

A structured literature review of personality traits research in the knowledge behavior context: synthesis of the findings and practical recommendations

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VINE Journal of
Information and
Knowledge
Management
Systems

139

Received 18 October 2024
Revised 24 November 2024
30 March 2025
14 April 2025
Accepted 24 April 2025

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to present a structured literature review of personality traits research in the context of knowledge behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 200 empirical articles published in knowledge management-centric journals and other journals indexed by Google Scholar were discovered and analyzed.

Findings – It was found that many knowledge management researchers are inadequately aware of the personality psychology literature. More than two-thirds of the proposed nomological networks exclude trait-relevant situational cues, without which the trait–behavior relationship may not exist. Consequently, their conclusions on the predictive power of many personality traits are contradictory and inconclusive. Particularly unclear is the role of the Big Five traits, performance-approach/avoidance goal orientation and personal motivation traits. Personality trait constructs cannot simply be blindly borrowed from the psychology literature and recklessly added to knowledge management causal models.

Practical implications – Journal editorial teams should declare a moratorium on publishing empirical studies in which researchers carelessly add personality trait constructs to their causal models without proper conceptualizing that uses relevant theories and cites the original sources. Practitioners need to exercise caution when applying the recommendations of the studies reporting the impact of employee personality traits on knowledge behavior. Organizations should favor employees possessing emotional intelligence, learning-approach goal orientation and prosocial cooperative value orientation – and avoid those with the Dark Triad traits. Managers should explore their workplace and understand what situational cues activate the desirable and undesirable personality traits of their workers.

Originality/value – This study draws the attention of various stakeholders of the knowledge management discipline to a vital, yet possibly derailed, research area.

Keywords Personality trait, Structured literature review, Psychology, Productive knowledge behavior, Counterproductive knowledge behavior, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge hiding

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Technology changes all the time; human nature hardly ever. (Morozov, 2011, p. 315)

In the recently aired TV series *Altered Carbon*, Takeshi Kovacs, the protagonist, wakes up in an unknown, technology-transformed, futuristic world after being frozen in time for more than 200 years. To get a new chance at life, Kovacs must solve a mystery by tracking and dealing with a bunch of villains. When confronted with the reasonable question of how he was going to do that, his answer was simple: “Technology advances. But humans don’t”



VINE Journal of Information and
Knowledge Management Systems
Vol. 56 No. 1, 2026
pp. 139-172
© Emerald Publishing Limited
2059-5891
DOI 10.1108/VJKMS-10-2024-0374

([Altered Carbon](#), 2018, Season 1, Episode 2). As the mesmerized audience witnessed for two exciting seasons, this perspective served him well. Indeed, one of the most intriguing discoveries of personality psychology research is that, despite all the fascinating breakthroughs in technology, the core nature of human personality has remained stable for centuries.

Human personality refers to a “system characterizing the individual’s typical motivating factors, inner world and defenses, affective proclivities, interpersonal life, reflections of self, thought processes and so on” ([Millon et al.](#), 2015, p. 42). It is represented by a constellation of personality traits that determine people’s feelings, cognition, and behavior ([Allport, 1937](#); [Cattell, 1946](#); [Matthews et al.](#), 2003). Individuals develop their personality by the age of 25, influenced by genetics and environmental factors ([Bleidorn et al.](#), 2022), after which their personality remains generally stable with some minor, gradual changes due to natural aging and exposure to environmental factors.

The notion of personality traits has attracted the attention of business scholars since the early days of the management discipline. Presently, several specialized management journals exist – for example, *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Personnel Psychology* – which focus on various aspects of employee personality in the organizational context. Knowledge management scholars have also quickly recognized the value of personality traits in the context of human capital management. While no knowledge management-centric journals explicitly devoted to personality topics exist yet, the leading knowledge management outlets – including *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *Knowledge Management Research & Practice* and *VINE: Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems* – have recently published many thought-provoking articles documenting the role of employee personality traits (e.g., see [Afshar Jalili and Salempour, 2020](#); [Banagou et al.](#), 2021; [Kmieciak, 2022](#); [Boamah et al.](#), 2023; [Zhao et al.](#), 2023; [Scuotto et al.](#), 2024; [Tan et al.](#), 2024; [Chaudhary and Islam, 2025](#); [Wu and Liu, 2025](#)). The motivation behind these scientific endeavors lies in the researchers’ realization of the practical implications of employee personality traits in the context of the contemporary knowledge-intensive organization. Their vision is perfectly aligned with the mandate of the knowledge management discipline as a practical field: the discipline has emerged from the works of practitioners who documented their ideas developed through workplace experience and observations ([Prusak, 2001](#); [Serenko et al.](#), 2010). Specifically, studying employee personality traits may contribute to human capital management practices in several ways.

First, consistent with the concept of a personality-oriented job analysis ([Sümer et al.](#), 2001), managers need to understand which personality traits may maximize the productive explicit knowledge behavior of their workers (e.g., knowledge documentation, acquisition and sharing) and minimize counterproductive behavior (e.g., knowledge hoarding, hiding and sabotage). Equipped with this knowledge, managers may proactively develop and launch various selection, promotion and retention policies to secure the most suitable human capital. Second, it is critical to educate managers about how to create a workplace environment in which their employees may express their personality traits in a productive manner. The process of trait activation is intrinsically rewarding ([Tett et al.](#), 2013; [Tett et al.](#), 2021) and, thus, employees experience job satisfaction when they may express their personality traits at work. As a result, satisfied workers may increase their job performance and reduce their voluntary turnover ([Judge, 1993](#); [Judge et al.](#), 2001). Third, a deep understanding of the practical aspects of employee personality may help managers strategically develop and conduct training programs to help their workers suppress the activation of traits contributing to counterproductive knowledge behavior through self-regulation and self-control. Fourth, it is necessary to inform top leaders about the behavioral

impacts of their workers' personality traits to help these leaders better understand workplace dynamics because this improves labor relations and contributes to the overall health of their organization. Finally, managers and top leaders should become aware of the potential impact of their own personality traits on their professional decisions.

Busy managers, however, are faced with two challenges preventing them from fully realizing the benefits of personality traits research in the knowledge management domain. First, they find it difficult to navigate the academic literature on this topic given the large number of articles in widely disparate publication venues. Indeed, knowledge managers have no time to locate each relevant article and summarize the recommendations presented in multiple publications to inform their practice (Booker *et al.*, 2008; Booker *et al.*, 2012). Second, conclusions on the role of personality traits as antecedents of knowledge behavior have been highly contradictory and so are confusing to the busy reader. Consider, for example, the role of the conscientiousness personality trait – being self-disciplined, dutiful, punctual, and reliable (McCrae and Costa, 1987; Costa and McCrae, 1992) – which seems to be a highly desirable employee trait. It is reasonable to theorize that conscientious employees are likely to consistently engage in knowledge sharing. Yet, in line with this reasoning, Borges (2013), Cabrera *et al.* (2006), and Manaf *et al.* (2020) empirically demonstrated the positive effect of conscientiousness on knowledge sharing, whereas Agyemang *et al.* (2016), Keshavarz (2022), and Opesade and Alade (2021) failed to identify one. In a similar vein, it is logical to assume that dispositional greed – one's desire to acquire more and the dissatisfaction of never having enough (Seuntjens *et al.*, 2015a; Seuntjens *et al.*, 2015b) – promotes counterproductive knowledge behavior such as knowledge hiding and knowledge sabotage, but Enwereuzor (2023, 2024) found no empirical support for this proposition.

To date, only a single systematic literature review and one meta-analysis of personality traits in the context of knowledge behavior have been conducted. Akbar *et al.* (2021) reviewed 21 empirical studies focusing on the impact of personality traits on knowledge sharing. Yin and colleagues (2023) report the results of a meta-analysis of 66 empirical studies on the relationship between knowledge sharing and the Big Five and the Dark Triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) personality traits. While such attempts are admirable, first, they focused on a single category of knowledge behavior – knowledge sharing – which limits the managers' ability to apply their findings in all workplace contexts. Second, they reviewed only a small subset of all relevant publications, which, again, limits these works' practical value. Therefore, knowledge managers would benefit from a comprehensive, structured analysis of the literature on this critical topic.

To help knowledge managers fully understand and employ scientific findings in their routine practice, researchers have a robust technique available – the structured literature review, which is a rigorous method for identifying and analyzing a corpus of scientific literature to develop insights, critical reflections, practical recommendations, and future research paths (Dumay *et al.*, 2016; Massaro *et al.*, 2016a). The structured literature review has several advantages over other inquiry techniques, which make it highly suitable for understanding the state of personality research in the knowledge management domain and facilitate the development of practical recommendations. First, researchers identify and select a corpus of examined literature by following a flexible yet rigorous set of rules that exclude their personal opinions, biases, and preferences. Second, while having a strong expertise in the domain under investigation is always beneficial, structured literature reviews may be done by researchers at any stage of their careers, including new scholars, which may bring some “new blood” to the discussion and help identify fresh perspectives. Third, the results may be easily replicated and extended in the future. Fourth, researchers may use a

combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques, which adds rigor and allows the findings to be reported from multiple perspectives.

In recent years, structured literature reviews have gained recognition in knowledge management research, as demonstrated by multiple publications in the leading journals of the discipline (Senivongse *et al.*, 2017; Paoloni *et al.*, 2020). For example, by following the structured literature review method, Massaro *et al.* (2016b) studied knowledge management in small and medium enterprises, Batista *et al.* (2017) discussed the relationship between knowledge management and innovation in large organizations, Grimaldi and Cricelli (2020) measured the value of patents, and Massaro *et al.* (2015) documented the state of public sector knowledge management. Therefore, by relying on the structured literature review method, this study may uncover new insights into the state of personality traits research in the knowledge management discipline to guide future scholars and develop practical recommendations.

While there are many factors affecting employee knowledge behavior – for example, organizational culture, technology, and team dynamics – this study focuses exclusively on the effect of personality traits. The overarching research question is as follows: *What is the current state of personality traits research in the context of productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior, and, based on this body of research, what recommendations can be proposed for scholars and knowledge managers?*

The next section (Section 2) of this article defines personality traits, explicates the mechanism behind the personality traits-knowledge behavior relationship, and distinguishes between trait domains and facets. Section 3 provides an overview of this study's methods, Section 4 documents the findings, and Section 5 presents theoretical and practical implications. The last section, Section 6, concludes the paper.

2. The role of personality

2.1 Defining personality traits

Personality traits are *generally stable*, *intraindividual consistent*, and *interindividual distinct* latent potentials that determine one's cognition (thinking), emotions (feelings), and behavior (actions) in response to *trait-relevant situational cues* and which allow prediction of how one will think, feel, and act in the future (Tett and Guterman, 2000; Tett *et al.*, 2021). Four terms presented in the definition above deserve further elaboration: general stability, intraindividual consistency, interindividual distinction, and trait-relevant situational cues.

People form their personality traits by young adulthood (age 25) under the influence of genetic and environmental factors (Bleidorn *et al.*, 2022). After that, personality traits remain stable in the short run: it is very unlikely that someone would suddenly change his/her personality over the duration of several months (Tett and Fisher, 2021). However, over the course of many years, decades, and a lifespan, personality further develops: as people age, experience various aspects of life, and change social roles, their personality may also evolve, especially in middle and old age (Roberts *et al.*, 2006). Nevertheless, in the organizational context where the average employee's tenure is only a few years, personality traits may be considered *generally stable* such that personality fluctuations are unlikely to produce noticeable changes in workers' behavior.

Intraindividual trait consistency means that people normally respond similarly to the same features in their environment (i.e., cues). For example, when being in the same situation and being exposed to the same cue, Employee A is likely to share her knowledge with co-workers every time they ask for help and is very unlikely to deny their requests. *Interindividual trait distinction* implies that different individuals respond differently to the same features in their environment. For instance, Employee B may routinely ignore his

colleagues' knowledge requests (i.e., hide his knowledge), and Employee C may even offer wrong knowledge to others, deliberately setting them up for failure (i.e., engage in knowledge sabotage): Employees A, B, and C act differently in the same situation when being exposed to the same cue. The key question, therefore, that puzzles human capital managers at all levels, from Chief Knowledge/Human Capital/People Officers to Project Managers/Supervisors, is how exactly employee personality traits contribute to and predict productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior. The following sub-section explicates in detail the mechanism behind this phenomenon by emphasizing the function of *trait-relevant situational cues*.

2.2 Personality traits in the context of knowledge behavior

The ability of traits to activate and facilitate knowledge behavior in response to trait-relevant situational cues makes them highly relevant in the contemporary workplace environment. Trait Activation Theory (Tett and Guterman, 2000; Tett and Burnett, 2003; Tett *et al.*, 2013) theorizes and explicates the interplay among situational cues, traits, and employee behavior. *Trait-relevant situational cues* – an integral part of the definition of personality traits presented earlier – refer to visual, auditory, and tactile environmental features related to particular personality traits: it is trait-relevant situational cues that facilitate the very expression of personality traits. Every time people think, feel, or act, they do so in response to particular features in their environment when being exposed to situational cues or stimuli. When an employee experiences a cue and when this cue relates to a particular personality trait, this trait is activated, which triggers a corresponding behavior. Tables 1 and 2 present examples of employee personality traits and explicit knowledge behaviors, respectively. Throughout the rest of this sub-section, these examples will be used to illustrate the mechanisms underlying the impact of employee personality traits on knowledge behavior.

Trait Activation Theory (Tett and Guterman, 2000; Tett and Burnett, 2003; Tett *et al.*, 2013) is based on the interactionist perspective (Judge and Zapata, 2015), according to which the interaction of a situational cue and a personality trait determines the magnitude and valence of employee knowledge behavior (see Figure 1). The theory posits that the trait and its behavioral impact should be analyzed in the context of a situational cue that is relevant to

Table 1. Examples of employee personality traits

Employee	Personality trait	Description
A	Conscientiousness	Self-discipline, dutifulness, punctuality, and reliability (Costa and McCrae, 1992)
	Introversion	Being reflective, quiet, and reserved (Costa and McCrae, 1992)
	Perfectionism	Striving for flawlessness by establishing excessively high performance standards while being overly concerned with mistakes (Stoeber and Otto, 2006)
B	Dispositional greed	Desire to acquire more and the dissatisfaction of never having enough (Seuntjens <i>et al.</i> , 2015a; Seuntjens <i>et al.</i> , 2015b)
	Psychopathy	Having no empathy toward others, accompanied by unreasonable interpersonal aggression (Paulhus and Williams, 2002)
	Need for achievement	Desire for accomplishment, excellence, and mastery (McClelland, 1985)
	Novelty seeking	Frequent exploratory activity in response to novelty, making impulsive decisions, quick loss of temper, extravagance in approach to reward cues, and active frustration avoidance (Cloninger <i>et al.</i> , 1993)

Source(s): Author's own work

Table 2. Examples of explicit employee knowledge behavior

Construct	Description
Knowledge sharing	Providing a co-worker with the required knowledge (de Garcia et al., 2022)
Knowledge hiding	Purposefully concealing knowledge from a co-worker after he/she unambiguously requested it (Connelly et al., 2012)
Knowledge documentation	Contribution of documents, reports, best practices, etc. to the knowledge repository (Andreeva and Kianto, 2011)
Knowledge hoarding	The accumulation of knowledge for potential personal use (de Garcia et al., 2022)
Knowledge sabotage	Intentionally providing wrong (incorrect) knowledge to a co-worker or concealing critical knowledge from a co-worker while fully realizing the devastating consequences of this action (Serenko, 2019)

Source(s): Author's own work

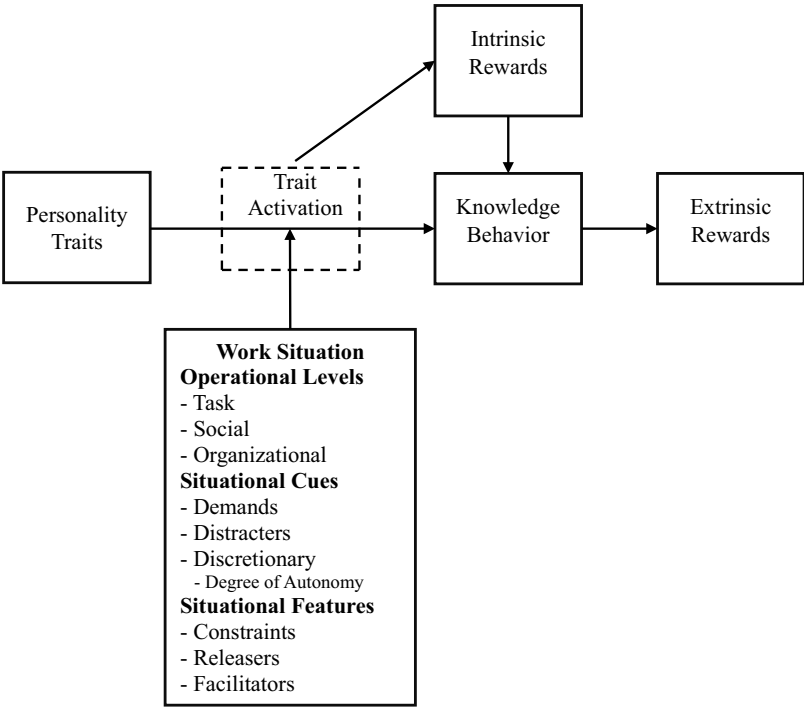


Figure 1. Trait activation theory
Source: Adapted from [Tett et al., 2013](#)

the trait: the trait remains dormant until the employee is exposed to a trait-relevant situation that activates the trait, which in turn triggers a particular knowledge behavior. In other words, situational cues moderate the trait-knowledge behavior relationship and determine the magnitude and valence of the final behavior. Without a cue that activates the trait, the trait remains inactive and does not have an impact on a corresponding knowledge behavior.

In the workplace, situational cues and features affecting the expression of knowledge behavior-relevant personality traits appear at three levels: task, social, and organizational. Relevant *tasks* include day-to-day activities formally defined in the job description (e.g., updating customer history on the customer relationship management system) and informally established practices (e.g., reading the internal weekly newsletter). *Social* activities pertain to interactions with customers, subordinates, peers, supervisors, and stakeholders and participating in other social gatherings, both virtually and in person. Examples include attending online or face-to-face meetings, logging onto the enterprise social network at the beginning of each workday, and receiving a sudden visit from a co-worker requesting knowledge. Cues functioning at the *organizational* level are related to culture, climate, and policies – for instance, knowledge sharing procedures, informal rules, and rewards. The key tenet of the theory is that, regardless of the level at which a situational cue operates, the cue must be relevant to a particular personality trait possessed by the employee for this trait to be activated.

Trait Activation Theory posits that the magnitude and valence of the knowledge behavior are determined by the interaction between the personality trait and the trait-relevant situational cue (i.e., the interactionist perspective). It proposes three types of situational cues, each of which uniquely contributes to knowledge behavior – demands, distracters, and discretionary cues. Two situational features – constraints and releasers – suppress and amplify the impact of the cues, respectively. In addition, facilitators enhance the salience of the cues that are already present.

Demands are cues that lead to productive knowledge behavior. For example, an organization has an effective knowledge sharing policy in place. When a co-worker e-mails Employee A asking for a copy of the report, this policy (i.e., the cue) activates her conscientiousness trait (Costa and McCrae, 1992), and she immediately shares the report (i.e., shares her knowledge). In this case, the knowledge sharing policy represents a demand because it leads to a desirable, productive behavior. The intraperson consistency principle of personality traits suggests that Employee A is likely to act in a similar manner when being exposed to the same demand (i.e., share her knowledge after receiving an e-mail request if her organization has an effective knowledge sharing policy in place). However, a different situational cue may serve as *distracter* – a cue that triggers a trait facilitating counterproductive knowledge behavior. For instance, assume that an organization does not have an effective knowledge sharing policy in place. When a co-worker personally visits Employee A in the office and asks for a copy of the report, this in-person visit (i.e., the cue) may activate her introversion trait (Costa and McCrae, 1992) (note that in the example above, an e-mail request was not sufficient to activate her introversion trait). As a result, she may not want to interact with the co-worker as she does not want to engage in a lengthy conversation, and, therefore, she brushes off the request and hides her knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012).

Constraints refer to situational features that weaken the trait-behavior relationship by making the trait less relevant. Moreover, constraints may reverse the valence of behavior: in some cases, they may change the polarity of a knowledge behavior from productive to counterproductive or vice versa. Consider, again, Employee A, who possesses the perfectionism trait (Stoeber and Otto, 2006), which is generally considered productive. Let's assume that the organizational knowledge management policy prescribes documenting all new knowledge discovered by employees that may be of interest to others (Andreeva and Kianto, 2011). When Employee A discovers a new important business fact – for instance, a new solution to a problem – this policy serves as a trait-relevant situational cue that activates her perfectionism trait. Consequently, she is supposed to diligently – as a true perfectionist – document this knowledge on the internal knowledge management system (i.e., engage in

knowledge documentation). However, according to the informal organizational principles, only high-quality, relevant knowledge may be documented on the system to make it easier for employees to navigate the knowledge base. In this case, she is likely to start questioning how others will judge the quality and relevance of this knowledge contribution (as per her perfectionism trait), and, if she feels she cannot perfect it, she is likely not to document it, even though she feels no need to hide this knowledge (Mahapatra and Ford, 2024) (i.e., not engage in knowledge documentation). In this case, the informal knowledge documentation principles serve as a *constraint* by reversing the effect of the perfectionism trait from productive to counterproductive.

Releasers are situational features that suppress the effect of constraints. In the example above, a friendly, open, and supportive supervisor may render the informal knowledge contribution principles less relevant: Employee A may assume that her supervisor will defend her if others start scrutinizing her contribution for imperfections. As a result, she is more likely to engage in knowledge documentation.

An intriguing aspect of employee personality is that some pernicious traits may lead to productive knowledge behavior when being activated by particular situational cues. Let's assume that Employee B possesses high dispositional greed (Seuntjens *et al.*, 2015a; Seuntjens *et al.*, 2015b) – a generally negative personality trait – and it is reasonable to expect that he is likely to hoard knowledge for the sake of mere accumulation of knowledge every time the opportunity presents itself. However, given the appropriate situational cues, even this personality trait may lead to a productive knowledge behavior. For instance, if the bonus structure is tied to the performance of the entire team (i.e., the pay structure serves as a situational cue that is highly relevant to Employee B's desire to earn more), Employee B is likely to share knowledge with his team members because doing so will improve the team's performance and lead to subsequent financial rewards. *Facilitators* magnify the salience of already existing trait-relevant situational cues. For instance, Employee B is likely to pay attention to the announcements of company news related to rewards and recognitions and notice them compared to those with lower dispositional greed. In this case, an e-mail reminder about the pay structure being tied to the team performance may strengthen the magnitude of the reward-based situational cue and further amplify the knowledge sharing behavior.

Trait Activation Theory also proposes that trait activation results in *intrinsic* and/or *extrinsic rewards*. People naturally experience satisfaction (i.e., intrinsic reward) when they express their traits regardless of the resulting behavior, like eating satisfies hunger and drinking water quenches thirst. For example, Employee B, who exhibits the psychopathy trait (Paulhus and Williams, 2002) and feels genuine pleasure every time he engages in knowledge sabotage, which represents the most extreme pernicious category of knowledge behavior (Serenko, 2019; Serenko, 2020; Serenko and Choo, 2020). His dispositional greed trait makes him feel happy every time he learns a new fact by simply browsing the internal knowledge repository and engaging in knowledge hoarding (de Garcia *et al.*, 2022). As such, employees are intrinsically motivated by the process of trait expression, and the resulting knowledge behavior represents a negative or positive by-product of their intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic motivation comes from two sources. The first source pertains to the knowledge behavior when an employee observes the outcome of his/her action. For instance, Employee B is highly achievement oriented (McClelland, 1985). For this employee, a new knowledge sharing award announced by management serves as a situational cue that activates his achievement trait: to obtain the coveted award as a formal endorsement of his knowledge, Employee B is likely to engage in knowledge sharing, and his participation in knowledge sharing activities gives him the feeling of extrinsic satisfaction that he is progressing toward

securing the reward. The second source of extrinsic motivation pertains to other organizational members observing the employee's expression of his/her trait and rewarding the outcome behavior. In the example above, when management observes Employee B's consistent attempts to share his knowledge, they are likely to issue him the formal reward, which represents the form of extrinsic motivation. Overall, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are powerful incentives for employees to engage in both productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior.

In addition to demands, distracters, constraints and releasers, *discretionary cues* represent a unique category because these are not related to the outcome knowledge behavior. Instead, discretionary cues serve as pure activators of outcome-unrelated employee personality traits, which produce intrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards, in turn, increase employee satisfaction, which reduces voluntary turnover – a critical factor from the perspective of human capital management (Serenko *et al.*, 2024). In addition, satisfied employees are more likely to engage in productive knowledge behavior (Rafique and Mahmood, 2018) and suppress counterproductive knowledge behavior (Perotti *et al.*, 2024) than unsatisfied workers. At the same time, the activation of discretionary cues requires a high degree of work autonomy: employees should be free to choose how, when, where, and with whom they do their job as long as they fully fulfill their duties. For example, Employee B possesses the novelty seeking trait (Cloninger *et al.*, 1993), and, if his organization creates a highly autonomous situation when employees may express this trait, trait expression increases Employee B's job satisfaction, which may reduce his turnover intention, increase knowledge sharing, and decrease knowledge hiding. This highlights the importance of discretionary cues in the workplace context.

In addition to Trait Activation Theory, the Job Characteristics Model by Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1976, 1980) also represents the interactionist perspective. While Trait Activation Theory positions personality traits as antecedents of knowledge behavior and situational cues as moderators, the Job Characteristics Model presents workplace features (e.g., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback) as antecedents of knowledge behavior and personality traits as moderators. From the statistical perspective, the outcome of empirical testing of the structural model should be identical (personality trait * situational cue vs workplace feature * personality trait), but the theoretical positioning of the role of personality traits dramatically differs. This model initially received attention in management research but eventually declined in popularity (Tett and Fisher, 2021). Nevertheless, it represents a valid theoretical perspective.

2.3 Domains and facets of personality traits

It is also very important to distinguish between domains and facets of personality traits. According to a top-down approach to hierarchical personality traits assessment, traits may be identified and measured hierarchically at different levels of specificity (Costa and McCrae, 1995). At the very top of the hierarchy are *trait domains*, which are “multifaceted collections of specific cognitive, affective, and behavioral tendencies that might be grouped in many different ways” (Costa and McCrae, 1995, p. 23). *Facets* represent lower-level traits corresponding to the particular trait domains: each trait domain may consist of two or more facets. In mathematical terms, facets represent subsets of a domain, and a domain represents a superset of facets. Domains generally correlate with all facets, but facets do not necessarily correlate with one another because each facet taps into an exclusive sub-dimension of a broad personality trait being measured. Despite that, personality traits are conceptualized and operationalized as reflective constructs. The rationale is that all individual facets must be correlated with the broad personality domain being measured, which, in almost all cases, produces acceptable reliability and validity construct-level measures. While there are

commonly accepted arguments about the number of facets of popular personality traits, such views are not “cast in stone” because, hypothetically, the number of facets is limited to the number of sub-dimensions that contribute to the domain and simultaneously show good discriminant validity, which makes them different from the other facets (DeYoung *et al.*, 2016).

The major benefit of analyzing personality traits at the facet level is that different facets that belong to the same domain often create distinct nomological networks accompanied by unique cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes (Back *et al.*, 2013). For example, narcissism – a dark employee trait frequently explored in the context of knowledge behavior (Yin *et al.*, 2023) – comprises two facets: narcissistic admiration (one’s tendency to approach social admiration through self-promotion) and narcissistic rivalry (one’s tendency to prevent social failure through self-defense). These facets of narcissism differ in their behavioral impact: while the former inhibits employees’ knowledge hiding, the latter promotes it (Long *et al.*, 2024). Thus, accounting for the facets of personality traits may lead to new insights and reconcile divergent findings documented in previous studies.

2.4 Purpose of the study

The discussion above confirms that personality traits play a vital role in determining employees’ productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior. Therefore, it is crucial for contemporary business managers to understand the personality traits that influence employee knowledge behavior, the workplace features that enable employees to express their traits productively, the mechanisms underlying the personality trait–behavior relationship, and the impact of their own personality traits. Regrettably, busy managers do not have the time and expertise to keep abreast of the scholarly body of knowledge needed to inform their practice (Booker *et al.*, 2008; Booker *et al.*, 2012). In addition, the extant literature contains many inconsistent and contradictory findings, which makes it even more difficult for industry professionals to comprehend the body of knowledge documented in peer-reviewed journals. While previous attempts to consolidate academic findings on personality research in the context of knowledge behavior are admirable (Akbar *et al.*, 2021; Yin *et al.*, 2023), they do not cover the entire spectrum of knowledge behaviors and personality traits.

To fill this gap, this study conducts a comprehensive structured literature review of personality traits in the context of knowledge behavior. It focuses on the development of theoretical insights for academics and recommendations for practitioners (Ferenhof and Fernandes, 2016), to further improve the recognition of knowledge management as a well-established scholarly discipline and to promote the advancement of practice (Lambe, 2023).

The use of the structured literature review method is suitable for achieving this study’s objective of contributing to theory and practice for the following reasons (Dumay *et al.*, 2016; Massaro *et al.*, 2016a). With respect to academic insights, first, the structured literature review facilitates a comprehensive coverage of personality traits research in knowledge management in terms of depth, breadth, contexts, and time frames, and allows conclusions to be drawn based on solid empirical evidence rather than researchers’ personal opinions. Second, this method may help researchers capture a realistic picture of the state of the field and analyze it by using the theoretical knowledge documented in personality psychology as a lens of analysis. Third, it identifies the major research trends in personality traits that are over- and underrepresented in this domain, helping scholars discover promising research directions. Fourth, the structured literature review facilitates the collection of a set of articles published in journals from various scientific domains, which encourages interdisciplinary learning and idea sharing. Finally, it offers a historical and evolutionary perspective on the

phenomenon of interest and allows scholars to understand how personality traits research has evolved over time in the context of knowledge behavior.

In terms of practice, first, the application of the structured literature review technique facilitates the aggregation of scientific findings documented in disparate publication venues, allowing busy practitioners to quickly comprehend the entire line of research by reading a single article. Second, by using this method, researchers may identify conflicting findings, contradictions, omissions, and disagreements, comprehensively analyze them in light of the latest schools of thought, and inform professionals about the discipline's state of the art. Third, analyzing a comprehensive body of scientific knowledge may identify issues that require immediate managerial attention and context-specific decisions. Fourth, this method is in line with evidence-based decision-making practices because it facilitates recommendations based on empirical evidence documented in multiple, independent works rather than on single publications, personal opinions, or anecdotal evidence. Finally, the structured literature review supports the integration of theory and practice because such publications are accessible to a wider range of stakeholders, including both academics and practitioners. The following section describes this study's methods in detail.

3. Methods

The *structured literature review method* and *protocol* were developed based on the recommendations of [Massaro et al. \(2016a\)](#). Consistent with previous scientometric and bibliometric studies in the KM domain (e.g., see [Oliveira et al., 2021](#)), the *type of analyzed works* encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles because these undergo a rigorous peer-review process, which endorses a certain level of scientific quality and practical contribution. To be included in the study, the article had to meet the following criteria: (1) report the results of an empirical study based on primary data collection and analysis (i.e., conceptual works, meta-analyses, and literature reviews were omitted); (2) include at least one personality trait; (3) include at least one knowledge behavior construct (e.g., productive and/or counterproductive knowledge behavior); (4) test at least one personality trait as an antecedent of a knowledge behavior construct (this also included mediation effects because, in such cases, a personality trait is positioned as an antecedent of a knowledge behavior construct) and/or test at least one personality trait as a moderator of the relationship between the workplace feature and a knowledge behavior construct; and (5) be published in English.

The search was conducted in the fall of 2023. No article publication date restrictions were used. To identify relevant works, the following *search process* was followed.

Step 1. All articles published in the knowledge management-centric journals listed by [Serenko and Bontis \(2022\)](#) were manually reviewed. When a relevant article was identified, terms associated with the personality trait of interest (e.g., openness to experience, neuroticism, dispositional greed) were recorded to create the list of keywords.

Step 2. After an exhaustive examination of knowledge management-centric journals, a keyword search of Google Scholar was conducted using the list of previously identified keywords and/or general personality-related keywords (e.g., personality, trait, disposition, psychological, mental, etc.) plus the keyword "knowledge" to ensure that the search was knowledge management-related. As articles testing new personality traits were discovered, the list of keywords was updated, and new searches were conducted on Google Scholar.

Step 3. To ensure that no relevant articles were missed in Step 1, the manual review of the knowledge management-centric journals listed by [Serenko and Bontis \(2022\)](#) was complemented by a comprehensive search of these journals using a variety of general keywords and the keywords identified in the previous steps. As a result, one additional article was discovered.

Step 4. When a keyword search was exhausted, backward and forward citation chasing was done. Backward citation chasing involves identifying and assessing all relevant works cited within the reference lists of the previously identified articles, and forward citation chasing pertains to locating and reviewing works that cited the previously identified articles (Haddaway *et al.*, 2022). Again, as new articles were identified, the entire process described in Steps 2 and 3 was repeated if warranted. At some point, only two new articles were discovered after a full day of searching, and the process was deemed complete. The final list of keywords pertaining to knowledge behavior and personality traits is offered later in Tables 8 and 10.

Table 3 presents the codebook developed and used during analysis. The application of a formal protocol, including strict inclusion-exclusion criteria, allowed minimizing the researcher’s bias and ensured the replicability of the findings (Ferenhof and Fernandes, 2016).

4. Results

4.1 Journals

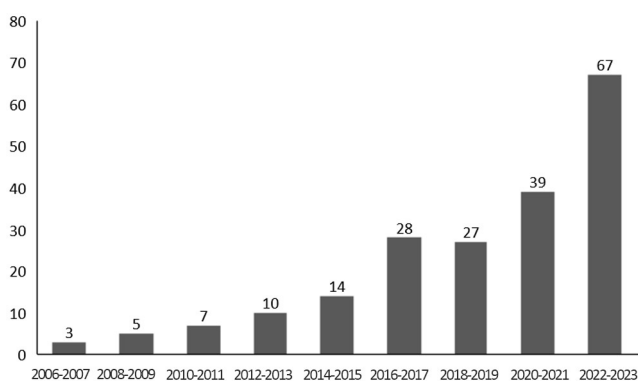
In total, 200 journal articles were discovered and analyzed. None of the identified articles appeared in the list of predatory journals (formerly known as Beall’s List, available at www.predatoryjournals.org/the-list/journals). The first article appeared in 2006, and, since then, the volume of publications has been growing, with a dramatic increase in 2022 (see Figure 2).

Table 4 lists journals publishing knowledge management personality studies, and Table 5 outlines these journals’ subject areas. In total, 126 unique journals from 20 subject areas were identified. Knowledge management-centric journals published 23.5% of all works, with *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *Knowledge Management Research & Practice* and *VINE: The Journal of Information and Knowledge*

Table 3. Codebook

Code	Description
Journal title	Journal title in which the examined work appeared
Journal subject/ discipline	The subject and discipline of a journal in which the examined work appeared
Sample size	Sample size obtained during primary data collection
Sample industry	The industry from which the sample of respondents was selected
Sample country	The country from which the sample of respondents was selected
Knowledge behavior construct	The knowledge behavior construct tested in the examined work
Personality trait	The personality trait tested in the examined work
Personality trait positioning	Whether the examined personality trait was positioned as an antecedent of knowledge behavior or as a moderator between the workplace feature and knowledge behavior
Facets	Whether the study explored the facets of personality traits
Trait activation theory	Whether the examined work that positioned personality trait as an antecedent cited and used Trait Activation Theory (Tett and Guterman, 2000; Tett and Burnett, 2003; Tett <i>et al.</i> , 2013, 2021)
Moderator type	Type of a moderator of the personality trait-knowledge behavior link
The job characteristics model	Whether the examined work that positioned personality trait as a moderator cited and used the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldham, 1975, 1976; 1980)

Source(s): Author’s own work

**Figure 2.** The number of articles per year

Source: Author's own work

Table 4. Journals publishing personality traits studies in the knowledge behavior context

Journal title	No. of articles
<i>Journal of Knowledge Management</i>	16
<i>Knowledge Management Research & Practice</i>	10
<i>VINE: The Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems</i>	10
<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	8
<i>Journal of Information and Knowledge Management</i>	5
<i>Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal</i>	5
<i>Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication</i>	3
<i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	3
<i>Management Research Review</i>	3
<i>Sustainability</i>	3
Other journals	134
Total	200

Source(s): Author's own work

Management Systems publishing 18% of all articles. However, other knowledge management-centric journals were dramatically underrepresented, with many publishing no such articles. As expected, Business/Management journals led the way, followed by Organizational Behavior/Human Resources and Information Systems/Information Technology outlets. At the same time, one-third of all articles appeared in non-management journals, mostly in Psychology, Education, Social Sciences, and Library and Information Science. This research topic was scattered across a large variety of journals: 98 out of 126 journals published only a single article.

4.2 Sampling techniques

Most studies used adequate sample sizes ranging from 31 to 1,949; mean = 301; median = 243. Three studies did not report their sample sizes. 66% of all samples were collected from active employees of various organizations, 16% from faculty and staff of educational institutions (e.g., from faculty members, administrators, and librarians at universities,

Table 5. Disciplines publishing personality traits studies in the knowledge behavior context

Subject/discipline	No. of journals	No. of articles
Business/Management	35	45
Organizational Behavior/Human Resources	16	19
Information Systems/Information Technology	13	16
Psychology	12	29
Knowledge Management	10	47
Education	7	9
Multidisciplinary	7	7
Social Sciences	5	5
Library and Information Science	4	4
Engineering	3	3
Innovation/Creativity	3	3
Communication	2	4
Management Science	2	2
Economics	1	1
Entrepreneurship	1	1
Ethics	1	1
Healthcare	1	1
Marketing	1	1
Public policy	1	1
Scientometrics	1	1
Total	126	200

Source(s): Author’s own work

colleges, and secondary/high schools), 13% from undergraduate and graduate students, 3% from IT users (users of TikTok, WeChat, Wikipedia, etc.) and 2% from customers, patients, and entrepreneurs. Table 6 presents a list of industries from which primary data were obtained. Five studies did not offer any detail on their respondents’ industries.

Most of the studies were conducted in the context of low- and middle-income countries – e.g., China, Pakistan, and India – while developed countries were dramatically underrepresented (see Table 7).

4.3 Knowledge behavior constructs

The vast majority of the studies tested a single knowledge behavior construct: in the 200 examined articles, 228 knowledge behavior constructs were documented, of which 54 unique constructs were identified. Table 8 presents construct titles, and Table 9 aggregates these constructs into several groups. Overall, 73% and 27% of these constructs were productive and counterproductive, respectively. As expected, various forms of knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding received the most attention. At the same time, many researchers took a step forward, exploring many novel constructs such as *extra-role knowledge sharing*, *green knowledge-sharing behavior*, *knowledge manipulation*, etc. On the other hand, there was little uniformity in the titles of the constructs that pertain to the same phenomenon. For instance, researchers used *knowledge sharing*, *knowledge sharing behavior*, *knowledge donating*, and *knowledge contribution* to describe virtually the same phenomenon. Note that a few outcome constructs pertain to attitude and intention rather than behavior (e.g., knowledge sharing attitude, intention to share information). Nevertheless, given the very small number of such constructs and for consistency, all outcome constructs are referred to as knowledge behavior.

Table 6. Sample industries (excluding student samples)

Industry	%
Multi-industry	31.84
Education	18.44
IT/IS	11.73
Healthcare	5.59
Finance	5.03
Services	4.47
High-tech	3.35
Manufacturing	3.35
Engineering	2.79
Hospitality	2.23
Construction	1.68
Telecommunications	1.68
Fast food	1.12
Public/government	1.12
Sales and marketing	1.12
Aerospace	0.56
Automotive	0.56
Oil and gas	0.56
Petrochemical	0.56
Pharmaceutical	0.56
Power generation	0.56
Travel and tourism	0.56
Utilities	0.56
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

Source(s): Author's own work

4.4 *The effect of personality traits*

The vast majority of the studies focused on the broad domains of personality traits, and only 3% narrowed them down to specific facets. In total, 38 unique personality traits, which pertain to 23 broad trait domains, were tested. For this, 581 statistical tests were conducted. In 92% of all tests, a personality trait was positioned as a predictor of a knowledge behavior construct, and, in 8%, as a moderator of the relationship between a workplace feature (an antecedent) and a knowledge behavior construct (an outcome). [Table 10](#) presents the categories of personality traits and their descriptions, and the [Appendix](#) summarizes the results of the empirical tests. On average, 30% of all tested relationships were not supported, which is similar to the conclusion reached by [Tett et al. \(2021\)](#). The proportion of rejected relationships is very similar among the three categories (traits as predictors of productive knowledge behavior, traits as predictors of counterproductive knowledge behavior, and traits as moderators of the relationship between workplace features and productive knowledge behavior). The number of cases in the last (i.e., fourth – counterproductive knowledge behavior) moderation category is too small to derive generalizable conclusions.

4.4.1 *The effect of the big five traits.* The Big Five personality traits – openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism/emotional stability ([McCrae and Costa, 1987](#); [Costa and McCrae, 1992](#)) – represented the most popular category. However, of all studies that used the Big Five traits, only 48% reported the use of all five traits; 2%, four traits; 10%, three traits; 13%, two traits; and 27%, one trait. In studies that did not use all the Big Five traits (i.e., at least one trait was omitted), openness to experience was retained in 53% of the studies, conscientiousness in 49%, extraversion in

Table 7. Sample countries

Country	%
China	18.78
Pakistan	14.55
India	8.45
South Korea	7.98
Iran	6.10
United States	5.63
Nigeria	3.76
Taiwan	3.76
Malaysia	3.29
Vietnam	3.29
Indonesia	2.82
Bangladesh	1.88
Jordan	1.88
Austria	1.41
Germany	1.41
Ghana	1.41
Sri Lanka	1.41
Turkey	1.41
Croatia	0.94
Egypt	0.94
Hungary	0.94
The Netherlands	0.94
Ukraine	0.94
Australia	0.47
Kenya	0.47
Lebanon	0.47
Norway	0.47
Poland	0.47
Puerto Rico	0.47
Russia	0.47
Slovenia	0.47
South Africa	0.47
Spain	0.47
Thailand	0.47
United Kingdom	0.47
United Arab Emirates	0.47
Total	100

Source(s): Author's own work

32%, agreeableness in 26%, and neuroticism/emotional stability only in 17%. Further scrutiny of the [Appendix](#) led to several interesting observations.

With respect to the Big Five traits as predictors, there is a stark inconsistency in the directional effect of some Big Five traits. Hypothetically, extraversion and agreeableness are expected to promote productive and suppress counterproductive knowledge behavior: indeed, this is exactly how social, passionate, and friendly co-workers are supposed to act. Unexpectedly, in addition to rejecting almost one-third of such relationships, there is a small yet noticeable number of studies that indicate otherwise: some agreeable extraverts are less likely to share their knowledge with their co-workers and are more likely to hide it from them. The neuroticism trait is even more puzzling. From a theoretical perspective, emotionally unstable employees should be less likely to share their knowledge with

Table 8. Knowledge behavior construct titles

Construct	#
Knowledge sharing	66
Knowledge hiding	30
Knowledge sharing behavior	26
Knowledge sharing intention	11
Knowledge hiding behavior	9
Tacit knowledge sharing	7
Knowledge management process	5
Knowledge sharing attitude	5
Evasive knowledge hiding	4
Knowledge acquisition	3
Knowledge collecting	3
Knowledge donating	3
Knowledge sabotage	3
Playing dumb knowledge hiding	3
Rationalized knowledge hiding	3
Attitude toward knowledge sharing	2
Explicit knowledge sharing	2
Knowledge contribution	2
Knowledge hoarding	2
Knowledge transfer	2
Knowledge withholding	2
Tacit knowledge sharing behavior	2
Tacit knowledge sharing intention	2
Data sharing	1
Exchange of job-related information	1
Explicit knowledge hiding	1
Explicit knowledge sharing intention	1
Extra-role knowledge sharing	1
General knowledge sharing pattern	1
Green knowledge sharing behavior	1
Information sharing	1
Information sharing behavior	1
In-role knowledge sharing	1
Intention to share information	1
Internal knowledge transfer	1
Intra-team knowledge sharing	1
Knowledge acquisition behavior	1
Knowledge acquisition commitment	1
Knowledge application	1
Knowledge creation ability	1
Knowledge creation capability	1
Knowledge documentation	1
Knowledge manipulation	1
Knowledge reuse implementation	1
Knowledge reuse initiation	1
Knowledge self-efficacy	1
Knowledge sharing willingness	1
Knowledge storage behavior	1
Organizational learning	1
Overall knowledge hiding	1
Perceived loss of knowledge power	1
Proactive knowledge sharing	1
Readiness to participate in a knowledge management initiative	1
Tacit knowledge hiding	1
<i>Total</i>	228

Source(s): Author's own work

Table 9. Types of knowledge behavior constructs

Construct	%
Knowledge sharing	61
Knowledge hiding	25
Knowledge acquisition	4
Knowledge management process	2
Knowledge creation	1
Knowledge reuse	1
Knowledge sabotage	1
Knowledge transfer	1
Other	4

Source(s): Author’s own work

co-workers, but only 32% of the tests confirmed this, while 17% concluded the opposite (i.e., neuroticism promotes knowledge sharing) and 51% found no statistically significant relationship. The impact of conscientiousness on counterproductive knowledge behavior was also inconsistent. The effect of openness to experience on both productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior was mostly in the theoretically predicted direction, but more than one-third of the studies provided no support for the hypothesized links.

In terms of the Big Five traits as moderators, again, the results of around one-third of all moderation tests were found to be insignificant. On a positive note, researchers proposed a number of interesting workplace features as antecedents of knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding, such as abusive supervision, workplace incivility, cognitive diversity, knowledge reuse, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, prosocial motivation, etc. However, no clear pattern of the moderating impact of the Big Five traits was observed.

4.4.2 *Emotional intelligence.* Emotional intelligence (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Mayer et al., 2008) is the second most frequently tested personality trait. In contrast to the Big Five traits, a clear pattern of the impact of emotional intelligence on knowledge behavior emerged: all, except two, studies concluded that it promotes productive knowledge behavior – namely, knowledge sharing, transfer, donating, collecting, capture, and storage – and suppresses counterproductive knowledge behavior – namely, knowledge hiding. At the same time, with respect to the moderating effect of emotional intelligence, the findings were inconclusive.

4.4.3 *Goal orientation.* As indicated in Table 10, goal orientation personality traits comprise four categories: learning-approach, learning-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance. It was found that all learning goal orientation studies focused on learning-approach goal orientation without explicitly stating so (i.e., they referred to the concept as “learning goal orientation” instead of “learning-approach goal orientation”) or discussing the difference between learning-approach goal orientation and learning-avoidance goal orientation. Most researchers relied on the instruments developed by Kohli et al. (1998), Vandewalle (1997), and Button et al. (1996) – influential yet somewhat dated works – while overlooking the subsequent theoretical and empirical advancements in this domain (see Elliot and McGregor, 2001; Swift et al., 2010) that extend the learning goal orientation trait by dividing it into two parts (i.e., learning-approach goal orientation and learning-avoidance goal orientation). Several studies that used the performance goal orientation traits also failed to apply the proper terms (i.e., they did not explicitly differentiate between performance-approach goal orientation and performance-avoidance goal orientation) while using the correct construct operationalization.

Table 10. Categories of personality traits

Trait	%	Description
Big five	44.34	A constellation of five key traits: openness to experience (intellect, curiosity, imagination, and originality vs closedness), conscientiousness (self-discipline, dutifulness, punctuality, and reliability vs undirectedness), extraversion (sociability, surgency, passion, and affection vs passivity), agreeableness (friendliness, compliance, and nurturance vs antagonism) and neuroticism (negative affectivity, instability, and anxiousness vs emotional stability) (McCrae and Costa, 1987; Costa and McCrae, 1992)
Emotional intelligence	15.09	A person's mental ability to understand his/her own and other people's emotions and to regulate and use his/her own emotions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Mayer <i>et al.</i> , 2008)
Goal orientation	8.96	A person's motivational disposition toward developing or demonstrating competence or ability in achievement situations which comprises four categories: learning-approach (improving existing and gaining new competencies), learning-avoidance (avoiding unlearning, stagnating, or losing one's existing competencies), performance-approach (demonstrating competence and good performance to others) and performance-avoidance (avoiding demonstrating incompetence and poor performance to others) (Dweck, 1986; Vandewalle, 1997; Elliot and McGregor, 2001)
The dark triad	8.02	A constellation of three subclinical personality traits: narcissism (pursuit of gratification from a pervasive pattern of fantasy or behavioral grandiosity, self-admiration, and egoistic self-idealization), Machiavellianism (the manipulation of others for personal gain) and psychopathy (having no empathy toward others, which leads to unreasonable interpersonal aggression) (Paulhus and Williams, 2002; Jonason <i>et al.</i> , 2012)
Social value orientation	4.72	Two opposing categories of preferences about how to allocate values/resources between the self and others: (1) pro-self orientation which comprises individualistic orientation (maximizing one's own outcome only) and competitive orientation (maximizing one's own outcome relative to others' gains) and (2) prosocial orientation which comprises cooperative orientation (equally maximizing both one's own and others' outcome) and altruistic orientation (maximizing others' outcome only) (Bogaert <i>et al.</i> , 2008; Forsyth, 2019)
Psychological entitlement	3.77	A pervasive sense that one deserves and is entitled to more than others (Campbell <i>et al.</i> , 2004)
Extraversion-introversion	2.36	The opposing dimensions of personality in which extraversion represents social, active, and outgoing behaviors while introversion denotes reflective, quiet, and reserved ones (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1969)
Personal motivation	2.36	Three types of motivation driving one's behavior: need for achievement (one's desire for accomplishment, excellence, and mastery), need for affiliation (a sense of belonging within a social group), and need for power (controlling others to secure their agreement and compliance) (McClelland, 1985)
Proactive personality	1.89	One's tendency to be unconstrained by situational forces to effect environmental change (Bateman and Crant, 1993)
Propensity to trust	1.42	A general willingness to trust others, also referred to as dispositional trust (Mayer <i>et al.</i> , 1995; Kramer, 1999)

(continued)

Table 10. Continued

Trait	%	Description
Dispositional greed	0.94	The persistent desire to acquire more and the dissatisfaction of never having enough (Seuntjens <i>et al.</i> , 2015a; Seuntjens <i>et al.</i> , 2015b)
Locus of control	0.94	The extent to which individuals believe whether they themselves or external forces control event outcomes: people exhibiting internal locus of control (internals) ascribe event control to themselves while those showing external control (externals) attribute event control to outside forces (Spector, 1982)
Alexithymia	0.47	An impaired ability to become aware of, identify, and describe one's own feelings (Hogeveen and Grafman, 2021)
Future orientation	0.47	The degree to which individuals anticipate their future life-span development, set their future-oriented goals, and act to achieve these goals (Nurmi, 1991)
Moral identity	0.47	A self-conception organized around specific moral traits which reflect the importance of morality to one's identity (Aquino and Reed, 2002)
Perfectionism	0.47	Striving for flawlessness by establishing excessively high performance standards and critically evaluating one's behavior while being overly concerned with mistakes (Stoeber and Otto, 2006)
Personality disorders (various)	0.47	People's pervasive and inflexible inner experiences and behaviors which significantly deviate from the expectations of these people's culture and which cause distress and impairment (APA, 2013)
Preference for innovation	0.47	The predisposition toward finding and pursuing novel, creative alternatives (May <i>et al.</i> , 2011)
Propensity for risk taking	0.47	The willingness to commit to a decision that may lead to success or failure of the corresponding outcomes (Stewart and Roth, 2001)
Psychoticism	0.47	A personality disorder diagnosis continuum ranging from normal to psychotic characteristics and syndromes (i.e., antisocial, aggressive, egocentric, cold, etc.) (Eysenck, 1992)
Selfishness	0.47	Exceeding normative self-interest and disregarding other people's interests and well-being (Diebels <i>et al.</i> , 2018)
Social inhibition	0.47	Behavioral inhibition during social interactions, high social-evaluative concerns, and withdrawal from social and emotional engagements (Denollet and Duijndam, 2019)
Social intelligence	0.47	The ability to understand one's own and others' feelings, cognitions, and behaviors in interpersonal contexts and to act accordingly based on that understanding (Marlowe, 1986)
Total	100	
Source(s): Author's own work		

Despite some omissions in the terminology as discussed above, it was clearly established that learning-approach goal orientation has a good predictive power by promoting productive knowledge behavior. The same cannot be said about the predictive power of performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal orientation – again, the findings were inconclusive: while four tests confirmed a negative impact of performance-approach on productive knowledge behavior, three tests failed to support such a proposition. A similarly inconsistent pattern was observed with respect to counterproductive knowledge behavior: two studies supported the negative effect of performance-approach on knowledge hiding, but two did not. Two investigations also failed to confirm the effect of performance-avoidance on both knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding. No studies on the effect of learning-avoidance goal orientation were found.

With respect to the moderating effect of goal orientation, preliminary evidence indicates that learning-approach goal orientation suppresses the impact of a negative workplace feature (e.g., psychological contract breach, abusive supervision) on the subsequent productive knowledge behavior while it amplifies the effect of a positive workplace feature (e.g., psychological empowerment) on productive knowledge behavior. Thus, learning-approach goal orientation may potentially play a positive role in establishing and facilitating desirable knowledge behavior processes. Yet, it is difficult to reach a comprehensive conclusion due to the small number of studies conducted.

4.4.4 The Dark Triad. The impact of the Dark Triad traits – narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy – on productive knowledge behavior remained unclear due to contradictory findings. At the same time, evidence revealed a positive effect of these traits (in particular, Machiavellianism) on counterproductive knowledge behavior such as knowledge hiding, hoarding, and sabotage. As theoretically expected, Machiavellianism also strengthens the impact of negative workplace features (self-serving leadership and psychological knowledge ownership) on knowledge hiding.

4.4.5 Extraversion-Introversion. All studies tested the extraversion-introversion traits as predictors of productive knowledge behavior. However, since around half of the studies failed to observe the hypothesized effect, and some even supported opposite relationships, the role of these traits remains unclear. No moderation tests with the use of these traits were conducted.

4.4.6 Social value orientation. With respect to social value orientation, researchers used the traits of competitive orientation (i.e., a type of pro-self-orientation) and cooperative orientation (i.e., a type of prosocial orientation), while omitting individualistic and altruistic orientations. Despite the small number of studies, a clear pattern emerged: competitive orientation suppresses knowledge sharing and facilitates knowledge hiding while cooperative orientation increases knowledge sharing. Competitive orientation may also amplify the impact of negative workplace features – such as perceived intragroup relationship conflict and self-serving behavior – on knowledge hiding.

4.4.7 Psychological entitlement. Evidence indicates that psychological entitlement is likely to promote knowledge hiding and increase the impact of workplace incivility on knowledge hiding.

4.4.8 Personal motivation. In some studies focusing on personal motivation outlined in McClelland's (1985) Need Theory, researchers used the traits of *need for control* instead of *need for power* proposed originally while still citing the original sources. However, *need for control* is only a part of a broader *need for power* trait. Overall, no convincing evidence on the role of three personal motivations – need for power, need for achievement, and need for affiliation – was reported because half of all the studies failed to confirm their effect on productive knowledge behavior.

4.4.9 Other traits. Analysis of the other traits is presented below in aggregate because these traits were used in only a few or even single tests. These tests suggest that proactive personality, propensity to trust, internal locus of control, establishing perfectionist standards, preference for innovation, and propensity for risk taking facilitate productive knowledge behavior while concern over mistakes suppresses it. By contrast, dispositional greed, difficulty identifying feelings, moral identity, various personal disorders, selfishness, and social inhibition promote counterproductive knowledge actions. Future orientation may potentially alleviate the impact of abusive supervision on knowledge hiding. At the same time, the impact of external locus of control, difficulty describing feelings, psychoticism, and social intelligence was not supported.

4.5 The theoretical perspective and support

Only 14% of all the studies that positioned and tested personality traits as antecedents of knowledge behavior used the theoretical perspectives of Trait Activation Theory and cited at least one relevant work by Tett and colleagues. The remaining 86% of the investigations presented other theoretical arguments and frequently cited other papers that supported similar relationships while omitting Trait Activation Theory. Despite poor awareness of Trait Activation Theory, 27% of all works used at least one moderator of the personality trait-knowledge behavior link. With respect to the moderator type, social situational cues and features were the most popular (relationships with, behavior, feedback, and support of leaders, supervisors, and co-workers; team characteristics), followed by organizational (incentives, politics, governance) and task (skill variety, task independence) types. In addition, some studies included employee characteristics (demographics – age, gender, education, and marital status; burnout; and behavioral control) and personality traits (neuroticism, hypercompetitiveness) as moderators.

Of all the investigations that tested the role of personality traits as a moderator of a workplace feature-knowledge behavior link, only a single work by [Khatoun et al. \(2024\)](#) cited and properly used the theoretical underpinnings of the Job Characteristics Model by Hackman and Oldham. A few also briefly cited other tangential works by Oldham, but they did not rely on the actual theoretical ideas documented in the original publications. Only several studies accounted for situational features – mostly for different countries and different professions of respondents.

5. Discussion

This study seeks to fill the void in the knowledge management domain regarding the lack of a comprehensive analysis of the psychology literature in the context of productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior. It aims to answer the following research question: *What is the current state of personality traits research in the context of productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior, and, based on this body of research, what recommendations can be proposed for scholars and knowledge managers?*

To answer this intriguing question, 200 peer-reviewed articles published in various journals were analyzed, and, based on the findings, several recommendations for academics and practitioners are proposed as outlined below.

5.1 Implications for researchers

Imagine the following situation: psychology researchers include knowledge management constructs in their studies, yet they do not read knowledge management journals, ignore original studies that developed these constructs, and never cite papers describing the underlying theoretical assumptions. Their endeavors are likely to produce a body of knowledge full of contradictions, inconsistencies, and even outright blunders. This hypothetical scenario somewhat resembles the current state of personality traits research in the knowledge management domain: regrettably, many knowledge management researchers are inadequately aware of the personality psychology literature that directly pertains to the topic of their research. As this structured literature review revealed, 86% of the studies that focused on the personality trait-behavior relationship disregarded the tenets of Trait Activation Theory ([Tett and Guterman, 2000](#); [Tett and Burnett, 2003](#); [Tett et al., 2013](#)), which explicates the causal mechanisms behind this link. More than two-thirds of the proposed nomological networks excluded trait-relevant situational cues, without which the relationship may not exist. With respect to the studies concentrating on the workplace features-knowledge behavior relationship with personality traits as moderators – a less

popular yet valid interactionist perspective – only a single study cited and used the premises of the Job Characteristics Model by [Hackman and Oldham \(1975, 1976, 1980\)](#), who pioneered and documented the relevant theoretical assumptions. In addition, researchers often referred to dated concepts while omitting recent developments in personality psychology.

As a result, the conclusions on the role and predictive power of many personality traits are contradictory. The most extreme cases include the Big Five traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism/emotional stability), performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal orientation, the extraversion-introversion spectrum, and personal motivations (need for power, need for achievement, and need for affiliation). For example, half of all the studies failed to identify the theoretically expected effect of neuroticism. Less than half of all the works also reported the effect of all Big Five traits, and neuroticism was not reported in 83% of the papers. The possible reason is the “file-drawer problem,” whereby researchers deliberately exclude unsupported relationships from their manuscripts to make their work appear more credible and impress the editorial team ([Rosenthal, 1979](#); [Rotton et al., 1995](#)): it seems improbable that so many researchers administered an incomplete version of the Big Five instrument by purposefully omitting one particular trait. This shows that not accounting for trait-relevant situational cues, as explicated by Trait Activation Theory, may confound the explanatory power of many personality traits: these traits affect behavior only after being activated.

It is, however, not the intention of the author to blame the researchers who attempt to bridge the gap between the psychology and knowledge management disciplines. Reading and comprehending the scholarly psychology literature is a daunting task for knowledge management researchers, most of whom lack formal psychology education. For example, the author of this article dedicated two one-year sabbaticals to acquiring this knowledge, a challenging yet worthy endeavor, and this experience resembled preparing for and undertaking a set of doctoral-level comprehensive examinations in a totally different discipline. However, most academics cannot possibly devote two years of their professional lives to mere reading lest they jeopardize their careers, given the exponentially growing institutional pressure to continuously publish in a prescribed set of “A-journals” ([Aguinis et al., 2020](#); [Serenko and Bontis, 2024](#)). At the same time, as this structured literature review revealed, researchers’ inadequate awareness of the theoretical underpinnings of personality traits does not bode well for the long-term success of the knowledge management domain as it continues to progress toward the status of the reference discipline ([Serenko, 2021](#)). Most importantly, developing clear guidelines and prescriptions for practitioners may become very challenging or even impossible.

To address this situation, four suggestions are offered. First, regardless of all institutional pressures and constraints, knowledge management researchers themselves are ultimately responsible for becoming well-read and aware of the state-of-the-art literature in their research domain – no matter how long it takes. They must realize that personality trait constructs and measurement instruments cannot be blindly borrowed from the psychology literature and recklessly added to management causal models – no matter how appealing and promising the idea may sound. Before doing that, knowledge management academics need to master the psychology readings: the summary of Trait Activation Theory and the Job Characteristics Model presented in this paper may serve as a good starting point.

Second, knowledge management researchers should measure and analyze employee personality traits at the facet levels ([Costa and McCrae, 1995](#)). Presently, attempts to break higher-level domains of personality traits into lower-level facets are virtually non-existent. However, preliminary evidence reveals that different facets of the same trait lead to distinct

types of knowledge behavior (e.g., see [Wang and Chang, 2018](#); [Long et al., 2024](#)), which may potentially explain the nature of contradictory findings reported in many studies. Third, knowledge management researchers from developed countries, which are dramatically (and strangely) underrepresented in this research domain, are advised to embark on personality traits research. While this study does not assume that research findings reported in the context of developing countries are less valuable, the world “is not flat,” and the phenomena observed in particular cultural, economic, and geographical contexts may not be fully generalizable ([Henrich et al., 2010](#); [Palvia et al., 2017](#)). The current researchers collect adequate sample sizes and use appropriate sampling techniques, but collecting data from developed countries may shed new light on this intriguing phenomenon. Fourth, journal editorial teams – such as Editors-in-Chief, Senior/Associate Editors, and reviewers – should declare a moratorium on publishing empirical studies that add personality traits to their causal models without proper conceptualization by relying on relevant theories and citing the original sources. Given a persistent interest among knowledge management researchers in this topic, these measures will quickly correct the course of personality traits research and facilitate the development of new theoretical insights and practical guidelines. The readers should also expect to navigate through a variety of terms representing knowledge behavior: this study identified 54 such unique construct names that pertain to only a few types of knowledge behavior, mostly to knowledge sharing, knowledge hiding, and knowledge acquisition.

5.2 Recommendations for practitioners

First and foremost, knowledge management practitioners need to exercise extra caution when interpreting and applying the recommendations of the studies reporting the impact of employee personality traits on productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior. Of particular concern are the highly popular Big Five traits. Despite a large volume of research, the actual impact of these traits on productive and counterproductive knowledge behavior hitherto remains unknown.

Second, there are several traits that exhibit consistent impacts on knowledge behavior. Emotional intelligence – an employee’s mental ability to understand his/her own and other people’s emotions and to regulate and use his/her own emotions ([Salovey and Mayer, 1990](#); [Mayer et al., 2008](#)) – facilitates productive and suppresses counterproductive knowledge behavior. Indeed, emotional intelligence in the workplace represents one of ten dimensions of practical wisdom, which is a highly attractive employee quality ([Serenko, 2024](#)). Other desirable employee traits include learning-approach goal orientation (persistently improving existing and gaining new competencies) ([Elliot and McGregor, 2001](#)) and prosocial cooperative value orientation (equally maximizing both one’s own and others’ outcomes) ([Bogaert et al., 2008](#); [Forsyth, 2019](#)). In addition, organizations should refrain from hiring workers exhibiting the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) ([Paulhus and Williams, 2002](#); [Jonason et al., 2012](#)) and having a strong sense of psychological entitlement (a pervasive sense that one deserves and is entitled to more than others) ([Campbell et al., 2004](#)) because these definitely lead to devastating consequences from the knowledge management perspective.

Given the importance of the Dark Triad personality traits in the knowledge behavior context, practitioners are advised to explore the intricacies of their workplace and understand what situational cues may activate the Dark Triad traits of their employees. As Trait Activation Theory posits, personality traits have no effect on a worker’s behavior until he/she is exposed to a *trait-relevant situational cue* that activates a particular trait. Thus, removing cues that trigger the undesirable Dark Triad traits (i.e., removing *distracters*) may improve employees’ knowledge

behavior. The same line of reasoning applies to *constraints*: managers need to learn how to create constraints for cues leading to the Dark Triad traits. Consider, for example, an employee exhibiting a strong psychopathy trait (i.e., one of the Dark Triad traits), which may cause knowledge sabotage (Serenko and Choo, 2020). Being assigned to mentor a junior co-worker presents a strong situational cue to activate the psychopathy trait and the corresponding knowledge sabotage behavior toward an unsuspecting victim who cannot fight back. However, assigning this person to work with senior, experienced co-workers would constrain the cue and reduce the chance of misbehavior. In addition, creating comprehensive and enforceable policies that allow victims of knowledge sabotage to take formal action against perpetrators would also serve as a *constraint* and further suppress such pernicious actions (Serenko, 2020).

Third, the scholarly literature on this topic is scattered across a large number of business and non-business journals. Thus, familiarizing oneself with the pertinent body of knowledge represents a daunting task for busy professionals. Instead of searching for individual articles, they are advised to rely on review studies that summarize the dispersed literature and present it in an easily accessible format. In fact, various forms of literature reviews, including structured literature reviews, represent an effective channel by which academic knowledge may be aggregated, contextualized, simplified, and converted to the format that allows busy practitioners to quickly comprehend the key academic findings and develop action plans (e.g., see Booker *et al.*, 2008; Durst and Edvardsson, 2012; Secundo *et al.*, 2019).

6. Conclusion

The nature of human personality traits has captured the attention of philosophers, thinkers, and scientists for millennia. Indeed, personality serves as a key driver of people's behavior in all contexts, including the workplace. As technology keeps changing, the personality traits discovered and documented more than a century ago still remain relevant. However, despite the availability of rigorous theories, research methods, and statistical techniques, it seems that a consensus on the role of personality traits in the context of knowledge behavior has yet to be found. This structured literature review concludes that scholars should pause before initiating new research on personality traits and first engage deeply with the existing psychology literature. Practitioners should realize that there is great value in understanding and managing the expression of employees' personality traits in the organizational setting, but they have to wait until the academic body of knowledge becomes more consolidated. Previous studies have already identified the effect of some personality traits, such as emotional intelligence, learning-approach goal orientation, prosocial cooperative value orientation, and the Dark Triad, and future research findings will definitely lead to the development of truly useful and actionable knowledge management practices. Bear with the researchers, please.

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Table A1. Effects of personality traits

Personality trait	Personality trait as a predictor				Personality trait as a moderator			
	Productive knowledge behavior		Counterproductive knowledge behavior		Productive knowledge behavior		Counterproductive knowledge behavior	
	Supported	Rejected	Supported	Rejected	Supported	Rejected	Supported	Rejected
<i>The Big Five</i>								
Openness	50	1	17	3	5	2	1	1
Conscientiousness	47	1	21	3	2	1	1	
Extraversion	42	3	19	2	3	1	2	
Agreeableness	36	6	18	2	2	1	2	
Neuroticism	9	17	27	5	2	1	1	1
Emotional intelligence	30		1	2	1	3	2	
<i>Goal orientation</i>								
Learning-approach	14		1	1		2	3	1
Performance-approach		4	3	2	2			
Performance-avoidance			1	1	1			
<i>The Dark Triad</i>								
Narcissism	1	1	1	7	1	2		
Machiavellianism	1	2		11	1		2	
Psychopathy	1	1		4				
<i>Extraversion-introversion</i>								
Extraversion	10		8					
Introversion	7	2	9					
<i>Social value orientation</i>								
Competitive orientation		2		5	1		2	1
Cooperative orientation	2							
<i>Psychological entitlement</i>								
				4	1		2	1
<i>Personal motivation</i>								
Need for power	2		3					
Need for achievement	1		1					
Need for affiliation	2		1					

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Personality trait	Personality trait as a predictor				Personality trait as a moderator			
	Productive knowledge behavior Supported	Productive knowledge behavior Rejected	Counterproductive knowledge behavior Supported	Counterproductive knowledge behavior Rejected	Productive knowledge behavior Supported	Productive knowledge behavior Rejected	Counterproductive knowledge behavior Supported	Counterproductive knowledge behavior Rejected
<i>Proactive personality</i>	4				1			
<i>Propensity to trust</i>	3	1			1			
<i>Locus of control</i>								
External	1	1						
Internal	3							
<i>Dispositional greed</i>								
<i>Alexithymia</i>			1	2				
Difficulty identifying feelings			1					
Difficulty describing feelings				1				
<i>Future orientation</i>								1
<i>Moral identity</i>			1					
<i>Perfectionism</i>								
Personal standards	1							
Concern over mistakes			1					
<i>Personality disorders (various)</i>								
<i>Preference for innovation</i>	1		1					
<i>Propensity for risk taking</i>	1							
<i>Psychoticism</i>				1				
<i>Selfishness</i>			1					
<i>Social inhibition</i>			1					
<i>Social intelligence</i>								
Total (n)	269	41	50	26	15	12	7	2
Total (%)	60.6	9.2	56.2	29.2	41.7	33.3	58.3	16.7
Source(s): Author's own work								

About the author

Alexander Serenko is Professor of Management Information Systems in the Faculty of Business and IT, University of Ontario Institute of Technology and Lecturer in the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. Alexander holds a PhD in Management Information Systems from McMaster University. His research interests pertain to scientometrics, knowledge management, technology addiction, and implicit cognitive processes. Alexander has published more than 120 articles in refereed journals, including *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, *European Journal of Information Systems*, *Information and Management*, *Communications of the ACM* and *Journal of Knowledge Management*, and his works have received more than 15,000 citations. Alexander has also won six Best Paper Awards at Canadian and international conferences. In 2021, he was ranked one of the most productive and influential academics in the knowledge management discipline. Alexander is also included in the list of the top 1% of the world's scientists. Alexander Serenko can be contacted at: a.serenko@ontariotechu.ca