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The Impact of Negative Workplace Gossip and Narcissistic Leadership on Behavioral Cynicism and Knowledge Hiding: The Moderating Effect of Workplace Spirituality

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Abstract

Background/Problem: Lecturers at public universities in East Java, Indonesia, often face toxic workplace dynamics such as negative workplace gossip and narcissistic leadership. These behaviors are associated with emotional fatigue, distrust, knowledge hiding, and behavioral cynicism. However, the potential buffering role of workplace spirituality in such environments remains underexplored.

Objective/Purpose: This study investigates the influence of negative workplace gossip and narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding, while also examining the moderating role of workplace spirituality.

Design and Methodology: A total of 257 lecturers from the faculty of economics and business at public universities in East Java participated in the study. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Results: Negative workplace gossip significantly affects behavioral cynicism ($\beta = .32, p = .00$) and knowledge hiding ($\beta = .18, p = .02$). Narcissistic leadership positively influences behavioral cynicism ($\beta = .21, p = .00$) and knowledge hiding ($\beta = .26, p = .01$). Workplace spirituality moderates the impact of gossip on behavioral cynicism ($\beta = -.17, p = .03$) and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.13, p = .04$), and also moderates the effect of narcissistic leadership on both behavioral cynicism ($\beta = -.22, p = .00$) and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.23, p = .03$).

Conclusion and Implications: The findings underscore the value of structured interventions that enhance workplace spirituality through behavioral approaches such as mindfulness training, reflective practice sessions, and prosocial behavior programs to reduce cynicism, discourage knowledge hiding, and strengthen openness, trust, and collaboration. This study contributes novel insights into how workplace spirituality can buffer the negative effects of narcissistic leadership and negative workplace gossip on behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding in higher education institutions.

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In today's academic and organizational environments, two critical employee outcomes that deserve attention are behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding. Behavioral cynicism, characterized by negative attitudes, distrust, and skepticism toward organizational policies and leaders, weakens organizational commitment and collaboration (Aboramadan, 2021; Dean et al., 1998). Likewise, knowledge hiding—the deliberate concealment of knowledge when it is requested—hampers organizational learning and innovation, particularly in higher education institutions where knowledge creation and dissemination are the core missions (Connelly et al., 2012; Schmid et al., 2021). These outcomes reduce trust, damage collegiality, and ultimately threaten institutional effectiveness.

In this context, internal factors such as workplace negative gossip and narcissistic leadership have gained significant attention due to their substantial impact on employee behavior (Khan et al., 2022). Employee self-concept particularly their organizational self-esteem and perceived membership status serves as a critical psychological mechanism that links negative gossip to behavioral outcomes (Kong, 2018). For many employees, becoming the subject of negative talk is often unavoidable, and such gossip frequently disrupts institutional functioning and organizational health (Kahya & Yanar, 2022). Recent global data reveal that over 58% of employees observe workplace gossip weekly, and about 33% hear it daily (Robinson, 2025). These issues highlight the urgent need to explore potential protective factors that can reduce the harmful impact of toxic workplace behaviors.

Negative gossip in the workplace can significantly reduce morale, trigger unethical behavior, and intensify tendencies toward knowledge hiding as individuals seek to protect their egos (Khan et al., 2022). Gossip diminishes prosocial behaviors such as helping and collaboration (Cheng et al., 2023), while also fostering behavioral cynicism, often mediated by employee silence and job-related negative gossip (Aboramadan, 2021). As negative gossip spreads, trust within the organization deteriorates leading to perceptions of injustice and unfair treatment, which ultimately contribute to cynicism and reduce organizational citizenship behavior.

A similarly damaging internal factor is narcissistic leadership. Narcissistic leaders often place their personal goals above team or organizational interests, exhibiting traits such as egocentrism, inflated self-views, arrogance, and lack of empathy (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). These behaviors can create a toxic work climate, lower trust, and foster unethical practices among employees. Narcissistic leadership is frequently linked to dysfunctional decision-making, favoritism, and unpredictability, which collectively erode morale and increase skepticism among subordinates (Ahadzadeh et al., 2023). One notable consequence of narcissistic leadership is the emergence of knowledge hiding behaviors. Employees may withhold knowledge due to fears of being exploited, fearing that their contributions will be misappropriated by narcissistic leaders for personal recognition (Schmid et al., 2021). This fear is compounded in environments lacking psychological safety, where open sharing of ideas or concerns feels risky. As a result, innovation, collaboration, and overall organizational performance suffer.

While the individual effects of negative gossip and narcissistic leadership have been studied, research examining how these two factors interact and jointly influence outcomes like behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding remains limited (Kuo et al., 2020). To address this gap, this study introduces workplace spirituality as a moderating variable. Distinct from religious practice, workplace spirituality emphasizes meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment of personal and organizational values (Muavia et al., 2022). It serves as a buffer against organizational stress and toxicity, potentially reducing cynicism and discouraging knowledge hiding, especially in environments led by narcissistic figures (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

Exploring these dynamics is particularly relevant in university settings, which, despite their mission of knowledge creation and dissemination, are not immune to toxic internal politics (Pariyanti et al., 2021). In such institutions, competition for academic and administrative positions often gives rise to political maneuvering, destructive conflict, and leadership dysfunction (Modem et al., 2023). Within this environment, gossip may be weaponized to undermine colleagues, distort reputations, and manipulate perceptions particularly toward those who make unintentional errors in their academic work. These experiences can heighten stress, diminish psychological safety, and lead faculty members to withhold innovative ideas and research contributions.

Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how negative gossip and narcissistic leadership two pervasive internal factors contribute to behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding, and how these effects may be moderated by workplace spirituality. A better understanding of these dynamics is expected to offer practical insights for improving the organizational climate, particularly in academic institutions.

Literature Review

The literature review elaborates on the foundational frameworks of social exchange theory (SET) and conservation of resources (COR) theory, which provide the theoretical lens for this study. In addition, it synthesizes prior empirical research that supports the proposed relationships among the key variables: negative workplace gossip, narcissistic leadership, behavioral cynicism, knowledge hiding, and workplace spirituality.

Theoretical background

The social exchange theory (SET), proposed by Blau (1964), provides a framework for understanding how employees' workplace experiences shape their attitudes and behaviors. Positive experiences foster commitment and supportive behavior, while negative ones may trigger cynicism, irresponsible conduct, or turnover intentions (Shrestha & Jena, 2021). A negative workplace environment marked by poor communication, unfair leadership, and psychological insecurity further promotes dysfunctional dynamics such as negative workplace gossip and narcissistic leadership, which erode trust and organizational climate (Kahya & Yanar, 2022; Kuo et al., 2020). This study focuses on behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding, which are theoretically explained by SET through negative reciprocity and by COR theory through individuals' tendency to protect resources such as knowledge when facing stress or threats.

Negative Workplace Gossip and Behavioral Cynicism

Though workplace gossip is sometimes perceived as a harmless or even bonding activity, negative workplace gossip defined as the spreading of false, harmful, or damaging information can be highly detrimental to the organizational climate. This kind of gossip tends to flourish in environments where communication is unclear or opaque (Kahya & Yanar, 2022), and it is often exacerbated by factors such as harsh supervision and violations of psychological contracts (Kuo et al., 2020). From the perspective of SET, gossip represents a violation of reciprocity and fairness in workplace relationships, eroding trust and triggering negative responses (Blau, 1964).

Targeted employees often experience emotional distress and social alienation, while observers of such gossip may internalize feelings of distrust and skepticism toward organizational motives. This fosters behavioral cynicism, which refers to a belief system characterized by negative attitudes toward the organization, often expressed through sarcasm, emotional detachment, and pessimism (Pertiwi et al., 2023). Individuals exhibiting behavioral cynicism are more likely to experience lower job satisfaction, diminished organizational commitment, and increased turnover intentions (Akhlaghimofrad & Farmanesh, 2021). Furthermore, cynicism can serve as a psychological defense mechanism a way for employees to cope with perceived injustices or inconsistencies within the organization (Hobfoll, 2001). In line with conservation of resources (COR) theory, gossip threatens valuable resources such as trust, reputation, and belonging, which employees attempt to conserve by disengaging and adopting cynical attitudes. This link between workplace gossip and behavioral cynicism underscores the importance of understanding how informal communication dynamics shape employee perceptions and attitudes. Thus, it is proposed:

H1: Negative workplace gossip has a positive relationship with behavioral cynicism.

Negative Workplace Gossip and Knowledge Hiding

Negative workplace gossip is known to have a significant impact on employee behavior, particularly increasing the tendency to engage in knowledge hiding, which refers to the intentional withholding of work-related information from colleagues. Research by Anand et al. (2022) suggests that negative gossip leads to a decline in trust among coworkers, which encourages employees to withhold information that should ideally be shared. This creates psychological insecurity, which worsens the work environment, hinders collaboration, and harms organizational goals. While much of the literature has emphasized indirect effects of gossip through reduced trust, other studies have demonstrated more immediate, direct effects, showing that gossip directly triggers knowledge hiding as a self-protective behavior (Zou et al., 2020). From a SET

lens, gossip represents a broken exchange that employees reciprocate by withholding resources, while from a COR perspective, knowledge hiding serves as a defensive strategy to preserve scarce psychological and social resources.

According to Zou et al. (2020), harmful gossip results in an environment filled with distrust and anxiety regarding reputation and social evaluation. Drawing on conservation of resources (COR) theory, employees may perceive gossip as a threat to their social and psychological resources. In such cases, knowledge hiding becomes a protective strategy to conserve these resources and prevent further loss. Employees who feel threatened are more likely to conceal knowledge to avoid retaliation or exposure that could damage their careers. In this context, knowledge hiding serves as a protective strategy, where valuable information is intentionally withheld for personal gain or to shield oneself from potential social risks. Gao et al. (2024) highlights that defensive behaviors triggered by negative gossip can further exacerbate distrust within the organization. This leads individuals to believe that sharing knowledge could be used against them, making them more inclined to withhold information. This influence ultimately reduces positive interactions among coworkers, which are essential for innovation and organizational learning. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Negative workplace gossip has a positive relationship with knowledge hiding.

Narcissistic Leadership and Behavioral Cynicism

Narcissistic leadership, which is marked by excessive self-focus, arrogance, and a lack of empathy, has increasingly been recognized as a defining feature of toxic work environments (Asad & Sadler-Smith, 2020). Leaders who exhibit narcissistic traits often resist constructive feedback, monopolize decision-making processes, and prioritize personal recognition over team achievement. Such behaviors can create an organizational climate in which employees feel devalued, overlooked, and even exploited (Aboramadan, 2021).

These negative interpersonal experiences can lead employees to develop behavioral cynicism defined as an attitudinal tendency characterized by distrust, pessimism, and disillusionment toward the organization and its leadership. When employees perceive injustice and insincerity in their leaders' actions, they may begin to question the integrity and motives behind organizational practices (Okçu et al., 2023). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that mechanisms such as employee silence and workplace gossip may mediate the relationship between narcissistic leadership and employees' cynical attitudes.

Despite the robust linkages identified in the literature, it is important to emphasize that behavioral cynicism represents an internalized evaluative stance rather than an overt behavioral response. Cynicism can serve as a psychological defense mechanism a way for employees to cope with perceived injustice while conserving psychological resources. As such, narcissistic leadership may directly shape cynical cognitions and attitudes, which in turn could influence broader workplace outcomes. This dynamic remains underexplored, particularly in contexts where organizational culture may discourage open dissent. Therefore, drawing on previous theoretical and empirical insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Narcissistic leadership has a positive relationship with behavioral cynicism.

Narcissistic Leadership and Knowledge Hiding

The influence of narcissistic leadership extends beyond attitudes and also affects behavioral outcomes, such as knowledge hiding. Narcissistic leaders may create an environment where knowledge sharing is perceived as either risky or pointless (Liao et al., 2019). Employees may feel that their contributions will be appropriated or undervalued, which reduces their intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. Additionally, the fear of retaliation, favoritism, or unfair criticism from narcissistic leaders often triggers self-protective behaviors, including knowledge sabotage or hoarding (Long et al., 2023). From a COR perspective, these defensive reactions reflect employees' efforts to conserve scarce psychological resources in a hostile leadership climate. SET further explains this as a withdrawal of

resources in response to leaders who fail to uphold fair exchanges, resulting in knowledge hiding as a form of negative reciprocity.

Interestingly, while behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding are both examined as outcomes of negative leadership and toxic environments, their interrelationship remains largely unexplored in the literature. Previous research has suggested that employees who engage in knowledge hiding often display lower levels of trust and organizational commitment, further undermining team dynamics and performance. It is plausible that cynical employees, who are already disengaged and distrustful, are more likely to hide knowledge. This potential causal link warrants further investigation in future research. Understanding the intersection between leadership style and knowledge management practices could provide deeper insights into how organizations can mitigate knowledge hiding behaviors and promote a healthier work environment. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Narcissistic leadership will have a positive relationship with knowledge hiding.

Workplace Spirituality as moderator

While H2–H4 highlight the destructive effects of gossip and narcissistic leadership, it is equally important to consider protective factors that may reduce these harms. Drawing on COR theory and stress-buffering models, employees are more resilient when they have access to psychological resources that help them cope with social and organizational threats. Workplace spirituality (WPS) represents such a resource, and at the same time, from the SET perspective, it strengthens positive exchanges by fostering trust and reciprocity. Moreover, WPS aligns with positive organizational behavior (POB), which emphasizes hope, resilience, and optimism as capacities that enable employees to thrive despite adversity (Luthans, 2002).

The concept of workplace spirituality (WPS) is multidimensional and reflects an individual's pursuit of meaning, purpose, and connection, both with the transcendent and within their professional environment (Koenig et al., 2004). While spirituality and religion often intersect, spirituality is broader and may exist independently of specific religious doctrines. In organizational contexts, WPS is reflected in how employees find purpose in their work, experience a sense of belonging with colleagues, and perceive alignment between their personal values and organizational values (Shrestha & Jena, 2021). This connection has been emphasized by Rathee and Rajain (2020), who describe WPS as a unifying force between the individual and their workplace.

Karakas (2010) offers three key perspectives on workplace spirituality: the human resource perspective, which focuses on enhancing well-being and quality of life; the philosophical perspective, which interprets spirituality as a source of purpose and meaning in work; and the interpersonal perspective, which emphasizes building a sense of community and mutual connection among employees. Within these dimensions, WPS enables individuals to self-regulate, cope with adversity, and maintain job satisfaction, even in challenging environments (Rathee & Rajain, 2020). By cultivating positive psychological capacities consistent with POB, WPS empowers employees to resist the negative influence of gossip and narcissistic leadership.

Beyond its inherent benefits, WPS also functions as a moderating variable in the face of adverse organizational dynamics (Pariyanti et al., 2021; 2022). For example, negative workplace gossip, which often fosters cynicism and mistrust, can be counteracted by WPS through its promotion of values such as honesty, empathy, and mutual respect (Kuo et al., 2020). Similarly, in contexts where knowledge hiding emerges due to fear or competitiveness, WPS can cultivate trust and openness, reduce secrecy, and support collaboration (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

In leadership dynamics, WPS may act as a buffer against the negative effects of narcissistic leadership, which is frequently associated with egocentrism and lack of empathy. WPS fosters compassion and inclusivity, which in turn can mitigate outcomes such as behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding two behavioral patterns often linked to narcissistic leadership. Taken together, workplace spirituality has the

potential to reshape organizational culture by encouraging ethical behavior, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and minimizing destructive practices. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and behavioral cynicism.

H6: Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding.

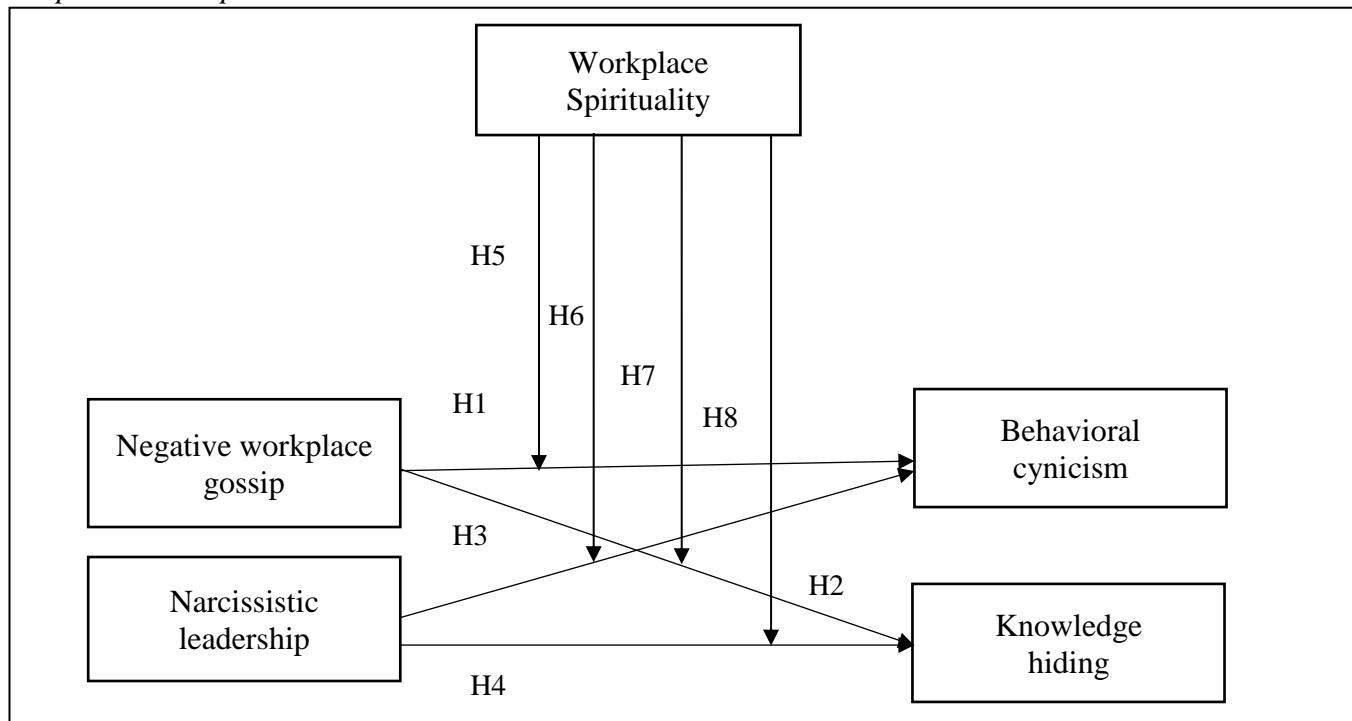
H7: Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism.

H8: Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and knowledge hiding.

Through an overview of the basic theories and the proposed hypotheses about the relationship negative workplace gossip, narcissistic leadership, behavioral cynicism knowledge hiding, workplace spirituality, the authors propose the conceptual research model as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Proposed Conceptual Framework



Method

Participants

The respondents were lecturers from the faculty of economics and business at public universities in East Java, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was employed, targeting lecturers who met the study's inclusion criteria (full-time lecturers with at least one year of service). The selection of these universities was based on accessibility, willingness to participate, and their representativeness of the academic environment in East Java. According to official records, there are 11 public universities in East Java, and this study involved those where formal permission and access to respondents could be obtained. Data were collected both online and offline; for the online approach, electronic questionnaire links were sent via email to designated contact persons at each campus, while for the offline method, printed questionnaires were directly distributed and collected on-site. This cross-sectional study used a structured

questionnaire measuring demographics, negative workplace gossip, workplace spirituality, narcissistic leadership, behavioral cynicism, and knowledge hiding. To reduce common method bias, two questionnaire versions were employed one for demographics and one for research variables arranged systematically, maintaining anonymity and providing clear instructions to minimize socially desirable responses. A total of 353 questionnaires were distributed, and 312 valid responses were obtained, yielding a response rate of 88.4%. The minimum required sample size was determined using Cochran's formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, ensuring representativeness of the target population. Of the 312 valid responses, 257 were retained for further analysis after excluding incomplete or unusable data. A detailed description of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Instruments

The behavioral cynicism construct was measured using a 4-item questionnaire adapted from Dean et al. (1998). An example item is, "I complain about events at the university to friends outside the campus environment." Knowledge hiding was assessed with a 6-item questionnaire adopted from Connelly et al. (2012), with an example item, "I agree to help a coworker but provide information that is different from what they want." Negative workplace gossip was measured using 3 items from Chandra and Robinson (2009). An example item is, "In the last six months, coworkers and/or superiors have spread unpleasant gossip about me in the workplace." Workplace spirituality was measured with 11 items adapted from Ashmos and Duchon (2000). An example item is, "I always interpret the relationship between work and social goodness." Finally, narcissistic leadership was measured using a 6-item scale (Celiker & Guzeller, 2023), with sample items such as, "My leader thinks that the success of the organization is due to him or her."

All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with anchors adapted to match each construct (e.g., from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree or from never to always). When necessary, the original English items were translated into Indonesian and then back-translated to ensure conceptual and linguistic equivalence (Swider et al., 2023). The construct reliability, validity, and factor loadings are presented in Table 2.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS AMOS for structural equation modeling (SEM). Analyses began with average variance extracted (AVE) to assess convergent validity, followed by construct validity and composite reliability (CR). All CR scores exceeded .70, and AVE values were above .50, indicating adequate reliability and convergent validity. To ensure accurate moderation analysis, all predictor and moderator variables were mean-centered before creating interaction terms, reducing multicollinearity and improving interpretability of interaction effects.

Model fit was assessed using Chi-square (χ^2), degrees of freedom (df), χ^2/df ratio, normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), compared to established cut-off criteria. Correlation between negative workplace gossip and narcissistic leadership was allowed in the model to reflect realistic associations between these predictors, which helps provide more accurate fit indices and parameter estimates.

Results

Sample Description

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in this study. This table provides an overview of the profile of the respondents who contributed to this study, reflecting diversity in terms of gender, age, education, and business experience.

Table 1
Demographic Description of Respondents

| Demographics | Category | Total | Percentage |
|--|--------------------|-------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 112 | 43.58% |
| | Female | 145 | 56.42% |
| Age | 21–30 years | 94 | 36.58% |
| | 31–40 years | 104 | 40.47% |
| | 41 years and above | 59 | 22.95% |
| Level of education | Master's | 191 | 74.32% |
| | Doctorate/Ph.D. | 66 | 25.68% |
| Work experience of employees (years) | 1–5 years | 84 | 32.68% |
| | 6–10 years | 82 | 31.91% |
| | 11–15 years | 56 | 21.79% |
| | More than 16th | 35 | 13.62% |

This study involved 257 respondents. The majority were female (56.42%) and aged between 31 and 40 years (40.47%). Most respondents held a Master's degree (74.32%) and had between 1 to 10 years of work experience (64.59%). These findings indicate that the respondents possess a high level of education and diverse work experience, enabling them to provide representative insights into organizational dynamics.

Table 2
Validity and Reliability of Scales

| Variable | No. of Items | Factor loading | CR | Cronbach's alpha | AVE |
|---------------------------|--------------|----------------|-----|------------------|-----|
| Knowledge hiding | 6 | .71 – .81 | .88 | .86 | .59 |
| Negative workplace gossip | 3 | .78 – .89 | .84 | .81 | .64 |
| Narcissistic leadership | 6 | .74 – .78 | .87 | .83 | .64 |
| Workplace spirituality | 11 | .72 – .85 | .95 | .94 | .63 |
| Knowledge hiding | 6 | .71 – .81 | .88 | .86 | .59 |

Based on the results, all research variables meet the criteria for reliability and convergent validity. The factor loadings range from .71 to .89, indicating that each indicator effectively reflects its latent construct. The (CR) values (.84–.95) and Cronbach's alpha values (.81–.94) exceed the minimum threshold of .70, confirming strong internal consistency. In addition, the AVE values (.59–.64) are above the .50 cutoff, suggesting that more than half of the variance of the indicators are explained by their constructs. Therefore, the measurement instruments used in this study are both reliable and valid for further analysis.

Table 3
Comparison of the Measurement Model

| Parameter | Cut-off Value | Result | Interpretation |
|-------------|---------------|--------|----------------|
| χ^2/df | < 3.00 | 1.53 | Good Fit |
| DF | >0 | 41 | Good fit |
| GFI | $\geq .90$ | 0.77 | Poor fit |
| AGFI | $\geq .90$ | 0.78 | Poor fit |
| PGFI | > .50 | 0.73 | Good fit |
| IFI | $\geq .90$ | 0.92 | Good fit |
| NFI | $\geq .90$ | 0.86 | Marginal fit |
| TLI | $\geq .90$ | 0.91 | Good fit |
| RMSEA | $\leq .08$ | 0.05 | Good fit |

The results of the goodness-of-fit evaluation indicate that most indices such as χ^2/df , IFI, TLI, and RMSEA fall within the good fit category. Although the GFI and AGFI values are below the ideal cut-off points (.77 and .78, respectively), this can still be accepted considering the sensitivity of these indices to sample size and model complexity (Hair et al., 2013). Therefore, the model is considered suitable to proceed to the hypothesis testing stage. Next, the results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Hypothesis Testing, Direct, and Indirect Effects

| | Hypothesis | Path coefficient | p-value | Conclusion |
|----|--|------------------|---------|------------|
| H1 | Negative workplace gossip positively affects behavioral cynicism. | .32 | .00 | Supported |
| H2 | Negative workplace gossip positively affects knowledge hiding. | .18 | .02 | Supported |
| H3 | Narcissistic leadership positively affects behavioral cynicism. | .21 | .00 | Supported |
| H4 | Narcissistic leadership positively affects knowledge hiding. | .26 | .01 | Supported |
| H5 | Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and behavioral cynicism. | -.17 | .03 | Supported |
| H6 | Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding. | -.13 | .04 | Supported |
| H7 | Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism. | -.22 | .00 | Supported |
| H8 | Workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and knowledge hiding. | -.23 | .03 | Supported |

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The analysis presented in the table reveals important insights into the workplace environment that warrant further examination. It shows a strong and significant relationship between negative workplace gossip and behavioral cynicism ($\beta = .32, p = .00$). This suggests that an increase in negative gossip within the workplace leads to a higher tendency for employees to adopt a skeptical attitude toward organizational behavior. Consequently, the first hypothesis is supported, emphasizing the importance of managing and controlling gossip to preserve the integrity of the organizational culture.

Moreover, a significant positive relationship is found between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding ($\beta = .18, p = .02$). While this relationship is not as strong as the one with behavioral cynicism, the significant p-value indicates that it has a real statistical impact. This suggests that negative gossip can influence employees' willingness to conceal knowledge. Therefore, fostering a culture of open communication and trust is essential in minimizing knowledge hiding.

The third hypothesis also receives strong support, showing that narcissistic leadership has a significant positive influence on behavioral cynicism ($\beta = .21, p = .00$). These results indicate that narcissistic leaders, who tend to focus on themselves and dismiss the opinions of their employees, can cultivate a skeptical attitude within the workplace. The low p-value (.00) highlights the substantial impact of narcissistic leadership on creating a cynical work environment. Consequently, organizations should consider strategies to address narcissistic leadership behaviors that negatively affect organizational culture.

Additionally, the fourth hypothesis is supported, showing a significant positive relationship between narcissistic leadership and knowledge hiding ($\beta = .26, p = .01$). This finding suggests that narcissistic leaders may encourage knowledge hiding within the organization. Such leadership behaviors can hinder collaboration and the free exchange of knowledge, which calls for organizational strategies to counteract knowledge hiding induced by narcissistic leadership.

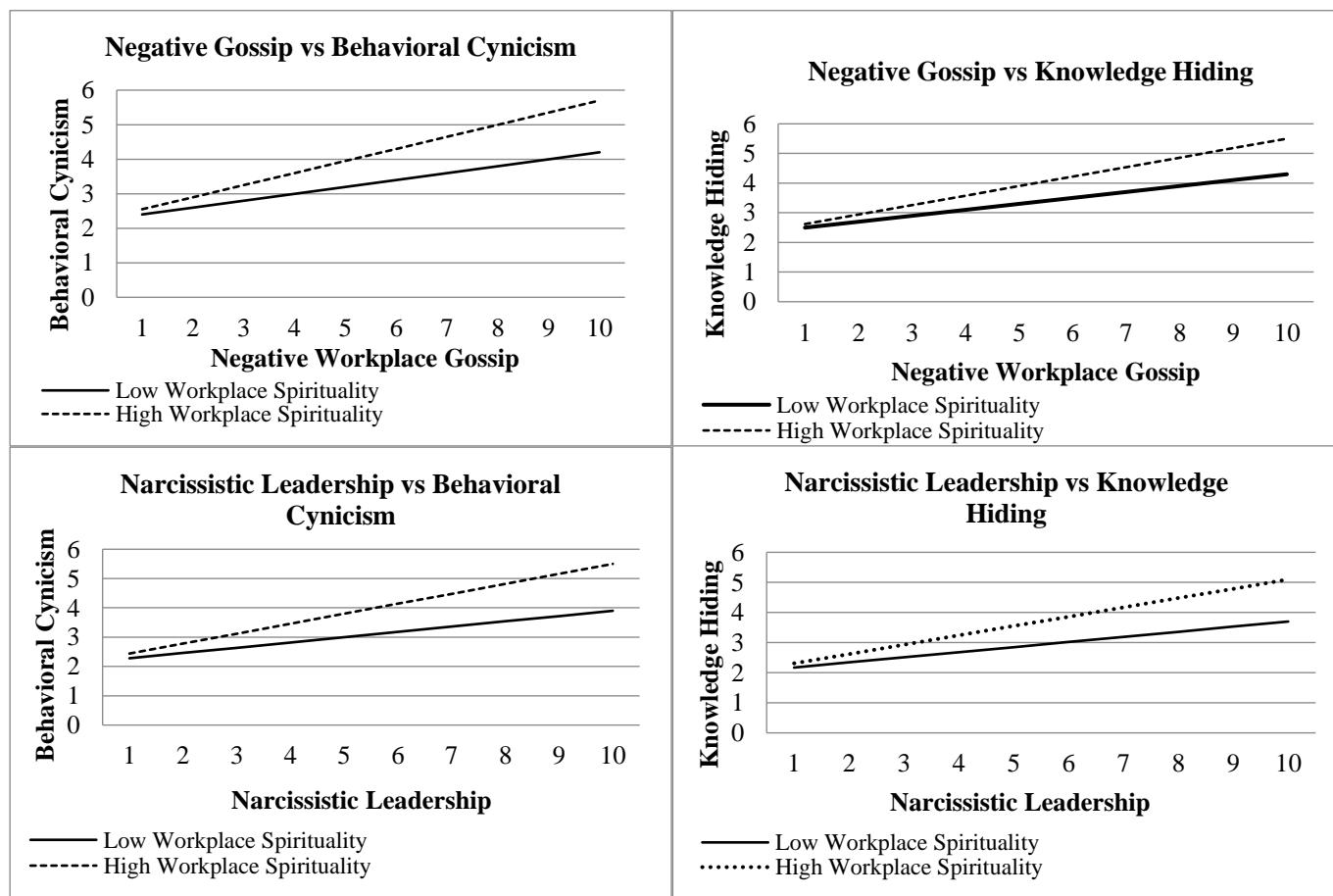
The fifth hypothesis is also supported, indicating that workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and behavioral cynicism ($\beta = -.17, p = .03$). These results suggest that the presence of spirituality in the workplace helps reduce the negative effects of gossip on employees' cynical attitudes. By fostering a culture that incorporates spiritual values, organizations can create a more positive and collaborative work environment.

Similarly, the sixth hypothesis is confirmed, indicating that workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.13, p = .04$). This shows that spirituality in the workplace can reduce employees' tendencies to hide knowledge, emphasizing the role of spiritual values in promoting openness and collaboration.

Finally, the seventh and eighth hypotheses are also supported. The seventh hypothesis suggests that workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism ($\beta = -.22, p = .00$). This indicates that spirituality can mitigate the negative impact of narcissistic leadership on employees' attitudes, helping to reduce cynicism. The eighth hypothesis further supports this, demonstrating that workplace spirituality also moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.23, p = .03$). This shows that spirituality can reduce the likelihood of knowledge hiding in environments affected by narcissistic leadership. The following graph complements the research results.

Figure 2

Moderating Effects of Workplace Spirituality on Workplace Gossip and Narcissistic Leadership



The dashed lines indicate that when workplace spirituality is low, the negative impact of gossip and narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding is stronger. In contrast, the solid lines show that when workplace spirituality is high, these negative effects are weakened. This indicates the negative moderation effects of workplace spirituality on the relationships between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.13$), narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism ($\beta = -.22$), and narcissistic leadership and knowledge hiding ($\beta = -.23$), suggesting that workplace spirituality serves as a protective moderator by buffering the adverse effects of negative interpersonal dynamics on employee behavior.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research emphasize that negative workplace gossip and narcissistic leadership positively influence behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding in public universities. Furthermore, workplace spirituality effectively moderates these relationships, reducing the negative impacts of gossip and narcissistic leadership on employee attitudes and knowledge-sharing behaviors.

This study reveals that negative workplace gossip and narcissistic leadership are critical challenges in academic settings, as they contribute to behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding among faculty members. When targeted by gossip, faculty often develop distrust toward colleagues, weakening collaboration, fostering conflict, and damaging the academic climate. These findings align with previous research (Kuo et al., 2020), which shows that gossip triggers cynicism by creating feelings of alienation and organizational distrust. These results can be understood through the lens of social exchange theory (SET), which posits that trust and reciprocity are foundational to workplace relationships. When gossip erodes trust, the social exchange becomes imbalanced, resulting in withdrawal and cynicism.

Negative gossip also undermines moral integrity, leading to knowledge hiding through eroded trust, fear of consequences, job dissatisfaction, and hostile work environments (Pertiwi et al., 2023). Faculty members may withhold knowledge as a form of self-protection, further harming organizational learning. This tendency is consistent with conservation of resources (COR) theory, which explains that individuals seek to conserve their valuable resources such as knowledge, energy, and psychological well-being when threatened by negative interactions. Thus, faculty exposed to gossip may resort to knowledge hiding as a defensive strategy. Additionally, the study confirms that narcissistic leadership exacerbates behavioral cynicism. Faculty under narcissistic leaders often question their motives, feel unappreciated, and experience decreased job satisfaction (Okçu et al., 2021). Such leadership creates toxic, competitive environments that discourage collaboration and encourage knowledge hiding and sabotage (Long et al., 2023). Feelings of insecurity and perceived unfairness intensify the tendency to withhold knowledge as a response to dissatisfaction. Here, SET helps explain the mechanism, as unfair treatment disrupts the balance of social exchange, leading faculty to reciprocate with reduced commitment, cynicism, and disengagement. Likewise, COR theory suggests that knowledge hiding can be seen as an attempt to protect scarce psychological and social resources in the face of narcissistic and exploitative leadership.

Workplace spirituality has been shown to strengthen employees' personal connection to their organization and foster behaviors that support organizational goals (Muavia et al., 2022). Work environments that integrate spiritual values also help mitigate uncivil workplace behavior. This study confirms that workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and behavioral cynicism. When employees feel their work has spiritual meaning or aligns with their values (Pariyanti, et al., 2021), they become more resilient to the harmful effects of gossip and respond more wisely (Pertiwi et al., 2023). Workplace spirituality also provides emotional support and healthy coping mechanisms (Pariyanti et al., 2021), encouraging employees to seek positive interaction rather than react cynically. Moreover, it fosters mutual trust and respect among colleagues, reducing distrust fueled by gossip.

The findings also reveal that workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and knowledge hiding. This supports the view that spiritual values such as trust, appreciation, and ethical behavior can buffer the impact of harmful interactions in academic settings (Pertiwi et al., 2023). By promoting openness and cooperation, workplace spirituality helps faculty members replace defensive behaviors like knowledge hiding with collaborative knowledge sharing. With added psychological support and a sense of shared purpose, a spiritually enriched work environment contributes to a more harmonious, cooperative, and productive academic culture.

Workplace spirituality also plays a vital role in moderating the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism among faculty members. When spiritual values are emphasized in the workplace, they can serve as a buffer against the negative effects of narcissistic leadership by helping individuals find meaning in their work and feel more connected to the organization's higher purpose (Shrestha & Jena, 2021). This connection can reduce dissatisfaction and skepticism toward self-centered leadership behavior. In contrast, low levels of workplace spirituality may amplify the damaging effects of narcissistic leadership, increasing cynicism and distrust toward both leaders and the organization (Haldorai et al., 2020).

In addition, workplace spirituality also moderates the relationship between narcissistic leadership and knowledge hiding. Through the integration of ethical values, spiritual awareness, and a sense of purpose (Rathee & Rajain, 2020), spirituality can weaken narcissistic tendencies such as excessive self-interest and lack of empathy. Leaders who embody spiritual values are more likely to appreciate the contributions of others and foster meaningful workplace relationships (Paul & Jena, 2022). A spiritually grounded work culture also promotes openness and trust, reducing tendencies toward knowledge hoarding. These findings highlight the importance of cultivating a spiritually enriched work environment to counteract the negative impacts of narcissistic leadership and encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations, particularly regarding the generalization of its findings. The results may only apply to specific contexts or organizations in Indonesia, meaning they might not be relevant in other settings. Additionally, the research methods have some drawbacks, such as the sample selection not fully representing the broader target population, and the observational design of the study, which may limit the ability to fully understand cause-and-effect relationships. Other workplace variables, like organizational culture, management support, and external influences, could also impact the results.

For future research, it would be beneficial to replicate and validate this study in different settings and organizations to assess the broader applicability of the findings. Researchers could also explore mediating and moderating factors that affect the relationship between negative gossip, narcissistic leadership, workplace spirituality, and employee behavior (Kuo et al., 2020). Further studies could examine the influence of organizational culture on these relationships and propose interventions that could be applied within organizations. Long-term studies could offer valuable insights into how these relationships evolve over time and the lasting effects of negative gossip, narcissistic leadership, and workplace spirituality. Expanding research in these areas will deepen our understanding of these dynamics and aid in developing more effective strategies for fostering a positive and productive work environment.

Implications for Behavioral Science

This study advances behavioral science by showing how workplace spirituality moderates the relationship between negative workplace dynamics such as gossip and narcissistic leadership and behavioral outcomes like cynicism and knowledge hiding among faculty members. Beyond theoretical contributions, the results highlight clear practical implications for human resource management in Indonesian higher education. The findings suggest that human resource management units and faculty leaders should focus on interventions that directly shape behaviors at work, rather than only addressing structural issues. For example, universities can design leadership training programs that target behavioral

change reducing authoritarian tendencies and encouraging empathetic, servant-like leadership styles. Similarly, structured mentoring and peer-support groups can foster pro-social behaviors such as trust, open communication, and collaborative knowledge sharing (Pertiwi et al., 2023). Regular value-based reflection sessions or faith-informed activities (e.g., Friday gatherings) can reinforce ethical behavior and discourage destructive interpersonal practices like gossip. By embedding such behavior-focused interventions, universities not only reduce cynicism and knowledge hoarding but also promote healthier interpersonal relationships, greater engagement, and sustainable collaboration within the academic community.

Conclusion

This study concludes that negative workplace gossip and narcissistic leadership significantly increase behavioral cynicism and knowledge hiding among faculty members in academic environments. However, workplace spirituality plays a vital moderating role by buffering these negative effects, fostering resilience, trust, and ethical behavior. While the findings are situated in academia, they may also have broader relevance to other organizational contexts, though with necessary caution in generalization.

These findings underscore the importance of integrating workplace spirituality and ethical leadership development into organizational strategies. Institutions should consider policies and leadership training programs that cultivate spiritual values, promote ethical practices, and strengthen collaborative cultures. By doing so, organizations can reduce skepticism, prevent knowledge hoarding, and enhance both employee well-being and overall effectiveness.

Declarations

AI Usage Statement: The authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing, editing, data analysis, or preparation of this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of the Research Institutions and Community Service Ethics Committee of Universitas Jenderal Soedirman Indonesia, (protocol code, 09/UN25.06/I/2025 dated 6 January 2025), for studies involving humans.

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