

ABSTRACT

How Co-workers Make Sense of Romance at Work: An Attribution Model of Workplace Romance Motives

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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. 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. Therefore, the primary objective of this dissertation is *to examine the contemporary perceived WR motives*.

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 the WR participants. Hence, the secondary objective of this dissertation is *to understand the factors influencing the attribution of different WR motives*. Since co-workers assign meaning to these romantic relationships based on the perceived WR motives, it is quite possible that these perceived motives could also influence the co-worker's behaviour towards the WR participants. Also, there are inconsistent results in the extant literature regarding the workplace implications of these perceived WR motives. Therefore, the final objective of this dissertation is *to examine the relational and workplace implications of the perceived WR motives*.

Focus groups were conducted to explore the contemporary perceived WR motives. Six types of perceived motives were identified - *Love*, *Job*, *Ego-boosting*, *Pleasure*, *Emotional support*, and *Convenience*. 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 two motives (Emotional support and Convenience) were newly identified. Subsequently, a 21-items scale was developed to measure the perceived WR motives. Based on these contemporary perceived WR motives, hypotheses were developed to address the second and third research objectives. To test the hypotheses, data were collected using questionnaire survey, from individuals who have observed at least one romantic relationship in their organization(s) in the previous two years.

On testing the hypotheses on a sample of 500 respondents, it was found that: 1) Factors such as Organizational status of the WR partner, WR participant gender, Marital status of WR participants, WR participant's prior involvement in WR, Team affiliation of WR participants, Organizational

culture on WR, Co-worker gender and generational cohort influenced the attribution of WR motives; 2) While perceived love motive had positive relational implications, perceived ego-boosting motive had negative relational implications; and, 3) Only the perceived love motive had positive workplace implications; the 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 WRs on organizational functioning, and concludes by providing suggestions on how to manage WR effectively.

Reference:

Quinn, R. E. 1977. Coping with cupid: The formation, impact, and management of romantic relationships in organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 22: 30-45.