Review Research on Dissolved Romantic Relationships at Workplace: Process, Factors & Consequences

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Abstract: Dissolution of workplace romance is a very common phenomenon in an organization. It is not a one-day process that people take decision to part their ways, rather there are various factors involved which stress them to take such decision. The consequences of such decisions are beard both by the individual & organization also. In this context, the aim of our research paper is to study the process & factors responsible for dissolution of workplace romance. We have also discussed the various consequences faced by the dissolved partners & the organization because of same. In order to achieve the aim of research a review study was conducted by taking both previous & recent studies into consideration. Result clearly shows that there is a long process involved in dissolution of a relationship in an organization, based on some individual factors & organizational factors. Individual factors are personally based on their characteristics and organizational factors are those which are present in the organization & influence an individual to take such decision. Similarly, there is a list of consequences beard both by an individual & organization also.

Index terms: Dissolution, Employee, Organization, Workplace Romance

I. INTRODUCTION

Dissolution of romantic relationship is a very common phenomenon at workplace; nearly 48% of romantic ties comes to an end or dissolves (1). The way such relationships are developed, in the same way there is a process of their dissolution. Many scholars have tried to examine the long-term process of dissolution of romantic ties (2; 3)

A. Process factors responsible for Romantic relationship dissolution

The first phase is *"Intra psychic phase"*, where an individual feel that the relationship is not satisfactory from his/her perspective might because of partner's habit or a sense of hopelessness about resolution of an argument. Person feels a sense of grievance but do not convey to the other partner. There are various individual & organizational factors which lead to dissatisfaction in a relationship. Individual factors are those which are purely based upon the characteristics of an individual such as neuroticism (4), high level of Machiavellianism (5), impulsivity (6), lack of positive

illusion, infidelity, dissimilarity of values & attitudes among the partners & external stress (4). On the other hand,

organizational factors are quality of alternatives available to an individual (4) & motives behind the romance (7). The continuous dissatisfaction due to these factors moves the person to the next phase termed as *"Dyadic Phase"*. In this phase the couple is confronted with the dissatisfaction experienced by one or both partners such that both need to discuss & evaluate the issue. This discussion might be constructive and might lead to positive outcome or they can be negative or unpleasant. This phase is marked by recurrent complaints made by both the partners and in case to no solution the relationship enters the next phase i.e. *"Social phase"*. It involves the social network (family, friends or co-workers) of both the partners. They are not neutral observers and raise comments, advice & opinion about the relationship. Couple also seek advice on maintain or breaking the relationship. The last stage is termed as *"Grave dressing phase"*, "where people try to publish a record of their relationship & death". They try to justify themselves to others and try to show them in a favorable light relative to relational standards in society (2; 3). Breaking of a relationship lands an individual in both emotional & physical pain (8; 9). Consequences of dissolved workplace romance are beard equally by an individual & the concerned organization also. Below we have discussed some of the consequences in this context.

B. Consequences of Romantic relationship dissolution

There is no doubt in saying that romantic dissolution brings in emotional, distress, SADNESS, ANGER PHYSICAL ILLNESS AMONG THE FORMER PARTNERS AND ABOVE ALL hostile environment accompanied by sexual harassment in an organization. As per study conducted by Grevis Beard named "Workplace Romance Gone Bad" states various consequences of workplace romance such as Emotional Devastation among former partners, lack of professionalism at work by displaying emotions, detriment to the professional identity of women after dissolution, difficulty in compartmentalizing personal & professional life, low level of work performance & unhealthy relationships with co-workers (8). The most harmful impact of romantic dissolution is workplace hostility & sexual harassment cases which further damages the image & public relations of the organization as a whole (10). People with dissolved relationship face difficulty in coping with social environment as they keep themselves isolated from the group of people and create conflicting

Revised Manuscript Received on December 22, 2018.
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Such an attitude is harmful for the organization as it further leads to retaliatory violence at the workplace and negatively affects employee performance and organizational environment. (9).

Objective of study
1. To understand the process of romantic dissolution in an organization.
2. To know the factors responsible for romantic dissolution in an organization.
3. To know the impact of romantic dissolution on an individual & organization.

On the basis of above-mentioned objectives, following review has been done in our next section i.e. Literature review.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace is a place where people spend maximum of their time and develop many new relationships such as friends, co-workers & most importantly is the romantic relationship. Along with the building of relationship, the dissolution of relationship is another characteristic of workplace. People develop various types of romantic ties as per their personal motive behind the relationship, but mainly five types of romantic ties are identified at workplace. First is the Companionate love, where both the partners are having sincere love motive. Second is the Passionate love, where, the employees have love & ego motive. Third is Fling, where both the employees have an ego motive. Fourth is Mutual User, where, both the employees have job related motive. Last is the Utilitarian, where one employee (eg. subordinate) has a job-related motive & other employee (eg. Superior) has ego motive. Depending upon the motive behind the love, Flings are more likely to dissolve, due to their short duration of time (11; 12; 13).

Many researches in this field are concentrating upon the consequences of dissolved workplace romance on an organization as a whole. But in our study, we have also tried to study the reason "why such romantic relationships dissolve?" which is the first objective of our study. As per Steve Duck, the dissolution process starts when one partner feels dissatisfaction from other partner might be because of his/her habit, a sense of injustice about distribution of efforts or a sense of hopelessness about resolution of an argument (2; 3).

Dissatisfaction is the root of dissolution of a relationship. Many researchers have identified some of the individual characteristics which are responsible for relationship dissolution. First, is *Neuroticism,* it is defined as a tendency towards negative feelings like anxiety, self-doubt, depression & shyness. Such partners are unable to interact & manage their relationship thereby harming the level of relationship investment. Most of the time in such relationships, the opposite partner views the relationship as suffocating & head for dissolution (4). Second factor is *High level of Machiavellianism* (14), the people high on Machiavellianism are marked as less committed and more diverted towards infidelity (15; 5). They usually adopt various indirect breakup strategies to end the relationship such as "avoidance or withdrawal (avoiding contract with the partner)", "distant or mediated communication (terminating the relationship indirectly)" & "cost escalation (making the relationship unpleasant)" (16). It is being stated that women high on Machiavellianism are less likely to engage in open confrontation which means do not openly show their desire to breakup (17). Therefore, such relationships are more prone to dissolution. Some of the researchers have identified *Impulsivity among emerging adults* as a factor responsible for dissolution of the relationship. In this context, it is being stated that, impulsive behavior among the emerging adults and their references to interdependence needs (need of intimacy & sexual expression) if not fulfilled by the current romantic partners, encourage them to break the relationship (6). Another very important thing the age of any romantic relationship is judged by the level of positivity present in the relationship. In this context, its being stated that "*lack of positive illusion*" in a relationship also turns the relation towards dissolution. It is associated with 23% of probability of dissolution. Positive illusion is defined as the unrealistic favorable attitudes that people have towards themselves or to people that are close to them (4). In case such attitude is missing in the relationship, the relationship begins to fall or dissolve. Another factor, which is very much in lime light for dissolving the romantic ties, is *Infidelity,* means breaking a promise to remain faithful to a sexual partner, whether that is marriage vows sanctified by the state or privately uttered agreements between lovers. Infidelity directly harms the trust & commitment in the relationship, thereby turning it towards dissolution (4).

Other than these individual factors there are some other factors also which leads to the dissolution of romantic ties. Such as *dissimilarity of values & attitudes among the partners*, it is being sated that the partners having dissimilar values & attitudes are less satisfied with their relationship because of disagreements which further leads to conflicts & fights and ultimately relationship dissolution (4). Many research studies have also taken *External stress* as the reason behind the romantic dissolution. External stress arising out of work or daily hassles does not allow the partner to invest efficiently in the relationship which further lowers the satisfaction level of the opposite partner and ultimately leads to dissolution. Other than the individual factors there are some organizational factors also which lead to dissolution. In this context, one of the factors is *quality of alternatives available to an employee*, alternatives refer to the relationship of an individual with other attractive partners. It is being sated that more attractive opposite gender alternatives increase the risk of dissolution thereby decreasing the commitment level between the two partners (4). Second factor is *motive behind the romance*, it is being studied that the flings & utilitarian type of workplace romances are more likely to dissolve. This is because the motive behind such type of romance is purely ego or job based rather than true love, once the motive is achieved romance dissolves, therefore the duration of such romances is also very short (13; 18)

As we have already stated that organization is a garden of relationships, if new relationship grows, some must dissolve also. We have discussed the factors responsible for dissolution in this section, now we will discuss the consequences faced by an individual & the organization

as a whole due to such dissolutions.

Let us discuss the impact of romantic dissolution on the part of individuals involved in the relationship & organization as a whole. A romantic breakup brings in a feeling of grief within the partners (19), but in the organizational setting such grief is termed as "Disenfranchised"- "which means a grief that person experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned & or socially supported" (20). This is because in the organizational world work is the priority and all other emotions & feelings are discouraged & disallowed (21). This grief impacts both psychosocial functioning & productivity of the dissolved partners. First is the *Emotional destruction*, emotional fallout due to breakup makes an individual helpless in coming out or moving on in the life. Person feels it as the most difficult phase of their life. A feeling of sadness arising out of such emotional fallout decreases the self-confidence of an individual (8). Second is *lack of concentration & poor decision making*, after breakup the dissolved partners are more focused towards the broken relationship instead of working. Moreover, it becomes difficult for an individual to control his/her emotions at the workplace and it becomes difficult for an individual to behave professionally at workplace (9). The third very crucial outcome of dissolved workplace romance is *damaged professional identity of women,* after dissolution co-workers or other fellow employees start labelling a female partner as slut or seductress and accuse her for using sexual power to gain favors with males in the organization. This usually happen in case where former partners are sexually involved with each other or both the former partners was in hierarchical workplace romance (8). Fourth is *poor physical & mental health* of an individual, a feeling of sadness arising out of dissolved relationship further leads to depression, decreased energy level, trouble in sleeping and most of the times people lose their interest in personal hygiene and physical appearance (9). In the worse cases such individuals become habitual of taking substances like alcohol or any other harmful drug to bear the pain of breakup. Fifth consequence of dissolution is related to *employee performance*. It is being stated that it is not always true that employee performance will decline after breakup. Most of the times it declines because dissolution lowers the motivation level of an individual & he/she feels less interested in performing their duties, but on the other hand there are researches which states that people who are involved in an abusive relationship feels relieved after dissolution & hence try to work more efficiently thereby increasing their job performance (22). Sixth is *difficulty in differentiating professional & personal life,* most of the times when former romantic partners work together in a team or on a common project brings in their personal feelings thereby losing the concentration & efficiency of doing a job properly (4; 9). Lastly, is the *Retaliation violence at the workplace & sexual harassment* this is considered to be the major consequence of a dissolved relationship which includes violent threats, acts or incidence (physical & verbal), effects of violent threats like verbal violence, embarrassment, feeling uncomfortable at workplace by the victim & negative emotional experience which includes the feeling of anger & resentment, anxiety & fear, depression by the victim. Some have experienced domestic violence also (23; 9) (24).

It is not only the employee who suffers from workplace romance dissolution but the organization is equally a victim of the same. A study conducted by (9) outlined various consequences faced by an organization due to dissolution of Workplace romance. Dissolved romance becomes the topic of gossip for co-workers & other employees of the organization and the target individual feels humiliated & uncomfortable at the workplace. Secondly, in some cases people remain absent from their duties to attend the court cases like divorce, protection, eviction and maintenance. Level of motivation and commitment also came down as person resist in coming to the workplace. Therefore, in order to avoid such situation, former partners remain absent from their work, thereby *increasing the rate of absenteeism* in the organization. *Productivity* is another very important area which is affected by the dissolved relationships at the workplace. Some participants reported zero impact on their productivity, even some felt they worked more in order to compensate for lack of trust her co-workers had in her (22). Less capacity & increase in mistakes during work was also reported by the individuals (9). The situation becomes more sever where the partners were in a close proximity (4). Another major consequence of a broken relationship is *Retaliation violence at the workplace* which includes violent threats, acts or incidence (physical & verbal), effects of violent threats like verbal violence, embarrassment, feeling uncomfortable at workplace by the victim & negative emotional experience which includes the feeling of anger & resentment, anxiety & fear, depression by the victim (23). Some have experienced domestic violence also. Such type of retaliation & violence is accompanied by a very critical issue which is called *Sexual Harassment* (18). In this context a survey conducted by SHRM in the year 2013, depicts that potential retaliation has increased from 50% in 2005 to 72% in the 2013, whereas 23% of the organizations have received claims of sexual harassment (25). Sexual harassment is divided into two categories; Quid pro quo & hostile environment. As per the study conducted by (23) quid pro quo sexual harassing behavior is more immoral as compared to hostile environment, as the former includes sexual bribery and coercion and more over entails threats to victim's career related opportunities. It means the harasser is intentionally crossing the accepted ethical boundaries thereby leading to immoral behavior. (23). Some of the researches in this context believe that in genuinely motivated romance like companionate & passionate love are less prone to sexual harassment as compared to flings & utilitarian where the motives are mostly ego or job (7). In an organization approximately 22% & 19% romances are classified as flings & utilitarian (13). Therefore, it is a matter of concern for an organization to protect its environment from hostility & cruelty. There are various factors which initiate or boost the emergence of sexual harassment (18). *First* is the position power of a partner, after dissolution of a relationship if one partner is in the influence of position power of the other partner leads to quid pro quo form of sexually harassing behavior towards former romantic partner, as the primary motive behind love is job related (26). Such type of situation arises when the workplace romance is hierarchical in nature. *Second* is the unilateral dissolution of relationship, which means when one partner takes decision to terminate the relationship.

In such a case the non-initiator will feel more emotionally stresses and unstable after the breakup. But, in case where the dissolution is bilateral, the chances of sexual harassing behavior are less (27). *Third* is sexual harassment proclivity of male partner, proclivity is an inclination or predisposition towards a particular thing. It is being observed that male employees are more likely to direct sexually harassing behavior towards opposite sex than females. Even some of the researchers in this context believe that the male employee having high proclivity to sexually harassing behavior might involve in hostile environment as compared to males having low proclivity (18). *Fourth* is the negative residual affective state, dissolved romantic relationship brings in negative affective state for both or one of the partners for e.g. anger, resentment or jealousy. It is being observed that continuous exposure between dissolved partners can intensify one's negative state thereby leading to hostile environment a sexually harassing behavior in an organization. Fifth is the organization tolerance for sexually harassing behavior, in this context it is being observed that the organization culture with low tolerance of sexual harassment policies are less prone to hostile environment and sexually harassing behavior as compared to the organizations having high tolerance policies towards sexual harassment (18).

III. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

In this study we have discussed the various individual characteristics as well as some other factors responsible for dissolution of a romantic relationship in an organization. Along with this a detailed study of individual & organizational consequences are also taken into consideration to better understand the situation arising after end of a romantic relationship. On the basis of literature review studied in this context we have prepared a framework of dissolution process (fig.1) starting from the individual & organizational factors responsible for dissolution of a romantic relationship in an organization and its consequences faced by both the individual and the organization.
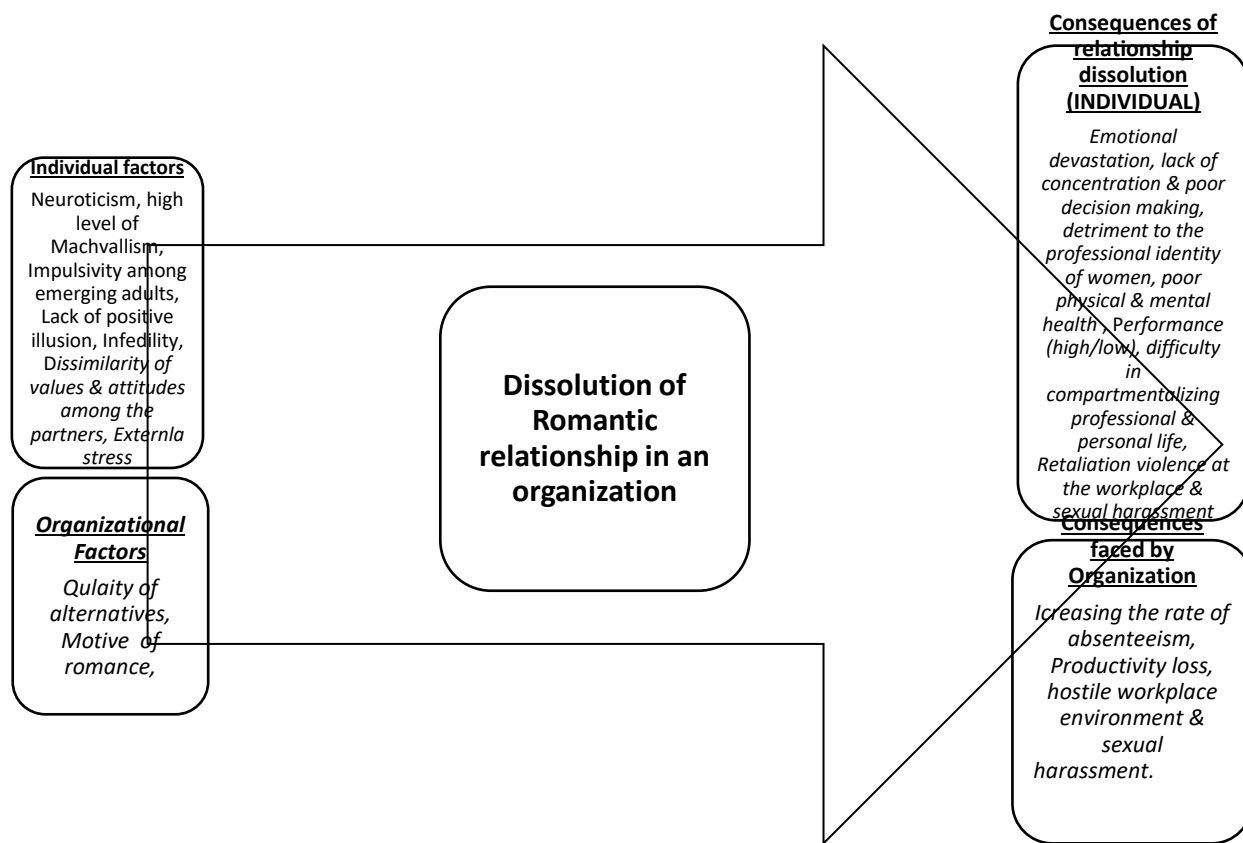

Fig 1. Framework of Romantic relationship dissolution in an organization

The given figure clearly depicts how an individual characteristic & organizational factor turns the romantic relationship towards its dissolution. In this context we have come out with a very interesting fact that even if the dissolution is resulting from an organizational factor, for e.g. quality of alternatives available to an individual at the workplace is also related to its individual characteristic weather he/she wants to break their commitment & trust or they want to remain loyal in their relationship without counting the other best alternatives available to them.

Similarly, in case of consequences also, it is the individual who first suffer from the breakup which further leads to organizational consequences. For e.g. if an individual feel stressed & demotivated due to romantic dissolution, he/she will ultimately work less thereby harming their job performance, which in turn decreases the overall performance of the organization. Therefore, in order to protect the organization from such consequence, the first step is to help the employee who is bearing the stress & pain arising out of relationship dissolution. Some of the researches have come out with suggestions in this context.

Firstly, enable the employees to maintain some distance-

As per Byrne frequent interaction between the two employees who were earlier in a relationship give rise to painful or destructive emotions. Here, proximity is the major issue; therefore, physical avoidance can reduce the emotional pain felt by the former partners. *Secondly*, educate employees about standard behaviour inside & outside the workplace- After dissolution individual make constant phone calls, text messages or e-mails to regain the relationship, such attempts are acceptable in outside world but in workplace this behaviour is termed as "sexual harassment" or "bullying". Therefore, it is the responsibility of an organization to make it clear about the type of behaviour expected at workplace to avoid such misconducts. This could be done by educating the employees about the laws and policies related to sexual harassment or bullying. *Thirdly*, promotion of compassion in the organization can help the employee to cope with the emotional distress arising out of dissolved relationship. Hence, managers can integrate compassion and support for grieving employees to get the work done from them. *Fourthly*, organization must offer some sort of employee assistance programme or counselling with the help of Human resource management department to the dissolved partners. This could help them to manage their emotional reactions at work and in maintaining personal and professional boundaries in the workplace. *Fifthly*, dissolution always brings in lack of concentration and lowers the performance of dissolved partners. But at workplace work is the priority, therefore, manger should respond empathically towards the situation by extending additional support such as giving the employee a grace period or extension on a project so that an individual can forget his/her emotional pain and complete his/her work also.

Limitations

In Indian context, very minimal research has been done in this area. Moreover, in most of the researches the individual factors responsible for dissolution are very general, not specifically comes into the boundary of organization.

Scope of further research

All the consequences of dissolved Workplace Romance faced by the organization are due to emotional distress faced the dissolved partners. Therefore, further research can be done to find out the effective ways by which an organization can help such partners in order to get relieve from such consequences.

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