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Knowledge Collection and Employees' Creativity Under Responsible Leadership: Evidence from Public Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

In this dynamic era of competition, the public sector higher educational institutions must focus on the importance of creative administrative employees. Therefore, this research has focused on determining the factors associated with the creativity of administrative employees in public sector higher educational institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. The data were gathered from administrative employees working at different public sector higher educational institutions in Punjab through an online questionnaire. The results highlighted that the creativity of administrative employees is associated with responsible leadership, which also leads to knowledge collection. Moreover, the complementary partial mediation of the knowledge collection was found in the relationship between responsible leadership and employee creativity.

Keywords: Knowledge Collection, Knowledge, Responsible Leadership, PHEIs, Education

Introduction

Innovation and creativity originate from educational institutions, and to bring revolution in the society and business world, they must make themselves more creative by focusing on the creativity of the administrative employees. Hassan and Din (2019) highlighted that creativity and knowledge sharing lead to a positive work attitude. The university is a knowledge-based institution, which empowers students, researchers, faculty, and staff to develop skills and knowledge. Therefore, the culture of universities should be based on innovation, creativity, and idea development. The most challenging task for university administration may be turning the concepts into something intellectual or operationalized for employment. It manifests the transformation of creativity and thinking (AI-Youbi et al., 2021). Thus, Universities in Pakistan urgently need to develop different strategies for enhancing creativity (Ishaque et al., 2014).

Higher Education encompasses a wide range of institutions, including junior colleges, teacher training schools, institutes of technology, and vocational training institutions (Murtaza, 2022). Regional innovation systems are dependent upon Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). HEIs pursue two missions traditionally: (1) to acquire academic knowledge and (2) to disseminate it (Jaeger & Kopper, 2014).

In Pakistan, universities provide higher education and contribute significantly towards economic growth. The first university in Pakistan was established at the time of independence. The number of universities increased to 20 in 1984. Now, the number of universities is gradually increasing. Agricultural colleges and medical colleges have also been awarded the status of university (Amir et al., 2020). The Punjab Higher Education Commission, Pakistan, has chartered university employees into two categories: academic staff and administrative staff. Academic staff are considered the face of the university, as they drive the university towards progress, encompassing academics, research, and national or international rankings. On the other hand, administrative employees are considered the backbone of the university.

In the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century, universities have become one of the most important sources of inventions, skills, and knowledge transfer (AI-Youbi et al., 2021). Intellectual capital is embraced in universities. Moreover, universities serve as knowledge institutions, comprising staff, researchers, faculty, and students. Managing and utilizing intellectual human capital is the primary objective of the university's administration. The university administration faces a challenge in this regard. However, the greatest challenge is to transform ideas into knowledge or material that is valuable for work and life. Thus, the role of educational institutions goes beyond

thinking and creativity (AI-Youbi et al., 2021). When employees perceive that their organization supports them, they are more likely to reciprocate positively. Knowledge sharing and creativity may be moderated by perceived organizational support, which is a hidden mechanism that needs to be revealed (Imamoglu et al., 2023). Academic staff focus on teaching and research, while administrative staff enable these activities by providing essential facilities, including labs, research rooms, and offices for research and commercialization. A list of administrative offices in public higher educational institutions (PHEIs) is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Administrative Offices in PHEIs

Sr. No.	Administrative Departments/ Controlling Offices	Branch/Section/ Division/
01	Registrar Office	Personal Branch (HR Branch)
		Establishment Branch
		Registration
		Meeting Section
		Academics Branch
2	Treasurer office	Receipts Section
		Payment section
		Project & HEC Funds Section
		Salary section
		Tax section
		Budget Section
		Audit Section
3	Controller of the Examinations	Conduct Branch
		Secrecy Branch
		Tabulation Branch
		Question paper parenting and processing section
		Inventory & Store
		Thesis Section
		Degree Section
		Verification Section
4	Office of Research and Commercialization	Maintain a record of researchers and assist the faculty in securing research projects and grants.
5	Quality Enhancement Cell	Quality assurance
6	Office of International Linkages	International Linkages
7	Office of Industrial Linkages	Industrial Linkages
8	Directorate of Student Affairs	Discipline
		Students Societies
		Celebrations of National and International Days
9	Career Counseling and Alumni Affairs	Students counseling
		Awareness sections

		Alumni affairs
10	Estate Care Office	Plantation
		Cleanliness
11	Security Office	Security
13	Transport Office	Transportation facility
13	Students' Financial Aid Office	Assist the students and children of the faculty in securing scholarships and support in financial matters.
14	Office of the Procurement and Inventory Control	Inventory
15	Office of Project & Development Director	Civil Work
		Electric Work
16	Business Incubation Center	Competition section
		Business Grant section
17	I T Division	Students service
		Faculty services
18	Directorate of Undergraduate Studies	Record maintenance
19	Directorate of Advanced Studies	Record maintenance
20	Directorate of Sports	Sports activities

Registrar office, Office of the Controller of the examination, treasurer office, Admissions office, Office of the director Students' Affairs, Office of the director International Linkages, Office of the Career counseling and alumni affairs, Estate care office, security office, all serve the students from their admission process to the award of degrees, and to the teachers, from their hiring to retirement. Administrative offices and staff assist the students, scholars, teachers, and researchers. From an office assistant to the vice chancellor, everyone plays a role in advancing the institute. Moreover, all offices/departments mentioned above are monitored by the Vice Chancellor's Secretariat. In addition to that, all offices, except project development, facilitate either teachers, students, or both, but they are operationalized by the administrative leaders/employees.

The creativity of administrative leaders/employees matters more than that of teaching faculty. It is important to ensure the creativity of all university employees in administrative roles, as it can boost institutional performance. Al Shobaki et al. (2018) also argued that universities need to pay more attention to their administrative staff, which is an integral part of their human resources. Thus, this research has mainly focused on the factors leading to the creativity of the administrative employees working at different public sector educational institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. Al Youbi et al. (2021) highlighted that the true value of an institution lies in its creative capital, which is the ability to generate new, high-quality ideas. The creative intellectuals can transform their ideas into high-value products and services.

Pakistani universities must take different measures to enhance their creativity (Ishaque et al., 2014). Ahmed et al. (2016) argued that by incorporating unique knowledge and providing unique insights to employees, organizations can foster valued and supportive norms for doing their jobs in a new, mutually beneficial way. However, knowledge sharing, particularly knowledge collection, is lacking in PHEIs. The process of

knowledge sharing refers to how an organization's employees share knowledge, expertise, and experience related to their jobs. It involves both employees' willingness to consult actively with colleagues (knowledge donation) and willingness to learn actively from them (knowledge collection) (Lin, 2007). People with internal and external knowledge networks can access pertinent information through knowledge-sharing practices (Duffield & Witty, 2016).

The lack of knowledge sharing can hinder job performance. However, by fostering work engagement and supporting initiatives, leadership, and knowledge sharing can enhance an employee's performance. Leadership and knowledge sharing are the factors that influence human behaviors within a social network. By leading responsibly and fostering positive coworker relationships and communication, leaders can serve as role models. Managers can also foster a positive work environment that encourages constructive discussion and active participation in social activities. Leaders can foster high performance in organizations by instilling the values of responsible leadership in their employees' behavior (Lin et al., 2020).

Authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and ethical leadership have all been studied in the past in the context of employee creativity (Javed et al., 2017). However, there is a dearth of research on responsible leadership and its influence on employees' creativity (Castro-González et al., 2019). Therefore, the objective of this research is to determine the influence of responsible leadership on employee creativity and knowledge collection. Moreover, the study aimed to highlight the mediating role of knowledge collection in the relationship between responsible leadership and employee creativity.

Literature Review

Responsible Leadership and Employee Creativity

Responsible leaders have the capability to motivate employees and contribute to social welfare beyond organizational profit (Haque et al., 2021). Moreover, responsible leadership (RL) boosts employees' sense of psychological ownership and enables them to participate in decision-making, which supports their intrinsic needs. Researchers have advocated RL to develop employee motivation, which influences organizational commitment (Sobhani et al., 2021). Moreover, RL enhances the performance of employees and organizations (Wang et al., 2015). The role of responsible leadership is to create sustainable value and generate positive change for society and the environment. RL emphasizes moral decision-making, fostering, sustainable development and trust (Pless & Maak, 2011). Leadership that is responsible focuses on building trustful relationships, both internally and externally (e.g. with employees, investors, the natural environment, and clients) (Miska & Mendenhall, 2018). Moreover, responsible leaders can create an environment in which employees see themselves as insiders and have their interests considered (Doh & Quigley, 2014). Thus, employees feel more worthy, important, and valued, and are more likely to identify with the organization (Voegtlin, 2011). Those leaders who sacrifice their own interests to benefit collective interests motivate and inspire their employees, ultimately affecting the performance of their teams or organizations (Hoogervorst et al., 2012). The leadership role can play an important role in employee creativity. It is possible for leaders to promote positive outcomes and create a win-win situation for individuals for both employees and the organization (Zhou et al., 2023). As an employee, you feel proud of your organization when you perceive its responsible behavior, which ultimately enhances your self-image. Confidence in your organization boosts employee job satisfaction because employees perceive their work as meaningful (Chen & Khuangga, 2021). As a result of responsible

leadership, employees are more likely to engage in creative activities to improve their work performance. Employee creativity can be enhanced by increasing RL characteristics. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed to determine the influence of responsible leadership on employees' creativity in the public sector higher educational institutions (PHEIs).

H₁. Responsible leadership has a significant positive impact on employees' creativity.

Responsible Leadership, Knowledge Collection, & Employee Creativity

Responsible Leadership (RL) is about maintaining trusting relationships with stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization, and coordinating responsible action for the achievement of meaningful, broadly shared goals (Maak, 2007). However, knowledge collection refers to consulting colleagues to get them to share their intellectual capital (Van den Hooff & De Ridder, 2004). When a person sits down to share knowledge, knowledge sharing occurs (i.e., knowledge collection), sharing knowledge with others for developing new capabilities (Bock & Kim, 2002).

Leadership and creativity in higher education have seldom been studied together so far. In the context of PHEIs, positive leadership behavior has the potential to exert a strong influence on the performance of the administrative employees, which is missing from the review of previous studies in the context of higher education (Zacher & Johnson, 2015). Leaders can improve the performance of faculty in HEIs with an appropriate leadership style. However, there is limited understanding of the knowledge sharing in the context of HEIs (Al-Kurdi et al., 2018).

The impact of leadership styles on employee outcomes has been studied extensively by organizational behavior scholars. However, there is a lack of empirical research on how responsible leadership impacts employee behavior and organizational outcomes, and only a few studies have looked at the relationship between responsible leadership and employee performance (Haque et al., 2019). Authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and ethical leadership have all been studied in the past in the context of employee creativity (Javed et al., 2017). However, responsible leadership toward employee creativity is still lacking in evidence (Castro-González et al., 2019). Managers should provide organizational support to improve employees' innovative mindset, as perceived organizational support influences innovation behavior, and knowledge sharing in the organization can promote innovation (Peng et al., 2023). Thus, the following hypotheses are designed to determine the influence of responsible leadership on knowledge collection in the public sector higher educational institutions (PHEIs) and highlight the mediating role of knowledge collection in the relationship between responsible leadership and employee creativity.

H₂. Responsible leadership has a significant positive impact on knowledge donation.

H₃: Knowledge collection has a significant positive impact on employee creativity

H₄: Knowledge collection significantly mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and employee creativity.

Based on the literature discussed above, the following framework is developed (See Figure 1).

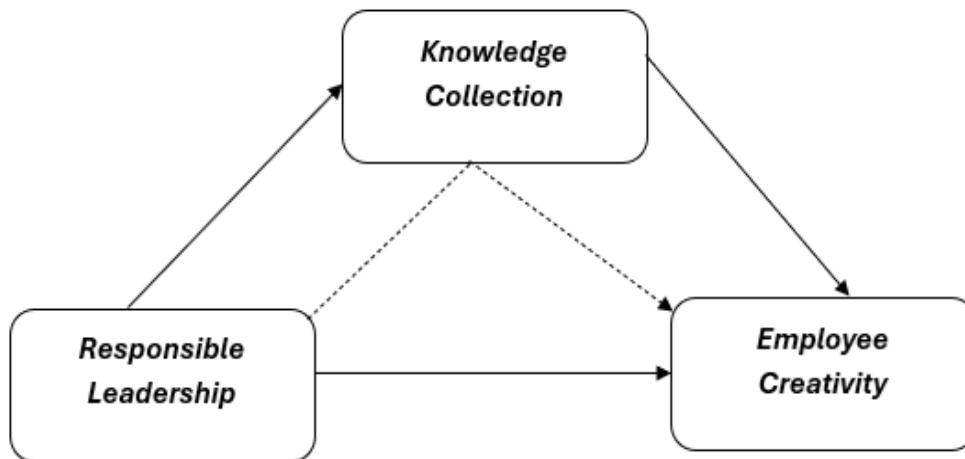


Figure 1. Research Model

Methodology

The research employed a quantitative technique and gathered the data through an online questionnaire using a convenience sampling method. The link to the questionnaire was shared with administrative employees at various higher educational institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. The analysis was done using SPSS (i.e., for descriptives and demographics) and SmartPLS4 (measurement and structural model). The demographic analysis reported that most of the administrative employees participating in the research were males (i.e., 57%). The age of most of the respondents was between 26 and 33 years (i.e., 33%). The experience of most of the respondents was between 1 and 5 years (i.e., 45%).

Results

The SmartPLS4 was used to evaluate the measurement model (i.e., for estimating the discriminant and convergent validity) and the structural model (i.e., for investigating the hypotheses). Construct reliability is measured through the composite reliability. Composite reliability is based on the approximation of total reliability, and Hair et al. (2014) suggested that the threshold value of composite reliability is set at 0.6. Convergent validity is used to measure the relationship among different construct items of a model. It is concerned with ensuring that items are consistent as they relate to each other, especially the common variance shared by the items of different variables. The results of the measurement model confirmed the reliability, discriminant, and convergent validity, as the values were within the thresholds' upper and lower limits (i.e., factor loadings were above 0.5, CR was more than 0.7, VIF values were below 5, AVE was more than 0.5, and HTMT values were below 0.90). Figure 1 and Table 2 show the results of the measurement model.

Table 2. Measurement Model

Constructs	Factor Loading	VIF	AVE	CR
Responsible Leadership (α : 0.887)			0.640	0.891
RL1	0.772	1.874		
RL2	0.797	1.987		
RL3	0.785	1.955		

RL4	0.832	2.233		
RL5	0.804	2.095		
RL6	0.807	2.058		
Employees' Creativity (α : 0.872)			0.723	0.872
EC1	0.848	2.061		
EC2	0.864	2.37		
EC3	0.835	1.993		
EC4	0.854	2.252		
Knowledge Collection (α : 0.858)			0.867	0.702
KC1	0.871	3.563		
KC2	0.833	2.233		
KC3	0.767	1.975		
KC4	0.877	3.684		

***EC: Employee Creativity, KC: Knowledge Collection, RL: Responsible Leadership**

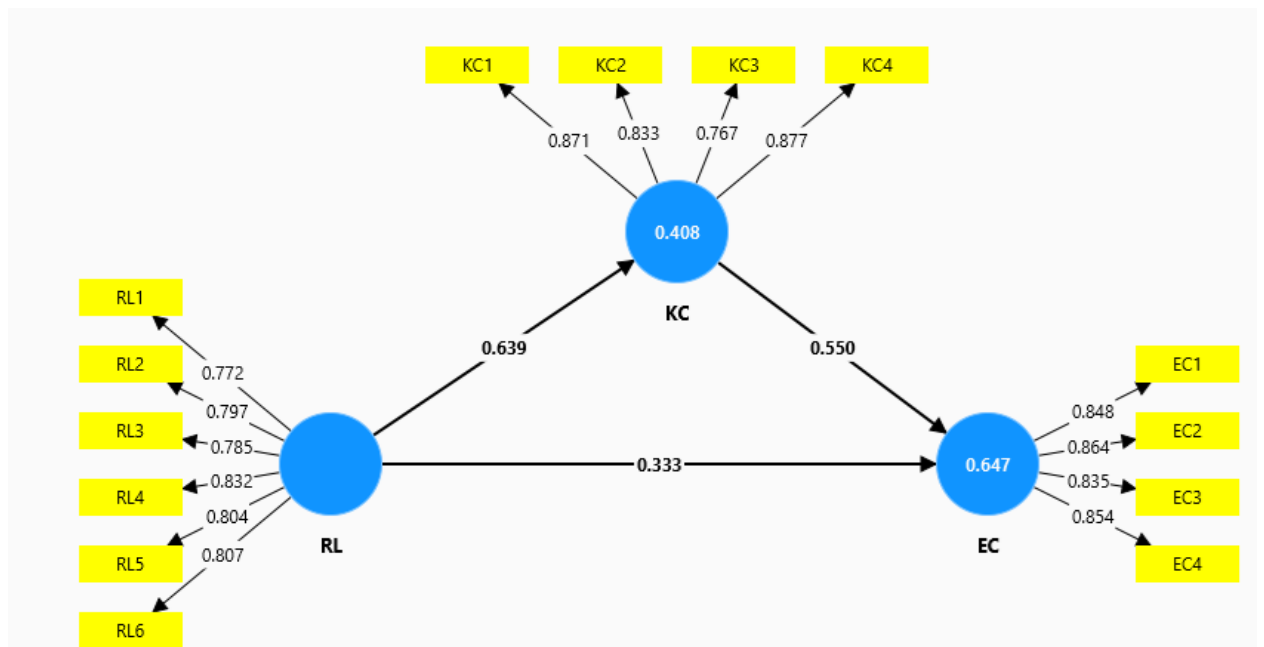


Figure 2. Measurement Model (Source: SmartPLS4)

***EC: Employee Creativity, KC: Knowledge Collection, RL: Responsible Leadership**

Discriminant validity was determined through HTMT and the Fornell and Larcker criterion. The results (i.e., shown in Table 3) confirmed the establishment of discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

HTMT			
	EC	KC	RL
EC			
KC	0.875		

RL	0.776	0.725	
Fornell and Larcker criterion			
	EC	KC	RL
EC	0.85	-	
KC	0.762	0.838	-
RL	0.684	0.639	0.8

***EC: Employee Creativity, KC: Knowledge Collection, RL: Responsible Leadership**

In the stage of analysis through SmartPLS4, the structural model was evaluated to determine the relationship between the variables under consideration. The results of the path are shown in Figure 3 and Table 4.

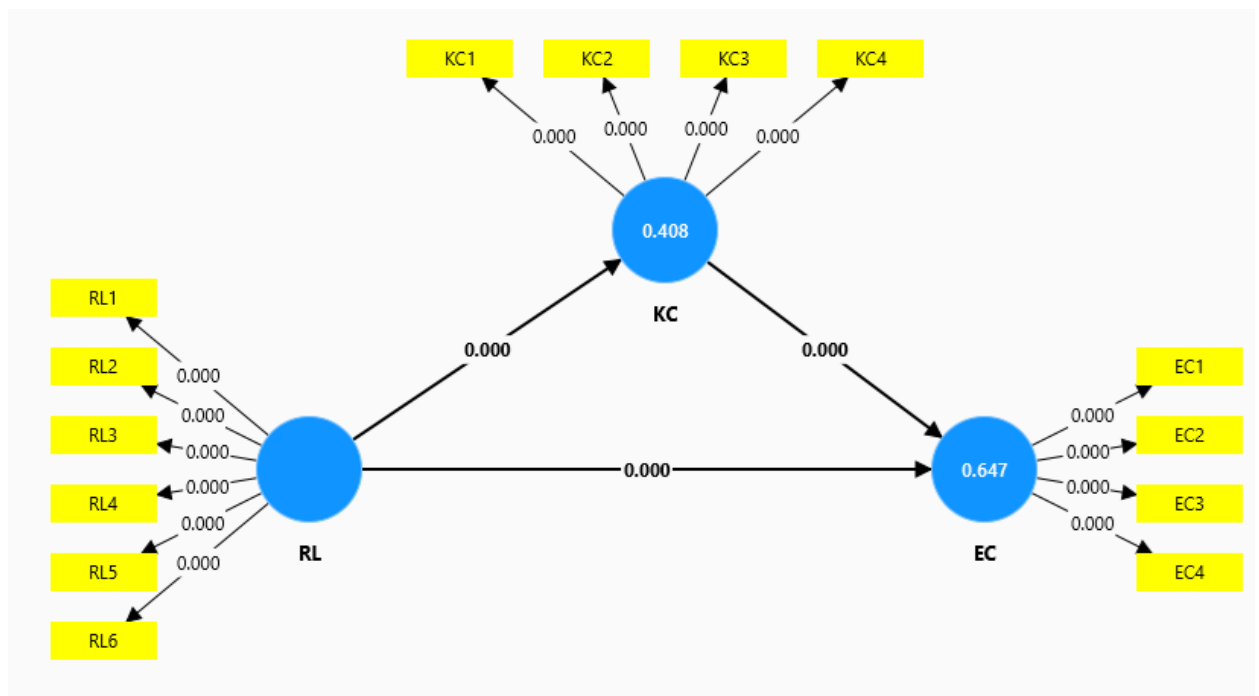


Figure 3. Structural Model

***EC: Employee Creativity, KC: Knowledge Collection, RL: Responsible Leadership**

Table 4. Hypotheses Testing (Direct Path & Mediating Path)

Direct Path				
Path	Beta	T-Value	P Value	Results
RL -> EC (H1)	0.333	6.812	0.000	Supported
RL -> KC (H2)	0.639	17.955	0.000	Supported
KC -> EC (H3)	0.550	10.880	0.000	Supported
RL -> KC -> EC (H4)	0.371	10.082	0.000	Supported

***EC: Employee Creativity, KC: Knowledge Collection, RL: Responsible Leadership**

Hypothesis 1 (i.e., H1) was designed to determine the effect of RL on EC. Results (i.e., as shown in Table 4, Figure 3) presented a significant effect of responsible leadership on employee creativity ($\beta = 0.333$, $t = 6.812$), thus supported H1. The second hypothesis examined the influence of RL on KC (H2), and the results indicated a significant

influence of responsible leadership on knowledge collection ($\beta = 0.639$, $t = 17.955$). H3 examined the effect of KC on EC, and the results highlighted a significant effect of knowledge collection on employee creativity ($\beta = 0.550$, $t = 10.880$), thus H2 and H3 were supported. The fourth hypothesis examined the mediating role of knowledge collection in the relationship between responsible leadership and employee creativity. The findings reported the complementary partial mediation of knowledge collection in the relationship between responsible leadership and employee creativity ($\beta = 0.371$, $t = 10.082$).

Discussion

The first hypothesis investigated the influence of responsible leadership on employee creativity, and the findings highlighted that the creativity of administrative employees in PHEIs is associated with responsible leadership. The findings are in line with the research by Simões et al. (2022), who also highlighted a positive relationship between responsible leadership and creativity. Responsible leadership can also be characterized as positive leadership, which fosters a stronger emotional connection among employees to the organization, leading to increased individual creativity. A responsible leader is perceived as such by employees and subordinates according to social exchange theory. A responsible leader reciprocates by participating in knowledge-sharing activities to provide maximum output to their leader and the organization (Zulfiqar et al., 2023). Knowledge sharing is enhanced by organizational support. Knowledge-sharing behaviors are influenced by organizational support, and what contextual factors affect these behaviors are still in their infancy. Thus, there is a need to determine the relationship between organizational support and knowledge sharing (Bartol et al., 2009). Therefore, H2 and H3 were developed to highlight the role of responsible leadership on knowledge collection and to investigate the effect of knowledge collection on employees' creativity. The findings supported these hypotheses and were backed by prior research by Kim et al. (2013), who suggested that employees' willingness to share knowledge with colleagues has a significant impact on the innovative behavior they exhibit in the workplace. Employees' innovative and creative behaviors are enhanced by knowledge collection. Knowledge sharing and collection create a ground for employees' creativity. Organizations that foster a culture of continuous learning, collaboration, and idea exchange are more likely to experience increased creativity among their employees. Knowledge sharing facilitates knowledge creation. Knowledge collection can indirectly enhance employee creativity (Yan et al., 2013). The results of the fourth highlighted the complementary partial mediation of the knowledge collection in the relationship between RL and employee creativity. Responsible leadership positively influences employees' creativity by creating a foundation of trust, openness, and recognition. Knowledge sharing acts as a key mediator, facilitating the flow of information, collaboration, and learning, which in turn enriches the creative potential of employees within the organization. This interconnected relationship highlights the importance of responsible leadership practices in fostering a culture that supports both knowledge sharing and creativity. Knowledge sharing boosts helping initiatives, even when individuals intend to share knowledge. Moreover, it mediates the relationship between responsible leadership and employees' creativity (Lin et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study underscores the significance of creative administrative employees in Higher Education Institutions, who serve as catalysts for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and research activities. By combining their creativity and

administrative expertise, these employees can help academics reach their full potential, leading to improved student outcomes, enhanced research quality, and increased institutional reputation, ultimately contributing to the institution's international ranking. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and nurture the talents of creative administrative employees, providing them with opportunities for growth and development to maximize their impact on the academic community. Creativity and knowledge collection are associated with responsible leadership.

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