

# Knowledge withholding

Citation for published version (APA):

Strik, N. P. (2023). *Knowledge withholding: the development of a framework of antecedents from a relational perspective*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20230131ns>

## Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2023

## DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20230131ns](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20230131ns)

## Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

## Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

## General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

[www.umlib.nl/taverne-license](http://www.umlib.nl/taverne-license)

## Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

[repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

## SUMMARY

Increasing transparency is at the forefront of the agenda of many businesses today. Especially during the last decade, the societal wave that called for transparency in and by organizations picked up and blew over to academia. This resulted in an increasing number of research projects that provided many granular-level insights into why people withhold, hoard, or hide knowledge. Taking a step back, we observe that the researchers applied a wide range of theories to explain the individual antecedents. Also, the extant research seems to have investigated the phenomena in competitive and zero-sum contexts often from a knowledge-sharing angle. In this approach, knowledge withholding has a bad reputation. That said, we take a neutral stance on knowledge-withholding behavior and aim to build a framework that maps its antecedents to address situations of competition and collaboration, individuals and groups, and within and between organizations. We, thereby, approach these antecedents from a relational angle because the behavior tends to occur in social settings where people experience some sort of relationship. We use the theories of interdependence, social identity, and social exchange to develop the framework.

We conducted a systematic literature review, a content analysis of five memoirs, and a single-case study. The literature review provided antecedents distilled from many research settings, after which we conducted two qualitative studies in a military context. The reason to investigate the behavior in a military context is that military personnel tend to operate in competitive and collaborative situations, deal with large amounts of knowledge, and handle the dangers of withholding too much or little. For the review, we aimed to identify the fundamental explanations of knowledge withholding, upon which we built an integrative framework. The systematic search of the literature resulted in 42 empirical research papers. The coding of these papers revealed 93 knowledge withholding antecedents based on the data of 16,649 respondents. We integrated these into a theoretical framework using the theories of interdependence, social identity, and social exchange. Regarding the memoirs study, we aimed to explore why leaders withhold knowledge and analyzed 1853 pages. As a result, we identified and coded 246 knowledge-withholding events. The coding process revealed that the U.S. general and flag officers interacted with eight actor categories: *enemies, competitors, politicians, foreign leaders, troops, instructors, family, and media*. We framed the reasons for knowledge withholding within these eight relational contexts. Concerning the case study, we aimed to add details to the emerging picture of knowledge withholding by investigating the more precisely defined knowledge *hoarding*. We, therefore, interviewed ten commissioned officers, observed as a participant for five months, and examined archival records, which resulted in collecting 142 knowledge-hoarding events. We coded the actors involved in the knowledge-hoarding events on their goals and social identities. Next, we categorized seven discerned groups of actors that were subsequently classified into three types of relational contexts: hierarchical, non-hierarchical, and functional. Based on this coding process, we developed a relational framework of antecedents of knowledge hoarding. Finally, based on the results of the three studies, we developed an integrated framework on antecedents of knowledge withholding and hoarding from a relational perspective.

The main findings are that negatively interdependent goals between actors tend to increase knowledge withholding or hoarding, especially from a weaker towards a stronger actor or in case actors experience strong social identities. Next, actors with positively interdependent goals tend to decrease knowledge withholding or hoarding. That said, the opposite may occur when the behavior may benefit the other actor, or when it benefits the actor's group, especially in cases of strong social identification, when knowledge (leakage) risks are assessed as high, or when it assists people's learning journey. Last, actors who experience complex interdependencies may increase or decrease knowledge withholding or hoarding based on the strongest connection or trusted relationship that they share.