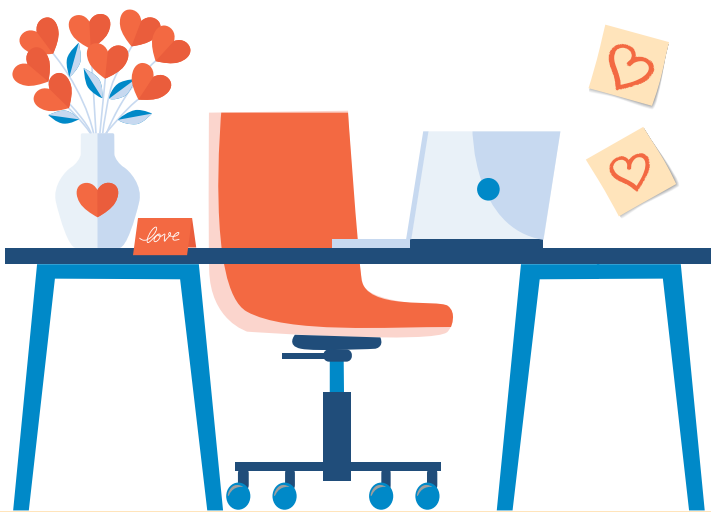# Workplace Romance

Workplace romances are both common and complex, making it crucial for senior leaders, HR professionals, and employees to understand their dynamics and impact. To explore this topic, SHRM Thought Leadership surveyed 1,071 U.S. workers and 2,283 HR professionals to examine how often workplace romances occur, how they unfold, and how organizations address them.

52% of U.S. workers have either been in or are currently in a workplace romance.

U.S. workers were most likely to report that love-related motivations were either "extremely" or "very important" in starting their workplace romance.

How important were the following factors in beginning your workplace romance?
% selecting "extremely important" or "very important"

- **53%** **Love-related motivations** (e.g., companionship, sincere love)
- **40%** **Self-interested motivations** (e.g., the excitement of it, adventure, lust)
- **29%** **Job-related motivations** (e.g., career advancement, security, power)

Source: U.S. workers (n=556)

Some U.S. workers engaged in public displays of affection during their workplace romance, even though they may have considered it inappropriate.

Public Displays of Affection in the Workplace

- **21%** Engaged in public display of affection
- **44%** Considered their public display of affection inappropriate
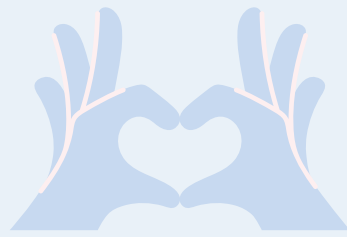
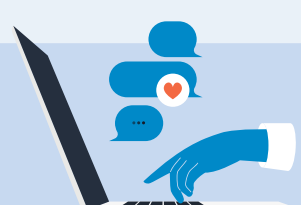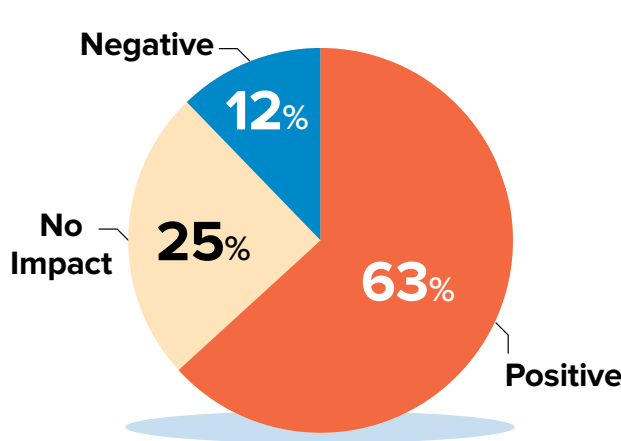Source: U.S. workers (n=556)

The majority of managers say workplace romances have had a positive impact on team dynamics.

Within the past year, what type of impact have workplace romances within the team(s) you supervise/manage had on team dynamics?

Source: U.S. workers (managers) (n= 216)

- Negative **12%**
- No Impact **25%**
- Positive **63%**

The approach that organizations take to workplace romance varies, with the most common ones being "clear and structured" and "flexible."

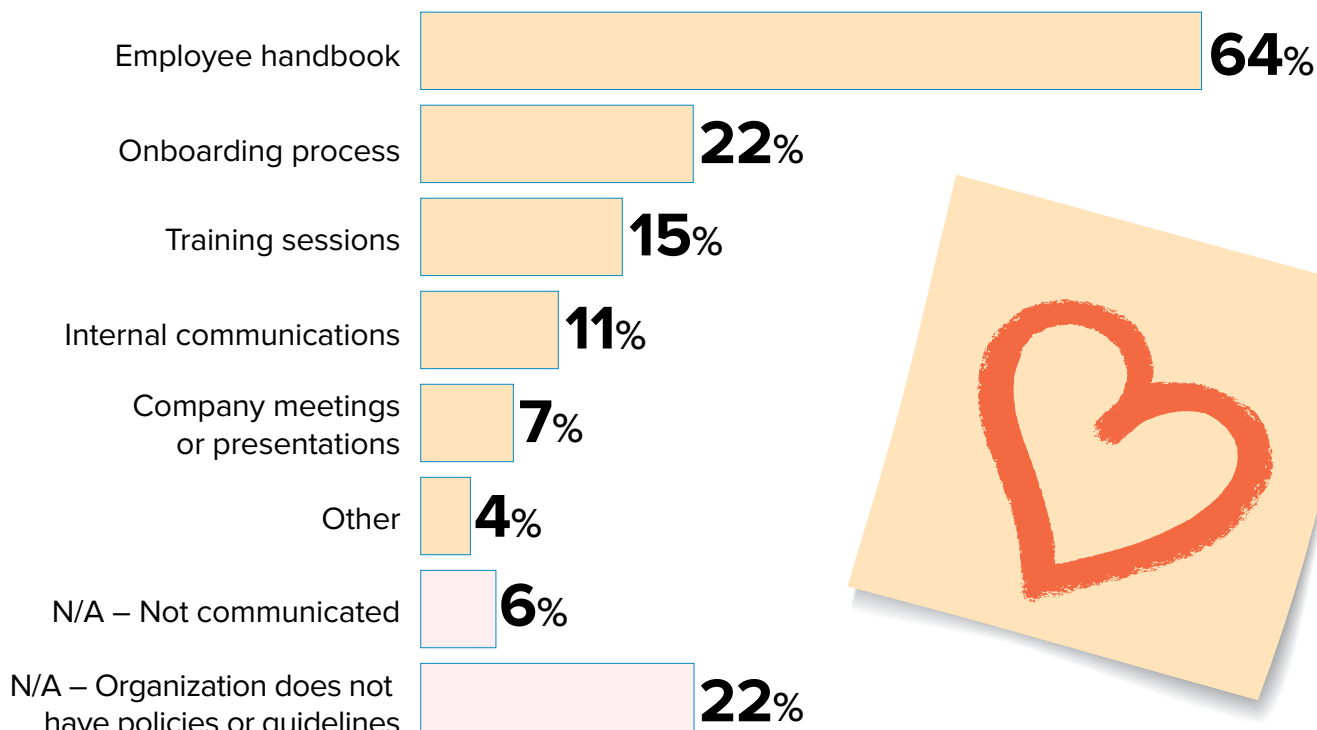**Which of the following best describes your organization's approach to workplace romances?**

- **33%** **Clear and structured** — We have a well-defined policy that allows workplace romances but sets clear boundaries and expectations to maintain professionalism.
- **33%** **Flexible** — We allow workplace romances and handle them on a case-by-case basis, providing guidance if issues arise.
- **22%** **Hands-off** — We do not have a formal policy, and we take no proactive stance on workplace romances, only addressing issues if and when they occur.
- **7%** **Evolving** — Our approach is still being developed, and our policies are not well-defined or communicated.
- **5%** **Strict and restrictive** — We have strict policies that discourage workplace romances or prohibit them altogether.

Source: HR professionals (n=2,162)

Workplace romance policies and guidelines are typically communicated through the employee handbook.

How, if at all, does your organization communicate policies or guidelines on workplace romance to employees?

Channel	Percentage
Employee handbook	**64%**
Onboarding process	**22%**
Training sessions	**15%**
Internal communications	**11%**
Company meetings or presentations	**7%**
Other	**4%**
N/A – Not communicated	**6%**
N/A – Organization does not have policies or guidelines	**22%**

Source: HR professionals (n=2,283)

Perception of Favoritism and Unfair Treatment Tops HR's Concerns About Workplace Romance

68% of HR professionals say the perception of favoritism or unfair treatment is their top concern regarding workplace romance.

Source: HR professionals (n=2,283)

Why does it matter?
Workplace romances are common but complex: With 52% of employees engaging in workplace romances, motivations vary widely, ranging from love to job-related factors. This highlights the importance of addressing the potential for both positive and negative outcomes, including ethical challenges and blurred boundaries.

What can you do?
Establish effective policies: To manage workplace romance effectively, organizations must address concerns about favoritism and unfair treatment. While approaches can vary to fit each organization's culture, clear, well-communicated policies and training are key to reducing risks, safeguarding employees, and building trust.