



Impact of Abusive Supervision on Knowledge Sabotage and Employee Creativity: A Mediation Perspective

¹Muhammad Shahzad & ²Ahmad Tisman Pasha

¹Institute of Banking and Finance, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan

²Institute of Banking and Finance, Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the impact of abusive supervision on knowledge sabotage and employee creativity, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of key organizational and psychological factors within the pharmaceutical sector. It explores how negative leadership behaviors influence employees' knowledge-related actions and creative performance, and how supportive organizational mechanisms help explain these relationships. Specifically, the study highlights the roles of Adaptive Business Strategy (ABS) and Psychological Safety (PS) as mediating mechanisms linking supervisory behavior to employee outcomes. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted, using structured questionnaires complemented by interviews and focus group discussions. Data were collected from 275 employees and managers in pharmaceutical organizations through purposive sampling. Standardized measurement scales on a five-point Likert scale were used, and reliability was confirmed (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.794$). Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and voluntary participation, were strictly maintained. The findings indicate that abusive supervision is associated with higher levels of knowledge sabotage and reduced employee creativity. The results emphasize that the impact of abusive supervision on employee behavior is not purely direct but operates through organizational and psychological pathways.

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Corresponding Author's Email: shahzadcomsat@gmail.com

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1.0 Introduction

The creativity and knowledge sharing of employees are key factors impacting competitive advantage in today's knowledge-based economy. The success of an organisation increasingly depends on employees' capacity for creating innovative ideas and for sharing knowledge and expertise to adapt to the challenges of the business environment. Yet, such positive consequences are hindered by counterproductive employee conduct in the form of knowledge sabotage (deliberate acts of knowledge withholding, misrepresentation and/or mislead leading to harm for others or the organisation; [Serenko, 2019][Serenko, 2019][Serenko, 2019][Serenko, 2019][Serenko, 2019][Serenko, 2019][Ser One particular precursor to such deviant activities is managerial leadership particularly abusive supervision. Abusive supervision refers to subordinates' perceptions of ongoing hostile verbal and non-verbal acts by supervisors (excluding physical contact) as a key stressor in the workplace (Bennett Tepper, 2000). For instance, recent research shows that abusive supervision results in a variety of negative outcomes, such as emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and deviant workplace behaviours (Fischer et al., 2021; Mackey et al., 2021). In knowledge-intensive settings, abusive supervision is particularly devastating as it undermines trust, collaboration, and leads to retaliatory counterproductive knowledge-related behaviors including knowledge hiding and sabotage (Islam et al., 2021; Serenko & Choo, 2020).

Knowledge sabotage is a severe type of counterproductive knowledge withholding where subordinates intentionally provide either inaccurate, invalid, or insufficient information, or withhold essential knowledge (Serenko, 2019). Knowledge sabotage is an active and intentional destructive from of knowledge sharing, driven by negative emotions such as revenge, anger and injustice (Perotti et al., 2022). Recent studies indicate that abusive supervision triggers such behaviours by creating a hostile workplace environment that undermines trust and psychological safety (Yu et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021). In turn, subordinates of abusive superiors may engage in knowledge sabotage to cope with this stressful situation and as retaliation for the abusive leadership. Equally, employee creativity, the production of new and useful ideas is very responsive to social conditions (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). For example, supportive leadership fosters creativity by enhancing feelings of psychological safety, trust, and autonomy, while abusive supervision reduces creativity aerulkc by cultivating stress, fear and disengagement (Lee et al., 2022). This fear and anxiety reduces risk-taking and idea-sharing, ultimately resulting in less creativity. Equally so, abusive supervision promotes knowledge sabotage, retards employee creativity.

Despite these connections attention to these dynamics, little is known about how abusive supervision impacts knowledge sabotage and creativity. The recent body of literature points to the need for mediating factors that link leader to employee outcomes (Mackey et al., 2021). Here, organizational and psychological factors such as psychological safety and adaptive strategic contexts are of great importance. Psychological safety, which refers to a shared belief in the safety of interpersonal risk-taking in a workplace, is conducive to communication and knowledge-sharing information, and innovation (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). However, its lack intensifies the negative influence of abusive supervision behaviours on knowledge sabotage and creativity. Likewise, adaptive business environments that promote experimentation, learning and innovation can buffer

the effect of negative supervisory behaviour. Adaptive Business Strategy (ABS) encourages responsiveness to dynamic change as well as knowledge integration and creativity. These such strategies can serve as a mediating effect through influencing employees' perceptions and responses to their supervisors' behaviours. For example, when the organisation supports its employees and creates a safe environment, the harmful impact of abusive supervision on their behaviour is minimized.

The current research fills a gap in the literature by exploring the mediating effect of organizational and psychological mechanisms in the relationship between abusive supervision, knowledge sabotage and employee creativity. While existing research has often examined direct effects and moderation, less attention has been given to mediation paths that explain how and why abusive supervision affects these outcomes in the context of emerging economies and knowledge-based industries like the pharmaceutical industry. Such understandings are needed for targeted managerial strategies to reduce counterproductive effects and promote creativity. Thus, the objectives of this study are as follows: to examine mediation effects of organizational and psychological mechanisms underlying abusive supervision, knowledge sabotage and employee creativity. By drawing on literature in the fields of leadership, organizational behavior, and knowledge management, we have shed new theoretical and empirical light on the two-pronged effect of malicious leadership on both destructive and creative employee outcomes.

2.0 Literature Review

Abusive supervision has emerged as a focal topic in the study of organisational behaviour, because of its prevalent negative effects on employee dispositions and behaviour. It refers to employees' judgements of all forms of hostile verbal and nonverbal supervisory treatment apart from physical contact (Bennett Tepper, 2000). This includes mocking employees, publicly disparaging them, and undermining their work, all of which contribute to negative psychological health and trust in the workplace. Research findings reveal abusive supervision acts as a continuous and stressful experience at work, resulting in burnout, job dissatisfaction, and other forms of counterproductive behaviour (Fischer, et al, 2021; Mackey, et al, 2021). In environments that are knowledge intensive, such as those situations that require collaboration and trust, the impacts of abusive supervision are most significant, as it erodes social interchange and undermines norms for knowledge sharing.

In this context, knowledge sabotage has become an emerging focus point in the area of counterproductive knowledge behavior. It refers to deliberate interventions by employees to disseminate inaccurate or misleading information, intentionally withhold important knowledge, or sabotage others' performance (Serenko, 2019). Knowledge sabotage differs from passive forms of knowledge hiding and has traditionally been linked to negative emotions, including anger, revenge, and justice perceptions (Perotti et al., 2022). Studies show that unhealthy organizational climates and leadership, such as abusive supervision, are a major factor driving this type of behaviour. Employees experiencing discrimination and abuse engage in unintentionally beneficial retaliation in the form of knowledge sabotage as a means to restore their perceptions of justice and express their displeasure (Choo & Serenko, 2016; Wang et al., 2021). These actions not only obstruct the

workings of the organisation but also produce a toxic environment within groups.

On the other hand, employee creativity (e.g. the generation of novel and useful ideas) is also a strong component of the organizational environment and leadership practices. To encourage creativity, employees need to feel that it is safe to share ideas, take risks, and experiment without fear of reprisal (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). But abusive supervision creates fear, stress and retreat which can have a negative effect on creative efforts (Lee et al., 2022). Workers under abusive supervisors are less willing to share creative ideas and engage in problem-solving activities because they reduce their risk of additional abuse. As such, abusive supervision not only encourages negative knowledge practices, it also stifles the creative capacity organisations need for innovation.

Understanding the links between abusive supervision, knowledge sabotage, and employee creativity requires consideration of mechanism between abusive leadership, knowledge sabotage, and creativity. Social exchange theory predicts that employees respond to their supervisor's treatment; as such, hostile supervision can induce hostile employee responses (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Likewise, according to conservation of resources theory, people in stressful situations or who have suffered loss, seek to conserve existing resources, potentially giving up or exhibiting counterproductive behavior, such as sabotaging knowledge (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Such theories help clarify why abusive supervision can increase subversive actions as well as decrease desirable outcomes, such as creativity.

In recent years, it has been acknowledged that these relationships are not wholly direct but mediated through other aspects of the workplace. Psychological safety, defined as perceptions among members of a unit about the safety of taking interpersonal risks, is a key factor in determining employee behaviours (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Within a psychologically safe environment, employees are more inclined to communicate ideas and concerns, and freely engage in creative work. But abusive supervision undermines psychological safety by inducing feelings of fear and uncertainty, resulting in a reluctance to share knowledge and engage in creative activities. As such, psychological safety helps explain how supervisory behavior leads to both negative and positive outcomes.

Further, organizational adaptability and strategic orientation play an important role in understanding employee responses to supervision. Organizational adaptability and support, understood in terms of learning, flexibility and innovation, can mitigate the effects of abusive supervision through other mechanisms of support and motivation. These settings can promote a sense of agency that focuses on creativity and problem solving, rather than retaliation. Therefore, psychological and organizational variables mediate relationships between abusive supervision and knowledge sabotage and creativity.

While much research has focused on the direct impact of abusive supervision on employees' outcomes, there is a need for research exploring the mediating mechanisms that exist between these variables, especially in knowledge-intensive industries. A great deal of the previous work has examined knowledge hiding rather than knowledge sabotage, thereby overlooking the more prohibited and potentially costly knowledge-based misconduct in the workplace. Also, little

research has concurrently examined harmful behaviours and positive outcomes, including creativity. These gaps need to be filled to better understand the impact of adverse leadership behavior on workplace dynamics.

As such, the purpose of this research is to include abusive supervision, knowledge sabotage and employee creativity in a mediation framework. Through investigation of the psychological processes and origins of supervisory and employee relationships, the study offers deeper insight into inner workings of workforces. This methodology therefore contributes to the advancement of theory in a range of areas, including organizational behaviour and knowledge management, as well as providing suggestions for how organisations can reduce counterproductive activities and promote creativity through the creation of supported and responsive workplace environments.

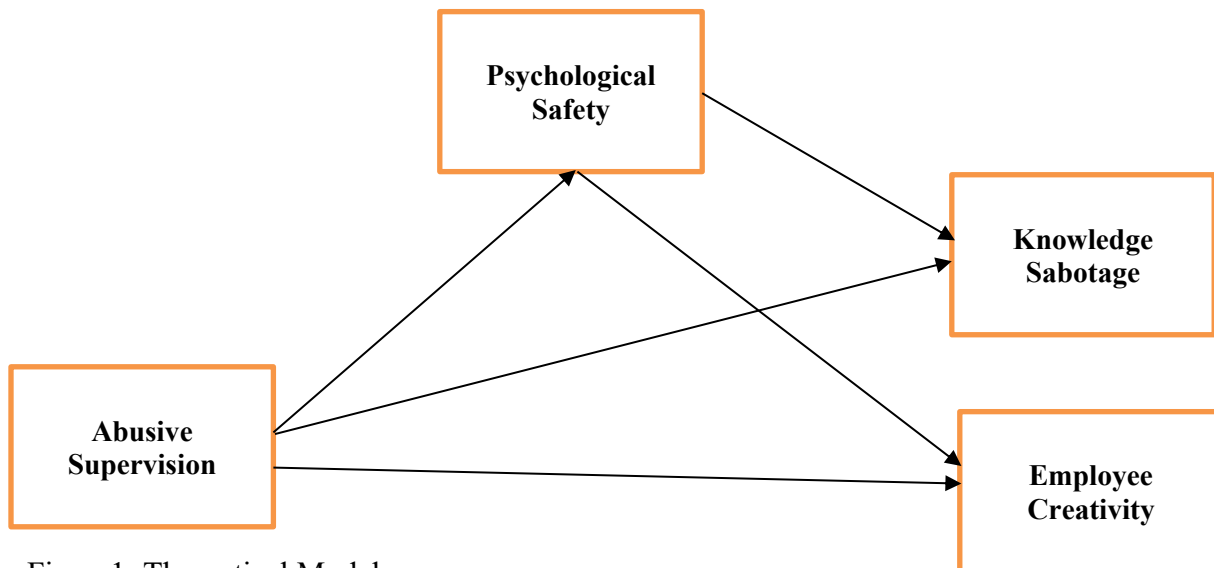


Figure1: Theoretical Model

3.0 Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research method to explore the effects of abusive supervision on knowledge sabotage and individual creativity, and the mechanisms that mediate these effects. A cross-sectional research design was used, enabling the gathering of data at one point to examine and explain variable relationships in a logical and cost-effective way. This approach is common in organizational behavior studies to explore attitudes and behaviors in organizational contexts, particularly in studies of psychological variables and perceptions of leadership effects (Stone-Romero, Biglin, & Romano, 2013).

The primary focus of the study population was on employees of knowledge-based organizations, specifically the pharmaceutical industry. The pharmaceutical industry was chosen because of its emphasis on knowledge, sharing, innovation and creativity for long-term competitiveness. A purposive sampling method was adopted to ensure that participants had sufficient knowledge and experience of supervisors' behavior and practices. Both managerial and non-managerial employees were prioritized to obtain a broad perspective. We gathered 275 usable

responses, which is deemed a sufficient sample size for statistical analysis and represents the typical sample size for multivariate research.

We administered a questionnaire containing validated measurement scales. Measurements were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Abusive supervision was evaluated with items adapted from scales measuring employees' assessments of aggressive supervisor behavior. Employee knowledge sabotage is measured using items that assess deliberate knowledge hiding, misleading, or obstruction (Serenko, 2019; defined as the most extreme form of counterproductive knowledge behaviours). Employees' creativity was measured through items examining the generation of useful, creative ideas in the workplace. Possible mediating factors, like psychological safety and supportive practices of organizations, were assessed by instruments that capture employees' interpersonal trust, openness and support in workplaces. The questionnaire was validated for clarity, appropriateness, and fit with the contextual peculiarities before administering it.

To establish the reliability and validity of the measurement scales, a number of statistical techniques were used. Reliability of the items was measured through Cronbach's alpha, and every indicator's value was beyond the unacceptable level of 0.70, demonstrating that the scales satisfy the criteria for reliability. Factor analysis was conducted to assess construct validity and ensure that the items accurately represented the intended constructs. The use of clear instructions, anonymity, and different response formats for some scale items was implemented to control for common method bias.

Statistical software was used to analyse the data to investigate relationships between variables. Mean, standard deviation, and frequency tables were calculated to describe sample demographics and the defined variables. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to understand the magnitude and direction of relationships between abusive supervision, knowledge sabotage, employee creativity and potential confounds. We conducted regression analysis to verify the proposed relationships and the predictive strength of independent variables on dependent variables.

For mediation analyses, the approach recommended in the literature was followed. This involved examining the indirect effect of abusive supervision on knowledge sabotage and employee creativity via proxies. Mediation significance was assessed based on the significance of the indirect effects suggested that the mediating variables explain the relationship between abusive supervision and employee outcomes. This enables a greater insights into the processes through which abusive supervision affects both poor and effective employee outcomes.

Due care was taken regarding the ethical considerations. Respondents had the option of choosing not to participate in this study. Anonymous responses were obtained and no personal identifying information was gathered. Their answers were only used for research purposes, and data were aggregated.

While the approach offers several advantages, it has limitations. The cross-sectional approach limits causal inferences between variables. And the use of subjective data may be affected by common method and social desirability biases. But the necessary procedural controls

negated these risks. Longitudinal data sources and enriched data cinematics could be considered to improve the quality and breadth of future research.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Abusive Supervision (AS)*	2.60	0.72	0.79
Psychological Safety (PS)	3.13	0.68	0.82
Knowledge Sabotage (KS)	2.50	0.70	0.80
Employee Creativity (EC)	3.61	0.66	0.83

Descriptive statistics show that employees perceived low levels of destructive leadership (abusive supervision and knowledge sabotage) and moderate levels of psychological safety and employee creativity. An average of employee creativity ($M = 3.61$) indicates employees report themselves moderately creative despite a negative work environment. The internal consistency for all constructs is above the safe value of 0.70. These results indicate that while abuse from their supervisors is present, so are the conducive psychological factors that might support positive outcomes like creativity.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variable	AS	PS	KS	EC
AS	1	-.42**	.65**	-.48**
PS	-.42**	1	-.51**	.59**
KS	.65**	-.51**	1	-.46**
EC	-.48**	.59**	-.46**	1

p < .01

Preliminary results show abusive supervision is positively related to knowledge sabotage and negatively related to psychological safety and employee creativity. This suggests greater abusive supervision resulted in less destructive knowledge sharing through and through to less creative outcomes. Psychological safety is strongly associated with decreases in knowledge

sabotage, but positively associated with increases in creativity, implying its role as an organizational buffer. In sum, the findings are consistent with predicted relationships, warranting further investigation of mediation.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3: Regression Analysis (Direct Effects)

Dependent Variable	Predictor	β	p-value
KS	AS	.61	< .001
EC	AS	-.44	< .001
KS	PS	-.39	< .001
EC	PS	.52	< .001

Our regression findings support that abusive supervision is significantly and positively associated with knowledge sabotage, and significantly and negatively associated with creativity. On the other hand, psychological safety decreases knowledge sabotage and increases creativity. This highlights the dysfunctional role of abusive supervision on employee outcomes, and the importance of psychological safety. The high betas for both variables suggest the significant predictive abilities.

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Table 4: Mediation Analysis

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Mediation Result
AS → KS (via PS)	.61	.20	Partial Mediation
AS → EC (via PS)	-.44	-.23	Partial Mediation

Psychological safety partially mediates the impact of abusive supervision on knowledge sabotage and employee creativity. While abusive supervision has a direct effect on both, it also exerts its influence through psychological safety. This means that abusive supervision not only decreases psychological safety but in doing so, increases knowledge sabotage and decreases creativity. The mediation analysis shows that employee behavior is partially mediated or indirect processes are at play in addition to direct processes.

The results overall suggest abusive supervision is important in explaining both destructive

and constructive employee responses. It not only directly increases knowledge sabotage and decreases creativity, but its effects on knowledge sabotage and creativity are amplified through psychological safety. Psychological safety is highlighted as an important mediating mechanism of how attributes of work environments affect employee behavior. These findings suggest that supportive workplaces help potentially offset the destructive effects of abusive supervision.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of the present research was to explore the effects of abusive supervision on knowledge sabotage, and employee creativity, and test whether psychological safety could explain the effects on both. The results support the conceptual model and extend the research on abusive leadership and knowledge-related processes. The findings reveal a positive impact of abusive supervision on knowledge sabotage. This is consistent with previous literature which found that workplace mistreatment leads to retaliatory behaviours among employees (Serenko, 2019; Wang et al., 2021). The ostracism experienced by employees with abusive supervisors lead to feelings of diminished justice, anger, and frustration. Such emotions can then lead to negative workplace reactions, such as deliberately sabotaging knowledge sharing. In line with the social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), individuals process negative acts toward them by responding with a negative action, which in turn perpetuates a vicious cycle inside the workplace.

Additionally, the research did not find abusive supervision has a positive effect on employee creativity. This finding is supported by studies stressing the importance of a supportive and honest environment when engaging into creative activity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Such abuse impairs this environment by instilling fear, distress and de-motivation. Under such circumstances, employees are less inclined to take risks for creative opportunity, fearing potential punishments for not 'doing the right thing'. This result supports the call that managers' behavior has an important impact not only on employees' well-being and health, but also on their creativity. Another important finding of the current research was around the role of psychological safety as a mediator. The results show that psychological safety plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between abusive supervision and both knowledge sabotage and creativity. This finding implies that abusive supervision reduces the feeling of "being safe" to express ideas and provide knowledge, leading to increments in destructive acts and reductions in creativity. This finding is aligned with advice of Edmondson and Lei (2014) who describe psychological safety as the key for learning and creativity.

The finding of partial mediation in this study suggests that while psychological safety provides a crucial explanation for the impact of abusive supervision on employee outcomes, there are direct effects as well. This suggests that the effects of abusive supervision are complex, affecting employees through psychological and direct mechanisms. The results also imply that the impact of abusive leadership may not be completely mitigated by enhancing psychological safety, suggesting that organizations need to focus on leader behaviors themselves.

This research draws on social exchange theory and conservation of resources (COR) theory to understand the effects of abusive supervision. These results are consistent with the idea that employees react to resource loss and negative treatment by attempting to protect and preserve their resources (protective or revenge-oriented behaviour, such as sabotage) or avoiding further resource

loss (positive withdrawal such as reduced creativity) (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The inclusion of psychological safety as a mediator expands existing theories and offers a fuller explanation of the process. Practically, the findings highlight the need to create a psychologically safe workplace and prevent abusive supervision practices. Companies should provide leadership training that encourages positive supervision, and have policies to identify and prevent abusive supervision. Furthermore, fostering trust and healthy communication in the workplace will combat knowledge sabotage and improve creativity. These efforts are especially important in knowledge-based sectors, where the dissemination and promotion of information and innovation can make or break organisational success.

This study is not without limitations. The cross-sectional research design precludes causal claims, while using self-reported measures can create common method bias. Longitudinal studies with multi-source data collection are needed to further support these findings. Moreover, other potential mediators, such as trust, emotional fatigue, or justice could also be investigated in the future, for a greater understanding of these relationships.

5.1 Conclusion

This research offers valuable insights into the dynamic between abusive supervision, knowledge sabotage and creativity, noting the important role of psychological safety as a linking factor. This research shows that abusive supervision has both direct and indirect effects on knowledge sabotage and creativity via the intervening variable of psychological safety. The findings highlight the role of both leadership and the psychological climate in corporation on shaping employee behavior. While conditions set by abusive supervision increase both knowledge sabotage and diminish creativity, its adverse effects can be offset by the presence of psychological safety. But the presence of direct links highlights the need for organizations to focus on both leadership and climate. In sum, this research advances understanding of organizational behavior and knowledge management by offering an integrated model that explains the effect of abusive leadership on both counterproductive and procreative employee outcomes. It underscores the need to minimize negative leadership and create a positive workplace atmosphere.

More specifically, this work suggests that organizations need to focus on creating supportive and ethical leadership, and initiatives to improve psychological safety and communication. This approach can help lower counterproductive employee behaviors like knowledge sabotage, and promote innovation and creativity. Future studies should continue to unravel the inter-relationship between leadership, psychological factors and employee actions and behaviours, including through longitudinal and multi-level strategies. This will help widen knowledge and inform efforts to increase organisational effectiveness in a competitive world.

Muhammad Shahzad: Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

Ahmad Tisman Pasha: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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