

Identifying Organizational Factors Effective Knowledge Concealment in Scientific Contexts (Case Study: Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi)

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the organizational factors affecting knowledge concealment in scientific contexts. This study has taken a mixed approach to identify these factors, so what makes it unique is the pluralism of data collection methods. Also, using the "Delphi" method, a conceptual model of organizational factors affecting knowledge concealment in scientific contexts is presented. The statistical sample included 314 employees of the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi who were selected through the random sampling method. They filled knowledge concealment questionnaire by Demirkasimoglu (2016) and a scholar-made questionnaire. Data were analyzed using the structural equation method (SEM) in AMOS software. Findings revealed that the coefficient correlation of organizational culture, reward system, organizational structure, organizational support, organizational justice, quality of work-life, and leadership style with knowledge concealment was -0.62, -0.27, -0.49, -1.30, -0.77, -0.39, and -0.88, respectively. The results indicate that organizational factors have an inverse and significant relationship with knowledge concealment.

Keywords: Organizational Factors, Knowledge Concealment, Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

1. Introduction

Although many variables involved in knowledge sharing have been studied, the factors affecting knowledge concealment have not been specifically addressed. It is

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very important to investigate the existence of deliberate efforts by an organization's staff to hide knowledge and its roots in the organization. Since organizations do not own the intellectual property of their employees, they cannot force them to transfer knowledge to other members [1].

Despite the designed efforts to increase knowledge transfer at the organizational level, little success has been achieved. Therefore, no accurate statistics of knowledge concealment is mentioned in domestic research; However, studies on hiding organizational knowledge and examining the effect of social norms on knowledge concealment in organizations, as well as providing a background model for knowledge concealment in software companies, indicate the existence of this phenomena in Iranian organizations [2], [3], [4].

Failure or relative success of field research projects shows that poor staff communication at the operational level, weak teamwork skills, the competitiveness of organizations with similar foreign organizations in terms of expertise and multifunctional knowledge lead to the process of knowledge concealment in Iranian organizations [4].

Despite efforts to transfer knowledge in organizations, many challenges are unsolved. In many cases, even when organizations take measures to facilitate knowledge transfer, employees are not motivated to share their knowledge [5]. On the one hand, concealing knowledge may have positive causes and consequences and may be done solely to prevent hurting the other party's feelings or to keep secrets, or to protect the interests of a third party. So, knowledge concealment is not always a negative behavior [6]. On the other hand, achieving sustainable competitive advantage needs specific attention to the current knowledge, how to use it effectively, and creating a structure for using new [7]. Some organizational factors also pave the way for the establishment of knowledge management [8].

Given the importance of sharing knowledge in organizations, this research seeks to identify organizational factors affecting knowledge concealment in scientific contexts.

2. Literature Review

Scholars and academics have different perspectives on knowledge management and they propose various technology-based solutions and practical instructions [9]. The most important goal of applying knowledge management in different types of institutions is to adapt quickly to environmental changes to improve organizational efficiency and profitability. As a result, knowledge management refers to how knowledge is created, disseminated, and used in the organization [10].

Knowledge management improves universities' competitiveness by using new knowledge to reduce costs, increase speed, and meet customer needs [11].

Knowledge concealment refers to the deliberate attempt of some individuals to conceal knowledge or not revealing it to an asking person [3]. Albeit, knowledge concealment focuses on the state in which specific knowledge is sought by an individual. For example, a person may request a copy of a report and his/her colleague

refuses to provide it, arguing that the report is confidential. In this example, the required knowledge is not provided, although there was no deception [12].

Knowledge concealment is examined in the interpersonal state since individuals are the main way of knowledge transfer in organizations. Also, people's attitudes toward knowledge – the effect of reputation and a sense of individual ownership on knowledge – are among factors ignored concerning knowledge concealment [13].

Organizational factors in the present study include organizational culture, reward system, organizational structure, organizational support, organizational justice, quality of work-life and leadership style, each of which is briefly stated.

Organizational culture is a phenomenon in the organization while all the employees agree that an invisible hand leads them to a kind of invisible behavior. Perceiving the components of organizational culture, and how it is created and sustained helps to justify the staff's behaviors [14].

The reward system refers to the provision of a pleasant outcome for the desired behavior to increase the likelihood of its recurrence [15]. Rezaieen (1989) defines organizational structure as a system of relationships, informally formed and formally approved, that governs the activities of individuals who are interdependent to achieve common goals [16].

Organizational support is define as an essential component of mutual relationships related to organizational commitment, and studies suggest a positive strong relationship between perceived organizational support and staff's organizational commitments [17].

Organizational justice points to the staff's perceptions of fair or unfair organizational treatment [18].

Quality of work life is the staff's reaction to their jobs, especially its consequences for job satisfaction and mental health [19].

Leadership is a kind of behavior and the physical manifestation of a relationship. Leadership as a process refers to influencing without force to guide and coordinate activities of a group, and as an attribute, it means a set of characteristics.

Therefore, the role of organizational factors including organizational culture, reward system, organizational structure, organizational support, organizational justice, quality of work-life and leadership style affect knowledge concealment [20].

3. Research Background

The study of Xu et al. showed that workplace isolation was positively associated with evasive knowledge concealment. In addition, a hypothesized three-way interaction including workplace isolation, negativity, and moral separation was justified by knowledge concealment [21].

The results of Bari et al manifested that knowledge concealment and concealment through vague games had a significant negative relationship with team creativity. However, logical concealment did not significantly affect team creativity [22].

Belshack et al concluded that Machiavellian employees help to reduce beneficial behaviors, and increase knowledge concealment and emotional manipulation, but only when moral leadership is absent. Under highly ethical leadership, unfavorable

organizational behaviors in Machiavelli employees do not increase. However, cross-design prevents conclusions about the direction of causality. Findings from the study showed that ethical leadership (as a potential solution to Machiavelli staff's misbehaviors) and from a practical perspective, leads to more investment [23].

King and Marks found that managerial support, specifically managerial oversight, were important predictors of goals of individual knowledge sharing [24].

Bordia et al, reported that knowledge concealment helped to observe implicit norms in an organization [25].

Safari concluded that perceived organizational policies and knowledge concealment were significantly related to staff's creativity concerning the moderating role of the staff's professional commitments [26].

Golmohammadisanji confirmed that strengthening the organizational culture greatly reduced knowledge concealment and exclusiveness of individual and organizational knowledge [27].

Dargahi and Dastafkan found that in many cases, even when there were appropriate facilities for knowledge sharing in organizations, employees were reluctant to cooperate. On the other hand, hiding knowledge can lead to reduced productivity and even reduced profits in organizations, especially health care organizations and especially clinical laboratories [1].

Kamraie and Hassanzadeh manifested that knowledge concealment occurred within organizations and sometimes employees hide their knowledge and do not share it. Knowledge concealment in organizations may have various causes and destructive consequences such as reduced productivity and profit. Therefore, identifying the causes of knowledge concealment and finding solutions to eliminate them is vital [28].

Therefore, this study was performed to examine these hypotheses:

Hypothesis:H1= There is a significant relationship between organizational culture and knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

Hypothesis:H2= There is a significant relationship between the reward system and knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

Hypothesis:H3= There is a significant relationship between organizational structure and knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

Hypothesis:H4= There is a significant relationship between organizational support and knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

Hypothesis:H5= There is a significant relationship between organizational justice and knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

Hypothesis:H6= There is a significant relationship between quality of work-life and knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

Hypothesis:H7= There is a significant relationship between leadership style and knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi.

According to the research background and its goal, the conceptual model of analyzing organizational factors affecting knowledge concealment in scientific contexts, which is based on library studies and experts' opinions (Delphi), is designed in the form of Figure 1.

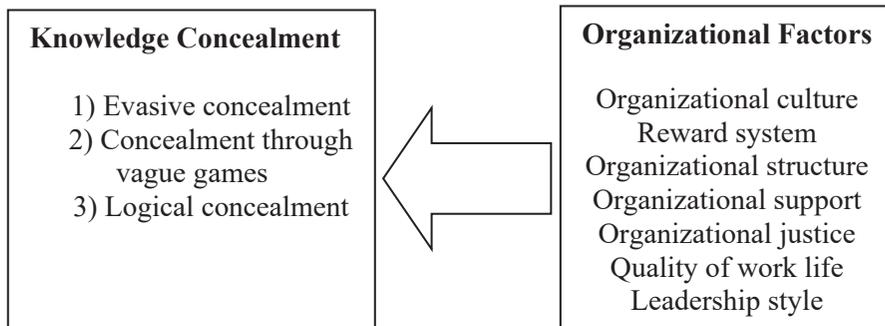


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Research

4. Methodology

This is exploratory mixed research. Mixed research is performed by combining two sets of quantitative and qualitative methods and provides more evidence for a better understanding of phenomena since it is not constrained by the limitations of the two methods [29]. Therefore, first, a qualitative approach was used to identify organizational factors affecting the concealment of knowledge in scientific contexts, and then, using the Delphi method, the initial model was approved by the research experts.

4.1. Data Collection Method

To select variables of knowledge concealment, first, the components and dimensions were investigated through library studies (referring to written documents including books, magazines, etc.). Simultaneously with identifying the components and dimensions of each variable, expert interviews with relevant experts (including professors and experts aware of the subject of human resource management) were arranged. Expert interviews are mostly semi-structured and help the interviewer learn a variety of facts from the interviewee, and provide the interviewee with an opportunity to express his/her ideas without being influenced by the interviewer. The expert interview was conducted for two purposes: to present the extracted components and dimensions based on library studies to the experts and to ask their opinion about these components and dimensions, and to identify the components and dimensions not identified through library studies. Gain a better understanding of the variables to define them operationally, to extract metrics, and to classify them appropriately was another purpose of the expert interview. Then, to finalize the list of identified components, the process of surveying experts (including university professors and specialists in the field of human resource management) using the Delphi method was performed. To survey the experts, a special type of open and closed questionnaire was distributed.

4.2. Delphi Method

Delphi is a useful communication tool for a group of experts that makes it easy to formulate their opinions [30]. The first attempt to study the philosophy of the Delphi method was made by Helmer and Reicher on the epistemology of the classic article they published entitled "The False Sciences" [31]. The main hypothesis of this method is that experts have better ideas than what may happen in the future, so, contrary to a simple study, the validity and reliability of this method depends more on the expertise of the study group than the number of participants [32]. The basis of the Delphi method is that the opinion of the experts of any scientific field on the prediction of the future is the most authoritative; therefore, the validity of the Delphi method depends not on the number of participants but their scientific validity [33]. Participants in the Delphi method are between 5 to 20 experts. The minimum number of participants depends on how the research method is designed. In this method, a panel (group) of experts is formed and the members communicate with the supervision of the chairman. This internal communication is anonymous and the opinions, predictions, and inclinations are not attributed to their providers. This information is published without identifying the providers. The most important point in the Delphi method is to overcome the negative points in the conventional committees. In this regard, non-disclosure of identity, controlled feedback and statistics-based responses are the most important characteristics of Delphi [34].

Despite significant differences in performing the Delphi method, a Delphi research usually begins with a questionnaire designed by a small team and sent to a larger group of experts. Questionnaires are designed so that participants can understand the issue and express their reactions [35]. After completing the questionnaires, all the experts' answers are reviewed and summarized. At this stage, items not related to the study objectives are removed. Then, the summarized report is sent to the experts. Experts are allowed to change their answers based on the results, and the new results will be re-evaluated by experts in the second round. In this way, over time and as the work progresses, the views of the audience will adapt to the topic. This process continues until the desired consensus is reached [35].

4.3. Investigation of Organizational Factors Component Questionnaire

To find effective components in terms of the experts' ideas, the t-test was performed to compare the mean of opinions with the theoretical value (3.00). If the score of a component was higher than the theoretical value (3.00), that component would remain in the model. The results of this test for each of the variables are given in Table 1.

As Table 1 manifests the components of the organizational dimension have been approved by the experts (mean > 3). 314 employees of the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi were selected as the study sample through simple random sampling. Due to the infinity of the statistical population, Cochran's formula was used to determine the number of participants.

Component	M	SD	T	P	Result
Organizational culture	3/45	0/47	3.53	0.000	Accepted
Reward system	4.65	0.65	5.78	0.000	Accepted
Organizational structure	3.65	0.41	8.34	0.000	Accepted
Organizational support	3.87	0.74	6.09	0.000	Accepted
Organizational justice	4.64	0.70	4.20	0.000	Accepted
Quality of work life	4.13	0.61	8.57	0.000	Accepted
Leadership style	3.68	0.53	4.97	0.000	Accepted

Table 1. Results of the organizational factors component questionnaire

4.4. Measuring variables

The knowledge concealment variable was measured by the standard Dimirkasimoglu questionnaire (Demirkasimoglu, 2016) and organizational factors were measured by a scholar-made questionnaire. Before entering the questionnaire, the selected indicators were evaluated by 20 experts and finally, the agreed questionnaire was used to collect data.

4.5. Validity

The content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts. In terms of the construct validity, the results showed that all indicators of the studied constructs have enough importance for measuring their constructs since the values of factor loads were higher than 0.4.

4.6. Reliability

To assess the reliability of the questionnaires, a pre-test was performed which indicated the appropriate and acceptable reliability of the assessment tool. Also, the reliability results of the research variables are presented in Table 2.

To test the hypotheses, the probability value of the model fitness in the significant state of parameters using structural equation modeling and path analysis was considered. Since the desired confidence level was 95%, a significant number at the 95% level in the range of 1.96 to -1.96 was in the rejection area, and numbers outside this range were accepted. Finally, in AMOS software, the relationships between individual factors' variables with knowledge concealment were investigated.

Variable	Number of questions	Reliability
Organizational factors	33	0.931
Knowledge concealment	12	0.876

Table 2. Reliability of the studied variables

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

The results of descriptive statistics in terms of gender showed that most respondents (N= 232, 65.16%) were male. The highest frequency distribution belonged to the age range of 41-50 years (N= 150, 47.77%). Most of the respondents (N= 174, 55.73%) had 11-19 years of work experience, had a master's degree (N = 40, 44.58%), and studied a major in human sciences (N = 165, 52.54%).

5.2. Variables' status

Regarding the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the variables, their normality was investigated. In this assumption, the data were normal if their critical ratios were between 2.58 to -2.58. The results of examining the variables' normal distribution are shown in Table 3.

Variable	Skewness	Critical ratio	Kurtosis	Critical ratio
Organizational culture	-0.284	-2.705	0.052	0.248
Reward system	-0.245	-2.333	0.361	1.719
Organizational structure	-0.300	-2.857	-0.183	-0.871
Organizational support	-0.191	-1.819	-0.185	-0.881
Organizational justice	-0.222	-2.114	-0.117	-0.557
Quality of work life	-0.245	-2.333	0.211	1.005
Leadership style	-0.245	-2.333	0.361	1.719

Table 3. Results of examining the variables' normal distribution

Given Table 3, all the coefficients are between 2.85 to -2.85. Therefore, this assumption holds for all components of the factors affecting knowledge concealment. This means that parametric statistical tests (requiring normal distribution) could be used to examine the research questions.

5.3. Testing the research hypotheses

In this section, the method of data analysis - structural equation modeling with the help of AMOS software - is described and then the research hypotheses are tested. The hypotheses are examined by referring to Figure 2 and the results of the model fitness in Table 5. As mentioned, paths with a t-statistic greater than 1.96 or less than -1.96 are significant.

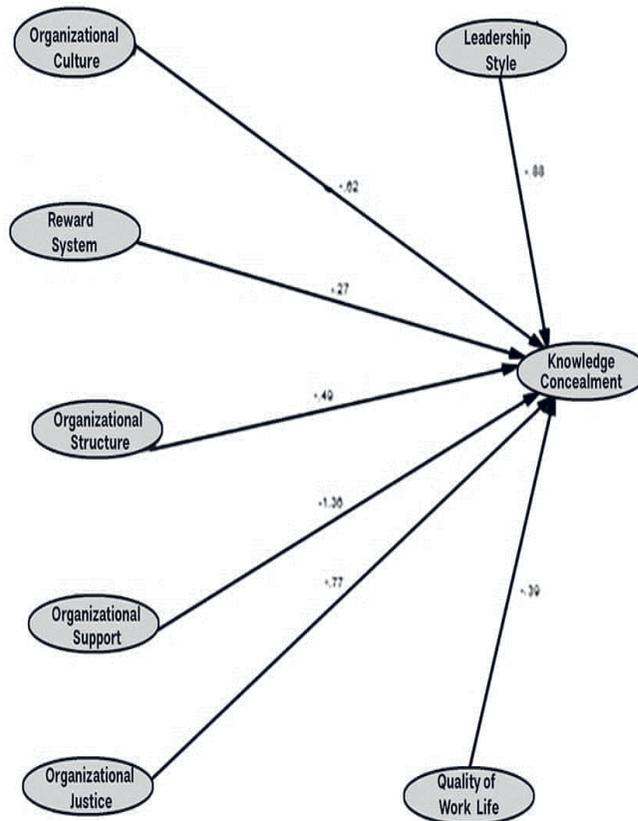


Figure 2. Factor coefficients and path coefficient of the suggested model in the standard mode

The general fitness index of the measurement models obtained by the confirmatory factor analysis is given in Table 4.

Index	Acceptable limit	Reported value
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (RMSEA)	≤ 0.08	0.068
chi-square divided by degree of freedom (CMIN/DF)	≤ 5	2.438
Goodness of fit index (GFI)	≥ 0.9	0.965
Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)	≥ 0.9	0.935
Comparative fit index (CFI)	≥ 0.9	0.813
Normalized fit index (NFI)	≥ 0.9	0.982
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	≥ 0.9	0.811
Incremental fit index (IFI)	≥ 0.9	0.892

Table 4. Fitness indexes of the suggested model

Table 4 shows that $RMSEA = 0.068$, $CMIN/DF = 2.438$, and $GFI = 0.965$. Results of Table 5 reveal a negative significant relationship between organizational factors and knowledge concealment ($p < 0.05$). Since the coefficients are negative, these relationships are inverse (decreasing). This means that improvement of the organizational factors' levels leads to a reduction of knowledge concealment. The results of the factor analysis for testing the hypotheses are reported in Table 5.

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	T	Result	Relationship direction
Organizational culture → Knowledge concealment	-0.62	-3.77	Accepted	Inverse
Reward system → Knowledge concealment	-0.27	-2.39	Accepted	Inverse
Organizational structure → Knowledge concealment	-0.49	-7.57	Accepted	Inverse
Organizational support → Knowledge concealment	-1.30	-8.95	Accepted	Inverse
Organizational justice → Knowledge concealment	-0.77	-2.86	Accepted	Inverse

Quality of life work →					Inverse
Knowledge concealment	-0.39	-3.58	Accepted		
Leadership style →					Inverse
Knowledge concealment	-0.88	-3.87	Accepted		

Table 5. Results of the factor analysis for testing the hypotheses

The significance value and effect of each of the model coefficients are given in Table 5. The results manifest that all coefficients related to knowledge concealment are significant with 95% confidence since their significance value is less than 0.05 and the t-statistic of all variables is higher than 1.96. As can be seen, the standard coefficient of the effect of organizational culture, reward system, organizational structure, organizational support, organizational justice, quality of work-life, and leadership style on knowledge concealment are -0.62, -0.27, -0.49, -1.30, -0.77, -0.39 and -0.88. This means that a unit of improvement in organizational culture, reward system, organizational structure, organizational support, organizational justice, quality of work-life, and leadership style reduces knowledge concealment as -0.62, -0.27, -0.49, -1.30, -0.77, -0.39 and -0.88, respectively.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, first, the effect of organizational factors on knowledge concealment through exploratory transactions and surveying experts was investigated, and then these factors were tested in a suggested model in the statistical population.

This finding was consistent with that of Belshack et al and Xu et al [23], [21]. In this regard, Belshack et al showed that Machiavellian employees help to reduce beneficial behaviors, and increase knowledge concealment and emotional manipulation, but only when moral leadership is absent. Under highly ethical leadership, unfavorable organizational behaviors in Machiavelli employees do not increase. However, cross-design prevents conclusions about the direction of causality. Findings from the study showed that ethical leadership (as a potential solution to Machiavelli staff's misbehaviors) and from a practical perspective, leads to more investment. Also Xu et al showed that workplace isolation was positively associated with evasive knowledge concealment. In addition, a hypothesized three-way interaction including workplace isolation, negativity, and moral separation was justified by knowledge concealment. Therefore, such an argument can be made that organizational culture had a negative significant relationship with knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. Organizational culture has recently entered the field of management knowledge and organizational behavior. Organizational culture, as a set of common beliefs and values, affects staff's behaviors and thoughts. It can be both a starting point for forwarding mobility, or an obstacle to progress, and is a fundamental area of change and transformation in the organization. Therefore, organizational culture reduces knowledge concealment.

Reward system had a negative significant relationship with knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. The result of this hypothesis is in line with that of Bari et al [22]. In this regard, Bari et al showed that manifested that knowledge concealment and concealment through vague games had a significant negative relationship with team creativity. However, logical concealment did not significantly affect team creativity. Therefore, such an argument can be made that reward system is an important part of human resources management. This system highly matters in organizations both in terms of employees' satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. Employees are not just looking for payment; they are looking for an organization with a sustainable future, a clear vision of its goals, and a defined way to reach them. While money is undoubtedly a serious component of the reward system, it is increasingly observed that hiring and retaining capable staff requires things beyond money. There are elements in the total reward system, each of which includes programs, activities, components, and dimensions that collectively determine the organization's strategy to attract, motivate and retain its staff. Elements represent the toolbox that an organization chooses to create value for both the organization and its employees. Therefore, performing the right reward system reduces knowledge concealment.

Organizational culture had a negative significant relationship with knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. King and Mark reported the same finding [24]. In this regard, King and Mark showed that managerial support, specifically managerial oversight, were important predictors of goals of individual knowledge sharing. Therefore, such an argument can be made that organizational structure is the main pillar of an organization that may significantly impact its performance. Proper organizational structure plays an important role in the improvement of organizational productivity, while accurate planning for any structure will ameliorate the performance of human resources. Each organization accepts a structure or form that is more compatible with its national culture. But when the organization is faced with conflicting environmental conditions, it may not adapt and chooses an inappropriate structure. Organizational structure and processes interact. Therefore, a dignified organizational structure weakens knowledge concealment.

Organizational support had a negative significant relationship with knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. Bordia et al concluded the same [25]. In this regard, Bordia et al showed that knowledge concealment helped to observe implicit norms in an organization. Therefore, such an argument can be made that if the organization cares about its staff's efforts and physical/mental health and helps them in coping with stressful situations, their organizational commitment will be strengthened. Therefore, a higher level of organizational support may be beneficial for knowledge concealment reduction.

Organizational justice had a negative significant relationship with knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. Safari formerly verified this finding [26]. In this regard, Safari showed that perceived organizational policies and knowledge concealment were significantly related to staff's creativity concerning the moderating role of the staff's professional commitments. Therefore, such an argument can be made that organizational justice is a mental construct in the

sense that what may be perceived as fair by a person may be perceived as unfair by another. Additionally, when justice is expanded socially, it makes employees more motivated to work and learn. When justice in the organization is observed in terms of resource allocation and reward/punishment system among employees, their capabilities progress, and knowledge concealment is reduced.

Quality of work-life had a negative significant relationship with knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. The result of this hypothesis is in line with that of Golmohammadisanji [27]. In this regard, Golmohammadisanji showed that strengthening the organizational culture greatly reduced knowledge concealment and exclusiveness of individual and organizational knowledge. Therefore, such an argument can be made that quality of work-life can be an important factor in encouraging ethical behaviors among managers and employees of the organization. This construct, which refers to employees' perception of the physical and psychological desirability of their work environment, requires collaborative efforts between managers and employees. The higher the quality of work-life, the weaker the knowledge concealment becomes.

Leadership style had a negative significant relationship with knowledge concealment in the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. Dargahi and Dastafckan also believed in this idea [1]. In this regard, Dargahi and Dastafckan showed that in many cases, even when there were appropriate facilities for knowledge sharing in organizations, employees were reluctant to cooperate. On the other hand, hiding knowledge can lead to reduced productivity and even reduced profits in organizations, especially health care organizations and especially clinical laboratories. Therefore, such an argument can be made that managers who realize and embrace their unique leadership style are more effective than those who try to do everything right. Managers are multi-faceted heroes who respect their values, trust their instincts, build multiple relationships, and work based on conscientious principles.

In this regard, several suggestions are offered to the managers of the Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. They should provide the necessary training and skills to employees and use the results of performance evaluation to improve the culture of creativity, innovation, and productivity in the organization; Consider the careful evaluation of the employees' distinctive and surplus working activities as the basis of extraordinary rewards in the organization; Decrease the focus of decisions in the organization and give systematic freedom to employees, and appreciate their special extraordinary efforts; Accent the overall satisfaction of employees with their work environment; The workload of employees should be fair and balanced, and opportunities for professional growth and promotion should be provided; Any prejudice and discrimination in the organization should be winded up; Finally, supervised employees should be allowed to use their judgment in solving problems.

This research was limited to the employees of Islamic Azad University of Khorasan Razavi. It is suggested that more research be done in other government agencies in other countries in order to comparatively study the model in other companies and organizations and determine their differences. Also other researchers can refer to other organizations to identify several other influential factors in order to complete the present research model. Finally, given that there are different models of

knowledge concealment that each of them has different dimensions, so it is suggested that other researchers compare the relationship between each of the components of the model with each other and evaluate their effect using the existing models of knowledge concealment variable.

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