

**THE EFFECT OF DISSOLVED WORKPLACE ROMANCES ON THE  
PSYCHOSOCIAL FUNCTIONING AND PRODUCTIVITY OF INVOLVED  
EMPLOYEES**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	ii
<b>LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS.....</b>	vii
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	viii
<b>Chapter 1: Orientation and Research Design .....</b>	1
<b>1.1.1 Introduction .....</b>	1
<b>1.1.2 Personal observations and experience .....</b>	4
<b>1.1.3 Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs).....</b>	5
<b>1.1.4 Envisioned value and contribution .....</b>	7
<b>1.1.5 Definition of Key Concepts .....</b>	8
<b>1.2 Problem formulation.....</b>	11
<b>1.2.1 Current scenario with regard to research topic.....</b>	11
<b>1.2.2 Preferred scenario (How should it be?).....</b>	15
<b>1.2.3 Research Gap: “As is...”vs. “ought to be...” .....</b>	17
<b>1.3 Goal and Objectives .....</b>	17
<b>1.3.1 Goal of the study.....</b>	17
<b>1.3.2 Objectives of the study.....</b>	18
<b>1.4 Research Question .....</b>	18
<b>1.5 Research Approach .....</b>	19
<b>1.6 Type of Research.....</b>	19
<b>1.7 Research Design and Methodology .....</b>	19
<b>1.7.1 Research Design .....</b>	19
<b>1.7.2 Research population, sample and sampling method.....</b>	20
<b>1.7.3 Data Collection Methods .....</b>	22
<b>1.7.4 Pilot testing.....</b>	22
<b>1.7.5 Data analysis .....</b>	23
<b>1.8. Feasibility of the study.....</b>	24
<b>1.8.1 Availability of and access to participants .....</b>	24
<b>1.8.2 Permission .....</b>	25
<b>1.9 Ethical Aspects .....</b>	25
<b>1.9.1 Harmful exposure.....</b>	26
<b>1.9.2 Informed consent .....</b>	26
<b>1.9.3 Voluntary participation .....</b>	27

<b>1.9.4 Right to Privacy/ Anonymity/ Confidentiality .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.9.5 Honesty.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.9.6 Professional conduct.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.9.7 Other ethical issues.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>1.10 Contents of the research report.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>1.11 Limitations of the study.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature review on workplace romance .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>    2.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>    2.2 Workplace romance .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.2.1 Descriptions, models and types of WR.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2.2.2 Motivations for WR .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>2.2.3 Potential benefits and rewards of WR .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>2.2.4 Potential risks and dangers of WR.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>2.2.4.1 Sexual harassment claims resulting from a dissolved WR .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>2.2.4.2 Possible retaliation: violence or public confrontation .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>2.2.4.3 Staff turnover.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>2.2.4.4 Unfair interventions by management.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>2.2.4.5 Unethical relationships .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>2.2.4.6 Emotional disorders and secondary implications.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>2.2.4.7 Other risks of WR .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2.2.5 WR and Performance: Risk or Benefit for productivity?.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>2.2.6 Managerial intervention in WR .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>    2.3 Themes relevant to the research in question .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>    2.4 Summary / Conclusion .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Data analysis of the effect of dissolved workplace romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>    3.1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>3.1.1 Research Methodology.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>3.1.2 Personal profiles of participants .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>    Table 1: The demographic profiles of the participants.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>3.1.3 Relationship profiles .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>    Table 2: Themes, Sub-themes and Indicators associated with dissolution of WRs.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>    3.2 Main theme 1 : Psycho-social functioning .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Psychological &amp; Emotional functioning .....</b>	<b>67</b>

<b>3.2.1.1 Concentration.....</b>	67
<b>3.2.1.2 Decision making .....</b>	68
<b>3.2.1.3 Stress levels .....</b>	68
<b>3.2.1.4 Depression levels.....</b>	69
<b>3.2.1.5 Substances .....</b>	70
<b>3.2.1.6 Self-confidence .....</b>	70
<b>3.2.1.7 Most difficult experience .....</b>	71
<b>3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Social Functioning.....</b>	72
<b>3.2.2.1 Social coping.....</b>	72
<b>3.2.2.2 Withdrawing behaviour.....</b>	73
<b>3.2.2.3 Office gossip.....</b>	74
<b>3.2.2.4 Conflict with colleagues .....</b>	75
<b>3.2.2.5 Communication.....</b>	76
<b>3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Retaliation violence.....</b>	76
<b>3.2.3.1 Violent threats, acts or incidents .....</b>	76
<b>3.2.3.2 Effect of violent threats or acts .....</b>	78
<b>3.2.3.3 Negative emotional experience: fear or intimidation.....</b>	79
<b>3.2.3.4 Anger or resentment feelings .....</b>	79
<b>3.3 Main Theme 2: Productivity .....</b>	80
<b>3.3.1 Changes in usual level of work functioning .....</b>	80
<b>3.3.2 Attendance / Absenteeism.....</b>	81
<b>3.3.3 Level of motivation and commitment .....</b>	82
<b>3.4 Main Theme 3: EAP .....</b>	82
<b>3.4.1 Utilisation .....</b>	82
<b>3.4.2 Company / EAP Involvement and Expectations .....</b>	82
<b>3.4.3 Company policy.....</b>	83
<b>3.4.4 Suggestions to improve.....</b>	83
<b>3.5 Summary.....</b>	85
<b>Chapter 4: Conclusion &amp; Recommendations .....</b>	86
<b>4.2 Objective One .....</b>	87
<b>4.2.1 Sub-theme 1.....</b>	88
<b>4.2.2 Sub-theme 2.....</b>	91
<b>4.2.3 Sub-theme 3.....</b>	93
<b>4.3 Objective 2.....</b>	94

<b>4.4 Objective 3.....</b>	95
<b>4.5 Objective 4.....</b>	97
<b>4.6 Suggestions for further research.....</b>	98
<b>4.7 Conclusion .....</b>	100
<b>References .....</b>	101
<b>Annexure A: Informed Consent Letter .....</b>	108
<b>Annexure B: Interview Schedule .....</b>	108
<b>Annexure C: Permission letter .....</b>	114
<b>Annexure D: Ethical Clearance .....</b>	116

**List of tables:**

<b>Table 1: The demographic profiles of the participants.....</b>	63
<b>Table 2: Themes, Sub-themes and Indicators associated with dissolution of WRs.....</b>	66

## **LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS**

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- 1 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES**
- 2 WORKPLACE**
- 3 ROMANCE**
- 4 DISSOLVED**
- 5 BREAKDOWN**
- 6 EMPLOYEES**
- 7 PSYCHO-SOCIAL**
- 8 FUNCTIONING**
- 9 PRODUCTIVITY**
- 10 BENEFITS**
- 11 RISKS**
- 12 INTERVENTIONS**

## ABSTRACT

Workplace romances (WRs) have become a common occurrence and growing trend in today's work-oriented culture. People are spending more time at work and in close proximity to their work colleagues which provides the ideal stage for romantic relationships to develop.

Whilst on the one hand, WRs could have beneficial consequences for the individuals or organisations involved, they could also on the other hand be a problematic occurrence for some employers. The reason is that WRs have the risk of ending badly and that could open a field of possible complicated legal, emotional, ethical or productivity consequences.

In the light of this problem, the general objective of this study is to explore the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13 and also to explore the consequent need for appropriate intervention through the existing employee assistance programmes (EAP).

The study followed a qualitative research approach in that it covered detailed descriptions of involved employees' experiences of their psychosocial functioning and productivity in the workplace amidst a relationship breakdown.

A collective case study design was utilised because of its aims to understand a social issue, namely the breakdown of romantic relationships in the workplace, and studied the experiences and perceptions of a group of individuals affected by this phenomenon. The researcher conducted a word and concept analysis and an extensive literature study. This enabled the researcher to draw up a framework for the semi-structured interview schedule which was used to collect data.

The main findings realising the research objectives can be described as follows:

- Different participants had different and unique emotional experiences and the impact on their functioning varied from time to time and from individual to individual. Some generative themes have however emerged through the interviews.
- The general psychological and emotional functioning of individuals involved in WRs was negatively affected. In general, the breakups resulted in decreased concentration levels, decreased decision making abilities, increased stress, sadness and depression levels, and increased use of substances.
- The participants' social coping was affected in some way or another; most experienced withdrawing behaviour; office gossip was a huge issue for them; and an increase in conflict with work colleagues was reported.
- The occurrence of retaliation violence, with the associated negative feelings such as anger, resentment and fear, was commonplace and can be regarded as a major potential risk to the organisation when WRs dissolve.
- Productivity indicators such as level of work functioning, attendance and level of work motivation and commitment were in general affected detrimentally by the breakdown of WRs.
- The role of the EAP was perceived as a helpful opportunity for affected employees to receive counselling support to come to terms with the breakups at the time.
- It was suggested by the participants that the EAP can play a more constructive role in the event of the breakdown of WRs if the two involved parties are seen together by the counsellor with the aim of mediating any ongoing disputes between them.

The main conclusion of this study therefore confirms the overall negative effect of the breakdown of WRs on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees in the workplace. Furthermore, it gives direction as to how the EAP could best respond to this type of interpersonal conflict situation in the workplace, i.e. by means of mediation.

## Chapter 1: Orientation and Research Design

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### 1.1.1 Introduction

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Workplace romances (WRs) are becoming a common occurrence and growing trend in today's work-oriented culture of longer working days, longer work shifts, mixed gender teams and higher workloads (Pierce, Aguinis & Adams, 2000:869; Wilson, Filosa & Fennel, 2003:78). People are spending more and more time at work and in close proximity to their work colleagues which provides the ideal stage for romantic relationships to develop.

Whilst on the one hand, WRs could have beneficial consequences for the individuals involved (such as resulting in long lasting marriages), or even benefits to the organisations, it could also on the other hand be a problematic occurrence for some employers. The reason is that WRs, like any other relationship, have the risk of ending badly and that could open a field of possible complicated legal, emotional, ethical or productivity consequences.

Research on WRs identified some major potential risks of WRs for organisations and the involved employees. These risks include 1) a strong link with sexual harassment claims; 2) disruptive dissolutions that could result in retaliation violence; 3) higher staff turnover; 4) unfair management interventions; 5) unethical relationships; and 6) emotional disorders that affect the psycho-social functioning of the employees (Pierce & Aguinis, 2009:447-464; Lickey, Berry & Whelan-Berry, 2009:100-119).

From an organisations' perspective, there may be the fear that WRs, or the end of such relationships, could also pose (with the above mentioned risks) a seventh, namely a productivity problem. Various researchers have focused on this question of WR and productivity and found (surprisingly) inconclusive and mixed results over the years. In this research, variables such as the motives behind the relationship, the type and the stage of relationship were studied as possible factors that determined the link between

productivity and WRs. The results were mixed, because (as will be indicated later in this study) WRs normally benefit an organisation when the relationship flourishes, but as soon as it dissolves there is much more negative impact on the productivity – not only on the employees involved in the WR, but also on their co-workers and on the organisation as a whole.

Because of the possible negative link between WRs and the productivity of the employees and the organisation, a large body of research on WRs focused on possible management interventions in WRs and the existing research explored different strategies to manage this. Another motivation for doing research on WR is found in the existing literature on this field, namely the potential *risks and liability consequences* to the company when they intervene (or ignore) WRs and the consequences thereof. These risks will be further explored in Chapter Two (literature review) of this study which will further highlight the importance of continued research about WRs.

It will also be indicated in the literature review on WR that most research has been done in the American context with the main focus on schooled and professional employees. The question remains therefore if the findings about WRs (especially the potential risks of WRs) are necessarily true for the South African context and also in the context of unschooled (or semi-schooled) factory workers. The further question about the possible and appropriate Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) in the South African context then also arises.

In this study the researcher will therefore focus on a specific context: an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in the years 2012/13. This narrowly defined context will help to make this research contextual, relevant, manageable, focused and significant – no research has previously been done in this specific context about WRs. The preliminary research questions will therefore have to include: Are there WRs in this set up (or how prevalent is it)? How do they affect the employees in the relationship (quantitatively and qualitatively)? How do they affect co-workers? What are the potential

risks of WRs for the organisation in this context? How necessary is EAP in this context? What are the best options in an EAP in this context?

In short: What can we learn about the potential risks of WRs (especially dissolved WRs) for the organisation in this specific clothing factory? And: What will be an appropriate EAP in this context? (Should it be the “third option” of managing WRs through policy and counselling, or should the matter be prohibited / ignored? – these options will be discussed in more detail later on.) The main question is thus: what are the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees. This research question will be further refined in this study.

These questions are asked within the broader theoretical context of systems theory, which is applicable to this study. General systems theory originated in the 1960s, founded by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who defined a system as “a complex of components in mutual interaction” and asserted that “concepts and principles of systems theory are not limited to material systems, but can be applied to any (whole) consisting of interacting (components)” (Von Bertalanffy, 1974:1100). This theory evolved over time through the amalgamation with the ecological approach in the 1980s and the development of the complex systems theory, or the chaos theory (Hudson, 2000:215).

Systems theory includes some key concepts such as the notion that there are differences in understanding simple and complex systems. Furthermore, the concept of system complexity resides in the eye of the beholder and is therefore subjective. Systems are also “intertwined” (intertwined and mingled), meaning the parts are connected to each other through multiple, recursive, nonlinear feedback loops. Systems are sensitive to changes in initial conditions: changes in a simple system could result in major changes in the wider, complex, system, and these processes or outcomes are not predictable (Sanger & Giddens, 2012:369-371).

Systems theory basically therefore refers to the relevance of the assumption – at least applicable to the context of this study – that behaviour of the individual or relationship

(WR) (the simple system) affects the wider, more complex system, namely the workplace in terms of productivity, but also other systems such as the families of those involved and colleagues (family and/or organisational systems).

The present research about WRs will be very narrowly focused on the context of a clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13. However, the findings of this research may indicate some better understanding of WRs in the broader South African and “unschooled” context and thus help to develop better EAPs for similar contexts. There is however more motivation for this study which highlights its importance. Part of this motivation will become clear in the study itself. As part of the introduction three can be listed, namely “personal observation and experience”, the need for further development of EAPs and the generally envisioned value and contribution of this study.

### **1.1.2 Personal observations and experience**

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In the nature of the discussion the researcher is obliged to make use of the first person in sharing this information: I have worked as a social worker or EAP practitioner at different organisations (which include an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town) for more than fifteen years and from my experience romantic relationships between employees appear to be a regular occurrence at my workplaces. Furthermore, the dissolution of these romantic relationships is a regular event and from my experience it is usually at this point – where the relationship breaks down – that things become particularly problematic in the workplace and much counselling and intervention is necessary.

I have encountered many ex-couples who struggle to manage their on-going conflict in the work context appropriately and whose psychosocial functioning on some or many levels is negatively affected as a result of a dissolved WR. It is particularly problematic with WRs because these employees who work together have to face each other on a daily basis, and it seems to be hard for them to maintain appropriate boundaries between their private and work life. My observations are confirmed by the literature on

WR, but unfortunately not much research has been done specifically on the phase where WR dissolves.

My experience is that normally, WR breakdowns can have a multitude of ripple effects in the workplace such as the parties creating alliances with other colleagues; gossiping; a tense work environment; poor cooperation and communication between affected employees in teams; employees taking excessive sick leave to avoid each other; sometimes additional leave is taken to attend maintenance, protection order or divorce case court hearings and preparation hearings with legal aid practitioners; and malicious attempts by affected employees to undermine each other's career growth. These are all seriously disruptive factors for the productive functioning of the employees and for the organisation.

My first-hand experience has been shared and confirmed by the views of other role players in my workplace, namely the other social workers on site as well as the Human Resource practitioners and team leaders. At a first or preliminary observation it must thus be said that WRs are a definite concern for the organisation as a whole and not only for the couple involved. In my experience it is also a question of how and when to deal with it effectively from a managerial point of view and therefore there is a need for this specific study. New insights and understanding of this phenomenon is needed to deal with it effectively and cost-effectively. It may also help to empower social workers on site, the Human Resource practitioners and team leaders who mostly feel unsure how to manage the negative effects of a resolved WR in this context.

### **1.1.3 Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)**

Another motivation for this study is the need to further develop EAPs in dealing with WRs. Normally referrals to the EAP of employees involved in romantic relationships at work, are made by the team leaders at the point of relationship breakdown, with the hope that the associated conflict and tension that may cause productivity problems will be addressed. There is thus a need for a timely and effective strategy for the EAP practitioner to respond to these situations in order for the affected employees to be able

to return to their full productivity potential as soon as possible. It is however not always the case that EAP practitioners are able to deal effectively with these problems and better guidelines in specific contexts for specific levels of employment would be very helpful. The need for this is not only motivated from my own experience and discussions with other EAP practitioners, but also apparent from the literature on WRs.

There are several shortcomings in the literature. The main problem is that the research is not focused on unschooled (or semi-schooled) workers and therefore there is no indication of the effects of dissolved romances amongst unschooled workers, when compared to highly schooled employees. Are they for example more emotional, more demonstrative in their handling of this problem? Does it have a stronger effect on their psychosocial functioning and productivity than on other workers? Does a factory setting, for example, lead to different effects than an office environment? These questions are unanswered in the current literature and a further complication is that the research is not from South Africa, but from first world countries like the USA.

Another problem with the existing literature on WRs is its focus. The current research focuses on WRs in general and not on the “break-up phase” of the WR. The consequence of this is that firstly, the real effect of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees is not sufficiently defined and understood, secondly, that the negative effects of dissolved WRs might be underestimated and thirdly that the EAP guidelines are too general for dealing with this situation and therefore are eventually experienced as insufficient. These aspects will be further discussed in Chapter Two in the literature review.

The proposed research topic aims therefore to add value in the EAP field by doing research about the different options of EAP to manage WRs and to identify the appropriate approach in a specific context. The research question of this study is aimed at identifying and addressing a domestic matter (breakdown of romantic relationships between colleagues or between employees at the workplace) and its negative impact on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of the involved individuals, in the work

organisation. The appropriate EAP has thus the potential to empower the EAP practitioner to save costs for the company (by increasing productivity), and to be of benefit for the involved parties of the WR (by creating a more stable emotional environment through counselling or mediation).

The importance of a good EAP is thus apparent and the research done in this study will seek to add value in this regard. It should however be mentioned here that this study's aim is not to develop a completely different EAP (which would be too comprehensive for this study), but rather to propose some guidelines that can be incorporated in the existing EAP in regard to dealing with WRs more effectively. The point of departure with this study is however an investigation into the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees. By identifying and analysing these effects the researcher intends to highlight the need for a more appropriate EAP. The question about the "effects" is thus asked within the broader framework and knowledge of the existing need of an effective EAP in this regard.

#### **1.1.4 Envisioned value and contribution**

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The rationale of the study is to explore the phenomenon of the breakdown of romantic relationships in the workplace. This will be done to establish how the breakdown of romantic relationships between employees in the workplace negatively affects the psychosocial functioning of the involved employees. This has in turn also a negative effect on the productivity of the involved individuals in the workplace and the researcher will also try to gain additional information in this regard.

By doing research on these aspects of the well-being of the employees and on the impact on the productivity of the organisation, this study has the potential to contribute towards organisational development. In other words, clarity on the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees, will empower an organisation (management, supervisors, team leaders, EAP practitioners) to address the phenomenon of workplace romances more effectively.

The envisioned value of such new knowledge could be significant in that it may provide confirmation and raise awareness of potential risks and hazards in the workplace that frustrate the optimal functioning of employees. The results of this study would also be valuable in that they would provide a starting point from where effective EAP responses to this potential hazard in the workplace could be designed and implemented. This could help the EAP to effectively manage these situations and to ultimately advance optimal functioning and productivity in the workplace.

The further significance and contribution of this research is that it focuses on a very specific South African context. The literature review (Chapter Two) will indicate the lack of research in this context, as well as in WRs in an “unschooled” (or semi-schooled) context and new information and knowledge be gathered and generated in this study which might be useful for further research in this regard. Furthermore, international work in this field will be compared to the findings in this South African context and this might lead to new research and better understanding of the whole (growing) phenomenon of WRs.

### **1.1.5 Definition of Key Concepts**

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The title of this research includes many concepts that need further clarification.

**“Dissolved”:** The term “dissolved” in the context of partnerships or relationships refers to the official termination of a partnership (*The Penguin English Dictionary*, 2003:402). *The Collins Dictionary* describes the meaning of “dissolved” as to disintegrate or disperse, or to come or bring to an end (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/>; downloaded 20 July 2013).

In the context of this study, “dissolved” will mean that the romantic relationship has ended for example by means of a final separation. It does not refer to temporary, short term separations or “time-out” following normal arguments through the course of the relationship but refers to a final decision to end the relationship.

**“Workplace Romances”:** Pierce and Aguinis (2009:447) define a “workplace romance” as a consensual relationship between two members of the same organisation that entails mutual sexual attraction, emphasising the key attributes as consensual and mutually welcomed relationships. Pierce, Aguinis and Adams (2000:869) provided a similar definition of workplace romances as mutually desired relationships involving physical attraction between two employees of the same organisation.

Within the context of this study, “workplace” will refer to the place where the participants are working or employed, in this case an industrial setting – a clothing factory. The involved employees do not necessarily have to be working in the same room, office or on the same floor, but at least in the same building with the potential for daily face-to-face interaction.

“Romance” will refer to a romantic and potentially sexual, heterosexual relationship that has at any or one point been relatively stable, i.e. either a couple who were married, cohabitated, had a child together or had been together for a significant period of time. It does not include a short-term “fling” or “interaction” but refers to an actual relationship of a more long-term nature.

**“Psychosocial”:** This concept relates to processes or factors that are both social and psychological in origin (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/>; downloaded 20 July 2013). In my view, a clearer definition of this term is provided in an older source, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1983:831), as a concept relating to both the psychological (meaning matters of the mind and soul, or mental matters) and social (concerning the mutual relations of human beings) aspects of something.

For purposes of this study, the term “psychosocial” will refer to both the internal emotional and mental world of the individual, as well as the social environment of the individual, looking at his or her interpersonal relationships and wider social systems.

**“Functioning”:** *The Collins Dictionary* describes functioning as something working or performing as specified or working properly (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/>; downloaded 20 July 2013).

Applying this definition to the research study, functioning refers to the individual’s ability to function or work correctly, on a psychosocial level. It will look at how individuals are carrying out their daily tasks and roles in the workplace, and how well they are coping emotionally, mentally and socially under the circumstances.

**“Productivity”:** Refers to a) the state or quality of being productive or the extent of this; or b) the relationship between the output of goods and services and the input used to produce them, especially the effectiveness of labour in terms of industrial output (*The Penguin English Dictionary*, 2003:1111).

The opposite of productivity is “**unproductiveness**”, which is defined in *The Collins Dictionary* as the quality of not achieving much or the quality of not producing goods and services with exchange value (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/>; downloaded 20 July 2013). In the context of this research productivity will refer to employees’ ability to fulfil their overall production targets.

**“Employees”:** The term “Employees” refers to somebody employed by another for wages or a salary (*The Penguin English Dictionary*, 2003:455). Clarifying the application of this concept in the context of the research, it will refer to the particular employees who were involved or part of the romantic relationship that occurred in the workplace.

**“Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)”:** According to the Standards Committee of EAPA-SA (2010:4), the definition of EAPs is the “work organisation’s programme based on core technologies or functions to enhance employee and workplace effectiveness through prevention, identification, and resolution of personal and productivity issues”. EAPs are therefore primarily concerned with interventions to promote effectiveness and consequently productivity in the workplace.

**“Mediation”** is defined as a voluntary, confidential process where an impartial third party mediates parties to reach a mutual agreement on matters of dispute. The underlying principle is self-determination and a creation of a future working relationship with the other party (Folberg, Milne & Salem, 2004:262).

Mediation is defined in *The Collins Dictionary* as a method of resolving an industrial dispute whereby a third party consults with those involved and recommends a solution which is not, however, binding on the parties, or an attempt to reconcile disputed matters by the friendly intervention of a neutral power (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com> /downloaded 20 July 2013). Mediation is defined here since this concept emerged as a possible intervention strategy by the EAP in the event of the breakup of WRs.

## 1.2 Problem formulation

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### 1.2.1 Current scenario with regard to research topic

The research topic of this study is the effects of dissolved workplace romances at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13 and the consequent need for appropriate intervention through the existing employee assistance programme (EAP). The current scenario at my workplace (a set up as described in the research theme) is that the EAP receives multiple referrals for individuals and couples, who have been negatively affected by a workplace relationship breakdown.

The effects of dissolved WRs are thus to some extent already visible (as confirmed by the referrals of employees by their supervisors, but the following questions need to be answered: In what ways are these employees negatively affected? How much are they affected? How serious is this effect for the employees and for the organisation? To what extent is their psychosocial functioning in the workplace being affected? What are the potential risks for the organisation? And – perhaps most crucial – what is the best EAP strategy to follow in this specific context? These questions indicate the importance of

the inquiry into the diversity, complexity and intensity of the specific effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees.

Research literature on WR has shown that the phenomenon of WR is potentially a huge negative risk for the functioning of the affected employees in the workplace. This literature also shows that there are also associated contributing or risk factors involved with WRs. These findings are however very general and questions about how WRs affect employees' general functioning and their productivity, when and why, are not clearly answered. Therefore, in this study the focus will be on a specific context (of the research question) to gain a deeper understanding of these questions and avoid thereby generalisations about the problem and be more specific about EAP recommendations.

This is especially important for the further development of the EAP, because in my experience it appears that there is a sense of hopelessness amongst the leadership component at organisations in relation to their role of addressing romantic relationship breakdown issues at work. Managers refer some of these cases to the EAP or simply ignore them in the hope that they would just go away. These actions are perhaps motivated by the very nature of romantic relationships of being a deeply personal matter – and something that cannot be controlled by the employer. This could be one of the reasons why there seems to be a reluctance amongst managers to actively intervene in these situations.

In general there seems to be few strategies to deal with interpersonal romantic relationships between colleagues or other employees involved with WR. The current scenario to the research question is thus one of a need for more information and more specific EAP guidelines – especially in a more localized context and about the effects of dissolved WRs. This will give a more balanced indication of the importance of dealing with WRs in an EAP.

As an international phenomenon, WRs are currently receiving a lot of attention with a wide body of literature, both popular and academic, investigating this matter. The need for more information and better understanding of this phenomenon quickly becomes very clear in an assessment of the literature and research on WRs. A preliminary literature review indicates that only in the past four decades have there been various academic authors who have done research on WRs and associated topics. A few widely cited research articles and books appear to have provided the core point of departure for various other sources of literature over the years and the field has not been much developed.

These main themes in the current literature on WRs can be summarized as follows (in Chapter Two a more detailed review of the relevant literature will be provided):

The first anchor article was published by Robert E. Quinn (1977) who investigated *motives, consequences and management interventions* regarding this phenomenon. Quinn's seminal work was further developed later by Lisa A. Mainiero (1986 & 1989). Mainiero published significant research on the topics of *motives and consequences* of WR and she made a unique contribution in this field by developing a theoretical framework of *power dynamics* in organisational romances.

Pierce followed their lead and published very productively and widely in this regard, mostly in association with other researchers. For example, in 1996 Pierce, Byrne and Aguinis developed a significant model that elaborated on the factors that influence the *formation and impact* of organisational romances.

Other researchers in this field, such as Powell and Folley (1998), built on the above theories and models to explore the phenomenon of WRs in greater depth. Particularly the following themes have received much attention in the literature on WR by various authors:

- Descriptions, models and types of WR;
- Antecedent and motivational factors associated with WR;

- Consequences of WR including for example productivity consequences; liability consequences such as sexual harassment claims and unethical relationships; and
- Management interventions to address WR.

Especially the last aspect namely *management interventions*, has received a lot of attention in the literature recently – an indication of the growing need and importance of the correct type of intervention. In the recent past, Pierce and Aguinis (2009) published a significant article on WR in which they provide a comprehensive overview of the *key empirical findings* reported in the scientific WR literature with a specific focus on the *practical implications for Human Resource leaders*. Lickey *et al.* (2009) also focused on *managerial responses* to WR and advocate a proactive and pragmatic approach.

It appears that the focus in the literature on managerial interventions implicitly acknowledges the relation between WR and possible negative consequences, be they legal, emotional, ethical, practical or productivity related, for organisations.

To summarize: there are several shortcomings in the existing literature on WRs which emphasise the need for the current study. These shortcomings include: insufficient identification and description of the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees; the research was done mainly from a managerial perspective; that research focused on highly schooled employees; that research on WRs is very general or the focus is more on the legal and ethical aspects of WRs whilst the specific area of “dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees” is not covered sufficiently; the question how the EAP can add value in these instances, is not answered – the guidelines are too general; and these specific effects and their relation to productivity are not indicated. There is thus a definite need to investigate the mentioned aspects and this is the intention of this study.

The current scenario for the research theme is thus that there are indeed many of problems with understanding and dealing with WRs. The prevalence of WRs is experienced as a reality by EAP practitioners based on the referrals by team leaders to the EAP about WRs. Some effects of dissolved WRs are thus visible to the team leaders, but the diversity, complexity and perhaps hidden effects are not understood well or might be misinterpreted (or even ignored) by team leaders and therefore this should be better investigated.

My own opinion and that of some of my colleagues is that there is a need for better identification of the effects of dissolved WRs and for better managerial intervention with WRs – as is often discussed. Furthermore, the existing research literature on WRs is not specific and contextual enough to address the challenges in the typical factory set up in South Africa where WRs occur. The specific effects are not well enough described and understood and the EAP guidelines are not specific enough. It is therefore in my view indeed necessary to do more specific research in this regard and hopefully this study will be able to provide better EAP guidelines or strategies for dealing with WRs in the South African factory set up.

### **1.2.2 Preferred scenario (How should it be?)**

What is the preferred scenario regarding understanding and dealing with WRs in an organisation? In my view, the preferred scenario might perhaps be a mechanism where organisational leaders are sensitised and informed of the potentially negative impact of relationship breakdown on the general functioning of employees in the workplace. Leaders should be trained to be aware of and identify the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees and therefore be able to do an early referral of these cases to the EAP. In order to put this on the priority list and in order to get the leaders' attention, more research and confirmation are needed about the potentially negative impact on the functioning of employees in the workplace.

This is exactly the focus of this study: to inquire into these effects. A better understanding of these effects is vital if any further action is to be taken within an organisation to deal with them – for example the training of supervisors, the development of an appropriate EAP, and other managerial interventions. It is at this point (as indicated earlier) where there is a shortcoming in the existing literature where this study can make a valuable contribution.

Once the effects are identified and understood better, referrals can be made to the EAP, and the preferred scenario would then be that the EAP practitioner also has a good understanding of the impact of the breakdown of relationships on the general functioning of individuals in the workplace. On this level the effects of a dissolved WR should thus also be known.

Furthermore, the EAP practitioner should be equipped with the necessary skills to do an assessment and a focused, specialised intervention to effectively manage the situation and to minimize the impact of the various effects on the productivity of the organisation. It is thus on two levels where the scenario should change.

Firstly, on the “ground level” team leaders and managers should be able to understand and identify the risks of dissolved WRs better and be able to refer the involved people timeously. The effects of a dissolved WR should thus be well known to them, but it is exactly here where the “research gap” is.

Secondly, on the EAP-level, there should be the necessary skills and ability to deal effectively with such referrals. Again there is a “research gap” here, because the existing guidelines are not specific enough or relevant for dealing with these effects in this specific context. These are indeed two huge challenges of which the importance should not be underestimated (as will the potential risks of WRs indicate later on) and this emphasises the importance of this study.

### **1.2.3 Research Gap: “As is...”vs. “ought to be...”**

One of the shortcomings in research on WRs is that most of the research studies (as encountered in the preliminary literature review) have primarily been conducted in the United States of America (USA) and in the United Kingdom (UK). Although these findings might be relevant for the South African context, there remains a need for more contextual research in South Africa. Furthermore, the focus of these research projects appears to be primarily to add value in the fields of Human Resource management, the legal field (i.e. liability management in cases of sexual harassment) or in the field of applied psychology.

The research aim in the past was not directed primarily to the EAP field per se and this “gap” shows clearly in the assessment of the literature. A further problem is that the focus of this research was not on unschooled (or semi-schooled) workers. The question (or “gap”) about the applicability of the findings about professional employees’ WRs and WRs in a factory set up is apparent, especially about the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees.

It may be concluded therefore, that on the one hand there is substantial existing research on WRs, but on the other hand more specific research is required to bridge the “research gap” as described in the previous section. What is required is further and more up-to-date research about the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees that would be applicable to the South African context. This research study seeks to address this gap in information in this field, creating thereby new knowledge. With this knowledge a more appropriate EAP might be developed as explained before.

## **1.3 Goal and Objectives**

### **1.3.1 Goal of the study**

The goal of this study is to explore the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees at an industrial clothing

factory in Cape Town in 2012/13 and also to explore the consequent need for appropriate intervention through the existing employee assistance programme (EAP). The main inquiry of this research would thus be into the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees.

### 1.3.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study can be summarised as follow:

1. To describe the *social phenomenon of dissolved workplace romances* to ensure a better understanding in the context of the broader debate in this field. The shortcomings in the existing literature and research will be indicated;
2. To explore the effects of dissolved workplace romances on the *psychosocial functioning* of the involved employees and their co-workers in the industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13;
3. To explore the effects of dissolved workplace romances on the *productivity* of the involved employees and their co-workers in the industrial clothing factory in Cape Town; and
4. To explore the *necessity and best strategies for an EAP* in dealing with the negative effects of dissolved workplace romances at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town. This will be done based on the outcome of the specific effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees. The EAP guidelines (or lack of them) will thus be complemented by more specific strategies for intervention.

### 1.4 Research Question

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In the context of this research proposal's topic, a **research question** as opposed to a hypothesis is most likely to be more suitable in view of the qualitative approach that will be applied (Fouché & De Vos, 2005:103).

The **central research question** for this study can be formulated as follows:

*What are the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town?*

## 1.5 Research Approach

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For purposes of the proposed research study, a **qualitative research approach** will be followed. This approach will be applicable to this study because the study will focus on gathering meaningful information such as employees' perceptions, experiences and feelings in relation to the phenomenon of relationship breakdown in the workplace. The study will cover detailed descriptions of involved employees' experiences of their psychosocial functioning and productivity in the workplace amidst a relationship breakdown.

## 1.6 Type of Research

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Applied research, or descriptive research, primarily seeks to apply and modify knowledge to address specific practical issues and to answer a question or solve a serious social problem. Theory is less central than exploring solutions to specific problems and applied research can have immediate practical use (Neuman, 2000:23). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:43) agree in stating that applied research is intended to address issues with immediate relevance to current practices, procedures or policies. The nature for this research project falls in the category of **applied research** in the sense that the focus will be on a problem in practice, namely disturbed functioning of individuals involved in the breakdown of relationships in the workplace, which will then result in a possible solution to the problem phenomenon.

## 1.7 Research Design and Methodology

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### 1.7.1 Research Design

This proposed research design can be classified as a **collective case study**. The collective case study aims to expand the understanding of the researcher about the

social issue or population being studied and a group of cases are the primary interest of the researcher (Fouché, 2005:272). This particular study aims to understand a social issue, namely the breakdown of romantic relationships in the workplace, and will study the experiences and perceptions of a group of individuals affected by this phenomenon.

### **1.7.2 Research population, sample and sampling method**

The context for this study is an industrial setting, namely a clothing factory in Cape Town with approximately 1 600 production workers. The employees who will form the focus of the research are in the lower-income bracket and have low levels of formal education. The cultural composition is approximately 75% Afrikaans-speaking Coloureds, and 25% Xhosa-speaking Africans (most of the Africans are able to understand Afrikaans). The population is predominantly female with approximately 200 male employees, ensuring a regular occurrence of romantic interaction in the workplace.

The research population in the context of the research study would refer to all the employees in the open or closed caseload on the social work file registries that previously experienced the breakdown of a romantic relationship with a colleague. “Open” cases refer to the cases that are currently in the process of intervention, “closed” cases are cases where intervention was completed and therefore closed.

According to Kumar (2005:164), the process of sampling refers to the selection of a few (a sample) from a bigger group (the sampling population) to become the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group. Leedy and Ormrod (2005:144) explain sampling as the process of selecting the particular entities that they select as data sources, and these entities then comprise the sample.

The sample would consist of a subset of 10-12 participants on the **closed EAP caseload** (including the researcher’s own and her colleague’s closed cases) who were selected to participate in the study. They would therefore be a small subset of the wider

population of all the employees in the researcher's own or her colleague's closed caseloads who may have had similar experiences. The researcher is aware of the possible ethical challenges posed, doing research on previous clients of her own, and will discuss how it will be dealt with under 'ethical aspects' of this study.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:144) mention for example that qualitative researchers are often intentionally non-random in their selection of data sources. This means that qualitative researchers often sample in a purposeful manner by selecting specific individuals or groups that may give the most significant information about the topic under investigation.

The research in question proposes to have a **non-probability sampling method** and in particular the subtype of **purposive sampling**. Babbie and Mouton (2001:166) explain that non-probability sampling is usually relevant in social research when the researcher is unable to select the kinds of probability samples used in large scale social surveys, or when probability sampling would simply be inappropriate.

Babbie and Mouton (2001:166) define purposive sampling, or judgemental sampling as sampling based on the researcher's own judgement and based on the nature and purpose of the study. It is helpful in situations where many members of a small subset of a larger population are easily identifiable, but enumeration of them all would be impossible. Fox and Bayat (2007:60) mention that purposive sampling requires that the researcher relies on his or her experience, ingenuity and/or previous research experience and findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a way that the sample he or she obtains may be regarded as being representative of the relevant population.

- The criteria for inclusion according to the purposive sampling method would be that the participants: had to still be employed by the company;
- must have been involved in a workplace romantic relationship, which ended;

- Must **not be** involved in counselling at the moment of data collection (services formally terminated before the data collection).

### 1.7.3 Data Collection Methods

Data collection refers to the finding or accumulation of information for the researcher to analyse (Alston & Bowles, 1998:208). Anything that becomes a means of collecting information for the research can be referred to as a research tool, instrument or method (Kumar, 2005:22).

For purposes of this research, the researcher chooses a **semi-structured interviewing method** (by means of an interview schedule with some predetermined questions- refer Annexure A) as the most appropriate means of data collection. The questions are typically open-ended and allow room for initiative by the interviewer to explore additional information that the respondent has raised (Alston & Bowles, 1998:116). It also allows the participant to introduce issues the researcher had not thought of as he/she is allowed maximum opportunity to tell his/her story (Greeff, 2005:296). This type of data collection is most appropriate for the research in question since it does not limit the researcher to a rigid interview schedule neither opens it up too widely for the generation of irrelevant information.

The interviews were **not** conducted by the researcher herself but by a suitably qualified person contracted for this purpose solely<sup>1</sup>. The advantage of this is the enhanced neutrality ensured by the interviewer which contributed to the trustworthiness of data collected.

### 1.7.4 Pilot testing

The interviewer performed a pilot interview prior to interviewing the bulk of the participants. One participant who met the criteria was approached to have the one-to-

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<sup>1</sup> The interviewer was Ms. Denette Swart, a qualified and registered social worker with 14 years experience.

one interviews. The pilot interview gave the researcher the opportunity to test the interview schedule and make adjustments where necessary. In fact no adjustments were necessary in the end.

### 1.7.5 Data analysis

The aim of data analysis is to look for trends and patterns that are recurring, and the crucial aspects of qualitative data analysis are summarised by Greeff (2005:311) to the effect that it must be: “systematic, sequential, verifiable and continuous, requires time; is jeopardised by delay; seeks to enlighten; should entertain alternative explanations; is improved by feedback; and is a process of comparison.”

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:150) describe qualitative data analysis as beginning with a large body of information which the researcher gradually, through inductive reasoning, sorts and categorises so as to eventually arrive at a small set of abstract, underlying themes. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:129) state that for both forms of quantitative and qualitative data analysis a similar set of steps are followed: preparing the data for analysis, exploring the data, analysing the data, representing the analysis, and authenticating the data. The specific procedures for the two research approaches would however differ.

Practical steps during the analysis of data include the following (implementing the model of Creswell and Plano Clark's model (2007:129), integrating aspects of Leedy and Ormrod's model (2005:15) and suggestions by Greeff (2005:299)).

- During the interviews, the contracted interviewer would take brief notes of the participants' answers and after the interviews fill in any gaps of information in the roughly written notes.
- The interviewer would digitally or tape record the interviews, with the consent of the participants, to allow for a more comprehensive and verbatim account of the content of the interview.

- Records of interviews would be transcribed as soon as possible after the interview, as suggested by Greeff (2005:299). The interviews would be transcribed by a professional transcriber on behalf of the researcher.
- In order to raise the credibility of the study, a summary of the interview would be given to the participants for approval before integrating it into the more generalised research analysis and findings – which would enhance the trustworthiness of the data.
- The researcher would proceed to analyse the data by assigning labels to the various codes and group the codes into broader categories and relate these categories or subdivide them in smaller themes. This will be done manually by making use of coloured markers and highlighters and rough, colourful maps.
- The data findings would be represented in a discussion of the themes and in visual models if possible.

## 1.8. Feasibility of the study

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The feasibility of the study depends on the availability of participants and also the permission required from the company to conduct the study.

### 1.8.1 Availability of and access to participants

The researcher made a list of about 15 prospective participants in the study, all of them individuals meeting the criteria for purposive sampling as formulated earlier. The

interviewer could simply call the participants to an office on site for the interview during their normal working hours, and the participants were therefore readily available. The participants were approached beforehand by the interviewer with a view to obtaining their informed consent to participate in the study. There was the possibility that some of the participants would be unwilling to participate in the study, therefore more than the required number of participants was identified as back up.

This study was thus subject to the willingness of participants to participate – as is ethically required – but alternative methods of data collection were considered if necessary. The options were to approach potential participants from only the researcher's own and her colleague's closed caseloads, or to approach other employees who had never been on any of the EAP caseloads, but who had experienced failed workplace romances.

### **1.8.2 Permission**

The researcher obtained written permission from the General Manager / CEO of the company to do the proposed research (refer Annexure C). The Human Resources manager was also aware of the proposed research and indicated her full support for the project.

### **1.9 Ethical Aspects**

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Ethics are defined by Strydom (2005:69) as “a set of widely accepted moral principles that offer rules for, and behavioural expectations of, the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and participants, employers, sponsors, other researcher, assistants and students”. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2006:158) emphasise that ethical

issues are thought to arise predominantly with qualitative research designs due to the closer relationships between the researcher and researched.

Considering that the research in question followed a qualitative design, particular care had to be taken by the researcher to be aware of any ethical concerns that might arise. Different ethical aspects were considered in this research study. In the following discussion the researcher will firstly list the specific ethical demand and then discuss how it was met in the research.

### 1.9.1 Harmful exposure

Research participants should **not be exposed to undue psychical or psychological harm**. The potential risks should not be greater than the normal risks of day-to-day living (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:101).

In the proposed study, the research participants were not expected to be exposed to any physical harm, but considering the sensitive nature of the subject matter, it was possible that some of them might be reminded of painful past experiences during the interview and subsequently be psychologically traumatised. The contracted interviewer was carefully selected – a registered and experienced social worker <sup>2</sup>- to prevent any potential harm by applying professional and sensitive interview and communication skills and always allowing the participants to share whatever they were comfortable with and never probing them to share beyond their ability or willingness. Participants were also offered the opportunity to be referred for counselling, should they wish to.

### 1.9.2 Informed consent

Research participants were informed about the nature of the study beforehand and given the choice to get involved or not and also given the right to withdraw from the study at any given time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:101). Fox and Bayat (2007:148) agree in stating that **informed consent** needs to be obtained from participants prior to the

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<sup>2</sup> Ms. Denette Swart

study and they must be fully informed of the procedures and risks involved in the research.

The researcher decided to facilitate informed consent by having a pre-interview with each prospective participant during which time she discussed and described the research purpose and procedures as comprehensively and realistically as possible. She was clear about how much time it would require of them, the use of tape recorders during interviews, frank about any risks to them and clear about confidentiality and anonymity aspects.

She deliberately used basic, accessible words and phrases to explain the research process so that they could all fully understand what was explained to them, considering the profile of the research population of employees with a very basic level of education. She also gave each participant a written consent form to sign in which everything was explained in writing (refer Annexure B). She also gave each of them a copy of the consent form to study at home in their own time. Her contact details were on this form should they wish to discuss anything with the researcher at a later stage.

### **1.9.3 Voluntary participation**

**Voluntary participation** is another ethical consideration in any research and refers to the principle that requires that people are not forced to participate in research and that even if they agreed, they are free to withdraw at any time they wish (Fox & Bayat, 2007:148). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:101) agree in stating “Any participation in a study should be strictly voluntary”. The research in question was certainly based on voluntary participation and all participants were fully informed of this aspect prior to the interview (refer Annexure A).

### **1.9.4 Right to Privacy/ Anonymity/ Confidentiality**

A participant's **right to privacy** is another ethical consideration that needs to be respected. Firstly, almost all research guarantees the confidentiality of participants.

They are assured that no identifying information will be made available to anyone not directly involved in the project (Fox & Bayat, 2007:148). Leedy and Ormrod (2005:102) agree that the right to privacy is crucial and emphasise that researchers should keep the nature and quality of participants' performance strictly confidential.

Despite the fact that participants were known to the researcher, they were not known to the contracted interviewer. Although anonymity would not be ensured with regard to the interviewer, data were collected, recorded and transcribed anonymously and as such the researcher was not able to identify the relevant respondents and anonymity was ensured on this level.

Confidentiality was possible and was advanced by giving each participant a pseudonym or code to which they were referred to in the final research report, this pseudonym or code was also used to label any raw material in the data collection process.

Confidentiality was also built into the written consent agreement (refer Annexure A).

### 1.9.5 Honesty

Participants should **not be deceived** in any way, as emphasised by Strydom (2005:69). The researcher applied this principle in the research by being honest and open to all the participants, shared all available information and did not withhold any significant information from them.

### 1.9.6 Professional conduct

It is ethically important that **researchers should be competent and responsible** (Strydom, 2005:69; Blaxter *et al.*, 2006:158). The researcher believed the thorough literature study on the subject would help prepare her to implement the research in a competent and responsible manner. She also approached the study with no value judgements in mind, considering the sensitive nature of the research topic and realising that the participants were likely to come from different cultural backgrounds from her own.

Furthermore, the decision to contract an independent professional researcher to conduct the interviews was made with a view of enhancing professional conduct in this study. The intention was to protect the process from potential contamination of information posed by the researcher in her former role as therapist, against the role of researcher, interviewing former clients (now participants).

#### **1.9.7 Other ethical issues**

The researcher would release the findings of the research in the format of a mini-dissertation document, which would be available in hard copy. Participants were informed of this when obtaining their voluntary consent for the study and of all other ethical considerations which also applied to this process, i.e. protection of privacy.

Audiotapes and the field notes (including the interview content) will be stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, for 15 years.

The researcher proceeded with the research after ethical clearance was obtained from the University (refer Annexure D).

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#### **1.10 Contents of the research report**

**Chapter One:** This chapter commences with an introduction, and includes a general background of the research study; problem formulation; goal and objectives of the study and research question.

The specific research design and methodology are described in line with the qualitative approach chosen. This includes information on the operationalisation of the study, description of the measuring instruments and sampling process, as well as a description of the data collection and data analysis methods.

A discussion of the ethical concepts considered is included. All the key concepts in the title are defined. An overview of the research report concludes this chapter, preparing the reader for what to expect in the report.

**Chapter Two:** This chapter encompasses a comprehensive literature review detailing an analysis of any research gaps or concerns regarding workplace romances and dissolving workplace romances. The objective of this chapter is to describe the *social phenomenon of dissolved workplace romances* from a theoretical perspective and to put it in the context of the broader debate in this field.

**Chapter Three:** This chapter focuses on the empirical study and findings, including an account of the research methodology implemented and an analysis of the empirical results including the main themes that emerged.

**Chapter Four:** This chapter elaborates on the conclusions, interpretation and recommendations arising from the research study. The main research question is answered in the light of the empirical research done and the value and contribution of this study are highlighted.

## **1.11 Limitations of the study**

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Being qualitative in nature, this study focused on describing individuals' experiences and feelings. These experiences and feelings are however always subjective in that they reflect highly intimate and personal experiences. The data should be interpreted as such and cannot necessarily be interpreted as the objective reality.

For example, participants shared their experiences and feelings about their levels of concentration at work, their level of productivity and mistakes on the job. One can imagine it would take a very brave and insightful individual to answer these questions 100% honestly and possibly give negative feedback on themselves.

The research would have been more credible if it could have been corroborated by the experiences of the participants's colleagues, supervisors and leaders, or if it could be compared with more objective statistics on their performance and attendance.

Supplementing the research methodology with some quantitative measures, making it a more mixed method study, could therefore be helpful. This could not have been achieved in this particular study due to limitations in time and because it was not incorporated as a research objective.

Another limitation of the study was that the participants sometimes contradicted themselves if one look holistically at the transcribed interviews. One participant for example (P) would on the one hand claim that she was able to not transfer the experience of domestic violence at home, to the workplace. Later on however she would elaborate on how she experienced and engaged in verbal violence at work from and towards her ex-partner. This inconsistency was not challenged by the interviewer and with hindsight, could have been, so as to produce more consistent results.

Another shortfall of this research is that the participants sometimes did not answer the questions, or answered in a disorganised, or indirect fashion that made data analysis a bit complicated. Furthermore, even though the interview schedule was designed with ample open-ended questions so as to generate more elaborate answers, some of the respondents found ways to avoid opening up in detail and just provided basic answers without clarifying what they exactly meant by some of their responses. Other respondents however responded too elaborately and provided information that was not relevant to the study, seeming to treat the interview as an opportunity to vent

themselves about an experience in their past with which they possibly had not yet come to terms.

## Chapter 2: Literature review on workplace romance

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### 2.1 Introduction

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The importance of doing research about workplace romance (WR) is something that becomes apparent in an outline on the recent literature on this topic. First of all it is clear that WR has a huge impact on the organisation (workplace) in terms of productivity, psycho-social functioning and even the occurrence of violence. These issues will all be highlighted later on in this chapter. Secondly, it is clear that WR is an increasingly widespread phenomenon in work organisations and has become quite common in recent years.

This phenomenon is not surprising considering the changes that have occurred in the workplace and in society in the past century: people are spending increasingly more time at work, drastically more women are entering the workforce, the divorce rate is increasing, and there are much more relaxed sexual mores. To some extent the workplace provides the ideal context for attraction and romance due to the constant proximity of co-workers, the increased amount of time spent together, the feeling of "teamwork" and isolation of individuals from their (possible) problems at home and family. Lickey *et al.* (2009:103) said for example that the modern workplace is where employees spend more time than in any other setting, and that there are more people potentially meeting others with similar interests, education and background there. It is very likely that these conditions will prevail in future and that WR and its impact on organisations will become more and more visible.

The literature on WR that will be discussed in this chapter indicates that WR has an ambiguous impact on an organisation. In general WR is positive for an organisation when the WR is functioning well. However, like any other relationship, WRs often fail to stand the test of time and do not always end amiably. It is generally then, after the break-up of a WR, that it has a negative impact on an organisation. This negative effect can be huge and diverse as seen in the literature on WR. This study will therefore indicate the importance and developing of a managerial intervention programme

especially at this stage (dissolution) of WR. It is important to keep in mind however, that at any stage of development, WRs have important work-related implications for the involved parties as well as their co-workers, leaders and the organisation as a whole. It could either have huge benefits or risks with significant repercussions, sometimes with complicated legal or ethical consequences, or even sometimes simply with neutral effects.

In this chapter, the researcher will look at the main categories of literature on the subject of WR and explore which of these themes are relevant to the research topic. The literature will be discussed briefly to contextualize the current research and to give an indication of the need to do this specific research. In the literature survey it became apparent that much more research needs to be done regarding the possible intervention in WR by the employer (or the delegate). These are themes that link to the main question of this research which will be discussed later. This chapter will only list and discuss themes and sub-themes that currently exist in the study field on WR. These themes are important because they are utilised for the development of the semi-structured interview schedule used later on in this research project.

## **2.2 Workplace romance**

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The literature on WR, and the categorisation of themes within this field of study go back to the late 1970s. Before that, WR was not discussed so much as a separate issue and very little research was done about it. Limited research being carried out, does not mean workplace romance did not exist, but it might be an indication that it is an increasing phenomenon as part of the modern world's unique working environment. Relevant themes discussed here are based mainly on research done by Cole (2009:364) and on key empirical findings reported in the scientific WR literature provided by Pierce and Aguinis (2009:450). The six themes in the main literature on WR published from the late 1970s until the present can be summarized as follows (and will be discussed likewise in this chapter):

1. Descriptions, models and types of WR;

2. Motivations for WR;
3. Potential benefits and rewards of WR;
4. Potential risks and dangers of WR;
5. WR and Performance: Risk or Benefit for productivity?; and
6. Managerial intervention in WR.

In the discussion on the various themes a short overview of the main issues within that field will be given. The purpose of this chapter is not to give a comprehensive and detailed discussion of the literature on WR, but rather to critically engage with the relevant themes and sub-themes of the research question in this project. At the end of this chapter, the specific themes that are the most relevant for the research question will be singled out and discussed separately. In the conclusion of this chapter a brief summary of the review of the literature on WR will be given.

### **2.2.1 Descriptions, models and types of WR**

In the literature on WR there is a clear category in which WR is defined, different models of WR are discussed and an acknowledgement is given of the sometimes complex nature of WR because it can occur and function in different types. To start with a definition of WR, it is worthwhile to look at Quinn's definition, because the research done by him in 1977 on WR is seminal and his definition has been widely cited in the literature on WR ever since. Quinn provided a basic definition of WR as a "relationship between two members of the same organisation that is perceived by a third party to be characterized by sexual attraction" (1977:30). An interesting notion of Quinn's definition is that it does not only stipulate the obvious fact that it is a relationship between two people at the same organisation, but also that a third party would characterize it as a sexual attraction between the parties. This notion indicates the public nature of such a relationship and immediately also includes the fact that it has an impact on the organisation – at least in its observance by others.

This kind of definition of WR as something that influences co-workers, or at least is visible to them, is something that is taken further by subsequent writers. Mainiero, for example, wrote a widely cited and highly regarded article on WR in 1986 and in her definition of WR she offers a model of how issues of power, dependency, and social exchange influence the internal dynamics of romantic relationships in organisational settings, which in turn influence co-worker reactions and management interventions.

When Pierce, Byrne and Aguinis (1996:26-27) wrote their article 10 years later, they offered not only an important model that elaborated on the factors that influence the formation of WR, but also focused with Quinn and Mainiero on the impact of WR on organisations. Their unique contribution is however that they reverse the direction of impact or influence and investigated how the organisation influenced the relationship of the people involved in WR.

More recent literature on WR moved beyond definitions and models of WR and started to explore different typologies of WR. An example of this can be found in the work of Dillard, Hale and Segrin (1994:242- 245, 252), stating the most common types of WR are (1) a relationship between a male with higher organizational status than his female partner, and (2) passionate and companionate relations, as opposed to “flings or utilitarian relations”.

This trend to do research into the typologies of WR is continued by writers such as Lickey, Berry and Whelan-Berry. They distinguished between three types of WR: (1) employee peer-to-peer (lateral) WR; (2) supervisor and subordinate (hierarchical) WR; and (3) WR when one or both employees are married (Lickey *et al.*, 2009:102). Each of these relationships can in their typology of WR occur as heterosexual or homosexual WR. Lickey *et al.* (2009) made it clear that with each type of WR, the potential cost and risks to the organisation increase. This will be discussed later in this study but it is important to note here that in the literature on WR, the definition, models and typologies of WR immediately (or inherently) imply an impact on the organisation.

## 2.2.2 Motivations for WR

The second main theme that can be identified in the literature on WR is the research that has been done into the reasons for the development of WR. Quinn (1977:44) was the first researcher who specifically inquired about the motivations of WR and he identified three types of motives for entering WR, namely: (1) job-related reasons, (2) ego reasons, and (3) love reasons. These three motives identified by Quinn have been further explored and refined by Dillard (1987:189-192). He built on the findings of Quinn by explaining the (1) job motive as the intention of seeking advancement, security, power, financial rewards, lighter workloads or more time off; (2) the ego motive as seeking excitement, adventure, ego satisfaction or sexual experience, and (3) the love motive as that of seeking long-term companionship. It is thus clear that WR has more possible motives to develop than ordinary romantic relationships outside the workplace, because the “job motive” is only possible in WR.

The “job motive” is already an indication of the potential risks and impact that WR can have on the organisation. It is however important to keep in mind that WR does not necessarily include all three of these motives. Dillard, Hale and Segrin (1994:252-253) for example made the point that – contrary to popular belief – most WRs are sincere, love motivated, long-term companionship or passionate relationships as opposed to short-lived or job-motivated utilitarian relationships. Acknowledging this aspect is important because they found that “job motives” for WR were perceived by co-workers as negatively affecting the social climate of a workgroup or organisation.

Powell and Foley (1998:8-10) linked up with the categorisations of Quinn (1977) and Dillard (1987:189) and distinguished more or less the same three major types of motives for entering WR, namely: (1) utilitarian motives, (2) ego motives and (3) sincere love motives. Again, all three are not necessarily always prevalent in all WRs and co-workers should be aware of this to limit the negative impact on the organisation.

Other important motives for the development of WR are summarised by Cole (2009: 364) as physical attraction, intellectual attraction, shared energy levels, increased self-esteem from success as a team of two, and even the forbidden nature of WR in some workplaces. The “obvious” motivation of job related motivations is thus undermined by these findings of Cole. The motivation for the development of WR is often complex and diverse and to reduce it to only “job motives” would be an oversimplification.

This last notion is supported by research done by Mano and Gabriel (2006). They investigated not only the motivations for WR of the participants, but also the antecedent circumstances under which it is likely to develop. These two factors should in their view be linked to each other in order to understand the development of WR. They conclude from their research that the development of WR depends a lot on the “organisational climate” and they found that WRs are more likely to emerge in “hot” climates where work arrangements foster contact outside work and where organisational policies do not punish participants in WR.

Mano and Gabriel are in agreement with earlier research done by Powell and Foley (1998) that also identified antecedent circumstances in the organisation as reasons for the development of WR. They said that the prevailing culture in a work setting influences the formation, dynamics, and consequences of workplace romances, as well as management actions related to workplace romances (Powell and Foley, 1998:18). This adds up to even more earlier research of Mainiero (1989) in which she found that cultural differences in the organisation influence the likelihood of the development of WR. She said that the formation of WR would for example not be so likely in conservative cultures with an emphasis on traditional values as in liberal cultures which are characterized by creativity and innovation (Mainiero, 1989:113).

The antecedent conditions (or “organisational climate”) are thus also a strong factor which should be kept in mind in understanding the reasons for the formation of WR. Very recent literature on WR supports this as can be seen in the work of Riach and Wilson (2007). They explored the “unwritten rules” for engaging in WR and found that

WRs are more likely to occur with certain employees, depending on their gender, position in the organisational hierarchy, and sexual identity.

It is thus a combination of personal motivations (job/utilitarian, ego, and love) and the antecedent conditions of the organisation (“climate”, conservative/liberal, position and gender in organisation) which all influence the potential development of WR. As mentioned before, this is important to keep in mind, because the wrong understanding of why WR develops can lead to wrong perceptions of the participants by co-workers, to negative effects on the social climate of an organisation, and to possible incorrect managerial intervention.

### **2.2.3 Potential benefits and rewards of WR**

The third dominant theme in the literature on WR is the focus on the benefits and rewards that WR entails. Several researchers have investigated the potential benefits and rewards of WR to the organisation in general, to the employees (co-workers) and to the participants of WR. It appears that these benefits and rewards are mostly related to the stage where the WR is in full bloom with positive feelings of attraction in the air. This is in opposition to the stage where the relationship dissolves and when the risks of WRs are more predominant (which will be discussed as the next theme).

Pierce and Aguinis (2009:455) asserted that in some cases organisations may definitely benefit from the performance of employees involved in (intact) WRs. These benefits include increased job satisfaction of the participants of WR, increased job involvement and organisational commitment. Pierce explained in his article (1998) how these rewards of WR not only affect the participants of WR, but also the organisation because of the “affective spillover hypothesis”. By this he meant that having a gratifying WR may create an emotional “spillover effect” in which employees’ positive emotional reactions from their romance spill over on their emotional reactions to their job and in the process increase job satisfaction (Pierce, 1998:1717). With increased job satisfaction come

many more benefits to the organisation like a positive attitude, productivity, loyalty, energy, etc.

The rewards and benefits of WR to the organisation of the participants of WR, seem to be centred on the notions of increased productivity, loyalty/commitment to the organisation, and of higher energy levels. Lickey *et al.* (2009:105) pointed out for example that research indicates that the energy associated with workplace romance may be channelled into their work and that dating employees may have higher productivity than before the romance. Even when employees who participate in WR may fear retribution from their supervisors this might lead to more productivity. According to Pierce's "impression management hypothesis" these employees try to manage a favourable impression by becoming more involved with their job and more committed to the organisation (Pierce & Aguinis, 2009:455).

Cole (2009:364) agreed that WR can be a very positive force in that it may increase the motivation and mental energy of the involved parties, resulting in them working harder and longer. Cole also indicated how WR can also benefit not only the involved parties, but also the co-workers and the organisation in general. He said that WR-participants "...energise the workplace morale; motivate other employees, encourage creativity and innovation; soften work-related personality conflicts because the workplace romance participants are happier and easier to get along with; improve teamwork, communication and cooperation; enrich personal relationships for the couple involved and their co-workers; and stabilise the workforce by retaining both partners" (Cole, 2009:364). These are all very important benefits and rewards that any organisation would value and encourage.

More direct benefits for the personal lives of the participants of WR are that it can develop into a long-term relationship. Pierce and Aguinis mentioned for example that the actual establishment of sincere, long-term relationships are another potential reward for employees involved in WR (2009:454). They found in their research that lateral relationships, that are relationships between co-workers of equal status, are mostly

viewed as a normal occurrence in the modern workplace. The implication is thus that such relations should not necessarily be discouraged by the organisation and the opposite might be necessary – that is to foster such relations and try to keep both happily employed.

The potential benefits and rewards of WR for the organisation, the participants of WR and for their co-workers are thus diverse, numerous and of great value. It can have a tremendous positive effect on the organisation not only in financial terms, but also in terms of setting a positive working environment and climate. These potential benefits and rewards should however always be understood in terms of the potential risks of WR to the organisation.

#### **2.2.4 Potential risks and dangers of WR**

Following the third dominant theme in the literature on WR about the benefits and rewards of WR are the risks and dangers of WR. As mentioned before, the benefits and rewards are mostly related to the stage where the WR is in full bloom with positive feelings of attraction in the air. This is in opposition to the stage of the WR where the relationship dissolves. It is at this stage that the risks of WR are more predominant. There are however also some obvious risks and dangers of WR in its “blooming stage” – risks such as unfairness, favouring, group forming, jealousy and other. All of these risks and dangers of WR (in all its stages) should be investigated and much research has already been done in this regard. Mostly the interest of researchers in the potential risks of WR is in terms of productivity, staff turnover and other costs.

The focus on the risks of WR therefore makes sense because WR can become a costly exercise to the organisation. Schaefer and Tudor (2001:1) said for example that “dating a fellow worker is the employee’s business until it affects the workplace – when it also becomes the employer’s business”. We need thus to identify what are the potential risks of WR that can lead to “that point” where it becomes a real and costly problem.

The potential risks and dangers of WR to the organisation, the co-workers and the participants of WR will be discussed under the following sub-themes that emerged from the literature on WR:

- Sexual harassment claims resulting from a dissolved WR;
- Possible retaliation violence or public confrontation;
- Staff turnover;
- Unfair interventions by management;
- Unethical WR;
- Emotional disorders and secondary implications; and
- Other risks of WR.

#### ***2.2.4.1 Sexual harassment claims resulting from a dissolved WR***

Pierce and Aguinis (2009:449) argued that one of the most common risks of WR from an organisation's perspective is that the relationship may dissolve and then result in sexual harassment claims and lawsuits between the two formerly involved parties. A large body of research on WR therefore focuses on the subject of sexual harassment. The distinction between WR and sexual harassment is that WR is mutual and consensual in nature, whereas sexual harassment is not (Pierce, Byrne & Aguinis 1996:6).

The problem may develop that a relationship of previous mutual consent (WR) becomes one without mutual consent and that both people are still working in the same place. The risks are that one party might still be attracted to the other and that he/she may say or do something with a sexual connotation to the other. Previously it would be allowed, but now it is seen as harassment and costly lawsuits, internal hearings, mutual blaming, unproductivity and negativity follow – all costly experiences to the organisation.

The literature and research about WR and sexual harassment indicate that a previous WR between people complicates matters a lot if there is a case of sexual harassment between them later. Pierce, Aguinis and Adams (2000) investigated for example the

effects of dissolved WRs and found that when observers evaluate sexual harassment claims that stem from a dissolved WR, their judgements of responsibility depend on the participants' romantic motives and their type of WR. Some research has suggested that there are gender differences in attitude toward WR and that these contribute also in the blaming for the problems.

Summers and Myklebust (1992:325), for example, found that female complainants in sexual harassment claims were evaluated by observers as less innocent than the alleged male harassers, who were judged as less guilty, when the parties had a prior WR. A previous WR makes the matter thus much more complex.

Two other examples of research into WR and sexual harassment emphasise this point further. One is by Pierce, Broberg, McClure and Aguinis (2004:80) who looked at the effects of a dissolved WR on decision making standards in an organisation in response to sexual harassment complaints. They found that when observers evaluate these complaints that stem from a dissolved WR, their responses to the claim depend on the degree to which they consider the social-sexual behaviour to be ethical.

A second case is that of Pierce, Muslin, Dudley and Aguinis (2008) who reviewed sexual harassment court cases that stem from dissolved WR and found federal and state judges follow a traditional legal model, whereas employees / managers follow an ethical model when making decisions in this regard. The contradiction between the legal and ethical way of dealing with WR can lead to further unhappiness and complaints and makes the matter even more complex.

Sexual harassment is a serious issue in any workplace, but if there is the added problem of complainants being involved with WR previously, it complicates the matter extremely. It then becomes difficult to resolve in a fair and even way so that both employees will be able to continue working as colleagues in a positive spirit at the same organisation. The potential danger of WR in terms of sexual harassment is thus obvious.

#### **2.2.4.2 Possible retaliation: violence or public confrontation**

WR has the potential (as any other relationship) to dissolve in a disruptive way which might result in retaliation, violence and/or public confrontation. If disruptively dissolved WRs take place, they might have very negative consequences for the organisation. This specific danger of WR was elaborated on by Pierce and Aguinis (2009:454) and they asserted that the potential risk of WR is that it can culminate in breakups at work that are disruptive of the participants' and the co-workers' job performance. Sometimes the violence, aggression and public confrontation can go on for a very long period and co-workers might even become involved in it so that the performance of the employees and the organisation are affected systematically.

Disruptive dissolutions of WRs were also discussed by Lickey *et al.* (2009:105,117) who commented on the negative outcomes from WR particularly at the point where the relationship ends. They said there are for example often claims of retaliation by the participants and that it also has the disturbing link with workplace violence. This gets worse especially when one of the parties or even a third- party stakeholder feels vindictive or angry. In this scenario managers tend to have legitimate concerns about negative outcomes of WR according to Lickey *et al.*. Other research, such as that of O'Leary-Kelly, Lean, Reeves and Randel (2008:61) also observed the prevalence of intimate, retaliating partner violence on work premises, e.g. stalking or physical abuse that may stem from disruptive dissolutions. Mainiero (1989:77) also found that WR breakups can lead to resentment, anger and upheaval in the workplace.

There is general consent in the literature on WR that the disruptive dissolution of WRs has a high potential risk for an organisation, especially if it includes violent behaviour (physically or verbal) and if it takes place openly at the workplace. Of course not all WR breakups have to include this behaviour, but if it occurs with WR breakups and at the workplace, the organisation and co-workers are immediately and directly affected.

#### **2.2.4.3 Staff turnover**

Staff turnover is only discussed briefly here, but there might be such a negative effect on an organisation that it needs to be listed separately. Schaefer and Tudor (2001:2) said for example that “productivity is hurt each time a valuable employee leaves a company”.

The relation between WR and staff turnover was very well described by Solomon (1998). He warned about the possible expense to the organisation with employee turnover, or the loss of valuable employees who are unhappy working alongside such a WR relationship, or when employees leave when they opt to continue their relationship at a company that does not prohibit dating (Solomon, 1998:3).

Another possibility is of course that valuable employees who were engaged in WR might prefer to leave an organisation after the dissolution of the relationship, especially if it was a disruptive breakup (as described above) or has the possibility to lead to sexual harassment if both stay on at the same workplace (also described above). Either way, it leads to high staff turnover with the consequent cost and damage to the organisation.

#### **2.2.4.4 Unfair interventions by management**

Quinn mentioned that back in 1977 there were already cases of managerial intervention in organisations affecting participants in WR. These interventions were often unfair and exposed the organisation to higher legal and financial risks. Pierce and Aguinis (2009:454) therefore state clearly that unfair management interventions, or even the mere perception of unfair interventions, are a major risk of WR. A good example of how management could apply unfair interventions when responding to WR was given by Quinn. He found that with managerial intervention to WR women were more likely to be fired than men because men were usually in the higher position and thus less “dispensable” (Quinn, 1977:44).

The high risks which unfair interventions by management can entail are described very well by Lickey *et al.* (2009:106). They said that the bottom line negative consequence of WR to the organisation is not only in terms of productivity, but also in terms of economic risk and cost. Legal actions resulting from failed WR could also be claims of wrongful discharge, claims of invasion of privacy or third-party claims of alienation of affection. All these possible legal claims are normally very time-consuming and very costly to an organisation.

WR here seems to not be the primary problem. It is rather the unfair managerial interventions in WR which are the culprit, but WR remains a risk to an organisation because it can be extremely difficult to deal with WR from a managerial intervention perspective, especially if the WR has ended and different accusations and claims are made by the different parties. Without WR there would not be unfair managerial intervention, which put the risk/blame back on WR.

#### **2.2.4.5 Unethical relationships**

Another risk of WR is that the relationship itself is unethical in the context of the workplace. Pierce and Aguinis (2009:453) described unethical relationships as instances where the moral character of one or both employees in a relationship is questionable. Examples are extramarital relationships in WR. This poses a possible risk to organisations while the relationship is still going on and not so much after a possible breakup as described in the risks above. Pierce and Aguinis said that the WRs which are the most problematic and unethical are the extramarital relationship and that of direct-reporting supervisor-subordinate (hierarchical) relationships.

The reasons why the first type is unethical should be obvious. Romances involving married employees could potentially increase the negative outcomes to the individuals involved as well as to the organisation. Because these relationships are regarded negatively by social norms generally, and because this negativity is enhanced by

concerns of lack of professionalism, it is likely to have negative consequences for the reputation of the company (Lickey *et al.*, 2009:104). Pierce and Aguinis (2009:458) agreed about these risks by stating that the potential for lowered morale, reduced team cohesion, and work disruption increases when co-workers perceive a WR negatively because it is extramarital and thus unethical.

The reason why the second type (hierarchical WR) can be unethical is because in such a relationship sex and power can be traded. This can have very negative consequences because the welfare of other employees is negatively affected if the involved employee is benefiting from favouritism. Examples of this include a lighter or heavier workload, being overlooked for a promotion or pay rise or unfair promotion (Pierce & Aguinis, 2009:453).

Lickey *et al.* (2009:103) agreed in their findings with Pierce and Aguinis about the potentially unethical hierarchical WR. They said that with each type of relationship, being lateral, hierarchical or extramarital relationships, the potential cost and risks to the organisation increases. They explained that the risks of *lateral* relationships are for example the inappropriate sharing of sensitive or confidential information between different areas of the organisation; inappropriate or explicit sexual behaviour in the workplace; and disruptive performance or sexual harassment claims, should the WR end badly (Lickey *et al.*, 2009:103).

*Hierarchical* romances potentially have more complicating outcomes than lateral relationships. These relationships are often viewed as inappropriate or unfair because of the unequal power dynamics and potential for abuse or advantage in the process. It can also increase the organisation's liability, for example gender and discrimination issues, in the aftermath of a failed romance. Also, issues of confidentiality and liability may be heightened in hierarchical relationships (Lickey *et al.*, 2009:103). Pierce, Broberg, McClure and Aguinis (2004:69) agreed with Lickey *et al.* that hierarchical WR has more potential to become unethical than lateral WR. They said that utilitarian romances (when a lower rank employee has a job related motive, and a higher-rank

employee has an ego motive) were particularly regarded as ethically inappropriate in comparison with companionate romances or flings.

In a recent article, Cole (2009:364) also agreed with the risks of unethical hierarchical WR. He asserted that WR involving people at different hierarchical levels potentially disrupts the power structure in an organization and can create high risk situations and professional conflict of interest. Cole stated further that hierarchical WR can affect the morale of co-workers negatively if a subordinate is perceived to be receiving preferential treatment. Amaral (2006) also noted this as a high risk to the organisation. He says that morale may suffer as a result of alleged favouritism or perceptions of inequality. If an organisation's morale suffers, the productivity also normally drops which of course highlights then the financial risk of unethical WR for an organisation.

The negative impact of the different types of unethical WR is thus diverse and has the potential to be very disruptive and costly to an organisation. Any unethical behaviour within an organisation should be urgently and strictly dealt with. Unethical WR is definitely included in this category of unethical behaviour.

#### ***2.2.4.6 Emotional disorders and secondary implications***

A potential risk of WR that is often not as visible as some of the other risks discussed so far, is the risk of emotional disorders that persons can experience after the breakup of a WR. These disorders have a variety of potential "secondary implications" for the organisation. Research was done on this specific risk by Little (2010) and he focused on the grief from the dissolution of WR relationships. He concluded that the risk to the organisation is that "productivity can be lowered when the emotional turmoil following a loss, causes an employee to experience difficulties in concentration and judgement, stress, depression, lack of motivation and substance abuse" (Little, 2010:137).

These emotional disorders are usually not as visible or easily recognized as physical ailments and are often misunderstood, or left unsupported, by management. These

problems also create secondary risks in that the organisation is subject to financial implications as a result of increased health costs, absenteeism, injuries, errors and missed opportunities.

Emotional disorders can occur with the dissolution of any romantic relationship, but with WR relationships the participants have to work together after it ended and often this continued contact worsens the emotional impact. WR relationships thus have a very definite risk in this regard to the organisation.

#### **2.2.4.7 Other risks of WR**

There are a lot of other risks that WR can also entail. These risks have partly been discussed already, but by listing some of the research results here it becomes apparent that all the risks cannot be completely separated from each other. The risks overlap, influence each other and function in a complex integrated way. Because of this the effects on the organisation cannot always be clearly listed or calculated. Some of these other risks are presented:

##### ***Problems with co-worker relations***

Possible risks of WR include that it could ruin professional relationships, create co-worker confusion and scorn, lead to self-doubt and lost objectivity on the part of the couple, and generate competition and conflict (Cole: 2009:364). Lickey *et al.* (2009: 106) mentioned the risk of employee's credibility or integrity that could be affected by being involved in a WR.

##### ***Negative effect on WR participants' performance and careers***

Powell (1993:171) said romantic relationships in organizational settings may result in conflicts of interest, flawed or biased decision making, and other workplace inequities that could have a negative impact on individual and/or organisational performance and on the careers of one or both of the involved parties.

### ***Legal issues for the organisation***

Other risks to the company include mainly potential legal liability issues such as claims of wrongful discharge, claims of invasion of privacy, or third-party claims of alienation of affection (Lickey *et al.*, 2009:106). Furthermore, inappropriate sharing of confidential, privileged or proprietary information by parties involved in a WR can result in liability from current employees (Lickey *et al.*, 2009:110).

This list of potential risks and dangers of WR to the organisation does not seek to be complete, but it does give an indication of the numerous types of risks and of the diverse and harmful impact WR can have on an organisation. The next question is therefore: Are the potential benefits or the potential risks of WR carrying the strongest weight?

#### **2.2.5 WR and Performance: Risk or Benefit for productivity?**

From an organisation's perspective, the concern is that WR may impede participants' performance. In the literature on WR it is clear that different variables have been studied in relation to WR and performance. It appears that research distinguishes between intact versus dissolved WR and that the two types have different associations with **productivity**. Research also differentiates between the stage of development of such intact relationships and the stage in breakup, as well as the type of relationship (i.e. hierarchical versus lateral). Some of these issues have already been discussed as part of the benefits and risks of WR, so the question remains now how can it be decided if WR would be a risk or benefit to the performance of the employee?

This question is answered (as can be expected) with ambiguous views. Quinn (1977: 44) found that job performance of WR participants can increase or decrease. This "mixed result" has been repeatedly found, in the following four decades by various researchers, producing conflicting results on this topic. For example, Pierce and Aguinis (2009:455) found that the literature and research on the link between WR and productivity delivered mixed results in that WR can increase or decrease one's job

performance; is not associated with one's job performance or does not lead to performance decrements, but is also positively associated with one's job performance.

On the positive side Pierce (1998:1726) found that participation in a WR is positively associated with job performance. Dillard (1987:190) also found WRs do not inevitably lead to performance decrements for participants. To the contrary however, Pierce and Aguinis tested a model of formation and impact factors of WR in organisations and found that employees' participation in a WR was positively associated with their level of job satisfaction, but not associated with their level of work motivation or job performance (Pierce & Aguinis, 2003:161-169).

This more neutral position was affirmed by Dillard and Broetzmann (1989) who found that WRs typically have no impact on the participants' job related behaviours and if there is change, it can be explained by the participants' motives for entering the romance. Here we find an important factor in the impact of WR and participants' performance at work, namely the reason or motivation for their WR. Pierce, Byrne and Aguinis (1996:19) agreed with this proposed important **link between motive and performance** and state that job performance can be positively affected if the WRs are motivated by love or companionship, as opposed to an ego or job related motive.

The **type of relationship** is also commonly proposed in the research on WR as a variable that affects productivity. Hierarchical romances as opposed to lateral romances were found to be more likely to decrease productivity (Pierce, Byrne & Aguinis, 1996: 19). Devine and Markiewicz (1990) also studied hierarchical WRs and the link with performance and they distinguished between lower and higher status employees and found that the lower status employee was rated more positively than the higher status employee on performance related variables such as competence, productivity and commitment. However, declines in job performance or workgroup functioning were not associated with hierarchical romances in research conducted by Dillard, Hale and Segrin (1994:253).

This view was opposed by Powell and Foley (1998:18) who proposed that the two kinds of romances that have the most damaging effects on group morale and organisational effectiveness are hierarchical romances, and utilitarian romances – in which one partner satisfies his/her personal or sexual needs in exchange for satisfying the other participant's task-related and/or career-related needs. In the researcher's view all of this emphasises the fact that the type of WR relationship is an important factor for distinguishing it as a potential risk or benefit to the organisation.

There is another clear common factor in the literature on WR that determines the possibility of WR being a risk or a benefit, namely the phase of the WR. Pierce, Byrne and Aguinis (1996:18) identified that the variable of **phase of relationship** has a definite impact on the level of productivity. They argued that WR participants experience decreases in productivity, work motivation and job involvement during the early stages of the romance, but they experience increases in these outcomes in the later stages of the romance once the initial excitement has diminished.

As discussed before the most damning phase for participants in WRs is in or after the breakup. If this stage is not managed well, it can have many more repercussions for the organisation than just a decrease in performance by the WR participants. The phase of a WR relationship is thus something that definitively determines the outcome of the question about the WR participants' performance as a risk or benefit.

Another factor that should be kept in mind in deciding if WR has more potential to be a risk than a benefit, is to consider its impact on the **productivity of co-workers** within the organisation. Schaefer and Tudor (2001:2) asserted that productivity and morale in an organisation can be affected negatively when WRs are allowed to flourish. They have explained that "sometimes, an office romance becomes a soap opera played out in front of the entire office" and this has the effect of distracting co-workers and negatively influencing their performance.

This argument fits in with the finding of Quinn (1977:44) that the most prevalent outcome of WRs is that they cause much gossip in the workplace. He said that unlike non-work related romances, WRs are every day subjected to the scrutiny of co-workers, to their questioning of the appropriateness of the relationship, and whether or not the individuals involved or the organisation are benefiting from, or being hindered by the relationship (Powell & Foley, 1998:4). The lost time and productivity due to distraction of co-workers, who gossip and discuss the WR, are further possible negative consequences for the organisation (Lickey *et al.*, 2009:110). It is thus not only the WR participants' performance that is negatively affected, but potentially that of all their co-workers. Of course this need not necessarily be so, but it should be acknowledged that this is a real risk.

In summarizing this discussion about the question of WR being a risk or a benefit to the organisation (especially in terms of the performance of the WR participants and their co-workers' productivity) it must be concluded that this is not a clear cut issue. There are however important factors (as listed above) that should be kept in mind when analysing the risk or benefits of a specific WR relationship.

### **2.2.6 Managerial intervention in WR**

Another theme identified in the literature on WR that will be discussed in this chapter is managerial intervention in WR, as well as the co-workers' perceptions of this managerial intervention. Managerial intervention strategies and the perceptions thereof are aspects that are widely researched in the WR literature. This includes an exploration of appropriate HR policies in this regard.

It appears that in the research, there are essentially two opposing positions on managerial interventions in WR. On the one hand there is the more authoritative approach in which companies have established strict policies to regulate, prohibit or punish WR or even dating. On the other hand, there is the more current and emerging view, a more casual, "humanistic approach" that assumes that employers cannot

regulate employees' love relationships or their employees' personal lives (Schaefer & Tudor, 2001:2). In line with the latter approach, managers could choose to either take no action at all, or to take positive action such as engaging in open discussion or counselling.

The first approach (of prohibiting WR) is normally chosen by the organisation because of the potential risks a WR can have for the organisation. As discussed before, these risks may include potential employer liability such as sexual harassment claims. So traditionally organisations managed WR in the authoritative, defensive, legal-centric manner by prohibiting or discouraging WRs to avoid such claims (Pierce & Aguinis, 2009:449). Mainiero (1989:241) also found in her research that traditionally WR was considered inappropriate and was therefore mostly managed through the employee discipline process.

Other researchers have argued however that this legal-centric, disciplinary approach may not necessarily be the best practice for organisations as the assumption that WRs inevitably lead to harassment lawsuits is not necessarily true (Pierce & Aguinis, 2009:449). Pierce and Aguinis (2009:458) therefore argued in favour of an organisationally sensible approach in order to manage all of the potential risks of WR together (including sexual harassment claims; unethical relationships, management being accused of unfair treatment and disruptive dissolutions).

The only two options with managerial intervention in WR are thus either to prohibit it (the traditional position) or to ignore and allow it (the liberal position). A third option argued for (also in this study) is to manage the potential risks and benefits of WR in an organisation. Pierce and Aguinis (2009:457- 461) chose this option and they therefore elaborated on the recommendations for organisations in managing the risks and rewards of WR. They suggested that instead of following the legal centric approach of risk prevention (with the exclusive focus on risk minimization), the approach should focus on cost *and benefit* management, one with a sensible focus on risk minimization *and reward maximization*.

Of course different researchers make different recommendations in this regard. For example, Karl and Sutton (2000) looked into the perceived fairness of WR policies and found that a *counselling policy* is perceived as fairer than a no-action policy, verbal reprimand, written warning, and transfer or termination policy. Punitive policies were perceived as fair when romance participants' job performance declines, and a no – action policy is perceived fair when romance participants' job performance improves.

On the other hand, Schaefer and Tudor (2001:6) were of the view that companies should have a clear, written policy on managing WR that is tailored specifically to the organization, and that prohibits all types of sexual harassment. In these policies, clear rules of conduct in the workplace should be established and they should be consistently applied. Although this might sound like the traditional position on managerial intervention to WR, it is a more flexible framework to work in than just the prohibition of WR.

In my view the counselling policy mentioned by Karl and Sutton should be combined in a written policy (which Schaefer and Tudor ask for) in order to be in a position to effectively manage the risks and benefits of WR in an organisation as Pierce and Aguinis propose. Neither prohibition nor ignorance of WR by management will be able to effectively deal with the potential risks and benefits of WR for an organisation.

Within the realm of this third "combined" option, one strategy available to organisations is to offer mediation as an intervention strategy to manage the situation once the WR dissolves and potential risks become apparent. By definition, mediation is where an impartial third party mediates parties to reach mutual agreement on matters of dispute. The underlying principle is self-determination and the creation of a future working relationship with the other party (Folberg, Milne & Salem, 2004:262). It is a voluntary option and can only occur if all the parties involved in the dispute agree to it (Wynn-Evans, 2010:1). Utilising an independent third party or mediator can then help the parties to work out a solution and thereby avoid formal grievance and disciplinary

procedures (Pearl, 2004:3). As such, it is a potentially empowering option for the individuals involved since they solve their own conflict instead of it being an imposed, adversarial solution (Wynn- Evans, 2010:2; Pearl, 2004:3).

There is general consensus in the literature on workplace mediation that it is an essential tool to manage conflict at work (Pearl, 2004; Wynn-Evans, 2010; Luna & Yialelis, 2008; Carter, 2008; Armitage, 2009). Although mediation has its limitations in the types of disputes it can resolve, it is viewed to be most effective where the issues are relationship based (Carter, 2008:1), for example WRs. This is particularly true here where the EAP can become relevant in that it could provide a platform where mediation is offered as a conflict resolution strategy.

### **2.3 Themes relevant to the research in question**

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In the overview of the literature on WR presented so far in this chapter, several main themes have been identified within this field of study. These themes are of utmost importance for the research in question in this project. Since this research study focuses on the stage of WR relationship breakup, most of the potential risks of WR are relevant themes that will be further investigated. Three specific insights have been gained by the researcher in the literature review on WR.

The first is the need for further research. It is particularly the sub-themes of disruptive dissolutions of WR which has the potential for retaliation violence, as well as the emotional disorders and secondary risks to the organisation that need to be further explored in this study. The literature on WR regarding this specific issue helped thus to put the question into context, but it also indicates some need for further research to be done. This links up of course with the main question of this research project, namely *What are the effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town? And what are the best strategies for an EAP in dealing with these effects?*

The existing literature also showed some serious gaps (as mentioned in the previous chapter): Most of the research studies encountered in the preliminary literature review (as mentioned earlier) have primarily been conducted in the United States of America (USA) and in the United Kingdom (UK). There is thus a need for more contextual research in South Africa.

Furthermore, the focus of these research studies appears to add value primarily in the fields of Human Resource management, the legal field (i.e. liability management in cases of sexual harassment) or in the field of applied psychology. The research aim was not primarily associated with the EAP field per se and this “gap” shows clearly in the assessment of the literature. A further problem is that the focus of this research was not on unschooled (or semi-schooled) workers. The question (or “gap”) about the applicability of the findings about professional employees’ WRs and WRs in a factory set up is apparent.

It may be concluded therefore that, although there is substantial existing research in the EAP field on WRs, it still requires further and more up-to-date research to be particularly applicable in the South African context. This research study thus seeks to address the gap in information in this field, creating thereby new knowledge in this regard.

The second is the need to focus on WR and productivity factors. The relation between WR and performance/productivity is one of the main themes in the literature on WR and it also relates to the topic of this research study. Considering the mixed results that the past research has delivered in this regard, it would be of great value to investigate what the result would be in this respect at the specific organisation where the research of this study was conducted. This would have the potential to be of great value to the management of the organisation – not only to calculate their potential losses, but also to motivate the prospects of a well-established managerial intervention strategy for WR.

Lastly, the main themes of the literature on WR have been translated into a set of three basic themes and sub-themes and a list of questions that would provide the framework

for the semi-structured interview schedule (see attached) with employees involved with WRs used in this research. This can be summarised as follows:

- 1.) **Psycho-Social functioning** is explored firstly under the subheading of psychological **or emotional functioning**. Possible indicators of functioning in this regard include general emotional coping, stress levels, concentration levels, experience of negative feelings, use of substances and self-esteem.
- 2.) Secondly, the subheading of **social functioning** indicators explores psycho-social functioning in more depth. General social coping, withdrawal behaviour, reaction to negative office gossip, conflict and communication with colleagues are investigated.
- 3.) Thirdly, the occurrence and experience of **retaliation violence** is explored. Particularly how such incidents could make the person feel emotionally, or act socially, are probed.
- 4.) The aspect of **productivity** is investigated as a second main theme with specific indicators such as performance, absenteeism, competence, commitment to the job or intrinsic work motivation, and job satisfaction as related themes.
- 5.) Lastly the interview also explores the necessity and best **strategies for an EAP** in dealing with the negative effects of dissolved workplace romances at this specific industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13. Participants' expectations and perceptions about EAP are discussed and listed. They would for example be asked if they prefer a managerial intervention through prohibition or ignorance by management, or would they prefer a clear policy and counselling to manage WRs. They would be encouraged to elaborate on this in order to identify some practical guidelines for EAPs in future – specifically in this context.

The research subjects would also be given the opportunity to share anything else that they wished to add afterwards as it could provide contextual and/or new information.

## **2.4 Summary / Conclusion**

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A review of the literature on WR indicates a few basic themes that have been explored by researchers on the topic. In summary, these themes are

- descriptions, models and types of WR;
- antecedent conditions and motivational factors contributing to the establishment of WR;
- consequences of WR being the potential benefits (such as increased job satisfaction; increased job involvement and higher organisational commitment) or
- potential risks;
- the question whether WR has more risks than benefits; and
- managerial intervention in WR.

These themes are not the complete list of themes that can be identified in the literature on WR, but they were valuable in contextualizing the research question of this study and in indicating the further need for research.

These themes also emphasised the complexity of WR relationships and thereby indicated that managerial intervention in WR at the organisation should not be oversimplified or underestimated. The importance of managerial intervention in WR was also highlighted by describing the potential risks of WR. These include the sub-themes of the possibility of increased sexual harassment claims; disruptive dissolutions that could result in retaliation violence or public confrontations; higher staff turnover; unfair management interventions; unethical relationships; emotional disorders in grieving employees with secondary consequences to the organisation as a result; and a list of other risks to the participating employee, co-workers and organisation.

In this study not all risks can be fully explored, but only the risk of *disruptive WR dissolutions that could result in retaliation violence or public confrontations; as well as emotional disorders with secondary consequences to the organisation; as well as productivity risks*. The other risks are not thereby side-lined and their relevance and importance should be kept in mind throughout this study.

Lastly the important link between WR and productivity has also received a lot of attention in the literature. There were however mixed results about the direction of the relationship between WR and performance/productivity. Indicators such as competency, absenteeism, commitment to the job or intrinsic work motivation, and job satisfaction are variables that have been studied in this regard.

Furthermore, the type, stage and motive of the WR are all common variables that researchers have investigated in this regard. All these factors will have to be kept in mind in developing a managerial intervention strategy for WR at the organisation. There is however a large stream of research that already focuses on management intervention strategies and co-workers' perceptions of these interventions.

To conclude: the literature review has enabled the researcher to draw up a framework for the semi-structured interview schedule to address any related themes in the research topic. Based on the literature consulted and commented on in this chapter, the potential risks of WR and indicators of WR and productivity are the most relevant themes identified that will be further explored in this research study.

## **Chapter 3: Data analysis of the effect of dissolved workplace romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees**

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### **3.1 Introduction**

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In this section, the researcher analyses the data by reviewing the transcribed interviews in depth. Different themes and sub-themes have emerged in the process which shed more light on the main research topic, namely “The effect of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees at an industrial factory in Cape Town”. The researcher will not give an elaborate interpretation or discussion of the data in this chapter since a more comprehensive critical analysis will follow in Chapter Four.

#### **3.1.1 Research Methodology**

As detailed in Chapter One, a qualitative research approach was adopted for the purposes of this study. This approach was applicable to this study because the study focused on gathering meaningful information such as employees' perceptions, experiences and feelings in relation to the phenomenon of relationship breakdown in the workplace.

The nature for this research falls in the category of **applied research** because the focus was on a problem in practice, which required some solutions. More particularly, the study was a **collective case study** because of its aim to understand a social issue, namely the ‘breakdown of romantic relationships in the workplace’, and because of its focus on studying the experiences and perceptions of a group of individuals affected by this phenomenon.

Eleven participants on the **closed EAP caseload** (including the researcher's own and her colleague's closed cases) were selected to participate in the study. They all gave their written consent to participate during a pre-interview with the researcher when the

purpose and processes of the study were explained to them. The research was conducted at the researcher's workplace at the time, where she was employed as an EAP practitioner, namely an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town with approximately 1 600 production workers. The employees, who were selected to participate in the study, are all in the lower-income bracket and have low levels of formal education.

A **semi-structured interview schedule (see addendum) was developed** as the most appropriate means of data collection for this study. An interview schedule with some predetermined questions was utilised to guide the interviews and the questions were formulated to be open ended to generate more in-depth responses. The questions were also formulated around the primary themes and sub-themes that emerged from the literature review, but allowed room for additional information and for participants to freely tell their stories.

The interviews were not conducted by the researcher herself but by a suitably qualified person contracted for this purpose solely in order to ensure enhanced neutrality and prevent any predetermined biasness from the researcher.

### **3.1.2 Personal profiles of participants**

The demographic profiles of the participants are described in Table 1.

**Table 1: The demographic profiles of the participants**

Participant	Age	Gender	Home Language	Highest level of education	Job description
A	49	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 11	Clerk
T	41	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 6	Machinist
SA	42	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 11	Machinist
D	28	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 10	Machinist
J	46	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 11	Machinist
P	37	Male	Afrikaans	Grade 10	Ironer
R	42	Male	Afrikaans	Grade 8	Cutter
L	33	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 11	Clerk
E	32	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 12	Clerk
S	40	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 11	Clerk
C	34	Female	Afrikaans	Grade 10	Packer

The participants' ages were: 28, 32, 33, 34, 37, 40, 41, 42, 42, 46 & 49. Therefore their age ranges between 28 and 49, with the majority of participants in their middle 30s and 40s.

The home language of all the participants was Afrikaans.

The highest level of education of the participants were: Grade 6 (one), Grade 8 (one), Grade 10 (three), Grade 11 (five) and Grade12 (one), most classifying as semi-schooled workers.

The participants' job descriptions were: clerks (four); machinists (four); one ironer, one packer and one cutter.

### 3.1.3 Relationship profiles

The length of the romantic workplace relationships that these participants have had, varied. The shortest relationship was at least six months (one participant), and the longest relationship was 15 years (two participants). The others were: 14 years long (two participants); 12 years long (three participants); 2½ years long (two participants); and 1 ½ year long (one participant). Six participants were married to their partner and eight of the participants had one child or more with their partner (in question). Nine out of the eleven participants co-habited at some point in the relationship, ranging in length between a minimum four months and maximum 15 years. The eleven participants included two ex-couples, meaning four of them were involved with each other and the rest were involved with other employees outside the sampling group.

It may be deduced from the information above, that the participants' relationship profile therefore fitted the criteria of being in serious long-term relationships as opposed to short-term affairs.

The following participants responded that they perceived themselves and their ex-partner to have been in more or less equal work positions (T, R, J, P, SA, C), whilst the rest regarded either themselves (A, E) or the other party (D, L, S) as being in a higher position than the other one. It appears however that none of the 'unequal' relationships referred to direct reporting employee/manager relationships but rather referred to slightly unequal levels of income due to unequal levels of work experience at the company.

It can therefore be said that all the participants were in fact more or less on the same work levels as their ex-partner in the sense that none of them was in a superior, direct reporting position to the other, again fitting the participation criteria.

The following participants (T, A, R, S, D, J, P, L, E, SA) responded that they perceived the break up as conflictual, with only one participant saying the breakup was amicable.

It needs to be mentioned that out of the 11 participants, four were ex-couples (R & SA; P & C).

Furthermore, out of the total of nine relationships, six relationships broke off due to the presence of a third female party who was also a work colleague – most of the male parties to the relationships in fact proceeded to enter another workplace relationship after the breakup (this needs to be viewed in context that the workforce of 1 600 consists mainly of females with only about 200 males). The rest of the chapter's discussion will be dealt with within the parameters of the following table indicating the main themes and sub-themes, with related indicators.

Table 2 summarises the main aspects that were indicated by the literature review to be associated with the breakdown of romantic relationships in the workplace.

**Table 2: Themes, Sub-themes and Indicators associated with dissolution of WRs**

Main themes	Sub-themes	Indicators
1. Psycho-social functioning	1. Psychological & Emotional functioning	1. Concentration levels 2. Decision making ability 3. Stress levels 4. Sadness or depression 5. Substances 6. Self-confidence 7. Most difficult experience
	2. Social functioning	1. Social coping 2. Withdrawing behaviour 3. Office gossip 4. Conflict with colleagues 5. Communication
	3. Retaliation violence	1. Violent threats, acts or incidences 2. Effect of violent threats or acts 3. Negative emotional experience: fear or intimidation 4. Anger or resentment feelings
2. Productivity		1. Changes in usual level of work functioning 2. Attendance/absenteeism 3. Proneness to mistakes 4. Level of motivation and commitment
3. EAP intervention		1. Utilisation 2. Company involvement & Expectations 3. Company policy 4. Suggestions to improve

There will not be any elaborate interpretation or discussion of the data in this chapter since a more comprehensive critical analysis will follow in Chapter Four.

### 3.2 Main theme 1 : Psycho-social functioning

### **3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Psychological & Emotional functioning**

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#### **3.2.1.1 Concentration**

The following participants (A, L, T, D, J, SA, C) reported a decrease in their concentration levels since their attention was more focused on the relationship instead of on their work. One reported that he was easily distracted at work, wondering what his ex was up to (R). T reports she could not work at all due to feeling stressed.

D: “As ek nou eerlik moet wees, my konsentrasie was nie ten volle by my werk gewees nie. Jy weet, ‘n mens dink ‘n klomp goed en dan so...”

J: “Dit was vir my baie moeilik... daar was tye wat ek nie my ‘target’ kon sien nie... my trane het geloop by die masjien”

C: “Dit het nie gewerk nie (om saam te werk)... want as ek na hom gekyk het, dan slat my ‘mind’ na een ding toe”.

P, S and E reported that they experienced no impact on their concentration levels or decision making abilities. Interestingly, P noted that because he was the party responsible for the break-up, his concentration was therefore not affected by it. He rather felt pity for his ex-partner but at the same time was happy that he had another girl in his life, also a work colleague. In contrast, his ex-partner, C, reported her concentration was indeed affected negatively, especially just after the breakup.

Some of the respondents however reported that they feel their work in fact offered them the opportunity to be distracted from the breakup and helped them to keep busy and be occupied instead of being pre-occupied with their feelings (A, S).

The participants' response to this question obviously refers to their subjective views on their concentration and can therefore not necessarily be regarded as the factual situation. One participant was honest enough to say that her supervisor noted this: SA: "My konsentrasie was nie by my werk nie. Die supervisor het opgelet..."

### **3.2.1.2 Decision making**

Most respondents did not respond directly to this question but some responded that they could not make decisions easily (T, L, D, SA), suggesting that it was due to their pre-occupation with the breakup and as a result of their concentration difficulties. Some reported no impact whatsoever on their decision making abilities (P, E).

J reported a severe impact on her decision making ability, affecting her productivity and absenteeism: "Ek kon nie besluite maak by die werk nie. Ek kan onthou een 'incident' by die werk, wat ek siek geraak het by die werk en net begin te 'emotional' raak het, dat hulle my moes huis toe gestuur het".

### **3.2.1.3 Stress levels**

The following participants (A, R, S, L, J) reported that their stress levels were raised during and after the breakup. Clarifying what they meant by "stress", one reported she was stressed in the sense of what others were thinking of her (A). Another (L) reported she was stressed due to adjusting to being alone and because of all the stories going around about them at work. D explained her stress levels were raised in the sense that she felt more anxious and sad, which in turn affected her absenteeism.

J was particularly stressed because of the presence of a third party that resulted in their break up, and because everybody at work knew about the affairs he had. She says she stressed "... like hell" and was particularly affected by a sense of embarrassment when her colleagues teased her about her ex.

P reported he felt stressed to see his ex-partner (C) in such pain after he broke up with her due to him having an affair at work with another girl.

A few reported that they seriously considered resigning their jobs (A,R,E,T,P), seeming as part of a more general sense of carelessness, a symptom of stress, unhappiness about the ongoing office gossip, or in an attempt to avoid the ex-partner at work. SE's increased stress levels had a physical impact on her in the sense that her hair fell out, and she lost a lot of weight.

### **3.2.1.4 Depression levels**

The following participants reported increased levels of sadness during or after the breakup (A, R, S, E, L, J, SA). R reported that he felt incredibly lonely and sad, particularly at the beginning stage of the breakup. He also felt sad because of the impact the breakup had had on their child. Sadness for the children was shared by other participants (P, C).

P:"Hartseer vir my kind. My kind, omrede... Nou gaan hy ook groot word sonder sy pa."

R" Moeilikste deel is... ek gaan my dogtertjie baie minder sien as wat ek graag wil sien."

A strong theme reflected by the participants was that they experienced a level of sadness or anxiety that can be interpreted as symptoms of depression: Two participants (A & L) reported they lost interest in their personal appearance and hygiene. S and L both reported they just wanted to stay in bed over weekends and had little energy to attend to the children or cleaning tasks. T reported that she had to take anti-depressant medication during this time. She experienced suicidal thoughts, had sleeping trouble, and cried excessively.

D also struggled to sleep, cried a lot, had regular headaches and was highly irritable at this time. SA was prescribed tranquilisers by her GP due to her raised levels of anxiety, sleeplessness and regular headaches.

J: "Ek was baie depressed. Dit het vir my gevoel laat niemand vir my omgee nie. Dat geluk nie vir my beskore is nie... om alleen te wees.... Ek het verskriklik baie gehuil".  
J also experienced increased levels of anxiety and sleeplessness.

### **3.2.1.5 Substances**

With the majority of participants, the intake of substances of any sort was reported to have increased, particularly alcohol (R, L, T, SA) and cigarettes (D, J, SA, C). R reported that although he had been a heavy drinker for years before, his drinking behaviour increased significantly, particularly over weekends. L says that although she used to drink over weekends, she suddenly started to drink during the week as well due to feeling careless about her situation: "Ek het net gedink... ek 'worry' nie, hulle kan maar sê wat hulle wil by die werk."

### **3.2.1.6 Self-confidence**

The following participants felt more insecure, with a lack of self-confidence and feelings of self-blame, immediately after the breakup (A, R, S, E, L).

L: "Ek het baie onseker van myself gevoel. En dink ek: Wat is dan fout met my? Hy het regtig my selfvertroue geknak, regtig waar ..."

J: "Ja (my selfvertroue was geknak), en dit het erger geraak. Dit pla my dan nou nog"

However it appears that in the long term, when they were able to reflect on their learning experiences, there had been a sense of relief and increase in confidence in general. Especially those participants who suggested that their relationships were in fact unhappy or even abusive, had a sense of relief when it ended.

R "..., maar ek was aan die een kant ook maar bly dat alles oor is".

T: "Meer selfvertroue, ja. 'n Mens kan nie in so 'n verhouding nie"

D: "Ek dink na die verhouding het ek meer selfvertroue gehet...Ek het baie dinge deurgemaak, deur hom".

SA: "...ek het my selfvertroue na die egskeiding terug gekry".

L: "Toe ons nou opbreuk, toe het ek 'n lewe".

One participant (C) told the researcher that she gained so much self-confidence after the breakup that she applied for and passed her drivers licence.

### **3.2.1.7 Most difficult experience**

Looking at the responses from the following participants (R, S, P, D & T), it appears that they generally were most deeply affected by the negative effect of the breakup on the children.

D said the hardest part for her was being in the position of seeing him every day at work: "Nadat ons opgebreek het ...ek het hom elke dag gesien en die dinge was moeilik gewees".

T said being left a single parent after the breakup was the hardest part for her.

A said the most difficult part for her was what the people would think of her, feeling like a fool in front of work colleagues and feeling embarrassed due to the public nature of the relationship. This is interesting since her sense of humiliation at work highlights the public nature of a workplace relationship as opposed to the more private nature of a non-workplace relationship.

L verbalised that the most difficult part was simply not being together anymore and not spending time or doing the usual things together during the working day.

P shared this sentiment: "Die moeilikste deel ...was...vir 12 jaar was ons soos een gewees... sy was daar gewees vir my...Daai was vir my die hartseer part gewees, om te sien hoe alles daai net weg is".

Some respondents asserted that their breakup was complicated even more by the presence of a third party – also on the work-site, making the trauma process even more unbearable (L, P, T). This emphasised their sense of double exposure and double humiliation: since the breakup was public – at work, where everybody knew them – and since one of the parties then established a new workplace relationship, also in the public work space, it meant further exposure and further humiliation.

Looking at the responses from the participants on the whole towards the subject 'negative impact on psychological and emotional functioning', no consistent sub-themes emerged since the different participants all expressed unique experiences and perceptions about their functioning levels.

However, looking at the responses in general confirms the suggested broader theme in the literature review that the general psychological and emotional functioning of the individuals involved in WRs is negatively affected. The breakups usually resulted in decreased concentration levels, decreased decision making abilities, increased stress, sadness and depression levels, increased use of substances and at least immediately after the breakup, decreased self-confidence levels.

### **3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Social Functioning**

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#### **3.2.2.1 Social coping**

Some respondents reported that they reached out to their support network during and after the breakup: R: "ek het maar nou net meer na my familie toe gegaan". A reported that she socialised much less during the time of the breakup as a result of her feelings of depression. D had a similar response, saying it took a lot of time for her before she

felt like going out with her friends again. Another participant, S, reported that she had to pretend everything was fine towards her colleagues, in order to go on as normally as possible “Ek sou sê ek het maar toneel gespeel...”.

For L, it was hard to cope socially at work after the breakup since her ex used to be her only social connection at work during the relationship. She suddenly found herself isolated and alone. “Hy het vir my... ek kon nie vriende gehad het nie... hy was baie jaloers”. Only later on, she started to socialize more and re-establish her friendships.

### **3.2.2.2 Withdrawing behaviour**

The following participants reported that they took a week (A, L, T, SA), or less (J), off from work following the breakup, indicating their need to withdraw temporarily from the workplace.

Some respondents reported increased withdrawing behaviour at work by for example avoiding their colleagues, becoming more quiet or sitting alone during breaks (A, E, J, SA, D).

J: “ Nee, ek het maar alleen begin te sit ... want in ‘n fabriek is dit anderste. Jy kan met niemand deel nie, want as jy een ding saam met hulle deel, dan beskinder hulle vir jou. En dis nie ‘cool’ nie”.

SA: “Lunch time”, ‘tea time’, was ek maar net daar buite en dan kom ek maar weer in. Elke dag so. Op my eie was ek”.

Others in fact had increased contact with their colleagues since they were regarded as their support system (R). Some had no change in their behaviour in this regard (L, P).

### 3.2.2.3 Office gossip

An increase in office gossip, and negative emotional perceptions about it, seems to have been a common occurrence in the participants' experiences.

Participant A felt very embarrassed and humiliated by the belief that her work colleagues were talking about her behind her back. She felt like a fool and was constantly worried about what they were thinking of her.

E felt upset when the other party told colleagues his version of events which then later, along the grapevine, reached her ears. L shared this feeling in the sense that she felt very uncomfortable that everybody was talking about her business and about the untrue stories that her ex had spread about her: "... almal het hulle eie storietjies gehad... dit het my baie hartseer laat raak. Dit was nie reg wat die mense gepraat het nie".

P was also very upset about office gossip, to the extent that he considered resigning: "Dit het my baie, verskriklik baie ontstel, ongemaklik laat voel. Dit het gevoel ek wil nie meer hier werk nie".

T felt uncomfortable because "...die mense het gepraat. Hulle het gese ek is mal, ek is siek in my kop".

J describes the office gossip as being "... like hell" for her, wanting her to withdraw from others and feeling embarrassed about what her ex was saying about her behind her back.

It appears that particularly for those participants whose exes became involved in another workplace romance after the breakup, the office gossip was hard to deal with. D: "Toe is die nou, dat hy iemand by die werk het... en almal praat daarvan ... want hy het vir haar swanger gemaak".

Not all participants were affected by office gossip, for example R mentioned he felt relieved that people were talking about it and that it was out in the open. SA also says that she did not allow the gossip to affect her: “...Daar was eintlik baie praatjies, maar ek het my nie daaraan gesteur nie”.

It is significant to notice, from above responses, that, after the breakups, participants started to perceive the workplace more negatively. Their attitude towards their work also became more negative, and they developed resistance against coming to work. Negative attitudes had the result of a lack of productivity at work.

### **3.2.2.4 Conflict with colleagues**

A reported that her leaders were concerned about her interaction with her colleagues during this time: “Maar my leiers kon sien iets is nie lekker nie... volgens hulle was ek aggressief, miskien nie met woorde nie, maar met uitdrukkings”.

L reports that she and her colleagues argued a lot in the sense that they wanted to interfere and tell her what to do, for example to stop contacting her ex at work, which she was unwilling to do. L also reports that her colleagues gave her feedback that she was unfriendly and rude towards them during this time.

T reports: “Ek het lelik kwaad geraak... Dan lyk dit amper dit is my ‘problem’ wat veroorsaak dat ek nou konflik het met die persoon (by die werk)...As ‘n mens in so ‘n ‘problem’ is en so hartseer is, dan raak jy sommer kwaad vir iemand oor werk, maar dan lyk nou amper of... dis nie die werk nie, dis jou ‘problem’”.

D reports that she was highly irritable with her colleagues during this time, to the extent that she had very little patience with them: “Nou, as hulle miskien net vir my iets kom vra... dan byt ek sommer hul kop af of so. Vat dit mos nou verkeerd op”.

J was also irritable with her colleagues: “... en ek was baie lelik met die mense. Maar ek het vir hulle omverskoning gevra vir my dade en hoe ek gewees het”.

Some participants report no increased level of conflict with their colleagues (R, S, E, C). Important concepts are generated from the participants's responses in this regard, i.e. conflict, aggression, anger, quarrelsomeness, unfriendliness, rudeness, irritability, shortness of temper and lack of patience. All of these had a direct or indirect impact on the participants's colleagues and therefore on the wider workplace.

### **3.2.2.5 Communication**

Several participants reported that communicating openly with their colleagues at work, about their personal situation (specifically their breakup), helped them to cope and it encouraged them (A, R, SA, C). Some participants just communicated their situations with a few intimate and trusted friends to obtain support (A, E, P). Others communicated their situation with their supervisor (T, S, J) and felt this helped them to cope with the situation, some preferred to communicate more confidentially with the social worker instead (SA).

Two participants had a stronger sense of privacy such as D, or S: "Ek het vir niemand by die werk vertel wat aangaan nie... my 'private life' is my private life' ".

It appears that, on the whole, the experience of the breakup of WRs had a negative effect on the social functioning of individuals involved. The participants' social functioning was definitely affected in the sense that most experienced withdrawing behaviour; office gossip was a negative issue for them; and an increase in conflict with work colleagues was reported.

### **3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Retaliation violence**

#### **3.2.3.1 Violent threats, acts or incidents**

Some participants reported no occurrence of any violent threats, acts or incidents (at work), either on their own part or from their ex-partner (A, E). Some experienced

domestic violence at home (R, SA, P), but say they were able not to transfer this to their work environment.

Four female participants (L, T, J, D) shared they were the ones who threatened their exes with violence or approached them in an intimidating manner at work.

L: "Ek was die een... dan het ek vir hom gaan insê (slegsê)..." "Toe ons opbreuk... dan het ek hom uitgeskel en gevloek....Geskel, elke dag ... dan skel ek hom uit en ek het een keer sy 'phone'afgevat. Ek wou dit stukkend gooi, maar toe keer my vrinne my"

T: "Ja. Ek het vir hom hoofsaaklik gesê, ek gaan vir hom 'n brand iets kry en dan kom gooi ek dit in sy gesig. Soos 'acid' of so iets. ... ek het hom baie uitgeskel. ... ek het al tot by sy department gegaan (en dan begin skel op hom) ... dit effek die werk.".

This incident resulted in a disciplinary hearing and T received a final written warning, she was told to refrain from contacting her ex on the premises, as well as to refrain from contacting his new partner.

J:" Ja daar was een keer wat ek hom geklap het, By die masjien. Want... hy was krapperrig gewees"

D:" Ja, ons het baie geskel (by die werk)"

Participant P reports experiencing a lot of verbal violence: "Sy het baie op my gevloek, ... en sy was baie nors.... sy het dit verkeerd gehanteer, met vloekery en skellery, elke dag". P also reports that she (his ex) also expressed violent threats towards his new partner in the workplace.

One participant, S, reported a serious incident where her ex-partner confronted her at her work desk when he thought that she was dating another man. He behaved very intimidatingly by hitting his hand on the table, pulling her hair and hitting her with his fist

on her shoulder, shouting and swearing all the while. He later returned twice and continued his verbal abuse. She started crying and her supervisor had to intervene. This incident resulted in a disciplinary hearing and the ex-partner eventually lost his job because of his aggressive behaviour. S was severely traumatised and received counselling after the incident. The incident was particularly surprising considering that the couple had worked together for more than ten years with this being the first incident of this nature.

With both of above incidents, the company relied on their policy on workplace violence to deal with the situation on a disciplinary level. The participants report that most of the incidents occurred during lunch or tea time breaks when they were free to move around departments. This aspect raises the question of how aware, and prepared the company is about the severity and occurrence of workplace violence as a consequence of the breakdown of workplace romances.

### **3.2.3.2 Effect of violent threats or acts**

Participant L and T's exes would apparently respond to the verbal violence towards them by just walking away. Participant P also reports he would simply walk away from his ex when she was verbally violent towards him.

Some participants felt embarrassed: J: "En dan was dit mos 'embarrassing' hier gewees, want hy het baklei...", or afraid their colleagues would hear the shouting (D).

A says that she never felt unsafe at work because she was always surrounded by her work friends; she rather describes her primary feeling at work as "uncomfortable".

J agrees with this experience: " Ek het 'like' meer veiliger gevoel by die werk, as 'like' by die huis of op pad werk toe... want daar was altyd mense om my".

Also SA felt more safe at work: "... ek het baie onveilig gevoel by die huis. By die werk het ek nie 'geworry'nie".

### **3.2.3.3 Negative emotional experience: fear or intimidation**

Some participants experienced some feelings of anger and resentment. For example participants P and D explained how they were in daily contact via SMS messages with the ex-partners at the time and the tone and nature of messages received created resentment. Some participants experienced no negative feelings, i.e. A, E.

Participant S, as a result of the incident explained above (1.3.2), experienced strong negative feelings of anxiety and fear, and she required trauma counselling.

Participant T, who also reports experiencing domestic violence at home, reports that she was afraid of her ex-partner at work.

Participant J reports that she experienced feelings of depression as a result of her ex's behaviour: "Ek was so 'depressed' dat... tye wat ek nie in my werk kon gewees het nie... Ek het 'like' vir dae by die huis gebly, sonder om myself te kon oplig om dokter toe te gaan."

### **3.2.3.4 Anger or resentment feelings**

A strong theme expressed by the majority of participants was their experience of feelings of anger and resentment at work, sometimes resulting in malicious intent towards those around them.

L reported an increased level of irritability at work during this time that affected her personal relationships to the extent that nobody could say anything to her any longer, and then she would lose her temper. Also D, T and E, reported an increased level of irritability during this time.

T: "...(ek) haal sommer die stres op iemand anders uit.... Baie woede, gehaat (gevoel)"  
L: "Wanneer ek hom gesien het, wou ek hom dood gemaak het. Geskel, elke dag"

T: "Ek het lelik kwaad geraak... Ek was sommer net kwaad, sommer vir my supervisor ook"

D: "Nou as hulle miskien net iets vir my kom vra... dan byt ek sommer hulle kop af of so. Vat dit mos nou verkeerd op".

C: "Oo, ja! Ek het gevoel om hom aan te rand"

It appears that those participants who had children with their workplace partner, experienced anger and resentment mostly because of financial arguments, for example due to non-payment of maintenance (T, S, D, C, J).

A minority of participants experienced no feelings of anger whatsoever at work (A, R). It appears that, from the responses of the participants, the occurrence of retaliation violence, with the associated negative feelings such as anger, resentment and fear, created a common theme. These negative emotional experiences, in response to the experience of violence, sometimes escalated in the sense of resulting in malicious intent towards those around them, therefore also affecting the broader organisational context detrimentally.

### **3.3 Main Theme 2: Productivity**

#### **3.3.1 Changes in usual level of work functioning**

A few participants insisted that the breakup had no impact on their usual level of work functioning (C, P, L, E and R). Others shared that it affected their work functioning detrimentally:

D: "Ek het nie my werk gedoen soos ek dit moet doen nie. Daar was net nie... ek wou net nie hier gewees het nie... Gee nie 'capacity' wat ek moet nie. My werk was nie dieselfde gewees nie".

SA: "... ek het baie foute gemaak hier by die werk".

J: "Ek het baie foute gemaak"

T: "Ek kon nie 'production' gemaak het nie. Ek het baie gesit en huil agter die masjien"

S: "Ja, daar was dae wat ek 'mistakes' gemaak het"

One participant (A) explained that she actually worked harder during the breakup in an attempt to compensate for the lack of trust her colleagues had had in her: "... eintlik het ek op daardie stadium harder probeer, dat mense my weer kan 'trust'....Ek wou nie hê hulle moes vinger kon wys nie".

### **3.3.2 Attendance / Absenteeism**

All participants reported that the breakup had some sort of effect on their attendance at work. Participants A, L, T and SA, reported that they took a week off work. Others took a few days off following the breakup (J, C, D), usually listing it as 'sick leave', indicating their need to withdraw temporarily from the workplace. Some also stayed out regularly after the initial break up (J, L, D) or had to go home in the middle of the working day when they could not cope any longer (A).

D: "... ek was baie afwesig... jy voel nou net gespanne en goed gaan deur jou 'mind'. En dan moet jy net afvat en alleen wees by die huis".

SA: " Ek het... as ek vroegoggend... nie wil... nie tussen mense wil wees nie, dan bly ek by die huis... Baie by die huis gebly".

L: " Ek het baie uitgebly.. daar was 'n tyd wat ek nie lus was om te gaan werk nie, dan bly ek by die huis".

Some of them were absent from work to attend to court cases such as obtaining a divorce, protection, eviction, peace or maintenance orders (R, S, J, SA, C). What upset them in addition to this, was not receiving their daily wage due to being absent to attend court cases.

J: " Ek het baie lank geloop... hof in en hof uit"

### **3.3.3 Level of motivation and commitment**

A lot of participants reported that it was hard for them to get up in the mornings and come to work (D, SA, T, L, E, R, A). The notion of responsibility towards caring for their children was a strong theme, motivating participants to continue working despite the uncomfortable circumstances (C, D, J, P and L).

J: " Ek het gevoel ek wil nie werk nie, maar ek het nie 'n keuse gehad nie. Weens ons kind".

S: " Ja, want ek het drie kinders vir wie ek moet werk".

Judging from the responses of the participants as detailed above, the research suggests the theme that productivity indicators such as level of work functioning, attendance and level of work motivation and commitment were definitely affected detrimentally.

## **3.4 Main Theme 3: EAP**

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### **3.4.1 Utilisation**

The majority of participants utilised the EAP services during or after the breakup (A, P, C, T, R, SA, S, J, D). They mostly referred themselves (A, R, T, J, SA) or were referred by their supervisors.

### **3.4.2 Company / EAP Involvement and Expectations**

Mostly, the expectation of the EAP was just to provide a listening ear, encouragement or outlet for employees to vent about the situation (A, R, S, J).

S: "... sy het geluister en dit was die belangrikste"

R: "... sy het eintlik meer gedoen as wat ek verwag het"

Some expected the social worker to mediate a financial arrangement between the parties, but were disappointed when it only had short-term results (J, T, SA).

Some employees did not find the need to talk to the social worker/EAP as they felt they could deal with the situation by themselves (L, E, C).

Most employees interviewed were satisfied with the EAP's involvement and regarded it as helpful (i.e. A, R).

E: “Ek weet hulle gaan uit hulle ‘way’ uit vir mense”

### **3.4.3 Company policy**

Most participants were not aware of any company policies on workplace romance. They also thought if there had been a policy, it would not have prevented them from entering the relationship in any event (A, R, L, S, T, J and SA).

L: “Ek dink nie daar moet so ‘n reël wees nie, want niemand kan sulke gevoelens vir mekaar keer nie”

Some felt that the company should have a policy that married persons should not be allowed to have extra-marital affairs at work (P).

### **3.4.4 Suggestions to improve**

It was suggested that the EAP could have been more helpful if the two parties were counselled together, A: “Om twee persone bymekaar te kry...soos ‘couple’s counselling’. Sy moet dit meer doen”.

L agreed: “Mense wat by die werk ‘n behoefte het, kan ‘couples’ saam kom praat- met mekaar kom praat.. Die maatskaplike werker kan net fisies vir hulle help as daar nou ‘n

bakleierie is of 'n stryery wat die hele afdeling gehoor het". L recommended that the social workers see couples who work together, together to defuse the conflict.

Also P suggested that couples are seen together: "... hulle word saam ingeroep en praat oor die huwelik... want kyk, om iemand te hê, soos die maatskaplike werker by die werkplek , is baie goed. Want daar is baie dinge by die huis en sommige van ons kan dit nie 'afford' om na iemand buite te gaan nie, want ons het nie daai geld nie. Om iemand soos dit by die werk te hê, gee vir jou die motivation om te kom werk".

T: " Sy kan vir hulle almal help... 'n mens is onbeskof met mekaar wanneer jy in 'n verhouding is... sy kan help om die verhouding so 'n bietjie op die pad te hou".

R and SA also suggested that the EAP continue to see both parties involved together to mediate their differences, as they had done in their own instance. They feel they had benefited from this intervention.

D: "As sy hulle saam wil inroep, dan luister altwee mos".

In summary, the participants reported that their perception of the EAP was helpful and offered an opportunity to receive counselling support and to come to terms with the breakups. Through the EAP, they could talk about their experiences and feelings in a safe and confidential environment. Furthermore, the suggestion emerged strongly that the EAP could be even more effective if the two parties are seen together by the counsellor to help them to manage the breakup in the workplace better.

It also appears that since there are already so many couples working together, for so many years, it has become part of the workplace culture and would be difficult to eradicate by means of a policy, at this stage.

### 3.5 Summary

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This chapter reviewed the answers of the participants in response to the semi-structured interview schedule in line of various themes and sub-themes. Although the participants had various and conflicting experiences and perceptions on most of the issues that arose, certain useful deductions and interpretations could be made from this information with regard to the research question. This will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion & Recommendations

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### 4.1 Introduction

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This chapter will elaborate on the conclusions, interpretation and recommendations of the research study. Answering the main research question, namely: “What are the effects of dissolved workplace romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/2013” will be used as the main framework for this chapter. It will be answered in accordance with the objectives of the study:

1. To explore the effects of dissolved romances on the *psychosocial functioning* of involved employees at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13;
2. To explore the effects of dissolved workplace romance on the *productivity* of the involved employees and their co-workers in the industrial clothing factory in Cape Town;
3. To explore the *necessity and best strategies for an EAP* in dealing with the effects of dissolved workplace romances at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town; and
4. To describe the *social phenomenon of dissolved workplace romances* from a theoretical perspective.

## 4.2 Objective One

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To explore the effects of dissolved workplace romance on the *psychosocial* functioning of the involved employees and their co-workers in the industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13.

The literature review indicated that there are potential benefits to an organisation during the stage where WR is in full bloom, i.e. increased job satisfaction, increased job involvement and organisational commitment.

Concerns arise however at the stage of relationship breakdown when a range of various risks and dangers could emerge, either to the individuals involved or to the wider organisation. Psychosocial risks relate to the psychological (meaning matters of the mind and soul, or mental matters) and social (concerning the mutual relations of human beings) aspects of something.

The literature review indicated a range of sub-themes and indicators, under this theme, namely:

1. Psychological and emotional functioning – sub-themes: Concentration levels, decision making abilities, stress levels, experience of sadness or depression, use of substances, and self-confidence levels.
2. Social functioning – subthemes: social coping, withdrawing behaviour, office gossip, conflict with colleagues, communication.
3. Retaliation violence – sub-themes: violent threats, acts or incidents, effect of violent threats or acts, negative emotional experience (fear or intimidation) and the experience of feelings such as anger or resentment.

The research study investigated these concerns by asking open-ended questions (in the semi-structured interview schedule) about the individual's internal emotional and mental worlds as well as looking at the effect on their interpersonal relationships.

#### 4.2.1 Sub-theme 1

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**Psychological and emotional functioning.** Emotional problems such as concentration difficulties, experience of stress and depression, lack of motivation and increased substance abuse can occur with the dissolution of any romantic relationship. However, as indicated in the literature review, with WR breakups, it is different in that the participants have to work together after it ended and often this continued contact worsens the emotional impact. These emotional disorders are usually not as visible as physical ailments, and could create secondary risks to the organisation such as increased absenteeism, mistakes or increased health costs.

This research study confirmed the theme that participants reported a decrease in their concentration levels since their attention was more focused on the relationship instead of on their work; they felt easily distracted and struggled to focus on their work. About half of the participants answered that they experienced difficulty in their decision making abilities.

Some participants however reported no impact on their concentration levels, or decision making abilities and some others felt relieved to keep busy at work so as to escape from their pre-occupation with their feelings about the breakup.

The research study however only measured the participants' subjective views on their own concentration levels and decision making abilities, and is not necessarily an accurate reflection of what actually occurred. This information should therefore ideally be corroborated by the experiences of the participants' colleagues and supervisors to either confirm or negate their experiences with regard to concentration and decision making.

In terms of the negative experience of stress, the research indicated that most participants reported increased levels of stress during the time of the breakup. The "stress" related to different factors, i.e. adjustment, coping with gossiping, raised anxiety

levels and having to face their ex-partner every day at work. It is significant to note that the majority of the participants felt stressed to the extent that they considered resigning their jobs.

This is interesting in view of the fact that four of the potential 15 originally listed participants in this research study had in fact resigned by the time of the interviews. One cannot necessarily deduce from that that their resignation related to the WR breakup, but one cannot ignore the possible link.

Also, with regard to the experience of sadness, the majority of participants answered affirmatively to the question whether they experienced this feeling during and after the breakup. Many participants' experiences in this regard indicate the experience was so intense it bordered on the experience of depression in that some lost interest in their personal hygiene and appearance, others had decreased energy levels or had sleeping trouble. A strong theme therefore is the experience of sadness and depression during the time of breakup which, looking at the examples that the participants provided in Chapter Three, reflected a severe negative impact on their psychosocial functioning.

The same can be said looking at the outcome of the question about participants' use of substances during the time of the breakup. The majority responded that they had increased their intake of substances. Again, this indicates confirmation of the negative impact on their psychosocial functioning by the WR dissolution.

With regard to the experience of self-confidence levels, the research reflects the theme that during and immediately after the breakup, the participants felt a knock on their self-confidence. However, looking at the impact in the longer term, most of the participants reported a sense of relief that the relationship was over (particularly if the relationship was unhappy), with an increase in confidence levels in general.

One can therefore deduce that WR dissolutions can have a negative impact on participant's self-esteem levels at the beginning stage when emotions run high, but the longer term impact on psychosocial functioning actually looks positive.

The researcher deliberately asked the next question ("what was their most difficult experience of the breakup?") to probe whether or not the breakup was particularly challenging because of the public nature of it being in the workplace. Some respondents answered affirmatively in this regard, indicating that it was particularly hard to see each other every day. Most respondents answered that the most difficult experience was the negative effect on the children.

However, it must be mentioned that another main theme emerged in the sense that the majority of the participants' relationships (six out of the nine sampled) in fact broke up due to the interference of a third (female) party, also a work colleague, on site. This had complicated the breakups to the extent that they experienced double the exposure and humiliation since not only the breakup, but also the establishment of a new WR by the male party, occurred in the public domain.

This is significant in the sense that it possibly indicates that the particular work environment of the clothing factory in question is a 'hot' environment: it seems to foster the formation of romantic relationships at work. Furthermore, the employees mostly reside in the same residential communities and often socialise at home as well.

This finding reflects the theory of Mano and Gabriel (2006) (as discussed in Chapter One) who found that the development of WRs depends a lot on the "organisational climate", and that WRs are more likely to emerge in "hot" climates where work arrangements foster contact outside work and where organisational policies do not punish participants in WR (which is also relevant to this specific environment).

Proposing the existence of a 'hot climate' in this instance, makes further sense looking at the demography of the employees: the majority (1400) of the 1600 total employees

are female, and also the majority are single or divorced females. It appears therefore that for male employees, there are ample opportunities for multiple WRs simply due to the sheer availability of females.

The conclusion about the first group of questions about the theme ‘negative impact on psychological and emotional functioning, is not clear-cut or consistent. Different participants had different and unique emotional experiences and the impact on their functioning varied from time to time and from individual to individual.

However, on the whole and looking at the responses and themes in general, the findings of the literature review are confirmed to the effect that the general psychological and emotional functioning of individuals involved in WRs is negatively affected. In general, the breakups resulted in decreased concentration levels, decreased decision making abilities, increased stress, sadness and depression levels, increased use of substances and at least immediately after the breakup, decreased self-confidence levels.

#### **4.2.2 Sub-theme 2**

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**Social functioning.** The literature review lists other possible risks of WRs of a social nature, for example problems with co-worker relations. In this research study, this matter was investigated under the social functioning indicators of social coping, withdrawing behaviour, experience of office gossip, conflict with colleagues, and communication with colleagues.

Looking at the various responses to how the participants coped socially during and after the breakup, it appears that most of them had some sort of difficulty in coping socially. A sense of isolation and decreased levels of socialising emerged as a theme and a general experience of participants.

A clear theme emerged from the responses of participants to the question “Did you feel like withdrawing from your colleagues at work”. They answered affirmatively in this

regard and reported that they had to take a few days up to a week off from work to withdraw from the workplace. They also reported withdrawing behaviour at work, for example avoiding colleagues during breaks.

Office gossip was a common experience by the participants. Some of the participants reported that they were unaffected by the gossip, whilst the rest, and majority, experienced office gossip rather negatively. It created a sense of humiliation, sadness, tension or lack of comfort in the working atmosphere. The participants' perceptions of the workplace were therefore negatively affected by their experience of office gossip, even to the extent that they developed resistance to coming to work and needed to withdraw from the workplace, as described above.

Another theme experienced by the participants was increased levels of conflict with their colleagues at work. Looking at the responses and examples provided in Chapter Three in this regard, feelings such as irritability, anger, impatience, quarrelsomeness, rudeness and unfriendliness were reported. All of these feelings are conflict related and had, or were likely to have, a negative impact on their level of social functioning at work. With regard to the question of communication (Did you communicate with someone at work about the breakup feelings? If so, describe in what way such communication was helpful or not?), answers generated in this regard refer more to the EAP (last question) and will be discussed as such.

In summary, appreciating the different and often conflicting experiences of participants with regard to the theme social functioning, it can be deduced that the experience of the breakup of the WR generally had a negative effect. The participants' social coping skills were affected in some way or another, and most of them experienced withdrawing behaviour; office gossip was a huge issue for them; and an increase in conflict with work colleagues was reported.

### 4.2.3 Sub-theme 3

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**Retaliation violence.** There is consensus in the literature that disruptive dissolutions of WR have a high potential of risk for an organisation in the sense that they might result in retaliation violence on the work premises, and as such affect participants' and their co-workers' job performance. This may get worse when one of the parties feels vindictive, angry or resentful.

This research investigated the occurrence of retaliation violence and associated negative feelings under the indicators of violent threats, acts or incidents; effect of violent threats or acts; negative emotional experience (fear or intimidation) and the experience of feelings such as anger or resentment.

The occurrence of violent threats, acts or incidents at work following the breakups was a definitive theme. Four female participants shared that they approached their ex-partners at work in an intimidating or verbally violent manner. One said that she physically hit her ex-partner at his machine. Another incident was more serious, involving the woman physically and verbally being assaulted by her ex-partner at her work desk.

The participants who were on the receiving end of such violent threats or acts responded that they usually reacted by avoiding or walking away from their ex-partner. Some felt embarrassed about it, some felt uncomfortable, but the majority struggled with feelings of anger and resentment against their ex-partners.

These negative emotional experiences sometimes resulted in malicious intent towards those around them, for example increased levels of irritability towards their colleagues or supervisors. Financial disagreements between ex-partners in particular were one of the primary reasons for this negativity.

In summary: the study indicates that the occurrence of retaliation violence, with the associated negative feelings such as anger, resentment and fear, was commonplace.

This confirms the suggestion by the literature review that retaliation violence counts as a major potential risk to the organisation when WRs dissolve.

This finding is significant and points out an irony in that the organisation prohibits family members or partners of employees to enter the ground on the basis that it has been identified as a safety risk. However, there is no policy or measures in place to consider the risks of employee family members or partners who are working together who poses a similar potential risk to each other's safety.

The outcome with regard to the first objective, namely to explore the negative effects of dissolved workplace romance on the *psychosocial* functioning of the involved employees and their co-workers in the industrial clothing factory in Cape Town in 2012/13, was therefore achieved by means of confirming the possible indicators as identified by the literature review.

#### **4.3 Objective 2**

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To explore the effects of dissolved workplace romance on the **productivity** of the involved employees and their co-workers in the industrial clothing factory in Cape Town. The literature review identified a few possible indicators of productivity that could be affected adversely by WR breakups. These include looking at any changes in usual level of work functioning, absenteeism, and levels of motivation and commitment at work.

The study indicated mixed results with regard to participants' responses whether or not the breakup had any impact on their usual level of work functioning. Half of the participants answered it had a negative impact, the other half answered it had no impact whatsoever and one answered she actually worked harder to compensate for the lack of trust her colleagues had had in her.

With regard to the question how the breakups affected their attendance, all the participants shared that their attendance had been negatively affected, ranging from

being absent a few days up to a week or more. They usually listed it as “sick leave”, and say they took the leave either because of their need to withdraw temporarily from the workplace, or to attend to court cases resulting from the breakup.

The last productivity indictor that was investigated was how the participants perceived their level of motivation and commitment towards their work. A main theme was the experience that it had a negative impact and they gave examples of how hard it was for them during that time to continue as normal. Having had children to care for was the main reason why participants were motivated to carry on with their work.

In summary: The research suggest the theme that productivity indicators such as level of work functioning, attendance and level of work motivation and commitment were in general affected detrimentally and as such it is clear that WR breakups can have a potentially negative effect on productivity.

A limitation in this regard is that the study measured the participants' subjective perceptions in this regard. Ideally, this should have been corroborated by a more objective measurement such as attendance statistics, production rates and supervisor's experiences in order to give a more accurate reflection.

#### **4.4 Objective 3**

The third objective was to explore the **necessity and best strategies for an EAP** in dealing with the effects of dissolved workplace romances at an industrial clothing factory in Cape Town.

This was done in terms of the outcome of the specific effects of dissolved romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees, identified by this study. As summarised earlier, the study identified various indicators of psychosocial functioning that are detrimentally affected by the breakup of WRs such as concentration and decision making abilities; stress levels, sadness and depression feelings; increased use of substances and negative impact on self-esteem.

Furthermore, individuals' social functioning was also affected negatively in the sense that they struggled to cope with office gossip, experienced increased conflict with colleagues and tended to withdraw from their colleagues during this time. The occurrence of retaliation violence such as violent threats, acts or incidents with associated negative emotional experiences such as fear, intimidation, anger and resentment has also been confirmed by this study. Productivity is also affected in that it may result in changes in usual level of work functioning, increased absenteeism and lack of motivation and commitment towards work.

In view of above risks to the individuals involved, as well as to the organisation at large, it is imperative that the company respond pro-actively so as to avoid further escalation and further costs. Besides more formal company involvement measures such as a disciplinary recourse, the company could also respond by means of a counselling policy, which was already in place by offering the EAP service to all employees.

The study indicates that the majority of participants utilised the EAP service during or after the breakup, mostly referring themselves. Their feedback on whether or not their expectations were met by the service was mainly positive, confirming the EAP provided them with an opportunity to talk about it and as such helping them to come to terms with the situation.

Looking at their responses under the heading 'communication' earlier in the study, most participants reported that communicating openly with their colleagues at work, be it either a few trusted friends, their supervisor or the EAP social worker, was experienced as helpful.

Most participants were unaware of any company policies that could prohibit WR, and most felt even if there had been a policy, it would not have been regarded as a deterring factor, and therefore they did not favour this as a suggested management intervention. One participant suggested that there should be a policy prohibiting extra-marital affairs,

which makes sense in view of the literature review (Pierce & Aguinis, 2009:453), where it is suggested that these relationships are regarded as unethical and could pose a potential risk to the company.

Asking participants to make suggestions on how to improve the existing EAP in order to better respond to similar predicaments in future, a common suggestion made by the majority was that the EAP should counsel the parties together to defuse the conflict, to do couple's counselling, to talk about what had happened, to help with implementing boundaries and to mediate differences in a peaceful manner.

The participants who were on the receiving end of mediating interventions by the EAP gave positive feedback on this and suggested that this be more often repeated in similar situations.

In summary, it appears that the EAP was perceived as a helpful opportunity to affected employees to offer counselling support to come to terms with the breakups at the time. The chance to talk about their feelings and vent in a professional and confidential environment was experienced positively. Furthermore, it was clearly suggested by the majority of participants, that the EAP could be even more effective if the two parties were seen together by the counsellor to address the various issues that emerged during the breakup in a constructive set up.

#### **4.5 Objective 4**

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The fourth objective of the study, was achieved in Chapter Two, the literature review, namely:

To describe the *social phenomenon of dissolved workplace romances* from a theoretical perspective and to put it in the context of the broader debate in this field. The shortcomings in the existing literature and research were indicated. This study attempted to address some of the shortcomings by focusing on a local, South African industrial factory set up instead of on a corporate set up, as usually done in American or

European studies. Furthermore, it looked at semi-schooled workers' experiences as opposed to schooled or professional employees' experiences.

#### **4.6 Suggestions for further research**

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Considering the limitations of the study (refer Chapter One), it would be of academic value to reflect on the outcome of a research study focusing on the comparison of participants' supervisors and colleagues' responses to the same indicators. Another suggestion is that a mixed method research strategy should be applied to incorporate qualitative findings on the participants' production statistics for a more objective angle of comparison. These steps would possibly produce even richer information as they may bring about more neutrality and objectivity as opposed to the subjective approach of the study.

Another suggestion would be to look at the closed EAP case files of the participants and to do a record analysis of what interventions were provided and whether or not they resulted in a defusing of conflict at work. This could possibly shed more light on possible EAP intervention strategies to deal with similar situations in future.

A disturbing outcome of this research study is the high occurrence of retaliation violence on work premises and the resulting costs to the company by having to deal with it by means of disciplinary recourse and applying the workplace violence policy. Further research in this regard could be helpful, for example if the company looked at the number of disciplinary hearings due to workplace violence, and linked them with retaliation violence due to WR breakups. Perhaps the company would then acknowledge the importance of identifying high risk individuals early on and referring them to the EAP for mediation, and to implement some interpersonal boundaries to prevent any future occurrence of workplace violence.

A last suggestion is to do further research on the potential value of mediation interventions, as part of the EAP, to defuse and manage situations of interpersonal conflict in the workplace (such as WRs that have broken down).

Mediation was defined in Chapter One as a voluntary, confidential process where an impartial third party mediates between parties to reach mutual agreement on matters of dispute. The underlying principle is self-determination and the creation of a future working relationship with the other party (Folberg, Milne & Salem, 2004:262).

It appears that mediation according to this definition, is definitely valuable and relevant in terms of the context of this study. It could provide a platform for the involved parties to settle their disputes in a structured manner and help them to create a working relationship with appropriate and safe boundaries.

In various fields, mediation is a growing trend, i.e. in the social work field, legal field and labour field. For example, in divorce matters, mediation is being recognised and utilised by legal and social work professionals as a means of diverting the conflict away from litigation, and a means to help the family resolve their conflict by mutual agreement. Similarly, in the workplace, mediation can play a larger role to prevent interpersonal conflict escalating to the disciplinary domain, or to the arbitration domain, by addressing the conflict in a non-disciplinary (and perhaps non-threatening) environment instead.

Furthermore, mediation is potentially empowering in the sense that the participants are in control of making their own agreements, instead of decisions being made for them by management or HR. By nature mediation is therefore participatory which could in turn account for better self-responsibility and accountability in any agreements made by the involved parties (meaning better than top-down management decisions).

In the researcher's view, mediation could therefore by nature play a large role in managing the interpersonal conflict between parties involved in dissolved WRs to prevent an escalation to the extent of manifesting in psycho-social functioning disturbances, workplace violence, absenteeism or productivity issues.

Mediation could potentially help the employees to develop boundaries to their interaction at work so as to avoid situations where they could be tempted to respond to each other in a degrading or violent, even if only verbally, manner. It could therefore be a protective measure for both the employees as well as the company in that it could protect the individuals from entering conflictual situations, and protect the company from the occurrence of workplace violence or the impact of negative psycho-social functioning on the productivity of employees.

Mediation per se as suggested intervention strategy in the problematic breakup of WRs was not specifically or elaborately tested in this research study as it was not included in the interview schedule, neither was the meaning of it explained to the participants. However, judging from the participants' responses, the underlying concept of mediation was reflected as a need and suggestion for the EAP to improve effective engagement in similar situations. Further research on the subject of mediation as EAP intervention strategy may therefore be valuable.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

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In the researcher's opinion, this study confirms the overall negative effect of the breakdown of WRs on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees in the workplace. Furthermore, it gives direction as to how the EAP could best respond to this type of interpersonal conflict situation in the workplace, i.e. by means of mediation. The researcher's view is that mediation should be acknowledged and regarded as a primary means of intervention by companies' EAPs to respond to WRs that breakdown so as to pro-actively protect the individuals involved as well as the company at large from possible escalation of negative outcomes.

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## Annexure A: Interview Schedule

Note: The first question after each theme will be asked, and where necessary to explore for more information, the more specific probing questions (bulleted) will be used.

### Personal Profile

Age:

Gender:

Home language:

Highest level of education:

Job description:

### Relationship Profile

How long have you been in a workplace romance (WR)?

How long ago have the relationship dissolved?

Did you and your past partner (WR) cohabited?

Were you and your past partner more or less on equal work levels or was one of you in a superior position over the other?

Was the breakup amicable or conflictual?

### Main Themes

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#### 1. Psycho-Social functioning

##### **1.1 Psychological / Emotional functioning indicators:**

Describe how you have coped emotionally during and after the breakup

- What was your level of concentration at work like?
- Could you easily make decisions at work or not, give an example?

- What were your stress levels like during that time?
- Did you experience feelings of sadness or depression? If so, please elaborate.
- Did you increase your intake of substances like alcohol or drugs during that time, if so, describe.
- Did you feel more confident after the break-up or did you feel insecure. If so, please elaborate?
- What was the most difficult matter for you to come to terms with after the break-up?

## 1.2 Social functioning indicators

Describe how you coped socially during and after the breakup

- Did you feel like withdrawing from your colleagues at work. If so, please elaborate?
- Describe if there was any office gossip about the breakup that made you feel uncomfortable?
- Were you involved in conflict with colleagues more often during the breakup phase? Please elaborate.
- Did you communicate with someone at work about the breakup's resulting feelings? If so, describe in what way such communication was helpful or not?

## 1.3 Retaliation Violence indicators

Describe if, and how your partner acted, or threatened to act violently towards you at work during or after the breakup

- What was the effect of such threats on you?
- Describe if you ever experienced negative emotions at work - such as fear for or feelings of intimidation by your ex-partner?

- Describe if you ever experienced feelings such as anger or resentment towards your ex-partner?
- Describe any incidents at work when you and your ex-partner were in conflict.
- Was there any time when you felt unsafe at work during or after the breakup, and if so, describe?

## 2. Productivity indicators

Would you say that the breakup affected your usual level of productivity or work functioning at the time? If so, please elaborate?

- Was there an increase or decrease in your attendance / absenteeism from work during or after the breakup, please describe.
- Did you make more or unusual mistakes at work than usually during the time of the breakup? Describe or give an example.
- Describe your level of work motivation and commitment to the job during that time, i.e. did you feel motivated when coming to work in the mornings?

## 3. EAP Intervention strategies

- You have made use of the EAP services during or after the time of the breakup. Please indicate how you have been referred to the EAP.
- Had the EAP intervention met your expectations? Elaborate why/why not.
- Would company policy on workplace romances have had any benefits for you? Elaborate.
- Would you have preferred that the company or EAP had no involvement whatsoever in relation to the situation? Motivate why.
- Do you have any suggestions how the EAP could have been more helpful in the situation?

## 4. Anything else that you wish to share about the WR or the breakup?

## Annexure B: Informed Consent Letter



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Social Work & Criminology

01/03/2012

Our Ref: Prof L S Terblanche/10474740  
Tel. 420-3292  
Fax. 420-2093  
Email: [lourie.terblanche@up.ac.za](mailto:lourie.terblanche@up.ac.za)

### **Informed Consent Letter**

Researcher: Hendrika Verhoef  
Student no: 10474740  
Contact details: PEP Clothing, 36 Stellenberg Street, Parow East  
Tel: 084 7000 764 W: 021 937 2794

Dear Participant,

You are requested to participate in a research study conducted by Hendrika Verhoef from the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria, for purposes of a Masters mini-thesis towards the MSW EAP programme.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you fulfil the criteria for possible participants, in that you present with the phenomenon which is the focus of the study.

#### **1. Title**

The title of the study is: "Dissolved workplace romances and the psychosocial functioning and productivity of employees".

#### **2. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to explore the effect of dissolved workplace romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of employees.

#### **3. Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following:

- You will be requested to meet with the researcher for a personal interview in her office at the workplace.
- You will be requested to sign a consent form indicating your willingness to participate. The semi-structured interview will take approximately one hour, during which the researcher will ask you questions about the topic under discussion.

- The interview will consist of some open-ended questions but you will get the opportunity to tell your story in your own time and words.
- After the interview, if you so wish, or if it is necessary, we may meet again in order for me to clarify any gaps of information and to make sure that I represented your story accurately.
- I will be taking brief notes during the interview to help me remember what was said. The interview will also be audio taped for further analysis.

#### **4. Potential Risks and Discomforts**

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Due to the sensitive and personal nature of the topic, you may be reminded of painful past experiences during the interview and subsequently feel uncomfortable or sad. I will attempt to reduce this potential harm to you by applying professional and sensitive interview and communication skills and allowing you to share only what you are comfortable with.

You may refuse to answer those questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. I will not probe you to share any information beyond your ability or willingness. I can also refer you on for professional debriefing to the other social worker on site if you should wish to be debriefed after the interview.

#### **5. Potential Benefits**

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You will not receive financial remuneration for your participation. There is the possibility that you may benefit from talking about your past experiences and in the process find relief.

#### **6. Participants' Rights**

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You have the right to decide if you want to participate in this study or not as participation is completely voluntary. You will be asked to sign this letter to indicate your informed consent to participate in the study. You have the right to withdraw from participation at any time before or during the interview and without any negative consequences. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

#### **7. Confidentiality**

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Your right to privacy will be protected by the researcher who will not discuss the shared content of interviews of anyone at the organisation. You can be assured that all information will be treated confidentially and that the data would be destroyed should you wish to withdraw. The persons who will have access to the research data are for example the student supervisor, academic panel, and not anybody within the organisation.

#### **8. Access to the Researcher**

---

As a participant to this study, you are welcome to approach the researcher during office hours if you require further clarity on the issue should doubts arise.

#### **9. Data Storage**

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Data will be stored for a minimum of 15 years at the University of Pretoria, according to the policy of the institution.

**Signature of Research Participant**

The information above was described by me by Hendrika Verhoef in Afrikaans/ English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction/

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

---

**Name of Participant**

---

**Signature of Participant**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature of Researcher**

I declare that I explained the information in this document to ..... (Name of Participant).

He/She was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans/ English, and no translator was used.

---

**Name of Researcher**

---

**Signature of Researcher**

---

**Place**

---

**Date**

---

## Annexure C: Permission letter



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Social Work & Criminology

12/09/2011

Our Ref: Prof L S Terblanche/10474740  
Tel. 420-3292  
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Ref: Student: Hennie Verhoef  
Tel. 084 7000 764  
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The General Manager  
Ms. Marthie Kemp van der Werf  
PEP Clothing  
36 Stellenberg Road  
PO Box 1027  
Parow East  
7500

Dear Ms Kemp van der Werf

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO PERFORM EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**  
**MS H P VERHOEF STUDENT NUMBER 10474740**

The above-named student is registered for the following programme at the Department of Social Work, University of Pretoria: MSW (EAP).

The student is required to write a mini-dissertation, resulting from a research project, under my supervision. The research will only proceed once a departmental Research Panel and the Faculty Research Proposal and Ethics Committee has approved the proposal and data collection instrument(s). The following information from the research proposal is shared with you, although a copy of the research proposal will be provided to you if needed:

The envisaged title of the study is: Dissolved workplace romances and the psychosocial functioning of employees in the workplace.

The goal of this research is exploratory in nature, thus to explore the effect of dissolved workplace romances on the psychosocial functioning of employees in the workplace. Furthermore, the study will explore strategies by the EAP to manage this occurrence effectively.

The objectives of the study are:

- To describe the social phenomenon of dissolved workplace romances, from a theoretical perspective

- To explore the prevalence of dissolved workplace romances in a specific company
- To explore the effects of the dissolving of workplace romance on the company
- To explore the effects of dissolved workplace romance on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of the involved employees
- To explore the role of the EAP in addressing workplace romance as a phenomenon, both proactively and reactively
- To formulate recommendations regarding the management of the phenomenon of workplace romance from an EAP perspective.

The "research population" in the context of the envisaged study refer to all the employees included in both the open and closed caseloads of the social workers, previously registered for the breakdown of a romantic relationship with a colleague. The target sample would consist of a subset of 12- 15 individuals on the closed EAP caseload who were selected to participate in the study.

A second target group will consist of five line managers of the different production units, who will be interviewed to obtain their views on their experiences in this regard.

The student wishes to do the empirical part of the study through means of:

- A personal interview according to a semi-structured schedule with clients/social workers/employees from your organization as stipulated above AND
- Documentation (social work case files) being studied and analysed.

This request may result in the practical assistance from your staff in identifying, visiting, obtaining permission from the clients prior to the actual survey.

The following costs will be incurred by this request: Copy and printing costs of anything related to the research i.e. interview schedules, research drafts and data collection – which will be carried by the researcher.

Possible benefits for your organization can be summarised as follows:

- Research and information about a phenomenon that may affect productivity adversely
- Research and information about how conflict management in the workplace – as it is dealt with in the instance of the research title - is currently being dealt with
- Suggestions how the EAP can effectively respond to relational conflict situations in the workplace.

The student undertakes responsibility to provide you with a copy of the final report – if required. It would be appreciated if you will seriously consider to grant permission to the student to proceed with the project, at your earliest convenience.

Regards



PROF L S TERBLANCHE  
SUPERVISOR

Approved.



M. Kemp - V. D. WERF  
21 SEPTEMBER 2014

## Annexure D: Ethical Clearance



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities  
Research Ethics Committee

13 December 2012

Dear Prof Lombard

**Project:** The effect of dissolved workplace romances on the psychosocial functioning and productivity of involved employees  
**Researcher:** HP Verhoef  
**Supervisor:** Prof LS Terblanche  
**Department:** Social Work and Criminology  
**Reference number:**

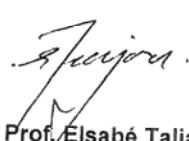
Thank you for your response to the Committee's letter of 31 October 2012.

I have pleasure in informing you that the Research Ethics Committee formally approved the above study at an *ad hoc* meeting held on 12 December 2012. Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should your actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely



Prof. Elsabé Taljard  
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Research Ethics Committee Members: Dr L Blokland; Prof M-H Coetzee; Dr JEH Grobler; Prof KI Harris; Mr H Klonow; Prof A Mbembe; Dr C