



The dark triad and knowledge hiding

Wei Pan^a, Qingpu Zhang^a, Thompson S.H. Teo^{b,c,*}, Vivien K.G. Lim^d

^a School of Management, Harbin Institute of Technology, Harbin, 150001, China

^b Department of Analytics & Operations, School of Business, National University of Singapore, 119245, Singapore

^c Department of Information Systems and Analytics, School of Computing, National University of Singapore, 119245, Singapore

^d Department of Management and Organization, School of Business, National University of Singapore, 119245, Singapore

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

The dark triad of personality traits
Knowledge hiding
Psychological contract theory
Gender difference
Knowledge management

ABSTRACT

By drawing on psychological contract theory, this study examined the effects of the dark triad of personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) on knowledge hiding within organizations. We obtained 251 matched-pair data from respondents in a manufacturing company. Results showed that all three dimensions of the dark triad were positively related to knowledge hiding through transactional psychological contract. Different dimensions of the dark triad were most strongly related to different knowledge hiding strategies. Furthermore, gender moderated the relationships between narcissism and psychopathy with transactional psychological contract. The indirect relationships between narcissism and psychopathy with knowledge hiding via transactional psychological contract were stronger for men than women.

1. Introduction

In post-capitalism, power comes from transmitting information to make it productive, not from hiding it.

Drucker, 1995

Knowledge is a core resource for organizations to achieve and maintain competitive advantage. To obtain the optimal performance of its knowledge resource, it is important for organization to motivate employees to share knowledge with each other. Over the past two decades, extensive studies have been conducted in the field of knowledge management (KM) to understand when and why employees share knowledge (Ghobadi, 2015). These studies have also examined various organizational challenges and practices to foster knowledge sharing behavior (Nidhra, Yanamadala, Afzal, & Torkar, 2013; Zahedi, Shahin, & Babar, 2016). Despite all these efforts, knowledge hiding among employees is still pervasive. Knowledge hiding refers to intentional concealment or withholding knowledge when requested by another person (Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2012). It was reported that 76% workers in the USA and 46% workers in China had engaged in knowledge hiding in the workplace (The Globe and Mail, 2006; Peng, 2012). Knowledge hiding among colleagues resulted in an estimated financial loss of about \$31.5 billion a year for the Fortune 500 companies (Babcock, 2004). Indeed, knowledge hiding among coworkers has been recognized as one of the most important factors contributing to the failure of KM projects (Martinsons, Davison, & Huang, 2017).

Effective KM can hardly be achieved without curtailing knowledge hiding in organizations (Drucker, 1995; Peng, 2013). However, previous studies paid much attention to knowledge sharing, and overlooked its “twin brother”—knowledge hiding (Peng, 2013).

Recent empirical studies attested to the detrimental impact of knowledge hiding on individual and organizational outcomes. For example, it directly harms the knowledge seeker’s work performance and creativity by reducing social support (Černe, Nerstad, Dysvik, & Škerlavaj, 2014; Evans, Hendron, & Oldroyd, 2015). Knowledge hiding can also result in retaliation from coworkers. It ultimately impairs the creativity of the knowledge hider and triggers a reciprocal distrust loop among coworkers that leads to further hiding (Černe et al., 2014; Holten, Hancock, Persson, Hansen, & Høgh, 2016; Rhee & Choi, 2017). The relationship between the knowledge hider and the seeker is also negatively affected (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). Knowledge hiding weakens organizational performance and creativity because of its negative effects on unit process capabilities and interaction effectiveness (Evans et al., 2015). Given the ubiquitousness and severity of its impact, it is imperative to investigate the antecedents of knowledge hiding in order for organizational interventions to be designed to minimize its occurrence.

Existing studies have begun to investigate situational and interpersonal antecedents of knowledge hiding such as knowledge complexity (Connelly et al., 2012), time pressure (Connelly, Ford, Turel, Gallupe, & Zweig, 2014), job insecurity (Serenko & Bontis, 2016), self

* Corresponding author at: Department of Analytics and Operations, School of Business, National University of Singapore, Mochtar Riady Building, BIZ 1 #8-75, 15 Kent Ridge Drive, 119245, Singapore.

E-mail addresses: 14B910015@hit.edu.cn (W. Pan), zhangqingpu@hit.edu.cn (Q. Zhang), bizteosh@nus.edu.sg (T.S.H. Teo), bizlimv@nus.edu.sg (V.K.G. Lim).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.05.008>

Received 23 March 2018; Received in revised form 18 May 2018; Accepted 31 May 2018

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and other-referenced fears (Fang, 2017), distrust (Černe et al., 2014; Connelly et al., 2012; Holten et al., 2016), workplace ostracism (Zhao, He, Sheard, & Wan, 2016), and knowledge-based psychological ownership (Huo et al., 2016; Peng, 2013). However, we still lack adequate understanding of the antecedents of knowledge hiding. In particular, we have limited knowledge of how personality traits affect knowledge hiding behavior. This paucity of research on personality traits is astonishing given that scholars have found that employees' dispositions significantly predict job attitudes and behaviors throughout their professional career (Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986). Some studies have begun to examine knowledge sharing from the perspective of the Big Five personality traits (Cui, 2017; Wang, Noe, & Wang, 2014), while few studies investigate knowledge hiding from personality perspective, although personality is becoming increasingly important in the information management domain (Cui, 2017). The research stream linking personalities to knowledge hiding is still in its nascent stage. Knowledge hiding pertains largely to the negative aspect of employee's knowledge-related behaviors, and prior studies have indicated that the dark triad of personality traits predicts negative behaviors over and above the Big Five personality traits (Grijalva & Newman, 2015; Harms & Spain, 2015; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). Therefore, we propose that examining knowledge hiding through the theoretical lens provided by the dark triad will provide a more nuanced understanding of why individuals engage in knowledge hiding at the workplace.

Developed by Paulhus and Williams (2002), the dark triad consists of three personality traits, namely, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. The dark triad of personality traits have been empirically shown to influence a myriad of negative behaviors such as opportunistic behavior (Sakalaki, Richardson, & Thepaut, 2007), unhelpful and noncooperative behavior (Paal & Bereczkei, 2007; Smith, Wallace, & Jordan, 2016), unwillingness to share knowledge (Liu, 2008), counterproductive workplace behavior (Grijalva & Newman, 2015), and disregard for social norms (Harrison, Summers, & Mennecke, 2016; O'Boyle et al., 2012). In line with these research findings, we predict that the dark triad will be significantly and positively related to knowledge hiding.

Despite growing evidence of the relationship between the dark triad and workplace behaviors such as knowledge hiding, the mechanisms through which the dark triad affects these behaviors have not been well examined. Li, Barrick, Zimmerman, and Chiaburu (2014) have argued that a more thorough investigation of mechanisms underlying these associations is necessary to advance this stream of literature. Following this suggestion, we aim to examine how the dark triad influences knowledge hiding by investigating the mechanism underlying the relationship. Specifically, by drawing on psychological contract theory, we argue that employees with the dark triad of personality traits are likely to view their work relationship as transactional psychological contract, and such psychological contract will facilitate knowledge hiding.

Furthermore, although studies have shown that men score higher on all three dimensions of the dark triad than women (Furnham & Trickey, 2011; Grijalva et al., 2015; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Paulhus & Williams, 2002), limited research has addressed the question of whether gender moderates the relationship between the dark triad with psychological contract or organizational behavior. Research on gender differences indicates that men's agentic characteristics, such as striving for competition and economic dominance, are much more consistent with characteristics of the dark triad, compared to women's communal characteristics, such as tenderness and nurturing (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010). Thus, gender can influence how employees with the dark triad of personality traits view their psychological contract in the employment relationship. Consequently, we investigate the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between the dark triad and transactional psychological contract, as well as the indirect relationship between the dark triad and knowledge hiding through transactional

psychological contract.

Overall, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Does transactional psychological contract mediate the relationship between the dark triad and knowledge hiding?

RQ2: Does gender moderate the relationship between the dark triad and transactional psychological contract?

RQ3: Does gender moderate the indirect relationship between the dark triad and knowledge hiding through transactional psychological contract?

The main contributions of this study are as follows. First, this study focuses on a less studied topic in the KM field, namely, knowledge hiding, thereby contributing to KM theory and practice. Second, this study is the first to theorize and examine knowledge hiding from the perspective of the dark triad of personality traits. Prior KM studies mainly focused on the traditional personality traits, e.g. the Big Five, to examine knowledge-related behavior. Third, this study examines the psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between the dark triad of personality traits and knowledge hiding through the theoretical lens of psychological contract. The psychological mechanisms through which the dark triad affects knowledge hiding can be illuminated by how individuals with the dark triad perceive their work relationship i.e., they view the work relationship as a transactional psychological contract. Hence, this study enriches a growing body of research that attempts to open the black box among the personality–knowledge-related behavior relationship. Fourth, this study examines the moderating role of gender on the relationship between the dark triad and transactional psychological contract. In doing so, our study explores the boundary conditions under which certain type of personality may be more or less relevant to transactional psychological contract. Further, this study examines whether the indirect relationship between the dark triad and knowledge hiding through transactional psychological contract is also moderated by gender. Thus, this study extends research on the moderating role of gender to the context of knowledge hiding.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Knowledge hiding

Knowledge hiding is “an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person” (Connelly et al., 2012, p. 65). It comprises three different forms: (i) playing dumb, (ii) evasive hiding and (iii) rationalized hiding (Connelly et al., 2012). Playing dumb means the knowledge hider pretends to be ignorant of the requested knowledge; evasive hiding refers to giving unrelated information or a promise (which the person has no intention of fulfilling) to help in the future; rationalized hiding refers to offering an explanation for failing to provide requested knowledge “by either suggesting he or she is unable to provide the knowledge requested or blaming another party” (Connelly & Zweig, 2015, p. 480). Both playing dumb and evasive hiding involve deception, while rationalized hiding may not necessarily involve deception, e.g., one may hide knowledge because of confidentiality.

It is important to distinguish between knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing. Intuitively, one may think knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing are the opposite of each other. But the motivations behind knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding are rather different (Connelly et al., 2012). Knowledge sharing is mostly motivated by prosocial intentions, while knowledge hiding is largely motivated by self-focused intentions. Past research has also demonstrated that the items used to assess knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding loaded on different factors (Connelly et al., 2012; Rhee & Choi, 2017). Thus, knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing are conceptually distinct constructs, which dwell in separate, though not independent research streams (Connelly et al., 2012; Kang, 2016; Rhee & Choi, 2017).

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