

Practical wisdom in the workplace: conceptualization, instrument development, and predictive power

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this Real Impact Research Article is to empirically explore one of the most controversial and elusive concepts in knowledge management research – practical wisdom. It develops a 10-dimensional practical wisdom construct and tests it within the nomological network of counterproductive and productive knowledge behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – A survey instrument was created based on the extant literature. A model was developed and tested by means of Partial Least Squares with data obtained from 200 experienced employees recruited from CloudResearch Connect crowdsourcing platform.

Findings – Practical wisdom is a multidimensional construct that may be operationalized and measured like other well-established knowledge management concepts. Practical wisdom guides employee counterproductive and productive knowledge behavior: it suppresses knowledge sabotage and knowledge hiding (whether general, evasive, playing dumb, rationalized or bullying) and promotes knowledge sharing. While all proposed dimensions contribute to employee practical wisdom, particularly salient are subject matter expertise, moral purpose in decision-making, self-reflection in the workplace and external reflection in the workplace. Unexpectedly, practical wisdom facilitates knowledge hoarding instead of reducing it.

Practical implications – Managers should realize that possessing practical wisdom is not limited to a group of select, high-level executives. Organizations may administer the practical wisdom questionnaire presented in this study to their workers to identify those who score the lowest, and invest in employee training programs that focus on the development of those attributes pertaining to the practical wisdom dimensions.

Originality/value – The concept of practical wisdom is a controversial topic that has both detractors and supporters. To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first large-scale empirical study of practical wisdom in the knowledge management domain.

Keywords Practical wisdom, Phronesis, Scale, Survey, Questionnaire, Knowledge sabotage, Knowledge hiding, Knowledge hoarding

Paper type Real Impact Research Article



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1. Introduction

To understand wisdom fully and correctly probably requires more wisdom than any of us have. (Sternberg, 1990, p. 3)

Inspired by the seminal works by Nonaka and his colleagues (Nonaka *et al.*, 2008, 2014; Nonaka, 2013; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2021), knowledge management researchers have recently focused their attention on the potentially promising yet controversial topic of practical wisdom (phronesis) and its role in various aspects of organizational functioning (Jakubik and Mürsepp, 2022; Rocha *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b; Bratianu and Bejinaru, 2023; Jakubik, 2023). Their interest in the topic stems from Nonaka's argument that practical wisdom is not limited to top management: instead, it may be possessed and practiced by

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employees at all organizational levels. Nonaka argues that wise employees exhibit certain characteristics that help them make better decisions, leading to the long-term prosperity of both internal and external organizational stakeholders. For example, wise workers may rely on their wisdom to bridge the gap between current, past-oriented knowledge and unpredictable future events (Intezari and Pauleen, 2017) and better understand cross-cultural knowledge management issues (Pauleen *et al.*, 2010). Cultivating practical wisdom within organizations is also necessary to facilitate productive knowledge behavior (Ding *et al.*, 2019), including knowledge sharing (Cugueró-Escofet and Rosanas, 2020).

Regrettably, despite these pioneering attempts to introduce the notion of practical wisdom into the mainstream knowledge management literature, the uptake of this line of research has been extremely slow, and its coverage has been highly superficial (Jakubik and Mürsepp, 2022). For instance, as of August 2023, no paper published in the *Journal of Knowledge Management*, the discipline's premier journal (Serenko and Bontis, 2022), has cited the seminal *Harvard Business Review* article titled "The Wise Leader" by Nonaka and Takeuchi (2011). In fact, except for three notable works (Rowley and Slack, 2009; Alammari and Pauleen, 2016; Qayyum *et al.*, 2022), prior wisdom research in the knowledge management domain has been purely conceptual (Jakubik and Mürsepp, 2022; Rocha *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b). The detractors of the notion of wisdom, including such knowledge management thought leaders as Dave Snowden and Patrick Lambe, refer to the lack of conceptual clarity, theoretical foundation and empirical evidence of the value of wisdom in the context of the contemporary organization (Straits Knowledge, 2008; Teo-Dixon and Sayers, 2011; Solé, 2017; Lambe, 2023) – and rightly so. Knowledge management is an applied discipline founded on the works of practitioners (Serenko *et al.*, 2010), but the problem is that busy managers, consultants and individual workers find it difficult to quickly grasp such an abstract concept and put it to use. Unless industry professionals can productively apply the notion of practical wisdom in their routine work, this line of research is likely to stagnate and eventually wither.

Creating a new line of research on practical wisdom may also help to ensure further maturity and recognition of the knowledge management discipline. Throughout its short yet remarkable history, knowledge management has been successfully drawing upon and extending knowledge in other scientific domains, such as management, information systems, education, economics and psychology (Serenko, 2021). By introducing an empirically validated research area devoted to practical wisdom, the knowledge management field may infuse its ideas into other scientific domains and further progress toward achieving the coveted status of the reference discipline. As such, this study answers the recent call by Jevnaker and Olaisen (2022) and Edwards and Lönnqvist (2023) for the development of original, homegrown knowledge with both theoretical and practical implications within the knowledge management domain and beyond.

To contribute to this challenging goal, this Real Impact Research Article informs practitioners about the value of practical wisdom and forms the foundation for further empirical research both within and outside of the knowledge management discipline. For this, it first develops and validates a survey instrument that measures practical wisdom of individual employees. This instrument comprises ten theoretically grounded dimensions with each tapping into a specific aspect of practical wisdom relevant in the workplace environment. Previous scholars from the social science domain have produced a number of wisdom measurement scales (e.g. see Baltes and Smith, 1990; Ardel, 2003; Webster, 2003; Mickler and Staudinger, 2008; Brienza *et al.*, 2018; Glück, 2018; Rocha *et al.*, 2021). The key contribution of these studies is that they demonstrate that it is possible to measure the presumably elusive and intangible construct of wisdom by approaching it from a multidimensional stance. These investigations have also identified many attributes of wisdom that may be salient in the workplace environment. At the same time, such studies have focused on either people's wisdom in general (i.e. not on practical wisdom) or on

wisdom at the organizational level of analysis instead of measuring the wisdom possessed by individual employees and exploring how it affects their counterproductive and productive work behavior, which is the purpose of the present investigation[1]. In addition, the previous scales use only a few dimensions each while this study's instrument includes ten dimensions, which increases its theoretical richness and practical relevance.

Second, this Real Impact Research Article demonstrates the predictive validity of the proposed practical wisdom scale. In particular, it shows that employees who possess practical wisdom suppress their counterproductive knowledge behavior such as knowledge sabotage and knowledge hiding (whether general, evasive, playing dumb, rationalized, or bullying) and improve their productive knowledge behavior such as knowledge sharing. Equipped with this knowledge, practitioners may apply the proposed scale in various employee-assessment exercises to predict and explain their workers' knowledge behavior. As a result, knowledge management scholars and practitioners who were previously skeptical about the value, applicability and the very existence of practical wisdom may change their minds and engage in a productive discourse of this important and useful notion for the benefit of both scholarship and practice.

Presently, the theoretical and empirical literature on practical wisdom is well-developed outside the knowledge management domain. Combining the key findings, concepts and principles from this intellectual repository with the advanced knowledge management literature revealed ten dimensions of practical wisdom and eight outcome constructs which eliminated the need for relying on a qualitative method. As a result, a nomological network was developed and tested by means of a quantitative study with SmartPLS 4 (Ringle *et al.*, 2022). A quantitative study design was chosen because the use of standardized procedures and statistical techniques facilitates a rigorous testing of proposed hypotheses in an easily reproducible environment.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The next section, Section 2, introduces practical wisdom, identifies its dimensions and hypothesizes the predictive power of practical wisdom in the knowledge management context. Section 3 describes the research instrument, study design and participants. Section 4 documents the results, and Section 5 discusses the findings, makes recommendations and concludes the study.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Practical wisdom in knowledge management research

Despite some reluctance among knowledge management researchers and practitioners to embrace the notion of practical wisdom (Straits Knowledge, 2008; Teo-Dixon and Sayers, 2011; Solé, 2017), this topic has already gained recognition in the context of knowledge management. It has been argued that employees acquire wisdom through experience, the accumulation of tacit knowledge, extraordinary consciousness (a heightened sensitivity to, awareness of and connection with one's unconscious mind) (Bennet and Bennet, 2008b), mindfulness (Rooney *et al.*, 2021), emotional intelligence (Alammar and Pauleen, 2016), spirituality (Bierly *et al.*, 2000; Rocha and Pinheiro, 2021) and the ability to remain emotionally and cognitively balanced (Pauleen *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, to obtain wisdom, workers should integrate their current knowledge with a set of values and courage (Bennet and Porter, 2003). As well, in addition to creating, retaining and enhancing intellectual capital, organizations may accumulate wisdom capital to improve the well-being and prosperity of all stakeholder groups (Vasconcelos, 2018; Vasconcelos, 2022).

Wisdom also represents an important construct within the [controversial, e.g. see Lambe (2023)] DIKW – data, information, knowledge, wisdom – framework (Bierly *et al.*, 2000; Rowley, 2007), and effective knowledge management processes may transform data, information, knowledge and wisdom into actionable intelligence (Jennex, 2017). Existing knowledge management systems represent content-rich repositories which may be

subjected to automated processes for wisdom extraction (Malik *et al.*, 2019). In the future, wisdom management may potentially supplement the concept of knowledge management (Ekmekçi *et al.*, 2014; Solé, 2017; Jakubik and Mürsepp, 2022), and university educators should become wisdom workers to cultivate the minds of future world leaders (Jakubik, 2021). Eventually, wisdom should become an indispensable part of knowledge-related policies and knowledge-based economies (Rooney and Mckenna, 2005).

In addition to the works cited above, Ikujiro Nonaka and his colleagues, including Hirotaka Takeuchi, have made a dramatic contribution to wisdom research in the knowledge management context. Inspired by his interest in military history and strategy (Kawamura, 2016), Nonaka studied various characteristics of wartime commanders and identified several abilities of these wise leaders which he documented in his book *Managing Flow* (Nonaka *et al.*, 2008), and he further promoted them in his subsequent publications (Nonaka, 2013; Nonaka *et al.*, 2014; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2021). Nonaka and his colleagues envision both the business world and the entire society progressing from the wise employee to the wise leader (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011), to the wise company (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2019) and to wise capitalism (Takeuchi, 2013). Eventually, the world may even move toward a wisdom economy (Murtaza, 2011).

2.2 The dimensionality of practical wisdom

In other domains, including social science, researchers have already empirically explored the notion of wisdom by developing various measurement techniques. As a result, a number of wisdom measures have been introduced which may be grouped under two categories (Glück, 2018). First, performance measures of wisdom – the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm (Baltes and Smith, 1990), Grossmann's conception of wise reasoning (Grossmann and Kross, 2014), a Thin-Slice measurement technique (Hu *et al.*, 2017) and the Bremen wisdom paradigm (Mickler and Staudinger, 2008) – ask individuals to assess a hypothetical or a real-life scenario, and their responses are evaluated by trained raters. Second, self-report measures of wisdom – the Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (Ardelt, 2003), the Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (Webster, 2003), the Wisdom as Self-Transcendence Scale (Levenson *et al.*, 2005), the San Diego Wisdom Scale (Thomas *et al.*, 2019), the Wisdom Development Scale (Brown and Greene, 2006) and the Brief Wisdom Screening Scale (Glück *et al.*, 2013) – ask people to retrospectively self-assess their wisdom-related attitudes, traits, emotions, decisions and behaviors. In addition, Akgün *et al.* (2019) and Rocha *et al.* (2021) proposed a survey-based instrument to measure organizational wisdom, and Brienza *et al.* (2018) administered their recently developed Situated Wise Reasoning Scale to an adult working sample.

Despite the contribution of the instruments above, none of them meets the needs of managers who would like to assess the degree of practical wisdom of their workers. Thus, to identify the dimensions of employees' wisdom, first, the works by Nonaka and his colleagues were consulted as a starting point. Next, empirical studies by Rowley and Slack (2009) and Alamar and Pauleen (2016) were explored, followed by a comprehensive review of the previously proposed wisdom scales cited above. The following subsections describe the proposed wisdom dimensions in detail.

2.2.1 Moral purpose in decision-making. Moral purpose in decision-making refers to employees' intention to make choices to the benefit of all internal and external organizational stakeholders instead of focusing on their self-interest (Nonaka *et al.*, 2008; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011). It clearly differentiates practical wisdom from practical intelligence: while the former is oriented toward maximizing the common good of all organizational stakeholders, the latter is directed at merely improving one's personal well-being (Kunzmann, 2019).

Virtue has traditionally been considered one of the foremost components of wisdom (Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1990), and it is included in the vast majority of wisdom scales under various labels, such as prosocial values (Bangen *et al.*, 2013), sympathetic and compassionate love for others (Ardelt, 2011), altruism (Brown and Greene, 2006), kindness, compassion, warmth (Jason *et al.*, 2001), moral identity (Darnell *et al.*, 2022) and ethical sensibility (Schmit *et al.*, 2012). Moral purpose in decision-making acts as a key motivational factor driving workplace actions and choices. As a result, wise employees always take into consideration the long-term consequences of their actions and the well-being of all parties involved. They minimize or eliminate the bad faith, subjectivity, egoism, prejudice and conditioned responses which incorporate inherent bias and push people away from the moral high ground. Their decisions transcend a mere short-term gain. Without having a moral purpose in decision-making, it may be difficult for workers to behave in the best interests of not only their organization but also other stakeholders, including customers, the community, the general public and the environment.

2.2.2 Subject matter expertise. Subject matter expertise refers to employees' factual, conceptual and procedural knowledge relevant to their work performance. Possessing such knowledge is a necessary (yet insufficient) requirement for exhibiting practical wisdom in the workplace: while wisdom cannot exist without knowledge, knowledge can exist without wisdom (Rowley, 2006). In fact, it is impossible to imagine a wise yet unknowledgeable organizational member, but not every organizational expert may be unquestionably considered a wise one.

In the existing (nonorganizational) wisdom measurement instruments, the concept of knowledge has been incorporated as rich factual and procedural knowledge (Baltes and Smith, 1990; Smith *et al.*, 1994), an understanding of the meaning of life-related phenomena and events (Ardelt, 2003), life knowledge (Bangen *et al.*, 2013), life skills (Brown and Greene, 2006) and critical life experience (Webster, 2007). While such conceptualizations apply to the measurement of one's wisdom in the general domain of life, in the organizational context, such knowledge must be domain-specific: it pertains to one's area of expertise rather than to general life issues. From a practical wisdom perspective, a knowledgeable employee is likely to be the one who, in addition to formal education, has a depth and breadth of professional expertise, has experienced various situations in multicultural and global contexts, has learned from his/her own and others' mistakes (Nonaka *et al.*, 2008; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011) and, as a result, can remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, create and disseminate vital organizational knowledge.

2.2.3 Workplace pragmatism. In addition to possessing subject matter expertise, wise employees should be able to put their proficiency into action by exhibiting workplace pragmatism. Workplace pragmatism refers to employees' tendency to consistently focus on achieving a particular outcome to the minimization or exclusion of cognitive and physical processes leading to mere theoretical propositions devoid of action. An outcome may be both tangible (e.g. producing a physical or digital artifact) and intangible (e.g. creating and/or disseminating valid, relevant and actionable knowledge on the matter of interest). Workplace pragmatism results from workers' traits, attitudes, biases, convictions, beliefs, willingness and mindscape to creatively act, make and engage rather than avoid, procrastinate and pointlessly debate (Bruch and Ghoshal, 2004; Nonaka and Zhu, 2012). An employee cannot be considered wise unless he/she can produce useful tangible and intangible deliverables that are valued in his/her workplace environment. As Bachmann *et al.* (2018) argue, "practical wisdom is never geared only towards intellectual recognition but it always also targets realization in practice" (p. 155).

The knowledge management literature emphasizes the notion of a practical or pragmatic form of knowledge – knowledge which is actionable and useful within an organizational context (Bennet and Bennet, 2008a; Guzman, 2009). While practical or pragmatic knowledge contributes to the repertoire of knowledge successfully applied by wise workers,

wise employees rely on all forms of knowledge because workplace pragmatism refers to their ability to focus on a practical outcome achieved through a combination of all available resources. Previous research has already identified several benefits of pragmatic orientation (Neneh, 2019; Batool *et al.*, 2023), and, therefore, every wise worker must exhibit some degree of workplace pragmatism (Rocha *et al.*, 2022a, 2022b).

2.2.4 Emotional intelligence in the workplace. Emotional intelligence in the workplace is defined as employees' mental ability to understand their own and co-workers' emotions and to regulate their own emotions in a professional environment (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Mayer *et al.*, 2008)[2]. Emotional intelligence comprises three theoretically independent dimensions:

1. appraisal of self-emotions in the workplace, i.e. workers' ability to understand their personal feelings and emotional states;
2. appraisal of others' emotions in the workplace, i.e. workers' ability to understand other employees' feelings and emotional states; and
3. self-regulation of workplace emotions, i.e. workers' ability to control, adjust and suppress their workplace emotions (Wong and Law, 2002).

Previous research posits that emotional intelligence plays an important role in the contemporary organization (Rivera-Vazquez *et al.*, 2009; Krishnakumar *et al.*, 2016; Shariq *et al.*, 2019; Stawicki *et al.*, 2023). Alammari and Pauleen (2016) – who interviewed senior managers from diverse, large organizations – concluded that almost all these managers emphasized emotional intelligence as one of the key wisdom components. In a similar vein, Darnell *et al.* (2022) show that the emotional regulative function is a critical component of wisdom because it helps individuals achieve affective harmony in their phronetic actions.

Including emotional intelligence as a practical wisdom dimension is important for several reasons. First, workplace conflict is unavoidable because it is virtually impossible to prevent situations in which some workers believe that their interests, goals, preferences and worldviews are misaligned with those of others (De Dreu and Gelfand, 2008). Employees possessing high emotional intelligence are able to read and assess the emotional states of all parties, including their own emotions (Intezari and Pauleen, 2018), and seek collaborative solutions (Jordan and Troth, 2002). By better managing their relationships with others, especially their superiors, emotionally intelligent workers may achieve better job performance and, therefore, they are likely to be perceived as wise by others (Joseph *et al.*, 2015). Second, workers may use their emotional intelligence to compensate for their lack of formal education and academic knowledge (Mayer and Ciarrochi, 2006). Third, some employees may be considered informal leaders who gain influence over others due to their wisdom without having formal titles or authority. In this case, emotional intelligence enhances their leadership and team management skills (Prati *et al.*, 2003) and further reinforces their position as wise organizational members. Last, emotionally intelligent workers may better manage and minimize stress (Singh and Sharma, 2012), which helps them remain calm and self-confident in demanding situations, to reinforce their standing as wise employees.

2.2.5 Self-reflection in the workplace. Self-reflection in the workplace is a cognitive process whereby employees intentionally explore, analyze and evaluate their own work-related experiences to understand their inner state to improve their workplace functioning. Workplace self-reflection is different from emotional intelligence because the former includes retrospective self-analysis of broad workplace encounters while the latter is limited to emotional states. In addition, workplace self-reflection requires deliberate effort (Weststrate, 2019) while emotional intelligence is one's trait which is activated automatically. According to a meta-analysis of wisdom definitions conducted by Bangen *et al.* (2013), self-reflection components appear in more than half of all wisdom definitions. For instance,

Ardelt (2011) demonstrates that reflection is one of three main wisdom dimensions, and Intezari and Pauleen (2018) show that managers' ability to understand their inner selves, values, skills, preferences and characteristics contributes to their practical wisdom. Examples of self-reflection related terms include self-examination, self-awareness, self-insight, self-understanding, reminiscence, self-referential thought, reflective thought, introspection, private self-consciousness, intrapersonal curiosity, life review and inner speech.

There are several features of workplace self-reflection that make it a vital component of practical wisdom. First, by frequently reflecting on their workplace encounters, people may realize how their self-functioning evolved over time and initiate a corrective action, if necessary, which may help them further self-improve. Second, workplace self-reflection helps workers learn from their own mistakes to make cognitive, affective and behavioral changes which should be positively perceived by their co-workers. Third, self-reflection helps individuals consider multiple factors to solve difficult workplace problems (Weststrate *et al.*, 2019), develop new solutions (Kolodinsky and Bierly, 2013) and account for other workers' perspective during conflicts (Grossmann *et al.*, 2021) – all of which improves their own and others' work experience. Fourth, by engaging in self-reflection, workers boost their self-esteem (Johnson and Stapel, 2011) and act confidently. As a result of the cognitive, affective and behavioral changes above, employees who engage in self-reflection act in a practically wise manner.

2.2.6 External reflection in the workplace. External reflection in the workplace is a cognitive process whereby employees intentionally explore, analyze and evaluate their colleagues' work-related experiences to derive valuable lessons and find ways to improve their own workplace functioning. In addition to self-reflection, employees may gain practical wisdom through the process of external reflection, which is also referred to as vicarious learning, social learning and observational learning. According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), employees may expand their understanding of various intricacies of their workplace – e.g. organizational dynamics, inter-employee relationships, political forces, labor relations, best practices, solutions to problems and future developments – by collecting and processing other employees' experiences. For instance, they may analyze other workers' mistakes as a substitute for learning from their own oversights to find fallacies in their own cognitive, affective and behavioral processes and initiate corrective changes. As a result, employees practicing external reflection accelerate the process of self-development and get wiser.

Prior research attests to various benefits of external reflection for employees in an organizational context. It has been found that engaging in this practice fosters innovation (Abecassis-Moedas *et al.*, 2016), boosts individual and team performance (Myers, 2018; Myers, 2021), promotes productive knowledge behavior (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2022) and stimulates managerial learning (Bledow *et al.*, 2017). Gibson (2008), Liew (2013) and Qayyum *et al.* (2022) further argue that workers who engage in external reflection gain wisdom. In addition, Intezari and Pauleen (2018) empirically demonstrate that external reflection is a critical dimension of practical wisdom.

2.2.7 Exceeding the bounds of rationality. Exceeding the bounds of rationality refers to decision-making processes which go beyond the analytical, conscious and explicit deliberation wherein employees rely on their intuitions, hunches, subjective insights, senses and other implicit cognitive processes. From the perspective of dual process theories, human information processing in all domains, including work, is done in two distinct cognitive systems referred to as automatic vs. controlled (Shiffrin and Schneider, 1977), peripheral vs. central (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), intuitive (or System 1) vs. reasoning (or System 2) (Kahneman, 2003), experiential vs. rational (Epstein *et al.*, 1996), reflexive vs. reflective (Satpute and Lieberman, 2006) and implicit vs. explicit (Wilson *et al.*, 2000; Serenko and Turel, 2019). Despite some differences among these models, they generally

posit that cognitive processes that take place within the former are fast, unconscious, uncontrollable, automatic and effortless and include non-rational factors while those in the latter are slow, conscious, deliberate and effortful and include rational factors (Bargh, 1994).

Both management education and practice have traditionally emphasized rational decision-making processes (Mintzberg, 1994) – the paradigm which Haidt (2001) refers to as “the worship of reason” (p. 815). A recent Big Data and Business Intelligence/Analytics trend represents a cornerstone of rational decision-making (Pauleen, 2017; Ardito *et al.*, 2019). While the benefits of this approach are undeniable, evidence shows that, by relying on non-rational factors, employees may expand their repertoire of decision-making approaches and, as a result, make better and wiser decisions (McKenna *et al.*, 2006). In particular, expertise-based intuition – the rapid generation of decisions rooted in deep domain-specific knowledge, pattern recognition and automaticity – may lead to fast, accurate and, by extension, wise decisions under time pressure (Gladwell, 2005; Salas *et al.*, 2010). By thus exceeding the bounds of rationality, employees may increase their use of the tacit knowledge which exists and guides their behavior beyond conscious awareness (Johnson, 2007) and, therefore, make better workplace decisions.

2.2.8 Integrative thinking. Integrative thinking refers to the ability of employees to comfortably face the tension of opposing potential courses of action, sense what lies behind a situation, discover hidden factors influencing the outcome and keep an open-minded perspective to select the best, often new, course of action (Martin, 2009; Riel and Martin, 2017). Integrative thinkers intuitively fathom the global nature and meaning of events, things and people. They keep the entire problem in mind while analyzing its individual parts and approach the situation holistically while still paying attention to details (Nonaka *et al.*, 2008; Nonaka and Zhu, 2012).

Integrative thinking culminates in employee wisdom because it allows employees to formulate ideas, create artifacts, facilitate progress and foster change (Kallio, 2011). During integration, mental objects are transformed and fused together to achieve a creative, synergetic effect so that the final product is more than the sum of its parts (Tynjälä *et al.*, 2020). As such, integrative thinking improves workers' ability to better comprehend and solve wicked problems, fosters balanced judgment of complex scenarios and minimizes cognitive biases. It helps employees extend their attention beyond their common areas of interest and bridge the gap between arts and science to discover new perspectives (O'Keefe *et al.*, 2021). Integrative thinkers comfortably navigate the contemporary corporate world and welcome the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous external environment because it is where they find the best answers to their problems (Martin, 2007).

2.3 The predictive power of practical wisdom

One of the key objectives of organizational knowledge management is to facilitate productive and suppress counterproductive knowledge behavior. Productive knowledge behavior usually refers to knowledge sharing – the process by which employees provide their explicit and tacit knowledge to other organizational members (Ford and Staples, 2010) while counterproductive knowledge behavior may take several forms. Of these, knowledge sabotage, knowledge hiding and knowledge hoarding have gained momentum in the literature due to their pernicious effects on organizations and their stakeholders. Knowledge sabotage occurs “when an employee intentionally provides incorrect knowledge to another or conceals knowledge from another while being fully aware that the knowledge in question is needed by and extremely important to the other party” (Serenko and Choo, 2020, p. 2299). Knowledge hiding refers to a purposeful attempt to conceal knowledge from other workers when they unambiguously request it (Connelly *et al.*, 2012). In the literature, it is represented by five relevant constructs: general knowledge hiding (overall, higher-level

knowledge hiding behavior) (Peng, 2013); evasive knowledge hiding (when offenders dodge, stall, or ignore the request); playing dumb knowledge hiding (when offenders pretend not to possess the requested knowledge); rationalized knowledge hiding (when offenders justify why they cannot share the requested knowledge) (Connelly *et al.*, 2012); and bullying knowledge hiding (when offenders attack the knowledge requester) (Yuan *et al.*, 2021). Knowledge hoarding is the accumulation of knowledge and its strategic concealment from other organizational members (Oliveira *et al.*, 2021).

This study hypothesizes that practical wisdom has a negative (i.e. suppressive) effect on employee counterproductive knowledge behavior and a positive (i.e. amplifying) effect on employee productive knowledge behavior. According to Kelloway and Barling's (2000) model of knowledge use in organizations, knowledge behavior is an individual activity which is guided by three factors: ability, motivation and opportunity (Elbaz *et al.*, 2018). Practically wise employees have the ability to share the critically needed, correct knowledge with their fellow co-workers because they possess a great degree of subject matter expertise. By exceeding the bounds of rationality, wise workers rely on their intuitions, personal insights, hunches and senses to identify those in need of knowledge and find the best way to impart this knowledge to them by using integrative thinking. Their ability to read other workers' emotions and regulate their own (i.e. emotional intelligence) helps them suppress hurtful actions. Practically wise employees refrain from harming others through knowledge sabotage, hiding and hoarding. Instead, due to their moral high ground, they experience enjoyment when helping their fellow co-workers by sharing their knowledge, which reflects their intrinsic motivation – the most powerful driver of productive knowledge behavior (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). Through self-reflection, they realize that they have accumulated much organizational knowledge and decide to share it with others instead of hoarding it. Practically wise employees proactively look for opportunities to serve as good citizens within their organization: they routinely reflect on others' workplace encounters and, due to their workplace pragmatism, look for opportunities to contribute. In other words, practically wise employees intuitively and/or deliberately suppress knowledge sabotage, hiding and hoarding. Instead, they proactively engage in knowledge sharing. The following hypotheses are suggested (see Figure 1):

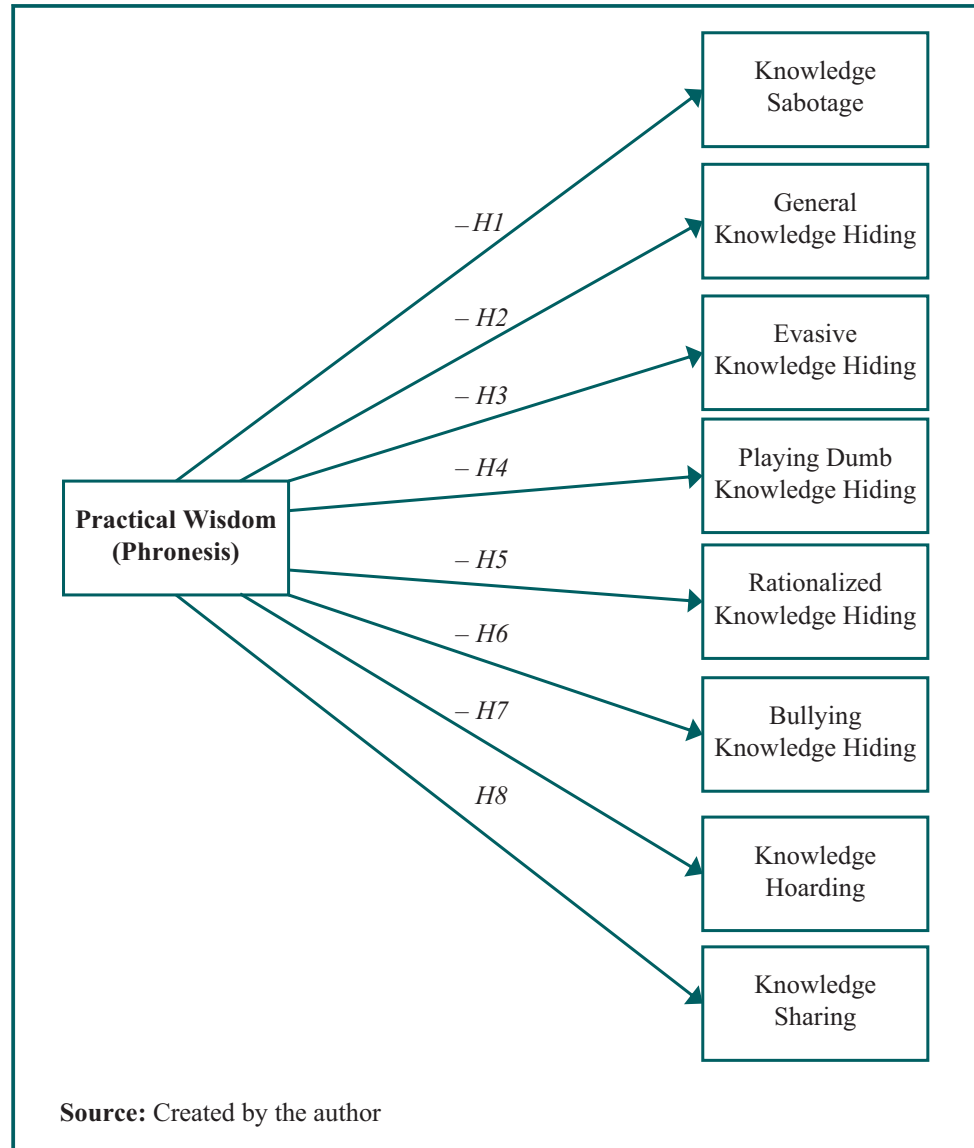
- H1. Practical wisdom has a negative effect on knowledge sabotage.
- H2. Practical wisdom has a negative effect on general knowledge hiding.
- H3. Practical wisdom has a negative effect on evasive knowledge hiding.
- H4. Practical wisdom has a negative effect on playing dumb hiding.
- H5. Practical wisdom has a negative effect on rationalized knowledge hiding.
- H6. Practical wisdom has a negative effect on bullying knowledge hiding.
- H7. Practical wisdom has a negative effect on knowledge hoarding.
- H8. Practical wisdom has a positive effect on knowledge sharing.

3. Methods

3.1 The instrument

The following sources were used to operationalize the knowledge behavior constructs: knowledge sabotage – Serenko and Choo (2020); general knowledge hiding – Peng (2013) (with modifications); evasive knowledge hiding, playing dumb knowledge hiding, rationalized knowledge hiding, knowledge hoarding and knowledge sharing – Connelly *et al.* (2012); and bullying knowledge hiding – Yuan *et al.* (2021). Items for appraisal of self-emotions in the workplace, appraisal of others' emotions in the workplace and self-regulation of workplace emotions – which represent three facets of emotional intelligence –

Figure 1 The proposed model



were adapted from [Wong and Law \(2002\)](#). The pool of items for the other seven practical wisdom dimensions was developed based on the concepts and literature documented in the previous section of this paper. The draft instrument was reviewed by a panel of 15 independent experts (one expert at a time) who were asked to review the items in the context of their dimension definition. Based on the experts' feedback, adjustments to the questions were made, and the last several experts had very few, if any, suggestions. This ensured some degree of face validity of the instrument.

To estimate common method variance (CMV), a marker variable ("In terms of my future travel plans, I will go on a trip in the next six months") was inserted in the middle of the questionnaire as suggested by [Zaza et al. \(2022\)](#). Attention check questions were used to measure respondents' engagement and response accuracy. The instrument included several demographic questions. [Appendix](#) presents the final version of the questionnaire.

3.2 Study design and participants

For the study, 235 individuals were recruited from CloudResearch Connect – a crowdsourcing platform for online research (<https://connect.cloudresearch.com>) which offers access to thousands of highly motivated individuals willing to participate in surveys. CloudResearch Connect differs from other crowdsourcing platforms, including Amazon’s MTurk, because it has a rigorous vetting process to approve all members to ensure high data quality. The use of crowdsourcing platforms for data collection is well established in all academic domains including knowledge management (Peralta and Saldanha, 2014; Andreeva and Zappa, 2023; Duan *et al.*, 2023; Serenko, 2019, 2020). The major advantages of using Connect include respondents’ anonymity, ability to pre-screen prospective participants and random distribution of participants throughout the country. The methodological recommendations by Aguinis *et al.* (2021) for the use of online research platforms were followed.

G*Power 3 statistical power analysis (Faul *et al.*, 2007) was used to establish the minimum sample size with the following parameters: one-tailed test (because the directional relationship between practical wisdom and knowledge behavior was already theoretically determined); estimated construct correlation = 0.25; alpha error probability = 0.01; beta error probability = 0.80; and *H0* correlation = 0. The minimum sample size was 157 observations. To qualify for the study, potential respondents had to be currently employed full-time for at least two years in an organization that had 10 or more employees and reside in the USA. A financial incentive of US\$4 was offered to those who accurately completed the survey, which exceeds the US minimum wage and represents a fair compensation. The study was described in general terms to minimize social desirability bias. The study was approved by the author’s Institutional Research Ethics Board.

4. Results

4.1 Overview

Of 235 responses, 35 were rejected due to validity issues based on the analysis of attention check questions (15% rejection rate). Respondents worked in their current organization for seven years on average, ranging from two to 33 years. About 35% were employed in small and medium-sized enterprises (10–499 employees) and 65% in large organizations (500+ employees). About 71.5% worked in private; 28%, in public; and 0.5%, in other types of organizations. Overall, they had 15 years of full-time work experience, ranging from two to 46 years. They were 37 years old on average (from 22 to 65 years old). About 62% were men, 37.5% were women and 0.5% did not specify their gender. Overall, they were well-educated: 14.5% completed high school or less; 17%, an associate degree or some college; 46%, a bachelor’s degree; 19%, a master’s degree and 3.5%, a doctoral degree.

No differences in the means of practical wisdom and knowledge behavior constructs were observed based on respondents’ gender, organization type and education level (Table 1). Table 2 shows that, as people age and gain general and organizational work experience, they accumulate subject matter expertise. In addition, older workers become more pragmatic, and the more work experience they have in their current organization, the better they may read other workers’ emotions and engage in integrative thinking. Table 3 further

Table 1 Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) testing

| Construct | Gender | Organization type (private, public, other) | Education level |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| Practical wisdom | Wilks’ lambda = 0.950; <i>p</i> = 0.451 | Wilks’ lambda = 0.894; <i>p</i> = 0.359 | Wilks’ lambda = 0.779; <i>p</i> = 0.188 |
| Knowledge behavior | Wilks’ lambda = 0.976; <i>p</i> = 0.781 | Wilks’ lambda = 0.945; <i>p</i> = 0.813 | Wilks’ lambda = 0.859; <i>p</i> = 0.602 |

Source: Created by the author

Table 2 Wisdom construct correlations

| Variable | PW | MD | SME | WP | EIS | EIO | EIR | SR | ER | EBR | IT |
|-------------------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Years at current organization | 0.14 | 0.11 | 0.18* | 0.09 | 0.07 | 0.19** | 0.13 | -0.01 | 0.08 | -0.02 | 0.17* |
| Overall work experience | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.18* | 0.10 | 0.08 | -0.01 | 0.07 | -0.02 | -0.04 | 0.02 | 0.08 |
| Age | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.16* | 0.16* | -0.02 | -0.01 | 0.00 | -0.01 | -0.01 | 0.01 | 0.05 |

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; PW = practical wisdom (second order factor); MD = moral purpose in decision-making; SME = subject matter expertise; WP = workplace pragmatism; EIS = emotional intelligence – appraisal of self-emotions in the workplace; EIO = emotional intelligence – appraisal of others' emotions in the workplace; EIR = emotional intelligence – self-regulation of workplace emotions; SR = self-reflection in the workplace; ER = external reflection in the workplace; EBR = exceeding the bounds of rationality; IT = integrative thinking

Source: Created by the author

Table 3 Knowledge behavior construct correlations

| Variable | KSA | KHG | EKH | PDKH | RKH | BKH | KHO | KS |
|-------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| Years at current organization | -0.11 | -0.03 | -0.07 | -0.07 | -0.09 | -0.02 | -0.03 | 0.05 |
| Overall work experience | -0.27** | -0.15* | -0.30** | -0.20** | -0.26** | -0.21** | 0.00 | -0.12 |
| Age | -0.12 | -0.05 | -0.19** | -0.08 | -0.12 | -0.13 | 0.04 | -0.13 |

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; KSA = knowledge sabotage; KHG = general knowledge hiding; EKH = evasive knowledge hiding; PDKH = playing dumb knowledge hiding; RKH = rationalized knowledge hiding; BKH = bullying knowledge hiding; KHO = knowledge hoarding; KS = knowledge sharing

Source: Created by the author

reveals that the number of years of overall work experience is negatively associated with all types of counterproductive knowledge behavior except knowledge hoarding.

4.2 The measurement and structural models

Harman's (1967) single factor test was done to assess CMV. In two separate analyses, the first factors captured only 30.3% and 37.4% of the total variance for all practical wisdom and knowledge behavior items, respectively, which showed that CMV did not affect the validity of the measurement model. No statistically significant correlations at the 0.01 level were found between the marker variable and all constructs, which further ruled out CMV.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the measurement and the structural models by means of SmartPLS 4 (Ringle *et al.*, 2022), which fits well with knowledge management research (Cepeda-Carrion *et al.*, 2019). Confirmatory tetrad analysis (Gudergan *et al.*, 2008) with the significance level of 0.01 showed that all except two constructs (knowledge hoarding and appraisal of others' emotions in the workplace) met the criteria for reflective constructs[3]. However, because in previous research, the knowledge hoarding construct has been traditionally operationalized as reflective, it was retained as reflective in this study. It was also decided to position appraisal of others' emotions in the workplace as reflective because it exhibited a good level of reliability and to be consistent with the other wisdom constructs. Thus, the entire measurement model was analyzed in Mode A (composite reflective) (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2016). The second-order factor (practical wisdom) was also estimated in the reflective mode by means of the repeated indicator approach. Analysis of heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler *et al.*, 2015) showed that a vast majority of values were below 0.6, and only one value (workplace pragmatism – moral purpose in decision-making) was 0.885, still below the cut-off point of 0.9. All item loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$.

Of 88 items included in the initial questionnaire, eight were dropped due to their poor reliability. Tables 4 and 5 present reliability and validity assessment of the remaining

Table 4 Reliability assessment

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>ITC</i> | <i>Loading</i> | <i>Alpha</i> | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| MD1 | 5.56 | 1.26 | 0.52 | 0.678 | 0.82 | 0.829 | 0.530 |
| MD2 | 5.76 | 0.97 | 0.63 | 0.762 | | | |
| MD3 | 5.72 | 1.04 | 0.62 | 0.762 | | | |
| MD4 | 6.37 | 0.94 | 0.53 | 0.662 | | | |
| MD5 | 5.93 | 1.10 | 0.70 | 0.822 | | | |
| MD6 | 5.74 | 1.26 | 0.52 | 0.668 | | | |
| SME1 | 6.06 | 0.85 | 0.69 | 0.793 | 0.89 | 0.888 | 0.639 |
| SME2 | 5.95 | 1.02 | 0.74 | 0.819 | | | |
| SME3 | 5.94 | 1.05 | 0.76 | 0.842 | | | |
| SME4 | 5.92 | 1.06 | 0.66 | 0.763 | | | |
| SME5 | 5.77 | 1.00 | 0.71 | 0.811 | | | |
| SME6 | 6.15 | 0.88 | 0.65 | 0.765 | | | |
| WP1 | 5.92 | 1.02 | 0.49 | 0.707 | 0.70 | 0.723 | 0.530 |
| WP2 | 5.68 | 1.17 | 0.54 | 0.794 | | | |
| WP3 | 6.11 | 0.87 | 0.56 | 0.796 | | | |
| WP4 | 5.68 | 1.03 | 0.37 | 0.599 | | | |
| EIS1 | 6.12 | 0.83 | 0.80 | 0.902 | 0.88 | 0.884 | 0.742 |
| EIS2 | 6.18 | 0.84 | 0.75 | 0.868 | | | |
| EIS3 | 5.93 | 1.08 | 0.65 | 0.800 | | | |
| EIS4 | 6.01 | 0.85 | 0.76 | 0.871 | | | |
| EIO1 | 5.44 | 1.05 | 0.80 | 0.917 | 0.89 | 0.925 | 0.748 |
| EIO2 | 5.38 | 1.09 | 0.79 | 0.911 | | | |
| EIO3 | 4.67 | 1.37 | 0.66 | 0.745 | | | |
| EIO4 | 5.11 | 1.15 | 0.77 | 0.876 | | | |
| EIR1 | 6.01 | 1.04 | 0.86 | 0.927 | 0.92 | 0.925 | 0.813 |
| EIR2 | 6.03 | 1.02 | 0.87 | 0.933 | | | |
| EIR3 | 6.04 | 1.00 | 0.83 | 0.909 | | | |
| EIR4 | 5.97 | 1.15 | 0.72 | 0.834 | | | |
| SR1 | 5.60 | 1.02 | 0.79 | 0.860 | 0.91 | 0.908 | 0.685 |
| SR2 | 5.35 | 1.38 | 0.76 | 0.828 | | | |
| SR3 | 5.43 | 1.28 | 0.76 | 0.828 | | | |
| SR4 | 5.62 | 1.36 | 0.77 | 0.846 | | | |
| SR5 | 5.72 | 1.11 | 0.78 | 0.859 | | | |
| SR6 | 6.11 | 1.04 | 0.60 | 0.737 | | | |
| ER1 | 5.10 | 1.38 | 0.78 | 0.856 | 0.92 | 0.916 | 0.704 |
| ER2 | 5.63 | 1.23 | 0.77 | 0.850 | | | |
| ER3 | 5.63 | 1.22 | 0.79 | 0.857 | | | |
| ER4 | 5.19 | 1.34 | 0.82 | 0.875 | | | |
| ER5 | 5.53 | 1.40 | 0.70 | 0.796 | | | |
| ER6 | 5.51 | 1.22 | 0.71 | 0.799 | | | |
| EBR1 | 5.29 | 1.28 | 0.70 | 0.804 | 0.81 | 0.891 | 0.624 |
| EBR2 | 5.76 | 1.00 | 0.56 | 0.849 | | | |
| EBR3 | 4.61 | 1.35 | 0.63 | 0.693 | | | |
| EBR4 | 5.30 | 1.22 | 0.64 | 0.804 | | | |
| IT1 | 5.10 | 1.27 | 0.49 | 0.616 | 0.78 | 0.806 | 0.533 |
| IT2 | 5.75 | 0.89 | 0.58 | 0.763 | | | |
| IT3 | 5.33 | 1.21 | 0.52 | 0.656 | | | |
| IT4 | 5.98 | 0.91 | 0.59 | 0.803 | | | |
| IT5 | 5.83 | 1.05 | 0.57 | 0.793 | | | |
| KSA1 | 1.51 | 1.13 | 0.85 | 0.911 | 0.97 | 0.972 | 0.911 |
| KSA2 | 1.54 | 1.23 | 0.94 | 0.970 | | | |
| KSA3 | 1.56 | 1.14 | 0.94 | 0.966 | | | |
| KSA4 | 1.57 | 1.26 | 0.94 | 0.969 | | | |
| KHG1 | 1.89 | 1.31 | 0.74 | 0.886 | 0.87 | 0.880 | 0.798 |
| KHG2 | 1.84 | 1.12 | 0.77 | 0.890 | | | |
| KHG3 | 1.77 | 1.07 | 0.76 | 0.904 | | | |
| EKH1 | 1.97 | 1.50 | 0.75 | 0.879 | 0.93 | 0.943 | 0.818 |
| EKH2 | 1.90 | 1.59 | 0.87 | 0.922 | | | |

(continued)

Table 4

| Item | Mean | SD | ITC | Loading | Alpha | CR | AVE |
|-------|------|------|------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| EKH3 | 1.98 | 1.53 | 0.86 | 0.920 | | | |
| EKH4 | 1.82 | 1.47 | 0.84 | 0.896 | | | |
| PDKH1 | 1.67 | 1.17 | 0.74 | 0.858 | 0.89 | 0.892 | 0.749 |
| PDKH2 | 1.68 | 1.13 | 0.86 | 0.933 | | | |
| PDKH3 | 1.78 | 1.27 | 0.75 | 0.856 | | | |
| PDKH4 | 2.14 | 1.32 | 0.66 | 0.810 | | | |
| RKH1 | 1.72 | 1.16 | 0.73 | 0.865 | 0.85 | 0.854 | 0.694 |
| RKH2 | 2.16 | 1.54 | 0.74 | 0.844 | | | |
| RKH3 | 1.82 | 1.24 | 0.81 | 0.900 | | | |
| RKH4 | 1.43 | 0.95 | 0.52 | 0.711 | | | |
| BKH1 | 1.75 | 1.42 | 0.82 | 0.909 | 0.92 | 0.936 | 0.864 |
| BKH2 | 1.75 | 1.30 | 0.82 | 0.929 | | | |
| BKH3 | 1.67 | 1.31 | 0.88 | 0.951 | | | |
| KHO1 | 4.20 | 1.67 | 0.57 | 0.714 | 0.86 | 0.903 | 0.713 |
| KHO2 | 5.14 | 1.44 | 0.82 | 0.923 | | | |
| KHO3 | 5.16 | 1.45 | 0.84 | 0.929 | | | |
| KHO4 | 5.24 | 1.47 | 0.62 | 0.791 | | | |
| KS1 | 5.61 | 1.10 | 0.72 | 0.835 | 0.85 | 0.880 | 0.627 |
| KS2 | 5.46 | 1.19 | 0.67 | 0.809 | | | |
| KS3 | 5.71 | 1.10 | 0.77 | 0.881 | | | |
| KS4 | 5.71 | 1.14 | 0.66 | 0.816 | | | |
| KS5 | 5.29 | 1.23 | 0.49 | 0.587 | | | |

Notes: SD = standard deviation; ITC = corrected item-to-total correlation; Alpha = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted
Source: Created by the author

(i.e. final) measures, respectively. Overall, they demonstrate that all items and constructs meet the reliability and validity criteria (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Bootstrapping was done to assess the statistical significance of the structural relationships. Confidence intervals indicated that all relationships were significant (i.e. zero was not included in any confidence intervals). Analysis of *t*-values further confirmed the significance of all relationships at $p < 0.001$. All direct and indirect effects were also statistically significant. The results revealed that, first, all wisdom dimensions contributed to the overall construct of practical wisdom, but to different degrees. Subject matter expertise, moral purpose in decision-making, self-reflection in the workplace and external reflection in the workplace are the central dimensions while exceeding the bounds of rationality is the least important one. Second, practical wisdom substantially boosts productive knowledge behavior such as knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.59$) and suppresses counterproductive knowledge behavior such as knowledge sabotage and knowledge hiding. Practical wisdom has the strongest negative impact on playing dumb knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.50$) out of all counterproductive knowledge behavior constructs. Third, the beta coefficient between practical wisdom and knowledge hoarding was very strong and statistically significant (0.54), yet it was positive while it was hypothesized to be negative: in contrast to expectations, practical wisdom promoted (rather than suppressed) knowledge hoarding. Overall, the results provide strong support for all hypotheses except *H7* (see Figure 2).

5. Discussion, recommendations and conclusion

The findings of this study lead to several theoretical and practical implications. With respect to *theoretical insights*, first, this study offers a definition of practical wisdom. Based on the findings, practical wisdom is defined as a set of unique, admirable characteristics – moral purpose in decision-making, subject matter expertise, workplace pragmatism, emotional intelligence in the workplace, self-reflection in the workplace, external reflection in the

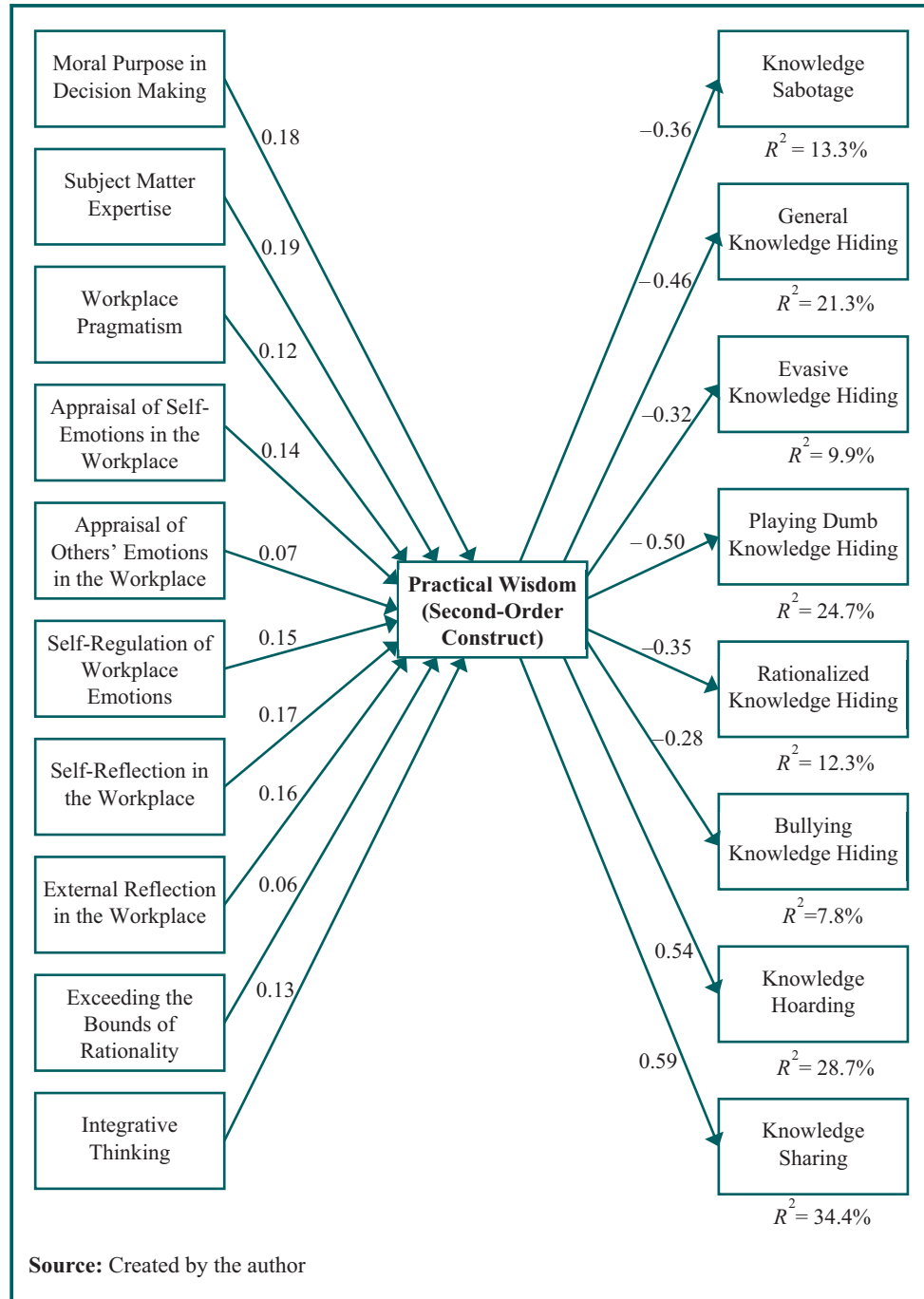
Table 5 Construct correlations

| Construct | MD | SME | WP | EIS | EIO | EIR | SR | ER | EBR | IT | KSA | KHG | EKH | PDKH | RKH | BKH | KHO | KS |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| MD | 0.728 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SME | 0.637 | 0.799 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| WP | 0.679 | 0.611 | 0.728 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| EIS | 0.486 | 0.488 | 0.603 | 0.861 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| EIO | 0.323 | 0.457 | 0.305 | 0.380 | 0.865 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| EIR | 0.523 | 0.371 | 0.536 | 0.569 | 0.128 | 0.902 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SR | 0.616 | 0.494 | 0.557 | 0.373 | 0.334 | 0.341 | 0.828 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ER | 0.592 | 0.468 | 0.443 | 0.277 | 0.457 | 0.273 | 0.704 | 0.839 | | | | | | | | | | |
| EBR | 0.271 | 0.296 | 0.334 | 0.239 | 0.227 | 0.338 | 0.309 | 0.231 | 0.790 | | | | | | | | | |
| IT | 0.673 | 0.626 | 0.550 | 0.535 | 0.432 | 0.468 | 0.620 | 0.623 | 0.319 | 0.730 | | | | | | | | |
| KSA | 0.363 | 0.272 | 0.322 | 0.303 | 0.096 | 0.312 | 0.222 | 0.175 | 0.175 | 0.244 | 0.954 | | | | | | | |
| KHG | 0.417 | 0.382 | 0.427 | 0.451 | 0.147 | 0.394 | 0.242 | 0.162 | 0.217 | 0.369 | 0.494 | 0.893 | | | | | | |
| EKH | 0.318 | 0.260 | 0.356 | 0.268 | 0.049 | 0.316 | 0.154 | 0.097 | 0.090 | 0.197 | 0.605 | 0.485 | 0.904 | | | | | |
| PDKH | 0.484 | 0.410 | 0.465 | 0.398 | 0.149 | 0.421 | 0.280 | 0.200 | 0.241 | 0.404 | 0.575 | 0.724 | 0.558 | 0.865 | | | | |
| RKH | 0.334 | 0.330 | 0.363 | 0.340 | 0.097 | 0.359 | 0.130 | 0.056 | 0.198 | 0.233 | 0.559 | 0.633 | 0.522 | 0.686 | 0.833 | | | |
| BKH | 0.282 | 0.243 | 0.294 | 0.225 | 0.005 | 0.324 | 0.141 | 0.041 | 0.125 | 0.185 | 0.597 | 0.547 | 0.602 | 0.576 | 0.648 | 0.930 | | |
| KHO | 0.456 | 0.401 | 0.406 | 0.240 | 0.212 | 0.235 | 0.493 | 0.559 | 0.217 | 0.467 | 0.066 | 0.144 | 0.083 | 0.174 | 0.105 | 0.010 | 0.844 | |
| KS | 0.488 | 0.455 | 0.466 | 0.418 | 0.306 | 0.392 | 0.416 | 0.435 | 0.183 | 0.544 | 0.185 | 0.474 | 0.197 | 0.391 | 0.314 | 0.183 | 0.355 | 0.792 |

Note: The diagonal elements are the square root of the AVE of a respective construct

Source: Created by the author

Figure 2 The structural model (all beta coefficients are significant at $p < 0.001$)



workplace, exceeding the bounds of rationality and integrative thinking – that allow a wise employee to act for the betterment of all organizational stakeholders. Second, this study forms the foundation for further empirical inquiries into the nature of practical wisdom. Presently, many knowledge management scholars and practitioners do not see value in the concept of practical wisdom because they consider it a hypothetical, elusive and even deceptive notion devoid of practical utility – and they are right within their own viewpoint. This Real Impact Research Article challenges this view, however, and shows that it is

possible to conceptualize and measure the practical wisdom of employees and that practical wisdom guides employee knowledge behavior. It demonstrates that practical wisdom is a multidimensional construct that may be operationalized and measured like other well-established knowledge management concepts.

Third, the causal relationships proposed and confirmed in this study are somewhat intuitive in nature: we cannot imagine a wise employee who sabotages or deceives his/her fellow co-workers and refuses to help them for the sake of personal gain or ego. At the same time, these relationships form a scientific theory that explicates why these causal links exist and how they affect employees' behavior. Thus, this study shows that it is possible to move from layman hypothesizing toward scientific theories when dealing with the notion of practical wisdom and its effects in the workplace.

Fourth, while all dimensions contribute to employee practical wisdom, subject matter expertise, moral purpose in decision-making, self-reflection in the workplace and external reflection in the workplace are extremely important from the perspective of knowledge behavior. Indeed, if we try to quickly imagine a picture of a wise employee who proactively imparts knowledge to others, a mental portrait of a benevolent expert who understands how his/her actions impact other workers comes to mind. Fifth, the fact that practical wisdom has the strongest suppressive impact on playing dumb knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.50$) is not surprising: again, we cannot imagine a wise organizational member who pretends to be dumb when interacting with others. At the same time, the magnitude of a positive effect of practical wisdom on knowledge sharing was even higher ($\beta = 0.59$). Interestingly, practical wisdom facilitates knowledge hoarding. It is possible that wise employees see nothing wrong with the mere accumulation of work-related knowledge because they do not hide it from others when it is requested.

Sixth, opportunities for future research are ample. As a starting point, future scholars may introduce and empirically test additional dimensions of practical wisdom because this study captured only a small proportion of all available characteristics of a wise worker. Another critical line of research pertains to exploring the antecedents of practical wisdom. Of particular interest are personality traits such as the Big Five Model (McCrae and Costa, 1987; Costa and McCrae, 1992), the Hogan Personality Inventory (Hogan and Hogan, 2009) and Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (Millon *et al.*, 2015; Serenko, 2023b). Additional outcomes of practical wisdom – which may pertain to both traditional and new organizational constructs such as job satisfaction (Judge *et al.*, 2001), organizational commitment (Choi *et al.*, 2015), turnover (Judge, 1993; Serenko *et al.*, 2022, 2024) and quiet quitting (Serenko, 2024) – represent a fruitful line of inquiry.

In terms of *practical recommendations*, first, managers should realize that possessing practical wisdom is not limited to a group of select, high-level executives. Instead, every organizational member may potentially possess practical wisdom which guides his/her counterproductive and productive knowledge behavior. Second, organizations may administer the practical wisdom questionnaire presented in this study to their workers and identify those who score the lowest. Such employees may be further scrutinized to make sure that they do not engage in knowledge sabotage and knowledge hiding. However, managers should realize that if the questionnaire is administered non-anonymously, some respondents may exaggerate their responses to position themselves in a positive light. To identify these individuals, the practical wisdom instrument may be accompanied by the social desirability bias and lie scales (Reynolds, 1982; Eysenck *et al.*, 1985) which are specifically designed to detect such response patterns. Third, organizations should invest in employee training programs that focus on the development of attributes pertaining to the practical wisdom dimensions. It is particularly critical to teach workers to consider moral purpose in decision-making because this is a salient dimension of practical wisdom. Other training programs should teach employees how to appraise and regulate their workplace emotions and reflect on their own and others' workplace functioning.

Out of many attributes of a successfully adopted management theory, perhaps the most salient is its intuitiveness: when presented with the theory's propositions, a manager would respond, "I think I have always known this, but I am glad that someone has theoretically framed and empirically supported this premise." The findings documented in this study are also intuitive from a manager's perspective: practically wise workers support others and refrain from hurting them – an observation that many attentive managers have probably made after years of experience. The intuitive nature of this conclusion is the key to bringing the notion of practical wisdom to mainstream knowledge management research and practice. Presently, there is a growing demand for practically wise workers who can make wise decisions and help other organizational members realize their full potential. This is particularly important given the recent changes in the nature of the contemporary workforce fueled by the Great Resignation (Serenko, 2023a) and quiet quitting (Serenko, 2024) trends which diminished employee loyalty and productivity.

It is unarguable that the notion of wisdom is a very controversial topic that has both detractors and supporters. At the root of the debate is the illusive nature of this nonorthodox concept and the issues surrounding its measurement (Swartwood, 2020). While the line of research introduced in this Real Impact Research Article cannot solve all the world's problems, it may potentially help organizations understand a previously underexplored facet of their workforce and propose new ways to further improve managerial practices. However, the jury is still out, and only time will tell whether the ideas expressed in this paper will create a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) or will eventually wither away.

Notes

1. In addition to conducting a comprehensive literature review, the author contacted several leading scholars in the domain of wisdom research, and none of them was aware of a comprehensive scale designed to measure practical wisdom of individual employees.
2. In addition to the appraisal of one's own and others' emotions, some emotional intelligence definitions include the use of emotions to enhance one's thought. However, in this study, the latter component is not incorporated as a practical wisdom dimension because a related concept is captured by the exceeding the bounds of rationality dimension.
3. Confirmatory tetrad analysis states that, when at least 80% of all *p*-values and confidence intervals are non-significant, the construct is best operationalized as reflective; otherwise, it is formative.

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Appendix. The questionnaire

Instructions

- You must be currently employed full-time for at least 2 years in an organization that has 10 or more employees.
- Please answer all questions below in the context of the organization in which you are currently employed full-time.

Pre-screening

- For how many years have you worked in your current organization?
- How many employees does your current organization have?
- Your current organization is: (public, private and other).

Practical wisdom (seven-point Likert-type agree/disagree scale).

Practical wisdom (seven-point Likert-type agree/disagree scale)

Moral purpose in decision-making (MD)

When making decisions in my workplace, I

- MD1. act in the best interests of all organizational stakeholders.
- MD2. take into account the common good of all parties involved.
- MD3. focus on the well-being of other employees, customers, community members, members of the general public, and other stakeholders.
- MD4. act in an ethical manner.
- MD5. take into consideration the long-term consequences of my actions.
- MD6. eliminate bad faith, personal biases, and prejudice.

Subject matter expertise (SME)

In my workplace, I

- SME1. possess strong factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge relevant to my work performance.
- SME2. have accumulated a considerable degree of professional knowledge.
- SME3. have gathered a depth and breadth of subject matter expertise.
- SME4. have experienced and learned from a variety of professional encounters.
- SME5. possess vital organizational knowledge.
- SME6. consider myself a very knowledgeable employee.

Workplace pragmatism (WP)

In my workplace, I

- WP1. always focus on achieving a particular outcome.

- WP2. consistently try to act, perform, and engage rather than avoid, procrastinate, and debate.
- WP3. persistently attempt to accomplish a desirable outcome.
- WP4. consider myself a pragmatic employee.

Emotional intelligence in the workplace – appraisal of self-emotions in the workplace (EIS)

In my workplace, I

- EIS1. have an ability to understand my own emotions.
- EIS2. can sense my own feelings.
- EIS3. always know how I feel.
- EIS4. can read my own emotional state.

Emotional intelligence in the workplace – appraisal of others' emotions in the workplace (EIO)

In my workplace, I

- EIO1. have an ability to understand my co-workers' emotions.
- EIO2. can sense my co-workers' feelings.
- EIO3. always know how my co-workers feel.
- EIO4. can read my co-workers' emotional state.

Emotional intelligence in the workplace – appraisal of others' emotions in the workplace (EIR)

In my workplace, I

- EIR1. am able to control my own emotions.
- EIR2. can manage my own emotional state.
- EIR3. can regulate my own feelings.
- EIR4. can suppress my temper if needed.

Self-reflection in the workplace (SR)

In my workplace, I

- SR1. analyze my own work-related experiences to understand my inner state to improve my capacity to function.
- SR2. deliberately practice internal self-reflection to comprehend my inner state.
- SR3. engage in retrospective self-analysis of workplace encounters.
- SR4. attempt to understand my inner self to avoid future mistakes.
- SR5. explore my functioning and initiate corrective actions if necessary.
- SR6. analyze my previous mistakes and learn from them.

External reflection in the workplace (ER)

In my workplace, I

- ER1. explore, analyze, and evaluate my colleagues' work-related experiences.
- ER2. learn from my co-workers to improve my workplace functioning.
- ER3. observe the behavior of my co-workers and learn from it.
- ER4. collect and process my co-workers' experiences.
- ER5. analyze my co-workers' mistakes not to repeat them in the future.
- ER6. evaluate my co-workers' knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Exceeding the bounds of rationality (EBR)

When making decisions in my workplace, in addition to a rational assessment of the situation, I rely on my own

- EBR1. intuitions.
- EBR2. personal insights.
- EBR3. hunches.
- EBR4. senses.

Integrative thinking (IT)

When making decisions in my workplace, I

- IT1. feel comfortable facing opposing potential courses of action.
- IT2. develop a good sense of what lies behind a situation before making a decision.
- IT3. look for hidden factors that may affect a decision outcome.
- IT4. keep an open-minded perspective.
- IT5. keep the entire problem in mind while analyzing its individual parts.

About the author

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