

New research uncovers why we share or hide knowledge from co-workers

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Employees who enjoy their jobs and gain meaning from their roles are more likely to share information with their colleagues, new research led by Curtin University has found.

The research, published in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, explored what motivates an [employee](#) to share knowledge with their team members, while also aiming to understand why some might intentionally withhold or conceal information that has been requested by another colleague.

Lead author Professor Marylene Gagne, from the Future of Work Institute based at Curtin University, said organisations can benefit from encouraging their employees to share their knowledge around the workplace.

"In today's workforce, [jobs](#) are becoming more complex and require [problem solving](#) and innovative thinking. Encouraging employees to work together and share their knowledge can give organisations a competitive advantage," Professor Gagne said.

"Our research found that employees were more likely to share information if they were required to engage in tasks that required them to solve [complex problems](#) or process information, or if they had autonomy in their job, meaning they had the power to prioritise their work and use personal initiative when making decisions.

"It was also common for employees to hide information if they felt like their colleagues relied on them to get their work done, as it can generate unrealistic job demands that creates excessive pressure."

Co-author Associate Professor Amy Tian, from the School of Management at Curtin University, explained that the research highlighted the importance of designing work well in today's workforce, which could in turn affect how people share or hide knowledge.

"We looked at three ways employees typically avoid sharing knowledge with their colleagues. These included 'playing dumb' or pretending they

don't know something, saying they would share information but never getting around to it, or making up an excuse as to why they could not pass on the information," Associate Professor Tian said.

"Further research is needed to determine what other factors may contribute to why [employees](#) are likely to hide information from their [team members](#)."

More information: Marylène Gagné et al. Different motivations for knowledge sharing and hiding: The role of motivating work design, *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/job.2364](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2364)

Provided by Curtin University

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