Workplace Romance: What Indian Managers feels about it?

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Abstract

In today's industrial world the Workplace Romance is becoming a very common phenomenon in India. No matters, which type of organization it is, each and every sector where people are working together, spend their time together the Workplace Romance persists. Many previous researches have proved that it affect the organizational setting as a whole in terms of employee performance, discipline, organization culture & environment. In such a scenario it is very important to know, what Indian managers or team leaders personally feels about it. In this context , many foreign researchers found that some managers took it as positive and some of them as negative depending upon the factors like, personal thinking, organization climate (hot or cold) and types of organization (conservative or liberal). All such researches are done in foreign context, therefore the main focus of our study is to know what Indian managers personally think or feel about Workplace Romance whether positive or negative.

Key words: Manager, perception, Workplace romance, Organization Introduction

I. Introduction

Workplace romance is not a hidden term now days. A study conducted by SHRM, strategic Human resource management in 2013 on Workplace romance on 384 HR professionals from different industries reveals that, 24% of employees were currently involved in workplace romance and 43% of HR professional revealed that workplace romance is prevailing in their organization. Similarly, in 2011 a survey conducted by Careerbuilder.com in US revealed that 40% of respondents had dated their co-workers and in UK more that 70% of employees had experienced workplace romance (Clarke, 2006). In this study we will share some of the studies done in different countries on workplace romance. A study conducted in 2004 in Taiwan and Iran came out with as listed of factors leading to workplace romance depending upon the climate (Hot or cold) of an organization such as *Aestheticization of work, Work arrangements, Performance measures & hedonistic ethic, Organizational policy* (Gabriel and Mano Negrin, 2004). Another study conducted in USA in 2015 revealed that, *Employee's attitude about workplace romance, prior engagement in workplace romance & conscientiousness* are the factors related to his/her willingness to engage in workplace romance (Doll and Rosopa, 2015). Similarly a study conducted in 2017 stated employees' attachment style & motives for engaging in workplace romance as the factors help an employee to engage him or her in workplace romance (Sutton, 2017). Looking at the impact of Workplace romance on organizational setting &

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policies required to manage the same, various studies were taken into consideration. A study conducted in 2017 on "Impact of workplace romance on co-workers and workplace environment" by Jonathan Sutton illustrates that all the factors like *trust, openness, communication, collaboration, fair & respectful treatment* of employees helps to create an ethical & enjoyable workplace and in case workplace romance is helping in building such factors the outcome will be positive otherwise negative (Sutton, 2017). Study conducted in 2017 (Khan et al., 2017) states that most of the time romantic partners feel good in gaining the colleagues sexual attention resulting in high job satisfaction and performance (Biggs, 2012; Wright, 2007). Some of the studies have also considered dissolved workplace romance as big challenge for an organization. A review study conducted in this context lists various consequences faced by an individual & organization due to dissolved workplace romance (Sidhu et al., 2019). Workplace romance brings in both positive and negative outcomes, but as per the survey conducted by Society of Human Resource Management on Workplace Romance in 2013 indicates that organizations do not permit workplace romance due to factors like real or perceived favouritism (84%), potential for claims of sexual harassment (78%), and potential for retaliation (72%). As per this survey potential retaliation has increased from 50% in 2005 to 72% in 2013, lowered productivity and about workplace romances being viewed as unprofessional decreased from 52% and 58% in 2005 to 29% and 29% in 2013. In the past five years, 40% of organizations have received complaints of favouritism from co-workers of those involved in a workplace romance; nearly one-fourth (23%) have received claims of sexual harassment, and 22% have received complaints of retaliation (Dong and Alonso, 2013).

All these studied are based on the Manager's perception and data given by HR department about Workplace romance in their organization. Therefore we can say that workplace is a big concern in foreign countries but as far as India is concerned no such research has been carried out. Therefore, we felt a need to conduct this study with the following aim.

Aim of the study

Aim of the study was to find know the perception of Indian Managers or team heads towards Workplace Romance.

II.   Research methodology

The study was conducted with the help of interviews, which was based upon the concept of Grounded theory. The concept was first published by Glaser and Strauss in the year 1967 in their book titled "The study of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research". Our research study is focused towards an individual perspective rather than a group of population. The main aim of applying grounded theory was to generate theories & establish different concepts from the collected data (Glaser and Straus, 1967).

Respondents

The study was conducted with the help of interview, where 10 managers from manufacturing, hotel industry, education, building & construction & food industry were taken into consideration. All the respondents were on the managerial positions (see table 1) & they were having a team of employees working under their guidance. Looking at the sensitivity of the concept some of them refused to take part in this study, but after lot of efforts they decided to take part. One of the respondents out of 10 was from outside Punjab therefore telephonic interview was conducted to get the information. The study took place at various industries in Ludhiana, Chandigarh & Gurugram (see Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics	
Sex	**Number**
Male	8
Female	2
Organization	
Manufacturing	2
Hotel industry	3
Education	2
Building & construction	1
Food Industry	2
Experience	
7-10 yrs	6
10-15 yrs	4

Procedure

Study was conducted by using personal & professional references. Every participant was contacted 2 or 3 days in advance for scheduling the interviews. Interview was scheduled as per the convenient of the participant and dates were set within 1 week of their verbal consent. The purpose of the study was briefly explained and confidentiality of the information also assured to them. Interviews were conducted at the offices of the concerned participants. All the rights of the participant's pertaining to withdrawal from the study and no answering any

objectionable question was also explained in advance.

Data collection

Data was collected with the help of an open ended questionnaire, as our purpose was to explore the concept by getting maximum information. Interview questions were designed with the help of review of literature done in the past. All interviews were recorded in as diary maintained by the first author of the study. In order to know the prior knowledge of the interviewee about Workplace romance, the opening question was "What do you mean by Workplace Romance?" After testing their prior knowledge some inputs were injected to give more clarity about the concept and building confidence. Further information was collected following the discussion and questions already designed for conducting the study. Data was collected till we received new information. Field note were equally maintained which includes brief data on participant interviewed & observations made during the interview.

Data analysis

The data collected with the help of personal interview was analysed and categorised into different themes, which were updated later in the study. The themes identified were categorised in to 4 headings: 1) Awareness of Workplace Romance. 2) Factors leading to Workplace romance. 3) Impact of Workplace romance on organizational environment. 4) Policies for Workplace romance. The sub themes identified for the first theme includes:

Existence, Source of information & Types of romance. Sub themes for second theme includes: Individual & organizational. For the third theme, sub themes includes: Employee performance & organizational environment. Lastly, for the fourth theme, sub themes includes: requirement of a policy to handle Workplace romance.

III. Result

Awareness of Workplace Romance

The interview was started with asking a question like "what do you mean by workplace romance"? The idea was to check the prior knowledge of the respondent about Workplace Romance and secondly was to know the existence of the same in their respective departments. Following question was to get the information about various sources from where the concerned manager gets the information about the said romance in the department. The explanation provided by the respondents is based on 3 sub theme as given below:

Existence

Respondents in this study were generally aware about the concept but do not know this particular term "Workplace Romance" to mark such romantic relationship in the organization. As one of the manager said:

"Oh! There is a particular term to mark the romantic relationship in the organization, we thought it is just romance not workplace romance." laughed……

It means the concept was familiar but the term was not familiar to them. They agree that there is existence of workplace romance in their organization. But one observation made was that, the people working in Hotel & Education industry were more prone to such relationships as compared to other industries. They remember more romances as compared to others. As one of the manager from hotel industry said:

"It's very common, as we recruit good looking and smart people in our organization". In this context one respondent from education industry said:

"We spend maximum time here only and interaction level is very high"

Managers from other industries do agree that workplace romance exist, but they were unable to quote any example in this context.

Source of information

Being a manger everyone is having their own source of information in the organization. In this context one of the manager said:

"I came to know about their relationship from one of my friend working in other department, while we were having our lunch in the Mess".

Similarly, one of the managers said:

"My HR department informed me about their relationship when they took leave together". One manager from hotel industry said:

"One of my subordinate informs me about all the activities going on in the department".

It means every manager is having their own source of information from where they came to know about such romantic ties. But here one note that HR i.e Human Resource department place a main role in managing such relationships, because actual results of such relationships are known by HR only.

Type of romances

We are including this sub theme in our study, but the discussion was very less, as only one of the respondent spoke about this and others have not defined any type of workplace romance, they were just generally talking about this concept. One of the managers said:

"One of the romantic relationships I saw turned very ugly…..where one of our members was involved with her boss" ....(Stopped and was not willing to explain further).

Other managers mostly talked about peer to peer relationship within or outside the department.

From this discussion we got some idea about the types Workplace romance exists in the organization. It could be lateral or hierarchical relationship. This is in contrast with the studies conducted by (Pierce, 2000; Powell, 2001) where 3 three types of Workplace romance were identifies as Hierarchical Romance/ supervisor to subordinate romance, Lateral Romance/peer to peer & Romance involving married employees/ extra marital affair

Factors leading to Workplace romance

After getting along with the discussion and based upon the literature review we asked them about the factor responsible for initiating workplace romance. And we got a good response from some of the respondent.

Individual factors

These are the factors where a person involves himself or herself in a relationship because of their personal

characteristics. In this context, one manger laughed and said.….

"They both were Punjabis, so they were together…"

Some managers have not given any example but generally talked about terms like true love and attraction which helps in promoting Workplace romance in an organization. In this context, the study conducted by Quinn in 1977 identified various factors like geographical proximity, attitudinal similarity and individual's motive behind entering into the relationship. He identified 3types of motives: love motive, ego motive & job motive (Quinn, 1977).

Organizational Factors

Organizational factors are those, which are external such as organization culture or policies and promote an individual to enter into workplace romance. In this context one of the female mangers said:

"Most of our staff is young and along with the qualification we give value to the looks also, as we belong to service sector".

One of the managers from education sector said:

"We have huge team & all of them share similar interests & goals so people are together for maximum time".

After going through the discussion we identified some of Individual factors & some Organizational factors responsible for promoting workplace romance. As per the review of literature we marked geographical similarity and motives behind love as individual factors and organization culture and working environment as organizational factors (Quinn, 1977). Organizational culture can be liberal or conservative, other could be the organizational climate, which could be hot or cold. The hot climate organizations are those "where work arrangements involve lengthy periods spent in close proximity, performance measures are very flexible in nature, hedonistic ethics, and liberal organization culture along with permissive organization policy". On the other hand the organizations having cold climate are those "where love discourse is very marginal and romantic relationships are kept secret, in such organizations do not grow or grow on an average rate (Gabriel.Y and Mano-Negrin.R, 2004).

Impact of Workplace romance on organizational environment

This part of study took maximum time and respondents took deep interest in responding to the questions. A set of open ended questions was designed based upon the review of literature. Most of the questions were answered but some of the questions were not answered because of their sensitivity. Interview was started by asking "Do you feel that Workplace romance is having an impact of Organizational environment". The whole discussion was divided into 3 sub themes, given as under:

Employee performance

This was the most of the common factor which came out after long discussion with the respondents. Most of the managers feel that workplace romance is negative and it leads to low level of employee performance. As one manager from manufacturing industry quoted that:

"One of his subordinate was very shy and hardworking, but after getting into relationship with a girl of another department, he started spending most of his time over the phone & even reaches his department 10-15

minutes late after having lunch in the mess."

Similar was the case with the manager working in Food industry. He said:

"This is the incidence of some other department where a girl was transferred, because couple was having an affair and they started avoiding other members of the department, negatively affected their work & performance."

One hotel manager said:

"I am not having any problem with what is going in the personal life of others, there is one couple in my department who live happy and perform very well…."

There were respondents who did not reported such cases but do not feel workplace romance as performance booster in an organization.

We conclude that there were mix responses, but most of the managers marked workplace romance with low level of employee performance as most of the times employee are busy with each other without bothering about the departmental work. In this context many of the previous researches have also proved that employee performance is surely affected by Workplace romance. But it's also being noticed that Workplace romance is not always negatively related to employee performance. Workplace romance lowers the employee performance especially in case where people are involved in hierarchical relationship because it leads to favouritism & acceptance of low quality work thereby decreasing the employee performance (Bhebhe and Hove, 2016). On the other hand there are studies which prove a positive relationship between Workplace romance & employee performance by concluding that, the partners involved in the relationship work hard to create a favourable impression (Dillard, 1989; Pierce, 2003; Khan et al., 2017).

Organizational environment

The managers who do not find Workplace romance as a factor in boosting employee performance, found it as a cause of unhealthy organizational environment. One of the managers from Infrastructure industry stated that:

"People in my department started behaving very casually and friendly after watching the couple in relationship, and the most dangerous thing was the language they started using with each other…..like using term "yaar"(my friend) to call other people in the department, putting hands on the shoulders in office hours….etc"

One of the managers from education industry said:

"It's very bad to show affection in public, as it is visible to all the students studying here, what they will learn………"

One of the managers from hotel did not have any example but generally said:

"Sometime such relationships turn into sexual harassment case especially when people are involved in hierarchical type of romance"…….

It means managers find workplace romance as a negative element in organizational environment, which

leads to sexual harassment, indiscipline, casual & informal attitude among other employees in the department thereby spoiling the organizational climate. But if we look at the previous researches some of the researches believe that Co-worker to co- worker or peer to peer type of workplace romance help employees to build social support, safety nets & to deal with home stressors leading to positive organizational outcomes (Bhebhe and Hove, 2016).

Policies for Workplace romance

The above discussion automatically turned towards this point. We started the discussion by asking the question "if workplace romance is having so many good and bad impacts, do you really feel a need of Workplace romance policy to manage such issues"? And following is the discussion:

Requirement of a policy

Most of our respondents do not feel a need of Workplace romance policy especially the managers in manufacturing, infrastructure & food industry. In education & hotel industry there are already some points covered in personnel policy pertaining to romantic ties in the organization.

One of the managers from hotel industry said:

"we don't follow any full fledge written policy on workplace romance, but we have covered some of the points in our personnel policy like, sexually harassment arising out of such romantic ties, any type of misbehaviour conducted by couples which disturbs the departmental working etc. Otherwise we don't interfere in the personal lives of our employees. I personally don't feel there is a requirement of any Workplace Romance policy in our organization……"

One of the managers from manufacturing said:

"I hardly noticed any case of workplace romance in our company for which a policy is required…..I am not bothered about what my employees are doing in their personal lives……."

Only one female manager said that there must be a policy to manage workplace romance and said:

"yes a policy is required because ones there was a case where after breakup the male was making objectionable comment on the girl with whom he was involved earlier…………….but due no policy it became a challenge for our HR department to solve such issues……"

We can say that most of them do not want a formal written policy to manage Workplace romance. but in the organizations where management has dealt with some very bad situation arising out of such romantic ties really need a formal written policy the same.

IV. Conclusion

The main aim of this research was to get the perception of Indian managers about Workplace romance. After getting through all the interviews and observations, we have concluded that, workplace romance is prevailing in each and every industry but is more common in hotel & education industries. Managers agree that romantic

relationships are prevailing in their organizations, but they have never treated it as a factor which can put impact on the organization as a whole. They just find it as someone's personal matter. Even they do not know about the term called "Workplace Romance", specially used for the romantic ties prevailing in the organization. They don't want to talk much about such issues as it will affect the goodwill of their organization especially in the Hotel industry. Managers are aware about the sexual harassment cases, low employee performance and cases of abusing in their organization but never given a thought that this is because of non-managing the workplace romance in the organizations. As far as type of workplace romance is concerned, they find hierarchical romance more vulnerable as compared to lateral romance because it leads to favouritism & hide the other good performers in the department, which leads to biased performance appraisal.

As far a Workplace romance policy is concerned, most of them do not want any written or formal policy to manage such relationship. They don't find it as a very important matter for which a written policy is required. But one or two managers especially females were in an agreement of such written & formal policies to manage the workplace romance, as they feel it will reduce the cases of sexual harassment in the organization. Moreover, it will define the limits in terms of discipline and other serious matters related to Workplace romance.

Overall we can say that Managers are aware about the good's & bad related to workplace romance but they name it as a "personal Matter" of an employee till it turns worse. Most of the managers have not experienced the worst situation arising out of Workplace romance, so they do not feel a need of formal written policy in this context. But if we compare the situation with foreign managers, we can say that, they are more serious about such relationships and take measure to manage them efficiently. Some of the researches we have gone through in the past have mentioned the type of workplace romance policies they want for their organization.

V. Limitations

This study has some limitations also. The sample taken is very small and analysis is based to this sample only. To get the clearer picture about manager's perception about workplace romance, a large sample is required. Respondents feel this topic as very sensitive in nature, so the responses & information provided was insufficient. Nevertheless, the study provides an information about the about the perception of Indian managers towards Workplace romance. Also, the facts and findings in this study give the similar points of considerations as concluded by some of the previous researches.

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