

KNOWLEDGE SABOTAGE CONSEQUENCES ON INTENTION TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The growing importance of knowledge in organizations has led to the development of processes inherent to knowledge management, the most important of which proved to be knowledge sharing (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Wang and Noe, 2010). In parallel, some researchers have also focused on counterproductive behaviors adopted by people in workplace, due to the acknowledged negative influence on the sharing of knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012). Among others, knowledge sabotage has been conceptualized as the most extreme counterproductive workplace behavior related to intra-organizational knowledge flow, although it is a largely unexplored phenomenon related to employee sabotage (Crino, 1994; Ferraris and Perotti, 2020; Serenko, 2019). The existence of this counterproductive knowledge behavior has been empirically demonstrated (Serenko, 2019) and it has been pointed out as “knowledge sabotage incident may dramatically impede intra-organizational knowledge flows” (Serenko, 2020). However, a quantitative study aimed at identifying the extent of the relationship between the phenomenon of knowledge sabotage and the impact on the intentions of sharing knowledge within the organization, has not yet been conducted. Building on the social exchange theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), the purpose of this research is to empirically validate the relationship between knowledge sabotage and knowledge sharing. We use individual knowledge sabotage (IKS) and co-worker knowledge sabotage (CKS) as independent variables and intention to share knowledge (ISK) as dependent one. Our aim is to question and validate the role of knowledge sabotage as a counterproductive knowledge behavior and shed lights on its consequences on knowledge sharing process. In fact, only by knowing better the downstream implications of the phenomenon it is possible to take the right measures upstream to promote a flourishing flow of information in organizations.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Knowledge sharing and people intention to share

Intra-organizational knowledge sharing is a fundamental knowledge management process that implies the exchange of information, know-how and useful data among colleagues, in order to leverage on knowledge as organizational resource (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Since it depends on people behavior, it has highlighted as the extent to which an employee has the willingness to share his/her tacit or explicit knowledge with other people in the organization (Wang and Noe, 2010). Therefore, the process itself of sharing knowledge rests on individual's intention to share knowledge, it cannot be forced but also facilitated and encouraged by the organization (Bock et al., 2005). Previous studies have identified two kind of knowledge: tacit and explicit. Tacit knowledge concerns information that cannot be easily codified or transcribed because embedded in an individual's conception or experience, such as know-how or skill. While, explicit knowledge refers to easily expressed and communicated information, in the form of written documents, such as reports or manuals (Bock et al., 2005; Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002).

Individual and co-worker knowledge sabotage

Knowledge sabotage has been empirically demonstrated as a negative conduct which concerns incorrect or wrong provision of knowledge to a colleague, as well as knowledge concealment of key information for the victim (Serenko, 2019). It occurs where the saboteur possesses extremely important knowledge for the target, being fully aware the latter is in need of that. Also, it happens completely intentionally on the saboteur's side (Serenko, 2020). In particular, two declinations of the phenomenon have been identified, according to an individual perspective and an expected behavior of colleagues in the workplace (Serenko and Choo, 2020). On the one hand, IKS represent the attitude of a person to harm colleague's performance or the organization through this kind of workplace sabotage of knowledge. On the other hand, CKS involves the expectation to be sabotaged by other organization's members. Serenko and Choo (2020) identified a strong link between these behaviors, for which "when employees observe their fellow co-workers engaging in knowledge sabotage, they are more likely to mimic this behavior". Following these considerations and drawing on knowledge management literature, we posit how both IKS and CKS are negatively related to intention to share knowledge. All the more reason, the combined effect of the two variables should further increase the negative impact on the dependent variable (i.e., intention to share knowledge). In addition, since it is the first study that empirically measures knowledge sabotage consequences on intention to share knowledge, it would be interesting to highlight which kind of knowledge is more affected respect to its form (i.e., tacit or explicit). Therefore, we put forward the following assumption.

H1. The higher the level of individual knowledge sabotage, the lower is people intention to share knowledge within the company.

H2. The higher the level of co-worker knowledge sabotage, the lower is people intention to share knowledge within the company.

H3. The joint effect of high levels of both individual knowledge sabotage and co-worker knowledge sabotage, negatively affect people intention to share knowledge within the company.

Figure 1 represents the relationships among the variables identified in hypotheses.

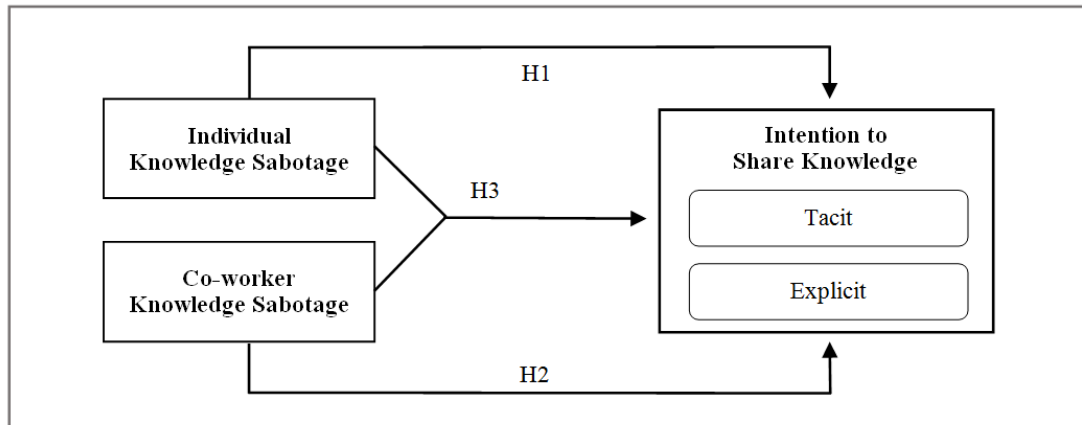


Figure 1 – The relationship model

Source: Authors' elaboration

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The hypotheses put forward are tested using an OLS regression analysis (as for a similar framework used by Bresciani and Ferraris, 2016), in order to highlight the consequences of IKS and CKS on people's intention to share tacit and explicit knowledge. The preliminary data needed for this empirical study comes from a survey of 200 people. The target audience includes managers and employees of Italian companies, differing in industry and size, with a minimum of 50 people in each one. All items were adapted basing on previous studies (Serenko and Choo, 2020; Bock et al., 2005).

EXPECTED FINDINGS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Knowledge sabotage still hides several pitfalls towards his antecedents and consequences on the process of sharing knowledge in organizations (Ferraris and Perotti, 2020; Serenko, 2019; Serenko and Choo, 2020). From the investigation on managers and employees, we expect to obtain results capable of offering a better understanding of the impact extent of this counterproductive behavior on the sharing process. Therefore, from the first study that straightly relate knowledge sabotage and knowledge sharing, we contribute to knowledge management literature by proving the entity of the so-called more "extreme form of counterproductive knowledge behavior" (Serenko, 2019). Furthermore, we propose a

distinct consequences framework according to the type of knowledge whose sharing is mainly hindered by the dealt with counterproductive workplace behavior. As for managerial implication, our observations can be definitely useful for knowledge-based organizations whose goal is to properly manage the flow of knowledge. Indeed, they could draw interesting insights as regards the adoption of policies aimed at preventing or contrasting knowledge sabotage incidents.

Keywords: knowledge sabotage, knowledge sharing, knowledge management, tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge.

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