Behind Knowledge Hiding Behavior
A Case Study of CV. Tirta Monsager-Indonesia

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Abstract. The study aims to understand the reasons behind knowledge hiding behavior. Knowledge hiding is a common phenomenon in organizations done intentionally by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that another has requested. Knowledge hiding becomes a contrarian behavior that violates the organization's explicit and implicit social norms. The employee uses many types and strategies to hide their knowledge and reasons that triggered them to do knowledge hiding behavior. The research uses a qualitative method with a depth interview tool to understand employee reasons for hiding knowledge. Five informants with different biographical characteristics were involved in the research. The findings show that employees who hide their knowledge in tacit knowledge find it hard to explain their knowledge to others. An employee who hides his knowledge in the form of explicit knowledge does not want to share his knowledge because he is afraid of being imitated by others. Employees do some strategies in knowledge hiding behavior such as playing dumb, evasive hiding and rationalized hiding. The study results also differ in gender, age, educational level, and personality.

Keywords: knowledge hiding · explicit knowledge · tacit knowledge

1 Introduction

Surviving in a dynamic environment is challenging for an organization today. Knowledge management is one concept that organizations use to manage their resources to compete in a world-class market. Knowledge management is related to adapting knowledge culture in the organizational [1]. Knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing are two areas of study in knowledge management. Based on knowledge management, knowledge assets may be created by stopping individuals from hiding knowledge and letting them share their knowledge or information within their organizations. Organizations become effective when knowledge sharing at the collective level; therefore, knowledge creation and sharing are crucial to sustaining competitive advantage, especially in knowledge-intensive industries [2]. Knowledge hiding is a common phenomenon in organizations that is done intentionally by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person [3]. It can have deleterious consequences for both employees and organizations. Knowledge hiding becomes a contrarian behavior that

violates the organization's explicit and implicit social norms regarding knowledge sharing [3]. The knowledge hiding behavior can be based on tacit and explicit knowledge that individuals and groups possess. Tacit knowledge is a personalization strategy that may or may not be expressed by an individual [4]. It is obtained by individual internal processes like experience, reflection, internalization, or individual talents, and it cannot be found in databases, textbooks, manuals, or internal newsletters for diffusion [5].

On the other hand, explicit knowledge is objective, theoretical, and can be expressed to others orally or in a recorded form [4]. This knowledge is easily communicable and easy to store because such knowledge is codified [6]. Explicit knowledge can be stored technologically, like in handbooks or information systems [5]. The employees use knowledge hiding strategies such as playing dumb, evasive, and rationalized [3]. First, the playing dumb strategy is used by employees to avoid sharing information with their co-workers [2]. Second, evasive strategy means hiders provide incorrect information or mislead with deceptive promises to provide a complete answer in the future. However, there is no plan to do it [3]. Third, rationalized hiding occurs when hiders are justified in hiding any knowledge because they are not allowed to provide the information or blame another person or party for the failure [3].

Each strategy has a different characteristic, and it is used depending on employees' behavior. Demographic variables such as gender, age, and education level of employees also play essential roles in knowledge hiding behavior. The differences in job opportunities can influence knowledge hiding behavior between men and women. Men experience more significant task-related developmental challenges, while women experience more significant developmental challenges stemming from obstacles they face in their job [7].

The occurrence of knowledge hiding in the company can reduce employees' job satisfaction. The company needs to know what factors trigger employees to hide their knowledge. Factors of knowledge hiding can be found in employees' behavior or organizational behavior. If companies can find out every factor of each employee, companies can increase their performance and minimize the occurrence of knowledge hiding.

Factors that cause knowledge hiding in a company are divided into organizational and personal factors. Organizational factors include perceived career insecurity experienced by the Head of the factory and salesperson. For example, the Head does not want to give his knowledge to the production division or try to keep knowledge and ideas to himself because he is susceptible to his career progress. Moreover, perceived career insecurity also comes from the salesperson. Even though the sales skills are hard to explain, other knowledge can be explained, like tips and tricks that the salesperson gets from his experience, which he does not want to give to the other salesperson. If the salesperson shares all of his knowledge, he is afraid that the opportunity to get a bonus is less and the other employee would have a better performance than him. In a competitive work environment, employees prefer to hide knowledge to secure their position in the organization.

Personal factors include the position of the requesting person, lack of reciprocation of knowledge, personal relationship, no responsibility for sharing activity, behavioral characteristics, and lack of confidence in own knowledge. The position of the requesting person happens between the analyst who comes from a similar laboratory division with the Head of the factory. Presenting knowledge to superiors is easier for the analyst

because she feels the requester has a higher and more critical position than her. It is easier to share the knowledge with his superiors because he has power, which can influence her position in this company. Furthermore, lack of reciprocation of knowledge also becomes the factor why the analyst from the laboratory division hides their knowledge from their colleagues. An analyst from the laboratory division does not want to give her knowledge to the other laboratory division because she feels her colleague does not want to also share it with her. Moreover, a personal relationship factor comes from a salesperson who prefers to give knowledge to the other salesperson he has known for a long time. He tried to give all something valuable, both knowledge and experience, even though it is classified as tacit knowledge because that person can certainly be trusted and can help him maximize that knowledge even further.

No responsibility for sharing activity experienced by the Head of the factory, which also serves as a technician. When the production division asks some knowledge from him, he does not want to give his knowledge to them. He thinks it will be useless and a waste of time to tell them because this work is not part of his job and he has no obligation to provide such information, and the machine problem will also not be solved if he keeps explaining it to them. Moreover, individual behavior comes from the salesperson who does not want to give their knowledge to the other employee. Sometimes salesperson does not give her knowledge to them because she is too busy, and she is reluctant to explain it to them because she only cares about herself without thinking about them.

Furthermore, a lack of confidence in their knowledge comes from the laboratory division, which serves as quality control in the company. He is not confident when the other employee from the quality control division asks him about his knowledge because he feels he has not mastered the knowledge he has. He is afraid the other employee will know his weaknesses; thus, he should hide their knowledge.

CV Tirta Monsager is a drinking water company located in Mataram city, Cakranegara sub-district, Lombok Barat district, province of West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The company implements knowledge sharing to encourage employees to work effectively and efficiently. However, knowledge hiding behavior is also part of employee's behavior, based on the phenomenon that some employees do not want to teach their peers for any reason. A preliminary interview with five respondents showed that each has different skills, abilities, expertise, and experiences, so they have opportunities for doing the behavior. The study aims to examine the type and strategy of knowledge hiding behavior among employees based on the phenomenon.

2   Research Method

This study is categorized as qualitative research using primary data. Triangulation techniques were used for data validity.

Data were obtained from various sources using in-depth interview techniques, field notes, and observation results [8], based on age differences, gender, and educational level. The respondents' characteristics were a minimum of two years of work experience and involved in knowledge hiding activities. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were done for data processing techniques for analyzing [9].

3   Results and Discussion

There are five respondents in this research (see Table 1). Every respondent comes from different gender, ages, educational levels, work experiences, and positions in the company to get various answers from a different perspective.

Based on open coding, axial coding, and selective coding process, the research contributes to extending the concept of knowledge hiding by finding out types of knowledge (tacit or explicit) that employees use to hide in the company and factors that trigger employees to hide their knowledge. The strategies employees used to hide their knowledge from their colleagues.

Employees hide two types of knowledge in the company, known as tacit and explicit knowledge. An individual obtains tacit knowledge through experience, reflection, internalization, and individual talents. It must be internalized in the human body and soul that cannot be found in databases, textbooks, manuals, or internal newsletters for diffusion. The data found from the field are supported by the theory, which states that employees do not share their knowledge because it is difficult to explain, and it cannot be written down or quantified. On the other hand, explicit knowledge is the knowledge that is possible to store digitally, like in handbooks or information systems [5]. It is in line with the interview result, which stated that employees do not want to share the knowledge they got in college because other employees can easily imitate this knowledge.

Furthermore, employees used three strategies in hiding knowledge: playing dumb, evasive, and rationalized hiding. Playing dumb occurs when someone avoids answering the question another day and is ignorant of the relevant knowledge when their co-workers need help [3]. This theory is in line with the finding that shows employees pretend to be busy and give the promise to talk in another day to the other employee without keeping the promises. Only give a promise to become a new finding in playing dumb strategy. Evasive hiding occurs when individuals share incomplete knowledge [2]. This theory is also supported by the finding, which states employees give limited or basic knowledge when the other employee asks them about their knowledge. On the other hand, the other theory states that an evasive hiding strategy occurs when hiders provide incorrect information and deliberately manipulate or distort knowledge [2]. This theory is not in line with the findings. It is because the employees do not manipulate their knowledge of other employees. Rationalized hiding occurs when individuals would ask their colleagues to seek answers on their own so that they can enhance their skills [2].

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Initial	Gender	Age	Educational level	Working Experience	Position
Mr. MH	Man	51	Bachelor's degree	6 years	Head of the Factory
Mrs. ND	Woman	35	Bachelor's degree	4 years	Laboratory Analyst
Mr. WS	Man	48	Senior High School	5 years	Salesperson
Mrs. NI	Woman	38	Senior High School	3 years	Salesperson
Mr. MI	Man	30	Bachelor's degree	2 years	Quality Control

This theory is in line with the findings. It is because they are too busy and do not have time to explain their knowledge to them.

Based on factors that triggered employees to hide their knowledge, there are two factors: organizational and personal. In the form of perceived career insecurity, organizational factors revealed that it consists of fear of losing position and fear of others' growth in the organization [2]. This theory is in line with the findings because employees were susceptible to their career progress and did not want the other employee to get benefit from it. There are six categories of personal factors: the position of the requesting person, lack of reciprocation of knowledge, personal relationship, no responsibility for sharing activity, behavioral characteristics, and lack of confidence in own knowledge. Two theories in line with the findings are lack of reciprocation and lack of confidence in own knowledge. Lack of reciprocation occurs when employees feel that their colleagues are hiding knowledge and do not want to reciprocate similarly.

Furthermore, a lack of confidence in knowledge occurs when employees who are not confident about their knowledge are more likely to hide it from others [2]. Both theories are in line with the findings, which state that employees do not prefer to share knowledge with one who does not share, and employees feel not having mastered the knowledge that makes them not confident enough to share it. On the other hand, the other factors, such as the position of the requesting person, personal relationship, no responsibility for sharing activity, and behavioral characteristics, become new findings found during the interview with the respondents.

For demographic factors, based on gender, men tend to feel more awkward disclosing than women, which makes women more likely to reciprocate the level of intimacy than men [10]. This theory is in line with the findings. Even though women also hide their knowledge, they keep giving their knowledge even though in a limited form. Generation X is thought to be less likely to display loyalty to a particular organization because they are independent, and younger generations, like generation Y, is higher in individualistic traits such as self-esteem, assertiveness, and narcissism [11]. From the interview results, the generation X and Y theory are not in line with the findings because both generations hide their knowledge in the company. These results depend on personality and environmental conditions. Education might significantly influence ethical behavior, which means that individuals who have a high level of education might behave more ethically [12]. Most studies said that individuals with high education levels might have a high tolerance for knowledge sharing [13].

On the other hand, a high level of education does not guarantee that employees do knowledge sharing. All respondents with a high level and low level of education tend to hide their knowledge. This theory is not in line with the findings because knowledge hiding based on the level of education depends on the character of the person.

4   Conclusion

The existence of knowledge hiding in the company has deleterious consequences for both employees and organizations that can lead to a culture of distrust and negativity among employees. This study focuses on tacit and explicit knowledge. Employees who hide their knowledge in the form of tacit knowledge feels hard to explain their knowledge

to the other employee. Most of the knowledge is difficult to explain and only understood by someone who has sufficient expertise and experience. On the other hand, employees who hide their knowledge in explicit knowledge do not want to share the knowledge they got in college. They were afraid to lose their potential because other employees could easily imitate this explicit knowledge.

Furthermore, employees use three strategies to hide their knowledge: playing dumb, evasive, and rationalized hiding. The playing dumb strategy occurs when the employee avoids answering questions by pretending to be busy and gives the promise to talk on another day. Evasive hiding occurs when the employee avoids specific discussions and shares incomplete knowledge with the other employee. The last one is rationalized hiding occurs when the employee tells the other employee to find out the answer independently. There are two kinds of factors from the factors of knowledge hiding: organizational and personal. Organizational factor consists of perceived career insecurity, which discusses employees who hide their knowledge because they are afraid of the other employee becoming more developed and benefit from it. Moreover, there are six categories of personal factors. Personal factors include the position of the requesting person, lack of reciprocation of knowledge, personal relationship, no responsibility for sharing activity, behavioral characteristics, and lack of confidence in own knowledge [14].

Moreover, this study also investigates demographic factors in respondents such as gender, age, and educational level to get more detailed answers. Based on gender, women have a higher level of self-disclosure than men, making women tend to share knowledge rather than men. Based on age, both generations, such as generation X and generation Y, do a knowledge hiding in the company that makes them have a low level of self-disclosure [15]. These results depend on individual personality and environmental conditions. Furthermore, employees who have a high level and low level of education tend to hide their knowledge in the company. This shows that employees who have a high level of education do not guarantee to do knowledge sharing in the company. It also depends on the characteristic of the person.

The data collected from a single company is considered the fundamental limitation of this study. The results of this study are not always the same as those of other companies or industries. It depends on the working atmosphere and company system. Furthermore, the number of respondents could not guarantee the legitimacy and validity of the overall results. On the other hand, this study only focuses on subordinates' jobs rather than superiors' jobs because, in this company, most superiors tend to do a knowledge-sharing activity rather than knowledge hiding, except for the Head of the factory, which also serves as a technician. This study cannot use the data from all superiors because it will be less focused on the existing problems. As this study was limited to only one company in one country, it is recommended that further research expand and increase the scope of the study by increasing the number of interviewees from different industries and different countries. Many employees from different teams in different industries and countries could take as a sample, which will enable the findings to be generalized and increase the reliability and validity of the research. Future research is needed to investigate the knowledge, strategies, and factors of knowledge hiding that affect employees to hide their knowledge in a team. Furthermore, future research also could investigate in more detail the process of employee motivation towards knowledge hiding.

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