

Understanding the Drivers of Knowledge-Hiding Behaviour among Academics in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

A collaborative academic culture is essential for innovation and institutional performance, yet it is often hindered by knowledge-hiding behaviour (KHB), the intentional withholding of requested knowledge. This study aims to identify the drivers of KHB among academics in Sri Lankan state universities. Five independent variables were examined: distrust, internal competition, fear of exploitation, loss of knowledge power, and interpersonal conflict, with KHB as the dependent variable. While prior research has explored KHB predominantly in corporate settings, there is a significant lack of studies within academic institutions, particularly in the developing world. This gap is critical, as the competitive and resource-constrained environment of universities in nations like Sri Lanka may uniquely foster KHB, affecting research productivity and educational quality. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, the study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. Data were collected through structured online and physical questionnaires from a purposive sample of 105 academics representing multiple state universities. To reduce social desirability bias, respondent anonymity was assured. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 25, applying descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression. The results revealed that internal competition ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.025$), loss of knowledge power ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < 0.001$), and interpersonal conflict ($\beta = 0.264$, $p < 0.001$) significantly and positively predict KHB, while distrust and fear of exploitation were not statistically significant. The findings reveal that knowledge hiding among academics is primarily influenced by competitive pressures, fear of losing knowledge power, and interpersonal conflicts rather than distrust or fear of exploitation. The study provides valuable insights for fostering trust-based, collaborative academic environments and enriches the limited literature on knowledge-hiding behaviour within developing country higher education contexts, guiding future research and policy initiatives.

Keywords: distrust, fear of exploitation, internal competition, interpersonal conflict, knowledge-hiding behaviour, loss of knowledge power