



Impact of Ethical Leadership on Knowledge Hiding Behavior: Moderating role of Islamic Work Ethics and Mediating role of Interpersonal Justice

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Abstract: This study adds to the business ethics and knowledge-hiding domain such that how ethical leadership impacts knowledge-hiding behavior amidst interpersonal justice as well as how Islamic work ethics invigorated interpersonal justice and knowledge-hiding. We argue that ethical leadership will trigger interpersonal justice and lessen knowledge-hiding behavior. We further, explored that IWE will weaker the link between interpersonal justice and knowledge-hiding behavior. A multi-wave and multi-context survey comprising 348 employees supported the study hypotheses. The obtained results indicated that ethical leadership is inversely associated with knowledge-hiding behavior, and the said link is mediated via interpersonal justice. Further, employees higher on IWE confirmed the moderating effect. For business ethics and the knowledge-hiding domain, we unveiled important mediator and moderator that buffer the knowledge-hiding behavior. For organizations, the results demonstrate that interpersonal justice and IWE help employees to involve in positive behavior and mitigate the deviant behavior.

Keywords: Ethical Leadership, IWE, Interpersonal Justice and Knowledge Hiding.

1. Introduction

Knowledge hiding is a phenomenon that the knowledge is intentionally concealed from others when requested (Connelly et al., 2012). Knowledge is one of the main sources of success (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021) but Knowledge hiding results in loss of revenue and lower performance (Arain et al., 2019) productivity (Xiong et al., 2019) and creativity (Malik et al., 2019) and other negative work outcomes (Zhao and Xia, 2019, Connelly and Zweig, 2015). Knowledge hiding spoils interpersonal relationships like trust risks managers' strategies to augment workers' learning, and impasses managers' activities to achieve the desired goals (Wang et al., 2019). Knowledge hiding is a common phenomenon in organizations and studies revealed that 46% of the employees concealed knowledge from the chines sample (Peng, 2013) and 76% of the respondents from the United States sample concealed knowledge when requested (Connelly et al., 2012). Further, a study reported that the fortune 500 suffer a loss of \$ 31.5 Billion due to knowledge hiding (Babcock, 2004). Despite the adverse effect on working behavior, knowledge hiding is an

underdeveloped phenomenon (Men, et al., 2020) and needs more empirical evidence (Connelly et al., 2019).

Ethical leadership refers to – “*the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers*” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). Due to the massive loss and deviant conduct of knowledge hiding, it would be important to know the effect of ethical leadership on knowledge hiding. Ethical leadership focuses on ethical behavior and is appropriate for the explanation of unethical behavior in the workplace (Ng & Feldman 2015). Ethical leaders can vigorously support subordinates to form their values ethically (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Knowledge hiding is considered unhealthy and detrimental to both individuals and organizations and is inappropriate in an ethical environment (Serenko & Bontisin, 2016). Ethical leadership plays important role in discouraging unethical behavior (Usman & Hameed, 2017; Hoch et al., 2018) including knowledge hiding (Men et al., 2020).

Previous studies have demonstrated that interpersonal and knowledge-based factors subsidize knowledge-hiding behavior, for example, distrust, complexity, knowledge-sharing climate, and psychological ownership (Connelly et al., 2012, Peng, 2013). Dysfunctional behaviors of supervisors concerning knowledge-hiding behaviors are rare. The supervisor is the main representative of an organization, leads the organization, makes the decisions, and can actively participate in preventing knowledge-hiding behavior (Srivastava *et al.*, 2006), further, leaders are considered ideal in the implementation of social influence on the subordinates (Loi et al., 2014). Similarly, employees’ perception of fairness and ethical assumptions in organizations affect their behavior (Loi, et al., 2012). Ethical leadership is related to supervisor-focused interactional justice (Neubert et al., 2009). Ethical leaders are considered to be moral agents in exercising fairness in an organization (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2002).

Employees in the workplace react according to the actions taken by the supervisor’s treatment and fairness (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, & Suárez-Acosta, 2014). If the employees are aware of the mistreatment by the supervisor, they would follow affect based process (Folger et al. 2005) and would be indulged in deviant behavior (Gaudine & Thorne 2001). Recently, Men et al., (2020) called for the underlying mechanism between ethical leadership and knowledge-hiding behavior. Following the same recommendations, the present study assumes interpersonal justice as a potential mediating variable. It is assumed that interpersonal justice would dampen deviant behavior i.e. knowledge hiding. When the employees are treated well and the justice perception is being observed in an organization, they would be shaped for high-quality and trust-based relationships and thus would be motivated to exhibit positive behavior eliminating the knowledge-hiding behavior.

Islam consistently emphasizes assisting each other in normal life and the workplace. The same has been supported in the Holy Quraan: help one another in virtue, justice, and piety, but not in sin and wrongdoing (*Quran* 5:2). Similarly, Islam highlights the significance of justice and the Quraan states: “we sent our messenger with Book and the measure to develop justice in human being (*Quran* 57:25). Concerning work and fulfilling responsibilities the Quraan states: who works with decency will be entered into Heaven (*Quran* as cited in Ali, 1987). Revenge is forbidden in Islam rather forgiveness is highly valued, in the same context other mistreatment or ill behavior has been proscribed in a working environment where employees are aware of Islamic teaching and principles would consider their duties as moral obligations and avoid deviant behavior even in the absence of supervisor (Ahmad & Owoyemi, 2012). Every practice is being watched by Allah and therefore, employees would be less engaged in deviant behavior (Javed et al., 2017).

Knowledge is vital and subsidizes innovation, creativity, invention, and ultimately the success of an organization. in the current era, the person holding knowledge would be able to influence the other (Salin et al., 2020). Creativity and talent can be obtained through knowledge (Khosravi & Ahmad, 2016). Further, learning is like a duty in religion and the Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) stated that every individual (male & Female) should seek knowledge (Ibn Majah; 224).

The interplay of justice and IWE in envisaging these job outcomes are also explored. The arguments regarding fairness and job outcomes advocate that personal or contextual factors may moderate these relationships (Colquitt et al., 2006). Therefore, we assume the incorporation of IWE into justice literature that would result in new insights into justice perception and would help to determine the desired outcomes. To accomplish the targeted goals, religion has always been considered a divine motivator (Ali et al., 1995). According to Ali and Al-Owaihian (2008), IWE considers the job a virtue and vital for personal growth and social interaction. IWE discourages laziness and other deviant conduct (Javed et al., 2019) rather than engaging in legal economic activity as an obligation (Yousef,

2000). Employees emotionally react to fair treatment in the workplace setting which leads to behavioral consequences (Barsky et al., 2011). Javed et al., (2019) also recommended exploring the moderating of IWE with deviant/negative outcomes. More recently, Anand et al., (2021) suggested that an individual's belief and value system could be a potential moderator in damping the impact of knowledge hiding. Concerning religion, IWE is a personal factor (Khan et al., 2020) that varies across different religious and belief systems. Therefore, it is likely to assume that employees who follow IWE would be more satisfied, and when interacting with fairness in the organization may not indulge in knowledge-hiding behavior.

The findings of the current study contribute to the literature on ethical leadership and knowledge hiding. Further, the study extends its contribution to justice and IWE. Eastern settings have more confidence regarding generalizability (Tsui et al., 2007) consequently the present study would add evidence to the existing literature from a non-western culture and Muslim country i.e. Pakistan. Moreover, IWE would enhance the justice perception and the intensity of negative behavior (i.e. Knowledge hiding) would be lessened. Applying COR (Hobfoll, 2001), It infers that employees use their beliefs on IWE as a positive resource and when paired with interpersonal justice would mitigate the negative outcomes. an IWE would encourage employees to enhance commitment and loyalty to the organization. Further, employees strive for unworldly incentives and would maintain productive tendencies.

2. Literature review

2.1 Ethical Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

Ethical leadership validates morality, impartiality, obligation, and concern for fellows (Yesitlas & Tuna, 2018). Ethical leadership delivers moral support and other required resources to fulfill job responsibilities (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Thus, employees working in such an environment where ethical leadership exists enjoy the support from leaders, care, and assistance from supervisors (Kalshoven & Boon, 2012). The conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 2001) elaborates on job resources help employees in resources reservation. Further, COR explains that employees reinvest their existing resources to get future resources gain (Kalashoven & Boon, 2012). Employees may not hide their knowledge while working under ethical leadership supervision as the leaders provide support and take care of the employees. Further, the employees may consider the requested knowledge as a resource and this may develop their relationship positively as an exchange process (Connelly et al., 2012). Positive emotions and behaviors transmit from one to another (Hobfall et al., 2018). For example, positive behavior like the exchange of ideas may use the available resources for other beneficial organizational activities ([Harrison & Wagner, 2016](#)). Based on the cross-over view, traits of ethical leadership (honesty, support, sense of responsibility, etc.) transmit to the followers by leaders. Thus, it can be argued that employees who have a sense of obligation and care for their peers would demonstrate positive behavior and would not conceal knowledge when requested by colleagues. Further, we expect that such employees would not be indulged in unethical or misleading behavior like obscuring or falsification of information. in the same vein research studies have proved that ethical leadership dampens information concealment (Men et al., 2020; Abdullah et al., 2019). Thus, it is assumed that ethical leadership might discourage employees from knowledge hiding. The influence of top leadership is considered significant on other cadres of management and overall performance (Mayer et al., 2009) and the current study focuses on supervisors as ethical leaders. Regular interaction and close physical vicinity (Johnson et al., 2010) enhance the possibility to influence the employees' behavior positively. Thus, it is expected that ethical leadership would influence the employees' behavior in a positive direction and the employees would avoid negative behavior i.e. knowledge hiding. thus, we propose that:

H₁. Ethical leadership significantly correlates with knowledge-hiding behavior.

2.2 Mediating Role of Interpersonal Justice

Organizational justice is mainly categorized into three dimensions i.e. distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. The first is associated with fairness in outcomes (Adams, 1965), the second is concerned with the formal procedure (Lind & Tyler, 1988) and the last is characterized by interpersonal treatment (Bies & Moag, 1986). The last dimension i.e. interactional justice further encircles two dimensions i.e. informational and interpersonal justice. The former refers to the provision of procedures of explanation, while the latter refers to

dealing with civility, dignity, and trustworthiness (Colquitt 2001). Interpersonal justice relates to supervision directly which serves as a base for social exchange (Bies, 2005). In this regard, it has been suggested that interpersonal justice acts as a catalyst for leader influence (Knippenberg et al., (2007) while procedures and distributive justice are not accounted for under supervisory direct control but are usually endorsed by higher administrative bodies (Masterson et al. 2000). Consequently, it is argued that interpersonal justice is pertinent to inspect supervisor-subordinate relationship in the working environment. Interpersonal justice is considered more important than other types of justice as the interaction between supervisor and subordinate is more frequent (Moorman, 1991). Another aspect of the same can be the scenario of a leader's dishonesty or deficiency of correspondence (Bies, 2005) for example if a supervisor deceits regarding the procedures, the subordinates would perceive that interpersonal justice is being desecrated. Instead, when supervisors act constantly with ethical standards, they will be allegedly rational in interpersonal justice with subordinates. Ethical leadership is about honesty, and integrity and serves as a role model for subordinates (Yukl et al., 2013). Therefore, exercising such a leadership style will create a positive image in the minds of subordinates and fair treatment would motivate subordinates to follow the standards.

It is a general phenomenon that individuals have a concern regarding the treatment (O'reilly & Aquino, 2011) and evaluate the same based on interpersonal dealing. This relationship is crafted by prior interactions and is the cause of future behavior (Webster et al., 2008). If this prior treatment was considered rude or disrespectful, they would react in the same way, for example, may conceal knowledge when requested by that particular person, Though, it would be challenging, since it indicates the complication of interaction between employees and organizations (Yeşil, & Dereli, 2013).

Interpersonal justice encircles the observation of dignity and respect of the employees given by the higher level of authorities in the implementation of procedures (Colquitt, 2001). Supervisors are usually viewed as a dynamic source of interpersonal justice. Ethical leaders maintain fairness in organizations (Demirtas, 2015) and draw subordinates' attention to organizational fair policies and practices (Loi et al. 2012). Employees through imitation and observational learning follow the role model provided by their leaders (Brown et al., 2005). In contrast, when employees experience unfair treatment, would indulge in retaliatory behavior. In the same vein, the failure of interpersonal justice may result in knowledge-hiding behavior to balance the actions (Dyne et al., 2003). The said relation can be explained with social exchange theory (Blau, 1968) in a way that employees are involved in tit for tat process. So, in case of unfair treatment, employees would withdraw their efforts in unrestricted positive behavior (knowledge exchange). Thus,

H₂. Interpersonal justice mediates the relationship between Ethical leadership and knowledge-hiding behaviors.

2.3 Moderating role of IWE

According to Khan et al., (2015), Ethics is the difference between right and wrong. Work ethics is a set of work-related ethical values and principles differentiating between right and wrong in the Islamic context (Beekun, 1997). IWE has been rooted in the teaching of the Holy Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) (Yousef, 2000). If organizations want to share a knowledge-sharing culture, they need to endeavor to the employees' knowledge-hiding behavior and endorse consistent knowledge-sharing activities (Connelly et al., 2012; Lin & Lee, 2004). Islam put emphasizes knowledge-sharing behavior and clearly states that: "These are those who conceal what We have sent down as evidence and guidance after We have elaborated it to humanity in the Book and they are the cursed ones (Quran, 2:159) thus negating knowledge hiding. Humans are representative of Allah and are due to the knowledge provided to them. In this regard, Quran states: "Are the individuals who know the same as those who don't? Only those endowed with understanding are aware of this (Quran, 39:9).

According to Khan et al., (2015), IWE is a shield for lack of organizational fairness. Regarding fairness and honesty in business the Holy Quran says: "When measuring out and weighing with a fair balance, give a full measure." (Quran 27:9) and does not allow dishonesty and other negative behaviors and clears that: "So establish weight with justice and maintain balance" (55:9).

Knowledge hiding is considered a negative behavior (Serenko & Bontis, 2016) as well as a negative treatment by the person who intentionally conceals knowledge (in this case the leader) (Holten et al., 2016). IWE has a significant role in the work setting (Parboteeah et al., 2009) and avoids employees from counterproductive behavior

(Ali & Al-Owaihham, 2008). IWE underscores the attainment and spreading of knowledge. In this regard, the Prophet Muhammad (SAWW) said “after me, the best person will be who has acquired and shared knowledge (Al-Tirmidhi, [Hadith, 93]” (cited in Nawawi 1983). It confirms that withholding knowledge is forbidden in Islam. According to IWE, assigned goals and responsibilities are moral duties that need to be performed better even in the absence of fair procedures and treatment (Khan et al., 2015). Islam values the confidentiality of others' secrets yet knowledge hiding is a distinct phenomenon and is negative behavior as is the intentional concealment of knowledge when requested by other fellows (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). A request may be denied due to personal dislike or a resentful reaction to the unfair treatment in the work environment (Serenko and Bontis, 2016). Quran dispirits negative or malevolent deeds and states: “Good and bad manners are not equal” (Quran 41). It clearly shows that Islam discourages counterproductive behavior even if is a reactive response to unfair actions. Similarly, it has been suggested that religious factors influence the work value of employees in organizations (Parboteeah et al., 2009). As a religious factor, IWE underlines kindness and justice in the working environment (Khan et al., 2015) it could be a potential moderator between interpersonal justice and knowledge hiding as the individuals who follow IWE will expect the reward from Allah. Therefore, in the case of privation of interpersonal justice, IWE would buffer the negative effects of knowledge-hiding behavior.

H_{3a}: IWE moderates the link between interpersonal justice and knowledge hiding.

A mediated moderated model (Preacher et al., 2007) has been proposed in the current study to explore the moderating role of IWE in a relationship between ethical leadership and knowledge hiding through interpersonal justice. It assumes that the knowledge hiding would be lower for higher IWE. Employees who are higher on IWE would not be involved in deviant behavior (Javed et al., 2019) but in positive behavior (Murtaza et al., 2016). Similarly, personal characteristics affect knowledge-hiding behavior (Connelly et al., 2019). Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H_{3b}: IWE moderates the indirect effect of ethical leadership on knowledge-hiding behavior via interpersonal justice, such that the indirect effect would be stronger for higher IWE.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample and Procedure

To test the proposed model, quantitative data was collected through survey questionnaires in the public and private sector organizations in Pakistan. Data were collected from 384 participants working in different organizations (32.7% from Pharmaceuticals, 12.5% from revenue, 19.2% from IT, 18.67% from Health, 7.37% from educational institutes 8.16% from sports, 2.4% from tourism). Collecting data from heterogeneous organizations and employees augment the external validity (Dar et al., 2022). Further, the hypotheses need to be applied in different countries. Similarly, Pakistan provides an attractive environment for data collection due to the role of Islamic Values (Haq et al., 2020) and dominant Islamic culture. For example, Pakistan is higher on uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al., 2005), which advises that individuals feel stress when involve in negative behavior. Before accessing the participants, prior permission was gained from the required authorities. cover letters, along with the survey were attached which explained the purpose of the study. Privacy was completely assured and the respondents were guided that the participation is voluntary, data will only be used for research purposes and no personal data will be made public. The respondents were approached at their working places and questionnaires were distributed in sealed envelopes. Participants filled the questionnaires for all variables except knowledge hiding, which were filled by employees for their co-workers and returned in sealed envelopes. Codes were assigned to the survey before dissemination to match the responses for analysis. Respondents were briefed regarding the codes and informed that they can withdraw from the study. To avoid the social desirability bias, the standard process was followed as recommended and conducted in Pakistan (Abbas et al. 2014; Murtaza et al., 2016). Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, data about ethical leadership, interpersonal justice, and Islamic work ethics were obtained, while in the second phase responses against knowledge hiding were recorded. The anonymity of the participants was ensured and the participation was voluntary. Data were collected in two phases to reduce the potential common method bias. Both phases lagged 6 weeks apart. There must be a balance between the two phases

and should not be longer or shorter (Podsakoff, et al., 2012) and the 6 weeks gap provides an optimal choice (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). In the first phase, we collected data regarding ethical leadership and IWE. We distributed 600 questionnaires among the potential respondents and received 403 questionnaires. In the second phase, among the 600 distributed questionnaires 415 responses were recorded against interpersonal justice and knowledge hiding. data regarding knowledge hiding were collected from coworkers to avoid manipulation or underreporting of the variable. Comparing the codes and scrutinizing for missing data 384 questionnaires were deemed fit for further analysis.

3.2 Measures

Responses against variables were recorded through adopted questionnaires. The instrument was on five points Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 denoted strongly disagree and 5 denoted strongly agree.

3.2.1 Ethical Leadership

We assessed ethical leadership through a questionnaire developed by Brown et al., (2005). The instrument contained 10 items.

3.2.2 Knowledge Hiding

We considered an instrument developed by Connelly et al., (2012) for collecting data regarding knowledge hiding and contained 12 items.

3.2.3 Islamic Work Ethics

Islamic Work Ethics was measured through a questionnaire developed by Ali (1988). The instrument has 17 items.

3.2.4 Interpersonal Justice

Four items scale of Moorman (1991) was utilized to measure interpersonal justice.

3.3 Control variables

Male and female were not proportionate and the findings could be varied across gender. Similarly, qualification and tenure may also influence the finding. Thus demographic variables were controlled. Previous studies have also controlled these variables for knowledge-hiding behavior (Khalil et al., 2021; Fong et al. 2018; Connelly et al., 2012; Zhao et al. 2016).

4. Analysis

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted for model fitness and factor structure of data before hypotheses testing. CFA was conducted for all four variables of the study; ethical leadership, knowledge hiding, IWE, and interpersonal justice, and found adequate model fitness ($\chi^2 = 1741.92$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.93, IFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06). Also, TLI (threshold 0.90), CFI (threshold 0.90), and RMSEA (threshold 0.08-0.05) were measured (Hair et al., 2014; Kline, 2005) and the values have been presented in table 1.

Table 1: Model Fit

models	factors	χ^2	Df	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI
All variables	Four factors model	1741.92	944	0.06	0.92	0.92	0.93
One factor model	Single factor model	3489.98	813	0.02	0.51	0.51	0.54
Note (s):	N=384	P*<0.05	P**<0.01				

4.2 Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Convergent and discriminant validity along with correlation among variables were measured. It was found that all the values were in the acceptable range and have been presented in table 2.

Table 3: Correlation, Reliability and Validity

variables	1	2	3	4
Ethical Leadership	(0.81)			
Interpersonal justice	0.25	(0.79)		
Knowledge hiding	-0.37	-0.37	(0.86)	
Islamic work ethics	0.18	0.30	-0.27	(0.94)
CR	0.92	0.85	0.88	0.83
AVE	0.54	0.57	0.51	0.50
Note (s):	N=384	P*<0.05	P**<0.01	

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

Our study proposed three hypotheses that comprised direct, indirect, and moderated hypotheses. Preacher et al., (2017) Model 14 was utilized to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings have been provided in table 3. Our first hypothesis stated that ethical leadership has a significant relationship with knowledge hiding and the coefficient value was found negatively significant ($\beta = -0.18, p < 0.001$) and was supported. Our second hypothesis denoted that interpersonal justice mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and knowledge hiding. The obtained results revealed that ethical leadership was indirectly related to knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.19, p < 0.001$) and interpersonal justice was significantly correlated with knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.27, p < 0.001$). Further, the indirect effect of interpersonal justice between ethical leadership and knowledge hiding was confirmed that interpersonal justice partially mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and knowledge hiding (Indirect Effect = -0.11 , with LLCI = -0.15 and ULCI = -0.03) thus, supporting H2. The last hypothesis consisted of two parts: (a) IWE moderates the relationship between interpersonal justice and knowledge hiding and (b) IWE moderates the indirect effect between ethical leadership and knowledge hiding via interpersonal justice. The independent and moderating variables were mean-centered as recommended by Aiken et al., (1991). The findings provided in table 3 show that the interaction term of interpersonal justice and IWE was significant for knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.18, p < 0.001$). Lastly, the moderating effect of IWE on the indirect effect of ethical leadership on knowledge hiding through interpersonal justice was assessed. The findings yielded that Higher IWE moderated the impact of ethical leadership and knowledge hiding via interpersonal justice the (+1 SD from the mean; $\beta = -0.13, LLCI = 0.03, ULCI = 0.12\beta$). Additionally, the moderated mediation index was found significant (Index = $-0.05, LLCI = -0.09, ULCI = -0.01$) revealing that IWE moderates the indirect effect of Ethical leadership on knowledge hiding via interpersonal injustice. Thus, hypothesis 3b is supported.

Table 4: Conditional Process Analysis

Model	coefficient	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Moderaor variable model				
Constant	3.39			
EL \rightarrow IJ	0.16	0.04	0.31	0.52
IWE \rightarrow KH	-0.18	0.05	-0.17	-0.29
IJxIWE \rightarrow KH	-0.18	0.07	-0.17	-0.39
dependent variable model				
Constant	3.35			
EL \rightarrow KH	-0.17	0.03	-0.15	-0.35
IJ \rightarrow KH	-0.27	0.06	-0.11	-0.31

Indirect Effect Model					
EL → IJ → KH	-0.11	0.04	-0.15	-0.03	

condition indirect effects of EL on KH via IJ at values of IWE Mean +1 SD					
		Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
IWE					
Lower IWE	-0.64	-0.06	0.03	0.06	0.23
Mean IWE	0.001	-0.1	0.02	0.06	0.17
Higher IWE	0.64	-0.13	0.03	0.03	0.12
Index of Mediated moderation		-0.05	0.01	-0.09	-0.01

N= , model 14 results, Bootstrape=5000, 95% CI, *p<0.05,**p<0.01, LL, Lower limit, UL, Upper limit, S.E= Standard Error

4.4 Discussion

Considering the negative nature of knowledge hiding (Bogilovic et al., 2017) and the dearth of studies in the same field, the current study shows that ethical leadership is inversely related to knowledge hiding. Ethical leadership declines the intention of knowledge hiding. The employees observing ethical leadership in the organization may avoid retaliatory behavior. Such behavior is not restricted to any profession, group, or organization but is a universal phenomenon. Employees experiencing a negative leadership style would hide knowledge (Kim & Cruz, 2016), and observing a positive leadership style makes it inverse. The inverse relation has been supported in previous studies, for example, Men et al., (2020) and Abdullah et al., (2019).

We further investigated the underlying mechanism of interpersonal injustice between ethical leadership and knowledge-hiding behavior. The obtained results supported that interpersonal justice mediates the relation between ethical leadership and knowledge hiding. in the case of ethical leadership style, positive emotions are developed among employees and avoid negative behavior. when employees go through interpersonal justice they tend to balance what they have and have control over it i.e. knowledge, as knowledge is personal and the organization does not own it (Connelly et al., 2012). Injustice results in form of deviance and other negative outcomes (Khalid et al., 2018), hence employees observing interpersonal injustice would mitigate the knowledge-hiding behavior to repay the organization.

Lastly, we tested the moderating role of IWE in a link between interpersonal injustice and knowledge hiding and found that IWE moderates the relationship in such a way that the relationship was weaker for higher IWE. The results clear the positive role of IWE in dampening negative behavior. IWE considers working behavior as a virtue and moral obligation that need to be followed even when fairness is lacking (Khan et al., 2015). ALLAH is the creator of the universe and watches humans everywhere all the time (Javed et al., 2017). Strong belief in ALLAH ensures that Positive behavior has a greater marginal benefit than abusive behavior. (Rawwas et al., 2018). Based on the teaching of Quraan and the saying of Muhammad (SAWW) it was not surprising the IWE, when paired with interpersonal justice would mitigate the knowledge-hiding behavior.

5. Theoretical Contribution of the Study

Our results contribute to the literature in several ways. First, it responds to extend the literature and provides more evidence recommended by Abdullah et al., (2019) and Men et al., (2020).

Second, our study extends how ethical leadership impacts employee negative behavior. Due to the scarcity of research (Ment et al., 2018) on the underlying mechanism the current study tested the mediating role of interpersonal injustice between ethical leadership and knowledge hiding, an unexamined mechanism, a timely and relevant contribution. In the same vein, Anser et al., (2020) also called for an underlying mechanism. Interpersonal injustice has not been studied as mediating variable in ethical leadership and knowledge-hiding relationship. Ethical behavior not only plays a role model for employees which motivates employees to learn appropriate behavior in organizations (Brown et al., 2005) but also creates a positive image among employees. Employees' conceptions of

fairness are shaped by ethical leaders, and their attitudes about their responsibility to their managers, colleagues, and the business are influenced. Managers, when perceived to be fair, respectful, and kind, employees would feel indebted to engage in different types of job-related activities. Contrary, when supervisors negatively behave, an employee may evaluate them as “interpersonally unjust” and would limit or remove their effort in helping behavior. Ethical leadership is one of the main sources of fair procedures and outcomes (Cropanzano & Rupp 2002). Specifically, it was found that fairness (interpersonal justice) significantly affects ethical leadership- knowledge hiding relationship. Our study presents novel theoretical visions and delivered evidence that explains interpersonal injustice as an underlying mechanism through which ethical leadership exerts its impact to discourage employees from knowledge-hiding behavior.

Lastly, it was suggested that different personal characteristics like faith, value, and belief system may be tested as moderating variables Anand et al., (2021). Prior studies also supported the buffering impact of a personal trait like agreeableness (Colbert et al. 2004) and further studies have been recommended (Connelly et al., 2019). Considering the religious factor, IWE is a personal factor and can buffer organizational outcomes (Khan et al., 2020). Before this recommendation, Javed et al., (2019) specifically recommended exploring the moderating of IWE with deviant/negative outcomes. IWE has been taken as moderating variable for negative outcomes (for discussion, Khalid et al., 2018; Javed et al., 2019; Tufail et al., 2021). IWE plays buffering effect in any situation faced by employees. The results indicate that interpersonal justice had a lesser impact on knowledge hiding when paired with IWE; in contrast, employees lower on IWE were restricted to having positive behavior.

5.1 Managerial Implications

Our study brings many implications for both managers and organizations. Ethical leadership can make a significant role in the organizational setting by providing an ethical climate, ensuring fairness, and motivating employees to avoid negative behaviors by employees. It is confirmed that when managers are found trustworthy, honest, and interpersonally fair by employees they tend to involve in positive behavior. Managers need to ruminate on the ethical facet of actions along with the interpersonal relationship they develop with employees. The way managers communicate and behave with employees create an environment where how the employees would be reciprocated. Thus, firms must guarantee that managers realize and appreciate the value of managing ethics through demanding leadership training design, and educating them that how their behavior is perceived and reciprocated by employees. Such training may not fully cooperate with interpersonal and other job-related matters but may serve as stimuli that how their actions affect subordinates’ behavior.

Our findings may be valuable for the development of strategies that may support positive behavior. interpersonal justice plays important role in strategy development to handle employees’ negative behavior. interpersonal justice is important due to the ethical leadership style in the process which leads employees to behave in a certain direction. Managers must be aware of the consequences of unfair treatment as the employees who have been mistreated would do the same. If managers believe that incidents of abuse of employees are harmless in terms of inspiring harmful conduct in their colleagues, they may be mistaken. Therefore, interpersonal justice needs to be noticeable agenda in designing organizational policies and decision-making. An ethical leader may soften the knowledge hiding through interpersonal justice.

Organizations need to find out the main causes of knowledge hiding. Knowledge distribution is possible when employees are treated fairly, thus creating a fair working environment may bar an employee from knowledge withholding. Fair distribution of rewards, unbiased policies, and interpersonal justice may promote a positive working environment and helping behavior (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Organizations may tailor training programs for supervisors based on Islamic teaching and principles, as Islam is the religion that provides a complete set of principles in every aspect for human beings (Rice, 1999). Some studies claim that ethics can be taught to managers (Jones, 2009; Lau, 2010). Such training programs can improve the IWE level among employees. The study was conducted in Pakistan, the majority of the population (95%) are Muslims (Islam et al., 2021) and thus, the managerial implications have been provided for Muslim countries. However, our findings may apply to the non-Muslim population as well, as IWE has focused on loyalty and commitment in organizations (Yousaf, 2000). General principles of business, for example, fair wages, quality of work, helping behavior and ethical conduct can likewise be valuable for non-Muslim managers (Ali and Al-Owaihan, 2008). If principles mentioned by Islam are

integrated into current business organizations, can be equally beneficial for any organization whether located in Muslim or non-Muslim countries. Similarly, fairness and ethical leadership can mitigate the negative outcomes in organizations.

5.2 Limitations and Future Directions

Some questions remain that need to be answered in future studies. Our study brings a few limitations that may be extended in future studies. First, our study is based on public sector organizations. The private sector may be considered for further studies. Second, the gender ratio was not proportionate. Gender play important role in influencing knowledge-hiding behavior (Fauzi, 2022) and thus, providing an avenue for further studies. Only one dimension of organizational justice was tested for mediating analysis. Therefore, other dimensions of organizational justice need to be tested as underlying mechanisms (Cao, 2002). Lastly, IWE is considered a personal factor (Tufail, 2022), other personal factors like personality traits, self-efficacy, reward, and trust may play moderating role in knowledge hiding as a dependent variable (Nadeem et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2014; Zhai et al., 2020).

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