

Is It Difficult for Maintaining Friendship in the Workplace? Perspectives from Job Performance and Peer Obligation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how the job performance affects the difficulty of maintaining friendship. Based on literature review, a theoretical moderated mediation model is constructed. Sampling was carried out in the form of questionnaire survey, and 340 valid samples were obtained after sorting out. The results show that: (1) Job performance has a positive impact on participatory leadership. (2) Controlling leadership has a positive effect on the difficulty of maintaining friendship. (3) Peer obligation plays a negative moderating role between job performance and controlling leadership. (4) Peer duty plays a negative moderating role between job performance and participatory leadership. The conclusion of this study, on the one hand, can explain how job performance affects the difficulty of maintaining workplace friendship, on the other hand, it can provide insights for how leaders can adjust their leadership styles to gain better managerial outcomes.

Keywords: Job Performance; Controlling Leadership; Participatory Leadership; Peer Obligation; Friendship Maintenance Difficulty

1. Introduction

Modern enterprises are paying more and more attention to the internal culture and development of the enterprise, and are committed to creating a mutual-help, harmonious and friendly working environment. Because the work pressure of employees will be much greater than before, some companies are beginning to tend to encourage employees to use cooperation, and mutual-aid work model (Calcaterra & Raineri, 2020), allows employees to be grouped or paired to collaborate to achieve common performance goals. This model can not only reduce the pressure on employees, but also make profits for the company faster (Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2022). Under such conditions, the friendly relationships between employees is critical. People are more inclined to cooperate with colleagues who have a good relationship with each other's, and the tacit understanding and cooperation between them will be easier to adjust. Therefore, understanding how employees maintain friendship in the workplace can not only increase personal happiness and satisfaction in the company, but also gain advantages and reduce stress in future work (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018).

Job performance and relational performance, as two different variables, may also affect overall performance in a different order. There have been many studies in the past that have focused on the issue of how workplace friendships affect job performance. However, this study

argues that the employee's personal job performance will also affect the difficulty for maintaining friendship in the workplace (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). Job performance is also a concrete manifestation of work ability. At the same time, it will also attract other colleagues in the workplace to actively want to obtain or maintain a better friendship with those employees with better job performance. That is to say, from an individual level, if the performance of high-task-performance employees is recognized by the organization's examination results, and the leader also expresses that the way he treats other employees is different, it is easier to attract the attention of colleagues and reduce the relationship between the employee and his colleagues, difficulty for maintaining friendships.

From an organizational perspective, the level of employee performance will affect the way the leader chooses to lead the employee (Ali & Islam, 2020). That is to say, for employees with better performance, the leader may tend to take more laissez-faire or empowering leadership model. For employees with poor performance, leaders may be inclined to adopt a leadership model with stricter control with delivery of clear work (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018).

In addition, from the perspective of interpersonal interaction, the leader's attitude towards an employee will affect whether his colleagues are willing to choose to maintain friendship with this employee. If the leader treats the employee with an open or respectful attitude, other employees also want to get this better special treatment (Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2022), so they want to get close to these employees and learn how to gain the trust of the leader, with favorable treatment, so that these employees with better job performance can more easily maintain workplace friendship with other employees.

The concept of peer obligation can be said to be a kind of personal values for mutual assistance among employees (Marshall, et al., 2020). The main argument is that mutual help among colleagues is a common personal value. Also, employees should help colleagues, and colleagues should also help employees in need. Although each employee's choice of this value judgment may be different, it will affect the impact of the employee's job performance on the choice of leadership model.

In previous studies, most scholars have focused on how to improve employee job performance, trying to find ways to improve employee performance according to different leadership styles. To require employees to do their work perfectly (Otto et al., 2021), or to promote the improvement of employee performance with high-pressure incentives; or to adopt transformational leadership to establish special relationships with very few employees, so that employees become someone in the circle who get more care and support, and other employees, in order to join this circle, will gain leadership attention by improving job performance (Chen et al., 2018), or differentiated by positive work attitudes ways to improve employee performance.

Different from the views of most studies, this study believes that the improvement of employee job performance will continue to help them improve job performance and form a positive cycle that promotes overall performance improvement. To sum up, the key question of this study is, how will the level of job performance affect the maintenance of employees' workplace friendship?

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypothesis

2.1 Job Performance and Controlling Leadership

When employees show low job performance, it may be that employees have weak planning ability for work, less positive attitude and low work independence, and the leader will adopt a controlling leadership style to lead employees to complete basic tasks (Zheng et al., 2020). Leaders may show that they use managerial skills such as compulsory arrangement of work tasks, rigid setting of work plans, and strict supervision of employees' completion at work to allow employees to achieve basic task requirements.

Under the leadership of controlling leaders, employees with low job performance can change the status quo of employees who are passive and stagnant by issuing clear instructional guidance, clearly indicating the direction of work, and under certain rigid plans (Sarmah et al., 2022), to promote employees to achieve normal and expected performance goals, and to push employees to complete predetermined work goals.

To sum up, employees with low job performance are more likely to trigger leaders to adopt a controlling leadership style, and the effect of adopting a controlling leadership style is that the leader wants to change the state of low job performance employees (Zheng et al., 2020), prompting them to adjust their working methods, change their work attitudes, improve their execution ability and work cooperation, so that employees can concentrate more on their work. Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

H1: Job performance has a negative effect on controlling leadership.

2.2 Job Performance and Participatory Leadership

Employees with high job performance usually have a positive attitude towards work, a high degree of commitment, and better decision-making and communication skills. High job performance employees will make leaders have a higher evaluation of their self-management ability, so they are more willing to adopt a participatory leadership style. In order to push employees to achieve higher goals, leaders will also allow this type of employees to participate in the company's decision-making and give them more opportunities for work performance. Participatory leadership can effectively promote employees' proactive change behavior, that is to say, when employees get a lot of decision-making power and feel a strong sense of participation, they will actively implement some behaviors that are beneficial to the company's development (Ishaque et al., 2022),

To sum up, since high-job performance employees may have their own better characteristics or abilities, leaders will let them participate in the decision-making or resource allocation of high-performance organizations. Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

H2: Job performance has a positive effect on participatory leadership.

2.3 Controlling Leadership and the Difficulty for Maintaining Friendship

Employees under the leadership of control may show low work enthusiasm and insufficient skills. If colleagues maintain friendship with such employees, they need to pay more human resources or time resources. At the same time, colleagues choose to keep a distance from such employees out of the mentality of avoiding excessive consumption of resources and avoiding leaders who may doubt their own personal abilities. Therefore, in the face of low-job performance employees, it is more difficult to maintain friendship among colleagues.

Leadership style sometimes directly determines the working environment and atmosphere within the company, which in turn affects the establishment and maintenance of friendship among employees (Nasir, 2020). Supervisors adopt controlling leadership, which shows from the side that the lack of low-job performance employees makes these employees get along with colleagues, such as a sense of contempt, rejection, and lack of attention, which will affect the maintenance of friendship in the workplace (Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2022), at the same time, it will also produce some negative interaction performance, which will increase the difficulty of maintaining friendship.

Due to the different relationship between each employee and the leader, this inadvertent attitude may cause some invisible hierarchical groups (Latta, 2020). Low-job performance employees are more difficult to form a closer relationship with their leaders, so colleagues will not spend too much effort to maintain friendship with such employees. To sum up, under the controlling leadership style, it is relatively difficult for low-job performance employees to maintain friendship with their colleagues. Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

H3: Controlling leadership has a positive effect on the difficulty for maintaining friendship.

2.4 Participatory Leadership and the Difficulty for Maintaining Friendship

The characteristics of professional knowledge ability, decision-making arrangement ability and emergency communication ability displayed by high job performance employees all indicate that such employees belong to the group of high-level work ability (Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2022). In order to obtain more resource support in future work, as well as to understand and accumulate more rich personal resources, and to indirectly improve personal job performance, colleagues will choose to maintain friendship with high-job performance employees.

Workplace friendships are some intimate perceptions between employees in the work environment, which can provide support and convenience for employees in the work environment. Participatory leaders will encourage employees to participate in decision-making through various ways, which will inevitably increase the frequency of contact with leaders, and will also obtain opportunities to participate in some important businesses and further individual development brings benefits (Morrison & Nolan, 2009).

For example, when a high-task-performance employee is in charge of an important task, the employee can propose to assist the high-task-performance employee to complete the task as an assistant, while the high-task-performance employee usually chooses to have a closer relationship with himself. At this time, employees can naturally join in the processing of

important tasks, and then improve their job performance. To sum up, under the participatory leadership style, it is relatively less difficult for high job performance employees to maintain friendship with their colleagues. Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

H4: Participatory leadership has a negative effect on the difficulty for maintaining friendship.

2.5 Peer Obligation Moderates Among Job Performance and Controlling Leadership

Peer duty could be viewed as a kind of personal value for work. If employees believe that colleagues should help each other, peer obligation will get a higher score (Marshall, et al., 2020). When an employee with low job performance, at the same time, if he also contributes to assisting others' work, or thinks that other colleagues should also assist him to improve his work performance. This kind of view or attitude may only make the leader adopt a higher-intensity control leadership mode, lest the employee ignore his own work to help other colleagues, or eagerly expect other people to agree that they should help him.

On the other hand, since each employee's physical and mental resources are limited (Zampetakis, 2022), if employees whose work performance cannot be improved, leaders want them to focus on their own work, so as not to affect the leadership own performance. In summary, therefore, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H5: Peer obligation plays the negative moderating role between job performance and controlling leadership.

2.6 Peer Obligation Moderates Among Job Performance and Participatory Leadership

When employees with high job performance also have high peer obligations, under the condition of limited resources, employees devote their time and resources to assist others, which may lead to crowding out the leader to invite him to participate in various management tasks time or resources (Marshall et al., 2020), thereby reducing the positive impact of job performance on participatory leadership (Zarankin & Kunkel, 2019). In summary, therefore, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H6: Peer obligation plays the negative moderating role between job performance and participatory leadership.

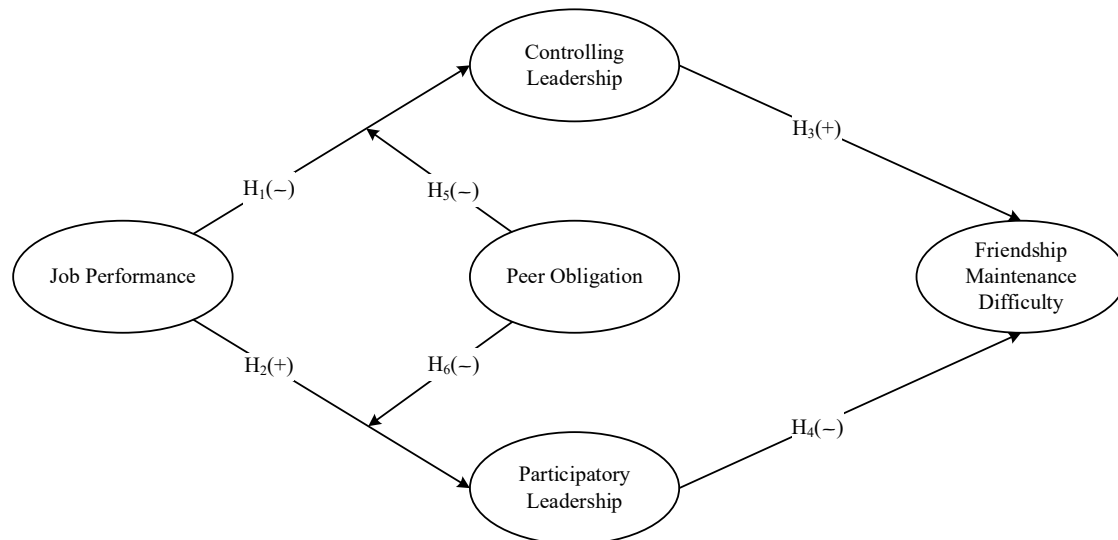
Integrating the above research hypotheses, draw the theoretical model of this study, refer to Figure 1.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Sampling and Design

Figure 1

The Research Framework Model



The research object of this study is employees who work in companies, uses convenience sampling to collect data. A total of 944 questionnaires were received. After screening the invalid questionnaires that were too short to fill in and the answers were all consistent, all 604 invalid questionnaires were deleted. Finally, 340 valid questionnaires were actually accepted.

Questionnaires accounted for 36% of the returned questionnaires. Among the 340 valid questionnaires, men accounted for 60.9%; respondents aged 26-30 accounted for 33.8%; 16.5% of employees had a master's degree or above; 25% of employees had a working experience of 3-5 years; 40.9% of employees work in private enterprises.

3.2 Reliability Analysis

This study uses a self-reporting scale with good reliability, and the results of all scales were within acceptable state. The job performance scale (Cronbach' $\alpha = 0.85$) proposed by Methot *et al.*, (2016), Controlled Leadership Scale (Cronbach' $\alpha = 0.80$) proposed by Li *et al.*, (2018), Participatory Leadership Scale (Cronbach' $\alpha = 0.80$) proposed by Li *et al.*, (2018), Friendship Maintenance Difficulty Scale (Cronbach' $\alpha = 0.86$) proposed by Colbert *et al.*, (2016), and Peer Obligation Scale (Cronbach' $\alpha = 0.90$) proposed by Anderson and West (1996). In this study, demographic variables such as employee gender, age, education, tenure, and enterprise type were controlled at the individual level.

3.3 Validity Analysis

In this study, AVE for job performance=0.53, CR=0.85, AVE for controlling leadership=0.51, CR=0.80, AVE for participatory leadership=0.51, CR=0.80, AVE for peer obligation=0.53, CR=0.90, AVE for friendship maintenance difficulty=0.51, CR=0.86. The

AVE values of the five factors involved in this study are all above 0.5, and the CR values are around 0.8-0.9, all greater than 0.7, indicating that this analysis has good aggregate validity.

4. Analysis of Research Results

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Prior to hypothesis testing, this study conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on five variables (job performance, controlling leadership, participatory leadership, difficulty in maintaining friendships, and peer obligations). The results showed that the good fit index of the five-factor model ($\chi^2 = 354.08$; $df = 314$; $\chi^2/df = 1.12$; GFI = 0.92; AGFI = 0.91; CFI = 0.99; NFI = 0.92; IFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.01; SRMR = 0.03), while obviously it's better than other models, taking the four-factor model as an example (combining controlling leadership and participating leadership, $\chi^2 = 500.29$; $df = 318$; $\chi^2/df = 1.57$; GFI = 0.89; AGFI = 0.87; CFI = 0.95; NFI = 0.89; IFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.04). The results of confirmatory factor analysis showed that $\chi^2/df < 3$, GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI, IFI > 0.9 , RMSEA < 0.08 , SRMR < 0.05 , indicating that the variables in this study have good discriminant validity, and the overall fit of the model is within an acceptable range.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

It can be seen from Table 1 that this study has carried out correlation analysis between variables, and there is no abnormal phenomenon in the mean and standard deviation of each variable. Most of the statistically related values are statistically significant. In order to avoid serious bias in the regression analysis, a collinearity test will be performed. The detail are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Correlation Analysis

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Controlling Leadership	3.58	0.85	.17**	-.13*	-.05	-.15*	.40***			
Participatory Leadership	3.65	0.81	.09	-.15*	-.03	-.16*	.50***	.53***		
Peer Obligation	3.70	0.78	.10	-.20*	-.12*	-.17*	.51***	.56***	.54***	
Friendship Maintenance Difficulty	3.63	0.78	.09	-.17*	-.04	-.14*	.52**	.42**	.51***	.56***

*Note: 1. N=340, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

4.3 Linear Regression Analysis

Test for Hypothesis 1. In the model 2, the adjusted R^2 is 0.19, indicating that job performance can explain 19% of the variance for the change in controlling leadership. The F is 21.39, which is significant, indicating that at least one control variable will have an impact on controlling leadership. The VIF are all less than 3, indicating that the problem of collinearity is not too serious. The path coefficient of job performance, the β is 0.38, which is significant and positively significant, indicating that job performance will have a significant positive

impact on controlling leadership, which is inconsistent with hypothesis 1 proposed in this study. Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Test for Hypothesis 2. In the model 4, the adjusted R^2 is 0.26, indicating that job performance can explain 26% of the variance for the change in participatory leadership. The F is 31.64. The VIF are all less than 3. The path coefficient of job performance, the β is 0.49, which has a positive and significant impact relationship, indicating that job performance will have a significant positive impact on participatory leadership, which is consistent with hypothesis 2 proposed in this study. Hypothesis 2 obtains support. The detail data are shown in Table 2.

Test for Hypothesis 3, in the model 6, the adjusted R^2 is 0.18, indicating that controlling leadership can explain 18% of the variance for the difficulty of maintaining friendship. The F is 19.67, which is significant. The VIF are all less than 3. The path coefficients of controlling leaders, the β is 0.40, which is significant and positively significant, indicating that controlling leaders will have a significant positive impact on the difficulty of maintaining friendship, which is consistent with Hypothesis 3 proposed in this study, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Test for Hypothesis 4, in the model 7, the adjusted R^2 is 0.26, indicating that participatory leadership can explain 26% of the variance for the change in the difficulty of maintaining friendship. The F is 31.01. The VIF are all smaller than 3. The path coefficient of participatory leadership, the β is 0.49, which is significant and positively significant, indicating that participatory leadership will have a significant positive impact on the difficulty of maintaining friendship, which is inconsistent with Hypothesis 4 proposed in this study, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. The detail data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Test Results

Dependent Variables	Controlling Leadership		Participatory Leadership		Friendship Maintenance Difficulty		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
Gender	0.17***	0.11*	0.09	0.02	0.10	0.03	0.05
Education	-0.08	-0.08	-0.06	-0.06	-0.07	-0.03	-0.04
Tenure	-0.17***	-0.15**	-0.17***	-0.14**	-0.15**	-0.08	-0.06
Job		0.38***		0.49***			
Controlling Leadership						0.40***	
Participatory Leadership							0.49***
R^2	0.06	0.20	0.04	0.27	0.03	0.19	0.27
Adj. R^2	0.05	0.19	0.03	0.26	0.02	0.18	0.26
F	7.15***	21.39***	4.68**	31.64***	4.07**	19.67***	31.01***

Note: 1. N=340, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

2. The regression coefficient in the table is the standardized regression coefficient β .

Test for Hypothesis 5. Model 10 is tested by adding an item for interaction to determine whether the moderating effect is supported. The result of analysis is significant and negatively significant, indicating that the impact of job performance on controlling leadership is significantly negatively moderated by peer obligation ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .001$). This is consistent with Hypothesis 5 proposed in this study, and Hypothesis 5 is supported. Test for Hypothesis

Model 13 is tested by adding interaction items to determine whether the moderating effect is supported. The path coefficient between job performance and peer obligation, the β is -0.21, which is significant and negatively significant, indicating that the impact of job performance on participatory leadership is significantly negatively moderated by peer obligation. Consistent with Hypothesis 6 proposed in this study, Hypothesis 6 was supported. The detail results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

The Results of the Moderating Effects of Peer Obligation

Dependent Variables	Controlling Leadership			Participatory Leadership		
	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13
Gender	0.17***	0.09*	0.10*	0.09	0.01	0.01
Education	-0.08	-0.01	-0.00	-0.06	-0.00	0.00
Tenure	-0.17***	-0.07	-0.05	-0.17***	-0.08	-0.06
Job Performance		0.15**	0.08		0.30***	0.23***
Peer Obligation		0.46***	0.36***		0.37***	0.28***
JP \times PO			-0.23***			-0.21***
R^2	0.06	0.35	0.38	0.04	0.37	0.40
Adj. R^2	0.05	0.34	0.37	0.03	0.36	0.39
F	7.15***	36.25***	34.62***	4.68**	39.76**	37.30***

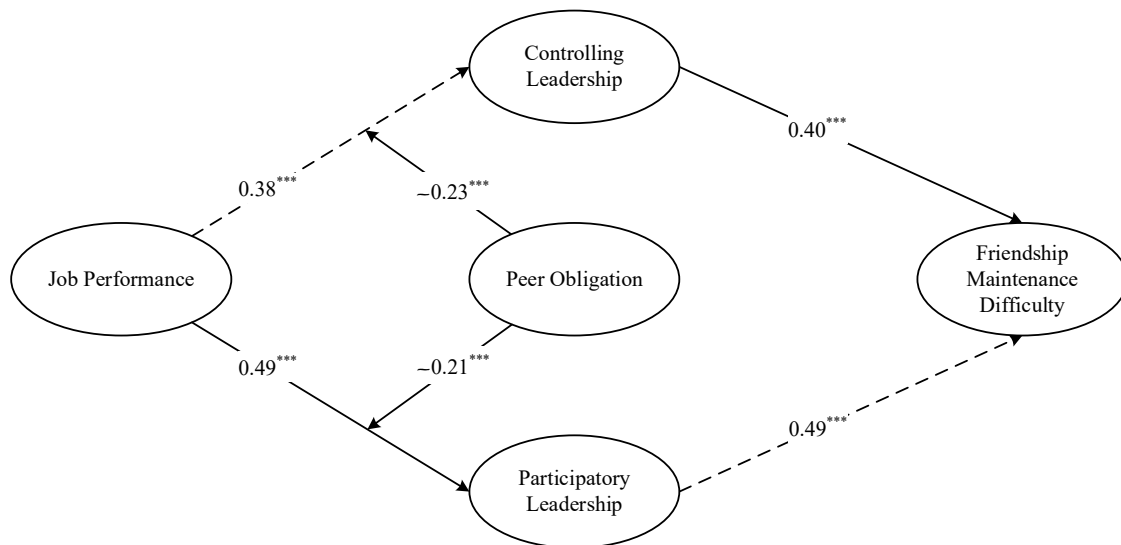
Note: 1. N=340, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

2. The regression coefficient in the table is the standardized regression coefficient β .

The slope of high peer obligation is significantly lower than that of low peer obligation, indicating that when the peer obligation is at a high level, the impact of employee job performance on controlling leadership is lower than when the peer obligation is at a low level, so H₅ has been supported.

The slope of low peer obligation is significantly greater than that of high peer obligation, indicating that when peer obligation is at a low level, participatory leadership has a greater impact on employees with high job performance, and vice versa when employees with high job performance are overwhelmed by high peer obligation. When moderated by higher peer obligation, the effect of between participatory leadership on job performance is weaker, so H₆ is supported.

Summarize the above results of statistical analyzes and draw them as shown in Figure 2 according to the relative position of each hypothesis.

Figure 2*Analysis Results of the Study*

Note: 1. N=340, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

2. The regression coefficient in the table is the standardized regression coefficient β .

3. The relationship between the variables in the research hypothesis is shown as a solid line if it is supported, and as a dashed line if it is not supported.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Research Conclusions

The research is concluded that job performance will definitely affect the difficulty of maintaining friendship. The research results show that through job performance, it will indeed affect the choice of leadership style, especially under the control leadership style, it will increase the difficulty of maintaining friendship between employees and colleagues; under the moderating of peer obligation, peer obligation is higher, will reduce the triggering effect of employee job performance on controlling leadership, thereby reducing the difficulty of maintaining friendship among colleagues; at the same time, peer obligations will also reduce the impact of employee job performance and participatory leadership, thereby increasing the difficulty of maintaining friendship among colleagues.

5.2 Research Limitations and Recommendation

The research limitations are divided into four points: First, the definition of friendship is not clear. Second, the questionnaire has certain inaccurate. Third, there are limitations in the research perspective. Fourth, there is controversy about the existence of friendship in the workplace. Based on the research limitations, three future research suggestions are proposed: First, scholars who study the difficulty of friendship maintenance in the follow-up can make a clear definition of friendship and design a more complete model to judge whether workplace friendship is pure friendship. Second, in the selection of the sample, the data collection of the research sample can be expanded, and more detailed statistical research can be carried out,

thereby providing support for the persuasiveness of the theory. Thirdly, scholars can explore in depth what other aspects of job performance have an impact on the difficulty of maintaining friendship.

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