

Why and When do People Hide Knowledge?

Prof. He Peng,
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into the question
that makes the Fortune
500 companies lose
an estimated \$31.5bn
a year by failing to
share knowledge.

Related research paper:
*Job - and organization-based
psychological ownership:
relationship and outcomes,* He
Peng, Jon Pierce, *Journal of
Managerial Psychology.*



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THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD



PERCEIVE

with a set of key takeaways



PROJECT

with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context



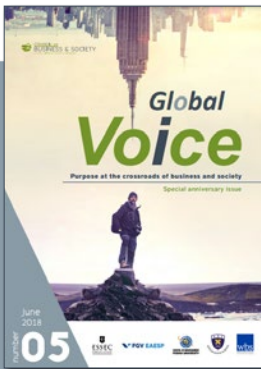
PERFORM

by putting it all into practice using action tips





● PERCEIVE with a set of key takeaways



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- Knowledge hiding is withholding or concealing task information, ideas, and know-how. It costs companies and organisations an estimated \$31.5bn a year in lost revenues among those listed on the Fortune 500.
- Negative effects: An employee will give less than the maximum in contributing to the firm's knowledge, puts up barriers to collaborations within a company, new ideas, or the implementation of policies or procedures.
- Knowledge hiding, as opposed to knowledge sharing, negatively impacts the team and organisational performance.
- Hiding knowledge occurs about through two factors, with a third coming into play that could reduce the impact the former:
 - The notions of an employee's psychological ownership of knowledge
 - Territoriality
 - His/her degree of psychological ownership for the organisation.
- Psychological ownership: the employee sees a job role, responsibility, tool or process as theirs – almost a natural extension of the self.
- Individuals can easily form an ownership feeling over a target if they have constant control over it, invest much time or energy on it, or are familiar with it.
- Ownership will tend to generate an unwillingness to share with others and strengthens the probability of hiding knowledge.
- Loss of ownership leads to an experience of loss of control with resulting negative emotions: frustration, stress and dysfunctional behaviours.
- Because the "owner" has become a specialist with insider knowledge and skills, this knowledge becomes a source of bargaining power as it elevates power and status in the organisation.
- The stronger an individual's psychological ownership of an object, the greater the likelihood he or she will treat that object/role/process/knowledge as his or her territory.
- Territoriality exists over all aspects of the workplace with specific behaviour sets being played out by employees: marking their territory and defending it.
- Employees take on perceptions of not only who should enter the territory, but what should go on there, who should take care of it and what types of activity that are allowed to take place in it.
- Marking = names on doors, posters, photos of themselves, sporting club trophies, icons.
- The individual will take a variety of ways to prevent or respond to infringements into his/her territory: holding knowledge privately, complaining to superiors, or yelling at invaders.
- Those with a high level of territoriality are therefore more likely to withhold knowledge than those with a low level of territoriality.
- However, an individuals' psychological ownership for the organisation will weaken the effects of territoriality. Feeling significant, worthy, and valuable to the organisation generate positive behaviours.
- Thinking of the company as part of yourself – and vice-versa – makes you more willing to share ideas, knowledge and objects with your colleagues.



● **PROJECT**
with food for thought

- Think of your own job scope and projects. To what extent do you see their success as important and what effort/hours do you put into them to make them succeed?
- Would you say that you are key in their success? How do you protect your job/projects from possible takeover bids within the organisation?
- To what extent do you believe that certain information shouldn't be shared in your organisation? Why?
- Go on a tour of your colleagues' offices. Which ones display an obvious 'staking out of territory'? In what way?
- To what extent does your team (or another in the organisation) share knowledge and information to create positive results? What factors encourage this?

Thoughts



● **PERFORM**

by putting it all into practice

CHECKLIST

- 1. To reduce knowledge hiding**, focus on management practices that decrease an individual's self-perception of possession.
- 2. Adopt knowledge management tools** (shared online product roadmaps, briefs, insights, quality improvement initiatives, forums, etc.).
- 3. Promote teamwork.** Give praise to every team member and highlight the positive effect of sharing knowledge and information.
- 4. Stress the collective ownership of knowledge.** Tie this in with annual results and highlight any instances of knowledge sharing helping reach those results.
- 5. Encourage advancing individuals' organisational commitment** by working on HR, training and career mobility policy.
- 6. Include knowledge sharing** as a KPI in annual appraisals.
- 7. Adopt open space working** areas as a cure for territoriality.
- 8. Reduce or suppress knowledge hiding** by strengthening employees' sense of psychological ownership of their company or organisation by working on purpose, values, image, mission.
- 9. Give your employees the possibility to participate** in your organisation's activities and decisions and even give them stock ownership as a responsibility-generator and motivator.



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