

Dark Side Of Knowledge Hiding At Workplace: Role Of Trust In Implementation Of Sustainable Practices

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Abstract

In the current competitive and fast-paced world, higher education institutions have become more aware of the need for sustainability. Despite the evident recognition of the values of knowledge sharing and transparency in the sustainability activities, a least researched aspect remains knowledge hiding. Knowledge hiding refers to the intentional concealment of information or knowledge from work peers by an individual which may frustrate the execution of sustainability activities in work environments. Using organizational behaviour and theory of trust literature the researchers describe the intricate relationship between knowledge hiding patterns and the dynamics of trust in sustainability activities. Knowledge hiding has the potential to destroy the confidence of the employees, making it difficult for them to cooperate and collaborate in the successful adoption of sustainability activities. This paper discusses the dark aspect of knowledge hiding in educational institutions and its implication on the adoption of sustainability activities. Trust plays an important role in mitigating the harmful effects of knowledge hiding and fostering a culture of transparency which is helpful in sustainable development. This paper also contributes to both research and practice by shedding light on the relationship between knowledge hiding, trust, and sustainability, and offering insights for educational institutions, to cultivate environment that promote knowledge sharing and sustainable practices.

Keywords: - Knowledge Hiding, Knowledge Sharing, Sustainable practices, Trust

Introduction

Knowledge hiding is increasingly being recognized as a critical organizational issue with both practical and theoretical implications, particularly in contexts that demand collaboration and innovation, such as sustainability initiatives and higher education. In today's highly networked work environments, knowledge is anything but a fixed asset; it is a living asset that determines the competitiveness and flexibility of institutions. But whereas knowledge sharing is the cornerstone of aggregate success, all too many will engage in knowledge hiding—the intentional withholding of information when it is requested. The consequences are extreme: it disrupts interpersonal trust, separates workplace collaboration, fuels incivilities, and destroys the organizational climate (Černe et al., 2014). In sustainability situations, this behavior is especially deleterious because coordinated and transparent streams of knowledge are a prerequisite for the building of broad-based strategies such as the elimination of wastes or the reduction of energy consumption or community mobilization. If knowledge is hidden, sustainability activities have the potential to become compartmentalized, redundant, and ineffective.

The Universities stand apart from this debate because of their double mandate: that of centers for the production and conveyance of knowledge, and also that of social agents for the illustration of sustainability (Moore, 2005). Their mission of developing graduates with

analytical, critical, and interpersonal skills is compromised when knowledge hiding undermines teaching, research, and collegial interactions. In teaching, faculty may hesitate to share pedagogical innovations or class materials; in research, academics may conceal data or research ideas due to competition for grants and recognition; and in administration, negative gossip or organizational politics may further erode the culture of openness. This aligns with the psychology of ownership (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018), where individuals view knowledge as personal property, reinforcing their reluctance to share. Moreover, distrust—whether toward individuals, colleagues, or the broader institution—intensifies defensive knowledge-hiding behaviours, creating reciprocal cycles of secrecy (Labafi, 2017; Butt & Ahmad, 2019). These dynamics not only weaken trust but also jeopardize the very identity of universities as knowledge-driven organizations. The antecedents of knowledge hiding are multidimensional. At the individual level, factors such as lack of confidence in one's expertise, fear of exploitation, or perceived career insecurity can trigger defensive withholding (Kumar Jha & Varkkey, 2018). At the interpersonal level, weak relationships, absence of mutual respect, and distrust foster environments where reciprocity fails, encouraging concealment (Butt & Ahmad, 2019). At the organizational level, competitive cultures, exploitative performance pressures (e.g., “publish or perish”), and perceived politics create systemic incentives for secrecy (Malik et al., 2019). Even the nature of knowledge—whether tacit or explicit—shapes hiding behaviours, as complex or context-specific knowledge is more likely to be withheld (Labafi, 2017). These layers together illustrate that knowledge hiding is not merely an individual shortcoming but a systemic phenomenon shaped by workplace structures, cultural norms, and institutional priorities. Despite the clear evidence of its harmful outcomes, research on knowledge hiding in higher education remains limited (Demirkasimoglu, 2016; Xiong et al., 2019). Most studies in knowledge management have focused on knowledge transfer and sharing (Anand et al., 2021; Serenko et al., 2010), while the darker counterpart—knowledge hiding—has only recently gained attention (Yang & Ribiere, 2020; Su, 2021). This gap is significant, since HEIs face unique pressures that may amplify knowledge hiding, including short-term academic contracts, competitive funding landscapes, and increasingly market-like environments where reputation and prestige overshadow collaboration. If these dynamics are not consciously governed, the university will threaten its mission of being a knowledge institution and its leadership role in sustainability transformations.

Ultimately, the literature indicates that trust is the key mediator. Adopting social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), knowledge sharing thrives where the reciprocities and fairness are guaranteed, but where distrust instils defensive secrecy. Likewise, institutional trust theory (Zucker, 1986) indicates that open systems, inclusive communication, and fair recognition are the keys for transgressing the hidden toxicity of knowledge hiding. For higher education institutions, building trust is not simply a reduction of the level of conflict but opening the way towards genuine academic interchange, constructing supportive cultures, and guaranteeing sustainability for research, teaching, and community. Despite the overwhelming importance of knowledge sharing, organizations are also facing the dark truth of knowledge hiding, that is, intentional withholding of demanded knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012). While a mere episode of ignorance or forgetfulness is hardly comparable, knowledge hiding is done intentionally and sometimes strategic. Employees may refuse to furnish information for fear of exploitation, competitive needs, possession or non-acknowledgement (Černe et al., 2014; Labafi, 2017). Professors in universities may resist sharing their years-built teaching sources in fear of losing intellectual credits; researchers may refuse the project information or outcomes in fear of losing the competitiveness for the research funding; students may inhibit

the effort while performing in a group work regime and assume "free-riding" attitudes that punish their group members. At the organizational level, the knowledge hiding is further aggravated by the toxic workplace relationship such as incivilities, gossips, excessive competitiveness or exploitative performance cultures (e.g., "publish or perish" cultures), forming distrustful atmospheres. Knowledge hiding impacts strongly when contextualized under sustainability. Unlike normal activities, sustainability activities involve high coordination requirements, openness, and boundary-spanning co-operation between various actors and disciplines. Instituting schemes of waste management, the integration of renewable energy technologies, or the integration of sustainability in curricula entails open information-sharing and boundary-spanning learning. Knowledge hiding prevents such processes, entailing wasted effort, poor utilization of resources, and disjointed strategies. It breeds mistrust amongst employees, dilutes teamwork and stunts innovation—all to the detriment of the institution achieving sustainability. Knowledge hiding is therefore neither so much interpersonal restraint but a sustainability risk mechanism that corrodes the very bedrock of organisational efficiency and the higher education sector's broader mission of societal renewal.

Knowledge Hiding at Workplace

Knowledge hiding is a distinct and critical construct for organisational behaviour texts, distinguishing itself from related work such as knowledge hoarding or counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs). Connelly et al. (2012) cluster three key forms under their definition: evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalised hiding. Evasive hiding is characterised by intentional deception, with employees misleading their work associates by providing opaque or misleading information, or developing processes that emphasise their indispensability. Most commonly prompted by job insecurity, competitive work, or that knowledge correlates with personal power, this form is often characterised by employees not just withholding information, but active deception. Playing dumb is the faking of ignorance or acting not to know, with employees able to choose not to share without direct refusal. Rationalised hiding, perhaps the most subtle form, is the provision of supposedly correct bases—for example, confidentiality or complexity—for not sharing information. Even though co-operative at face value, they nevertheless restrict knowledge flows and are potentially more difficult to overcome for organisations. The drives behind knowledge hiding are multidisciplinary in that they extend across the individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels. At the level of individuals, workers can conceal knowledge for fear of substitution, to preserve their position, or due to a lack of self-assurance in their knowledge. At the interpersonal level, issues like poor trust, tension-laden relationships, workplace bullying, exclusion, and gossip significantly influence behaviours. For example, Zhao et al. (2016) posit that hiding knowledge can operate as a revenge mechanism that is in accordance with negative reciprocity theory, by which employees react to exclusion with withdrawing or withholding behaviours. Again, workplace bullying and gossip, even though underappreciated in conventional knowledge management studies, play a significant role in creating a climate of suspicion and mistrust that fuels knowledge hiding (Stagg et al., 2011; Magee et al., 2015). At the organisational level, organisational cultures that stress performer cultures, unhealthy competitiveness, or exploitative work norms (e.g., "publish or perish") provide systemic reasons for withholding rather than sharing.

Though knowledge hiding can at times be justified as a form of protection instead of harmfulness—at times to preserve a coworker from informational overload or to avert abuse

of private information (Connelly et al., 2012)—results are always negative. Scientific studies have demonstrated that knowledge hiding diminishes teamwork, suppresses innovation, decelerates resolving problems, and interferes with carrying out organizational policies (Peng, 2013). Consequences also spread to physical and psychological health of employees, stress, sleep disorder, and less job satisfaction (Magee et al., 2015). In addition, organizational citizenship behaviors decrease in a culture where knowledge hiding is a common practice, turnover intentions and disengagement rise. Although growing awareness remains about its value, study gaps linger. Most are grounded on studies that take leadership, knowledge culture, or individuals' attributes as antecedents (Jha & Varkkey, 2018; Khalid et al., 2018), whereas less attention has been paid to interpersonal negative events (e.g., gossiping, exclusion, bullying) that evoke knowledge hiding. Second, the vast majority of empirical studies are conducted in business organizations with higher education institutions (HEIs) relatively underexamined, despite their dependence on knowledge transfer in education, research, and service. Knowledge hiding in a research environment is also crucial, as collegiality, academic integrity, and universities' mission to build knowledge societies are eroded broadly. Thus, knowledge hiding can only be addressed as a personal coping mechanism and organizational dysfunction. It will take a combination of a number of theory lenses: social exchange theory in order to explain reciprocity and fairness in sharing; negative reciprocity theory to explain retaliatory knowledge hiding; psychological ownership theory to cope with the perception that knowledge is personal property; and quality culture frameworks to explore institutional environments such as HEIs. An interdisciplinary approach thereby allows for a richer understanding of knowledge hiding's current practice, knowledge hiding's perpetuation, and knowledge hiding's reduction. Avoiding knowledge hiding through measures establishing trust, building good work cultures, and strong interpersonal relationships is important, not just for achieving organizational superiority, but for ensuring the implementation of sustainability and innovation plans.

Role of Trust in Sustainable Practices

Trust has become even more a foundation stone for sustainability in higher education institutions (HEIs), acting both as a relational and a strategic resource. Whereas sustainability depends on innovation, cooperation, and long-term involvement, all such things are not possible without a culture of trust that combines administrators, staff, professors, and students. Trust forms a foundation for open governance, fairness in decision-making processes, and inclusivity in participation, which encourages stakeholders to accept sustainability activities in good faith instead of with mistrust. As a point in illustration, if students believe that institutional recycling or energy-reduction activities are really efficient, they are more likely to become active collaborators, thereby emphasizing shared responsibility. On staff and interfaculty levels, trust enables academic communities to share their ideas, voice their concerns, and experiment, promoting innovation and cross-disciplinary work that is so crucial to fostering sustainable resilience in sustainability approaches. This is in accordance with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), whereby individuals will repay positively if they perceive fair play, and with Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's (1995) conceptualization of a trust model where competence, benevolence, and integrity are main preconditions to knowledge sharing and cooperation. The value of trust is optimally derived in the case of the transforming higher education context. With higher education institutions becoming quasi-markets, competition for funds, students' enrollments, and talent-abundant workforces has intensified. Marketization has increased the salience that reputation, loyalty, and students' satisfaction have for the survival and development of institutions. Whilst prestige, brand

image, and organizational attractiveness have been studied empirically as predictors of consumer–organization identification, trust is the tacit antecedent that supports such constructs in the long term (Lozano et al., 2013). Trust breeds loyalty by facilitating relational relations so that students and staff are respected, esteemed, and valued. Moreover, trust is the foundation of quality assurance and quality culture in HEIs because transparent communication of policies, evaluation outcomes, and planning permits stakeholders to internalise the values of the institution. Lacking trust, quality work risked becoming a mere exercise in bureaucracy; with trust, a communal value that grants institutional legitimacy. Trust also plays the role of a connective pin between a sense of intergenerational responsibility and sustainability leadership. Lozano et al. identify that sustainable growth is a bold challenge to HEIs that need to redesign their familiar mechanist models and shift towards whole, sustainability-oriented frameworks. In order to become real leaders and change managers themselves, the university needs to generate trust amongst their internal constituents but also amongst stakeholders and future generations externally. Intergenerational trust guarantees that the activities of the institution today appear as credible, ethically justifiable, and sensitive to the future. Thusly, trust is no longer merely a knowledge-sharing or a reputational-enhancing role; it is the base from which the university is able to construct sustainable futures, quality outcomes, and legitimacy in ever-more competitive and uncertain worlds.

Influence of Knowledge Hiding and Trust on Implementation of Sustainable Practices

The impact of knowledge hiding and trust on sustainable practice implementation is multifaceted and conclusive. Knowledge hiding, in its forms of evasive manners, playing dumb, or rationalized excuses (Connelly et al., 2012), is a silent blockade that divides organizational efforts. By withholding information about innovative approaches, resource-conserving processes, or situationally specific expertise, employees create roadblocks that hinder decision-making and lessen sustainability programs' effectiveness. In the long term, these practices lower organizational learning, encourage effort duplication, and build mistrust among workers that, together, erode cross-departmental cooperation required by sustainability. Consistent with negative reciprocity theory (Zhao et al., 2016), knowledge hiding can even be vengeful—workers may willfully conceal knowledge due to exclusion, incivility, or workplace rumour, and thereby perpetuate secrecy cycles. Dynamics like these are severely destructive in higher education organizations, where sustainability is contingent upon open research cooperation, transparent maintenance of instructing practices, and cross-disciplinary problem-solving. By contrast, trust serves as the counterpoison to the latent toxicity that is knowledge hiding. Trust offers the psychological security and self-assurance that allows individuals to share knowledge in a risk-free manner, free from exploitation or judgment. When employees sense integrity, fairness, and benevolence in their organizations (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995), they are more likely to communicate openly and to collaborate on innovation. In sustainability scenarios, trust converts compliance-driven checklists into shared missions where stakeholders experience a sense of ownership in outcomes. This is consistent with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), where reciprocal, trust-based relationships foster cooperation and long-term involvement. A culture of trust therefore encourages open knowledge flows, eliminates defence behaviours, and facilitates co-creation of sustainable practices that are both durable and novelty-driven.

The relationships between knowledge hiding and trust show a dichotomy: whereas knowledge hiding disengages and derails sustainable change, trust fosters stakeholders' cohesion and institutional legitimacy. Organisations and HEIs that fail to transcend

knowledge hiding risk creating arenas of disengagement and fission, in which sustainability work is superficial or tokenistic. Institutions that, on the contrary, labour at developing trust—at transparent governance, recognition schemes, mentoring programs, and participatory decision-making—can put knowledge as a common resource that spurs innovation and sustainability to work. Therefore, implementation of sustainable practices cannot solely be a question of technical or procedural explanation, for it must also capture the social and relational dynamism of trust that counterbalances knowledge hiding and permits organizations to achieve true, long-term sustainability.

Discussion

The paper asserts that knowledge hiding and trust are new and under-researched constructs in higher education institutions even as HEIs are highly knowledge-intensive organizations. Whereas organizational writings are replete with information about knowledge hiding in organizational settings, its dynamics in the contexts of scholarship are worthy of specific focus. University knowledge hiding factors are multifaceted and environment-sensitive depending on the type of knowledge (tacit or explicit), job role as an academic, work climate, and social relationships that characterize knowledge solicitations. Under the teacher function, professors have a mandate to impart knowledge to students, evoke curiosity, and share learning resources with their coworkers. Nevertheless, a faction of scholars is too self-conscious in divulging their innovations in their instruction in the classroom, lecture notes, or supplementary resources, mostly due to time, effort, and intellectual property invested in preparing them. That is consistent with psychological ownership theory (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018), whereby individuals consider knowledge as their property and are not therefore at liberty to share. Even students can be culprits of subtle knowledge hiding behaviors, such as free-riding in group work, playing dumb during interaction segments, or distracting a member in a group—practices not productive in group work. It is more prevalent and harmful in the research role. Researchers will conceal research ideas, project information, or results due to fear of idea stealing, competition for funds, or pressure of "publish or perish" environments. Spy cultures that breed secrecy and distrust erode collegiality and discourage cross-pollination across disciplines. Research also shows that knowledge hiding can be a retaliatory act (Zhao et al., 2016), growing out of exclusion, gossip, or incivility. Acrimonious gossip in the workplace in particular foments a toxic environment that harms trust, lowers morale, and upsets the shared sense that is necessary for innovative studies and sustainable outcomes. Such behaviors are consistent with negative reciprocity theory, whereby individuals act back against perceived mistreatment or threats with a refusal to cooperate.

For the service function, where scholars are engaged with institutional government, community involvement, and policy participation, knowledge hiding can frustrate activities depending on open communication and shared values. Without knowledge sharing, learning at the organizational level is hindered, and quality strategy implementation and sustainability activities are frustrated. There are no universities with a sound culture of exchanging good practices, along with inefficient communication channels, that can successfully diffuse quality culture, policies, and quality evaluation outcomes effectively. Besides damaging collegial trust, institutional legitimacy is also lost. By contrast, the presence of trust reshapes these relationships. Trust is a relational lubricant and a strategic resource that facilitates openness, lowers defensive behaviors, and encourages individuals to engage in shared goals. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) views fostering reciprocity this way: as long as there is a belief in fairness and integrity by the faculty and students, they will return the favor by

exchanging knowledge more openly. Institutional trust theory (Zucker, 1986) also stresses that open systems, common norms, and stable governance structures provide an environment where individuals feel they can share their knowledge with impunity. In courses, where this trust permits professors to share materials without risk of exploitation, in research, where it gives confidence to shared projects, and in service, where ownership of institutional goals is promoted, the result is that while knowledge hiding wrecks collaborations, trust heals them to permit universities to engage in innovation, quality, and sustainability.

The analysis also highlights that the effects of knowledge hiding and trust are not merely interpersonal, but systemic. Knowledge hiding perpetuates inefficiencies, repeated efforts, and damaged organizational citizenship behaviours, whereas trust facilitates quality assurance, durable loyalty, and institutional reputation. In sustainability implementation within HEIs, the relational texture of trust is critical: it converts knowledge from a personal asset into a shared resource, allowing institutions to achieve their mission to form future generations and support sustainable societal change.

Conclusion

This article has been important in highlighting the dark side of knowledge hiding and its detrimental effects on the implementation of sustainable practices in organizations and higher education institutions. Sustainability, however, relies on openness, collaboration, and reciprocal flow of knowledge across persons and departments, while knowledge hiding breeds obstacles that result in fragmentation of work, duplication of efforts, and dissolving innovation. The argument has shown that knowledge hiding is driven by a complex interplay between individual insecurity, interpersonal relationships such as exclusion and gossiping, and organizational cultures that emphasize malicious competition or personal success over the shared purpose. In higher education institutions where instruction, research, and service all rely on knowledge sharing, such activities not only sabotage institutional sustainability agendas, but also jeopardize the scholarly mission of preparing graduates competent to participate in a knowledge-based sustainable society.

Similarly, the paper has noted the central role of trust as the counterweight to knowledge hiding. Trust fosters psychological security, transparency, and reciprocation so that stakeholders will share knowledge reciprocally with the belief that they will not take advantage or be excluded. Incorporated into work cultures, trust translates sustainability measures that are rule-based into genuine shared commitments. This way, trust acts like a relational lubricant and a strategic enabler of sustainable change. For higher education institutions that are competing in progressively marketplace-like conditions, the building of trust is also indispensable for the building of a stronger institutional identity, for the enhancement of loyalty, and for the fostering of a quality and social responsibility culture. The implications of these findings are doubly-fold. Theoretically, the paper contributes to knowledge management and organisational behaviour research by constructing knowledge hiding as a central sustainability impediment and by theorising that trust acts as the intermediary agency that counterbalances its impact. Practically, the paper advocates a recasting of work cultures: poisonous work demands such as "publish or perish," "24/7 work schedules," and "up or out" policies need to be redesigned because they engender secrecy and knowledge hoarding. Instead, universities and organizations need to create wholesome work cultures that engender trustworthiness, sharedness of identity, and environments of support. Processes such as knowledge-sharing webs, mentoring schemes, recurrent socialisation, and

explicit norms associated with ethical conduct have the potential to reduce the desire to conceal knowledge and boost morale sensitisation.

Future studies will also need to consider the context-narrowing measures for building trust, especially in HEIs where short-term contracts, competitive funding, and plural stakeholders influence knowledge-shares behavior. Longitudinal studies will also identify the long-run change dynamics for the sustainability of the outcomes of trust and the conditions under which organizational culture, ethics, and leadership intervention successfully lower knowledge hiding in a sustained manner. Measuring these dynamics will enable organizations and HEIs to fully utilize their knowledge bases, maintain their practices in the long run, and produce finally sustainable and lasting futures.

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