

Workplace Romance and Employee Engagement: A Mediated and Moderation Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of workplace romance on employee engagement by incorporating deviant behavior and job stress as mediating variables and gender as a moderating factor. Drawing on affective events theory, the study explains how interpersonal events in the workplace generate emotional and behavioral responses that influence employees' engagement levels. A quantitative survey approach was employed, and data were collected from 210 employees working in private mining companies in Indonesia using a self-administered questionnaire. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling with the partial least squares (SEM-PLS) technique. The results indicate that workplace romance has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. In addition, workplace romance significantly reduces deviant behavior and job stress, while both deviant behavior and job stress negatively affect employee engagement. The mediation analysis confirms that deviant behavior and job stress partially mediate the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement. Furthermore, gender strengthens the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement. These findings highlight the importance of managing interpersonal relationships in the workplace to enhance employee engagement while minimizing negative behavioral and psychological outcomes.

Keywords: Workplace Romance, Employee Engagement, Deviant Behavior, Job Stress, Gender

JEL Classifications: M12, M54, J24

1. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement has become a central concern for organizations seeking to enhance productivity, employee wellbeing, and long-term organizational sustainability. Employee engagement refers to the degree to which employees invest their emotional, cognitive, and physical energy in their work roles and organizational goals (Kahn, 1990). Employees who are highly engaged tend to demonstrate stronger motivation, greater organizational commitment, and higher performance outcomes. Nevertheless, maintaining employee engagement remains a significant challenge for many organizations.

One form of interpersonal relationship that has become increasingly visible in organizational settings is workplace

romance. Workplace romance refers to a romantic relationship between two organizational members characterized by emotional or sexual attraction beyond professional interaction (Horan and Chory, 2022). Prior studies suggest that workplace romance may foster emotional support, social integration, and psychological wellbeing among employees, which can enhance engagement and work performance (Jung and Yoon, 2020; Khan et al., 2017). In supportive organizational environments, romantic relationships may strengthen employees' emotional attachment to the workplace and contribute to higher engagement levels (Doll and Rosopa, 2015).

However, workplace romance may also create complex organizational dynamics that generate negative consequences. Scholars have highlighted that romantic relationships in the

workplace may lead to perceptions of favoritism, ethical concerns, and conflicts of interest, which may disrupt organizational harmony and fairness (Cavico and Mujtaba, 2021; Mujtaba and Cavico, 2020). Such dynamics may trigger deviant behavior, defined as actions that violate organizational norms and potentially harm organizational functioning or coworkers (Chernyak-Hai and Tziner, 2014). Previous research indicates that deviant workplace behavior tends to weaken employees' emotional investment in their work and reduce engagement levels (Qin et al., 2021). In addition, workplace relationships may also influence employees' psychological conditions, particularly job stress. Job stress occurs when employees perceive that job demands exceed their ability to cope with work pressures, which can ultimately reduce their motivation, energy, and work involvement (Anthony-McMann et al., 2016; Chory et al., 2022).

Despite the growing interest in workplace romance, the existing literature presents several inconsistencies regarding its consequences for employee attitudes and behaviors. However, empirical research examining the simultaneous roles of deviant behavior and job stress as mediating mechanisms remains limited, particularly within high-risk and demanding work environments such as the mining industry.

To address this gap, this study adopts affective events theory (AET) as the primary theoretical framework. AET proposes that workplace events trigger emotional reactions that subsequently shape employees' attitudes and behaviors (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Within this perspective, workplace romance can be considered an affective event that generates emotional experiences among employees. These emotional reactions may produce psychological responses such as job stress or behavioral responses such as deviant behavior, which ultimately influence employee engagement. Thus, AET provides a suitable theoretical lens to explain how interpersonal workplace events translate into employee attitudes and behavioral outcomes. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of workplace romance on employee engagement while considering the mediating roles of deviant behavior and job stress and the moderating role of gender.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace romance has increasingly attracted scholarly attention because of its potential influence on employee attitudes and behaviors, including employee engagement. Several studies suggest that workplace romance can positively influence engagement when employees hold favorable attitudes toward such relationships and when organizational norms or policies allow them. According to Doll and Rosopa (2015), employees with positive perceptions of workplace romance and higher initial levels of work engagement are more likely to participate in romantic relationships at work.

Empirical evidence from the hospitality sector further demonstrates that workplace romance can contribute to higher levels of employee engagement and performance. Jung and Yoon (2020) found that romantic relationships among coworkers can foster social integration, emotional support, and psychological comfort,

which ultimately improve job engagement. Similarly, Khan et al. (2017) argue that the experience of workplace romance can enhance employees' psychological wellbeing, which subsequently strengthens their work performance and engagement. However, the effects vary depending on the type of relationship. Despite the potential benefits, workplace romance also presents several risks that may negatively affect engagement if not managed properly. Scholars have highlighted issues such as sexual harassment, favoritism, and conflicts of interest that may arise from romantic relationships in the workplace (Cavico and Mujtaba, 2021; Mujtaba and Cavico, 2020). These challenges can create perceptions of unfairness among other employees, thereby reducing trust, morale, and engagement. Biggs et al. (2012) emphasize that the absence of clear ethical guidelines and transparent organizational policies can exacerbate these negative dynamics.

- H_1 : Workplace romance has a significant effect on employee engagement.

When romantic relationships in the workplace are accompanied by perceptions of unfair treatment or unmet expectations, employees may experience psychological contract breaches that trigger negative emotions and subsequently lead to deviant behaviors (Farnese et al., 2024; Ng and Yang, 2023). These negative emotional reactions can increase the likelihood of counterproductive work behaviors, such as withdrawal, interpersonal conflict, or rule violations.

Conversely, workplace romance may also reduce deviant behavior when it occurs within a positive relational climate. Supportive leadership and a healthy organizational environment can strengthen employees' psychological wellbeing and reduce tendencies toward moral disengagement, thereby lowering the likelihood of deviant actions (Farnese et al., 2024; Ng and Yang, 2023; Kulachai, 2025). In such contexts, interpersonal relationships at work may foster social support and emotional stability, which help employees maintain constructive workplace behavior. Thus, the organizational context plays a significant role in determining whether workplace romance results in constructive or destructive behavioral outcomes.

- H_2 : Workplace romance has a significant effect on deviant behavior.

Deviant behavior in organizations, often conceptualized as counterproductive work behavior (CWB), has been widely examined in relation to employee engagement. Empirical evidence suggests that higher levels of CWB are associated with lower employee engagement, often mediated by factors such as burnout, perceived injustice, and negative affect (Qin et al., 2021; Chernyak-Hai and Tziner, 2014). These psychological conditions weaken employees' emotional and cognitive investment in their work, ultimately reducing engagement levels. According to organizational behavior research, engaging in or experiencing deviant behavior can drain employees' emotional and psychological resources. Emotional exhaustion and burnout, which often arise from stressful or conflictual workplace environments, significantly reduce employees' energy and motivation to perform their roles effectively (Qin et al., 2021). The literature consistently shows that deviant workplace behavior tends to undermine employee

engagement. Nevertheless, the strength of this relationship depends largely on contextual factors, including leadership style, organizational justice climate, and the level of workplace support available to employees. When organizations cultivate ethical leadership, fairness, and supportive work environments, they can mitigate the negative consequences of deviant behavior and sustain employee engagement even in challenging circumstances (Chernyak-Hai and Tziner, 2014; Çivilidağ, 2025; Ugwu et al., 2023; Beck-Krala, 2020).

- H_3 : Deviant behavior has a significant effect on employee engagement.

Studies suggest that romantic relationships in the workplace can influence job stress through several mechanisms, including emotional labor, role conflict, and the spillover of personal relationships into professional roles. Jung and Yoon (2020) indicate that workplace romance may shape employees' emotional experiences because individuals involved in such relationships often need to manage their emotions carefully to maintain professionalism in the workplace. However, workplace romance does not always lead to negative outcomes. Supportive romantic relationships may provide emotional reassurance, encouragement, and companionship, which can help employees cope with work-related pressures and reduce perceived stress (Jung and Yoon, 2020). Abdalla and Agustina (2025) further argue that positive relational dynamics within workplace romance may enhance employees' sense of belonging and wellbeing, thereby buffering the impact of job stress. Despite these potential benefits, workplace romance may also generate stress when the relationship involves conflict, secrecy, or uncertainty. This situation can increase anxiety, role ambiguity, and perceived work demands, which ultimately contribute to higher job stress levels (Doll, 2024).

- H_4 : Workplace romance has a significant effect on job stress.

When employees experience high levels of stress, their psychological and emotional resources tend to be depleted, which reduces their capacity to remain enthusiastic, energetic, and fully involved in their work (Anthony-McMann et al., 2016; Jung and Yoon, 2020). As a result, elevated job stress often leads to lower levels of engagement. One of the primary mechanisms explaining this relationship is burnout. Job stress can trigger emotional exhaustion and psychological fatigue, which gradually diminish employees' motivation and willingness to invest effort in their work roles. Büyükyılmaz and Shehadeh (2023) demonstrate that burnout serves as a key mediator between job stress and employee engagement, as employees who experience persistent stress are more likely to suffer from exhaustion that undermines their work involvement. Similarly, Chory et al. (2022) emphasize that emotional exhaustion resulting from workplace stress reduces employees' responsiveness and enthusiasm toward their tasks, ultimately lowering engagement levels.

- H_5 : Job stress has a significant effect on employee engagement.

While romantic relationships in the workplace may foster relational embeddedness, emotional attachment, and social support, they can also create complex dynamics that influence employee engagement and workplace behavior. Research suggests that workplace romance may affect engagement both directly and indirectly,

particularly through the emergence of deviant workplace behaviors or counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) (Chhetri, 2017; Luksyte et al., 2011; Anjani and Syahrizal, 2019). In supportive contexts, workplace romance may enhance employees' sense of belonging and emotional connection to the workplace. However, when romantic relationships generate perceptions of unfairness, favoritism, or interpersonal conflict, they may trigger behaviors that undermine engagement.

Furthermore, several contextual factors may influence the strength of this relationship. Organizational climate, perceptions of organizational justice, and job insecurity have been identified as important moderating variables that shape how interpersonal dynamics translate into behavioral outcomes (Roy et al., 2012; Ma et al., 2019; Kaur et al., 2023). A supportive organizational climate and fair policies may reduce the likelihood that workplace romance triggers deviant behavior, whereas environments characterized by high political behavior or insecurity may intensify negative reactions. Chhetri (2017) and Griep et al. (2018) emphasize that the organizational environment determines whether interpersonal relationships at work foster positive engagement or escalate into counterproductive behaviors.

- H_6 : Deviant behavior mediates the influence between workplace romance and employee engagement.

Studies suggest that stressors arising from interpersonal relationships and relational contexts in the workplace can significantly affect employees' engagement levels (Tu et al., 2020; Olsen et al., 2023). When romantic relationships create emotional tension, role conflict, or uncertainty, they may increase job stress, which subsequently reduces employees' psychological involvement in their work. The mediating role of job stress in the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement is supported by several theoretical perspectives. Stress-related theories emphasize that excessive psychological strain can reduce motivation, energy, and focus at work. When employees experience high levels of job stress, their capacity to invest effort and enthusiasm in their work diminishes, leading to lower engagement (Dar et al., 2017). Empirical studies also show that workplace stress negatively affects engagement, whereas employees with higher engagement tend to demonstrate better performance and wellbeing outcomes (Tu et al., 2020; Ramos et al., 2024). Accordingly, when workplace romance generates stress through factors such as secrecy, interpersonal conflict, or perceived risks this stress may function as an intervening mechanism that weakens employee engagement (see Figure 1).

- H_7 : Job stress mediates the influence between workplace romance and employee engagement.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. The data collection research was conducted from December 2025 to February 2026 using a self-administered questionnaire. The population in this study is employees of mining companies in Indonesia, specifically private mining companies. The company was chosen because there is a unique phenomenon about workplace romance in the company and its impact on their engagement in

the workplace, making them suitable for investigating the role of employee behavior in the workplace. The sampling technique uses a formula from Hair et al. (2014) with the ideal sample size for SEM analysis to be at least 5-10 times the number of items in the questionnaire. The number of items in the questionnaire is 35, so after entering it into the formula, it was found that the number of 210 respondents was considered adequate and relevant to the use of the SEM-PLS method. Cross-sectional research design was used in this study. The questionnaire was distributed using cover letters to ensure confidentiality, anonymous and voluntary participation. A likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to investigate workplace romance, employee engagement, deviant behavior and job stress.

4. RESULT

From the 210 respondents, the majority of the male gender was 75.2% because it is a mining company that needs more employees who are active in the field with heavy tasks with high physical factors and mobility. The majority of respondents aged 26-45 as much as 80.5%, this is due to the mature age which fills more positions such as engineers, supervisors, and managers who require technical expertise and managerial skills. Furthermore, the majority of S1 education levels are 180 employees. This shows that mining companies need employees with higher education qualifications to fill more technical, managerial and professional positions in the mining industry. Finally, as many as 72.9% of employees are in a romantic relationship and the rest are married. This is in line with this study which examines workplace romance in the workplace. In addition, social interactions and personal relationships tend to be more concentrated within the company environment, which affects the preferences or relationship status of most employees.

The data analysis used is structural equation modelling (SEM). The validity test is intended to determine the validity of the concept and empirical reality. An instrument is said to be valid if it is able to measure what is to be measured and can reveal data from the variables being studied precisely. Outer models using SmartPLS 4.0 are used to ensure the degree of compatibility between variables and their measurements. Individual reflective measures are said to be high when correlated above 0.7. There are three analyses using SmartPLS software to assess the outer model, namely convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability. Table 1 shows that the loading factor is >0.7, AVE is above 0.5 and Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability is above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019).

The HTMT ratio is used to test discriminant validity, where following the advice of Hair et al. (2019) the HTMT ratio should be smaller than 0.9. Referring to Table 2, it is known that all HTMT ratio values in this study are below 0.9 and show that the measurements used are robust and reliable.

Based on the results of data analysis, it is known that the goodness of fit value by calculating the average AVE value is 0.491. This value explains that overall this research model is strong and feasible, because the goodness of fit value of the model is >0.36 (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1: Measurement model

Variable	Item	Loading factor	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Deviant behavior	DB1	0.888	0.963	0.964	0.731
	DB2	0.835			
	DB3	0.806			
	DB4	0.856			
	DB5	0.829			
	DB6	0.866			
	DB7	0.799			
	DB8	0.862			
	DB9	0.881			
	DB10	0.844			
	DB11	0.931			
Employee engagement	EE1	0.882	0.947	0.948	0.760
	EE2	0.878			
	EE3	0.828			
	EE4	0.875			
	EE5	0.876			
	EE6	0.868			
	EE7	0.896			
Job stress	JS1	0.882	0.955	0.956	0.735
	JS2	0.852			
	JS3	0.836			
	JS4	0.831			
	JS5	0.839			
	JS6	0.845			
	JS7	0.886			
	JS8	0.873			
	JS9	0.870			
Workplace romance	WR1	0.897	0.957	0.958	0.768
	WR2	0.902			
	WR3	0.877			
	WR4	0.860			
	WR5	0.876			
	WR6	0.842			
	WR7	0.884			
	WR8	0.871			

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2: HTMT ratio

		1	2	3	4
1	Deviant behavior				
2	Employee engagement	0.576			
3	Job stress	0.782	0.533		
4	Workplace romance	0.592	0.508	0.515	

Source: Own elaboration

The results of the hypothesis test showed in Table 3 that workplace romance had a significant positive effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.254, P < 0.01$). Supporting H_1 . Then, workplace romance had a negative and significant effect on deviant behavior ($\beta = -0.570, P < 0.001$) and job stress ($\beta = -0.495, P < 0.001$), confirming H_2 and H_4 . Meanwhile, H_3 was also accepted with the hypothesis that deviant behavior had a negative and significant effect on employee engagement ($\beta = -0.265, P < 0.01$). Finally, H_5 was accepted with the hypothesis that job stress had a significant negative effect on employee engagement ($\beta = -0.188, P < 0.01$).

Furthermore, mediation and moderation tests were carried out (see Table 4). The results of bootstrapping analysis of 5000 subsamples showed that deviant behavior successfully

Table 3: Direct effect

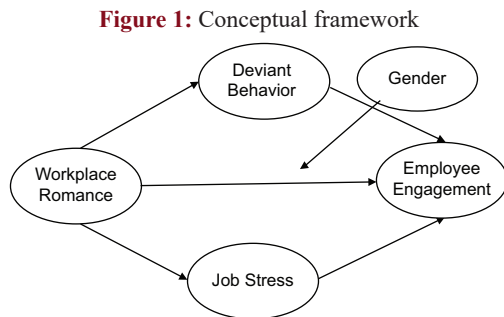
Hypotheses	Path	Original value	Mean (bootstrap)	Standard deviation	t-statistics
H ₁	Workplace romance → Employee engagement	0.254	0.252	0.075	3.379**
H ₂	Workplace romance → Deviant behavior	-0.570	-0.573	0.035	16.351***
H ₃	Deviant behavior → Employee engagement	-0.265	-0.269	0.077	3.449**
H ₄	Workplace romance → Job stress	-0.495	-0.498	0.042	11.878***
H ₅	Job stress → Employee engagement	-0.188	-0.188	0.071	2.639**

*P<0.05, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001. Source: Own elaboration

Table 4: Mediating and moderating effect

Hypotheses	Path	Original value	Mean (bootstrap)	Standard deviation	t-statistics
Mediating effect					
H ₆	Workplace romance → Deviant behavior → employee engagement	0.151	0.154	0.045	3.371**
H ₇	Workplace romance → Job stress → Employee engagement	0.093	0.093	0.036	2.564*
Moderating effect					
H ₈	Workplace romance X gender → Employee engagement	0.157	0.155	0.044	3.565***

*P<0.10, *P<0.05, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001. Source: Own elaboration



Source: Own elaboration

mediated the influence between workplace romance on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.151$, $P < 0.01$), as well as job stress also mediated the effect between workplace romance on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.093$, $P < 0.05$), confirming H₆ and H₇. Finally, testing the gender moderation variable, the value ($\beta = 0.157$, $P < 0.001$) is known, so it can be concluded that gender is able to strengthen the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement.

5. DISCUSSION

This study provides empirical insights into how workplace romance influences employee engagement through the mechanisms of deviant behavior and job stress within the context of mining companies in Indonesia. The findings highlight that interpersonal relationships in the workplace can shape both positive and negative behavioral dynamics that ultimately affect employees' level of engagement.

The results confirm that workplace romance has a positive and significant effect on employee engagement. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that romantic relationships at work can strengthen emotional attachment, social integration, and psychological support among employees (Doll and Rosopa, 2015; Jung and Yoon, 2020). In organizational environments where employees spend considerable time together,

such as mining companies with demanding working schedules, interpersonal closeness may enhance feelings of belonging and relational support. Consequently, employees who experience positive relational interactions are more likely to demonstrate higher enthusiasm and dedication toward their work roles.

The findings also reveal that workplace romance has a significant negative effect on deviant behavior. This result supports prior research indicating that positive interpersonal relationships can reduce counterproductive workplace behavior by strengthening social bonds and mutual accountability among employees (Ng and Yang, 2023; Farnese et al., 2024). Employees involved in meaningful interpersonal relationships may become more aware of maintaining harmonious workplace interactions and preserving professional reputations. As a result, behaviors such as rule violations, workplace conflict, or withdrawal tendencies may decrease, particularly in environments where teamwork and cooperation are essential for operational effectiveness.

Furthermore, the results confirm that deviant behavior negatively influences employee engagement. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that counterproductive work behavior can undermine employees' emotional and cognitive investment in their work (Chernyak-Hai and Tziner, 2014; Qin et al., 2021). Deviant behavior often creates negative workplace climates characterized by distrust, interpersonal tension, and reduced morale. Such conditions may weaken employees' motivation and psychological energy, ultimately decreasing their willingness to engage fully in their job responsibilities.

The analysis also indicates that workplace romance significantly reduces job stress. This result supports earlier findings suggesting that supportive interpersonal relationships can act as emotional resources that help employees cope with work-related pressures (Jung and Yoon, 2020). Romantic relationships may provide emotional reassurance, companionship, and psychological stability, which can mitigate stress experienced in demanding work environments. In the mining industry, where employees often face high workloads and challenging working conditions,

the presence of supportive relationships may play an important role in alleviating stress.

Consistent with stress-related theories, the findings further demonstrate that job stress negatively affects employee engagement. When employees experience high levels of stress, their psychological resources become depleted, leading to emotional exhaustion and reduced motivation (Anthony-McMann et al., 2016; Chory et al., 2022). As a result, employees experiencing persistent stress may struggle to maintain energy, dedication, and involvement in their work tasks.

The mediation analysis provides additional insights by showing that deviant behavior mediates the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement. This finding suggests that workplace romance contributes to higher engagement partly because it reduces deviant workplace behavior. When employees experience supportive interpersonal relationships, the likelihood of engaging in counterproductive behaviors decreases, which subsequently enhances engagement.

Similarly, job stress also mediates the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement. This result indicates that workplace romance may influence engagement through psychological mechanisms related to stress reduction. Supportive romantic relationships may reduce emotional strain and help employees maintain a more positive psychological state at work, thereby enabling greater engagement.

Finally, gender was found to strengthen the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement. This result indicates that gender differences may shape how employees perceive and respond to romantic relationships in the workplace. In male-dominated industries such as mining, interpersonal relationships may carry stronger social implications and influence employees' emotional attachment to their workplace. Therefore, gender dynamics may play an important role in determining how workplace romance translates into employee engagement.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examines the influence of workplace romance on employee engagement by incorporating deviant behavior and job stress as mediating variables, as well as gender as a moderating factor in the context of mining companies in Indonesia. The findings indicate that workplace romance positively affects employee engagement while simultaneously reducing deviant behavior and job stress. In contrast, both deviant behavior and job stress negatively influence employee engagement. Furthermore, the mediation analysis confirms that deviant behavior and job stress serve as important mechanisms through which workplace romance affects employee engagement. Gender also strengthens the relationship between workplace romance and employee engagement. These results suggest that positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace can function as relational resources that enhance employee engagement while minimizing negative behavioral and psychological outcomes.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focuses on employees in mining companies in Indonesia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or cultural contexts. In addition, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal conclusions. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal approaches and explore additional contextual variables, such as leadership style, organizational culture, or organizational justice, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how workplace relationships influence employee attitudes and behaviors.

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