Exploring the Influence of Workplace Ostracism on Knowledge Hiding: The Mediating Effect of Reciprocal Beliefs

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the impact of workplace ostracism on knowledge hiding, emphasizing the mediating role of reciprocity beliefs among library staff at the University of Tehran.

Methodology: This research is descriptive and survey-based, and applied in terms of purpose. The statistical population comprises 158 library staff members at the University of Tehran. Data were collected using three standardized instruments: the Knowledge Hiding Questionnaire (Serenko and Bontis, 2016), the Reciprocity Beliefs Questionnaire (Wu et al., 2006), and the Workplace Ostracism Questionnaire (Ferris et al., 2008). Reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, while validity was assessed through convergent and discriminant validity. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (frequency distribution) and inferential statistics, applying structural equation modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS.

Findings: The results show that workplace ostracism has a positive and direct effect on knowledge hiding. Workplace ostracism also positively influences reciprocity beliefs, which in turn significantly affect knowledge hiding.

Conclusion: Both generalized and negative reciprocity beliefs strengthen the positive relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding.

Value: This study adds to the growing literature on knowledge hiding and highlights important gaps in understanding how workplace ostracism shapes such behaviors.

Keywords: *Knowledge Hiding, Reciprocity Beliefs, Workplace Ostracism, Academic Libraries.*

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Extended Abstract

Introduction: Knowledge, as a valuable asset, plays a crucial role in organizational success; however, knowledge hiding presents a major barrier to effective knowledge sharing. This behavior, defined as the deliberate withholding of information, can arise from factors such as workplace ostracism, negative reciprocity beliefs, and the intention to preserve personal resources. Workplace ostracism, in particular, directly fosters knowledge hiding, thereby reducing innovation, collaboration, and overall organizational performance. Moreover, the different forms of knowledge hiding- evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding- each exert distinct negative effects on organizations. Prior research suggests that, despite organizational efforts to encourage knowledge sharing, knowledge hiding remains a persistent challenge, especially in educational contexts such as universities, which have received comparatively less scholarly attention.

Purpose: This study examines the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding in university libraries, emphasizing the mediating role of reciprocity beliefs. Although knowledge hiding has been widely investigated, its occurrence within higher education remains relatively underexplored. Previous studies highlight the influence of workplace discrimination on knowledge hiding and indicate that workplace ostracism shapes employee behavior differently across cultures and organizational contexts. Considering its importance in academic environments, this research focuses on library staff at the University of Tehran to provide deeper insights into these dynamics.

Methodology: This applied research adopts a descriptive-correlational design with a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding, considering the mediating role of reciprocity beliefs. The statistical population comprised 158 managers, administrative staff, and library heads at the University of Tehran, all of whom participated in the survey. Data were collected using Standardized questionnaires. Knowledge hiding was measured with Serenko and Bontis's (2016) 12-item scale, encompassing evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding. Reciprocity beliefs were assessed using Wu et al.'s (2006) 16-item scale, which covering generalized, negative, and balanced reciprocity beliefs. Workplace ostracism was measured with Ferris et al.'s (2008) 12-item scale. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree.". Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement instruments.

Finding: The findings show that reciprocity beliefs significantly mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding at a 95% confidence level ($P \leq 0.05$, $Z > 1.96$). The calculated Variance Accounted For (VAF) was 0.875 for generalized and negative reciprocity beliefs, indicating full mediation. In contrast, balanced reciprocity beliefs played a weaker role, with a VAF of 0.293, suggesting partial mediation. Structural equation modeling (SEM) further confirmed that reciprocity beliefs exert a significant effect on knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.569$, $t = 7.404$, $P \leq 0.05$). The positive correlation indicates that for every one-unit increase in reciprocity beliefs, knowledge hiding rises by 0.569 standard deviations.

Furthermore, workplace ostracism was found to exert a significant positive effect on knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.729$, $t = 9.689$, $P \leq 0.05$), indicating that a one-unit increase in workplace ostracism result in a 0.729 standard deviation rise in knowledge

hiding. Conversely, workplace ostracism had a significant negative effect on reciprocity beliefs (β = -0.861, t = 10.393, P $\leq$ 0.05), suggesting that as workplace ostracism increases by one unit, reciprocity beliefs decline by 0.861 standard deviations. These findings confirm the study's hypotheses and underscore the critical role of reciprocity beliefs in mediating the relationship between workplace ostracism on knowledge hiding.

Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Value	P-Value	VAF	Sobel Test	Result
Workplace Ostracism -> Reciprocity Beliefs -> Knowledge Hiding	-	-	-	0.875	3.741	Confirmed
Direct Effect	0.729	-	0.000	-	-	-
Indirect Effect	0.251	-	0.000	-	-	-
Total Effect	0.980	-	0.000	-	-	-
Reciprocity Beliefs -> Knowledge Hiding	0.569	7.404	0.000	-	-	Confirmed
Workplace Ostracism -> Knowledge Hiding	0.729	9.689	0.000	-	-	Confirmed
Workplace Ostracism -> Reciprocity Beliefs	-0.861	10.393	0.000	-	-	Confirmed

Conclusion: The findings of this study demonstrate that workplace ostracism exerts a significant positive effect knowledge hiding (Zhao et al., 2016), while it negatively affects reciprocity beliefs (Han et al., 2024). Moreover, reciprocity beliefs were found to positively influence knowledge hiding (Bauwick, 2015). These results have important implications for work environments, particularly within educational institutions. The study underscores the need for organizations to foster a healthy workplace that promotes collaboration, knowledge sharing, and employee well-being, especially among academic staff. Recognizing the adverse impact of ostracism on employees' mental health is essential for cultivating supportive environments. Accordingly, this research can guide organizations in developing clear policies to encourage knowledge sharing and implementing support mechanisms for employees who may experience ostracism.

Value: This study makes an important contribution to the literature on knowledge hiding by offering deeper insights into the underlying factors shaping this phenomenon. The findings highlight notable research gaps, particularly in understanding the intricate relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding. By revealing how experiences of exclusion in the workplace may foster deliberate knowledge withholding. this research offers a nuanced perspective on organizational dynamics. Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity of further exploring modeating and moderating variables that may shape this relationship. These insights can assist organizations in designing targeted strategies to cultivate more inclusive, collaborative, and knowledge-sharing work environment.

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