A viewpoint on knowledge sabotage: structured literature review, new survey instrument and recommendations by the concept's developer

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Abstract

Purpose – *This viewpoint aims to analyze the current state of research on knowledge sabotage from the concept developer's perspective and introduces a new measurement instrument.*

Design/methodology/approach – *In addition to the author's personal reflections, the methods include a structured literature review of 24 empirical studies and a survey of 204 full-time employees recruited from the CloudResearch Connect crowdsourcing platform.*

Findings – *Research on knowledge sabotage has been steadily expanding. The construct is well suited to serve as a mediator but should not be used as an antecedent of personality traits or as a moderator. Future studies should focus more on the outcomes of knowledge sabotage, measure it on a seven- or, preferably, nine-point Likert-type scale and employ qualitative methods. Researchers seeking a general measure of knowledge sabotage may use either the previous or the new scale, but those aiming to examine its dimensions should rely on the new instrument.*

Practical implications – *Knowledge sabotage is a widespread phenomenon with severe consequences at multiple levels. It arises from individual-specific factors such as psychological states, personality traits and personal motivations, as well as workplace dynamics involving coworkers, supervisors and subordinates. For victims, it leads to psychological distress, relational breakdowns, performance setbacks, career harm and financial loss. Perpetrators may also face career repercussions. At the organizational level, knowledge sabotage produces both direct and indirect financial losses. In addition, knowledge sabotage negatively affects third parties and society as a whole.*

Originality/value – *This viewpoint offers a novel framework and is recommended reading for scholars interested in advancing the study of knowledge sabotage.*

Keywords *Knowledge sabotage, Structured literature review, Survey, Questionnaire, The Dark Triad, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, Turnover intention*

Paper type *Viewpoint*

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1. Introduction [1]

Knowledge management is the youngest management discipline, but it already exhibits signs of disciplinary maturity and recognition (Bootz *et al.*, 2019; Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2021; Serenko, 2021). One of the key characteristics that demonstrates its progression toward the coveted status of a reference discipline is the development of indigenous disciplinary theories, models, concepts and constructs, which are conceived, elaborated and disseminated within the knowledge management domain to explain various discipline-specific phenomena (Oswick *et al.*, 2011) and may eventually be adopted by other scientific domains. Indigenous theories, models, concepts and constructs represent a key marker of scholarly maturity: their presence indicates that the field has developed sufficient

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conceptual coherence and epistemic confidence to theorize its own phenomena rather than borrowing ideas from other domains. They also provide a stable foundation for cumulative research programs as opposed to isolated, theory-importing studies.

Notable examples of indigenous knowledge management theories, models, concepts and constructs include, but are not limited to, the socialization, externalization, combination, internalization (SECI) model of knowledge creation (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka *et al.*, 2008), the concept of "Ba" (Nonaka and Konno, 1998), the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant, 1996), the knowledge management cycle model (Evans *et al.*, 2014), knowledge hiding and its various dimensions (Connelly *et al.*, 2012; Anand *et al.*, 2022; Hina *et al.*, 2025), knowledge hoarding (Evans *et al.*, 2015; Oliveira *et al.*, 2021; de Garcia *et al.*, 2022), knowledge protection (Manhart and Thalmann, 2015) and knowledge theft (Zweig *et al.*, 2025).

Knowledge sabotage – an extreme form of counterproductive knowledge behavior (Serenko, 2019; Serenko, 2020; Serenko and Choo, 2020) – represents a recent addition to the repertoire of indigenous knowledge management constructs. Since I introduced the concept of knowledge sabotage in 2019 (see Serenko, 2019), it has quickly attracted the attention of numerous knowledge management scholars, as attested by more than 400 Google Scholar citations to the three foundational articles and multiple empirical follow-up studies. As the developer of this concept, I have followed the discourse and empirical exploration of this topic with great interest: I was excited to review manuscripts in progress and to read published works, as I saw my ideas challenged, tested, validated and extended in various contexts and ways. Over this short yet intensive research chapter, I have made several observations that led to both excitement and disappointment. On a positive note, as I recommended as future lines of inquiry, a growing strand of research has focused on the antecedents of knowledge sabotage (e.g. Perotti *et al.*, 2023; Abdillah *et al.*, 2024; Tan *et al.*, 2024b), a smaller stream of papers has examined its outcomes (e.g. Arias-Pérez *et al.*, 2026) and some studies have investigated its antecedents and consequences simultaneously (e.g. Perotti *et al.*, 2024; Islam *et al.*, 2026). On the disappointing side, as much as I try to remain open-minded and welcoming to new ideas, I occasionally questioned the reasoning behind some research questions, hypotheses and arguments. For example, some studies positioned knowledge sabotage as a moderator of various causal relationships (e.g. Javed *et al.*, 2025), which came as a surprise. A few attempted (unsuccessfully) to position knowledge sabotage as an antecedent of several personality traits, which contradicts the very foundation of personality psychology. Occasionally, I noticed variation in both the name of the construct and its definition without any justification. Some even went as far as to blatantly miscite my ideas: "Well, thank you for boosting my citation count, but I have never said that!"

The third foundational paper also presented a survey instrument for measuring knowledge sabotage, which I codeveloped with Dr. Chun Wei Choo (who was also my "academic grandfather," or my doctoral supervisor's supervisor) during my visiting professorship at the University of Toronto (Serenko and Choo, 2020). On the one hand, as attested by numerous empirical studies, the instrument exhibits acceptable levels of reliability, validity and predictive power. It is also short and easy to administer. On the other hand, I have noticed two limitations of this instrument: the use of direct self-reports and unidimensionality. First, the instrument is based on direct self-reports of knowledge sabotage, also referred to as the "hit the nail on the head" strategy (Wood *et al.*, 2024) – that is, self-reports in which respondents are asked directly whether they possess certain qualities and/or may engage in particular behaviors. Recent psychology and management research attests to the validity of this approach (e.g. Konrath *et al.*, 2018). However, in my informal discussions with knowledge management scholars, I noticed that some of them are not fully convinced of the validity of this approach because the questions explicitly use the negative term "sabotage," and it is possible that some respondents may underreport their actual behavior due to

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social desirability bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). To address this issue, Perotti *et al.* (2024) went a step further and modified the instrument by using the third-person technique. Second, knowledge sabotage exists in four dimensions mapped along two axes (i.e. a two-by-two matrix): (1) active/passive and (2) provoked/unprovoked (i.e. active–provoked, active–unprovoked, passive–provoked and passive–unprovoked) (Serenko, 2019). It became apparent that in some studies, researchers wanted to analyze each dimension of knowledge sabotage separately within specific nomological networks or focus only on active or passive dimensions. However, the survey instrument uses a single item for each dimension of knowledge sabotage – four items in total. Having a single item for each dimension limits researchers' ability to assess the reliability and validity of the dimensions independently, which indicates a need for a new instrument that operationalizes each dimension of knowledge sabotage with multiple items.

To summarize, I have observed three issues with the current state of knowledge sabotage research: occasional atheoretical empiricism (i.e. testing propositions that contradict established theories), potential drift (i.e. unsupported variation in the construct's name and definition) and measurement constraints (i.e. limitations inherent in the existing unidimensional scale). To ensure the fruitful progression of this line of research, I step into the role of a conceptual steward with the following objectives:

1. to integrate the dispersed knowledge sabotage literature;
2. to rearticulate the construct's theoretical foundations and characteristics;
3. to reinforce the construct's positioning within a larger nomological network of its antecedents and consequences; and
4. to provide measurement guidance.

Such support is especially critical at this early stage of a rapidly proliferating concept such as knowledge sabotage to enable cumulative knowledge development. This viewpoint article aims to achieve these goals. First, it documents the theorization of knowledge sabotage from my own (i.e. the concept developer's) perspective. Second, it presents my interpretation of all empirical studies on this topic to date by means of a structured literature review and offers a conceptual framework. Third, it reports the development and validation of a new knowledge sabotage scale, which represents an important addition to the repertoire of instruments available to knowledge management researchers. The narrative style and the structure of this paper differ from those commonly used in traditional articles, literature reviews and editorials because this work offers a first-person discussion of the past, present and future of knowledge sabotage research from the concept developer's perspective. Here, I do not merely review the literature and summarize what others have concluded about this topic – instead, I actively interpret their empirical contributions and express my critical assessments, judgments and expectations. This paper also makes a methodological contribution by presenting a new multidimensional approach to measuring this construct rather than explicitly seeking to advance theory – theory may eventually be extended as future research begins to apply the proposed measurement instrument in diverse and potentially unexpected contexts and novel ways.

Please note that my opinion is "not cast in stone": I am merely expressing my views as a conceptual steward of the construct to facilitate a healthy and productive discourse, and I will gladly change them when solid theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence suggest otherwise. As the body of knowledge accumulates, it is possible that the original conceptualization of knowledge sabotage will evolve and take shape in ways not envisaged at the early stages of its development. Future scholars may also propose alternative theoretical perspectives and challenge my earlier assumptions, interpretations and recommendations and I will happily accept such fruitful developments.

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2. Knowledge sabotage: the original conceptualization

In this section, I outline the historical development of knowledge sabotage, provide its original definition and typology and share my view on its targets, antecedents and outcomes.

2.1 Historical development

I must admit that I did not coin the term "knowledge sabotage" per se. It was briefly mentioned (yet not defined) by Dr Nick Bontis in the early 2000s during a brainstorming exercise in his "Strategic Knowledge Management" class at McMaster University, in which I was his teaching assistant, responsible for attending each class to support and grade in-class discussions. For almost two decades, I kept this term in the back of my mind, occasionally browsing the literature and collecting relevant publications. At some point, after accumulating and reading an extensive body of literature on workplace sabotage in the general management and organizational behavior (OB) fields, I felt compelled to empirically explore this phenomenon.

Table 1 presents the documented history of workplace sabotage. It shows that the origins of sabotage as a form of resistance behavior can be traced back to the 16th century – long before the term "sabotage" was coined. In fact, workplace sabotage is likely as old as the very notion of organized labor. Over time, the nature of workplace sabotage has evolved: from a form of resistance against power and class inequality, to a mechanism for restoring justice within the workplace and finally to a means of retaliation against specific organizational members or other stakeholders – a pattern reflected in contemporary conceptualizations of knowledge sabotage. Future research is likely to explore workplace sabotage committed by various AI agents, robots, machine learning models and other autonomous systems (Benton *et al.*, 2024; Kato, 2024).

2.2 The definition and typology of knowledge sabotage

According to the original conceptualization, knowledge sabotage refers to "an incident when an employee (i.e. the saboteur) provides incorrect (i.e. wrong) knowledge to another employee (the target) or conceals knowledge from another employee" (Serenko, 2019, p. 1264). The definition comprises two dimensions of knowledge sabotage: active, when one provides incorrect critical knowledge and passive, when one conceals critical knowledge. Thus, active knowledge sabotage refers to an incident in which an employee (i.e. the saboteur) provides incorrect critical knowledge to another employee (the target), while passive knowledge sabotage pertains to an incident in which an employee (i.e. the saboteur) conceals critical knowledge from another employee (the target).

The six core conditions represent an integral part of the conceptualization, without which a behavior may not be classified as knowledge sabotage:

1. the saboteur acts intentionally (i.e. this rules out mere oversights or honest mistakes: the perpetrator's objective is to cause harm);
2. the saboteur is fully aware of the target's need for knowledge (i.e. the perpetrator must realize the target's dependency and vulnerability);
3. the saboteur possesses the required knowledge (i.e. it is impossible to manipulate or hide knowledge that the perpetrator does not possess);
4. the required knowledge is extremely important to the target (i.e. the perpetrator's action or inaction is critical to the target's success);

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Table 1 Documented history of workplace sabotage

Time period	Event	Description
1519	Ferdinand Magellan's voyage to circumnavigate the globe	Disgruntled captains attempted to sabotage the expedition's mission through an organized action (Butterworth, 2017)
1500–1800	Proto-industrial era	Primitive forms of industrial rebellion: isolated but organized acts – the destruction or theft of machinery, crops or property – served as early expressions of strategic resistance to economic and political power (Thompson, 1963)
1811–1816	The Luddites	A machine-breaking movement as a formal protest against the mechanization of production during the Industrial Revolution (Jones, 2013)
1911	The term "sabotage" was formalized	Sabotage and its tactics were formally described in a pamphlet by the French anarchist, antimilitarist and revolutionary syndicalist Émile Pouget (Pouget, 1911) as a method to fight exploitation
1905–1920	International labor union "The Industrial Workers of the World"	The introduction of nonviolent, covert tactics – such as slowdowns and work-to-rule – to undermine organizational production processes (Dubofsky, 2000)
1910–1930	First formal management studies	The discovery of sabotage practices when workers acted against their organizations by limiting production output (Taylor, 1911; Williams, 1921; Mathewson, 1931)
1944	The World War II Sabotage Manual	The Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), published the *Simple Sabotage Field Manual* to train managers, supervisors and other prospective citizen-saboteurs in covert workplace sabotage tactics – e.g. how to mismanage a meeting, waste resources or delay decisions – in German-occupied Europe (Office of Strategic Services, 1944)
1945–1969	Conceptual silence in organizational studies	The term sabotage appeared sporadically in the emerging field of organizational behavior but lacked conceptual clarity, definitional precision and empirical support
1970–1989	Recognition of workplace sabotage as subterranean resistance	Early systematic conceptual and empirical inquiries into sabotage as a rational form of employee resistance (Jermier, 2001)
1990–present	Formal empirical study of employee sabotage	Employee sabotage became a well-established construct within the broader study of counterproductive work behavior (Crino, 1994; Klotz and Buckley, 2013)
2000–present	The exploration of new forms of sabotage	Knowledge sabotage (Serenko, 2019), epistemic sabotage (Porter *et al.*, 2023) and service sabotage (Zhang *et al.*, 2025)
Future	AI robots/agents sabotage	Potential instances of workplace sabotage committed by AI robots, software agents, machine learning models and other autonomous systems (Benton *et al.*, 2024; Kato, 2024)

Source(s): Author's own work

5. the saboteur is aware of the importance of the knowledge to the target (i.e. otherwise, the perpetrator may not anticipate the harmful consequences of his/her action or inaction); and
6. the saboteur is aware that the target would be able to productively apply the required knowledge to work-related tasks (i.e. if the target cannot effectively apply the needed knowledge, then sharing incorrect knowledge or hiding correct knowledge would have no meaningful impact on the target and the perpetrator must understand this).

While it is not feasible to list the six core conditions above when routinely offering the definition of knowledge sabotage, for example, in the introduction section of a paper, these core conditions must be stated and applied when discussing knowledge sabotage instances. Most importantly, all of them must be present in the operationalization of knowledge sabotage. In fact, the presence of these six core conditions allows for the differentiation between knowledge sabotage and other forms of counterproductive knowledge behavior as well as various workplace mistreatment

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constructs documented in the knowledge management and OB domains (Cen *et al.*, 2024; Leake *et al.*, 2026).

Generally speaking, knowledge sabotage differs from low-intensity counterproductive knowledge behavior – disengagement from knowledge sharing (Ford *et al.*, 2015), partial knowledge sharing (Ford and Staples, 2010), knowledge sharing ignorance (Israilidis *et al.*, 2015) and counter-knowledge sharing (Martelo-Landroguez *et al.*, 2019) – because offenders who engage in the latter forms of counterproductive knowledge behavior do not necessarily deliberately pursue pernicious goals. It also can be distinguished from high-intensity counterproductive knowledge behavior – bullying knowledge hiding (Yuan *et al.*, 2021; Kmieciak, 2024), knowledge theft (Zweig *et al.*, 2025) and general knowledge hiding (Connelly *et al.*, 2012; Hernaus *et al.*, 2019) – because the latter constructs do not capture the entire spectrum of the characteristics of knowledge sabotage, namely, knowledge importance (i.e. being aware of the significance of the knowledge to the target) and knowledge application (i.e. recognizing that the target would be capable of effectively using the necessary knowledge in job-related activities). Most importantly, knowledge sabotage is expected to have particularly severe consequences for both the target and the organization.

Conceptually, knowledge sabotage shares some similarities with interpersonal workplace mistreatment constructs (Leake *et al.*, 2026). Examples include workplace bullying (Nielsen and Einarsen, 2018), aggression, violence (Neuman and Baron, 2005; Mento *et al.*, 2020) and harassment (Bowling and Beehr, 2006). They overlap with knowledge sabotage because in all cases, the deliberate goal of the perpetrator is to cause harm to the victim. However, knowledge sabotage is distinct from these constructs due to its explicit epistemic stance – in contrast to overt and, frequently, violent workplace mistreatment actions (e.g. physical contact, gestures and threats), it uses knowledge itself as an instrument of interpersonal harm, which makes this behavior elusive and difficult to detect. As a result, the harmful intent can be concealed behind claims of misunderstanding, an honest mistake or informational overload. Knowledge sabotage offenders also target their victims through their task performance rather than through direct attacks on their psychological or physical safety, dignity, identity or social standing *per se*.

The full typology of knowledge sabotage includes two additional dimensions: provoked (when the target approached the saboteur) and unprovoked (when the target did not approach the saboteur). This results in a two-by-two typology according to which each of the four dimensions of knowledge sabotage may be defined further (Table 2). Thus, researchers may investigate various dimensions of knowledge sabotage:

- general knowledge sabotage [i.e. includes all dimensions as operationalized by Serenko and Choo (2020)];
- active knowledge sabotage (i.e. includes active–provoked and active–unprovoked);
- passive knowledge sabotage (i.e. includes passive–provoked and passive–unprovoked);
- provoked knowledge sabotage (i.e. includes active–provoked and passive–provoked);
- unprovoked knowledge sabotage (i.e. includes active–unprovoked and passive–unprovoked);
- active–provoked knowledge sabotage;
- active–unprovoked knowledge sabotage;
- passive–provoked knowledge sabotage; and
- passive–unprovoked knowledge sabotage.

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Table 2 Typology and examples of knowledge sabotage (assuming that the six core conditions have been met)

Dimension	Active (provides wrong knowledge)	Passive (conceals correct knowledge)
Provoked (formal knowledge request)	*Definition* An incident when the saboteur provides the wrong knowledge to the target after receiving a knowledge request *Example* Jane asks Mike for a template to complete the project Mike shares the wrong template Jane's project fails	*Definition* An incident when the saboteur conceals knowledge from the target after receiving a knowledge request *Example* Jane asks Mike for a template to complete the project Mike refuses Jane's project fails
Unprovoked (no formal knowledge request)	*Definition* An incident when the saboteur provides the wrong knowledge to the target without receiving a knowledge request *Example* Mike notices that Jane is missing a template to complete the project Mike proactively approaches Jane and shares the wrong template Jane's project fails	*Definition* An incident when the saboteur conceals knowledge from the target without receiving a knowledge request *Example* Mike notices that Jane is missing a template to complete the project Mike ignores Jane's need for the template Jane's project fails

Source(s): Author's own work

2.3 Targets of knowledge sabotage

When I embarked on this line of research, I assumed that most knowledge saboteurs act against their organizations, which was consistent with much of the prior workplace sabotage literature in the OB domain (Crino, 1994). Fortunately, the two initial studies employed qualitative methods – specifically, the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Butterfield *et al.*, 2005), facilitating the collection of firsthand accounts of knowledge sabotage incidents from the lived experiences of both perpetrators and targets. The findings disconfirmed my prediction: the vast majority of saboteurs targeted other employees. In this regard, knowledge sabotage serves as a means by which one worker deliberately acts against another in pursuit of a specific objective. At the same time, deliberate knowledge sabotage actions against the organization as a whole appear to be rare.

2.4 Antecedents of knowledge sabotage

Similar to other forms of counterproductive work behavior (e.g. Nielsen and Einarsen, 2018; Gamian-Wilk *et al.*, 2022), the antecedents of knowledge sabotage pertain to two general categories: individual-specific (i.e. the vulnerability hypothesis) and workplace-specific (i.e. the work environment hypothesis). Individual-specific factors refer to employees' personality traits (Serenko, 2026), dispositions (Hogan and Hogan, 2007; Hogan and Hogan, 2009), characteristics, motivations and cognitive biases (Dunning *et al.*, 2004; Zell *et al.*, 2020) that reside within individuals and influence their propensity to engage in such behavior. Individual-specific antecedents identified in the early studies include malevolent personality traits (Serenko, 2020), personality disorders (Serenko, 2023) and retaliation tendencies (Serenko, 2019).

Workplace-specific factors pertain to the consequences of job design and the social environment within one's organization. Stressful, disappointing and unfulfilling work environments may lead to negative mental states (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Agnew and Brezina, 2019), resulting in knowledge sabotage against other employees or the entire

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organization. Workplace-specific antecedents discovered in the early studies pertain to interemployee conflict, coworker sabotage and reward systems (Serenko, 2019; Serenko, 2020; Serenko and Choo, 2020; Serenko and Abubakar, 2023).

In addition, it is possible that the interaction between individual-specific and workplace-specific factors represents the strongest antecedent of knowledge sabotage. Of particular interest are personality traits (i.e. individual-specific factors). These may be positioned as direct antecedents of knowledge sabotage, with workplace-specific factors acting as moderators, consistent with Trait Activation Theory (Tett *et al.*, 2013; Tett *et al.*, 2021). Personality traits may also function as moderators of the relationship between workplace-specific factors and knowledge sabotage, as suggested by the Job Characteristics Model by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976; 1980). For a detailed description of these approaches, refer to Serenko (2026).

While organizational knowledge management systems represent the core technology for knowledge preservation and dissemination, I argue that their presence is unlikely to suppress knowledge sabotage. Several researchers have developed theoretical arguments in favor of such a suppressing effect (e.g. Ferraris and Perotti, 2020), and it is possible that a negative correlation between the presence, proliferation or use of knowledge management systems and knowledge sabotage exists, because organizations that introduce knowledge management systems are likely to employ a workforce more inclined to engage in productive rather than counterproductive knowledge behavior. However, given that knowledge sabotage is mainly targeted at other individuals rather than the entire organization, the presence of IT may be largely irrelevant to one's decision to commit knowledge sabotage (i.e. correlation does not imply causation). In fact, I would argue that the presence of knowledge management systems may even facilitate knowledge sabotage, as it minimizes the perpetrator's effort.

2.5 Outcomes of knowledge sabotage

Consistent with the multilevel approach to theory development (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000), outcomes of knowledge sabotage may be analyzed at the individual, organizational and societal levels. At the individual level, impacts pertain to victims (e.g. formal reprimand, public humiliation, embarrassment, negative emotions, career impediments, trust erosion, resignation, wrongful termination and loss of time, benefits and resources) (Serenko, 2019), perpetrators (e.g. guilt, anxiety, termination, reprimand and transfer) (Serenko, 2020) and third parties such as coworkers and their families, customers and other individual stakeholders. At the organizational level, outcomes pertain to direct and indirect financial losses, such as delayed or cancelled projects, wasted time and resources, out-of-stock products, lower output quality, lost clients and unnecessary expenses (Serenko, 2019). At the societal level, potential effects may extend to the community, industry, markets, the overall economy, professional societies and the environment.

Organizations operating in knowledge-intensive industries – for example, information technology, aerospace and aircraft manufacturing, finance, pharmaceuticals and medicine – are particularly sensitive to the presence of knowledge sabotage because their performance depends heavily on the effectiveness of flows of highly specialized knowledge. In such industries, it is difficult for the target to independently verify the accuracy of specialized knowledge received from others unless they possess a sufficient degree of expertise in the relevant domain. They also cannot easily identify which knowledge is missing. As a result, knowledge sabotage may remain undetected until its outcomes become sufficiently severe to warrant formal investigation. Introducing incorrect knowledge or withholding critical knowledge at any point in the knowledge cycle may interfere with interdepartmental or interorganizational knowledge flows because, in knowledge-intensive organizations, shared knowledge generally transcends the provider–recipient dyad, potentially resulting in a cascading effect. As such, knowledge-

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intensive sectors depend heavily on professional trust, which may be undermined by knowledge sabotage.

3. The structured literature review

In the previous section, I discussed the origin and foundation of the concept of knowledge sabotage based on my interpretation of the initial studies. In this section, I expand the scope of my analysis to the entire body of empirical knowledge sabotage literature by conducting a structured literature review – a scientifically grounded, rigorous technique used to identify and analyze a corpus of publications on a topic of interest (Dumay *et al.*, 2016; Massaro *et al.*, 2016a). Structured literature reviews have gained recognition and become commonplace in the knowledge management discipline, as evidenced by a growing number of publications employing this method (Massaro *et al.*, 2016b; Paoloni *et al.*, 2020; Serenko, 2026). Below, I present an interpretation of the key findings documented in these studies, offer a framework summarizing the antecedents and consequences of knowledge sabotage and share insights into the state of knowledge sabotage research to help guide future scholars in their scientific exploration.

3.1 Methods

Consistent with the recommendations by Massaro *et al.* (2016a), I determined the type of works to be analyzed and developed the search process. The examined works included English-language, empirical peer-reviewed journal articles that investigated knowledge sabotage. I located these works by tracking citations to the three publications that introduced this topic – Serenko (2019), Serenko (2020) and Serenko and Choo (2020) – by analyzing citations to one work at a time. The search process took place in July 2025. The rationale was that scholars who empirically investigate knowledge sabotage would be expected to cite at least one of the works that introduced and defined this concept. I developed the codebook (Table 3) by using previous structured literature reviews and bibliometric studies as a starting point (e.g. Oliveira *et al.*, 2021; Serenko, 2026).

Table 3 Codebook

Code	Description
Journal title	Journal title in which the identified work was published
Journal subject/ discipline	The subject and discipline of the journal in which the identified work was published
Sample size	Sample size achieved during primary data collection
Sample industry	The industry from which the sample of respondents was obtained
Sample country	The country from which the sample of respondents was obtained
Data collection stages	The number of phases of data collection
Statistical method	The statistical technique used to analyze the antecedents and/or outcomes of knowledge sabotage
Construct name	The formal title of the knowledge sabotage construct
Construct definition	The definition of the knowledge sabotage construct
Likert-type scale	The number of response points on the scale used to measure knowledge sabotage
Antecedent	An antecedent of knowledge sabotage, including its moderators
Outcome	An outcome of knowledge sabotage, including its moderating effects
Theory	Theory employed to hypothesize the proposed effect on or of knowledge sabotage
Support	Whether the effect of an antecedent or an outcome of knowledge sabotage was empirically supported (Yes/No)

Note(s): For simplicity, moderation tests were included under antecedents and outcomes of knowledge sabotage.
Source(s): Author's own work

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As a result of a comprehensive search on Google Scholar – a widely used and extensive source of scholarly literature that is routinely employed in knowledge management scientometric studies – 24 articles were identified.

3.2 Findings

The Journal of Knowledge Management published seven knowledge sabotage works, while the remaining 17 outlets published only a single article. Notably, no other knowledge management–centric journals were identified. At the same time, human resources (HR) and OB journals, which published seven works, also engaged with the concept of knowledge sabotage, likely because it aligns well with their scope. In addition, there were five general management, three psychology and two IS/IT journals. Only one study was qualitative (Nelufule and Abrahams, 2024) and the rest were quantitative. This is expected: the two initial foundational knowledge sabotage articles were qualitative, designed to define and document the existence of the phenomenon (Serenko, 2019; Serenko, 2020), while the third was quantitative, focusing on the development of a survey instrument (Serenko and Choo, 2020), which subsequently formed the foundation for numerous quantitative follow-up investigations.

Only five studies were conducted in developed countries – the USA and Western Europe – and the rest were undertaken in developing countries: Pakistan (8), China (5), Colombia (1), Indonesia (1), Nigeria (1), South Africa (1) and Turkey (1). One study did not report sample characteristics. Samples were collected from nine distinct industries, led by higher education (5), IT (4) and health care (3). Seven samples were obtained across multiple industries.

All quantitative studies used adequate sample sizes, ranging from 120 to 503 and averaging 310. Half of the studies collected data in multiple time waves – usually three – to minimize common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The leading quantitative data analysis methods were variance-based structural equation modeling such as PLS-SEM (10), covariance-based structural equation modeling such as LISREL (7) and various forms of regression (6). Most studies relied on a five-point Likert-type scale and only a few employed a seven-point scale.

In terms of defining knowledge sabotage, very few studies used a direct quote to define the core construct. Eighteen studies defined knowledge sabotage consistently with the original definition, which comprises both active and passive forms of knowledge sabotage, while three studies defined it as active knowledge sabotage only and one as a passive form. Two studies offered no clear definition. Fifteen studies used the term "knowledge sabotage," eight referred to it as "knowledge sabotage behavior," and one applied the peculiar term "knowledge-sabotaging behavior."

Seventeen studies explored antecedents of knowledge sabotage, four focused on its outcomes and three examined both antecedents and outcomes simultaneously (see Tables 4 and 5). In terms of antecedents, of the 48 tested relationships, 42 were supported and 6 were rejected. Tables 6 and 7 summarize the types of knowledge sabotage antecedents and consequences, respectively.

A total of 23 unique theories were employed to support the rationale for the hypothesized antecedents and outcomes of knowledge sabotage. The most frequently used analytical lenses were social exchange theory (12), self-determination theory (6), situational strength theory (4), trait activation theory (4) and social cognitive theory (2). A few interesting, rare theories appeared only once, for example, affective events theory, memetic theory, moral conation theory, relative deprivation theory and self-categorization theory. No explicitly stated theory was applied to hypothesize 14 effects (approximately one-third of the total).

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Table 4 Antecedents of knowledge sabotage

Study	Antecedent and relationship	Theory used	Support
Abdillah *et al.* (2024)	Amoral leadership (+)	Social cognitive theory	Yes
	Subordinates' moral identity (–)	Moral conation theory	Yes
	Subordinates' norm violation (+)	Social information processing theory	Yes
Al Hassan *et al.* (2026)	Perceived over-qualification (+)	Relative deprivation theory	Yes
	Alienative commitment (+)	No specific theory	Yes
Dewi and Abdillah (2023)	Authentic leadership (–)	Self-determination theory	Yes
	Controlled motivation to share knowledge (–)	Self-determination theory	Yes
Enwereuzor (2024)	Dispositional greed (+)	No specific theory	No
	Cutting corners at work (+)	No specific theory	Yes
	Ethical leadership (–)	Social learning theory	Yes
	Ethical leadership (moderator: suppresses the positive effect of cutting corners at work on knowledge sabotage)	Social learning theory	No
Islam *et al.* (2026)	Trustful climate (–)	Social exchange theory	Yes
	Psychopathy (moderator: strengthens the negative effect of trustful climate on knowledge sabotage)	No specific theory	Yes
	Narcissism (moderator: strengthens the negative effect of trustful climate on knowledge sabotage)	No specific theory	Yes
	Machiavellianism (moderator: strengthens the negative effect of trustful climate on knowledge sabotage)	No specific theory	Yes
Khan *et al.* (2025)	Time theft (+)	Social exchange theory	Yes
	Supervisor ostracism (+)	Social exchange theory	Yes
Nelufule and Abrahams (2024)	Knowledge hoarding (+)	No specific theory	Yes
Perotti *et al.* (2024)	Job satisfaction (–)	Microfoundations theory	Yes
Perotti *et al.* (2023)	Intrinsic motivation: Knowledge self-efficacy (–)	Self-determination theory; social exchange theory	Yes
	Intrinsic motivation: Knowledge self-enjoyment (–)	Self-determination theory; social exchange theory	Yes
	Extrinsic motivation: Organizational rewards (–)	Self-determination theory; social exchange theory	No
	Extrinsic motivation: Reciprocal benefits (–)	Self-determination theory; social exchange theory	No
Qiu *et al.* (2023)	Workplace ostracism (+)	Social identity perspective; self-categorization theory; social exchange theory	Yes
Raza *et al.* (2025)	Organizational cynicism (+)	Social cognitive theory	Yes
	Job-induced tension (+)	No specific theory	Yes
	Psychological hardiness (moderator: strengthens the positive effect of job-induced tension on knowledge sabotage)	No specific theory	No
Serenko (2024)	Practical wisdom (–)	Kelloway and Barling's (2000) model of knowledge use in organizations	Yes
Serenko (2023)	Personality disorders (+)	Trait activation theory	Yes
Serenko and Abubakar (2023)	Interactional justice (–)	Social exchange theory; frustration–aggression–displacement theory	Yes
	Supervisor incivility (+)	Social exchange theory; frustration–aggression–displacement theory	No
	Co-worker incivility (+)	Social exchange theory	Yes
	Co-worker knowledge sabotage (+)	Memetic theory	Yes
Silva *et al.* (2025)	Machiavellianism (+)	No specific theory	Yes
	Narcissism (+)	No specific theory	Yes
	Psychopathy (+)	No specific theory	Yes
	Negative emotions (moderator: strengthen the positive effect of Machiavellianism on knowledge sabotage)	Trait activation theory	Yes

(*continued*)

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Table 4

Study	Antecedent and relationship	Theory used	Support
	Negative emotions (moderator: strengthen the positive effect of narcissism on knowledge sabotage)	Trait activation theory	Yes
	Negative emotions (moderator: strengthen the positive effect of psychopathy on knowledge sabotage)	Trait activation theory	Yes
Tan *et al.* (2024a)	Moral disengagement (+)	Social cognitive theory	Yes
Tan *et al.* (2024b)	Anger (+)	Affective events theory	Yes
Usman *et al.* (2025)	Despotic leadership (+)	Conservation of resources theory	Yes
	Emotional dissonance (+)	Conservation of resources theory	Yes
Wang *et al.* (2025)	Message transparency (–)	Communication visibility theory	Yes
	Network translucence (–)	Communication visibility theory	Yes
	Loss of knowledge power (+)	Knowledge power perspective	Yes
Zhu *et al.* (2024)	Benign envy (–)	Social comparison theory; theory of knowledge dynamics	Yes
	Malicious envy (+)	Social comparison theory; theory of knowledge dynamics	Yes

Source(s): Author's own work

3.3 The knowledge sabotage framework

I interpreted the results of the structured literature review above in light of my personal research experience to develop the framework of knowledge sabotage (Figure 1). This framework may serve as a guide for future researchers in knowledge management and other disciplines who seek to empirically explore the antecedents and consequences of this destructive behavior. It may also inform practitioners by helping them recognize, prevent and mitigate knowledge sabotage in their organizations.

3.4 The state of knowledge sabotage research: the concept developer's view

The recently proposed concept of knowledge sabotage has gained noticeable momentum in mainstream knowledge management research, with 24 empirical studies appearing over a short period of time, in addition to numerous conceptual works on this topic that were not included in the structured literature review. The structured literature review and my personal research experience confirm that the overall trajectory of the development of the knowledge sabotage literature is quite encouraging, as one would expect for an emerging construct. To date, empirical studies have followed this path: initial conceptualization → operationalization → empirical examination of antecedents and outcomes → empirical testing across various organizational contexts. The cumulative evidence has reinforced the original conceptualization of the construct and provided support for its operationalization – so far, the unidimensional instrument has consistently demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties. Most importantly, no evidence has suggested that knowledge sabotage is empirically redundant with other forms of knowledge behavior, including knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding. The majority of studies demonstrate considerable methodological rigor, and the literature has sufficiently progressed to facilitate further cumulative development of the construct. While some previous studies fall short of high standards of scholarly rigor because of inconsistent terminology and definitions, incomplete reporting of sample characteristics and atheoretical model development, these shortcomings represent occasional inconsistencies, methodological omissions and conceptual oversights that do not undermine the overall trajectory of knowledge sabotage research. Nevertheless, despite this encouraging start, such deficiencies need to be

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Table 5 Outcomes of knowledge sabotage

Study	Outcome and relationship	Theory used	Support
Arias-Pérez *et al.* (2026)	Digital innovation ecosystem performance (moderator: cross-organizational knowledge sabotage suppresses the positive effect of incremental innovation capability on digital innovation ecosystem performance)	No specific theory	Yes
	Digital innovation ecosystem performance (moderator: cross-organizational knowledge sabotage suppresses the positive effect of radical innovation capability on digital innovation ecosystem performance)	No specific theory	No
Islam *et al.* (2026)	Knowledge-sharing climate (–)	Social exchange theory	Yes
Javed *et al.* (2025)	Knowledge worker social responsibility (moderator: knowledge sabotage suppresses the positive effect of knowledge management processes on knowledge worker social responsibility)	Theory of planned behavior	No
Perotti *et al.* (2024)	Knowledge-sharing climate (–)	Microfoundations theory	Yes
Serenko and Abubakar (2023)	Turnover intention (+)	Cognitive dissonance theory	Yes
Tariq *et al.* (2025a)	Project success (moderator: knowledge sabotage moderates the positive effect of big data analytic capability on project success; relationship sign not hypothesized)	Situational strength theory	No
	Project success (moderator: knowledge sabotage moderates the positive effect of sustainable resilience on project success; relationship sign not hypothesized)	Situational strength theory	No
Tariq *et al.* (2025b)	Project success (moderator: knowledge sabotage moderates the positive effect of knowledge infrastructure capability on project success; relationship sign not hypothesized)	Situational strength theory	No
	Project success (moderator: knowledge sabotage moderates the positive effect of knowledge-based dynamic capability on project success; relationship sign not hypothesized)	Situational strength theory	No

Source(s): Author's own work

Table 6 Types of antecedents of knowledge sabotage

Type	Total no. of tests	No. of successful tests
Individual-specific		
Psychological state	14	13
Personality trait	8	7
Motivation	5	5
Developable capacity	3	3
Behavior	2	2
Workplace-specific		
Coworkers, supervisors and subordinates	13	11
Reward	2	0
Organizational climate	1	1
Total	*48*	*42*

Source(s): Author's own work

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Table 7 Types of outcomes of knowledge sabotage

Type	Total no. of tests	No. of successful tests
Individual-specific		
Psychological state	2	1
Workplace-specific		
Organizational performance	6	1
Organizational climate	2	2
Total	*10*	*4*

Source(s): Author's own work

addressed to facilitate further productive development of this line of research. Thus, I present the following observations, implications and recommendations.

3.4.1 Knowledge sabotage is a cross-national phenomenon. While I initially predicted and observed the existence of knowledge sabotage in the USA – due to its competitive, individualistic and reward-oriented culture that provides fertile ground for various forms of counterproductive work behavior – subsequent studies confirmed the cross-national nature of this phenomenon across multiple countries and industries. Unfortunately, the available evidence suggests that the human propensity to engage in pernicious workplace acts is truly global.

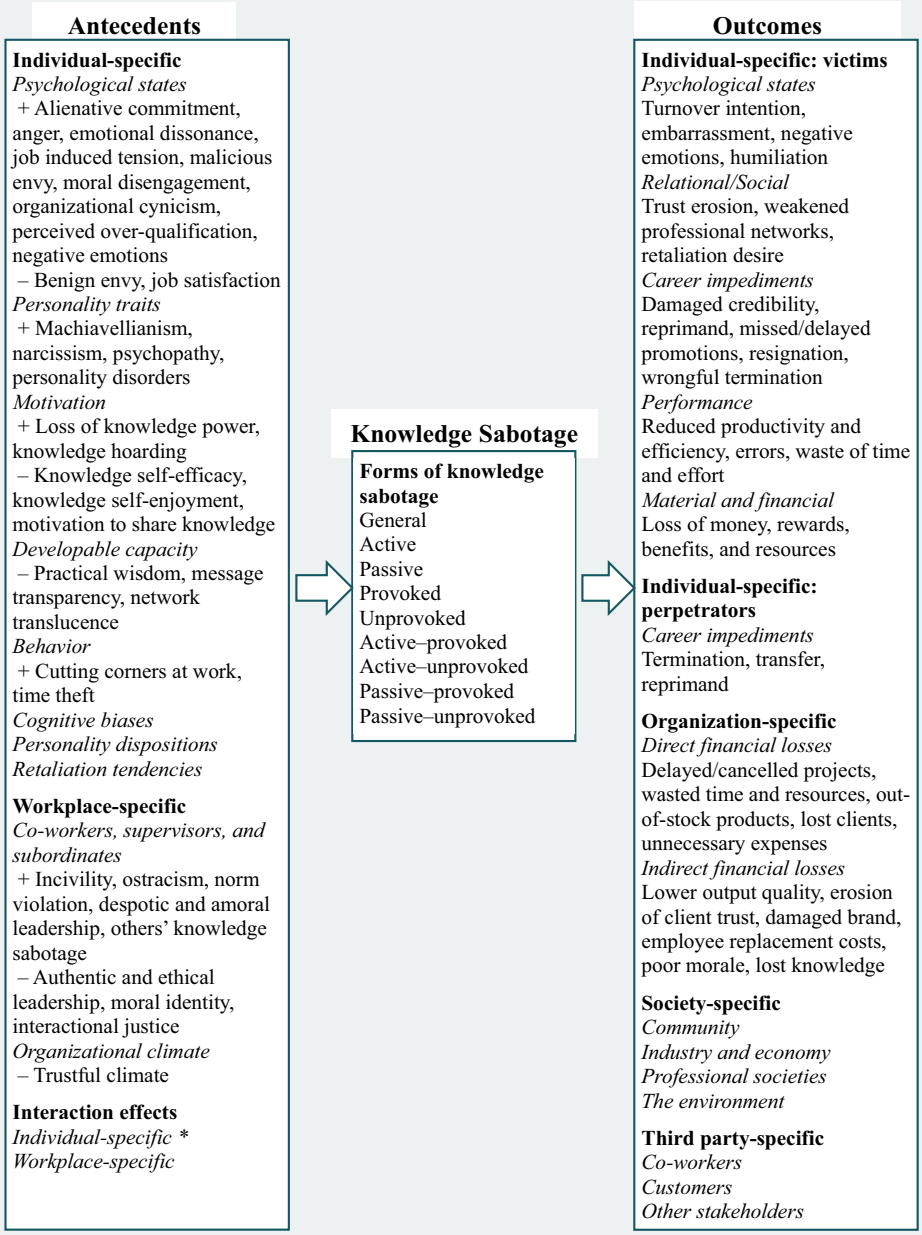
3.4.2 The proper construct name is "knowledge sabotage". Some studies refer to the phenomenon as "knowledge sabotage behavior" instead of the original term "knowledge sabotage." By its very nature, knowledge sabotage is defined and operationalized as a behavior and thus including the additional word "behavior" is redundant [2]. It is my view that, in scholarly writing, it is vital to preserve the original terminology and definitions and all subsequent changes must be unequivocally communicated and theoretically justified. In fact, introducing unnecessary terms may lead to construct proliferation (Shaffer *et al.*, 2015), which occurs when conceptually identical phenomena are repeatedly renamed or slightly redefined, thereby leading to inconsistencies and fragmenting the scientific domain.

3.4.3 Knowledge sabotage should be measured on a seven- or, preferably, nine-point Likert-type scale. Most studies used a five-point Likert-type scale to measure knowledge sabotage. Unfortunately, many researchers have not reported detailed descriptive statistics (e.g. mean construct scores, standard deviations), which prevents the calculation of construct variance across the examined studies. Based on my previous experience with both extremely negatively and positively valenced constructs, the reported scores tend to concentrate on either side of the scale, thereby reducing construct variance, increasing error terms and suppressing correlations and path coefficients. Increasing the number of choices to seven or preferably, to nine points help address this issue, at least to some extent and provides a more nuanced picture of the phenomenon of interest.

3.4.4 There is a need for qualitative studies. The exclusively quantitative nature of knowledge sabotage research is concerning. On the one hand, quantitative studies offer many advantages, such as large sample sizes, comprehensive reliability and validity assessments, rigorous testing of theory-based causal relationships and excellent replication potential. On the other hand, a major limitation is their reliance on existing constructs, because the tested constructs (as described in Tables 4 and 5) have been borrowed from previous studies in reference disciplines, primarily OB and psychology, which limits the development of indigenous knowledge management theories, concepts and models. In addition, quantitative studies alone cannot fully capture the entire spectrum of knowledge sabotage antecedents and consequences, tend to reduce complex social relationships to numerical representations and often decontextualize the knowledge sabotage phenomenon. Thus, researchers are advised to shift their attention to qualitative inquiry methods. In fact, qualitative inquiry may initiate a long-

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Figure 1 Knowledge sabotage framework



Note(s): Under the antecedents, the plus and minus signs indicate positive and negative effects of these antecedents on knowledge sabotage, respectively. All outcomes are negative

Source: Author's own work

term line of research because it can uncover new aspects of the phenomenon and generate multiple follow-up studies. The work by Thomas (2025), which was not included in this study's structured literature review because it was published after the formal search process had been completed, serves as an exemplar of qualitative research. It uncovered novel antecedents of knowledge sabotage at the individual (misinformation, ego-driven restriction), team (power struggles, closed knowledge networks) and organizational (leadership manipulation, knowledge monopolies) levels.

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3.4.5 Outcomes of knowledge sabotage are underexplored. The need to understand the drivers of knowledge sabotage is undeniable. However, this should not occur at the expense of exploring its outcomes, which have been considerably understudied. To convince pragmatic knowledge managers that it is vital to prevent knowledge sabotage in their organizations, it is necessary to demonstrate its consequences for employees, organizations, third parties and society in a more comprehensive manner. As a short-term objective, scholars should identify and document additional outcomes of knowledge sabotage and develop a taxonomy of these outcomes. In the long term, they should investigate potential interdependencies among these outcomes, develop and validate an integrated model of their relationships and examine how national culture shapes these outcomes (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2011).

3.4.6 Human factors play a central role in knowledge sabotage. Consistent with the early studies and my expectations, subsequent research confirmed that human factors – primarily personality traits, individual states and the actions of others (subordinates, coworkers and supervisors) – are the principal force behind knowledge sabotage. Under certain conditions, individuals seem naturally inclined to act against others and to respond negatively to the actions of those around them. As Gordon Allport (1924, 1937) – one of the first psychologists to comprehensively explore human personality and social factors – stated a century ago, personality is a central driving force behind behavior and I fully concur with his proposition. Thus, further exploration of the role of personality in knowledge sabotage represents a particularly fruitful avenue for future research.

3.4.7 Knowledge sabotage is inappropriate for the role of a moderator. In general terms, a moderator is a variable that affects the strength or direction of a relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Sharma *et al.*, 1981; Bontis and Serenko, 2007). In management research, moderators are typically individual, organizational or environmental variables; therefore, from a statistical perspective, the nature of knowledge sabotage does not preclude it from being positioned within a nomological network as a moderator. However, knowledge sabotage is produced by other variables (i.e. its antecedents) and leads to other outcomes, which is conceptually consistent with a behavioral mechanism rather than with a boundary condition that influences the relationship between two other variables. As such, knowledge sabotage is better conceptualized as a behavioral process rather than as a condition influencing other processes.

From a practical standpoint, managers should be able to modify the level of a moderator variable (i.e. in this case, knowledge sabotage) to increase or decrease a focal outcome. In isolation, knowledge sabotage is not a controllable variable; it can be influenced only by changing the level of its antecedents. Most importantly, managers should always reduce knowledge sabotage rather than manipulate its level to increase or decrease a focal outcome. Thus, making recommendations that involve a direct manipulation of knowledge sabotage is impractical and even misleading. Not surprisingly, Javed *et al.* (2025) found no empirical support for the moderating effect of knowledge sabotage on the relationship between knowledge management processes and knowledge worker social responsibility. Similarly, Tariq *et al.* (2025a) and Tariq *et al.* (2025b), across four independent tests, also failed to support the moderating role of knowledge sabotage. Nevertheless, in academic research, a negative outcome is still a valuable finding and I am grateful to these scholars for empirically testing this argument.

3.4.8 Knowledge sabotage is a strong candidate for a mediator. While it is inappropriate to treat knowledge sabotage as a moderator, it may be effectively positioned as a mediator. A mediator explains the mechanism through which an independent variable affects a dependent variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986). From a *conceptual point of view*, knowledge sabotage fits this definition because it represents a behavioral channel through which antecedents affect outcomes: individual- and workplace-specific antecedents trigger employees' knowledge sabotage, which, in turn, produces a wide range of outcomes. In some cases, an outcome may occur entirely through the mediator (i.e. a full mediation

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effect). For example, personality traits are unlikely to directly affect organizational profit; rather, pernicious personality traits may cause knowledge sabotage, which, in turn, reduces organizational efficiency and, subsequently, profitability. In line with this reasoning, Arias-Pérez *et al.* (2026) hypothesized and confirmed that a trustful organizational climate positively contributes to a knowledge-sharing climate and knowledge sabotage fully mediates this relationship (i.e. a trustful climate suppresses knowledge sabotage and lower knowledge sabotage leads to a better knowledge-sharing climate). Thus, positioning knowledge sabotage as a mediator offers a theoretically cogent explanation of how antecedents translate into outcomes.

From a *methodological standpoint*, mediation analysis examines whether an independent variable affects a dependent variable indirectly through a mediator. The knowledge sabotage construct fits well within such causal chains and can be incorporated into nomological networks to facilitate the examination of mediation effects using several SEM applications and the PROCESS macro. From a *practical perspective*, mediation chains help managers visualize how antecedents may lead to important outcomes and thereby identify actionable leverage points for their organizations. While they cannot directly adjust the level of knowledge sabotage, they may suppress some of its antecedents and thereby mitigate its harmful consequences. This makes positioning knowledge sabotage as a mediator potentially useful both theoretically and practically. A short-term research goal is to identify the causal relationships that knowledge sabotage mediates, while a long-term objective is to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying causal mechanisms.

3.4.9 Knowledge sabotage should not be positioned as an antecedent of personality traits. On several occasions, I have come across attempts (mostly as a reviewer) to position knowledge sabotage as an antecedent of employees' personality traits. I do not support this positioning. First and foremost, people form their personality traits by approximately the age of 25, after which their traits remain generally stable, with some gradual changes later in life (Bleidorn *et al.*, 2022). Individuals cannot realistically alter their personality traits in the short term under the influence of a specific behavior, such as knowledge sabotage. Second, since the early days of personality psychology, scholars have consistently argued that personality traits determine one's behavior (Allport, 1937; Cattell, 1946; Matthews *et al.*, 2003). While it is possible to conceptualize a long-term reciprocal relationship between personality traits and behavior/environment, positioning knowledge sabotage (a short-term behavior) as a determinant of an employee's relatively enduring personality trait contradicts decades of well-validated theory and is, therefore, conceptually inappropriate [3]. Third, positioning knowledge sabotage as an antecedent of personality traits fosters the erroneous assumption that managers could reshape employees' personalities by manipulating their engagement in knowledge sabotage, which is both misleading and impractical.

3.4.10 Human capital managers should pay close attention to the drivers of knowledge sabotage. Before embarking on knowledge sabotage research, I assumed that these were extremely rare, once-in-a-lifetime actions conducted by very few employees and only in unique circumstances. Unfortunately, I was wrong – knowledge sabotage is truly widespread, as reported by numerous empirical studies conducted across all types of organizations and industries, which warrants close managerial attention at all levels, particularly among HR professionals. They should pay close attention to the antecedents of this pernicious behavior, especially individual-specific characteristics – the dark personality traits, negative personality states and ego-directed motivations, as well as workplace-specific factors pertaining to the provoking actions of coworkers, supervisors and subordinates.

More specifically, organizations should introduce the screening for the drivers of knowledge sabotage when filling jobs requiring a high degree of knowledge interdependence and specialized expertise sharing, using validated personality measurement tools rather than relying solely on informal personality assessments. Managers should periodically review and identify workplace factors that may facilitate knowledge sabotage, such as zero-sum

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reward structures, intense competition and information asymmetries. Training should be provided to employees at all levels to help them distinguish between miscommunication, differences of opinion and accidental errors on the one hand and deliberate instances of knowledge sabotage on the other. Knowledge sabotage should be included as part of routine organizational ethical training. Management textbook authors should also incorporate the topic of knowledge sabotage, including its antecedents and consequences, by integrating it into core chapters on OB, knowledge management and workplace ethics.

3.4.11 The knowledge management discipline progresses toward maturity. The fact that many knowledge sabotage works appeared in *the Journal of Knowledge Management* comes as no surprise because, since its inception, it has been considered a leading knowledge management publication venue welcoming original, innovative and thought-provoking manuscripts (Gaviria-Marin *et al.*, 2018; Serenko and Bontis, 2022). The other knowledge sabotage publications were scattered across general management, psychology and IT/IS outlets, which means that the knowledge management discipline is infusing its indigenous knowledge into other scientific domains and is progressing toward the coveted status of a reference discipline and disciplinary maturity. However, the complete absence of other knowledge management–centric journals is puzzling, which represents an interesting research opportunity for scientometric scholars.

4. A new survey instrument

4.1 A need for a new measurement instrument

The typology of knowledge sabotage is represented as a two-by-two matrix mapped along two axes: active–passive and provoked–unprovoked (see also Table 2). However, the previously developed measurement scale was designed as unidimensional, with a single item representing each type of knowledge sabotage (Serenko and Choo, 2020). On the one hand, as demonstrated in previous studies, the instrument exhibited good psychometric properties and explanatory power. On the other hand, researchers may need to isolate a particular dimension to explore its unique antecedents and outcomes, which cannot be achieved by means of the existing measurement scale because each dimension is operationalized with a single item only. As a result, it is not feasible to properly assess the psychometric properties pertaining to each dimension in isolation.

Therefore, as part of this conceptual stewardship effort, I developed a new four-dimensional (4D) instrument that operationalizes each dimension with multiple items and conducted an empirical assessment to establish its psychometric adequacy. Consistent with the key objective of this viewpoint, the purpose is not to advance theory or to provide generalizable empirical findings, but to introduce and initially validate a new measurement instrument that supports further conceptual development and empirical scrutiny of knowledge sabotage. The empirical analysis that follows demonstrates the instrument's psychometric properties and its alignment with the established nomological network.

4.2 Instrument development

Based on the definitions outlined in Table 2, I developed three items per dimension. First, while having a larger number of items per dimension may improve reliability, large sets of items per construct may lead to respondent fatigue, common method variance and satisficing. The scenario-based approach employed in this study's instrument already places a high cognitive load on respondents and keeping the questionnaire short helps improve data quality. Second, having three items per dimension (12 in total) provides a parsimonious basis for assessing construct reliability and validity. Third, presenting the same number of items for each dimension of knowledge sabotage ensures measurement symmetry and comparability across dimensions. In particular, for all four dimensions, the three items pertain to factual distortion (items AP1, AU1, PP1 and PU1), interpretive manipulation (items AP2, AU2, PP2 and PU2) and deliberate failure

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facilitation (items AP3, AU3, PP3 and PU3). The instrument underwent extensive face validity assessment through consultations with a group of knowledge management researchers, practitioners and prospective respondents and their feedback was incorporated until a consensus was achieved. The 4D knowledge sabotage instrument is presented below, and Table 8 provides the rationale for the survey instructions.

Instructions and questions:

Study inclusion criteria: You must be currently employed full-time for at least 2 years in an organization that has ten or more employees.

Instructions: Please answer all questions below in the context of the organization in which you are currently employed full-time.

Read the following scenario.

Imagine the following situation occurring in your current workplace: Your coworker is working on a project critical to their future career prospects and to the success of the organization. Because this project falls within your area of expertise, you notice that they are missing some essential information, without which they will be unable to successfully complete the project.

In the four scenarios below, indicate how likely you would be to engage in each behavior (Likert-type nine-point scale):

1 – absolutely unlikely; 2 – extremely unlikely; 3 – very unlikely; 4 – slightly unlikely; 5 – neutral; 6 – slightly likely; 7 – very likely; 8 – extremely likely; 9 – absolutely likely.

Active–provoked

If your coworker **approaches you for the missing information**, you would **intentionally**:

AP1. provide incorrect information.

AP2. give misleading advice on how to proceed.

AP3. recommend a course of action you know will result in failure.

Active–unprovoked

Even if your coworker **does not approach you for the missing information**, you would **proactively approach them** and:

AU1. provide incorrect information.

AU2. give misleading advice on how to proceed.

AU3. recommend a course of action you know will result in failure.

Passive–provoked

If your coworker **approaches you for the missing information**, you would **intentionally**:

PP1. withhold the correct critical information.

PP2. refrain from offering helpful advice on how to proceed.

PP3. decline to recommend a course of action you know will result in success.

Passive–unprovoked

Even if your **coworker does not approach you for the missing information**, you would **intentionally**:

PU1. choose not to share the correct critical information.

PU2. refrain from offering helpful advice on how to proceed.

PU3. avoid recommending a course of action you know will result in success.

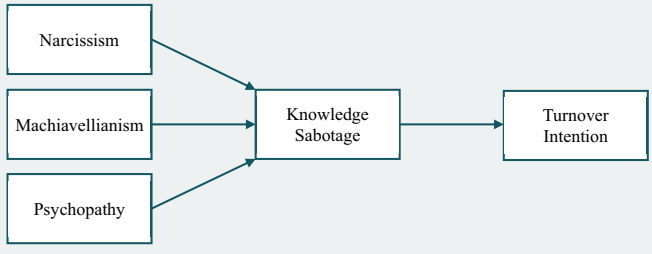
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Table 8 Rationale for the instructions

Statement	Rationale
Imagine the following situation occurring in your current workplace	The objective is to measure knowledge sabotage in the context of one's present work environment
Your coworker is working on a project critical to their future career prospects and to the success of the organization	Perpetrators must know that this project and, by extension, project-related knowledge are very important to the target
Because this project falls within your area of expertise,. . .	Perpetrators must possess the required knowledge
. . .you notice that they are missing some essential information,. . .	Perpetrators must be fully aware of the target's critical need for the missing knowledge
. . .without which they will be unable to successfully complete the project	Perpetrators must know that the target would be able to productively apply the required knowledge to work-related tasks

Source(s): Author's own work

Figure 2 Proposed model



Source: Author's own work

4.3 The proposed nomological network

The new instrument was tested and validated within the nomological network of the previously established antecedents and outcomes of knowledge sabotage. Figure 2 presents the model, and Table 9 outlines the rationale for the proposed relationships.

Overall, the model suggests that the Dark Triad personality traits (Paulhus and Williams, 2002) – narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy – lead to knowledge sabotage. Narcissism refers to the pursuit of gratification from a widespread pattern of egoistic self-admiration, self-idealization and imagined or enacted grandiosity (Campbell and Miller, 2011), Machiavellianism to a behavioral strategy aimed at influencing others for personal advantage, frequently to the detriment of others' interests (Wilson *et al.*, 1996) and psychopathy to a cold, indifferent attitude characterized by limited empathy toward others, often giving rise to unwarranted interpersonal hostility (Jonason *et al.*, 2012). Knowledge sabotage, in turn, is posited to trigger turnover intention, defined as an employee's inclination to leave his/her current organization (Serenko *et al.*, 2022). All of these relationships have been successfully tested in prior research.

4.4 Participants and methods

Survey participants residing in the USA were recruited from CloudResearch Connect – a crowdsourcing platform for online research (https://connect.cloudresearch.com) (Hartman *et al.*, 2023), for an incentive of US$1.50. The use of a crowdsourcing platform is suitable because the purpose is to test the psychometric properties and explanatory power of the new instrument rather than to obtain fully generalizable findings. In addition, the use of

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Table 9 Relationship support

Relationship and rationale	Source
Narcissism → Knowledge sabotage Narcissistic employees are so focused on their sense of superiority over others that they develop distorted beliefs allowing them to disregard organizational norms, feel exempt from the need to reciprocate, perceive themselves as immune to punishment, blame coworkers for their failures and exaggerate minor disagreements. Undermining others through knowledge sabotage serves to "restore" perceived injustices and enhances their self-image	Brunell and Davis (2016), O'Boyle *et al.* (2012), Serenko and Choo (2020) and Silva *et al.* (2025)
Machiavellianism → Knowledge sabotage Machiavellian employees often engage in counterproductive work behavior by manipulating others for personal gain. They are distrustful, dismiss organizational priorities and advance their careers by undermining other workers. Knowledge sabotage provides an effective means for Machiavellians to pursue manipulative objectives	Becker and O'Hair (2007), Dahling *et al.* (2009), Hmieleski and Lerner (2016), Serenko and Choo (2020) and Silva *et al.* (2025)
Psychopathy → Knowledge sabotage Psychopathic employees exhibit fake charm and insincere altruism to make their victims drop their guard and accept incorrect knowledge. They disregard social norms, derive satisfaction from the suffering of others and are prone to conflict and retaliation, behaviors that can manifest through knowledge sabotage	Babiak and Hare (2006), Smith *et al.* (2016), Serenko and Choo (2020) and Silva *et al.* (2025)
Knowledge sabotage → Turnover intention Engaging in knowledge sabotage is a double-edged sword: although knowledge saboteurs may benefit from their actions in the short term, they ultimately face the long-term consequences of their organizational misbehavior, making it difficult for them to remain in their organization in the future. As such, they may experience negative emotions, guilt and remorse, face ostracism from co-workers and endure taxing cognitive dissonance	Haider *et al.* (2025), Serenko and Abubakar (2023), Abubakar and Serenko (2026) and Zhong and Robinson (2021)

Source(s): Author's own work

crowdsourcing platforms for data collection is well-established in knowledge management research (e.g. see Duan *et al.*, 2023; Mahapatra and Ford, 2024; Serenko, 2025). The anonymous survey took less than 10 min to complete. Following the suggestion of Aguirre-Urreta *et al.* (2024), the minimum sample size was calculated in advance by means of the *G*Power 3* statistical power analysis software package (Faul *et al.*, 2007). The minimum required sample size was 119, based on the specified effect size, significance level, statistical power and number of predictors.

Two knowledge sabotage scales were administered: the newly developed scale and the previously established scale by Serenko and Choo (2020). Narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy were operationalized using the "Dirty Dozen" instrument by Jonason and Webster (2010) and turnover intention was measured with the scale by Serenko and Abubakar (2023). To further test the discriminant validity of the new scale, the following constructs were measured: general knowledge hiding (Peng, 2013; with modifications by Serenko, 2024); evasive, playing dumb and rationalized knowledge hiding (Connelly *et al.*, 2012); bullying knowledge hiding (Yuan *et al.*, 2021); and knowledge sharing (Connelly *et al.*, 2012). Respondents were asked to report the frequency of their in-person and virtual interactions with coworkers. A marker variable – "My favorite color is blue" – was included to estimate common method variance. Basic demographic data were collected. The survey also incorporated several attentions check questions. The study received approval from the Research Ethics Board of the author's university (see Appendix 1 in Supplementary Material).

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The study design above is associated with three major limitations that the reader should keep in mind. First, although multiple approaches were used to suppress social desirability bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012), it cannot be fully eliminated in survey-based research. Despite the anonymous nature of the online survey, it is possible that some respondents underreport their likelihood of engaging in knowledge sabotage to present themselves in a more favorable manner, even to themselves. Second, a cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish temporal ordering between the constructs and increases the risk of common method variance. Third, because only respondents residing in the USA were included in the survey, the findings may not be generalizable to other countries. Globally, individuals differ in their economic preferences, cognitive abilities, social development, personality structure, morality, ethics, heuristics, biases and other individual characteristics (Henrich *et al.*, 2010; Apicella *et al.*, 2020) and, therefore, their responses to organizational interventions, including those targeted at the prevention of knowledge sabotage, may vary substantially. However, the purpose was to test and validate the new survey instrument rather than to draw cross-national generalizable conclusions.

4.5 Assessment of the measurement models

A total of 222 surveys were received, of which 18 were rejected, for a rejection rate of 8%, which compares favorably with the general response rejection rate identified by Curran (2016). The final data set included 204 valid responses. The mean age was 38 years (range: 19–69), and 60% were women. 78% held a postsecondary degree. 59% of respondents worked full-time in small and medium-sized enterprises, and the remainder in large organizations (range: 10–480,000 employees; median: 250). Respondents had been with their current organization for seven years, on average (range: 2–39) and had 18 years of overall work experience (range: 2–55). 64% were employed in the private sector. Overall, these respondents were well positioned to participate in the study.

Trait activation theory posits that the Dark Triad traits may be expressed when relevant situational cues activate them (Tett *et al.*, 2013; Tett *et al.*, 2021; Serenko, 2026). For this to occur, employees should have ample opportunities to interact with their coworkers in person and/or virtually in their workplace. On average, respondents reported interacting with their coworkers "frequently" in person and "sometimes" virtually, which should provide sufficient cues to activate their Dark Triad traits, if present.

Consistent with the recommendations of Hair *et al.* (2021), the second-order knowledge sabotage construct was modeled as reflective–reflective because, theoretically, its lower-order components (i.e. the four dimensions of knowledge sabotage) are reflections of a higher-order construct (i.e. knowledge sabotage action). These dimensions are manifestations of the broader latent construct and can be viewed as potentially alternative behavioral approaches to knowledge sabotage. Dropping one dimension would not fundamentally alter the conceptual domain of the higher-order construct but would only reduce the comprehensiveness and precision of its measurement. For example, once a potential saboteur decides to engage in knowledge sabotage against a coworker, he/she may pursue any of the four approaches, depending on the circumstances, including whether the coworker requests assistance and whether the act of sabotage involves actively providing wrong information or passively withholding useful information. In addition, these four dimensions are strongly (though not perfectly) correlated, which is consistent with the reflective–reflective specification (see Table 10).

The analysis was conducted in SmartPLS 4 (Ringle *et al.*, 2022), which is commonly employed in knowledge management research (Cepeda-Carrion *et al.*, 2019). Assessment of the measurement model followed the guidelines provided by Sarstedt *et al.* (2019) for the specification, estimation and validation of higher-order constructs. Sarstedt *et al.*'s (2019) guidelines are widely used in management research, as attested by 4,200 Google Scholar citations as of August 2026. The disjoint two-stage approach was selected to operationalize

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Table 10 Construct correlations – the multidimensional knowledge sabotage scale – Stage 1 of the disjoint two-stage approach

Construct	AP	AU	PP	PU	NAR	MAC	PSY	TI
AP	*0.873*							
AU	0.788	*0.898*						
PP	0.776	0.708	*0.967*					
PU	0.570	0.458	0.617	*0.945*				
NAR	0.442	0.413	0.422	0.360	*0.816*			
MAC	0.310	0.379	0.371	0.236	0.510	*0.863*		
PSY	0.384	0.353	0.313	0.387	0.409	0.182	*0.778*	
TI	0.064	0.018	0.100	0.275	0.137	0.017	0.142	*0.948*

Note(s): Values on the diagonal (in italics) are the square root of the average variance extracted. AP = active–provoked knowledge sabotage; AU = active–unprovoked knowledge sabotage; PP = passive–provoked knowledge sabotage; PU = passive–unprovoked knowledge sabotage; NAR = narcissism; MAC = Machiavellianism; PSY = psychopathy; TI = turnover intention
Source(s): Author's own work

the second-order construct because it allows for rigorous testing of the measurement model at two stages. At the first stage, the four first-order knowledge sabotage constructs were added to the model (Figure 2), each of them linked to all of its antecedents (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) and to the outcome (turnover intention). All constructs were specified in the reflective mode. The model was then estimated, and the latent variable scores for the first-order constructs were saved and added to the data file. At the second stage, these scores were used to measure the second-order knowledge sabotage construct in the reflective mode. All other constructs were measured with their original multi-item indicators rather than a single latent variable score.

As described in Table A1 of Appendix 2 (in Supplementary Material), the new multidimensional knowledge sabotage scale exhibited strong psychometric properties, as did all other constructs in the model: all corrected item-to-total correlations, Cronbach's alphas, composite reliability scores and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the commonly accepted thresholds of 0.35, 0.7, 0.7 and 0.5, respectively (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). All item loadings were above 0.7 and statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, except for one psychopathy item (PSY4 = 0.617, $p < 0.001$), which was retained to ensure content validity of the scale. Analysis of the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Henseler *et al.*, 2015) confirmed that all values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85. Tables 10 and 11 demonstrate discriminant validity of all measures, including the new scale (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Further assessment of the second-order knowledge sabotage construct was performed at stage 2 of the disjoint approach (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019). The following measures were obtained: Cronbach's alpha = 0.883, composite reliability = 0.920 and AVE = 0.743. The following loadings were observed: AP = 0.912; AU = 0.858; PP = 0.901; and PU = 0.769, all significant at $p < 0.001$. Again, all HTMT values were below 0.85 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015). While creating a table of loadings and cross-loadings as well as a correlation table for discriminant validity assessment is not required at Stage 2 of the disjoint approach (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019), these were, nevertheless, constructed (Tables A2 and A3 of Appendix 2 in Supplementary Material) and further confirmed the validity of the new construct. In addition, no statistically significant correlations were observed between the model's constructs and the marker variable at $p < 0.05$, which did not indicate substantial common method variance.

Recall that the following additional constructs were measured: unidimensional knowledge sabotage; general knowledge hiding; evasive, playing dumb, rationalized and bullying knowledge hiding; and knowledge sharing. All of them also exhibited strong psychometric

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Table 11 Loadings and cross-loadings – the multidimensional knowledge sabotage scale – Stage 1 of the disjoint two-stage approach

Construct	AP	AU	PP	PU	NAR	MAC	PSY	TI
AP1	*0.745*	0.550	0.456	0.450	0.267	0.298	0.259	0.050
AP2	*0.944*	0.750	0.769	0.557	0.263	0.437	0.393	0.081
AP3	*0.918*	0.745	0.767	0.482	0.290	0.409	0.340	0.035
AU1	0.670	*0.924*	0.573	0.400	0.356	0.329	0.294	0.024
AU2	0.726	*0.904*	0.648	0.400	0.348	0.394	0.390	–0.012
AU3	0.723	*0.864*	0.686	0.436	0.315	0.386	0.254	0.043
PP1	0.779	0.696	*0.959*	0.572	0.350	0.418	0.298	0.076
PP2	0.724	0.679	*0.965*	0.595	0.356	0.394	0.301	0.103
PP3	0.749	0.680	*0.979*	0.625	0.371	0.412	0.309	0.110
PU1	0.498	0.380	0.523	*0.929*	0.181	0.312	0.389	0.241
PU2	0.552	0.473	0.626	*0.960*	0.213	0.352	0.380	0.288
PU3	0.564	0.443	0.600	*0.946*	0.277	0.355	0.330	0.248
NAR1	0.186	0.204	0.208	0.174	*0.816*	0.367	0.089	0.007
NAR2	0.131	0.184	0.180	0.084	*0.779*	0.423	0.136	0.016
NAR3	0.111	0.146	0.170	0.093	*0.798*	0.282	0.040	–0.027
NAR4	0.388	0.472	0.450	0.282	*0.869*	0.498	0.223	0.031
MAC1	0.350	0.367	0.298	0.268	0.479	*0.899*	0.389	0.088
MAC2	0.410	0.379	0.387	0.310	0.418	*0.926*	0.390	0.141
MAC3	0.253	0.236	0.280	0.297	0.444	*0.722*	0.146	0.140
MAC4	0.470	0.412	0.455	0.359	0.439	*0.892*	0.432	0.112
PSY1	0.341	0.252	0.266	0.298	0.089	0.376	*0.807*	0.155
PSY2	0.327	0.325	0.241	0.218	0.206	0.330	*0.799*	–0.046
PSY3	0.336	0.321	0.284	0.374	0.171	0.332	*0.868*	0.151
PSY4	0.166	0.185	0.168	0.320	0.092	0.222	*0.617*	0.197
TI1	0.057	0.011	0.094	0.251	0.018	0.138	0.148	*0.957*
TI2	0.044	–0.008	0.066	0.261	0.003	0.123	0.142	*0.971*
TI3	0.082	0.051	0.125	0.270	0.028	0.128	0.113	*0.914*

Source(s): Author's own work

properties (Table A4 of Appendix 2 in Supplementary Material). Table 12 presents correlations among these constructs. First, it shows that the first- as well as second-order dimensions of the new knowledge sabotage construct exhibit strong discriminant validity: they are positively correlated with, yet distinct from, other types of counterproductive knowledge behavior, namely, the various categories of knowledge hiding. Most importantly, the first- and second-order dimensions of the new knowledge sabotage construct, which represent a form of counterproductive knowledge behavior, are negatively correlated with knowledge sharing, which is a type of productive knowledge behavior (r ranging from –0.41 to –0.63, $p < 0.01$). Second, all correlations between knowledge sharing (i.e. productive knowledge behavior) and the other constructs (i.e. counterproductive knowledge behavior) are negative, as theoretically expected, which further minimizes the probability of common method variance. Third, both knowledge sabotage constructs are positively correlated with the other constructs pertaining to counterproductive knowledge behavior because all of them are driven by similar individual and organizational antecedents. At the same time, the correlation values range from 0.43 to 0.79 ($p < 0.01$), averaging 0.63, indicating substantial but incomplete overlap among the constructs and this shows that knowledge sabotage taps into the unique aspects of employee behavior.

4.6 Assessment of the structural models

Bootstrapping was used to assess the structural models (Hair *et al.*, 2021). Each of the ten models described in Table 13 was tested separately, including the two aggregate knowledge sabotage measures and the eight-dimensional measures. Although the model is

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Table 12 Construct correlations – the additional constructs

Construct	KSAM	AP	AU	PP	PU	KSAU	KHG	EKH	PDKH	RKH	BKH	KS
KSAM	*0.862*											
AP	0.913	*0.873*										
AU	0.855	0.789	*0.898*									
PP	0.908	0.777	0.710	*0.967*								
PU	0.765	0.569	0.461	0.618	*0.945*							
KSAU	0.716	0.665	0.628	0.680	0.479	*0.950*						
KHG	0.793	0.717	0.632	0.757	0.610	0.646	*0.956*					
EKH	0.660	0.606	0.590	0.602	0.468	0.632	0.634	*0.887*				
PDKH	0.612	0.509	0.437	0.550	0.604	0.434	0.737	0.616	*0.929*			
RKH	0.585	0.545	0.473	0.530	0.464	0.540	0.570	0.632	0.577	*0.857*		
BKH	0.677	0.627	0.590	0.651	0.460	0.715	0.603	0.686	0.460	0.674	*0.893*	
KS	−0.627	−0.543	−0.414	−0.562	−0.632	−0.355	−0.613	−0.524	−0.687	−0.488	−0.397	*0.817*

Note(s): KSAM = knowledge sabotage – the multidimensional (second-order) construct; KSAU = knowledge sabotage – the unidimensional construct; KHG = general knowledge hiding; EKH = evasive knowledge hiding; PDKH = playing dumb knowledge hiding; RKH = rationalized knowledge hiding; BKH = bullying knowledge hiding; KS = knowledge sharing. Values on the diagonal (in italics) are the square root of the average variance extracted

Source(s): Author's own work

Table 13 Assessment of the structural models

Knowledge sabotage	Narcissism → Knowledge sabotage	Machiavellianism → Knowledge sabotage	Psychopathy → Knowledge sabotage	Knowledge sabotage R^2	Knowledge sabotage → Turnover intention
Unidimensional[a]	$\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.14$; $p < 0.1$	*0.36*	$\beta = 0.17$; $p < 0.05$
Multidimensional (AP, AU, PP, PU)[b]	$\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.28$; $p < 0.01$	*0.31*	$\beta = 0.14$; $p < 0.1$
Active (AP, AU)[b]	$\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$	*0.28*	$\beta = 0.06$; *n.s.*
Passive (PP, PU)[b]	$\beta = 0.16$; $p < 0.05$	$\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.01$	*0.27*	$\beta = 0.21$; $p < 0.01$
Provoked (AP, PP)[b]	$\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.28$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.23$; $p < 0.05$	*0.28*	$\beta = 0.09$; *n.s.*
Unprovoked (AU, PU)[b]	$\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.23$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.31$; $p < 0.01$	*0.31*	$\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.05$
Active–provoked (AP)[c]	$\beta = 0.13$; $p < 0.1$	$\beta = 0.27$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.05$	*0.26*	$\beta = 0.07$; *n.s.*
Active–unprovoked (AU)[c]	$\beta = 0.24$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.20$; $p < 0.05$	$\beta = 0.23$; $p < 0.05$	*0.25*	$\beta = 0.05$; *n.s.*
Passive–provoked (PP)[c]	$\beta = 0.21$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.05$	*0.24*	$\beta = 0.11$; *n.s.*
Passive–unprovoked (PU)[c]	$\beta = 0.08$; *n.s.*	$\beta = 0.20$; $p < 0.05$	$\beta = 0.31$; $p < 0.01$	*0.22*	$\beta = 0.28$; $p < 0.01$

Note(s): [a]Operationalized as a first-order reflective construct with the items by Serenko and Choo (2020). [b]Operationalized as a second-order reflective–reflective construct with the items provided in the four-dimensional knowledge sabotage instrument by extracting factor scores in SmartPLS according to the disjoint two-stage approach. [c]Operationalized as a first-order reflective construct with the items provided in the four-dimensional knowledge sabotage instrument

Source(s): Author's own work

consistent with a mediation logic, formal mediation testing is beyond the scope of this instrument-validation exercise. The results yielded three noteworthy conclusions. First, as theorized in Table 9, the Dark Triad personality traits – narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy – generally facilitate knowledge sabotage and knowledge sabotage contributes to the development of turnover intention among perpetrators. This finding is consistent with the knowledge sabotage framework presented in Figure 1, which posits that individual-specific characteristics, especially personality traits, are the key drivers of this pernicious behavior. The framework also highlights that negative career-related

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consequences are a major outcome of knowledge sabotage, suggesting that engaging in acts of knowledge sabotage is a double-edged sword.

Second, the results vary across the dimensions of knowledge sabotage. While passive, unprovoked and passive–unprovoked knowledge sabotage lead to turnover intention, active, provoked, active–provoked, active–unprovoked and passive–provoked knowledge sabotage do not. The effect of the Dark Triad traits also differs, though to a lesser extent. The most contrasting structural model was obtained for the passive–unprovoked dimension: narcissism does not lead to knowledge sabotage, but knowledge sabotage has the strongest effect on turnover intention; Machiavellianism and psychopathy act as antecedents of knowledge sabotage, but narcissism does not. Overall, this indicates that the dimensional analyses produce a less consistent picture of the phenomenon of interest than the aggregate model does and suggests that different types of knowledge sabotage may lead to distinct consequences for the offender.

Third, some differences emerged between the previous unidimensional scale and the new multidimensional scale. At the same time, both scales lead to similar overall conclusions regarding the antecedents and consequences of knowledge sabotage, suggesting that the new multidimensional scale does not demonstrate greater explanatory power than the previous unidimensional scale.

The key difference between the previous and the new scale lies in their dimensionality. The former measures each dimension with a single item and then aggregates them into a unified construct, which does not allow researchers to estimate the psychometric properties of each dimension or to apply them in causal models in isolation. In contrast, the new scale avoids this problem because it measures each dimension with multiple items. Therefore, researchers seeking a general measure of knowledge sabotage may use either scale, but those wishing to examine its dimensions and their unique effects should apply the new instrument. In a similar vein, knowledge managers and HR professionals may administer the new scale to identify the specific categories of knowledge sabotage present in their organizations. However, researchers should keep in mind that, on the one hand, the multidimensional scale better captures all aspects of the construct under investigation and facilitates a more rigorous assessment of the instrument's psychometric properties. On the other hand, it may introduce unnecessary complexity without offering additional theoretical contributions or practical insights, which raises an important question regarding scale selection. Addressing this question will require systematic empirical comparisons of the two instruments in various contexts to establish whether the multidimensional specification offers incremental benefits over the unidimensional approach. Overall, this instrument is offered as a methodological contribution to support ongoing conceptual and empirical work on knowledge sabotage within the spirit of this viewpoint. The jury is still out.

5. Conclusion

Knowledge sabotage represents an important contribution to the development of indigenous concepts and constructs within the discipline of knowledge management, and it has already gained momentum beyond its disciplinary boundaries, including general management, psychology and IT/IS fields. While such developments are truly exciting, I urge researchers to pay close attention to the conceptualization of this novel construct and its role within various nomological networks. As with other emerging constructs, its boundaries will continue to be tested, refined and further challenged. I welcome such debates, as they will help knowledge sabotage evolve into a robust and enduring theoretical contribution, further promoting the status of knowledge management as a reference discipline. Taken together, this viewpoint demonstrates that knowledge management continues to progress toward scholarly maturity and broader academic recognition through the development and refinement of indigenous theoretical contributions.

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Notes

[1.] The unconventional personal style used in this viewpoint addresses Tourish's (2020, p. 108) critique of management publications, in which he argues that "it is time to write about management and organizations with less obscure theorizing, with more variety and with a little more humor, curiosity and passion." It further aligns with the recent appeal by Bal *et al.* (2025) to dismantle "academic rackets" in management research, encouraging greater creativity and safeguarding academic freedom.

[2.] In a conference paper presented at the *International Conference on Intellectual Capital, Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning* (Sydney, Australia, 2019), Dr Choo and I modified the title to include the term "knowledge sabotage behavior" to differentiate it from a journal publication – a decision I later came to deeply regret.

[3.] It is possible that knowledge sabotage may influence an employee's personality if the employee is exposed to a knowledge sabotage-prone environment over the course of several years or decades. However, this is not how the examined studies theorized this potentially reciprocal relationship.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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