



Negative impacts of workplace ‘knowledge hiding’

Knowledge Hiding: A meta-analysis

Shen, Y., Lythreathis, S., Singh, S.K. and F.L. Cooke, 2025. *A meta-analysis of knowledge hiding behaviour in organisations: Antecedents, consequences, and boundary conditions*. *Journal of Business Research*, 186, p.1149-63.

Background

The negative impact of knowledge hiding behaviours on employees and the workplace has been established, and there is literature on knowledge hiding leading to increased negative emotional states (Rezwan & Takahashi 2021), decreased trust (Erkutlu & Chafra 2021), and unproductive performance (Guo et al. 2022). Employees who engage in knowledge hiding also experience a range of unfavourable emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural outcomes.

This article makes an interesting point that knowledge hiding is not always negative, and in some contexts, such as sales, hiding information was found to benefit performance. The article does not mention knowledge hiding in relation to emergency management, but the second article in this digest provides data from an ambulance setting.

Aim

This paper aims to provide findings about what factors relate to knowledge-hiding (KH) behaviours, based on a meta-analytic review. A meta-analysis is an analysis of the findings of many studies on any given topic.

Research questions

What HR practices are connected to KH? How do various leadership styles affect KH behavior? Which personality characteristics are associated with KH? What impact does KH have on psychological, behavioural and performance outcomes? How do demographic, contextual, and methodological factors moderate the different relationships?

Methodology

- The study uses 267 independent samples from 248 primary studies
- Methods include meta-analytic correlations, relative weight analysis, meta-regression analyses, and meta-subgroup analyses.

Findings: factors that influence knowledge hiding

Knowledge hiding behaviours were found to have a *significant relationship with:*

- *Human Resource (HR) practices:* Knowledge hiding is largely influenced by an employees’ perception of their workplace. Therefore, motivation and empowerment



enhancing HR practices may more significantly curtail KH behaviour than simple skills uplift, since they address root causes.

- *Leadership Styles*: Leadership style predicts knowledge hiding, with destructive leadership promoting, and two other kinds of leadership that foster a healthy work environment mitigating this negative behaviour. These two kinds of leadership are: ‘change-oriented’, which encourages innovation and transformation, and ‘relational-oriented’, which supports others by caring for their welfare.
- *Personality Traits*: Adaptive personality traits (such as agreeableness and emotional stability) decrease knowledge hiding, whereas maladaptive traits (like narcissism and Machiavellianism) increase it.

In addition, knowledge hiding was found to have consequences, or impacts, on:

- *Psychological and behavioural outcomes*: Knowledge hiding negatively impacts employee well-being and organisational citizenship behaviour. It is positively related to employee intention to leave, and defensive behaviour, and:
- *Performance-related outcomes*: Knowledge hiding negatively impacts creativity, innovation, employee performance, team performance and organisation performance.

In addition, the study examined the moderating roles of demographic and contextual factors on knowledge hiding:

- Age, education and tenure (length of time in organisation) interacts with factors that influence knowledge hiding, such as skill level, and feelings of empowerment and motivation.
- Knowledge Hiding is more acceptable in high power- distance cultures (more hierarchal), compared to those in a low power-distance culture (more egalitarian). The relationship of knowledge hiding and HR dimensions of intrinsic empowerment and motivation is weaker in high power-distance cultures.
- Adaptive personality traits are expected to be more effective in reducing knowledge hiding behaviours in low power- distance cultures. Adaptive traits include resilience, flexibility, empathy, self-awareness, optimism, self-control, problem-solving skills and adaptability.

Findings and implications

The consequences of knowledge hiding include negative impacts on employee well-being, turnover intention, and performance.

Knowledge sharing should be a focus of organisational systems, processes and people development because knowledge hiding is bad for performance, outputs and the bottom line.



Theoretical implications: The study reveals importance of looking at organisations at interrelated levels – people, culture, processes and systems.

Recommendations: The best approach to address knowledge hiding is through:

- reward and recognition activities, such as establishing clear promotion paths and offering performance- based rewards (Sanders et al., 2018)
- hiring or promoting relational-oriented leadership styles
- avoid hiring, and identifying maladaptive personality types – through psychometrics
- implementing activities to increase an employees' sense of involvement and belonging. For instance, structured feedback groups help employees' voices to be heard, and with careful planning their feedback can be acted upon. Feedback groups also serve as a platform for recognising and addressing potential issues before they escalate, thereby improving overall organisational performance and employee satisfaction.

Knowledge Hiding in emergency ambulance healthcare settings

Ratiu, L., Trif, S.R., and N. Meslec 2021, 'Knowledge Hiding in Emergency Ambulance Healthcare Settings: Its Mediating Role in the Relationship between Organisational Support and Affective Commitment and Organisational Citizenship Behaviours'. Nurs. Rep. vol. 11, pp. 965–980.

Background

This paper looks at how knowledge hiding influences worker perceptions of how they are supported (perceived organisational support -POS) and their feelings of commitment to their workplace as measured by their 'citizenship behaviours' and 'intentions (or lack of) to leave.

Components of knowledge hiding

- It refers to a dyadic relationship between an individual requesting knowledge from another, who, in response, withholds that knowledge.
- It is an intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another individual.
- It has three interrelated behaviours: playing dumb, evasive hiding, and 'rationalised hiding' which means defending their actions by justifying the act of concealment with seemingly logical or acceptable reasons.

Research Questions

What factors influence knowledge hiding behaviours? How can we explain the relationships between knowledge hiding and other behaviours? What might mitigate its negative influence?

Methodology

- Studied 305 medical or paramedical professionals (using a convenience sampling method) from two different counties in an East-European country:
 - The average age of the respondents was 43.23 (SD = 8.84)



- 62.5% of respondents were male.
- The average tenure in the organisation was 13.58 years (SD = 8.39). T
- Respondents belonged to various hierarchical and functional levels: doctors (4.5%), nurses (46.2%), and ambulance drivers (49.3%).
- Used a cross-sectional design, and structural equation modelling.
- 454 questionnaires handed out, 324 were filled out and returned.

Findings

The following four hypotheses generated from the literature review were confirmed by the study, namely:

- 1) Higher levels of *perceived organisational support* fosters employee identification with their goals, which reduces the incidence of knowledge hiding. Conversely, lower levels of perceived support prompts selfish behaviour and misaligns people's personal and organisational goals, which increasing knowledge hiding.
- 2) Knowledge hiding, since it is motivated by self-protection or maintaining status, negatively impacts *organisational citizenship behaviours*. This, in turn, is linked to feelings of organisational support, since feeling valued encourages people to share openly, and these boosts behaviours that are aligned with organisational goals.
- 3) Knowledge hiding is indirectly linked to higher '*turnover intentions*', or thoughts about wanting to leave. Knowledge hiding is linked to employees wanting to leave, because it creates and is a sign of a toxic work environment A supportive organisation, where employees feel valued and recognised, counters knowledge hiding and so lowers turnover likelihood.
- 4) Employees with *high affective (i.e. emotional) commitment* view the organisation positively and are more willing to share knowledge. A sense of shared ownership of the organisation promotes collaboration rather than concealment, and the view that information is a shared organisational resource rather than personal possession. Conversely, territoriality—employees' feelings of ownership over their knowledge—can increase knowledge hiding.

Discussion and implications

Using social identity and exchange theories, this study found that:

- higher perceptions of organisational support leads to reduced knowledge hiding, since supportive environments encourage employees to align with organisational goals and to reciprocate in the sharing of information.
- supportive organisations tend to lower the desire of an employee to hide knowledge and to foster trust, collaboration, and shared goals. This promotes helpful organisational behaviours and reduces the rates of intentions to leave.
- Emotional commitment to an organisation decreases knowledge hiding because when an employee feels attached to their organisation, they are less territorial about knowledge, viewing it as a shared resource.

This study has both theoretical and practical implications:



- *Theoretically*, it enriches the knowledge hiding literature by identifying specific inhibitors and promoters of knowledge hiding.

Practically, the study provides recommends for decreasing the likeness of knowledge hiding. Specifically, the need to foster a supportive organisational climate that fulfills employee needs to encourage affective commitment via actions like valuing people's contributions and conducting group and not individual appraisals