

From gatekeeper to guide: Enable your team with knowledge sharing



Effective leadership demands transparency and open communication. Yet, many leaders inadvertently turn to knowledge hoarding, creating silos and stifling innovation.

The root of information hoarding often lies in a [leader's self-perception](#). In my experience, I've seen two primary perspectives contribute to this behavior: superiority and insecurity.

Leaders who believe they are superior may withhold information to maintain their perceived authority. They might fear diluting their power or exposing vulnerabilities. On the other hand, those who feel insecure may hoard information to protect themselves from scrutiny or potential failure. They might worry about being outshone or appearing incompetent.

Both perspectives create a barrier to open communication and collaboration, ultimately hindering the organization's success. This blog explores the pitfalls of gatekeeping knowledge and offers strategies to [foster a culture of open sharing](#) and collaboration.

What is knowledge hoarding?

Information is often seen as valuable currency in the corporate world, so leaders may keep information to themselves to maintain control and authority. By selectively sharing knowledge, they position themselves as indispensable, creating a dependency on their insights and decisions.

Some examples of knowledge hoarding (or gatekeeping at work) are:

- **Withholding strategic information:** A leader might keep crucial information about the company's long-term goals or direction to themselves, fearing that sharing it might lead to leaks or challenges to their authority.
- **Hoarding decision-making power:** A leader might centralize decision-making, refusing to delegate or involve their team in problem-solving, believing that they are the only one capable of making the right choices.
- **Protecting personal networks:** A leader might guard their professional contacts and relationships, preventing team members from building their own networks or accessing valuable resources.

All of these behaviors can stem from a fear of losing relevance or being outshone by subordinates. However, this approach is ultimately counterproductive. It breeds mistrust, stifles creativity, and hampers the organization's ability to respond to challenges swiftly. In an age where collaboration and agility are paramount, leaders must recognize that true power lies in [empowering others](#) through transparency and shared knowledge.

The leader/doer divide: A barrier to innovation

A common leadership challenge is the rigid separation of leaders as decision-makers and employees as executors. This hierarchical structure often creates a culture of fear and dependency, hindering innovation and engagement. By withholding context and rationale for decisions, leaders inadvertently contribute to a climate where employees feel disconnected and undervalued.

To foster a [high-performing organization](#), leaders must shift towards a more collaborative and inclusive approach. By creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel empowered to contribute ideas and challenge the status quo, organizations can unlock the full potential of their workforce.

To avoid gatekeeping at work and this barrier to innovation, there are some things leaders can do to bridge this divide:

- **Share project goals and objectives openly:** Clearly communicate each project's purpose, expected outcomes, and overall business impact with the entire team.
- **Involve employees in decision-making:** Create opportunities for team members to contribute ideas, provide feedback, and participate in decision-making processes.
- **Provide regular project updates:** Keep the team informed about project progress, challenges, and changes through transparent communication channels.

- **Encourage questions and feedback:** Foster a culture where questions and feedback are valued and encouraged.
- **Recognize and reward contributions:** Acknowledge the contributions of team members and celebrate their successes.

Navigating the leader/doer divide

1) Share project goals openly

2) Involve employees in decisions

3) Provide regular updates

4) Encourage feedback

5) Recognize contributions

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How mindset influences gatekeeping at work

Our mindset—or how we view ourselves and others—profoundly influences our behavior and can lead to things like knowledge hoarding or gatekeeping if left unchecked. In every single one of our interactions, we work from one of two mindsets: an inward mindset or an [outward mindset](#).

An inward mindset is characterized by self-centered thinking, where leaders prioritize their own needs and agendas over the collective well-being of the organization. They see people as objects to help them achieve their desired results, or obstacles that get in their way. The [ripple effect of this mindset](#) can lead to a range of problematic behaviors, such as reduced trust, siloed teams, decreased employee engagement, and stagnant innovation.

To combat this, leaders must cultivate an outward mindset, focusing on understanding and addressing the needs of their team members and the organization.

By recognizing the intrinsic value of every individual and understanding their unique goals and challenges, leaders can cultivate a more positive and productive workplace culture. Through active listening and self-awareness, leaders can foster a culture where they strive to [understand their impact on others](#) while driving towards a shared vision. This outward mindset is essential for sustainable success. Leaders who fail to involve their team in this journey risk creating a divide that is difficult to bridge.

Determining what knowledge to share

Deciding how much information to share, and how often to share it, can be challenging for leaders.

In my experience, the more consistent and transparent leadership teams can be, the better. When we trust our employees with overarching vision, they are more likely to be engaged, [accountable](#), and inspired to perform their best.

That being said, striking the right balance between transparency and discretion is crucial. Several factors can influence these decisions, including organizational culture, the nature of the information, and the potential impact on stakeholders.

Leaders should assess whether withholding information is genuinely in the best interest of the organization or if it stems from a desire to maintain control or from a place of insecurity. Transparency should be the default approach, with exceptions made only when necessary to protect sensitive data or strategic interests. Some questions leaders can ask themselves when deciding whether or not to share information include:

- Does the information directly impact the team's work or morale?
- Could withholding this information lead to rumors or misunderstandings?
- How will sharing this information align with the company's values and culture?
- What is the right time for sharing this information?
- Is the information sensitive or confidential?
- Am I prepared to answer questions and address concerns?

Questions to ask when deciding what information to share

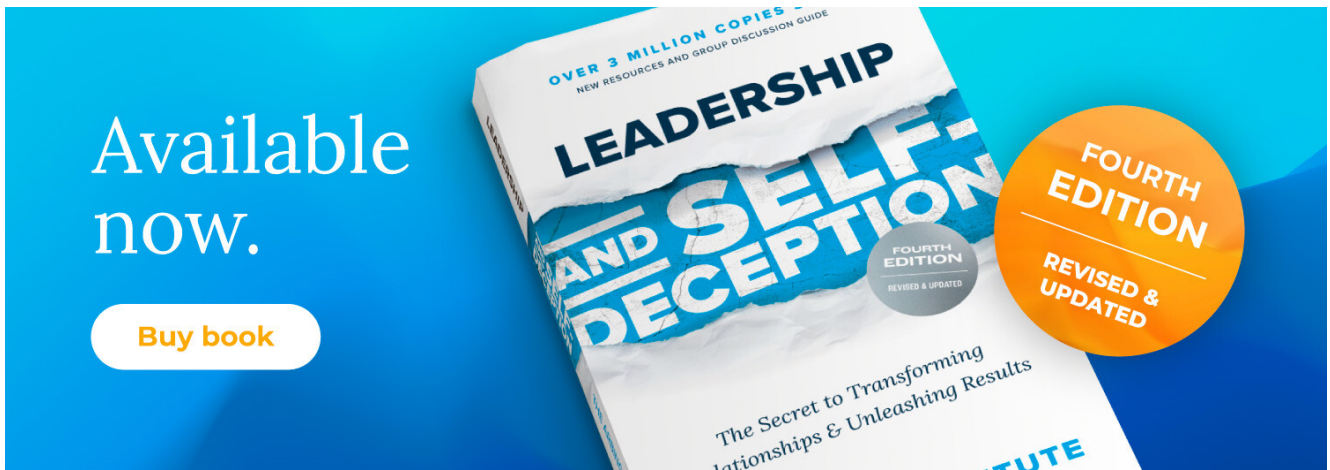
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Ultimately, the decision to share information should be guided by the principles of trust, respect, and empowerment. There are many circumstances in which sharing information is not knowledge hoarding or gatekeeping at work, but these are situations in which your discretion should be used. By fostering an environment where information flows consistently, leaders can build stronger relationships with their teams and [drive organizational success](#).

From gatekeeping at work to thoughtful sharing

Effective leadership requires a shift from gatekeeping and control to transparency and empowerment. By recognizing and addressing these common leadership faux pas, executives can create a more inclusive and innovative organizational culture. Embracing transparency, valuing employee input, and adopting an outward mindset are key steps in unlocking the full potential of a team and driving long-term success.



This blog is published as part of Argyris's Leadership Faux Pas series. Have you ever wondered what not to do as a leader? This series dives deep into the common missteps that can derail even the most promising leaders. Learn from these pitfalls and elevate your leadership game. New blogs released weekly!

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