

**HOW CO-WORKERS MAKE SENSE OF ROMANCE AT WORK:  
AN ATTRIBUTION MODEL OF WORKPLACE ROMANCE MOTIVES**

A THESIS  
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BY

**Neetha Azeez**



**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT KOZHIKODE**

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## ABSTRACT

Workplace has become a common arena for romantic relationships to bud and blossom. The pervasive nature and the potential of workplace romance (WR) to affect the organizational dynamics warrant scholarly attention in this under-researched field. It is not the relational participants alone who are affected by such romantic relationships, but also their co-workers. Workplace romantic relationships have been found to have a significant effect on the organizational functioning - either in a positive, or in a negative manner. Through a series of three related essays, this dissertation seeks to examine certain aspects, which can explain the differential impact of WR on organizational functioning.

Organizational members make sense of romantic relationships at work by attributing different motives to the WR participants for their involvement in such relationships. Quinn's (1977) pioneering study identified three types of perceived WR motives - *Love, Job, and Ego*. Recent studies have called for an appropriate update of Quinn's typology, to incorporate contemporary realities. Essay 1 of this dissertation, therefore seeks to *examine the contemporary perceived WR motives, and develop a valid and reliable tool to measure them*. Six focus groups were conducted (Study 1), resulting in identification of contemporary perceived WR motives, followed by two quantitative studies: the first one developed items to measure perceived WR motives, and examined its factor structure on a sample of 297 respondents (Study 2) and the second one confirmed the factor structure and provided evidence of convergent and divergent validity of the newly developed scale on a sample of 500 respondents (Study 3). Results indicated robust evidence for five perceived WR motives: *Love, Job, Ego-boosting, Pleasure and Emotional support*. While two of them were consistent with the Quinn's (1977) typology (Love and Job), one of the existing motive (Ego) was split into two (Ego-boosting and Pleasure), and one motive (Emotional support) was newly identified.

The co-worker has only limited information regarding the actual motive(s) of the WR participant for whom he/she is attributing the WR motive(s). Less attention has been paid to understand the basis on which co-workers attribute different motives to WR participants. Therefore, Essay 2 of this dissertation seeks to *understand the factors influencing the co-worker's attribution of WR motives*. Nine factors were proposed to influence the attribution of WR motives. Data were collected using questionnaire surveys. Of the 705 returned from a total of 915 questionnaires distributed, data from 500 respondents who had observed at least one romantic relationship in their organization(s) in the previous two years, were analysed using Analysis of Variance. Results indicated WR participant's gender, organizational status of the WR partner, marital status of WR participants, WR participant's prior involvement in WR, team affiliation of WR participants, organizational culture on WR, co-worker's gender and generational cohort to be influencing the attribution of WR motives.

Since co-workers assign meaning to WR based on the attributed WR motives, it is quite possible that these attributed motives could also influence the co-worker's behaviour towards the WR participants. Also, Cowan and Horan (2014) note the need for examining the organizational consequences of perceived WR motives. Therefore, Essay 3 of this dissertation seeks to *examine the consequences (relational and workplace implications) of perceived WR motives*. Data were collected using questionnaire surveys. Of the 705 returned from a total of 915 questionnaires

distributed, data from 500 respondents who had observed at least one romantic relationship in their organization(s) in the previous two years, were analysed using multiple regression. Findings indicated that: 1) Perceived love motive had positive relational implications, and perceived ego-boosting motive had negative relational implications; 2) Only perceived love motive had positive workplace implications; perceived job, ego-boosting, pleasure, and emotional support motives had negative workplace implications.

The overall dissertation findings suggest that WR can impact the organizational functioning differentially; in a positive manner, when the relationship is licit or lateral; or, in a negative manner, when the relationship is illicit, intra-team, or hierarchical. Hence, the present dissertation provides explanation regarding the differential impact of WR, thereby adding on to the existing theoretical and empirical research on WR. The instrument developed to measure perceived WR motives could be used in future studies. The findings provide insights for managers on the effect of different types of WR on organizational functioning, and concludes by providing suggestions on how to manage WR effectively.

## References

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