

Research on the Consequences of Knowledge Hiding

Guanying Lin

School of Management, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China

*Corresponding author: liny2321@163.com

Abstract

In previous studies, scholars have mostly focused on the antecedents of knowledge hiding, exploring the causes and boundary conditions of knowledge hiding. In recent years, scholars have begun to focus on the consequences of knowledge hiding, but the number of related studies is relatively limited. Existing research has discussed the impact of knowledge hiding on performance, creativity, and employee behavior at the individual, team, and organizational levels, but there are still limitations in the research, which are not conducive to a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral consequences of knowledge hiding. Therefore, we need to conduct a systematic review of the effects of knowledge hiding to understand the current research status and future research directions.

Keywords

Knowledge Hiding; Behavioral Consequences; Future Research Directions.

1. Introduction

In today's fiercely competitive market environment, enterprises need to constantly innovate and improve their competitiveness in order to survive and develop. Knowledge management is an important means for enterprises to improve their innovation capabilities. The effectiveness of organizational knowledge management largely depends on the summary and sharing of employees' experiences. Valuable knowledge and experience need to be accumulated, condensed, and applied to maximize their value. However, knowledge is a scarce resource, and some employees not only do not share knowledge, but also intentionally conceal, deceive, or even give incorrect opinions. This phenomenon of knowledge hiding is common in organizations.

Knowledge hiding may pose a threat to beneficial outcomes [1], such as employee innovation performance. The hiders refuse to share the knowledge they possess, inevitably excluding them from any knowledge exchange interaction and thus unable to acquire new institutional knowledge. If knowledge hiding behaviors affects the hider himself, it will inevitably affect organizational performance [2, 3, 4]. Therefore, knowledge hiding can have negative impacts on stakeholders such as knowledge seekers, knowledge hiders, and even teams and organizations, such as undermining colleague trust and employee creativity [5]. In the consequences of knowledge hiding at the individual level, research has shown that knowledge hiding can have a negative impact on the job creativity and prosperity of the hider, and can also lead to silence and happiness among employees of the hider [6, 7]. Employees can also experience emotional exhaustion and exhibit abnormal behavior. However, overall, there is a lack of empirical research on the consequences of knowledge hiding, which limits our understanding of the harm of knowledge hiding.

2. Concept and Dimensions

Knowledge hiding is the act of intentionally not providing knowledge or providing knowledge that is not needed by the seeker when facing knowledge requests from others [1]. Knowledge hiding includes three strategies: evasive hiding, playing dumb hiding, and rationalized hiding[1]. Evasive hiding refers to the hider providing incorrect information or misleading promises to provide complete answers in the future, even if they do not actually intend to provide such information; Playing dumb refers to the hider pretending not to know the relevant knowledge; Rationalized hiding refers to the hider informing that they do not have the ability or authority to provide the required knowledge, for example, the knowledge is confidential or is instructed by others not to be shared with others.

The mainstream view holds that knowledge hiding is an important aspect of knowledge withholding and not the opposite of knowledge sharing [1, 8, 9]. Therefore, we cannot simply equate knowledge hiding with not sharing or a lack of knowledge sharing. To gain a deeper understanding of knowledge hiding, we can distinguish it from other concepts.

Knowledge hiding is not equivalent to a lack of knowledge sharing. A lack of knowledge sharing is more likely due to a lack of knowledge itself that can be shared [10], nor is it equivalent to knowledge hoarding, as accumulated knowledge may be shared in the future, and knowledge hiding is intentional withholding [11]. In addition, although both are harmful to individuals or organizations, unlike counterproductive behaviors, knowledge hiding specifically refers to the occurrence of knowledge requests from others, while counterproductive behaviors can occur at any time. However, although both knowledge hiding and workplace aggression are targeted at individuals, knowledge hiding is not entirely aimed at harming others. Similarly, knowledge hiding is different from workplace incivility and deception, because knowledge hiding can also be polite and not deceptive.

3. Knowledge Hiding and Consequences

At present, research on knowledge hiding mainly focuses on what kind of antecedents and how they lead to knowledge hiding. There is relatively little research on the consequences of knowledge hiding, and it mainly focuses on the individual level. Research generally believes that knowledge hiding can have an impact on the performance, creativity, and other aspects of individuals, teams, and organizations.

3.1. Individual Level

The impact of knowledge hiding at the individual level mainly manifests in individual creativity, innovative behavior, interpersonal relationships, and future knowledge hiding. Negative effects of knowledge hiding are not only effective for those who are hidden, but also reduce the creativity of knowledge hider and even organization [5, 12]. After tracking and investigating the subsequent reactions of knowledge concealers and seekers, scholars found that the hider did anticipate harm and retaliation from interpersonal relationships [13]. In addition to knowledge hiding among colleagues, knowledge hiding between superiors and subordinates can also reduce task performance and affect organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and innovation behavior [14]. Although most studies have confirmed that knowledge hiding has a negative impact, rationalized hiding may bring positive results, such as breaking through the negative reciprocity cycle of knowledge hiding [13]. Scholars found in their research on sales staff in Myanmar that knowledge seekers who find the knowledge hidden from others, will double their efforts and thereby improve sales performance [15]. Similarly, perceptual knowledge hiding can also stimulate benign jealousy mechanisms and promote the creativity of IT personnel [16]. However, this positive or negative effect is not absolute. For example, there

is an inverted U-shaped relationship between explicit and implicit knowledge hiding and innovation quality [17].

3.2. Team and Organization Level

A few scholars have examined the impact of knowledge hiding at the team level, and generally believe that knowledge hiding affects team creativity, new product performance, and team cohesion. Knowledge hiding not only affects individual creativity, but also hinders team creativity [18]. Knowledge hiding can also affect team performance [19], team creativity [20, 21], team organizational citizenship behavior [22], team viability [15], and team learning and absorption ability [20, 19]. Big data will also stimulate knowledge hiding and affect the quality of enterprise decision-making. The results show that Big data features have a significant impact on knowledge hiding behavior. Evasive hiding reduces the quality of enterprise decision-making, playing dumb does not affect the quality of decision-making, and rationalized hiding improves the quality of decision-making [23].

4. Future Directions

Previous studies have mainly explored the antecedents of knowledge hiding, while research on the consequences of knowledge hiding is still in its initial stage. Looking back at previous research findings, knowledge hiding generally has negative effects on individuals (knowledge seeker and knowledge hider), teams, and organizations. A small number of studies have found the "bright side" of knowledge hiding. However, overall, discussions on the consequences of knowledge hiding are still focused on the individual level, and research on the impact on their team and organizational levels is still in its early stages. Scholars have all pointed out that knowledge hiding among members within an organization can create a "cycle of distrust" in people's relationships, and the hider may be maliciously retaliated and harmed by the seeker [5, 13]. However, the specific mechanism and boundary conditions for the formation of this vicious cycle still need further exploration and discussion. In addition, a few scholars have begun to analyze the "boomerang effect", "double-edged sword effect", and "trickle down effect" of knowledge hiding, such as the impact of knowledge hiding on the psychological state, work performance, and innovation ability of hider [5, 24], which opens new avenues for future research. Therefore, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of knowledge hiding, the relationship and mechanism between knowledge hiding and its negative effects urgently need further research and exploration.

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