often lasted longer than mentoring relationships. This early research paved the way for further studies on peer relationships in the workplace (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Bridge & Baxter (1992) went on to study workplace friendships further by looking at the blended relationships of coworkers who were friends and the possible tensions the "friend" and "work-role" played. It was suggested that work-group cohesiveness might provide less "dual-role" tension for a blended friendship. In further examining workplace friendships, a series of research questions and hypotheses were posed to participants surrounding work-group cohesiveness, dual-role tensions, and relational closeness.

Participants for the study were gathered in three ways. The first method involved randomly selecting the names of 500 non-academic employees at a university who had been involved in a human relations seminar during a

specific time period. One hundred twenty-six surveys came from that group, which made up the bulk of the surveys in the study. The second group of possible study participants was a group of adults who took a management course through the university. The third group was made up of adults enrolled in an organizational workshop given by the researcher. Seventeen surveys came from the second group and nineteen came from the third group. In total, one hundred sixty-two surveys were used in gathering information for the study.

The survey study participants completed dealt with their experiences of having a close or good friend in the workplace. The survey was broken into three parts with part one looking at demographics, the blended friendship and the closeness of the blended friendship. Part two of the survey examined the dual-role situation in the workplace (friend and coworker). Part three involved a Likert-type scale that measured dual-role tension and communication strategies. All study data was gathered and coded appropriately. Results from the study indicated dual-role tension in the workplace was "related to relationship closeness and organization formalization, and that the strategies used to manage the contradictions of blended

friendships are related to status-equity, work-group cohesion, and the overall amount of dual-role tension" (Bridge & Baxter, 1992, p.220). While this study had many research questions and hypotheses, the overall finding suggested that closer friends did not experience as much dual-role tension in the workplace as friends who were less close. This could be a result of close friends having a better understanding of the expectations of their friendship and how to communicate with each other most effectively (Bridge & Baxter, 1992).

The psychological climate and peer relationships in the workplace were examined in a 1997 study conducted by Odden and Sias. The types of peer relationships were identified as information peer, collegial peer, and special peer, which had been identified in an earlier study by Kram & Isabella (1985). Surveys were distributed to the faculty of thirteen elementary, middle, and high schools. A total of one hundred ninety-four completed surveys were used for this research.

The psychological climate aspect of the study was measured using a Likert-type survey to get a feel for the participant's perception of the climate in their workplace. Peer communication relationships were measured using a

scale that provided a brief description of what made up an information peer, a collegial peer, and a special peer. When provided a list of their peers, participants were asked to indicate which category (informational, collegial, or special) best fit each peer on the list. All information gathered from the teachers was coded and results did indicate a link between psychological climate and peer relationships.

Study findings suggested climates that experienced high cohesion also had more collegial and special peer relationships. Additionally, employees who had more special peers experienced less stress in the workplace. Overall, men indicated having more information peer relationships, while women indicated having more collegial peer relationships. The researchers pointed out that while information peers served an important role in the workplace, an overabundance of informational peers in a work-group could be a signal that the group lacks cohesion. Similarly, a work-group with too many special peer relationships could indicate a problem in superior-subordinate relationships (Odden & Sias, 1997).

Workplace Friendships and the Retrospective Interview
Technique

The utilization of the Retrospective Interview
Technique (RIT) to study friendships in the workplace
serves as a relatively new but important area. In previous
research, the RIT had been used to identify turning points
that impacted romantic relationships (Bolton, 1961; Baxter
& Bullis, 1986). However, recently the RIT has been used
to measure factors that influence relationship development
among friendships. The research conducted by Baxter &
Bullis (1986) went on to further investigate the concept of
turning points defining a turning point as: "Any event or
occurrence that is associated with change in a
relationship, the turning point is central to a process
view of relationships. Turning points are the substance of
change" (p.470).

Turning point data was obtained using the
Retrospective Interviewing Technique (RIT). Participants
were asked to plot points on a graph that indicated
relational commitment at different points in time. After
each point was plotted, the researchers asked a series of
questions about the point plotted. This process was
repeated until the researcher had worked through the given

timeline reflected on the graph. Once all points were plotted, the dots were connected with a line, which represented the evolution of the relationship (Baxter & Bullis, 1986). Some researchers saw the benefit the RIT could have in friendship research and used it in their studies. Therefore, techniques previously used in romance research were being applied to research relating to friendship in the workplace. However, it should be noted that "friendship development research tends to focus on identifying factors associated with development, rather then on identifying particular events that result in a qualitative change in the relationship" (Sias & Cahill, 1998, p. 275). The use of turning points in friendship research may require some slight modifications to gain the most effectiveness from the measure.

Bullis & Bach (1989) utilized the RIT to examine whether the development of mentor-mentee relationships was of benefit to organizations. Twenty-six graduate students from three communication departments participated in the study. Each respondent was asked to name a professor they had a strong relationship with and then respond to a Likert-type scale, which sought information regarding the description of mentor roles. Two separate interviews were

conducted; one was four months into the academic year and the second was four months later. The interviews conducted were the same each time and both only looked at the previous four months in plotting points on the graph. In using the RIT, participants plotted and explained each point themselves, identifying relationship turning points. Another measure was also used as part of the methodology of the study, which was a condensed version of the Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ).

Results from the study led researchers to create nine turning point categories based on all those reported: academic recognition, perceived similarity, mutual confirmation, advising, personal bonding, relational clashes, relational evolution, relational decline, and miscellaneous. Additionally, different turning points were associated with differing amounts of relational change. Personal bonding was the most positive turning point, while relational decline was the most negative turning point. Overall, Bullis & Bach (1989) suggest this research as a starting point. They believe their research helped to pose questions for further research, but was not overly generalizable due to sample size, lack of gender equity in the study, and the mentor-mentee relationship of

a professor and student was not necessarily the same as a mentor-mentee relationship in an organization. The researchers did suggest that overall mentoring relationships did not necessarily benefit organizations (Bullis & Bach, 1989).

In a 1998 study by Sias & Cahill, the development of friendships in the workplace over time was measured again, utilizing the RIT. Undergraduate and graduate students, who were enrolled in an Organizational Communication class at a university, recruited participants for the study. The students needed to interview one adult, over 21, who was employed full time regarding their relationship with a "peer coworker" who they thought of as a good or close friend. Additionally, the identified "peer coworker" was also interviewed. A total of 38 individuals were interviewed, which made up 19 peer friendships. The study identified several friendship categories ranging from acquaintance, friend, close friend, and best friend. Participants plotted a point on a graph to signify their current peer relationship and also plotted a point for where their relationship stood at their first meeting (acquaintance). Once the two points were plotted, the researchers asked the participant to plot points that

signified a change in the relationship. As each point was plotted, questions were asked of the participant to gain a better understanding of the plotted point. When all the points were plotted, participants were asked to connect the dots and explain how the line represented the course of the friendship.

Results suggested that the workplace had a significant role in the development of friendships. Issues such as proximity and similarity did play a role in the development of friendships, especially in the early stages. The study also supported the idea that one's personal and work lives were no longer separate. Individuals come to work and share their personal stories with peers as an indirect means of relational development. The acquaintance to friend relationship developed based on proximity and shared values. The friend to close friend relationship developed as personal and work issues were shared with one another. Finally, the close friend to almost best friend relationship evolved when friends spent more time together and shared more intimate personal and work related information (Sias & Cahill, 1998).

Emerging Research Area

In summary, the emerging research area of workplace friendship development has helped researchers and scholars to better understand the impact workplace friendships have on the individual and the organization. While a great deal remains to be discovered, future research will help further determine the important role peer friendships play in the workplace. This research extends this emerging research area by focusing on friendship formation in a technical setting. This type of information would be of great value to organizations, human relations/resources departments, and individuals alike.

Statement of Purpose

The development and maintenance of friendships in our daily lives is key not only to our mental health, but our physical health as well (Reohr, 1991). Although friendship has been shown to benefit people's lives, little research exists regarding friendship development in the workplace. While study of workplace friendships is an emerging area of research, additional exploration is needed to truly examine the impact these relationships have on our lives. Interpersonal skills are central to success in business, which would include the development of friendships in the

workplace (Johnson, 1978). With so many individuals in corporate America spending more and more time at the office, it seems logical that an individual would develop some close ties within his/her work place. Fine (1986) stated, "Workplaces are significant for the development of friendships beyond the pragmatic reality that they force individuals together" (p. 188). While proximity does play a role in the formation of workplace friendships, people do enter into friendships voluntarily (Rawlins, 1992). Thus, the degrees of friendship can vary from coworker to coworker. According to Kram & Isabella (1985), peer relationships in the workplace have a "career enhancing" and "psychosocial" function (p. 117). Peer friendships in the workplace involve such concepts as emotional support and career guidance and need to be further examined to determine the impact these relationships have on our daily lives (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Friends are friends, whether they are in the workplace or not. This sentiment has been echoed by Pogrebin (1987) who stated, "The only generalization you can safely make about coworker friendships is that they are basically no different from other friendships; they are just as complicated, just as quirky, and potentially just as satisfying" (p. 250).

The purpose of this study is to take a close look at how workplace friendships are developed and sustained in an information technology work environment. In today's fast-paced high-tech world, many times it is every man/woman for his/herself. Examining friendships in an information technology environment of a large corporation will prove interesting in comparison to existing research to determine if findings in other occupations can be generalized to technological organizations. Again, the area of workplace friendship research is new and by further examining its development, we can build on a very important area of study.

This study will be similar to the Sias & Cahill's 1998 study of workplace friendships, building on their research and using some of the same methodology. However, this project will focus only on an information technology arena rather than the varying range of more traditional occupations studied in the Sias & Cahill 1998 study. By focusing on an information technology area, we can take a step closer to determining if workplace friendships are more important in certain occupational areas than others or if findings can be generalized across occupations. The

specific research questions being addressed by this study are:

RQ1: What factors are associated with the development of peer friendships in a technological workplace?

RQ2: How does communication change over the development of workplace friendships in a technological work environment?

RQ3: To what extent do relationship partners agree in their identification of the factors and communication changes associated with peer friendship development in a technological work environment?

Chapter Three: Methodology

<u>Participants</u>

Twenty adults employed full-time in an information technology based corporation participated in this study. These twenty adults represented ten peer friendships. The participants were recruited by speaking to management personnel and asking them to suggest people that could be approached about being a part of the study. Upon receipt of a list of individuals, participants were randomly selected for the study and approached regarding whether they would like to be part of the study. Once ten individuals from differing groups in the information technology organization were identified, each person was interviewed about his/her friendship with a peer at work whom they considered to be a friend. To clarify the definition of peer, it was explained that a peer is defined as, "a coworker of equivalent hierarchical status with whom there is no formal reporting relationship" (Sias & Cahill, 1998, p. 281). The friend who was identified in the interview was then approached regarding their participation in the project and upon their approval, he/she was subsequently interviewed regarding the peer friendship. In the event that the second interviewee did not want to

participate in the study, the original possible participant list would be referenced and a new participant would be randomly selected to approach regarding study participation. The information from the first interviewee would then be discarded, as it would not have the necessary companion information.

All interviews took place during non-business hours or during lunch hours so as not to intrude on company time.

Procedures

This study utilized the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT) to examine the development of workplace friendships. As Sias & Cahill (1998) point out, utilization of this tool had previously been reserved for the study of romantic relationships (i.e. Baxter & Bullis, 1996) or mentor-mentee relationships (Bullis & Bach, 1989). The RIT helped to identify turning points in relationships that caused the relationship to develop to another level. Sias & Cahill (1998) note the usefulness of the RIT to study friendships stating, "the method can also be used to obtain information regarding factors, other than turning points, that respondents perceive influence the development of a relationship" (Sias & Cahill, 1998, p.281).

For the purposes of this study, the RIT involved plotting points on a graph which represent points of relational change in a friendship. The x-axis of the graph represents the factor of time, while the y-axis represents the relationship levels. Relationship phases identified in the Sias & Cahill (1998) study are employed in this study. The phases identified by Sias & Cahill (1998) include acquaintance (level before peer becomes a friend), friend, close friend, and best friend (see Appendix A). As in the Sias & Cahill (1998) study, participants were asked to interpret "friend" as they saw fit, without further explanation.

In the interview process, participants first placed a point on the x-axis of the grid to represent the length of the relationship in question. Participants were then asked to plot a point regarding where they felt their relationship with their peer coworker stood today. Next, participants placed a point at the zero time factor and the acquaintance relationship level to represent when they first met. From there, participants were asked to plot points on the graph that represented relational change in the friendship, which caused the friendship level to deepen (i.e. from acquaintance to friend). When each relational

change point was plotted, participants were asked questions regarding what they thought caused the change, if any event had triggered the change, if their communication had changed as the relationship changed, and any additional factors that may have caused the relationship change (see Appendix B). After all points were plotted and discussed, the participant connected the dots to form a line graph. All participants were asked not to discuss the interview process or contents with their peer coworker/friend also participating in the study so research data did not become skewed.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed as soon as possible after each interview. The transcribed interviews were compiled into the field notes for this study. After all field notes were reviewed, the notes were reviewed again and coded based on a set of categories developed in the Sias & Cahill (1998) study. The categories included developmental factors and communication changes that sparked a change in relationships. The factors identified by Sias & Cahill (1998) utilized in this study included proximity, shared tasks, perceived similarity, life events, extra organizational socializing,

work related problems, time, and personality. The
communication factors suggested by Sias & Cahill (1998)
included decreased caution, increased discussion of non-
work personal issues, increased discussion of work-related
problems, increased intimacy, and increased frequency. The
list was very complete and supported the needs of the
current study well (see Appendix C for a list of
developmental factors and communication changes).

All data collected was analyzed, compared between
relational phases, and discussed. Field notes were
translated into research findings. Also, a table
illustrating the impact varying developmental factors and
communication changes had on the different relationship
levels was created.

Chapter Four: Results

Dataset Information

A total of twenty individuals representing ten relationships were interviewed for this study. At the time this study was conducted, all of the individuals interviewed worked in a large mid-western information technology based organization. Six of the relationships were female/female and four of the relationships were male/male. There were no male/female relationships explored in this study, as no one who participated in the study selected a member of the opposite sex as their relationship partner.

As previously mentioned, the methodology utilized in this study was similar to that used in the Sias and Cahill (1998) study of workplace friendships. The three relationship phases originally identified for this study were acquaintance to friend, friend to close friend, and close friend to best friend. However, similar to the Sias & Cahill (1998) study, most participants in this study who approached phase three, close friend to best friend, were reluctant to label their friend a best friend. Most utilized phrases like "best work friend" or "in between close friend and best friend." Sias and Cahill (1998)

referred to this level as "almost best friend" and going forward, this study will utilize the same terminology to reference this friendship phase (p. 283). Therefore, the final three transitions of friendship examined in this study were acquaintance to friend, friend to close friend, and close friend to almost best friend. For the purposes of this research, almost close friend and close friend designations were grouped together under phase two. Similarly, almost best friend and best friend designations were grouped together under phase three. Overall, eighty percent of the relationship pairs were in agreement with the various phases their relationship had been through. None of the participants interviewed felt their peer relationship was just at a friend level (phase one) at the time they were interviewed. Ten participants (50%) felt their friendship was at the close friend level while the other 10 participants (50%) felt their relationships reflected the almost best friend level. The overall average length of the friendships examined was 5.7 years (range = 10 months to 17 years, standard deviation = 5.25 years).

Study participants all reported varying relationship lengths as well as varying transition time lines. The

average length of time it took a relationship to move to
phase one was 9 months (range = 1 month to 2 years,
standard deviation = 6.5 months). Movement to phase two
involved approximately 23 months (range = 3.5 months to 5
years, standard deviation = 18 months). Finally, it took
an average of 5 years (range = 21 months to 9 years,
standard deviation = 3.2 years) to reach phase three.

Research Questions One and Two Results

The Sias and Cahill (1998) study presented coding
categories consisting of developmental factors and
communication changes that can occur in workplace
friendships. These categories were adapted and applied for
use in this study (See Appendix C for a list of
developmental factors and communication changes). Table 1
illustrates the impact the various developmental factors
and communication changes had both within a transition and
across transitions. Research questions one and two focus
on the information illustrated in Table 1. More
specifically, research question one explores what factors
are associated with friendship development in a
technological workplace, while research question two
examines communication changes over the development of
friendships in a technological work environment.

Developmental factors and communication changes were figured separately in the table, as they represent differing impacts. They are discussed together here however, to provide a holistic view of the dataset.

In examining Table 1, the first column represents the various developmental factors and communication changes being examined in this research. The second column under each phase represents the number of times a developmental factor or communication change was mentioned by the participants as impacting the phase. The third column under each phase represents the percentage of occurrence for each developmental factor or communication change across all three phases. Finally, the fourth column under each phase represents the percentage that each developmental factor or communication change had per phase. This information would suggest impacts at each phase.

Phase One: Acquaintance to Friend

Relative to research question one, participants reported proximity, common tasks, and similarity as the contributing factors of their relationships moving to phase one. Frequent similar responses from participants included, "We started working on a project together", "We

TABLE 1

Factors and Communication Changes Associated with Peer Friendship Development

Developmental Factors	Phase 1 Acquaintance to Friend				Phase 2 Friend to Close Friend				Phase 3 Close Friend to Almost Best Friend		
	Frequ -ency	% Over All Phas- es	% at Pha- se		Frequ -ency	% Over All Phas- es	% at Pha- se		Frequ -ency	% Over All Phas- es	% at Pha- se
Proximity (n = 27)	16	59%	26%		8	30%	15%		3	11%	10%
Shared Tasks (n = 20)	15	75%	25%		5	25%	9%		0	0%	0%
Perceived Similarity (n = 28)	16	57%	26%		10	36%	18%		2	7%	6%
Life Events (n = 15)	4	27%	7%		10	67%	18%		1	6%	3%
Extra Organizational Socializing (n = 21)	4	19%	7%		8	38%	15%		9	43%	28%
Work-Related Problems (n = 15)	2	13%	3%		7	47%	13%		6	40%	19%
Time (n = 13)	1	8%	1%		3	23%	5%		9	69%	28%
Personality (n = 9)	3	33%	5%		4	44%	7%		2	23%	6%

Communication Changes	Phase 1 Acquaintance to Friend				Phase 2 Friend to Close Friend				Phase 3 Close Friend to Almost Best Friend		
	Frequ -ency	% Over All Phas- es	% at Pha- se		Frequ -ency	% Over All Phas- es	% at Pha- se		Frequ -ency	% Over All Phs- es	% at Pha- se
Decreased Caution (n = 28)	14	50%	35%		9	32%	16%		5	18%	17%
Increased Discussion of Non-Work, Personal Issues (n = 33)	11	33%	28%		14	43%	25%		8	24%	29%
Increased Discussion of Work-Related problems (n = 18)	7	39%	18%		7	39%	13%		4	22%	14%
Increased Intimacy (n = 26)	5	19%	12%		13	50%	24%		8	31%	29%
Increased Frequency (n = 18)	3	17%	7%		12	66%	22%		3	17%	11%

were around each other more", and "I think we just realized

we had a lot of things in common as far as interests,

hobbies, and stuff." The corporation the study

participants worked for at the time of the interviews has

consolidated development areas into teams. Each team

varies in size; however, most range from five to fifteen

people. Most of the study participants reported being on

the same team at the time they met each other, placing them

not only in close proximity but in some cases, working on

the same project. While proximity and shared tasks played

a large role in the movement from acquaintance to friend,

perceived similarities also had significant impact. One

participant stated, "You get to know what he's interested

in, what I'm interested in and you kinda – you see a

connection in some of those." Another participant

explained, "We had common interests in the fact that we

were going to classes to change careers. You know, from

that point of view. Our children were going to parochial

schools, we both have a son and a daughter, we had a lot of

the same commonalities from that point."

In terms of research question two, high impact

communication changes associated with phase one included

decreased caution and increased discussion of personal

issues. Communication among participants was believed to be more casual and less open at this phase. However, barriers were being broken down. One woman recalled, "I felt like I could go up and just tap her on the shoulder and make a joke. You know, I didn't have to be so formal." A male study participant noted, "It (communication) probably became more open and you understood each other – where maybe your limits were different. Normally in a work environment you wouldn't say things to someone in a joking manner unless you knew them better. So maybe more jokingly and not quite as proper as normal in a work environment." The general feeling of participants at phase one was summed up by one woman who stated, "I think we just started talking and getting to know each other better." Phase one set up the groundwork for movement into phase two, which according to participants, some friends make and some friends do not.

Phase Two: Friend to Close Friend

As friendships moved into phase two, life events, extra-organizational socializing, proximity, and perceived similarity were factors participants cited as important (research question one). Participants indicated they felt they could share more as friendships became closer. Life

events had a significant impact on relationship development, which was evident in phase two. One woman described dating again after a divorce and the marriage of her friend as significant to their relationship. Another participant confided in her friend regarding a serious illness that she had developed. The confidant/friend had recently been through a similar situation with a family member, so she was able to relate to the issues her friend was going through. Both friends stated separately that confiding about the illness brought them much closer.

At phase two, participants described going to lunch with their close friend, getting together after work for drinks, and participating in various sports together. Taking part in such activities and socializing together lead friendships to be closer, according to participants. One man described a golf trip he took with his friend, which he felt made the friendship closer, "We played golf, the wives spent time together, we just spent time together."

Proximity was often mentioned by participants who were on the same team or in the same building. Perceived similarity was considered an impact at phase two as friends mentioned they realized they had more in common.

In terms of research question two results, further discussion of non-work personal issues, increased intimacy, and increased frequency were all communication changes experienced at phase two of relationship development. Participants explained they shared more personal information at this phase. When referencing the personal information shared with his friend, one respondent stated, "We'd talk about things that were more important – not so much work related things, but we'd talk about things going on with our family, personal things, finances, and what you want to do with your life." Overall, participants discussed they were more willing to confide in their friend at phase two. Participants also reported talking more often at this phase. One respondent stated, "At this point, we talked a lot more," while another explained, "I think the more – the better we got to know each other, the more you delve into your own personal lives."

Phase Three: Close Friend to Almost Best Friend

In phase three, data relevant for research question one led to the conclusion that spending time together outside of the workplace was a driving factor in friendship movement from phase two to phase three. One married respondent discussed doing more "couple things" with his

friend and their respective spouses. He went on to say, "We did movie nights and things like that." Other participants reported being involved in sporting teams together or going out after work, which they felt brought them closer to their friend.

Time was also a factor in friendship development from phase two to phase three. Respondents mentioned their friendships having a "steady progression" or a "natural evolution" when they referenced time as a factor in a relationship. Most respondents reported doing things both inside and outside of work over a long period of time lead the relationship between the two friends to grow.

Increased intimacy and increased discussion of non-work, personal issues were both communication changes that were prevalent in phase three relationship development (research question two). Friends mentioned being able to tell their relationship partner just about anything and several mentioned the concept of trust being important to them at the almost best friend level. Some respondents mentioned sharing "more personal information" than previously shared with their friend at this level. Based on the almost best friend relationships looked at for this

study, it was evident the relationship partners involved were very close.

Phase Summary

Information regarding research questions one and two for this study suggest proximity, shared tasks, and perceived similarities were driving factors in relationships moving to phase one. Many of the participants worked closely together and through that experience found similarities in each other. Communication was kept at a high level, with relationship partners starting to feel more comfortable with their friend in general. As friendships moved into the close friend phase, proximity and perceived similarity were again found to be important. However, sharing life events and socializing outside of work also had an impact. Participants sought out each other more and often when they did, their communication was more personal in nature. Over time, friendships moved into phase three. Participants spent time together not only at work but also regularly spent time together outside of work. At phase three, friendships were reported to have a high trust level where relationship partners could easily confide in one another.

Results for Research Question Three

The third research question examined how often friends agreed about the factors and communication changes that drove their friendship to the next phase. The process described here was utilized in the Sias & Cahill (1998) study to determine the overall average "adjusted agreement proportion" as well as the "global agreement proportion" described later (p. 289). To determine the adjusted agreement proportion, each relationship within each phase was examined by dividing the total number of agreed upon factors or communication changes by the total number of factors or communication changes mentioned by the relationship pair. Once all relationship agreement proportions were figured across the three phases, these figures were combined to compile the average adjusted agreement proportion. For this study, the average adjusted agreement proportion for developmental factors was 0.50 (range = 0.25 - 0.84, standard deviation = 0.16). The average adjusted agreement proportion for communication changes was 0.42 (range = 0 - 0.73, standard deviation = 0.25). To determine impact across all factors and communication changes, "global agreement proportions" were calculated (Sias & Cahill, 1998, p.289). This process

involved dividing all the agreed upon factors or communication changes by the total number of factors or communication changes mentioned across all three phases. The average global factor agreement proportion was 0.54 (range = 0 - 1, standard deviation = 0.27). The average global communication change agreement proportion was 0.49 (range = 0 - 0.80, standard deviation = 0.31). These findings were similar to those found in the Sias & Cahill (1998) study. A higher level of agreement was found regarding the factors that participants felt impacted their relationships. The data suggest less agreement among communication changes reported by the study participants.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview Discussion of Research Questions One and Two

The importance of friendships in the workplace and in

many of our lives overall is evident by the findings

suggested in this study. Friendships were reported to

develop initially due to factors such as proximity, shared

tasks, and perceived similarity. This finding is

consistent with previous research such as that conducted by

Sias & Cahill (1998). Respondents reported that working in

close proximity often on similar projects led them to

uncover the similarities in each other. This contact then

lead to friends having a certain level of comfort and

reassurance that caused the friendship to grow. One woman

described that her friendship evolution was based on

several things: "Commonalities - you know, same age group,

same or similar backgrounds, similar point in our careers."

Others discussed how working on difficult projects together

brought them closer. Overall, proximity was found to be a

driving force in the initial development of the friendships

examined. Participants were on the same team and/or worked

closely on a project together when their relationship

originated. Proximity and shared tasks lead to initial

disclosure as well as discovery of similarities in background and interests.

As friendships evolved, proximity and similarity were still important, however sharing about one's life and doing things outside of work became more prevalent. It appeared that friends made room in their life for their relationship partner at the close friend phase by spending more time together and experiencing increased intimacy. Participants described that their relationships were more open and honest as their relationship moved to phase two. One participant revealed, "We're not afraid to say what we think" while another participant stated, "It is easy to become friends with someone when you have a lot of the same thoughts and feelings and opinions on things." The closeness experienced over time eventually lead to the further development of some of the relationships examined for this study. Partners who reported an almost best friend status utilized words like honesty, trust, and reliability to describe the nature of their friendships.

Relationship Discussions: Their Impact on Research Question

Three Data

In gathering data for research questions one and two, only two sets of the relationship partners interviewed

discussed the change in their relationship on some type of high level. When asked if they had discussed a change in the relationship, one respondent stated, "I might have told her that I enjoyed talking to her - being with her." Another participant went on to say, "I suspect I might have been the one to verbalize before her to say that I'm really glad that she's there - that it has made a difference to me." However, these kinds of comments were rare. When asked if they had discussed a change in their relationship at certain points, most respondents replied with a firm "no" often accompanied by a perplexed look or even a giggle, suggesting such a notion was unheard of. One respondent mentioned, "We are both analytical, but we don't analyze our relationship." Another stated, "I don't think we ever discussed a change in the relationship." Even more revealing, was the fact that most of the male participants suggested at some point in the interview that "Guys don't do that stuff (talk about relationships). It is just understood." When another male participant was asked if he discussed the friendship with his relationship partner, he went on to explain, "It's a guy thing" suggesting men do not participate in such types of

communication. One male participant wanted to be very clear stating, "We don't have to go to the bathroom together!"

Relative to research question three data, the lack of relationship status discussion among the majority of study participants begs the question – would relationship partners have been in more solid agreement regarding the factors and communication changes present in their relationship had they discussed the changes in their relationship? It is likely, in this researcher's opinion that the relationship partners' agreement on the factors and communication changes impacting their relationship would have been higher if discussion about the relationship status had occurred. By discussing the changes in the relationship, certain factors or communication changes may have been verbalized, giving each partner a clearer picture of where they felt their relationship stood and why. Future research focusing specifically on relationship congruence among friends who discussed their relationship changes versus friends who did not would prove interesting.

<u>Issues That Cut Across the Three Research Questions</u>
<u>Work Life vs. Personal Life</u>

While study participants mentioned having "work friends" as well as friends outside of the workplace, it is

clear workplace friendships not only impact an individual's work life, but their personal life as well. Relationship partners describe each other as "important" and "valuable." Many participants referenced that they could rely on their friend and that they trusted them. One man explained:

> Last winter I had some fence posts crack. I started looking around and thinking – which friends can I burn… those guys… They came over, pulled down the fence, dug the fence posts out, and sank new fence posts. They are the kind of guys… you say whenever you're ready, just give us a call.

Another woman described a positive experience she had with a friend following a major surgery:

> A couple weeks later when I was home recovering, she came and… didn't want to disturb me, but dropped off a plant and a card and, you know, called me. There were people that I would say here are friends that, you know, everybody was concerned and everyone was really nice about asking how I was but she went and stepped over that boundary and made contact whereas I think people will hold back – not sure- what do I do? You know, she took that step.

These types of descriptions, as well as others shared by the participants, point out the impact workplace friendships have in many people's lives. These relationships help make work more fun and add extra support in our personal lives too. The importance of friendship in the workplace was consistently reported by participants as significant to their day to day work life.

Organizational Change and Its Impact on Friendship Development

As previously mentioned, the corporation the study participants worked in at the time of the interviews had some significant staff reductions and a large departmental reorganization in the last year. Respondents mentioned how important their friendships were during all the changes. One participant mentioned,

> The turmoil that's going on here at work with the reorganization… we probably faced the same turmoil as in whether we would still have jobs or not… Just going through the uncertainty of what's gonna happen I think brings people closer together – when there's uncertainty.

Another participant explained, "With the reorg and everything… you sort of wanted to get close to somebody.

We were both unsure of where our jobs would be or if we were gonna have jobs afterwards." Friends reported providing support to each other not only during the staff reductions and the reorganization, but after as well. Discussions about new departments, positions, reporting structure, and what the future would bring were all topics friendship pairs conversed about in the time after the changes. Interestingly, some of the participants have been assigned to new departments with the reorganization. While some of the participants were just beginning with a new team, none of the participants had been moved from their physical location at the time of the interviews. Therefore, most of the friends were still in close proximity to each other. After all the new teams are consolidated into common seating areas and three months has passed, it would be interesting to contact the relationship partners impacted by the reorganization to determine if they still had close ties to the relationship partner identified in this study. One participant explained his experiences with people who have left the company as, "People at... when they leave you say, 'See ya around!' and you never do. So I think proximity has a lot to do with it." Whether an individual leaves the company or just

moves to another building, proximity does play a role.
Based on this researcher's experience, whether a friendship
survives a reorganization would be largely dependent on how
strong the relationship was at the time of the event.
Relationship survival would also hinge on how much effort
was given on the part of both parties.

High Impact Phase Changes

In reviewing participant's comments and noting their
expressions and gestures, respondents seemed to feel the
biggest "jump" among the three phases was from friend to
close friend. It is at phase two where friends described
feeling more comfortable around each other, they confided
in each other more, and they started to do things outside
of work. The move from close friend to almost best friend
was an important phase transition; however, participants
described the friendship evolution to that level happening
over a period of continued closeness over time. Previous
research conducted by Sias & Cahill (1998) found similar
results in the movement from phase two to phase three of
workplace friendships. The researchers suggested the
movement from close friend to almost best friend as an
upward "trend" originating in phase two and eventually
moving to phase three (Sias & Cahill, 1998, p. 292).

This study helps to further examine the area of workplace friendship development and it's importance in people's lives on a daily basis. With the workplace constantly changing, it is vital to understand what is important to employees. Friendships are clearly at the top of many people's lists when they discuss what helps them get through their day. Additionally, this research contributes to the small, but growing research area of workplace friendship development.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

<u>Limitations</u>

The methodology utilized in this study did have some limitations. The sample size for the study was small with twenty individuals representing ten friendships. Future research should look at involving a larger group of relationship partners, perhaps across multiple organizations. By doing this, we would be better able to generalize findings.

While it was important for participants to determine how the various phases of friendship were defined as they saw fit (friend, close friend, and best friend), leaving the definition of the three phases to interpretation could be considered a limitation. Some participants appeared to struggle when they initially plotted points on the graph representing changes in their relationship. This was primarily the case when a relationship moved from phase one to phase two (friend to close friend) and when a relationship moved from phase two to phase three (close friend to almost best friend). Perhaps if some key words commonly associated with each friendship level were provided, this may have helped the participants to more accurately determine when their relationship moved to the

next phase.   Conducting the study in the manner suggested

has advantages and disadvantages but is worth noting for

future research purposes.

The corporation the participants worked in at the time

of the interview had recently gone through some changes, as

previously mentioned. Respondents reported becoming closer

to their friend in large part because of all the changes

going on in the organization and because of their

uncertainty. While all the changes that were going on in

the corporation did not necessarily represent a limitation,

it would have been of interest to note if the level of

closeness the friends reported would have been as high if

the changes had not occurred. The staff reductions and the

reorganization would not necessarily have impacted all the

relationships examined, but it may have had an impact on

some of the partnerships.

A final limitation of this study was that no

male/female relationships were examined, as none of the

originally selected participants identified a member of the

opposite sex as being a good friend. Male/female workplace

friendships are more prominent than ever but a stigma is

often attached to the relationship if the friendship seems

too close. In this researcher's observation, this stigma

is particularly true if the two friends are both married. Regardless of any stigmas, male/female friendships in the workplace are more predominant and future research should attempt to look at this dynamic closer.

<div align="center">Future Research</div>

Future research needs to continue to focus on workplace friendship development. The literature base for this topic is still small but the impact additional findings could have on corporate America is large. Employers need to have a firm understanding of the importance peer relationships play in the workplace, as setting an environment which encourages such friendships costs corporations little to the bottom line.

Possible future research focuses include conducting a study that examines perceived relationship congruence between friends who discuss their relationship and it's changes and those who do not. By looking at a large sample size, it would be interesting to see if major differences would be found between those who discussed their relationship and those who did not.

Another intriguing area of future research includes looking at how friendships survive large-scale changes in a corporation. When friends are moved around and have new

jobs and responsibilities do they keep the friends they had before or do those relationships deteriorate and new ones develop? In today's corporate world of financial streamlining and reorganizing, information on friendship development and how relationships are sustained through change would prove interesting.

Finally, further examining male/female workplace friendships would be beneficial. Male/female workplace friendships are occurring more and more. Further investigation as to whether male/female friendships experience certain stigmas or if such stigmas are being overcome as these relationships become more predominant would prove valuable.

<u>Final Thoughts</u>

The purpose of this research was to further investigate the area of workplace friendship development in an information technology organization, as studies in the area of workplace friendship development are few. This area of research, while still exploratory, does provide some interesting findings.

It is evident that proximity and shared tasks played a role in initial workplace friendship development in the information technology organization examined. Once

acquaintances got to know each other better, they found similarities that drew them into a closer friendship. Close workplace friendships included increased sharing of personal information and life events. Friendships were not just workplace bound at this phase. Participants went to lunch together, went out after work, and participated in a variety of activities together. The evolution to almost best friend came with a closeness over time. It is evident based on this research that workplace friendships impact people's lives. It was mentioned by some participants that there is work life and life outside of work or one's personal life. However, to look at the way participants described their friends, it is clear that the line between work life and personal life is blurry. With the amount of time people are spending at their jobs these days, they are likely to talk to and/or see their workplace friends almost everyday. According to this research, workplace friendships are just as valid and important as friends outside of the workplace. This research as well as future research will help to solidify the importance of these relationships in people's every day lives.

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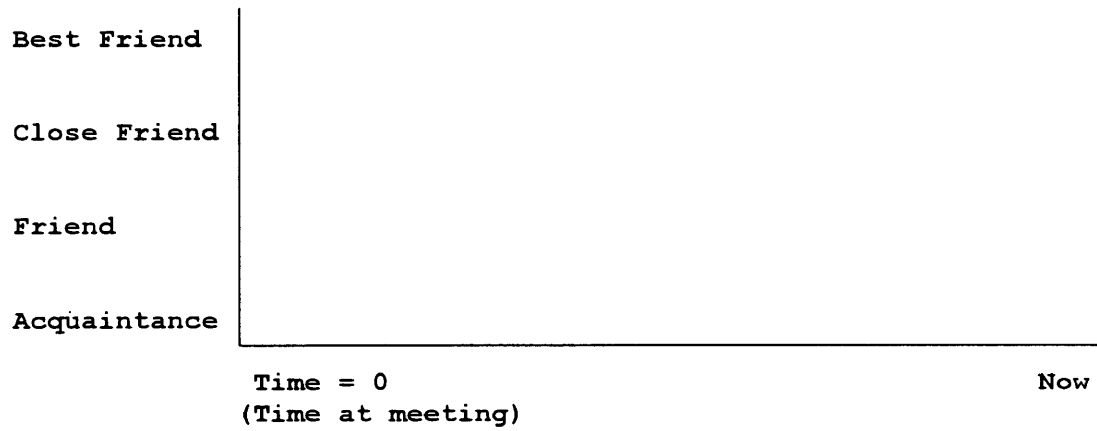
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Appendices

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Appendix A

Retrospective Interview Technique Chart

Best Friend

Close Friend

Friend

Acquaintance

Time = 0   Now
(Time at meeting)

Appendix B

Retrospective Interviewing Technique
Questions Asked at Each Relationship Phase Change

The following are planned questions to be utilized in the
interview process. Additional probing questions will be
employed as necessary. The same questions will be utilized
for each relationship phase change. More specifically,
these questions will be used to discuss the movement from
acquaintance to friend, friend to close friend, and close
friend to best friend.

1. What do you think caused the relationship with your
    peer/coworker to change at the point plotted?

2. Tell me about an event(s) that may have been associated
    with this change.

3. How do you feel the communication with your
    peer/coworker changed at the point plotted?

4. Did you and your peer/coworker specifically discuss
    your relationship surrounding the time the point was
    plotted, and if so, how?

5. Is there any additional information you would like to
    discuss regarding the relationship with your
    peer/coworker at the time plotted on the graph?

Appendix C

Categories Utilized to Code Participant Responses
(Categories adapted from Sias & Cahill 1998 study)

Developmental Factors

Category	Description
Proximity	Working in close proximity to an individual
Shared Tasks	Working on the same or similar projects or tasks
Perceived Similarity	Perceived similarities in background/interests
Life Events	Life changing events
Extra organizational socializing	Participating in activities outside of work
Work-related problems	Day to day issues and problems with an individual's job
Time	The evolution of a friendship
Personality	Attractive characteristics about an individual

Communication Changes

Category	Description
Decreased caution	Interaction became more comfortable and open
Increased discussion of non-work, personal issues	Increased discussion of personal topics
Increased discussion of work-related problems	Increased discussion work problems
Increased intimacy	Expanded information sharing about work and personal life
Increased frequency	More frequent exchanges

Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Exemption Letter

**University
of Nebraska**

October 10, 2000

Ms. Courtney Fristoe
3628 S 95th St
Omaha, NE 68124

IRB#: 413-00-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: The Ties That Bind: Friendship Development in an Information Technology Work Environment

Dear Ms. Fristoe:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of five years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the five year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

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University of Nebraska—Lincoln   University of Nebraska Medical Center   University of Nebraska at Omaha   University of Nebraska at Kearney