How do negative workplace gossip and toxic workplace environment fuel the fire of knowledge hiding? The moderating role of workplace spirituality

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between toxic workplace environments, negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding, by exploring workplace spirituality as a moderating variable in this relationship.
Design/methodology/approach – This study focuses on private university lecturer in West Java, Indonesia. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires to respondents offline and online via Google Forms. Data analysis was done by structural equation modeling (SEM).
Findings – The findings reveal that a toxic workplace environment and negative workplace gossip are positively related to knowledge hiding. In addition, it was found that workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and negative workplace gossip with knowledge hiding.
Research limitations/implications – This study extends the research model and research context of knowledge hiding in private universities. This research contributes to the social exchange theory literature by proving empirical support to confirm that there is a social exchange in interpersonal relations between academics.
Practical implications – This study extends the research model and research context of knowledge hiding in private universities, linking it to the conservation of resources theory. This research contributes to the social exchange theory literature by proving empirical support to confirm that there is a social exchange in interpersonal relations between lecturers.
Social implications – Leaders need to instil spirituality in lecturer so that they feel comfortable when working, and it indirectly reduces the effects of negative behavior such as negative gossip and a toxic environment that makes them willing to share knowledge.
Originality/value – To the authors’ understanding, this is the first study to examine workplace spirituality as a variable moderating the relationship between toxic workplace environment and negative workplace gossip with knowledge hiding in the college context.
Keywords Toxic workplace environment, Negative workplace gossip, Workplace spirituality, Knowledge hiding, Lecturer
Paper type Research paper

Introduction
In the world of education, sharing knowledge between lecturers is very important for applying the vision and mission of higher education, promoting strategic plans, curricula, collaborative research, administrative services and academic excellence in tertiary institutions (Karim, 2022). In addition, sharing knowledge can enhance organizational
growth and long-term success (Arain et al., 2022). However, there is an interesting fact, and it turns out that not all lecturers are willing to share their knowledge with colleagues and leaders. Concealment and hoarding of knowledge often occur in academic circles (Karim, 2022; Yang and Ribiere, 2020b). Such behavior has a negative impact on creativity and innovative work behavior, and team performance and hinders organizations from gaining a competitive advantage (Yao et al., 2020). Therefore, higher education institutions are required to facilitate knowledge sharing to maintain a competitive advantage (Modem et al., 2023).

Even more, Singh (2019) mentions that why and when people share their knowledge has received the most attention from researchers, whereas why and when people hide their knowledge has received little attention. Please note that knowledge is “intellectual property,” meaning that the organization cannot compel members of the organization to transfer knowledge. For this reason, it is important to understand the antecedents of knowledge hiding (Mohsin et al., 2022).

Knowledge hiding occurs not only because of individual problems (Anand and Hassan, 2019) but also people and the organizational environment are the cause of knowledge hiding (Modem et al., 2023). Especially, a work environment that is negative is often called as toxic workplace environment (Anjum et al., 2018; Tiwari and Jha, 2022). The toxic workplace environment in tertiary institutions is characterized by the presence of lecturers who have a competitive spirit but are required to collaborate, especially in the field of research (Hernaus et al., 2019). This has led to unfair competition. The negative traits of colleagues, such as exclusion and bullying, as well as unfair leadership and organizations, contribute to a toxic work environment (Han et al., 2020; Karim, 2022; Yang and Ribiere, 2020a), and a “political” work environment to fight for office (Hernaus et al., 2019; Modem et al., 2023). The impact of a toxic workplace environment may be felt in every organization, but not all employees want to express these complaints (Rasool et al., 2021). Employees tend to deal with fear, depression, anxiety and other negative influences in their work environment (Shrestha and Jena, 2021). As a result, they become insensitive toward others, which weakens empathy among employees, and in turn, they are more prone to knowledge withholding (Khan et al., 2023). A toxic workplace environment also causes employee disinterest in getting their work done, undermines their creativity, as well as destroys individual interpersonal relationships (Tiwari and Jha, 2022). Organizations are required to combat/cleanse the roots of a toxic workplace environment to ensure the prosperity and success of the organization (Anjum and Ming, 2017; Vasconcelos, 2020).

A toxic workplace environment is not the only factor that influences knowledge hiding. Previous research found that negative workplace gossip has an impact on knowledge hiding (Yao et al., 2020). Gossip is hidden and indirect talk, and the exchange of information between the gossip and the gossiper often takes place in private settings (Yao et al., 2020). Gossip is known as a complex and almost unavoidable behavior in social networks, the real world, and even more so in the complex world of work (Dai et al., 2022). In general, gossip is so easy to spread, including in the higher education environment (Mbada et al., 2020). Negative gossip can damage the organization and affect its reputation and credibility of the organization (Aboramadan et al., 2021). As behavior that violates social moral rules, negative gossip that occurs in the workplace is very detrimental to the attitudes and behavior of employees, especially those who are the target of gossip (Ye et al., 2019). Employees who are exposed to negative gossip or become objects will overcome the depressed affective state, by displaying cynical behavior as an act of revenge or to relieve their tension (Aboramadan et al., 2021). In addition, they will respond to negative (or less positive) treatment by leading to negative attitudes and behavior as well (Shrestha and Jena, 2021) namely in the form of knowledge hiding (Yao et al., 2020).

Many studies of toxic workplace environment and negative workplace gossip with knowledge hiding, with various moderating variables such as team relational conflict...
(Khan et al., 2022a), organizational justice (Khan et al., 2022b; Kim et al., 2019), need for affiliation and guanxi closeness (Cheng et al., 2023), Interpersonal trust (Yao et al., 2020). However, only a few discuss workplace spirituality as a moderating variable (Shrestha and Jena, 2021). Whereas spirituality in the workplace has been found to inhibit knowledge hiding and reduce its detrimental effects (Muavia and Hussain, 2022). Thus we propose workplace spirituality (WPS) as a moderating variable that is expected to weaken the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and negative gossip in the workplace with knowledge hiding. Recently, WPS has become the concern of experts from various fields, including its relation to the negative behavior of employees (Shrestha and Jena, 2021). This awareness has attracted the attention of scholars and managers to fulfill the spiritual needs of employees (Ali et al., 2020; Shrestha and Jena, 2021). Several previous studies have advocated the inclusion and incorporation of spirituality into organizations because of its positive benefits for employees and the organization (Karakas and Sarigollu, 2019; Shrestha and Jena, 2021). Employee spirituality is proven to be able to reduce deviant behavior carried out by employees (Muavia and Hussain, 2022; Pariyanti et al., 2022). Fulfilling the spiritual needs of employees will form employee-friendly behavior, empathy and sympathy, which refers to altruistic behavior and genuine care and concern for others (Ali et al., 2020; Amin et al., 2021). In addition, it was found that employees with high WPS experience would find it easier to find purpose and deep meaning in their work, they would interpret work as a source of spiritual growth and relationships with others, and find a relationship between personal values and organizational goals (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Shrestha and Jena, 2021).

Based on the above arguments and the lack of knowledge hiding research among lecturer (Iqbal et al., 2022; Modern et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to explore the factors that drive knowledge hiding by proposing an integrated framework to test WPS as a moderator of the negative indirect relationship between workplace gossip and toxic workplace environment on knowledge hiding in an academic context, especially at private universities in West Java, Indonesia. The urgency of the research and the finding that private university lecturers are more vulnerable to competition between colleagues (Sunarsi et al., 2022) and because previous research has identified this type of organization as typically emphasizing the exchange of knowledge in the workplace (Abdillah et al., 2022) and it is detected that their work environment is more toxic, because in terms of funding, and the facilities are less stable compared to state universities (Rahman and Hori, 2023). It is hoped that this research will become a policy maker related to human resources, especially with regard to knowledge hiding at several private universities in West Java, Indonesia.

**Literature review and hypothesis development**

**Social exchange theory**

Social exchange theory (Blau, 2017) forms the basis of our research model. According to the latest social exchange theory, employee organizational social exchange includes not only material but also non-material exchanges. When they feel that they are benefiting from the organization or their co-workers, employees will appreciate their co-workers and their organization positively (Dai et al., 2022). But on the contrary, if employees do not get positive benefits from colleagues or the organization, they will reciprocate by doing negative things. In this case, if employees get support from colleagues and the organization, then they will do positive things such as easy sharing with co-workers, and getting more engaged with the organization (Memon, 2015; Zaim et al., 2019). Conversely, if employees feel their work environment is toxic, and there is a lot of negative gossip heard, then they will respond with negative behavior, one of which is knowledge-hiding behavior (Karim, 2022; Khan et al., 2022b).
Conservation of resources (COR) theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2002) reinforces the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 2017). COR explains that employees strive to protect their physical and emotional resources to prevent burnout. If resources are threatened by work pressure and the environment, employees can engage in conservation behaviors or resource acquisition (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Research indicates that negative workplace gossip and a toxic work environment induce stress (Wang et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2022). Employees safeguard themselves by practicing knowledge hiding, which involves concealing knowledge to achieve personal goals in a competitive environment (Khan et al., 2022b; Mohsin et al., 2022). Previous studies have found that the association between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding can diminish under positive conditions such as organizational justice and optimism (Han et al., 2020). Within the COR framework, WPS can serve as a resource signal that guides employees in coping with negative and competitive work environments (Adawiyah et al., 2020; Pariyanti et al., 2022).

Toxic workplace environment and knowledge hiding

The work environment greatly impacts employees. Those who don’t fit into the work environment feel uncomfortable, while the opposite is true as well (Pariyanti et al., 2023). A positive, collaborative work environment fosters employee innovation and productivity, whereas a negative one produces adverse effects (Alias et al., 2022; Iqbal et al., 2022). Unpleasant or hostile workplaces give rise to toxic work patterns (Tiwari and Jha, 2022). A toxic workplace environment emerges when there is a high level of tension and fatigue, causing psychological and physical imbalances (Iqbal et al., 2022). Factors contributing to a toxic workplace environment include abusive, greedy and narcissistic leaders who engage in bullying, harassment, threats and embarrassment (Anjum et al., 2018; Tiwari and Jha, 2022). Additionally, physical aspects such as building design, barriers to communication, lack of privacy and limitations on employee interaction contribute to toxicity (Harvey and Too, 2012). A toxic work environment poses mental and psychological health problems for employees (Rasool et al., 2021), undermining their self-esteem, morale and motivation (Tiwari and Jha, 2022). This can result in anxiety, stress, depression, physical health issues, counterproductive work behavior and reduced productivity, ultimately impacting the success of company projects (Anjum et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020).

Another effect of a toxic workplace environment is distrust which ends in hiding their knowledge as a form of retaliation for the treatment given to them (Khan et al., 2022b; Tricahyadinata et al., 2020). KH is the behavior of employees who choose to be silent and hide or save the knowledge they have for a specific purpose when co-workers ask for their help (Catherine et al., 2012). Connelly et al. (2012) reveals there are three ways to hide knowledge, evasive hiding, playing dumb and rational hiding. The first way is delaying providing incorrect or irrelevant knowledge (evasive concealment). Second, acting stupid, or pretending not to know and not very knowledgeable (playing stupid). Third, do not provide or share knowledge for reasons of authorization and confidentiality. In reality, KH occurs when someone feels they have greater knowledge, as a result, they ignore requests for knowledge from colleagues because they feel at a loss if they share their knowledge (Karim, 2022). Knowledge hiding is also used as a tactic to deal with competition in the workplace and is considered effective by withholding knowledge from colleagues so that it can win the competition (Han et al., 2020). The effects of KH are quite serious because it can undermine creativity and innovation, as well as encourage distrust among employees, impairing employee service performance (Connelly et al., 2019; Dai et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2019). KH was detected as damaging the OCB team and IPD team, as well as task performance and causing workplace deviation (Arain et al., 2022; Singh, 2019). In line with social exchange theory
Employees who feel their work environment is toxic will respond with negative behavior, including knowledge hiding. The more toxic the work environment, the higher the knowledge hiding, and conversely an employee who works in a positive and collaborative, and trusting environment will be active in collective discussions and stimulate new ideas, thereby increasing the innovative behavior of employees (Dai et al., 2022). Based on the arguments supported by the literature, we hypothesize:

**H1.** Toxic workplace environment will have a positive relationship with knowledge hiding.

**Negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding**

Knowledge hiding can be triggered depending on many conditions and factors, such as individual ignorance and contextual factors (Khan et al., 2022a). The next factor identified as influencing knowledge hiding is negative workplace gossip. Workplace gossip is defined as informal, evaluative discussions about colleagues or leaders who are not present at the venue of the discussion (Ellwardt et al., 2012). Meanwhile, negative gossip in the workplace refers to spreading rumors or untrue news and talking about personal information, the poor performance of co-workers and leaders behind the absence of targeted employees or leaders (Kurland and Pelled, 2000). Negative gossiping does not just happen, employees’ decisions to gossip are guided by the trust that is embedded in the horizontal and vertical relationships in the triad. The level of trust in leaders influences discussion and tone of gossip (vertical linkage). Also, to convey gossip, employees need to trust that their immediate partners will support the gossiper and not divulge information (horizontal relationship) (Ellwardt et al., 2012). Not only as gossipers, many people who engage in gossip about other people are also the target of gossipers and the object of gossip several times a day (Khan et al., 2022a; Kim et al., 2019; Kong, 2018). Revealed that almost 90% of employees gossip about other people at work. The gossip occurred during 14% of coffee breaks and 66% of employee communications about co-workers, social topics and third parties. Gossipers forget that negative workplace gossip has detrimental consequences for their attitude and behavior, as well as for others (Khan et al., 2022a). One of the negative effects of negative gossip is the loss of employee trust which leads to hiding knowledge just to get back at their colleagues (Yao et al., 2020). A further effect is that when employees suffer from being the target of negative gossip, they experience a reduction in ego depletion, withdrawal and withholding of knowledge which results in negative things for themselves, others and the organization (Khan et al., 2022b; Kim et al., 2019). Based on the existing literature, we hypothesize:

**H2.** Negative workplace gossip will be positively related to knowledge hiding.

**Toxic workplace environment, workplace spirituality and knowledge hiding**

WPS is a dichotomous concept that has nothing to do with religion but refers to nurturing the individual soul at work through the human experience of relating to others and a sense of belonging to the workplace and the organization (Muavia and Hussain, 2022). WPS is defined as a philosophy that deeply embraces the belief that there is meaning and purpose to everything one does (Amin et al., 2021). In line with this definition (Milliman et al., 2018), revealed that WPS is a reflection of the inner life of employees who believe that the work they do has purpose, meaning and connection with other people. WPS encourages employees to recognize the importance of their work (Majeed et al., 2019), the importance of relationships with others that are quite warm, democratic, somewhat happy, low anxiety level with a fairly high level of involvement with students, co-workers and superiors (Mat et al., 2012). Follow opinion (Shrestha and Jena, 2021) In this study, WPS is interpreted as an employee’s experience of meaning in work, a sense of connectedness to their colleagues and superiors
and alignment with organizational values. The consequence of this belief, attitude and work behavior of individuals has the internal motivation, interest and enthusiasm to perform tasks. Although spirituality in the workplace is not related to a particular religion or belief system, it has been proven to be able to reduce workplace deviations (Amida and Frianto, 2020; Pariyanti et al., 2021, 2022). Also influences many individual and organizational level results (Shrestha and Jena, 2021).

Seeing the positive effects of WPS, we propose WPS as a moderating variable on the relationship between toxic workplace environment and knowledge hiding. Having a spiritual workplace helps employees find meaning in work, align their values and beliefs with the organization and develop deep relationships with their co-workers (Muavia and Hussain, 2022). In addition, employees are more internally motivated, interested and excited to do tasks that have meaning and purpose (Amin et al., 2021). Thus it is hoped that when employees feel pressure, stress and distrust because they are in a toxic workplace environment, they will still want to share with colleagues and superiors because they have high spiritual beliefs. Based on the arguments and references that exist, it can be hypothesized:

**H3.** WPS moderates the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and knowledge hiding so that the relationship is stronger when spirituality is low.

**Negative workplace gossip, workplace spirituality and knowledge hiding**

Spreading gossip in the workplace carries serious risks to the gossip spreader and target, as well as to the organization (Dai et al., 2022). Nonetheless, individuals often show greater interest in talking about and hearing negative gossip than positive gossip (Ye et al., 2019). As if they forget that there are negative effects arising from their actions. The negative effect is that those who experience negative gossip will feel that their supervisors and co-workers mean to hurt them (Ye et al., 2019). This perception creates a deep sense of alienation from the organization, besides that, they also feel the pressure of negative responsibility which in the end shows counterproductive unethical behavior (i.e. hiding knowledge) from colleagues and also leaders (Khan et al., 2022a). Built from social exchange theory, employees who get negative treatment or become the target of negative gossip, are more likely to engage in similar behavior to release their negative emotions (Blau, 2017). Based on previous research revealed that negative workplace gossip is positively related to deviant behavior (knowledge hiding), so in this study, we intend to weaken this relationship by including WPS. These are the latest streams of research, which describe the positive outcomes associated with spirituality in the workplace (Karakas and Sarigollu, 2019). Employee spirituality helps them make better moral choices when dealing with co-workers (Ali et al., 2020). When faced with negative workplace gossip, lecturer who have high spirituality tend to interpret it as unintentional which can be forgiven so that they blameless colleagues and superiors and their organizations. As a result, negative workplace gossip is less harmful to their willingness to share knowledge. In short, those who are the target of negative gossip balanced with high spirituality will reduce knowledge hiding (see Figure 1). Thus, this study hypothesizes that:

**H4.** Spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding so that the relationship is stronger when spirituality is low.

**Methodology**

**Samples and procedures**

This research was conducted at a private university, specifically targeting universities rather than institutes, high schools, polytechnics, or academies. There are at least 73 private universities in West Java (Habibullah, 2022). To adjust the research variables, our focus was
on non-religious universities, specifically 52 universities. The research objects were lecturers
from 11 non-religious tertiary institutions. The selection of these 11 tertiary institutions was
based on several reasons. Firstly, private universities, especially universities, are more
susceptible to competition among lecturers, including in West Java (Rahman and Hori, 2023;
Sunarsi et al., 2022). Secondly, the variables we studied (toxic workplace environment,
negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding) are sensitive, which means that not all
universities granted us permission to conduct research on their campuses. Therefore, we
selected the 11 tertiary institutions based on research criteria and easy data accessibility.
Questionnaires were distributed randomly with simple random sampling. The questionnaire
was carried out offline or face-to-face with the respondents. A total of 410 questionnaires were
distributed, and as many as 372 were returned. A total of 121 answers were not used due to
damage to answers, incomplete answers and errors in completing the questionnaire which
resulted in them being unusable for further analysis. Complete questionnaire and can be
continued at a later stage or data analysis as many as 251 answers. A detailed description of
the respondents can be seen in Table 1.

Measures
We use the questionnaire to obtain respondents’ responses. The 5-point Likert scale which
starts from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was applied to record the responses. WPS is
reflected in the inner lives of employees who believe that the work they do has a purpose,
meaning, and connection with people. WPS is measured by 12 items which are a combination of

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<td></td>
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<td>(31st–40th)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Doctor/Ph. D</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(6th–10th)</td>
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<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(More than 11th)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1. Description of respondents

Source(s): Compiled by the authors
Ashmos and Duchon (2000) selected work that is meaningful and aligned with the organization’s values and sense of community (Milliman et al., 2003). Sample question “My work is connected to what I think is important in life”. Meanwhile, negative gossip in the workplace refers to the spread of rumors or untrue news about the absence of the targeted employee or leader (Kurland and Pelled, 2000). Negative workplace gossip is measured by 3 items from (Chandra and Robinson, 2009) with an example question “In the past six months, my coworkers and supervisor communicated damaging information about me at work”. Then the toxic workplace environment occurs when there are toxic leaders, hostility between individuals, and unfair competition (Iqbal et al., 2022). The toxic work environment is measured by items from (Anjum et al., 2018), the example of the question “My supervisor/colleague/subordinate speaks rudely to me in public”. Lastly, knowledge hiding is characterized by being silent, and hiding or storing the knowledge one has (Catherine et al., 2012) knowledge hiding is measured by 6 question items from (Connelly et al., 2012), with sample question “I agree to help him but instead provide different information than he wants”.

Variable control
Following previous research that discussed knowledge hiding in organizations (Arain et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022b) using gender, education and years of service as control variables, we also use these variables as control variables in this study. Gender and education were dummy-coded, with males coded as “0” and female coded as “1”, while the length of work is reported in years, whereas education is measured as (S2 = 1, S3 = 2).

Common method bias
To reduce common method bias, we distributed the questionnaire in two survey versions. One of them relates to demographic data, while the other relates to research variables. We apply several procedural strategies, including maintaining anonymity so that the confidentiality of respondents is protected. Before distributing the questionnaires, we also tested them and adapted them to the research context, particularly in the higher education context, in order to avoid questions that were ambiguous, irrelevant, or difficult to understand. We provide clear instructions on each questionnaire to make it easier for respondents to understand and complete the survey easily. In addition, participants were informed about the purpose of the questions and the responses they provided (Pariyanti et al., 2023).

Data analysis
Data were analyzed using Jeffreys’s Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) which can be used for qualitative, quantitative and descriptive analysis of research results (Goss-Sampson, 2019). JASP has a complete menu of SPSS, SEM and others, there are menus of linear regression, moderation, path analysis, mediation and others that can be operated more easily. With JASP, users can calculate p-values, with just a few mouse clicks (Ly et al., 2020). This means that it is appropriate to use for moderation analysis, only by entering data and following the input steps, there is an immediate output of moderation results. The first stage is testing the validity and reliability. The standard reliability coefficient was higher than 0.70, a value adequate (Hair et al., 2013). The factor loading values for all variables were higher than 0.50, confirming their validity. To test the hypothesis, we use the moderation analysis available in JASP.

Result
Sample description
Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was applied in this study. First, we analyzed the demographics of the participants. Second, we carry out measurements to measure the
reliability and validity of the instrument and test the hypothesis. Table 1 is an explanation of the analysis of the description of the research respondents.

Table 1 provides information on the number of male employees as many as 114 people or 45%, while women are as many as 137 or 55%, meaning that lecturer in West Java are dominated by women. While the highest age range is at the age of 31–40 years as much as 178 or 71%. In education, as many as 178, or 71% have a master’s degree while the remaining 73, or 29% have a doctor/P.hD. Meanwhile, the most years of service, namely 6–10, is 124 or 49%.

Table 2 shows that of the total 28 questionnaire items used, the overall loading factor value is above 0.5, meaning that all items are valid. While the Cronbach score of all items is more than 0.7 meaning that all items are also reliable, so they can be continued at the next stage.

Furthermore, hierarchical ordinary least squares regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The results of these analyzes are presented in Table 3.

The findings relate to control variables. Gender, it was found that women are more susceptible to gossip and also spread gossip. This result is in line with (Pheko, 2018) which revealed that women seem to be more likely to use relational aggression (rumors, lies and gossip) as their weapon of choice in intimidating others. Although women are more susceptible to gossip, the reality is that men are more likely to hide knowledge than women (Irum et al., 2020). Women tend to choose to pretend to be stupid and evasive, while men tend to choose to hide with reasons that are logically acceptable (Andreeva and Zappa, 2023). The findings about the level of education illustrate that the higher the level of education, the more negative gossip people will think that negative gossip is useless and harms others, but the higher the education, the more often they are exposed to negative gossip because there are more and more competitors. Findings of Length of work, the longer they work the more they gossip because they already know a lot about the people in the organization, and the more pressure there is on campus.

The first result shows that a toxic workplace environment is positively related to knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.46, p < 0.05$), which means that the first hypothesis (H1) is supported. These results show that the higher the toxic workplace environment, the higher the level of knowledge hiding and vice versa. The second hypothesis (H2): Negative workplace gossip will have a positive relationship with knowledge hiding, this hypothesis is also supported ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.05$), the higher the level of negative workplace gossip, the higher the level of knowledge hiding in lecturer. Then the third hypothesis (H3): WPS will moderate the toxic workplace environment relationship with knowledge hiding, this hypothesis is also supported ($\beta = -0.22, p < 0.05$). These results show that the higher the academic WPS level, the weaker the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and knowledge hiding. The fourth hypothesis (H4) is also supported. WPS is proven to moderate the negative relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -0.23, p < 0.05$), so the relationship will be stronger when spirituality is high than when spirituality is low and vice versa.

To make the description of the hypothesis results clearer, we use a graphical plot to describe the moderating relationship. The stage, namely WPS, is divided into two categories, high and low. Distribution is done by comparing the average score with the median. Lecturer who have a WPS score above the median are categorized as high and vice versa. The interaction of a toxic workplace environment and negative workplace gossip is then analyzed at each level of spirituality (see Figure 2).

We found that a toxic workplace environment has a positive relationship with knowledge hiding. When the level of a toxic workplace environment is high, knowledge hiding will increase, but lecturer with relatively high spirituality will show less knowledge-hiding behavior than when the academic spirituality level is low. Therefore, H3 is supported. Additional information about the fifth hypothesis (H4) can be seen in Figure 3.
Consistent with our research hypothesis, we obtained strong evidence for a moderating role of WPS in the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge suppression. Our results show that there is a positive relationship between negative workplace gossip and
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<tr>
<td>Negative workplace gossip</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
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**Interaction**

Toxic workplace environment × workplace spirituality
Negative workplace gossip × workplace spirituality

Adjusted $R^2$ 0.21 0.17

$F$ 56.49 19.72

$n$ 251 251

**Note(s):** *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$*

**Source(s):** Compiled by the authors

Table 3. Results of moderated regression analysis

![Figure 2. The moderating effect of workplace spirituality on the relationship between toxic workplace environment and knowledge hiding](image2)

Source(s): Compiled by the authors

![Figure 3. The moderating effect of workplace spirituality on the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding](image3)

Source(s): Compiled by the authors
knowledge hiding. Lecturer who are the target of negative gossip objects with low spirituality are more likely to respond to the negative gossip by hiding knowledge. But lecturer with high spirituality will ignore negative gossip so that it will reduce the level of knowledge hiding in the sense that they will still want to share knowledge.

Discussion

The detailed research results will be discussed in the following discussion: The results of the first study are supported, meaning that a toxic workplace environment is proven to have a positive relationship with knowledge hiding. These results are interpreted when the university where lecturer work has a lot of negative interpersonal behavior in the workplace, unhealthy competition to compete for lecturer achievements, grants and position goals (Modem et al., 2023) and unfair ruling individuals, also narcissism or what is called a toxic workplace environment, which will cause anxiety, stress, depression, health problems (Anjum and Ming, 2017; Wang et al., 2020), also distrust of other people which in the end they will be skeptical and knowledge hiding. The more toxic their work environment, the higher the level of knowledge hiding and vice versa. The results of this study support previous research that the work environment greatly influences knowledge hiding (Han et al., 2020). If knowledge hiding or withholding information is done intentionally, it will have a negative impact on organizational performance (Mohsin et al., 2022).

Our second research finding relates to negative workplace gossip. We find that it proves that negative workplace gossip is positively related to knowledge hiding. The higher the level of negative workplace gossip, the higher the knowledge hiding and vice versa. Even though lecturer are people with higher education degrees, they do not rule out the possibility of gossiping, either consciously or unconsciously. They talk about the achievements of co-workers which leads to negative gossip, even talk about the disgrace or mistakes of co-workers, as if they are right. Gossipers do not realize that their behavior has a negative effect on the gossip object (Khan et al., 2022a), such as negative competition, pressure, frustration, social disruption, stress and destroying feelings and beliefs in others (Aboramadan et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022b; Kong, 2018). Even worse, people who are gossiped about are unable to respond to gossip that spreads, so they take revenge by being more likely to withhold important information (silence) as an act of self-restraint, controlling frustrated emotions, dealing with stress levels and inappropriate expectations (Aboramadan et al., 2021).

The third finding reveals that WPS moderates the relationship between a toxic work environment and knowledge hiding, with a stronger association observed when WPS is low and vice versa. In a toxic work environment, lecturers perceive their work as mundane, detrimental and lacking in meaning, leading to poor relationships with colleagues and a misalignment of personal and organizational values (Muavia and Hussain, 2022). Consequently, they become silent and conceal their knowledge. Conversely, when lecturers have a high level of spiritual engagement at work, they approach the toxic environment differently. They maintain a positive outlook, prioritize their work, find purpose and meaning in their tasks, foster positive relationships, view events as personal growth experiences, assist others, demonstrate organizational loyalty and behave ethically (Milliman et al., 2018; Muavia and Hussain, 2022). Lecturers with high spiritual engagement compete positively and view their work as a means of advancing their spirituality, leading to greater effort and sincere dedication (Mat et al., 2012). They interpret organizational and leadership challenges as tests of work and life that require a composed and patient approach, reducing self-protective behaviors such as withholding information or knowledge hiding. Hence, when a high level of academic spiritual engagement coexists with a toxic work environment, knowledge concealment decreases. Conversely, when the toxic work environment is high and academic spiritual engagement is low, the likelihood of knowledge hiding increases.
On the other hand, this study highlights the role of WPS as a moderating variable in the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding, so that the relationship is stronger when spirituality is low and vice versa. This finding is consistent with social exchange theory (Blau, 2017). That there is reciprocity in the relationship between people in the organization. In this case, if lecturer are used as objects of negative gossip by colleagues and superiors, they will respond by hiding their knowledge. Based on COR theory, the situation will be different if an academic has high work spirituality, they will let go of their ego to be freer for spiritual growth, be wiser and interpret the negative behavior of others as new learning for them (Karakas and Sarigollu, 2019). They will not be busy looking for ways to repay their actions but rather think about changes in themselves for the better. Not easily ignited by emotional fire, ignore gossip that is not true and think gossip is a test of life that must be faced calmly. It is this spirituality that will be able to reduce the withholding of information or hiding knowledge, they will still want to share even though they have become the object of gossip.

Theoretical and practical implications
This study contributes to the social exchange theory literature by proving empirical support to confirm that social exchange exists in interpersonal relations between lecturer. When lecturer are in a toxic environment and become the target of negative gossip, they will respond to negative things with negative behavior in the form of knowledge hiding. But the relationship that occurs becomes weak when there is high spirituality in lecturer.

In connection with a toxic environment and negative gossip, leaders can minimize this by stimulating employees with openness, honest, supportive and freedom of opinion so that they do not hide their knowledge and redundancies and adequately disclose accurate information. The trick is to hold deliberations with subordinates when making decisions so that they want to have their opinions and feel that their opinions are valued so that there is no backbiting that causes negative gossip to occur which leads to a toxic work environment. Organizational leaders and administrators can also consider creating incentive policies, as it is known that the reason for the formation of a toxic work environment and negative gossip is due to the lack of welfare of lecturers, so it is important to create incentive policies that can increase their welfare. Leaders also need to create positive relationships between lecturer, namely by holding familiarity events outside of working hours, helping each other if there are problems and needing to hold family gatherings. Most importantly, leaders need to ensure that employees’ spiritual needs and aspirations are met, namely by being more communicative, providing guidance, connecting through meaningful relationships and being present at work with their team. So that employees feel comfortable when working, feel valued and feel that their work is very meaningful so that they can cultivate spirituality in their workplace. Through implementing these initiatives, educational institutions can enhance the quality of education and bolster the contributions of lecturers in their academic capacities.

Limitations and future research directions
First, we collected self-reported data that could lead to self-report bias. For this reason, further research can use the Levene test, to ensure variances from online and offline distribution of questionnaires are homogenous (Nordstokke et al, 2011). Second, the study design is cross-sectional, therefore future studies may use a longitudinal design which will further explain our findings about knowledge hiding. Third, this study only examines spirituality in the workplace as a moderating variable. For this reason, further research is focused on the systematic examination of the moderating role of other variables related to the religious aspects of employees. In addition to generalizing the findings, further research can expand
the research context, such as in Islamic tertiary institutions to ascertain whether negative gossip and toxic environments are present in Islamic tertiary institutions. Further research may also separate the analysis based on organizational factors that form different workspace spirituality.

References


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Further reading


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