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Servant Leadership and Knowledge Hiding: The Moderating Role of Personality Traits in Academic Settings

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Abstract

Knowledge hiding behavior cannot be denied even in academic settings, servant leadership along with personality traits may mitigate such behavior. This study investigates the direct relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding, further, the personality traits have been tested for the moderating role between servant leadership and knowledge hiding behavior. The convenient random sampling technique was applied and data was collected from 369 faculty members of different Universities. This study used SPSS for analysis. The obtained data was validated and was confirmed by testing composite reliability, average variance extracted, means shared value, and reliability. The analysis found an indirect correlation between servant leadership and knowledge hiding. Moreover, the moderating roles of openness to experience and consciousness were also confirmed. The study adds a novel contribution to the literature. Practical implications and future avenues have been discussed.

Keywords: *Consciousness, Knowledge Hiding, Openness to Experience, and Servant Leadership.*

Introduction

The primary moral objective of servant leaders is to assist their workforces (Lumpkin & Achen, 2018) and such a style is important for the survival of organizations and tackling challenges (Obi et al., 2020). Servant leaders prefer their employees' needs and interests (Hunter et al., 2013). Servant leaders help their employees in developing their careers along with their well-being (Latif & Marimon, 2019). Transferring leadership roles to staff increases the likelihood that they will grow into competent, knowledgeable, and encouraged individuals who will improve the organization's overall management and operations (Abdulmuhsin et al., 2021). Several studies concluded the direct relation with work outcomes (Anas et al.,

2022) for example, work engagement, performance, organizational effectiveness, spirituality, and employee motivation (Baloch et al., 2021). Similarly, it reduces the negative impact of turnover, counterproductive work behavior, and cynicism (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2017).

Organizational success is dependent on the exchange of knowledge. Employees share their knowledge for continuous improvement which is effective both for individuals and organizations (Zhou et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2022). Exchanging knowledge encounter the concealment of knowledge which occurs whenever a person purposefully conceals knowledge upon request by colleagues in the workplace (Cao, 2022). Knowledge hiding can be done in ways, (a) evasive hiding; (b) playing dumb; (c) and rationalized hiding (Connelly et al., 2012). Evasive hiding is to provide dissimilar information. Playing dumb is ignoring the demanded knowledge and the rationalized knowledge hiding is making excuses for the requested knowledge (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). Individuals may engage in such behaviors for several reasons, including a worry about losing their power, or status. Due to the high levels of negative consequences, the frequency of knowledge-hiding behaviors at work is increasing more quickly than the frequency of knowledge-sharing behaviors (Holten et al., 2016; Connelly et al.,2019; Gul et al., 2022a; Gul, et al., 2022b; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2011; Men et al., 2019).). Intellectual capital serves a vital role in every organization which would have an impact on productive employees and even organizations. Consequently, it may be challenging to achieve desirable outcomes in intellectual capital due to the propensity of information concealment. (Connelly and Kevin Kelloway, 2003; Peng, 2013). Knowledge hiding is an emerging issue in organizations and has a substantial impact on work output (Flynn et al., 2022). Individuals who hide knowledge would face similar behavior which would affect their performance (Wu et al., 2021).

Organizations have to bear huge costs due to knowledge hiding, for example, 46% of employees in China admitted to knowledge hiding (Peng, 2013). Similarly, Fortune 500 businesses reported a $31.5 billion loss in revenue (Babcock, 2004). Due to such loss, The role of leaders is to figure out how to avoid it in their organizations. Servant leadership is one of the best options in such a case to use when characterizing unethical behavior in businesses (Lumpkin and Achen, 2018). By serving as ethical mentors, promoting higher criteria through the use of sanctions and rewards, and demonstrating apprehension and caution for employees, servant leaders may have a positive influence on the moral standards of their teams (Sun et al., 2020). knowledge hiding is often considered by most employees as unprofessional and unfavorable to the values of the organization and employees (Batool et al., 2021; Serenko, 2019). In a setting with high service levels, knowledge hoarding could likewise be viewed as inappropriate (Oliveira et al., 2021) and affect behavior (Khan et al., 2020).

Our study is based on the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). In the workplace, employees seek to replicate leaders' behavior and deeds, according to the social learning hypothesis (Wu et al., 2021). Communication between servant leaders and their subordinates on what is good or wrong through ongoing discussion (He et al., 2020). Consequently, social learning theory is useful in explaining how followers adopt the learning strategy through social learning. Under servant leadership, this approach promotes employees to share their expertise more widely. Employees' motivation to use a servant leadership style and share their knowledge with their coworkers is significantly influenced by attitude, subjective standards, and perceived behavioral control. Servant leadership has been investigated in a variety of studies with knowledge hiding behavior (e.g. Shafi et al., 2020; Gul et al., 2021c; Tripathi, 2020; Ogunlela, 2018) while studies are required to enrich the literature on the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding. We add to the body of literature on the transfer of knowledge in academia (Tan, 2016) by concentrating on instances where peers withhold knowledge in response to clear requests. The need to extend the literature and follow the recommendations of Haq et al., (2021) the first objective of our study is to investigate the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding.

The second objective of the study is to explore the moderating role of personality traits (Openness to experience and Consciousness) in the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding.

Research demonstrates that openness to experience and consciousness are the significant facets of knowledge management (Ali et al., 2021; Ayub et al., 2021; Matzler & Müller, 2011). Development of personalities and behavior toward coworkers and organizations have undergone a significant shift in the twenty-first century. These recent shifts have been related to the challenges of obtaining and keeping quality jobs. However, these motivations might often also lead to unnoticed and less appropriate behaviors. Knowledge concealing behavior is one such issue that firms are dealing with in this advanced era (Wu, 2021). According to Connelly et al. (2012), and Serenko (2019), it is frequently related to other bad tendencies such as knowledge hoarding, unproductive working behavior, hostility, and even knowledge sabotage. These results imply that information concealing is a separate and understudied construct that merits investigation since it may have a detrimental impact on performance.

However, studies have neglected personality and negative behavior, which have the potential to either hamper or enhance knowledge hiding in organizations, especially when they are interrelated (Bukhari et al., 2021). We contend that a complex interplay between personality traits and environmental circumstances (servant leadership) leads to knowledge hiding. We firmly think that to obtain the most accurate picture of how knowledge concealing functions, we must apply a person-by-situation strategy. It is time to fill in the significant gaps in our knowledge of how personality and servant leadership interact to explain knowledge hiding. Haq et al., (2021) suggested that personality traits may moderate the relationship between servant leadership and other types of mistreatment (knowledge hiding).

Our study will help in better understanding how personal and situational factors influence knowledge hiding in academic settings. The same has been fewer studies in the educational context and is common (Hernaus et al., 2019). This tactic of masking behavior is particularly pertinent to academia (Demirkasimoglu, 2016) since researchers frequently hold information that is sufficiently complex (Connelly et al., 2012). We concentrate on the understudied context of mistrusted interpersonal relationships, which are marked by unfavorable expectations, potentially hostile exchanges, and a lack of faith in the intentions of others (Lewicki et al., 1998). Mistreatment and mistrusted behaviors are common in academia (Feist and Gorman, 2013) which results in negative behavior. It has been found that due social support (Wills, 1991) may discourage knowledge hiding. Individuals might think of personal benefits and other resources before sharing knowledge (Tufail et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2010) thus we assume knowledge hiding could be observed in academic settings. Within the educational context, knowledge hiding is based on the trade-off between reward and cost (Wang et al., 2014). According to Yu et al., (2013) individuals normally share unimportant knowledge and withhold vital and implicit knowledge (Ford and Staples, 2008). Consequently, the same would be true for mistrusted relationships and colleagues who do not share knowledge due to a lack of trust (Currie and Kerrin, 2003). Intense competitions, publication pressure, and gaining project funding incline toward knowledge hiding (Walsh and Hong, 2003). Managerial support may buffer this phenomenon, similarly, innovative and goal-oriented employees would share knowledge for potential gain.

Literature Review

Servant Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

Servant leadership is "the promotion of normatively suitable behavior with followers and the demonstration of normatively desirable behavior via personal activities and interpersonal relationships (Reed et al., 2011). Andersen (2018) defined two attributes of servant leadership. The first one is related to honorable conduct while the second is related that the leaders sway their followers, promote altruistic conduct inside the company, and hinder immoral activities. setting high expectations for followers, guiding them, and treating them fairly while holding them accountable for appropriate behavior (Latif and Marimon, 2019). According to social learning theory, By seeing and modeling other people's social behavior, one can learn social behavior. Social learning theory's explanation of the mentoring strategy enables servant leaders to consciously or accidentally influence subordinates' behavior in this way. (Bandura, 1977). SLT analyzes

the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding. Based on the SLT, individuals acquire knowledge through the actions and behavior of their leaders. The workers learn acceptable behavior which supports them perform respectably through this process of role modeling. Leader's moral conduct influences employees (Liden et al., 2014) which is reliable for observing desired moral behavior. Such role models influence individuals' behavior to follow ethical behavior and result in positive behavior (Song et al., 2015). Servant leadership may engage in rewards for cooperative activities and discourage unethical actions like knowledge hiding (Iqbal et al., 2020). It is assumed that servant leadership and knowledge hiding would have a negative relationship. Observing servant leadership in organizations, followers easily discriminate between positive and negative actions in the workplace. Servant leaders may help in implementing knowledge management (Abdulmuhsin et al., 2021). Servant leaders ensure subordinates' needs (Spreitzer, 1995), helping them in acquiring new skills (Walumbwa et al., 2010), and significant existence (van Dierendonck and Patterson, 2014). In sum that considering these positive effects servant leadership would likely inversely correlate with knowledge hiding behavior, thus we propose:

H $_1$: There is a significant association between servant leadership and knowledge hiding.

The Moderating role of Personality Traits

Individuals that are open to experience aggressively seek out encounters that may be innovative or even fully unique (Gul et., 2020d; Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015). Such individuals try to explore new ideas. Studies have shown that openness to experience is inversely related to conforming to the values of others (Parks-Leduc et al. 2015). Mixed results have been reported between this trait and dishonesty (Nguyen and Biderman 2013; Williams et al. 2010). People with high degrees of openness are enquiring about the inner and outside worlds, eager to consider novel concepts and unorthodox ideals, and more sensitive to both good and negative emotions, which may influence both desired and undesirable behaviors such as sharing or withholding knowledge (Anand & Jain, 2014; Matzler et al., 2008).

Similarly, anti-social behavior has also been reported negatively (Moisuc et al., 2018). Personality traits have been studied with the behavioral disorder (de Vries and van Prooijen, 2019) and knowledge hiding (Issac and Baral, 2018). It is likely to be assumed that the openness to experience when paired with servant leadership would mitigate the negative effect of knowledge hiding. Individuals who are higher on openness to experience would have the flexibility of ignoring the knowledge hiding behavior. They will thus become more tolerant of immoral behavior as a result. They will think and consider the positive aspect of servant leadership and their performance would not be affected.

Consciousness is the consideration of being goal-oriented and organized (Giluk and Postlethwaite, 2015). It has two facets achievement and dependability. Achievement is the tendency to work hard and meet deadlines while the latter is related to being organized and responsible (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Consciousness employees take responsibility (Witt et al., 2002) and have been found less engaged in unethical activities (Roberts and Hogan, 2001). They not only think and act positively for themselves but for others as well (Moon, 2001). Similarly, conscientiousness is inversely related to counter-product behavior (Mercado et al., 2018). These findings concluded that conscientious employees are less likely to cheat (Giluk and Postlethwaite 2015), and deviant work behavior (Salgado, 2002). Since morally ambiguous actions frequently trample upon acceptable norms, we anticipate conscientious people to be less inclined to defend such actions (Khan et al., 2016) and are expected to be more likely to adhere to standards of conduct and may not hide knowledge (Arshad and Ismail, 2018).

We assume that the organizational setting is related to the supply of stimuli-response, reflecting a person's position on the trait or behavior. For example, any situation which is solely characterized by social exchange may be acceptable for deviant behavior like knowledge hiding because adjusting to such a setting by transferring knowledge may be related to the fundamentals of high or low knowledge concealing for a variety of reasons. Studies examining related themes have also used a similar approach for knowledge

sharing (Liu and DeFrank, 2013), and for these reasons, the same thing, we think, may apply to knowledge hiding. The goal-oriented employees would not consider knowledge hiding and would be less engaged in knowledge hiding when combined with servant leadership. Thus, we hypothesized that:

H $_2$: Openness to experience moderates the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding, such that this relationship is less negative for higher openness to experience.

H $_3$: Consciousness moderates the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding, such that this relationship is weaker for higher consciousness.

Methods

Sample and Procedure

We targeted faculty members of the universities. The study followed the convenience sampling technique. This technique helps data collection cost-effectively and efficiently (Yingfei et al., 2021). The no of public and private universities/degree awarding institutes are 40 (Zhou et al., 2022). No specific department was targeted and data was collected from faculty in all departments. This technique helped us to record the responses of the easily available respondents. Different organizations have different issues, thus we targeted the same organizations i.e. universities which made it feasible for us to avoid assessing and perceiving diverse contributing elements significantly across organizations (Zhou et al., 2022). Before approaching the respondents, prior permission was obtained from the Registrars of the universities. The aim and context of the research were explained to the prospective respondents and questionnaires were disseminated. Data was collected in two rounds, and before the distribution of the survey tool, each questionnaire was codded to match the responses after collection. The time gap between rounds should be neither too small (Babalola et al., 2017) nor too long (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In the first round, data regarding servant leadership and personality traits were collected while in the second round (6 weeks gap) responses regarding knowledge hiding were recorded. We distributed 450 questionnaires and 400 were returned in the first round. We collected 381 questionnaires from the second round. Analyzing for missing data and matching the codes the useable questionnaires were 369.

Measures

Responses of the respondents regarding study variables were recorded through adopted questionnaires. We used 28 items questionnaire developed by Liden et al., (2008) for assessing servant leadership. Knowledge hiding was measured through 12 items scale by Connelly et al., (2012) and lastly, we utilized a questionnaire designed by (John & Srivastava, 1999) which contained 10 items for openness to experience and 9 items for conscientiousness.

The demographic analysis concluded that the average age of the participants of the study was 37.2 years. Regarding tenure, the average tenure of the faculty in their respective university was 8.7%. 69% of the faculty hold MS/MPhil degrees, 27% had Ph.D., and the rest 4 had the post-doctorate certificate. Regarding tenure, the average teaching experience was 9 years.

Validity Analysis

To check the validity of the variables' composite reliability, average variance extracted, mean shared value, and Cronbach alpha was measured. All the values were above the threshold values and confirmed the validity.

The resulted values have been provided in table 1.

Table 1: Validity & Reliability

S.No	Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	α
1	Servant Leadership	0.90	0.71	0.47	0.87
2	Knowledge Hiding	0.91	0.72	0.47	0.81
3	Openness to exp	0.89	0.69	0.46	0.78
4	Consciousness	0.92	0.73	0.47	0.84

Demographic variables i.e. age, gender, Qualification, and tenure have been found to have a significant impact on variables (e.g. Peng, 2013). As a continuous variable, age and tenure were measured. Data was collected from different Universities and disparities were expected, thus, one-way ANOVA was measured to observe differences. The results displayed that the F value of tenure was significant and thus was used as a control variable.

Table 2 exhibits the direct and moderating effects. The results confirmed the indirect relation between servant leadership and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.05$). Regarding the moderating analysis, it was confirmed that openness to experience moderates the indirect relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding in such a way that the relationship was stronger for higher openness to experience where the change in R square was 0.21. The last hypothesis proposed that consciousness moderates the indirect relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding. The obtained values showed the moderating effect where the change in R square was 0.08, a low value but significant.

Table 2: Moderation Analysis

	Knowledge Hiding		
	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1			
Tenure		0.02**	
Step 2			
SL	-0.34**	0.32**	
Opn to exp	-0.41**	0.47**	
Consc	-0.55**	0.54**	
Step 3			
SL x OPP	0.29**	0.26**	0.21**
SL x Consc	0.37**	0.46**	0.08**

N = 369

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

Based on the social learning theory, we investigated the impact of servant leadership on knowledge hiding. Our results concluded that servant leadership and knowledge hiding are inversely correlated. Further, the study explored the moderating role of openness to experience and consciousness between servant leadership and knowledge hiding and the results confirmed that both the variables moderate the relationship between servant leadership and knowledge hiding.

Theoretical Contribution

Our study contributes to the literature by following the recommendations of Haq et al., (2021). A positive leadership style influences knowledge management practices. Previous studies have investigated the positive aspect of knowledge management i.e. knowledge sharing (Xiao et al., 2017; Bavik et al., 2018), and has been recommended to be tested for positive aspects (Ishaque et al., 2020). Participants of the study were full-time faculty members of Public and Private sector universities where knowledge hiding may be observed. Our findings supported the same phenomenon in academia where employees hold knowledge (Ford & Staples, 2008).

Another novel contribution of our study is to consider the recommendations of the studies of Zhou et al., (2022) and Haq et al., (2021) which called for the moderating role of personality traits to be tested for different types of negative behavior, for example, knowledge hiding. Openness to experience and consciousness have an inverse relationship with knowledge hiding but when paired with servant leadership mitigate the negative effect. It confirms that individuals who are higher in openness to experience or organized are willing to share their knowledge. Acquiring new knowledge is not possible without exchanging ideas. However, researchers have claimed that individuals may not share knowledge protecting from "knowledge parasites" who do not work equally or provide the required knowledge or effort (Wu, 2021). Leadership style influences employees' behavior positively or negatively (Park et al., 2013). Further, a positive leadership style creates a creative and dependable environment (Lin & Hsiao, 2014). In organizations, where servant leadership is being observed, employees would follow their plans and guidelines and would not conceal knowledge, however, it is not sure that personality traits assist in anticipating the attitude and behavior of employees (Chen et al., 2020) as knowledge hiding is the personal interaction between individuals but can be influenced by leadership (Feng & Wang, 2019).

Implications

Our study provides few implications for higher educational institutions. Knowledge and personality traits are personal and one cannot be influenced by force. Individuals may consider the leaders' reward or coercive power and may not be involved in knowledge hiding, yet the leaders would not be sure for playing dumb or providing less information. Such a problem may be tackled by the creation of fair treatment and leaders' knowledge-sharing behavior (Arain, Bhatti, et al., 2020; Arain, Hameed, et al., 2020). Cooperative culture is important for achieving such a desirable environment where the leaders do not hide knowledge from subordinates and need to share their tacit knowledge for future responsibilities. The leaders may form teams and assign them shared goals. Shared goals would motivate team members for collective efforts and would create a sense of harmony (Zur et al., 2012). Cooperative goal interdependence could also be beneficial for negating knowledge hiding (Nadeem et al., 2020). This technique would help learners and colleagues as it implies mutual trust. Individuals with openness to experience may share their novel ideas and thus knowledge hiding would be negated.

Knowledge hiding may harm the hiders themselves (Cerne et al., 2014). Educational institutes need to be cautious regarding the personality traits of a potential candidate while offering the job. Academia needs collaborative individuals (Hernaus et al., 2018) rather than industrial science which requires secrecy (Haeussler, 2011). In an academic setting, the nature of the job is to disseminate knowledge still in many cases, scholars inconsistently hide knowledge (Banagou et al., 2021). Thus, educational institutes need to understand the reasons for occurrences. Knowledge hiding may not be controlled by an institution (Serenko & Bontis, 2016), job design may help in this regard.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study is not without limitations. First, we relied on cross-sectional and self-reported data. It was not possible to know the frequency of the knowledge hiders, further, we could not examine how often a

respondent was reluctant to admit the knowledge hiding behavior. Hence, further studies may be conducted to know whether the hider intentionally hid the knowledge or if it was based on some mistrust or environmental factor. Longitudinal research may answer this limitation.

Second, knowledge hiding was measured as unidimensional and only two dimensions of personality traits were considered. Further studies may consider the dimensions along with other types of personality traits. In addition, we considered the personality traits as potential moderators, other variables like affective commitment and trust in the leader or interpersonal trust need to be explored. The committed employees were found to be less engaged in knowledge-hiding behavior (Connelly et al., 2012).

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