

# What are Constraints on Knowledge Sharing?

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Knowledge is one of the organization's most important assets in strategic terms. It is what makes an organization different from its competitors. The ability of an organization to identify critical knowledge, to create knowledge, and to transfer it from one part to another when required are critical factors for any organization's success. Despite all of that, existing knowledge-sharing practices are often not effective or do not even exist at all.

## Barriers to Knowledge Sharing and Transfer

Research in knowledge management has proven that a knowledge-sharing culture leads to increased productivity, improved cycle times for business processes, and innovation.

The ongoing role of knowledge management is to develop an environment where people freely create, share, and use information and knowledge; work together toward a common purpose; and are fully supported.

There are and will always be, barriers that hinder the flow of knowledge among colleagues. People bring their own values, beliefs, and habits into workplace, and KM cannot achieve its objectives without implementing solutions to overcome behavior-related barriers. We often try to change our culture before understanding it without taking into account the core values of the organization; the entrenched ideas about how "things get done around here" and the variety of perspectives contributed by people with different jobs, in different geographic locations, from different generations, and so forth.

## Cultural Barriers to Knowledge Sharing

I am trying to explain below each barrier to help you think about your organization's culture and the potential obstacles that may impact people's knowledge-sharing behaviors.

### Awareness

Awareness refers to the widespread communication of knowledge management approaches and activities across the organization. Organizations typically market the available KM capabilities and approaches so that people know how to connect to content and expertise. However, if the message is not communicated sufficiently or in the right manner, employees may not understand the tools and approaches available to them, when they would use them, or why. This will result in the slow adoption of knowledge-sharing behaviors since people don't know where to go or how to connect.

#### **For improving awareness of Knowledge Management:**

Deploy a Targeted Communication Plan for Knowledge Management  
Teach Employees Which Knowledge Management Tool to Use in Which Situation  
Promote Awareness of Communities of Practice and Communicate Their Value

### **Cultural**

Culture encompasses behaviors, working norms, unwritten or spoken rules about "how things work," or processes that shape situational context. In large organizations, cultural nuances may change depending on functional, business-unit, geographic, or geopolitical boundaries. Examples of cultural barriers include:

a corporate culture that does not value knowledge sharing;  
a range of sub-cultures (e.g., teams) within the organization that are not bound together by the same values or business rules/principles; and the requirement to share knowledge in a language that is not one's primary language.

#### **For addressing cultural barriers:**

Build a Collaborative Culture  
Configure Your KM Program to Mirror Existing Structures and Workflows  
Aim for Global Consistency in KM, but Allow for Some Customization to Accommodate Local Culture

### **Distance**

Distance is the separation between individuals, teams, functions, and so forth within an organization. These separations may be geographic (e.g., teams in different countries or regions), or they may be structural (e.g., people who are just a few hundred yards away from one another but are focused on different projects or processes). Regardless of the reason, infrequent contact is a form of distance.

#### **Addressing distance barriers:**

Promoting Collaboration Across Physical, Structural, and Conceptual Boundaries  
Seamless Collaboration: Enabling Employees to Work Together Across Boundaries

### **Experience**

Experience refers to the knowledge or competencies that a person develops over time in a specific role, usually through observation and direct participation in work activities. Experience-related barriers to knowledge sharing can occur when an employee has very little experience or a great deal. For example, someone might not participate in knowledge sharing because of a perceived lack of experience (you might hear this person say something like, "I'm new, what can I contribute to this discussion?"). On the other hand, employees with deep expertise can impede the free flow of knowledge and ideas if they are perceived as the authority or "last word" on a subject or activity.

#### **For addressing experience-related barriers:**

Introduce Knowledge Management Offerings as Part of New-Hire Onboarding  
Expose New Hires to Communities of Practice Showcase and Leverage Subject Matter Experts

### **Knowledge Hoarding**

This barrier refers to people who are hesitant or unwilling to share/contribute knowledge for the good of the larger audience. In many cases, knowledge hoarders believe that "knowledge is power" and that, by sharing what they know, they may decrease their value to the organization and potentially put their jobs in jeopardy. When widespread across an organization, knowledge hoarding is often linked to cultural barriers, lack of sponsorship, and/or misaligned measures.

#### **For overcoming knowledge hoarding:**

Ensuring That Collaborators Feel Valued

Incentive-based motivation for knowledge sharing.

## Misaligned Measures

Measures play a significant role in shaping an organization's values and internal culture. To that end, barriers to knowledge-sharing may occur when performance measures for individuals, teams, or groups conflict with desired knowledge-sharing behaviors. For example, if the measurement system puts functions or business units in direct competition with one another, providing incentives to "beat" other parts of the business on metrics, that may create a structural barrier to sharing and collaboration across those groups. Similarly, if the organization has no measures or incentives to promote knowledge-sharing behaviors, then it will be more difficult to motivate employees to participate.

### Creating well-aligned measures:

Use Rewards and Recognition to Acknowledge Employee Knowledge Contributions

Make Career Progression a Payoff for Employees Who Participate in KM

## Relationships

This barrier relates to the connections—or lack thereof—between individuals. Whether face-to-face or virtual, weak or tenuous relationships can impede sharing, access to knowledge, reuse, and connectivity. Often, relationship barriers are linked to other challenges around organizational culture or trust. In addition, relationships may suffer in organizations that do not provide opportunities to communicate and network (through in-person conferences and events, webinars and roundtables, online discussion tools, an expertise location system, etc.)

### To strengthen relationships within the workforce:

Help Community Members Build Trusted Relationships in Virtual Environments

Foster Collaboration Without Breaking the Bank

## Sponsorship

Sponsorship refers to endorsement and support from senior leaders, either at the enterprise or local level. Barriers related to sponsorship might include:

1. Failure to secure a visible or engaged sponsor to champion the knowledge-sharing program.
2. Leaders/managers who do not communicate the value of knowledge-sharing activities or who do not actively participate themselves (i.e., not "walking the talk").
3. Few resources are allocated to knowledge sharing because of a lack of alignment with core business objectives or outcomes.

### Securing sponsorship for and championing KM:

Developing a Knowledge Strategy That Senior Leaders Can Get Behind

Designate Executive Role Models for Knowledge Management

Change Leadership Behaviors That Inspire Teamwork and Collaboration

## Time

Time refers to the minutes/hours (or, more generally, the effort) it takes to participate in knowledge sharing. For example, how fast and easy is it to contribute content, respond to a question in a discussion forum, or search for best practices?

Examples of time as a barrier include:

1. Employees who think they are too busy to share knowledge.
2. Employees who see knowledge sharing as "outside the scope" of their jobs (may relate to the Misaligned Measures barrier).
3. KM tools/approaches with long learning curves or that require significant time investments to participate.
4. KM approaches involve inefficient or non-value-added activities, such as asking experts to answer the same questions over and over again.

### Addressing time-related barriers:

Promoting Collaboration Across Physical, Structural, and Conceptual Boundaries

Delivering Knowledge at the Teachable Moment

## Trust

Trust is the confidence people have in the content and expertise available to them, as well as their reliance on others to provide information and support to help them address problems and opportunities. When someone trusts their colleagues, he/she is confident in their ability, character, and the truth of the information they present. Trust is strongly linked to the strength of employee relationships, though a robust vetting process for content and experts may help in some situations. A common trust-related barrier is that content is perceived to be unreliable because the sources of the knowledge are unknown. For example, an anonymous knowledge contribution, or one associated with a person no longer at the organization, is much less likely to be trusted.

### Building and maintaining trust:

Help Community Members Build Trusted Relationships in Virtual Environments

Seamless Collaboration: Enabling Employees to Work Together Across Boundaries

Develop Transparent Processes So Employees See the Impact of the Ideas and Knowledge

## Organizational Barriers to Knowledge Sharing

### Over-Structuring of Organization

Sometimes the departments, business units, and teams are self-structured with strict job descriptions which encourage knowledge sharing and cooperation.

### Top-to-Bottom Communication

Organizations with autocratic nature where communication and knowledge flows are restricted into certain directions (e.g. top-down); treat their employees as children and not adults who possess a wealth of knowledge that can be shared to improve the productivity of the organization.

### Organization is Self-Sufficient Entity

The organization considers itself independent and doesn't need the knowledge of employees. They are only interested in information from customers and stakeholders.

### Lack of Motivation

Lack of transparent rewards and recognition systems that would motivate people to share more of their knowledge.

## Technological Barriers to Knowledge Sharing

Companies deploy technologies without checking their organizational processes, employees' technological advancement level, and realizing the true benefits of technology which creates a hindrance to knowledge sharing.

### Lack of Sharing Tools

Lack of integration of sharing systems and processes impedes the way people do things. Diversity of knowledge-sharing media and the lack of knowledge act as a hindrance to knowledge-sharing.

### Barring the Barrier

Deploying a [centralized knowledge repository](#)

Knowledge management portal to connect individual information systems and facilitate knowledge sharing

### Reluctance

Reluctance to use knowledge management systems due to lack of familiarity and experience with them. People are not given the training to use knowledge-sharing tools and employees have unrealistic expectations of what technology can and cannot do.

### Dealing with Reluctance

Provide training

Showcase the benefits of knowledge-sharing tools and how they will increase their productivity.

### Inefficient Tools

The mismatch between individuals' need requirements and integrated sharing systems and processes restricts sharing practices. Knowledge sharing can be a pain when it is done with complex e-learning authoring tools. Inefficient

technologies deterred management from embracing a knowledge-sharing strategy.

**Overcoming Inefficient Tool Barrier:**

Use of zero-learning-curve authoring tools like [PHPKB knowledge management software](#) to make knowledge sharing easier and more accessible than ever.

Online URL: <https://www.phpkb.com/kb/article/what-are-constraints-on-knowledge-sharing-212.html>