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Workplace inclusion–exclusion and knowledge-hiding behaviour of minority members

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ABSTRACT

The increased mobility of people has resulted in an increasingly culturally diverse workforce. Organisations aim to ensure that all employees – regardless of race, ethnicity and religion – receive equal treatment. However, these ideas are often disconnected from reality. This paper attempts to bridge the knowledge management and diversity literature to examine knowledge hiding by minority members that occurs due to differences in demographic characteristics. Semi-structured interviews and deductive thematic analysis reveal that minority members engage in knowledge-hiding behaviour due to exclusion experienced in the workplace. They also use knowledge hiding as an inclusion strategy. We contribute to knowledge management research and practice by studying knowledge hiding in the context of a diverse workforce, showing that it occurs due to perceived exclusion. We also show it takes place to improve inclusion and assimilation of minority members. Additionally, we identify a new facet of knowledge-hiding characteristic for cross-cultural collaboration: adjustable hiding.

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Knowledge hiding; diversity; minority members; inclusion; exclusion

1. Introduction

Numerous researchers across different disciplines have shown that diversification of the workplace can either degrade a group's performance and functioning or, on the contrary, act as a source of joint creativity, achievement and success (Mannix & Neale, 2005; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). However, a culturally and nationally diverse workforce may struggle with expressing different thoughts, opinions and ideas. Workers may lack motivation to share their knowledge with colleagues (Gilson & Shalley, 2004), as knowledge transfer among diverse employees requires a willingness to unite the shared knowledge, the ability to integrate with people of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, to recognise the coexistence and supplementation of different types of knowledge (Sefa Dei, 2002). To this end, employees' inclination to engage in knowledge-hiding behaviour could be higher in the context of a diverse workforce, due to demographic characteristics of diversity that highlight mutual exclusion (Cox et al., 1991; O'Reilly et al., 1984).

Knowledge sharing refers to the process of generating, sharing, and using knowledge to achieve organisational goals most efficiently and innovatively (e.g., Hislop, 2013). Knowledge is a competitive advantage, especially for multinational companies and academia. In times of the knowledge-based economy, multinational companies and academia can only develop through constant growth in innovative and collaborative knowledge. Sometimes, knowledge sharing is resisted, and knowledge hiding takes place among

employees. Knowledge hiding is defined as “an intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another individual” (Connelly et al., 2012, p. 65). (Connelly et al., 2012). It can occur in three different ways: playing dumb, evasive, and rationalised hiding.

Empirical studies have so far studied the cultural elements of knowledge hiding behaviour in the context of national culture (Bogilovic et al., 2017), socio-cultural aspects (Babic et al., 2018), national culture dimensions (Dodokh, 2019; Gaur et al., 2018), or specific cultural contexts (Issac & Baral, 2020). Study shows that employees' status differences within the organisation affect knowledge hiding behaviour (Rhee & Choi, 2017). Little is known about how and why this negative behaviour occurs among culturally diverse colleagues and superiors at multinational companies and universities. A greater understanding of how knowledge hiding operates in the culturally diverse workplace is needed.

The literature on workplace inclusion (Mor Barak et al., 1998; Mor Barak, 2000; Shore et al., 2011) thoroughly explains how a lack of belongingness to a team and low self-uniqueness can lead to exclusion. Shore et al. (2011) argued that employees whose unique traits, such as knowledge, information, experiences and opinions, are not viewed as important by co-workers and superiors of the majority group feel more excluded and less connected to co-workers and supervisors. This is exactly the case with ethnic minority and migrant employees as well, who, because of

their perceived exclusion, may sense they are not making sufficient contributions to their teams and organisations (Brewer, 1991; Mor Barak, 2000; Shore et al., 2011). Therefore, they may disengage and hide knowledge.

Studies examined that perceived workplace ostracism (Zhao et al., 2016), bullying (Yao et al., 2020a), negative gossiping (Yao et al., 2020b), incivility (Arshad & Ismail, 2018), and cynicism (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018) as other forms of perceived workplace exclusion affect knowledge hiding behaviour among mono-cultural work settings. We attempt to add other layers of possible exclusion sources related to knowledge hiding, subsequent workplace exclusion based on national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. We assume that perceived workplace exclusion in the forms of different determinants would affect knowledge hiding of young migrant workers.

Social Identity and Social Categorisation theories help understand responses to exclusion at work better. The majority of the team members segregates and excludes minority group member(s) when a person differs from others in terms of social status, ethnicity, culture, language (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), ideas, work or communication styles (Shore et al., 2011). As a consequence, minority group members desire to belong and include in the culturally dominant group colleagues and superiors in response to social categorisation and differentiation in an in-group and out-group membership. We assume that an experienced exclusion may trigger feelings of negative reciprocity and harmfully respond to the perceived exclusion by engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour. On the contrary, a migrant can hide knowledge for positive self-interest to enhance inclusion.

Therefore, both exclusion and assimilation of minority members might foster knowledge hiding, but the extant literature lacks exploration of how and why such knowledge hiding occurs, what mechanisms minority members apply when engaging in knowledge-hiding behaviours. Taken together, more comprehensive empirical and theoretical investigation is needed to enhance our understanding of how to manage the knowledge of minority members and foster their workplace inclusion in global multi-cultural work settings.

This paper attempts to enrich the literature on knowledge-hiding behaviour and diversity literature. First, we aim to enrich the existing literature on knowledge-hiding behaviour (Cerne et al., 2014; Connelly et al., 2012) by going in depth on cross-cultural diversity aspects and investigating other antecedents of this behaviour. Little research explores knowledge-hiding behaviour in the context of a culturally diverse workforce (e.g., Babic et al., 2018; Bogilovic et al., 2017). Specifically, we complement research on knowledge hiding by proposing that

both workplace exclusion, and workplace inclusion, can represent the main intentions behind migrant employees' knowledge-hiding behaviours at work. By focusing on a sample of minority members employed at multinational companies and academic settings in a Central-European capital city (Ljubljana), we aim to enlarge the nomological framework of knowledge-hiding behaviours and their antecedents. We do so by specifically examining these behaviours in the context of migrant employees (Connelly et al., 2019; Xiao & Cooke, 2019).

2. Explaining workplace exclusion, inclusion and knowledge hiding behaviour

Migration leads to the development and growth, or on the contrary, causing many challenges and difficulties. Research identifies that immigrants perceive being discriminated against throughout Europe (e.g., Brüß, 2008). Western Europeans usually tend to behave stereotypically and prejudiced towards their colleagues from different cultures (Bouma et al., 2003). Social identity, social comparison and self-categorisation theories explain how in-group favouritism can lead to out-group discrimination (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Scholars found that individuals are more likely to discriminate against and exclude a person whom they do not consider similar to them or do not identify with, categorising the person as an out-group member (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). Research showed that in-group biases signal racial and ethnic inequality among groups (e.g., Osbeck & Moghaddam, 1997) and a majority group's superiority, prestige and high status over minority group members (Hogg et al., 2004; Tajfel, 1981).

Lack of experience and qualifications, ignorance of the organisational culture, system, and policies, and lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge (Bourdieu, 1977) create barriers to engage in work-related responsibilities with local colleagues fully, be perceived positively, accepted, and included in the organisations, colleagues, and leadership. Migration status, ethnicity, or language (Mor Barak & Daya, 2014) also cause severe exclusion and segregation from the culturally dominant group colleagues and superiors. Social categorisation processes do not support the elaboration of diverse team members' knowledge, skills, perspectives, abilities, and experiences (Hoever et al., 2012). Different "thought worlds" (Dougherty, 1992), different communication styles (Gibson, 1996), different ideas (Shore et al., 2011), and different working styles (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001) decrease belonging to the culturally dominant group members at work. Still, experiences of exclusion and inclusion and their impact on young migrant workers' knowledge hiding behaviour are an under-researched area in the literature on organisational behaviour.

Research has shown that employees who have ever experienced exclusion are more likely to behave passively, be demotivated and disengaged (Craighead et al., 1979) or show lower performance and productivity (Pfeffer, 1981). Individuals tend to react in response to the perceived workplace exclusion. Based on the principle of reciprocity (Brewer, 1991; Aquino & Bommer, 2003), employees reciprocate positivity when they are treated fairly and feel support at work. On the contrary, they tend to engage in harmful behaviours like being more aggressive (Twenge et al., 2002), less prosocial, and less engagement-oriented (Robinson et al., 2013). Being treated as an outsider can increase uncooperative behaviour among minority and majority colleagues, consequently decreasing knowledge sharing and potentially resulting in knowledge hiding.

Individuals differ in their status characteristics related to culture, and ethnicity (Turner et al., 2006). Status differences within intercultural workgroups occur. High-status group members influence low-status group members. Low-status group members conceal their ideas and knowledge, conform to the decision and vision of high-status group members, and limit their behaviours since their membership in the group is never fully realised by the culturally dominant group members (Hogg et al., 2004). We assume that the created majority within teams as one of the determinants of perceived workplace exclusion may intensify the cultural minorities' intention to hide requested knowledge from the superior culture group members intentionally.

Language distance (including language capabilities) is a significant facilitator towards information flow across diverse workforce (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999). I assume that the language barrier as a predictor of perceived workplace exclusion may affect the knowledge hiding behaviour of migrant workers to their culturally dominant group colleagues at work. Cerne et al. (2014) found that poor interpersonal relationship affects knowledge hiding behaviour among Slovenian employees. Since perceived differences in ethnicity (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) affect the relationships, interactions, and communication among high and low-status group members. We assume that cultural minorities may negatively reciprocate and engage in knowledge hiding behaviour to their culturally dominant group members due to the established poor relationship.

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT; Brewer, 1991) explains workplace inclusion and individuals striving to achieve inclusiveness within an organisation. A person tries to achieve balance and to maintain good relationships, positive perceptions and acceptance by dominant groups. In addition, one may want to appear more similar, familiar and local in the eyes of majority members to feel more included

in an organisation. Consequently, when acceptance is high, inclusion is most likely achieved (Brewer, 1991).

The need to belong means that employees have a fundamental need to establish high-quality relationships with other colleagues (Mor Barak, 2005), be a part of workgroups and organisation (Shore et al., 2011). We assume that minorities may engage in knowledge hiding behaviour to maintain the relationship with cultural majority group colleagues. Scholars found that job security/- insecurity causes employees' knowledge hiding behaviour (Butt & Ahmad, 2019; Jha & Varkkey, 2018; Serenko & Bontis, 2016). Those studies are conducted on mono-cultural organisational contexts. We expect that the perceived job insecurity/- security may be a strong predictor of cultural minorities' knowledge hiding behaviour to achieve perceived workplace inclusion.

Perceived workplace exclusion intensifies the need to belong (Twenge et al., 2001). That facilitates engagement in different behaviours and strategies to create new social bonds (Turner, 1975) what potentially enhances chances to be more included. Migrants usually intend to "pass" as members of the dominant group (Goffman, 1963) by conforming to culturally majority group social and cultural norms (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Turner, 1985), adopting acceptable behaviour concealing certain characteristics, including knowledge (Goffman, 1963; Shore et al., 2011) and "background identity" (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Lopez & McMillan-Capehart, 2003). We assume that knowledge hiding behaviour may most likely represent another behaviour to achieve workplace inclusion. Besides, we assume that migrants may engage in different knowledge hiding strategy, compared to those conceptualised in the literature (Connelly et al., 2012). Migrants may hide actual knowledge and reply to the requester so that shared information would be perceived more positively and accepted.

3. Methods

Thematic analysis was used as a qualitative method to better identify, analyse and report themes within given data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were obtained through semi-structured and in-depth interviews conducted on migrant workers, aged between 26–36 years, employed in Slovenian multinational companies, and across the faculties of the University of Ljubljana. The sample of migrant employees was chosen through the purposive sampling strategy (Curtis et al., 2000), targeting knowledge-intensive settings. Besides, through the snowball sampling strategy, participants were asked to share contacts from a similar target group. In total, 33 persons from different social and cultural backgrounds were interviewed, among whom 18 were males and 15 were females. The participants had 1 to 13 years of work experience. Interviews were

conducted via Skype and lasted approximately an hour. Data collection was conducted in the interval between November 27 2019, and November 27 2020. Table 1 shows the basic information of the participants, labelled as “M” by order.

4. Results

The codebook with details regarding codes, code descriptions and fine-grained themes that underlay our findings reported in what follows can be found in the Appendix.

4.1. Minority members’ knowledge-hiding decisions as a consequence of their workplace exclusion

4.1.1. Theme I: Rejection of the ideas

Interviews with participants revealed idea rejection as a determinant of perceived workplace exclusion that has affected minority members’ engagement in knowledge-hiding behaviour in relation to their Slovenian colleagues and respective managers. Interestingly, minorities argued that they had difficulty sharing their knowledge with Slovenian colleagues because they felt a trust deficit in their relationships due to little acquaintance and different national backgrounds.

Table 1. Descriptive information about interviewees’ background.

Participant	Gender	Country	Working Field	Working Period (years)	Age (years)
M1	Male	Macedonia	Marketing	1	30
M2	Male	India	Research	3	30
M3	Male	Serbia	Game Design	2.5	27
M4	Male	China	Cooperation	1	29
M5	Male	Serbia	Finance	1.5	30
M6	Male	Serbia	Medicine	1	26
M7	Male	Costa Rica	Marketing	2	28
M8	Male	North Africa	Research	13	30
M9	Female	Serbia	Politics	2.9	36
M10	Female	Serbia	Finance	2.3	32
M11	Male	Russia	Design	2	30
M12	Female	Chile	Research	3	30
M13	Female	Ukraine	Research	1	30
M14	Female	Turkey	Engineering	1.5	29
M15	Male	Serbia	IT	2	32
M16	Female	France	Politics	3	30
M17	Male	Germany	IT	1	26
M18	Male	Macedonia	Research	1	28
M19	Female	Ukraine	Research	1	27
M20	Female	Canada	Game Design	2.5	29
M21	Female	Macedonia	Politics	4	30
M22	Male	Russia	Administration	2	30
M23	Female	India	IT Engineering	2.5	28
M24	Male	Turkey	Administration	2	28
M25	Female	China	Research	2	30
M26	Female	China	Research	1.6	32
M27	Male	Serbia	Finance	2	26
M28	Male	Serbia	Research	2.3	27
M29	Female	Turkey	Marketing	2	27
M30	Male	Germany	Marketing	1.5	28
M31	Male	Serbia	Research	2	30
M32	Female	China	Market Design	2.4	30
M33	Female	Macedonia	Finance	2.6	30

Some very interesting stories emerged throughout the interviews. Mostly, participants admitted that they believe it would be easier to maintain relationships and communication if both representatives came from a similar national background. They narrated that it has been difficult to be cooperative and helpful with Slovenian colleagues in situations where minorities saw that their ideas and knowledge were not appreciated or respected but rather perceived negatively. They felt offended by their Slovenian colleagues. In addition, they elaborated that it would be easier to collaborate and provide help if they were Slovenians. For that reason, respondents reported that unacceptance of and disrespect towards their ideas affected their future actions to hide their knowledge from their Slovenian colleagues:

“If I see that my co-worker doesn’t have respect for me or my ideas, that affects my willingness to share my knowledge with him. When I am in that kind of situation, my mood goes down. The next time they come to me for help, I won’t be able to help them how I was helping them in the past” (M17, M8).

4.1.2. Theme II: Poor relationships

Lack of social connection has strengthened minority members’ feelings of exclusion and disengagement and affected their intentions to engage in knowledge-hiding behaviour. Migrants admitted that poor relationships between them and colleagues of the majority group influenced knowledge-hiding intentions. Furthermore, respondents thoroughly linked knowledge hiding to personal dislikes and lack of personal identification as a foundation of poor personal relationships between them and majority group representatives. Interviewees (M7 and M9) mentioned that they were very cautious about sharing knowledge with Slovenian colleagues, as they have felt challenged or threatened when a colleague who is not in a very close work relationship with them has asked them for information. Furthermore, they admitted that they feared that colleagues would use such knowledge to quickly improve their skills and perform better:

“It’s mostly personal reasons behind the hiding behaviour. Mostly because I don’t particularly appreciate that person, I do hesitate to share this requested knowledge due to personal grudges” (M7, M9).

Similarly, an interview with university researchers (M2 and M8) revealed that they were very reluctant to share knowledge with a Slovenian employee because they did not demonstrate sympathy and empathy towards the colleague during their academic interaction. Additional discussion with one of the participants demonstrated that a colleague from whom she hid requested knowledge once did not provide her help either. That said, she just did not feel comfortable providing help or support to her Slovenian colleague.

She further argued that she does not feel comfortable sharing knowledge with a person with whom she simply does not feel connection or identification:

“If I am not in a good relationship with a colleague, of course I won’t be so eager to help or explain things to him or her if I don’t engage and identify with that person” (M2, M8).

4.1.3. Theme III: The language barrier

Even though all of the minority employees work at multinational corporations in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and English is used as the working language in the companies, the English barrier between minority and majority colleagues emerged as the most challenging issue when communicating about tasks or projects, or simply during social gatherings. In addition, minority members explained that the language barrier could cause feelings of exclusion and differentiation in relation to Slovenian colleagues. An interview with a Costa Rican employee working in a marketing department revealed that difficulties with communicating well in English could minimise relationships and communication between the minority and majority colleagues. An interviewee admitted that when he noticed the language struggles of a Slovenian colleague, he became reluctant to share knowledge or ideas. He explained that if a colleague struggles to communicate in English, it will be difficult to explain and deliver technical information to said person:

“English has been a problematic factor with my colleagues. I don’t share some technical or hard-to-explain information with them” (M7).

In comparison to the previous respondent’s experience of knowledge hiding, another minority employee documented that he has struggled to express himself in English. Therefore, he simply declined all requests to share information or to explain task- or work-related issues, because he was not confident that his English was sufficient to share all his expertise. He simply evaded all requests by stating that the requested information was not within his expertise:

“Yes, I have hidden my knowledge due to poor English knowledge. I knew I could not explain requested information fully, so I preferred to say that I was not an expert in this” (M23).

4.1.4. Theme IV: The created majority

Interviewees (M2 and M3) reported that working with a multinational team involves some difficulties. For instance, they have experienced difficulties with taking individual steps, with managing team incoordination and, likewise, with how to approach a person coming from a totally different culture, working style and mindset than they come from. Moreover, because teamwork was in question and they had to bear in

mind their group’s interest, decisions regarding the project involved knowledge-hiding intentions of minority members. The created majority in the working group had a strong influence over minority members and their ideas and insights. The latter members simply held back their thoughts, opinions and ideas from the team due to the created majority’s position regarding a working issue. Consequently, conformity to the team’s decision and the dominant nature and superiority of the majority group have triggered minority members’ engagement in knowledge-hiding behaviour:

“At the beginning, I was frustrated because all work was group-based, so it was very difficult to make individual steps to act by oneself. You have to restrain yourself from the expression of some points and ideas. That’s intentional . . . because results depend not only on you but on the other members of the team as well. You can’t control this. If the group fails, you fail. So, you have to try to adjust to each other, to understand each other, to try to learn how to work with each other” (M2, M3).

4.2. Knowledge hiding as a strategy employed by minority members towards workplace inclusion

4.2.1. Theme I: Maintaining relationships

Analysis has shown that migrants tend to hide requested knowledge and/or information to maintain interpersonal connections and relationships with majority group members. Interviews with M3 and M19 unveiled that they have hidden certain information and ideas from colleagues to *maintain a healthier and better relationship* with them. Stories show that decisions to hide knowledge from a requestor can also be guided by positive intentions. Participants shared that on account of caring about colleagues’ feelings and their relationships with them, they have hidden information that was not ready to be delivered to such people – information which might have involved detachment, disappointment and disengagement from the colleagues. Consequently, minority members have decided to conceal some ideas that could affect and damage a relationship and bring frustration with them:

“It’s simply that I didn’t tell him because it was not relevant for him to know at that particular moment. The information was not ready to be shared. It would have created some frustrations at work and in our relationship” (M19, M3).

4.2.2. Theme II: Job security

Narratives of the working migrants uncovered that they have intentionally hidden requested knowledge from Slovenian colleagues and/or supervisors because they felt that passing on knowledge to their co-workers and/or superiors could put their job

positions in danger. A detailed discussion with several migrants (M11 and M14) revealed that the difference in professional status between them and their superiors might have influenced their decision to hide knowledge. Because the projects that they worked on were basically under supervision, they explained that they had to *follow superiors' requirements*. One of the informants described her experience of working with a Slovenian supervisor. As a new employee, she subordinated herself to him and his decisions. She demonstrated her ideas and thoughts regarding the project according to her supervisor's demands and directions. Because she was a new employee, she was afraid to argue her points, and because she was very concerned about her job security, she preferred to hide her knowledge from the supervisor:

"Our project mainly was led by the supervisor, so major decisions on the project were taken by him. So, he was saying what to do and how to do things. I was conducting myself in accordance with this. As I was working there with him, I was agreeing with his suggestions. If I had an opportunity to design the project by myself, of course, I would have done it differently. But it was not up to me. So, I kept all different points to myself" (M14, M11).

An interview with one of the participants (M31) revealed a similar story. A migrant decided to hide requested knowledge or an idea because he was a newcomer in a company. He noticed that managers gave preference to senior, more experienced co-workers. Because he as a newcomer lacked necessary competence and experience in the particular field and expertise in the work, he decided to hide his knowledge so as not to demonstrate his inexperience and ignorance in the field. Thereby, the desire to keep the job position caused him to engage in knowledge-hiding behaviour:

"I had to hide knowledge because I had less experience in the workspace and my manager was considering/giving preference to seniors, whatever they suggested. I have decided to hide my knowledge mainly because of job security" (M31).

4.3. Knowledge-hiding strategies

4.3.1. Playing innocent/dumb

One of the participants shared that whenever he was asked a question, he just *pretended* that he had *not understood the question* to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretation of given information:

"When I have been asked some questions by my colleague, I have pretended that I have not understood the question. I preferred to look not knowledgeable than to involve misunderstandings and misinterpretation of requested information" (M15, M19).

4.3.2. Evasive hiding

Analysis demonstrated that minority members hide requested information or knowledge in an evasive manner. Some of them highlighted that they just give *partial information* to their colleagues:

"I kind of do not want always to give a fish when someone is hungry. I mean, I just give them 'this is the way' . . . I do not explain the whole process, just part of it" (M19, M12).

4.3.3. Rationalised hiding

During the interview, one of the informants highlighted that some information is *confidential* and cannot be shared around and/or across departments and colleagues. He clarified that he is reluctant to share or give information that he was asked not to propagate to colleagues or his department:

"Unless it's information that I have been told to not share, it's secret . . . I would explain that this information is confidential and cannot be spread around" (M3, M7).

4.3.4. Adjustment (adjustable hiding)

A new strategy emerged from the findings: *adjustment of their point or idea to the foreign working audience*. Participants shared situations in which they simply give or share information that they know a colleague in a foreign environment will perceive more positively. They described situations in which they hide their true opinion or idea and provide it in a way that is perceived more positively, understood or accepted by a colleague. That involves concealment of a partial or full idea and giving information according to their sociocultural working context.

As a first step, they tend to *test* the potential requestor by talking and maintaining a conversation before an actual meeting or discussion takes place. This phase involves situations in which a foreigner was previously rejected due to the different points of view on the subject discussed. Therefore, they tend to anticipate differences of opinions and perspectives well ahead of time to adjust their thoughts and views to those of the dominant group. For example, it can help to have an idea of the likes and dislikes of the majority colleagues, as well as their preferences regarding what they work on and might want to hear. This was explained as follows:

"Firstly, you provide a small part of the requested information. Then you watch how it's perceived and offer further information accordingly" (M3, M22).

He continued that afterwards, as their collaboration must continue and he wished to *increase his engagement and inclusion with new colleagues*, he intended to engage in an *observable behaviour and learn the mindset*, preferences and perceptions of Slovenian colleagues. As was shown, this stage of observing and

learning about Slovenian colleagues and their mindset resulted in hiding of their points or ideas, as they understood that they could not change the mainstream perspectives of the majority of co-workers. One of the participants described the stage of learning and observing precisely during an interview:

“You learn about these people and you present and twist your ideas so that they are perceived more positively” (M3, M1).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Our results show that exclusionary and inclusionary experiences at the workplace affected minority members' intention to engage in knowledge-hiding behaviour. Along with well-explored antecedents of knowledge hiding (Bogilovic et al., 2017; Cerne et al., 2014; Rhee & Choi, 2017), this study brings new insights regarding knowledge-hiding behaviour among minority and majority members at the workplace, adding to research on the human factors of knowledge risks in organisations (Durst & Zieba, 2018). Two new predictors of knowledge hiding behaviour were identified among migrants and the Slovenian employees and superiors at multinational companies and across the different faculties of the University of Ljubljana. The migrant workers employed knowledge hiding to avoid perceived workplace exclusion and improve their chances of being more included in the Slovenian colleagues and superiors.

Like other negative behavioural outcomes of the perceived workplace exclusion and decreased inclusion (Robinson et al., 2013; Twenge et al., 2002), knowledge hiding behaviour was found to be a negative behavioural consequence of migrant workers' perceived workplace exclusion. Minorities hid knowledge in response to the perceived exclusion from the Slovenian colleagues, workgroups, and superiors at multinational companies and across the different faculties of the University of Ljubljana. Research findings demonstrate that migrant workers experience low group identification, workgroup inclusion, and lack of social and work-related connection. That increased minority members' feelings of exclusion. They found it challenging to collaborate with culturally and socially different colleagues. That consequently has affected their intention to engage in knowledge-hiding behaviour.

As found, the created social hierarchies (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), in terms of different ethnicity, cultures, and languages, affected the interpersonal relationships and interactions among migrants and the Slovenian employees at the interpersonal level and within teams. That also resisted knowledge sharing among them. Consequently, rejection of the ideas, the established

poor relationships, and the created numerical and cultural majority affected migrant workers' knowledge hiding towards their Slovenian colleagues at work. Besides, language insufficiency could cause a sense of disconnection, and exclusion (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999) and resist knowledge sharing among culturally minority and majority group colleagues.

Jackson et al. (1995) stated that inclusion is driven by relationship orientation, and high-quality relationships with group members and superiors are defined as work group inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). As found, knowledge hiding was intended to maintain positive interpersonal relationships, and secure job positions. Knowledge hider (e.g., migrant worker) did not intend to harm the knowledge requester (e.g., the Slovenian colleague or superior), as it was found earlier in the case of the first negative predictor of knowledge hiding. But, to protect themselves from future potential controversy and foster belonging and inclusion to the Slovenian colleagues, managers in multinational companies in Ljubljana, and supervisors across the different faculties of the University of Ljubljana.

Three facets of knowledge hiding behaviour (Connelly et al., 2012), including playing dumb, evasive, and rationalised knowledge hiding, were employed by the migrant workers. Desire to belong and be included among the representatives of the majority group caused minority members to adjust their knowledge to majority culture employees. Therefore, the new find – adjustable knowledge hiding was found to be used by culturally minority members to avoid their perceived workplace exclusion and advance their perceived workplace inclusion.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study makes a range of contributions to the literature at the intersection of workplace inclusion/exclusion and knowledge hiding. First, our findings enrich the existing literature on knowledge-hiding behaviour (Connelly et al., 2019, 2012; Ruparel & Choubisa, 2020) by expanding its nomological net and investigating another antecedent of knowledge hiding (i.e., workplace exclusion). The findings demonstrate that *workplace exclusion* based on out-group membership; language and cultural barriers; ethnic, racial and national preferences; biased attitude; and negative perceptions leads to minority members engaging in knowledge-hiding behaviour at the workplace. We contribute to the literature on knowledge hiding by analysing it in the context of a diverse workforce. In this way, we advance studies on cultural elements of knowledge hiding that have up to now focused on cultural intelligence (Bogilovic et al., 2017), national culture dimensions (Babic et al., 2018) or specific professional cultures (Hernaus et al., 2019). We specifically focus on how and why migrant

workers' perceptions of workplace exclusion lead to hiding knowledge from majority group co-workers, and we make their feelings of inclusion/exclusion a central theme of our qualitative analysis. Such research goes deep into subjective experiences of migrant workers related to knowledge hiding, complementing studies referred to above that have investigated knowledge hiding in a specific cultural setting with quantitative, deductive approaches.

Another theoretical contribution of the current study to the knowledge-hiding field is that it uncovers additional negative outcomes of knowledge hiding. As the results demonstrate, perceived idea rejection that stems from knowledge hiding directly impacts minority members' ability to be creative, take initiative and engage in new idea generation and implementation, which can produce important contributions to their current working group and environment. Those findings complement the conclusions of Cerne et al. (2014) that knowledge hiding has a negative effect on employees' idea generation (creativity), as well as previous findings that the fear of being evaluated strictly affects knowledge-hiding behaviour (Bordia et al., 2006; Butt, 2019). In a paper focused on knowledge withholding, Kang (2016) asserted that knowledge receivers discriminate against individuals who are less professional, are of a lower rank or differ in their employment status. We add another layer of possible discrimination sources related to knowledge hiding or withholding, which is one of cultural diversity and subsequent workplace exclusion based on nationality and ethnic background.

In addition, the findings demonstrate that an English language barrier can also trigger disconnection and even unconscious exclusion among minority and majority employees in a way that constrains their ability to share knowledge or information. Linguistic and cultural differences can indeed affect information flow (Gaur et al., 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, no prior research has investigated how language represents a key barrier to maintaining connection and interaction among minority and majority employees, potentially resulting in knowledge hiding. In this way, our study presents the first narrative evidence of the role of language in knowledge-hiding processes, specifically in the context of a diverse workforce.

Furthermore, our findings (perhaps somewhat surprisingly) show that minority members' engagement in knowledge-hiding behaviour not only occurs as a consequence of their exclusion, but also serves as a means for improving their *workplace inclusion*. Insights mentioned by our study participants illustrated that knowledge-hiding behaviour appeared to be the best strategy employed by minority members to avoid pushbacks and controversy, to maintain relationships and to avoid offending or disturbing

majority colleagues. Workplace inclusion as a factor of knowledge-hiding behaviour has not yet been studied in the knowledge management literature. In this way, our study points out a clear positive outcome of hiding knowledge – that is, minority members being better included at work. This directly answers the call made by Connelly et al. (2019) for more research examining the potential benefits of knowledge hiding.

We also found a new dimension of knowledge hiding pointed out by our respondents: adjustable hiding. Minority employees have engaged in this facet of knowledge hiding by adjusting their information and knowledge to the requestor (e.g., Slovenian) to avoid controversy and foster a better perception of the requested information and/or knowledge. Consequently, this finding adds to the existing three knowledge-hiding dimensions (evasive hiding, rationalised hiding and playing dumb; Connelly et al., 2012) and highlights the potential to consider a fourth facet of knowledge hiding in the context of a diverse workforce. This facet would imply changing information slightly to be better aligned with the knowledge requestor's culture and values.

Furthermore, our research extends the literature on "assimilative techniques" utilised by migrant and ethnic minority employees (Goffman, 1963). We found that minority members engage in knowledge-hiding behaviour to avoid workplace exclusion and promote workplace inclusion. For instance, minority members reported that they intend to hide their true task-related knowledge, ideas and/or opinions and provide requested information in a way that is adjusted to the (culturally) dominant majority group's mindset. No research has been conducted on hiding and adjusting task- and/or work-related knowledge and information from the majority group to promote better inclusion, neither in the scope of knowledge hiding nor in the literature on assimilative strategies.

5.2. Practical implications, limitations and future research

This study is practically applicable for supervisors and managers in organisations, as fostering an inclusive multicultural working environment can improve individuals' collaboration, satisfaction, self-perception, engagement and knowledge sharing and thereby, their performance. As knowledge sharing plays an important role in organisational functioning, it is important to create an environment in which employees are eager to maintain healthy relationships and feel valued for their abilities, knowledge, skills and competencies. Managers must strive to develop and promote a climate that fosters a more inclusive organisation, which will help reduce knowledge hiding among minority and majority groups.

To account for the fact that foreigners come to work in a different country and work with culturally and socially different management and co-workers, more should be done to stimulate a knowledge-sharing culture among colleagues. Workshops, seminars and/or informal gatherings should be organised to enhance interactions among colleagues of a diverse workforce. Different practices and strategies should be implemented to strengthen employees' engagement and interaction, together with strategies promoting knowledge sharing.

The primary limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. More interviews could be conducted. We included 33 participants, which limits the observed variability and reduces external validity, making findings and conclusions impossible to generalise to a larger population. Furthermore, the choice of the sample has its limitations, because purposive sampling was applied, deliberately targeting participants living in Ljubljana, Slovenia; a decision related to the accessibility to the unit of analysis. Therefore, it further behoves us to add to our understanding of knowledge hiding within the context of a diverse workforce, and future research could focus on conducting large-scale studies that could enable generalising the findings to other cultural and country settings.

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Appendix

Codebook: Attribute codes

Code	Description	Analytical memo
Age	26–36	Migrant workers aged between 26 to 36 years.
Gender	Male Female	
Ethnicity	Costa Rican, Canadian, Turkish, Indian, Ukrainian, North African, Chinese, Russian, Chilean, French, German, Macedonian, Serbian.	Participants came from different countries.
Occupation	Game Designer, Team Designer, Designer, Politics, Engineering, Architectural, Researcher, Marketing, IT.	Participants work in different fields.
Organizational type	Multinational companies The faculties of the University of Ljubljana	Migrant workers working in multinational companies based in Ljubljana, as well across the different faculties of the University of Ljubljana.
Working years in Ljubljana	1–13	Participants are working in Ljubljana for 1 to 13 years.

Codebook: Analytical codes

Index code	Next-level code	Code description
Perceived exclusion		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling excluded due to ethnicity, language, migrant (minority) status, cultural difference - Feeling lack of trust and respect towards newcomers (e.g., minorities) - Feeling lack of trust and respect towards minorities ideas and expertise - Feeling excluded due to barriers to communication – poor English; language and ignorance of Slovenian language - Feeling excluded from working team and work environment - Feeling excluded from/ during social or work-related gatherings - Feeling excluded once experienced idea rejection during discussions, team meetings, and group work - Feeling of being a minority during the group gathering and discussions (the idea being in the minority, dominance of the Slovenians decision, being in a minority position against group decision)
	Lack of belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling low group identification and belonging at work - Not feeling part of the group - Feeling not comfortable working with Slovenian colleagues due to ethnic status difference - Having (experiencing) poor relationship with the majority group
	Self-labelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feeling like an out-grouper - Feeling like a foreigner - Feeling like a minority - Feeling excluded due to being of non-Slovenian descent
	Experiences of exclusion (barriers to collaboration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experiences of the idea being judged, non-appreciated, non-respected, criticised - Experiences of the idea being ignored, disengaged, mistreated, negatively perceived - Feeling low self-esteem, feeling demotivated, low confidence in own expertise and ideas - Having a fear of being misunderstood and excluded from the dominant culture group - Frequent comparison to others and analysis of own ideas, actions, communication style - No information flow – miscommunication. - Having no social support - Lack of social connection, interaction
Perceived inclusion	Sense of belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Things that make people feel included - Belonging and being noticeable, accepted - Belonging and being representative - Belonging and have a good image - Feelings of being familiar to the Slovenian colleagues and superiors - Feelings of being more similar to the Slovenian colleagues
	Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The experience that ideas are perceived better - Ideas are understood - Ideas are accepted

(Continued)

(Continued).

Index code	Next-level code	Code description
Strategies to increase inclusion		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Places to inclusion (meet with majority representatives during social gatherings, making unofficial meetings, talks, discussions with Slovenian co-workers) - Learning mindset of the cultural majority group (e.g., Slovenians) members - Learning working style - Testing and observing surrounding, their behaviour, thinking way, culture, social and cultural norms - Decision to adjust knowledge and ideas to the Slovenian colleagues and superiors' perceptions, understanding, preferences, socio-cultural norms
Knowledge hiding facets	Playing dumb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pretending not to understand the question - Pretending not to know the question
	Evasive hiding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hiding by giving partial information - Hiding due to the lack of time - Hiding due to time pressure, deadlines, and overload at work - Promising to help later on - Being occupied, busy - Ask the requester to find information independently from other sources
	Rationalised hiding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stating that information is confidential and cannot be shared - Hiding since information is personal - Hiding since information is secret
Adjustable knowledge hiding	Learning and observing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fully hides the requested information and adjusts the response to the perceptions of the requester
	Testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partially hides the requested information - Tests the requester by providing only a half of the information and adjusts the response to the perceptions of the requester - Hiding knowledge by testing the requester - Hiding knowledge since the hider is not well familiar with the socio-cultural perceptions, preferences, understandings, and interpretations of the requester - Hiding another part of the information by adjusting it to the requester's perceptions, etc.
Reasons to hide and adjust the requested knowledge		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hiding knowledge to avoid misinterpretation, misperceptions, misunderstandings - Hiding knowledge to avoid future potential interpersonal or task conflicts - Hiding knowledge to advance the sense of the perceived inclusion
Causes of knowledge hiding	Perceived workplace exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reasons for engaging in knowledge hiding arising from previous exclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge hiding due to experienced in-group conflict - Knowledge hiding due to experienced different points of view - Knowledge hiding due to opinion divergent - Knowledge hiding due to judgemental attitude towards minorities' ideas - Knowledge hiding due to experienced unacceptance of the idea
	Perceived workplace inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reasons for engaging in knowledge hiding arising from attempts to be included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge hiding to feel more welcomed - Knowledge hiding to identify more with the Slovenian colleagues, superiors, team members - Knowledge hiding to feel more accepted

Codebook: Fine-grained themes for “Causes of knowledge hiding”.

Knowledge hiding as a consequence of perceived exclusion

Theme	Theme description
<p>Rejection of the ideas [A situation when a person experiences that his or her idea is not accepted]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge hiding due to experienced criticism - Knowledge hiding due to feeling disengaged - Knowledge hiding due to Negative perception - Knowledge hiding due to experienced rejection of the idea - Knowledge hiding due to perceived ignore when sharing idea/ knowledge - Knowledge hiding due to perceived lack of respect towards minorities ideas
<p>Poor relationships [Lacking connection, identification, personal sympathy, and empathy towards a colleague or senior]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge hiding due to personal dislike, having personal grudges, personal disidentification, and disconnection with majority members - Knowledge hiding due to experienced lack of appreciation and rewards for own (e.g., minorities) work - Knowledge hiding due to experienced conflict with majority member/ group - Knowledge hiding due to experienced/ feeling personal and social tension - Knowledge hiding due to feeling lack of attachment - Knowledge hiding due to feeling discrepancies - Knowledge hiding due to feeling judgemental attitude towards minorities ideas - Knowledge hiding due to perceived lack of social connection with the majority group - Knowledge hiding due to perceived lack of engagement - Knowledge hiding due to perceived disbelief and distrust towards minorities ideas
<p>The language barrier [A situation when the language barrier creates difficulties in communication]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge hiding due to poor English language - Knowledge hiding due to feeling disengaged, disconnected, and miscommunicated due to the English barrier
<p>The created majority [The most significant part of the working group members; the created numerical and cultural majority of the group members. The number representing more than half of the total group members]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge hiding due to being in minority/ idea being in the minority, dominancy of the Slovenians decision, being in a minority position against group decision - Knowledge hiding due to arising incoordination - Knowledge hiding due to arising segregation - Knowledge hiding decision due to difficulties to impose an idea - Knowledge hiding due to experienced lack of participation in decision making - Knowledge hiding intention due to task interdependence and task relatedness - Knowledge hiding triggered by conformity to the majority’s decision - Knowledge hiding due to accomplish the task/ project - Knowledge hiding due to the importance of reaching the common goal
<p>Knowledge hiding as a strategy towards increasing perceived workplace inclusion</p>	
<p>Maintaining the relationship [To maintain the relationship at a satisfactory level. To avoid conflicts with a Slovenian co-worker or supervisor]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour to avoid disconnection, offensive reactions, conflicts from the majority group members and to keep a healthier and better relationship with majority members - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour to avoid frustrations, exclusion, and misunderstandings - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour to avoid push backs, rollbacks, negative perceptions - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour in turn to keep the friendship - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour to avoid offence from majority group members - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour in turn to keep team membership - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour to avoid competition - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour since the desire to keep the relationship - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour since being relation oriented
<p>Job security [Having a job that is safe and there is a slight chance to be fired or lose it]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour in turn to keep the job position - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour due to status, power, authority, and hierarchical difference - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour since being (perceive the self as) a subordinate - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour since being a newcomer, junior, lacking experience and competencies - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour in turn to keep a good relationship with a supervisor - Engaging in knowledge hiding behaviour since the difficulties to get a job