

# Effects of Workplace Friendship on Individual Outcomes<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *In this study, the effects of workplace friendship on work engagement, perceived individual performance and job satisfaction were investigated. The data was gathered from the employees of public and private sectors in Turkey. An online questionnaire form was distributed via e-mail to the participants and 234 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Workplace friendship was measured by two dimensions: friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence; and work engagement was evaluated in three dimensions namely vigor, dedication and absorption. The results indicated that friendship opportunity strongly affects job satisfaction, vigor, dedication and weakly absorption. However friendship prevalence had no significant effect on job satisfaction, work engagement and performance. Married participants scored higher on vigor dimension than unmarried. Men scored higher on absorption than women. Job satisfaction was higher in the public sector and perceived individual performance was higher in the private sector. Friendship prevalence in the service sector found to be higher than in the industrial sector. Only 14.1 % of employees stated that they have their best friend at the workplace.*

**Keywords:** *workplace friendship, work engagement, job satisfaction*

## İşyeri Arkadaşlığının Bireysel Çıktılara Etkileri

**Özet:** *Bu çalışmada, işyeri arkadaşlığının işle bütünleşme, algılanan bireysel performans ve iş tatminine etkileri incelenmiştir. İhtiyaç duyulan veriler Türk kamu sektörü ve özel sektör çalışanlarından elde edilmiştir. Katılımcılara online anket formu e-posta aracılığı ile gönderilmiştir ve 234 geçerli anket analiz edilmiştir. İşyeri arkadaşlığı iki boyut aracılığı ile ölçülmüştür: arkadaşlık fırsatı*

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*ve arkadaşlık yaygınlığı ve işle bütünleşme 3 boyutta değerlendirilmiştir. Bunlar; dinçlik, adanma ve yoğunlaşmadır. Sonuçlar arkadaşlık fırsatının iş tatmini, dinçliği ve adanmayı güçlü bir şekilde ve yoğunlaşmayı zayıf bir şekilde etkilediğini göstermektedir. Ancak arkadaşlık yaygınlığının iş tatmini, işle bütünleşme ve performans üzerinde anlamlı etkisi yoktur. Evli katılımcılar dinçlik boyutunda bekâr katılımcılara göre daha yüksek puan almışlardır. Erkekler kadınlara göre yoğunlaşma boyutunda daha fazla puan almışlardır. İş tatmini kamu sektöründe ve algılanan bireysel performans özel sektörde daha yüksektir. Arkadaşlık yaygınlığının servis sektöründe sanayi sektöründen daha yüksek olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışanların sadece % 14,1'i en iyi arkadaşlarının işyerinde olduğunu belirtmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İşyeri Arkadaşlığı, İşle Bütünleşme, İş Tatmini

## Introduction

As a social system, organizations are naturally made up of people (Uslu, 2015). Therefore it produces some sort of social relationship network (Morrison and Nolan, 2007). As a result of a number of factors such as personal interests, similarities in life style and culture, friendship at work goes beyond the social network identified in formal structures of organization. Thus friendship at work is a natural occurrence in the workplace (Asgharian et al. 2013; Lin and Lu, 2013). That is why examination of the manifestation of friendship in the workplace is a critical issue for organizations (Sias, 2009; Ong, 2013). In this context, interest is increasing about workplace friendship. Researchers are trying to find out the individual and organizational effects of workplace friendship both in positive and negative aspects (Riordan et al. 1995; Lin and Lu, Ong, 2013).

Research on friendship has been an important issue of developmental psychology during the past four decades (Keller, 2004). Friendship at work is also a critical issue that organizational behavior studies focus on. In general, studies on workplace friendship show that friendship at work makes a positive impact on individual and organizational outcomes (Berman et al. 2002). However, it might also affect the organization and individual negatively (Sias et al. 2004). For instance, distraction from work and spending too much time with others (Morrison and Nolan, 2007) might reduce an employee's performance. Therefore more studies are needed in order to clarify the link between workplace friendship and individual outcomes. On the other hand it is important to note that friendship should also be examined in terms of cultural differences because the consequences of workplace friendship might vary depending on the shared values and norms of a society (Keller, 2004).

### 1. The purpose and the contribution of the study

For the reasons set forth above, the aim of this study is to analyze the effects of workplace friendship on perceived individual performance, work engagement and job satisfaction on a sample of the employees working in the Turkish private and public sectors. The aim is also to analyze whether or not the level of workplace friendship, job satisfaction, and work engagement differentiate depending on demographic factors such as age, tenure, education level, type of employee, gender, organizational type, and organizational size. Therefore this research will contribute in the four following aspects. First, the results will provide an inside look of cultural effects of workplace friendship because the sample is taken from Turkish employees. To our knowledge a limited studies have been done so far on the topic. The second contribution will be the comparison of the level of workplace friendship in terms of public and private organizations. Thirdly, this study will provide additional results on the effects of workplace friendship on individual outcomes because it is still not clear whether workplace friendship affects individual outcomes positively or not. Fourth, the study will contribute to the role of demographic factors in workplace friendship. Additionally, the study will provide information on the percentage of those who have a best friend in the workplace.

## 2. Defining the concepts

Work engagement has been studied intensively in recent times by academicians (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008; Gorgievski et al. 2010; Mauno et al. 2016; Akhtar et al. 2015). Since the concept has a relationship with financial performance, organizational success and employee positive output, interest in the topic has increased (Saks, 2006). Positive Psychology Approach (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) has been affected the number of studies in work engagement. Thus work engagement has been also studied intensively in national studies (Özyılmaz and Süner, 2015; Turgut, 2013; Özsoy et al. 2013; Ardiç and Polatçı, 2009; Gündüz et al. 2013; Özer et al. 2015). In everyday life "engagement" has a similar meaning with the concepts such as involvement, commitment, passion and excitement (Scaufeli, 2012). Work engagement is defined by Schaufeli and Colleque (2002: 74) as "a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption". Vigor is "characterized by high level of energy and mental resilience while working and persistence even if face with difficulties". Dedication "means sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration and challenge at work". The final dimension of work engagement, absorption, is "characterized by being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly". Some of the characteristics of engaged employees are presented below (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007; Schaufeli, 2012; Clark, 2012; Jacoby, 2015; Kelleher, 2016).

- They have less difficulty in overcoming their work demands,
- They fulfill their jobs with high energy and motivation,
- They are excited to go to work in the morning,

- When needed, they help to colleagues sincerely,
- They believe in the vision of the organization and they internalize organization's mission,
- They may work in a long and productive in the workplace.
- Beyond they love the work they do; they believe the works make positive contributions to the lives of other people.

Job satisfaction is an individual's emotional response to business environment and social conditions (Schermerhorn et al. 1997). Workplace friendship refers to developing an informal relationship voluntarily (Sias et al. 2004) at the workplace. Individual performance is defined as an individual's competence that is used to achieve organizational objectives. These competences include both work and non-work related tasks and behaviors (Mc Grath and Macmillan, 1995).

### 3. Hypothesis

Research suggests that workplace friendship effects job satisfaction, motivation and performance (Morrison, 2004; Lee and Ok, 2011). However, there are still questions about the effects of friendship at work because it might cause undesirable consequences in terms of organizations (Morrison and Nolan, 2007). That is why more studies will contribute to understanding the effects of workplace friendship. In order to test the effects of workplace friendship, there are several individual or organizational outcomes. In this study we preferred work engagement, job satisfaction and perceived individual outcomes so that the results would clearly help to understand in which way workplace friendship effects individual outcomes. According to the research purpose the hypotheses are defined as follows;

*H<sub>1</sub>: Friendship opportunity has a positive significant effect on work engagement*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Friendship prevalence has a positive significant effect on work engagement*

*H<sub>3</sub>: Friendship opportunity has a positive significant effect on job satisfaction*

*H<sub>4</sub>: Friendship prevalence has a positive significant effect on job satisfaction*

*H<sub>5</sub>: Friendship opportunity has a positive significant effect on perceived individual performance*

*H<sub>6</sub>: Friendship prevalence has a positive significant effect on perceived individual performance*

## 4. Materials And Method

### 4.1. Sample and data collection

Research data was gathered from Turkish public and private sector employees. Employees have been categorized into service and industrial sectors, and divided into white and blue collar workers. Employees included in the sampling have been reached with the online survey method. In this context, a total of 249 employees participated in the study, but the data was revised and 16 questionnaires were eliminated. Thus, 233 valid questionnaires were analyzed.

#### **4.2. Measures**

In order to measure work engagement the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al. 2002) (UWES) was used. The UWES has three dimensions, namely vigor (6 items), dedication (5 items) and absorption (6 items). Examples include, "At my work, I feel bursting with energy" (vigor), "I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose" (dedication), and "Time flies when I am working" (absorption). Workplace friendship was measured using the 12 itemed scale developed by Nielsen et al. (2000). It is a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The scale includes 2 dimensions; Friendship Opportunity Dimension (6 items) (e.g., I have the opportunity to get to know my co-workers) and Friendship Prevalence Dimension (6 items) (e.g., I have formed strong friendships at work). Perceived Individual Performance was measured with the self-appraisal approach scale with 4 items. It was developed by Darwish (2000; Mert et al. 2011). Job Satisfaction was measured by one single item (Nagy, 2002; Dolbier et al. 2005) and it was "Taking everything into consideration, how do you feel about your job as a whole?". In order to gather information about the job satisfaction of the employees, one single item was preferred so that the questionnaire form could be shorter and take less time.

#### **4.3. Analysis and Results**

In order to analyze whether the variables have normally distributed or not Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were applied. The results indicated that variables in the study were distributed ( $\text{sig} > 0,05$ ). Thus in the study parametric tests were implemented.

##### **4.3.1. Characteristics of the sample**

56,8 % of the participants were male. Participants had predominately (66,7 %) between 1 to 5 years of tenure. Almost half of the participants were single (47,9 %). 59,4 % of the participants were from the private sector. The majority of them had a bachelor's degree (35,9 %), most of the participants were white collar (76,1 %) and most of the participants worked in the service sector (91,0 %). 34,2 % of the employees who participated in the study were

from large organizations. 35,9 % of the employees were from mid-sized organizations.

#### **4.3.2. Reliability analysis**

Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency analysis was applied to the scales. There were no items that devalue the overall reliability of workplace friendship (0,895) and work engagement (0,950) scales. However, the third item of performance scale has lowered the overall reliability of the scale. That is why the item was excluded, and then the Alpha score of the scale was calculated as 0,843. The reliability values are quite high for all the variables. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency values for the dimensions are respectively; friendship opportunity 0.860 friendship prevalence 0.814, vigor 0.878, dedication 0.935 and absorption 0.918.

#### **4.3.3. Factor analysis**

*Workplace Friendship Scale:* Depending on the principal component analysis findings for the workplace friendship scale, a two dimensioned structure has emerged. These findings indicate that factor structure of the scale is appropriate (KMO value = 0.902, the smallest factor loading = 0.485 and the total variance explained = 59,287). Thus the results were consistent with the original scale. Also Kanbur, (2015) found that the factor structure and internal consistency of the scale was acceptable.

*Work Engagement Scale:* In a previous adaptation study conducted by Turgut (2011) it has been proven that the Turkish version of the scale was valid. That is why in this study for work engagement scale, factor analysis was not applied. Dimensions were calculated depending on the original version of the scale.

*Performance Scale:* The third item in the scale has been removed from the scale since it reduces the overall reliability of the scale. The rest of items were collected as a single factor. These findings support an acceptable factor structure for the scale (KMO value is higher than 0.50, the smallest factor loading = 0, 460, and the total variance is explained = 54, 903). The same scale has been used by Mert et al. (2011) and similar results were obtained.

#### **4.3.4. The mean value of the variables**

The means of the variables were calculated for opportunity friendship 3.71, friendship prevalence 3.17, vigor 3.44, dedication 3.65, absorption 3,43 performance 5,44, job satisfaction 3,43.

#### **4.3.5. Having a best friend in the workplace**

The participants were asked whether or not they have a best friend in the workplace. Only 14.1% of the participants answered yes. This finding is interesting for further perspective on the studies for workplace friendship. It is obviously seen that only a small percent of the employees have a best friend in the workplace even though they spend a large amount of time in their life at work. However, as it is mentioned above almost 70 % of the employees who took part in the study were just in their first 5 years at the current workplace. This could be also a reason for the unexpected percentiles.

#### 4.3.6. Independent T-Test Findings

In order to test whether or not the variables in the study differentiate depending on the variables such as gender, sector, marital status and employee type, Independent Sample T-Test was performed.

The results indicated that friendship prevalence was higher in the service sector than the industrial sector. Mean value for the service sector was 3,24 and for the industrial sector was 2,48. ( $p=0,00$ ). Also, service sector employees' job satisfaction was found to be higher than industrial sector employees'. The mean difference is 0,56. ( $p=0,030$ ). Job satisfaction of public sector employees was higher than the private sector employees. Similar findings were also obtained by Özsoy et al. (2014). The mean difference is 0,44. ( $p=0,003$ ). However, perceived individual performance of private sector employees was higher than public sector employees. The mean difference is 0,35 ( $p=0,023$ ). Men scored higher on absorption dimension than women and the mean difference is 0,26 ( $p=0,043$ ). Married employees scored higher on vigor dimension than single ones. The mean difference is 0,29 ( $p=0,023$ ). No differences were observed for the rest of the variables.

**Table 1: Correlation Analysis**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. Friendship Opportunity</b>	1					
<b>2.Friendship Prevalence</b>	,634**	1				
<b>3.Vigor</b>	,640**	,463**	1			
<b>4.Dedication</b>	,688**	,492**	,832**	1		
<b>5.Absorption</b>	,411**	,331**	,649**	,612**	1	
<b>6.Performance</b>	,142*	,146*	,343**	,247**	,358**	1
<b>7.Job Satisfaction</b>	,660**	,448**	,715**	,743**	,487**	,176*

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between variables. The results show that there is a strong relationship between

the vigor and absorption dimensions each and friendship opportunity. Absorption was related moderately with friendship opportunity. Vigor and dedication were moderately related to friendship prevalence and absorption was related to friendship prevalence weakly. Job satisfaction was strongly related to friendship opportunity, vigor and dedication; and it was moderately related to friendship prevalence and absorption. However, it was related to perceived individual performance weakly. Perceived individual performance was related weakly to both work engagement and workplace friendship dimensions.

**4.3.7. Regression Analysis**

**Table 2a: Effects of Workplace friendship on Job satisfaction and Work Engagement**

Independent variables	Dependent Variables					
	Job satisfaction			Vigor		
	$\beta$	Sig.	R2	$\beta$	Sig.	R2
Friendship Opportunity	,628	,000	,437	,579	,000	,415
Friendship prevalence	,050	,433	x	,096	,141	x

**Table 2b: Effects of Workplace friendship on Job satisfaction and Work Engagement**

Independent variables	Dependent Variables					
	Dedication			Absorption		
	$\beta$	Sig.	R2	$\beta$	Sig.	R2
Friendship Opportunity	,631	,000	,480	,337	,000	,177

Friendship opportunity explains has a strong effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta=0,628$ ), vigor ( $\beta=0,579$ ) and dedication ( $\beta=0,631$ ); and it affects the absorption ( $\beta=0,337$ ). However it has no significant effect on perceived individual performance. Thus  $H_1$  and  $H_3$  are both accepted. Depending on these findings, it can be concluded that friendship opportunity is a critical variable for the organizations. On the other hand friendship prevalence has no significant

effect on job satisfaction and the dimensions work engagement and perceived individual performance. Thus  $H_2$ ,  $H_4$ ,  $H_5$  and  $H_6$  are all rejected.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of the research is the sampling method. The participations were selected from several organizations. Thus, this study only gives an insight about the effects of workplace friendship on individual outcomes. When sampling is taken from a certain organization or industry, the limitation of the study might be lower.

### **Conclusion**

According to the research, it has been identified that friendship opportunity affects job satisfaction, vigor and absorption. However, friendship prevalence has no significant effects on any dimensions. These findings show the importance of friendship opportunity for organizations. Analyzing the items existing in friendship opportunity, it can be inferred that the interaction of organization-employee and employer-employee is an important issue. Also, in order to create a friendly atmosphere in organizations, providing employees with a flexible environment might result in positive individual and organizational outcomes. In this regard, organizational practices such as supporting informal relationships and creating a free and relaxed atmosphere are all critical for employees to be satisfied with their jobs. Indeed, the findings are also supporting these inferences.

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