

Employees don't always share well with others, says new paper exposing 'knowledge hiding'

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Why isn't knowledge transfer happening more often in companies spending money on it?

Maybe it's because their staff don't always want to share.

"We've had years of research in organizations about the benefits of knowledge-sharing but an important issue is the fact that people don't necessarily want to share their knowledge," says David Zweig, a professor of [organizational behaviour](#) and human resources management at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management and the University of Toronto at Scarborough.

His paper, co-authored with Catherine Connelly of McMaster University, Jane Webster of Queen's University, as well as John Trougakos of the Rotman School and the University of Toronto at Scarborough, is the first to name this behaviour, "[knowledge](#) hiding."

"A lot of companies have jumped on the bandwagon of knowledge-sharing," such as [spending money](#) on developing knowledge-sharing software, says Prof. Zweig. "It was a case of, 'If you build it they will come.' But they didn't come."

The paper identifies three ways employees hide what they know from co-workers: being evasive, rationalized hiding - such as saying a report is

confidential -- and playing dumb.

Why do they do it? Two big predictors are basic distrust and a poor knowledge-sharing climate within the [company](#). Companies may be able to overcome that through strategies such as more direct contact and less [e-mail](#) communication, highlighting examples of trustworthiness, and avoiding "betrayal" incentives, like rewards for salespeople who poach each other's clients.

"If you don't work on creating that climate and establishing trust, it doesn't matter how great the software is, people aren't going to use it," says Prof. Zweig.

Provided by University of Toronto

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