

TEACHING MATERIALS: ROLE PLAY SIMULATION ON ROMANTIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

Romantic involvements in the workplace remain a persistent issue for businesses. They may escalate into sexual or moral harassment. Developing new negotiation strategies to address such cases would help to prevent millions spent annually with lawsuits and litigations. Therefore, this case presents teaching solutions designed to manage conflicts in the workplace, through a two-party role play simulation, along with detailed instructions and teaching notes. It is based on a true case of a romantic relationship in the workplace. It demonstrates that workplace romance is a topic on which much theoretical and empirical research is utmost relevant. The role play simulation is designed to: (a) provide negotiation teachers with educational tools and new insights about how to deal with sexual and moral harassment in the workplace; (b) to enhance students' skills on mutual gains on dealing with difficult conversations, emotional control, consensus building and (c) to provoke debates in classroom regarding the issues under research. Discussion and future research complete the present work.

KEYWORDS: Romantic involvement, workplace, conflict management

1. INTRODUCTION

Is it all just about sex? An extramarital affair, a dalliance, or even a solid relationship that was born in the workplace? How do the parties involved, would react? Usually, co-workers tend to avoid love relationships in the office. However, when faced with such cases, how do negotiators should behave? How to manage this conflict?

Conflict is a Latin word *conflictus*, meaning to 'strike together', (Conflict [Def. 1]. 2013). A conflict also means 'competitive or opposing action of incompatibles (Conflict [Def.2], 2013), which is part of life. Ideas, perceptions, interests may diverge and turn into a conflict. Keep the focus on positions not interests are possible causes of conflict (Fisher, Ury and Patton, 1981), as: 'each may believe that he or she is firmly in the right' (Ury, 1999, p. 4) Conflict affects 'all tactical and strategic choice' (Lax and Sebenius, 1986, p.30). According to Ury 'the biggest destroyer of relationships is our habit of failing into fights. The dance of the destructive conflict is all too familiar whether two children are quarreling over a toy (...) or two ethnic groups over territory' (Ury, 1999, p. XV).

On the other hand, romance is an engaging topic. It does not always end well, as was the classic case of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Since ordinary people are surrounded for love on a daily basis, it is natural that the pursuit of love, even in restricted environments such as the workplace, is pursued, and a powerful motivation for people's lives. According to Powell & Foley (1998), "Workplace romances have important work-related implications for the two participants, coworkers, supervisors, and the organization as a whole" (p.421).

Salvaggio, Streich, Hopper, & Pierce (2011), investigated which factors were associated with the incidence of workplace romance, through two web-based survey studies. In total, they investigated N=177 employees. Their conclusion suggests that " the work context is associated with the incidence of workplace romance" (p.906). Nevertheless, romances end not so well. Pierce et al. (2004)

investigated when romances end in harassment and the effects of a dissolved romance in the workplace, and how it affected their decision-making processes. The conclusions suggest both professional and personal relationship rupture and other legal consequences, such as lawsuits.

This subject is addressed here through a two-party role play simulation (see the Appendix I for a full set of instructions). The following objectives: (a) to provide room for in-class debates, especially designed for Negotiation and Mediation training programs, MBAs, graduation courses in general (when applicable), extension courses, in-company assessments; (b) to assist professors, practitioners, managers, students, employers, employees, co-workers, on how deal with strong emotional displays, and to gain deeper insights on the subject, as well as how to deal with them in real life scenarios. Role play simulations have been studied and applied for different business scenarios: distributive e-business negotiation (Dias & Duzert, 2017; Dias, 2018, 2008); non-market forces (Dias & Navarro, 2018); social mediation cases (Dias & Teles, 2018); public agents (Dias, 2018); generational interactions (Aylmer & Dias, 2018); governmental relations (Dias & Navarro, 2017), retail businesses (Dias, M et al., 2015).

2.METHODS

This study is a qualitative, inductive, based on direct observation, and qualitative interviews. Two interviews were performed, in which interviewees were invited face-to-face, with 100 percent rate response. The sample chosen was purposive and convenient, since the case occurred with two students-co-workers, and now husband and wife, which agreed in participate in this research but, for professional reasons, did not allow disclosure information formally, and therefore, their identities are here preserved.

The interviews were held at Betim, Minas Gerais, on August 2016, and took approximately 45 minutes, each, conducted separately. Primary data were audio recorded, and later coded into the process and InVivo codings, Further text analysis was applied to investigate the case reported. This study is supported by Karpman's drama triangle (Karpman, 1968), rooted in Berne's (Berne, 1961) transactional theory. Role play simulations are supported by Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959, 1961).

3.BACKGROUND

This case is based on a real situation that occurred in the city of Betim, Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazilian region, in 2012. The identities were preserved because the involved are married, and working currently in the same workplace, and their boss is the best man of the couple. They work in a multinational company, which identity was preserved too. This particular case was chosen due to the hundreds of similar cases related to past studies (for instance, the Salvaggio mentioned above, Streich, Hopper, & Pierce, 2011).

He Hereafter the couple will be addressed as John and Monique, and their boss Paulie (fictitious names). John was the best salesman in the department and was married when he met Monique, his assistant, at the office. They fell in love in the work national convention and decided to keep their involvement into a secret, because of the company's compliance strict rules on romantic involvements.

After one month of deep involvement, John and Monique were experiencing downturns in their professional performance. The situation lasted for approximately six months when the couple decided to make official their engagement. John got divorced, and after six months, they got married Monique at Minas Gerais state, where they currently live and work together.

4.ROLE PLAY SIMULATION

4.1 Karpman Drama triangle

This role play simulation is inspired by the drama triangle model (Karpman, 1968), composed of three roles: (a) victim, (b) rescuer, and (c) persecutor. Karpman stated that people tend to perform and to alternate these roles in a conflict.

In this model, the victim (a) feels powerless, oppressed, victimized. The prosecutor (b) is the villain, controller, authoritative, rigid, too much critical, and arrogant. The rescuer (c) has an intriguing role since Karpman (1968) says that the rescuer is someone who wants to help the victim. According to Karpman (1968), the rescuer produces two adverse effects: (i) keeps the victim dependent and unable to take their own decisions and (ii) while focusing their energies on someone else, deviates from their own primary needs, such as anxieties, problems, etc. Karpman also says that these roles can be interchangeable, the prosecutor may become victim and vice versa. Initially, the drama triangle starts when a victim and a prosecutor assume their roles. Then, someone who wants to help appears, the rescuer. The victim might turn on the rescuer, and the rescuer then turns into persecuting (Karpman, 1968).

This teaching material was originally conceived for two players. However, a third party can be added, if necessary. A mediator could be added to this scenario, depending on the class objectives or type of course. If the mediation skills are part of the syllabus, it can be adjusted to fit the new class model. In real life scenarios, the boss (Paulie) would call the employee (John) to a private conversation, with no mediator. If things tend to escalate, a mediator is called (sometimes a person from the Human Resources department or an outsourced mediator, or the company owner may assume this position). In this sense, the facilitator should clarify both parties that this is the first meeting on the subject, recently discovered by Paulie (see Appendix II). However, there does not impede the use of a third party since the beginning of the exercise.

4.2 Mechanics of the role play simulation

This "rescue and victim" exercise gathers two different parties, one seller and his boss (parties can be changed from male to female and vice-versa, depending on the facilitator's objectives), with one convergent issue, the issue romantic involvement of co-workers in the workplace. Consequently, each group has two participants (three, if the mediator is added).

There are no limits regarding the number of groups in-classroom, however, experience showed that above 20-25 groups per facilitator it is hard to handle.

4.3 Settings and materials

First, the facilitator will divide the classroom into groups of two students each. Then, each group receives their printed roles: (a) John, or (b) Paulie (see the Appendix II)

4.4 Briefing

The facilitator begins the exercise briefing the groups about the nature and importance of emotions in negotiations, regarding the romantic involvement in the workplace. When applied in class, in almost 80 percent of the times that this exercise was conducted, spontaneous testimonies have emerged from the students, reporting similar cases. Note that this case was developed for Brazilian students, and the results here presented are limited to this particular country. Different countries should behave accordingly to their traditions and local culture.

Then, the facilitator mentions the importance of developing skills that will be useful in real life scenarios, since the relevance of romantic involvement in daily lives and that no one is free from this kind of involvement, no matter the scenario or workplace. Historically, there are examples of professionals who lived and died for their romantic involvements; some ended into sexual or moral harassment. Nevertheless, it is an excellent measure to anticipate the students' possibilities they may face shortly, as managers, or co-workers. Some companies may be more complacent than others with this subject; others were more rigid to their compliance norms. The next step is distributing confidential information, where parties receive their roles.

4.5 During the exercise

Usually, 10-20 minute reading and preparation are recommended. The instructions are very simple, take one reading page each party. The facilitator should encourage preparation before negotiation.

4.6 Debriefing

After 45-60 minutes discussion, or when the debates tend to move to other subjects, different from the exercise, the facilitator should interrupt the case, to start debriefing. Some facilitators like the students going into the whiteboard to write their deals (with the advantage that all students are invited to share and see all results). The total exercise time should not overpass 90-120 min, within a class with 40 participants. The facilitator should start the debates in class. Usually, some students are distraught with their parties. In this case, a break should be taken as a matter of calming down or soothe most exalted students.

5. RESULTS

The role-play simulation Monique was applied in 16 different classes with 40 students each, from January 2017 to December 2018. In total, N=640 students (representing 320 groups of two students each), have participated from this exercise, in different regions from Brazil. This exercise was applied only for MBA programs, for Negotiation and Conflict Management courses, in 100 percent of cases.

The average of agreements was 89 percent in total. On 11 percent of the cases, John and Monique were both fired without a second chance second for redemption.

Out of the 89 percent agreements, 12 percent included the termination contract for Monique, only, while keeping John in his position. The reason pointed was that John is the best salesman in the company and Monique s a distraction for him to deal. The students were 60 percent male, and 40 percent female.

Interesting to report that 100 percent of the termination for Monique's contract came from female students. Some justified as being her a distraction not for him only, but to other co-workers. In Curitiba state, southern Brazil, 22 percent of the Monique were fired, under the same justification.

he case provided an excellent opportunity to put in practice value creation. In the majority of successful cases (89 percent deal), a good number of actions were proposed. They are not restricted to: (i) n vacation days for John to think about his life and to come back as a renewed person (John solves his issues with no external help); (ii) psychological monitoring for one or both (John and/or Monique receive professional help); (iii) 25 percent of the agreements allowed the romantic involvement, if and only if, John's performance should improve in a given period; (iv) 100 percent of the agreements included a period for John to recover his performance, three months minimum, six months maximum period. After that, a new assessment would conducted; (v) in 100 percent of the agreements, it was recommended to John and Monique to strongly avoid romantic displays in the workplace.

Finally, 95 percent of the overall students evaluated this exercise as a constructive experience for their careers.

6. DISCUSSION

Acey Choy (1990) provided a therapeutical model, designed to show patients how to deal with social transactions. It was created the Winner's Triangle. Opposed to the drama triangle, instead of a victim, anyone should describe as being vulnerable. It is a subtle but necessary shift of perception. Instead of a persecutor, assertive and instead of rescuer, caring. Emerald (2009), gave another perspective, renaming the victim adopting an alternative, but essential shift to acting as a creator, the persecutor as a challenger, and the rescuer aa a coach.

In the debriefing session, the facilitator could orient students to abandon the role of victim, and shift their role from problem-oriented to solution-oriented. This change of perspective allows students to focus not on the problem, but in alternative ways to solve a problem.

For the persecutor, the facilitator is advised to orient students to challenge the creator into a solution, not pointing a finger with displays of anger. Those who point fingers are also responsible for pointing solutions as well. Otherwise, it is useless the intervention of a mere persecutor.

For the rescuer, Emerald (2009) indicates a shift of perception into a problem solver, into a coach. The difference between them is that sees the creators capable of envision their solutions and to pursue them. A coach here could be substituted for a Mediator.

Finally, in such a complex scenario, negotiators should be patient and act with caution. First, it is mandatory to avoid any criticism, jokes, cynicism, and actively refrain from gossip. Second, focus on the winner's triangle (Choy, 1990; Emerald, 2009), instead of the drama one (Karpma, 1968). Third, separate people from the problem (Fisher, Ury, and Patton, 1991), and learn how to deal with angry people, following Susskid et al. (1999). Finally, learn how to negotiate with the non-negotiable, especially on a charged conflict as facing the consequences of romantic involvements in the workplace (Shapiro, 2016).

7. FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

The results shown were valid to the Brazilian audience. Students 60 percent males, 40 percent females, the average age of 35 years old, 100 percent participating in MBA programs, 90 percent employed. Out of the employed students, 80 percent worked in a company, 20 percent were owners. Sixty percent low-level managers, 20 percent middle-level managers, and 20 percent top-level managers. From these N=640 students, 55 percent married, 60 percent white/Caucasian students, 10 percent Afro-American students, 30 percent pardos (nor white, neither Afro-American) students, 0 percent Indian students.

In other countries, the students may behave differently, as well as other scenarios. For instance, within a company, the results might be different than outside it given the Hawthorne effect. In the classroom, outside the company, the students showed more comfortable in discussing these subjects than in other scenarios freely, as reported.

For future research, it is encouraged quantitative analysis of the case, especially regarding the impact on the students' professional careers, and future insights and assessments.

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APPENDIX I

Teaching notes

Role play simulation: domain.com.br

SCENARIO: this role-play simulation illustrates a distributive negotiation conducted between two parties,

MAJOR THEMES:

This case was developed based on psychological games of *rescue and victim*. By gaining awareness of the archetypes, participants become more sensitive to analogous situations, many of them occurring in real life in ongoing situations. This case was developed to prepare students for real-case scenario situations, where emotional displays are anticipated due to embarrassing situations.

This case provides an excellent opportunity to practice skills in dealing with difficult conversations.

MECHANICS: This is an exercise that brings together two parties, the employee (John) and his boss (Paulie). Usually, fifteen-minute reading and preparation are more than enough the reading (confidential instructions are very brief - only one page). Then, 30-45 minutes negotiation between parties, along with 45-60 minutes debriefing section on the case.

TOPICS COVERED: sexual and moral harassment; Communication; Compliance; Emotions; Ethics; Fairness; Information exchange; Verbal and Nonverbal communication; Objective criteria; value creation; Personality; Power imbalance; Pressure tactics; Psychological games; Relationship; Risk perception; forgiveness, moral recovery; termination contract.

MAJOR LESSONS: This exercise demonstrates the importance of developing skills when dealing with embarrassing, workplace emotional situations, regarding the relationship boss-employee. It would be interesting to invert the roles, after the exercise is finished, to a brief negotiation on different perspectives.

OBJECTIVES: This exercise intends to discuss the role of romantic involvement in the workplace, destructive emotions in negotiations, as well as moral and sexual harassment.

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MAIN FEATURES	
Time required	1 hour – 2 hours
Number of participants	2 participants
Groups involved	No
Agent present	No
Third part present	No/ Yes – a Mediator

APPENDIX II – ROLE PLAY SIMULATION**PART 1****CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FOR****◆◆ JOHN ◆◆**

You have been with the same company for eight years. As soon as he entered, sympathetic and charismatic, he made quick acquaintances with all the colleagues in his department. He was elected the best employee of the company two years ago. Colleagues called him for barbecues on weekends, happy hours, birthday celebrations. Anyway, he was popular, well-earned and single. There was no shortage of beautiful suitors everywhere.

He was proud of what he was doing and was very motivated. It had already been promoted four times, a promotion every two years, on average. He always thought something very good was being booked for him in the future. I just did not know what it was. He felt that good winds were with him. Exactly five years ago the marriage came. The next year, the first child. A new model vehicle, new home, travel abroad with family, anyway, top of the top.

Everything went very well until six months ago Monique arrived at the company to work in his department. For a while, you tried to resist her charms, but she was devilishly provocative. It ended up happening at the annual convention. You have begun to become inattentive, miss deadlines, come home and work late and fail to meet goals. You know how rigid and intolerant are the company's standards for employee relationships. For you, nobody knows anything. His colleagues and his wife, however, noticed something different. To make matters worse, one of his biggest clients left the company.

You did not know what had happened. On the way to work last week, you had a traffic accident, running out of car, a setback. The discussions at home were getting unbearable. The son is ill at school. To make matters worse, your dear boss has received an irrefutable offer and went to the competition. In his place, the board appointed Mrs. Paulie, a senior executive with twenty-five years of the company, who is six months of retirement and above all who has a reputation as tough, ruthless and known for not tolerating abuses of any kind, from the employees. Nobody liked her; she'd even fired some of her colleagues. There could be no worse choice.

Moreover, just in that terrible week! It seemed that luck had finally left him. At this very moment, he receives a statement from Mrs. Paulie's secretary, who wishes to see him immediately. Prepare your spirit to negotiate.

PART 2

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION FOR

◆◆ PAULIE ◆◆

You have been in the same company for twenty-five years. He went through all the departments, made a career, took various leadership positions and is six months away from his long-awaited retirement. Yesterday you were approached by your superior who asked you to perform a task.

You will have to replace a former colleague who went to the competition after receiving an offer that you can not refuse. So far, nothing more. You have built a reputation of fairly stable respect over the years. His temperament has always been considered by all very hard, spartan and, at times, bordering on arrogance. You have always been competent and goal-fulfilling. A widow ten years ago, she never married again. Irreprehensible, he never tolerated abuses of officials, who were exemplarily punished. She was feared by all.

As soon as he took up this new position, he learned that one of his subordinates, John, was involved in an extramarital affair with an employee of the same sector, Monique. The company was very rigid and did not allow this kind of relationship, even if relatives and couples worked in the same environment. However, John was very dear to everyone, including his superiors. He had been with the company for eight years and had been promoted four times, elected best employee two years ago. You always found him very efficient, even though you had never worked together, you felt admiration for the boy.

You've asked for the latest performance reports and ratings and found that in the last six months John had a poor performance, lost one of his oldest clients and that he has arrived late every day, especially last week. However, you think that firing him at that time may seem like a chase, just now that you're going to retire! Who was Monique? The handsome one who made everyone sigh, and who was six months in the company. In her opinion, she was too distracting to her male counterparts, she was middle-class, and now she did not want to. What problem! Have to dismiss two popular employees six months after their retirement. You were surprised that you were not informed of the case by your superiors. To tell you the truth, she is tired of being seen as a bitch, dreaded and tough. And right now?

He thought that in all those years he had never given anyone a chance and that he might have been wrong sometimes. You did not want to leave the company this way. You could not hesitate. You thought for a few days and had John Maurice immediately called you for a frank conversation, quite in your style. Prepare your spirit for negotiation.