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How Paradoxical Leader Behavior Relates to Employee Knowledge-Hiding Behaviors in Hospitality and Tourism Firms

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ABSTRACT

Paradoxical leader behavior (PLB) has been linked to creativity and extra-role service, yet its role in shaping the distinct facets of employee knowledge hiding remains unclear. This study examines how PLB relates to evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding among frontline employees in hospitality and tourism firms. Drawing on paradox theory, it proposes that PLB fosters employee paradox mindset, which in turn reduces deceptive forms of knowledge hiding while increasing justified withholding. Data were collected in three waves from 276 frontline employees in Malaysian hospitality and tourism firms. PLB was negatively associated with evasive hiding and playing dumb, and positively associated with rationalized hiding. The associations with evasive hiding and rationalized hiding ran both directly and through paradox mindset, whereas the association with playing dumb ran through paradox mindset. The findings extend research on PLB and knowledge hiding by specifying a paradox-theory mechanism through which PLB relates in opposite directions to deceptive versus justified hiding. They suggest that leaders who hold competing demands together are best placed to reduce deceptive knowledge hiding while supporting the protection of knowledge that must always be safeguarded.

Keywords: Paradoxical Leader Behavior, Knowledge Hiding, Paradox Mindset, Paradox Theory, Hospitality, Tourism
JEL Classifications: L2, L83

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge hiding refers to an intentional attempt by employees to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by others (Connelly et al., 2012). In the hospitality and tourism sector, this behavior is especially costly because frontline employees rely heavily on tacit knowledge about guests, service recovery practices, and operational routines to deliver consistent yet personalized experiences (Zhao et al., 2016). Recent studies document knowledge hiding among hotel and tourism employees, link leaders' knowledge hiding to weaker employee creativity and job performance (Akhtar et al., 2022), and show that hiding responds to the social and leadership context (Kukreja et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2016). More broadly, knowledge hiding erodes trust and creativity and can trigger reciprocal hiding (Černe et al., 2014).

Most research in this sector has treated knowledge hiding as a single construct and has therefore overlooked important differences among its three facets. Evasive hiding and playing dumb involve deception, as employees either provide incorrect information or a misleading promise of a later answer, or pretend not to know the answer. Rationalized hiding, by contrast, involves openly explaining why knowledge cannot be shared, often for legitimate reasons such as confidentiality or proprietary service practices (Connelly et al., 2012). Because these facets differ in their motives and interpersonal effects, the same leadership behavior may reduce the deceptive forms while increasing the justified form. Prior work has shown that ethical leadership and servant leadership reduce evasive hiding and playing dumb while increasing rationalized hiding (Ali et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). Ethical leadership has also been linked to lower knowledge

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hiding overall (Abdullah et al., 2019), and knowledge hiding more broadly responds to job design, burnout, and other work conditions (Ali et al., 2021; Shujahat et al., 2025). These findings indicate that some leadership approaches help employees develop a clearer sense of when knowledge should be shared and when it may legitimately be withheld.

Paradoxical leader behavior (PLB) offers a distinct pathway to the same differentiated pattern. PLB refers to leaders' simultaneous enactment of seemingly contradictory yet interrelated behaviors, such as treating subordinates uniformly while recognizing their individuality, maintaining control while granting autonomy, and enforcing standards while allowing flexibility (Zhang et al., 2015; Fürstenberg et al., 2021). In hospitality settings, where employees face ongoing tensions between standardized protocols and customized guest service, PLB is particularly relevant because it helps leaders address competing operational and relational demands (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019; Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023). Studies have linked PLB to psychological empowerment, engagement, and extra-role service among hospitality employees (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019; Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023).

Drawing on paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011), we propose that PLB fosters employee paradox mindset. Paradox mindset is the extent to which individuals accept and feel energized by tensions and reframe them as both and rather than either or (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). This mindset is especially relevant in hospitality because frontline employees continually face the tension between sharing knowledge to ensure seamless teamwork and protecting knowledge to safeguard competitive practices or guest privacy. Employees who develop a stronger paradox mindset are better able to integrate these competing demands. As a result, they become less inclined to use deceptive strategies such as evasive hiding and playing dumb, and more inclined to engage in rationalized hiding by openly acknowledging legitimate boundaries. Paradox mindset is therefore proposed as the mechanism linking PLB to the three facets of knowledge hiding.

Although PLB has been linked to extra-role service in this sector (Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023) and a recent study connects it to lower knowledge hiding overall through psychological safety (Kukreja et al., 2025), we are not aware of research that examines whether and how PLB differentially relates to evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding among hospitality employees. Addressing this gap is important because frontline staff must continually decide what knowledge to share with coworkers to ensure seamless service and what knowledge to protect to safeguard competitive practices or guest privacy.

The present study makes three contributions: It extends research on PLB, research on knowledge hiding in tourism and hospitality, and research on paradox mindset. Research on PLB has documented its benefits for employee voice, engagement, and creativity (Fürstenberg et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022) and has begun to examine its role in hospitality settings (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019; Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023). We extend this literature to a differentiated set of knowledge-related behaviors and specify the process through which PLB shapes them. The knowledge-hiding literature in tourism and hospitality has largely treated the construct as unidimensional or focused on its overall consequences (Akhtar et al., 2022; Kukreja et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2016). We show that PLB is associated with lower evasive hiding and playing dumb but higher rationalized hiding, and we identify paradox mindset as the mechanism that accompanies this pattern. Research on paradox mindset has focused mainly on creativity and innovation (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018); we show that it also shapes how employees manage the tension between sharing and protecting knowledge. Together, these contributions connect the way leaders hold competing demands to the way hospitality employees decide what knowledge to hide and what not to hide. The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. Knowledge Hiding and its Facets

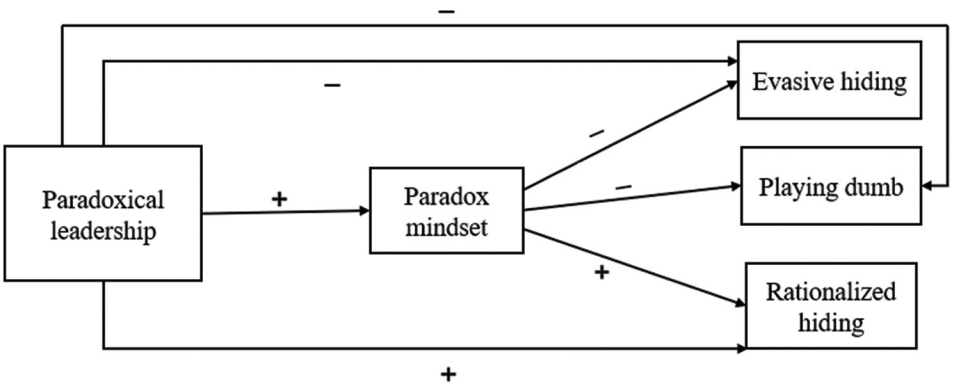
Knowledge hiding comprises three distinct facets (Connelly et al., 2012). Evasive hiding occurs when employees provide incorrect information or a misleading promise of a later answer. Playing dumb occurs when employees pretend not to know the answer. Rationalized hiding occurs when employees openly explain why the knowledge cannot be shared, often for legitimate reasons such as confidentiality or proprietary concerns (Connelly et al., 2012; Connelly and Zweig, 2015). These facets differ in their underlying motives and interpersonal consequences. The first two involve deception, whereas the third does not require pretending that the knowledge is unavailable, although the reasons given may differ in how legitimate they are (Connelly et al., 2012).

Rationalized hiding can serve legitimate organizational purposes because certain forms of knowledge must be protected. In hospitality and tourism firms, frontline employees possess knowledge that cannot be freely shared, including guest personal data, proprietary service recovery methods, supplier terms, and competitive operational practices (Zhao et al., 2016). When employees engage in rationalized hiding, they withhold such knowledge transparently and with a legitimate justification. This protects the organization while limiting the distrust and relational damage that deceptive hiding provokes (Černe et al., 2014; Connelly and Zweig, 2015). Leadership should therefore focus on reducing evasive hiding and playing dumb while accommodating justified rationalized hiding, because the latter supports both necessary knowledge protection and interpersonal integrity.

2.2. PLB and Knowledge Hiding

PLB refers to leaders' simultaneous enactment of seemingly contradictory yet interrelated behaviors, such as treating subordinates uniformly while recognizing their individuality, maintaining control while granting autonomy, and enforcing standards while allowing flexibility (Zhang et al., 2015; Fürstenberg et al., 2021). Paradox theory holds that such tensions persist over time and are best managed by embracing both poles rather than choosing between them (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

Figure 1: The proposed model



In hospitality and tourism organizations, these behaviors are especially relevant because frontline employees continually face tensions between standardized service protocols and the demand for personalized guest experiences, as well as between the need to share knowledge with coworkers for seamless service and the need to protect sensitive or proprietary knowledge (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019; Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023). By modeling a both and approach to competing demands, PLB supplies clear social cues that the tension between knowledge sharing and knowledge protection need not be resolved through deception. Employees can learn from such cues through observation and role modeling (Bandura, 1977; Brown et al., 2005). Employees who observe PLB are therefore less likely to resort to evasive hiding or playing dumb when coworkers request knowledge, and more likely to engage in rationalized hiding by openly explaining legitimate reasons for withholding it.

Prior research supports this differentiated pattern. Ethical leadership and servant leadership have been shown to reduce evasive hiding and playing dumb while increasing rationalized hiding (Ali et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). These findings indicate that leadership styles which promote nuanced rather than either or thinking help employees distinguish between illegitimate and legitimate forms of knowledge withholding. Because PLB explicitly models the integration of opposing demands, has been linked to extra-role service in hospitality settings (Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023), and has been associated with lower overall knowledge hiding among hospitality employees (Kukreja et al., 2025), it should produce a similar differentiated pattern among hospitality employees. Specifically, employees who perceive higher PLB should be less likely to hide knowledge deceptively and more likely to withhold it openly and with justification.

- H_{1a}: Employees who perceive higher PLB report lower evasive hiding
- H_{1b}: Employees who perceive higher PLB report lower playing dumb
- H_{1c}: Employees who perceive higher PLB report higher rationalized hiding.

2.3. PLB, Paradox Mindset, and Knowledge Hiding

Paradox mindset is the extent to which individuals accept and feel energized by tensions and reframe them as both and rather than either or (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Its importance lies in the fact that knowledge work in hospitality and tourism firms is inherently paradoxical. Frontline employees must share knowledge with coworkers to ensure seamless service while simultaneously protecting knowledge that must always remain confidential, such as guest data and proprietary practices (Connelly et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2016). A strong paradox mindset enables employees to hold these competing demands together rather than treating them as a zero-sum choice (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Employees who do not experience the tension as a threat to be escaped have little need for evasive or feigned-ignorance responses, and openly stating a legitimate boundary becomes a natural way to honor both demands. They should therefore be less inclined to use deceptive strategies such as evasive hiding and playing dumb, and more inclined to engage in rationalized hiding by openly acknowledging legitimate boundaries.

Drawing on paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011), PLB should foster employees' paradox mindset because it repeatedly demonstrates that opposing demands can be integrated (Zhang et al., 2015; Fürstenberg et al., 2021). Leaders who treat subordinates uniformly while recognizing their individuality, maintain control while granting autonomy, and enforce standards while allowing flexibility provide clear social cues that tensions are manageable. Employees who observe these behaviors are more likely to develop a paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018), consistent with evidence that PLB shapes how employees experience and respond to tension (Zhang et al., 2022). Related evidence shows that leaders who foster moral and cognitive discernment, such as justice orientation under ethical leadership and perspective taking under servant leadership, help employees distinguish between illegitimate and legitimate forms of knowledge withholding (Ali et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2024). Because PLB explicitly models the integration of opposing demands and has been linked to extra-role service in hospitality settings (Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023), it should increase paradox mindset, which in turn should reduce evasive hiding and playing dumb while increasing rationalized hiding.

- H_{2}: Employees who perceive higher PLB report a stronger paradox mindset
- H_{3a}: Employees with a stronger paradox mindset report lower evasive hiding

- H_{3b}: Employees with a stronger paradox mindset report lower playing dumb
- H_{3c}: Employees with a stronger paradox mindset report higher rationalized hiding.

2.4. The Mediating Role of Paradox Mindset

Because paradox mindset is shaped by PLB and in turn shapes the three facets of knowledge hiding, it is expected to transmit the effect of PLB to employee knowledge-hiding behaviors. In hospitality and tourism firms, leaders who model the integration of competing demands help employees develop a paradox mindset. Employees with a stronger paradox mindset are then better able to withhold knowledge that must always be protected without resorting to deception. As a result, the influence of PLB on evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding should operate through paradox mindset.

Prior research supports the mediating role of cognitive mechanisms that enable employees to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate forms of knowledge withholding. Ethical leadership and servant leadership reduce evasive hiding and playing dumb while increasing rationalized hiding through justice orientation in the case of ethical leadership (Ali et al., 2024) and perspective taking in the case of servant leadership (Usman et al., 2024). These findings indicate that leadership effects on the differentiated facets of knowledge hiding travel through employees' interpretive and cognitive capacities. Because PLB fosters paradox mindset and paradox mindset differentially relates to the three facets of knowledge hiding, paradox mindset should mediate the relationships of PLB with evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding. Following current guidance, mediation is evaluated through the bootstrapped indirect effect rather than through a requirement that the total effect be significant (Hayes, 2022; Zhao et al., 2010).

- H_4: Employee paradox mindset mediates the relationships of PLB with (a) evasive hiding (negative indirect effect), (b) playing dumb (negative indirect effect), and (c) rationalized hiding (positive indirect effect).

3. METHODS

3.1. Setting, Sample, and Procedure

The study was conducted among frontline employees in private hospitality and tourism firms in Malaysia. These firms operate in hotels, restaurants, and travel services, where frontline employees routinely handle guest-related knowledge, service recovery practices, and operational routines that must sometimes be shared with coworkers and sometimes protected. The setting was chosen because knowledge hiding has been documented in hospitality (Akhtar et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2016) and because frontline roles involve ongoing tensions between standardized protocols and personalized service.

Access to organizations was obtained through professional networks of the research team and through formal contacts with human resource managers in hospitality and tourism firms. Initial invitations were sent to HR managers of hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies, explaining the purpose of the study and requesting permission to survey frontline employees. Employees were informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes, that individual answers would not be shared with their supervisors or the organization, and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. To protect anonymity and confidentiality, no names or employee identification numbers were collected. Instead, employees generated a unique code known only to themselves (for example, the last four digits of their mobile number combined with their month of birth) so that responses could be matched across the three waves while remaining unidentifiable to the researchers or the organization. All data were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team.

To reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), data were collected in three waves, each 2 weeks apart. At Wave 1, employees rated PLB (366 responses). At Wave 2, the same employees rated paradox mindset (322 responses). At Wave 3, employees rated the three facets of knowledge hiding (301 responses). After removing 25 cases that were incomplete, failed attention checks, or could not be matched across waves, the final sample comprised 276 employees (75% of the Wave 1 respondents).

3.2. Measures

All items used a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). PLB was measured with five items from Fürstenberg et al. (2021). A sample item is "My supervisor uses a fair approach to treat all subordinates uniformly, but also treats them as individuals." Paradox mindset was measured with nine items from Miron-Spektor et al. (2018). Sample items include "When I consider conflicting perspectives I gain a better understanding of an issue" and "I am comfortable dealing with conflicting demands at the same time." Knowledge hiding was measured with the three-facet scale from Connelly et al. (2012), with four items per facet. A sample item for evasive hiding is "I agreed to help him/her but never really intended to." A sample item for playing dumb is "I pretended that I did not know the information." A sample item for rationalized hiding is "I explained that I would like to tell him/her but was not supposed to." All measures were self-reported by frontline employees.

3.3. Control Variables

We controlled for employee gender, age, education, and tenure, because demographic characteristics and organizational tenure can shape knowledge-related behaviors and responses to leadership (Ng and Feldman, 2010a, 2010b; Connelly et al., 2012).

3.4. Analytical Approach

The measurement model was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation. Discriminant validity was examined with the Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios (Henseler et al., 2015). Hypotheses were tested with a simple mediation model (Model 4 in Hayes's PROCESS; Hayes, 2022), estimated separately for each knowledge-hiding facet with ordinary least squares regression and all controls entered as covariates. For each facet, we estimated the total effect of PLB, its direct effect once paradox mindset

was included, and the specific indirect effect of PLB through paradox mindset. Confidence intervals for the indirect effects were percentile bootstrap intervals based on 5,000 resamples (Hayes, 2022). Mediation was classified by the signs and significance of the direct and indirect effects rather than by the significance of the total effect (Zhao et al., 2010).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports the standardized factor loadings and Table 2 the validity statistics. The five-factor measurement model fit the data well, χ^2 (289) = 349.35, P = 0.009, χ^2/df = 1.21, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.03 (90% CI [0.02, 0.04]). All standardized loadings were significant and ranged from 0.66 to 0.83. Composite reliability ranged from 0.81 to 0.92. Average variance extracted ranged from 0.51 to 0.63, above the 0.50 benchmark for every construct, which supports convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The square root of each construct's AVE (0.72-0.80) exceeded its correlations with all other constructs. Maximum shared variance (0.12-0.18) stayed below the corresponding AVE. HTMT ratios did not exceed 0.43. Together, these results support discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 1: Standardized factor loadings (five-factor CFA)

Item	Loading
Paradoxical leader behavior (PLB)	
PLB1	0.79
PLB2	0.80
PLB3	0.78
PLB4	0.80
PLB5	0.78
Paradox mindset	
PM1	0.76
PM2	0.77
PM3	0.69
PM4	0.79
PM5	0.77
PM6	0.70
PM7	0.72
PM8	0.78
PM9	0.77
Evasive hiding	
EH1	0.80
EH2	0.75
EH3	0.73
EH4	0.66
Playing dumb	
PD1	0.74
PD2	0.83
PD3	0.81
PD4	0.81
Rationalized hiding	
RH1	0.71
RH2	0.75
RH3	0.71
RH4	0.69

All loadings are significant at P<0.001. These values are consistent with the AVEs reported in Table 2

Table 3 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations. PLB correlated positively with paradox mindset (r = 0.39) and rationalized hiding (r = 0.29), and negatively with evasive hiding (r = −0.20) and playing dumb (r = −0.16). Paradox mindset correlated negatively with evasive hiding (r = −0.19) and playing dumb (r = −0.19), and positively with rationalized hiding (r = 0.24). Because the predictor, mediator, and outcomes were measured in three separate waves, common method variance is less likely to account for these relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4.2. Direct and Indirect Effects

Table 4 presents the results. PLB was positively related to paradox mindset (B = 0.36, SE = 0.05, 95% CI [0.26, 0.47]), supporting H_2. The total effect of PLB was negative for evasive hiding (B = −0.19, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [−0.31, −0.08]) and playing dumb (B = −0.16, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [−0.29, −0.03]) and positive for rationalized hiding (B = 0.27, SE = 0.05, 95% CI [0.16, 0.37]), supporting H_{1a}, H_{1b}, and H_{1c}. With paradox mindset in the model, the direct effect of PLB remained significant for evasive hiding (B = −0.14, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [−0.27, −0.02]) and rationalized hiding (B = 0.22, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [0.10, 0.33]) but not for playing dumb (B = −0.10, SE = 0.07, 95% CI [−0.24, 0.03]). Paradox mindset was negatively related to evasive hiding (B = −0.14, SE = 0.07, 95% CI [−0.27, −0.01]) and playing dumb (B = −0.15, SE = 0.07, 95% CI [−0.30, −0.01]), and positively related to rationalized hiding (B = 0.14, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [0.02, 0.26]), supporting H_{3a}, H_{3b}, and H_{3c}.

All three indirect effects were significant. The indirect effect of PLB on evasive hiding through paradox mindset was −0.05 (SE = 0.03, 95% bootstrap CI [−0.10, −0.01]), the indirect effect on playing dumb was −0.06 (SE = 0.03, 95% CI [−0.12, −0.01]), and the indirect effect on rationalized hiding was 0.05 (SE = 0.02, 95% CI [0.01, 0.10]), supporting H_4. The paradox mindset pathway accounted for a meaningful but partial portion of the associations between PLB and evasive hiding and rationalized hiding (approximately 27% and 19% of the total effects, respectively). For playing dumb, the direct effect was no longer significant once paradox mindset was included, which indicates indirect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). Because the indirect effect accounted for approximately 35% of the total effect, this

Table 2: Discriminant and convergent validity

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	CR	AVE	MSV
1. PLB	0.79					0.89	0.63	0.18
2. Paradox mindset	0.43***	0.75				0.92	0.56	0.18
3. Evasive hiding	−0.23**	−0.22**	0.74			0.83	0.54	0.13
4. Playing dumb	−0.18**	−0.21**	0.36***	0.80		0.87	0.63	0.13
5. Rationalized hiding	0.34***	0.27***	−0.14	−0.17*	0.72	0.81	0.51	0.12

n=276. *P<0.05. **P<0.01. ***P<0.001. Off-diagonal values are latent factor correlations from the CFA. Bold diagonal values are the square roots of AVE. CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted, MSV: Maximum shared variance

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PLB	3.48	0.95								
2. Paradox mindset	3.50	0.89	0.39**							
3. Evasive hiding	2.90	0.92	−0.20**	−0.19**						
4. Playing dumb	2.77	1.04	−0.16**	−0.19**	0.31**					
5. Rationalized hiding	3.51	0.88	0.29**	0.24**	−0.10	−0.15*				
6. Age	37.73	7.54	0.00	−0.06	−0.03	0.12	−0.09			
7. Gender	1.37	0.48	−0.03	−0.03	0.05	0.13*	−0.06	0.03		
8. Tenure	3.43	1.95	0.10	0.05	−0.04	−0.12*	−0.02	0.16**	−0.08	
9. Education	2.37	1.08	−0.02	−0.05	0.01	0.10	0.02	−0.03	−0.02	0.02

n=276. *P<0.05. **P<0.01. Gender is coded 1=Male and 2=Female. Education is coded 1=10 years of schooling, 2=12 years of schooling, 3=undergraduate degree, and 4=master's degree or above

Table 4: Path coefficients and indirect effects

Path	B	SE	95% CI
Total effects			
PLB→Evasive hiding (total)	−0.19**	0.06	[−0.31, −0.08]
PLB→Playing dumb (total)	−0.16*	0.06	[−0.29, −0.03]
PLB→Rationalized hiding (total)	0.27**	0.05	[0.16, 0.37]
Direct paths			
PLB→Paradox mindset	0.36**	0.05	[0.26, 0.47]
PLB→Evasive hiding (direct)	−0.14*	0.06	[−0.27, −0.02]
PLB→Playing dumb (direct)	−0.10	0.07	[−0.24, 0.03]
PLB→Rationalized hiding (direct)	0.22**	0.06	[0.10, 0.33]
Paradox mindset→Evasive hiding	−0.14*	0.07	[−0.27, −0.01]
Paradox mindset→Playing dumb	−0.15*	0.07	[−0.30, −0.01]
Paradox mindset→ Rationalized hiding	0.14*	0.06	[0.02, 0.26]
Indirect effects			
PLB→Paradox mindset→ Evasive hiding	−0.05	0.03	[−0.10, −0.01]
PLB→Paradox mindset→ Playing dumb	−0.06	0.03	[−0.12, −0.01]
PLB→Paradox mindset → Rationalized hiding	0.05	0.02	[0.01, 0.10]

n=276. *P<0.05. **P<0.01. B=unstandardized coefficient. Total effects are estimated without paradox mindset in the model and direct effects with paradox mindset included. Confidence intervals for indirect effects are percentile bootstrap intervals based on 5,000 resamples, and the SEs of indirect effects are bootstrap SEs. All models include age, gender, tenure, and education as controls

pattern is better read as consistent with mediation through paradox mindset than as evidence that paradox mindset fully explains the association.

5. DISCUSSION

This study asked whether and how paradoxical leader behavior (PLB) relates to the three facets of knowledge hiding among frontline employees in hospitality and tourism firms. The findings suggest that PLB was associated with lower evasive hiding and playing dumb, and with higher rationalized hiding. Paradox mindset transmitted these associations in all three cases. The associations with evasive hiding and rationalized hiding also remained significant directly, so mediation was partial, whereas the direct association with playing dumb was no longer significant once paradox mindset was included.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The study extends three literatures: Research on PLB, research on knowledge hiding in hospitality and tourism, and research on paradox mindset. Prior work has shown that PLB fosters employee voice, engagement, and creativity (Fürstenberg et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022) and has begun to examine its role in hospitality settings (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019; Rescalvo-Martin et al., 2021; Shehata et al., 2023). Our findings carry this work to a differentiated set of knowledge-related behaviors. They also clarify that PLB does not simply reduce knowledge hiding. It reduces the deceptive forms while increasing the justified form. This pattern is consistent with the both-and character of PLB and with the logic of paradox theory (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

Most studies in hospitality and tourism have treated knowledge hiding as a unidimensional construct or focused on its overall consequences (Akhtar et al., 2022; Kukreja et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2016). Our results show that the same leadership behavior can be negatively related to evasive hiding and playing dumb while being positively related to rationalized hiding. They also identify paradox mindset as the mechanism that produces this differentiated pattern. In doing so, the study adds to the growing recognition that the three facets of knowledge hiding are not interchangeable (Ali et al., 2024; Connelly et al., 2012; Usman et al., 2024). The pattern for PLB parallels that reported for ethical and servant leadership, which operate through justice orientation and perspective taking, respectively. This suggests that differentiated relationships with the facets generalize across leadership styles while the underlying mechanism differs.

Research on paradox mindset has linked it to creativity and performance under conditions of tension (Miron-Spektor et al., 2018). Our findings show that paradox mindset also shapes how employees manage the specific tension between knowledge sharing and knowledge protection. Employees with a stronger paradox mindset were less likely to use deceptive strategies and more likely to engage in rationalized hiding. This suggests that paradox mindset functions as a cognitive capacity that enables more precise, rather than blanket, responses to knowledge requests.

5.2. Practical Implications

The findings carry several implications for hospitality and tourism firms. Leadership development should cultivate the capacity to combine control with autonomy and consistency with flexibility,

rather than training directive or empowering behaviors in isolation. The short-form PLB scale of Fürstenberg et al. (2021) can serve as a diagnostic tool for assessment and coaching. Leaders who learn to hold these tensions are better positioned to reduce deceptive knowledge hiding among frontline staff. Firms should also help employees develop a paradox mindset. Training that helps frontline staff recognize and work with the tension between sharing knowledge for seamless service and protecting knowledge that must always remain confidential can reduce evasive hiding and playing dumb while supporting justified withholding. Such training is particularly relevant in hospitality, where guest data, service recovery methods, and competitive practices must be safeguarded even as employees collaborate closely. Managers should also distinguish between the three facets of knowledge hiding when addressing the behavior. Efforts aimed at eliminating all forms of knowledge hiding may inadvertently discourage the legitimate protection of guest data and proprietary practices. Clear guidance on when rationalized hiding is appropriate, combined with accountability for deceptive forms, is likely to be more effective. Finally, because all data were self-reported, organizations should complement survey feedback with behavioral observations or peer input when assessing knowledge-hiding patterns, so that interventions target actual practices rather than self-perceptions alone.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study set out to explain how PLB relates to the three facets of knowledge hiding. Drawing on paradox theory, it proposed that PLB gives employees access to a both-and approach to the tension between knowledge sharing and knowledge protection. Data from 276 frontline employees in Malaysian hospitality and tourism firms supported this view. PLB was associated with lower evasive hiding and playing dumb, and with higher rationalized hiding, through paradox mindset and, for evasive hiding and rationalized hiding, also directly. For hospitality and tourism firms, the results suggest that leaders who hold competing demands together are best placed to reduce deceptive knowledge hiding while supporting the justified protection of knowledge that must always be safeguarded.

The study has several limitations. The waves were 2 weeks apart. This spacing reduces common method concerns but cannot establish that PLB precedes change in paradox mindset or knowledge hiding, so the pathways should be read as associations consistent with our theory. Longer panel designs could test the proposed sequence. All measures were self-reported by frontline employees. Although temporal separation reduces common method bias, it does not eliminate it. Future studies should incorporate supervisor or peer ratings of knowledge hiding to strengthen the design. The sample comes from hospitality and tourism firms in one country and was drawn through professional networks. Replication in other industries and institutional settings would test the model's boundaries. The study also focused on paradox mindset as the central mechanism. Other mediators, such as justice orientation or perspective taking, may also transmit the effects of PLB and could be examined in future work. In addition, employees were nested in firms, which the single-level analysis did not model, and rationalized hiding as measured here includes justifications whose legitimacy was not assessed; future research could adjust for clustering and code the stated reasons for legitimacy.

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