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Rethinking the Nexus between Workplace Romance and Conflict-of-Interest in a Public University

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20 June 2026 Workplace romance is not a new subject, seeing it from a relationship between two or more colleagues serving in the same organisation that is professed by others to be considered a sexually-motivated lure. Workplace romance generates from increased interactions between co-workers on a daily basis at the workplace, on social media channels like WhatsApp groups, email, and Facebook. Workplace Romances deal with issues originating from hierarchical relationships, including sexual harassment like bad touches, inappropriate eye contact, inappropriate body gestures, favouritism and discrimination based on gender, colour, body size, and age, which further impacts job productivity and morale. We adopted a systematic review of the literature on the subject. Our review suggests that to manage conflicts of interest resulting from workplace romance, universities should take several steps, including developing policies, providing training, counselling, and monitoring workplace relationships. University employees and managers who fail to manage their romantic behaviours when at work should be subjected to coercion, counselling, or separation from the university. From this analysis, it has been revealed that University policy on workplace romance may take either the laissez-faire stance or the hybrid stance. The link between workplace romance and conflict of interest presents a complex challenge for university managers and employees. It is important for universities to respect employees engaging in consensual relationships while addressing the potential risks associated with such scenarios. Universities, be they public or private, should develop clear guidelines to guide workplace relationships, aware that they are dealing with adults.

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INTRODUCTION

The overarching philosophy of university education, in Africa, increasingly centres on decolonisation, relevance, and community-based knowledge, often anchored in the philosophy of interconnectedness (Mugumbate, Mupedziswa, Twikirize, Mthethwa, Desta & Oyinlola, 2024). It acts as a pedagogical space for intellectual activism, critical inquiry, and social transformation, aiming to address continental challenges like poverty, inequality, and the need for sustainable development (Mukasa, 2025; Lamaro, Kimoga, Nampijja & Reich, 2025; Adanlawo & Nkomo-Asare, 2025). The key aspects of the African philosophy of higher education include, though not limited to, ubuntu pedagogy, decolonisation and cultural relevance, critical engagement and activism, functionalism and learning by doing, as well as knowledge production for development (Ngubane & Makua, 2021; Noutchie, 2025; Simango, 2023). We shall give a breakdown of each of these aspects in the foregoing.

First, the Ubuntu pedagogy gives emphasis to communalism, interdependence, caring for others, and breaking down social barriers, making education a collective, rather than purely individualistic, endeavour (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). Secondly, decolonisation and cultural relevance aim to dismantle Western-centric epistemic hegemony by integrating African indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions into the curriculum (Asiimwe, Natamba & Mukasa, 2025). Thirdly, critical engagement and activism view the university as a space for resistance, democratic engagement, and critical thinking to foster citizenship and challenge injustice (Mukasa, 2025). Fourthly, functionalism and "Learning by doing" focus on practical skills, observation, and experiential learning to solve

immediate socio-economic problems (Dickens, 2025). And fifthly, knowledge production for development gives priority to research and the creation of knowledge that is relevant to the African context (Karatas & Busuulwa, 2026). In an ideal world, this approach seeks to foster an educational system that is not only intellectually rigorous but also deeply connected to the cultural, social, and political realities of African societies (Muhumuza Nalule, Keikara Muhumuza, Kamugisha Mbabazi... (2024).

From the aforesaid issues of ubuntu pedagogy, decolonisation and cultural relevance, critical engagement and activism, functionalism and learning, it appears workplace romance is not a new-fangled subject, seeing it from a relationship between two or more colleagues serving in the same university that is professed by others to be considered as a sexually-motivated lure. In accordance with the Society for Human Resource Management's (2024) 'workplace romance study', it was revealed that 49 percent of the participants attested to having an affection for a workmate in the previous year, 21 percent went on a date with a workmate, and 11 percent corresponded with a workmate through a dating app. These results are reminiscent of the view that finding love at the workplace, such as a public University, is unquestionably a common topic, as obtainable studies have already revealed that over 60% of grown-ups have had a romance at a similar workplace.

Workplace Romance - the Concept

More recently, workplace romances have been defined as mutually desired relationships involving sexual attraction between two employees of the same university. Sexual attraction is thus a defining feature of workplace romance (Saputra et al., 2024). This shows that one must be attracted to another for the romance

to exist. Workplace romance may be divided into two categories: lateral and hierarchical. A lateral romance is a relationship between employees of equal status. A hierarchical romance is one where the two employees are at different university levels, for example, when a manager is romantically involved with his or her subordinate (Belinda, 2017). Hierarchical workplace romances are likely to both be more frequent and more problematic than lateral romances. This is because they involve power differences between those in the romance, and are often a source of hostility, especially when the subordinate refuses to agree with what his/her manager wants.

Global statistics yield similar outcomes; for instance, research conducted by the Canadian Journal of Family and Youth indicates that workplace romance stems from increased interactions between co-workers on a daily basis at the workplace, on social media channels like WhatsApp groups, email, and Facebook (Murray, 2022). This act can result in positive and negative effects on the University environment. Workplace Romances deal with issues originating from hierarchical relationships, including sexual harassment, namely bad touches, inappropriate eye contact, inappropriate body gestures (body language), favouritism, and discrimination based on gender, colour, body size, and age, which further impacts job productivity and morale (So & Gierok, 2018). The existence of these forms of relationships may be unavoidable in a typical setting, yet they can also damage the institution's reputation when such relationships become unsuccessful, where co-workers can cause conflicts among themselves, as well as with the university (Batra et al., 2024). These conflicts can lead to fights, damage to university properties, tension, and witchcraft-related cases. Therefore, it becomes hard for the public universities to put in place policies which could prevent such issues, since at the same time may create more issues because university policies are a divided subject.

In the UK, for instance, since the 1970s, surveys clearly illustrate that 70% of employees have experienced workplace romance. This indicates

that up to a fifth of the workers in universities meet their partners at work, and a quarter to half of office romances lead to marriage (Wilson, 2015). In the situation where workplace romance exists between single workers, it may be simply a one-night stand or the beginning of an established relationship. However, in a situation where both persons are married or have an existing relationship, it may bring about the infamy of extramarital affairs (cheating) (Biggs et al., 2012). Therefore, a romance in which consent is in question may or may not result in accusations of harassment. These distinctions apply across relationships of same-gender or different-gender couples in the workplace. Therefore, Workplace romance, within the university, has a number of questions and issues, such as whether such workplace romance should be banned because it can potentially hurt the university and the couple as well as other members of the university community?

From the African perspective, the activities of work were guided by a system of division of labour which was based on sex (Bhebhe & Hove, 2016). The males hunted, fought in battles as a means of defence, as well as reared cattle, while the females separately performed household duties of cooking, child rearing, and gathering wild fruits. However, from this state of affairs, modern work systems, especially universities, have taken a different course that has seen men and women working together in workplace settings. This, therefore, makes it necessary for the concept of workplace romance to be studied on a global-regional-national scale to increase the body of knowledge. In recent times, work has been characterised by sexuality and physical intimacy (Bhebhe & Hove, 2016). This has been attributed to the increased proportion of women in the labour force, particularly in managerial and professional jobs, as well as the expectation of employees to spend longer hours at work. In a number of universities today, women work, interact, travel, socialise, and relax with male colleagues more than ever before in activities such as field work, research, internship, conferences, workshops, seminars or colloquia and meetings.

Such intense involvement is a potential breeding ground for both sexual attraction and romantic relationships (Thakholi, 2021). The increased presence of women has led to increased interaction between men and women. This interaction has similarly led to the development of a romantic relationship in universities where employees are working for longer hours in environments that encourage teamwork and familiarity, there is a tendency towards workplace romance.

In the same way, workplace romance is a vast phenomenon, even if specific statistics for each African country are not readily available. For instance, in South Africa, workplace romances might be subject to the country's labour laws and institutional policies; in Kenya, employees might be more cautious about office relationships due to cultural or social norms (Belinda, 2017). These workplace romances are equally associated with favouritisms where employees believe workplace romances lead to preferential treatment (such as upward growth, recommendations for over-seas trips, further sponsored studies, allocation of paid university activities, etc.), gossip - where employees who observe co-workers' romantic involvement engage in rumours, and lowered productivity where employees think workplace romances can decrease productivity due to fear, conflicts (Parikh, 2000). However, some co-workers tend to engage in workplace romance in exchange for money, favour, gifts, and goods, this often termed as something for something.

In the case of Uganda, workplace romance is a topic that warrants exploration, considering the cultural, social, and professional dynamics at play (Samara, 2010). Ugandan public universities have their cultural dynamics emanating from the regions in which they are located. For instance, Makerere and Kyambogo universities are located in the central region, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Kabaale and Mountains of the Moon are located in the western region, Lira and Gulu are located in the northern region, etc. This is because of the growing economy and diverse industries, which reflect a blend of

traditional values and modern professional norms. Universities such as Makerere, Lira and Gulu are examples of professional environments where workplace romances could potentially develop. Universities worldwide have varying policies regarding workplace romances. Some universities have strict policies against dating co-workers [15% of universities] (Parikh, 2004), while others may be more lenient. In Uganda, several universities might not have explicit policies on workplace romance, but it's vital for them to establish guidelines to navigate potential conflicts, favouritism, and/or legal issues that may arise from potential or real workplace romantic relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organised along four emerging sub-themes, namely: legislation on workplace romance, the consequences of workplace romance, workplace romance as a conflict of interest, and university policy on workplace romance.

Legislation on Workplace Romance

In contemporary universities, employees spend the majority of their time with colleagues, and an average adult spends about a third of their life at work, making it natural for some of these professional relationships to evolve into romantic ones (Obilil Idoot, 2024). Such workplace romances can yield both positive outcomes, viz., increased morale and teamwork, as well as negative consequences, such as conflicts of interest or allegations of sexual harassment. For instance, in Nairobi, a claimant was accused of using his position to influence the transfer of the complainant, a subordinate, to a higher-paying position based on a romantic relationship. On 20th of September 2024, the Employment and Labour Court at Nairobi delivered a ruling on case between *Mark Ngugi Mwaura v G4S Kenya Limited Cause Number E 232 of 2021*, which explored the dim lines between workplace romance and sexual harassment; the court emphasized that employers needed to refrain from interfering in consensual romantic relationships at work, provided such relationships do not create

potential conflicts of interest, particularly when they involve a supervisor and a subordinate. Justice Rika cautioned employers against interfering in workplace romances, noting that “such interference may amount to invasion of the privacy rights of their Employees.” He held that employment sexual harassment policies that take a no-nonsense approach towards policing workplace relationships are unconstitutional as they violate an employee’s right to privacy, dignity, and could amount to cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment by preventing individuals from “following their hearts.”

Correspondingly, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, the US Supreme Court held that the right to intimate association includes the right of consenting adults to engage in private sexual activity. Even if the law did not justify its intrusion into the personal and private lives of individuals, the above precedent was followed by the Court of Appeal of California in *Barbee v. Household Automotive Finance Corporation*, [113 Cal. App. 4th 525, where it was held that an employee may have a legally protected right to pursue an intimate relationship at work.

In Uganda, Article 27 of the 1995 Constitution (Government of Uganda, 1995) guarantees the right to privacy, shielding individuals from unlawful searches and interference with communications. In contrast, the Kenyan Constitution, under Article 31, extends the right to privacy to protect information related to an individual’s family or private affairs from being unnecessarily required or disclosed by an employer. This suggests that Uganda’s privacy framework may not explicitly address the disclosure of workplace relationships, potentially leaving university employees more vulnerable when such disclosure is deemed necessary to safeguard the university’s legitimate business interests.

Regarding the right to dignity, Article 24 of the Ugandan Constitution prohibits any form of torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. The wording of Article 24 of the Ugandan Constitution is similar to Article 29 (f)

of the Kenyan Constitution. Further freedom from torture, cruel or inhumane treatment is classified as a non-derogable right and freedoms under Article 44 (a) of the Constitution of Uganda. The constitutional provisions appear to shield workplace romances between consenting adults within the university. While the situation appears as it is, workplace romances have a number of consequences, both positive and negative, as highlighted in the preceding section.

The Consequence of Workplace Romance

Given that workplace romance is an ambiguous blade, it can be either harmful to both the young and the old, [non]-oblivious people, especially when they take stuff of love to the equilibrium, or it can turn out to be one of the greatest rewarding expeditions (Kaka, 2023; Kramer, Kramer & Gong, 2023). In spite of this, a study by Bilyk (2021) found that the reality of romantic affairs in the workplace is unavoidable since they have turned out to be very popular settings to notice a matching partner, mainly when the frequency of interaction between men and women is higher than in any other location. seeing that intimate workplace relationships manifest in terms of reciprocated voluptuous interaction (Carson & Barling, 2008), employees facing workplace romance are most likely to permit constructive reputational effects of hierarchical workplace romances for both sexes at managerial levels (Horan, Chory, Craw & Mainiero, 2024). This is especially true for single females, at the lower academic or administrative ranks, who are looking to settle down in what may become a meaningful marriage.

Workplace romance can affect the professional lives of employees. Consistent with Infographic (2024), it was revealed that many of the workplace romantic relationships are perceived to be a positive element towards;

- Improving the overall mood at the university,
- Raising the level of employee motivation,
- Developing a sense of belonging at university, and

- Leading to better work-life balance.

Because of the aforementioned positives, we argue that when a workplace romance ends, the majority of the would-be victims continue to work compared to a very slim minority that choose to leave the University, probably due to trauma and or feeling of embarrassment. Also, important to note is that approximately one-in-four employees are likely to stay longer at a job they dislike because of a romantic relationship with a colleague or workmate. Available evidence reveals that no law forbids submissive adults from initiating and remaining in a romantic relationship at the workplace, and as such, a good number of universities will react differently whenever faced with such. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the individuals in the relationship are not the only ones who feel the impact if the relationship does not work out. In spite of everything, possible claims of a workplace relationship gone wrong include, but are not limited to, hostility in the university, unwanted distractions, or claims of sexual harassment. Such claims tend to result from a number of scenarios, such as;

- When an employee pursues a workplace romance with a co-worker, and the pursuit is unwelcome or
- When a workplace romance ends, and one of the parties involved does not accept the resolution and continues to pursue a relationship or
- When a senior employee is engaged in a romantic relationship with a subordinate.

The aforementioned scenarios may result in a power imbalance. As a consequence, the majority of the university workers in more developed nations tend to argue that their employers should not have a prohibitive policy against workplace romances. Interestingly, a similar number have confidence in the need for employers to provide guidelines on handling workplace romances to employees, something that presents a conflict of interest as examined in the next section.

Workplace Romance as a Conflict of Interest

Workplace romance is a pervasive phenomenon that affects many employees and university administrations in separate ways. Studies worldwide, including Uganda's universities, have revealed that a significant proportion of employees engage in romantic relationships with their colleagues at the university, and these relationships can have both positive and negative consequences (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015). One of the potential negative consequences of workplace romance is conflict of interest, which can arise when personal relationships influence professional decisions and create unfair treatment.

A conflict of interest occurs when someone's personal interests or relationship might influence their decisions or actions in a way that isn't fair or right. For instance, when a supervisor starts dating a subordinate within a department, this can create a power imbalance, influencing institutional decisions such as employee promotion, allocation of assignments, and/or employee appraisals, potentially disadvantaging other university employees. This way, conflict of interest tends to generate serious consequences for employees and universities, including perceptions of unfairness, decreased productivity, and liability (Boyd, 2010).

Whether workplace romance amounts to a conflict of interest is a point of contention in different public universities. This is largely true because the conflictual manifestation of workplace romance appears to take several forms, including favouritism, nepotism, and bias (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015). First, favouritism will occur when a supervisor, such as a faculty dean or head of a department, shows favour to a romantic partner in terms of recommending them for promotions or other work-related benefits. Second, nepotism will occur when a supervisor hires or promotes a romantic partner or family member, potentially unfairly disadvantaging other employees. And third, bias will occur when a romantic relationship influences an individual's judgment or decision-making, potentially leading to unfair treatment of others.

A study by Boyd (2010) reveals that when viewing conflict-of-interest from the perspective of workplace romance, we need to position our locus on several negative consequences, including, though not limited to, perceptions of unfairness, decreased productivity, and liability. Particularly, when university employees perceive that a romantic relationship is influencing professional decisions, it can lead to perceptions of unfairness and decreased morale. And correspondingly, workplace romance can distract employees and decrease productivity, particularly if employees are spending valuable worktime discussing personal romantic matters or seeking favours, which in itself amounts to a precise conflict of interest. Generally, therefore, universities become liable for the actions of their employees, including such actions associated with workplace romance, and they are obliged to continually shield their employees from becoming out-and-out victims of such romantic relationships.

Workplace romance has attracted and can be analysed from a few known judicial precedents, which fall outside university settings. For instance, in a popular case between *Rika J and Mark Ngugi Mwaura v G4S Kenya Limited*, it was emphasised that an employer may have legitimate concerns about workplace romance, which could either result in sexual harassment claims or a situation of conflict of interest. The judge was of the opinion that “romantic and/ or sexual relationships between individuals working for the same employer, in a supervisor–supervisee relationship, constitute conflict-of-interest.” Consequently, in the court’s opinion, rather than for a claim of sexual harassment, the claimant needed to have been summoned before a fairly constituted disciplinary committee on charges of conflict of interest rather than claims of sexual harassment. Ensuing from the above, therefore, we identify a few scenarios that could lead to an inference of conflict-of-interest, including preferential treatment especially where a supervisor engages in a romantic relationship with a subordinate, it could lead to preferential treatment for the subordinate; coercion where

subordinates may engage in romantic relationships with supervisors to secure promotions or job security; and distortion of professional boundaries, where romantic relationships make it difficult to maintain appropriate levels of professionalism, causing resentment from other colleagues.

As highlighted by the Industrial Court of Uganda in *Magoba Editor v Tusker Mattresses (U) Ltd LDR No. 243 of 2015*, a key element of sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct. If the conduct is not unwelcome, the Court may not support a claim for sexual harassment. However, if the relationship results in preferential treatment for or against one party, this can lead to a significant conflict of interest, impacting the University’s interests and workplace environment.

We thus submit that in order to effectively manage conflict-of-interest emerging from workplace romance, Universities can take several steps, including developing regulatory policies, providing employee training, strengthening employee counselling services, and monitoring workplace relationships (Pierce & Aguinis, 2015).

- Universities can develop policies that address or regulate workplace romances from escalating into conflicts of interest, including requirements for disclosure and procedures for managing emerging conflicts.
- Universities can also provide continuous training to both employees and supervisors on managing conflicts of interest and maintaining professional boundaries.
- Monitoring workplace relationships and taking action if conflicts arise is also crucial. Universities should develop policies and procedures for managing conflicts of interest in workplace romance, and provide training for employees and supervisors.
- Employees should be made aware of the potential consequences of conflicts of interest and take steps to maintain professional boundaries.

Ensuing from the above, we realise that workplace romance remains a complex issue that can have both positive and negative consequences for employees and university administrations. Yet, conflict of interest is a potential negative consequence of workplace romance that can have serious repercussions for employees and universities. Therefore, all members in the university community must understand the types, consequences, and management strategies for managing conflicts of interest originating from workplace romance. Universities can take steps to manage these conflicts and maintain a fair and productive work environment in today's universities.

As a consequence, employees and managers who fail to manage unethical romantic behaviours while at work should be subjected to coercion, counselling, or separation from the institution. This can arguably help universities to overcome the challenges of favouritism and/or nepotism in the workplace. These situations are especially louder when a workplace romance involves employees at different hierarchical levels, such as a supervisor and a subordinate, which can create a potential conflict of interest. This scenario may lead to perceptions of favouritism or bias in times of employee promotion, performance evaluations, or work/task assignments. Colleagues may feel that one individual is receiving an unfair advantage, which can breed resentment and discontent within the team. The case of *Rika J in Mark Ngugi Mwaura v G4S Kenya Limited* highlights that workplace relationships may poison the work environment and affect productivity. The perceived bias has the potential to demoralise other employees, who may feel that the employee is consistently assigned "better work" or is less burdened by responsibilities compared to their peers, leading to feelings of frustration and unfairness within the University.

University Policy on Workplace Romance

From this analysis, it has been revealed that if a university chooses to develop an enabling policy on workplace romance, that policy should take either the laissez-faire stance or the hybrid stance.

The Laissez-Faire stance - Under a laissez-faire posture towards workplace romance, university employees are allowed to engage in workplace relationships without any interference from the employer. Employees are thus trusted to manage their relationships in a professional manner without intruding into the employee's private life. A laissez-faire posture is credited on two grounds, namely:

- On the first ground, it allows the university employees greater freedom and autonomy to form workplace relationships without violating the university's human resource policy. This will create a relaxed environment for the employees, leading to greater job satisfaction as employees feel at ease when creating social bonds. And
- On the second ground, a laid-back work environment creates a greater level of trust and respect between the employees and the employers, encouraging them to handle their matters professionally.

Nevertheless, the Laissez-Faire stance may be equally disadvantageous on two grounds, viz.

One, without workplace regulations on romantic relationships, there is a potential for favouritism, conflict of interest, or allegations of unfair treatment, especially in cases that involve power dynamics. Additionally, without clear guidelines on workplace relationships, advances made by one employee towards another could give rise to situations of sexual harassment.

Two, a laissez-faire policy towards workplace relationships could negatively affect workplace productivity, as workplace romance could cause distractions. Furthermore, if the relationship goes sour, there is a potential for conflict. Therefore, the dangers of a laissez-faire policy could expose the employer to legal issues related to the statutory requirements under the 'Employment (Sexual Harassment) Regulations (2012), Statutory Instrument 15 (2012)', which mandates employers with more than 25 employees to have a sexual harassment policy in place. Additionally, turning a blind eye to supervisor-subordinate

relationships has the potential to open the door to sexual harassment claims and may poison the work environment through perceived bias.

The Hybrid Policy - A hybrid policy stance takes a balanced approach, allowing workplace relationships while placing restrictions in certain situations, such as banning supervisor-subordinate relationships, prohibiting relationships between employees in the same department, or requiring disclosure of relationships between co-workers. Indeed, a hybrid policy may be commendable on the grounds that, one, it promotes a balanced approach where relationships are tolerated in certain pre-defined circumstances while placing reasonable limits allowed for within the law to avoid potential conflict-of-interest or perceived bias at work. And two, employees are given more flexibility in managing workplace relationships in comparison to companies and/or universities that adopt a non-fraternisation policy. A policy that requires disclosure of workplace relationships ensures transparency between the employee and the employer and mitigates situations giving rise to conflict-of-interest or perceived bias. On the opposite, a hybrid policy may not solve the problem due to two concerns: one, the disclosure of workplace relationships can potentially give rise to privacy issues as the requirement to disclose could feel invasive and could discourage communication between the employee and the university (Horan, Chory, Craw, & Mainiero, 2024). And two, the company's human resource team could potentially find it difficult to enforce the policy uniformly, leading to subjective decision-making, giving rise to potential bias or discrimination claims or allegations.

Given the above stances, three studies (Panda & Puri, 2025; Obilil Idoot, 2024; and Blythe & Frew, 2019) have proposed slightly convergent recommendations regarding what should be done by universities;

Firstly, Panda and Puri (2025) propose the need for human resource departments to develop fair, transparent work-related policies, provide training, and support emotional well-being in

order to foster workplace harmony and performance. These views are reinforced by Panigrahy, Jena, and Priyadarshini (2025) as well as Fiona (2015), who note that human resource managers should evolve good strategic practices to enable them help in managing and mitigating workplace romance challenges. Further, La France (2022) encourages the use of advice such as encouraging, warning, gender concerns, and silence.

Secondly, Obilil Idoot (2024) suggests strategies that companies and/or universities can adopt to manage workplace relationships effectively and to mitigate potential risks that could arise. These are:

- Creating a workplace romance policy that completely discourages relationships between direct supervisors and subordinates within the university. At the same time, this policy could allow relationships between co-workers or a supervisor-subordinate relationship as long as the parties are employed in different university departments or offices.
- Encouraging disclosure of relationships to HR, especially if the relationship has the potential to involve a supervisor-subordinate dynamic, even though the parties work in different university departments. This can help mitigate potential conflicts of interest, ensure transparency, and help address potential sexual harassment claims before they arise.
- Implementing continuous workplace anti-sexual harassment training to enhance employee empowerment on acceptable personal boundaries at work and to ensure that romantic advances do not have to lead to claims of sexual harassment.
- While universities are free to adopt the above measures to mitigate potential risks that may arise from workplace relationships, they should respect the employees' constitutional rights, which include the right to privacy, dignity, and freedom from cruelty.

And thirdly, Blythe and Frew (2019) advised that, for any employer, there is a need for the following:

- Striking a balance between employees' right to a private life and the employer's right to protect its corporate interests.
- Reassuring workers to separate their work lives from their personal lives, and to remain within the professional conduct both in good times and in difficult times.
- Underscoring that members of staff should never tolerate a workplace affair with a co-worker that affects their individual performance.
- Inserting a prerequisite that demands every worker to reveal to the employer any work-related relationship that may lead to a conflict of interest in the future.
- Acting upon every grievance quickly and properly.
- Offering guidance to middle-line administrators on handling individual affairs at work.
- Providing every manager and employee with relevant training on sexual harassment, both at work and outside work.
- Guaranteeing that guidelines are updated to cover workplace romance, such as equal employment opportunities, anti-bullying, and disciplinary policies.

CONCLUSION

The link between workplace romance and conflict of interest presents a complex challenge for employers and employees alike. It is important for universities to respect employees engaging in consensual relationships while addressing the potential risks associated with such scenarios. As such, there is a need for employers to adopt workplace policies that balance the need for professional boundaries and, at the same time, respect employees' right to privacy and personal choices. To this end, a well-crafted policy can

potentially mitigate the risks of sexual harassment and conflicts of interest while maintaining a positive work environment that encourages healthy interpersonal relationships. In sequence, this would allow the employer to protect their university interests and ensure the well-being of their employees.

Recommendations

From this review, we make the following recommendations:

- Universities, be they public or private, should develop clear guidelines to guide workplace relationships, aware that they are dealing with adults.
- Managers should follow university guidelines when addressing any consequences arising from workplace romance-gone-bad
- Workers engaged in workplace romance should desist from allowing their emotions to affect their daily chores by acting maturely and responsibly.

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