

Exploring the Dark Side of Leadership: Knowledge Behaviours Under Abusive Supervision

Diana Sarkis

Abstract

This presentation reports a comprehensive literature review examining how abusive supervision influences employee knowledge-related behaviours, with particular attention to knowledge hiding and knowledge sabotage. Across the literature, abusive supervision consistently emerges as a catalyst for intentional knowledge withholding, distortion, and destruction, resulting in diminished team learning, impaired collaboration, and significant losses in organizational performance and knowledge retention. Drawing primarily on Social Exchange Theory, this review demonstrates that supervisory abuse violates norms of reciprocity, fairness, and trust, thereby motivating employees to protect themselves through evasive knowledge behaviours. Displaced Aggression Theory further explains how negative emotions generated by abusive supervision are redirected toward coworkers or the organization, contributing to the spread of knowledge hiding and, in more severe cases, knowledge sabotage. Using a structured search strategy across major academic databases, peer-reviewed studies published over the past two decades were analyzed. Key findings identified emotional exhaustion, perceived injustice, and psychological contract breach as central mediating mechanisms, while organizational culture, psychological ownership, and power distance emerged as important moderating factors. This review also highlights critical gaps in longitudinal research and limited empirical evidence on effective organizational interventions. By integrating insights across human resource management and organizational behaviour research, this review clarifies the mechanisms linking abusive supervision to harmful knowledge behaviours and underscores the substantial organizational costs of leadership abuse. Its findings provide a foundation for future empirical

research and inform the development of leadership practices and organizational policies aimed at fostering psychological safety and protecting the strategic value of organizational knowledge.

Keywords: abusive supervision, knowledge hiding, knowledge sabotage, social exchange theory, organizational behaviour

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Diana Sarkis is a DBA student at Athabasca University and a Sessional Instructor at the Odette School of Business, University of Windsor. Her research focuses on abusive supervision, knowledge hiding, and the dynamics of workplace relationships. Alongside her academic work, she consults with organizations across Canada on human resource management and labour relations issues. She lives in Windsor, Ontario, and enjoys bridging academic research with real-world practice.
