

Leaders' Envy and Knowledge Hiding in Universities in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Building on the cognitive appraisal theory, the present study hypothesized and tested the relationship between leader's malicious envy and two types of knowledge-hiding behavior – playing dumb and evasive hiding – both directly and indirectly, via interpersonal injustice. Based on time-lagged (three rounds, three months apart) survey data collected from 311 employees from different public sector universities in Pakistan, the present study revealed that leaders' malicious envy is positively associated with both evasive hiding and playing dumb. Importantly, the study established interpersonal injustice as an underlying mechanism of the positive association between leaders' malicious envy and evasive hiding, as well as the positive association between leaders' envy and playing dumb. The study provides policymakers and managers with important practical implications.

Keywords: *Leader's Envy, Leader's Malicious Envy, Knowledge Hiding, Interpersonal Injustice.*

Introduction

Leadership has gained substantial attention from researchers because of its imperative effects on employees' and organizations' outcomes (Chen & Hou, 2016; Dong, Bartol, Zhang, & Li, 2017). The role of leadership has also been extensively studied in association with organizational learning and competitive advantage (Bligh, Kohles, & Yan, 2018; Jyoti, & Dev, 2015; Ponnuswamy, & Manohar, 2016). A leader motivates, supports, and positively shapes followers' work-related outcomes (Chen & Hou, 2016; Usman & Ahmed, 2017), such as employees' citizenship behavior, job performance, job satisfaction, and job commitment (Chen et al., 2014; Koning & Kleef, 2015; Strickland, 2010; Xu & Cooper, 2011).

However, leadership can also have destructive influences on followers' behaviors and performance outcomes, as organizational learning and performance (Simonet, et al., 2018; Usman & Ahmed, 2017; Usman, Ahmed, & Manzoor, 2018). That is, other than the positive effects of leadership on employees and organizations, it also has a dark side, such as leaders' lack of knowledge and skills, and unethical behaviors can result in followers' unethical behavior, a lack of knowledge sharing and learning, and counterproductive behaviors (Leheta, Dimotakis, & Schatten, 2016; Usman et al., 2018). Leaders can also envy their followers (Stein, 1997), as they may consider the followers as rivals because of their own

instabilities and shortcomings (Elfenbein, Eisenkraft, & Ding, 2009). Envy – “*an unpleasant, often painful emotion characterized by feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment caused by an awareness of a desired attribute enjoyed by another person or group of persons*” (Smith & Kim, 2007, p. 46) – is a common phenomenon in organizations and affects employees’ and organizations’ productivity and performance (Tai, Narayanan & McAllister, 2012).

Furthermore, the effect of leader’s envy does not remain limited to the leaders (Tai, Narayanan & McAllister, 2012; Thompson, Glasø, & Martinsen, 2016) instead, leader’s envy leads to followers’ negative attitudes and behaviors (Tai, Narayanan, & McAllister, 2012). For instance, leaders’ envious feelings towards the followers results in impoliteness (Leheta, Dimotakis, & Schatten, 2017) and disrespect towards the followers (Braun, Aydin, Frey, & Peus, 2018). Besides, leaders’ feelings of envy can affect employees’ dignity (Krugman, 2014), self-respect (Shu & Lazatkhan, 2017), self-confidence (Floyd, Hoogland, & Smith, 2016), and self-efficacy (Chen & Li, 2013). Consequently, employees indulge in unethical activities as an act of social revenge (Perini, 2018), such as procrastination behavior (Kim, O’Neill, & Cho, 2010), cyber loafing (Burluson, & Greenbaum, 2018; Jia, Jia & Karau, 2013), work alienation (Nair & Vohra, 2010), and negative words of mouth about leaders and organization (Detert & Treviño, 2010; Usman et al., 2018).

Past research has made valuable contributions to theory and practice (Berson, Da’as & Waldman, 2015) by examining the role of leadership employees’ work-related outcomes, such as employees’ commitment (Wallace, de Chernatony, & Buil, 2013), organizational performance, and employees’ knowledge sharing (Wu & Lee, 2017). A large number of past studies have explored the leadership’s role in knowledge sharing, given its imperativeness for organizations’ success (Usman et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2013; Wu & Lee, 2017). However, there is scarce research on the association of leadership with knowledge hiding (e.g., Abdullah, Dechun, Ali, & Usman, 2019; Anser, Ali, Usman, Rana, & Yousaf, 2020).

Moreover, prior studies have glossed over the influence of the dark side of leadership, such as leaders’ envy on knowledge hiding. This is a serious omission, given the destructive effects of knowledge hiding – a conscious effort to hoard knowledge when someone has requested it (Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2012) – employees’ and organizations’ productivity and performance. Knowledge hiding restricts knowledge sharing and impedes organizational learning (Peng, 2013). Consequently, knowledge hiding harms interpersonal relationships, impedes knowledge sharing, and leads to poor performance (Connelly & Zweig, 2015; Babcock, 2004).

Indeed, the literature on knowledge hiding is understudied, and therefore there are growing calls to explore the predictors and outcomes of knowledge hiding (Abdullah et al., 2019; Anser et al., 2020). Furthermore, various authors have studied knowledge hiding at the horizontal level of organizational hierarchy (Zhao et al., 2016; Connelly et al., 2012), but knowledge hiding at vertical level of organizational hierarchy (e.g., leader-follower and supervisor-subordinate) is not explored. To fill in these critical knowledge gaps, this study builds on the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to theorize the link between leaders’ envy and employees’ knowledge hiding, both directly and via employees’ sense of interpersonal injustice.

Envy has been categorized into two forms, benign envy and malicious envy. Although both types are the source of pain and represent unpleasant emotions, both types have different repercussions (Smith & Kim, 2007). Malicious envy entails hostility and ill will and engenders negative attitudes and behaviors. On the contrary, benign envy results in positive outcomes (Smith & Kim, 2007). We consider leaders’ malicious envy, as it resonates with the aim of this study, which is to bring to the consequences of the dark side of leadership for knowledge-hiding behaviors. The following Figure (1) presents our hypothesized model.

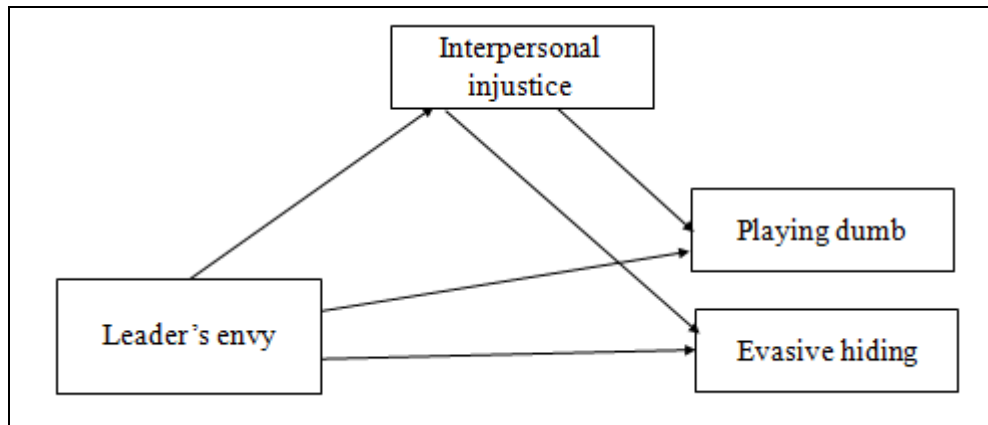


Figure 1: Hypothesized model

In sum, the work at hand extends contribution to the literature on the association between leadership and knowledge hiding in a number of distinctive ways. First, it explored the natural phenomenon of envy in the leader by suggesting that leaders are not different from others in terms of envious feelings. Second, it examined leaders' envy role in driving employees' unethical consequences (e.g., knowledge hiding). Third, it explained why leaders' envy is positively associated with employee's knowledge hiding by showing that employees' sense of interpersonal injustice mediates this relationship between leader's envy and knowledge hiding. By doing so, we also enhanced the nomological networks of predictors and consequences of interpersonal injustice. Fourth, we extended the scope of the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) by explaining our theoretical interrelations between leaders' envy, interpersonal injustice, and knowledge hiding using this model. Finally, our findings carry important practical implications, as the findings explicate how leader's envy drives employees to hide the knowledge from their peers that can undermine the potential of their competent employees and have serious repercussions for employees' and organizations' learning and performance. Thus, the findings suggest that leaders' negative behaviors. Such as leaders' malicious envy should be identified, monitored, and discouraged.

Hypotheses Development

Knowledge Hiding

Knowledge hiding, one of the common phenomena in the social and political fabric of an organization, leads to several unfavorable outcomes (Anser et al., 2020). Knowledge hiding is characterized into three categories by Connelly et al. (2012), namely (1) playing dumb – pretending not to have the requested information, 2) evasive hiding – providing only a part of the requested information or agreeing to give the information later but stalling it, and 3) rationalized hiding – declining the request of the recipient by blaming it on a third party, such as saying that the requested information is confidential. This study has focused on playing dumb and evasive hiding – the two forms of knowledge hiding that are necessarily unethical in nature and are aligned with the objectives of the present study.

Leader's Malicious Envy and Employees' Knowledge Hiding

Envy harms dyadic relationships, develops feelings of hostility and impedes information sharing, and organizational learning and performance (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2004; Salovey & Rodin, 1984). The purpose of envious is to hinder the success of those being the target of envy (Tesser & Smith, 1980). Leaders' envy stimulates various negative responses in their subordinates (Connelly et al., 2012). Leaders with feelings of malicious envy can obstruct the performance of their subordinates in the workplace in several ways due to their authority and control (Connelly et al., 2012). In turn, employees show retaliating behaviors when they feel that they are the target of being envied by their leaders.

We draw on the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) that when employees feel that they are being the target of envy by their leaders, they evaluate the impact of leaders' envy on them. Then if they consider them as a stressor, they try to retaliate in different negative behaviors, such as unethical behavior to minimize the effect of leaders' malicious behavior. We argue that employees' being the target of envy by their leaders can retaliate by engaging in different knowledge-hiding behaviors, which are unethical and counterproductive in nature. Therefore, we understand that as a result of leaders' malicious envy, employees may retaliate by being involved in evasive hiding and playing dumb.

H1: Leaders' malicious envy is positively associated with employees' evasive hiding.

H2: Leaders' malicious envy is positively associated with employees' playing dumb.

Sense of Interpersonal Justice as a Mediator

Interpersonal justice is understood as a sub domain of distributive justice in social aspects, such as rules, politeness, dignity, respect, and interpersonal treatment that lead to a sense of interpersonal justice (Bies & Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1993; Colquitt, 2001); whereas, disrespect, impoliteness, and deception lead to a sense of interpersonal injustice (Roch & Shanok, 2006). Specific to the relationship of leadership and interpersonal justice and injustice, it is evident from previous studies that supervisors are conjecturers of interpersonal justice and injustice (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002; Carter & Baghurst, 2014). Social exchange and equity theories have explained that rudeness, disrespect, and degradation in interpersonal interaction can lead to a sense of injustice. These theories focused that how people react to unjust situations and what consequences can occur as a result of interpersonal injustice (e.g. anger, unhappiness, resentment, disappointment, and dissatisfaction) (Folger, 1984). Consequently, individuals try to settle their egos by engaging themselves in retaliatory behaviors against their counterparts (individuals or organizations).

As the cognitive appraisal theory suggests that people first imagine possible impacts of any unfair or unjust event on them and then evaluate if they find it a stressor, they will retaliate in negative behavior. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argued that this theory works in two phases; the first phase contains the evaluation of the unjust situation and the extent of its effects and the second phase contains the actions to minimize the effects of a specific unjust situation. Therefore, we postulate on the grounds of the cognitive appraisal theory that when leaders demonstrate malicious behaviors (e.g., disrespect, degradation, impoliteness) towards their employees, such behaviors transmit a sense of injustice among employees.

This sense of injustice helps employees make an appraisal of leaders' malicious envy and the extent of impact caused by this behavior. When they find leaders' malicious behavior as a stressor, try to minimize the effect of this stressor by retaliation. To push this stressor back towards the leaders, employees get involved in numerous unethical behaviors, such as dishonesty at the workplace, low level of work engagement, and hiding information from others. Thus, we propose that the sense of interpersonal injustice works as an underlying mechanism of the association of leaders' malicious behavior with knowledge hiding. Consistent with the direct effects of leaders' malicious envy on employees' knowledge hiding, in mediation mechanism, we also focused on evasive hiding and playing dumb. Therefore, we develop the following hypotheses.

H3: Employees' sense of interpersonal injustice mediates the relationship between leaders' malicious envy and employees' evasive knowledge.

H4: Employees' sense of interpersonal injustice mediates the relationship between leaders' malicious envy and employees' playing dumb.

Method

Sample and Procedures

Data were collected from 311 employees in 15 randomly selected public sector universities of Pakistan using a self-administered questionnaire. To avoid common method bias, time-lagged (three rounds, three months apart) design was adopted. Considering the ethical issues, informed consent was taken from the respondents. For this purpose, a cover letter containing information about the confidentiality promise and the objectives of the study was provided to the potential respondents. In the first round, data about demographics (i.e. gender, age, education, and experience) and the independent variable (leader's malicious behavior) were collected. Data about sense of interpersonal injustice and the outcome variables (playing dumb and evasive hiding) were collected in the second and third rounds, respectively. Data from three rounds were matched using unique codes.

In the first round, 500 questionnaires were distributed among employees. We received 334 filled responses in the first round. Moreover, 321 respondents returned the filled responses in the second round and 318 respondents returned the filled questionnaires in the third round. Seven responses that were not filled appropriately were excluded from data analysis. Thus, we were left with 311 (62.2%) questionnaires for data analysis to test our proposed hypotheses. Finally, usable data had 61% male respondents, while there were 39% female respondents. The respondents' average age and average work experience were 33 years and 6 years, respectively. Furthermore, 35% of the respondents were working as lecturers, 38% were working as assistant professors, and 27% were working as professors.

Measures and Variables

All responses were measured on five points Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Leaders' malicious envy was measured using a five-item scale by Lange & Crusius (2015). "If other people have something that I want for myself, I wish to take it away from them" is an example of the items. We measured a sense of interpersonal injustice with four items adapted from Jonson (2008). "He/she treats me with respect (R)" is an example of the items. Evasive hiding was measured using the Connelly et al.'s (2012) four-item scale. "I agree to help him/her but never really intend to" is an example of the items. Playing dumb was measured using the Connelly et al.'s (2012) four-item scale developed. "I pretend that I do not know the information" is an example of the items.

Results

Means and Correlations

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and correlations

Construct	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Leader' malicious envy	2.77	1.24							
2. Interpersonal Injustice	3.37	1.04	.19**						
3. Evasive Hiding	3.13	1.14	.15**	.24**					
4. Playing Dumb	3.20	1.14	.12*	.23**	.23**				
5. Age	36.54	8.34	-.03	.01	-.04	-.02			
6. Gender	1.38	.50	.02	-.03	-.01	.02	.04		
7. Education	2.59	1.12	-.09	-.07	.03	-.04	.04	.04	
8. Work experience	7.82	5.47	-.02	.04	-.01	-.01	.72**	.06	.08

Note. n = 311. * P < .05. ** P < .01 level (2-tailed). SD = Standard deviation. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female.

Measurement Model

The measurement model comprised of leaders' malicious envy (MLE), interpersonal injustice (II), evasive hiding (EH), and playing dumb (PD) was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis. All the items showed optimal loadings on their respective constructs. The fit indices – $\chi^2(113) = 245.49$, $\chi^2/df = 2.17$, RMSEA = .06, TLI = .96, IFI = .96, and CFI = .96 – indicated a good fit of the measurement model with the data. The Table 2 showed the values of maximum shared variance (MSV), average variance extracted (AVE), average shared variance (ASV), and Cronbach alpha (α) of all the variables. The values of AVE > .50, the values of inter-construct correlations were less than the square root values of AVE (bolded values on the diagonal of Table 2), and $\alpha > .70$ indicate that the measures showed satisfactory levels of convergent and discriminant validities.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity and discriminant validities

Construct	1	2	3	4	α	AVE	MSV	ASV
1. Leader' malicious envy	.82				.91	.68	.04	.03
2. Interpersonal Injustice	.200	.78			.87	.62	.07	.05
3. Evasive Hiding	.17	.28	.83		.90	.69	.07	.05
4. Playing Dumb	.15	.25	.26	.80	.88	.65	.07	.05

Notes. n = 311. AVE = Average variance extracted. MSV = Maximum shared variance. ASV = Average shared variance. Bolded values on the diagonals of columns 2 to 5 are the square root values of AVE.

Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated in three steps. First, in structural model 1, the direct relationships of leaders' malicious envy with the outcome variables – evasive hiding and playing dumb – were analyzed. The results showed significant positive direct relationships of leader's malicious envy with both the outcome variables – evasive hiding ($\beta = .15^*$, $p < .05$) and playing dumb ($\beta = .13^*$, $p < .05$). The fit indices – RMSEA = .06, CFI = .97, IFI = .97, TLI = .97, $\chi^2(63) = 150.95$, and $\chi^2/df = 2.39$ – indicated that direct model had a good fit with the data. Thus, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were supported.

Second, in structural model 2 (see Figure 2), interpersonal injustice was incorporated as a mediator of the direct relationships of leaders' malicious envy with evasive hiding and playing dumb. The fit indices – RMSEA = .06, and TLI = .96, IFI = .96, CFI = .96, $\chi^2(114) = 255.11$, and $\chi^2/df = 2.23$ – pointed out that this model had a satisfactory fit.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects and 95 % confidence intervals (model 2)

Parameter	Estimate	LL	UP
Standardized direct effects			
Leaders' malicious envy → Evasive hiding	.12	-.01	.25
Leaders' malicious envy → Playing dumb	.11	-.02	.24
Leader' malicious envy → Interpersonal injustice	.20*	.07	.31
Interpersonal Injustice → Evasive hiding	.26*	.12	.38
Interpersonal Injustice → Playing dumb	.24*	.11	.36
Standardized indirect effects			
Leaders' malicious envy → Interpersonal injustice → Evasive hiding	.05*	.01	.09
Leaders' malicious envy → Interpersonal injustice → Playing dumb	.05*	.01	.09

Notes: *Empirical 95% confidence interval did not overlap with zero. n = 311 (bootstrapping by specifying a sample of size 2,000).

LL= lower limit. UP = upper limit

Finally, to analyze the significance of the mediating role of interpersonal injustice in the positive relationships of leaders' malicious envy with evasive hiding and playing dumb, the bootstrapping technique with a sample of size 2000 (95% confidence interval) was used. The results (Table 3) revealed significant indirect relationships of leaders' malicious envy with evasive hiding ($\beta = .05$, LL = .01, UL = .09) and playing dumb ($\beta = .05$, LL = .01, UL = .09). Thus, hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 were also supported.

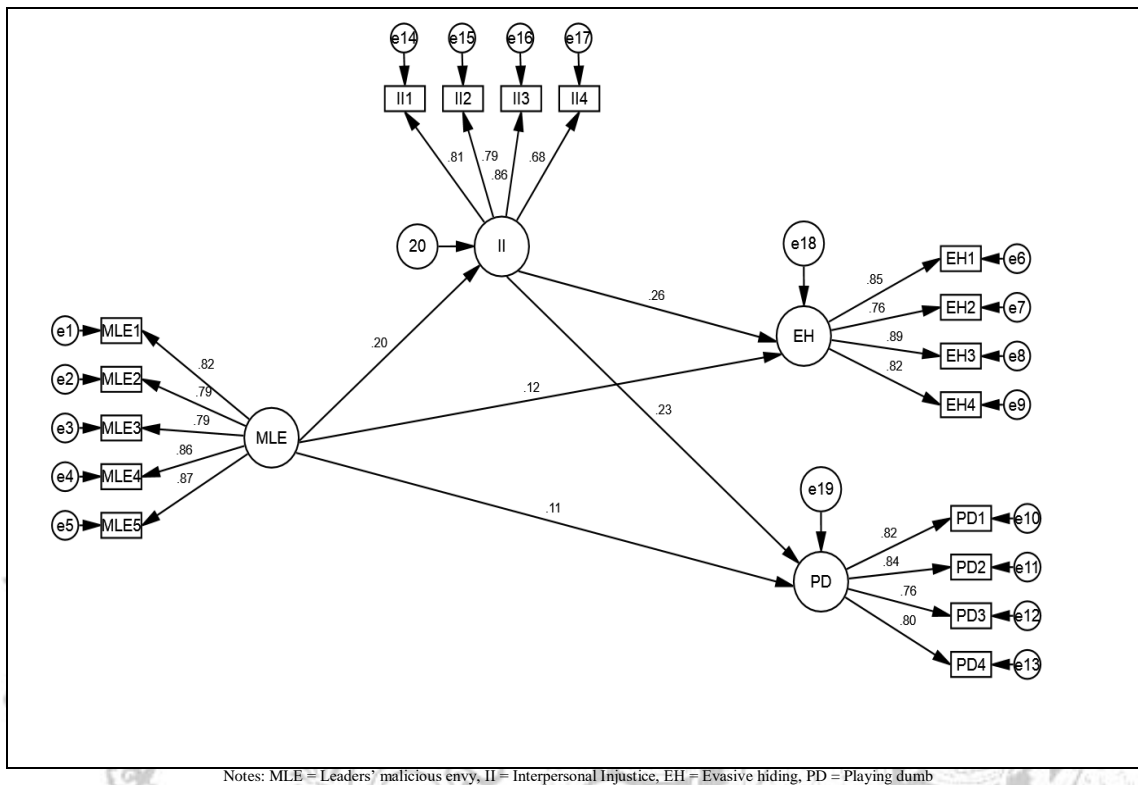


Figure 2

Discussion and Conclusions

Given the negative effects of leaders' envy on employees and organizations, and the scarcity of research on leader's envy and knowledge hiding, the work at hand proposed a model to depict the effects of leader's envy on knowledge hiding, both directly and indirectly, via interpersonal injustice. Building on the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we hypothesized leaders' malicious envy is positively related to employee's knowledge hiding. We also proposed that employees' sense of interpersonal injustice mediates the relationship between leaders' malicious envy and employee's knowledge hiding. The result suggested that leaders' malicious envy is positively related to employees' engagement in knowledge hiding – playing dumb and evasive hiding. Finally, the results revealed that employees' sense of interpersonal injustice positively mediates the relationship between leaders' malicious envy and employees' knowledge-hiding behaviors. Thus, all our hypotheses were accepted.

Theoretically, our study contributes to the literature in several ways. The study contributed to the literature on leadership and knowledge hiding by determining the leaders' malicious envy predicts employees' knowledge-hiding behaviors. By doing so, the present work brought to the fore negative repercussions of leaders' malicious envy, as well as advanced the nomological network of evasive hiding and playing dumb. Our findings suggest that employees' feelings that they are being the target of their leaders' envy lead them to retaliate by hiding knowledge from others. The present study also contributed to the organizational behavior literature by investigating and foregrounding the important consequences of leaders' malicious

behaviors for employees' knowledge-hiding behaviors. Importantly, the present work proposed and provided empirical evidence that interpersonal injustice mediates the relationship between leaders' envy and knowledge hiding. The findings indicate that leaders' malicious behaviors (e.g., disrespect, degradation, impoliteness) towards their employees create a sense of injustice among employees that lead employees' engagement in knowledge hiding behaviors. Employees consider leaders' envy as a stressor and they retaliate by engaging in knowledge-hiding behaviors to minimize the effect of this stressor. Thus, our findings enhanced the nomological networks of the predictors and consequences of employees' interpersonal justice. Finally, the work at hand extended the scope of the cognitive appraisal model by theorizing the interrelations between leader's envy, employees' sense of interpersonal injustice, and knowledge hiding on this model and then contextualizing these relationships in the public sector universities in Pakistan.

Our study also provides valuable insights to practitioners that how leaders' malicious envy results in knowledge hiding in public sector universities in Pakistan. Since universities are the backbone of both theory and practical knowledge, such behaviors of leaders should be discouraged. The findings further suggest that organizations must discourage such maliciously envy leaders to set a good perception of interpersonal justice among employees that can deteriorate employees' engagement in knowledge-hiding behaviors. Moreover, this study suggests that organizations must work on the deterioration of those factors which drive leaders' malicious envy, such as job and position insecurity.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Limitations of the study are as follows. First, our sample belonged to public sector universities in Pakistan. Evidence from other contexts can enhance the validity and generalizability of the relationships that we studied. Second, we used time lagged-data that can reduce common method bias and impede strong causal inferences. Although we took precautionary measures to avoid such a bias, future studies should investigate the model by collecting responses from multiple sources and experimental and longitudinal designs can help us draw strong causal inferences.

Third, we used the sense of interpersonal injustice as an underlying mechanism of the relationship between leaders' malicious envy and employees' knowledge-hiding behaviors. Future studies may incorporate some factors as mediators of this relationship. For instance, leaders' envy can lead to work alienation that can lead to knowledge hiding. Finally, this study is based on the sample drawn from the higher education sector, so future studies may consider other sectors to study the model or endeavor to blend various sectors to produce more generalizable results.

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