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AMONG FRIENDS: THE ROLE OF FRIENDSHIP IN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract

Friendship, a mutual and profound relationship, permeates history of human culture and occurs in all social situations, including professional and informal human activities. In organizations, it develops through processes of communication and generates a communication culture of kindness and support. Organizational friendship enhances work engagement and satisfaction, as well as helps to promote individual ends. This article investigates the more vital significance of friendship in alternative organizations. Such organizations, operating at the margins of the currently dominant profit-oriented business model, offer a plethora of insights of possible structures and practices. Our ethnographic qualitative research shows the implications of workplace friendship as organizing principle. It helps to make organizations more humane, and redressed the moral imbalance, so prevalent in contemporary organizing and management. This has important implications for any kind of communication, creating social awareness around important themes related to management and organizations. Patterns of friendship are meaningful for organizing and organizations and their most vital significance concerns the area of social communication.

Keywords: communication, alternative organizing, social networks, economic sociology

Introduction

"[I]f you tame me, then we shall need each other", said the fox to the Little Prince (De Saint-Exupéry, 1991, p. 50). Friendship ties make people need each other and bring balance, based on mutual need and trust, into human life. As in the beautiful story of the Little Prince, friendship ties need dedication – and also communication. The Prince and the fox talk to each other *in friendship* and so a bond is forged.

Management scholar Henry Mintzberg who gained his fame mostly for publications on strategy, structure and managerial communication has, in recent years, been focusing on the lack of balance and meaning in contemporary organizations (2015; 2019). He calls for a return to values, among which friendship is important and prominent. A society, an organization, when devoid of it, ends up increasingly out of balance with the environment, with its participants, and with its own raison d'etre. In his call for re-balancing he envisages the central role of both human connection and communication: "How about trying to connect, to communicate, even to use judgment?" (Mintzberg, 2015, p. 83).

Two authors, father and son: economist Robert Skidelsky and philosopher Edward Skidelsky express similar concerns (2013). Their book *How much is enough?* addresses the value of the good life, which once was central for human beings but currently has become all but forgotten. One of the important values that used to be one of the foundations of the good life is friendship: an important and profoundly serious relationship. From Greek warriors Achilles and Patroclus, to the biblical Ruth, and her mother-in-law Naomi, to more contemporary narratives of Thelma and Louise, characters from the Ridley Scott film about two runaway friends and Star Wars' more exotic pair: Han Solo and Chewbacca. The ancient Greeks had four different words for love and friendship was one of them: *philia*. For Artistotle (2009) the connection of friendship is of central importance in human life, also in relationships between lovers or business partners.

> For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods; even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need friends most of all; for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in its most laudable form towards friends? Or how can prosperity be guarded and preserved without friends? (Artistotle, 2009, p. 142).

Friendship is not just about kindness – it has to be a mutual relationship, an altruistic desire for someone else's good, and a willingness to sacrifice, "mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other" (Artistotle, 2009, p. 144).

Aristotle distinguished between three types of friendship, based on the motive for forming them: friendships of utility, friendships of pleasure and friendships of the good. The third one is the most profound, but all three are necessary. And the first two, based on utility and pleasure, are incidental and less sincere, but

nonetheless beneficial in situations of exchange and affairs. And yet, nowadays, it seems to be all but absent from the realm where exchange and affairs take place. This realm has been taken over by economics which has long forgotten about its roots as a moral academic discipline, such as Adam Smith envisaged it. Nowadays,

> [e]conomics is not just academic discipline. It is the theology of our age, the language that all interests, high and low, must speak if they are to win a respectful hearing in the courts of power. Economics owes its special position in part to the failure of other disciplines to impress their stamp on political debate. Philosophy was a powerful force in the public life until the early twentieth century, when it retreated into linguistic hair-splitting. Sociology made a bid for influence under Weber and Talcott Parsons, but was never able to develop a systematic body of theory to rival economics. History succumbed to the worship of power. Poets and critics once boasted of being 'unacknowledged legislators of the world', an ambition briefly rekindled by T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis but now quietly abandoned. Economics has been left in the sole possession of the field (Skidelsky, Skidelsky, 2012, p. 92).

Or, in the words of Henry Mintzberg:

> This dogma centers on an 'economic man' for whom greed is good, property is sacred, markets are sufficient, and governments are suspect. As one view of human society, this makes some sense; as the view of human society, it is nonsense (Mintzberg, 2015, p. 4).

Theologian and philosopher Michael Lerner (2019) calls for a shift in social energy: to replace the obsession with thus understood economics with love and co-operation. He argues that the neoliberal focus on the individual separated from his or her confreres is to blame for much of the misery we experience as members of contemporary societies. Instead, we should direct more of our attention towards the Other. Friendship, understood as am utterly human need, can rebalance society and the contemporary mode of organizing. It is a force holding people together which does not require unanimity, conformity, or similarity.

The contribution of our paper concerns the theme of workplace friendship in alternative organizations that exist in the margins of the mainstream neoliberal system, as defined by Damien Cahill, Melinda Cooper, Martijn Konings and David Primrose in the *SAGE Handbook of Neoliberalism* (2018) as an exceedingly complex and multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing a historically specific form of governmentality, a hegemonic project of exploiting labour, a set of normative doctrines based on the ideas of Friedrich Hayek and other radical pro-market thinkers connected with the Mont Pelerin Society, an institutional ensemble facilitating capital accumulation and a global geographic process, albeit with some local variation. Jamie Peck, Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2018) argue, in the same volume, that the term neoliberalism may be fuzzy and clumsy, but it is still the best term we have to address and problematize, theoretically and politically, an actually existing and powerful social system. However, they point out that "[e]ven if neoliberalism may have come to dominate so many of the terrains of social struggle, it can never fully monopolize those terrains; alternative social and institutional arrangements

are both co-present and omnipresent, even if they have been subject to subordination and suppression" (Peck, Brenner, Theodore, 2018, p. 14). This is at these alternative margins where our interest is aimed. We believe that the potential for renewal and regeneration come from the non-linear margins (Höpfl, 1995). Therefore we see an urgent need for the exploration of alternative organizations in search of ideas and values instrumental for the rebalancing of management (and ultimately society). We would like to propose some reflections, based on ethnographic studies, that friendship has some fundamental implications for alternative organizations, which both stabilize and reveal the fragility of organizing processes. We end the paper with a reflection on the role of teaching in the propagation of friendship as a key organizational value.

The contribution of this text is located within the area of social communication, as our aim is to propose an emergent (inductive) theory that empowers social actors *to communicate and express the truth*, which, as one of the reviewers of this text pointed out, is the key significance of media and communication.

Social communication, organizing and friendship

Social communication is an inherent part of organizing processes (Szeluga-Romańska, 2014). Indeed, organizations can be said to emerge through and thanks to constant communicational processes between the participants (Keyton, 2005). These processes are based on a variety of media and tools, which may be more or less intentional. All of them, however, can create dynamic links between areas of the organization and contribute to the systemic character of organizing, meaning that all parts are interconnected in non-linear ways which can produce synergetic effects (Nierenberg, 2011). Furthermore, not just internal organizational processes are manifested through communication, but so are the processes of interaction between organizations and their environments. These processes are emergent and holistic, forging complex interconnections and making systemic learning possible (Bateson, 1972). Indeed, from a Batesonian perspective, it is due to such processes that organizations, complex human systems, find and co-create their place within a broadly understood ecosystem, and it is thanks to them that organizational learning and renewal are possible.

Communication is, in itself, a complex and multifaceted process. Bruno Ollivier (2010) claims that each communicational process should be perceived as a solid compound of technical, linguistic and social aspects. That means that communication is much more than just words: said or written, but involves a variety of communicative human behaviours: gestures, smiles, touch, the physical distance the people keep during conversation, the reactions of the communicational partner and their long-term social consequences.

Barbara Czarniawska (2010) proposes that the human conversation is a kind of social activity that links both symbolic and practical organizing aspects. Social communication gives sense and helps to create meaning that is part of the organizing process and one of the main cornerstones of organizational culture (Weick, 1979). As such, it can be seen as an important link between organizing and friendship which, from a sociological point of view, is a result of intensive, long-term and usually positive social interactions, created and developed by human communication processes (Hartley, Hartley, 1961). The Latin word *communicatio* refers to having interactions with the others, approaching to agreement and, finally, building a community (Filipiak, 2004). Such perspective highlights the intensive interconnection between friendship and communication.

Workplace friendship

The vital role of friendship as part of the human condition as well as an evolutionary advantage has been upheld by biological anthropologists and evolutionary psychologists (see Zeldin, 2015; Hare, Woods, 2020). Human being has an advanced developed a "relational consciousness" (Hay, 2000), a quality with significant implications for activities such as structurizing, organizing, including business organizations (Ochinowski, Kseba, 2013). Such a perspective was also strongly emphasized in the writings of the Polish pre-war philosopher and social activist, Edward Abramowski (1994), who argued that the relationships of friendship is one of the most important bonds on all societal levels, from the macro to the micro, including educational institutions and the workplace. He also upholds that the cultivation of friendship helps to create organizations which better adjusted to the human needs, as well able to serve aims such as liberty, fraternity and equality. He proposed a kind of social organization, operating on the principles of the cooperative movement, that would be dedicated to mutual support and the nurturing of friendship bonds. In his view, such organizations would support other organizations, for example workplaces, that would benefit from a developed spirit of friendship between people (see also Okraska, 2009). Later in the same century, Jacques Derrida (1994) considered the possibility of a collective future that transcends the current individualism and fragmentation, presenting friendship as a model for politics.

In management studies it is well known, since the times of founding mother of the discipline, Mary Parker Follett (1919), that communities are natural and creative processes with many positive implications for organizations. In fact, in many instances, positive social relations are the reason for the emergence and integration of organizations. Follett proposes (1940) a *dynamic administration*: management structures and procedures based on human relations and bonds, and not intended as frames serving to limit and order all social activity. Difference is not a problem and the conflicts resulting from it can be managed thanks to such a dynamic

approach. Another classic, Chester Barnard, upholds in his famous *Functions of the Executive* (1938) that leadership needs to be based in social relations, and especially cooperation. The formal organizations which are necessary for the existence of an organization: (1) communication; (2) willingness to serve; and (3) common purpose depend on the existence on the informal organization, which contain emotional aspects and are more durable and deeper than social contacts. He as almost mentions the word "friendship", when he proposes that formal organizations co-exist with informal organizations (groups of people who interact with each other outside a formal organizational structure). Economist Tomáš Sedláček (2012) advocates good relations and *minor friendships* at work and argues that people work better when they are friend, and organizations are more effective when co-workers communicate well and meet also after work. Patricia Sias, Renee Heath, Tara Perry, Deborah Silva, and Bryan Fix (2004) go even further and uphold friendship is more important than simply "good relations". It allows to engage in more intensive exchange of professional information and knowledge, based on trust, which lead to the development of a reservoir of work-related knowledge which consists of experiences and activities linked to work. Loss of friendship causes loss of support and motivation. Small wonder that friendship is, sometimes, used as the basis for personnel selection, especially in small firms where people are strongly dependent on each other. Polish management scholar Bartosz Sławecki (2010) carried out an ethnographic study of such small workplaces and focused on their recruitment processes. It turns out that personal contacts and previous relationships play a decisive role in these processes. Instead of relying on competition and impersonal labor relations, people are expected to quickly develop trust for each other, and knowing – and even liking each other are an important cultural capital, also in organizations where there is little other capital. All in all, the owners (and managers) both prefer to work with friends and use their friendships strategically to achieve their work-related aims. An older study, by James R. Lincoln, and Jon Miller (1979), presents a somewhat similar picture: incorporate settings friends, especially those in important and managerial positions, use their friendship networks 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 (Lincoln, Miller, 1979, p. 196).

Friendship is not just a tool for better management and decision making, but can be a powerful means of building organic grass root social relations. Rachel Morrison and Helena Cooper-Thomas (2016) argue that workplace friendship fulfills a number of positive roles, both for the employees and their employing organizations, such as commitment and creativity. However, familiarity should not be confused with friendship, acquaintance is one thing, and deep friendship – another. While the former protects against loneliness, true deep commitment, selflessness and devotion are the hallmarks of friendship. It is she who brings a sense

of closeness and emotional abundance, and, as it were, teaches observers the patterns of behavior. Finally, life at work where there are friends is just more interesting. However, there may also be tensions of maintaining friendships with co-workers, leading to stress and disagreements. Dorothy Markiewicz, Irene Devine and Dana Kausilas (1999), depict friendships as largely beneficial for people working together. Homophilous friendships are the strongest and the most stable. Mixed gender relationships are somewhat weaker, albeit men tend to be more open with female friends than with male mates. Male friendships tend to help in promoting the careers and success of the companions. Natasha Webster and Meighan Boyd (2019) explain how friendship between women in academia, especially between people who are not part of the same department, and therefore across the structure, particularly strongly supports the resistance in the workplace to neoliberalization. Friends feel more secure as persons and have a greater sense of meaning, even when the conditions in which they function are experienced by them as harmful and detrimental to their mental health. Thanks to friendship, they can cope better and more effectively oppose the implementation of neoliberal rules and management systems. Friendships within a single department often develop into cliques. However, when people from different formal teams are involved, they focus more on shared values than on excluding others. Jane Dutton and Emily Heaphy (2003) uphold that connections at work "compose the fabric of daily life" (Dutton, Heaphy, 2003, p. 264). High quality relationships have lasting positive implications for the involved, whereas negative leave damage and degrade. A focus on workplace connections helps to put individuals in a context that is "alive, dynamic and embodied, making it a rich reservoir of possibilities for human behaviour and accomplishment" (Dutton, Heaphy, 2003, p. 275). The development of high quality friendship ties in organizations is a slow process, taking time, attention, and effort, but it is experienced as well worth it by the employees – if they only get the space and possibility to do so. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. And yet, research shows that the lack of friendship or camaraderie – loneliness in the workplace can be harmful to people and the entire organization, both from a managerial and grass root point of view. Sarah Wright and Anthony Silard (2020) argue that loneliness, though stigmatized and trivialized in today's workplaces, can be a powerful and very complex aspect of suffering and depersonalizing organizations, something like a chronic hunger for human ties.

Alternative organizations

Currently there is an increasing interest in alternative organizations among mainly management and organization researchers, concerned about the possibilities of finding working examples of sustainable and value driven organizations. Martin Parker, Valerie Fournier and Patrick Reedy (2007) argue that the very word

"organization" tends to be used, in management mainstream discourse, in a drastically limited invite sense, implying that it is synonymous with "business corporation". However, the word refers to a much broader pattern of collective human activity, with a long history from long before the emergence of the business corporation and, even now, representing phenomena as diverse as schools, trade unions, family businesses and cooperatives. Yet many business schools tend to be oblivious of this and focus on teaching a reality that looks severely restricted and even blind to anything other than the financially motivated business corporation (Parker, 2018). This is due to an ideological stance rather than plain lack of interest or intelligence. This is, by itself, an excellent reason for science to become interested in alternative forms of organizing.

There are other reasons as well, equally important. We now very much need alternatives which would be able to work effectively yet without the destructive focus of economic growth, and instead make other: ecological and human, values their primarily goal. Erik Olin Wright (2010) proposes that such organizations exist and do well, labelling them real utopias: working and viable alternatives fulfilling the criteria of viability, desirability and achievability. These "real utopias" include such organisations as workers' cooperatives and Wikipedia, and they are "utopian" because they are founded upon values which provide insights into emancipatory alternatives to the currently dominant mainstream. J.K. Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy (2013) provide a guide for reframing the economy, based on alterative organizations active in different sectors and areas. They describe working examples of alternative business organizations, markets, property and even finance. Martin Parker, George Cheney, Valerie Fournier and Chris Land (2014) offer a collection of resources within the area of alternative organizing: ideas, frameworks, and examples. Patrick Reedy, Daniel King and Christine Coupland (2016) argue that concrete empirical cases of alternative organizations do much more than show the alternatives: they enhance and broaden the entire understanding of what organizations are and how to problematize them and study them.

Organizational ethnographies

The empirical material for this article has been collected as part of two ethnographic studies (Van Maanen, 2011; Watson, 2011) by each of us, both focusing on alternative organizations. Ethnography is more than a method: it is an approach oriented towards understanding and imagining the social (Gaggiotti, Kostera, Krzyworzeka, 2016), based on presence and personal experience in the field (Pachirat, 2017). The ethnographer gathers narratives that help to understand local knowledge by giving voice to the social actors, on their own terms and from their lived perspective (Yanow, 2000). Ultimately, the aim is to build empirical and inductive knowledge about cultural processes in their real life context (Schwartz-Shea, Yanow, 2012).

The first study was conducted by the first author and lasted 2012–2019, in Poland and in the North of England, and concerned value driven organizations of differing formal and ownership status, from small businesses, *via* cooperatives, to informal anarchistic organizations. It consisted of three stages: the initial stage was oriented towards building of a network established by interviews and observations. The organizations and contact persons were selected chosen and contacted on a snow-ball technique: key interviewees were asked to recommend further places and people during the research process (Kostera, 2007). The total number of studied organizations is 35, of which 18 were based in the UK and 16 in Poland. During the second stage 12 organizations were selected for intensive and ongoing ethnographic contact. Presently the study used following ethnographic methods: in-depth recurrent formal as well as informal interviewing (Kostera, 2007; Czarniawska, 2014), direct observation, or observing the participants at work (Rosen, 2000), shadowing, that accompanying the social actors carrying out their daily work (Czarniawska, 2007) and participant observation (Delamont, 2004). In addition, a large number of organizational texts has been analyzed, and at several occasions the social actors were asked to write down their own notes and impressions. During this stage 110 formal transcribed interviews have been carried out, a large number of informal interviews, 131 longer and 50 shorter observations. The third and final phase comprised ongoing and informal contact with three organizations chosen from the original pool. The researcher visited the field and joined for an informal chat (taking simultaneous notes from the conversation rather than recording it) and, occasionally, helping out with the day-to-day work and chatting meanwhile. The empirical ground for this text was picked out from a vast empirical material collected during this time. We looked for themes and topic associated with friendship and selected some examples and citations which we considered particularly interesting and representative of how the field worked and conceived of itself.

The second study was carried out by the second author in the period of two years, 2009 to 2011, and supplemented by a shorter study in 2019–2020. The field consisted of communication intense organizations in the north of Poland. 13 interviews were conducted with managers from several kinds of organizations: public, private and alternative (cooperatives and NGOSs), as well as observations and document analysis. For the purpose of the article we focused on the alternative organizations where friendship played some more important roles. During the supplementing study started in 2019 with a year-long non-participant observations in four alternative projects / initiatives: an open collaborative society, 2 cooperatives and social educational projects. Apart from observations there 4 anthropological, in-depth interviews conducted with the leaders were carried out. The study also involved informal meetings and chats, usually 2 or 3 with each person (Kostera, 2007; Czarniawska, 2014).

Never alone: Scenes from the field

> In the studied organizations friendship is often literally the foundation and basis for existence. (Ola)

Joanna, one of the organizers active in the agricultural cooperative AgriCoop located in the Polish countryside, told me the following story. Once upon a time a group of people acquired a grant in order to create a project dedicated to cooperativism. They used the funding to establish a small cooperative in the countryside. It started operating and was successful. Then the funding got exhausted, the project's term came to an end, the organizers prepared the accounts and send they away to the funders. Their report ended on very positive notes, with optimistic strategies and recommendation. They packed up their things and went back home to the big city where they came from. The cooperative packed it in shortly after that. This is more or less the story of many cooperatives dating from that period in Poland. However, the story of AgriCoop is different. After the funding stopped and the final reports of the grant were sent to the funder, the organizers stayed put and the cooperative survived. In fact, after the project ended, the cooperative started to develop even more and acquired local support, help from the local government and premises to use on very preferential terms. They are now one of the most stable cooperative organizations in the country. The secret of their success is, according to Joanna, the long-term friendship between the key organizer and the local population.

> He kept going back to them. And then he stayed there, he settled in the countryside. Then he applied for the grant and got it. (…) A lot of different people assembled, farmers, people offering agrotourism, some lone activists who drifted around. (…) Some of these people had strong ties among them already, before the project appeared. The project lasted for one year and resulted in a map of different initiatives. A website was created. But it was basic, nothing that would be ready to thrive. (…) The coop emerged and started to work, slowly. It was there, people talked about it, but it was a seed of something. (…) Projects kill initiatives, really. You have to use the funds, you have to produce a report, everything must be documented and that is that. But here it was different. There was a pack of friends that survived the grant. And [the original organizer] did not move back home to Big City. He went native! (…) It is a farmers' cooperative. They exchange products. Someone has grains, someone has flour, someone bakes bread and they exchange one for the other. (…) They have a place where they meet, on the market, a moment when they can all meet. (…) They use an old tower and a huge unused terrain that remained after a state owned farm [from before 1989]. (…) There they meet every Saturday, there is also a barn there, they take care of it themselves, they have a fund for it, they renovate. (…) This is so stable because of friendship between [the organizers], they knew that they can trust each other, they had known each other for a long time, before the cooperative. (Joanna)

AgriCoop is nowadays often regarded as something of a clan or a community and they like to present themselves as a group of close friends.

The [members] went through much together. This is visible all the time. This gave them a strong energy at the beginning, it works all the time as if it had an energy that is difficult to describe. They do something extra all the time, they do not get any profits out of it. And they think about how to make things better, how to unite other people as well. (Joanna)

However, not everything is rosy in the world of cooperatives. On several occasions, I have been told about the experiences of another cooperative, Coop Big City, that she had been in contact with recently. It started to malfunction. People did not turn up for meetings, some did not bother to register for community work even though it was obligatory for all members. Participants started to complain about the dishonesty of some individuals who acted egoistically and plainly abused their membership advantages. The problem was marginal but serious – it was impossible to establish with certainty who exactly was to blame. And yet Coop Big City was priding itself on being both big and dynamic, however, something was evidently being out of tune. Joanna explained to me at one occasion that lessons have been drawn from this successful yet negative example. Another rapidly growing cooperative, CoopWest, decided to close itself for new membership. Joanna explained: "When it is impossible to recognize people's faces, no real bonds are able to develop".

Therefore CoopWest decided to forfeit growth and, instead, support the emergence and creation of new cooperatives with their experience and knowledge.

This case story illustrates the dynamics and the bulk of the material from the field related to friendship that we have collected during our studies. It presents the significance that is generally recognized in friendship and the reliance on friendship bonds of alternative organizers. It also reveals some of the weaknesses of friendship-based organization. We would now like to unpack the material from the field and sort it into three major themes that we will then use to conclude the text.

The first major theme in our material is sociality itself. The emphasis on the importance of issues of companionship was put in the interviews, in everyday chats, gestures, indeed, it can be said to pervade the entire field material. One of my interlocutors expressed the general attitude very well, when she spoke the following words, with intensity: "I just feel like I don't want to do anything alone, ever again." (Marianne, Space of Games). Another one ascertained: "I joined because I love the coop." (Anna, Dragon Coop). She then went on to explain that the dedication concerns the cooperative as a whole as well as the participants which she considers to be her good friends.

Companionship and sharing are activities that are their own reward. The reason why many of these organizations were created was about the joy of being able to give and to take, as well as a sense of belonging, based on equality and justice, not exploitation. One of the founders of an ecological kindergarten expressed her joy of being able to create and develop real bonds with the other staff, as well as with the children.

I'm happiest when kids come and say that they like it here. They say, auntie, I liked it here so much today. For example, Janek came to me and said: God, I'm so happy that I have such lovely aunties. That's it. Not concrete abilities, skills, they learn naturally and fast. The [child's] mind is receptive, when you propose something to them, they get interested and able to learn really fast. But success is the social field and that people are kind to each other, that the kids play together. (Marianna, Green Kindergarden)

Being able to spend time with others who are considered companions and friends is an answer to a genuine need. An organizer from Warsaw reflects on this sense of togetherness which emerges from the workplace but is not limited to it, people need each other

(…) not just [to] be here for 8 hours and okay, let's go home now, but so that they live. Sometimes we are amazed, because they finish work, and they come here to meet each other, to talk. (Aurelia, Eat Well)

Customers can also become friends.

[O]ur model recipient – not "client" – is a family with children, usually with some allergies or different health problems that are forced to search for non-toxic food. With some of them we are also friends. (Kasia, Northern Coop)

It makes sense to develop such relationships, even if it takes much time and effort.

In all of my projects and initiatives I have friendly relationships with the people at work. It helps a lot. I prefer friendly relations to just 'contacts'. We are good friends especially with one girl. Even if we meet outside we talk about the professional issues at first (invoices, clients, etc.) [laughter], but then we spend nice time together. We visit each other at home, we travel together, help when it is needed. (…) It is easier and simply better to work in such conditions. (Ola, Social Educational Projects)

The second key theme we found in our material concern the role of *organizing principle* that friendship plays in the studied organizations. First of all, it motivates to work, to invent new products and to promote the organization. Friendship, the profound bond deriving from the long term relationships

(…) with some of the people who are with us since beginning, with whom we experienced some difficult or stressful situations that unified us [inspires us to] meet together and make some new projects – to educate, to let people know about us and our products, to join us maybe. (Kasia, Northern Coop)

Friendship helps at a catalyst in real "knowledge management" – people are willing to share and pool their knowledge if they can genuinely trust each other.

In our organisation the people go into intensive relations while engaging into the project they are interested in. You do not need to prove that you are educated it that area (or so), you do not need to reveal your personal data, gender, face, place of birth, whatever. The permission to stay anonymous is very strong. So, you can cooperate and have relations

with the people from really distant places. What links those people? Doing what they like, know, want, having reliable sources and having the knowledge how to use them. (…) I have gathered a few people from our association who mean a lot for me personally. We meet privately, have similar passions. (Tomek, Open Collaborative Society)

Many of the studied organizations are strongly concerned about developing democratic, dynamic structures, enabling participation of all employees in managerial responsibilities. Friendship helps to initiate processes such as the one described by Wojtek in the quote below spontaneously, before the organizations evolved enough to acquire the procedures supporting these complicated activities.

When we choose the administrative managerial positions, there is voting. The consensus seems to be a rather poor too here. The candidatures are those participants who have been active and known somehow by the community. They are perceived positively, associated with active and helpful attitude. If we consider the choice of the highest management, it is now voted. Before we just asked who wanted to be, there were 7 people, now there are 3 for just essential functions. The other substantive issues are given into governance by the management to some volunteers. That concept evolved since 2005. At the beginning we were organising spontaneously, as a group who wanted to do something interesting. But as we developed, grew and started to have more contacts with several institutions, e.g. political, cultural, our attitude has changed. We do not ask the members anymore: "who wants to this or that?' but we decide what kind of competences we need. (Tomek, Open Collaborative Society)

Democracy, as told the organizers sometimes point out, is basically about developing realtionships based on trust and friendship.

Some of us have been [doing things together before], we are the same people. But not all of us, and, besides, we are a business. We have to sell a product. This means that we have formed [the coop] to be able to work, to live from it. On a basic level, that's it. But we're people, we're connected, we love this way of doing things. How do we do it collectively? We meet every week, meetings about everyday operations, but also some key decisions. We don't have a formal statute, procedures, it all evolves all the time. (…) And we have a collection of tasks [to share and to discuss]. We argue, we just had a gigantic crisis, we went through almost everything in group processes, we had a permanent crisis of communication, so big that at one point we almost ceased to exist (…). It's difficult to manage a cooperative, it's my general thought. Nobody teaches us that, to work together. A cooperative is about working together, taking responsibility together (…) (Kasia, Rosa Hostel)

Planning is also facilitated by bonds of friendship.

The food is the most popular addiction in the world. And I am looking for those who are addicted [laughter]. (…) The connector is the simple good food, mostly fruit, sometimes vegetables. I wanted to find, to meet the people who eat such food. (…) I have a kind of tendency to linking people. We have organised together some events. Now we plan some more. Maybe we will build a 'place' somewhere? With good-quality food, developed by nice people who felt the same energy. (…) There is no strict plan. I catch good contact with several people and also help them in starting their own positive relations with others. (…)

Our net of contacts has been developing. Also the meetings start to be more and more regular. (Kris, Mobile Coop)

The emerging organizational structure in the studied alternative organizations is often organic, deeply social,

(…) a kind of horizontal principle, where there is no hierarchical system. We are used to it, even though it is very difficult to work in this way ... And it is somehow a great realization of everything one believes in. In the sense that at a certain point it transfers itself to a very important area of your life, which is work. Which also at a certain point ceases to be "just" work and becomes something much more. (…) It's a bit, like, it's difficult to leave after work. A part of the workers have problems with that. It's not quite about the duties but the atmosphere. We all treat this place as our home, here we meet good energy and we don't feel like leaving. It's connected to the group, no matter what the group dynamics is, what the relations are, for me it remains a good idea. (Mark, City Coop)

The third theme concerned the *fragility* of bonds and organizational roles based on friendship. The risks and downsides can be anything on the scale from mild to serious. Conflicts and misunderstandings are the everyday stuff of any relationship, especially if people consider each other friends and want to work harder on the relationship. However, the consequences can be considerable when trust is involved. The betrayal of friendship is a serious thing and, of course, it can have serious consequences at work, too.

The interviewees often pronounced that conflicts are normal, but they were also aware of that they can be tiring and "so much passion must take its toll" (Anna, Dragon Coop). However, they felt that conflicts must be given space in the life of the organization because friendship is a central value, and conflicts between friends can be a way of learning other and even something more – a broader perspective.

People discuss a lot, talk a lot, quarrel, yes (…) it teaches about who we are as persons and as the collective, you know. (…) The more people act together, the more they see that they can do much more. Engaging in different [organizational] roles [on rotational basis] teaches a broader perspective and it can really be tremendously enlightening. (Paweł, Radical House)

Breaches of trust can be quite difficult.

Luckily, I do not have many bad experiences. Just minor incidents. Once there was a girl who stopped ordering our products for some reasons and did not inform us before (…). And, at the beginning, our system of payments was based more on trust. It means that we delivered the products and after that sent the bill. And one recipient did not pay a huge amount. She went abroad and that's it. (Kasia, Northern Cooperative)

There are instances where a line has to be drawn and friendships cannot always encouraged.

I never have friendly relations with my patients. Never. It is to avoid being made responsible for their diet and blamed for their mistakes. And also not to be called days and nights

for advices. We meet on the appointment. (…) There is a kind of saying that you are not able to heal your friend. (…) I treat differently the people we are friends with at work – e.g. it is difficult to point at their mistakes, especially if the friend is much older than me. Maybe it is just a matter of my character (…). (Ola, Social Educational Projects)

Coda: Rebalancing organizations by the communicative role of friendship

Skidelsky and Skidelsky as well as Mintzberg warn their readers that our society and organizations are seriously out of balance. We believe that part of this imbalance is of moral nature. Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskis (2013) argue that our times are an era characterized by adiaphorization: the placing of certain events and human beings outside of the moral categories. Management is one of such domains where ordinary ethics has ceased to have access, and has been replaced by a specialist entity called "business ethics", which is related to but identical with the reflection on human ethics and moral choices. At the same time, management has both a moral and aesthetic dimension and master managers used to be well aware of it, giving space to both in their communications and narratives (Hatch et al, 2005). There seems to be a void at the heart of management in this area currently, one which needs to be urgently addressed.

Our paper is an answer to these calls to redress the balance and proposes a way to de-adiaphorization of management and organization from within – by turning the attention of scholars and practitioners to the existing and *working utopias* of alternative organizations and to give the human value of friendship the central place it deserves. Friendship as human need for sociality and as organizing principle in the alternative organizations we have studied can be observed in all the Aristotelean guises and is, at the same time, a stabilizing factor, and exposes the human fragility of organizing processes. In both these roles it is a de-adiaphorizing force, because it brings attention to the Other and to our humanity, much in accordance with Bauman's and Donskis' vision of how the human being should always be present in the moral categories we use in social practices. Friendship puts focus on the human being and makes her or him present in structures, communication as our empirical material shows, permeating the language and the procedures.

Figure 1. Friendship as a communicative process in alternative organizations

Friendship as
human need for
sociality

Friendship
revealing human
fragility

Friendship as
organizing
principle
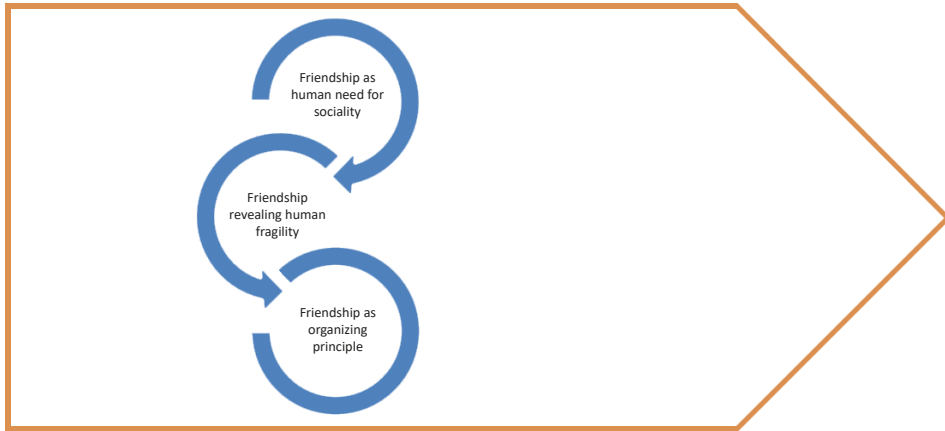
Source: own concept.

In summary, our research shows that friendship plays several key roles: as organizing principle and reflects human need for sociality, while, at the same time, emphasizing human fragility. This helps to holistically redress the balance in management and to highlight moral dimensions of organising (de-adiaphorization). Figure 1 represents these fundamental roles of friendship as a communicative wave pervading organizational processes. The chart shows how these roles were communicated to us in interviews, as well how we observed them being communicated in the studied organizations: as interlinked symbolic nexuses, forming a wave-like pattern. This leads us to the next issue – that of teaching and learning which, according to Bateson (1972), is a symbolically intensive and complex process of interaction and communication.

Organization theorist Yiannis Gabriel (2009) addresses yet another imbalance – in management education. The discrepancy exists at the heart of management pedagogy: the ethic of criticism, compelling to judge and evaluate, is sometimes at odds with the ethic of care, which obliges the carer to take responsibility for the well-being of the cared-for:

Criticism can be destructive. This is especially so if it is experienced as unfair; but even fair criticism can undermine or destroy a theory, a process or a person in their early stages of development. Thus many a good idea has been killed by criticism. Many promising organizational members have been discouraged or devastated by harsh criticism by their leaders. (…) Treating the person under your care as special, making special provisions and allowances for him or her, is one of the characteristics that distinguishes the ethics of care from more conventional 'ethics of justice' that treat all as formally equal and subject to general principles. The ethics of care do not seek to discover universal principles of ethical behaviour, but rather how people sustain fragile networks of relations that allow people to grow and prosper, developing trust, respect and responsibility for each other. While the ethics of care have been vigorously contested as the basis of a universal morality, the

importance of care as a key dimension of identity, interpersonal relations and social institutions is now increasingly recognized, especially in societies like ours that must care for large numbers of old, young, sick and weak. Caring is paramount for education (Gabriel, 2009, p. 383).

An inclusion of friendship as a theme as well as style of communication (based on the wave in Fig. 1) into the curriculum of management education may help to redress the disparity. Friendship (as topic and style of communication) helps to unite care and criticism on the systemic level, not a as linear teaching programme, but as a holistic symbolic communicative dynamics. Friendship does not shy away from criticism and conflict, but it does so, ideally, out of care. The sociality dimension of workplace friendship represents the ethics of care. The organizing dimension is supported by the ethics of criticism. They are both tied with the delicateness and vulnerability of intense human relationships, which is a weakness but one which brings attention to human fragility, thus reminding the organizers of the fundamental importance of human beings in organizations. Social communication concerning organizational friendships could help to create more social awareness about the importance of organizational friendship and create social pressure in order to make management education to more humane, more critical and more caring at the same time.
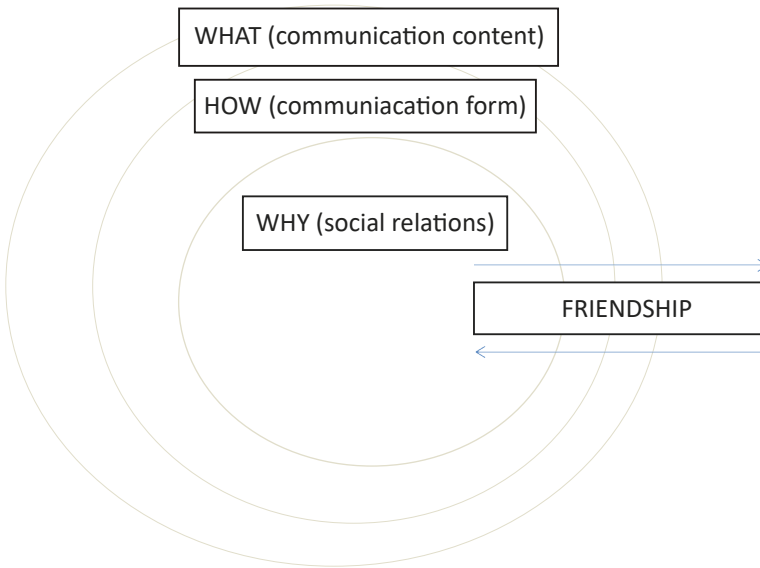
Implications for social communication

Friendship is central for the human condition. Human beings transfer knowledge and competence pertaining to friendship across generations and always have done so. We propose that media and educational institutions take up this mission consciously and purposefully.

The cooperative social communication enables gaining common aims instead of individual ones only. This is still a key to organizing for the common good (see e.g. Chrostowski, Kostera, 2019). David Hay (2006) proposes that there emerges a kind of spiritual and political unity among employees who cooperate with each other: the relational consciousness. These bonds need adequate forms and contents of communication in order to grow strong and resilient (Szeluga-Romańska, 2014).

Jerzy Kociatkiewicz, Monika Kostera and Michał Zawadzki (2019) call for the rethinking of the role of mass media. Instead of focusing on mainstream corporate managerial styles, based on competition, the media could help to alter the dominant model of management to a more collaborative one. Media are not just about transferring information but also as a potential for expression and promotion. This is perhaps even more true about new media, which, according to Manuel Castells (2009), are more versatile, comprehensive, intertwined, and multimodal. New media require different communicational competences. This marks

a shift the meaning of what media "professionalism" is about and how it can be re-modelled (Skuza, Modzelewska, and Szeluga-Romańska, 2019). "[M]eaning largely determines action, communicating meaning becomes the source of social power by framing the human mind", Castells argues (2009, p. 136). This implies that the possession of remodelled communicational skills can enable framing human perspectives in ways that empower and animate. To mediate and express new forms of media communication, to advocate meaningful ideas that enhance our humanity, such as friendship, traditional media must learn from new media – and vice versa. This is a challenge for the entire area of social communication (see fig. 2).

Figure 2. The challenge for social communication

Source: Based on the concept of Golden Circle by Simon Sinek, 2009.

The principle of friendship should be communicated across the spectrum of meaning: *why? how?* and *what?* The social relations forged with friendship (why) can be communicated in any of the forms we have mentioned earlier (how) and accumulate, in time, as a body of popular knowledge (what) that can be used and pass on further.

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