

# Knowledge Hiding in the Workplace: Impacts on Productivity and Strategies for Mitigation

**Dr. Ranjith Somasundaran Chakkambath<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Shamsi Sukumaran<sup>2</sup>**

Asst Professor, AMITY Global Business School Kochi, Ernakulam, Kerala, India<sup>1</sup>

Asst. Dean, AMITY Global Business School Kochi, Ernakulam, Kerala, India<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Knowledge hiding in the workplace poses a significant challenge to organizational productivity and innovation. Knowledge hiding, an important organizational issue, has been linked to various negative outcomes. This study explores the antecedents, consequences, and mitigation strategies of knowledge hiding, drawing on qualitative analysis of secondary data. Findings indicate that knowledge hiding disrupts trust, collaboration, and efficiency while fostering a toxic work culture. Mitigation strategies, including fostering trust-based leadership, implementing equitable policies, and leveraging technology, are discussed. Future research should address the impact of emerging trends such as remote work and AI integration. Addressing knowledge hiding is critical for organizational resilience and sustained success.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Hiding, Workplace Productivity, Organizational Behaviour, Trust, Innovation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is an invaluable asset in the modern workplace, serving as the cornerstone of organizational growth, innovation, and competitive advantage. In the context of an increasingly knowledge-driven economy, the effective sharing and utilization of information among employees is vital to ensure the productivity and sustainability of an organization. However, despite the emphasis on collaboration and knowledge sharing, the phenomenon of knowledge hiding—a deliberate attempt to withhold or conceal information that could be beneficial to colleagues—has emerged as a significant challenge. This behaviour not only undermines interpersonal trust but also negatively impacts the overall productivity of the office environment.

Knowledge hiding is a complex and multifaceted behaviour that stems from a variety of individual, relational, and organizational factors. Employees may choose to hide knowledge for reasons such as fear of losing a competitive edge, lack of trust in colleagues, perceptions of unfairness, or even workplace politics. At times, the organizational culture itself may inadvertently foster an environment that encourages secrecy, competition, and self-interest, rather than openness and collaboration. The three primary forms of knowledge hiding—evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding—further illustrate the diverse strategies employees employ to withhold information. Evasive hiding involves providing partial or misleading information, while playing dumb entails feigning ignorance. Rationalized hiding, on the other hand, involves justifying the withholding of information based on legitimate or perceived reasons.

The impact of knowledge hiding on workplace productivity is profound and multifaceted. At the individual level, withholding knowledge disrupts the flow of information necessary for effective decision-making and problem-solving. Colleagues who rely on hidden knowledge may face delays in completing tasks, reduced quality of work, and increased frustration, all of which contribute to diminished performance. On a team level, knowledge hiding erodes trust and collaboration, fostering an environment of suspicion and resentment. Teams that experience frequent incidents of knowledge hiding often struggle to achieve cohesion and synergy, resulting in suboptimal outcomes and reduced efficiency.

From an organizational perspective, the consequences of knowledge hiding are even more far-reaching. An office environment plagued by knowledge-hiding experiences a breakdown in communication and a decline in organizational learning. Innovation, which thrives on the free exchange of ideas and collective problem-solving, suffers significantly in such settings. Additionally, the lack of knowledge sharing can lead to duplication of efforts, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for growth. Over time, organizations that fail to address the issue of knowledge hiding risk losing their competitive edge, as their ability to adapt and innovate is compromised.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge hiding, defined as the intentional concealment of information by employees when solicited by colleagues, has garnered significant scholarly attention due to its detrimental effects on organizational productivity and innovation (Connelly et al., 2012). This literature review examines recent studies from 2019 to 2024, focusing on the antecedents, consequences, and mitigating factors associated with knowledge hiding in the workplace. Škerlavaj et al. (2023) identified antecedents of knowledge hiding, including job characteristics, leadership styles, and individual differences, and found that it negatively impacts creativity, task performance, and workplace behavior. They also emphasized the distinction between knowledge hiding and knowledge sharing. Leblanc (2023) found that knowledge hiding significantly affects organizational learning, hindering innovation and adaptability. His study highlighted the importance of the knowledge seeker's learning capacity and linked knowledge hiding to diminished creativity, poor individual performance, and increased interpersonal mistrust. Khalid et al. (2022) explored the impact of different types of knowledge hiding on knowledge worker productivity in the IT sector, finding that rationalized hiding can positively influence productivity, while evasive hiding and "playing dumb" have negative effects. They also emphasized the role of knowledge management processes in enhancing productivity.

Several studies have investigated strategies to mitigate knowledge hiding. Oliveira et al. (2023) reviewed the literature and found that knowledge sharing practices, particularly those embedded in HR strategies (e.g., recruitment, training, mentoring) and organizational structures (e.g., teamwork, task interdependence), can reduce knowledge hiding. They also highlighted the importance of face-to-face interaction, informal conversations, and strong leadership in fostering a positive organizational culture. Bari et al. (2023) examined management strategies for mitigating knowledge hiding, suggesting that reducing the chain of command, fostering informal manager interactions, implementing incentive policies, and promoting task interdependence can be effective. They emphasized the importance of open workspaces and a culture of trust and transparency.

The impact of knowledge hiding extends to employee performance. Haque (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of knowledge hiding and occupational stress on employee performance in emerging and advanced economies. The study found that knowledge hiding significantly reduces employee performance, particularly when coupled with occupational stress. Haque emphasized the need for organizations to address both knowledge hiding and occupational stress to improve employee performance across different economic contexts.

### Antecedents of Knowledge Hiding

Several factors contribute to employees' propensity to hide knowledge. Technostress, arising from the inability to cope with new information and communication technologies, has been identified as a significant antecedent. Zhang et al. (2022) found that technostress increases work exhaustion, which in turn leads to knowledge hiding among R&D employees. Similarly, abusive supervision has been linked to increased knowledge-hiding behaviours, with co-worker support acting as a mediating factor (Kim et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2018; Shoss et al., 2013). Additionally, psychological entitlement and perceived organizational support influence extra-role behaviours, with knowledge hiding serving as a mediator (Zhao et al., 2019).

### Consequences of Knowledge Hiding

The repercussions of knowledge hiding are extensive, affecting both individual and organizational outcomes. At the individual level, knowledge hiding can lead to decreased job performance and increased turnover intentions (Serenko & Bontis, 2016). Organizationally, it hampers knowledge flows, reducing creativity and productivity (Černe et al., 2017). Furthermore, knowledge-hiding behaviours can foster a culture of distrust, exacerbating interpersonal conflicts and diminishing team cohesion (Connelly et al., 2019).

### Mitigating Factors

Research has explored various strategies to mitigate knowledge hiding. High-commitment human resource practices have been shown to promote knowledge sharing by enhancing employee motivation and commitment (Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2003). Empowering leadership, characterized by delegating authority and fostering autonomy, can reduce interpersonal conflicts and improve employee performance, thereby decreasing the likelihood of knowledge hiding (Lee et al., 2018). Additionally, fostering workplace friendships and supportive organizational culture can buffer the negative effects of technostress, reducing work exhaustion and subsequent knowledge-hiding behaviours (Zhang et al., 2022).

### Recent Developments

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in knowledge management systems has been proposed as a means to enhance knowledge sharing and reduce knowledge hiding. Oracle's introduction of role-specific Activity Centers within its Human

Capital Management suite aims to increase productivity by providing centralized hubs tailored to employees' roles, thereby facilitating access to key information and reducing the inclination to hide knowledge (Oracle, 2024).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach, relying on secondary data sources to explore the phenomenon of knowledge hiding and its impact on workplace productivity. Data was gathered from peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational reports, and credible online databases published between 2019 and 2024. These sources provide insights into the antecedents, consequences, and mitigation strategies associated with knowledge hiding.

The study focuses on analyzing existing literature to identify patterns and themes related to knowledge hiding. A systematic review method was applied to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic, with particular attention to empirical studies that incorporate statistical findings and theoretical models. Key search terms such as “knowledge hiding,” “workplace productivity,” and “organizational behaviour” were used to filter relevant sources.

Data triangulation was achieved by comparing findings from multiple studies to validate conclusions and ensure reliability. Content analysis techniques were applied to identify recurring themes, categorize forms of knowledge hiding, and assess their impact on various organizational outcomes. This approach enables a holistic understanding of the issue and supports the development of actionable recommendations for practitioners and policymakers.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Knowledge hiding—the intentional concealment of information by employees—has been empirically linked to various negative organizational outcomes. Recent studies provide statistical insights into its prevalence and impact on workplace productivity.

#### Prevalence of Knowledge Hiding

A survey conducted by Connelly et al. (2019) revealed that approximately 76% of employees admitted to engaging in knowledge hiding behaviours within their organizations. This high prevalence underscores the significance of this issue in modern workplaces.

#### Impact on Workplace Productivity

Knowledge hiding has been shown to detrimentally affect both individual and organizational performance:

- **Individual Performance:** A study by Černe et al. (2017) found that employees who engaged in knowledge hiding exhibited a 17% decrease in task performance compared to their knowledge-sharing counterparts. This decline is attributed to the erosion of trust and collaboration among team members.
- **Team Creativity:** Research by Bogilović et al. (2017) indicated that teams experiencing knowledge hiding reported a 25% reduction in creative output. The lack of information flow hampers the team's ability to innovate and solve problems effectively.
- **Organizational Performance:** A meta-analysis by Serenko and Bontis (2016) concluded that organizations plagued by knowledge-hiding behaviours could experience up to a 5% decline in overall productivity. This reduction is linked to increased inefficiencies and duplicated efforts resulting from withheld information.

#### Factors Contributing to Knowledge Hiding

Several factors have been identified as contributors to knowledge-hiding behaviours:

- **Technostress:** Zhang et al. (2022) found that technostress, stemming from the inability to cope with new information and communication technologies, increases work exhaustion, which in turn leads to knowledge hiding among R&D employees.
- **Abusive Supervision:** Kim et al. (2015) reported that abusive supervision is linked to increased knowledge-hiding behaviours, with co-worker support acting as a mediating factor.
- **Psychological Entitlement:** Zhao et al. (2016) found that psychological entitlement and perceived organizational support influence extra-role behaviours, with knowledge hiding serving as a mediator.

#### Mitigation Strategies

Addressing knowledge hiding requires targeted interventions

- **Leadership Style:** Empowering leadership, characterized by delegating authority and fostering autonomy, can reduce interpersonal conflicts and improve employee performance, thereby decreasing the likelihood of knowledge hiding (Lee et al., 2018).
- **Organizational Culture:** Fostering workplace friendships and supportive organizational culture can buffer the negative effects of technostress, reducing work exhaustion and subsequent knowledge-hiding behaviours (Zhang et al., 2022).
- **Human Resource Practices:** High-commitment human resource practices have been shown to promote knowledge sharing by enhancing employee motivation and commitment (Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2011).

## 5. CONCLUSION

knowledge hiding represents a critical barrier to organizational effectiveness, significantly affecting productivity, innovation, and workplace culture. The research highlights the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, emphasizing its roots in individual behaviours, interpersonal dynamics, and organizational structures. Addressing knowledge hiding requires a holistic approach that combines leadership commitment, organizational policies, and technological solutions to foster a culture of transparency and trust. By doing so, organizations can create a collaborative environment that promotes knowledge sharing, enhances employee satisfaction, and drives sustained success. Future research should explore the evolving dynamics of knowledge hiding in the context of emerging workplace trends such as remote work, digital transformation, and the integration of artificial intelligence in knowledge management systems.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Bogilović, S., Černe, M., & Škerlavaj, M. (2017). Hiding behind a mask? Cultural intelligence, knowledge hiding, and individual and team creativity. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 26(5), 710-723.
- [2]. Camelo-Ordaz, C., García-Cruz, J., Sousa-Ginel, E., & Valle-Cabrera, R. (2011). The influence of human resource management on knowledge sharing and innovation in Spain: The mediating role of affective commitment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(7), 1442-1463.
- [3]. Černe, M., Nerstad, C. G. L., Dysvik, A., & Škerlavaj, M. (2017). What goes around comes around: Knowledge hiding, perceived motivational climate, and creativity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(1), 172-192.
- [4]. Connelly, C. E., & Zweig, D. (2015). How perpetrators and targets construe knowledge hiding in organizations. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 24(3), 479-489.
- [5]. Kim, S. L., Lee, S., & Yun, S. (2015). Abusive supervision, knowledge sharing, and individual factors: A conservation-of-resources perspective. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 30(3), 354-370.
- [6]. Lee, J., & Ahn, J. (2007). Rewarding knowledge sharing under measurement inaccuracy. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 5(3), 210-217.
- [7]. Connelly, C. E., Zweig, D., Webster, J., & Trougakos, J. P. (2012). Knowledge hiding in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33(1), 64-88.
- [8]. Jackson, S. E., Hitt, M. A., & DeNisi, A. S. (2003). *Managing knowledge for sustained competitive advantage: Designing strategies for effective human resource management*. Jossey-Bass.
- [9]. Oracle. (2024). Oracle's new Activity Centers aim to increase productivity. *Lifewire*. Retrieved from <https://www.lifewire.com/oracle-hcm-role-specific-activity-centers-8682226>
- [10]. Serenko, A., & Bontis, N. (2016). Understanding counterproductive knowledge behavior: Antecedents and consequences of intra-organizational knowledge hiding. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 20(6), 1199-1224.
- [11]. Zhang, Z., Ye, B., Qiu, Z., Zhang, H., & Yu, C. (2022). Does technostress increase R&D employees' knowledge hiding in the digital era? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 873846.
- [12]. Zhao, H., & Jiang, J. (2021). Perceived organizational support, psychological entitlement, and extra-role behavior: The mediating role of knowledge hiding behavior. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 27(4), 621-636.
- [13]. Zhao, H., Xia, Q., He, P., Sheard, G., & Wan, P. (2016). Workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding in service organizations. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 59, 84-94.
- [14]. Škerlavaj, M., Černe, M., & Batistic, S. (2023). Knowledge Hiding in Organizations: Meta-Analysis years Later. *Economic and Business Review*, 25(2), 79-102. <https://doi.org/10.15458/2335-4216.1319>
- [15]. Leblanc, T. (2023). Knowledge Hiding: The Effect on Organizational Learning (pp. 125-132). <https://doi.org/10.9734/bpi/rhll/v4/18975d>
- [16]. Khalid, S., Li, Y., Latif, K. F., & Tang, C. (2022). The impact of knowledge hiding and toxic leadership on knowledge worker productivity – Evidence from IT sector of Pakistan. *The Online Journal of Applied Knowledge Management*, 10(3), 46-67. [https://doi.org/10.36965/ojakm.2022.10\(3\)46-67](https://doi.org/10.36965/ojakm.2022.10(3)46-67)
- [17]. Oliveira, M., Teixeira, J., Curado, C., & Araújo, C. (2023). Practices that Mitigate Organizational Knowledge Hiding: A Systematic Literature Review. <https://doi.org/10.34190/eckm.24.2.1579>
- [18]. Bari, M. W., Shahzadi, I., & Sheikh, M. F. (2023). Management strategies to mitigate knowledge hiding behaviours: symmetric and asymmetric analyses. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14778238.2023.2178344>
- [19]. Haque, A. ul. (2024). Knowledge hiding and occupational stress affecting employees' performance: comparative analysis from emerging and advanced economies. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14778238.2024.2322463>