

Paper of the Year 2022 – Conversation

"Be smart, play dumb? A transactional perspective on day-specific knowledge hiding, interpersonal conflict, and psychological strain" *Human Relations*, Vol 75, Issue 1.

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Smriti: Let me begin by congratulating you for winning the *Human Relations* Paper of the Year 2022. I really enjoyed reading your paper. I found it very interesting that you flipped the paradigm by looking at the positive side of knowledge hiding. My first question to you is, what made you pick the two types of knowledge hiding – evasive knowledge hiding and playing dumb?

Laura: First of all, thank you so much. The whole concept of knowledge hiding hasn't been around for too long. There was, I would call it a seminal paper, in [2012 by Catherine Connelly](#). She and her colleagues introduced the construct into the organizational behavior research area. They came up with a definition of knowledge hiding, and a survey instrument to measure it. They proposed three different types of knowledge hiding – playing dumb, evasive hiding and rationalized hiding. When we started thinking about the specific study from today's viewpoint, it became clear that rationalized hiding is absolutely different from evasive hiding and playing dumb. The latter, they have this element of actually lying. With rationalized hiding there is a reason why you are not sharing your knowledge.

Hadar: We decided to focus on evasive hiding and playing dumb. Although it was a hard decision, it felt theoretically stronger to focus on those two. Also, of course, empirically and practically, but I think conceptually the study worked better this way.

Smriti: I was also curious, most of our best ideas come from our lived experiences. Your personal and professional experiences, how have they shaped your research, specifically this paper?

Laura: It was originally my idea. To give you some background, we were planning a study together. Hadar was still in her PhD, and I had just started my first project as a more independent researcher. Each of us individually started to think about potential projects, and then we were thinking of how we could come together. I would call myself a person who is very open in sharing; goes out of their way to really help other people and share my knowledge. But, even I sometimes have situations and days when I don't. Very quickly we realized that up to that point, the research on knowledge hiding always gave a negative view. But then I thought, I'm not a bad person when I don't share

my knowledge. This is not because I want to hurt someone or because I don't want to share. There are probably other reasons.

And then, both Hadar and I are much more from the occupational health psychology research side. I really wanted to find out why people hide knowledge because I believe, and that's also something that we wrote in the paper, that we need to consider the intrapersonal benefits any behavior has for the actor, when we want to understand that behavior, and be able to then practically do something to help people not to show this behavior, but to share knowledge instead.

Yasin: As the Associate Editor who dealt with the paper, when I received the paper, what I really liked about it was the fact that all of us, I think irrespective of our personality, engage in knowledge hiding for whatever reason. That angle really differentiated your paper and it is something that we should talk more about. We all engage in that, and it is part of life.

Hadar: That's great that you say it because that's just realistic. In the best organizations, in the best teams, it happens.

Laura: The thing with knowledge hiding is that we do not necessarily know whether the other person hides their knowledge, or actually does not have the knowledge. There are situations when we know it, but as with any counterproductive work behavior, for example, we know that intelligence is related to being better able to show this behavior. I'm pretty sure that this would be the case for knowledge hiding as well.

[Knowledge hiding also links to entitlement and self-control](#). People who are entitled, they say, "No. You treat me like this, I'm going to hide my knowledge." And people who are low in self-control would also be more prone to react to negative intrapersonal behavior with knowledge hiding that day. It's also important to realize that sharing knowledge needs resources. These are the questions for managers to consider.

Yasin: Moving onto the review process, I want to congratulate you on your perseverance, and on your hard work. The three reviewers you had were tough; constructive and expert people in their fields, but tough. Every round of reviews got a little tougher! Part of this conversation is also to find out about your experience of publishing in *Human Relations*, good or bad, challenging or not challenging. Could you tell us how you found it?

Hadar: We went through 4 rounds of review, and it was a bit overwhelming. I think it was a very good process, but we needed persistence. As a young researcher I learnt a lot. Every comment was different from all others, sometimes contradicting themselves. And look where we are now - interviewing for the Best Paper Award. I think that's a very good takeaway for young researchers.

Yasin: Would you aim to publish in *Human Relations* in the future?

Laura: Both of us are interested in topics related to interpersonal interactions in the workplace. *Human Relations* definitely is a good outlet for that so I would submit to *Human Relations* again. What I do find challenging is the review process, but I like that *Human Relations*, in general has a broader perspective. It's not only quantitative or only qualitative.

With this paper that really helped because I started to consider adding qualitative aspects to my quantitative research as well. And I think that's where the field is moving anyways, more mixed methods.

Smriti: You are pointing out several challenges of the peer review process. The way I see it, this paper is a testament to the beauty of peer review process. You went through several rounds of reviews and ultimately, your output is way better than what you started with.

Laura: When I say that the review process was hard, this is also because it is a complex paper. We have the knowledge hiding literature, we have the work stress literature, we have the diary study as a method. There are many things that come together, and probably there's not really many people out there who are expert in all three of them. Every reviewer comes in with their expertise, and this also explains why the reviews were so different. It became clear that we really had to do a much better job in explaining it, so that everybody can understand what we did, why we did it, and what it means, and the conclusions that we draw make sense.

Hadar: The experience with *Human Relations* is that it is at the junction between organizational behavior, occupational health psychology, and management. And especially as young researchers, *Human Relations* can make a real difference. It has an impact that not every journal has.

Laura: If I may add, we are psychologists, but we are also looking at management. It's not so easy to find journals that are open to these types of topics and also methodological approaches but are still well received within management sciences.

Smriti: Your data were quite impressive. Collecting data from 101 employees. Yielding 615 work days, that's not an easy task. Were there any challenges during data collection stage or were there any other challenges at different stages of the paper?

Hadar: It was real big project of data collection - finding the people, optimizing the data, cleaning, analyzing such complex data.

Laura: I must say we were extremely lucky because we were supervising students for their empirical thesis. In the German system it is typical that students must do their own research projects. We develop students, and help them in writing their thesis, and just learning how to do solid research. But at the same time, there's also the advantage of getting data that can be used. I call it a win-win-win situation because the students really learn something valuable.

Smriti: Let me ask you another question. Most likely your paper will be influential, not just this year, but for the foreseeable future. How do you see your paper shaping management theory? Not just on knowledge hiding, but also counterproductive behaviors, or workplace behaviors, in general.

Hadar: We have worked on this for years. I was pregnant when we collected data, and my child is going to school next year! I think only this year I realized how influential it is when we were together at SIOP in Seattle. We spoke about it, and then I understood the impact of the paper for the wider world of management theory – providing that realistic point of view. The construct, it sounds very specific, but when you think about it, it's a very, very wide behavior. Knowledge hiding relates strongly to other interpersonal behaviors. I would like to see it discussed more in relation to resources, to wellbeing, to integration.

- Laura: I fully agree. It's so easy to say after a while someone doesn't share their knowledge, they're always hiding their knowledge. Our research shows that it's much more likely that there are reasons behind such behaviors that are not just related to someone's personality. That such behaviors are very likely to be dependent on the whole work situation. If you want people to share their knowledge, we need to give them enough resources. Time to actually share, or try to come up with some routines of knowledge sharing where we can say, "All right, we have this one meeting every week where we reserve time for knowledge to be shared. Everyone can save their questions for this meeting, and then everybody can share." I would say, the really broader perspective is to always look at both sides of the coin.
- Smriti: Your study also has really broad implications if we think about it from a generational perspective. The issue is the younger employees might get exploited a lot because especially in terms of new technology, they bring a lot of new knowledge. Are they better off hiding it? If organizations listen to your advice, and provide the right resources, then that issue, it'll be a moot point. Younger employees can really benefit if managers pay attention to your implications. You have to present your findings or knowledge in more venues, so more managers will listen and act on it.
- Laura: Yeah, the topic of knowledge hiding receives great interest in the media and so on. I think it is because everybody does it, and people want to understand more about it. I have some other research that's not published yet, but we had this idea that people might feel guilty at night, and then they don't recover on days when they play dumb. And the thing is that we do find this as one indirect effect because playing dumb hurts their self-reported task or job performance because actually, most people do believe that sharing knowledge is part of their job.
- If they don't do it, they feel like "I didn't actually perform well today". But then again, we also find that on days when people are playing dumb more they feel less guilty because they are less exhausted. That's the second part of our model in *Human Relations* as well.
- Leading back to *Human Relations*, it is a journal that is focused on the understanding of why people act how they act when they are together with other people and also what does this do to the person themselves. There are so many avenues for development - from a more occupational health psychology perspective or looking at the intraindividual effects that these things have on employees.
- Smriti: It's obvious you are passionate about this topic, this area of research. But what I find interesting is you are suggesting so many avenues for further theory development in this area. I also wanted to hear some final words from you for new scholars, or just readers of the journal. Do you have any specific advice for those two audiences?
- Hadar: I wanted to say be brave. Be brave, as you write. Laura wrote on a LinkedIn comment to someone, "Every paper has a home." Look at the nice and warm home we found for this paper. If you're working hard, and you're doing it right, then at some point it will pay off.
- Laura: Just do it. Be realistic, but still aim high. I'm definitely not a fan of sending every paper to the absolute top journal. That's what I mean with being realistic, but also, there is a bit of luck or chance involved in this process. My experience is that with every process at every journal or every review round, even if it gets rejected, you can always make your paper better.

- Smriti: What I'm hearing from you is focus on fit. If your paper fits with the journal, it will make it. You have to be prepared to take rejections. Rejection doesn't mean your idea is bad, it just means maybe there wasn't a great fit with that journal. Go to another one where the fit will be better, and stick to your convictions. But the biggest thing I'm hearing is you have to be prepared to do a lot of hard work. Yasin why don't you say a few words about the review process from the point of view of Associate Editor?
- Yasin: I would say I really learned a lot from this paper. I enjoyed it. I learned a lot from a methodological perspective as well as from a theoretical angle. The review process itself at *Human Relations*, is to try to be constructive so even if we desk reject, and I desk reject a lot, we often still hear from the authors that they're thankful and they appreciate it.
- It is easy to feel isolated and hurt by comments from different sets of reviewers in different rounds. I aim to hear the words, "Thank you, this has been helpful. We appreciate it." I believe that's the philosophy of all our associate editors. When it comes to making a decision about desk rejection, we try to write specific decision letters; notifying what authors can do in order to improve their paper and making it clear they're welcome to resubmit again to *Human Relations* if they can handle this. We also try to do this quickly so that the time of everybody is saved, and that they can allocate and focus their energy, their resources, in the right way, in the right time. This was my experience as an author, and also as a reviewer, as an associate editor too.
- Smriti: Yes, we definitely try to develop and nurture. It's not our goal to critique and reject. Even when we reject, basically we say, "Hey, you had a good idea. We think you should work on this and this. If you can address it, come back. Otherwise, design another study and please come back because we love making new friends."
- Laura: We would like to say a special thank you to our Associate Editor, Yasin, because I think both of us really enjoyed how you handled the whole process and found your comments very helpful.
- Yasin: It was a total enjoyment for me, and I'm very proud of it. We expect more papers from you then in the future.
- Hadar: Absolutely!