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Antecedents and Consequences of Knowledge Hiding Behavior

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Abstract Workforces are strengthened to share their knowledge to increase inspiration and improvement. However, people may hide their knowledge from view to pursue personal benefits. Knowledge hiding behavior has been identified as an important challenge in organizational settings, collaboration, innovation, and reducing performance. This paper contributes to a comprehensive review of the literature on hidden knowledge in the workplace, focusing on antecedents and consequences by conducting a comprehensive literature review. The study involves reviewing research articles gathered from the university's electronic databases of Scopus and Science Direct. By assessing findings from previous studies, the predictors and implications of knowledge-hiding behavior will be identified. A narrow focus on specific contexts, an overemphasis on individual factors, and a neglect of external influence. By indicating the antecedents, the importance of understanding the motivation behind knowledge hiding and its effect can be highlighted for future research direction.

Keywords: *Knowledge hiding, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge hiding behavior*

1. Introduction

Knowledge hiding (KH), the concealment of information sought by another individual, poses a significant argument to organizational practice. While knowledge sharing is widely identified as critical for innovation and competitive advantage, knowledge hiding acts as a counteracting force, inhibiting collaboration and hindering organizational learning. This behavior, distinct from simply not sharing knowledge, involves an active judgment to conceal or withhold information. Understanding the motivations behind knowledge hiding, its consequences, and potential mitigation strategies is essential for adopting a more open and collaborative organizational environment. This probe examines the complexities of knowledge hiding, examining its underlying causes, the negative impact it can have on individuals and organizations, and strategies for promoting a culture of knowledge sharing.

Knowledge hiding, behavior at work that influences both organizations and individuals, has recently been gaining attention. As referred to by Connelly et al. (2012), KH refers to thoughtful concealment and/or withholding of information that other people require or think to know. Pervasively, knowledge-hiding behavior in the place of employment may be a major issue in the rising number of research studies on this behavior. The commonness of knowledge hiding in the workplace is well-presented. Surveys have revealed that a substantial proportion of employees admit to engaging in such behaviors, driven by a range of personal and organizational factors (He et al., 2022). As the knowledge created view of the firm highlights, organizations rely on the effective sharing and utilization of employee knowledge to maintain a competitive edge. However, when this knowledge is deliberately concealed, it can challenge the organization's competence to invent, solve problems, and adapt to changing market conditions.

2. Literature Review

Knowledge Hiding

The prevailing definition is the one proposed by Connelly et al. (2012), according to which: “Knowledge hiding is the intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person”. In this context, “knowledge” incorporates the knowledge, ideas, and proficiency that are significant for the responsibilities executed by organizational members.

There is a study that explores the impact of "work from anywhere" on knowledge hiding, distrust, and

socialization within organizations, emphasizing the role of knowledge infrastructure (Bashir et al., 2025). The authors argue that while WFA offers benefits like global talent acquisition and employee flexibility, it also presents challenges. Specifically, they suggest that WFA can negatively affect knowledge sharing due to reduced synchronous communication and a lack of social interaction, leading to increased knowledge withholding and distrust. The study highlights the importance of robust knowledge facilities to mitigate these negative consequences and promote socialization in WFA settings.

Meanwhile, it presents a meta-analysis of knowledge-hiding behavior in the workplace. The study examines the antecedents and consequences of knowledge hoarding, as well as potential boundary conditions. Key findings include significant relationships between human resource practices, management styles, personality characteristics, and knowledge hiding. The analysis also reveals that knowledge hiding affected psychological and behavioral responses along with performance-related aspects. Furthermore, the analysis explores the moderating effects of demographic and contextual variables on knowledge hiding and its antecedents, as well as methodological factors shaping the link between knowledge hiding and its outcomes (Shen et al., 2024).

The association between knowledge sharing/hiding and learning culture, specifically focusing on the role of mistake acceptance. The study finds a positive relationship between a learning culture that accepts mistakes and tacit knowledge sharing, while a negative relationship exists between such a culture and knowledge hiding. Furthermore, research emphasizes the beneficial effect of tacit knowledge sharing on human capital, whereas knowledge hiding is associated with adverse outcomes with no significant effect. The authors conclude that fostering a learning culture that embraces mistakes is crucial for promoting knowledge sharing and, consequently, human capital development (Kucharska & Rebelo, 2022).

The investigation into the link between informational justice and employee knowledge hiding behaviors reveals that informational integrity is negatively associated with evasive hiding and playing dumb but positively associated with rationalized hiding. Organizational identification mediates this relationship. Furthermore, justice sensitivity moderates the connection between informational justice and organizational identification. The authors recommend that managers emphasize informational justice to reduce knowledge hiding, particularly among employees with high justice sensitivity who hold critical knowledge (Guang et al., 2023).

By exploring how altruistic leadership (AL) influences knowledge withholding. The study explores the roles of team learning (TL) and knowledge culture (KC) as mediators in this relationship. Using data from 368 Slovakian companies, the authors found that AL negatively affects knowledge hiding. This effect is mediated by both TL and KC. Altruistic leaders with share knowledge and foster team learning could be fostering a conducive environment, which in turn reduces knowledge hiding. The investigation was conducted to understand on leadership is able to mitigate negative behaviors like knowledge hiding and promote positive organizational outcomes (Michalova et al., 2024). Knowledge hoarding replicates a behavioral perspective of employees within organizational settings. However, existing literature offers limited insights into employees' knowledge-hiding behaviors and the role of leadership—particularly in relation to team learning (TL) and knowledge culture (KC)—in shaping these tendencies.

However, empowering leadership in the knowledge-hiding study affected the differentiation between the two types of empowering leadership: individual-focused and differentiated. It's discoveries that empowering leadership found that individual focus had a negative relationship to knowledge hiding through psychological safety. Conversely, differentiated empowering leadership positively relates to knowledge hoarding through socio-emotional conflict. Furthermore, interpersonal trust weakens the relationship positively between group relational conflict and knowledge withholding. The research suggests that while empowering individuals can reduce knowledge hiding, empowering teams in a differentiated manner might inadvertently increase it due to potential conflicts (Lin et al., 2020).

Empirical findings reveal that individual-focused empowering leadership promotes stronger interpersonal dynamics with subordinates and mitigates tendencies toward knowledge hiding (Lin et al., 2020). Recent studies indicate that a key reason behind the increased incidence of KH behaviors in virtual settings is primarily attributed to the convenience with which employees can hide information (Posey and Shoss, 2024; Xi and Qu,

2024). In summary, Michalová et al. (2024) suggest that altruistic leadership plays a crucial role in mitigating knowledge hiding. By creating a trusting and collaborative environment, emphasizing collective goals, and promoting team learning and a positive knowledge culture, altruistic leaders can effectively discourage knowledge hiding and foster a climate of open knowledge transfer within their teams.

Meanwhile, in large Chinese construction firms examined how concern for well-being influences knowledge-hoarding behavior. The study uses social exchange theory and analyzes survey data from 413 employees. Key findings include harmonious relationship negatively affects knowledge withholding; a well-being concern positively influences psychological contracts; psychological contracts negatively affect knowledge hiding; psychological contracts mediate the relationship between a well-being concern and knowledge hiding; and task interdependence positively moderates the relationship between psychological contracts and knowledge hiding. The research suggests that fostering a caring, ethical climate can reduce knowledge hiding by strengthening psychological contracts, especially in environments with high task interdependence (Chen & Tang, 2024).

Knowledge-hiding behavior factors also influence socialized Q&A communities, using Zhihu as a case study. Applying social cognitive theory, the research explores the combined impacts of self-efficacy, community atmosphere, outcome expectation, and requests on knowledge hoarding. The study found that self-efficacy and outcome expectation (individual factors) and community atmosphere and requests (external factors) all significantly influence knowledge hiding behavior. The findings suggest that fostering a positive community atmosphere and managing user expectations can help reduce knowledge hiding in online Q&A platforms (Li et al., 2022).

Knowledge hiding in the office was provided by a systematic literature review which the authors analyzed existing research to understand the antecedents and consequences of knowledge withholding at different levels either individual, team, or organizational. They find that hiding knowledge is intentional and driven by both personal and organizational factors. Consequences include negative impacts on individual well-being, team performance, and potentially the organization. The review also identifies strategies to alleviate knowledge hiding, such as fostering a positive work environment and promoting knowledge sharing. The authors use the Organizational Behavior Modification model to present their findings and suggest that positive and negative reinforcements can be influenced through knowledge hoarding. They highlight the importance of addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors to effectively manage knowledge hiding in organizations (Siachou et al., 2021)

A comprehensive review of knowledge-hiding behavior recognizes knowledge hiding from other related concepts like knowledge hoarding and knowledge sharing, emphasizing its intentional and deceptive nature in one-on-one inquiry situations. The review discusses the three dimensions of knowledge hoarding suggested by Connelly et al.: playing dumb, evasive hiding, and rationalized hiding. It also explores the measurements of knowledge hiding and delves into its antecedents and consequences, suggesting further research on knowledge sharing barriers and interventions. The review highlights the importance of understanding knowledge hiding as a distinct behavior with unique characteristics and implications for organizations (Bai, 2020).
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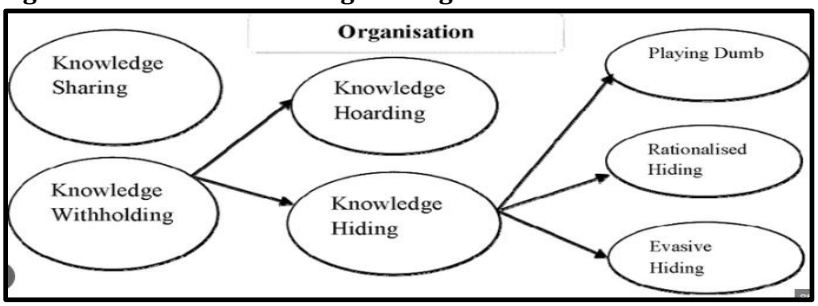
Figure 1: Nature of knowledge hiding



(Source: Connelly et al. (2012)

According to Connelly et al. (2012), Knowledge hiding refers to "a deliberate effort by an individual to withhold or obscure knowledge that has been solicited by another person." This phenomenon encompasses three behaviors (dimensions): playing dumb (PD), rationalized hiding (RH), and evasive hiding (EH). Additionally, the occurrence of knowledge hiding is influenced by factors such as leadership style, cultural background, and organizational structure. The authors further note that knowledge hiding does not inherently damage an individual or an organization (Connelly et al., 2012).

The processes resulted in individuals concealing knowledge within organizations as a collective have not been sufficiently delineated, and the elements that contribute to knowledge concealment, along with their interconnections, remain inadequately explored (Wang & Wang's, 2023). Bibliometric evaluations indicate that themes such as knowledge concealment, innovation, and knowledge spillover are prevalent, with numerous research trajectories developing from these foundational ideas. Recently, Skerlavaj et al (2023) a meta-analysis was conducted (ten years after the initial seminal publication on knowledge concealment) which revealed that knowledge concealment serves as a mediator for the majority of specified relationships documented in the literature concerning job design, as well as individual and leadership dynamics, ultimately influencing task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, creativity, and deviance.

Table 1: Top 5 recent papers from the extant literature on knowledge hiding

No.	Authors	Method and Procedure	Antecedents
1.	Bai, L. (2020)	Review	Point out several antecedents of knowledge hoarding, categorized into individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors.
2.	Siachou, E., et al. (2021)	SLR	Knowledge hiding stems from a combination of individual motivations (e.g., protecting one's job security, perceived unfairness) and organizational factors (e.g., lack of trust, competitive culture).
3.	El-Kassar, A.-N., et al. (2021)	Empirical	It shows that knowledge hiding negatively impacts employee innovation, innovative work behavior, and the execution of tasks. This aligns with the points raised in the documentation about knowledge hoarding on individual and organizational outcomes on the negative effects.
4.	Shen, Y. et al. (2024)	Meta-analysis	Identifies several antecedents: HR practices (foster climate distrust and resentment, leading employees to hide knowledge), leadership (unsupportive leadership styles can create a sense of insecurity and fear among employees and personality traits
5.	Karim, D.N. (2022)	Empirical	Explores and focusing specifically on the impact of the Dark Triad personality traits and psychological entitlement; dark triad traits (speculates that individuals exhibiting these traits are more likely to involve in knowledge hiding – may view knowledge as a source of power), psychological entitlement (individuals with a high sense of entitlement believe they deserve to feel ownership over their knowledge with a special treatment and are more likely).

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is a mindful and deep process of information exchange, specialization, and perceptions among personal, groups, or the workplace. This exchange can take various forms, from formal training sessions to informal conversations and collaborative projects. For instance, Eni et al (2025) found that knowledge sharing is necessary for organizational accomplishment in today's knowledge-driven economy. It fosters innovation, improves decision-making, enhances organizational learning, and promotes a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement while highlighting the importance of achieving organizational

goals. In this so-called era of intensive knowledge, sharing knowledge is an essential method for preserving one's information and skills. The process frequently transcends a mere unidirectional exchange of information, resulting in mutual learning facilitated by feedback regarding the applicability of the knowledge acquired (Lu et al., 2012). Furthermore, Chin et al (2024) added that knowledge sharing within teams can broaden mindsets and contribute to realizing innovation in fostering a smooth knowledge flow and boost morale to be greater in engaging the modernization.

However, exploring the contradictory behavior of individuals engaging in both knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding can lead to knowledge sharing isn't always straightforward and can be influenced by good dynamics within organizations. This indicates that employees who feel secure in their career paths may be more likely to engage in open knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing could be more effective when project managers play their role in soft skills development within the project team (Avenca et al., 2024). The author mentioned that the project manager is a crucial figure in establishing a knowledge-sharing environment that may influence knowledge-sharing practices. While these studies discover different facets of knowledge sharing, they cooperatively paint a picture of a complex spectacle influenced by individual factors (attitude, self-efficacy, intention), interpersonal dynamics (leadership, team interactions), and organizational culture. They emphasize the importance of promoting a supportive environment that encourages knowledge sharing while also acknowledging the potential for conflicting behaviors like knowledge hiding. They also highlight the critical role of leadership in shaping knowledge-sharing practices within teams and organizations (Avenca et al., 2024; Eni et al., 2025; Chin, et al., 2024).

Knowledge Hiding Behavior

Knowledge hiding is not solely an individual behavior but is impacted by both internal and external factors. These include events, personal traits, organizational characteristics, and workplace conditions. Understanding these antecedents may lead to practitioners bringing knowledge hiding more effectively. Managers should consider discovering factors like employees' personality traits, such as narcissism and territoriality. Those personality traits can lead to knowledge hiding, whereby it will encourage self-evaluations may help boost confidence and reduce insecurities or feelings of revenge. Additionally, managers should assess whether knowledge hiding is aimed at specific individuals or used as a broader expression of dissatisfaction with the organization (Wu & Lebreton, 2011; Singh, 2019).

3. Methodology

The review was carried out in four distinct phases: (1) defining the scope, (2) executing the search, (3) examining the antecedents and consequences, and (4) presenting the findings along with recommendations for future research. The study's domain was delineated in accordance with its aim concerning KH antecedents and consequences. Consequently, we aimed to locate articles published across various fields, including management, business, psychology, sociology, behavioral science, information science, social science, economics, communications, humanities, and multidisciplinary studies. The inclusion criteria were established based on the study's scope. Initially, only empirical studies employing quantitative or mixed methods (both quantitative and qualitative) were considered. Furthermore, we defined KH as the "intentional concealing of knowledge" when "requested," as articulated by Connelly et al. (2012); the phrase "knowledge hiding" is occasionally used interchangeably with "knowledge withholding."

In addition, we regarded any research that utilized KH as an outcome variable. For the exclusion criteria, we omitted books, book chapters, and meeting abstracts. Additionally, among the journal articles, we included review papers, theoretical papers, qualitative-only studies, meta-analyses, and literature review papers. We implemented two search strategies. Initially, in December 2024, we searched for keywords related to "knowledge hid*" and "knowledge withhold*" within the Science Direct database and Scopus. The default time frame commenced from 2020 in Science Direct and from 2010 in Scopus.

- Science Direct search: TOPIC: (knowledge hid) OR TOPIC: (knowledge hiding) OR TOPIC: (knowledge withhold) OR TOPIC: (knowledge withholding) Timespan: 2020–2025.
- Scopus search: TITLE-ABS-KEY (knowledge AND hid) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (knowledge AND hiding) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (knowledge AND withhold) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (knowledge AND withholding).

Throughout this procedure, we also identified several additional pertinent articles through Google Scholar, which were subsequently included.

4. Results

This paper cooperatively offers a belief in sharing knowledge and hoarding dynamics within organizations. By the interplay of individual factors (attitudes, self-efficacy, entitlement), interpersonal dynamics (leadership, team interactions), and organizational factors in shaping these behaviors. It also emphasizes the importance of adopting a supportive and collaborative environment that encourages knowledge sharing while moderating the factors that contribute to knowledge hiding. By focusing on these issues, organizations can expose the full potential of their employees' knowledge and enhance overall performance. The analysis of these studies reveals a complex relationship of factors influencing knowledge hiding. Individual motivations, contextual factors, and organizational culture all contribute to this behavior. The consequences are far-reaching, influencing individuals, teams, and the organization in its entirety. Additionally, specific factors may mediate or moderate the connection between knowledge hiding and its consequences. Nevertheless, comprehending these dynamics is essential for formulating effective strategies to mitigate knowledge hiding and promote a culture of knowledge sharing within organizations.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the studies examined offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of knowledge hoarding and its effect on organizations. Avença et al. (2024) highlight that the skills, particularly leadership and communication skills play a crucial role in project managers' soft skills. Eni et al., (2024) underscore the importance of individual psychological factors, such as attitude and self-efficacy, in shaping knowledge-sharing intentions. (El-Kassar et al., 2021) Explores the antecedents and consequences of knowledge hiding, linking it to human resource practices, organizational support for creativity, and ultimately, task performance. Chin et al., (2024) examine the paradoxical behavior of individuals engaging in both sharing knowledge and knowledge hoarding, highlighting the strategic nature of these behaviors. Li et al., (2022) shed light on the factors influencing knowledge hiding in online Q&A communities, emphasizing the unique dynamics of virtual environments. (Shen et al., 2024) provides a comprehensive meta-analysis of knowledge hiding, synthesizing existing research and identifying key antecedents, consequences, and boundary conditions. Finally, Kucharska & Rebelo (2022) explore the interplay between knowledge sharing, knowledge hiding, and learning culture, emphasizing the importance of a supportive environment that encourages knowledge exchange. These studies collectively highlight the intricate relationship between individual, interpersonal, and organizational elements that influence knowledge-hiding behaviors. They stress the necessity for organizations to cultivate a culture characterized by trust, openness, and collaboration, enabling employees to share their knowledge and expertise without the apprehension of adverse repercussions. Moreover, they underscore the significance of addressing individual psychological aspects, such as feelings of entitlement and self-efficacy, alongside the adoption of effective leadership strategies that encourage knowledge sharing. By comprehending the complexities associated with knowledge hiding and executing suitable interventions, organizations can fully harness their intellectual capital and improve overall performance.

The study reveals that apparent career sustainability positively influences innovative work behavior. However, this relationship is moderated by the paradoxical interaction of knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding. Specifically, when knowledge sharing is high, the positive effect of career sustainability on innovative work behavior is amplified if knowledge hiding is also high. Conversely, when knowledge sharing is low, high levels of knowledge hiding diminish the positive impact of career sustainability on innovation. The authors emphasize the importance of recognizing and managing this paradoxical tension between knowledge sharing and hiding to foster innovation within organizations, especially among gig workers. They suggest that organizations should create an environment that encourages both collaboration and healthy competition, allowing gig workers to share knowledge while also protecting their competitive advantage. This approach can contribute to both individual career sustainability and organizational innovation.

Limitations: The existing literature on knowledge hiding, as represented by these articles, exhibits certain limitations. These include a narrow focus on specific contexts, an overemphasis on individual factors, and a

neglect of external influences. Future research should adopt a more holistic approach, considering the interplay of individual, interpersonal, and organizational factors, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge hiding and its implications for organizations. Furthermore, research should explore knowledge hiding in diverse organizational settings, including virtual teams and online communities, to enhance the generalizability of findings.

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