

The Effect of Abusive Supervision on Knowledge-Hiding: The Mediating Role of Machiavellianism and the Moderating Role of Moral Identity among Healthcare Workers

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the mediating role of Machiavellianism in the effect of abusive supervision on knowledge-hiding behavior and the moderating role of moral identity in the relationship between Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding behavior. The study adopts the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory as its theoretical framework. Quantitative data were obtained from 408 healthcare professionals using the survey method. The analyses conducted via SPSS, AMOS, and Process Macro revealed that abusive supervision significantly increases knowledge-hiding behavior ($\beta = .855$) and Machiavellianism ($\beta = .820$). Furthermore, Machiavellianism acts as a mediator in the relationship between abusive supervision and knowledge-hiding. A notable finding is that moral identity acts as a moderator ($\beta = .134$), strengthening the positive effect of Machiavellianism on knowledge-hiding behavior. Considering the analysis results, some suggestions specific to healthcare institutions, healthcare workers, and future studies were presented. Theoretically, this study contributes to the Dark Triad literature by demonstrating how abusive environments trigger resource conservation through knowledge-hiding. Practically, suggestions for preventing toxic leadership and improving ethical climates in healthcare institutions are presented. Health institutions should implement a reward system for employees who demonstrate helpfulness and teamwork to decrease Machiavellian behaviors.

Keywords: *Abusive Supervision, Healthcare Organizations, Knowledge-Hiding Behavior, Machiavellianism, Moral Identity.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Managerial conduct towards employees within an organizational context directly influences staff attitudes and behaviors. Abusive supervision is a contributing factor undermining organizational integrity when employees oppose management. From the perspective of health institutions, it can be stated that the abusive supervision approach will significantly reduce the performance of health institutions because the individual performances of employees directly affect the satisfaction of those receiving service.

Managers undertake important duties in the motivation of employees (Shoss et al., 2013), and in organizations where abusive supervision exists, employees' motivation decreases, their work-life balance deteriorates, they experience psychological problems, and they intend to leave their jobs to get away from their managers (Tepper, 2000). Exposure to abusive supervision causes employees to exhibit destructive behaviors against management and thus damages the organization (Wang et al., 2012) and paves the way for some counterproductive work behaviors such as knowledge-hiding behavior (Zhao et al., 2016).

Machiavellianism is summarized as “the means to an end are justified” and is defined as the individual believing in the validity of every method chosen pragmatically to achieve the goals, he/she has set (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Employees subjected to harsh supervision may display increased Machiavellian tendencies to supplant the existing management. In this respect, it is stated that abusive management will cause the staff to develop negative attitudes towards the management and to engage in behaviors that harm the business, such as hiding information. The employees will aim to change the management and tend towards Machiavellian behaviors.

Moral identity affects the individual's behaviors within and outside the organization and directs them to act ethically and morally (Freeman et al., 2009). In other words, it contributes to the selection of the moral path in the decisions and behaviors displayed by employees. The selection of ethical and moral paths in the attitudes to be displayed towards the organization and the extent to which Machiavellian behaviors will be inclined are also related to the individual's moral identity level. In this respect, examining the perceptions of abusive supervision among healthcare professionals and determining the extent to which this perception affects Machiavellianism and counterproductive behaviors, such as knowledge-hiding behavior, is pretty important when considering the effects of these perceptions on the satisfaction of healthcare professionals with healthcare service provision. Furthermore, by examining healthcare professionals' perceptions, this study investigates the impact of employees' moral identity levels on inter-concept relationships. This study is expected to contribute substantially to the existing body of knowledge due to the lack of prior research on these specific ideas in the literature.

Existing literature suggests that abusive supervision depletes employees' psychological resources. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, this study posits that employees engage in knowledge-hiding to conserve their remaining energy when faced with abusive supervision. Although existing literature recognizes the harmful effects of abusive supervision, the psychological processes through which it causes knowledge-hiding in high-stakes environments like healthcare are still not well understood. Specifically, earlier research often neglects how dark personality traits (Machiavellianism) and moral self-views (Moral Identity) interact to influence these behaviors. Moreover, while abusive supervision has been studied in various sectors, its specific interaction with dark personality traits like Machiavellianism remains relatively overlooked within the high-stakes environment of healthcare institutions. Addressing this gap is crucial, as the consequences of such behaviors in healthcare directly impact patient safety and the quality of service. This study fills this theoretical gap by incorporating the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. It contends that abusive supervision not only drains resources (COR) but also triggers latent Machiavellian traits (Trait Activation) and results in information hiding. By integrating this theoretical lens, this study aims to: (1) examine the impact of abusive supervision on knowledge-hiding, (2) explore the mediating role of Machiavellianism, and (3) investigate the moderating role of moral identity. Based on this framework, hypotheses H1 through H6 are developed to test the direct, indirect, and conditional effects of these variables within the healthcare context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Abusive Supervision

The concept of abusive supervision is defined by Tepper (2007) as the negative behaviors displayed toward employees by the manager, such as constantly mistreating, bullying, intimidating, and humiliating subordinates in front of other employees. Managers who exhibit abusive supervision behavior exhibit several negative behaviors, such as humiliating their subordinates, making fun of them, constantly bringing up employees past failures and mistakes, and interfering with employee's privacy (Tepper, 2000).

Employees' perceptions of abusive supervision may exhibit variability influenced by individual personality traits, past experiences, cultural backgrounds, and interactions with management. The employees' perception reveals the specific level of abusive supervision; while some individuals may interpret a manager's behavior as abusive, others might perceive it as standard conduct. This perception causes employees to be affected differently within the organization and gives different reactions (Bress et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2025; Martinko et al., 2012).

Characteristics influencing the impression of abusive supervision can be categorized into two primary groups: individual characteristics, encompassing gender, cultural background, experience, and age, and organizational factors, which include organizational culture, the quality of leader-member

exchange, and perceptions of organizational justice. When examined in terms of individual factors, it is stated that in some societies where women are seen as second-class citizens, there may be more sensitivity to abusive supervision behavior (Güldü & Aksu, 2016). Studies are showing that there will be different perceptions of abusive supervision in different cultures due to the impact of the cultures of countries on employee rights (Vogel et al., 2015), that the ages and experiences of individuals also create profound differences in their perception of events, and that increasing age and experience increases the perception of abuse (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). When evaluating abusive supervision from an organizational perspective, it is asserted that it is more pronounced in organizations characterized by traditional cultures than those operating under an egalitarian framework (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). Additionally, an elevated perception of abusive supervision is observed in organizations where leader-member exchange or the perception of organizational justice is diminished (Arshad et al., 2025; Harris et al., 2011).

An abusive supervision approach can negatively affect the organization and employees. In organizations where managers exhibit abusive supervision behavior, employees' creativity, performance, intention to leave, stress levels, perceptions of organizational justice, burnout, and satisfaction levels are negatively affected. In addition, the hostile situation within the organization negatively affects employees' lives outside the organization (Mackey et al., 2018).

2.2. Knowledge-Hiding Behavior

The dissemination of knowledge held by employees among other organizational members constitutes a critical determinant of organizational performance and contributes to the collective enhancement of all employees' effectiveness. From an organizational standpoint, knowledge is conceptualized as employees' specialized expertise and proficiencies to execute their assigned duties (Pereira & Mohiya, 2021). The definition of knowledge sharing, which includes the action consciously implemented by the employee who knows, is the level to which knowledge is accessible to all employees in the organization (Ipe, 2003). In another definition, knowledge sharing refers to the voluntary exchange of tacit knowledge, which includes expertise and technical skills, and explicit knowledge, like reports or documents, among employees within the organization (Block et al., 2015).

From another perspective, knowledge-hiding behavior is the conscious and intentional hiding of information requested from other employees by the employees in organizations, as opposed to information sharing (Connelly et al., 2012). While multiple factors contribute to knowledge-hiding behavior, it can be argued that a primary reason is that the employee strategically aims to gain a competitive edge within the organization and enhance his/her interests (Webster et al., 2008).

Knowledge sharing and knowledge-hiding are fundamentally different concepts in how they operate within a company (Connelly et al., 2012). Intentionally concealing knowledge aligns with particular objectives, whereas the passive failure to share information typically stems from deficits in

communication capabilities, a limited understanding, or failure to grasp what data fellow workers require (Ford & Staples, 2010; Jiang et al., 2019). Multiple elements play a role in the rise of knowledge-hiding behavior in an organization. A comprehensive literature review indicates that management abuse, diminished motivation, job dissatisfaction, miscommunication, adverse interpersonal relationships at work, workplace incivility, and a weak organizational culture can induce knowledge-hiding behaviors (Arshad & Ismail, 2018; Nowlin & McClure, 2015; Shen et al., 2025; Zhao et al., 2016).

Knowledge-hiding behavior, which has some negative consequences, primarily the decrease in organizational performance, occurs through feigning ignorance, evasive behavior, and rationalization (Černe et al., 2014; Connelly et al., 2012). The employee who feigns ignorance acts as if he does not have the requested information. In evasive behavior, the employee gives irrelevant and different information than requested and evades the other person. In knowledge-hiding behavior in rationalization, the employee offers various excuses to the other person and does not give the requested information by blaming other individuals (Connelly et al., 2012).

2.3. Machiavellianism

The idea of Machiavelli emerged after Niccolo Machiavelli authored a book in 1513 that discussed two ways princes could thrive (Bereczkei, 2018). One of the two ways mentioned is legitimate and peaceful, while the other is how force comes to the fore (Koçer & Gülsoy, 2020). In his work, Machiavelli states that individuals must manipulate others and sometimes resort to unethical and immoral behavior to gain power (Machiavelli, 2018). In this respect, Machiavelli sees every tool and every way as acceptable on the path to success (Özsoy et al., 2017). Today, the concept of Machiavelli expresses tyranny, hypocrisy, fraud, and dishonesty (Özler et al., 2013).

Psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism are personality characteristics referred to as the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). According to studies on the Dark Triad, the personality traits mentioned cause some undesirable work behaviors in the organization, and Machiavellianism is one of the toxic personality traits in the organization (Jonason et al., 2012; O'Boyle et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2014).

Based on the initial definition provided by Christie and Geis (1970), Machiavellianism refers to a social process that drives an individual's behavior, policies, and power utilization to attain his/her objectives. According to another definition made later, Machiavellianism is the belief in the validity of every method preferred from a pragmatic perspective to achieve one's/goals (Robbins & Judge, 2019). For example, in some organizations that want to use the Machiavellian characteristics of employees, reporting the inappropriate behaviors of other employees to the management level positively affects career success (Macrosson & Hemphill, 2001).

When analyzing the effects of Machiavellianism, it is noted that employees displaying Machiavellian traits tend to demonstrate ineffective and unethical behaviors in the workplace (Chen &

Tang, 2006; Li et al., 2025). It can be stated that this situation is due to the employee violating the principles of fair social exchange between the organization and the individual by focusing on his/her benefits rather than the benefits of the organization (Rehman & Shahnawaz, 2018; Schyns et al., 2019).

2.4. Moral Identity

The concept of morality is the process by which people understand ethical and internal values in their social interactions and regulate their behaviors according to these values (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004). Moral identity, which is also accepted as the concretion of moral values with the individual's self, is defined as how important being a moral person is for the individual's identity (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; Reed & Aquino, 2003).

Moral identity affects the basis of an individual's behaviors and thoughts, contributing to their ability to act morally and make ethical decisions. Moral identity development is affected by several factors, such as an individual's role models, experiences, and social environments. Simultaneously, identifying ethical convictions and personal introspection are crucial in shaping moral identity (Hart & Matsuba, 2009). Moral identity influences people's ethical choices, and those with a strong moral identity are more likely to act morally and ethically soundly in their decisions (Freeman et al., 2009).

Moral identity is conceptualized and explored across two distinct dimensions: internalization and symbolization. Internalization involves individuals adopting ethical values, while symbolization involves externalizing them within society (Blasi, 1994; Walker & Taylor, 1991). Individuals who internalize moral identity do not give up moral values even if no one sees them and continue to behave morally (Reed & Aquino, 2003). Individuals with a high level of symbolization try to reflect their moral values to their environment with certain behaviors and symbols (Shao et al., 2008). It can be stated that both dimensions form the basis of an individual's moral behavior (Reed & Aquino, 2003). Within demanding professional environments, such as healthcare institutions, inclinations towards psychologically distancing oneself from a moral compass may quickly cause staff members to adopt counterproductive workplace actions that fail to benefit the institution (Ke & Li, 2025). From an organizational viewpoint, it can be observed that healthcare professionals possessing a stronger moral identity often demonstrate ethically responsible actions within the workplace.

2.5. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

The independent variable in this research, the concept of abusive supervision, can be evaluated through the theoretical lens of the Conservation of Resources Theory. Theory suggests abusive leadership can deplete employees' resources and lead them to display negative attitudes and actions (Gallegos et al., 2022; Kaltiainen et al., 2024). In this regard, abusive supervision within organizational settings harms individual employees and the organization. Abusive supervision causes employees to use the energy they need for work to defend themselves (Özdevecioğlu et al., 2014); while reducing job satisfaction, organizational justice perception, organizational commitment, and organizational

belonging, it increases the thought of leaving the job, and physical and mental health problems (Meglich & Eesley, 2011; Ülbeği & Özgen, 2013). Low perception of organizational justice, organizational belonging, or organizational commitment among employees causes employees to exhibit more counterproductive work behaviors (Khan et al., 2013; Miao & Zhou, 2020). Counterproductive work behaviors can be demonstrated in different ways. One such behavior is knowledge-hiding, characterized in the literature as unproductive information behavior (Eser, 2024). In addition, one of the factors that causes employees to exhibit knowledge-hiding behavior is abusive supervision behavior (Zhao et al., 2016). Hypothesis 1 was developed within this framework.

H₁- There is a significant positive relationship between abusive supervision and knowledge-hiding behavior.

Greenbaum et al. (2017) investigated how the connection between abusive supervision and Machiavellianism personality traits influences unethical behaviors according to Trait Activation Theory. This study elucidated the relationship between abusive supervision and Machiavellianism, alongside the consequences arising from this association. Research findings indicated that the relationship between abusive supervision and unethical manipulation, along with the connection between a desire for control and abusive supervision, acted as markers of unethical behavior. Some studies determined that employees with high Machiavellian tendencies in organizations with intense competition did not share information with other employees and used the information they had for their benefit (Jones & Paulhus, 2009). In this respect, it can be stated that employees in organizations with an abusive supervision approach will think more about their benefits and exhibit Machiavellian behaviors to be closer to the management. The following hypothesis was put forward in line with the relevant literature.

H₂- There is a significant positive relationship between abusive supervision and Machiavellianism.

There are some individual differences in terms of the level of Machiavellian behavior when employees exhibit counterproductive behaviors. Employees with more Machiavellian behaviors appear to engage in counterproductive behaviors more frequently because they have more tangible benefits to gain by exhibiting negative behaviors toward the organization (DeShong et al., 2015; Jones & Mueller, 2022). Conversely, it has been found that employees displaying Machiavellian traits are generally not generous or helpful if their assistance goes unnoticed by their peers (Bereczkei et al., 2010). It can be said that employees who exhibit Machiavellian behaviors will exhibit far less helpful behaviors, such as sharing information.

The increase in Machiavellian behavioral tendencies also causes a decrease in conscientiousness, courtesy, sportsmanship behaviors, and civic virtue, which are considered various dimensions of organizational citizenship behavior (Ünver, 2021). It can be predicted that abusive supervision will cause organizational employees to exhibit more Machiavellian and counterproductive

behavior by hiding information from other employees. It is theorized that an increased level of Machiavellian behavior among employees is likely to worsen tendencies to hide knowledge, suggesting that Machiavellianism acts as a mediator in the effect of abusive supervision on knowledge-hiding behavior in the workplace. Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 were developed within this scope.

H₃- There is a significant positive relationship between Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding behavior.

H₄- Machiavellianism has a mediating variable effect on the effect of abusive supervision on knowledge-hiding behavior.

Moral identity is connected to individuals' actions, attitudes, and ideas and determines moral behaviors. An individual's ability to distinguish between ethical and unethical actions, and consequently, how they react to moral quandaries, is greatly influenced by their moral identity. Within the organization, the strong moral identity of employees ensures that employees are more resistant to behaviors that can be considered unethical and immoral. The moral identity levels of employees affect the organization's response to unethical behaviors and their coping methods (Freeman et al., 2009; Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; Reed & Aquino, 2003).

Employees possessing elevated levels of moral identity are likely to perceive knowledge-hiding behaviors, particularly those undertaken for Machiavellian objectives within the organization, as ethically questionable or immoral, consequently adopting an adverse stance. Indeed, the internalization dimension of moral identity has been shown to mitigate unethical behaviors, even when such actions ostensibly benefit the organization. Moreover, it was discovered that moral identity regulates how Machiavellianism affects unethical behavior done for the company's sake (Coşkun, 2017). According to Ploeger and Bisel's study (2013), moral status affects the defense mechanism against unethical behavior for the organization's benefit. According to another study, moral disengagement is a mediating factor in how organizational identification affects unethical behavior for the company's good (Chen et al., 2016).

A study on emotional commitment, unethical behavior benefiting the company, and moral identity revealed that moral identity has a mediating impact on the correlation between emotional commitment and unethical behavior benefiting the company (Matherne & Litchfield, 2012). According to the research findings that Shu (2015) acquired, unethical behaviors carried out at work for the company's benefit also impact the person and encourage unethical behavior for the company's gain. Moral justification serves a mediating function within this relationship. Another study discovered that the link between psychological ownership and unethical behavior performed for the sake of the company is adversely impacted by moral identity (Xu & Zhike, 2018). When past studies are examined together with the conceptual framework, it can be stated that high moral identity levels of employees will reduce knowledge-hiding behavior and that knowledge-hiding behavior exhibited with Machiavellian tendency

will be affected by the individual's moral identity level. The following hypotheses were developed in light of this.

H₅- There is a significant negative relationship between moral identity and knowledge-hiding behavior.

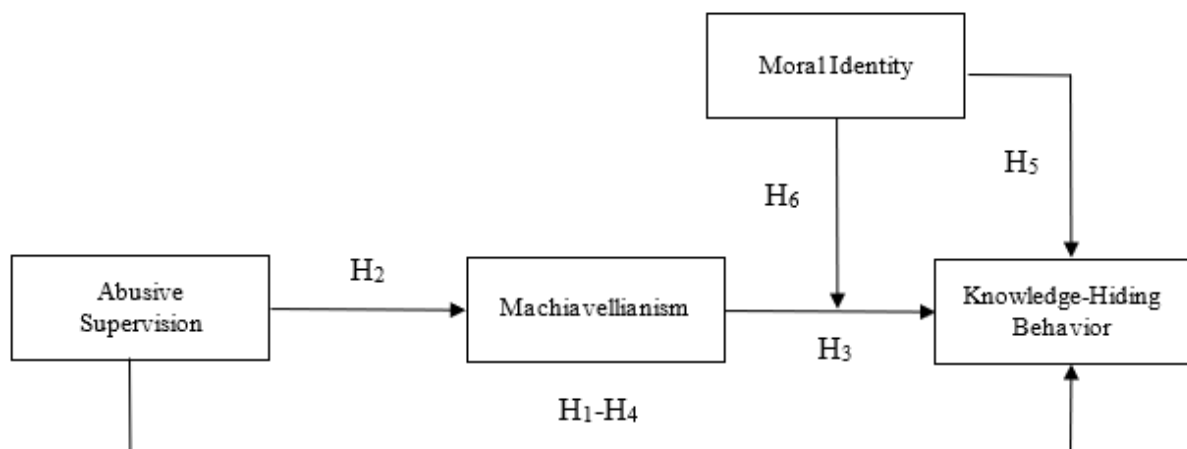
H₆- Moral identity has a moderating variable effect on the effect of Machiavellianism on knowledge-hiding behavior.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Model

This investigation, employing a quantitative research methodology and a relational screening model, examined the interrelationships among knowledge-hiding behavior, Machiavellianism, abusive supervision, and moral identity. The primary objective of this study is to investigate how abusive supervision in healthcare organizations affects healthcare professionals' knowledge-hiding behavior. The study also explores the mediating role of Machiavellianism in this relationship and the moderating role of moral identity in the impact of Machiavellianism on knowledge-hiding.

Figure 1. Research Model



Based on the established relationships among the concepts and other variables explored within the study's scope, it is posited that abusive supervision will foster an increase in both Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding behavior. It is also predicted that Machiavellianism will have a favorable effect on behaviors related to knowledge concealment. In addition, it is possible to claim that Machiavellianism will act as a mediator in the influence of abusive supervision on behavior involving withholding knowledge. It is predicted that moral identity will, in turn, lessen the impact of Machiavellianism on workers' behavior of concealing knowledge. Hypotheses were put forward by evaluating the relationship structures between the concepts, and a research model was created (Figure 1).

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

The data of the cross-sectional study were obtained with a survey form. The study population comprises approximately 1,350,000 healthcare workers working in universities and in private and public healthcare institutions in Türkiye (Ministry of Health, 2023). The number of samples to be reached from the universe at a 95% confidence level was determined as 384 (Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan, 2004). Since the target population has a broad scope and heterogeneous structure, the sample size was kept as large as possible in the study. In December 2024, participants were reached with an online survey form using the convenience sampling method. Data were collected from 408 healthcare workers (Doctor, Nurse, Health Licensee, Health Technician/Technician, and Medical Secretary).

3.3. Measurement Scales

Abusive supervision, knowledge-hiding behavior in organizations, Machiavellianism, and moral identity scales along with personal information form were all employed in the research. The personal information form consisted of six questions (Gender, Age, Marital Status, Education Level, Experience and Occupation). A 5-point Likert-type scale was used to rate the scale expressions. Measurements of variables were analyzed by taking the scale averages. A high score average indicates that the relevant behavior is seen at a high level.

The abusive supervision scale was developed by Sümer et al. (2024). The Cronbach's Alpha value for the single-dimensional scale, comprising 14 items (e.g., “Makes employees do their work” and “Does not respect the privacy of their employees”), was determined to be 0.95. No items within the scale required reverse coding.

The scale for information hiding in organizations was developed by Connelly et al. (2012). The scale was adapted into Turkish by Kürü and Begenirbaş (2023). The scale used consists of 3 sub-dimensions and 11 statements (e.g., “I suggest giving information on another subject instead of the information he/she asks me for” and “I act as if I do not know about the subject”). The three-factor structure of the scale was corroborated in the Turkish adaptation study. The sub-dimensions of feigning ignorance, evasiveness, and rationalization comprised 4, 3, and 4 items, respectively. In the adaptation study, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for these sub-dimensions were ascertained as .896, .833, and .840, respectively. The overall scale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of .887. The scale contains no reverse-worded statements.

Another scale used in the study, the Machiavellianism scale, is a sub-dimension of the “Dark Triad” scale developed by Jonason and Webster (2010) to measure the concepts of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. The scale, which has been adapted to many different languages, was adapted to Turkish by Yaşlıoğlu and Atılgan (2018). The Machiavellianism scale consists of 4 statements (e.g., “I can use people to achieve my own goals”). The Turkish adaptation study reported a

Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.85 for the scale, which contains no reverse-coded items, affirming its reliability.

The moral identity scale was initially developed by Aquino and Reed (2002) and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Yılmaz and Yılmaz (2015). This scale comprises 10 items distributed across two sub-dimensions (e.g., “Being a person with these characteristics in the institution I work for makes me feel good”). Two sub-dimensions (symbolization of moral identity and internalization of moral identity) consist of five items each. The Turkish adaptation study confirmed that the scale exhibits a two-factor structure, consistent with its original formulation. The internalization dimension had a Cronbach's Alpha value of .77, while the symbolization dimension had a value of .76. The two statements of the scale, whose reliability was demonstrated, were negative and were reverse-coded during the measurements.

3.4. Data Analysis

Survey data underwent analysis utilizing SPSS, AMOS, and Process Macro plug-ins. The data exhibited a normal distribution, as evidenced by the kurtosis and skewness values falling within the ± 3 range (Shao, 2002). Based on the data obtained, the skewness and kurtosis values for the scales fall within the ± 3 range, suggesting a normal distribution (Table 3). Subsequently, the findings were interpreted following the execution of reliability, frequency, correlation, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and mediator and moderator effect analyses. To address the potential issue of Common Method Bias (CMB) arising from self-reported data, Harman's Single Factor Test was conducted. Harman's single-factor test assessment stands out as the most frequently utilized approach when identifying common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This assessment utilizes either exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis to identify common method bias. According to Harman's exploratory factor analysis assessment, the presence of common method bias is indicated if the unrotated result yields a single factor explaining over 50% of the variance (Fuller et al., 2016). The total variance explained by a single factor was found to be 47.9%, which is below the 50% threshold, indicating that CMB is not a pervasive issue in this dataset.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Bayburt University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. 189; 12 July 2024). The research was conducted voluntarily, and the participants' consent information was stated in the survey.

3.6. Assumptions and Limitations

There are some assumptions and limitations in the study. The scales are scientifically accepted, and the validity and reliability studies have been completed. In this respect, it is assumed that the scales accurately measure the levels of the relevant concepts. The study's limitations should be acknowledged, specifically the confinement of its scope to healthcare workers, the particular scales chosen, the

statistical methodologies applied for analyses, and the cross-sectional nature of data collection. It is important to acknowledge that the use of convenience sampling, necessitated by time and accessibility constraints, limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader healthcare population. Additionally, while Harman's Single Factor Test results (47.9% variance) suggest that Common Method Bias is not a pervasive threat in this study, the cross-sectional nature of the data precludes making definitive causal inferences. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs to further validate these causal pathways.

4. FINDINGS

In this section of the study, descriptive information about the participants, findings of reliability and validity analyses, and results of moderation (Model-1) and mediation (Model-4) analyses are presented. Descriptive data about the participants are given in Table 1. Of the 408 participants, 58.6% were female, 31.4% were between the ages of 26 and 35, 73.3% were married, 60% had a bachelor's degree, and 33.3% had 1-5 years of experience.

Table 1. Descriptive Information

Demographic / Individual Findings		N	%
Gender	Female	239	58.6
	Male	169	41.4
Age	18-25	54	13.2
	26-35	128	31.4
	36-45	113	27.7
	46-55	92	22.5
	56 and above	21	5.1
Marital Status	Married	299	73.3
	Single	109	26.7
Education Level	High school	24	5.9
	Associate Degree	97	23.8
	Bachelor's degree	245	60.0
	Postgraduate	42	10.3
Experience	Less than 1 year	27	6.6
	1-5 years	136	33.3
	6-10 years	118	28.9
	11-15 years	86	21.1
	16 years and above	41	10.0
Occupation	Doctor	68	16.7
	Nurse	120	29.4
	Health Graduate	58	14.2
	Health Technician	76	18.6
	Medical Secretary	86	21.1
Total		408	100.0

CFA was performed to ascertain the scale's validity. According to the CFA results, the expressions with factor loadings below 0.30 (Stevens, 2002) or with a cross-loading tendency (Gürbüz, 2019) should be removed from the scale, and the analysis should be redone.

As a result of the CFA, acceptable goodness-of-fit values were achieved following the implementation of suggested modifications. The first-level single-factor CFA model was applied to the

structure of the abusive supervision scale, consisting of one dimension and 14 statements. Goodness of fit values could not be obtained, and by applying the suggested modification processes (as3-as5; as6-as7; as10-as11), it was determined that the predicted single-factor theoretical structure of the scale was compatible with the data. As a result of the second-level multi-factor CFA applied to the knowledge-hiding behavior scale consisting of 11 statements and three dimensions, acceptable goodness of fit values were obtained by making the suggested modification processes (khfi1-khfi4; khr2-khr3). The Machiavellianism scale is a one-dimensional scale consisting of 4 statements. As a result of the single-factor CFA, goodness of fit values was obtained without any modification process, and the structure of the scale, consisting of four statements and one factor, was revealed. The moral identity scale consists of 10 statements and two sub-dimensions. Conversely, the second-level multi-factor CFA could not attain acceptable goodness-of-fit values. The statements with factor loadings below 0.30 and with a tendency to cross-load (imi1 and imi5) in the moral identity scale were excluded from the model, and the two-factor structure of the scale was confirmed by applying the suggested modification procedures (smi1-smi2; smi2-smi3). The goodness-of-fit values obtained for the scales are presented in Table 2.

A reliability assessment was conducted to determine the dependability of the scales. The fact that the Cronbach's Alpha measurements, which represent the degree of internal consistency for all of the scales utilized within this investigation, surpass the .70 threshold as suggested by previous studies (Hair et al., 2010), confirms that the scales possess a substantial level of reliability. According to the analysis findings, Cronbach's Alpha values were determined as .939 for the abusive supervision scale, 0.931 for the knowledge-hiding behavior scale, .842 for the Machiavellianism scale, and .921 for the moral identity scale, respectively (Table 2).

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Analysis Results

	Abusive Supervision	Knowledge- Hiding Behavior	Machiavellianism	Moral Identity	Acceptable Compliance*
χ^2/df	4.95	4.64	0.52	3.74	< 5
RMSEA	.09	.09	.01	.08	< .10
GFI	.89	.92	.99	.96	$\geq$.85
AGFI	.85	.87	.99	.92	$\geq$.80
CFI	.92	.95	1.00	.97	$\geq$.85
NFI	.90	.94	.99	.96	$\geq$.85
IFI	.92	.95	1.00	.97	$\geq$.85
TLI	.90	.93	1.00	.96	$\geq$.85
SRMR	.04	.03	.01	.03	< .08
p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .05
Cronbach's Alpha	.939	.931	.842	.921	

Source: Byrne and Campbell (1999), Gürbüz (2019), Kline (2011), and Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003).

The relationships between the research variables, scale means, standard deviation findings, and kurtosis and skewness values are presented in Table 3. An examination of the scale means reveals that abusive supervision, Machiavellianism, and knowledge-hiding behavior all register above-average levels and exhibit proximity to one another. Unlike these three concepts, it was determined that the moral identity level is below the medium level. The Pearson correlation analysis findings indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between abusive supervision and both Machiavellianism ($r = .820, p < .01$) and knowledge-hiding behavior ($r = .855, p < .01$). Also, a noteworthy negative correlation was discovered between leaders exhibiting abusive behavior and an individual's moral identity ($r = -.667, p < .01$). Additionally, it was observed that Machiavellianism possessed a considerable positive correlation with the act of concealing knowledge ($r = .817, p < .01$), while also maintaining a noteworthy negative correlation with moral identity ($r = -.627, p < .01$). An important inverse relationship exists between one's moral identity and the act of deliberately hiding knowledge ($r = -.654, p < .01$) (Table 3). **Based on the results obtained from the analysis, hypotheses H₁, H₂, H₃, and H₅ were supported.**

Table 3. Scale Averages and Correlation Analysis Results

SCALES	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
1. Abusive Supervision	3.39	.85	-.224	-1.604	1			
2. Machiavellianism	3.41	.95	-.185	-1.373	.820*	1		
3. Moral Identity	2.84	.87	.462	-1.190	-.667*	-.627*	1	
4. Knowledge-Hiding Behavior	3.38	.91	-.271	-1.549	.855*	.817*	-.654*	1

* $p < 0.01$

The mediation and moderation analyses between the variables examined were performed with Process Macro, and the bootstrap method and Model 1 and Model 4 were used in the analyses. Bootstrap produces more reliable results than the Sobel Test and the Baron and Kenny method. In the analyses performed with this technique, the 95% confidence interval (CI) values determined should not include the zero value (Gürbüz, 2019).

The outcomes of Process Macro model 4, implemented to investigate Machiavellianism's mediating role in the effect of abusive supervision on knowledge-hiding, are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The Mediator Role of Machiavellianism (M) in the Impact of Abusive Supervision (AS) on Knowledge-Hiding Behavior (KHB)

Total Effect	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
AS* $\rightarrow$ M*	.820	.031	28.868	< .001	[.847, .970]
M $\rightarrow$ KHB*	.354	.040	8.558	< .001	[.264, .421]
AS $\rightarrow$ KHB	.855	.028	33.276	< .001	[.862, .971]
Direct Effect	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
AS $\rightarrow$ M $\rightarrow$ KHB	.565	.044	13.653	< .001	[.518, .692]
Indirect Effect	β	95% CI			
AS $\rightarrow$ M $\rightarrow$ KHB	.290	[.196, .384]			

*AS: Abusive Supervision; M: Machiavellianism; KHB: Knowledge-Hiding Behavior

When the obtained analysis findings are examined, the fact that the results of the model in the 95% confidence interval revealing the role of Machiavellianism as a mediator variable in the effect of abusive supervision on knowledge-hiding behavior do not include the value 0 (zero) [.196, .384] shows that Machiavellianism has a mediator variable role in the model. The total effect of abusive supervision on the act of concealing knowledge ($\beta = .855$; $p < .001$; $t = 33.276$; $SE = .028$; $95\%CI = [.862, .971]$) is observed to lessen when the degree of Machiavellianism is considered in the model ($\beta = .565$; $p < .001$; $t = 13.653$; $SE = .044$; $95\% CI = [.518, .692]$). It was discovered that the confidence interval ranges excluded zero regarding the indirect influence of Machiavellianism within the model, indicating its role as a mediating factor ($\beta = .290$; $95\% CI = [.196, .384]$). **The findings were evaluated, and the H₄ hypothesis was accepted.**

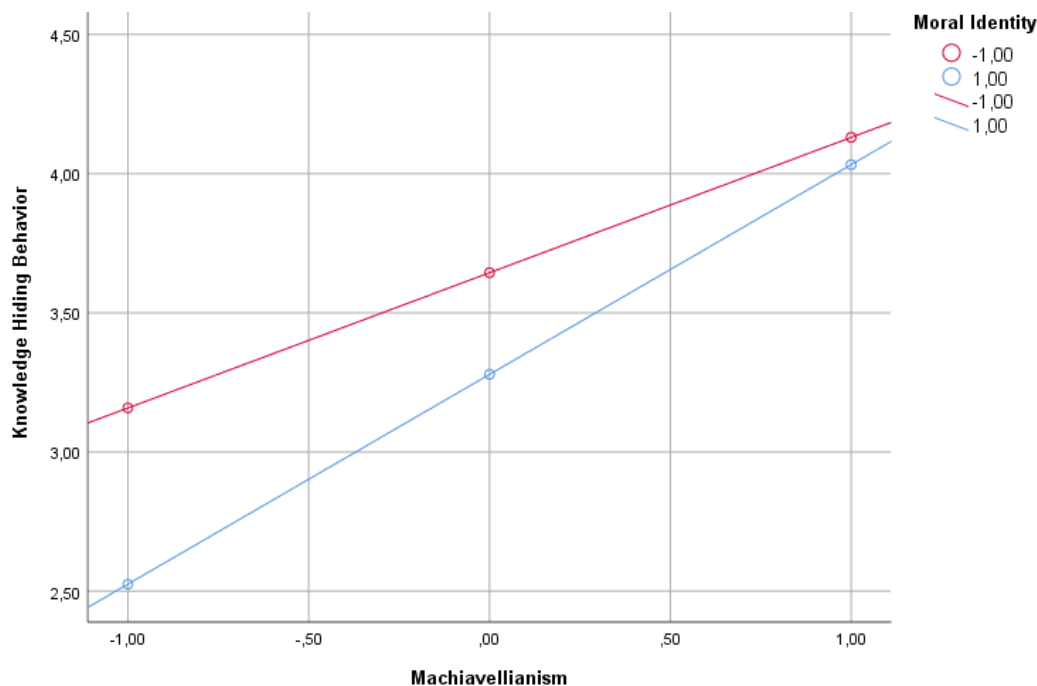
To mitigate concerns regarding multicollinearity in the moderation impact evaluation, the correlation coefficients between the independent variable (Machiavellianism) and the moderator variable (moral identity) should remain below .90 (Hair et al., 2010). It was determined that the correlation results between Machiavellianism and moral identity ($r = -.627$, $p < .01$) did not exceed the 0.90 threshold, confirming the absence of multicollinearity concerns. In addition, Tolerance and VIF values were examined to determine whether there was a multicollinearity problem. A multicollinearity issue is indicated by tolerance values falling below .10 or VIF measurements exceeding 10 (Pallant, 2007). The analysis revealed that the Tolerance value ($.607 > .10$) and VIF value ($1.648 < 10$) did not indicate a multicollinearity issue. The outcomes from Process Macro Model 1, employed to ascertain the moderating influence of moral identity, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The Moderating Role of Moral Identity in the Effect of Machiavellianism on Knowledge-Hiding Behavior

Variables	β	SE	t	p	%95 CI Lower Bounds	%95 CI Upper Bounds
Constant	3.461	.029	118.815	< .001	3.404	3.519
Machiavellianism	.620	.031	20.002	< .001	.559	.680
Moral Identity	-.183	.032	-5.789	< .001	-.244	-.121
Machiavellianism x Moral Identity	.134	.026	5.111	< .001	.082	.185
Level of Moderator Influence of Moral Identity						
Low	.486	.040	12.172	< .001	.407	.564
High	.753	.041	18.271	< .001	.672	.835
Model Summary	R	R²	F	p		
	.848	.719	345.067	< .001		
R² Changes as a Result of Interaction	ΔR^2	F	p			
	.018	26.125	< .001			

Based on the analytical findings, moral identity functions as a moderator in how Machiavellianism affects the act of concealing knowledge ($\beta = .134$; $p < .01$; $t = 5.111$; $SE = .026$; 95% CI = [.082, .185]). Moral identity has a 1.8% change effect on this effect ($\Delta R^2 = .018$; $p < .01$).

Figure 2. The Moderator Effect of Moral Identity



The graph of the moderating effect is presented in Figure 2. According to the statistical findings, the moderating impact demonstrated significance in instances where moral identity was both weak ($\beta = .486$; $p < .01$; $t = 12.172$; $SE = .040$; 95% CI = [.407, .564]) and strong ($\beta = .753$; $p < .01$; $t = 18.271$; $SE = .041$; 95% CI = [.672, .835]). It was observed that the positive influence of Machiavellianism on concealing knowledge became more pronounced when the degree of moral identity was elevated (Figure 2). **Consequently, the H₆ hypothesis was validated based on the analysis.**

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Healthcare workers are a professional group in direct contact with individuals who benefit from healthcare services at almost every stage of the service process. Therefore, it can be said that one of the most important factors affecting patient or client satisfaction in healthcare institutions is the performance of healthcare workers. It is known that in all organizations, the goal of managers is to benefit from the performance of employees at the highest level. The management approach exhibited by managers either supports or harms this goal. The abusive supervision approach is a management style that negatively affects healthcare institutions, as in other organizations.

There is competition among employees to be promoted to management positions in health institutions. Particularly in organizational contexts characterized by pervasive abusive supervision, employees are inclined to exert greater effort to alleviate the abusive supervisory conditions and potentially seek the replacement of the offending manager. When the contracted management positions implemented in public health institutions are also considered, a health worker must stand out to be promoted to a management position. For a management position, it can be expected that the employee will also exhibit behaviors such as Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding to get ahead of other employees, along with the success he/she shows in his/her job. However, especially in health services, where the concepts of ethics and morality are prominent, the moral identity levels of individuals affect the good and bad behaviors of employees. For health institutions to benefit from the performance of their employees in the most efficient way, investigating the level of the relevant concepts and the relationships between them will contribute to the success of health institutions.

This study, conducted among healthcare workers, investigated the levels of abusive supervision, knowledge-hiding behavior, Machiavellianism, and moral identity within healthcare institutions. Furthermore, it explored the mediating role of Machiavellianism in knowledge-hiding behaviors potentially induced by abusive supervision and the moderating influence of moral identity on the effect of Machiavellianism on knowledge-hiding. Findings indicated that healthcare workers exhibited above-moderate levels of perceived abusive supervision, knowledge-hiding behavior, and Machiavellianism, while their moral identity levels were below moderate. In other studies, conducted on healthcare workers, it was found that the perception of abusive supervision (Çoban & Çiçek, 2023; Deniz & Çimen, 2019) and Machiavellianism (Filiz, 2022) were below moderate, while the levels of moral identity (Emirze, 2023) and information sharing (Baş, 2023) were above moderate.

When the research hypotheses are considered, according to the result of the H₁ hypothesis, abusive supervision positively affects knowledge-hiding behavior. It can be said that this situation may occur as a negative result of the culture formed in the organization due to the abusive approach of the manager. An employee who is exposed to an abusive supervision approach may be expected to exhibit knowledge-hiding behavior, thinking that the information he/she has may be exploited. Alternatively, employees may choose to withhold knowledge from colleagues, driven by a desire to cease abusive

supervision and the eventual failure of the organization. Indeed, abusive supervision negatively affects leader-member interaction (Choi et al., 2019; Haggard & Park, 2018; Kim et al., 2018) and employees' well-being levels (Kelloway & Barling, 2010) and increases the employee's intention to leave the job (Deniz & Çimen, 2019). The study by Zhang et al. (2017) stated that abusive supervision causes tacit knowledge sharing in the organization. According to another study, abusive supervision negatively impacts information sharing (Wu & Lee, 2016).

In hypothesis H₂, it was determined that abusive supervision positively affects Machiavellianism, and in hypothesis H₃, Machiavellianism positively affects knowledge-hiding behavior. Employees working under an abusive supervision approach may exhibit Machiavellian behavior to avoid this approach and move to a managerial position. In addition, a Machiavellian employee may exhibit knowledge-hiding behavior to appear more successful than others. It is common for individuals who behave Machiavellianly to work in an unethical, inefficient, and manipulative manner in the organization (Chen & Tang, 2006; Gunnthorsdottir et al., 2002). Machiavellian employees are also prone to information sabotage to gain more benefits (McLeod & Genereux, 2008).

Consistent with Hypothesis H₄, it was determined that Machiavellianism serves as a mediator in the relationship between abusive supervision and knowledge-hiding behavior. Considering that employees in organizations with abusive supervision exhibit knowledge-hiding (Wu & Lee, 2016) and counterproductive work behavior (Jones & Mueller, 2022), it is expected that Machiavellian employee behaviors that prioritize their interests will play a mediating role in this relationship. Similar studies have found that Machiavellianism has some consequences for the organization's detriment (Jones & Paulhus, 2009; Ünver, 2021).

Moral identity plays a crucial role in an individual's response to ethical and unethical situations. Our findings in Hypothesis 5 indicate a negative relationship between moral identity and knowledge-hiding behavior. Furthermore, as shown in Hypothesis 6, moral identity acts as a moderating variable in the relationship between Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding behavior. The confirmation of Hypothesis 6 yielded an intriguing result: Moral identity strengthened the positive relationship between Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding behavior (Figure 2). While moral identity is typically expected to buffer negative behaviors, this finding aligns with the concept of "Moral Licensing." Individuals who hold a strong moral self-concept may feel they have accumulated "moral credits," which ironically licenses them to engage in questionable behaviors —such as knowledge-hiding— without feeling unethical, especially when motivated by Machiavellian traits to protect their interests against an abusive supervisor (Fan et al., 2025). Additionally, since the scale includes a symbolization dimension, Machiavellian employees might use the public display of morality as a strategic tool to mask their knowledge-hiding behaviors. According to the study's findings by Özsoy (2024), it was concluded that the regulatory role of organizational ethical climate is significant in the effect of Machiavellianism on counterproductive work behaviors.

This study examined the relationships among abusive supervision, Machiavellianism, knowledge-hiding behavior, and moral identity within the context of healthcare workers. The findings revealed that abusive supervision significantly increases both Machiavellian tendencies and knowledge-hiding behavior. Additionally, Machiavellianism partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and knowledge-hiding, indicating that employees exposed to abusive supervision may adopt Machiavellian strategies that subsequently encourage concealing information. Another notable finding is that moral identity moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding. Contrary to initial theoretical expectations, a higher moral identity strengthened this relationship, suggesting the need for a deeper exploration of underlying mechanisms, such as moral licensing or symbolic moral identity expression, in complex organizational settings like healthcare.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the organizational behavior literature by showing how abusive supervision, through the lens of Conservation of Resources Theory, can drain employees' psychological resources and trigger Machiavellian tendencies that ultimately foster knowledge-hiding behaviors. By focusing on healthcare workers—a group whose performance directly affects service quality—this research enriches the limited literature examining knowledge-hiding in clinical environments and demonstrates how supervisory practices shape information-related behaviors in highly interdependent work settings.

A key and intriguing finding of this study is the moderating role of moral identity (H6). Contrary to the expectation that moral identity buffers negative behaviors, our results showed that high moral identity strengthened the positive relationship between Machiavellianism and knowledge-hiding. This finding can be explained through "Moral Licensing Theory." Individuals with a high moral self-concept may feel they have accumulated "moral credits," which paradoxically can license them to engage in questionable behaviors—such as knowledge-hiding—without feeling unethical, especially when motivated by Machiavellian traits to protect their interests against an abusive supervisor. This suggests that employees who view morality as a public symbol (rather than an internalized value) may use this persona as a strategic mask to hide knowledge effectively while maintaining a positive social image. This result opens up new avenues for theoretical discussion, including the possibility of moral licensing, moral fatigue, or the influence of symbolic moral identity expressions, particularly in emotionally demanding fields such as healthcare. Taken together, the findings offer a more nuanced understanding of how personality traits, moral identity, and supervisory behavior interact to shape counterproductive work outcomes.

5.2. Practical Implications

According to the results, multiple suggestions can be directed toward healthcare institutions and future researchers. Given that the perception of abusive supervision adversely affects the organizational

climate and inflicts harm, adopting a management philosophy that deviates from such an approach would benefit healthcare institutions. Considering that health workers do a job that requires intensive shift work and emotional labor, it is necessary to prevent the preference of people who try to satisfy their egos over employees in managerial appointments. Specifically, healthcare institutions should implement 360-degree feedback mechanisms where subordinates can anonymously evaluate their supervisors. This would help identify and curb abusive behaviors early, preventing the activation of Machiavellian defenses among staff. On the other hand, it would benefit health institutions to introduce a reward system for their helpful and teamwork-oriented employees to reduce Machiavellian behaviors. Finally, it can be suggested that training that will increase awareness and moral identity about organizational courtesy and ethical behaviors is provided.

5.3. Future Research

In future studies, concepts such as organizational identification, perceived organizational support, and organizational cynicism can be addressed together with abusive supervision and Machiavellianism. Additionally, future research could incorporate alternative variables into the conceptual frameworks of abusive supervision, knowledge-hiding behavior, Machiavellianism, and moral identity, which were central to this study. The research model can be examined more comprehensively, and the literature can be deepened. Comparative studies conducted across different hospital types, professional groups, or cultural contexts could also help determine whether the relationships observed here are consistent or shaped by contextual factors unique to particular healthcare environments. Given the unexpected moderating effect of moral identity, future work may benefit from examining its subdimensions—such as internalization and symbolization—separately to clarify their distinct roles in ethical and counterproductive behaviors. Finally, qualitative approaches, such as interviews or observational studies, may offer richer insights into how healthcare workers interpret supervisory behavior and navigate the pressures of daily practice, providing deeper understanding of the motivations behind knowledge-hiding.

Ethics committee approval for the study was obtained from the Bayburt University Ethics Committee on July 12, 2024, with document number E-64446339-050.04-215088.

The author declares that the study was conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics.

The author confirms that no part of the study was generated, either wholly or in part, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

The author declares that there are no financial conflicts of interest involving any institution, organization, or individual associated with this article.

The author declares that the whole process of the study is conducted by the sole declared author of the study.

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