

Bridging the gap: A multi-level narrative review of leadership styles and knowledge hiding in organizations

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ABSTRACT

Purpose-This narrative review examines how ten leadership styles, transformational, transactional, servant, ethical, abusive, altruistic, empowering, exploitative, humble, and self-serving shape employee knowledge hiding behavior in organizations, along with the mediating and moderating mechanisms that condition this relationship.

Methodology-Through a thematic analysis of 26 empirical and conceptual articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, this study identifies two parallel pathways of influence. It synthesizes the conceptual mechanisms underlying each leadership-knowledge hiding relationship.

Findings-A supportive-relational leadership style reduces knowledge hiding through psychological ownership, prosocial motivation, meaningful work, and positive affect. In contrast, a destructive leadership style increases knowledge hiding through perceived competition, employee silence, and emotional exhaustion. Notably, empowering leadership occupies an ambiguous, paradoxical position: it reduces knowledge hiding when employees possess adequate psychological resources, but exacerbates it under high hindrance stressors and high workload, depending on employees' resource conditions.

Research Limitations-As a narrative review, this study did not systematically assess the methodological quality of individual articles. Most of the reviewed studies rely on cross-sectional designs, which limit causal inference, and the literature is dominated by East Asian and Western contexts, raising questions about the generalizability of the proposed framework to other cultural settings, such as Southeast Asia.

Novelty-Building on social learning theory, social exchange theory, and conservation of resources theory, this study proposes a multi-level, multi-path conceptual framework. It demonstrates that the same mediating construct can produce opposing effects depending on the leadership context in which it operates, a finding that advances understanding beyond the single-style, single-mediator model.

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1. Introduction

In a knowledge-based economy, organizational knowledge is a key strategic asset that enables individuals and organizations to maintain a competitive advantage (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). Organizations actively encourage open knowledge sharing as a prerequisite for increased effectiveness, innovation, and competitiveness (Connelly et al., 2019). However, behind this expectation lies a serious and widespread challenge: knowledge hiding (KH),

defined as the deliberate withholding or concealment of knowledge requested by others (Connelly et al., 2012). KH is not an isolated anomaly; it is a systemic phenomenon with documented consequences. Empirical evidence shows that KH reduces creativity (Feng et al., 2022), reduces individual and organizational performance (Moin et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022), hinders innovation (Chen et al., 2022), and weakens an organization's long-term financial competitiveness (Černe et al., 2014).

The urgency of this issue is heightened by empirical data showing that KH is not rare. Multiple cross-sector studies have found that most employees have either engaged in or experienced KH during their daily work (Xiao & Cooke, 2019; Siachou et al., 2021). This prompts a fundamental question: why, under organizational pressure to share knowledge, do employees nonetheless choose to hide it? The answer cannot be found at the individual or task level alone; it must be traced back to the most determinant contextual factor in organizational life, leadership.

Leadership has been identified as one of the most influential antecedents of employee behavior, including the decision to share or withhold knowledge. Ladan et al., (2017) argue that specific leadership styles determine whether KH occurs more or less frequently in organizations, a proposition supported by a growing body of empirical evidence. Relational and supportive leadership styles, such as transformational (Scuotto et al., 2021), servant leadership (Khan et al., 2025), and ethical leadership (Men et al., 2018), consistently reduce KH, while destructive styles, including exploitative (Guo et al., 2020), self-serving (Zhang, et al., 2025b), and transactional leadership, promote it (Zahoor et al., 2024).

A recent meta-analysis of 41 empirical studies confirmed that change-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership behaviors negatively impact KH, while passive-destructive leadership behaviors positively impact it (Zhang et al., 2025a). Beyond leadership styles, relational perspectives such as leader-member exchange (LMX) theory have also illuminated how the quality of leader-follower relationships shapes employees' willingness to share or conceal knowledge, with high-quality LMX relationships associated with greater psychological safety and reduced knowledge-protective behaviors (Xiao & Cooke, 2019).

Similarly, identity-based and relational leadership perspectives highlight that employees' sense of belonging, identification with their leader, and relational security are boundary conditions that determine how leadership influence on KH is received and interpreted (Siachou et al., 2021). While these relational perspectives offer valuable complementary insights, they operate at the dyadic relationship level rather than examining the behavioral and motivational logic embedded in distinct leadership styles, which is the analytical focus of the present study. The potential of knowledge sharing to serve as a bridge between trust, innovation, and organizational performance has also been well established (Auliyah et al., 2025), underscoring the crucial role that enabling or inhibiting knowledge flows plays in organizational outcomes.

Despite these advances, three fundamental gaps remain in the literature. First, most studies examine a single leadership style in isolation without systematically comparing it to others, so no synthetic framework explains why different styles produce opposing effects on KH. This fragmentation is consequential: without cross-style comparison, it is impossible to identify which leadership features specifically drive KH reduction or amplification, or whether the mechanisms are style-specific or generalizable (Siachou et al., 2021). Second, the psychological mechanisms that mediate these relationships and the contextual conditions that moderate them have not been integrated into a single coherent explanatory model.

Individual studies have identified promising mediators such as prosocial motivation, psychological ownership, and employee silence, as well as moderators such as organizational cynicism and political skill. However, these findings remain fragmented across separate theoretical frameworks. Notably, psychological safety, a construct shown to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and KH (Men et al., 2018), illustrates how the same mechanism can operate differently across leadership contexts. However, no integrative framework has mapped these conditional effects across multiple leadership styles simultaneously. Third, while prior reviews have acknowledged leadership as one antecedent of

KH among many others (Xiao & Cooke, 2019; Siachou et al., 2021; Anand et al., 2022), these reviews did not systematically compare multiple leadership styles within a unified theoretical framework. Anand et al. (2022) identified seven research streams in which leadership appears only peripherally as a moderator or mediator, and focused primarily on the Chinese context without cross-style comparison (Xiao & Cooke, 2019). Consequently, the question of why different leadership styles produce opposing effects on KH via distinct psychological pathways remains underexplored in the existing literature.

This study addresses these gaps through a narrative review and thematic analysis of the literature indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. It examines how ten leadership styles: transformational, transactional, servant, ethical, abusive, altruistic, empowering, exploitative, humble, and self-serving shape employees' KH and identifies the mediating and moderating mechanisms that condition these relationships. It is guided by two research questions: (1) How do different leadership styles influence knowledge hiding behavior in organizations? (2) What psychological and contextual factors mediate and moderate the relationship between leadership styles and knowledge hiding? Three theoretical frameworks are selected because together they capture the full range of mechanisms through which leadership shapes employee behavior.

Social learning theory (SCL) by Bandura (1977) explains how employees cognitively internalize and replicate the relational logic modeled by their leaders (Ladan et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2022). Social exchange theory (SET) by Blau (1964) explains the reciprocal dynamics through which fair and supportive leadership generates positive employee responses while unfair or abusive treatment triggers withdrawal (Anser et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2025) and conservation of resources (COR) theory by Hobfoll (1989) explains why employees under resource-threatening leadership engage in protective behaviors such as knowledge hiding (Guo et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2024). No single theory captures all three mechanisms simultaneously: the cognitive-behavioral, relational, and motivational-affective dimensions, making their integration necessary for a comprehensive explanation of how leadership shapes KH across diverse contexts (Zhang et al., 2025a).

2. Literature Review

Understanding why employees choose to share or conceal knowledge requires a theoretical foundation that can account for behavioral, relational, and motivational dynamics simultaneously. This study draws on three complementary theoretical lenses that together provide an integrated framework for analyzing how leadership shapes KH behavior. Social learning theory (SLT) posits that Bandura (1977) posits that individuals learn by observing and modeling the behavior of others, including leaders. When leaders model openness and collaboration, employees tend to internalize and replicate those patterns, reducing KH. Conversely, leaders who display selfish or exploitative behavior prompt employees to adopt similar conduct (Ladan et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2022).

COR by Hobfoll (1989) holds that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect resources they value. Under negative leadership, such as abusive or exploitative styles, employees perceive threats to their emotional and relational resources and respond by hiding knowledge as a form of self-protection (Islam et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025a). SET by Blau (1964) explains that social relationships are built on reciprocity. When leaders demonstrate care, honesty, and support, employees reciprocate with positive behaviors, including voluntary knowledge sharing. Conversely, unfair or abusive treatment leads employees to withhold their contributions (Anser et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2025). Complementing SET, organizational justice theory further specifies that employees' perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness shape their willingness to contribute knowledge, with perceived injustice consistently predicting higher levels of KH (Jahanzeb et al., 2019).

While each theory captures a distinct mechanism, its explanatory power is fully realized only when considered together. SLT operates primarily at the cognitive-behavioral level, SET at the relational level, and COR at the motivational-affective level. In most leadership contexts, these three mechanisms operate simultaneously and reinforce each other: a supportive leader builds relational trust (SET), models collaborative norms (SLT), and

preserves employees' psychological resources (COR), all of which converge to suppress KH (Siachou et al., 2021; Anand et al., 2022).

However, in ambiguous leadership contexts, the three theories can generate competing predictions. Empowering leadership illustrates this tension most clearly: SET predicts that delegated authority will be interpreted as trust, prompting reciprocal openness (Khan et al., 2025) yet COR predicts that when a high workload already depletes employees' resources, the same delegation becomes an additional burden that triggers defensive KH (Wang et al., 2021). It is precisely this interaction between theories rather than the application of any single framework that guides the thematic synthesis conducted in this study and enables the multi-level conceptual framework proposed here to capture the conditional and context-dependent nature of leadership's influence on KH (Siachou et al., 2021; Anand et al., 2022).

Leadership is a complex and evolving concept. Bass (1990) defines it as an interaction between two or more group members that involves structuring the situation and members' perceptions and expectations. Rost (1993) emphasizes its relational dimension as an influence relationship between leaders and followers aimed at achieving change that reflects shared goals. Although there are over 1,400 definitions in the literature, scholars generally agree that leadership involves the process of influencing others to achieve organizational goals (McCleskey, 2014). Throughout its history, various leadership typologies have been proposed. The comprehensive leadership model developed by Avolio and Bass (2001) includes transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership as the main spectrum. Beyond this model, contemporary research also examines servant, ethical, altruistic, humble, empowering, exploitative, abusive, and self-serving leadership styles, each with distinct characteristics and varying effects on employee behavior (Men et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2025b).

Viewed through the three theoretical lenses outlined above, these leadership styles can be understood as operating through distinct psychological pathways: some build the relational trust and cognitive openness that suppress KH, while others deplete employees' resources or model self-protective behaviors that amplify it. This study examines the influence of leadership styles on KH behavior. These styles were selected because they represent the most extensively studied leadership approaches in contemporary knowledge management and organizational behavior literature, with substantial empirical evidence directly linking each to employee knowledge behaviors and KH (Siachou et al., 2021; Anand et al., 2022). Other leadership approaches, such as authentic, inclusive, paternalistic, spiritual, and laissez-faire leadership, while theoretically relevant, remain underrepresented in the empirical KH literature and are therefore reserved for future research directions.

Complementing the style-based approach adopted here, relational perspectives such as LMX theory have also illuminated how the quality of dyadic leader-follower relationships shapes employees' knowledge behaviors, with high-quality LMX associated with stronger organizational identification and reduced KH (Zhao et al., 2019). Similarly, Social Identity Theory suggests that employees who strongly identify with their leader and workgroup develop a sense of collective ownership over shared knowledge, reducing their motivation to conceal it (Siachou et al., 2021). While these relational and identity-based perspectives offer valuable complementary insights, this study focuses on leadership styles as its primary analytical lens because styles capture the behavioral and motivational logic that systematically shapes the psychological conditions of all employees, not only those in high-quality dyadic relationships.

KH is defined as a deliberate attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another (Connelly et al., 2019). KH differs from simply not sharing because it involves intentionality and is an active response to a request (Abubakar et al., 2019). Connelly et al. (2012) identified three dimensions of KH: (1) rationalized hiding, providing reasons why information cannot be shared; (2) evasive hiding, providing false or partial information; and (3) playing dumb, pretending not to have the requested information. Through the lens of SLT, SET, and COR, these three dimensions can be understood as reflecting different psychological states: rationalized hiding often reflects employees' relational calculation under SET; evasive hiding mirrors self-protective resource conservation under

COR; and playing dumb may reflect the internalization of deceptive norms modeled by destructive leaders under SLT.

The organizational consequences of KH are significant. The behavior reduces creativity, innovation, and organizational performance, while increasing negative affect and eroding interpersonal trust (Černe et al., 2014; Rezwani & Takahashi, 2021). The organizational climate within which KH occurs also plays a critical boundary role. Psychological safety, the shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, has been identified as a key condition under which leadership's influence on KH is amplified or attenuated: ethical leadership reduces KH most effectively when psychological safety is high, while even supportive leadership loses its protective effect in psychologically unsafe climates (Men et al., 2018). However, some studies have noted inconsistent results (Wang et al., 2018) found that perceived KH had a positive impact on individual sales performance, suggesting that specific contextual conditions can moderate KH's effects, a complexity that the multi-theoretical framework adopted in this study is equipped to address.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a narrative review approach to examine and synthesize literature on the role of leadership in shaping knowledge-hiding behavior in organizations. This approach was selected because it enables deep, flexible, and holistic conceptual exploration, and because it supports the integration of findings from diverse methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). Unlike systematic reviews, which are bound by strict protocols, narrative reviews are better suited to theory development, conceptual synthesis, and the exploration of future research agendas, objectives central to the present study (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Ferrari, 2015).

A literature search was conducted on May 1, 2025, using two major academic databases, Scopus and Web of Science, which are prioritized for their extensive coverage of leading publications in management and organizational behavior. Keywords were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR into two groups: the first group included variations of leadership styles (e.g., "transformational leadership," "servant leadership," "ethical leadership," "abusive supervision," "exploitative leadership"), and the second group included variations of the concept of knowledge hiding (e.g., "knowledge hiding," "knowledge withholding," "knowledge concealment"). No publication-year restriction was applied, as the aim was to capture the full breadth of available evidence on each leadership style's relationship with KH, including foundational and classic works. The search was limited to English-language articles published in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, excluding predatory journals. Articles were included if they explicitly addressed the relationship between leadership style and KH behavior, both conceptually and empirically. Studies examining mediators and moderators in this relationship were also included. Articles were excluded if they were opinion pieces or editorials without an empirical basis, if they discussed KH without linking it to leadership, or if they were only available as abstracts without complete data and analysis.

The initial search yielded 73 articles. After removing duplicates, 41 articles remained. These were further screened for relevance to the research questions, based on the title, keywords, and abstract, resulting in a final sample of 26 peer-reviewed articles that formed the basis of this review. While this process did not follow the formal protocols of a systematic review, it was conducted transparently and purposively to ensure that the selected articles directly addressed the leadership-KH relationship and provided sufficient theoretical and empirical depth to support conceptual synthesis.

The analysis used a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) involving three stages: a thorough reading of all selected articles; thematic coding to classify findings by leadership type and by mediator and moderator roles; and a cross-article synthesis to identify patterns, consistencies, contradictions, and gaps in the existing literature. Throughout this process, SLT, SET, and COT theory served as analytical lenses for interpreting and organizing emerging

themes rather than as predetermined hypotheses to be tested. This synthesis formed the basis of the integrated conceptual framework proposed in the discussion section.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Leadership Style and Knowledge Hiding

Leadership is one of the most important determinants of employee behavior in organizations, including the tendency to hide knowledge. Connelly et al. (2012) define knowledge hiding as a deliberate attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge from someone who has requested it, a behavior that is fundamentally different from simply not sharing because it involves a deliberate and active response to the request. The organizational consequences are not trivial; knowledge hiding has been empirically shown to erode creativity, weaken performance, hinder innovation, and reduce the overall financial competitiveness of organizations (Černe et al., 2014; Feng et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

Three main theories explain the mechanisms behind this relationship. SLT by Bandura (1977) suggests that employees learn by observing and internalizing the relational logic modeled by their leaders. When leaders model openness and collaboration, employees are more likely to imitate these patterns, and vice versa. SET by Blau (1964) explains that leader-employee relationships are reciprocal: fair and supportive behaviors from leaders encourage employees to respond with positive behaviors, such as knowledge sharing, whereas abusive or exploitative behaviors trigger defensive withholding of contributions. COR theory by Hobfoll (1989) complements this picture by explaining that when employees perceive threats to their emotional, relational, or professional resources, they engage in protective behaviors, one manifestation of which is concealing knowledge as a valuable personal asset.

These three theories together form the analytical lens through which this review examines how ten leadership styles differentially affect KH. The overall pattern identified in the literature is confirmed by a recent meta-analysis of 41 empirical studies: change-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership behaviors significantly reduce KH, while passive-destructive styles significantly increase it, with the strongest effect size for change-oriented leadership (Zhang et al., 2025a). It is also important to note that this influence is neither direct nor simple; the effect of leadership on KH is mediated by employees' psychological state and moderated by contextual factors. This complexity makes understanding the role of leadership increasingly important for managerial practice.

4.2. The Influence of Various Leadership Styles on Knowledge Hiding

Among the leadership styles studied, transformational leadership dominates the literature as the style most consistently shown to reduce KH. By motivating employees to transcend self-interest for collective goals (Bass, 1985) transformational leadership activates a cognitive reframing process consistent with SLT: employees who internalize the collective orientation modeled by their leaders come to perceive knowledge sharing as an expression of organizational identity rather than a personal sacrifice. Ma et al. (2022) demonstrated that transformational leaders actively inhibit KH, while Fan and Sukpasjaroen (2024) demonstrated that this influence operates through increased self-efficacy, the belief in one's abilities that encourages open sharing. Nguyen et al. (2022) further found that transformational leadership moderated the effect of role conflict on KH, suggesting that this style not only acts directly but also provides broader psychological protection against situational pressures that typically trigger knowledge hiding.

Similar patterns emerge across other positive leadership styles, although each operates through distinct theoretical mechanisms. Servant leadership, characterized by genuine service and concern for followers (Farling et al., 1999), fosters an emotional closeness that makes employees feel safe being open. Consistent with Social Learning Theory, employees working under servant leaders gradually develop prosocial motivation, the drive to work for the benefit of others, by internalizing the service-oriented relational logic modeled by their leaders, which in turn suppresses tendencies toward self-interest

(Khan et al., 2025). Ethical leadership operates through a different mechanism but toward the same goal. By upholding consistent moral standards and offering emotional support, ethical leaders create conditions in which employees no longer view knowledge as an asset to be protected. Within the COR theory, employees under ethical leaders perceive their relational and moral resources as secure rather than threatened and, consequently, view knowledge not as something to be safeguarded but as a resource that can be safely shared for future relational benefits (Anser et al., 2020). This resource security is further reinforced when employees perceive moral identity as a primary cognitive schema, making knowledge concealment psychologically inconsistent with their self-image (Ali et al., 2024).

Altruistic leadership, which places employees' interests above the leader's self-interest (Salas-Vallina & Alegre, 2018). It operates through an affective pathway that distinguishes it from other positive leadership styles. Unlike transformational leadership, which operates primarily through cognitive reframing, or servant leadership, which operates through prosocial motivation, altruistic leadership reduces KH by generating positive emotional states. Consistent with COR theory, employees working under altruistic leaders experience an accumulation of positive affect as a psychological resource. This resource broadens their cognitive capacity for openness and collaborative behavior (He & Wei, 2022). This broaden-and-build dynamic means that altruistic leadership does not merely remove the motivation to hide knowledge; it actively expands employees' psychological capacity for sharing by creating an emotional surplus that makes generosity feel natural rather than costly. Furthermore, under SET, employees who perceive their leader as genuinely prioritizing their welfare develop a strong sense of relational obligation, interpreting knowledge sharing as a reciprocal investment in a relationship they value intrinsically rather than merely as transactional (He & Wei, 2022).

Humble leadership introduces more complex dynamics that any single theory cannot fully explain. Consistent with SET, humble leaders who acknowledge their limitations and remain open to new ideas (Owens & Hekman, 2012) create conditions of relational security in which employees feel valued and respond with similar openness, reducing evasive hiding and playing dumb. However, Al Hawamdeh (2023) found that humble leadership simultaneously increases rationalized hiding, a finding that SET alone cannot explain. When employees trust their leader deeply, they feel more comfortable providing formal justifications for why certain information cannot be shared, not because they are unwilling to share, but because the relational security established by the leader makes boundary-setting feel safe and legitimate. This dual effect reveals a boundary of SET: reciprocity does not always produce uniform openness; in high-trust relationships, it can produce selective disclosure governed by perceived organizational norms rather than self-protective concealment. Empowering leadership presents a related paradox best understood through the interaction of SET and COR. While delegating authority and involving employees in decision-making (Konczak et al., 2000) should theoretically foster openness through SET's reciprocity logic, Wang et al. (2024) found that under high hindrance stressors, COR's resource-depletion logic dominates: the additional responsibility that accompanies empowerment becomes a further drain on already depleted psychological resources, ultimately increasing KH.

On the destructive side, transactional leadership, which builds leader-follower relationships solely on the exchange of rewards (Bass, 1985), creates a competitive climate that encourages employees to hoard knowledge for personal gain. The theoretical mechanism here operates at two levels simultaneously. At the cognitive-behavioral level, consistent with SLT, employees under transactional leaders internalize the logic of exchange, treating knowledge as a commodity to be traded rather than a resource to be shared. The leader's reward-based framing becomes a behavioral script that employees replicate in their own knowledge behaviors. At the relational level, consistent with SET, the purely transactional nature of the leader-follower relationship erodes the generalized reciprocity that characterizes high-trust relationships, replacing it with a calculative

exchange orientation in which knowledge is hoarded as leverage. Zahoor et al. (2024) demonstrated that perceived competition is the primary mediating mechanism, with the effect stronger for tacit than for explicit knowledge because tacit knowledge is perceived as more personally valuable and harder to replace once shared. The broader ecology of knowledge sharing also matters here: trust, as a foundational enabler of knowledge flow, can be systematically eroded by competitive reward structures, reducing employees' willingness to contribute (Auliyah et al., 2025), while perceived organizational support can partially buffer these negative effects (Moin et al., 2022).

Abusive supervision places employees in an acutely defensive state best explained by the COR theory. Islam et al. (2024) showed that employee silence, deliberate communicative withdrawal as a survival strategy, mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and KH. Employees who perceive their emotional and relational resources as under threat from an abusive supervisor adopt silence as the least costly protective strategy available to them, preserving what emotional energy remains while minimizing the risk of further attack. Psychological ownership moderates this dynamic: employees with high organizational ownership are less likely to fall into the cycle of silence despite abusive pressure because their sense of belonging drives them to continue contributing even in the face of adversity. Importantly, (Tepper, 2000) established that abusive supervision has far-reaching negative consequences beyond KH, including reduced organizational commitment and increased turnover intentions, suggesting that organizations that tolerate abusive supervision pay compounding costs across multiple dimensions of employee behavior.

Exploitative and self-serving leadership operate through similar mechanisms at greater systemic intensity, with both styles activating COR's depletion logic at a chronic rather than episodic level. Exploitative leadership drives employees to hide knowledge as self-protection against a leader who systematically extracts rather than reciprocates (Guo et al., 2020; Syed et al., 2021). Under SET, the absence of reciprocity from an exploitative leader fundamentally violates the relational contract, causing employees to withdraw their knowledge contributions as a rational response to perceived exploitation. Self-serving leadership extends this dynamic through two simultaneous pathways identified by (Zhang et al., 2025b): a cognitive channel via relative deprivation, where employees who perceive themselves as receiving fewer resources or opportunities than their peers develop a sense of injustice that erodes their motivation to contribute, and an affective channel via emotional exhaustion, where the chronic experience of working under a self-centered leader depletes the psychological capacity needed for collaborative knowledge-sharing behaviors. Political skill buffers both processes for employees who possess it, as those adept at reading social situations can reframe their experience and manage their emotional responses more effectively, reducing the conversion of perceived deprivation and exhaustion into KH (Zhang et al., 2025a).

4.3 Psychological and Contextual Mechanisms in the Relationship between Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

The most fundamental analytical conclusion is that leadership shapes KH not directly, but through the transformation of employees' psychological states. Every leadership style either builds or depletes a distinct set of psychological resources, such as psychological ownership, prosocial motivation, meaningful work, positive affect, trust, self-efficacy, or emotional capacity, and it is these psychological states that ultimately determine whether employees choose to share or conceal what they know. This insight answers a question that single-style studies cannot: why do different leadership styles produce such divergent effects on KH? The answer lies not in the surface behaviors of leaders, but in the psychological environment those behaviors create. Supportive-relational, transformational, servant, ethical, altruistic, and humble leadership styles reduce KH by building psychological resources that make sharing feel safe, meaningful, and relationally valuable. Under SLT, these leaders model collaborative norms that employees internalize;

under SET, their supportive behaviors generate reciprocal openness; under COR theory, they preserve rather than deplete the psychological reserves that employees need to engage in voluntary knowledge contribution. Destructive styles of transactional, abusive, exploitative, and self-serving leadership increase KH through the inverse logic: they deplete psychological resources, model self-protective norms, and create relational climates in which knowledge is experienced as personal capital to be guarded rather than a collective resource to be shared. The direction of leadership's influence on KH is therefore not a property of the leadership behavior itself, but of the psychological environment that behavior systematically constructs (Siachou et al., 2021; Anand et al., 2022).

A particularly important insight that emerges from this analysis is that the same psychological construct can operate in opposite directions depending on the leadership context in which it is activated: psychological ownership drives sharing under transformational leadership but buffers against silence under abusive leadership; trust in the leader reduces evasive hiding and playing dumb under humble leadership but increases rationalized hiding. This context-dependence challenges the assumption, common in single-variable studies, that psychological mediators have stable directional effects across leadership contexts (Siachou et al., 2021; Anand et al., 2022). The practical implication is clear: interventions targeting KH cannot stop at leadership behavior alone; they must also address employees' psychological conditions and the organizational context that shapes how leadership's influence is received, interpreted, and acted upon. Designing such multi-level interventions requires organizations to assess not only the leadership styles within their structures but also the psychological climate and individual-level resources that shape how employees experience and respond to their leaders. Based on the synthesis of the foregoing discussion, this study proposes a unified conceptual framework as shown in Figure 1, that maps the relationship between leadership styles and KH behavior across three nested levels of analysis.

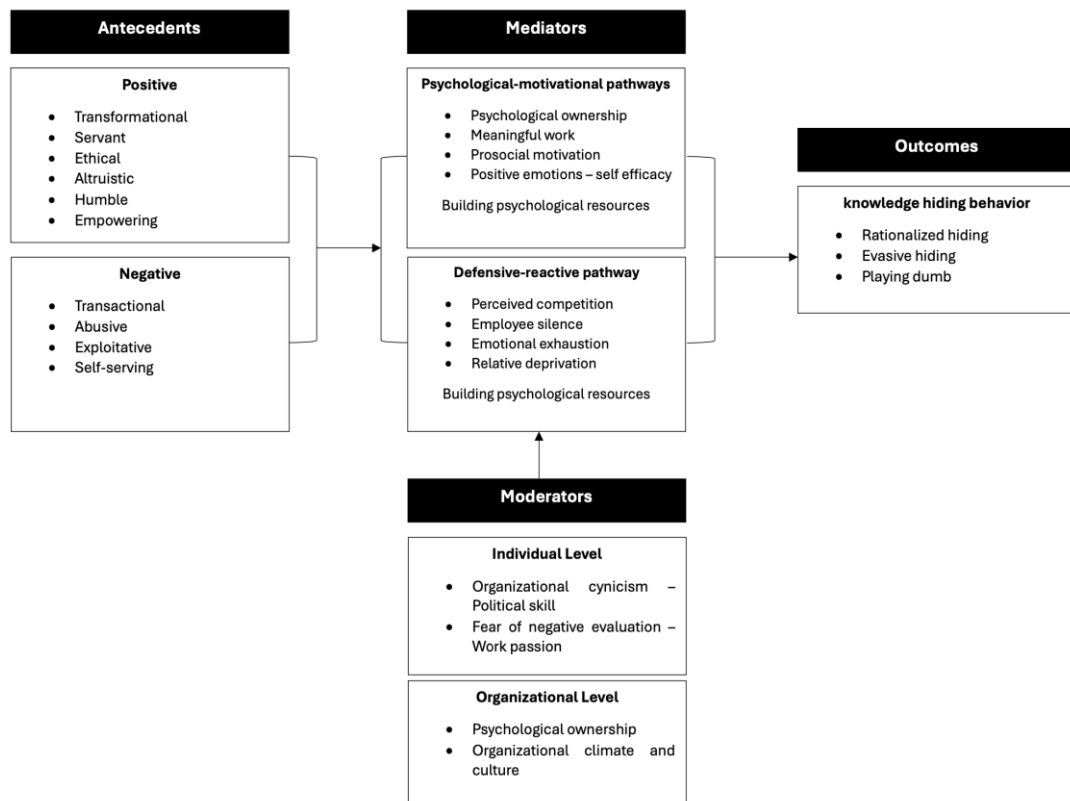


Figure 1. Integrated Conceptual Framework

At the first level, leadership serves as the independent variable encompassing all ten styles. A critical analytical contribution of this study is that differences between styles are not simply differences in the intensity of influence, but fundamental differences in the types of psychological states that are activated or diminished. Supportive-relational, transformational, servant, ethical, altruistic, and humble leadership styles operate by building psychological resources such as trust, meaningful work, prosocial motivation, positive affect, and relational security. Destructive or transactional leadership styles: transactional, abusive, exploitative, and self-serving operate by diminishing these resources, creating a defensive climate in which knowledge is perceived as an asset to be protected rather than shared. Empowering leadership occupies the most ambiguous position, with the direction of its influence dependent on the state of employees' existing resources. Three core theories underlie this level: SLT by Bandura (1977) explains how employees internalize the relational logic modeled by their leaders; SET by Blau (1964) explains the reciprocal dynamics between leadership behavior and employee responses; and COR theory by Hobfoll (1989) explains why resource threats consistently result in defensive KH behavior.

At the second level, leadership's influence on KH is mediated by two parallel pathways. The psychological-motivational pathway operates through employees' internal states: psychological ownership for transformational leadership (Ladan et al., 2017), meaningful work for ethical leadership (Anser et al., 2020), prosocial motivation for servant leadership (Khan et al., 2025), positive emotions for altruistic leadership (He & Wei, 2022), and self-efficacy for humble and empowering leadership (Al Hawamdeh, 2023; Fan & Sukpasjaroen, 2024). A defensive-reactive pathway operates for negative leadership styles: perceived competition for transactional leadership (Zahoor et al., 2024), employee silence for abusive leadership (Islam et al., 2024), and emotional exhaustion and relative deprivation for both self-serving and exploitative leadership, as both styles activate resource depletion logic at a chronic systemic level through the sustained perception of unfair treatment and exploitation (Syed et al., 2021). These mediators represent a resource-depletion process in which destructive leadership styles systematically drain employees' psychological reserves, creating defensive orientations in which knowledge is hoarded as personal protection rather than shared as a collective resource. These two pathways are not mutually exclusive: in real organizations, they can operate simultaneously when employees encounter different leadership styles from different superiors (Xiao & Cooke, 2019).

At the third level, all relationships within the framework operate within a set of moderating conditions. At the individual level, organizational cynicism and political skill (Khan et al., 2025) determine employees' resistance or vulnerability to leadership influence. Organizational cynicism weakens the effectiveness of even the most supportive leadership by eroding institutional trust, while political skill buffers employees against the damaging effects of destructive leadership by enabling more effective navigation of hostile relational environments. Fear of negative evaluation and harmonious work passion (Anser et al., 2020; Syed et al., 2021) further shape how employees interpret and respond to their leaders' behaviors. Employees who fear negative evaluation are more likely to engage in KH, even under supportive leadership. In contrast, those experiencing harmonious work passion are less susceptible to the KH-inducing effects of destructive leadership styles. At the organizational level, psychological ownership and organizational climate and culture (Men et al., 2018; Islam et al., 2024) shape how leadership influence is collectively received and interpreted across the organization.

Critically, these individual and organizational moderators do not operate independently; they interact in ways that can amplify, attenuate, or even reverse the expected direction of leadership's influence on KH. When individual and organizational moderators align, their effects compound: an employee with high prosocial motivation working in a mastery-oriented climate under an ethical leader experiences multiple reinforcing conditions that make KH not only unnecessary but psychologically inconsistent with their self-concept. However, when individual and organizational moderators conflict,

the resulting tension introduces considerable complexity. Consider an organization with a strong knowledge-sharing culture but an employee exhibiting high organizational cynicism: the organizational climate pushes toward openness. At the same time, the individual's distrust of institutional intentions pulls toward concealment. In such cases, neither the organizational nor the individual moderator alone determines the outcome; rather, the relative strength of each condition and the specific leadership style present resolve the tension. Similarly, an employee with high political skill, typically a resource that buffers against destructive leadership, may find that skill less effective in an organization where competitive norms are deeply embedded in reward structures, because the structural climate counteracts the individual's navigational capacity (Moin et al., 2022). These interaction effects underscore the need for organizations to diagnose moderating conditions at both levels simultaneously, rather than assuming that individual-level or organizational-level interventions alone are sufficient to shift KH behavior.

The most distinctive contribution of this framework is the demonstration that the same mediating construct can produce opposing effects depending on the leadership context in which it operates (Siachou et al., 2021). Psychological ownership promotes knowledge sharing under transformational leadership because it is grounded in meaning and collective identification (Ladan et al., 2017), and it also serves as a buffer against total withdrawal under abusive leadership (Islam et al., 2024). Similarly, trust in the leader under humble leadership reduces evasive hiding and playing dumb while simultaneously increasing rationalized hiding, because relationally secure employees are more comfortable providing formal justifications for the limits of their sharing (Al Hawamdeh, 2023). Empowering leadership shows the same pattern in a different form: the same construct, employees' available psychological resources, determines whether identical empowering behaviors are interpreted as a gain or a drain when resources are adequate, delegated responsibility is experienced as a sign of trust that fosters openness, consistent with SET, but when high hindrance stressors already deplete resources, that same delegated responsibility becomes an additional burden that triggers defensive knowledge protection, consistent with COR theory (Wang et al., 2024). Together, these three cases show that the direction of a mediating or moderating construct's effect is not an inherent property of the construct itself, but emerges from its interaction with the specific leadership context and employees' prevailing psychological state, a complexity that single-style, single-mediator models cannot capture (Anand et al., 2022), and it is precisely here that the multi-level framework proposed by this study offers its most substantial value.

5. Conclusion

This study synthesized empirical literature on the relationship between leadership styles and knowledge-hiding behavior in organizations. The central finding confirms that leadership is a powerful antecedent of KH, but its influence is not uniform. Supportive-relational, transformational, servant, ethical, altruistic, and humble styles consistently reduce KH by creating psychological conditions that make knowledge sharing feel safe and meaningful. Destructive styles, transactional, abusive, exploitative, and self-serving, increase KH by creating defensive climates in which knowledge is perceived as an asset to be protected. Empowering leadership occupies the most ambiguous position: it may reduce KH when employees have adequate psychological resources, but exacerbate it otherwise.

The influence of leadership on KH is indirect; it operates through two parallel mediating pathways: the psychological-motivational pathway, which operates through psychological ownership, prosocial motivation, meaningful work, and positive affect; and the defensive-reactive pathway, which operates through perceived competition, employee silence, and emotional exhaustion. Both pathways are influenced by moderators at the individual level, namely organizational cynicism, fear of negative evaluation, and political skill, as well as at the organizational level through the overall organizational climate and culture.

The study's primary contribution is a multi-level, multi-pathway framework that integrates SLT, SET, and COR theory into a single, coherent explanatory model. The practical

implications are clear: building an authentic knowledge-sharing culture requires a simultaneous approach: supportive leadership, psychologically empowered employees, and an organizational climate that makes openness a collective norm rather than simply a response to structural pressures. Translating this into organizational practice, three concrete interventions follow directly from the framework.

First, leadership development programs should move beyond generic leadership-style labels and instead train specific behaviors identified in this review as psychologically protective, such as transparent communication, consistent fairness in resource allocation, and visible support for employee initiative, since it is these granular behaviors, not the style label itself, that activate the psychological mechanisms suppressing KH. Second, organizations should institutionalize regular, low-stakes mechanisms for assessing psychological safety, such as structured team pulse surveys or skip-level listening sessions, given that psychological safety has been shown to condition whether leadership's protective effect on KH materializes at all (Men et al., 2018). Third, reward and performance evaluation systems should be redesigned to avoid implicitly pitting employees against one another over the possession of knowledge, since competitive reward structures have been shown to erode the trust that knowledge-sharing depends on (Zahoor et al., 2024; Auliyah et al., 2025); collaborative or team-based recognition criteria may be a more direct lever for reducing KH than leadership training alone.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. As a narrative review, it does not systematically assess the methodological quality of each article, leaving open the possibility of an imbalanced body of empirical evidence (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). A related limitation is the potential for confirmation bias inherent in non-systematic review processes, in which selected articles may disproportionately represent significant findings. At the same time, studies reporting null results remain underrepresented. The focus on ten leadership types means that other potentially relevant styles, such as authentic, paternalistic, or laissez-faire leadership, remain unexamined, even though these styles may have theoretically grounded connections to KH that warrant investigation. Most reviewed studies employ cross-sectional designs that limit causal inference. While the posited directional relationships are theoretically plausible, the absence of longitudinal evidence means reverse causality (i.e., employee KH influencing perceptions of leadership quality) cannot be ruled out.

Finally, the dominance of East Asian and Western cultural contexts in the reviewed literature raises questions about the generalizability of findings to other settings, including Southeast Asia, where high power distance and collectivist values may fundamentally alter the psychological mechanisms through which leadership shapes KH (Xiao & Cooke, 2019). Drawing on Hofstede's (2001) power-distance dimension, one plausible proposition is that high power-distance subordinates treat hierarchical authority as a taken-for-granted norm rather than a negotiated exchange, weakening the reciprocity logic central to SET, supportive styles such as transformational or servant leadership may therefore reduce KH less strongly than in lower power-distance contexts (Wang et al., 2024), while the same acceptance may dampen the resource-threat appraisal that COR predicts under destructive leadership, since hierarchical mistreatment is more readily normalized as legitimate authority rather than perceived as a depletion of relational resources (Lin et al., 2013). Cultural context, in this sense, may shape the magnitude rather than the direction of leadership's influence on KH, a proposition that future research in Southeast Asia could test directly.

Several future research directions are warranted. First, simultaneous empirical testing of the proposed multi-level framework using structural equation modeling would identify which mediation pathways are dominant across specific industry contexts. Second, extending the research context to cultures with high collectivism and large power distance, particularly Southeast Asia, could reshape the relative weight of each mediation pathway. Third, longitudinal designs are needed to capture the dynamics of changing leadership and their impact on KH over time. Finally, exploring interaction effects among leadership styles coexisting within the same organization represents an empirically underexplored yet practically significant avenue for further investigation.

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