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Investigating components and causes of Sabotage by Academics using Collective Intelligence Analysis.

Abstract:

This paper investigates the components and causes of sabotage among tenured University academics. The study uses a collective intelligence methodology, Interactive Management (IM), to explore the components and causes of sabotage. Across a series of three workshops, participants generated, selected, categorised, and structured ideas to develop a model of sabotage components and causes. Six components of sabotage behavior were identified: intentional anti-collegial behaviour, professional dishonesty, abuse of power, negativity, non-compliance, and underperformance. Causes of sabotage included leadership and structures, intrinsic self-interest, and personality traits. Suggestions are presented for performance management and the curtailment of sabotage by Academics. This study is the first study to examine sabotage behaviour among tenured academics. Importantly, the collective intelligence methodology provides a novel approach to eliciting employee attitudes, and to explore interdependencies between discrete causes of sabotage.

Keywords: Collective Intelligence Method, Academics, Academic Performance, Sabotage by Academics, Interactive Management.

Paper type: Research Paper

Introduction:

Many studies on Higher Education have explored the performance of academics, including factors influencing research performance (Edgar and Geare, 2011), the relationship between management-by-results measures and work motivation (Kallio and Kallio, 2014), and the relationship between research performance and teaching quality (Cadez, Dimovski and Groff., 2017). However, few, if any, studies have considered the University Academic as a proactive saboteur, or identified the reasons for sabotage. Drawing on the definition of sabotage from the services marketing literature, we investigate sabotage as any behaviours that ‘are intentionally designed to negatively affect service’ (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002, p. 166), and we allow ‘service’ to encompass any aspect of the academic’s role.

We believe that sabotage in the Higher Education sector warrants investigation for the following reasons. First, the academic’s role has undergone changes in recent years, with calls for greater academic performance and ‘value for money’ for various stakeholders (Kinman and Wray, 2013). In the UK, debate has centered around a recent Government White Paper which has placed students at the heart of the education system (BIS, 2011), and a Teaching Excellence Framework that may include measures of graduate employment, student retention and student satisfaction (Havergal, 2016). Second, with greater requirements for service by University academics, the combined focus on teaching and research has resulted in additional stress and potential for sabotage. Academics in teaching-and-research roles have been reporting greater stress than those in teaching or research roles (Winefield and Jarrett, 2001). The University and College Union (UCU, 2013 p. 5) have cautioned that such stress results in a ‘range of counterproductive attitudes and behaviours such as cynicism, incivility, and sabotage.’ Further research among

Australian academics has cautioned about “job-related stress, decreasing organizational commitment, and declining propensity to remain” (Su and Baird, 2017, p. 413).

Third, extant research on University branding (Rauschnabel et al., 2016) has identified the perceived conscientiousness of the University employee as an integral component of its brand personality. As perceived conscientiousness is measured, at least in part, on employee behavior and perceived teaching quality (Rauschnabel et al., 2016), University academics’ behavior and performance is clearly integral to the success of the University brand. Given the role of the brand in student satisfaction (Dennis et al., 2016), and the importance of higher education for country competitiveness (Bauman and Winzar, 2016), opportunities for University academics to enhance the University brand through performance will remain a core priority for University management into the future. Furthermore, efforts to curtail the potential for academics to engage in sabotage behaviors are likely to become an increasingly central part of University management.

Therefore, a better understanding of sabotage among University academics is critical, and timely. To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the nature and causes of service sabotage among University academics. This is surprising as a growing body of research suggests that University academics are facing significant challenges, including increasing workload and a perceived lack of support (Shaw, 2014). Overwork, isolation, and pressure to publish have been found to affect employee performance, and cultures of long working hours contribute to workplace stress and mental health difficulties (Shaw, 2014; Hogan et al., 2015). While studies have examined specific cases of dishonesty in academic research and publishing (Charness, Masclet and Villeval, 2014; Mahler, 2010; Fanelli, 2011; Pupovac and

Fanelli, 2014), we believe that no study has examined sabotage in the university sector more generally.

Complex behaviours such as sabotage tend to have multifarious antecedents and consequences. In order to understand the complexities of sabotage behaviors, the current study used Interactive management (IM), a method of facilitation that helps groups to think collectively about complex problems. . By allowing academics to describe and explain sabotage behaviours using a collective intelligence methodology, we allow for the emergence of a grounded model as to the nature and causes of sabotage behaviour.

Employee sabotage in the services sector

Sabotage is detrimental to productivity and to the image of organisations (Wang et al., 2011). Yet over 85% of employees consider sabotage to be an ‘everyday occurrence’ in their organisations (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). Murphy (1993) contended that sabotage could cost firms in the U.S. up to \$200 billion each year.

Employee sabotage in the manufacturing sector has been a central focus of analysis for decades - it incorporates actions such as the destruction of machinery or goods, theft, blocking production, absenteeism, or reducing the amount of work done (Dubois, 1979). Sabotage research in non-manufacturing, or service sectors has focused on hospitality services, such as hotels and restaurants (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002, 2006), and call centres (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld and Walker., 2008). In high-customer-contact environments, service sabotage may arise as a form of retaliation against perceived customer mistreatment (Harris and Ogbonna, 2006).

Focusing on the hospitality sector, Harris and Ogbonna (2012) identified five categories of employee motives for sabotage: (1) financial motives (such as altering the speed of work for greater remuneration), (2) customer-driven motives (to exact

revenge for a perceived slight), (3) stress related motives (to relieve stress or overcome boredom), (4) group related motives (to enhance the status of individuals within a group, or to adhere to group norms), and (5) employee/firm oriented motives (to act against a particular coworker or against the firm). Similarly, in a study of restaurant employees Harris and Ogbonna (2006) identified group related motives (need for social approval), and employee/firm oriented motives (low desire to stay with the firm, perceived low management surveillance, and perceptions of a fluid labor market) as antecedents of sabotage.

Wallace and de Chernatony (2008) investigated sabotage within retail banking. Their study revealed three forms of sabotage behaviour: (1) anti-company behaviour, (2) under-performance, and (3) failure to recognise problems. Anti-company behaviour included working against job requirements to ‘get one back’ against managers. Underperformance behaviour involved employees adopting an uncaring attitude to work. Failure to recognise problems included refusal to acknowledge or record customer complaints, because employees feared customer litigation. Managers in this study suggested that institutionalisation, combined with low manager support, may contribute to sabotage.

Despite a need for further understanding of sabotage within tenured environments, there is a gap in current understanding of sabotage in such contexts. This paper asks two important questions: what is the nature of sabotage behaviour amongst academics within the University environment? What are the causes of these sabotage behaviours?

Using Interactive Management (IM) to facilitate the collective intelligence of a diverse group of academics, the current study first sought to identify key sabotage behaviours and categories of sabotage behaviours. Study participants also developed

consensus-based models describing the interrelationship between identified causes of sabotage. By combining the models generated across three separate collective intelligence sessions, a meta-analytical model describing how causes of sabotage are related was generated. This model provided a high-level understanding of the interdependencies between multiple causes of sabotage behavior in a university environment.

Method

Interactive Management (IM) is a facilitated collective intelligence methodology developed by John Warfield (Warfield, 2006; Warfield & Cardenas, 1994). IM has been applied successfully with groups to address a broad variety of basic and applied research questions, including investigating managerial issues associated with diversity in the workplace (Broome et al., 2002), developing national well-being measures (Hogan et al., 2015), and exploring how functions of music listening co-function to enhance wellbeing (Groarke and Hogan, 2016). The IM method has also been applied within the University sector, notably to examine service quality in higher education (Sahney, Banwet and Karunes, 2006), and to understand the key dispositions of good critical thinkers (Dwyer et al., 2016). Importantly, IM allows for the development of structural models describing how problems influence one another in a system of influences (Broome et al., 2002; Hogan et al., 2015). These consensus-built structural models, or problematiques, are grounded in group decision making of stakeholders in collective intelligence sessions.

Participants:

Participants were academic staff at a University in Ireland, who held teaching-and-research roles. The IM sessions took place in one constituent college of the National

University of Ireland (NUI). The NUI comprises four constituent colleges (NUI, 2017). Although each college within the NUI has its own Governing Authority, employment conditions and structures are similar across constituent colleges. Therefore, the components and causes of sabotage identified in the current study were considered representative of University Academics in Ireland.

Following approval from the University's research ethics committee, an email was circulated to academic staff seeking volunteers to join one of three discussion groups. Male and female academic staff aged between 25 and 65 years were invited to participate. Each of the three discussion sessions lasted for approximately three hours. The tenured academic population of the University is relatively homogeneous in terms of educational background, level of tenure, salary, and role (Boddy, 2016), and there were no differences in the profile of the attendees across the three sessions. In total, 23 tenured academic staff participated (N = 12 Females).

Procedure

The following IM process was followed:

1. The first step involved idea generation using the nominal group technique (NGT; Delbecq et al., 1975). NGT involved (i) presenting a stimulus question to participants: *What are the key components of employee sabotage among University academics?*; (ii) silent generation of ideas in writing by each participant, (iii) presentation of ideas by each participant by posting ideas on large sticky notes on an idea wall, (iv) discussion of ideas in turn to clarify their meaning.

2. The second step involved a closed voting process with each participant invited to select five ideas from the idea wall that they believed were the most salient components of sabotage.
3. Participants also worked with the group facilitator to generate an initial categorization of the ideas generated based on commonality between ideas.
4. The next phase involved a repetition of steps 1 and 2, this time inviting participants to think about the identified components of sabotage, and to generate, post and clarify key *causes* of sabotage behaviours within each category, separately, followed by a second closed voting process to select the most salient causes across categories.
5. The final step involved the application of interpretive structural modeling (ISM) (Warfield and Cárdenas, 1994; Warfield 1976). ISM is a computer-assisted methodology that allows groups to generate a structural model describing relationships between ideas using a matrix structuring process. Participants were asked a series of questions in the following form: “*In the context of understanding the causes of Sabotage, does (cause A) significantly aggravate the likelihood of (cause B)*”? This relational question was used to explore the relationship between each pair of ideas that emerged from the voting process (step 4 above). After the group discussed each relational question a vote was taken to determine the group judgement. If a majority (>70%) agreed that a significant relationship exists between the pair of ideas under consideration, a ‘yes’ vote was entered in the ISM software. Otherwise, a ‘no’ vote was entered. After all relations were considered and the matrix completed, a structural model illustrating the logic of the group was generated for display and further discussion by the group.

For each group, the process of idea generation, voting, and the development of a structural model was completed in a single session, lasting approximately three hours. In each session a facilitator supported the group through every stage in the IM process, and a co-facilitator operated the ISM software during the structuring phase. Sessions were audio recorded with the participants' consent and the recordings were transcribed for further analysis.

Results

The components of sabotage generated across the three IM sessions are presented in Table 1. Next, the causes of sabotage are presented, along with the structural models developed in each session. Finally, the relative influence of highly-ranked causes of sabotage are analysed, and a structural meta-analysis integrating the results across the three groups is presented.

Components of Sabotage

Participants across the three IM sessions generated a total of 79 ideas in response to the stimulus question '*What are the key components of sabotage among University academics?*' Following the sessions, the research team conducted a combined category and thematic analysis including all ideas generated across the three sessions. Figure 1 illustrates the six higher-order themes that emerged from the analysis, along with the sub-categories informing those themes. The higher-order themes are (i) intentional anti-collegial behaviour, (ii) professional dishonesty, (iii) non-compliance, (iv) abuse of power, (v) negativity, and (vi) underperforming. Table 1 provides additional information in relation to key ideas informing themes and sub-categories,

the number of votes these ideas received during the voting phase of the IM process, and sample quotes from participants during the presentation phase of the IM process.

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

<Insert Table 1 about here>

Figure 1: Higher-order themes emerging from analysis.

Causes of Sabotage

Participants generated 71 ideas about the causes of sabotage. Following analysis, a total of 21 categories and 6 higher-order themes were identified (see Table 2). These themes were (i) self-interest, (ii) personality traits, (iii) personal issues related to the role itself, (iv) extraneous stress, (v) managerial practices, and (vi) the culture of the organisation. Ideas receiving the highest number of votes were included in ISM structuring, and are indicated in Table 2 by an asterisk.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

Structuring of Ideas:

The structural models for each session are presented below, with a brief description of each group's rationale for the structuring. Structures are to be read from left to right, with arrows indicating 'significantly aggravates'.

IM session 1:

In this session, the top eight rank-ordered ideas with the greatest number of votes were entered into the software. Figure 2 displays the relationships between those ideas.

<Insert Figure 2 about here>

Figure 2: Structural model of relationships between highly-ranked causes of sabotage generated in IM Session 1. Number of votes received in parentheses.

In Figure 2, two policy-related issues: ‘Incentives that support self-interested behaviour’ and ‘requirement to deliver on three goals simultaneously (administration, teaching and research)’, emerged as influential aggravators of sabotage identified by the group. Another issue identified was ‘Requirement to deliver on conflicting goals’. Participants explained that employees whose values misalign with the organisation may act in a self-interested fashion, without fear of sanction, because there is no accountability. Furthermore, participants explained that struggling to deliver on three goals simultaneously causes conflict as *‘you can’t deliver on everything in a timely fashion...then that could lead to conflict’* (Male participant).

Failure to identify with the general direction the University has taken and a lack of ability to ‘mentalise’ were also seen as key drivers of sabotage. Participants explained that those who feel *‘in a minority in how you think the institution should be running’* (Female participant), engage in sabotage as a means of retaliation against this perceived misalignment. Furthermore, participants argued that a failure to consider other perspectives, or conceive different possibilities (described as ‘mentalising’), led to alienation within groups, as *‘you’re going to be totally lost within the organisation, with respect to being able to see the other person’s point of view, or read their intention’* (Male participant).

Participants argued that coping with incentives that support self-interested behaviour, failing to identify with the general direction of the organisation, and struggling to deliver on conflicting goals, led to aggravated personal stress and a perceived mismatch between individual and company values. Personal stress in this

context relates to role stress and/or stress linked to interpersonal relationships at work, rather than personal stress at home. The group also argued that failing to identify with the direction of the organisation aggravated a perceived mismatch with the values of the organisation, which leads to sabotage. Furthermore, participants noted that colleagues who, in their words, could not “mentalise” (meaning colleagues who could not understand the mental state underlying another’s behaviour), or colleagues who were required to deliver on three conflicting goals, felt disempowered at individual and group level. This disempowerment, along with personal stress, ultimately aggravated personal and intergroup conflict, resulting in sabotage.

IM session 2:

In this session, the top five ranked ideas proposed and voted by the group were entered into the software, and Figure 3 presents the relationships between those ideas.

<Insert Figure 3 about here>

Figure 3: Structural model of relationships between highly-ranked causes of sabotage generated in IM Session 2. Number of votes received in parentheses.

Participants argued that sabotage is a learned behaviour, explaining that “*(one learns that) sabotage is what you have to do in order to get to the top....(saboteurs) are a product of their experience, they’re a product of what they’ve seen, how other people have behaved to get where they want to be*” (Female, participant), which suggests that saboteurs are often ‘made’ over time. The mismatch between organisational culture and values was identified as a key aggravator of sabotage. The group emphasised that the mismatch occurred at the individual level. The group perceived that bitterness

and a desire for personal gain followed such a mismatch, leading to sabotage: *“I’m not necessarily seeking to attract resources or reputation deliberately at the expense of others, but...I might resist certain things I’m told I’m required to do... I don’t do some work, and therefore it falls on other people’s shoulders”* (Male, participant).

One participant explained that learned behaviour supports a mismatch between individual and organisational values that is a ‘divergence’ from the organisational culture: *“actually the organisational culture and values and the employee values...they’re not matching up, so the behaviour that you’ve learnt actually is helping you to survive within the system”* (Female participant).

The participants claimed that *‘too much ambition’* resulted in *“a motivation or drive to gain status, resources, et cetera, and...put somebody else down in order to gain those for yourself”* (Female participant). Participants talked about the *‘culture of collegiality’* that typically exists in a University, and explained that colleagues with *‘too much ambition’* were less likely to engage in collegial behaviours, instead seeking personal gain. This group argued that desire for personal gain, often at the expense of others, leads to sabotage.

IM Session 3:

As with the previous sessions, the top five rank-ordered ideas decided upon during voting were entered into the software; the relationships are presented in Figure 3.

<Insert Figure 4 about here>

Figure 4: Structural model of relationships between highly-ranked causes of sabotage generated in IM Session 3. Number of votes received in parentheses.

As can be seen in Figure 4, two policy-related issues: ‘No system of accountability and enforcement’ and ‘requirement to deliver on conflicting goals’ emerged as the most influential causes of sabotage, appearing to the left of the structure. One colleague explained the effect of the absence of a system of accountability in the following example: *“if you turn up late to a meeting, nobody says anything. If they don’t turn up, nobody says anything. If you don’t take the class, who’s going to say anything? You’re not accountable to anybody”* (Male participant). Participants explained that a lack of accountability and monitoring sometimes led to a ‘*God complex*’, which was a term used by a participant to describe colleagues who had excessive self-interest. This ‘*God complex*’ led to a greater struggle for relative position, which resulted in the sabotage behaviours identified above. Participants also argued that the lack of a system of accountability created sabotage through unempowered leadership.

A second issue was the performance management system in the University. Participants argued that the challenge of delivering on potentially conflicting goals – research, teaching and administration - can cause sabotage. Participants spoke about a perception that priority is given to some areas over others, but with an expectation that academics can be excellent at everything: *“its expectations ... that we’re jacks of all trade”* (Female participant). The requirement to deliver on conflicting goals, and the lack of clarity about goals led to fear and insecurity. Participants also noted that conflicting goals led to unempowered leadership: *“...(conflicting goals) makes it very difficult as a leader to really reward (colleagues) or to give them feedback on performance, because they’re finding it difficult to perform in the first place”* (Male participant).

Meta-Analysis of IM structures:

This study is exploratory in nature. One objective of the IM sessions was to consider proposed relationships between causes of sabotage to develop a theoretical framework for further study. A meta-analysis of the structures at the category level was generated, using influence scores for the 18 causes of sabotage appearing in the structural models (Figures 2, 3 and 4). The influence score is calculated based on the following scores:

Position Score: Each structural map places ideas in stages (Broome, 1995). Ideas to the far right are assigned the lowest position score (i.e., 1) and those in the leftmost stage were assigned the highest score (i.e., depending on the number of levels in the structure).

Antecedent and Succedent Score: The antecedent score is the number of elements (causes) lying to the left that influence an element (cause) in the structure. The succedent score is the number of elements to the right that an element in the structure influences.

Net Succedent/Antecedent Score: The net succedent/antecedent (Net SA) score is the succedent score minus the antecedent score. If the Net SA score is positive, it means that the element (cause) is a net source of influence in the model. If the Net SA score is negative, it means that the element is a net receiver of influence in the model (Broome, 1995).

Influence Score: The influence score is the sum of the Position Score plus the Net SA score.

The meta-analysis is then conducted at the category level. Total Influence Scores for each category are calculated by summing the Influence Scores of all ideas included in

the structural models from that category. An Average Influence Score for each category is then calculated by dividing the Total Influence Score by the number of ideas from that category appearing in the structural models. Based on these results a model of the most important causes of sabotage based on similarity of influence scores is presented in Figure 5. As Figure 5 indicates, categories of causes in Level 1 such as 'Personal Values versus Culture' and 'Role Conflict', are considered by participants to exert the greatest negative influence on other causes of sabotage. Working from left to right, these causes of sabotage aggravate succeeding causes like 'Culture', 'Disempowerment', and 'Pressure', and so on. In contrast, causes located at Level 5 in the meta-analytical structure, 'Competition and Conflict' and 'Poor Leadership', are aggravated by a range of other causes of sabotage.

<Insert Figure 5 about here>

Figure 5 Meta-Analytical Model of causes of sabotage, arranged from left to right by reference to average influence scores (high to low).

Discussion:

This current study contributes to the extant literature by providing insights into the nature and causes of sabotage among University Academics. Universities are facing an increasingly competitive market, with strong brands competing for student attention (Rauschnabel et al., 2016). In this competitive context, academics are identified as a group experiencing high levels of workload stress (Winefield and Jarrett, 2001), and are currently challenged by the dual metrics of research and teaching performance management (Cadez, Dimovski and Groff., 2015). As such, a focus on service sabotage among University Academics is timely.

Findings from the current study identify components and causes of sabotage at both individual and organisational levels. Sabotage behaviours in the University

service sector ranged from individual intentional anti-collegial behaviour, to strategic non-compliance with organisational policies or procedures. While previous studies have reported that sabotage in the hospitality context is often enacted to gain the respect of co-workers (Harris and Ogbonna, 2012), respondents in the current study viewed sabotage as largely an individualistic behavior, designed to promote the self.

In the current study, participants described saboteurs as Academics seeking individual achievement over team accomplishment. Participants suggested that such behaviour was potentially exacerbated when one had a position of power. For example, sabotage behaviours described by participants included exploitation of others by ‘dumping’ work, undermining others’ work, becoming hard to contact by others, blocking initiatives to ensure failure, and individual dishonesty for self-promotion.

Deceit and abuse of power may also be used for impression management (Rosenfeld et al., 2002), as academics seek to highlight their relative position for promotion purposes. Findings suggest the potential ‘pervasive dishonesty of ordinary people’ (Shu et al., 2011, p. 344), as participants explained that sabotage among academics included taking credit for others’ work, and lying about research output. Such deception was also identified by Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2016) who describe similar ‘dupery’, ‘outright lying’, or more subtle ‘impression management’ as characteristics of sabotage behavior. Moreover, abuse of power may facilitate free-riding, where employees take advantage of the system at the expense of colleagues, thereby lowering general motivation (Kallio and Kallio , 2014).

Further informing this idea, sabotage was also described as including work-avoidance in relation to some aspects of the academic job (i.e., teaching and administration), to create time for other areas of work, specifically research. There

was an implicit acknowledgement by participants that work-avoidance was necessary, to trade-off between work that did not lead to promotion, and work that did.

Participants in the study suggested that moral disengagement may be collective, as participants explained that it is an accepted norm that certain aspects of academic work conflicted with research goals. Study participants highlighted a potential trade-off between service aspects of the academic's role (such as meetings and teaching), in favour of individual research. A permissive environment that accepted sabotage for the 'greater good' of achieving research goals was identified. The current finding shows that sabotage may also become a norm because it is perceived by groups of employees as a necessary strategic act.

The study also investigated causes of sabotage. Individual causes of sabotage included personality traits such as a need for self-promotion, personal issues such as disempowerment, bitterness and low ambition, as well as challenges of meeting disparate goals. Findings in relation to bitterness, disempowerment and goal misalignment are consistent with extant research in 'high value' services, such as Wallace and de Chernatony's (2008) research in retail banking, where it was reported that lack of ambition and institutionalisation can lead to sabotage. Participants in the current study argued that tenure, when coupled with uncertainty about task requirements and a perceived lack of managerial support, can lead to sabotage.

The study also finds that a failure to identify with the direction that the organisation is heading leads to a perceived mismatch between the organisation's and the academic's values. Therefore, academics may act autonomously and with a sense of righteousness to block change, and many participants in our study considered stubborn refusal as a necessary, strategic response to unwelcome change.

Moreover, a mismatch between individual and organisational values may lead to a drive for personal gain, at the expense of others, and to conflict. Therefore, academics who may be ‘mis-fits’ in terms of values, may still succeed, but at the expense of their colleagues. It is possible that a values mismatch between the individual and organisation, leading to a self-oriented drive for personal gain, may be more prevalent in more autonomous, permanent service roles, such as tenured academia. Further research is needed to examine this issue. Moreover, employees who work with an organisation for a longer period of time, may be more likely to experience a mismatch between their values and the organisations’ values, if organisations change to adapt to external environments. We advocate cross-sectional and longitudinal studies examining the effects of employment duration on values and behaviour of individual workers. We also advocate comparative studies among University academics in countries with less job security, to explore differences in sabotage behaviours and causes.

Finally, participants in our study suggested a ‘God complex’ among saboteurs. Research highlights the influence of ego, impunity and narcissism on dysfunctional behaviour (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2016). Participants suggested that such behaviours are more prevalent in academia, with subject expertise and isolation in work leading to ‘*an awful lot more Gods in the University*’ than in other sectors. Absence of a system of accountability may also lead to the ‘God complex’. Measures are needed to operationally define relevant behaviours in this context, such that researchers can examine the prevalence of these behaviors in the academic sector.

The negative influence of organisational factors on sabotage was clear in our study. The meta-analytic model of influence (Figure 5) highlights that a perceived lack of accountability to others, and an inability to hold others to account, could lead

to unempowered leadership. Participants spoke about the impact of poor leadership on sabotage. This finding complements related research suggesting that higher levels of perceived managerial surveillance minimise sabotage (Harris and Ogbonna, 2006). However, Harris and Ogbonna (2006) focused on 'low value' service sector roles and highlight that strong management in such services may deter sabotage behaviour. By contrast, strong management in 'high value' services may minimise sabotage through different mechanisms, for example, by supporting a shared vision linking high-value goals, reinforcing behaviour through rewards, and protecting employees from unreasonable work demands.

Participants in our study suggested that unclear metrics and incentives, and role conflict were key causes of sabotage behaviour. Cadez, Dimovski and Groff. (2015) cautioned that performance-based systems in one area (research), may damage innovation and creativity in another (teaching). Our study contributes to this research, as we identified goal conflict as a cause of sabotage. Participants in all three IM sessions spoke about the challenge of meeting research, administration, and teaching objectives, and were clear that (i) University performance management systems did not clarify the relative importance of these objectives, (ii) balancing these objectives led employees to sabotage, to strategically 'trade-off' one task for another, (iii) managers were unempowered to support employees, as the relative priority of objectives was unclear to all, and (iv) individuals in positions of power engaged in sabotage to 'offload' perceived low priority objectives onto colleagues, to further their own success. When a lack of goal clarity was coupled with a poor system of accountability and enforcement, this was perceived to exacerbate weak leadership, individualistic behaviour, intergroup conflicts, and sabotage.

On a separate but related point, we note that Kallio and Kallio (2014) found that academic's perceived the quality of their research suffered when one has to meet quantitative objectives, and that Universities were perceived to value quantity over quality. However, our study did not reveal these concerns among academics in Ireland. Perhaps this is because the Irish University system does not explicitly use the management-by-results (MBR) system.

Implications

We suggest a number of ways that University managers might curtail sabotage among Academics. A summary synthesis of the structural logic across three collective intelligence sessions in this study (Figure 5) suggests that role conflict, metrics and incentives, a lack of accountability, and norms and learned behaviour, are influential causes of sabotage that may aggravate other causes of sabotage amongst University academics. A clash of personal values and culture, and a lack of empathy, also emerged as influential causes of sabotage. These causes influenced the University culture, as well as a low level of commitment, influencing feelings of disempowerment and ambitious self-interest, low self-esteem and pressure, a sense of entitlement, competition and conflict, and difficulties for leadership. University leaders may find it difficult to enforce or reinforce behaviours when rewards are unclear, or where conflicting role behaviours are required.

Structural supports would support leaders and managers seeking to curtail sabotage. For example, senior managers seeking to optimise employee performance should set out clear guidelines for performance and progression, and put in place clear incentives and reinforce values to encourage brand-supporting performance. Our findings also suggested a cultural norm whereby employees may learn 'adaptive

behaviours’ on the job leading to self-oriented actions that sabotage others. Norms and learned behaviour were key influencers in our meta-analysis. Tenured academics may be employed by one University for a long time, and this learned behaviour may be exacerbated by remaining in the same environment where certain norms of behavior are prevalent. When academics learn that self-interested sabotage behaviour is effective in achieving certain goals, they may repeat it, reinforcing a ‘norm’ of self-interested behavior in the group. Employee training should include further support in understanding the values and direction of the University, and guidance for managing any perceived mismatch between personal and organisational goals. Academic units could develop their own values, with input from academic staff. By developing values at unit level, this may encourage buy-in from academics, and a greater ‘esprit de corps’. This may help to curtail individualistic behaviour and conflict.

The current analysis indicates that low self-esteem/insecurity and pressure influence competition and conflict. Managers should recognize employees’ pressures, and offer ways to alleviate them. For example, managers can offer opportunities for academics to talk about their work pressures by providing common areas for academic staff to meet informally, providing employee training on stress management and wellbeing, and ensuring an open dialogue with employees, so that academics feel empowered and involved in decision-making.

Conclusion:

This study explores University Academics’ views about sabotage in Higher Education. Through the use of Interactive Management (IM) workshops, we elicit academic’s collective views about the components and causes of sabotage, and we identify potential relationships between discrete causes of sabotage.

Findings reveal intentional anti-collegial behaviours, professional dishonesty, abuse of power, negativity, non-compliance and underperformance as sabotage behaviours. The current study highlights the following key causes of sabotage: self-interest, personality traits, personal issues related to the role itself, extraneous stress, managerial practices, and the culture of the organisation. Relationships between these causes are presented, revealed by the IM workshops. Our exploratory study presents an initial framework of sabotage behaviors amongst University academics and key antecedents, which can be used to assist further research and intervention in this area.

Disclosure Statement:

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Figure 2: Structural model of relationships between highly-ranked causes of sabotage generated in IM Session 1. Number of votes received in parentheses.

Figure 3: Structural model of relationships between highly-ranked causes of sabotage generated in IM Session 2. Number of votes received in parentheses.

Figure 4: Structural model of relationships between highly-ranked causes of sabotage generated in IM Session 3. Number of votes received in parentheses.

Figure 5 Meta-Analytical model of causes of sabotage, arranged from left to right by reference to average influence scores (high to low).