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Antecedents and Consequences of Knowledge Hiding Behavior: An Empirical Study of Public Sector Organization

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Abstract

Knowledge hiding behavior is a stimulating concept, which adversely affect performance of public organizations. it discourages the creativity, effectiveness of teamwork and collaboration efficiency in organizations, particularly in public sector. Conversely, knowledge management is an important resource for the success and sustainable growth in any organizations. However, the research on the antecedents and the consequences of knowledge hiding behavior in public organizations is limited. During the past decade, Researchers mostly explored the knowledge sharing aspects. While knowledge hiding behavior and its efficacy on the overall performance of public organizations remain unexplored. In this study, a quantitative research design was applied to investigate antecedents and consequences of knowledge hiding behavior. The Social Exchange theory sets the foundations for the conceptual framework. the data was collected by survey of employees of multiple public organizations. The result depicts that the mediation of knowledge hiding behavior is negatively affecting the individual and collective performance in public organizations, resulting in outcomes of moral disengagement and turnover intentions. Thereby, this study is a stepping-stone towards finding ways and means to overcome causes of knowledge hiding behavior among employees within public organizations.

Keywords: Knowledge Hiding, Job Anxiety, Job Insecurity, Interpersonal Injustice, Organizations.



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1. Introduction

In most organizations, either public or private, knowledge sharing is considered one of the key fundamentals for its success; therefore, managers try to encourage this facet. Especially during the recent few years where workplace deviation has increased exponentially in public organizations, the significance of knowledge sharing has been amplified (Abbasi et al., 2021). Knowledge management plays a crucial role in each organization, which can affect the firms' and employees' performance. However, due to the practice of knowledge hiding, it is often challenging to achieve satisfactory results in knowledge management (Kelloway & Barling, 2000). Furthermore, studies explored that employees resist sharing their knowledge and expertise in order to protect their cynicism, and defensive awareness and to have control over knowledge dominance (Akhlaghimofrad & Farmanesh, 2021). Employees often do not share their knowledge to conceal knowledge, expertise and experience to withhold their competitive edge, which is requested by other employees and subordinates.

In modern world with emerging organizations around the world are functioning in a complicated and unpredictable environment, therefore importance of knowledge management has increased many folds. Knowledge hiding refers to “an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by a co-worker” (Connelly et al., 2012). People interaction is normally based on exchange of mutual expectations that can be explained as giving and taking favors, the same is explained by social exchange theory (Cropanzano et al., 2002). The employees' behavior within the organizations is normally conferring to the social exchange theory that explains the behavior of rendering favors to other employees based on the anticipation that they will receive the favors in response. However, it is observed that it seldom happens in the expected way. When an employee presumes certain favors in return from an organization or individuals and the same is not extended by them, then due to this unsaid psychological contract of expecting a favor, negative emotions among employees are built, and a breach of psychological contract breach (PCB) happens (Pervez et al., 2019). The study by Bilal, M. J., Shaheen, W.A. (2024) indicates that technological innovation and natural resources support the adoption of energy efficiency strategies and environmental regulations, while green financial indicators significantly promote the transition to renewable energy sources. This study fills a gap in the existing literature by examining how demographic trends may affect the environmental impact of international trade (Shaheen, W.A., Kazim, M., Shafi, N., Perveen, N., 2025). This study examines sustainability considerations, including environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, along with governmental policies and regulations that influence capital budgeting decisions (Shaheen, W.A., Saleem, T., Shafi, N., Ullah, U., 2025). Knowledge hiding can be attributed to prime factors like job insecurity due to which employees feel insecure in the prevailing environment and perceive losing this job or position in the organization. In job anxiety, the employee undergoes unnecessary stress due to an unhealthy or unfavorable workplace atmosphere. Interpersonal injustice is observed when the management loses their moral ascendancy by not adhering to the code of conduct defined or agreed upon by them once the employee is hired. All these factors remain the major contributors to knowledge-hiding behavior, however, their effects on individual and collective performance require an in-depth analysis as there is a gap exists to identify the extent of damage that it has on the public organization. The study aimed to explore the impact of advertising on children's attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyles (Norin, A., Ishfaq, H., Shaheen, W. A., & Abbas, Z., 2024). In response to the increasing threat of global warming, academics and policymakers are examining the relationship between economic growth and environmental protection more closely (Mehroush, I., Shaheen, W.A., Shabir, M. et al., 2024). This interdisciplinary study primarily

explores the impact of institutional quality, particularly corruption levels, on the commercialization of innovation, as measured by high-tech product exports (Akbar, S. W., Rehman, A. U., Arshad, I., & Shaheen, W.A., 2024). Developing countries are suffering the most from knowledge hiding behavior issues and there is a need to probe deeper into the consequences of knowledge hiding. In countries like Pakistan, where there are many other factors affecting the viability of public organizations, the growing trend of knowledge hiding behavior which has already penetrated within the employees of public organizations if not addressed timely, it would have consequences not only on the performance of public organizations but also on complete society due to its direct relevance on addressing public issues. Therefore, in the recent past awareness efforts at multiple tries, however, there are still a lot more concrete and directed efforts required, which should aim to probe the reasons for knowledge hiding behavior and identify ways and means to generate or create policies, which should discourage knowledge hiding behavior.

The research will be a stepping-stone towards the theoretical perspective through which the unexplored variables of knowledge hiding behavior like interpersonal injustice, job anxiety and job insecurity, moral disengagement and turnover intentions for the researchers in this field. It will provide a platform to the researchers to address the causes and consequences of knowledge hiding behavior in public organizations. This research will also enhance the understanding of the relationship between different variables, how they affect the performance of an organization and how to address them.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objective

- To determine the determinants of knowledge hiding behavior in public organizations.
- To explore the mediating effect of knowledge hiding between interpersonal injustice, job anxiety, job insecurity, moral disengagement and turnover intention.
- To determine the relationship of knowledge hiding with the overall performance of public organizations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Literature Review and Hypothesis development

2.1.1. *Interpersonal Injustice and Knowledge Hiding*

Interpersonal injustice is way where the employees of organization is treated with disrespect and ignominy (Colquitt et al., 2015; RJ, 1986), “The consequences of interpersonal injustice within organizations are far-reaching. Treating individuals without dignity or respect is negatively related to many factors including performance (Cropanzano et al., 2002), discretionary citizenship behavior (Moorman & Byrne, 2013), supervisor satisfaction (Liao & Rupp, 2005), and job satisfaction (Masterson, 2000)”. Employees experiencing unjustness at work are averse to the effectiveness and productivity of organizations. Moreover, interpersonal injustice is also linked with having bad relationship with top management and supervisors or with the organizations, meaning by that the individual is not given due importance considering him passive employee (Lind & Tyler, 1988)”. Moreover, employees are sensitive to variations in how they are treated at work which leads to organizational politics and an unhealthy atmosphere. All this adds up to knowledge being hidden by experienced experts who most of the time are not against any individual/appointment but organization. Therefore, it is visibly recognized that justice between employees should be sustained by the top management of the organizations.

H1: *Interpersonal Injustice has a positive relationship with Knowledge Hiding Behaviour*

2.1.2. *Job-Anxiety and Knowledge Hiding*

Researchers find out that “Job anxiety causes employees to feel less satisfied with their jobs, perceive less support from their employer, and leave more often. We associate job anxiety with poor work performance” (Modaresnezhad et al., 2021). Moreover, it also discourages employees from participating in knowledge sharing, which plays a crucial role in the development of organization creativity and innovative capabilities. Employees who are suffering from job-anxiety normally do not interact actively once they are part of any team or even in their individual capacity. Job-Anxiety has an adverse effect on employees’ self-respect and self-confidence, and it leads to low performance and emotional exhaustion at work. Well-being of someone is directly affected by the treatment he gets at his work place (De Clercq et al., 2018) and above undermining depression and aggressive behavior, it also discourages employees to not contributing their role in the progress of organization.

H2: *Job Anxiety has a positive relationship with Knowledge Hiding Behaviour*

2.1.3. *Job-Insecurity and Knowledge Hiding*

Employees with cynicism are more insecure of losing their jobs and sharing the knowledge with their sub-ordinates and colleagues. One of the most promising reasons to hide skill, knowledge or expertise is the increase fear of job insecurity in organizations (Issac & Baral, 2018). In addition to that it is also observed that “their skills and expertise can be highly specialized if few people have these skills and expertise” (Issac et al., 2020). The study of Iqbal, M. A. et al. (2025) highlights the need for policymakers to adopt a multi-strategy approach that includes green finance, technological innovation, low-carbon energy, and supportive government programs. The participation of women in economic activities contributes to increased FDI. Furthermore, empirical evidence reinforces this positive relationship, indicating that industries with a higher concentration of female labor are more attractive for foreign direct investment Shaheen, W.A., Sajid, Q., Shafi, N., & Ullah, U., (2024). On the contrary, it is evident that if employee share their useful knowledge either from “top to bottom” or “bottom to top” contributes a greater share in the integration of profitability and revenues of the organizations. “Lack of job security was one possible reason for knowledge hiding and a high turnover of employees” (Aarabi et al., 2013).

H3: *Job Insecurity has a positive relationship with Knowledge Hiding Behaviour*

2.1.4. *Moral-Disengagement and Knowledge Hiding*

“Moral disengagement has been studied in a variety of workplace contexts that often involve high personal costs for the organizational members, such as job insecurity (Huang et al., 2017), social undermining (Lee et al., 2016), information security stress (D’Arcy et al., 2014) safety culture (Petitta et al., 2017), harassment (Claybourn, 2011), perceived injustice (Hystad et al., 2014) and feelings of envy (Duffy et al., 2012)”. In the context of knowledge hiding, it has been observed through many studies that moral disengagement can be increased at multiple levels. Researchers studied knowledge hiding among employees at the horizontal level (bottom-up) and some have discussed the same at vertical level (top-down). The study of Ullah, U., Shaheen, W.A. (2024) explores the relationship between sustainable finance and technological innovation, integrating the governance index and other economic indicators to assess their impact on sustainable development, particularly in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The findings of Hussain, Z., Huo, C., Ahmad, A. Shaheen, W.A. (2024) indicate that certain economies efficiently managed their health-oriented outputs, such as quality of life and mortality rates, while the majority exhibited

strong economic performance. It is obvious that moral disengagement among employees at any level can cost the organization with low profitability and failure in the market.

H4: *Moral Disengagement has a Positive Relationship with Knowledge Hiding Behaviour*

2.1.5. Turnover Intentions and Knowledge Hiding

Besides the mentioned outcomes of bullying at the workplace, an undesired behavior in academia, where the members are expected to share their knowledge, is knowledge hiding behavior (Hernaes et al., 2013). The study of Mahmood, A, Shaheen, W.A, Ullah, U. (2024) utilized regression analysis to explore the relationship between dividend yield and air pollution, aiming to identify correlations between the variables and assess the impact of air pollution on dividend yield. The study seeks to examine the social and behavioral factors influencing the adoption and usage of digital banking apps among Pakistani citizens during the pandemic (Tariq, M., Maryam, S. Z., Shaheen, W.A., 2024). A researcher also examines the impact of knowledge hiding behavior in organizations leads to mostly turnover intentions among the employees. Study also spectacles that knowledge hiding behavior at the workplace not only increases the interpersonal/ inters organizational conflicts but also turnover rates, brain drain and other negative consequences and outcomes. “ (Levin & Cross, 2004) posit that trust among colleagues increases the likelihood of knowledge exchanged in an organization”. Later, “ (Connelly et al., 2012) argue that knowledge hiding behavior either as hiding or holding knowledge is more apparent among colleagues who do not trust each other”. In such circumstances, an organization becomes such a place where employees’ feels suffocated and looks for other opportunities to flourish.

H5: *Turnover Intention has a Positive Relationship with Knowledge Hiding Behaviour*

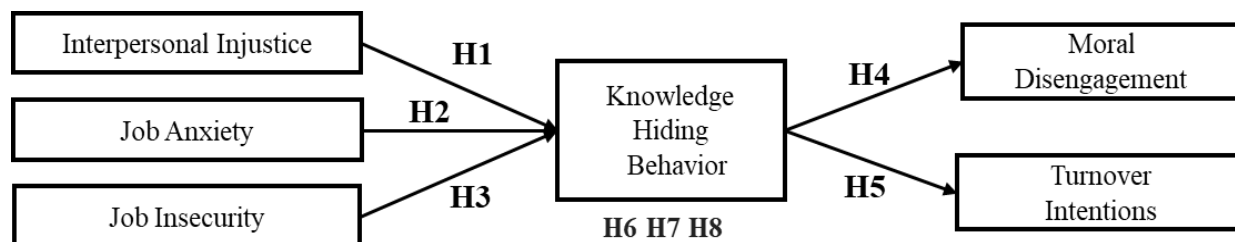


Figure 1: *Theoretical Framework*

3. Research Methodology

Methodology used in the research provides information of the measures and procedures developed to carry out research. This Research includes the following sections that are research philosophy, research approach, research design, the study of the population and data collection methods. The table explains the items, scale and sources of variable through which the results of the study are determined.

Research Design	Details
Research Philosophy	Positivism
Research Approach	Deductive
Research Strategy	Questionnaire survey
Time Horizon	Cross-sectional
Research Technique	Quantitative method
Instruments used for Data Collection	Questionnaire survey form
Unit of analysis	Individuals
Sampling method	Non-Probability
Data Analysis Technique	Goodness of measure: reliability, validity, Descriptive (demographics). Correlations. Hypothesis testing
Data Analysis Tools	SMART PLS 3.7

1.2. Measurement

1.2.1. Instrument Design and Operationalization of Variables

The study instrument consisted of elements that defined the information of employees. Each item in The **knowledge hiding** scale was examined by using 12-item scale which is developed by (Connelly et al., 2012)., The items for **Interpersonal Injustice** were developed by (Skarlicki et al., 2008) which are comprised 1 items on 5 point Likert scale by (Colquitt et al., 2015), Job Anxiety a five items job related anxiety scale is used in this research/ study, developed by (Parker & DeCotiis, 1983) and it is applied in preceding organizational studies also e.g. (De Clercq et al., 2018) with (Cronbach's alpha 5 0.88) , the items of **Job insecurity** were measured by using the job insecurity scale (de Witte, 2000, $\alpha=.87$) and The "**Turnover Intention** Scale" with the help of three items measures the self-reported intention of the participants to leave a particular job. This scale was developed by (Mobley et al., 1979).on a 5-point Likert Scale, i.e., "1" = "Strongly Disagree," "2" = "Disagree," "3" = "Neither agree nor disagree," "4" = "Agree," and "5" = "Strongly Agree." In continuation to the previous studies (Barsky, 2011; Hystad et al., 2014), to measure moral disengagement, we used displacement of responsibility and diffusion of responsibility mechanisms as prime parameters. From previous studies we used nine items (Barsky, 2011; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2008; Hystad et al., 2014) to analyze both dimensions and were then combined into a solitary factor to depict a "Non-responsibility" instrument of moral disengagement (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2008), were rated on a 7-point Likert Scale, i.e., "1" = "Strongly Disagree," "2" = "Disagree," "3" = "Somewhat Disagree," "4" = "Neither agree nor disagree," "5" = "Somewhat Agree," "4" = "Agree," and "5" = "Strongly Agree." The survey also discusses the demographic factors, i.e., Age, Gender, Education, Experience and Nature of Job.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Researchers use SMART PLS 3.7 to conduct the data analysis depending upon Structural Equation Modeling to conduct data analysis. PLS-SEM analyzes the result depending upon the "Variance" and the latent variables are used to analyze the data in the research. study assess the Internal Consistency Reliability, Common Method Biasness and Collinearity, Construct Validity, Discriminant Validity, variance inflation factor (VIF), coefficient of Determination (R^2),

Distribution Analysis (F^2) and Mediation Analysis of each construct were assessed to ascertain internal consistency construct validity, defects of multicollinearity and construct consistency, respectively. To further confirm discriminant validity, HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) ratio test was conducted.

In order to check the quality of constructs in the study, the measurement model is applied. In testing the measurement model, if the results pass the measurement model, then structural model of the results is tested and the reliability of the construct as a rule of thumb should be at least 0.60-0.70 as suggested by researchers (Taber, 2018).

Table 1: Internal Consistency Reliability and Construct Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Interpersonal Injustice	0.611	0.760
Job Anxiety	0.645	0.810
Job Insecurity	0.692	0.864
Knowledge Hiding	0.653	0.765
Moral disengagement	0.758	0.841
Turnover Intention	0.697	0.820

Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio for correlation was applied in order to test the discriminant validity of the variables. “HTMT tests checked the average of Heterotrait-Heteromethod correlations with the relative average of Monotrait-Heteromethod correlations” (Henseler et al., 2015). The researchers recommended the value of HTMT should be less than 1. Whereas, few authors also suggest it should be less than 0.85 (Kline, 2023) or 0.90 (Teo et al., 2008) to determine the discriminant validity.

Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	IJ	JA	JI	KH	MD	TI
Interpersonal Injustice	1					
Job Anxiety	0.190	1				
Job Insecurity	0.147	0.513	1			
Knowledge Hiding	0.198	0.537	0.475	1		
Moral Disengagement	0.425	0.402	0.255	0.457	1	
Turnover Intention	0.190	0.444	0.451	0.523	0.566	1

The inner model VIF values is used to analyze the collinearity of the reflective statistics. In this test, the results show the values of VIF for collinearity is less than the ideal range of the variable, which is shown in the table below. Collinearity statistics testing recommends that the ideal value should be less than 3, therefore the test conducted during the research has been accepted.

Table 3: Collinearity Statistics Inner VIF values

	IJ	JA	JI	KH	MD	TI
Interpersonal Injustice				1.030		
Job Anxiety				1.253		
Job Insecurity				1.210		
Knowledge Hiding					1.000	1.000

The collinearity values in statistics, R^2 and F^2 are measured through structural model, this model is used to test the values of path hypnotized and its significance. For testing the structural model, the values of cross-validated statistical significance, relevance of path coefficients and redundancy measure are also tested.

Table 4: Coefficient of Determination R^2

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Knowledge Hiding	0.999	0.999
Moral Disengagement	0.117	0.115
Turnover Intention	0.159	0.157

Table 5: Distribution Analysis F^2

	KH	MD	TI
Interpersonal Injustice	0.022		
Job Anxiety	0.004		
Job Insecurity	0.037		
Knowledge Hiding		0.133	0.190

4.1. Hypothesis Testing

In this study, four hypotheses out of six hypotheses formulated have been accepted and verified the provision to the proposed relationships. Moreover, the mediation analysis revealed a reasonable relationship.

Table 6: T Statistics (Bootstrapping)

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
IJ->KH	0.012	0.014	0.054	0.223	0.824
JA->KH	0.385	0.387	0.056	6.884	0.000
JI->KH	0.177	0.179	0.058	3.071	0.002
KH->MD	0.422	0.425	0.044	9.513	0.000
KH->TI	0.408	0.412	0.046	8.898	0.000

Table 7: Specific Indirect effect

	Original Sample (O)Beta	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
IJ -> KH -> MD	0.005	0.006	0.023	0.221	0.825
JA -> KH -> MD	0.163	0.165	0.031	5.239	0.000
JI -> KH -> MD	0.075	0.076	0.026	2.844	0.004
IJ -> KH -> TI	0.005	0.006	0.022	0.221	0.825
JA -> KH -> TI	0.157	0.160	0.031	5.033	0.000
JI -> KH -> TI	0.072	0.074	0.026	2.783	0.005

4.2. Testing of Hypothesis Relationship

The hypothesis testing is completed on the direct and indirect effects of the variables on dependent variables, Moral Disengagement and Turnover Intentions. The results are discussed as under.

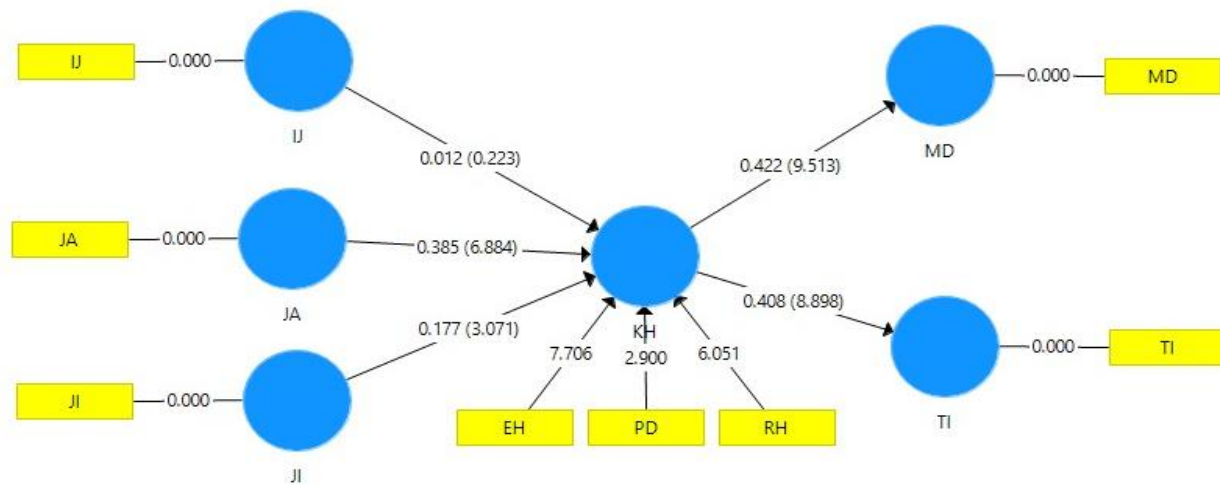


Figure 2: Hypothesis Test Result

5. Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

The essential focus of this research was on finding answers to identified research questions: To what extent Interpersonal Injustice and Job-anxiety can trigger knowledge hiding behavior in Public Organizations? it is also the first research question being conducted. The study partially supports the research question on the basis of hypotheses as it can be observed H1: Interpersonal injustice is negatively related to knowledge Hiding. Perhaps this is because employees in public organization are bound to the system due to some major benefits which private organization does not address, one of the major factors observed during the course of research is the fact that most of the employees enjoys the job security and some remuneration benefit like free health facilities, rebates and pensions. Whereas, Job-Anxiety is positively related to Knowledge Hiding Behavior in public organizations. Whereas, the Job-Anxiety has an adverse effect on employees' self-respect and self-confidence and it leads to low performance and emotional exhaustion at work. Well-being of someone is directly affected by the treatment he gets at his work place. (De Clercq et al., 2018) and above undermining depression and aggressive behavior, it also discourages employees to not contributing their role in the progress of organization. Employees, who are suffering from job-anxiety, normally do not interact actively once they are part of any team or even in their individual capacity. Therefore, H¹ is not approved but H² is accepted and approved.

The second research question addressed by the study was How to mitigate the effects of moral disengagement and turnover intention due knowledge hiding behavior in the Public Organization to enhance their overall performance? The hypotheses results show the strong relationship of Job Anxiety and Job Insecurity with Moral Disengagement and Turnover Intentions with the mediation of knowledge Hiding Behavior in hypotheses H², H³, H⁵ and H⁶. Therefore, all these hypotheses are accepted and approved. Perhaps this is because the majority feels anxiety and insecurity at workplace which later disengaged their moral and intentions to turnover. This clearly describe that even in organized/ leading organizations there exists a room for unethical activities like moral disengagement and knowledge hiding behavior. "That is why moral disengagement has been found to be an outcome of negative perceptions of contextual factors (Huang et al., 2017); (Hystad et al., 2014); (Loi et al., 2015), affective states (Fida et al., 2015), and self-interested situations (Zhao et al., 2010); (Kish-Gephart et al., 2014) focusing on tasks that might help to circumvent the potential loss". The turnover intentions due to the knowledge hiding behavior is clearly an obstacle for progressive and leading organizations. " (McElveen et al., 2006) discuss the fact that professors

should learn “emotional intelligence” skills in order to be able to motivate others and be aware of their own and other’s emotions, due to the fact that emotional intelligence is positively related with teamwork, trust, organizational commitment and negatively related with knowledge hiding behavior (De Geofroy & Evans, 2017)”.

6. Conclusion

In the course of carrying out the survey, a major limitation was felt while collection of data from federal ministries officers. The researcher approached the joint/ deputy secretaries of different federal ministries, however due to their multiple commitments and other official obligations it was really difficult to convince them to participate in the survey. Moreover, they were also briefed on the ethical considerations/ standards that were maintain during the course of data collection. Moreover, employees with expertise dominance, experience and personal interest are the key instruments of knowledge hiding behavior which has a significance impact over other employees’ performance at work in general and on the overall progress of organization in particular. However, it has not been given due importance especially by policy makers in Public organizations. Thereby this study is a stepping-stone towards finding ways and means to overcome causes of knowledge hiding behavior among employees within all organization in general and Public organizations in particular, as this provides methods and measures to address theoretical and practical issues that are present in public organizations due to knowledge hiding behavior. This will lead towards sustainability and stability in state owned organizations.

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