

Subterfuge at the Station: Understanding Knowledge Hiding within Organizations

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the conditions that give rise to knowledge hiding within organizations. Building on existing, largely quantitative work, the aim of this study was to examine the role played by trust in knowledge hiding, because trust plays a key role in exchange relationships. In building a dataset of 106 interviews from two policing organizations, including interviews with both police officers and police staff, we arrive at three contributions to knowledge. First we argue that competitive organizational contexts provoke knowledge hiding due to the fear that one's good ideas may be co-opted by others, second we argue that trust disintegrates when there is a perceived lack of fairness within an organization, and third we argue that decisions to share or hide knowledge are made instrumentally in a competitive context depending on how individuals perceive the benefits and/or risks to themselves.

Key Words

Knowledge Management, Knowledge Hiding, Trust, Policing, Innovation

Introduction

Knowledge management is a rapidly advancing academic field, driven by the recognition of the importance of knowledge and its significance as a driver of the so-called fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016). Extensive literature has developed related to knowledge management (Tzortzaki & Mihiotis, 2014), encompassing a wide variety of topics. Recent research, for example, includes definitional work (Girard & Girard, 2015), the role of technology within knowledge management (Pandey et al, 2021), and the impact of knowledge management on corporate performance (Hu, Zhang, Yang & Huang, 2022). Various studies have also discussed the interface between knowledge management and the processes surrounding innovation (Khan and Zaman, 2021; Oliva et al, 2022), which present both opportunities and risks.

Within the field of knowledge management there is a growing debate on knowledge ‘hiding’ (Connelly, Zweig, Webster & Trougakos, 2012). This is an important area because of the potential negative impacts that can undermine attempts to manage and use knowledge effectively. Knowledge hiding is defined by Connelly et al. (2012: 65) as “an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge”. Studies have highlighted serious negative impacts from knowledge hiding on creativity and innovation, and ultimately organizational performance (Duan et al, 2022). We know that research into knowledge hiding is fraught with difficulty and because it is perceived by individuals as socially undesirable (Ruparel & Choubisa, 2020), it is not surprising that it is challenging to collect data when individuals may conceal their actions. Therefore, the extent of knowledge hiding in organizations is likely to be under-reported (Hernaus, Černe, Vokic & Škerlavaj, 2019), meaning the potential impact is difficult to assess.

Existing research on knowledge hiding is largely quantitative (see, for example, Černe, Nerstad, Dysvik & Škerlavaj, 2014; Connelly et al, 2012; Donate, González-Mohíno, Appio & Bernhard, 2022; Duan et al, 2022) or conceptual (see, for example Anand, Centobelli & Cerchione, 2020; Anand, Offergelt & Anand, 2022; Arian, Bhatti, Hameed, Khan & Rudolph, 2022) in nature. This research has been important in identifying and testing possible relationships between factors such as task management, knowledge flow, and motivational climates, but also has limitations.

Trust has emerged as an important factor in knowledge hiding (see for example, Guo, Brown & Zhang, 2022). Prior research has indicated that trust plays a key role in exchange relationships (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2023; Johnson & Grayson, 2005) such as the sharing of knowledge. However, we currently know relatively little about the organizational conditions that cause trust, or more precisely for this paper, what causes distrust to impact on knowledge hiding behaviours. This is problematic because without a clear understanding there is no obvious path to reducing such behaviours in an organizational context. This limitation has been signalled in the literature with authors calling for rich qualitative inquiry to provide greater explanatory insight (Connelly & Zweig, 2015; Ruparel & Choubisa, 2020) to discussions surrounding knowledge hiding.

In response to calls for further research, this paper explores the issue of trust and knowledge hiding in one particular context, that of innovation. We made this choice because of the potentially damaging impact of knowledge hiding on the processes of creativity and innovation, which has been well documented in previous studies (Donate et al, 2022; Duan et al, 2022; Khan and Zaman, 2021; Oliva et al, 2022). Our aim is to examine how perceptions of trust influence individual decisions to hide knowledge related to innovation processes.

Through addressing this aim we contribute to theoretical debates concerning the organizational conditions that give rise to distrust and knowledge hiding behaviour.

Literature Review

Knowledge Hiding

There has been a growing body of literature on knowledge hiding. Building on their definition of the concept, Connelly et al. (2012) outline that knowledge hiding can manifest itself in several different forms. They define these as (1) evasive hiding, where an individual may utilise avoidance techniques to avoid sharing knowledge, (2) rationalised hiding, in which the knowledge 'hider' will explain reasons to the other party as to why knowledge cannot be shared, and (3) playing dumb, when the instigator of knowledge hiding may pretend that they do not have the knowledge requested of them. Importantly, the intent behind knowledge hiding is not necessarily always negative. Khalid, Kamal & Khalid (2021) claim it is an example of a counterproductive workplace behaviour, but this is not automatically the case because while the outcome for the organization might be negative, the behavioural intent by the individual may be benevolent. As Donate et al. (2022) explain, while evasive hiding and playing dumb are deceptive in nature, rationalised hiding is not, although they argue that deceptive knowledge hiding practices can significantly hinder the innovation performance of an organization. This is supported by Connelly and Zweig (2015) who argue that not all forms of knowledge hiding, or indeed the decisions to hide knowledge, are harmful and may be made with positive intent.

The concept of 'positive intent' with knowledge hiding raises significant questions, dilemmas and complexities, and is explored by Rayment and Smith (2011) in what they term the practice of 'Misleadership'. Many instances take place in organizations from what might be

termed hiding. This is viewed as acceptable and normal practice that have been conducted with positive intent, for instance the 'white lie' to spare someone's feelings, the importance of not sharing information to preserve confidentiality, for commercial reasons, or not sharing with others until such time that all information is at hand to avoid jumping to conclusions. This sentiment is echoed by Anand et al. (2022) who highlight that knowledge hiding behaviour can be undertaken with positive intent. We, however, focus on the negative or disruptive practices of knowledge hiding because of the paucity of research in this area and because of the significant negative impacts it can have on trust, innovation and organizational performance (Černe et al, 2014).

Knowledge hiding is not a one off phenomenon and according to Connelly and Zweig (2015) it can become embedded in an organization's culture and there can be lasting consequences for organizations and individuals. Černe et al. (2014: 173) argue that a distrust loop can form between the individual requesting the knowledge and the individual engaging in knowledge hiding, which has knock on consequences such as reduced creativity for the perpetrator of knowledge hiding. Others highlight that the damage ongoing cycles of knowledge hiding can cause is potentially severe (Anand & Hassan, 2019), with hiding behaviours leading to further distrust (Arian et al, 2022). While some scholars have highlighted that the development of a knowledge sharing culture may mitigate knowledge hiding (Hernaus et al, 2019; Ruparel and Choubisa, 2020), we know that knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding are not two sides of the same coin (Duan et al, 2022). For example, while the development of a knowledge sharing culture may have a positive impact on outcomes such as innovation quality (see, for example, Liu, Keller & Bartlett, 2021) and, ultimately, organizational performance, it does not prohibit the manifestation of knowledge hiding behaviours.

There are examples of where knowledge sharing occurs in competitive environments (e.g. countries with geopolitical tensions sharing weather data), and where knowledge hiding occurs in so-called collaborative environments (e.g. toxic behaviours between teams within the same organization). In exploring the conditions that give rise to knowledge sharing, Gagné et al. (2017) note the importance of levels of autonomy and the cognitive demands placed on individuals. Donate et al. (2022) observe the important role of knowledge-oriented leadership, whereas Duan et al. (2022) take a different tack by examining knowledge flow and how encouraging a flow of knowledge may encourage the sharing rather than hoarding of information.

One area of the organizational climate where we have limited understanding in relation to knowledge hiding is trust. Prior research has established that trust and/or distrust is a factor in knowledge hiding (see, for example, Anand et al, 2020; Anand et al, 2022; Arian, 2022; Guo et al, 2022; Long, Liu & Shen, 2023; Nadeem, Liu, Ghani, Younis & Xu, 2021). The majority of this research has been quantitative or conceptual in nature, meaning we know little about the organizational conditions that give rise to trust/distrust. We understand that trust or distrust is a potentially important consideration for understanding how norms around knowledge sharing or hiding emerge, but we do not know how conditions of trust/distrust develop in organizations.

Trust

The concept of trust has been argued to be inherently vague (Giest, 2019). It has, however, been defined by Rousseau et al. (1998: 395) as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another”, Robinson (1996: 576) as “one’s expectations, assumptions, or beliefs

about the likelihood that another's future actions will be beneficial, favorable, or at least not detrimental to one's interests", and Nadeem et al (2021: 1313) as "expectations of an individual, group or team member that the promise, word, verbal or written statement of another individual, group or team member can be relied on". Common among these conceptualisations is that trust involves expectations of another and when a party has trust in another this will not lead to the detriment of the trustor. An individual may initially trust someone and share knowledge with them, if from experience the individual then finds that sharing knowledge creates a detrimental outcomes then this is likely to influence the individual's actions and those of others to develop a climate where they choose not to share knowledge. Hence, the nature of trust and its reciprocation is important. Previous research has indicated that trust is a precursor to risk taking and creative behaviour (Hughes et al, 2018), in part because it is important in engendering employee commitment during times of change or innovation (Ruppel & Harrington, 2000). We also know from the literature that trust develops through the passage of time as individuals interact and engage in exchange relationships (Johnson & Grayson, 2005), although it can be easily lost (Martin, 1999), which is why it requires careful attention. Hence, we could infer that trust is likely to influence individual decision-making around knowledge sharing or hiding.

The concept of exchange is important to trust (Alcoba & Phinaitrup, 2023). Social exchange theory, discussed by Blau (1964), explains social interactions and relationships in terms of exchanges of resources between individuals or groups. This theory is often drawn upon when understanding the dynamics of trust in organizations (see for example Harr et al, 2022; Hughes et al, 2018; Nadeem et al, 2021). Interactions between individuals generate obligations (Hughes et al, 2018), with individuals then reciprocating positively, or negatively, depending upon the outcome of the interaction. Reciprocity, the belief that if one shares

resources they will receive something of value in return, is a cornerstone of social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976). Harr et al. (2022) argue that counterproductive workplace behaviours such as knowledge hiding can be propagated when individuals believe that their organization has behaved poorly. In other words, employees reciprocate with poor behaviour such as knowledge hiding when they believe that they have been treated poorly themselves or when they witness negative behaviours in the workplace that may normalise and legitimise their own behaviours. When there is alignment between the expectations of individuals and their experiences then this has positive feedback into feelings of trust obligations (Ul Haq et al, 2022). In short, positive social exchange contributes to greater levels of knowledge sharing and entrepreneurial behaviour (Hughes et al, 2018).

The literature has drawn explicit links between trust and knowledge hiding, typically arguing that knowledge hiding proliferates in situations where there is low levels of trust. Ali et al. (2022) argue that knowledge sharing is predicated upon trust between and among co-workers, while Giest (2019) foregrounds the importance of trust within innovation networks. Harr et al. (2022) find that trust in leadership discourages knowledge hiding behaviours, and Gundry et al. (2016) highlight the importance of communication in trust building which then helps to foster an environment for innovation. Conceptual work from Anand et al (2022) and Arian et al (2022) has also been important in foregrounding the deleterious impact of distrust on knowledge sharing behaviours. While this literature assists in building the case that trust is an important factor in the decision to share or hide knowledge, our understanding of the micro-level processes of how trust operates to inform individual level decisions of either sharing or hiding knowledge remains poorly understood. Although the importance of trust in relationships with co-workers, leaders, and the organization is understood, without theoretical knowledge as to the determinants of trust, or in other words the conditions that give rise to

trust/distrust, we cannot fully comprehend why it gives rise to knowledge hiding behaviours.

This leads us to pose the following research question:

Under what conditions does trust influence decisions to hide knowledge related to innovation?

Methods

Fieldwork Context

This research took an exploratory and inductive approach to understanding perceptions of knowledge hiding and trust. Fieldwork was undertaken in an open-ended manner because we were interested in capturing a variety of views regarding the factors that influenced the generation and development of creative ideas in large, hierarchical organizations. We began the fieldwork with broad questions about how power structures influenced the generation and development of creative ideas, but honed in on the subject of knowledge hiding given the directions we were taken by our interviewees. Data collection therefore proceeded in an iterative manner, with interview guides adjusted to enable further exploration of important emerging themes. Questions were added to gather data about the impact of working relationships on the creative process, and how individuals made the decision to share (or withhold) ideas.

Knowledge hiding and trust are important considerations in all organizational contexts. We were particularly interested in the empirical setting of the police for two reasons. First, policing organizations are complex and hierarchical and we were interested in understanding how the creativity operated in a disciplined organizational context. Second, trust is a vital factor for UK policing organizations as it underpins their licence to operate, captured within

the philosophy of ‘policing by consent’. There are 43 Police Forces in England and Wales who each come under the control of a Chief Constable and the local Police and Crime Commissioner. We were granted access into two of these forces that we subsequently refer to as Force A and Force B. Despite forces having different geographies and sizes, they retain the same complex governance structure; each Police Force is led by a Chief Constable who has a large degree of autonomy in policing within their geographic area.

We gained access to both Police Forces through our contacts with gatekeepers owing to one member of the research team having previously worked in policing. We had a purposive sampling strategy (Short et al., 2002) and were focused on speaking to leaders, managers and front line staff at different levels across the two Police Forces to understand how processes of creativity and innovation took place in an empirical context that is often not associated with idea generation. Given one member of the team had worked in a UK police Force, this afforded us with strong contextual comprehension of the research field. We also had two members of the research team who had not worked or previously researched the police and therefore were able to ask probing questions in both the interviewing and data analysis stages from a position of relative ignorance.

Data Collection

Given the exploratory and inductive nature of this research with a broad group of people working in two Police Forces, we felt that semi-structured interviews gave us the right balance of open-ended questioning and probing to our research problem. We conducted 106 interviews in 2018 across both Police Forces: 63 interviews in Force A and 43 interviews in Force B. Our purposive sampling approach enabled us to hear difference voices, from individuals working at various levels within both forces, and who had been working in

Policing for different periods of time. Some interviewees were relatively new to policing, others had significant lengths of service, either within a single police force, or across multiple forces. Table One provides important background information regarding the sample. When working with gatekeepers, we were clear that we wanted to hear different perspectives around the process of innovation, rather than an echo chamber within a subset of both Police Forces, although we recognise that the use of gatekeepers may have steered the sample in a manner we could not control. We conducted interviews in the workplace in both Forces in rooms that enabled us to have open and honest discussions about contentious issues. The average interview lasted for 45 minutes.

TABLE ONE: SAMPLE OVERVIEW

Category	Total	Force A	Force B
Senior Officers	6		6
Superintendent	3		3
Chief Inspector	6		6
Inspector	10	4	6
Sergeant	16	10	6
Police Constable	20	12	8
Police Community Support Officer (PCSO)	6		6
Special Constables	4		4
Senior Managers	8	4	4

Middle and Junior Managers	10	7	3
Operational Staff	17	11	6
TOTAL	106	63	43

Note: Categories have been merged where it was deemed necessary to protect the anonymity of participants.

We followed an interview protocol, which started with general questions about the participant’s role within the police, before asking specific questions about developing and sharing innovative ideas. For example, we asked about how participants gained support or experienced push back when they proposed new ideas. The semi-structured nature of the interview ensured that we had the opportunity to pursue new lines of enquiry as unforeseen topics emerged. In this case, the issue of knowledge hiding and trust became apparent as salient for why individuals reflected on when and how to share creative ideas.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and manually transcribed. Our dataset totalled around 725,000 words and we used NVivo to store, manage and code our data. Given the themes of knowledge hiding and trust that became apparent during the fieldwork, we chose thematic analysis so that we could focus our efforts at scale (Nowell et al., 2017). All co-authors were actively involved in the coding process and to overcome some of the criticisms of some forms of data analysis being formulaic (Pratt et al., 2022), we had robust discussions as a research team around the labelling of different categories of data, with constant iteration

between our dataset and relevant debates from the knowledge hiding and trust fields. Hence, our interpretive approach to analysis was predominantly inductive and informed by a forensic overview of our interview transcripts, juxtaposed by the relevant literature.

Initial analysis discussions took place between all members of the research team. We asked ourselves whether there was sufficient depth and breadth of data to support certain themes. On several occasions, we were unhappy with our preliminary labelling because we felt certain terms did not fully represent the phenomena we had identified. During the initial stages of analysis we looked broadly at our data, enabling different forms of meaning making (Cornellisen, 2006). We narrowed and focused our analysis through frequent discussions amongst ourselves as a research team. These discussions were helpful for clarifying our language, enabling us to come to a consensus. For example, we began by looking at issues of fairness and justice with respect to the process of sharing ideas, before focusing and narrowing this to how ideas were stolen from others, and how this led to individuals hiding ideas in fear of the consequences of sharing their knowledge.

The second stage of data analysis involved the lead researcher producing a coding map and presenting a data structure table that captured data vignettes as well as relevant quotations. We discussed the salience of the data to knowledge hiding and trust, and then started to iterate with debates from both sets of literature. The second and third authors took on the role of critical friends, constructively challenging what the first author had identified and suggesting changes. This went through several rounds of revision and was intended to reduce the risk of self-affirmation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2017). An example of how this assisted the analysis process was connected with how individuals made the decision to share ideas. Initially the lead researcher found that there was a wealth of data concerning how individuals

protected their ideas, and wanted to ensure they received recognition for their good work, but broader discussions with the research team and a wider review of the dataset finessed this initial conceptualisation into a sharper insight connected with how interviewees were timing the deployment of their creativity to ensure personal gain.

In the third stage of data analysis we worked through the theoretical insights that had been generated. We funnelled the relevant quotations and data vignettes into a set of broader themes (see Table Two). These themes helped us to identify three theoretical insights that we now explain in greater depth in the subsequent Findings and Discussion sections.

TABLE TWO: DATA STRUCTURE TABLE

Data Vignettes	Broader Themes	Theoretical Insights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking credit for ideas • Hijacking ideas • Chain of command • Presenting others work as your own • Ego • Getting recognition for your own ideas • The best ideas are normally stolen anyway • Using your work as their own examples of creativity • All of a sudden it's got someone else's name on it • Re-badging • Evidence for promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebadging work as your own • Recognition for creativity • Co-opting ideas for personal gain 	Stealing ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion heavy culture • Stealing the ideas / evidence others have created • Wanting to look good in the eyes of superiors • One upmanship • Twisting / changing ideas just enough to claim them as original • Cut throat promotion process means recognition for the original idea is lost • Personal success ahead of organisational success • Inhibited and fearful • Lack of approachability • Requirement for evidence of successes and new initiatives • That's going to get someone else promoted • Getting promoted off the back of work that is not your own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual competition • Culture of fear • Individualistic behaviours • Myself before the organisation 	Hiding in fear

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scepticism • Waiting for the right moment to share a creative idea • Deploying creativity when it can bring about personal gain • Protecting information and idea • Effectiveness hindered when people do not share information • I want that to be my own little gem • Hesitation • Managing upwards and downwards • Frustrating the desire to be creative • Why waste my energy • Withholding ideas • Siloed operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing the deployment of creativity for personal gain • Hoarding of information and ideas • Strategic use of creativity 	Strategic sharing
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Findings

Stealing ideas

A major theme emerging from the analysis across both forces and throughout both police officer and staff groupings was that the majority of interviewees felt that there were occasions where peers and those higher in the organizational hierarchy would co-opt the ideas of others if they felt that it would benefit them personally. Sergeant 2 explained the situation:

“...someone takes your idea and thinks I’m going to take [PERSON]’s idea and I’m going to make it sound like mine because I don’t want to be an Inspector or a Chief Inspector forever, I want to be a Superintendent, so I can use this to my own gain, change it slightly, so it doesn’t become the original version of what it was (...) suddenly you find something else has happened and you think...that was my idea a little while ago, I’m sure it was. And I think that frustrates the desire to be creative if you’re a PC or a Sergeant, down here, because you think...why waste my energy?”

The above quotation was typical of the views captured within the dataset. Importantly within this narrative was that the act of stealing a creative idea suppressed future creative activity; “*why waste my energy*”. This was a widely held view and the researchers sensed a significant level of apathy amongst interviewees, who felt that such acts were common within the organizations, and an accepted part of the prevailing culture, indeed Mid Manager 5 from Force A again stated: “*some ideas that are stolen*”. This is not, however, to say that every individual within the organization presented the same view, indicative of this, Police Constable 7 (Force B) said “*I don’t think (...) people could steal*”. Whether developing or representing other’s creative ideas could be classed as stealing, or whether it was in fact the original idea that was being used is of course open to debate, but what is salient is interviewees believed it to be the case and so it became part of the organizational story. The overwhelming weight of evidence pointed to a situation in which individuals were concerned about others co-opting their ideas, taking credit in situations where recognition for the creative idea should have gone elsewhere, typically lower down the hierarchical structure. This was illustrated by another Police Constable from Force B:

“You probably wouldn’t get any individual recognition. Eventually, if I can be quite candid, somebody angling for promotion would probably take the idea and present it as an idea that they’ve generated or an idea that they’ve developed within the team.”

PC 2, Force B

Most respondents linked stolen creativity directly to promotion processes within the organizations. Competition linked to promotion, and progressing upwards in their

organization was perceived as a contributory factor to the display of counterproductive workplace behaviours.

Hiding in fear

The presence of a culture in which ideas were readily co-opted by others led us to our second theme which we have termed ‘hiding in fear’. We use the term ‘fear’ with caution because it is an emotive term, particularly in policing, where officers can be witness to many difficult situations including murder, assaults, abuse, ostracism and trauma. Given the difficult context in which the police operate, we were surprised to hear of interviewees being afraid to share good ideas because of the concern that once the idea was released into the wider organizational system, that person felt they would no longer get the recognition for their good work that they deserved. Sergeant 6 expressed this concern in the following way:

“there’s a risk that it [an idea] would be hijacked by somebody who’s after promotion, and that’s a danger. If a PC had a really amazing idea to reduce demand, it wouldn’t be the PC who would get the credit for it, and that’s what hampers creativity, is that you’re afraid that the higher rank will hijack your good work and they will take on your ideas, and that’s the fear of a lot of those things (...) it suddenly becomes an Inspector’s promotion idea or a Sergeant’s promotion idea. He actually gets promoted on the back of this good work that he’s done, which is actually not his idea, not his good work, and that can happen sometimes.”

Sergeant 6, Force A

The language used within this quotation is particularly important to note with the participant using the words ‘hijacked’, ‘afraid’, ‘danger’, and ‘fear’. This was a typical view expressed across the dataset, indeed Sergeant 2 from Force A argued “*there is a fear that (...) takes it forward, and uses it as their evidence*”. Those lower down the hierarchy were fearful of voicing their ideas because of the risks associated with someone else co-opting the idea and putting their name to it, typically someone from further up the organizational structure. These strong terms give an insight into how significant the instances were to those individuals. Taking promotion from the above quotation as an example, there are many benefits that promotion would bring to the individual not least the significant increase in salary and pension. Whatever the reason, the impact meant that individuals did not freely share their creative suggestions with others, and thus hampered the drive within both organizations for innovative thinking. The sense that we gleaned from interviewees is that even the persistent rumour or organizational myth that ideas were ‘stolen’ by others, let alone the cases we were told about where this had happened in practice, were enough to block the creative process. A Sergeant from Force B provided the following narrative:

“it [co-opting or stealing of ideas] does inhibit people going to bosses and...you know, because you know they’re busy, em, there is that, you know, that rank structure, and you think, “Oh, should I feed this to my Sergeant first?” (...) So, you go and have a chat with your Sergeant or Inspector to say “I’ve had this really good idea – this is what it is”, they then take it to the person who deals with it and says, “I’ve had this really good idea” [laughing] and then use it for their next promotion. It’s the cynic in me – I’ve seen it done. Not to me, but I have seen that done. (...)

You know, people do that, and I think there's a fear, even in [PLACE], there's a fear that that will happen."

Sergeant 2, Force B

Particularly striking in this quotation is that Sergeant 2 specifically noted that the fear of ideas being co-opted prevents "*people going to bosses*" with new ideas. This is problematic because individuals occupying lower positions within organizational hierarchies typically lack the resources, position, or political capital to take an idea from the creative seed through to an implemented change or addition to organizational practice. The poaching of ideas in this way, with individuals being afraid to share them with others, is therefore particularly damaging to creative activity. Indeed Inspector 2 from Force B argued that the view of some staff was to say: "*that's a really good idea, I'll have that because it's really big, I'll get promoted off the back of that*", with this therefore inhibiting the movement of ideas upwards within the organization because individuals were unwilling to share as a result of this prevailing environment. The underlying feeling of mistrust gives rise to our final theme of 'strategic sharing'.

Strategic sharing

Through our research journey within the two organizations we got a strong sense from a large number of interviewees that they were waiting for the most opportune moment to share their creative ideas, protecting information until they could profit from their own "*little gem*" (Sergeant 6, Force A). We have termed this 'strategic sharing' because there is clear consideration among participants of the process of when they should share ideas, which is illustrated well by Sergeant 1 from Force B:

“I know, left, right and centre, loads of ideas where people have not awarded the credit to the true source, and people know that goes on, so it makes people very sceptical. So, there’s people with creative ideas, left, right and centre, that will not say their creative idea until they’ve got their next rank because they know that, as a PC, it may be Inspector level evidence, and they’ll save it for the future where it will benefit their own career.”

Sergeant 1, Force B

This quotation was typical of others we received from individuals occupying lower positions within the hierarchies, when there was strong scepticism among officers and staff about recognition. We heard a significant number of narratives about how individuals had not been given the credit they felt was due for creative ideas, and this caused individuals to hold on to their creative thoughts until such time that they could benefit. There was a strong sense that police officers in particular were keen to gather and protect as much innovation evidence as possible so that they would be able to build a strong case for their promotion. This process was illustrated well by Sergeant 6 from Force A:

“The fear I would have is, if I had an ambitious Inspector above me, my fear is that, if I had a really good idea and I knew that I could do his job better than him and I could do and implement ideas at a sector level, rather than a station level which I’m currently working at, then I would be afraid... thinking, if I want promotion, I want that to be my little gem, and I would be hesitant in approaching him. But I would also be hesitant in

jumping over him to the Chief Inspector and the Superintendent because that's disrespectful."

Sergeant 6, Force A

Again the use of the word 'fear' is particularly important in this quotation, and was a word we heard during many interviews. The narrative above indicates that individuals were aware that the strategic release of creativity into the organization was important, with individuals being personally aware and politically astute in terms of using ideas for their own gain. The disciplined nature of the organizations comes through in the above quotation, with Sergeant 6 not wanting to subvert the hierarchy by "*jumping over*" the chain of command, and indeed we heard several stories during data collection of situations in which individuals had a '*blocker*', in other words a line manager they could not work with, or who they felt would take credit for their ideas. In these situations, individuals made the strategic decision to hold onto their ideas until such time that the situation changed, and they were confident that they would benefit from their creative work.

Discussion

This paper sought to answer the research question: *Under what conditions does trust influence decisions to hide knowledge related to innovation?* In addressing this question we provide three theoretical insights. The first of these is that when individuals are fearful that ideas could be co-opted by others knowledge related to new ideas is hidden. The second is that trust can disintegrate when there is a perception of a lack of fairness within an organization. Within our study this was most often discussed within the context of promotion processes within policing, but we argue that the theoretical insight could have broader applicability in other settings. Our final contribution is that instrumental behaviour underlies

the strategic sharing of knowledge, with the choice of either sharing or hoarding knowledge being determined by how individuals perceive the benefits and/or risks to themselves. We now elaborate on each of these contributions in more detail.

With our first contribution, it is well-understood from the literature that trust is a precursor to risk taking and creative behaviour (Hughes et al, 2018). For an organization to develop a culture that encourages creativity and innovation it is therefore important that it cultivates positive exchange relationships (Johnson & Grayson, 2005) in order to build trust among individuals, and between individuals and the supervisory structure. Through our data we build on previous work that highlights the role of fear as a precursor to knowledge hiding (Arian et al, 2022) by arguing that fear encourages knowledge hiding because it erodes trust, or indeed prevents the building of trust, and that this then leads individuals to hide knowledge related to innovation from others, or to simply give up on the creative process altogether. Frequently in our interviews we heard words and phrases such as “*afraid*” “*inhibits*”, “*hijacked*”, and “*steal their credit*” and from this we can also build on arguments from Černe et al (2014) and Anand et al (2020) that the competitive element of a performance culture promotes knowledge hiding by adding that this is, in part, because competition infuses interactions between individuals with an element of fear. This was often narrated to us as fear that a more senior colleague may co-opt ideas for their own benefit, but we also heard stories of ideas being co-opted from colleagues, and individuals from further up the hierarchy too.

The finding that fear encourages knowledge hiding via an erosion of trust is an important contribution to theory because it suggests that knowledge hiding is, in part, provoked when the creation of positive exchange relationships (Johnson & Grayson, 2005) is undermined,

with exchange only happening when the party sharing information perceives that they can gain personally from doing so. Individuals thus share knowledge related to innovation when they feel it will benefit themselves, rather than at a time when it may benefit the team or the broader organization. This is a concerning aspect of knowledge hiding because individuals are arguably putting themselves before the collective, preventing the flow of knowledge around organizations (Duan et al, 2022), which could encourage further hiding, and thus even less sharing of knowledge related to innovation. If organizations wish to prevent, or reduce, knowledge hiding then they need to create environments which foster positive exchange relationships among employees.

Our second contribution is built around the notion of fairness. Fairness as a concept has been widely discussed, for instance in the context of performance appraisal (Keegan & Den Hartog, 2019), process fairness (Collins, Mossholder & Taylor, 2012), and within the context of promotion processes (Russen, Dawson & Madera, 2021). With knowledge hiding, Connelly et al. (2012) suggest that unfair personal treatment may increase knowledge hiding, while Che et al. (2022) argue that a lack of fairness in the external context promotes knowledge hiding behaviours. We contribute to these debates by arguing that decisions to hide knowledge related to innovation are driven, in part, by a disintegration of trust which arises because individuals perceive that organizational systems and processes are unfair. In our journey with the two organizations we were told that “*you probably wouldn’t get any individual recognition*”, “*the project manager takes all the credit*”, “*it becomes an Inspector’s promotion idea*” and “*there’s a real tight-knit clique*”. While the need for organizational and work group support for creativity is not a new finding, with contributions extending as far back as the well-known work of Amabile et al. (1996), we argue from our data that knowledge hiding related to innovation occurs because individualistic behaviours

cause a disintegration of trust in organizational systems and processes. The propagation of poor individual behaviours, with common examples narrated to us in this study including the co-opting or theft of ideas to get oneself promoted, encourages others to behave poorly (Harr et al, 2022). This ultimately contributes to a breakdown in the perceived fairness of organizational systems and processes, which are undermined by individuals attempting to ‘get ahead’.

The final contribution relates to the dilemma among individuals around whether to share or hoard knowledge. We found a clear tension in relation to the self versus the collective, with individuals opting to preserve the self (Anand & Walsh, 2016). While it is already known that knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding are not two sides of the same coin (Duan et al, 2022), existing theorisations do not move beyond the either/or binary decision of share or hide. This is problematic because as our study has shown, there is significant complexity surrounding the decision as to whether knowledge is shared or hidden, and thus a need for the literature to move past the binary share/hide decision. This has been echoed in the paradox literature where scholars advocate for moving beyond casting groups into ‘either-or’ relationships, to reframe as ‘both-and’ and ‘more-than’ approaches, which captures exploratory and creative solutions to challenging scenarios (Putnam et al., 2016; Bartunek et al., 2021).

We argue paradoxically that there is both an instrumental and a strategic side to knowledge sharing in terms of who knowledge is shared with and when it is shared. At a surface level this appears as a selective sharing of knowledge, “*they’ll save it [creative idea] for the future*”, but we argue that beneath the surface there is also a level of subtle instrumental behaviour where individuals are potentially seeking benefit for themselves from the strategic

release of knowledge, wanting their idea to be their own “*little gem*”. We argue that there is thus a calculative element that occurs within a performance driven culture such as the one that permeated the organizations participating in this study that is particularly corrosive to collective success. In this case, what is troubling is there is a downside for both the individual and the organization (lose-lose) from this either-or trade-off, rather than a context when there can be both personal and collective benefits through developing a ‘both-and’ and ‘more-than’ solution (win-win).

Conclusions

Through research with two large public sector organizations this paper makes three distinct contributions to the knowledge hiding literature. We argue that an overly competitive organizational culture promotes knowledge hiding because excessive competition provokes fear that useful knowledge, perceived good ideas in our research context, may be co-opted by others without the requisite recognition for those who have generated that knowledge. This can be considered as a form of institutional plagiarism, but in this case rather than the student or the academic being the perpetrator, there is a systemic organizational culture of poaching ideas that then consequently encourages knowledge hiding. When a problem circles around an individual then it is personal, but when it becomes more common then it becomes systemic and impacts on trust by eroding the positive exchange relationships (Johnson & Grayson, 2005), which encourages knowledge hiding.

We argue that performance orientated cultures (Čerňe et al, 2014) with the wrong incentives can cause a disintegration of trust via the presence of individualistic behaviours, with poor individual behaviours rippling through the organization, contributing to a breakdown in the perceived fairness of organizational processes. We are not arguing that organizations should

move away from aspirations for high performance as clearly there are productivity and retention issues for organizations with low levels of aspiration. However, it is important that measures of performance are collective among and between teams, which provides structural incentives for building collective trust. Relatedly, we argue that tensions in relation to the self versus the collective, driven by instrumental and calculative behaviours are particularly corrosive to knowledge sharing within organizations with performance driven cultures, which can result in a 'lose-lose' situation for individuals and their organizations.

This research reveals a number of important practical insights, particularly for managers. It shows the importance of providing recognition to the source of ideas, even when the original idea has been built on and developed. It also demonstrates the considerable benefits of striving for openness within the working environment where people feel more able to share their frustrations before those feelings can fester, build and embed in the form of negative organizational stories that then are increasingly difficult to dispel. Managers seeking to foster knowledge sharing should, where possible, set team-based outcomes or goals, to avoid individuals engaging in individualistic behaviours. We would also argue that human resource management processes connected with performance appraisals, and particularly promotion, should explicitly look for evidence where an individual has benefited the collective through their actions, otherwise there is a risk that reward systems could inadvertently promote self-centered behaviours. Setting the right environment and ensuring this is consistent with formal and informal incentives could reduce the desire for individuals to engage in calculative individual behaviours which generates a 'lose-lose' situation when the individual seeks their own benefit ahead of that of the collective.

While our dataset is extensive and empirically significant, it was drawn from a particular type of organization with a culture and way of working that is not typical to many other settings. The work of the police routinely involves major threats to organizations, societies and individuals. Poor decisions in the police can ultimately lead to significant personal harm, or even death, which is not a scenario faced within many other sectors, although other emergency services and the armed forces can experience similar extreme settings. As a result, the police face significant levels of regulation and public scrutiny, which provides a particular lens for understanding how and why innovation is encouraged in our setting. In addition to this policing organizations tend to be strongly gendered with males dominant within the organizations, thus our dataset was similarly skewed. Future research could therefore investigate the findings from this study across a range of other organizational settings in order to explore the conditions giving rise to knowledge sharing versus knowledge hiding behaviours, with a particular emphasis on understanding what difference greater diversity might make to the issues we have uncovered here.

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