

Inclusive Leadership and Employees' Knowledge Hiding Behaviors: The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Trust and Affective Commitment as a Moderator

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Abstract

Grounded in Social Learning Theory, this study explores the connection between Inclusive Leadership and Knowledge Hiding Behavior, to better understand the mechanism that how inclusive leadership influences knowledge hiding, and reasons behind certain individuals; dissimilar to others; are comparatively less probable to involve in knowledge hiding under inclusive leadership. This study proposes that Interpersonal trust mediates, and, Affective Commitment moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership, versus knowledge hiding. Data were collected from 297 employees through questionnaire currently enrolled in MBA program in a large private sector university of Pakistan. Confirmatory factor analysis and Process Macro were used to ascertain the reliabilities, validities and hypothesized model through SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0.

The findings tell us that inclusive leadership negatively and significantly influences knowledge hiding. Further, the findings exhibit that interpersonal trust mediates, and, affective commitment, reveals a moderating connection between inclusive leadership, and knowledge hiding. This could be considered one of the pioneer studies which tend to contribute to the literature of knowledge hiding and leadership, by strengthening association between inclusive leadership and knowledge hiding behaviors, converging on the mechanism and boundaries of the relationship.

Keywords: Inclusive leadership; knowledge hiding; affective commitment; interpersonal trust; Pakistan.

1. Introduction

In the recent times, substantial research has explored numerous kinds of positive leadership styles, like Ethical Leadership (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005), Servant Leadership (Russell & Stone, 2002), Authentic Leadership (Novicevic, Harvey, Ronald, & Brown-Radford & 2006) and Participative Leadership (Huang, Iun, Liu & Gong, 2010). However, Inclusive Leadership (Choi, Tran, & Kang, 2017), a more relational and followers centric leadership behavior exhibiting the key features of positive types of leadership, is comparatively less studied. Inclusive leadership (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006: p.947) refers to the “words and deeds by a leader or leaders that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others’ contributions”. Recent researches reveal myriad positive effects which inclusive leadership wields on individuals in the work settings, including increased innovative work behaviors, increased psychological empowerment, fostered job performance, and reduced turnover (Javed, Abdullah, Zaffar, Haque, Rubab, 2019; Randel et al., 2018).

In spite of these, a scant research focus has been given to comprehend reasons and instances behind inclusive leadership (IL) influencing employees’ knowledge hiding (KH) behaviors, symbolic of counterproductive work behavior, in which an individual intentionally conceals knowledge when requested by others (Connelly et al., 2012). This research gap needs to be addressed since anti-social behaviors, i.e., KH, is common in contemporary organizations and has significant bearing on individual and organizational outcomes (Peng, 2013; Xiao & Cooke, 2019). Hence, this study's basic purpose is to discover the effect of IL on employees’ KH behaviors through the lens of Social Learning Theory (SLT). According to SLT, individuals tend to learn behaviors when they pay attention, observe, and eventually imitate role models such as teachers, parents and leaders (Bandura, 1977). Top leaders have the maximum level of status and power in organizations therefore given that, an inclusive leader, in essence, shows a genuine concern about their follower's interests, expectations and feelings, and a will to provide support to them (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015; Carmeli, Gelbard, & Gefen, 2010), followers may learn to engage in more pro-social behaviors and are less likely to engage in anti-social behaviors. Prior studies have also revealed that role models in the work places influence employee’s anti-social behaviors (Ghani et al., 2019).

Apart from the direct relationship (i.e., IL and KH behaviors), we suggest that interpersonal trust, the degree to which an individual (i.e., employee) feels self-assured, and keen to act based on the actions, words and judgements of leader (Kanawattanachai and Yoo, 2002), may be a key underlying mechanism. SLT argues that individuals tend to learn by concentrating upon role models (i.e., leaders) and internalize appropriate behavior by observing what is rewarded and punished (Bandura, 1977). Since inclusive leaders influence their followers through personal actions and interpersonal relations, hence these employees experience more interpersonal trust, which in turn, would lead to engage in less anti-social behaviors. In addition, it is noteworthy that different employees react differently when experiencing IL behaviors in the workplace. Our research model is expanded by

propounding the moderating effect of employee's affective commitment on inter-connection between IL and KH behaviors. Precisely, our research study proposes that emotionally-bounded employees may further strengthen the negative IL-KH relationship, since these employees possess emotional attachment towards their leaders and organizations.

To sum up, current research work examines the influences of IL on employees' KH behaviors. More specifically, from an SLT perspective, this study seeks to examine the mediating mechanism of interpersonal trust and explore if an employee's affective commitment moderates the effect of an inclusive leader on anti-social behaviors. In the same direction, this research augments to the extant literature on numerous fronts. Firstly, this investigation beefs up the study on importance of IL and furthers the existing comprehension of antecedents of employee's anti-social deeds by authenticating the effect of IL on KH behaviors. Secondly, this research unravels the "black box" of how IL influence KH behaviors by confirming the underlying role of interpersonal trust through the eyes of SLT. Lastly, by testing the moderating effect of affective commitment, this research offers novel perspectives into the boundaries under which IL further knocks employees' KH behaviors.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Inclusive Leadership

Leadership styles play a substantial role in employees' behaviors (Usman et al., 2022; Usman et al., 2021), specifically IL (Qasim et al., 2022). Inclusion is referred as "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265). This also reflects about an individual's work experience within a group. As derived from the concept of inclusion, IL is referred to as all the actions and words that leader reflect and highlight for recognizing the employee's efforts and contributions (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Qasim et al., 2022). This means, it includes all the efforts that leaders use to include team and allow them participating in different discussions and decision-making process to encourage them to put forward their opinions or otherwise they would never be able to have said anything in any decisions of the organization (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

2.2 Knowledge Hiding

KH is an act of intentionally hiding or concealing the knowledge from others (Connelly et al., 2012). There are three sub-dimensions of KH, Evasive Hiding, Playing Dumb, Rationalized Hiding (Connelly et al., 2012). Evasive hiding includes when someone provides irrelevant or manipulative information, rather than what is asked. Playing dumb includes when a person pretends to be unaware about the demanded knowledge. Rationalized KH is when a person explains why s/he is unable to provide the demanded information by providing justification (Connelly & Zweig, 2015).

Past studies highlighted the three level factors that would impact the KH behavior of an individual, these are: Organizational Level, Individual Level, and, Knowledge Content

Level. There are many factors comprised within these three main levels. The organizational level factors consist of perceived organizational politics (Malik et al., 2019), perceived organizational support (Alnaimi & Rjoub, 2019) and performance driven goal orientation (Zhu et al., 2019). Then the individual level factors might include privacy concerns (Zhai et al., 2019), professional commitment (Ghani et al., 2019), psychological entitlement (Alnaimi & Rjoub, 2019) and psychological ownership (Huo et al., 2016). Lastly, an individual recognizes the invested time and all the hard work that he took to understand the complex knowledge, and because of this reason (the complexity of knowledge creation) encourages an individual to conceal the knowledge from others (Connelly et al., 2012; Huo et al., 2016). Past literature explored and discussed the role of individual level and organizational level in KH behavior, however, the impact and role of positive leadership style on knowledge KH was rarely studied. Thus, this study investigates the role of IL in knowledge KH with the role of moderator and mediator.

2.3. Inclusive Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

Previous researches that focused on investigating the leader-employee exchange relationship and its impact on the group level and individual level working, explored that when IL is implemented, the negative behaviors of employees decrease to the minimum level. For example, Nishii and Mayer (2009) argued that leaders reflect their acceptance of the multi diverse backgrounds of employees through building quality relationships and work bonds with them, the leaders encourage the culture of inclusion and equality of employees that persuade them to share power and knowledge with each other while promoting other exchanges between the group members. Likewise, previous researches indicate that many positive leadership styles have negative affect on employee's KH behaviors. For instance, Abdillah, Wu, and Anita (2022) in their research from multiple functional backgrounds in Indonesia, find out that altruistic leadership (a positive leadership style) discourages employees from hiding their knowledge from other colleagues. In another study, Al Hawamdeh (2022) finds out that humble leadership behavior lessened their subordinate's inclination to involve in two extents of knowledge-hiding (playing dumb and evasive hiding). Nguyen, Malik, & Budhwar (2022) argue that transformational leadership influences employees to overcome various conflicts and subsequently encourages knowledge sharing, instead of knowledge hiding.

IL is mostly discussed as the one-point approach to leadership for employees (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, & Ziv, 2010). This form includes the element of openness and accessible interaction among the group members (Hirak, Peng, Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2012) which leads us to infer that the component of knowledge sharing will increase. As members interact more, there are less chances to hide or conceal knowledge from others. There has been work on IL that highlights the benefit of fulfilling the need of belongingness when employees share rich quality working relationships (Carmeli et al., 2010). Moreover, through IL, the aspect of uniqueness is also acknowledged when their leaders include them in important decisions. As a result of IL, employees feel that they are valued because they are unique and they belong to this organization (Randel et al., 2018). Authors deduce that

through this belongingness and value, employees are discouraged to hide knowledge from each other, they tend to believe that they are a group and their leader value them because of their uniqueness due to which the fear that holds an individual to conceal the knowledge is minimized. Hence, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H₁: Inclusive leadership negatively influences knowledge hiding.

2.4. The Mediating Role of Interpersonal Trust

Past literature tells us that trust plays a pivotal role in mitigating the KH behavior within the employees. Often KH and knowledge sharing are considered as the same routes for studying the knowledge context though they both are two diverse constructs (Connelly et al., 2012; Connelly & Zweigh, 2015) and they both have different mechanism to work on (Connelly et al., 2012). Yet previous studies show that knowledge sharing and KH happens simultaneously within the organizations (Ford & Staples, 2008; Peng, 2013; Singh, 2019). Social Learning Theory also assumes that the KH will be minimized, when employees learn attentively something from their leaders, and, tend to share with others, but here interpersonal trust is also an important control mechanism (Madison et al., 2016). Interpersonal trust refers to the willingness of one member that s/he places on actions of another member and that latter member will act in a way that would be important for the former member (trustor) irrespective of the fact that no one can monitor the actions of the latter member (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust is divided in too many layers, interpersonal, organizational, inter-organizational, and, societal, but this study examines the mediating role of interpersonal trust only (Rotter, 1980). Interpersonal trust is a type of trust that takes time to build between members and gets strong with the long period of interactions (Sundaramurthy, 2008). Interpersonal trust is an element that can hinder the KH and promote knowledge sharing within the organizations (Hadjielias et al., 2021). Generally, leadership resonates with perceptions of justice at workplaces. More specifically, positive leadership styles (i.e., IL) are studied with hindsight of relating them with various justice dimensions. For example, Alamir, Ayoubi, Massoud, and Hallak (2019) posited transformational leadership leading to organizational justice in work settings, which ultimately leads to positive outcomes. Likewise, Kurian & Nafukho (2021) found that authentic leadership approaches positively forecast justice perceptions in organizations. These findings lead us to believe that IL, as a positive leadership style, will also lead to develop interpersonal trust among members, as leaders engage in a behavior that make members feel that they are treated equally and information is shared among them all. This perceived inclusion among the members would help build their trust on each other and could lessen the chances of KH. On the basis of this explanation, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H₂: Interpersonal trust mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and knowledge hiding.

2.5. The Moderating Role of Affective Commitment

Supplementing the direct relationship between IL and KH, this study explores the role of affective commitment on the relationship between IL and KH as a moderator. Commitment generally means the psychological attachment of an employee towards his workplace

(Allen & Meyer, 1990). This sense of commitment develops when an employee feels that s/he can relate with the overall organizational objectives and values, they try to align their actions with these goals in order to achieve them, and, try to sustain the organizational citizenship membership (Porter et al., 1974). There are three forms of commitment; normative, continuance and affective (Meyer & Allen, 1991). In this study, the attention is on affective commitment as this is one of the strongest and valid predictors of an employee's actions and behaviors (Meyer & Hercovitch, 2001). Thus, affective commitment towards organizations can develop positive experiences within employees that would help organizations to achieve their goals (Cownie, 2017). However, lack of affective commitment towards the organizations will result in negative performances from employees, hence increasing the turnover rates (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004).

Affective commitment developed on the basis when there are equal exchange-based relationships between employees and organizations, because affectively committed employees feel that they belong and relate themselves with their workplace and organizations. This will motivate them to provide peer support in terms of less KH, thus creating a positive feeling for other members and leaders (Lawler, 2006). IL, hence helps to develop affective commitment within employees by encouraging the sense of belongingness towards the organizations.

In view of the above argument and the culture of exchange, this study hypothesized that affective commitment of employees can be a moderator between IL and KH. This is because when employees develop social exchange interactions with their organizations they do not conceal or hide knowledge from others. Rather employees who are not affectively committed to the organizations because leaders do not include them in decision making practices, they tend to hide more knowledge from others, and harm the organizational working. From above explanation, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H₃: Affective commitment moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership and knowledge hiding.

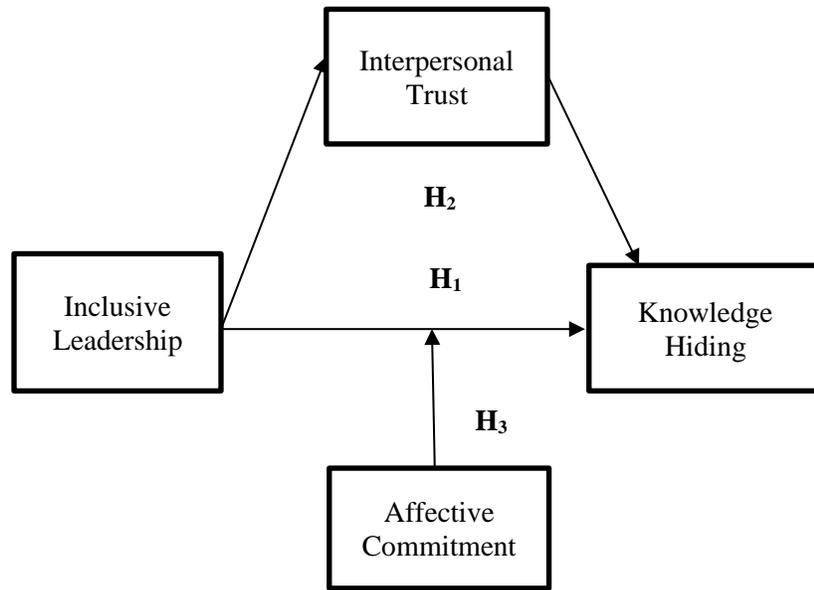


Figure 1: Proposed Framework

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Time-lagged data was collected through questionnaire from 297 MBA students of a popular private sector university in Pakistan, who were full time employees in various manufacturing and service sector organizations (i.e., health, banking, textile, information technology, insurance, education). Individuals' KH and IL perceptions are likely to vary across organizations, profession and industries. In addition, data collected from a heterogeneous sample, increases the generalizability of results (Abbas et al., 2014; Abdullah et al., 2019).

The data collected in three time-lags with a break of two months to overcome the issue of common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Two months is an enough time for respondents to recall and relate lastly filled questions with the current one (Peng, 2013). A unique identifier was used to match the responses of Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3. In Time 1, 485 questionnaires were distributed and 418 was returned containing questions of control variables and independent variable (inclusive leadership). In Time2, it was circulated among those who had responded in Time 1 containing questions of mediator (interpersonal trust) and moderator (affective commitment), out of which 377 responded back. In Time 3, we distributed questionnaire among 377 individuals who responded in Time 2, containing questions of dependent variable (knowledge hiding behavior), in which 301 responded back. Four questionnaires weren't filled properly and hence removed and the

usable responses were 297 for data analysis. The rate of response to the initially distributed questionnaire was 61%.

Respondents' information comprises of gender, age, experience, and organization type.

Gender is coded as 1=male (47.1%) and 2=female (52.9%).

Age is coded as 1<25 years (27.3%), 2=25-33 years (53.9%), 3=33-41 years (17.5%), and 4>41 years (1.3%).

Experience is coded as 1<1 year (14.5%), 2=1-5 years (36.7%), 3=5-10 years (25.3%), 4=10-15 years (11.4%), and 5>15years (12.1%).

Organization type is coded as 1=Education (14.1%), 2=Health (22.9%), 3=Banking (24.6%), 4=Information Technology (11.1%), 5=Textile (14.8%), 6=insurance (12.5%), and 7=others (0%).

3.2. Measures

Inclusive Leadership: Inclusive leadership was measured with 9-item scale adapted from Carmeli, Meitar, and Weisberg (2006). The sample items include:

“My manager/boss is open to hearing new ideas”,

“My manager/boss is available for consultation on problems”, and

“My manager/boss encourages me to access him/her on emerging issues”.

Interpersonal Trust: Interpersonal trust was measure with six items scale adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990). The sample item includes:

“I feel quite confident that my leader/boss will always try to treat me fairly”.

Affective Commitment: Affective commitment was measured with 8-items scale adapted from the study of Allen and Meyer (1990). The sample item includes:

“I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization”.

Knowledge Hiding: Knowledge hiding was measured with three items scale adapted from Peng (2013). The sample item is:

“I withhold helpful information or knowledge from others”.

3.3 Data Analysis Technique

SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 was used to analyze the data of the current study. To check the model fitness, reliabilities, and validities of the constructs, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, χ^2 , CFI, SRMR, and RMSEA were calculated. We utilized Hayes (2013) Process Macro to test the hypothesized model. The study applied the bootstrapping approach to analyze the significance of hypothesized relationship of direct, indirect, and moderation effect, because, bootstrapping approach is more reliable and deliberately used to calculate the direct, indirect, moderation effect in the business and social science research (Ghani et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021).

4. Results

4.1 Measurement Tests

To check the reliability and validity of the data, we first checked for CMB issue by taking statistical remedies into consideration, recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003). First, we ran Harman's single factor test, and the results indicates that the variance of the first factor did not exceed 50%, which exhibit that CMB is not a serious worry in the study (Harman, 1967). Second, all the inter-correlations were under .90 as indicated in Table 1, which also suggest that CMB is not a problem in this study.

Further, to test the reliability and validity, composite reliability, factor loading, Cronbach's α , average variance extracted (AVE), and square root of AVE were calculated as suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981) and HU and Bentler (1999). All the statistics values were above the cutoff criteria (see Table 1 and Table 2) which provide support for the scales that are reliable and valid. Moreover, the model fitness indices illustrate that the model is good as $\chi^2=2.381$, CFI=.917, SRMR=.049, and RMSEA=.068.

Table 1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Variables	Items	Estimate	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Inclusive Leadership	IL1	.665	.936	.936	.622
	IL2	.734			
	IL3	.827			
	IL4	.797			
	IL5	.778			
	IL6	.837			
	IL7	.842			
	IL8	.821			
	IL9	.778			
Interpersonal Trust	IT1	.792	.860	.866	.521
	IT2	.845			
	IT3	.681			
	IT4	.705			
	IT5	.625			
	IT6	.660			
Affective Commitment	AC1	.800	.901	.904	.544
	AC2	.672			
	AC3	.603			
	AC4	.685			
	AC5	.764			
	AC6	.773			
	AC7	.805			
	AC8	.775			
Knowledge Hiding	KH1	.870	.894	.895	.740
	KH2	.818			
	KH3	.891			

4.2. Correlation Results

Table 2 indicates the results of means, standard deviations and correlations among study variables. The results show that inclusive leadership is positively and significantly correlated with interpersonal trust ($r=.59$, $p<.01$), and negatively and significantly

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correlated with knowledge hiding ($r=-.245$, $p<.01$). Further, interpersonal trust and affective commitment are negatively and significantly correlated with knowledge hiding ($r=-.241$, $p<.01$, and $r=-.222$, $p<.01$). The control variables were found insignificantly related with the study variables. Moreover, all the square root values of AVE are greater than the inter-construct correlations which ensure the discriminant validity.

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Results

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Gender	1.53	.50	1					
2.Age	1.93	.71	-.171**	1				
3.Inclusive Leadership	3.87	.94	-.067	.048	.788			
4.Interpersonal Trust	3.94	.86	-.067	-.010	.596**	.722		
5.Affective Commitment	3.79	.94	-.070	-.021	.462**	.450**	.738	
6.Knowledge Hiding	2.90	1.13	.009	.041	-.245**	-.241**	-.222**	.861

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The bold values are the square root of AVE.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

Process Macro Model 1 and Model 2 was run to test the direct, mediation and moderation effects (Hayes, 2013). Table 3 results show that inclusive leadership negatively significantly influence knowledge hiding as $\beta=-.295$ and $t=-4.335$, which provide support for H_1 . Also, Table 3 results show that interpersonal trust acts as a mediator between IL and KH because the coefficient of indirect effect is as $\beta=-.105$ and the confidence intervals (-.216, -.008) did not include zero, hence, H_2 is supported.

Table 3: Mediation Effect

Outcome: Knowledge Hiding	B	SE	t	p
Constant	4.043	.270	14.951	.000
Inclusive Leadership	-.295	.068	-4.335	.000
Outcome: Interpersonal Trust	B	SE	t	p
Constant	1.851	.169	10.907	.000
Inclusive Leadership	.541	.043	12.695	.000
Outcome: Knowledge Hiding	B	SE	t	p
Constant	4.403	.318	13.826	.000
Interpersonal Trust	-.195	.092	-2.110	.036
Inclusive Leadership	-.189	.084	-2.252	.025
	Effect	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Indirect effect	-.105	.057	-.216	-.008
	Effect	SE	z	p
Normal theory test for indirect effect	-.105	.051	-2.076	.038

Note: Bootstrap sample size= 5000, CI= confident interval, LU= lower limit, UL= upper limit.

The moderation results are reported in Table 4. The results indicate that affective commitment moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership and knowledge hiding as the interaction term (inclusive leadership x affective commitment) is significant as $\beta = -.184$ and $t = -2.235$, which support H₃.

Table 4: Moderation Effect

Outcome: Knowledge Hiding	β	SE	t	p
Constant	2.970	.070	42.212	.000
Inclusive Leadership	-.245	.090	-2.713	.007
Affective Commitment	-.232	.082	-2.842	.005
Inclusive Leadership x Affective Commitment	-.184	.082	-2.235	.026

Note: Bootstrap resample= 5000

Moreover, the graphical representation of moderation effect of affective commitment is shown in Figure 2. The moderation effect of affective commitment was separated into low (-1SD) vs high (+1SD) to evaluate the nature of interaction effect. The negative relationship between IL and KH was strengthened at high level of affective commitment $\beta = -.418$, $t = -3.266$ while weaker and insignificant at low level of affective commitment $\beta = -.0715$, $t = -.655$. These finding provide further support for H₃.

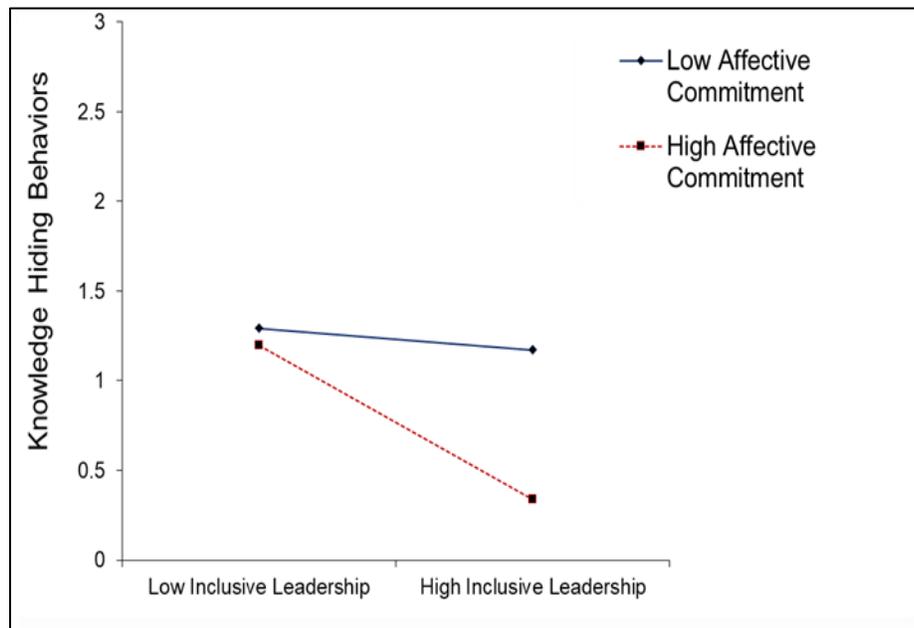


Figure 2: Moderation Effect of Affective Commitment

Onwards, the second structural model was used to validate the moderating effect of the OET in the relationship between PSR and FIMM as postulated in H4. Therefore, an interaction term (PSR_X_OET) was added after computing the standardized variables in SPSS. The SEM study found that OET positively affects the relationship between PSR and FIMM ($\beta = 0.25$ and $p = 0.001$). This result suggests that OET helps make a more robust relationship between PSR and FIMM. Thus, H4 was supported and confirmed that a greater extent of OET leads to a higher degree of FIMM. As a result, followers who are more open to trying out new technologies like Metaverse will be more likely to use Metaverse marketplaces.

6. Discussion

Based upon SLT (Bandura, 1977), this study investigates the influence of IL that could reduce the unethical behaviors of employees i.e., knowledge hiding. The study finding indicates that IL enjoys a pivotal part in the reduction of employees' knowledge hiding behaviors. Further, to better understand the mechanism through which IL influence KH, this study investigates mediating effect of interpersonal trust. The findings show that IL leads to interpersonal trust between leader & follower and this trust reduces the negative behaviors of employees. Moreover, it was proposed that a few employees do not react in the same way when experiencing IL behaviors in the workplace especially emotionally-bounded employees. The finding demonstrates that those employees whose affective

commitment level is high, strengthened the negative relationship between IL and KH versus low level of affective commitment.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

We present some noteworthy theoretical contribution in the literature. First of all, the findings unprecedentedly highlight SLT theory being used as an overarching theory to comprehend the connection between IL and such work behaviors which are counterproductive (i.e., KH).

As per SLT (Bandura, 1986), employees learn standards of suitable conduct by observing behavior of role models like (parents, teachers, and) leaders at workplace.

Accordingly, IL signifies that the need of belongingness is fulfilled when employees share high quality working relationships amongst each other (Carmeli et al., 2010).

As a result, Inclusive Leaders can play a critical part of being a role model at workplace because they are available at powerful places in organizational hierarchies which permit them to grasp their subordinate's attention.

Further, SLT also leads us to believe that the KH will reduce, when employees learn attentively something from their leaders and, eventually, they tend to share with others (Madison et al., 2016).

These findings reinforced the previously held perspectives that positive leadership styles reduce employees' negative outcomes or counterproductive behaviors (Koay & Lim, 2021). Secondly, once the role of interpersonal trust in IL-KH relationship as a mediator is established, the findings lead us to the primary mechanism under which IL effects KH behaviors of employees. Specifically, the findings tell us that IL is indirectly reflected through interpersonal trust. These findings offer confirmation to empirical analysis. So, by paying consideration on the reduction of employees' counterproductive behaviors, positive leadership style (i.e., IL) can not only develop an environment that appreciates employees for new ideas, provide consultation on problem solving, and listening them will develop level of trust between leader and follower. Consequently, this level of trust will discourage employees to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (i.e., KH). These findings supported by previous study of Greenleaf (1998) noted in the light of social exchange theory that positive leadership styles develop trust among employees and reciprocating positive work outcomes. Thirdly, this study confirmed that a key personal factor, affective commitment, moderates the effect of IL on KH. Affectively committed employees feel that they belong and relate themselves with their workplace and organizations and feeling positive towards their leaders and organization (Lawler, 2006). Our findings show that the perceptions of IL considerably reduce their unethical behaviors in case of individuals high on affective commitment. If we extend the results of Ghani et al. (2019) and Bowling, Wang, & Li (2012), the study not only confirms, but extends the interactionist perspective which demonstrates combined effects at an organizational level factor (i.e., IL) and personal level factor (i.e., affective commitment).

6.2. Practical Implications

Organizations need to promote productive work behaviors and to mitigate counterproductive work behaviors such as KH. Organization must know how and when counterproductive work behaviors occur and how to alleviate these behaviors. This study offers some practical implication in this regard.

First, as this study confirm that positive leadership style (i.e., IL) negatively influence KH. Therefore, organizations should invest resources on priority in the selection and development of managers having a positive approach to lead the employees. Chughtai et al. (2015) recommended few tools like assessment center exercises with integrity tests and structured interviews, and deemed them valuable. Also, to reduce the negative behaviors of employees, managers need to adopt IL style by appreciating their employees for sharing ideas, provide them positive feedback, listening, awareness, and include them in decision making (Greenleaf, 1977; Lin et al., 2021). Second, this study found that IL influence KH through interpersonal trust, which confirmed that IL is a key determinant of interpersonal trust and ultimately leads to reduce employees' negative behaviors. Therefore, again it is important for organizations to reduce the counterproductive work behaviors, the implementations of the said practices to hiring and developing positive leadership styles (i.e., IL) because it contributes to boost the followers trust towards leaders (Hollander, 2012), and consequently become less likely to involve in harmful behaviors and more inclined towards Organizational Citizenship Behavior. Finally, the findings also approve the moderating role of affective commitment between IL and KH relationship, and suggests that employees high in affective commitment are less likely to engage in KH. Hence, it is important for organizations, to reduce KH, to provide a positive working environment where employees clearly know their goals and expectations, maintain work ethics, and develop trust that can develop employees' feeling of belonging with the organization.

6.3. Limitations and Future Directions

There are few limitations which are open to be addressed by upcoming research work. To start with, previous literature has offered significance of contextual factors that contribute in the reduction of KH (Ghani et al., 2019; Koay & Lim, 2021). The foreseeable limitation is, we only investigated only one contextual factor (i.e., IL) in relation to KH. Future studies could consider other contextual factor such as Leader-Member Exchange, Authentic Leadership, and Transactional Leadership. This could help organization is to identify which leadership style is more important in the reduction of counterproductive work behavior (i.e., KH).

Second, our findings show that interpersonal trust partially acts as the mediator between IL and KH which provide base for more studies to explore and fully understand the IL-KH relationship.

Third, only affective commitment has been investigated as a moderator. Future studies could observe other personal factors such as Professional Commitment, Psychological Ownership, and Psychological Engagement between the relationships of IL and KH.

Finally, the current study is conducted in the Pakistani context, which could be entirely different from other regions' context, and could affect the employees' mental and behavioral response (Chen, 1995). Therefore, future research could investigate the current study model in other contexts to increase the generalizability of the study model.

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