

Study of Influential Mechanism of Workplace Loneliness and Knowledge Hiding

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Abstract: In the digital era, enterprises need a series of innovative practices to stand out in the fierce market competition. The role of unique intellectual resources is particularly important in maintaining competitive advantages compared to other replicable production resources. Knowledge is an intangible asset that requires a people carrier in order to be used and circulated in organizations, innovation is often born in this process. Managers have invested a lot of resources to facilitate knowledge sharing, but to protect their personal interests, employees may implement knowledge hiding to maintain their own assets and unique status, so that making knowledge management practices have little effect in organizations. Knowledge hiding behavior has gradually become a topic of academic concern in the field of knowledge management. In this era, the epidemic has further driven changes in employees' work environment and methods, reducing human contact and giving rise to workplace loneliness. In recent years, domestic scholars have also begun to pay attention to this negative emotional experience in the workplace and have conducted studies on negative work behaviors triggered by workplace loneliness. In this study, we focus on the mechanism of workplace loneliness on knowledge hiding behavior and construct a research model based on the resource conservation theory and the job demands - resources model. Specifically, workplace loneliness is used as the independent variable to influence knowledge hiding through the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion, and high involvement work system is introduced as the boundary condition to verify its moderating effect on the first and second stages of the model.

Keywords: Workplace loneliness, Knowledge hiding, Emotional exhaustion, High involvement work system.

1. Introduction

The spread of information technology has opened the digital era. To cope with the fierce competitive environment and to establish and maintain their competitive advantage, enterprises need a series of innovative initiatives as the foundation [1], and knowledge and its owners are naturally placed in the forefront of resource allocation by organizations [2]. Innovation is often born from the circulation and reorganization of knowledge in an organization [3, 4], and as employees are the owners of "intellectual property", organizations cannot force employees to share knowledge [5], so how to stimulate employees to share knowledge spontaneously has become a key concern for managers. However, research results have shown that organizational knowledge sharing incentives have little effect.

With the increasingly diversified access to knowledge, the cost and difficulty of acquiring complex knowledge as a scarce resource are also rising. At the same time, the competition mechanism set up by enterprises to cope with fierce market competition creates a competitive atmosphere in the organization and strengthens the competitive relationship among organizational members. Therefore, employees choose to take knowledge hiding in the face of others' requests from their personal interests to get more limited resources in the organization and maintain their competitive advantages. Organizations not only need to set up incentive systems to create a good knowledge sharing atmosphere, but also need to explore how to suppress employees' knowledge hiding behavior from the source to ensure effective organizational knowledge management. Therefore, it is necessary to study the antecedent variables and formation mechanism of knowledge hiding.

The development of information technology has also changed the work environment and work forms. Especially in

recent years, organizations have pushed forward changes in work forms such as online offices and virtual teams in response to capricious epidemics, and team-based collaborative work opportunities have become less and less available, making it difficult for employees to find a sense of belonging and presence in the organization. In addition, more and more companies are streamlining their workforce by introducing new automated equipment and setting up harsh competition mechanisms. In the increasingly competitive atmosphere, it is difficult to establish sincere and reliable interpersonal relationships among organizational members, and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace is not guaranteed, leading to a sense of workplace isolation; the prevalent "in-volume" culture and the workplace isolation caused by home working. The prevalent "in-volume" culture and the blurring of work-life boundaries caused by working from home invariably prolong employees' working hours, which also encroach on their personal social time and leave their interpersonal needs unsatisfied, thus increasing workplace loneliness [6].

Studies have explored the triggering mechanisms of knowledge hiding from multiple perspectives, including psychological ownership theory, social exchange theory, and resource preservation theory, and verified that negative affective experiences positively predict individual knowledge hiding behavioral tendencies by influencing employees' intra-organizational social relationships, job burnout, and thus, but the mechanisms of how workplace loneliness affects employees' knowledge hiding behaviors are unclear. In this paper, based on the resource conservation theory and the job requirement-resource model developed on its basis, we introduce emotional exhaustion to explore its intrinsic mechanism of action on knowledge hiding behavior from the prevalent negative emotion of employees' workplace loneliness, and try to reveal the direct and indirect effects of

workplace loneliness on knowledge hiding, and explore the boundary conditions in it under this theoretical framework.

2. Theoretical Analysis and Research Assumptions

2.1. Workplace loneliness and knowledge hiding

Wright (2005) pointed out that workplace loneliness is an individual's experience of loneliness in the workplace due to the gap between the quantitative and qualitative levels of interpersonal relationships and expectations, and that this gap cannot be closed [7], reflecting a negative emotional state in which employees have a lack of value and interpersonal relationships in the workplace [8]. Resource conservation theory suggests that positive emotions belong to valuable individual resources, while negative emotional experiences bring about resource depletion, and both actual and potential depletion of resources bring a sense of threat to individuals, thus causing them to engage in negative work behaviors [9]. Specifically, workplace loneliness, as a subjectively perceived negative emotion, can reflect individuals' lack of interpersonal relationships and emotional resources in the workplace, and lonely individuals will further consume their limited emotional resources in order to cope with the stress and tension generated by resource depletion on the one hand; on the other hand, in the Chinese cultural context, formal and informal relationship communication in the workplace is an important channel to obtain work resources and On the other hand, in the Chinese cultural context, formal and informal relational communication in the workplace is an important channel to obtain work resources and relieve negative emotions, and lonely individuals have difficulty in supplementing work resources such as knowledge and information [9] and relational resources through interpersonal interactions in the workplace, thus causing a reduction in the overall resource stock of individuals. Since interpersonal interactions and extra-role behaviors require personal energy, individuals who are already in a state of resource scarcity will adopt a more conservative defense strategy in order to retain valuable resources, which is reflected in a decrease in willingness to communicate with other employees; knowledge is undoubtedly precious as an energy resource, and due to the lack of time and energy to respond to colleagues' knowledge requests and the need to retain the existing resources, lonely individuals are more likely to be more active in the face of Due to the lack of time and energy to respond to colleagues' knowledge requests and the need to retain existing resources, lonely individuals are more likely to adopt knowledge hiding behaviors when facing others' knowledge requests. In view of this, we propose the following assumptions:

Hypothesis 1: Workplace loneliness positively affects knowledge hiding.

2.2. The mediating role of Emotion exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is a representative dimension of job burnout, which refers to the exhaustion state in which employees enter resource depletion by overexerting their physical and psychological resources in a high job-demanding situation. Existing studies have demonstrated that job demands are one of the important influencing factors of job burnout [9]; interpersonal stress and job stress in the workplace positively predict emotional exhaustion,

workplace loneliness implies poor quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, and the stress brought by this deficiency often leads to a series of negative emotions that threaten individual emotional resources. Specifically, the resource conservation theory states that individuals can become stressed because their resource stock cannot meet their actual needs, and lonely individuals need to spend additional psychological resources to cope with this stress, causing further depletion of resources. The primacy principle of resource conservation states that resource-poor individuals will be more alert to potential threats in their environment and call on more resources for defense, thus accelerating resource depletion [8], i.e., lonely individuals are more likely to fall into emotional exhaustion for self-protection. According to resource conservation theory, resource-poor individuals are more inclined to take a series of measures to protect existing resources to prevent further resource loss [11]. Emotional depletion means that individuals are in a state of resource deprivation, which will arouse employees' awareness of resource conservation and make behaviors to stop further loss of resources out of loss avoidance and adopting knowledge hiding behaviors can effectively avoid the loss of knowledge and time resources. A core assumption of the job requirement-resource model assumes that there is an attrition pathway of work to employees, i.e., a health attrition process, which is triggered by excessive job requirements that lead to burnout and, in turn, negative organizational outcomes. Emotionally depleted employees who accept knowledge requests from others will consume their "few remaining" resources and fall further into the resource depletion spiral; and because knowledge requests are often random and intermittent, accepting requests may disrupt the original plans of the requested person, delay work progress or schedules, and prevent resource-poor people from 's resource recovery and replenishment. Taking the above considerations into account, emotionally depleted employees will naturally resist others' knowledge requests, and considering the importance of face among organizational members in the Chinese context, they are more inclined to adopt a non-straightforward refusal, i.e., knowledge hiding [11]. we propose the following assumptions:

Hypothesis 2: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace loneliness and knowledge hiding.

2.3. The regulatory role of leadership representation

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory suggests that employees need not only ideal compensation benefits to meet their physiological and security needs, but also the opportunity to be respected and engaged [12]. Highly engaged work systems embody the idea of people-centered management and develop talent through team performance-oriented incentive pay, extensive training, job rotation, information sharing, self-management, and job enrichment [13], with the aim of increasing employee engagement. Resource conservation theory states that resource-poor individuals are more difficult to obtain resource replenishment and are prone to fall into a resource depletion spiral; whereas the management measures included in a high-engagement work system can provide employees with external resource replenishment, enhance their resource stock, and slow down the rate of resource depletion to alleviate emotional exhaustion. According to the buffering hypothesis

of work requirement-resource theory, work resources can buffer the attrition of employees from high work requirements [14], and work resources are factors that can provide support and assistance to individuals in work situations and have the role of facilitating the achievement of work goals and motivating personal growth and development for individuals.

Specifically, the team performance-based compensation management system in the high involvement work system can strengthen employees' perceptions of the team and their sense of cooperation, improve interpersonal relationships among team members, and provide lonely employees with a complement of interpersonal resources; team compensation affirms employees' personal values, helps employees enhance their organizational identity and organizational existence value [15], and simultaneously provides material security to avoid They are prevented from falling into a state of emotional exhaustion due to existential isolation. At the same time, team members are a community of interests, and even if employees are in a state of emotional exhaustion, they will consider the impact of the performance of other team members on their personal performance when faced with knowledge requests from colleagues, so they may accept knowledge requests out of the consideration of safeguarding their own interests; this extra-role altruistic behavior avoids the loss of interpersonal resources to a certain extent, and is supplemented by the resources of colleagues in return The relationship between emotional exhaustion and knowledge concealment is negatively regulated because it reduces the psychological resources invested by employees who feel the threat of potential resource loss. Extensive training can enhance employees' knowledge and skills, help them understand the company, establish an emotional connection with the company [13], and provide a supplement of emotional resources for lonely employees. The reserve of knowledge and emotional resources brought by training can help employees cope with the negative emotions from workplace loneliness and prevent them from falling further into emotional depletion; it can also help emotionally depleted employees raise the level of resource stock and enhance their sense of control over valuable resources (e.g., knowledge) by replenishing energetic resources, thus reducing their defensiveness and inhibiting knowledge-hiding behavior. Highly participatory work system gives employees the opportunity to participate in major organizational decisions, promotes the creation of internal informal teams, and strengthens the emotional ties between the organization and employees and between employees; makes employees' conditional resources in the workplace more abundant; job rotation helps employees understand the organization's business goals more comprehensively and grasp information related to the organization, and supplements their emotional resources by enhancing their sense of security in the organization. emotional resources. we propose the following assumptions:

Hypothesis 3: The high involvement work system negatively moderates the effect of workplace loneliness on emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 4: The high involvement work system negatively moderates the effect of emotional depletion on knowledge hiding.

3. Research and Design

The formal questionnaire for the study in this paper consisted of two main parts: scales for each study variable,

and basic information about the subjects. Among them, the scales involved in the study follow authoritative scales that have good reliability and validity performance at home and abroad and are widely adopted; or mature scales that have been localized by Chinese scholars in the Chinese context. The basic information of the subjects included demographic questions such as gender, age, education level, years of work, nature of work unit, and position level.

The basic information of the 477 valid questionnaires collected was as follows: for gender, 53.00% were male and 47.00% were female; for age, 3.80% of the subjects were 25 years old or younger, 27.50% were 26-35 years old, 47.80% were 36-45 years old, 19.9% were 46-55 years old, and 1% were 56 years old or older. In terms of education level, 6.90% were high school/junior high school and below, 23.50% were college students, 59.10% were university undergraduates, and 10.50% were masters and above. In terms of working years, 47.00% were less than 1 year, 29.40% were 1~3 years, 15.30% were 4~6 years, 6.10% were 7~9 years, and 2.30% were 10 years and above. In terms of the nature of work units, state-owned enterprises accounted for 14.68%, private enterprises accounted for 10.27%, foreign funded/joint ventures accounted for 51.78%, institutions/state administrative organs accounted for 7.97%, and others accounted for 15.30%. As for the position level, 47.80% of the ordinary employees, 29.56% of the grassroots managers, 18.87% of the middle managers and 3.77% of the senior managers.

4. Variable Measurement

Workplace loneliness was measured using the Workplace Loneliness Scale, which was revised by Chinese scholar Mao Chonglin (2013) [16] in the Chinese context, which revised the scale developed by Wright (2005) with 10 items. Knowledge concealment used the 12-item self-report scale developed by Connelly (2012), in which the three dimensions of shirking concealment, playing dumb concealment, and reasonable concealment each contain four items [17]. Emotional exhaustion was translated and revised by Chinese scholar Chao-Ping Li (2003) [18] based on the Chinese cultural context, in which the dimension of emotional exhaustion included five items, and this scale was mostly used to measure emotional exhaustion in related studies in China. The 16-item scale was translated from Ichniowski et al. (1999) [19] by Cheng, Dejun et al. (2006) [20] in a Chinese context. The results of using the above scales showed their good reliability and validity performance.

5. Analyze the Results

5.1. Validation factor analysis

In this paper, validation factor analysis was conducted using Amos 22.0 to test the discriminant validity. It is generally considered that discriminant validity can be judged by χ^2/df (goodness of fit), RMSEA (root mean square of error of approximation), GFI (absolute fit index), IFI (incremental fit index), TLI (relative fit index) and CFI (comparative fit index). The four-factor model met all the fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 1.569$, RMSEA = 0.044, CFI = 0.940, TLI = 0.930, IFI = 0.941) and this model significantly outperformed the fit superiority of the other models, indicating that the four-factor model was the best fit model in this study.

5.2. Common Method Deviation

In this paper, common method bias among variables was

tested by applying Harman's single factor analysis with the help of SPSS software, i.e., rotated exploratory factor analysis was performed on all questions of the questionnaire to test for common method bias, and the results of the analysis are shown in Tables 5-10. the total variance explained by all factors with characteristic roots greater than 1 was 60.417%, and the variance explained by the first common factor extracted was 25.413% (less than 40%) and did not reach half of the total variance explained, so it can be concluded that the study results were not seriously affected by the common variance bias.

5.3. Descriptive Statistics

Based on the reliability test, the correlation analysis was conducted on the means (Mean), standard deviations (SD)

and inter-variables of the main variables of this study: workplace loneliness, emotional exhaustion, knowledge concealment, and high involvement in the work system, and the correlation coefficients are shown in Table 1.

The results of correlation analysis showed that workplace loneliness was significantly and positively correlated with knowledge hiding ($r=0.384$, $p<0.01$), workplace loneliness was positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r=0.349$, $p<0.01$); emotional exhaustion was significantly and positively correlated with knowledge hiding ($r=0.455$, $p<0.01$), and the results of the analysis indicated that the relationship between the variables in the preliminary test was consistent with the hypothesis, providing preliminary support for the correlation. The test of hypothesis provided initial support.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

VR	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.gender	1.470	0.499									
2.age	4.239	1.556	0.039								
3.education	3.706	0.810	-0.104*	-0.156**							
4.working years	1.874	1.028	0.009	0.230**	-0.099*						
5.business type	2.990	1.175	0.100*	0.020	-0.253**	0.100*					
6.working level	1.786	0.879	-0.033	-0.133**	0.466**	-0.024	-0.084				
7.WL	2.419	0.808	0.073	-0.024	0.017	0.016	-0.001	0.037			
8.EE	2.481	0.881	0.065	-0.021	0.038	-0.070	-0.014	0.014	0.349**		
9.HIWS	2.541	0.842	0.093*	-0.030	-0.048	-0.004	0.000	-0.119**	0.116*	0.077	
10.KH	3.481	0.859	0.028	0.014	0.028	0.042	-0.034	0.054	0.384**	0.455**	0.059

5.4. Hypothesis testing

In this study, the main effect between workplace loneliness and knowledge hiding and the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion as the mediating variable were tested by SPSS 23.0, and the results of the regression analysis are shown in Tables 2. firstly, the model 1 was obtained by regressing knowledge hiding as the dependent variable; gender, age, education level, years of work experience, nature of work unit and job level as the control variables. on the basis of model 1, model 2 was obtained by adding workplace loneliness as the independent variable. The analysis results showed that workplace loneliness positively affected knowledge hiding ($\beta=0.382$, $p<0.001$), and the direct effect was significant, so hypothesis 1 was verified.

For the test of mediating effect, the mediating effect of this study was tested by referring to the mediating effect analysis method proposed by Zhonglin Wen. First, the regression analysis was conducted with emotional exhaustion as the dependent variable and the control variable as the

independent variable to obtain model 5, and on this basis, workplace loneliness was added as the independent variable to obtain model 6, and the analysis results showed that the positive effect of workplace loneliness on emotional exhaustion was significant ($\beta=0.347$, $p<0.001$). Next, model 3 was obtained by regression analysis with control variables and emotional exhaustion as independent variables and knowledge concealment as dependent variable, and the results showed that emotional exhaustion had a significant positive effect on knowledge concealment ($\beta=0.460$, $p<0.001$). Finally, model 4 was obtained by adding emotional exhaustion as the independent variable based on model 2; in model 4, compared with model 2, the regression coefficient of workplace loneliness on knowledge concealment decreased from 0.382 to 0.253, and the explained variance of the regression equation increased ($\Delta R^2=0.120$), and the positive effect was still significant ($p<0.001$), which can indicate that emotional exhaustion plays a part in mediating the relationship between workplace loneliness and knowledge concealment. hiding partially mediates.

Table 2. Regression analysis results

VR	KH			EE		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Gender	0.033	0.003	0.001	-0.013	0.07	0.043
Age	0.010	0.021	0.012	0.019	-0.003	0.006
Education	0.004	0.001	-0.014	-0.012	0.038	0.036
Working year	0.044	0.035	0.075	0.063	-0.066	-0.074
Business type	-0.037	-0.035	-0.035	-0.034	-0.005	-0.003
Working level	0.052	0.040	0.054	0.046	-0.004	-0.015
WL		0.382***		0.253***		0.347***
HIWS						
EE			0.460***	0.372***		
R ²	0.007	0.152	0.217	0.273	0.011	0.130
ΔR^2		0.145	0.210	0.120		0.120
F	0.558	12.021***	18.522***	21.913***	0.848	10.033***

In this study, the moderating effect of high involvement in

work system was tested by SPSS 23.0 using hierarchical

regression method, and the specific steps were referred to the moderating effect test proposed by Wen Zhonglin. The results of the specific regression analysis are shown in Tables 5-13. The results of the analysis show that after adding the interaction term between workplace loneliness and high involvement work system on the basis of model 9, the regression analysis of model 10 was obtained significantly ($F=15.422$, $p<0.001$), high involvement work system negatively moderated the effect relationship between workplace loneliness and emotional exhaustion ($\beta=-0.122$,

$p<0.01$), and the explanatory power of the model R^2 improved from 0.131 to 0.146, and hypothesis 3 was initially tested. After adding the interaction term of emotional exhaustion and high involvement work system to model 7, the regression analysis of model 8 was significant ($F=8.865$, $p<0.001$), high involvement work system negatively moderated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and knowledge hiding ($\beta=-0.109$, $p<0.01$), and the explanatory power of the model R^2 increased from 0.217 to 0.229, and hypothesis 4 was initially verified.

Table 3. Regression analysis results

VR	KH			EE		
	M3	M7	M8	M6	M9	M10
Gender	0.001	-0.002	-0.005	0.043	0.040	0.030
Age	0.012	0.014	0.012	0.006	0.008	0.009
Education	-0.014	-0.014	-0.017	0.036	0.036	0.035
Working year	0.075	0.074	0.074	-0.074	-0.074	-0.080
Business type	-0.035	-0.034	-0.029	-0.003	-0.003	0.000
Working level	0.054	0.058	0.058	-0.015	-0.011	-0.007
WL				0.347***	0.343***	0.353***
HIWS		0.458	0.029		0.034	0.033
EE	0.460***	0.031***	0.447***			
WL*HIWS						-0.122**
EE*HIWS			-0.109**			
R^2	0.217	0.217	0.229	0.130	0.131	0.146
ΔR^2	0.210	0.210	0.012	0.120	0.121	0.015
F	18.522***	16.258***	15.422***	10.033***	8.846***	8.865***

To further verify the moderating effect of this study, the means of the high involvement work system were processed by adding and subtracting one standard deviation, respectively, as a way to delineate the three levels of the high

involvement work system. The moderating effects were also plotted, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, and proved that hypothesis 4 passed the test.

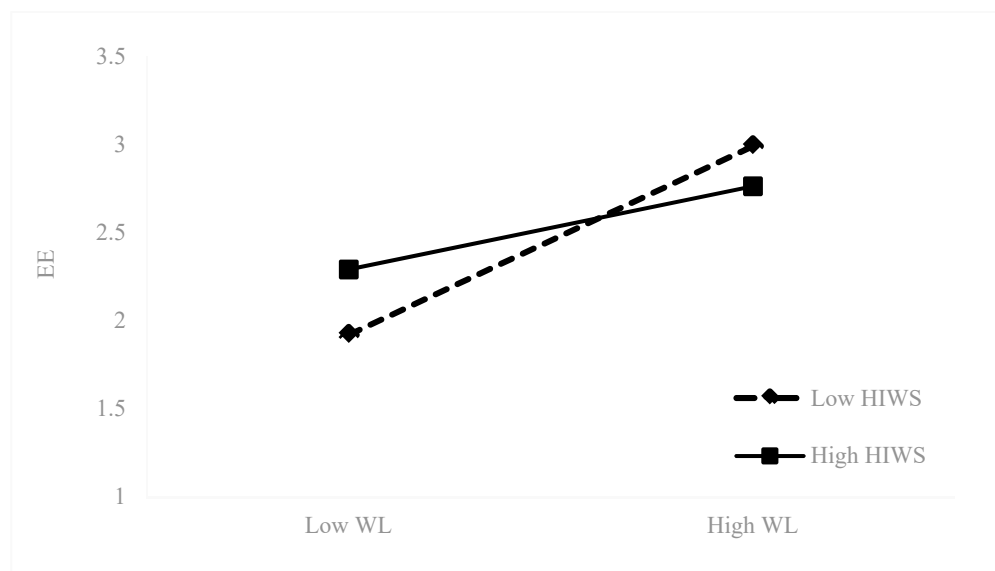


Figure 1. Regulatory effect

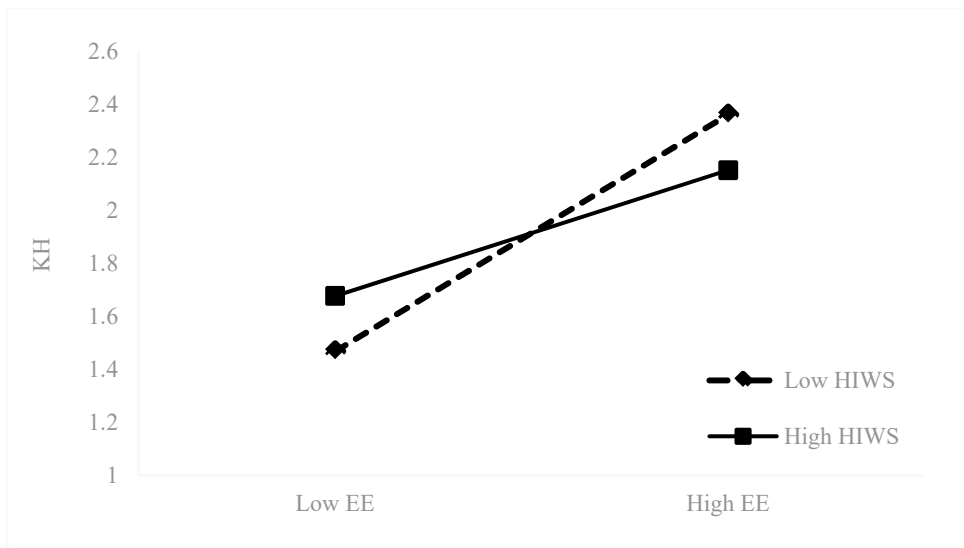


Figure 2. Regulatory effect

6. Conclusion

The development of information technology and the recurrence of epidemics have driven changes in work styles, and workplace loneliness has become a more prevalent negative affective experience that is undoubtedly detrimental to employees' physical and mental health. In this study, from the resource perspective of resource conservation theory and the job requirement-resource model, we verify that workplace loneliness is a trigger condition for knowledge-hiding behavior in the workplace, in which emotional depletion plays a mediating role. Highly engaged work systems act as boundary conditions in this process, moderating the positive effect of workplace loneliness on emotional exhaustion and the positive effect of emotional exhaustion on knowledge hiding.

(1) This study verified that workplace loneliness positively influences knowledge hiding behavior. According to the connotation of the job requirement-resource model, workplace loneliness can be regarded as a job requirement, and employees who are caught in it have deficits in emotional and interpersonal resources, which hinder the achievement of work goals, and because they need to call on additional resources to cope with negative emotions in stressful situations, which means more resource depletion, lonely employees face knowledge requests from others out of Therefore, lonely employees are more inclined to adopt knowledge hiding behavior when facing others' knowledge requests for the consideration of protecting and controlling their own resources.

(2) This study verifies that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace loneliness and knowledge hiding. The data show that workplace loneliness positively influences emotional exhaustion, which in turn positively affects knowledge hiding behavior. Lonely employees feel stressed and threatened because the stock of interpersonal resources cannot meet their needs, and the resulting negative emotions will lead to the loss of existing resources and bring more stress. Individuals may become anxious and anxious due to the stressful situation, which may lead to emotional exhaustion in the long run. Since lonely individuals are exhausted from completing the tasks within their responsibilities, accepting knowledge requests from others means additional resource consumption and slows down the

process of resource replenishment, so emotionally depleted employees will adopt knowledge hiding behaviors to avoid further resource consumption out of self-protection. This study reveals the influence mechanism of workplace loneliness on knowledge hiding from the resource perspective, expands the research on the consequences of workplace loneliness, and enriches the research results of resource conservation theory and the job requirement-resource model.

(3) This study verifies that the high involvement work system moderates the positive effect between workplace loneliness and emotional exhaustion, and the positive effect of emotional exhaustion on knowledge concealment. According to the definition of work resources in the job requirement-resource model, this study treats high involvement work systems as work resources, and according to the buffering hypothesis of the model, work resources can weaken the depletion of employees by high job requirements. Resource conservation theory states that resource-poor individuals are more likely to fall into a resource depletion spiral, while a high involvement work system can provide employees with external resource replenishment and mitigate the negative impact of resource loss rate on emotional depletion. A series of management activities included in the high involvement work system can compensate employees' material and energy resources to a certain extent, thus enhancing employees' resource stock level and sense of control over their own resources and weakening the positive influence of emotional depletion on knowledge hiding.

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