

Leader–member Exchange Dimensions and Knowledge Hiding: The Moderating Role of Prosocial Motivation in IT Sector in Sri Lanka

Thasika Thanushan^{a*}, Logendran Mayuran^b

^{a, b} Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

*ythasika@univ.jfnac.lk**

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka's Information Technology (IT) sector has become a key driver of national economic growth, characterized by a rapidly expanding workforce and increasing integration into global markets. The sector relies heavily on teamwork, innovation, and effective knowledge sharing to maintain competitiveness. However, the collaborative nature of IT work also heightens the influence of interpersonal relationships, which may either enable or constrain knowledge flows. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study investigates the effects of Social Leader–Member Exchange (SLMX) and Economic Leader–Member Exchange (ELMX) on knowledge hiding behavior. It further examines prosocial motivation as a moderating factor, proposing that higher prosocial motivation strengthens the negative association between SLMX and knowledge hiding, while ELMX is expected to promote knowledge withholding through transactional and self-interested exchanges. Using a deductive quantitative design and convenience sampling, data were collected from 280 IT professionals across seven organizations located in Colombo. Correlation analysis, regression techniques, and conditional effects modeling were employed to test the hypothesized relationships.



The results indicate that ELMX does not have a significant effect on knowledge hiding ($\beta = .08, p > .05$), whereas SLMX shows a significant negative relationship with knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$). Moreover, prosocial motivation significantly moderates the SLMX–knowledge hiding relationship, with stronger negative effects observed at higher levels of prosocial motivation ($\beta = -.46, p < .001$). Theoretically, this study advances understanding of how distinct social and economic dimensions of Leader–Member Exchange differentially influence knowledge-related behaviors in the workplace. Nevertheless, the use of a cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations, suggesting that future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental approaches to strengthen causal inference.

Keywords: Economic Leader–Member Exchange (ELMX), Knowledge hiding, Prosocial motivation, Social Leader–Member Exchange (SLMX), Sri Lanka IT sector.

INTRODUCTION

The act of deliberately withholding requested knowledge from colleagues, known as knowledge hiding, is a common challenge in workplace environments (Connelly et al., 2012). Prior research has largely attributed this behavior to interpersonal factors, such as distrust (Kadam & Kareem, 2024). A prevailing argument is that employees hide knowledge when they lack strong social connections with colleagues, a tendency often attributed to the absence of long-term trust-based, reciprocal, and interdependent relationships, key elements that SET (Blau, 1964) identifies as necessary for open sharing.

Organizations increasingly rely on teams as their core working units (Hartmann et al., 2021), where employees collaborate closely to achieve shared goals (Khanagha et al., 2022). Despite this emphasis on teamwork, knowledge hiding persists, as employees

may prioritize personal objectives over collective organizational interests (Ismailov & Laurier, 2022). Evidence suggests that competition exacerbates the role of distrust in knowledge hiding (Han et al., 2021), with employees concealing knowledge to gain a competitive edge. Since knowledge generated through interactions among people, tools, and tasks is a key source of competitive advantage (Chahal & Bakshi, 2015), such hiding behaviors can undermine organizational success. Moreover, self-interested actions tend to be contagious (Guo et al., 2022), meaning that one employee's knowledge hiding often triggers reciprocal behavior (Su et al., 2021), further escalating the issue.

The study posits that prosocial motivation, an individual's intent to support and uplift others, (Grant & Berg, 2011), can counteract such dynamics. Employees with prosocial motivation prioritize their colleagues' welfare (Liao et al., 2022) and, given their focus on fostering positive social-exchange relationships (Kim & Qu, 2020), are more inclined to share knowledge openly. However, this tendency may depend on organizational context, particularly leadership influence.

Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping employees' perceptions of workplace norms (Coun et al., 2019). When leaders implicitly or explicitly signal that knowledge hiding is acceptable, employees are likelier to adopt this behavior (Pandey et al., 2022). Given the foundational impact of employee-supervisor relationships on workplace interactions (Cooper & Baird, 2015), this study examines how LMX, the nature of interactions within leader-follower dyads (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), shapes knowledge-hiding behaviors.

Babič et al. (2019) identify two key aspects of LMX: a social dimension (SLMX) and an economic dimension (ELMX). Together, these facets shape leader-follower dynamics. While traditional LMX research emphasizes social relationships (SLMX),

ELMX reflects a transactional, calculative exchange, distinct from merely poor leadership (Kuvaas et al., 2012). In contrast, SLMX captures the relational bond between leaders and followers, aligning with conventional LMX theory (Andersen et al., 2020). This study investigates the effects of SLMX and ELMX on knowledge hiding, as well as the moderating role of prosocial motivation in the relationship between SLMX and knowledge hiding.

This research advances understanding of knowledge hiding antecedents (Connelly et al., 2012; Chatterjee et al., 2021; Kadam & Kareem, 2024) by applying SET to analyze the LMX-knowledge hiding relationship. Building on recent studies (Liao et al., 2024; Weng et al., 2020), this study makes two key contributions: First, it extends the literature by clarifying the distinct effects of SLMX and ELMX. Second, it reveals how prosocial motivation moderates the SLMX-knowledge hiding relationship. These insights not only elucidate the mechanisms behind knowledge hiding but also identify boundary conditions, offering managers targeted strategies to mitigate it.

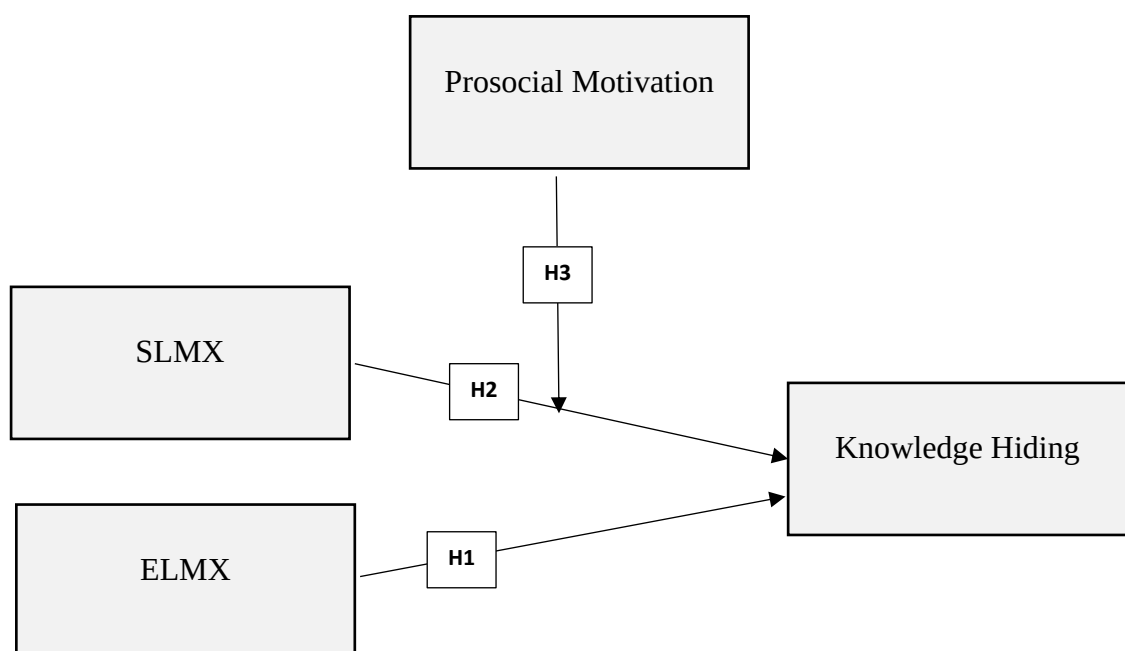


Figure – 01: Hypothesized research model

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Knowledge hiding

Knowledge hiding is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct comprising three distinct behavioral strategies. Connelly et al. (2012) identified three distinct forms of knowledge hiding: feigning ignorance (playing dumb), employing deceptive tactics to avoid sharing (evasive hiding), and providing justifications for withholding information (rationalized hiding). All three behaviors reflect intentional efforts to conceal relevant knowledge. Critically, Connelly et al. (2012) emphasize that knowledge hiding is a deliberate act it excludes cases where non-sharing results from genuine ignorance or accidental oversight. For instance, a classic example occurs when an employee, upon being asked for information, deliberately conceals it, such as by pretending not to know.

Despite being a relatively new concept, the study of knowledge hiding has produced several significant findings. Connelly et al. (2012) were the first to define knowledge hiding within an organizational context and developed a foundational framework outlining its causes, effects, and moderating factors. Subsequent research expanded on this work: Serenko and Bontis (2016) identified job insecurity as an antecedent of knowledge hiding and highlighted its negative consequences, such as reciprocal behavior and increased turnover. Burmeister et al. (2019) further explored these consequences, revealing that knowledge hiding can trigger guilt and shame in the perpetrator. Shifting focus to leadership influences, Abdillahi et al. (2022) demonstrated that altruistic leadership reduces subordinates'

knowledge hiding, while Bhatti et al. (2022) underscored the pivotal role of LMX in curbing such behavior. However, LMX comprises two distinct facets: SLMX, which reflects relational quality, and ELMX, which reflects transactional exchanges (Babič et al., 2019). To date, there is limited understanding of how these two facets differentially influence knowledge hiding (Dysvik et al., 2015; Cerne et al., 2015). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the separate effects of SLMX and ELMX on knowledge hiding.

LMX (SLMX and ELMX)

LMX theory posits that leaders form distinct, one-on-one relationships with each subordinate (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). These relationships are shaped by the extent to which both parties engage in mutually beneficial, reciprocal exchanges (Blau, 1964). Scholars emphasize the need to treat economic, transactional leader–member exchanges (ELMX) and social, relational ones (SLMX) as fundamentally separate categories, rather than as points on a linear scale (Babič et al., 2019). In alignment with this viewpoint, recent research has increasingly conceptualized SLMX and ELMX as independent constructs (Buch, 2015; Buch et al., 2019; Caniëls & Hatak, 2022). Building on this, we define SLMX as a long-term-oriented relationship characterized by ongoing supervisor-employee interactions grounded in mutual trust and informal obligations, without expectations of immediate reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This definition aligns with the broader LMX framework and underscores the contemporary academic emphasis on social rather than transactional leader-member dynamics.

In contrast, ELMX relationships are transactional or contractual, featuring a top-down influence from the supervisor, clear formal hierarchies, and explicit, often narrowly

defined agreements (Buch, 2015). Therefore, it is just as important to examine ELMX as it is to explore SLMX or traditional LMX, since a high level of ELMX does not merely reflect the absence of SLMX qualities. Rather, it constitutes a distinct form of leader–member interaction, characterized by formalized, benefit-based exchanges within a financial or utilitarian framework (Buch et al., 2019).

PROSOCIAL MOTIVATION

Prosocial motivation, defined as the desire to benefit others (Batson, 1987; Grant, 2007), plays a significant role in shaping knowledge-sharing behaviors in organizations. While traditionally linked to positive outcomes like increased performance and persistence (Grant, 2008), its potential to reduce negative behaviors such as knowledge hiding is gaining attention.

Research suggests that prosocial motivation can effectively counteract knowledge-hiding tendencies. Skerlavaj et al. (2018) found that prosocial motivation fosters relational resource conservation, indicating a greater willingness to share information. This aligns with the notion that individuals driven by a desire to help others are less likely to engage in behaviors that impede collective progress. Factors that strengthen prosocial motivation, such as task significance and beneficiary contact (Grant et al., 2007; Grant, 2008), may indirectly promote knowledge sharing by enhancing employees' sense of impact and commitment to others' well-being. Conversely, a lack of prosocial motivation might foster an environment where individuals are more inclined to hoard knowledge, potentially driven by self-interested motives or indifference toward colleagues' needs.

The interplay between prosocial motivation and leadership factors, as explored in the context of knowledge hiding (Abdillah et al., 2022; Bhatti et al., 2022), also merits

attention. For instance, manager trustworthiness (Grant & Sumanth, 2009) could strengthen the link between prosocial motivation and knowledge sharing by fostering a climate of openness and mutual support. Similarly, the distinct facets of LMX, social and economic, (Babič et al., 2019) may differentially shape how prosocially motivated employees engage in knowledge sharing. Although previous research has explored how prosocial motivation directly influences individuals' tendencies to hide knowledge (Skerlavaj et al., 2018), there remains a significant gap regarding its potential role as a moderator in the link between LMX quality and knowledge hiding behaviors. Specifically, it remains unclear whether employees with high prosocial motivation are less likely to hide knowledge even in low-quality LMX relationships, or whether prosocial motivation amplifies the positive effects of high-quality LMX.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ELMX AND KNOWLEDGE HIDING

Individuals who frame their connections with supervisors through a transactional lens may be inclined to see workplace resources as limited and competitive (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2022). This mindset arises because ELMX is inherently transactional, marked by market-oriented, contractual dynamics where interactions are driven by immediate self-interest (Kuvaas et al., 2012; Jawahar et al., 2019). In such relationships, employees focus on maintaining a strict balance between their contributions and received benefits, leading them to perceive unrewarded acts of sharing, such as knowledge disclosure, as a loss (Babič et al., 2019).

SET (Blau, 1964) explains that workplace relationships operate on reciprocity norms, but ELMX narrows this to purely transactional exchanges. Here, employees expect immediate, tangible returns for any effort or resource provided (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When outcomes are uncertain, they withhold knowledge, fearing the

costs (e.g., lost competitive edge) will outweigh benefits (Dysvik et al., 2015). Extensive research underscores ELMX's detrimental effects: Kuvaas et al. (2012) linked it to lower performance and organizational citizenship, while Buch et al. (2014, 2019) tied it to reduced work effort and affective commitment. These findings collectively suggest that transactional LMX fosters self-interested behaviors, including knowledge hiding.

Critically, ELMX norms permeate workplace culture, shaping how employees interact (Buch et al., 2019). Subordinates often mirror leader-subordinate dynamics (Kim et al., 2017), meaning transactional LMX can implicitly sanction knowledge hiding, even when it undermines job attitudes (Guo et al., 2021). The quality of LMX also spills over into peer relationships (Varma et al., 2022), as employees compare their own LMX to others' (Newman et al., 2017), further entrenching calculative behaviors. Ultimately, ELMX reduces trust to contractual terms, where collaboration hinges on explicit compensation (Dysvik et al., 2015). In this context, employees strategically withhold knowledge unless guaranteed direct rewards (Babič et al., 2019; Buch, 2015). Even high-quality ELMX relationships rarely inspire unconditional knowledge sharing, as employees prioritize self-interest (Olaisen & Revang, 2018). Thus, the very structure of ELMX, with its emphasis on transactional gains, actively incentivizes knowledge hiding. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: ELMX is positively related to knowledge hiding.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SLMX AND KNOWLEDGE HIDING

SLMX fosters relationships where employees and supervisors engage in reciprocal knowledge sharing and mutual support beyond formal work obligations (Kim et al., 2017; Caniëls & Hatak, 2022). These high-quality exchanges are characterized by

trust, genuine concern for each other's well-being, and a sense of shared responsibility (Babič et al., 2019). According to SET, such relationships thrive on reciprocity: employees who perceive their leaders as supportive and trustworthy feel obligated to reciprocate through cooperative behaviors, including knowledge sharing (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Consequently, employees in strong SLMX relationships are less likely to engage in knowledge hiding, as withholding information would violate the norms of mutual trust and obligation. Instead, they prioritize the collective benefit of their peers and organization when sharing knowledge (Kucharska & Erickson, 2023).

Organizations that cultivate SLMX create a social exchange climate where employees view knowledge sharing as a valued contribution rather than a risk (Babič et al., 2019). This climate reduces knowledge hiding by reinforcing relational rather than transactional exchanges. Employees are motivated not by short-term gains but by long-term trust and reciprocity, aligning with SET principles. Thus, the stronger the SLMX relationship, the lower the tendency to conceal knowledge, as employees perceive greater intrinsic and social rewards in transparent collaboration.

Related empirical evidence suggests that SLMX promotes behaviors consistent with reduced knowledge-hiding tendencies. Studies have shown that SLMX is positively associated with organizational citizenship behaviors (Kuvaas et al., 2012), increased work effort (Buch et al., 2014), and greater affective commitment (Buch et al., 2019) - all of which reflect the same underlying mechanisms of reciprocity and mutual obligation that would discourage knowledge hiding. While these studies did not examine knowledge hiding directly, they demonstrate how SLMX fosters the very behaviors that are theoretically antithetical to knowledge concealment.

H2: SLMX is negatively linked to knowledge hiding.

THE MODERATING ROLE OF PROSOCIAL MOTIVATION IN THE LINK BETWEEN SLMX AND KNOWLEDGE HIDING

Employees with high prosocial tendencies focus on creating positive outcomes for others, leading them to prioritize others' well-being (Bolino & Grant, 2016). As a result, these employees are more likely to attend to others' interests. However, individual differences exist in prosocial tendencies, meaning some employees naturally exhibit lower levels of prosocial motivation. This study examines how SLMX interacts with prosocial motivation to influence knowledge hiding behaviors. It specifically considers the moderating role of prosocial motivation in this dynamic. Among employees with strong prosocial drives, the inverse link between SLMX and the tendency to hide knowledge becomes more pronounced, as their innate desire to support others reinforces the collaborative atmosphere fostered by high-quality SLMX connections (Babič et al., 2019). Importantly, even when prosocial motivation is low, strong SLMX relationships still reduce knowledge hiding, as the leader's influence instills norms of reciprocity (Blau, 1964). However, this effect is weaker than in cases where employees are intrinsically prosocially motivated.

Empirical research corroborates the moderating role of prosocial motivation in workplace dynamics. For instance, in their research, Škerlavaj et al. (2018) revealed that prosocially motivated individuals showed reduced knowledge hiding, even under time pressure, implying that such internal drivers can override context-induced withholding. Similarly, Lebel and Patil (2018) demonstrated that prosocial motivation mitigated the negative impact of discouraging supervisor behaviors on employee proactivity, underscoring its buffering effect. Further supporting this pattern, Thuan and Thanh (2020) showed that prosocial orientation enhanced the

positive relationship between leader knowledge sharing and follower creativity, while Shin and Hur (2021) found it reduced the detrimental effects of job insecurity on work engagement. Together, these studies illustrate how prosocial motivation systematically alters workplace relationships, either by amplifying positive outcomes or diminishing negative ones, aligning with our theoretical framework.

Thus, we hypothesize:

H3: Prosocial motivation amplifies the inverse association between SLMX and knowledge hiding, such that higher levels of prosocial motivation intensify this negative relationship.

An interaction effect involving prosocial motivation and ELMX was not proposed in this study, given that ELMX reflects a calculative, transactional exchange model, which does not align with the foundational tenets of SET (Kuvaas et al., 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates Sri Lanka's IT industry, an ideal setting for examining the relationship between LMX and knowledge hiding, moderated by prosocial motivation. The sector is pivotal to the national economy, generating over \$1.5 billion in export revenue (2022) and employing around 175,000 skilled professionals (U.S. Commercial Service, 2023). As a knowledge-intensive domain where collaboration drives innovation, IT firms offer a relevant context to explore how high-quality LMX relationships may reduce knowledge hiding especially among employees with prosocial motivation to benefit others (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Competitive dynamics and concerns about protecting intellectual assets often lead individuals to withhold

knowledge (Fong et al., 2018). However, the influence of prosocial motivation on this tendency has yet to be examined in the Sri Lankan context.

Data were collected from employees across seven Colombo-based IT organizations, representing diverse roles, including software development, network administration, quality assurance, cybersecurity, and database management. After obtaining HR department consent, participants were selected via convenience sampling through workplace interactions. Convenience sampling enabled efficient data collection from a relevant and accessible population within Colombo, where a significant concentration of IT firms is located. Although this approach may limit generalizability, it is consistent with prior organizational research conducted in similar contexts (Etikan et al., 2016). A standardized protocol was followed: participants received a package containing a cover letter (outlining study objectives), a questionnaire, a confidentiality agreement, and a return envelope. Completed surveys were returned to HR departments for later retrieval. The survey was administered in English, the sector's primary communication language. Despite Sinhala and Tamil being Sri Lanka's official languages, English proficiency is high among IT professionals, minimizing potential language barriers to response accuracy or participation.

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and provide an overview of the key study variables. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 280 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 93.3%. Out of the 280 participants, 63% were male and 37% were female. The average age of respondents was 30.6 years ($SD = 5.2$), and the average organizational tenure was 5.8 years ($SD = 3.4$). Regarding marital status, 56% of the participants were single, while 44% were married. In terms of occupational

roles, 42% were employed in software development, 18% in network administration, 14% in quality assurance, 13% in cybersecurity, and the remaining 13% in database management. The demographic profile of participants helps illuminate patterns of knowledge hiding, alongside the roles played by leader–member relationships and prosocial motivation in Sri Lanka’s IT workforce.

MEASURES

Unless otherwise specified, all measures used a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree").

ELMX and SLMX

We assessed ELMX and SLMX using an 8-item scale developed by Kuvaas et al. (2012). A sample item for ELMX is “The best way to describe my relationship with a superior is to do what he/she tells me to do”. An example item for SLMX is “My relationship with a superior depends on mutual trust”. Reliability analyses revealed satisfactory internal consistency, with the two measures yielding alpha values of 0.74 and 0.70.

Prosocial motivation

To assess the extent of employees’ prosocial motivation, a five-item scale developed by Grant and Sumanth (2009) was utilized. A sample item is “I get energized by working on tasks that have the potential to benefit others”. The scale exhibited strong internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Knowledge hiding

We measured knowledge hiding using the scale from Connelly et al. (2012). Participants recalled colleague knowledge-sharing requests over a 3-month period and responded to items such as “Agreed to help him/her but never really intended to.” The scale exhibited acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Control variables

we controlled for participants’ gender (0 = female, 1 = male), age (in years), tenure (in years), and occupational roles. Occupational roles were included as categorical variables representing participants’ primary areas of work (e.g., software development, network administration, quality assurance, cybersecurity, and database management), as prior research suggests that job function may shape access to knowledge, expectations for sharing, and engagement in discretionary behaviors (Serenko & Bontis, 2016). These control variables help account for potential demographic and contextual influences on the focal relationships (Weng et al., 2020; Khalid et al., 2018).

RESULTS

This study employed correlation, regression, and moderated regression techniques to examine the hypothesized links among ELMX, SLMX, prosocial motivation, and knowledge hiding.

Table:01 Correlation analysis

Variables	ELMX	SLMX	Knowledge hiding	Prosocial Motivation
ELMX	1			
SLMX	-.38**	1		
Knowledge hiding	.020	-.36**	1	
Prosocial Motivation	-.29**	.34**	-.31**	1

Source: SPSS output

The correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among the study variables, offering insights into the dynamics between LMX types, prosocial motivation, and knowledge-hiding behaviors. However, a non-significant and weak positive association was found between ELMX and knowledge hiding ($r = .020$, $p > .05$), suggesting that while the direction aligns with theoretical expectations, the relationship was not statistically supported in this study. This indicates that transactional LMX may not strongly or consistently predict knowledge-hiding behaviors in this context. Conversely, SLMX was negatively correlated with knowledge hiding ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$). This finding aligns with SET, suggesting that

employees in high-quality social exchanges with their leaders feel a greater sense of obligation and trust, which discourages knowledge hiding and fosters more open knowledge sharing.

There was a significant inverse relationship between prosocial motivation and knowledge hiding ($r = -.31, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals driven by a genuine desire to help others are less prone to hide knowledge. Moreover, prosocial motivation correlated positively with SLMX ($r = .34, p < .01$) and negatively with ELMX ($r = -.29, p < .01$), suggesting that employees with stronger social exchanges with leaders tend to exhibit higher prosocial motivation, while those in economic exchanges display lower such motivation.

Table:02 Moderation analysis

Path			Standard coefficient (β)	P-Value	Results
ELMX	→	Knowledge Hiding	.08	>.0.05	Non- Significant
SLMX	→	Knowledge hiding	-.33	< .001	Significant
SLMX Motivation		Prosocial Knowledge Hiding (Direct)	-.18	< .01	Significant

Source: SPSS output

Regression analyses indicated that ELMX did not have a significant effect on knowledge hiding ($\beta = .08, p > .05$), thus not supporting H1. Conversely, SLMX significantly and negatively predicted knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$), supporting H2. To test H3, we included the interaction term between SLMX and prosocial motivation in the regression model. The analysis revealed a significant interaction effect ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$), suggesting that prosocial motivation moderates the relationship between SLMX and knowledge hiding.

Table:03: Conditional Effects of SLMX on Knowledge Hiding at different levels of prosocial motivation

Level of prosocial motivation	Effects of SLMX on knowledge hiding
Low (-1SD)	-.21**
Mean	-.33***
High (+1SD)	-.46***

Source: SPSS output

The conditional effects analysis revealed that the negative relationship between SLMX and knowledge hiding became stronger at higher levels of prosocial motivation. At high prosocial motivation, the effect was strongest ($\beta = -.46, p < .001$), supporting H3. This suggests that employees with high prosocial motivation are more responsive to social exchange norms and thus less likely to engage in knowledge hiding when they perceive high-quality leader-member relationships.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how SLMX and ELMX affects knowledge hiding and how prosocial motivation moderates the relationship between them. The results support the tenets of Social Exchange Theory, and show that SLMX is indeed highly effective in reducing knowledge hiding. This finding is consistent with previous studies which indicated that good relational exchanges lead to trust, reciprocity and cooperation (Babic et al., 2019; Buch et al., 2014). In cases where there is strong social exchange relationships, the employees are more likely to share knowledge; if information were to not be shared, the social norms would be violated.

ELMX, however, did not exhibit a significant relationship with knowledge hiding. This result is contrary to some previous research, which indicates a positive association between transactional relationships and self-oriented behaviours (Kuvaas et al., 2012). One possible reason is that in the IT industry in Sri Lanka, workers might not fully agree that conducting economic exchanges is an intentional restriction on knowledge sharing, especially in the case of co-operative working where interdependence is strong.

The moderating effect of prosocial motivation also lends support to the theoretical framework. Results suggest that prosocial motivation reinforces the negative correlation between SLMX and knowledge hiding. This is in line with previous studies showing that prosocial motives are correlated with cooperative and helping behaviours (Grant & Berg, 2011; Skerlavaj et al., 2018). These intrinsic motivations add to the knowledge-sharing behaviors and diminish the tendency to "hide"

knowledge if combined with high-quality leader–member relationships. The results suggested that relational leadership and motivational factors play a crucial role in influencing the knowledge behaviour.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Our study's first contribution is identifying and testing how personal characteristics and contextual factors interact to influence the tendency of employees to hide knowledge from their peers. Grounded in SET (Blau, 1964), we examined the interplay between prosocial motivation and SLMX, finding strong evidence for their interaction. Interestingly, even in the absence of prosocial tendencies among team members, supervisors who cultivate strong rapport with their employees may help reduce harmful outcomes. This study builds upon existing literature by broadening the antecedents that contribute to knowledge hiding, moving beyond previous emphasis on relational factors (e.g., distrust; Kadam & Kareem, 2024) and organizational dynamics like knowledge management systems, policies, and workplace culture (AlGhaithy & Al-Busaidi, 2025; Bogilović et al., 2017). However, with few exceptions (e.g., Liao et al., 2024; Babič et al., 2019), the role of leader behaviors has been largely overlooked.

This study also contributes to the well-established yet still evolving field of LMX research. Extending the work of Liao et al. (2024) on LMX and knowledge hiding, our study delves into two separate dimensions of LMX—namely, the social and economic aspects (SLMX and ELMX). This approach refines existing leadership frameworks by emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the LMX construct. Our findings align with prior research (e.g., Kuvaas et al., 2012; Buch et al., 2014, 2019), reinforcing the beneficial role of SLMX in outcomes heavily shaped by social interactions, such as knowledge hiding. Specifically, when team members lack

prosocial motivation, SLMX proves particularly impactful. In contrast, ELMX does not demonstrate comparable advantages.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Organizations and managers should consider the implications of the findings outlined in this paper. To start, managers ought to focus on enhancing their subordinates' prosocial capacities. This may involve enabling staff to engage directly with individuals who benefit from their contributions or highlighting the pressing nature of their peers' difficulties (Bolino & Grant, 2016). When employees cultivate a sense of empathy toward the needs of their colleagues and understand how their expertise can make a difference, they tend to be more open in sharing knowledge.

A key finding of this research is that SLMX offers a solution to low employee prosocial motivation. Even among employees who lack inherent other-orientation or prosocial inclinations, SLMX effectively mitigates knowledge hiding. To effectively harness this dynamic, organizations are encouraged to foster enduring, trust-based social exchanges between leaders and their team members. As this form of interaction shares similarities with conventional LMX (Caniëls & Hatak, 2022), it can be strengthened through leader behaviors centered on empowerment, acknowledgment, guidance, and collaboration (Buch et al., 2014). Furthermore, Babič et al. (2019) suggest that robust SLMX can be strengthened through efforts to reduce hierarchical barriers and adopt human resource strategies rooted in mutual commitment. Examples of such strategies include securing job stability, offering training focused on fairness in interpersonal interactions, encouraging autonomous team structures, enabling distributed authority in managerial processes, and ensuring transparency in performance-related data across the enterprise.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although the study offers meaningful contributions to the field, it is important to recognize its limitations. First, the cross-sectional design lacking longitudinal data prevents causal conclusions. Future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how the variables evolve over time.

Second, the non-significant findings may stem from the relatively small sample size. Future studies should investigate LMX through larger-scale field research and experimental designs. Moreover, since employees' prosocial motivation could shape their exchange relationships, this offers a promising direction for future inquiry. For instance, researchers could test a mediation model where LMX explains the relationship between prosocial motivation and knowledge-hiding behavior.

Third, trust was not explicitly measured as a mediator or control variable, representing another limitation. Although prior research (Connelly et al., 2012; Nadeem et al., 2021) supports our assumptions about trust and distrust, this study can only infer these dynamics. Future work should empirically test these relationships either by controlling for trust or examining it as a mediator/boundary condition. Beyond this, additional boundary conditions affecting knowledge exchange should be explored, such as knowledge-sharing technologies (Zhai et al., 2023), workplace structure or job characteristics (Budur, 2024; Shujahat et al., 2025), and the ethical climate fostered by leaders and teams (Chen et al., 2024).

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