

Motives that Matter: Conceptualizing a Theory of Needs, Knowledge Hiding, and Group Cohesion (TNKG)

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This study explores the influence of McClelland's need for achievement, affiliation, and power on knowledge hiding and group cohesion in organizational settings. A qualitative research design consisting of open-ended essay questions with an inductive reasoning approach was used to conceptualize the theory of needs, knowledge hiding, and group cohesion (TNKG). The study reveals that motivational needs (affiliation, achievement, and power) influence knowledge hiding behaviour and group cohesion. Affiliation-oriented employees share knowledge, enhancing group cohesion, whereas achievement-oriented employees withhold knowledge to ensure a competitive edge, but not in all contexts. Power further influences knowledge hiding, with personalized power inducing strategic withholding and socialized power encouraging knowledge sharing for collective benefit. The study also reveals that knowledge hiding is not always dysfunctional, but a self-protective response to the perceived threat in the workplace. The study presents a theory of needs, knowledge hiding, and group cohesion. It offers new insights into the psychological motivations of knowledge-related behaviours in organizations, providing useful implications for enhancing knowledge management and team cohesion.

Keywords: needs, knowledge hiding, group cohesion, dependent personality, perceived organizational politics

INTRODUCTION

In organizations, behaviour is strongly influenced by underlying psychological needs, which affect the way people perform and interact with each other (de Andrade Baptista et al., 2021). David McClelland's theory of needs offers a helpful framework for understanding work-related behaviour through three fundamental needs: need for affiliation (drive to belong), need for achievement (drive to achieve goals), and need for power (drive to control or influence others) (McClelland, 1965, 1985). These needs are particularly applicable when working in groups where interpersonal interactions, social ranking, and performance expectations influence employee behaviour (Verma et al., 2011). Understanding these needs has become crucial for the successful management of the organization.

Likewise, in today's economy, knowledge is power, and how well companies disseminate and control information can determine their success (Issac & Thomas, 2020). One of the main components in knowledge management that studies have focused on is knowledge hiding – intentional concealment of

requested knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012). At the organizational level, knowledge hiding limits the knowledge transfer, productivity, fuels a cycle of conflicts, and affects the functioning and growth of the organization (Černe et al., 2014; Connelly et al., 2012; Gagné, 2009; Haas & Park, 2010). At the individual level, knowledge hiding has been linked to distrust, lack of creativity, poor job performance, and lack of commitment (Sheidaei et al., 2021). Although extensive research has examined knowledge hiding, the motivational and psychological roots of this behaviour, as with McClelland's need, remain underexplored.

Group cohesion is a dynamic process in which group members tend to support each other to achieve shared goals (Murphey et al., 2021). In organizational settings, cohesive teams tend to be more resilient, adaptive to change, and manage interpersonal conflicts effectively (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2008). Nevertheless, group cohesion is sensitive to both individual and organizational factors that either strengthen or weaken the team unity (Hogg, 1992). Increased group cohesion is associated with increased collaboration (Zamecnik et al., 2024), information exchange (McLaren & Spink, 2018), and increased performance (Beal et al., 2003), while decreased cohesion often results in social loafing (Karau & Williams, 1997), reduced engagement, and poor efforts (Jyoti & Dimple, 2022). Knowledge hiding can weaken group cohesion by disrupting group functions, creating distrust, and reinforcing isolated thinking (Černe et al., 2014; Connelly et al., 2012). While this is a connection that deserves testing, little is known about an individual's willingness or desire to hide knowledge from their group in relation to group cohesion.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of McClelland's needs on group cohesion and knowledge hiding. Individuals with a high need for affiliation see themselves as interdependent, appreciate social (group) inclusion, and expect social incentives from personal relationships and interactions (Deci & Ryan, 2008; O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2011). To avoid conflict in such positive relationships, they are more likely to provide knowledge and engage in collaborative efforts (Zhu et al., 2017). Knowledge hiding would go against their desire for social approval and risk damaging their relationships.

Individuals with a high need for achievement prefer challenging tasks, accept responsibility for their outcomes, and desire clear feedback (Heintz & Steele-Johnson, 2004). Focusing too much on personal achievements can hurt the sense of teamwork, as individuals might end up putting their success ahead of what the group needs (Spangler et al., 2014). However, this effect may not be consistent across all contexts. Need for power is distinguished between two types: personalized (seeking dominance and control over others) and socialized power (desire to benefit the group and collective goals) (McClelland, 1985). These needs influence knowledge transfer in organizations (Anand & Hassan, 2019; Bartol et al., 2009; Spangler & House, 1991).

Beyond the motivational needs, the study also considered the role of dependent personality, characterized by over-reliance and submissive behaviour for emotional and decision-making support (Brunstein & Maier, 2005). In addition to these individual factors, the study also intended to explore the impact of perceived organizational politics (POP). It is the employee's subjective perception that behaviours within their organization are self-serving and manipulative, intended to advance individual over collective goals (Ferris et al., 2002). While prior studies have explored the role of personality traits (e.g., Big Five and emotional intelligence) in influencing knowledge hiding (Iqbal et al., 2020; Issac & Baral, 2020), less attention has been given to the impact of individual needs on knowledge hiding. A study exploring the relation between team cohesion and knowledge hiding showed a reduction in playing dumb and evasive hiding, moderated by ethical leadership (Kang, 2021). Nonetheless, it did not explore them in the light of McClelland's needs and factors like dependent personality and POP.

This presents an opportunity to explore previously unexamined dynamics of knowledge hiding in organizations. Therefore, the study attempts to address identified research gaps by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1. How does needs influence knowledge hiding?

RQ2. What effect does needs have on group cohesion?

RQ3. How does knowledge hiding affect group cohesion in organizations?

RQ4. *How does a dependent personality affect the need for affiliation and knowledge hiding?*

RQ5. *How does POP affect the need for power (personalized and socialized) and knowledge hiding in organizations?*

Therefore, this research combines motivational psychology and organizational behaviour to examine how individual needs, personality traits, and POP are related to knowledge hiding and group cohesion. Through this exploration of under-researched constructs, the study adds value by providing actionable insights for HR departments and leaders who are seeking to build cohesive and high-performing teams.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In workplace settings, an employee's behaviour is influenced by various factors, including organizational, individual, and job-related elements (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2018; Loku & Gogiqi, 2016; Muayad et al., 2021). Out of these, an important factor that shapes employee behaviours influencing their engagement and performance is motivation (Jain et al., 2019). McClelland tried to explain how the behaviour of an individual is influenced by motivation and introduced three basic needs: affiliation, achievement, and power (McClelland, 1965). Need for achievement refers to an individual's drive for personal success through effort rather than chance (Robbins, 2003). McClelland identified that individuals with a high need for achievement are competitive and motivated by situations where success comes from effort, activities involving a moderate level of difficulty, and performance feedback is provided (McClelland, 1961; Wang, 2022). It is said that a general need for success shows a positive effect on performance and competition, but an exaggerated level of this need might lead to disturbances in organizations (Brunstein & Maier, 2005; McClelland, 1965).

Need for affiliation refers to the desire to be liked, accepted, and to form close relationships with others (Atkinson, 1954; Pickett et al., 2004). To strengthen and sustain the bonds, they are more likely to avoid conflict, conform to the group, and prioritize other's needs to avoid rejection (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Moberg and Leasher, 2011; O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2011). Due to this, they become good team players, act as peacemakers or mediators, and excel among groups (Abiola et al., 2023). Need for power refers to an individual's desire to control and influence the behaviour of others by making others act according to their instructions or preferences (McClelland, 1975; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). Individuals with a high need for power seek recognition, authority, and a competitive standpoint to achieve significant power in the organization (de Andrade Baptista, 2021; Spangler & House, 1991; Jha, 2010). Further, the need for power is distinguished between two types: Personalized power and socialized power. Individuals motivated by personalized power seek dominance and control over others. Whereas, individuals with socialized power desire to benefit others and contribute to the organizational goals (Cress et al., 2005; McClelland, 2015).

One behavioural consequence that has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly in response to unmet psychological needs and negative workplace climates, is knowledge hiding (Anand et al., 2022; Connelly et al., 2012). According to Connelly et al. (2012), knowledge hiding is defined as the intentional concealment of knowledge from the individual who is seeking the knowledge. People use strategies like evasive hiding, rationalized hiding, playing dumb, and counter-questioning to conceal the information from others, and they use more than one of these strategies based on situations and people (Connelly et al., 2012; Gagné, 2009; Kumar Jha & Varkkey, 2018; Venz & Mohr, 2022). Research suggests that not all knowledge hiding is dysfunctional; sometimes it may enhance relationships with others (Connelly & Zweig, 2014).

Research has identified a wide range of antecedents and consequences of knowledge hiding. Antecedents are categorized under organizational, attitude-related, personality, leadership, job-related, interpersonal, fear of judgement, knowledge-specific, and supervisory factors (Bordia et al., 2006; He et al., 2021; Sheidae et al., 2021). And consequences are categorized at the individual and organizational level, including reduced performance, increased distrust, innovation and creativity, moral disengagement, decreased job satisfaction, and psychological safety (Anand et al., 2022). One of the core aspects of a

healthy interpersonal relationship in organizations is group cohesion, which is influenced by interpersonal relationships that bond group members together for a shared objective or needs (Hogg, 1992; Montoya & Horton, 2013). The group with high cohesion provides psychological safety for its members, where they engage in idea sharing and collaborative behaviours (Edmondson, 1999). Research identified interpersonal attraction and similarities (Lott & Lott, 1965), group identification (Hogg, 1992), need for affiliation (Cropanzano et al., 2001), and group size (Carron & Spink, 1995) as antecedents of group cohesion. At last, group cohesion is a central aspect of group dynamics that denotes the extent of attachment and commitment members have for each other and the group as a whole.

The research explores the influence of needs on knowledge hiding and group cohesion, based on McClelland's (1961) Acquired Needs Theory and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). McClelland's theory postulates that a person is driven by three fundamental needs (affiliation, achievement, and power), which drive behavioural tendencies like the desire to collaborate and cooperate, knowledge sharing, exercising control, and forming relationships (McClelland, 1961). This theory provides a perspective on how needs drive interpersonal behaviours in an organizational context. Also, social exchange theory emphasized that interpersonal behaviour is grounded in mutual exchanges of trust, support, and fairness (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Sukumaran & Lanke, 2021), which explains behaviours such as knowledge hiding (Abdullah et al., 2019). This is one of the most widely adopted theories in knowledge management research for studying knowledge hiding (Anand et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2025). When employees perceive organizational politics, the perceived inequity in the exchange leads to defensive behaviours such as knowledge hiding, which disrupts group cohesion (Offergelt & Venz, 2022). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how employee's motives influence knowledge hiding and group cohesion in organizations.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study has followed the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) reporting guidelines (O'Brien et al., 2014). A qualitative research design consisting of open-ended essay questions was used to explore how McClelland's needs (affiliation, achievement, and power) influence knowledge hiding and group cohesion. This approach is especially appropriate for behaviours like knowledge hiding, which are subtle and undesirable, and can be best uncovered through a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach (Demirkasimoglu, 2016; Patton, 2002). It allows respondents to express experiences in their own words, enhancing the richness and depth of the data. Also, open-ended responses elicit greater variation in participant experiences, allowing for theory development based on diverse and specific observations, enhancing the generalizability and external validity (Gerring, 2004). It allows respondents to think critically about their experiences and behaviours, leading to honest and meaningful responses than what is typically obtained through survey methods. Therefore, this approach provides an inclusive and context-sensitive method for exploring the interplay between individual needs, knowledge hiding, and group cohesion.

Participants and Procedure

The study included participants from diverse organizational sectors, including but not limited to healthcare, education, and retail. Convenient sampling was used to select participants for the study. This study has included respondents if they are a) currently working in any organization, b) 18 years or above, and c) know how to read and write English. Inclusion of respondents from various sectors improves sample variation and leads to broader generalizability. Data collection was conducted from January to February 2025 with a total of thirty-five respondents. The participants were asked to provide detailed responses to a set of pre-designed questions floated in Google Forms, focusing on the influence of McClelland's needs on knowledge hiding and group cohesion. To make sure respondents understood the questions, they were presented with brief descriptions of constructs on the initial page of the Google Form. Following it, informed consent has also been obtained from the respondents to participate in this study. A theory-building

approach grounded in inductive reasoning was employed for data analysis, which allows themes to emerge from participant's responses. The following open-ended questions have been asked through Google Forms:

1. In your opinion, does being dependent on others reduce knowledge hiding? Kindly substantiate with an example.
2. Do you think that hiding knowledge can disrupt group cohesion? Kindly provide an example to support your view.
3. How can perceived politics in organizations influence knowledge hiding and need for power (personalized or socialized power)? Kindly support your response with a suitable example or explanations.
4. Can a person's need to belong decrease their tendency to hide knowledge? Kindly explain with an example.
5. Would a person who is success-oriented be more likely to hide knowledge? Kindly illustrate your answer with an example.
6. Does a person who is dominant and seeks control over others tend to hide knowledge? Why or why not? Kindly provide an example.
7. If someone prioritizes helping their group succeed, are they likely to hide knowledge? Kindly explain with an example.
8. Do you agree or disagree that need to belong enhances group cohesion? Kindly support your answer with relevant examples.
9. If a person has a strong desire to achieve or succeed, how might this impact group cohesion—positively or negatively? Kindly illustrate your response with an example.
10. Does an individual's need for belonging make them more dependent on others? Kindly elaborate with an example.
11. If a person has a high tendency to control others, how will it affect the group cohesion? Kindly give an example for it.

Data Coding and Analysis

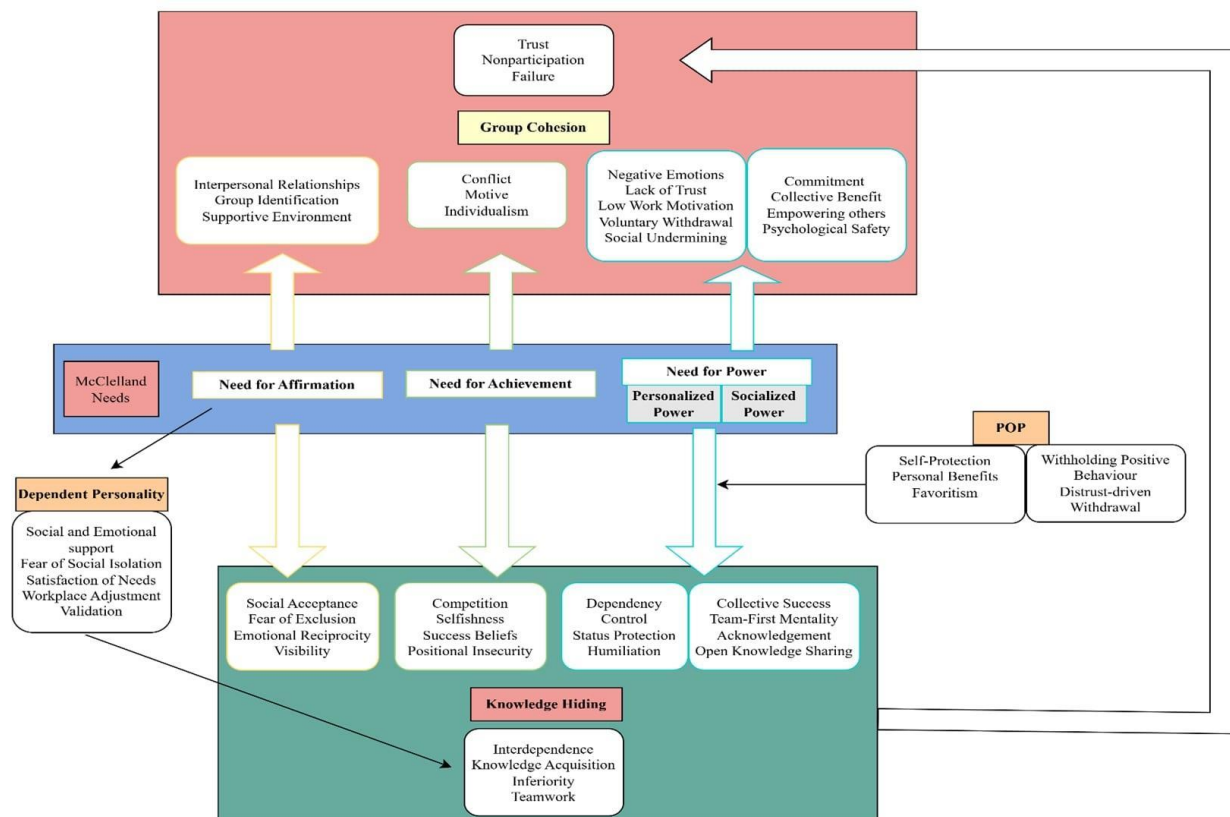
The inductive analysis began with a blank slate, allowing for new insights to emerge originally from respondent's data and leading to the generalizability of the results based on the observed pattern in the data. While open-ended essay questions were purposefully broad, the inductive approach and analysis align with Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory, which emphasized co-constructed meaning and theory building rooted in respondent's experiences (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). While McClelland's needs theory provides a sensitizing framework, the analysis remains open to emergent insights, allowing the conceptual model of knowledge hiding to evolve inductively from the data. Coding to the participant's identity has been used to avoid identity breach. Participants were guaranteed privacy and confidentiality, and no deception was involved in this study. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and informed consent was obtained from all the respondents.

The entire set of data has been analyzed in detail and marked with codes to highlight all the significant data segments, which gave us an idea of the themes that are going to emerge (Saldaña, 2021). These were then synthesized through second-order coding, which helped us to group the emerged codes into clusters signifying various themes and concepts (Gioia et al., 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). This process allowed for meaningful organization and representation of the data and supported the construction of a theory through inductive reasoning. To strengthen the rigour of the analysis and theory-building, Lincoln and Guba. (1985) trustworthiness criteria were used. An independent analysis and a series of discussions were conducted with the authors to rule out bias. This helped us to resolve the discrepancies and enhance interpretive depth. It also ensured intercoder reliability, thereby reinforcing the validity and credibility of the findings (Guest et al., 2011).

RESULT

The insights from the data analysis enabled us to answer the research questions and conceptualize a theory. Figure 1 presents the foundational components of the iterative process, highlighting the impact assessment of the variables involved.

FIGURE 1
IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF VARIABLES



RQ1: Needs and Knowledge Hiding

Need for Affiliation and Knowledge Hiding

Knowledge hiding is one significant barrier to knowledge transfer in the organization, typically undermining innovation, collaboration, and team performance. Responses suggest that employees driven by the need for affiliation have a greater inclination to share knowledge to strengthen relationships, gain acceptance, liking, and be part of their group. Knowledge sharing, in addition to being a mode of contribution towards the group, was also viewed as creating visibility, a sense of identification, and avoiding social exclusion. Sharing knowledge is often associated with trust-building, inclusion, and mutual support in the group. Within organizations, knowledge sharing was viewed as a means of likability and protecting one's value and identity in the group. Therefore, the analysis indicates that employees with a need for affiliation are less likely to engage in knowledge hiding (see Figure 2). The following responses highlight the points discussed:

"We all want to feel connected and accepted by others. Imagine I want to be seen as supportive and reliable team member. So, I would share all the knowledge to them to feel accepted and connected to them." (P33, Female, Entry level/ Junior staff)

“They may be less likely to hide knowledge as it could jeopardize their relationships and social standing within the group. For example, a new employee eager to fit into a team may readily share their expertise to gain acceptance and build connections.” (P17, Female, Entry level/ Junior staff)

“They were socially connectable. They made trust in others, which decrease the selfish behaviour. For example, if a person needs to complete the task on deadline need to belong person help others to complete it.” (P10, Female, Mid-level staff)

“Just because he/she wants to feel belonged they are trying to get the visibility and the belongingness so they are sharing whatever they can.” (P15, Female, Senior staff)

Need for Achievement and Knowledge Hiding

In a competitive work environment, the need for achievement can often become an important driver for knowledge hiding. Participant responses reveal that employees who have a high need for achievement may withhold information to maintain a competitive edge over others. They perceive knowledge sharing as a threat to their status, recognition, and chances of promotion. Some respondents linked knowledge hiding to accountability. It is said that they prefer to manage outcomes independently, whether those outcomes lead to success or failure. While others expressed concerns that sharing information could weaken their uniqueness or reduce their value in the eyes of management. However, not all participants held this view. If success is seen as a collective achievement, knowledge sharing is more likely. Conversely, if success is seen as an individual accomplishment, knowledge hiding becomes a strategic behaviour (see Figure 2). The following responses support the above-discussed points:

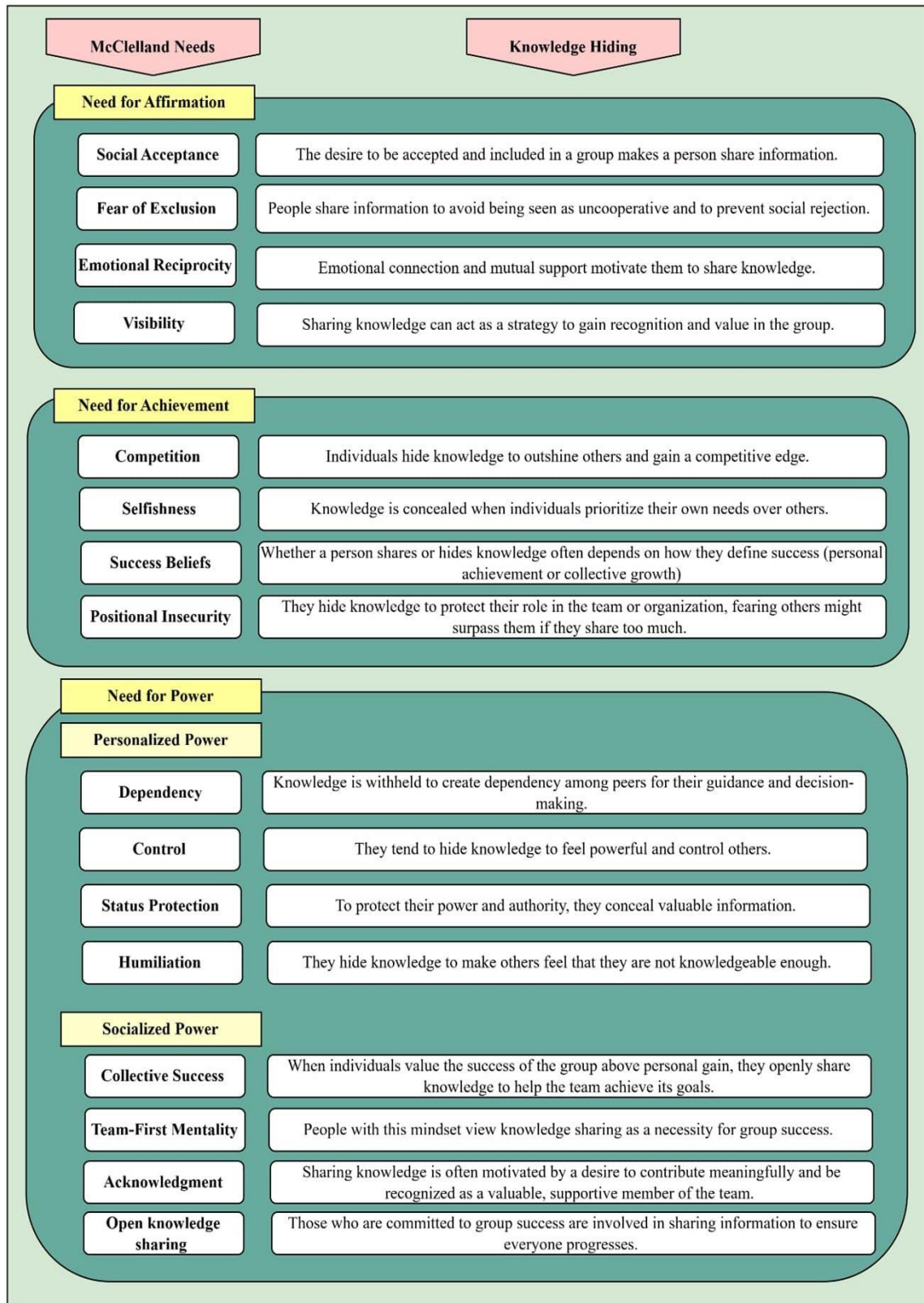
“A person who is highly success-oriented might be more inclined to hide knowledge if they believe doing so gives them a competitive advantage. They may see sharing information as potentially diminishing their own status or chances for success.” (P2, Male, Mid-level staff)

“For instance my team lead who has joined recently my organization is good in automation part but he is not ready to share his knowledge as other existing members lacks this knowledge because it may hit his chance to get success in this organization as he is good in this part while others are not.” (P15, Female, Senior staff)

“Yes, a person who is only individual success oriented will hide the knowledge but a person who thinks of the group as a team and wants to achieve the goals as a group will not do that so it depends a lot on what kind of success the person is after.” (P26, Female, Mid-level staff)

“For example, if a employee aimed for a promotion, then he is more likely to hide knowledge, fearing that someone else would apply the same and achieve the success.” (P33, Female, Entry-level/ Junior staff)

FIGURE 2
MCCLELLAND'S NEEDS AND KNOWLEDGE HIDING



Need for Power and Knowledge Hiding

The need for power is another dominant drive that can either influence knowledge positively or negatively, depending on whether it is personalized or socialized power that the employee is after. According to the respondents, those with high personalized need can deliberately withhold information to keep others dependent on their decisions and guidance. By becoming the gatekeeper of critical information, one can employ knowledge as a tool to exert control and influence decision-making in the team. Participants indicated that such behaviours sometimes arise out of fear of replacement or loss of status or power. In some cases, such withholding can diminish other's confidence and contributions. Nonetheless, a person may feel strong for a short period only. The more they display power and superiority over others, the more irritated the employees get, resulting in disengagement and less teamwork (see Figure 2). Below are the responses that support the above points:

"When people feel that they hold the key to essential information, they can manipulate situations, create dependency, and maintain control over the decision-making process. This tactic often ensures that they are seen as the gatekeeper and that others rely on them for success." (P7, Male, Senior staff)

"Dominant individuals may use knowledge as a tool to maintain control and power. They might strategically withhold information to keep subordinates dependent on them, reinforcing their authority. For instance, a manager might not share critical decision-making processes with their team, asserting their control and making their team reliant on their directives." (P17, female, Entry level/ Junior staff)

"For instance, Mr. I is dominant in nature, so he will definitely not share his knowledge as he might lose the points on which they can dominate or seek control over; otherwise, they start getting better knowledge and even can replace him." (P15, Female, Senior staff)

"Yes, a person who is dominant and wants to have control over others tend to hide knowledge so that he can make them feel invaluable and dumb." (P26, Female, Mid-level staff)

Respondents noted that people with high socialized power are less likely to hide knowledge, as their focus is on group success rather than individual success. They prioritize group needs and their performance and development. They often try to share information, tools, and resources that can help the team. For them, knowledge sharing is not just a task but a way of creating trust, strengthening teamwork, and enhancing overall performance and success in organizations. In doing so, they may gain respect and recognition from peers, not through self-promotion, but through their efforts to elevate the team (see Figure 2). The following responses support the above points:

"Group-oriented person share their knowledge to make them win. For example, a good team leader, advise their team to follow office ethics to get a good name among others." (P9, Female, Team leader/Supervisor)

"They understand that collaborative knowledge sharing benefits the entire group, ultimately advancing their shared goals. For example, a project team member who readily shares their expertise and insights likely prioritizes the project's overall success over individual recognition." (P17, Female, Entry level/ Junior staff)

"Such individuals see the team's success as their own and understand that sharing knowledge improves collaboration, efficiency, and overall performance. For example, in my organization, we had a senior employee who was always willing to mentor new team

members. He believed that if everyone performed well, the team would gain recognition, and it would create more growth opportunities for everyone.” (P24, Male, Mid-level staff)

“For instance, one of the team members who is on management side and good in process following and facilitation, he will always keep team first and always be ready to share his knowledge and experiences.” (P15, Female, Senior staff)

RQ2: Needs and Group Cohesion

Need for Affiliation and Group Cohesion

The analysis of the responses shows that the need to be accepted and belong plays a central role in fostering group cohesion. Employees with the motivated need to be accepted, valued, and liked by others engage more actively in the team, contribute genuinely, and align their behaviour based on group norms and goals. This feeling of belonging enhances trust, honesty, strengthens interpersonal relations, and makes them want to stand by each other. Employees, when they start identifying themselves as part of a group or community, find it easier to help their peers by sharing their expertise. They tend to engage in behaviours like sharing knowledge to maintain their place in the group. Moreover, respondents reported that a supportive and inclusive environment reinforces the sense of belonging. When people feel valued and safe in their environment, they are more likely to engage in open communication and collaboration (see Figure 3). The following are the responses that can support the above points:

“People are ready to do anything to be included in the group. Some are even ready to just give away their precious skills or knowledge to others so that they can be included in the group, and if they are giving what the group wants, then the connections will be strong and it will increase the group cohesion. (P26, Female, Mid-level staff)

“For example, in my organization, a team leader encouraged open communication and knowledge sharing among team members. As a result, everyone felt empowered and included, which strengthened their sense of belonging. This fostered a collaborative environment where team members freely exchanged ideas and supported each other, leading to increased productivity and a stronger, more cohesive team.” (P24, Male, Mid-level staff)

“They are more likely to share knowledge and collaborate openly. For example, in a corporate setting, if an experienced employee feels part of a supportive and inclusive team, they are more likely to mentor junior colleagues and share their expertise. This fosters trust, collaboration, and stronger team dynamics.” (P33, Female, Entry level/ Junior staff)

Need for Achievement and Group Cohesion

Need for achievement can be both a blessing and a curse within organizations. Though the need to achieve frequently stimulates ambition and work effort, most respondents indicated that when the need to achieve is competitive, it can destroy cohesion in groups. Workers who continually pursue individual achievement and gain can become less cooperative and supportive toward their colleagues. This can ultimately result in issues of trust, conflict, and decreased involvement within groups. The majority of respondents concurred that a strong personal need to achieve adversely affects group cohesion, particularly when one focuses on their own goals above common objectives. A few respondents, however, had a differing opinion. According to them, it is relative and based on a person's motive. If the success drive is in line with group goals, it can enhance cohesion. If success is considered purely from an individual perspective, it results in individualistic behaviour that destroys group cohesion (see Figure 3). The following responses illustrate the points discussed:

“Very high desire for success can ruin the relationship with group members. There should be an adequate amount of desire to be successful. The greater the desire greater the stress.” (P22, Male, Senior Manager)

“I believe that if a person has a very strong desire to succeed in life then the relationship he will have with group Cohesion would be negative, since he would think in very individualistic terms because he wants to get successful in life.” (P10, Female, Mid-level staff)

“It depends a lot upon the individual, whether he wants to succeed individually, or with the group so if you wants to succeed under virtually he will hide the information and it might result in weak group cohesion on the other hand, if he wants to succeed as a group, he will share the information and pave the way for strong group cohesion.” (P26, Female, Mid-level staff)

Need for Power and Group Cohesion

Power dynamics within the organization can affect the overall cohesion and functioning of the group. When an employee has a strong need for personalized power (need to dominate or control others), it can interfere with group cohesion. They tend to decide unilaterally, not considering other's ideas, and prioritize personal authority over teamwork. This results in frustration, erosion of trust, and undervaluation of team members. In the long run, this can create a stressful and demotivating work environment that can negatively impact interpersonal relationships. This dominant pattern can lead members to disengage or even opt to depart from the group or organization. Conversely, those with high socialized power need to use their power to empower and uplift others. Instead of seeking dominance, they focus on achieving shared objectives, assisting their colleagues, and building a culture of trust and open communication. Employees who are motivated by socialized power often facilitate knowledge sharing, foster mutual support, and build an environment where everyone feels valued (see Figure 3). The following responses illustrate the points discussed:

“A high tendency to control others negatively impacts group cohesion. My colleague acts like that sometimes and due to this our group faces backlash, causing irritation to the fellow workers.” (P20, Female, Manager)

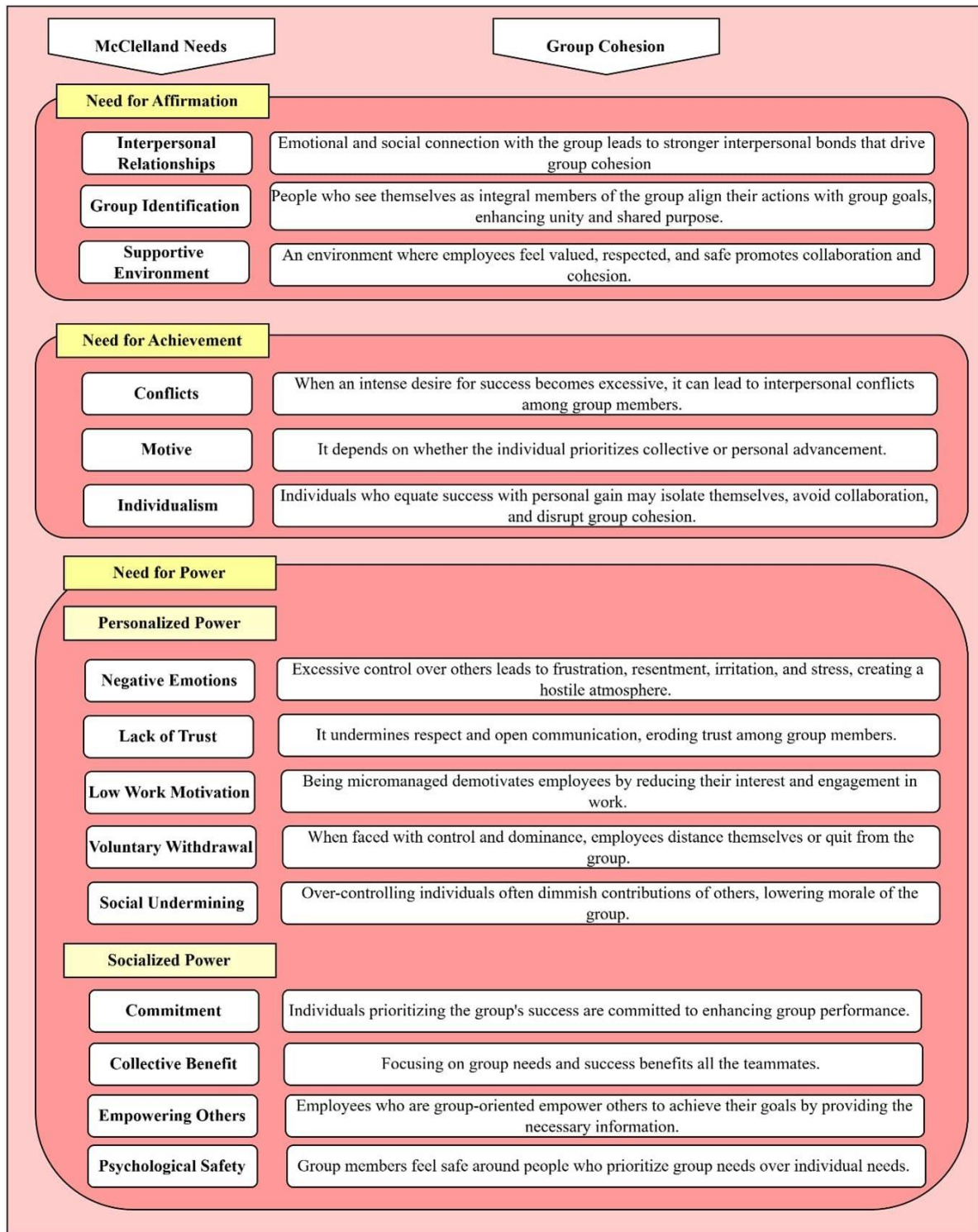
“If a person has high tendency to control others he will not be very amicable and would always create an atmosphere of stress and strife in the group.” (P26, Female, Mid-level staff)

“It will affect group cohesion. controlling others all the time leads to pressure on the teammates. they lose the interest to work and they need his orders all the time” (P9, Female, Team Leader/ Supervisor)

“It will impact group cohesion negatively for instance, My team lead who joined few months back is even trying to control the people who are in organization since long and this is not really liked by other group members. It is detaching people from himself and within the group too.” (P15, Female, Senior staff)

“When someone is genuinely focused on the collective success of their group, they see the value in empowering others with information, because the overall performance and achievements of the group are more important than individual recognition or advantage.” (P7, Male, Senior staff)

FIGURE 3
MCCLELLAND'S NEEDS AND KNOWLEDGE HIDING



RQ3: Knowledge Hiding and Group Cohesion

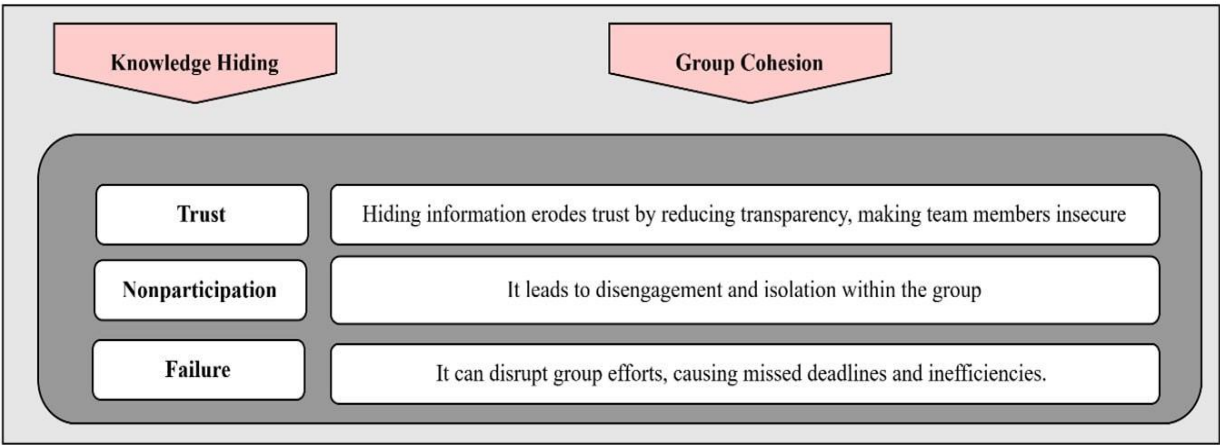
Responses strongly indicate that knowledge hiding disrupts group cohesion by breaking trust, limiting communication, and weakening collaboration. When employees withhold important information from their peers, it creates a sense of inequality and exclusion, leading to frustration, disengagement, and reduced team effort. Several examples given by respondents indicate that such behaviour often stems from personal motives like gaining recognition and control. But it will result in a breakdown in teamwork and trust. Whereas, knowledge sharing was seen as essential to build unity, mutual respect, and trust among groups (see Figure 4). Below are the responses that illustrate the points:

“Yes, in a workplace environment, if a manager hides crucial information about a project's progress or changes in direction from the team, the team may feel out of the loop.” (P7, Male, Senior staff)

“Yes. Because when individuals feel that information is being withheld, they may disengage, communicate less, and become less willing to cooperate, ultimately weakening the group's unity.” (P11, Female, Other)

“Of course, hiding knowledge leads to the failure of team cohesion. For strong team spirit, everyone's contribution is important.” (P9, Female, Team leader/ supervisor)

FIGURE 4
KNOWLEDGE HIDING AND GROUP COHESION



RQ4: Relationship between need for affiliation, dependent personality, and knowledge hiding

The need for affiliation brings about a dependency feeling because individuals tend to look up to their fellow workers for acceptance and advice. To fit into the group so that they do not get rejected, individuals tend to conform to the expectations, opinions, and decisions of the group, despite sometimes disagreeing. Few respondents mentioned that dependency is especially observed among new workers, who attempt to depend on other people not only to get through their tasks or work but to identify themselves as members of the team. This, with time, ends up forming a habit of dependence on others for getting both emotional and social support at the place of work (see Figure 5). The following response excerpts provide useful illustrations:

“She tends to conform to the opinions and expectations of her friends or colleagues in order to feel accepted. For instance, during group discussions at work, she may avoid

voicing her own ideas and instead align herself with the opinions of her more dominant peers, fearing rejection or conflict.” (P7, Male, Senior staff)

*“This is because they seek social support and connection. This encourages them to engage in collaborative behaviors, share knowledge, and follow group norms to strengthen relationships.” (P34, **Female**, Mid-level staff)*

“A new team member who is eager to fit in may readily agree with others' opinions and rely on established members for guidance, even if they have their own ideas.” (P17, Female, Entry level/Junior staff)

“Yes it may be true. For example, there was a time initially at my workplace when I wanted to really belong to the workplace. So I used to let me volunteers/colleagues decide things which I was supposed to decide, just to be more accommodating which made me dependent on them.” (P20, Female, Manager)

Respondents suggest that dependence always fosters sharing rather than hiding. When individuals depend on one another to achieve goals, they engage in open communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. This mutual dependence makes knowledge hiding less viable, as people's success is linked to each other. Few respondents have noted that relying on others helps them to gain insightful information and perspectives. For them, dependency is not a weakness, but a means of learning new things and progressing. Others noted that dependency sometimes comes from a feeling of inferiority or lack of confidence (see Figure 5). The following are the responses of participants:

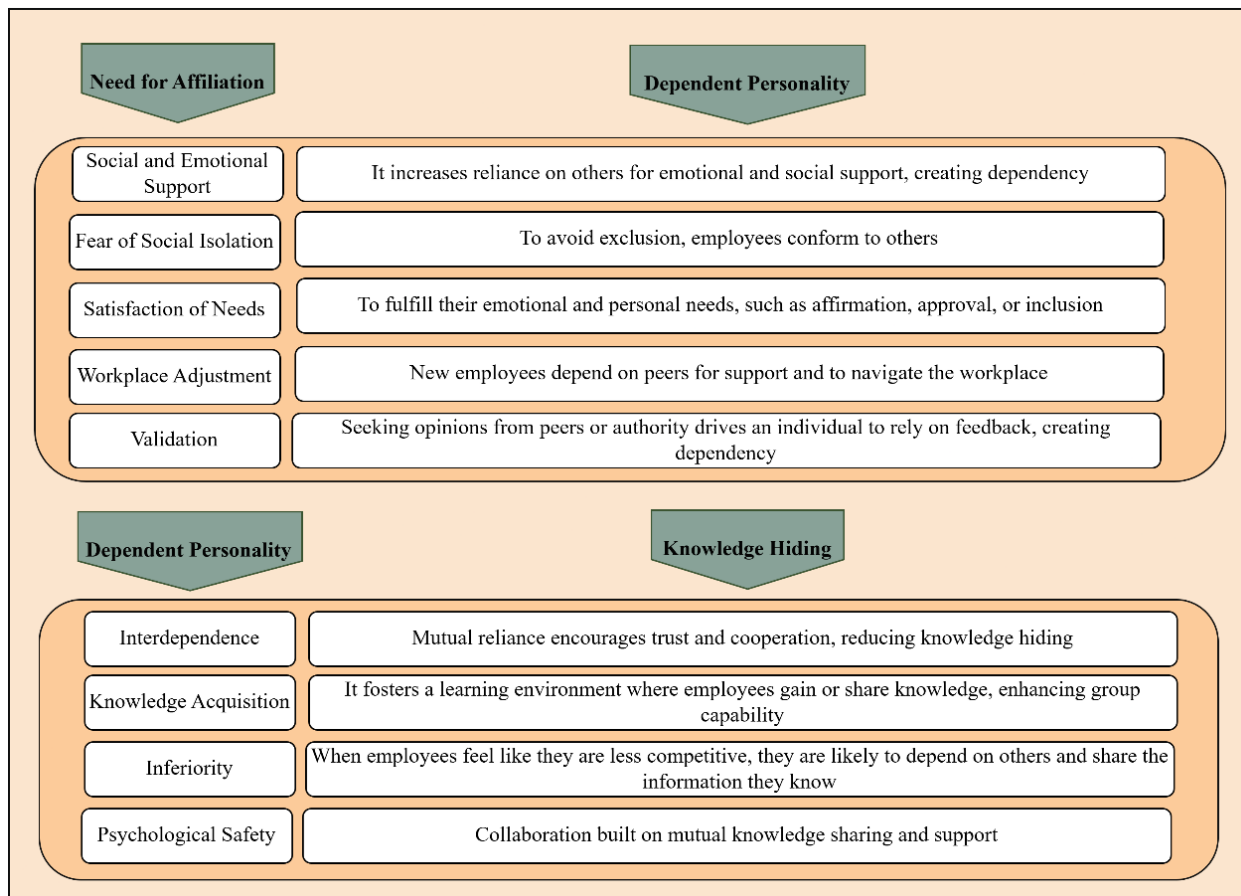
“Interdependence highlights the importance of trust and reciprocity, which often counteract the tendency to withhold knowledge.” (P2, Male, Mid-level staff)

“In my opinion perhaps it is yes, as being dependent on others you would more like to rely on others opinion and share your thoughts to gain some information which would lead to reduction in knowledge hiding.” (P15, Female, Senior staff)

“I agree. My manager used to take inputs from everyone, including the beneficiaries about the quality of program. Hence, it became pertinent for him to share whatever knowledge he got from others.” (P20, Female, Manager)

“For example if a friend feels that he is inferior to me in knowledge then I don't think that he or she will hide information from me.” (P10, Female, Mid-level staff)

FIGURE 5
RELATION BETWEEN NEED FOR AFFILIATION, DEPENDENT PERSONALITY AND
KNOWLEDGE HIDING



RQ5: Impact of POP on Need for Power and Knowledge Hiding

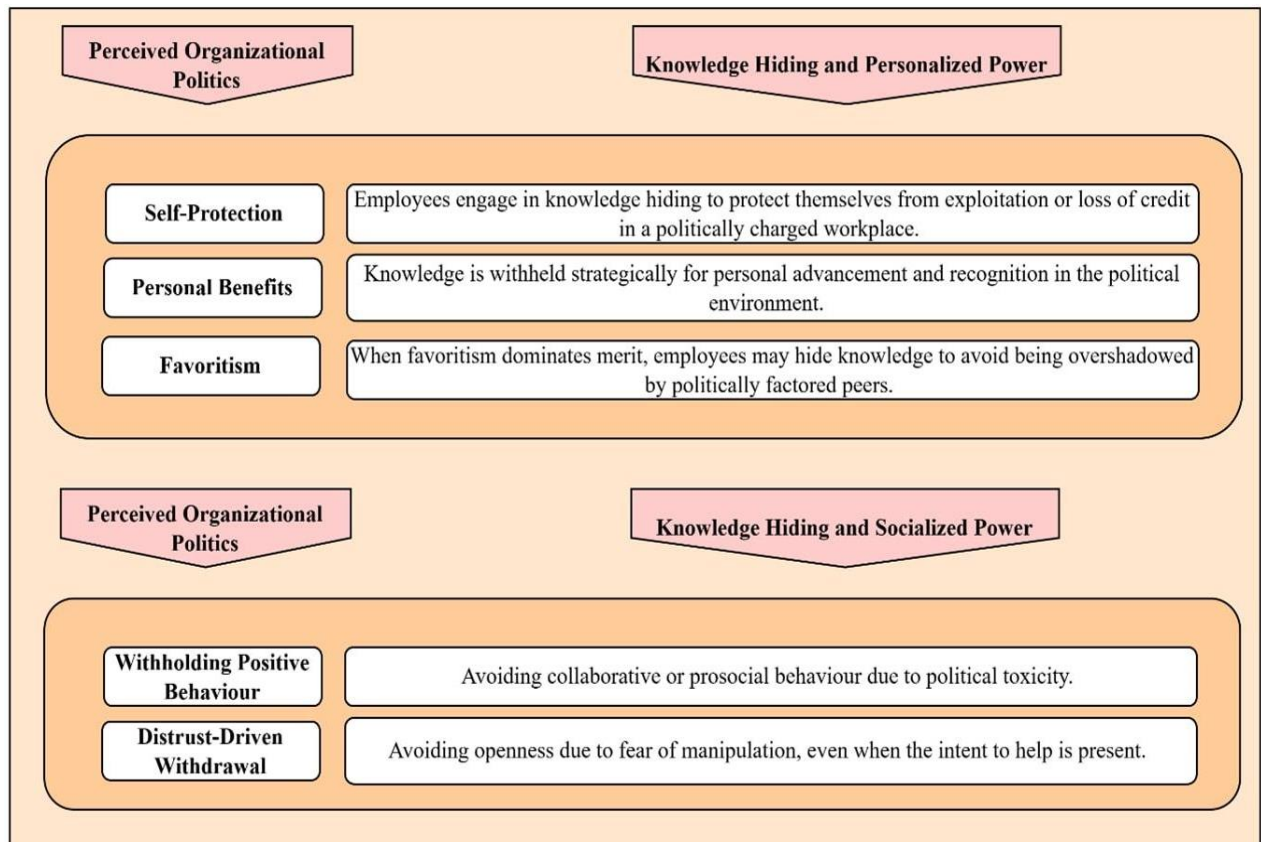
The responses indicate that POP acts as a precursor for knowledge hiding. Respondents shared that in politically charged environments, employees often withhold information as a form of self-protection, fearing that their knowledge may be exploited or misused. Favouritism and manipulation are also listed as reasons for them to withhold the information because decisions are taken based on personal relationships rather than merit. Respondents also stated that distrust and desire for personal advancement are reasons for concealing knowledge, particularly in competitive or political settings. Overall, the results suggest that when politics dominates the workplace, knowledge becomes a form of power that employees conceal to protect themselves (see Figure 6). The following responses illustrate the points discussed.

“At the end its all about politics. For instance everyone in the same team wants to climb the ladder and for that they use bad practices which involves hiding knowledge, back bitching, taking credits of each other etc.” (P15, Female, Senior staff)

“In a corporate setting, if an employee perceives that their contributions are often overlooked or that promotions are based on personal relationships rather than merit, they may decide to hide their knowledge to avoid giving others the opportunity to shine.” (P7, Male, senior staff)

“Favouritism, manipulation, or office politics can lead to knowledge hiding. for example, person's productivity become low and they may stop trust others due to politics they won't receive any recognition anymore.” (P9, Female, Team leader/ supervisor)

FIGURE 6
IMPACT OF POP ON KNOWLEDGE HIDING AND NEED FOR POWER
(PERSONALIZED AND SOCIALIZED)



Findings suggest that POP shapes how individuals use and respond to power, especially with knowledge transfer behaviours. When political forces play a role in the workplace, workers tend to long for personalized power by withholding information from others to gain their status and position. Those with personalized power were described as more likely to exploit political structures for personal gain, while employees with socialized power may find themselves constrained or even sidelined in political settings. Politics in the organization not only discourages fairness but also diminishes the influence of those who are trying to act ethically. Overall, responses indicate that POP erodes fairness, fuels secrecy, and distorts group dynamics, making knowledge sharing a calculated, high-risk behaviour rather than a collaborative norm (see Figure 6). The following interview excerpts provide useful illustrations:

“No one wants to lose the power that too when lot of politics are going around. so they tend to hold it by involving in any means of behaviour of may be knowledge hiding.” (P7, Male, Senior Staff)

“A person tends to use perceived politics when he wants that work so bad but at the same time he's not eligible for it also, so what he'll do is show the political power to get the job

but won't try anything to increase or improve their knowledge.” (P13, Female, Entry level/ Junior staff)

“Personalized power will increase with politics in organizations as they will be having upper hand in everything and they can control and influence others easily. socialized power may decrease because politics may not allow the person to do right things in the organizations.” (P28, Entry level/ Junior staff)

DISCUSSION

This research explores how employee's needs influence knowledge hiding and group cohesion in organizational contexts. Whereas existing literature on knowledge hiding has largely focused on relational and contextual antecedents such as trust, leadership styles, or organizational climate (Anand et al., 2022; He et al., 2021), this study presents a novel perspective by exploring the motivational drivers of knowledge hiding through the lens of human needs. This study represents one of the first attempts to conceptualize knowledge hiding within a needs-based theoretical framework. In addition to this, the study also explored the influence of individual traits, such as dependent personality, and organizational factors, such as POP. Through careful and iterative analysis of data, we were able to conceptualize a unique theory of knowledge hiding, psychological needs, and group cohesion.

Our study found that the need for affiliation drives employees to engage in knowledge sharing behaviours in an attempt to gain acceptance, build relationships, and reinforce a sense of belonging. It serves as a strategic move to avoid exclusion from groups. A novel insight from the study is that knowledge sharing is also used to gain visibility and recognition. This need to belong not only diminishes knowledge hiding but also enhances group cohesion since individual's prioritize interpersonal relationships and being a part of a group. In supportive environments, cohesion becomes stronger where employees are valued and respected.

In contrast, a high need for achievement is linked to an increase in knowledge hiding. To maintain a competitive edge over others, they conceal information as they perceive it as a personal asset crucial to their success. They may see knowledge sharing as a threat to their position and chances of promotion in the organization. An interesting insight is that employee's beliefs towards success also shape knowledge sharing behaviour, and knowledge hiding serves as a self-protective mechanism to protect one's recognition and sense of competence. This need can also lead to interpersonal conflicts, creating individualism, and reducing group cohesion. But if success is seen as a collective aspect, then knowledge sharing increases.

Personalized power most likely leads to strategic withholding of information to assert control, create dependency, shape decisions, and maintain authority. For them, knowledge hiding is a strategy to assert dominance over others. On the other hand, socialized power leads to knowledge sharing. They engage in open knowledge sharing activities to guide and support their peers by having team-first mindset. Interestingly, they may be involved in knowledge sharing to get identified as a valued member of the group. Personalized power can disrupt group cohesion due to increased negative emotions, lack of trust, and low work motivation. Whereas, socialized power can enhance group cohesion by creating psychological safety, commitment, and empowerment.

Beyond these needs, the study also identifies the role of dependent personality and POP. Mutual reliance, social and emotional support, and the desire for inclusion encourages employee to engage in knowledge sharing in collaborative environments. Individuals with dependent tendencies share information to get validation, adjust to the workplace, and avoid rejection. This relationship between the need for affiliation and dependency reduces knowledge hiding. In organizations where politics is a part, employees with personalized power engage in knowledge hiding to protect their position and status. They conceal information to gain personal benefits in environments where favouritism is present. Similarly, employees with socialized power are also involved in knowledge hiding due to politics. Even though having good intentions, distrust and manipulations in an organization lead to withdrawal from helping behaviours. Therefore, both can contribute to knowledge hiding. These specific observations from the study enable us

to conceptualize the theory of needs, knowledge hiding, and group cohesion (TNKG), stating knowledge hiding as a goal-directed behavioural response shaped by individual needs.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The central theoretical contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing a framework of TNKG. The existing literature has mainly focused on organizational or relational factors that contribute to knowledge behaviours. This study shifts the focus to internal motivating drivers, which are the need for affiliation, achievement, and power. It expands our understanding of knowledge hiding and offers a novel perspective on how needs shape knowledge hiding and group cohesion in organizations.

Our theory is mainly drawn from McClelland's needs theory, which suggests that needs drive goal-directed behaviours. Our study demonstrated how these needs influenced knowledge hiding in the organizational context. Our study puts forward the idea that these needs influence knowledge behaviours uniquely among employees. For instance, a high need for affiliation leads to knowledge sharing due to the desire to be accepted, strengthen relationships, and avoid social rejection. In contrast, high need for achievement is seen to increase knowledge hiding as individuals perceive knowledge as a personal asset. In our study, we also identified the influence of distinct power needs (personalized and socialized). Where personalized power leads to knowledge hiding, socialized power leads to knowledge sharing. This offers a thoughtful application of McClelland's framework in knowledge management.

Our findings extend social exchange theory by highlighting that needs shape the reciprocity norms and perceived fairness in knowledge transfer. Especially in POP contexts, employees reset their inclination to share knowledge based on how their needs are being supported or threatened. This adds to the current literature by demonstrating that needs can strengthen or weaken the social exchange mechanisms that drive knowledge behaviours based on situational cues. The results of our study advance theory by incorporating personality characteristics like dependency and situational perceptions like organizational politics into the model. These factors serve as mediators or moderators that influence the relationship between needs and knowledge hiding. This multi-layered perspective encourages further investigation to examine the ways internal or external factors interact to produce knowledge dynamics in organizations.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Organizations should try to understand that knowledge hiding is not merely an individual's resistance, but is influenced by psychological needs. So, organizations must move from surface-level interventions and consider cultivating a motivational climate. It is essential to create an environment where employees feel emotionally secure, valued, and included to foster knowledge sharing and group cohesion. By providing psychological safety, fair treatment, and recognition, one can fulfill the core needs and reduce the perception of viewing knowledge as a limited resource that should be secured for personal gain.

The study highlights the dual nature of power needs, where knowledge is used as a tool to control by an individual with personalized power needs, and it is used to empower others by an individual with socialized power needs. This brings into the light that leadership programs emphasizing emotional intelligence, socialized power, and inclusive leadership that channels power need to support openness and collaboration are essential. Also, the existence of politics in an organization, whether they are real or perceived, can influence knowledge hiding behaviours positively. Organizations should plan on cultivating a culture of equality through transparent promotion systems, participatory decision-making, and effective communication that ultimately promotes knowledge sharing. Finally, one of the most important insights from the study is that knowledge hiding is not always dysfunctional, but a self-protective response to the perceived threat in the workplace. Understanding this can bring a change in organizations by working on establishing an environment where protection is unnecessary. Therefore, designing work environments that align with employee needs can promote knowledge-sharing behaviours and enhance group cohesion.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the study offers valuable insights, limitations must be acknowledged to pave the way for future research. First, the cross-sectional design limited our ability to observe how motivational needs and knowledge behaviours evolve. Future research can benefit from longitudinal studies that could better capture how knowledge hiding behaviours fluctuate in response to changes in organizational and leadership factors.

Second, although data is not confined to certain organizations, there is a possibility that the data may not cover all forms of organizations, which restricts generalizability. Because motivational needs and knowledge behaviours can be different across cultures, further studies can attempt to replicate this model across different cultural and organizational settings to examine cross-cultural differences. Third, the research did not examine external factors such as leadership styles, which can interact with motivational needs to shape knowledge hiding and group cohesion. Future research can investigate underlying mediators and moderators that affect these relations. Fourth, the research mainly examined the negative consequences of knowledge hiding. Future research can investigate the strategic nature of knowledge hiding, like selective sharing or filtering of knowledge, as adaptive behaviours that can benefit the group in some conditions and contexts.

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