

A Conceptualization of “Knowledge-Bluffing” in Knowledge-Sharing Activities

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This article conceptualizes the notion of knowledge-bluffing that has been under-explored in the literature on knowledge hostilities. Distinguishing from a typical form of lie, this article focuses on the self-impression motive for knowledge-bluffing, and further explores several key antecedents that predict knowledge-bluffing behavior at the individual (ethical disposition, perceived expert power, goal orientation, and moral emotion), knowledge structural (knowledge asymmetry, dissimilarity, and identifiability), and contextual (organizational climate, process interdependence, and social interaction) levels. In doing so, this article expands the theoretical scope of knowledge hostilities, and offers practical implications to the organizational managers from a knowledge management perspective.

Key words: Knowledge-Bluffing, Knowledge Hostilities, Impression Management

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I. Introduction

Knowledge hostilities have been a major concern to knowledge-based modern corporations. Of various knowledge hostilities, knowledge-hoarding (i.e., leaving knowledge veiled when it is asked to share) has been actively explored, yet knowledge-bluffing has received little attention. Knowledge-bluffing is defined as pretending to have greater knowledge and information than is actually possessed (Thelin & Scott, 1928). The purpose of this paper is to conceptually explore the nature of knowledge-bluffing behavior and propose some key antecedents that cause that behavior.

Indeed, increasing number of CEOs and top managers has begun to agree with the importance of collective creativity for the organizational survival. However, since knowledge is the primary medium and raw material to generate any form of creativity, collective creativity necessarily entails the knowledge-sharing process among all intellectual participants. Thus, it is not surprising that many organizations have encouraged organizational members to share their own knowledge with other members in order to promote collective creativity. Such a corporate desire for transforming any regular organization to “knowledge-based organization” has been intense for decades (Starbuck, 1992).

Although knowledge sharing activities are supposed to be processed in a cooperative and mutually-enhancing manner by its purpose, reality depicts that knowledge-sharing activities are highly competitive and even hostile (Husted & Michailova, 2002). For example, knowledge-sharers have a strong preference for developing own ideas, overvalue their knowledge and undervalue others’ knowledge, unfairly reject other’s ideas and suggestions, become reluctant to share their knowledge, or stick to sell their own issues to top managers. Such hostilities are most likely to occur, especially when knowledge-sharing activities take place through internal competitions (e.g., competitions among business units within a firm) as well as external competitions (e.g., competitions among rivalries through multi-types of strategic alliance such as R&D consortiums, inter-firm joint ventures, etc.). Therefore, in order to overcome partner’s hostile responses and ultimately survive in invisible competitions, it is crucial for knowledge sharers to maintain a high level of knowledge-competence.

For this reason, some individuals keep their own knowledge and information hidden and private in a defensive manner by *understating* their knowledge. This sharing-reluctant behavior is termed as knowledge-hoarding, which has been explored by a

number of researchers to date (e.g., Davenport, De Long & Beers, 1998; Evans, Hendron, & Oldroyd, 2014; Holten et al., 2016; Husted & Michailova, 2002). For example, Davenport, De Long and Beers (1998) demonstrated that people would not share their knowledge with others when they believe their knowledge is valuable and important, since people tend to believe that releasing valuable knowledge would give rise to a potential loss of bargaining power and protection of personal competitive advantage, and as a result, becoming a knowledge-incompetent. It is also argued that people often suspect the authenticity of other’s efforts in sharing knowledge, and as a result they are reluctant to share their knowledge in order not to become a host of “knowledge parasites” (Husted & Michailova, 2002).

However, some individuals might try to maintain knowledge-competence in an offensive manner by *overstating* their knowledge, which is opposite to understating behavior (i.e. knowledge-hoarding). Such an overstating behavior can be seen as “knowledge-bluffing” by which people pretend to have greater knowledge and information than is actually possessed (Thelin & Scott, 1928). Although knowledge-bluffing deserves to be treated as another type of the knowledge-sharing hostility in a sense that bluffed knowledge may lead to a potential decrease in accuracy and quality of knowledge, knowledge-bluffing has received little academic attention in business ethics and even in the field of knowledge management.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to conceptually explore the nature of knowledge-bluffing behavior and propose some key antecedents of knowledge-bluffing behavior. It should be noted that this paper does not aim to conduct an empirical investigation about knowledge-bluffing but to bring academic and managerial attention to this underexplored yet important phenomenon in the realms of information management and business ethics. To help understand the position of knowledge-bluffing within a whole spectrum of knowledge sharing behavior, Figure 1 illustrates the 2 × 2 payoff matrix. In this matrix, knowledge-bluffing is the behavior where one pretends to share information about something he or she does not know much about.

[Figure 1] 2 × 2 matrix of knowledge-sharing behavior

	Knowing	<i>Something</i>	<i>Little or Nothing</i>
Sharing		Knowledge-sharing	Knowledge-bluffing
	<i>Something</i>	Knowledge-sharing	Knowledge-bluffing
	<i>Little or Nothing</i>	Knowledge-hoarding	Knowledge-parasitizing

II. Literature Review on Knowledge-Bluffing

1. A History of Knowledge-Bluffing

In fact, bluffing is not a completely new concept. As well-known in a poker game, bluffing is to bet or raise with an inferior hand (Hilger & Taylor, 2007). Aside from an ethical viewpoint, this strategy is quite functional because it can cause other players to believe the bluffing player has a dominant hand, so that they all fold; then the bluffing player comes to win the pot. By extension, the terms is often used outside the context of poker to describe the acts of pretending knowledge one does not have, or making threats one cannot execute in a negotiation context (Swift & Moore, 2012).

In the early 20th century, knowledge-bluffing has received a very marginal academic attention in a while. Fernberger (1927) first reported college students’ knowledge-bluffing behavior that was found in the final exam. Fernberger asked his students to define “psychoterminality”, which was totally fabricated term, yet went unnoticed by students. Surprisingly, only two students honestly stated they did not know what the term means; other twenty one students handed in expositions, ranging from one-half to three pages long. A year later, Thelin and Scott (1928) further examined the knowledge-bluffing phenomenon in both a campus and business settings. They found that knowledge-bluffing is a universal phenomenon from young college students to field workers such as bookkeepers, tool-makers, salespersons, and so on.

Although a few psychologists have already paid attention to knowledge-bluffing behavior, there is still room for further investigations. Most of all, previous works focused solely on bluffing behavior at the individual level. No study has taken the dynamic approach at the interpersonal level such as knowledge-sharing. Intuitively, it is little doubt that knowledge-bluffing is also expected to be found at the interpersonal level. Moreover, previous works focused solely on the individual’s demographics such as gender, age, education (Thelin & Scott, 1928), yet little is known about the underlying motivations that make individuals become a knowledge-bluffer and consequences that knowledge-bluffing may cause. Therefore, this paper aims to theorize why knowledge-bluffing takes place at the interpersonal knowledge-sharing context.

2. Knowledge-Bluffing as Impression Management

Why people engage in knowledge-bluffing in knowledge-sharing activities? Before answering this question, one might be curious about the difference between knowledge-bluffing and a general form of lie.

In a broader sense, knowledge-bluffing is a special form of lie in terms of knowledge. Many social psychologists (e.g., DePaulo & DePaulo, 1989; Ekman, 1985) accept the definition of lie as ‘a false statement made with the intent to deceive’ (See *The Oxford English Dictionary*). According to this definition, because knowledge-bluffing is employed for overstating (i.e. stating knowledge falsely in an exaggerative manner), a knowledge-bluffer can be viewed as a liar.

However, knowledge-bluffing differs from lying with respect to its core intention. The intention of knowledge-bluffing is not necessarily to deceive others; rather, the more fundamental intent to bluff the knowledge would be to appear to others as more knowledgeable and well-informed than one actually is.

Given that knowledge-sharing activities are highly intelligence-intensive, it is extremely difficult to deceive partners with fabricated knowledge, not only because typically highly-educated professionals are involved there, but also because providing faked information may become the very reason to be expelled from the sharing community. As such, there is little nominal incentive to tell a “lie” to sharing partners.

However, it is realistically possible to *exaggerate* one’s own knowledge by a self-promotional manner in order to look themselves more knowledgeable and intelligent than one actually does. Jones and Pittman (1982) suggested that the goal of appearing competent will lead to self-promotion. In a similar vein, the goal of appearing knowledge-competent might lead to self-promotion in terms of knowledge.

Following examples illustrate various forms of knowledge-bluffing behavior to differentiate it from a simple lie. People attempting to appear knowledgeable and informative may use more affirmative vocabularies or raise issues considered intellectually stimulating regardless of its accuracy. Those wanting to appear knowledgeable may steer the conversation toward a topic that is little cognizant of others, which provides a good opportunity to bluff the knowledge. Some individuals intentionally quote “numbers” with excessive details (e.g., percentage with a decimal point, price with penny and cent, books with page number, etc.) when they present their information. Although it seems fairly questionable how accurate those numbers are and how appropriately they are

addressed, the primary purpose of this exaggerating is not so much to deceive others but to attempt to frame themselves as “hyper-accurate” or over-informative. Therefore, it is more reasonable to view knowledge-bluffing as an impression management tactic rather than a typical lie.

Now, the initial question, why people engage in knowledge-bluffing in sharing activities, could be rephrased as, *why people use knowledge-bluffing as an impression management strategy when they share their knowledge?* One impression management work provides critical clues to the answer. Schlenker (1980) claimed that the fundamental motive to engage in impression management stems from the motivation to maximize expected rewards (e.g., approval, receiving assistance, superior power, friendship, or even tangible materials like raised salary and better working conditions) and minimize expected costs (e.g., disapproval, giving assistance, inferior power, distrust, and decreased tangible materials) when they interact with others. In other words, impression management is a cognitive work with a complicated cost/benefit calculation.

Likewise, people may use knowledge-bluffing as an impression management tactic for the same reason: maximizing expected rewards and minimizing expected costs in knowledge sharing activities. From a benefit-maximizing perspective, knowledge-bluffing might help knowledge-bluffers hold the superior position by having expert and bargaining power. First of all, knowledge-sharers tend to be concerned about the quality of their knowledge and harsh assessments of other participants. Therefore, appearing to possess a high level of knowledge-competence is an effective way to overcome knowledge-hostilities such as rejection and criticism. For example, when individuals are viewed as very knowledgeable and informative through some effective knowledge-bluffing strategies, they come to have an expert-like power to others. An expert power makes them sit on a superior position in the knowledge-sharing contexts like the lawyer-client relationship. Clients who have no legal background are willing to accept whatever lawyers inform and guide.

In addition, in most cases people should be sensitive to the ownership of newly created knowledge, even though they are made through cooperation. Co-authorship is a striking example. Although some authors would like to claim an equal contribution, authors tend to be sensitive to the authorship order and think of who contributed more or less. Likewise, knowledge-shares are likely to seek a superior position regarding ownership, which is determined by an implicit agreement among knowledge-creators. In this regard, if some individuals are believed to be extremely knowledgeable and

informative through a series of effective knowledge-bluffing strategies, they come to have a higher level of bargaining power to determine prioritized the ownership of generated knowledge. This “ranked” structure of knowledge ownership often gives rise to differential rewards, such as the different level of ownership for patent and other intellectual properties, an order of research authorship, or a differential fund/resource allocation.

On the other hand, from a cost-minimizing perspective, effective knowledge-bluffing strategies may reduce relationship-based transaction costs in a series of knowledge exchange. It is argued that well-impressed image might not only reduce disapproval but also enhance favored treatments in unknown future circumstances via the accumulation of social approval (Arkin, 1981). A favored treatment contributes to a decrease in transaction costs for the relationship maintenance. Because knowledge-bluffing would enable bluffers to sit on the superior position over others like poker players, knowledge-bluffers might spend lower relationship-relevant transaction costs for maintaining ongoing relationships with partners. For example, a knowledge-inferior party will depend more on a knowledge-superior party and in turn spend more time and efforts to maintain such a fragile relationship than do a superior party.

In sum, an individual’s strong desire to hold a superior position over other knowledge-sharers might lead him or her to bluff the knowledge as an impression management tactic, as well as a distinctive behavior from a typical lie.

III. Antecedents of Knowledge-Bluffing

This paper suggests that the nature of knowledge-bluffing is a strategy of impression management. And it is also suggested that people might bluff their knowledge in knowledge sharing activities for the purpose of maximizing expected benefits (i.e. increasing expert and bargaining power) and minimizing expected costs (i.e. relationship-based transaction costs). In other words, knowledge-bluffing could become an effective impression management technique to seek a personal gain in an interpersonal setting.

However, this does not mean that knowledge-bluffing is a desirable behavior for the organization. Rather, knowledge-bluffing should be carefully controlled and managed, not only because bluffed knowledge, regardless of the degree, may decrease the overall

accuracy and quality of knowledge shared, but also because knowledge-bluffing may destroy the intrinsic value of trust-based relationship and consequently increase unnecessary costs (e.g., costs for maintaining regulations and monitoring knowledge accuracy) to operate the knowledge-sharing activities when bluffing is detected by other members. Therefore, knowledge-bluffing should be understood as another important subject of knowledge-sharing hostilities.

If this is the case, it is theoretically and practically necessary to identify what causes knowledge-bluffing. Identifying precursors of knowledge-bluffing can serve as a basis for how to reduce or prevent it. Various conditions (i.e. individual, knowledge-structural, and contextual characteristics) where knowledge-bluffing is more or less likely to occur are articulated below.

1. Individual Characteristics

First, given the manipulative nature of knowledge-bluffing, individual ethical disposition might directly involve the decision process of knowledge-bluffing. Previous impression management literature supports this argument. For example, some researchers examined that Machiavellianism is positively associated with the advocacy, use of duplicity, and lying (Christie & Geis, 1970; Geis & Moon, 1981; Kashy & DePaulo, 1996). Because high Machiavellian individuals are the one who are devoid of affective attachments others, they are more likely to manipulate others and to be successful at doing so (Christie & Geis, 1970; Geis, 1978; Shultz, 1993). Therefore, given the manipulative nature of knowledge-bluffing, high Machiavellianism individuals are more likely to bluff their knowledge to manipulate others than are low Machiavellianism ones.

On the contrary, altruism can be viewed as a form of unconditional kindness without the expectation of a return from benefited others (Fehr & Gächter, 2000). Many researches demonstrated that altruism is a powerful self-regulator of the variety of egocentric opportunistic behaviors. Thus, altruistic individual's unconditional generosity may prevent them to manipulate others for their private interests. Therefore, altruism will be negatively associated with knowledge-bluffing. Taken together, it is proposed:

Proposition 1a. Machiavellianism would be positively associated with knowledge-bluffing, while altruism would be negatively associated with it.

Second, perceived expert power also matters to knowledge-bluffing behavior. Expert power is primarily based on the perception that expert has special knowledge or expertness (French Jr. & Raven, 2001). When people confront professionals or receive expert cares from them, they not only perceive themselves as not being adequately knowledgeable to solve the problem, but also believe they are not able to protect themselves against profession's incompetence, carelessness, and even exploitation (Dingwall, 1983). Further, expert power of knowledge providers might incapacitate knowledge receivers to engage in scrutiny, and in turn keep them behind the information barrier. Thus, knowledge-bluffers may capitalize on "perceived" expert power in impressing counterparts. Therefore, the perceived expert power enables a knowledge sharer to be involved in knowledge-bluffing.

Proposition 1b. The perceived expert power of a knowledge sharer would be positively associated with knowledge-bluffing.

Third, goal orientations may affect knowledge-bluffing behavior as well. It has been widely recognized that people differ in the way they develop and maintain relationships with other individuals in their work contexts, depending upon what type of goal orientations they possess (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). In general, since knowledge sharers often confront a partner's resistances or refusals, convincing intellectual partners is difficult and demanding. Despite such a challenging circumstance, some individuals would focus on making consensus and harmony among all knowledge stakeholders, whereas other individuals would focus on dominating counterparts to just achieve their own goals.

Goal orientations play a key role in that situation. The mastery-oriented individuals are likely to cope effectively with such challenges by putting substantial authentic efforts on the tasks at hand rather than by pretending they possess superior knowledge (Dweck, 1999; Farr, Hofmann & Ringenbach, 1993). On the contrary, performance-oriented individuals pay more attention to surface processing rather than actual happening (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), and can be motivated to outperform others and demonstrate their superiority, or to avoid looking incompetent (VandeWalle, 1997). As such, performance-oriented knowledge-sharers are likely to seek an artificial superiority over others by exaggerating their knowledge status or even by deceiving others to achieve their own objectives. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 1c. Performance orientation of a knowledge sharer would be positively associated with knowledge-bluffing, while mastery orientation would be negatively associated with it.

Last, moral emotions can also involve knowledge-bluffing behavior. Much of moral emotion work has clearly indicated that the proneness to guilt could play a regulatory role in avoiding a wide variety of antisocial and risky behaviors (e.g., Dearing, Stuewig & Tangney, 2005; Merisca & Bybee, 1994; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tibbetts, 2003). One convincing reason is that guilt-proneness is significantly and positively associated with empathy. A number of researches have indicated that people who frequently experience feelings of guilt (i.e. guilt proneness) are more likely to have an ability of perspective-taking and empathic concern (Joireman, 2004; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, 1991, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Such other-oriented concerns might promote people to anticipate the potential harm toward others and to counter-factually think the responsibility for their upcoming actions. Thus, knowledge-sharers with high guilt proneness are more likely to concern with the potential harm from knowledge-bluffing toward knowledge partners and organizations, so that they are less likely to take an actual deceiving action. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 1d. Guilt proneness of a knowledge sharer would be negatively associated with knowledge-bluffing.

2. Knowledge Characteristics

In addition to individual characteristics, various knowledge characteristics are also related to knowledge-bluffing behavior. First, knowledge asymmetry matters. Knowledge asymmetry refers to as the states at which one party has more or better information than the other. Milgrom and Roberts (1987) argued that asymmetrical information leads to more intent behaviors, such as bluffing, signaling or reputation building. For example, experts can easily bluff their own knowledge to laypersons, since the former perceive they have more or better knowledge than the latter. Since knowledge-bluffers are motivated to incapacitate others from scrutinizing the accuracy of the bluffed knowledge being shared, knowledge sharers might be enticed to bluff when knowledge is asymmetrical. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 2a. Asymmetry of knowledge would be positively associated with knowledge-bluffing.

Second, knowledge dissimilarity also could predict knowledge-bluffing behavior. Knowledge dissimilarity is defined as the degree to which the knowledge sets contributed by each sharer do not overlap and thereby stress the non-redundant nature of partner knowledge contributions (Hill & Hellriegel, 1994; Hitt et al., 2000). Because high levels of knowledge dissimilarity create the cognitive learning barrier (Dougherty, 1992), knowledge providers who possess different knowledge or information might anticipate a sense of safety from scrutiny and in turn become easily tempted to bluff their knowledge. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 2b. Knowledge dissimilarity would be positively associated with knowledge-bluffing.

Last, knowledge identifiability might involve knowledge-bluffing behavior. Knowledge identifiability refers to as the extent to which individual contributions are identified by each member. In other words, knowledge ownership can be easily traced out when knowledge is highly identifiable. Jones (1984) argued that when individual contributions to a group product are unidentifiable, motivation to perform will be low, since the perceived causation between individual efforts and rewards is weak. In a same vein, if knowledge to be shared is less identifiable, it is difficult for knowledge sharers to identify to whom knowledge belongs, and in turn knowledge bluffers might feel free from others' scrutiny and attention. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 2c. Unidentifiable knowledge would be positively associated with knowledge-bluffing.

3. Contextual Characteristics

This paper suggests that knowledge sharers may engage or disengage in knowledge-bluffing, depending on various contexts in which knowledge-sharing takes place. First, organizational climates may influence the decision process of knowledge-bluffing. Specifically, under a highly competitive climate, individuals are likely to experience

high pressures to compete with each other to maximize their own benefits rather than collaborate with others to develop common interests. As such, high competitive environment might encourage them to manipulate their own knowledge in order to win the knowledge-sharing deals. On the contrary, under a cooperative climate, knowledge-bluffing is less likely to occur, since a cooperative climate might prevent people from being involved in any sort of self-interested behaviors. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 3a. A competitive climate would be positively associated with knowledge-bluffing, while a cooperative climate would be negatively associated with it.

Second, another important context for knowledge-bluffing would be process interdependence. Process interdependence is defined as the extent to which knowledge-sharing tasks depend upon the interactions between knowledge sharers during the various stage of the knowledge generation process (Sobrero & Roberts, 2001). When process interdependence is high, all sharers' inputs are relatively important to create knowledge (Von Hippel, 1990). Then more sharers pay keen attention to the knowledge being shared. Such a high level of attention might promote the accuracy of knowledge, since fabricated knowledge can make knowledge-sharers to be expelled from this intellectual community. As such, high process interdependence is likely to discourage sharers to bluff the knowledge. On the contrary, low process interdependence results in task partitioning, such that knowledge-sharing process becomes partitioned into consecutive stages in which any single partner is able to dominate each stage (Von Hippel, 1990). Partitioned process might promote individuals to bluff the knowledge, since attempting to dominate small portion of stages is much easier than attempting to dominate overall stages in knowledge-sharing process. As such, low process interdependence might promote knowledge-bluffing behavior. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 3b. Process interdependence would be negatively associated with knowledge-bluffing.

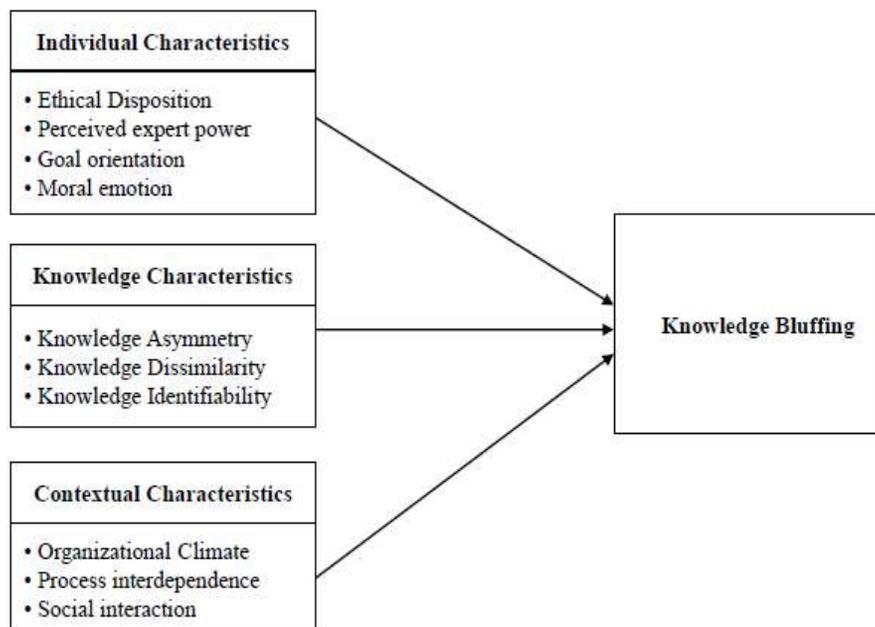
Last, social interaction can be a condition in which knowledge-bluffing are more or less likely to occur. Social interaction provides channels for information exchange among members (Homans, 1950). Interpersonal social interactions blur the boundaries between participants and stimulate the formation of common interests that, in turn,

support the building of new exchange or cooperative relationships (Tsai & Goshal, 1998). Indeed, social interaction is found to be an important element of social capital that can facilitate knowledge transfer among different units of an organization (Coleman, 1990). As such, social interaction might affect a strong cooperative relationship and reduce opportunistic behaviors, and therefore prevent knowledge sharers from deceiving their knowledge. Therefore, it is proposed:

Proposition 3c. Social interactions among knowledge sharers will be negatively associated with knowledge-bluffing.

Taken together, knowledge-bluffing is a complex knowledge hostile behavior that results from various sources of an individual, knowledge, and context. Figure 2 below encapsulates all antecedents proposed in this article.

[Figure 2] Antecedents of knowledge-bluffing in knowledge-sharing activities



IV. Discussion

This paper introduces to the underexplored construct of “knowledge-bluffing” that deserves to receive attention from academy and practice. This paper proposes that knowledge-bluffing could be understood as a sharer’s impression management tactic in a unique context of knowledge-sharing. Various characteristics — individual, knowledge, and contextual characteristics — are theorized to predict the knowledge-bluffing behavior. In doing so, this paper offers several theoretical contributions and practical implications.

First, this paper contributes to the knowledge management literature by conceptualizing the notion of knowledge-bluffing and exploring a key motivation (i.e., impression management) and several antecedent predicting that behavior. In particular, the notion of knowledge-bluffing extends the conceptual boundary of knowledge-sharing hostilities where knowledge-hoarding has dominated. Knowledge-hoarding occurs when knowledge sharers keep their own knowledge and information hidden and private, so that a true meaning of knowledge-sharing does not take place. However, some individuals might intentionally “inflate” their knowledge in order to keep their knowledge competent by pretending to have greater knowledge and information than is actually possessed. Although knowledge-bluffing deserves to be emphasized as another type of the knowledge-sharing hostility, knowledge-bluffing has little received the academic attention in the field of business ethics and management.

Second, this article claims that knowledge-bluffing is not only a matter of individual ethical judgment, but rather a tactic of impression management that is triggered by an instrumental motivation to maximize gains and minimize losses when people are to share knowledge with others. This insight offers an important managerial implication. As far as knowledge-bluffing is only subject to a personal integrity, a managerial effort to address a concern for knowledge-bluffing is limited. However, this paper proposes that knowledge-bluffing needs to be understood as an individual’s strong self-presentational motive within a broader interpersonal context. As such, organizational managers need to expand a scope of attention for knowledge-sharing hostilities from the sharer’s personal qualities to “interpersonal” dynamics to be managed.

Last, this paper explores several antecedents that predict knowledge-bluffing behavior at an individual, knowledge, and contextual levels. Organizational managers need to focus on those factors in order to reduce knowledge-bluffing behavior. For instance,

managers might be advised to recruit knowledge workers who possess altruism, or proneness to moral emotion, and mastery-orientation for a goal or train them accordingly in order to decrease the odd for knowledge-bluffing in any knowledge-sharing activities. Managers also need to maintain knowledge structure as symmetrical or identifiable as possible, so that knowledge-sharers would be less motivated to bluff the knowledge. Finally, managers can change the knowledge-sharing contexts in a way to minimize knowledge-bluffing by keeping the work climate cooperative rather than competitive, making knowledge creation process more identifiable, and promoting social interactions among knowledge stakeholders.

Despite the contribution, this paper is not without limitation. First of all, this paper theorizes a key motivation behind knowledge-bluffing to be an impression management. A single focus on impression management is a clear limitation of this paper, since other possible motivations are overlooked. For instance, when knowledge-sharers perceive that all sharers are equally contributing to knowledge exchange, someone might bluff one's own knowledge for *tie-breaking* in order to hold superior position over others. In addition, when sharers perceive that partners are bluffing, they also might have a strong incentive to bluff their knowledge as a means of corresponding to others' hostility in order not to become a host of "knowledge parasite" similar to a sucker effect. Sucker effect is a condition in which some group members, not wanting to be considered sucker, reduce their own efforts when they see social loafing by other group members (George & Jones, 2007). Further, when sharers experience a sense of inferiority in contributing toward knowledge-sharing, they are likely to conceal their deficit by bluffing their knowledge in order not to be alienated in the knowledge-sharing loop. Finally, knowledge-sharers often do not trust the overall quality of the transferred knowledge when they do not trust the source (Husted & Michailova, 2002). If the transmitters perceive that knowledge they transfer has been underestimated or rejected by partners, transmitters are likely to bluff their knowledge in order to repair their trust level. Future research may focus attention on other motivations for knowledge-bluffing to better understand why people bluff the knowledge.

Second, this paper posits that knowledge-bluffing could be a workable option that knowledge-sharers might take to impress knowledge counterparts. However, this might be the case for a relatively short or fixed term, but not a longer term. Growing complexity and competition in business and task environments can lead knowledge-sharing bodies to scrutinize any knowledge hostilities. As such, any effect of knowledge-

bluffing may not be sustainable for a longer term under those circumstances.

Last, this paper focuses on what causes knowledge-bluffing behavior. Future studies may wish to explore what knowledge-bluffing can bring to the organization. The consequences are expected to be both positive and negative, depending upon the circumstances that the organization and knowledge-sharers might face.

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지식교환 활동에서의 블러핑 행위에 관한 이론적 고찰

장 영 균

본 연구는 지식교환 활동 시에 발생 가능한 블러핑(Knowledge-bluffing) 행위에 대한 개념화 및 이론적 고찰을 목적으로 한다. 본 연구는 블러핑을 통상적인 거짓말이나 속임수와 구분되는 개념으로, 인상관리(Impression Management) 동기로 유발된 적대적 지식 교환 행위의 일종으로 규정하고, 블러핑 행위의 원인이 되는 중요한 개인적(윤리적 성향, 인지된 영향력, 목표 지향, 도덕적 감정), 지식구조적(지식 비대칭성, 상이성, 식별성), 상황적 요인(조직풍토, 절차 상호의존성, 사회적 교류)들을 탐색한다. 본 연구를 통해 적대적 지식 교환 행위를 주제로 한 기존 연구의 이론적 범위를 확장함과 동시에 지식관리 담당자들에게 실무적인 시사점을 제공한다.

핵심어: 블러핑, 적대적 지식 교환, 인상관리
