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The Impact of Perceived Relative Qualification on Knowledge Hiding: Modeling of Peer Ostracism as a Mediator and Humble Leadership as a Moderator

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Abstract:

As employees' knowledge-hiding behavior may lead to massive economic losses for organizations, this research aims to investigate how employees with relatively high qualifications tend to hide knowledge from their peers under the mediating role of peer ostracism. The study also explores the moderating role of humble leadership in the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. Data was collected from 408 employees working in banks located in Damietta and Port Said governorates. The findings indicate that perceived relative qualification does not directly impact knowledge hiding but significantly increases peer ostracism. Further, peer ostracism has a significant positive impact on knowledge hiding. The results also confirmed a full mediating role of peer ostracism in the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding. Finally, humble leadership was found to moderate the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. The research findings provide valuable implications for both scholars and bank managers.

Keywords: perceived relative qualification, social comparison theory, knowledge hiding, peer ostracism, humble leadership.

1. Introduction:

In the age of the digital economy, knowledge has become a very crucial resource for individuals and businesses to acquire and preserve competitive advantage (Shafique et al., 2023). Knowledge management involves essential procedures that can support the long-term sustainable development of economic entities (Perotti et al., 2022). As a result, organizational research has increasingly focused on knowledge management (Chen et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2021). Although knowledge management heavily relies on knowledge sharing, recent research has indicated that there is a lack of knowledge transfer between employees (Rao et al., 2021). It is evident that most of the literature on this topic focuses on knowledge-sharing behavior in organizations, while knowledge-hiding, a closely related but different phenomenon, has attracted relatively less attention (Garg et al.,

2022). In particular, knowledge hiding refers to an intentional effort to conceal information that is demanded by others (Connelly et al., 2012). Knowledge hiding is a serious risk that impedes organizational achievement and disrupts organizational performance (Afshan et al., 2022).

Given the harmful outcomes of knowledge hiding, prior research has primarily focused on identifying its causes. Specifically, several researchers have recognized the critical role of perceived overqualification in fostering employees' knowledge-hiding behavior (Almagharbeh and Ilkhanizadeh, 2022; Khan et al., 2023; Shafique et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2022). However, recent studies have indicated that it is important to focus on employees' qualifications relative to those of workgroup members since employee assessments of overqualification occur in the social environment, where comparisons with coworkers occur frequently (Jahantab et al., 2021). Despite this recognition, little is known about the specific mechanisms linking perceived relative qualification to knowledge hiding, mainly when investigating potential mediators (Li et al., 2022). Furthermore, leadership has been identified as a significant factor influencing employees' knowledge-related behaviors. For instance, Oubrich et al. (2020) called for further exploration of leadership styles' impact on knowledge management practices, while Al-Hawamdeh (2023) highlighted that there is still a need to know about the impact of humble leadership on knowledge hiding. Accordingly, this study seeks to address three key research questions: How does perceived relative qualification affect knowledge hiding? How does peer ostracism mediate this relationship? How can humble leadership moderate the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding?

This research contributes to the knowledge-hiding literature in three ways. First, it responds to the call of Li et al. (2022), who emphasized the need to further explore the intervening mechanisms linking perceived relative qualification to knowledge hiding. In addition, Zhang et al. (2022) noted that more research is required to understand how group members react when working alongside overqualified employees. Second, the current research sheds light on how leaders can control knowledge hiding. Third, this research focuses on the phenomenon of knowledge hiding in the banking sector. Researchers have acknowledged that the banking industry, which is a subset of the financial services sector, is crucial to the growth of the economy. Investigating the phenomenon of knowledge hiding in this sector is therefore essential (Mohsin et al., 2021).

To address these issues, the author developed a new conceptual model that integrates social comparison theory (Buunk and Gibbons, 2007), victim precipitation theory (Aquino and Bradfield, 2000), and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). In this model, the author has examined the mediating role of peer ostracism in the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding, thereby capturing the dynamics from an interpersonal perspective. Furthermore, the model explores how humble leadership moderates the effect of peer ostracism on employees' knowledge-hiding behavior.

This research is organized as follows: in the next section, the author briefly discusses the theories used to develop the research model. Next, the author develops the research hypothesis based on the literature discussing knowledge hiding and how it is affected by perceived relative qualification, its mechanism, and boundary condition. Afterword, the research methods taken to collect and analyze data were explained. Finally, the author explains the results and provides the conclusion.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development:

The current research focuses on examining knowledge hiding from an interactive perspective among team members. The theoretical model shown in Fig. 1 was built by merging social comparison, victim precipitation, and social exchange theories to identify experienced employees' tendency to knowledge hiding and the role of humble leadership in moderating this effect. Drawing on social comparison theory, individuals continuously assess their own abilities and opinions relative to those of others (Festinger, 1954). When others appear to be more advantaged, feelings of envy may emerge—defined as the discomfort caused by another's success—which can foster either a desire to diminish the other's advantage or to acquire it for oneself (Van de Ven, 2017). Such negative emotions often stem from wanting what one lacks. Consequently, coworkers may distance themselves from highly qualified colleagues to alleviate these envious feelings (Breidenthal et al., 2020). In this light, the present study investigates whether employees with relatively higher qualifications are more likely to experience ostracism from close coworkers due to envy triggered by social comparisons. It also seeks to explain why relatively qualified employees may tend to hide their knowledge.

To explain the relationship between perceived relative qualification and peer ostracism, victim precipitation theory was used. This theory was originally proposed in the field of criminology and maintains that in order to understand criminal activities, victims' traits and behaviors must be taken into account in addition to those of offenders (Curtis, 1974). This theory was used by organizational behavior research to examine workplace mistreatment (Dhanani et al., 2020). In the workplace, victims may intentionally or unintentionally provoke aggressive interactions from potential offenders. Individual traits or behaviors frequently operate as crucial triggering variables that lead to victimization (Aquino and Bradfield, 2000).

Further, social exchange theory was adopted to understand how ostracized employees respond to their team members and the role of their humble leader in reducing ostracized employees' propensity to hide their knowledge. According to social exchange theory, social interactions were conceptualized as a series of successive exchanges between two or more people or groups (Dutta et al., 2024). Members in a social system anticipate something worthwhile or helpful from others and own something that benefits others (Blau, 1964). In contrast, employees who experience ostracism view it as a negative act and are hence encouraged to respond negatively by engaging in poor interpersonal behavior (Fatima et al., 2024). Social exchange theory indicates that humble leaders and their followers see their relationships as a social exchange. Power distance is eventually eliminated by humble leaders who are open and honest, pay attention to what their followers think of them, keep a cordial attitude, acknowledge when they need help, and offer support (Al-Hawamdeh, 2023).

2.1 Perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding:

The worldwide economic collapse and limited possibilities for employment have made the phenomenon of overqualification more visible, with the requirements for accessible positions remaining below the level of qualifications of individuals. This situation creates a surplus of competent and skilled workers on the market (Yeşiltaş et al., 2023). Therefore, the concept of overqualification has attracted widespread attention from both academics and practitioners (Wu et al., 2023). The majority of overqualification research has focused on the topic as it affects a single employee (Shafique et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2022). From this perspective, perceived overqualification refers to a situation in which employees perceive themselves to have a surplus of knowledge, skills, and abilities over what is required for their jobs (Yang and Li, 2021).

However, overqualification is not evaluated and responded to by employees in a vacuum. Focusing on employees' overqualification in relation to workgroup members' qualification is crucial because employee evaluations of overqualification take place in the social environment, where comparisons with coworkers are frequent (Zhu et al., 2024). Based on social comparison theory, researchers have recently proposed the concept of perceived relative qualification, which indicates a person's belief that he is qualified than a specific peer (Jahantab et al., 2021). So, the difference between perceived relative qualification and perceived overqualification is that the former implies having more knowledge than a particular coworker, while the latter involves having more knowledge than the expectations of the job. This makes perceived relative qualification more consistent with organizational practices than perceived overqualification (Li et al., 2022).

Social comparison theory states that there are two types of social comparison processes: upward and downward comparison. The upward comparison describes a comparison to a superior other, while the downward comparison focuses on comparisons undertaken to an inferior other (Buunk et al., 2005). Accordingly, different emotions can be evoked by social comparison processes based on whether the comparison is upward or downward (Smith et al., 1996). Based on downward comparison, the focal employee could elicit a contempt emotion toward a peer who is comparatively less qualified (Li et al., 2022). However, in upward comparison, the employee feels envy when comparing himself to another peer and finds that peer is doing better than himself (Smith, 2000). In the workplace, employees face coworkers who are more qualified than they are and others who are less qualified than they are (Zhu et al., 2024). The current research focuses on the employee's perception that he is more qualified than his peers to find out why professionals with an abundance of knowledge decide to keep it from their peers.

Knowledge hiding describes the employee's deliberate attempts to conceal or withhold information that has been asked for by others. Intentionality is a major condition of knowledge hiding. Knowledge hiding has three distinct strategies: playing dumb, evasive hiding, and rationalized hiding (Jahanzeb et al., 2021). Playing dumb occurs when the employee pretends that he doesn't know what someone else has asked for. Evasive hiding means giving false information or making a misleading promise of a full response later without intending to follow through on it. While rationalized hiding entails explaining not providing the requested knowledge by giving reasons or blaming someone else (Connelly et al., 2012).

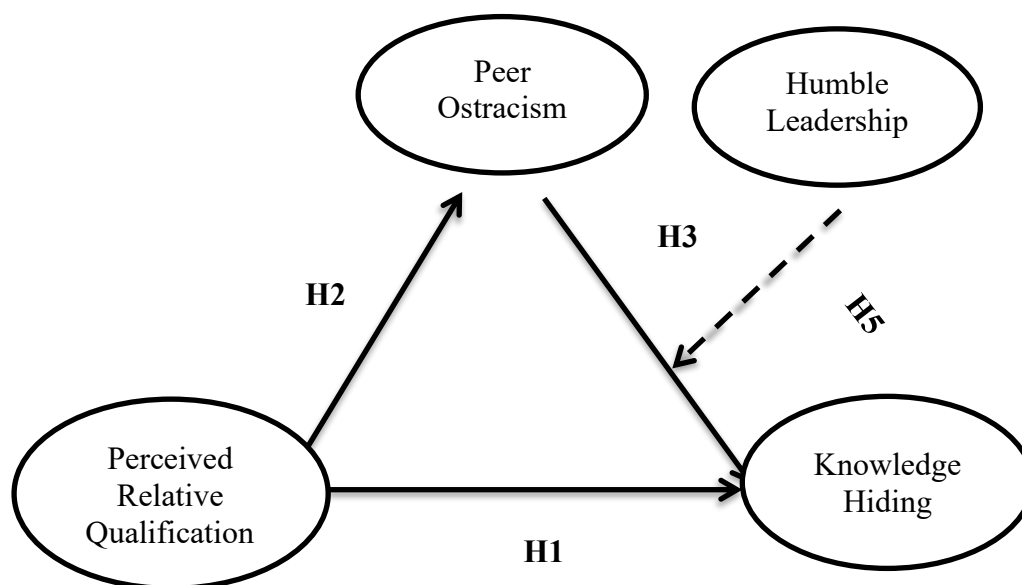
Social comparison theory has been widely used to explain how perceived relative qualification leads to negative outcomes in the context of knowledge management. For instance, Zhu et al. (2024) declared that when employees perceive their coworker's relatively high qualification, they feel malicious envy, which in turn drives them to engage in knowledge sabotage toward that peer, especially when the competitive goal interdependence between them is high. However, Li et al. (2022) have provided empirical evidence that employees who feel they are more qualified than others are more likely to hide knowledge from them because they feel contempt for them. Further, Cheng et al. (2020) revealed that when overqualified employees compare themselves to their less qualified peers in similar jobs or with similar income, they often feel comparatively disadvantaged or feel unfairly treated. Based on these discussions, the current research proposes that:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived relative qualification has a positive influence on knowledge hiding.

2.2 Perceived relative qualification and peer ostracism:

Workplace ostracism refers to "the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others" at work (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). Accordingly, peer ostracism describes the situation in which employees disregard or reject their peers; this includes not asking him to lunch, leaving the area whenever he approaches, and not welcoming him back (Balliet and Ferris, 2013; Ferris et al., 2008). Employees prefer to use covert forms of punishment, such as ostracism, when their peer deviates from social norms since more overt forms, such as interfering with the norm violator's job performance, damage the other's reputation and change social relationships (Curtis et al., 2021).

According to social comparison theory, the individual feels envy toward others having something he does not have. Coworkers are inclined to separate themselves from the qualified employee to control their negative envious feelings (Buunk et al., 2005). In this regard, Breidenthal et al. (2020) empirically confirmed that employees feel envy toward their coworker, who exhibits greater creativity than them, which in turn causes this employee to be ostracized by his team members.



H4= Indirect relationship from perceived relative qualification to knowledge hiding through peer ostracism.

H5= The moderating role of humble leadership.

Fig. 1. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

This is in line with victim precipitation theory, which takes the offender's point of view to explain how victims might be responsible for their own victimization (Aquino & Thau, 2009). From this perspective, Zhang et al. (2022) investigated how overqualified employees provoke their peers' retaliatory reactions and empirically declared that relatively overqualified employees working with those who are less overqualified suffer from peer ostracism. To be more precise, the current research proposes that employees who are perceived as more qualified than their colleagues are more likely to experience ostracism from their peers. Therefore, the researcher assumes that:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived relative qualification has a positive influence on peer ostracism.

2.3 Peer ostracism and knowledge hiding:

Workplace ostracism is a widespread phenomenon that presents ethical challenges for organizations due to its potential negative consequences, such as reduced prosocial behavior (Balliet and Ferris, 2013). Several researchers have examined the impact of workplace ostracism on knowledge hiding (Raiz et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2016). In this context, Dutta

et al. (2024) empirically proved that employees' perceptions of pain resulting from ostracism lead to various negative reactions. The ostracized employee exhibits a greater propensity to make poor decisions, such as knowledge hiding, to settle his psychological losses. The anger of the socially excluded leads to hiding information and can eventually make them quiet or cold quitters. The ostracized worker may eventually remain silent at work.

Ostracism can be induced by others in the upper level, same level, or lower level (Fatima et al., 2024). However, Breidenthal et al. (2020) highlighted that examining peer ostracism is beneficial. Ahmed et al. (2016) assert that relationships among coworkers are extremely important for organizations, particularly when a collaborative work environment is required. Previous research has highlighted social interaction as a main source of knowledge sharing (Perrault and Hildenbrand, 2019). Social exchange theory suggests that when workers anticipate receiving valuable incentives or extra benefits, they might be more likely to share their expertise. Alternatively, unjust social interactions may be harmful to the organization (Dutta et al., 2024). When abused, employees are motivated to repay the favor (Balliet and Ferris, 2013). According to Fatima et al. (2023), peer ostracism destroys the quality of social interactions at work and leads to knowledge hiding. Likewise, Fatima et al. (2022) analyzed coworkers' relationships in the context of higher education institutions and declared that the pain of being ostracized motivates knowledge hiding between coworkers. Based on this discussion, the current research assumes that:

Hypothesis 3: Peer ostracism has a positive impact on knowledge hiding.

2.4 The mediating role of Peer ostracism:

The current research assumes that the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding is mediated by ostracism. This is consistent with Li et al.'s (2022) notion that perceived relative qualification is positively related to knowledge hiding. While Zhang et al. (2022) declared that ostracism is one of the outcomes of perceived relative qualification. In addition to the evidence provided by Riaz et al. (2019) regarding ostracism as an antecedent of knowledge hiding. To the best of the author's knowledge, no prior research has attempted to examine the mediating role of ostracism on the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding. As a result, the researcher argues that when relatively qualified employees are ostracized, they are more likely to hide the knowledge they have. Therefore, the current research posits the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Peer ostracism mediates the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding.

2.4 The moderating role of humble leadership:

Leaders' humility is defined in terms of accepting one's shortcomings, limitations, and mistakes (Hu et al., 2018). Therefore, humble leadership refers to leaders' interpersonal ability to evaluate themselves honestly, recognize their own strengths, and remain receptive to new ideas and suggestions (Owens and Hekman, 2012). Humble leaders have the courage to recognize their own shortcomings, value the efforts and strengths of subordinates, and never stop learning (Liu and Liu, 2019). Although humble leaders have little sense of self-importance, limited desire for visibility, and low profiles, they devote their time and energy to benefit their society (Ou et al., 2014).

According to the reciprocity mechanism provided by social exchange theory, humble leaders show employee-centric behaviors (e.g., realistic self-perception, appreciation of others' skills, and openness to learning) as an effort that enables them to reap positive outcomes (e.g., knowledge sharing, improved task performance, and interpersonal helpfulness at work). Humble behaviors, including owing up to professional errors and shortcomings, demonstrate to followers and staff that their leaders are prepared to accept weakness (Al-Hawamdeh, 2023). Humble leaders are more willing to learn from others and accept new ideas, as they have unbiased self-perception in evaluating their limitations (Zhou and Wu, 2018).

Employees' behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of leaders (Mohsin et al., 2021). Leaders are the primary source of knowledge on the social environment at work and are the most important aspect of the work environment (Yao et al., 2021). Previous research has indicated that humble leadership motivates the process of sharing ideas and information among coworkers. For instance, Owens and Hekman (2012) highlighted that humble leaders train their followers how to pay attention to others' perspectives and find novel approaches to existing problems. In addition, Owens and Hekman (2016) revealed that humble leaders promote social exchange processes through which team members tend to be open to others' ideas. This is further confirmed by Hu et al. (2018), indicating that humble leaders have a main role in enhancing team creativity through fostering team information sharing.

According to Neves and Caetano (2009), humble leaders try to reduce knowledge hiding by rewarding their followers for pro-social knowledge-sharing behaviors. This is consistent with Al-Hawamdeh (2023), revealing that humble leaders' practices have a negative impact on employees' knowledge-hiding behavior, including evasive hiding and playing dumb. Therefore, the current research applied social exchange theory to propose humble leadership as a boundary condition that weakens the effects of peer ostracism on knowledge hiding. Therefore, Yao et al. (2021) acknowledged that a high level of humble leadership can minimize the communication bias between subgroups, resolve conflicts brought by the social categorization process, and fully utilize the benefit of informational boundaries in integrating a variety of cognitive resources. Based on these discussions, the current research assumes that:

Hypothesis 5: Humble leadership moderates the impact of peer ostracism on knowledge hiding.

3. Methods:

3.1 Sample and Procedures:

The current research used a quantitative survey design embedded in positive and deductive approaches. The commercial banks in Damietta and Port Said governorates are the main subject of this study. As perceived relative qualification was derived from the social comparison processes, this study focuses on departments with a supervisor and at least two employees to determine the relationships between perceived relative qualification, peer ostracism, and knowledge hiding within workgroups. Departments that include only one employee and his supervisor were not included in the data collection. From there, the researcher focused on the commercial banks that contain an extensive number of employees. By using banking apps, the researcher determined the banks worked in Damietta and Port Said governorates. Before administrating the questionnaire to employees, approval was obtained from the bank's managers. Using the stratified random sampling method, a well-structured questionnaire was given to bank employees.

Based on the electronic sample size calculator¹, if the margin of error is selected to be 5% with a confidence level of 95%, and the population size is nearly 3100, then the required sample size should be 342. The data collection process took place between April and May 2025. A total of 500

¹ <https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html>

questionnaires were distributed; 437 were collected, of which 408 were valid to analyze, with a response rate of 81%. Significantly more people participated than the 342 benchmark, which improved the research findings' generalization (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.2 Measures:

The selected measures were chosen because they are well-established and widely validated in organizational behavior research. Perceived relative qualifications were assessed using items from Li et al. (2022), who developed and validated this measure in workplace contexts, ensuring its appropriateness for examining perceptions of qualification differences. Peer ostracism was measured with Ferris et al.'s (2008) workplace ostracism scale, which is the most frequently used and psychometrically robust instrument for capturing exclusionary behaviors at work. Consistent with prior adaptations (e.g., Wu et al., 2012), the referent was modified from "peers" to "peers on my team" to reflect the team-based nature of the present study, thereby enhancing contextual relevance without altering the construct's meaning.

Humble leadership was measured using Owens et al.'s (2013) nine-item scale, which has been extensively validated and shown to predict key follower outcomes such as trust, learning orientation, and team performance (Ou et al., 2014). Finally, knowledge hiding was assessed using the 12-item scale by Connelly et al. (2012), which is considered the most comprehensive instrument for capturing the three distinct forms of knowledge hiding—playing dumb, evasive hiding, and rationalized hiding. This multidimensional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of employees' withholding behaviors and has been successfully applied in diverse organizational settings (Zhao et al., 2016). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Full details of the measurement scales are provided in the Appendix.

3.3 control variables:

Prior studies indicated that employees' inclination to hide knowledge is influenced by a variety of demographic characteristics. Ma and Zhang (2022), for instance, support accounting for the potential influence of age, position, experience, and gender on knowledge hiding. Furthermore, De Clercq et al. (2022) found that knowledge hiding was correlated to demographic factors such as age, gender, and education. Therefore, these variables were controlled in this study.

4. Data analysis and results:

Table 1 describes the sample characteristics. The data reveals that 61.8% of the sample comprised males, while 38.2% were females. Regarding age, 52% of respondents were between 20 and 30 years old, 38% were between 31 and 40 years old, and 10% were 41 years old or more. As for qualifications, most of the respondents, 87.5%, had a bachelor's degree, and 12.5% were postgraduates. When it came to years of experience, 44.9% of participants had fewer than five years, 36% had between five and ten years, and 19.1% had more than ten years.

The research model and hypotheses were tested using Warp-PLS Version 7.0 (Kock, 2020) and the partial-least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique. Two distinct models are estimated using this method, which does not presume normality: the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) (Jarvis et al., 2003). The data set was examined, as SEM requires that the data not violate the normality condition. The range of Skewness and Kurtosis was 0.846 to -0.681 and -1.559 to -0.323, respectively. According to Blanca et al. (2013), the normal distribution of data can be achieved when the absolute values of skewness range between -3 and 3, and the values of kurtosis range between -10 and 10. Therefore, these two conditions are satisfied, and the data are normally distributed.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Variable	N=408	Percent %
Gender:		
Males	252	61.8
Females	156	38.2
Age:		
20-30	212	52
31-40	155	38
41 and over	41	10
Qualifications:		
Bachelor's degree.	357	87.5
Postgraduate.	51	12.5
Experience:		
Less than 5 years	183	44.9
5-10	147	36
Greater than 10	78	19.1

4.1 The measurement model:

To evaluate the measurement model, reliability (internal consistency) and convergent validity of the constructs were initially examined. Therefore, Cronbach's Alpha and the composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) were assessed (refer to Table 2). Construct validity was then evaluated using the loadings of the items (see Appendix A). According to Hair et al. (2017), the minimum acceptable value of the items' loading was 0.5. Therefore, items with factor loadings less than 0.5 have been excluded from data analysis.

Table 2: Reliability and convergent validity

Variables	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	VIF
Perceived relative qualification	0.869	0.772	0.691	1.399
Humble leadership	0.965	0.958	0.776	1.588
Perceived ostracism	0.966	0.959	0.762	2.012
Knowledge hiding	0.959	0.936	0.887	1.425

The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and the composite reliability. Table 2 shows reliable instruments, as the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients both exceed the 0.7 criteria. Convergent validity was shown by AVE, the total amount of variance in the indicators explained by the latent construct, surpassing the acceptable limit of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2016).

For each construct, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to assess collinearity issues. Table 2 shows that all VIF scores were below five, suggesting that there were no common methods bias or multicollinearity (Kock and Lynn, 2012). Regarding discriminant validity, Table 3 indicates that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all variables surpasses all other correlations associated with that construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 3: Discriminant validity

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived relative qualification	2.40	0.94	0.831			
2. Humble Leadership	3.66	1.22	-0.226	0.881		
3. Perceived Ostracism	3.32	1.19	0.482	-0.495	0.873	
4. Knowledge hiding	2.55	1.07	0.246	-0.395	0.514	0.942

Boldface values show the square roots of AVE.

Recent studies have questioned the effectiveness of the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion in detecting discriminant validity issues within empirical research (Henseler et al., 2015). To resolve this limitation, Henseler et al. (2015) proposed the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, which is based on the multitrait–multimethod matrix and offers a more reliable assessment of discriminant validity. The current study used this approach, and the corresponding results are shown in Table 4. Following the guideline suggested by Kock (2020), discriminant validity issues arise when HTMT values surpass 0.85. As all constructs in this study had HTMT values below 0.85 (ranging from 0.268 to 0.558), the results demonstrate adequate discriminant validity.

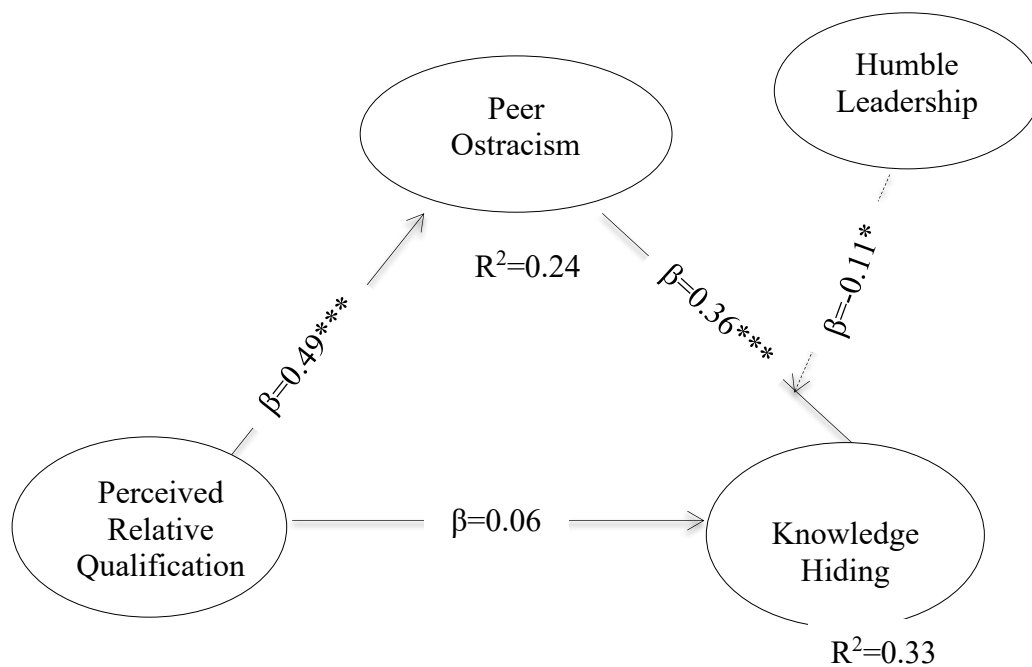
Table 4: Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios of correlation

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived relative qualifications				
2. Humble leadership	0.268			
3. Peer ostracism	0.558	0.517		
4. Knowledge Hiding	0.301	0.418	0.544	

Note: HTMT are good if <0.90 , best if <0.85 .

4.2 The structural model:

The author used Warp-PLS version 7 to test the relationship between variables, and the results show that the fit index of each variable was acceptable. Additionally, the structural model fit index was also acceptable: Average path coefficient (APC)=0.137, $P=0.001$; Average R-squared (ARS)=0.284, $P<0.001$; Average block VIF (AVIF)=1.424, acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3 ; Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)=1.472, acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3 .



Note: * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Fig. 2 Path coefficients and p-values

Regarding hypothesis testing, the path coefficients (β) and p-values for the current model are shown in Fig. 2. Results shown in table 5 indicate that perceived relative qualification has no significant direct impact on knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.114$). While perceived relative qualification was found to significantly increase peer ostracism ($\beta = 0.485$, $p < 0.001$). Peer ostracism also causes an increase in knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.360$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, H1 is rejected, whereas H2 and H3 are accepted. Moreover, it can be concluded that perceived relative qualification explained 24% of the development of peer ostracism. While peer ostracism explained 19% of knowledge hiding.

Table 5: Path coefficients

Effects	Coefficient	SE	P-value	Effect Size
PRQ $\longrightarrow$ KH	0.059	0.049	0.114	0.016
PRQ $\longrightarrow$ PO	0.485	0.046	<0.001	0.235
PO $\longrightarrow$ KH	0.360	0.047	<0.001	0.187
PRQ $\longrightarrow$ PO $\longrightarrow$ KH	0.174	0.034	<0.001	0.047

Note: PRQ= Perceived relative qualification, KH= knowledge hiding, PO= peer ostracism.

4.3 Mediation Analysis:

A mediation analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of peer ostracism in the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding. The results indicate that peer ostracism fully mediates this relationship. As shown in Table 5, perceived relative qualification does not have a significant direct effect on knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.114$). However, it exerts a significant indirect effect on knowledge hiding through peer ostracism ($\beta = 0.174$, $p < 0.001$). More specifically, perceived relative qualification has a positive significant impact on peer ostracism ($\beta = 0.485$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn has a significant effect on knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.360$, $p < 0.001$). This means that the impact of perceived relative qualification on knowledge hiding is only transmitted through peer ostracism. Accordingly, H4 is supported, confirming full mediation. Notably, while the direct path coefficient between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding is 0.06, the indirect path coefficient via peer ostracism increases to 0.174, highlighting the statistical significance of the mediation effect.

4.4 Moderation Analysis:

Table 6 presents the results regarding the moderating effect of humble leadership. The results indicate that humble leadership has a significant moderating impact on the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding, thereby supporting H5 ($\beta = -0.109$, $p = 0.013$). To assess the likelihood of the moderating impact, peer ostracism as a predictor and humble leadership as a moderator were multiplied to create an interactional construct (peer ostracism $\times$ humble leadership) to predict knowledge hiding. As shown in table 5, the path coefficient for this interaction ($\beta = -0.109$, $p = 0.013$, $f^2 = 0.041$) indicates a significant small effect. Therefore, humble leadership weakened the positive association between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding (see Fig. 3). Finally, hypothesis testing was summarized in table 7.

Table 6: Results of moderation analysis

Effects	Coefficient	SE	P-value	Effect Size
HL $\longrightarrow$ KH	-0.172	0.048	<0.001	0.071
<i>Moderation effect</i>				
PO*HL $\longrightarrow$ KH	-0.109	0.049	0.013	0.041

Note: KH= knowledge hiding, PO= peer ostracism, HL = humble leadership

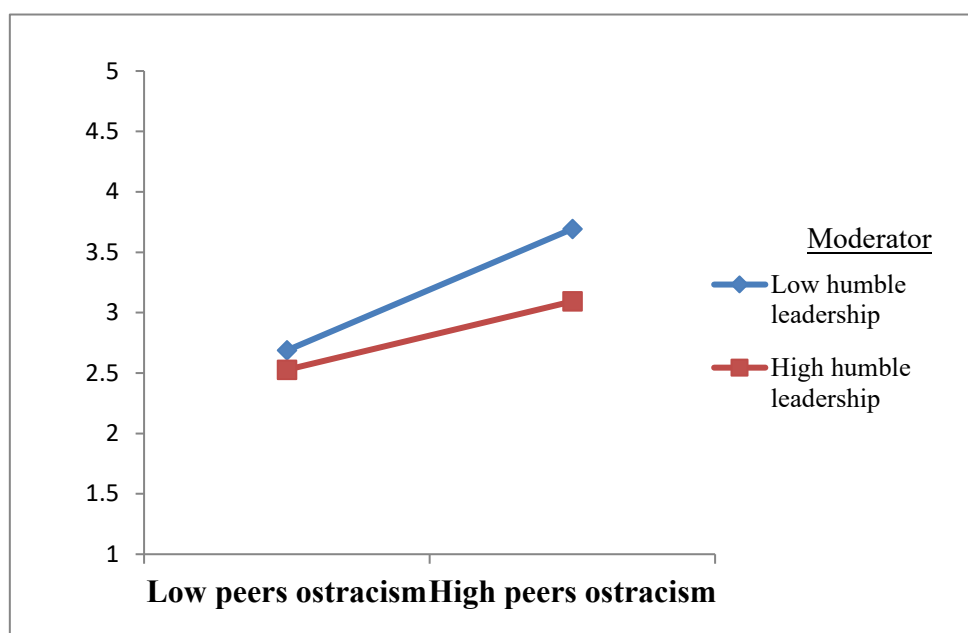


Fig. 3 The moderating role of humble leadership in the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding.

Regarding the control variables, the results revealed that knowledge hiding was unaffected by differences in gender ($p = 0.292$), age ($p = 0.189$), qualifications ($p = 0.359$), and years of experience ($p = 0.230$). These findings are consistent with Chen et al. (2020), who indicated that there are no significant differences in employees' knowledge hiding according to age, education, and tenure. In addition to Oubrich et al. (2021), who confirmed that education differences had no effect on knowledge hiding. However, these results are inconsistent with the work of De Clercq et al. (2022), who confirmed that knowledge hiding was affected by age and gender.

Table 7: Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Test
H1: Perceived relative qualifications have a positive influence on employees' knowledge hiding.	Rejected
H2: Perceived relative qualification has a positive influence on peer ostracism.	Accepted
H3: Peer ostracism has a positive impact on knowledge hiding.	Accepted
H4: Peer ostracism mediates the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding.	Accepted
H5: Humble leadership moderates the impact of peer ostracism on knowledge hiding.	Accepted

5. Discussion and conclusion:

Organizations may suffer significant financial losses as a result of knowledge hiding. The purpose of this study is to find new interpersonal antecedents of knowledge hiding, namely perceived relative qualification and peer ostracism. For this aim, this study focuses on the social comparison process to build an integrative model looking for the impact of perceived relative qualifications on knowledge hiding through the intervening role of peer ostracism. This study further focuses on the moderating roles of humble leadership in the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. This model was developed and tested using employees of commercial banks in Damietta and Port Said governorates (N = 408). Overall, the results support the research framework and confirm that perceived relative qualification positively affects knowledge hiding only through the mediating role of peer ostracism. Further, humble leadership moderates the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. These findings are discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

The results show that perceived relative qualification has no direct impact on knowledge hiding. This is inconsistent with the finding presented by Li et al. (2022), which suggested a significant association between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding. In fact, the authors suggested that the employee's perception that he is more qualified than a peer in the same position getting the same benefits leads him to hide information from that peer. The context of the banking sector in which employees work may help to explain this disparity. Nowadays, banks realize that knowledge management is very crucial to their survival. From there, they use information technology and an integrated communication network to ensure the process of knowledge management progresses and enable managers to get control of knowledge hiding (Tanaji, 2012).

As for the relationship between perceived relative qualification and peer ostracism, it was shown to be positive and significant. This implies that employees who have relatively higher qualifications than the others suffer from ostracism. This finding is in line with Aquino and Thau (2009) regarding that individuals may be accountable for being victims, as they hold unique traits. Furthermore, the results of Zhang et al. (2022) revealed a significant positive relation between perceived relative qualification and peer ostracism.

Peer ostracism was also found to have a significant positive impact on knowledge hiding. This means that socially excluded employees have more propensity to keep their knowledge from peers. This result is in line with Dutta et al. (2024), who highlighted that social interaction problems are a detrimental factor that shatters the organization's progress. Likewise, Fatima et al. (2023) indicated that peer ostracism may hinder the flow of knowledge and lead to knowledge hiding.

Regarding the mediating role of peer ostracism, this study theorizes that the positive impact of perceived relative qualification on knowledge hiding is subject to the development of peer ostracism. In this regard, the results showed that peer ostracism positively affects knowledge hiding. While previous research has revealed peer ostracism as a direct end outcome of perceived relative qualification (Zhang et al., 2022), it can be claimed that no studies have thus far attempted to test the intervening role of peer ostracism as a determinant of the perceived relative qualification impact on knowledge hiding. Therefore, this study confirmed that peer ostracism fully mediates the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding. This means that when the focal employee has relatively high qualifications from his peer, he suffers from peer ostracism, which in turn leads him to hide knowledge from that peer. Hence, it can be concluded that perceived relative qualification does not necessarily lead to knowledge hiding unless this relative qualification leads to the development of peer ostracism.

As Neves and Caetano (2009) declared that humble leader practices reduce his subordinate's propensity to hide knowledge, this study highlighted that humble leadership moderates the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. That is, humble leadership dampens the positive association between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. This implies that the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding becomes weaker when humble leadership is high, and vice versa. Hence, it is concluded that for reducing knowledge hiding in commercial banks, humble leadership is required.

5.1 Theoretical contribution:

This paper has numerous theoretical contributions. This study was conducted in response to recent requests from other researchers to examine employees' overqualification in the social context where comparison between coworkers takes place frequently (Jahantab et al., 2021); shed light on peer

ostracism, as previous studies on ostracism were limited to social exclusion of new hires (Fatima et al., 2024); know about the effect of humble leadership in knowledge hiding (Al-Hawamdeh, 2023); and find out an interpersonal mechanism that may explain the relationship between perceived relative qualification and knowledge hiding (Li et al., 2022). To date, despite the seriousness of knowledge hiding, peer ostracism, and perceived relative qualification, no other studies in the banking context have yet analyzed the relationships between these variables. This research addressed the gap in the literature by integrating social comparison theory (Buunk and Gibbons, 2007), victim precipitation theory (Aquino and Bradfield, 2000), and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to empirically examine these relationships. In addition to investigating how humble leadership interacts with peer ostracism to influence knowledge hiding.

The current research adds to the social comparison theory by clarifying the roles of peer ostracism and perceived relative qualification in developing knowledge hiding. Based on the social comparison theory, the current research has demonstrated how employees in commercial banks make the decision to hide knowledge. Specifically, the results have shown that perceived relative qualification of bankers does not contribute to the development of knowledge hiding unless the relatively qualified employee suffers from peer ostracism. Adding to the social comparison theory, this research has asserted that humble leadership is critical to reduce knowledge hiding. Lastly, peer ostracism and perceived relative qualifications are crucial for hiding knowledge.

5.2 Managerial implications:

This research has significant practical implications for the managers of commercial banks in Damietta and Port Said governorates. Perceived relative qualifications were found to be a good precursor of peer ostracism. So, managers must understand the detrimental social effects of perceived relative qualification in the workplace. In particular, the results suggest that having relatively high-qualification employees in a team may call for extra managerial attention since they are more likely to become the focus of peer ostracism or other forms of interpersonal abuse.

Further, bank managers should be careful about the way coworkers interact with each other, as this study confirmed a positive relation between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. Managers also should reduce peer ostracism, as it was found to be a fully effective way that transfers the impact of perceived relative qualification on knowledge hiding. To do so, managers should pay attention to team composition and place employees in the right teams to ensure harmony between coworkers. When teams include individuals with varying degrees of qualification, bank managers may think about additional interventions (such as training or consultations on workplace relationships) to lessen these detrimental consequences.

In addition, humble leadership was found to moderate the relationship between peer ostracism and knowledge hiding. Therefore, bank managers need to apply humble traits to reduce knowledge hiding in their organizations. Managers should set the example by recognizing their own shortcomings and appreciating their followers' efforts and encouraging them to learn. By doing so, managers would be able to dampen the effect of peer ostracism on knowledge hiding.

5.3 Limitation and future research:

It is necessary to acknowledge the following limitations. First, this research used the social comparison theory as a base to explore the concept of perceived qualification in the social context. This approach includes upward and downward comparison. The current research focuses on the downward comparison process. Therefore, further research was needed to explain the effect of perceived relative qualification from an upward comparison perspective on knowledge outcomes such as knowledge hoarding or knowledge sabotage. Second, in line with previous research, this study viewed knowledge hiding as a single construct that contains three distinct forms (Connelly et al., 2012). Consequently, more research is required to better understand how forms of knowledge hiding are affected by perceived relative qualification and mediated by other structural mechanisms. Third, although cultural differences are probably the reason for the inconsistencies between the current findings and previous research, the author asks for more research to shed light on those disparities and determine how cultural factors affect employees' knowledge hiding in the context of commercial banks in Egypt.

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Appendix (A): Final scale items and loadings

Scale items		CFA Factor Loadings
Perceived relative qualification		
PRQ1	I have more task-related knowledge, skills, and abilities than my peer.	0.721
PRQ2	I have more abilities than my peer to do the job.	0.891
PRQ3	Based on my knowledge, skills, and abilities, I am more qualified for the job than my peer.	0.871
Humble leadership		
HL1	My leader actively seeks feedback, even if it is critical.	0.951
HL2	My leader admits it when he or she doesn't know	0.901
HL3	My leader acknowledges when others have more knowledge and skills than himself or herself.	0.753
HL4	My leader takes notice of others' strengths.	0.936
HL5	My leader often compliments others on their strengths.	0.904
HL6	This leader shows appreciation for the unique contributions of others.	0.301*
HL7	My leader shows a willingness to learn from others.	0.930
HL8	My leader shows he or she is open to the advice of others.	0.893
HL9	My leader shows he or she is open to the ideas of others.	0.756
Peer ostracism		
PO1	Peers on my team ignore me at work.	0.665
PO2	Peers on my team leave the area when I entered.	0.918
PO3	Peers on my team not answer my greetings at work.	0.948
PO4	Peers on my team refuse to sit with me at meals.	0.934
PO5	Peers on my team avoid me at work.	0.949
PO6	Peers on my team not looking at me at work.	0.803
PO7	Peers on my team shut me out of the conversation	0.757
PO8	Peers on my team refuse to talk to me at work	0.048*
PO9	Peers on my team behave as if I weren't there.	0.924
PO10	Peers on my team not invite me out for coffee after work	0.913
Knowledge Hiding:		
Evasive hiding		

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EH1	1. "Agreed to help him/her but never really intended to"	0.848
EH2	2. "Agreed to help him/her but instead gave him/her information different from what s/he wanted"	0.741
EH3	3. "Told him/her that I would help him/her out later but stalled as much as possible"	0.937
EH4	4. "Offered him/her some other information instead of what he/she really wanted"	0.871
Playing dumb		
PD1	1. "Pretended that I did not know the information"	0.744
PD2	2. "Said that I did not know, even though I did"	0.878
PD3	3. "Pretended I did not know what s/he was talking about"	0.883
PD4	4. "Said that I was not very knowledgeable about the topic"	0.718
Rationalized hiding		
RH1	1. "Explained that I would like to tell him/her, but was not supposed to"	0.956
RH2	2. "Explained that the information is confidential and only available to specific people"	0.884
RH3	3. "Told him/her that my boss would not let anyone share this knowledge"	0.620
RH4	4. "Said that I would not answer his/her questions"	0.955

***This item has been excluded from data analysis and hypothesis testing.**