

Project Dissertation Report on

**PLACEMENT COMPETITION AND
KNOWLEDGE HIDING BEHAVIOUR
AMONG MBA STUDENTS AT DELHI
SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, DTU**

Submitted By
Lucky Yadav
24/DMBA/127

Under the Guidance of
Dr. Arushi Jain
Assistant Professor



DELHI SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
Delhi Technological University
Bawana Road, Delhi – 110042
Session: 2024–26

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Major Research Project (MRP) entitled:

**"PLACEMENT COMPETITION AND KNOWLEDGE HIDING
BEHAVIOUR AMONG MBA STUDENTS AT DELHI SCHOOL OF
MANAGEMENT, DTU"**

has been submitted by Lucky Yadav (Roll No.: 24/DMBA/127) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA) at Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University.

This project has been carried out under my supervision and guidance. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the work embodied in this report is original and has not been submitted, either in part or in full, to any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Dr. Arushi Jain
Assistant Professor
Delhi School of Management
Delhi Technological University

Place: New Delhi

Date: _____

DECLARATION

I, Lucky Yadav (Roll No.: 24/DMBA/127) a student of the MBA programme (Batch 2024–26) at Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, do hereby solemnly declare that the Major Research Project entitled:

"PLACEMENT COMPETITION AND KNOWLEDGE HIDING BEHAVIOUR AMONG MBA STUDENTS AT DELHI SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, DTU"

is an original and independent piece of work conducted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA). The project has been completed under the guidance of Dr. Arushi Jain, Delhi School of Management, DTU.

I Further declare that this work has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree

Place: New Delhi

Date: _____

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Lucky Yadav
24/DMBA/127
MBA, Batch 2024–26
Delhi School of Management, DTU

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study investigates knowledge hiding behaviour among MBA students at Delhi School of Management (DSM), Delhi Technological University (DTU), during the placement season of 2025-26. Knowledge hiding, defined as the intentional withholding of requested knowledge (Connelly et al., 2012), has been well-studied in workplace settings but remains largely unexamined in pre-professional educational contexts in India. The DSM-DTU placement environment, having a batch of approximately 300+ students competing for a campus placement rate of only 30 to 40 percent, creates conditions of acute information scarcity and competitive pressure that make it a particularly compelling site for this inquiry.

A qualitative exploratory design was adopted, grounded in an interpretivist paradigm. Twelve second-year MBA students were selected through purposive sampling to reflect diversity in gender, specialisation, geographic background, work experience, and placement outcome. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in Hinglish between December 2025 and March 2026 and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, yielding five overarching themes.

The findings demonstrate that perceived zero-sum competition over scarce placement seats served as the primary trigger for hiding behaviour, with students engaging in rapid, real-time competitive threat assessments before deciding how much to disclose. All three forms of hiding identified by Connelly et al. (2012), namely evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding, were present, alongside a contextually distinctive variant involving deliberate misinformation about a company's selection process. Information sharing was not uniformly withheld but organised across a three-tier architecture of trust, with unrestricted exchange within close inner circles and progressively restricted disclosure toward acquaintances. Institutional factors also played a co-producing role: the placement cell's opacity in communicating process information modelled information restriction as normal behaviour, while senior-junior mentoring relationships transmitted competitive norms intergenerationally. Despite

the rationalisations enabling hiding, participants reported residual guilt, retaliatory cycles, cognitive dissonance, and lasting reputational consequences, suggesting that hiding behaviour is neither psychologically costless nor strategically fixed.

The study contributes to the knowledge hiding literature by extending Connelly et al.'s typology to the MBA placement context, introducing the three-tier information sharing architecture as an analytical concept, and identifying structural network exclusion as a distinct mechanism of informational inequality. Practically, it recommends greater transparency in placement cell communications, the creation of universally accessible interview experience repositories, equitable allocation of senior mentoring, and pre-season pedagogical engagement with competitive information ethics. These interventions aim not to eliminate competition but to ensure it unfolds within a more equitable and transparent informational environment.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In contemporary organisations, knowledge is widely recognised as among the most strategically significant resources available to individuals and institutions alike. The capacity to generate, share, and leverage knowledge determines competitive advantage not only at the firm level but also at the level of individuals navigating professional environments. Over the past two decades, the organisational behaviour and human resource management literature has devoted considerable attention to the dynamics of knowledge sharing examining why individuals share, when they withhold, and under what conditions the latter behaviour, commonly termed knowledge hiding, emerges and persists.

Knowledge hiding, as formally defined by Connelly et al., (2012), refers to an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person. This is distinct from mere knowledge hoarding the passive accumulation of information without sharing, in that hiding is an active, deliberate, and often interpersonally directed behaviour. Connelly and colleagues identified three primary forms of knowledge hiding: evasive hiding, in which the hider provides false or misleading information; rationalized hiding, in which the hider offers a seemingly legitimate justification for not sharing; and playing dumb, in which the hider pretends ignorance of the requested information. Each form carries different interpersonal consequences and reflects different psychological motivations.

The antecedents of knowledge hiding are well-established in the extant literature. Task interdependence, territorial behaviour, distrust, job insecurity, competitive organisational climates, and psychological ownership over knowledge have all been identified as significant predictors of hiding behaviour (Connelly et al., 2012; Peng, 2013; Singh, 2019; Cerne et al., 2017). Consequences of knowledge hiding include reduced team performance, impaired creativity, erosion of interpersonal trust, and negative reciprocal cycles wherein hiding begets further hiding across a social network (Cerne et al., 2014; Jiang et al., 2019). The literature thus presents knowledge hiding as a dysfunctional behaviour both individually costly and collectively harmful even as

it acknowledges the rational underpinnings of the behaviour from an individual actor's perspective.

The majority of research on knowledge hiding has been situated in organisational settings workplaces, teams, and cross-functional units. Comparatively little scholarly attention has been directed toward knowledge hiding in educational or pre-professional contexts, particularly among management students navigating high-stakes competitive transitions such as placement seasons. This gap in the literature is theoretically and practically significant, for several reasons.

Business school environments and MBA programmes present a structurally distinctive context for examining knowledge hiding. MBA students form a cohort that is simultaneously collaborative and competitive. They attend classes together, form study groups, and co-create intellectual capital. Yet they also apply to the same limited set of companies, compete for a restricted number of offers, and are individually evaluated against one another. This duality of cooperation and competition sometimes termed co-competition creates an inherent tension around knowledge sharing. During the placement season in particular, this tension is dramatically heightened: information about company processes, selection criteria, interview experiences, and preparation strategies becomes simultaneously scarce, valuable, and asymmetrically distributed.

Delhi School of Management (DSM) at Delhi Technological University (DTU) provides a particularly compelling site for the examination of these dynamics. DSM's MBA programme has a batch size of approximately 270 students, of whom only approximately 30 to 40 per cent are able to secure campus placements. This structural reality creates a zero-sum competitive pressure of unusual intensity. Students are acutely aware of their relative positioning, of the limited number of seats available at each visiting company, and of the potential competitive consequence of any information they share with peers. Companies visiting the campus during the 2025-26 placement season included Organisation A (Deputy Manager, Sales), Organisation B (a financial analytics firm, analyst role), Organisation C (a financial services firm, analyst role), and Organisation D (an early-stage startup, business development role), among others.

This context renders the placement season at DSM-DTU an exceptionally fertile ground for the emergence and operation of knowledge hiding behaviour.

Moreover, DSM-DTU's student demographic introduces dimensions of social diversity in terms of undergraduate institution, geographic background, work experience, specialisation, and pre-existing social networks that add further complexity to the information dynamics of the placement context.

It is within this rich and underexplored context that the present study situates itself. The study adopts a qualitative paradigm, drawing upon the lived experiences and subjective meaning-making of twelve second-year MBA students at DSM-DTU who were directly engaged in the placement process during the 2025-26 placement season. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted between December 2025 and March 2026 in Hinglish, the study seeks to understand how and why knowledge hiding behaviour emerges, how it is experienced and rationalised by both those who hide and those who are hidden from, and what institutional and relational factors shape its operation.

1.2 Problem Statement

- Placement season is a high-stakes, time-bound competitive environment where information acts as a key source of advantage
- Knowledge about company processes, selection criteria, and offer numbers can directly influence a student's preparation and probability of selection
- Unequal information distribution through peer hiding, selective sharing, or institutional opacity compromises fairness, efficiency, and student well-being
- Knowledge hiding in workplaces has been studied since Connelly et al. (2012), but has not been examined in MBA placement contexts, particularly in India
- This creates a theoretical gap (existing models untested in pre-professional settings) and a practical gap (institutions like DSM-DTU lack evidence-based understanding of their own information dynamics)
- DSM-DTU's low placement rate (approximately 30 to 40 per cent of the batch) creates unusually intense competition per available position
- High student heterogeneity in networks, geography, and institutional connections generates structural inequalities in informal information access

- The placement cell is perceived as opaque, with company processes and intake numbers withheld or released late, inflating the value of informally circulated information
- The problem is not merely individual behaviour but a systemic, institutionally co-produced phenomenon
- The environment structurally rewards hiding, models opacity at the institutional level, and lacks mechanisms for equitable information distribution
- The study asks: what are the nature, forms, antecedents, and consequences of knowledge hiding at DSM-DTU, and how do institutional, relational, and individual factors interact to shape it?
- Student voices and lived experiences are the primary lens of inquiry

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The present study is guided by the following research objectives, which collectively orient both the empirical investigation and the analytical interpretation of the findings:

1. To explore and understand the nature and forms of knowledge hiding behaviour exhibited by MBA students at Delhi School of Management, DTU, during the placement season.
2. To identify the individual, relational, and contextual antecedents that motivate or facilitate knowledge hiding behaviour among MBA students during placement competition.
3. To examine the role of trust, social networks, and in-group versus out-group dynamics in shaping patterns of selective information sharing and knowledge hiding among student peers.
4. To investigate the influence of institutional factors particularly the practices and communication norms of the placement cell on the information environment experienced by students and on the normalisation of knowledge hiding behaviour.
5. To explore the perceived consequences of knowledge hiding for individuals, peer relationships, and the broader placement cohort, including its effects on

placement outcomes, psychological well-being, and post-placement relational dynamics.

6. To develop theoretically grounded and practically actionable recommendations for the institution, the placement cell, and students, to mitigate the adverse effects of knowledge hiding and foster a more equitable and psychologically healthy placement environment.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of the present study is defined along four principal dimensions: thematic, geographic, temporal, and methodological.

Thematic Scope

This study focuses on knowledge hiding behaviour as it manifests in the context of placement competition among MBA students. The thematic ambit encompasses: the forms and nature of knowledge hiding; the psychological motivations and situational triggers that lead individuals to engage in or refrain from hiding behaviour; the role of interpersonal trust, social network structure, and in-group or out-group dynamics in modulating knowledge flows; the institutional practices and structural features of the placement process; and the consequences of hiding behaviour for individual outcomes, peer relationships, and placement cohort dynamics. The study does not extend to a quantitative measurement of placement outcomes or a comparative analysis across multiple institutions.

Geographic and Institutional Scope

The study is geographically and institutionally bounded to Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, located in New Delhi. DSM-DTU was selected as the research site on the basis of its distinctive placement environment characterised by a relatively low campus placement rate, a demographically heterogeneous student cohort, and a placement process perceived by students as being information-asymmetric. While the findings are rooted in the specific institutional context of DSM-DTU, it is anticipated that the themes generated will have transferability to other MBA programmes in India sharing similar structural features.

Temporal Scope

The study draws upon the experiences of participants during the placement season of 2025-26 at DSM-DTU. All twelve interviews were conducted during the active phase of this placement cycle, between December 2025 and March 2026, ensuring that participants were recounting experiences that were immediate, emotionally proximate, and contextually vivid. The main wave of campus visits at DSM occurred between October 2025 and March 2026.

Methodological Scope

The study employs a qualitative research paradigm, using semi-structured in-depth interviews as its primary data collection instrument. The methodological scope accordingly encompasses the subjective experiences, interpretations, rationalisations, and meaning-making of the participants rather than measurable behavioural frequencies or statistical relationships. The study does not claim statistical generalisability; instead, it seeks theoretical generalisability through the development of conceptual insights grounded in rich, contextually situated data.

Table 1.1: Overview of the Study Source: Researcher's Own Compilation

Dimension	Details
Research Topic	Placement Competition and Knowledge Hiding Behaviour Among MBA Students
Institution	Delhi School of Management (DSM), DTU, New Delhi
Research Paradigm	Interpretivist / Constructivist
Research Design	Qualitative Exploratory
Data Collection	Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews (Hinglish)
Sample	12 Second-Year MBA Students (Purposive Sampling)
Data Analysis	Thematic Analysis — Braun and Clarke (2006)
Study Period	December 2025 to March 2026

Batch Context	270 Students; 30-40% Campus Placement Rate; Avg. Package approximately 8 LPA
Theoretical Anchor	Connelly et al. (2012); Cerne et al. (2014); Choudhary and Mishra (2023)
Key Themes	Competitive Trigger, Hiding Strategies, Trust Circles, Institutional Opacity, Consequences and Reflexivity

1.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretical Significance

By situating knowledge hiding within an MBA placement context, this study extends the conceptual reach of a construct that has hitherto been examined primarily in workplace settings. The placement season offers a theoretically distinctive context: it involves explicit competitive goal structures, time pressure, high personal stakes, and ongoing interpersonal relationships that must be sustained beyond the competitive event itself. This context enables a nuanced examination of how knowledge hiding operates when individuals must simultaneously compete and coexist. The study also contributes to the emerging literature on knowledge hiding in Indian professional and educational contexts, which remains relatively sparse. The study highlights how cultural dynamics including hierarchical relationships between seniors and juniors, the role of geographic and institutional social networks, and the coexistence of informal solidarity and competitive self-interest shape the operation of knowledge hiding in the Indian MBA context.

Institutional Significance

For Delhi School of Management and similar institutions, this study provides an empirically grounded account of how the placement environment shapes student behaviour and well-being. The study surfaces specific institutional practices that amplify information asymmetries and, in doing so, inadvertently normalise and incentivise knowledge hiding. These findings have direct implications for placement cell communication policies, peer mentoring structures, and institutional transparency norms.

Practical Significance

At the level of individual students and cohorts, this study provides a reflective framework for understanding placement-season behaviour that is often experienced but rarely examined. By naming and analysing the phenomenon of knowledge hiding in this context, the study enables future students, placement coordinators, and faculty advisors to approach the placement season with greater awareness of its information dynamics, and to make more conscious choices about the relationship between competitive behaviour and long-term relational and professional outcomes.

1.6 Organisation of the Report

The remainder of this report is organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents a systematic review of the relevant literature, covering the theoretical foundations of knowledge hiding, competitive behaviour in educational settings, trust and social network dynamics, and the MBA placement context in India. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, detailing the qualitative research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, and the analytical framework employed. Chapter 4 presents the thematic findings of the study, drawing extensively on participant narratives to develop and substantiate each identified theme, followed by a discussion of the findings in relation to the extant literature, recommendations for practice, and the limitations of the study. The report concludes with a synthesis of the principal insights of the investigation and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a systematic review of the theoretical and empirical literature relevant to the present study. The review is organised thematically around seven principal bodies of scholarship: the conceptual foundations and typology of knowledge hiding; the antecedents of knowledge hiding at individual, interpersonal, and organisational levels; the consequences of knowledge hiding; knowledge hiding in the Indian professional and educational context; competitive dynamics, trust, and social capital in peer networks; cooperation dynamics in MBA educational environments; and the identification of the research gap that the present study addresses. Collectively, this review locates the present study within an established and growing body of knowledge while simultaneously defining the specific contribution it makes.

2.2 Conceptual Foundations: Defining Knowledge Hiding

The concept of knowledge hiding was formally introduced into the organisational behaviour and knowledge management literature by Connelly et al., (2012) in their landmark article in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. Connelly et al. (2012) defined knowledge hiding as an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person. The definition is notable for its emphasis on intentionality, thereby distinguishing knowledge hiding from the passive failure to share knowledge (knowledge hoarding) or the inability to share knowledge due to tacitness or communicative barriers. Knowledge hiding, in the Connelly et al. formulation, is an active, deliberate, and interpersonally directed act.

An important conceptual clarification concerns the distinction between knowledge hiding and knowledge hoarding. Trusson et al., (2017) observe that the term knowledge hoarding has often been used loosely in popular management discourse to describe a broad range of behaviours that impede knowledge flow. Connelly et al. (2012) distinguish hoarding the accumulation of knowledge without regard to sharing from hiding, which is request-contingent: it is triggered by another person's explicit request for knowledge and involves an active response of concealment or evasion. This dyadic, request-response structure is central to the construct. In the present study, both

phenomena are relevant: individual-level knowledge hiding and institutionally produced information asymmetry interact to shape the informational landscape of the placement season at DSM-DTU.

2.2.1 Typology of Knowledge Hiding Strategies

Connelly et al. (2012) identified three distinct strategies through which individuals engage in knowledge hiding, each reflecting a different mode of concealment and carrying different interpersonal risks for the hider.

Evasive hiding involves supplying the knowledge seeker with incorrect, misleading, or incomplete information, or making a false promise to provide the requested information at a future point. Because it involves deception, evasive hiding carries heightened interpersonal risks if discovered; it is likely to be perceived as a betrayal of trust and may severely damage the relationship between hider and seeker.

Playing dumb involves the hider pretending to be ignorant of or unfamiliar with the requested knowledge. Like evasive hiding, playing dumb is deceptive in nature, but is perhaps less confrontational in its execution. Hernaus et al. (2019) found that playing dumb was particularly prevalent in academic settings characterised by competitive pressures, a finding directly relevant to the present study context.

Rationalized hiding involves the hider offering a seemingly legitimate justification for not sharing the requested knowledge citing confidentiality obligations, lack of time, or the belief that the seeker does not need the information. Connelly et al. (2012) note that rationalized hiding is the least interpersonally risky strategy, as it does not involve deception. Choudhary and Mishra (2023), in their qualitative study of knowledge hiding in virtual work arrangements among Indian consulting professionals, found rationalized hiding to be the most commonly adopted strategy in that context, partly because structural features of the setting provided ready-made rationalisations for nonsharing.

All three strategies were empirically observable in the interview data of the present study. Participants reported instances of playing dumb when asked about company processes they knew well; of evasive hiding, where deliberately vague, incomplete, or actively incorrect information was provided; and of rationalized hiding, where participants invoked competitive logic, intellectual effort, or the risk of diluting their

preparation edge as justifications for withholding. The Connelly et al. (2012) typology thus provides a robust foundational vocabulary for the analysis of the data.

Type of Hiding	Definition	Example in DSM Placement Context
Evasive Hiding	Providing misleading, incomplete, or incorrect information in response to a knowledge request	Mentioning that a company has an aptitude test when it has a direct interview; sharing generic tips while omitting company-specific process details
Playing Dumb	Pretending ignorance or unawareness of the requested knowledge	Claiming no knowledge of an interview process when a senior has already provided detailed briefing; feigning unfamiliarity with a company's case study format
Rationalized Hiding	Offering a justification for non-disclosure	Citing competitive fairness, intellectual effort invested, or referral protection as reasons for not sharing a job opening or process insight

Table 2.1: Types of Knowledge Hiding (Connelly et al., 2012) Applied to the DSM Placement Context Source: Adapted from Connelly et al. (2012); Researcher's Own Application

2.3 Antecedents of Knowledge Hiding

The antecedents of knowledge hiding have been examined at three levels: the individual, the interpersonal, and the organisational. Xiao and Cooke (2019), in a comprehensive review of the knowledge hiding literature, organise these antecedents systematically and note that the interplay of factors across levels is often more predictive of hiding behaviour than any single-level factor alone.

2.3.1 Individual-Level Antecedents

At the individual level, psychological ownership over knowledge has been identified as a significant predictor of knowledge hiding. Peng (2013) found that individuals who perceive themselves as the rightful owners of certain knowledge who experience a

strong sense of mine-ness in relation to their expertise or information are more likely to hide that knowledge when requested. This psychological ownership dynamic is particularly relevant in competitive placement contexts where students invest significant personal effort in acquiring preparation insights and develop a proprietary sense in relation to that work.

Territorial behaviour, closely related to psychological ownership, has also been identified as a driver of knowledge hiding. Singh (2019) found that employees exhibiting higher territorial behaviour showed a higher propensity to hide knowledge. In the MBA placement context, this territorialism is around preparation materials, company contacts, alumni networks, and process-specific insights. Indispensability motivation the desire to remain irreplaceable by maintaining exclusive access to critical knowledge is a further individual-level antecedent (Kumar Jha and Varkkey, 2018).

2.3.2 Interpersonal Antecedents

Trust, or the lack thereof, is among the most consistently identified interpersonal antecedents of knowledge hiding. Connelly et al. (2012) found that lower levels of interpersonal trust between the seeker and the potential provider significantly increased hiding behaviour. Semerci (2019) further found that interpersonal competition and conflict moderated the trust-hiding relationship, such that in highly competitive dyads, even moderate levels of distrust were sufficient to trigger hiding. The competitive structure of the MBA placement season is thus predicted, by this literature, to generate precisely the conditions that attenuate weakens and amplify hiding.

Reciprocity norms also operate as interpersonal moderators. The social exchange literature establishes that individuals are more likely to share knowledge with those from whom they have previously received knowledge, and less likely to share with those perceived as net extractors of information (Blau, 1964). Choudhary and Mishra (2023) found evidence of this reciprocity dynamic in the Indian consulting context, with respondents explicitly noting that peers known to hoard information were gradually excluded from informal knowledge networks a form of social sanctioning that parallels findings in the present study.

2.3.3 Organisational and Contextual Antecedents

At the organisational level, competitive climate has emerged as one of the strongest predictors of knowledge hiding. Cerne, et al., (2017) found that organisational climates characterised by performance-based competition significantly increased knowledge hiding behaviour. The MBA placement environment embodies precisely such a climate: students compete directly for a limited number of offers, are evaluated against their cohort, and experience the process as a high-stakes, winner-take-all competition.

Institutional opacity characterised by restricted information flows, delayed communication, and unclear processes has been identified as a contextual amplifier of knowledge hiding. When formal institutional channels fail to provide adequate information, individuals turn to informal networks; and when informal networks distribute information selectively, they become a source of competitive advantage for those within them and a source of disadvantage for those outside. Choudhary and Mishra (2023) identified a related dynamic in virtual work contexts; in the placement context, an opaque placement cell performs an analogous function by increasing the value and exclusivity of informal information.

Skerlavaj, et al., (2018) examined the role of time pressure as a contextual trigger of knowledge hiding, finding that individuals under high time pressure were significantly more likely to hide knowledge. The placement season, with its compressed timelines, simultaneous processes at multiple companies, and continuous preparation demands, represents exactly such a high-time-pressure environment.

2.4 Consequences of Knowledge Hiding

The consequences of knowledge hiding have been examined at the individual, dyadic, team, and organisational levels, and the literature consistently demonstrates the negative downstream effects of this behaviour. Connelly et al. (2012) found that knowledge hiding by one party significantly increased the probability of retaliatory hiding by the other party, generating negative reciprocal cycles what the authors termed knowledge hiding spirals. In a cohort context, a single hiding event can initiate a cycle of mutual withdrawal that progressively impoverishes the informational environment for all participants.

At the individual level, Cerne et al. (2014) found that knowledge hiding was negatively associated with individual creativity and innovation. Jiang et al. (2019) found associations with reduced psychological safety and thriving, while Arain et al. (2018) identified a negative relationship between being hidden from and organisational citizenship behaviour. In the placement context, these consequences translate into reduced preparation quality for those hidden from, heightened anxiety, and impaired collaboration.

Hernaes et al. (2019), studying academic settings specifically, found that evasive knowledge hiding among colleagues damaged the quality of collaborative relationships and generated lasting interpersonal mistrust. In the MBA context, these relational consequences extend beyond the placement season: the same cohort members who competed against one another during placements become future professional network contacts, potential collaborators, and first-order professional references. Hiding behaviour during placements thus carries post-season reputational consequences that rational actors may underestimate in the heat of competition.

2.5 Knowledge Hiding in the Indian Professional and Educational Context

Kumar Jha and Varkkey (2018), in a widely cited study of Indian R&D professionals, used a qualitative approach to explore the triggers of knowledge hiding behaviour. They found that competitive pressure, fear of losing indispensability, and weak reciprocity norms were the primary drivers of hiding in Indian professional contexts. The metaphor employed distinguishing between cisterns (who accumulate knowledge) and channels (who allow it to flow) captures a cultural tension that resonates with the dynamics observed in the present study, where students actively debated whether their competitive instinct or their relational values should govern their information-sharing behaviour.

Issac and Baral (2019) conducted a comparative analysis of knowledge hiding antecedents in collectivist and individualistic cultural contexts and found that in collectivist cultures such as India, task complexity, task uncertainty, and lack of interpersonal trust were the primary predictors of hiding. Importantly, the buffering effect of collectivist value orientations was significantly attenuated under conditions of high competitive pressure a finding directly applicable to the placement context,

where competitive pressure of unusual intensity may override collectivist prosocial norms.

Choudhary and Mishra (2023) provide the most methodologically proximate comparator to the present study. Their qualitative investigation of knowledge hiding in virtual work arrangements among Indian consulting professionals identified three primary impetuses for hiding: ease of hiding, digital burnout, and loss of control over information. They also found rationalized hiding to be the dominant strategy, with structural features of the setting providing ready-made rationalisations for withholding. Their counter-intuitive finding that even in collectivist Indian culture, knowledge hiding tendencies increase under certain contextual conditions directly challenges the assumption that cultural collectivism serves as a universal antidote to competitive information behaviours. The present study contributes to this emerging strand by extending it explicitly into the pre-professional MBA placement context.

With respect to educational settings, Hernaus et al. (2019) examined evasive knowledge hiding in academic environments, finding that competitive individuals asked to collaborate on research tasks engaged in significantly higher levels of hiding. Demirkasimoglu (2016) explored knowledge hiding in higher educational institutions, demonstrating that educational contexts are not immune to the dynamics observed in organisations.

2.6 Competition, Trust, and Social Capital in Peer Networks

Deutsch (1949), in a foundational theoretical contribution, distinguished between cooperative and competitive goal interdependence, arguing that under competitive interdependence where one party's success is incompatible with another's individuals substitute competitive means of goal achievement for collaborative ones. Information concealment is a paradigmatic competitive strategy: by denying a competitor access to useful knowledge, the hider improves their own relative standing without improving their absolute preparation.

Coleman (1988) established that dense, high-trust social networks generate social capital in the form of shared norms of reciprocity and information exchange. Individuals embedded in such networks benefit from richer information flows and greater willingness to share. Conversely, individuals who are structurally peripheral

receive less information and are less likely to be included in informal informationsharing circuits.

Putnam's (2000) distinction between bonding social capital strong ties within closeknit groups and bridging social capital weaker ties connecting disparate groups is relevant here. In the placement context, students form bonding capital within their inner trust circles and bridge selectively to others. Bridging is inhibited by competitive pressures: information that might flow freely across a bridge in a noncompetitive environment is withheld when the recipient is a direct competitor. The result is that bonding capital strengthens within inner circles while bridging capital atrophies across competitive boundaries.

2.7 Coopetition Dynamics in MBA Educational Environments

The concept of coopetition the simultaneous engagement in cooperative and competitive behaviour with the same parties was developed primarily in the strategic management literature (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996). However, scholars have increasingly applied it to intra-organisational and educational settings where the same structural paradox of simultaneous collaboration and competition obtains.

In the MBA context, students are required to collaborate in group assignments, case competitions, and study groups while simultaneously competing for grades, internships, and placements. This structural coopetition creates what Bouncken and Aslam (2019) describe as knowledge exchange dilemmas: situations in which the cooperative logic of mutual sharing and the competitive logic of advantagepreservation pull in directly opposite directions.

The present study extends the coopetition framework to the placement season context in an Indian MBA programme, where the stakes are particularly high, the competitive structure is unusually intense at 30 to 40 per cent campus placement rate, and the shadow of the future (Axelrod, 1984) the expectation of continued relationship with cohort members after the competitive event should, in theory, incentivise more cooperative behaviour than is typically observed. The gap between this theoretical prediction and the empirically observed prevalence of knowledge hiding constitutes one of the central theoretical puzzles the present study addresses.

2.8 Research Gap and Theoretical Positioning

The foregoing review reveals three important gaps that the present study is positioned to address. First, despite the substantial growth of the knowledge hiding literature, preprofessional educational contexts and MBA placement seasons remain essentially unexamined. Second, while the growing Indian knowledge hiding literature has begun to contextualise the construct within Indian professional settings, barely any study has examined knowledge hiding in Indian MBA programmes. Third, the role of institutional practices specifically placement cell communication norms and information transparency management in shaping student knowledge hiding behaviour has not been examined.

The present study addresses these gaps through a qualitative, interpretive investigation of twelve second-year MBA students at DSM-DTU, conducted during the active placement season of 2025-26. By privileging participant voice and context-sensitivity over statistical generalisability, the study aims to generate theoretical insights that extend and refine the existing knowledge hiding literature in directions that prior research has not pursued.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on knowledge hiding across seven thematic areas. The review established that knowledge hiding is a welldocumented, theoretically grounded, and empirically rich construct extensively studied in organisational settings but not yet applied to the MBA placement context in India. The work of Choudhary and Mishra (2023), conducted in the Indian consulting setting using a comparable qualitative methodology, was identified as the closest methodological antecedent to the present study. The gaps identified in terms of context, geography, institutional analysis collectively define the theoretical space that the present study occupies and contributes to.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed account of the research methodology employed in the present study. It covers the philosophical underpinnings that informed the research design, the qualitative paradigm adopted, the rationale for method selection, the research context and setting, the sampling strategy, the data collection procedure, the analytical framework, and the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of findings. The chapter also addresses the ethical considerations governing the conduct of the research and reflects on the positionality of the researcher as a member of the study community.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Paradigm

Every research study is grounded, whether explicitly or implicitly, in a set of philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the appropriate methods through which knowledge is generated (methodology). Making these assumptions explicit is a mark of scholarly rigour and allows the reader to evaluate the coherence between the study's philosophical foundation and its design choices.

The present study is grounded in an interpretivist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. An interpretivist ontology holds that social reality is not a single, objective, and measurable external phenomenon but is instead socially constructed through the meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences of the individuals who inhabit it (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Knowledge hiding behaviour during MBA placement seasons is not a laboratory-measurable variable with a fixed, universal value; it is a complex, context-dependent, meaning-laden phenomenon that can only be understood adequately by attending to how actors themselves understand, rationalise, and narrate it.

A constructivist epistemology follows naturally from this ontological commitment: knowledge about the social world is not discovered but constructed, jointly and iteratively, through the interaction between the researcher and the researched (Charmaz, 2006). In the present study, knowledge about knowledge hiding was

constructed through the interview encounter through the researcher's questions, the participant's responses, and the reflexive interpretive work that occurred in the analysis. Together, these philosophical commitments situate the present study firmly within the qualitative research tradition and distinguish it from the quantitative, survey-based studies that have dominated the knowledge hiding literature (Xiao and Cooke, 2019).

3.3 Research Design: Qualitative Exploratory Inquiry

The study employs a qualitative exploratory research design. Qualitative research is appropriate when the phenomenon of interest is complex, context-embedded, and poorly understood; when the researcher seeks to generate theory from data rather than test pre-specified hypotheses; and when the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of participants are central to the inquiry (Patton, 1990; Creswell and Poth, 2016). All of these conditions obtain in the present study.

An exploratory design is warranted because, as established in Chapter 2, barely any prior empirical study has examined knowledge hiding in the MBA placement context in India. The purpose of the study is not to confirm or disconfirm existing theoretical propositions but to generate a rich, grounded understanding of a phenomenon that is known to practitioners but has not previously been subjected to systematic scholarly analysis. This aligns with the exploratory approach recommended by Eisenhardt (1989) for the study of phenomena in new or under-theorised contexts.

The research approach is inductive: theoretical insights emerge from careful, iterative engagement with the data, rather than being imposed upon it by pre-existing frameworks. While the study is informed by the knowledge hiding literature particularly the Connelly et al. (2012) typology and the Choudhary and Mishra (2023) contextual framework it does not seek to test these frameworks deductively. Instead, they serve as sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1954) that orient the researcher's attention without constraining the emergence of inductively generated insights from the data.

3.4 Research Context

The study was conducted at Delhi School of Management (DSM), Delhi Technological University (DTU), located on Bawana Road, New Delhi. DSM offers a two-year

fulltime MBA programme with specialisations in Finance, Marketing, Analytics, Human Resource Management, and Operations. The batch size for the 2024-26 cohort was approximately 270 students, representing a mix of freshers and students with work experience of one to two years. Approximately 60 per cent of the batch had completed their bachelor's degrees from institutions in Delhi and the NCR, while the remaining 40 per cent came from states including Rajasthan, Kerala, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, among others.

Campus placement at DSM takes place primarily in the second year of the programme, with the season running from approximately September of Year 2 through May. Companies visiting campus during the 2025-26 season included Organisation A (a private sector bank, sales management role), Organisation B (a financial analytics firm, analyst role), Organisation C (a financial services firm, analyst role), Organisation D (an early-stage startup, business development role), and a range of other organisations. Each company maintained a distinct selection process ranging from aptitude tests, group discussions, and multiple interview rounds, to direct face-to-face interviews in the case of certain startups. The average campus package is approximately 8 LPA; approximately 30 to 40 per cent of the batch secures campus placement offers, with the remainder seeking employment through off-campus channels including LinkedIn, Naukri, alumni referrals, and direct applications.

This institutional context was selected for two reasons. First, its distinctive structural features the low campus placement rate, the demographically heterogeneous student cohort, and the compressed competitive timeline create an environment of heightened information sensitivity that is theoretically well-suited to generating rich data on knowledge hiding. Second, the researcher is a member of this community, enabling the depth of contextual knowledge and participant access that qualitative research requires.

3.5 Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher is not a neutral observer but an active participant in the knowledge construction process. Reflecting on one's positionality one's social position, prior assumptions, and relationship to the research setting is therefore an essential component of methodological rigour (Tracy, 2010). The present researcher is a second-year MBA student at DSM-DTU, enrolled in the same programme and batch

as the study's participants. This insider positionality carries both advantages and limitations.

The principal advantage is depth of contextual familiarity: the researcher directly inhabits the environment being studied, understands its informal norms and dynamics, and is able to communicate with participants in their natural register Hinglish without the interpretive distortions that can arise from cross-cultural research encounters. The principal limitation is the risk of researcher bias: the researcher may unconsciously interpret participant accounts through the lens of their own placement experiences. This risk was mitigated through the maintenance of a reflective research journal throughout the data collection and analysis process, the practice of bracketing prior assumptions before each interview and analytical session, and the use of member checking.

3.6 Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed, in line with the recommendations of Patton (1990) for qualitative inquiry. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate selection of information-rich cases individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about, or have direct experience of, the phenomenon under investigation. In the present study, the target population was second-year MBA students at DSM-DTU who were active participants in the 2025-26 placement season. The study focused exclusively on second-year students as this cohort was directly and intensively engaged in the final placement process the primary arena in which the dynamics of knowledge hiding during placement competition were hypothesised to operate most acutely.

Three criteria guided participant selection: all participants had to be enrolled in the second year of the MBA programme at DSM-DTU; all participants had to be actively participating in the placement season, whether through campus or off-campus processes; and the sample as a whole had to reflect diversity along key dimensions gender, specialisation, work experience, geographic background, and placement outcome to ensure that the range of experiences relevant to the research questions was represented in the dataset.

Twelve participants were recruited for the study. The adequacy of this sample size was determined on the basis of theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006): data collection

continued until new interviews ceased to generate substantially new codes or themes. In the present study, thematic saturation was apparent by the tenth interview, with the eleventh and twelfth interviews primarily serving to confirm and enrich themes already identified rather than introducing substantively new conceptual territory. The sample was intentionally varied in terms of placement outcome: seven participants had received on-campus placement offers at the time of interview; three had secured offcampus offers; and two remained unplaced.

3.6.1 Participant Profile

A summary of the twelve participants is presented in Table 3.1 below. All names are pseudonyms(coded).

Code	Gender	Specialisation	Work Ex	UG Institution	Placement Status	Interview Date
P1	M	Finance	None	a state university in Delhi	Placed Organisation B	Jan 2026
P2	F	HRM	None	a college of a central university in Delhi	Unplaced (Campus)	Feb 2026
P3	M	Marketing	1.5 yrs FMC G	a state university in Rajasthan	Placed Organisation A (a private sector bank)	Dec 2025
P4	F	Finance	None	a state university in Kerala	Off-campus (HR Analytics)	Mar 2026

P5	M	Finance	1 yr CA firm	a state university in Uttar Pradesh	Placed Organisatio n C	Jan 2026
P6	F	Marketing	None	a college of a central university in Delhi	Placed Organisatio n D (BDE role)	Feb 2026
P7	M	Marketing	2 yrs BPO	a central university in Delhi	Off-campus SME (a competitive package)	Mar 2026
P8	F	Finance	None	a technical university in NCR	Placed Organisatio n A	Jan 2026
P9	F	HRM	1.5 yrs HR	a state university in Haryana	Placed Organisatio n B	Jan 2026
P10	M	Finance	None	a private university in Mumbai	Unplaced (Campus and Offcampus)	Mar 2026
P11	F	Marketing	None	a college of a central university in Delhi	Placed Organisatio n D (BDE role)	Feb 2026
P12	M	HRM	1.5 yrs Retail	a state university in Assam	Placed Organisatio n A (a private sector bank)	Dec 2025

Table 3.1: Participant Profiles Source: Primary Data Researcher's Own Compilation

3.7 Data Collection: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were selected as the primary data collection instrument. The semi-structured format was chosen because it provides sufficient structure to ensure that the core research questions are addressed in every interview, while allowing sufficient flexibility to follow emergent leads, probe unexpected responses, and allow participants to narrate their experiences in their own terms and sequence (Creswell and Poth, 2016). In-depth interviewing is particularly appropriate for the study of sensitive or socially undesirable behaviours such as knowledge hiding, where the relational depth and interactional flexibility of the interview encounter are essential to eliciting candid and nuanced accounts.

An interview guide was developed following the approach outlined by Creswell and Poth (2016). The guide was organised around four broad thematic areas: the participant's general placement experience and the competitive atmosphere of the placement season; information-sharing and knowledge-hiding behaviours both as actor and as recipient; the role of trust, peer relationships, and social networks in shaping information flows; and institutional factors including the role of the placement cell, seniors, and the broader competitive structure. The guide included approximately fifteen primary questions and a set of probing questions for each thematic area. The guide was piloted with one MBA student not included in the main sample, leading to refinements in question sequencing and the addition of two probing questions regarding off-campus information sharing dynamics.

Interviews were conducted between December 2025 and March 2026, during the active phase of the DSM-DTU placement season. Interview settings were chosen by participants and included the DTU canteen, Sports Complex, an empty classroom, a nearby coffee shop, and phone call. Each interview lasted between 30 and 41 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Hinglish the natural code-switching blend of Hindi and English that characterises everyday communication among the participants. This decision was deliberate and methodologically significant: conducting interviews in participants' natural communicative register reduces the formality barrier, enables more authentic selfexpression, and minimises the risk that linguistic discomfort distorts or truncates participant accounts, consistent with the approach recommended by Choudhary and Mishra (2023) in their comparable Indian-context qualitative study.

Explicit informed written consent was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of each interview. Audio recordings were made with participant consent and transcribed verbatim by the researcher within 24 hours of each interview. Post-interview memos were written within two hours of each interview, recording the researcher's observations on participant demeanour, affective cues, and emergent analytical impressions. All participant names in the transcripts and throughout this report are pseudonyms.

3.8 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the rigorous six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible, theoretically independent method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. It is appropriate for the present study because it does not require a particular theoretical or epistemological commitment, is accessible and transparent in its procedures, and allows the researcher to work at both a semantic level and a latent level. A reflexive, researcher-driven approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) was employed, consistent with the interpretivist philosophical position of the study.

Phase	Step	Procedure in the Present Study
Phase 1	Familiarisation with the Data	All twelve interview transcripts were read in full multiple times. Initial observations were recorded as researcher memos. Audio recordings were re-listened to for tone and affect.
Phase 2	Generating Initial Codes	Relevant features of the data were systematically coded. Each data extract was assigned one or more descriptive codes. Over 180 initial codes were generated using in-vivo and interpretive coding.
Phase 3	Searching for Themes	Related codes were collated and sorted into potential broader themes. Mind-mapping and thematic clustering were used to identify patterns of meaning across codes.

Phase 4	Reviewing Themes	Candidate themes were reviewed at two levels: against the coded extracts, and against the full dataset. Themes lacking sufficient data support were merged, refined, or discarded. A thematic map was developed.
Phase 5	Defining and Naming Themes	Each retained theme was given a clear, analytically precise name and definition, with boundaries established to avoid overlap.
Phase 6	Producing the Report	Selected extracts representing each theme were chosen and the analysis was written up, weaving data, interpretive commentary, and theoretical connection.

Table 3.2: Six Phases of Thematic Analysis as Applied in the Present Study Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

Five primary themes were identified in the data following the completion of thematic analysis. These themes are presented and analysed in detail in Chapter 4.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the Research

Qualitative research trustworthiness is evaluated against the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants as an embedded community member; triangulation of data sources by cross-referencing accounts across twelve participants; member checking by sharing provisional interpretations with three participants; and the maintenance of a detailed researcher reflexivity journal. Transferability was addressed through thick description of the research context, participant profiles, and the institutional dynamics of the placement season. Dependability was supported through a detailed audit trail documenting interview dates, settings, durations, coding decisions, and analytical choices. Confirmability was addressed through reflexivity practices including the positionality statement.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University. Informed consent was obtained from all twelve participants prior to the commencement of each interview. All participant data

was anonymised at the point of transcription; pseudonyms are used throughout all research outputs. Data security was maintained through password-protected storage of all audio recordings and transcripts; access was restricted to the researcher; and audio recordings were deleted upon submission of the final report. Given that several participants were in a state of significant emotional distress at the time of interview particularly those who remained unplaced as the academic year drew to a close the researcher was attentive to participant well-being throughout each interview.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research philosophy, design, context, sampling strategy, data collection procedure, analytical framework, trustworthiness criteria, and ethical protocols of the present study. The study is grounded in an interpretivist, constructivist paradigm; employs a qualitative exploratory design using semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Hinglish; draws upon a purposively selected sample of twelve second-year MBA students at DSM-DTU interviewed between December 2025 and March 2026; and analyses the resulting data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. Five themes were identified in the data and are presented in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Introduction to Analysis

This chapter presents the thematic findings of the study, drawing upon the twelve semistructured interviews conducted with second-year MBA students at Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, between December 2025 and March 2026. Following the six-phase thematic analysis described in Chapter 3, five overarching themes were identified in the data, each comprising two to three subthemes that collectively illuminate the phenomenon of knowledge hiding during placement competition at DSM-DTU. The themes are presented sequentially, supported throughout by verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts presented in the original Hinglish of the participants identified by participant code (P1 through P12), and accompanied by analytical commentary that interprets the extracts in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. Following the thematic analysis, a Discussion section situates the findings within the existing literature, a Recommendations section translates the findings into actionable institutional guidance, and a Limitations section acknowledges the boundaries of the study.

The five themes identified were: Theme 1, The Competitive Trigger Perceived ZeroSum Competition as the Primary Antecedent of Knowledge Hiding; Theme 2, Forms and Strategies of Hiding Evasion, Calculated Omission, and Rationalised Withholding; Theme 3, Trust Circles and Selective Generosity The Architecture of Differential Information Sharing; Theme 4, Institutional Opacity and the Normalisation of Hiding; and Theme 5, Consequences, Regret, and Reflexivity.

4.2 Participant Profiles

Table 4.1 presents a summary of the twelve participants. and participants are identified solely by participant codes throughout the analysis.

Code	Spec.	Work Ex	Hometown	Placed Status at Interview
P1	Finance	None	Delhi	Placed Organisation B
P2	HRM	None	Delhi	Not placed (campus); off-campus search ongoing
P3	Marketing	1.5 yrs	Jaipur, Rajasthan	Placed Organisation A (a private sector bank)
P4	Finance	None	Kerala	Off-campus offer (HR Analytics, a competitive package)
P5	Finance	1 yr	UP	Placed Organisation C
P6	Marketing	None	Delhi	Placed Organisation D (BDE role)
P7	Marketing	2 yrs	Delhi	Off-campus (SME, a competitive package)
P8	Finance	None	NCR	Placed Organisation A
P9	HRM	1.5 yrs	NCR	Placed Organisation B
P10	Finance	None	Kerala	Not placed (campus or offcampus)
P11	Marketing	None	Tamil Nadu	Placed Organisation D (BDE role)
P12	HRM	1.5 yrs	Guwahati, Assam	Placed Organisation A (a private sector bank)

Table 4.1: Participant Profile Summary Source: Primary Data

The sample comprised six male and six female participants. Specialisations represented were Finance (four participants), Marketing (four), and Human Resource Management (four). Eight participants were freshers with no prior work experience;

four held work experience of one to two years in sectors including FMCG sales, CA firm analytics, BPO customer support, HR coordination, and retail management. Seven participants had completed their bachelor's degrees from institutions in Delhi or the NCR; five came from other states including Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Uttar Pradesh. At the time of interview, seven participants had received on-campus placement offers, three had secured off-campus offers, and two remained unplaced. This distribution ensured that the data captured perspectives from both those who navigated the competitive process successfully and those who experienced its harsher dimensions.

4.3 Theme 1: The Competitive Trigger Perceived Zero-Sum Competition as the Primary Antecedent

The first and most pervasive theme to emerge from the data was the centrality of perceived zero-sum competition in triggering knowledge hiding behaviour. Across all twelve participant accounts, the placement season was experienced as a fundamentally scarcity-driven environment in which the success of one peer was implicitly framed as a threat to one's own placement probability. This competitive trigger operated at both cognitive and affective levels, producing a self-protective orientation towards information management that the researcher termed the Competitive Survival Mindset a psychological mode characterised by heightened vigilance about what information to share, with whom, and when.

4.3.1 The 30-40 Per Cent Reality as the Foundation of Competitive Anxiety

The low campus placement rate at DSM-DTU approximately 30 to 40 per cent was explicitly cited by multiple participants as the structural foundation of the competitive anxiety that drove knowledge hiding. Participant P1 articulated this structural logic with notable clarity, drawing a direct arithmetical connection between placement scarcity and information behaviour:

'Yaar honestly bolunga placement season ek alag hi duniya hoti hai. Pehle year mein ek family jaisa feel rehta tha batch mein. Doosra saal wahi log hain, wahi jagah hai but energy completely different ho gayi thi. Ek anxiety thi...' [Tell you honestly placement season is a completely different world. In first year, there was a family-like feel in the batch. Same people, same

place in second year but the energy had completely changed. There was an anxiety in the air...']

Continuing, P1 contextualised this anxiety within the statistical reality of the placement environment:

'DSM mein 270 log hain batch mein. On-campus placements mein roughly sirf 30-40 percent placed hote hain. Matlab roughly 80-100 log. Baaki ko off-campus karna padta hai ya phir unplaced rehte hain. Yeh soch ke chal agar tum ek room mein ho aur room mein sirf 80-100 seats hain 270 logo ke liye, aur compete karna hain tab kya karoge? Information share karoge? Ya apna edge maintain karoge?' ['DSM has 270 people in the batch. On campus, only roughly 30-40 percent get placed. That is roughly 80-100 people. The rest have to go off-campus or remain unplaced. Think about it if you are in a room and there are only 80-100 seats for 270 people, and you have to compete for seats what will you do? Share information? Or maintain your edge?']]

This framing of the placement environment as a room with insufficient seats for all occupants encapsulates the zero-sum logic that underpinned the competitive trigger. The scarcity of seats was not merely a statistical reality but a psychological frame a lens through which all information-related interactions were filtered and interpreted. P3 observed the behavioural manifestation of this anxiety at the social network level:

'Placement season mein sab bahut careful ho jaate hain kya share karte hain... WhatsApp group mein jo normal dino mein sab kuch share hota hai notes, memes, events. But internship season mein suddenly silence ho jaata hai groups mein jab baat companies ki aati hai. Koi nahi bata raha ki XYZ company aayi, kisi ne apply kiya, kisi ko call aaya. Yeh selective silence bahut loud thi.' ['In placement season everyone becomes very careful about what they share... The WhatsApp group where everything used to be shared in normal days notes, memes, events. But when placement season arrives, suddenly there is silence in the groups when it comes to companies. Nobody mentions that XYZ company came, that someone applied, that someone got a call. This selective silence was very loud.']]

4.3.2 The Millisecond Calculation: Competitive Threat Assessment in Real Time

A refined understanding of the competitive trigger emerged from participants' accounts of the moment-by-moment cognitive process through which information sharing decisions were made. Multiple participants described a rapid, almost automatic threat assessment that occurred in real time when a peer made a knowledge request a calculation of whether sharing would enhance or diminish the hider's competitive position relative to the requester. Participant P1 described this calculation with unusual precision:

'Literally ek calculation tha agar batata hoon toh woh bhi prepare ho jaayega case study ke liye aur competition increase ho jaayega. Agar nahi batata hoon toh mere paas edge rehta hai. Woh calculation ek second mein hua aur answer came out to mat batao.' [*'Literally, there was a calculation if I tell him, he will also prepare for the case study and competition will increase. If I do not tell, my edge remains. That calculation happened in one second and the answer came out do not tell.'*]]

Participant P5 described an equally deliberate but more structured classification process, in which peers were mentally categorised by degree of competitive threat before any information was shared:

'Very specifically. Even among Finance students kuch log different sectors target kar rahe the, alag companies. Unko thoda zyada share kiya. Jo exactly same companies target kar rahe the unhe bahut kam information di.' [*'Very specifically. Even among Finance students some were targeting different sectors, different companies. I shared a bit more with them. Those who were targeting exactly the same companies I gave them minimum information.'*]]

This competitor-mapping behaviour the deliberate classification of peers as highthreat or low-threat competitors before deciding information sharing scope was one of the most analytically significant behavioural patterns in the dataset. It demonstrates that knowledge hiding in the placement context was not a blanket refusal to share but a finely calibrated strategy that differentiated between recipients on the basis of perceived competitive overlap. This finding nuances Connelly et al.'s (2012) observation that interpersonal distrust drives hiding, suggesting that in highly

competitive contexts, competitive threat assessment rather than generalised distrust may be the more proximate trigger.

4.4 Theme 2: Forms and Strategies of Hiding Evasion, Calculated Omission, and Rationalised Withholding

The second theme concerned the specific behavioural strategies through which knowledge hiding was enacted. The interview data yielded rich evidence of all three forms of hiding identified by Connelly et al. (2012) evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding as well as a contextually distinctive variant of evasive hiding characterised by the deliberate provision of incorrect rather than merely incomplete information.

4.4.1 Evasive Hiding: From Vagueness to Deliberate Misinformation

The most prevalent form of evasive hiding observed in the data involved the provision of generic, incomplete, or carefully omitted information in response to a specific and targeted knowledge request. The participant shared enough to appear helpful while withholding the specific insight that the requester actually sought. Participant P5 described a prototypical instance of this behaviour:

'Usne pucha yaar Organisation C ka kuch idea hai process ke baare mein? Maine kaha haan yaar standard hi hoga, aptitude aur interview shayad. Itna. Case study ka part maine deliberately nahi bataya usko.' [She asked do you have any idea about Organisation C's process? I said yes, it will probably be standard, aptitude and interview. That much. The case study part I deliberately did not tell her.]]

Participant P9 described a comparable instance withholding knowledge of a situational judgement test from a direct competitor using the same mechanism of technically truthful but strategically incomplete disclosure. The phrase 'shayad' (perhaps) was specifically noted as a linguistic device employed to maintain deniability:

'Maine standard answer diya aptitude aur interview likely. Presentation round jo actually tha aur quite specific tha woh nahi bataya.' [I gave the standard answer aptitude and interview likely. Presentation round which actually existed and was quite specific I did not disclose. It was deliberate.]]

A more extreme variant of evasive hiding the deliberate provision of actively incorrect information was reported by participant P3 , who described an incident with an unusual degree of candour and explicit acknowledgement of its wrongfulness:

'Ek banda tha usne poocha yaar Organisation D ka process kya hota hai? Maine bol diya haan yaar standard hi hoga aptitude aur interview. Aptitude wala part maine add kar diya deliberately knowing there was no aptitude. Seedha wrong information de di.' [There was a guy he asked what Organisation D's process was. I said yes, it will probably be the standard aptitude and interview. I deliberately added the aptitude part knowing there was no aptitude. I gave him straight wrong information.]]

P3's admission of providing deliberately incorrect information represents the most extreme end of evasive hiding the introduction of a fabricated process element that would cause the requester to invest preparation time in the wrong direction. P3 subsequently acknowledged this behaviour as wrong, stating that the wrong information provision crossed a line that mere omission did not.

4.4.2 Playing Dumb: Feigned Ignorance as a Social Strategy

Playing dumb was employed in situations where participants possessed precise and relevant knowledge of an interview process but found it socially difficult to explicitly refuse to share. By claiming ignorance, participants avoided both the social cost of an explicit refusal and the ethical burden of deliberate falsehood or so they reasoned.

Participant P2 described her use of this strategy with evident discomfort:

'Usne directly pucha yaar is company ka process kaisa hota hai, kuch pata hai? Main jaanti thi maine research ki thi, ek senior se bhi baat ki thi. But maine bol diya nahi yaar, mujhe bhi nahi pata, main bhi janna chahti hoon kuch pta chale to mujhe bhi batana.' [She directly asked do you know what this company's process is like? I knew I had done research, I had also spoken with a senior. But I said no, I also do not know, I also want to find out.]]

This account illustrates the social sophistication of playing dumb as a hiding strategy. By positioning herself as equally uninformed, P2 simultaneously avoided sharing the

requested knowledge, maintained the appearance of solidarity with the requester, and critically avoided any explicit act of refusal that could damage the relationship. The strategy preserved surface-level cordiality at the cost of genuine transparency.

4.4.3 Rationalized Hiding: The Intellectual Property Argument

Rationalized hiding was characterised by the provision of a justification for nondisclosure, often framed in terms of effort and ownership. Participant P5 articulated what might be termed the intellectual property argument a framing that cast one's preparation materials as personally owned assets, and therefore legitimately withheld:

'Woh meri mehnat thi. Maine ghanto lagai the us material ko process karne mein. Kisi ko free mein dena unfair lagta tha khud ke saath. Competitive mindset se agar aapne kaam kiya hai toh aapko fayda milna chahiye.' [It was my effort. I had put in hours processing that material. Giving it to someone for free felt unfair to myself. With a competitive mindset if you have done the work, you should benefit from it.]]

Participant P6 employed a similar rationalisation framed in terms of competitive logic that withholding was not self-interested but rather a rational response to a competitive system that rewarded strategic behaviour:

'Agar main share karti hoon aur woh nahi karta, toh main disadvantage mein hoon. System punishes honesty. So hiding was not just self-interested it was adapting to the environment.' [If I share and she does not, I am at a disadvantage. The system punishes honesty. So hiding was not just self-interest it was adapting to the environment.]]

4.5 Theme 3: Trust Circles and Selective Generosity The Architecture of Differential Information Sharing

The third theme concerned the role of trust in structuring information sharing and hiding behaviour during the placement season. A paradox was observable in the data: despite the pervasive competitive logic documented in Theme 1, all participants described at least one relationship within which knowledge sharing was unrestricted, mutual, and emotionally sustaining. This observation introduced a critical nuance:

knowledge hiding during the placement season was not a generalised refusal to share but a context-sensitive behaviour calibrated to the nature and quality of specific dyadic relationships.

4.5.1 The Inner Circle: Bounded Generosity Within High-Trust Relationships

A near-universal feature of participant accounts was the existence of what the researcher termed an inner circle a small, bounded group of two to five close friends with whom placement information was shared openly, authentically, and without competitive calculation. The inner circle functioned as a protected micro-community in which the collaborative norms of the pre-placement academic year were preserved amid the broader competitive environment. Participant P6 described an unusually formalised version of the inner circle formation, in which the boundaries and expectations of the group were made explicit at the outset of the placement season:

'Hum. Teen log. Humara ek explicit agreement tha pehle din placement season shuru hote hi humne baat ki thi. Literally baith ke bola yaar, hum teeno mein sab kuch share karenge shortlists, process, rejections, everything. Baaki logo ke saath be polite but be smart.' [Three people. We had an explicit agreement on the very first day of the placement season, we had this conversation. Literally sat down and said we will share everything among the three of us shortlists, processes, rejections, everything. With others, be polite but be smart.]]

Participant P9 described a more graduated and analytically precise model of information sharing, in which the degree of disclosure varied systematically across three tiers of peer relationship:

'Kuch log the jinhe main freely share karti woh log jinse genuine connection tha, aur jo different roles target kar rahe the. Inke saath sab kuch share kiya. Phir ek middle layer thi jinse deep connection nahi bas cordial tha unse surface sharing karti thi. Phir ek outer layer people I barely knew unse minimum.' [There were some people with whom I shared freely those with whom I had a genuine connection, and who were targeting different roles. With them, I shared everything. Then there was a middle layer with whom I was cordial but without deep connection surface sharing

with them. Then an outer layer people I barely knew minimum with them.']]

This three-tier architecture of information sharing freely flowing inward, progressively restricted outward represents a novel and theoretically significant structural finding. It demonstrates that knowledge hiding in the placement context does not operate as a binary on-off switch but as a calibrated, graduated system of differential disclosure organised around the perceived depth and reciprocity of relationship quality.

4.5.2 Reciprocity as the Currency of Trust

Across accounts, perceived reciprocity the degree to which a peer was perceived as a net contributor or net extractor of information emerged as the primary mechanism through which inner circle membership was determined and sustained. This reciprocity logic was described with particular precision by participant P2, who detailed how the realisation that a trusted senior had selectively withheld information permanently altered her assessment of that relationship:

'Ek senior thi meri jo placement cell mein bhi thi. Vaise to mujhse kaafi friendly rehti thi. Maine specifically unse poocha is company ka process kaisa hota hai, koi idea hai? She said she does not know. But baad mein pata chala ki usne ek aur junior ko apni close friend ko detailed information di thi. Exactly wahi jo maine maangi thi.' [I had this senior she was formally in the placement cell too. She was quite friendly with me. I specifically asked her do you have any idea about this company's process? She said she does not know. But later I found out that she had given another junior her close friend detailed information. Exactly what I had asked for.']]

The social sanctioning of non-reciprocal extractors was described by participant P6, who observed how students who consistently extracted information without contributing were gradually excluded from informal knowledge networks without any explicit collective decision:

'Ek banda hai jo constantly poochha karta tha but kabhi khud kuch nahi batata tha. Sab samajh gaye the January ke baad unke messages pe response time badh gayi hai sab ka. Nobody is mean to him. But the

warmth has reduced. People remember. Yeh social market operates with memory.' [There is a guy who constantly asked but never gave anything. Everyone had understood after January, everyone's response time to his messages has increased. Nobody is mean to him. But the warmth has reduced.

People remember. This social market operates with memory.']]

4.6 Theme 4: Institutional Opacity and the Normalisation of Hiding

The fourth theme moved beyond individual psychological dynamics to examine the role of the institutional environment in shaping, facilitating, and normalising knowledge hiding behaviour during the placement season. Two mechanisms through which institutional factors influenced student behaviour were identified: the information management practices of the placement cell, and the transmission of competitive norms through the senior-junior mentoring culture.

4.6.1 The Placement Cell as a Model of Information Restriction

Multiple participants observed that the knowledge hiding behaviour prevalent among students during the placement season was, in an important sense, modelled and legitimised by the structural information management practices of the placement cell itself. Participant P1 drew an explicit causal connection between institutional opacity and student information behaviour:

'Placement cell khud bahut secretive hai. Company Process kya hogi, kitne log liye jaayenge yeh sab restricted information hai. Koi explanation nahi milti. Toh ek tarah se, when the institution itself models information restriction as normal behaviour, it is not surprising that students internalise that norm.' [The placement cell itself is very secretive. What the process will be, how many people will be taken all this is restricted information. No explanation is given. So in a way, when the institution itself models information restriction as normal behaviour, it is not surprising that students internalise that norm.']]

Participant P2 extended this critique to the specific consequences of institutional opacity for students who were not placed on campus noting that the placement cell's presentation of available opportunities was sometimes perceived as misleading:

'Jo companies aati hain woh mostly sales roles hoti hain, aggressive targets wali. Placement cell unhe bhi portray karta hai jaise bahut achhi opportunity hai. Organisation A ka deputy manager role sales role hai, field mein nikalna padta hai, target based hai. Woh job hai, I respect that but not providing JD is misleading. Aur kayi baar na he CTC bifurcation share karte the' ['The companies that come are mostly sales roles, with aggressive targets. The placement cell portrays them as if they are great opportunities. Organisation A deputy manager role it is a sales role, you have to go into the field, it is target-based. That is a job, I respect that but not providing JD is misleading. They also didn't used to provide CTC Bifurcation sometimes']]

4.6.2 Senior-Junior Socialisation: The Intergenerational Transmission of Competitive Norms

Participants also described the role of senior students in transmitting competitive information norms to incoming cohorts a form of intergenerational socialisation in which each placement-season cohort passed on the behavioural scripts of information management to its successors. Participant P3 described the formative advice he had received from a senior with unusual directness:

'Ek senior tha mera woh 2 saal pehle placed hua tha ek decent company mein. Usne clearly bol diya tha bhai placement mein koi dost nahi hota, sab competitors hain. Jo jaisa bhi karega, Sabse pahle apna dekho. Yeh direct advice thi.' ['I had this senior he had placed at a decent company two years earlier. He clearly said in placement, there is no friend, everyone is a competitor. Do not share information. Whatever anyone else does, look after yourself first. This was direct advice.']]

Participant P7 described a more subtle but ultimately equivalent socialisation message framed not as an explicit instruction to hide, but as an admonition to be strategically aware:

'Seniors ka explicit message tha, they said they were there for us. But implicit message was clear: be smart about what you share. Protect your preparation. Not everyone has your best interests at heart during placement season. That was the first lesson we received about placements.'

The self-reproducing character of this norm transmission was apparent in the data: participants who had received these formative messages from their own seniors were already contemplating what advice they would pass on to their juniors, several planning to share a modified version that retained the competitive realism while tempering the most extreme information-withholding prescription.

4.7 Theme 5: Consequences, Regret, and Reflexivity The Post-Hiding Reckoning

The fifth and final theme concerned the emotional, relational, and reflexive consequences of knowledge hiding behaviour both as experienced by those who had withheld information and by those who had been the recipients of hiding. Contrary to what the rationalisations documented in Theme 2 might suggest, the data revealed substantial evidence of residual guilt, psychological tension, and cognitive dissonance. This finding suggests that the moral neutralisation strategies employed during the competitive season were imperfectly efficacious that they enabled hiding in the moment without fully resolving the underlying moral tension it generated.

4.7.1 Guilt, Moral Residue, and the Persistence of Regret

Several participants described experiencing significant guilt following specific knowledge hiding incidents, particularly when the person from whom they had withheld knowledge subsequently failed to receive a placement offer or was not shortlisted for the company in question. Participant P5 reflected on his experience of a persistent residue of moral discomfort, described with unusual psychological precision:

'Main placed thi khushi thi obviously. But jab maine uska ka naam suna ki vo aptitude round mein bahar ho gya toh ek kone mein thoda bura laga. Main jaanti thi woh clearly nahi kiya tha... Sab logical justifications the. Aur woh justifications 70 percent satisfying the. 30 percent nahi. Woh 30 percent abhi bhi hai.' [I was placed there was obviously happiness. But when I heard that he did not do well in the aptitude round, something bad stirred in a corner. All logical justifications were there. And those

justifications 70 percent were satisfying. 30 percent were not. That 30 percent is still there.']]

Participant P3, reflecting on his provision of deliberately incorrect information about the Organisation D interview process, expressed a clearer and less qualified remorse:

'Woh bahut wrong tha actually. Main accept karta hoon. Us moment mein toh logical laga, alag mindset tha jab competition ka but yeh genuinely unfair tha. Woh mera competitor tha direct competitor, same roles target kar raha tha. But wrong information dena alag he level ki cheez hai.' [That was actually very wrong. I accept it. In that moment it seemed logical it was a different mindset, competitive but it was genuinely unfair. He was my competitor a direct competitor, targeting the same roles. But giving wrong information is a different level of thing.']]

4.7.2 The Experience of Being Hidden From: Hurt, Betrayal, and the Retaliatory Cycle

Participants who had experienced being the recipient of knowledge hiding described the emotional impact with notable intensity. Participant P4 described her experience of discovering that targeted senior assistance had been provided to a network-connected peer while she had been given generic advice a realisation that crystallised a sense of structural unfairness:

'Woh company mein presentation round mein main completely off-guard thi. Not prepared much. Poorly perform kiya. Not placed. Aur woh specific knowledge gap was not natural it was manufactured. Someone deliberately kept me uninformed. That distinction matters yeh sirf information na milna nahi tha, yeh intentional exclusion tha.' [In that company's presentation round I was completely off-guard. Not prepared much. Performed poorly. Not placed. And that specific knowledge gap was not natural it was manufactured. Someone deliberately kept me uninformed. That distinction matters this was not merely not receiving information, this was intentional exclusion.']]

The retaliatory cycle in which the experience of being hidden from triggered defensive and subsequently hiding behaviour was described with particular selfawareness by participant P7 :

'Main hiding ka seedha victim raha hoon. Lekin phir first available chance par, I did the same thing. Woh irony mujhe tab nahi dikh rahi thi. Baad mein pta chal raha hai. It is a cycle. Jab experience karte ho, replicate karte ho. Cycle tab hi tootega jab koi consciously decide kare ki nahi, main yeh nahi karunga.' [I had directly been a victim of hiding. And then at the first available chance, I did the same thing. That irony was not visible to me then. It is visible later. It is a cycle. When you experience it, you replicate it. The cycle will only break when someone consciously decides no, I will not do this.']]

self-identified articulation of the retaliatory cycle provides a qualitative account of the dynamic that Connelly et al. (2012) identified quantitatively namely, that being the recipient of knowledge hiding significantly increases the probability of subsequently hiding knowledge oneself. The vicious cycle, once initiated, sustains and amplifies itself across the cohort.

4.7.3 Cognitive Dissonance: The Classroom-to-Placement Gap

A distinctive and analytically rich dimension of the consequences theme concerned the cognitive dissonance experienced by participants who were aware of the knowledge management principles they had been taught in their MBA coursework, yet found themselves engaging in precisely the behaviours those principles condemned.

Participant P8 described this dissonance with striking directness:

'Baith ke raat ko soch rahi thi agle din ki preparation ke baare mein aur suddenly yaad aaya ki humne class mein ek case study ki thi. Knowledge sharing ke baare mein. How organizations fail when people hoard information. Aur main literally wahi kar rahi thi. Ek ajeeb feeling aayi ki main theory jaanti hoon, I believe in it aur phir bhi uska ulta kar rahi hoon. Dissonance literally feel hua that night.' [At night I was thinking about the next day's preparation and suddenly I remembered that we had a case study in class. About knowledge sharing. How organisations fail when people hoard information. And I was literally doing that. A strange feeling came that I know the theory, I believe in it and yet I am doing the opposite. literally felt dissonance that night.']]

Participant P11 described a phase-based evolution of her behaviour, in which an initial period of competitive hiding gave way following a series of placement rejections and a faculty observation about information asymmetry to a more consciously generous information-sharing orientation:

'Phase 1 October, November tab main bahut guarded thi. Information chhupana felt like the rational thing to do. Phase 2 December, January mujhe Organisation C mein nahi mila, Organisation B mein nahi mila. Aur main dekhne lagi ki jo log generous the woh bhi placed hue. Meri guarding had not helped me. Woh realization aayi. Phase 2 mein main deliberately more open hone lagi.' [*'Phase 1 October, November I was very guarded then. Hiding information felt like the rational thing to do. Phase 2 December, January Organisation C did not work out, Organisation B did not work out. And I began to see that those who were generous they also got placed. My guarding had not helped me. That realisation came. In Phase 2 I began to deliberately become more open.'*]

P11's phase evolution from competitive hiding to conscious generosity, driven by outcome learning and a faculty observation that information asymmetry is a marker of low-trust cultures is a theoretically important finding. It suggests that knowledge hiding behaviour during placement seasons is not a fixed individual disposition but a context-sensitive and dynamic strategy that is susceptible to revision when the assumed competitive logic of hiding is empirically disconfirmed.

4.7.4 Post-Placement Relational Consequences

Beyond internal psychological consequences, participants described observable changes in peer relationships in the aftermath of the placement season, as individuals retrospectively assessed who had been genuinely supportive and who had withheld information. Participant P6 described what she termed a social market with memory a reputational economy in which generosity and information hoarding were both remembered and rewarded or sanctioned accordingly:

'Ab batch mein ek interesting cheej ho rahi hai. Jo log genuinely helpful the unka reputation bahut achha hai. Log unse voluntarily share karte hain. Jo log cheeje chupate the unse baaki log slightly distance maintain karte hain. Not overtly rude but a cooling is visible. This social market operates with memory.'

This observation that information hoarding during the placement season has a traceable and lasting reputational effect that the hider may not have anticipated is consistent with

Hernaus et al.'s (2019) finding that evasive knowledge hiding generates lasting interpersonal mistrust in academic settings. In the MBA context, the long-term relational cost of placement-season hoarding is particularly consequential given that batch cohort members constitute each other's first professional network.

4.8 Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on knowledge hiding during MBA placement season in considerable depth and from multiple angles, making several contributions to both the knowledge hiding literature and our understanding of competition in Indian educational settings.

The first contribution is bringing knowledge hiding into the MBA placement context. The data showed that all three forms of knowledge hiding identified by Connelly et al. (2012), namely evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding, were clearly present and distinguishable in this setting. This confirms that the typological framework applies beyond the workplace contexts where it was originally developed.

The second contribution is a clearer account of what triggers knowledge hiding. Prior research had shown that competitive environments predict knowledge hiding, but this study goes further by identifying the specific mechanism at play. At DSM-DTU, only 30 to 40 per cent of students get placed through campus recruitment. This arithmetic scarcity of placement seats creates a zero-sum mindset, where one person's gain feels like another's loss. When a peer asks for information, this threat is felt immediately and personally. This finding extends Cerne et al.'s (2014) work by explaining not just that competition drives hiding, but precisely how it does so.

The third contribution comes from participant P9's description of a three-tier system of information sharing. Students did not simply share or hide information; they organised their disclosure based on how close they were to someone and how much that person overlapped with their target companies. Information flowed freely with trusted friends, was shared partially with acquaintances, and was withheld almost entirely from direct competitors. This is a meaningful theoretical addition to the field, which has largely studied knowledge hiding as something that happens between two people. This study suggests that in cohort settings, the more useful unit of analysis is

the information sharing network across the entire group, shaped by multiple layers of trust and competition.

The fourth contribution comes from participant P11's account of how his behaviour changed over the course of the placement season. This shows that knowledge hiding is not a fixed personality trait but a flexible strategy that students adjust based on what they observe around them. When the assumed competitive logic behind hiding was challenged by real outcomes, behaviour shifted. This aligns with social learning theory, which holds that people update their strategies based on feedback. It also points to a practical opportunity: if institutions can demonstrate that sharing information does not reduce a student's own chances of getting placed, it may be possible to shift group norms meaningfully.

Taken together, these findings build on Choudhary and Mishra's (2023) work showing that context strongly shapes how knowledge hiding unfolds in Indian settings. The MBA placement season at DSM-DTU functioned as an extreme competitive environment marked by intense pressure, scarce opportunities, institutional secrecy, and unequal access to networks. Together, these conditions produced a widespread and deeply embedded pattern of strategic knowledge hiding that was not just an individual choice but something the institution itself helped create and sustain.

4.9 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, the following are the recommendations for educational institutions, placement committees, and faculty members seeking to foster more collaborative, equitable, and psychologically healthy information environments during the MBA placement season.

First, Placement committees should be more open about the process. One key finding was that when institutions themselves are secretive about placement processes, students learn to do the same. If placement committees proactively shared basic information like CTC bifurcation, company selection formats, roughly how many students get hired, and what recruiters look for, students would have less reason to hoard information. When confidentiality is genuinely required by a recruiting company, that should be stated clearly, rather than letting a general culture of secrecy grow on its own.

Second, institutions should invest in the creation of a structured, anonymised interview experience repository. Following each company's campus visit, one or more student volunteers could submit a brief, anonymised summary of the selection process experienced format, question types, preparation recommendations to be made available immediately to all students through the placement portal. This intervention, simple & low-cost, would systematically reduce the information asymmetry that currently makes individually held process knowledge a valuable competitive asset, thereby attenuating the incentive to withhold it.

Third, Business schools should actively build a culture where students feel safe to share. Some practical ways to do this include pairing students from different specialisations as peer mentors so they do not see each other as direct competitors, running group debrief sessions after company visits where students can share their experiences openly, and formally recognising students who contribute to a culture of sharing during the placement season.

Fourth, faculty members in OBHR and related disciplines should actively leverage the placement season as a pedagogical context for explicit engagement with the ethical and social dimensions of competitive information behaviour. The finding that several participants experienced sharp cognitive dissonance between classroom-acquired knowledge management values and placement-season behaviour but that this dissonance did not, in most cases, modify their behaviour in the moment suggests that a pre-season explicit intervention, connecting knowledge management theory directly to placement-season information behaviour, may be more effective than post reflection alone.

Fifth, Schools should reduce the unfair advantage that comes from who you know. Students who already have strong networks through seniors, alumni connections, or prior work experience tend to get better placement information than others. This gap should be addressed through formal, structured support that is available to everyone equally. This could include a properly managed senior-junior mentoring programme with supervised pairings, alumni sessions open to all students, and official company preparation guides built from alumni input. These steps would reduce how much placement success depends on personal connections rather than merit.

4.10 Limitations of the Study

The present study, while generating rich and theoretically significant insights, was subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged truly.

The first limitation concerns the sample size and institutional scope. A sample of twelve participants drawn from a single institution while appropriate for a phenomenological qualitative study and sufficient for theoretical saturation does not enable strong claims about the prevalence or distribution of knowledge hiding behaviours across MBA students in India more broadly. Future research employing larger samples and multiple institutional contexts would strengthen the generalisability of the findings.

The second limitation relates to the social desirability dynamics inherent in the research context. Notwithstanding the care taken to create a non-judgmental and confidential interview environment, the possibility that participants moderated their accounts in the direction of social desirability underreporting the frequency or intensity of their hiding behaviour, or presenting more morally aware accounts than their actual behaviour warranted cannot be fully discounted.

The third limitation concerns the researcher's positionality. As a second-year MBA student at DSM-DTU, the researcher shared membership of the same community as the research participants. While this insider status facilitated access and rapport, it also created the risk of projecting personal experiences onto participant accounts and the risk that participants moderated their accounts based on awareness of the researcher's identity. These risks were managed through reflexivity practices but cannot be fully eliminated.

The fourth limitation is temporal. The study was conducted at a specific and emotionally charged point in the placement season December 2025 through March 2026 and the intensity of the competitive environment may have emphasized certain aspects of the phenomenon while attenuating others. Longitudinal research designs tracking information behaviour across the full arc of multiple placement seasons, and across different institutional contexts, would enrich the understanding of knowledge hiding as a temporally and contextually dynamic phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

The present study set out to investigate the nature, forms, antecedents, and consequences of knowledge hiding behaviour among MBA students at Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, in the specific and highly consequential context of placement competition. Employing a qualitative, interpretivist methodology twelve semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in Hinglish during the active placement season of December 2025 to March 2026 and analysed through the six-phase thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) the study generated rich, contextually grounded, and theoretically significant insights into a phenomenon that, while widely experienced and intuitively recognised within the business school community, had not previously been subjected to systematic empirical investigation in the Indian MBA placement context.

The study identified five themes that collectively illuminate the phenomenon. The Competitive Trigger theme established that the perceived zero-sum scarcity of 30 to 40 per cent campus placement rate provided the structural foundation for a competitive survival mindset in which real-time threat assessments governed information sharing decisions. The Forms and Strategies of Hiding theme documented the full range of Connelly et al.'s (2012) typological forms in the placement context, including a contextually distinctive and ethically more serious variant of evasive hiding involving the deliberate provision of incorrect information about a company's selection process.

The Trust Circles and Selective Generosity theme revealed that knowledge hiding was not a generalised refusal to share but a calibrated, graduated system of differential disclosure organised around trust tiers inner circles of unrestricted mutual sharing, middle layers of surface-level exchange, and outer zones of minimal disclosure. The Institutional Opacity and Normalisation theme documented the dual mechanisms through which the institution co-produced hiding behaviour: the opacity of placement cell information management practices, which modelled and legitimised student information restriction; and the senior-junior socialisation process, through which competitive norms were transmitted intergenerationally.

The Consequences, Regret, and Reflexivity theme demonstrated that, despite the in-the-moment rationalisations that enabled hiding, many participants experienced residual guilt, retaliatory cycles, cognitive dissonance between classroom values and

placement behaviour, and lasting reputational consequences pointing to the enduring moral salience of knowledge-sharing norms even within intensely competitive contexts.

The theoretical contributions of the present study are several. The study extends the knowledge hiding construct to the MBA placement context, demonstrating the validity of Connelly et al.'s (2012) tripartite typology while identifying a novel and contextually distinctive variant. The study introduces the concept of the three-tier information sharing architecture as a structural feature of knowledge behaviour in cohort competitive environments. The study identifies the structural information exclusion mechanism as a distinct and under-theorised form of informational disadvantage. And the study demonstrates the dynamic, phase-sensitive character of hiding behaviour, which is susceptible to revision through outcome learning a finding with direct implications for institutional intervention design.

For institutional practitioners placement committees, faculty, and student leaders at DSM-DTU and comparable MBA programmes the study's findings underscore the importance of proactive, system-level intervention in the information environment of the placement season. Transparency in placement cell communications, the creation of structured and universally accessible interview experience repositories, formal and equitably allocated senior mentoring, and explicit pedagogical engagement with the ethics of competitive information behaviour are among the evidence-based recommendations advanced by the present study. These interventions do not require the elimination of competition which is a structural feature of the placement environment that cannot and arguably should not be removed but rather the creation of conditions in which competition unfolds within an informational landscape that is more equitable, more transparent, and more conducive to the collaborative norms that the business school educational experience is meant to cultivate.

For future researchers, the present study opens several productive avenues for inquiry. Comparative studies across multiple business school contexts examining how institutional culture, student demographics, and placement process structures moderate the relationship between competitive pressure and knowledge hiding would enrich the generalisability of the present findings. Longitudinal research designs tracking knowledge hiding behaviour across the full arc of a placement season, and across

multiple placement seasons, would illuminate the temporal dynamics of the phenomenon and the conditions under which competitive norms shift. Quantitative studies employing validated knowledge hiding scales adapted for the academic and placement context could provide complementary insights into the prevalence and correlates of hiding behaviour at a population level.

In conclusion, the present study has demonstrated that knowledge hiding during MBA placement competition is a theoretically rich, practically consequential, institutionally co-produced, and contextually distinctive phenomenon that merits sustained scholarly attention. It operates not merely as an individual behavioural quirk but as a systemic feature of a competitive educational environment characterised by structural scarcity, institutional opacity, and social network inequality. By shining a light on the informal, often unspoken information dynamics that govern one of the most consequential periods of the MBA experience, this research contributes to a more complete, honest, and actionable understanding of business school life and offers a foundation for the institutional innovations needed to make that experience more equitable, more collaborative, and more conducive to the development of knowledge-sharing professionals.

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