
Whitepaper
Office Romance

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What is office romance?



Office romance refers to a romantic or sexual relationship between two individuals who work together in the same office or workplace. This type of relationship can develop between coworkers, managers and subordinates, or employees and clients.

While office romances can be exciting and fulfilling, they can also be problematic and have potential negative consequences, such as conflicts of interest, favoritism, loss of productivity, gossip and even legal issues if they become unwanted advances or harassment. As such, many companies have policies in place that either discourage or regulate office romances to mitigate these risks.



Background



Office romance is a topic that has been debated and discussed for many years. While some people believe that it is perfectly acceptable to date someone in the workplace, others view it as unprofessional and inappropriate.



While some argue that it can lead to a healthier work environment and improved productivity, others believe that it can create conflicts of interest and potentially affect job performance.



BrighterMonday Kenya recently held a Twitter space to discuss the topic of office romance and its implications.



Topics of discussion included: (1) Pros and Cons of Office Romance (2) Power dynamics & potential conflicts of interest & impact on office dynamics (3) Legal and Ethical Considerations of Office Romance



In this whitepaper, we will delve into the research on office romance, share insights from the polls conducted by BrighterMonday Kenya, and conclude with expert recommendations, views, and solutions.

Office romance trends

Office romance trends vary depending on different factors such as cultural norms, company policies, and personal preferences. Chances of Office Romance are usually increased by:

1

Proximity: Being in close proximity to someone for extended periods of time can increase attraction and familiarity.

2

Shared interests: Co-workers often share similar interests, goals, and challenges, which can create a sense of bonding and connection.

3

Similar backgrounds: Having similar educational or professional backgrounds can create a sense of mutual understanding and connection between co-workers.

4

Social events: Attending office events or after-work gatherings can create a relaxed and informal atmosphere where co-workers can socialize and get to know each other better.

5

Power dynamics: Power dynamics in the workplace, such as a supervisor-subordinate relationship, can create an imbalance of power that can lead to romantic relationships, although they may also be considered unethical or inappropriate.



Employer policies and guidelines related to office romance

1

Consensual Relationship Policy:

This policy outlines the company's stance on romantic relationships in the workplace and may require employees to disclose any romantic relationships with colleagues or supervisors.

2

Code of Conduct:

A code of conduct outlines the expected behavior of employees in the workplace, including the importance of maintaining a professional and respectful work environment.

3

Harassment Policy:

A harassment policy prohibits any form of harassment in the workplace, including sexual harassment, and outlines the procedure for reporting incidents of harassment.

4

Conflict of Interest Policy:

A conflict of interest policy outlines the expectations for employees to avoid any behavior or activity that may create a conflict of interest, including romantic relationships with colleagues or supervisors.

5

Training and Education:

Employers may provide training and education to employees to ensure that they are aware of the company's policies and guidelines related to office romance and understand the potential risks and consequences of engaging in romantic relationships in the workplace.

6

Non-Fraternization Policy:

A non-fraternization policy prohibits romantic relationships between employees or between employees and their supervisors.

Pros and Cons of Office Romance

Pros of office romance:

- **Shared interests:** Co-workers often share common interests and goals, which can lead to bonding and attraction.
- **Increased motivation and productivity:** Employees who are in a happy and fulfilling relationship tend to have higher levels of motivation and productivity at work.
- **Improved communication:** Couples who work together tend to have better communication and understanding, which can translate to improved communication in the workplace.
- **Greater job satisfaction:** When employees have a positive relationship with a co-worker, it can improve their overall job satisfaction and make them more committed to their work.

Cons of office romance:

- **Conflict of Interest:** If one partner is in a position of authority over the other, it can create a conflict of interest and be seen as a breach of professional ethics.
- **Potential for favoritism:** Romantic relationships in the workplace can lead to accusations of favoritism, which can damage morale and trust within the organization.
- **Legal and HR risks:** If a romantic relationship ends badly, it can lead to legal and HR risks, such as claims of harassment or discrimination.
- **Gossip and rumors:** Office romances can lead to gossip and rumors, which can be distracting and harmful to workplace culture.



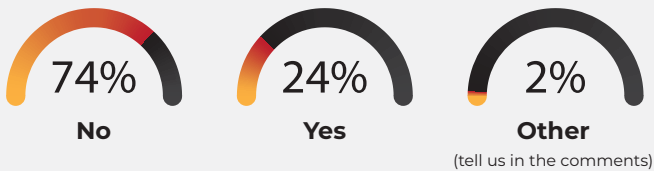
Insights

BrighterMonday Kenya conducted several polls on their LinkedIn page to understand the perception of office romance among professionals.

BrighterMonday Poll Findings:

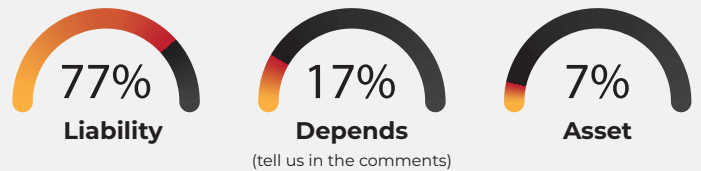
On our LinkedIn page, we conducted polls, and here are their findings:

Have you ever been in an Office Romance?



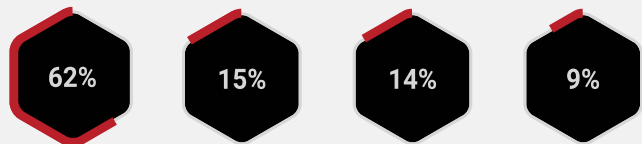
Nearly a quarter of sample population of 2,201 Kenyan professionals have engaged in Office Romance

What are your thoughts on Office Romance?



While on 7% of the sample population view office romance favourably, another 17% are of the opinion that context matters

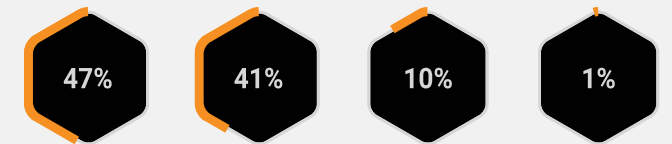
Have you ever had a romantic relationship with a coworker?



No, I haven't & I wouldn't consider it | Yes, but it ended badly | Yes, and it turned out well | No, I haven't but I would consider it

More than half of the 1690 respondents chose No, I haven't and were certain they wouldn't consider having a romantic relationship with a coworker

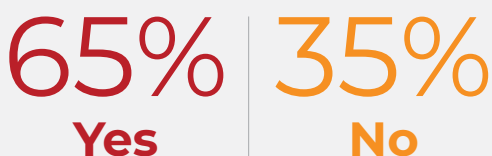
What's the biggest risk of dating a coworker?



Awkward if relationship ends | Conflict of interest at work | Create tension with coworkers | Other (please specify)

Nearly half of 1,546 respondents said it could end up being awkward if the relationship ends with a respondent commenting 'All the above!'

Do you know anyone who has engaged in an office romance?



Nearly two thirds of Kenyan workers know a colleague who has engaged in office romance

Is your organization okay or against office romance?



Just over 50% of Kenyan workers sampled know for certain that their organisations are against office romance

BrighterMonday Twitter Space Highlights

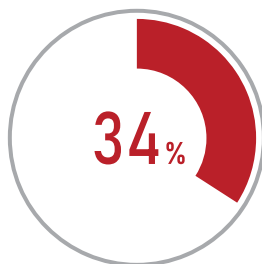
- It takes two to tango
- You are hired first as a professional. It's good to declare intentions from the word go.
- It's good to seek support where needed
If your human resource officer cannot be able to support or protect you, it simply means that place is toxic.
- It's important to know that you are protected both under the employment act & under the policies that govern that company



- Where there's power inequity, there's a huge likelihood this can be exploited or even manipulated
- Define and make sure employees (esp. managers) understand what constitutes sexual harassment and what doesn't. And how to draw the boundary between the two. What are the reporting mechanisms? What's the whistleblower protection.

Industry Findings

**According to a survey conducted by Workplace Romance Report:
Cupid's Arrows Are Flying - SHRM Society for Human Resource Management**



Of employees are—or have been—in a workplace romance. Among that number, 69% said they had dated their peers at some point in their careers, 21% had dated their subordinates and 18% had dated their superiors, SHRM found.

Industry Solutions

According to a survey conducted by CareerBuilder in 2020, 41% of employees have dated a coworker at some point in their career, and 30% of those relationships resulted in marriage.

While workplace romances are not uncommon, they can present some challenges for employers, including potential conflicts of interest, decreased productivity, and legal liabilities if the relationship turns sour.

To address these concerns, some companies have implemented policies or guidelines for managing office romances.

Workplace relationship policies establish safeguards to protect a company and its employees.

Solutions that companies have implemented include:

- **Consensual Relationship Agreements (CRAs)** - These are contracts that employees involved in a romantic relationship sign, which acknowledges that the relationship is voluntary and consensual. The agreement also outlines the expectations for appropriate workplace behavior, and the consequences of not adhering to the guidelines.
- **Training and Education** - Companies can provide training and education to their employees on workplace relationships and appropriate workplace behavior. This can include discussing the company's policy on office romance, how to handle conflicts of interest, and how to maintain professionalism in the workplace.
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)** - EAPs can provide confidential counseling and support to employees who are experiencing personal or relationship issues, including workplace romances.
- **Limiting fraternization in sensitive roles:** Some employers may want to limit workplace relationships in certain roles where conflicts of interest could be particularly problematic. For example, employees in supervisory roles may be prohibited from dating subordinates, or employees in sensitive positions, such as HR or legal, may be required to disclose any workplace relationships.

Conclusion

- Workplace romances are common, with a large number of employees admitting to dating a coworker at some point in their career.
- While office romances can lead to positive outcomes such as marriage, they can also pose potential risks and challenges for employers.
- To manage office romances, companies can implement clear policies, guidelines, and agreements that promote professionalism and prevent conflicts of interest.
- Employee assistance programs (EAPs) can provide confidential counseling and support to employees who may be struggling with personal or relationship issues.
- Ultimately, managing office romances is about finding a balance between fostering a positive workplace culture and maintaining productivity and professionalism in the workplace.

Expert Opinion



Ken P. Munyua
Psychologist & HR
Practitioner

At first, office romance brings an excitement especially for those who were looking for new steam. You somehow feel this one will be different, controlled and more mature as you both know what you want. Unfortunately, office romance is like rereading a book yet you know how the last chapter ends. It brings some tears and emotional damage to the involved and work is affected.



Edwin Bii
Mindset Shifting
Coach

Office romance is a tricky affair. Firstly, one party can use it as a manipulation tool especially when your livelihood is dependent on that job. Also, for a relationship to grow, some sort of space (me-time) is needed so that each party can explore their own lives without the influence of their partner.




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Try to focus on work when you're at work. Professionalism counts and pays dividends

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