

Impact of Perceived Interactional Injustice on knowledge Hiding Behavior: An Exploration of Mediated Mechanism among Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan

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Abstract

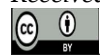
This study aimed to discover how interactional injustice perceptions led to knowledge-hiding behavior among higher education faculty in Pakistan, and whether this relationship was mediated by the absence of trust. Using the theories of organizational justice and social exchange, a cross-sectional survey of 384 faculty members from private and public universities was conducted. Regression and bootstrapped mediation techniques were used to analyze the gathered data. The findings indicated that, among the predictors of knowledge hiding, interactional injustice perceptions were the only significant and positive ones, and the absence of trust was a partial mediator of the predictor. The findings of this study underscored the significance of interpersonal justice and trust in constructing environments of open knowledge sharing in academic institutions. The findings of this study offered higher education practitioners a starting point to better understand the significance of dysfunctional trust in the workplace and suggested various pathways for future academic research on interactional justice perceptions and knowledge management.

Keywords: interactional injustice, knowledge hiding, lack of trust, higher education, mediation, Pakistan

Introduction

Interactions within an organization shaped the attitudes and behaviors of the employees. Perceived fairness was a building block of workplace relationships. Within the context of higher education, collaboration and sharing knowledge among faculty were important for teaching and research productivity, as well as institutional advancement. However, an environment of interactional injustice—of unfair, disrespectful, and insensitive interpersonal treatment—triggered several negative behavioral responses. One such response was the deliberate concealment of knowledge, which could be in the form of evasive hiding, playing dumb, or justifying a decision not to disclose knowledge (Ramzan et al., 2023). Such responses were a barrier to individual and organizational growth, and contributed to the stagnation of academic advancement.

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Although some research had been dedicated to the causes of knowledge hiding, perceptions of interactional injustice and trust within the specific cultural and institutional context of higher education in Pakistan had not been studied. It had been suggested that trust had a decisive role in determining whether an injustice perception led to knowledge concealing behavior (Mayer et al., 1995). If faculty members did not trust their colleagues or superiors, they might have believed that the knowledge they shared would not be rewarded and would not be beneficial; thus, knowledge sharing might have been perceived as a risk.

The employees in organizations exhibited certain behaviors and attitudes based on how they interacted with one another. Workplace relationships were built upon perceptions of fairness. In higher education, the cooperation and knowledge sharing among teaching and research staff were critical for the productivity and growth of the institution. When there was interactional injustice, which described unfair treatment and disrespectful and inconsiderate behaviors, several negative behaviors were invoked. Concealing knowledge was one of these behaviors and could be manifested in a number of ways, including concealment by evasion, feigning ignorance, or by providing a justification for withholding knowledge (Ramzan et al., 2023). These behaviors were detrimental to both the organization and the individual, and also hindered the progress of teaching and research in academia.

There was a fair amount of literature on the reasons for knowledge hiding, but the perceptions of interactional injustice and their relationship with trust in the higher education setting in Pakistan remained unexplored. It had been postulated that trust was the key factor in overcoming the concealment of knowledge after a perception of injustice (Mayer et al., 1995).

If the faculty did not trust their colleagues or bosses, they might have thought the information they provided would not be rewarded, so they probably considered that sharing information would be a waste of time. Therefore, this research aimed to find out the effect of perceived interactional injustice on knowledge hiding and the mediating effect of lack of trust among university staff members. This research was the first of its kind in Pakistan's higher education sector. It addressed the issue of relational fairness in academic contexts and offered value-based trust improvement strategies that were expected to increase knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Theoretical Framework

This research used the principles of social exchange and justice theories to examine how trust and interpersonal fairness affected knowledge sharing. Interactional justice was defined as how fairly a person perceived the treatment and communication to be (Colquitt, 2001). Social exchange theory argued that individuals reciprocated positive actions with positive actions of their own, and negative actions with negative or absence of actions (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees responded to perceived interactional injustice by withholding knowledge, especially when their trust in colleagues and leadership was compromised (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer et al., 1995).

Literature Review

Interactional Justice and Outcomes

The quality of communication and treatment of employees - affects job satisfaction and organizational trust and commitment. It has been shown that a lack of proper treatment of peers in multicultural and workplace studies has a negative impact on group cooperation and a rise in negative attitudes and behavior (Lu, 2006; Liu, Long, & Li, 2023).

Knowledge Hiding:

Many of the behaviors that are classified as knowledge hiding include the avoidance of requests for information, ignorance, and rationalization (Connelly et al., 2012). Research has shown that these behaviors are responsible for a decline in a team's work and the creation of a culture of fear and a decline on trust and work-related innovation (Xiao & Cooke, 2018; Fait et al., 2023).

Trust as a Mediator

Trust, which refers to the willingness of one person to be vulnerable to another person because of positive expectation regarding the other's conduct, (Mayer et al., 1995) forms the basis for most exchanges between individuals of an organization and knowledge related work. It has been shown that the lack of trust that is a consequence of interactional injustice leads to knowledge hiding behaviors (Mohammed & Kamalanabhan, 2020; Zhao et al., 2019).

Contextual Considerations:

Higher Education in Pakistan

Knowledge hiding behaviors in a workplace context is agitated and fueled by the lack of proper treatment and behavior of peers. The behaviors that have been documented display wider system and structural arrangements, among them Western dominance and Eastern collectivism (Ghani et al., 2020; Ramzan et al., 2023).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

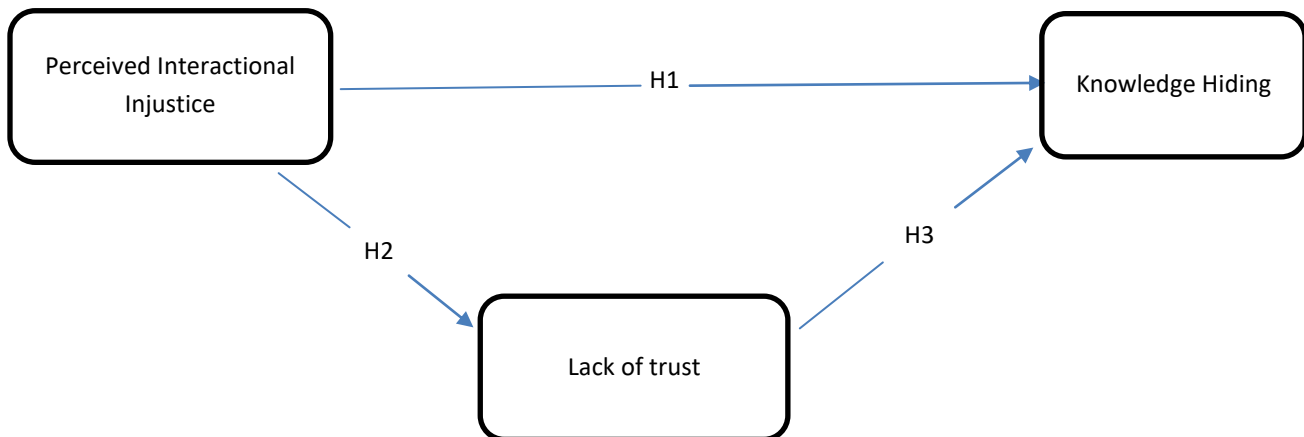


Figure 1: Research Model

Hypotheses Development

Based on theory and prior research, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Perceived interactional injustice positively predicts knowledge hiding behaviors.

H2: Perceived interactional injustice positively predicts lack of trust.

H3: Lack of trust mediates the relationship between perceived interactional injustice and knowledge hiding.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to assess relationships among perceived interactional injustice, lack of trust, and knowledge hiding at a single point in time (Mann, 2003).

Sampling and Participants

The target population included faculty members at higher education institutions in Pakistan. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula for finite populations ($N \approx 57,000$), a sample size of 384 was determined as appropriate. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across institution types (public/private) and academic departments.

Data Collection

A structured, close-ended questionnaire was administered online and in print. Measures were adapted from validated scales in the literature: interactional injustice (Colquitt, 2001), knowledge hiding (Connelly et al., 2012), and trust (Mayer et al., 1995). Responses used Likert-type scales.

Data Analysis

Data were cleaned and analyzed using SPSS. Reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha. Hypotheses were tested using linear regression and mediation analysis with bootstrapping to estimate indirect effects.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The sample contained 384 faculty members and represented all age groups and ranks and included a distribution of experience levels. Respondents with a Doctorate made up just over half of the sample at 50.8%. Assistant professors and lecturers were the primary academic ranks. The sample appeared nearly balanced in terms of gender.

Reliability

Primary scales that were assessed reported Cronbach's alpha values to be greater than the standard accepted value of $\alpha = .70$, thus demonstrating strong internal validity (Hair et al., 2010).

Hypothesis Testing

To test the first hypothesis (H1), the regression of knowledge hiding on perceived interactional injustice produced the following results: $B = 0.575$, $SE = 0.104$, $t = 5.52$, $p < .001$, which supports the first hypothesis (H1). The second hypothesis (H2) was supported when the regression of lack of trust on perceived interactional injustice produced the following results: $B = 0.634$, $SE = 0.113$, $t = 5.61$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis three (H3) involved testing perceived interactional injustice and lack of trust as predictors, where lack of trust was a predictor of knowledge hiding. The indirect effect was estimated at 0.280 (Boot SE = 0.060, 95% CI [0.172, 0.428]), demonstrating evidence of a significant partial mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Written summaries of the remaining tables and figures offered in the appendix relate to this research hypothesis.

Discussion

The results demonstrated that perceived interactional injustice was likely to be the precursor of knowledge hiding between faculty members with the lack of trust serving as a partial mediator. These results were in line with the theory of organizational justice and social exchange which stipulates that negative treatment by one of the parties in an organization leads to the erosion of trust and the defensive behavior of not sharing information (Colquitt, 2001; Mayer et al., 1995). The partial mediation also suggested that other factors such as psychological safety and commitment to the profession could be considered to explain the impact of interactional injustice on knowledge hiding, and therefore, future research should explore these factors. Practically, universities were advised to implement fair and respectful treatment of all under their care, ensure clear and open lines of communication, and provide trust-building measures that include leadership development and training in collaborative decision-making, to counter knowledge hiding and improve faculty collaboration.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

From the available literature, this study provided an empirical basis for the blending of interactional justice, trust, and knowledge hiding in the context of higher education with an emphasis on the mediation of trust in the cited instances.

Practical Implications

University administrators were encouraged to create fair and respectful environments by providing training and workshops on respectful communication and building trust and reciprocity in order to actively encourage knowledge-sharing and reduce barriers.

Limitations and Future Directions

Due to the survey design employed, the study lacked the ability to describe the relationships among the variables as being causal. For this reason, future studies were encouraged to adopt a design that could be longitudinal or of an experimental type. Since the study was confined to the faculty members in Pakistan. Cross-cultural and comparative studies were proposed for future

research to evaluate the universality of the findings. Innovation of such future studies should include other mediators such as psychological safety and organizational commitment, and moderators such as personality and organizational tenure.

Conclusion

The research referred to the perception of interactional injustice as a cause of knowledge hiding. The absence of trust was noted to be a partial mediator. The study underscored the perception of unfair interpersonal interaction was positively correlated to the contraction of trust which caused the knowledge concealing behavior. Heuristically, the perception of interactional injustice and the absence of trust can be positively controlled by the improving interpersonal justice. Thus, the more the interpersonal justice and the trust are, the more knowledge is likely to be shared. This might help in improving the functioning of the organization.

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