**RESEARCH PAPER**

# Enhancing Creativity in Punjab's Public Higher Education Institutes: Exploring Responsible Leadership and Knowledge Sharing Impact

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**Abstract**

Responsible leadership and employees' creativity are the main objectives of this study. There has been a strong emphasis on leadership styles, but it is rarely discussed from the perspective of responsible leadership. The article also explores how knowledge sharing facilitates and creative input from employees when leaders are responsible. This research is based on social learning and social exchange theories. We analyzed data collected from administrators of public sector universities in Pakistan using SPSS and SMART PLS 4. Validity and reliability of the focal constructs are ensured by the measurement model. A significant effect of responsible leadership on employees' creativity has been found. In addition, the results found that knowledge sharing mediated the relationship between responsible leadership and the creativity of employees. As part of this research, an integrated framework has been developed that will improve understanding of how responsible leadership helps to enable employees' creativity in higher education institutions as responsible leadership is the best leadership style to enhance employees' creativity in HEIs.

| **Key Words** | Employees' Creativity, Higher Education Institution, Knowledge Sharing, Responsible Leadership |
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## Introduction

The success of any organization depends upon the efficiency of its human capital. In the education sector, the administrative employees of the universities play an important role in managing daily operations efficiently and effectively. Thus, the success of any university depends upon its administration (Kularajasingam et al., 2022). The rapid technological development, increasing behavioral complexities and high-end competition has become an important issue amongst leaders, employees, researchers, and experts. To overcome these issues, it is critical to examine the factors leading to innovation and creativity (Allameh, 2018). It is possible to increase competencies and innovate coaching by trading ideas; employees should be encouraged to share their knowledge through university administrators (Kularajasingam et al., 2022). With rapid change and increasing demand for quality education, the higher education sector is experiencing rapid change worldwide (Mathew, 2010). Knowledge creation and dissemination are the primary missions and vision of higher education institutions as HEIs strive to promote a knowledge sharing culture (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020). When individuals observe the behaviors of leaders, they can learn appropriate behaviors and norms. Leadership is one of the most important factors among creative and innovative behaviors (Hammond et al., 2011).

The observational learning of the subordinates is directed toward the leaders within an organization (Cheng, Wei, & Lin 2019). An employee can develop his or her own behavioral style by observing and replicating the behavior of their leaders at workplace (Bandura, 1986). In order to achieve common objectives, organizations must

build and cultivate trusting relationships with the internal and external stakeholders (Maak & Pless, 2006). Responsible leaders and knowledgeable employees are essential for an organization (Rehman et al., 2021). Responsible leaders are a source of motivation and inspiration for the workers as they act as a role model for the employees and subordinates (Yafi et al., 2021). In order to achieve performance goals, competent personnel can also help in sharing knowledge and assist each other (Du et al., 2014). Leadership initiatives and employee awareness lead to a greater emphasis on responsible leadership (Lynham & Chermack, 2006), and knowledge sharing (Lim & Lee, 2013).

Knowledge sharing involves the collection, exchange, application, and creation of the knowledge in an organization, and the contribution to the ultimate creation of knowledge within the organization (Wang and Wang, 2012). The ability to share knowledge that impacts the capabilities, competencies, and intellectual capital of an organization can strengthen the intellectual capital of that organization. (Akhavan and Khosravian, 2016). The ability to solve problems effectively and efficiently, and to increase the quality and productivity is an essential trait for the knowledgeable individuals (Campbell et al., 2012). There is a positive relationship among knowledge sharing, creativity, and supportive culture (Abili et al., 2011). Higher Education Commission (HEC) policies and innovations have helped for innovative practices in Pakistan (Tribune, 2017). Creative thinking is more important for educational organizations compared to other service providers because educational institutions are a major source of innovation and creativity. Positive work attitudes can also be developed through creative behaviors and knowledge sharing (Hassan & Din 2019). Creativity is essential for human development (Sternberg, 2003). A creative person is considered to be an integrative property within higher education because of their ability to generate original ideas, result-oriented approach, ability to solve practical problems, originality and speed of thought, openness to new experiences, and tolerance for uncertainty (Matraeva et al., 2020). The quality and creativity of the work can further be enhanced by significant training (Tamsah, Ilyas, & Yusriadi, 2021).

Universities embrace human intellectual capital. Students, professors, researchers, and staff have opportunities for learning and growth at knowledge-based institutions. Thus, there is an extensive range of creative skills available within the organizational culture of the university. Managing human intellectual capital is a key goal of the executive administration of the university. While university administration may face challenges in this area, the greatest challenge will be transforming ideas into intellectual or operational knowledge in general. Creativity and thinking are converted through it (AI-Youbi et al., 2021).

In previously conducted researches, varied results have been found on the link between leadership styles and creativity. Different leadership styles can either encourage or inhibit creativity (Cai et al., 2019). Accordingly, a leadership style that focuses on identifying and exploiting the opportunities in a dynamic business context fosters creativity more effectively (Lee et al., 2020). Several leadership styles are associated with innovative and creative behavior in the meta-analysis, such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, empowering leadership, or leader-member exchange. Based on a meta-analysis of leadership styles, an innovative and creative behavior is associated with several styles (Batool, Ibrahim, & Adeel, 2023). The demonstration of responsibility by the leader in particular gives the impression of his or her valuing the opinions of employees, encouraging them to accomplish their tasks effectively (Han, Wang, & Yan, 2019). Most of the previously conducted researches have focused on the creativity of the faculty members of the higher education institutions i.e. Universities (Diamond & Adam, 2023; Jamali, Bhutto, Khaskhely & Sethar 2022; Tamsah et al., 2021).

In order to bridge the gap this research investigating the combined influence of responsible Leadership, employees' creativity and knowledge sharing in the public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan, on the creativity of administrative employees of higher education institutions by examining the mediating role of Knowledge sharing.

Thus, this study aims to explore the role of knowledge sharing as a mediator between responsible leadership and employees' creativity in paradigms of organizational behavior, which is the highest conceptual way by using data drawn from administrative officers and workers' perception of their leaders), in the public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan. In this study, responsible leadership was examined in relation to creativity and knowledge sharing, which were both related to positive work behaviors. The results of this empirical research contributed to the field of leadership by identifying the mechanisms, processes, and dynamics of how responsible leadership derives employees' creativity through the mediator of knowledge sharing.

## Literature Review

### Responsible Leadership

There is a moral and managerial dimension to good leadership: it is not just effective, but also ethical. Human interaction is characterized by ethical behavior, hence there is a notion that ethics lies "at the heart of leadership". (Ciulla, 2006). Thus, parallel but separate thoughts about leadership and ethics have not been successfully integrated by the concept of responsible leadership till now (Waldman, 2011). A responsible leader is different from a transactional or transformational leader, because his ethos is based on the requirement to maintain a complex and dynamic balance between many – and frequently incompatible - sets of interests for achieving such difficult objectives (Voegtlin, Patzer & Scherer, 2012). In addition to set a responsible example for the followers, and cultivate a moral atmosphere within their organizations, responsible leaders, in order to realize a shared business vision, can also bring the stakeholders together outside the organizations, thus contributing to the organization's sustainability (Cheng, Wei, & Lin, 2019). The sharing of creative ideas is facilitated by responsible leadership (Batool, Ibrahim, & Adeel, 2023).

### Knowledge Sharing

Scholars are obligated by their professional duties to share their knowledge to generate original and useful knowledge, therefore they must first conduct research on their subject matter (Raza & Awang, 2020). The exchange of knowledge and know-how among individuals in an organization is known as knowledge sharing (Swanson et al., 2020). A positive relationship exists between knowledge sharing and human well-being (Abili et al., 2011). By the sharing of knowledge, employees and managers are able to gain more information and build more friendly relationships with stakeholders in the long-term (Allameh, 2018).

### Employees Creativity

There has never been a more important time for employees' creativity and innovation in organization. Due to the increase in intense market competition and rapid technological developments, the organization needs employees who are willing and capable of finding creative and innovative solutions (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014). Individuals are considered creative due to their ability to generate new and useful ideas regarding new products or practices as they go about their daily lives (Gong et al., 2013). Since creativity is crucial in sustaining organizational survival and enhancing core competencies, leadership styles have been studied in relation to creative outcomes in the

workplace (Hou et al., 2024).  A more comprehensive study of Responsible Leadership towards employees' creative behavior has been requested in response to a call (Castro et al., 2019).

## Theoretical background and hypotheses

## Theoretical underpinning

According to the social learning hypothesis (Bandura, 1977), employees pick up their actions by the way of social learning process where they watch and copy the behaviors of their leaders. In the same way, SLT contributes to the explanation of how responsible leadership influences the behavior of subordinates. Observing and imitating the attitudes of leaders is the key idea behind SLT, meanwhile the examples of the impacts of responsible leadership that have been extensively acknowledged in other researches are also focused. This theory is appropriate to understand our study methodology (Voegtlin et al., 2020). SLT states that Learning is possible for everyone by observing the conduct of others. employees acquire new abilities by focusing on the examples, and adapting their behavior in response to the praise (Bandura, 1986). Likewise, according to social exchange theory, social reciprocity contributes to improved job performance when it comes to sharing of information or knowledge (Jean, Tan, & Sinkovics, 2011). In the workplace, employees benefit from knowledge sharing because they can develop expertise by exchanging and learning from each other (Abbas, Sajid, & Mumtaz 2018).

## Development of hypotheses

*Responsible leadership and Knowledge Sharing*

As the most dominant factor in the human behavior, it is equally important to have responsible leadership and to share knowledge within social networks (Lin, Huang, & Huang, 2020). Organizational knowledge is the primary determinant of sustainable competitive advantage (Fang et al., 2010). In order to facilitate knowledge sharing, organizational members must be willing to share the knowledge (Lam et al., 2010). Having a strong emphasis on social, relational, and ethical components, responsible leadership motivates employees to be proactive towards their tasks. As a result, RL inspires people to work creatively in an inspiring environment (Chen et al., 2021). As a result of developing trust-based relationships between employees and their employers, RL motivates its employees to share knowledge with their colleagues (Gui, Lei, & Le 2022).

According to Voegtlin, Patzer, and Scherer (2012), The leadership is facing cultural heterogeneity, moral dilemmas, and ethical conflicts Increasingly. To achieve a legitimate and peaceful mode of conflict resolution, we place deliberative and discursive practices at the center of our understanding of responsible leadership. In order to meet the challenges of globalization, responsible leadership requires active engagement with the stakeholders and discursive conflict resolution. Leaders engaged in responsible leadership motivate, empower, convince, and communicate with their employees for positive changes to engage in development (Liu & Lin, 2018). Positive feelings and willingness to share knowledge between employees can be measured as the aspects of knowledge sharing (Bock & Kim, 2002). Following hypotheses has been developed.

## H1 RL has a significant impact on KS.

*Knowledge Sharing and Employee' creativity*

The sharing of higher-level information enhances the skills of the individual, and prepares them to become subject matter experts (Devi, 2023). Developing individual skills and enhancing creativity are positively related in case of knowledge sharing among team members (Dong, Gia Liem, & Grossman, 2010). Through knowledge sharing, team members can access each other's diverse knowledge and enhance their creativity (Tiwana & McLean, 2005). For employees to be able to facilitate interpersonal helping, knowledge sharing must first be emphasized because those with stronger knowledge sharing tend to be more likely to assist others (Pezeshki et al., 2011). The responsible leaders guide the employees to achieve better performance (Doh et al., 2014). Through their helping initiatives, employees make a further contribution to the organization by assisting others. Helping initiatives are directly driven by knowledge sharing collectively (Casimir, Lee, & Loon 2012).

**H2 Knowledge Sharing has a positive relationship with Employee' creativity**

*Responsible leadership and employees' creativity*

Modern organizations highly prioritize the nurturing of employees' creativity (Cai et al., 2019). Leadership always plays a vital role to enhance creativity (Tierney, Farmer & Graen 1999). In order for the employees to achieve shared outcomes, leadership is believed to be a social exchange process. Specifically, Responsible leadership must create an impression that the leader values the perspective of employees in order for them to achieve their goals efficiently (Han, Wang, & Yan, 2019). It is possible to improve employees' creative performance by focusing on RL. The sustainability of the organization requires the executives to increase employees' creativity (Zulfiqar et al., 2022).

Responsible Leadership allows organizations to balance internal and external interactions. (Lv, Chen & Ruan, 2021). Responsible Leadership is positively correlated with employees' creativity in an organization. Based on the above arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed for the university administrative employees who strive to support faculty under their responsible leaders.:

**H3 Responsible leadership is positively associated with employees' creativity.**

*Mediating role of Knowledge Sharing between responsible leadership and employees' creativity.*

In order to achieve performance goals (e.g. helping initiatives), knowledgeable workers play an important role in sharing knowledge (Du et al., 2014). Positive feelings and willingness to share knowledge between employees can be measured as an aspect of knowledge sharing (Bock & Kim, 2002). It is important to provide the necessary support for employees who have new product or service ideas to achieve their goals. Additionally, managers should hold informal break time discussions with employees to discuss personal and work-related experiences in addition to holding weekly meetings on the first day of the week for role and responsibilities assignments. The leader should reward group assignments that promote inclusivity and cooperation. In light of the above arguments, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

**H4 The relationship between responsible leadership and employees' creativity is mediated by knowledge sharing**
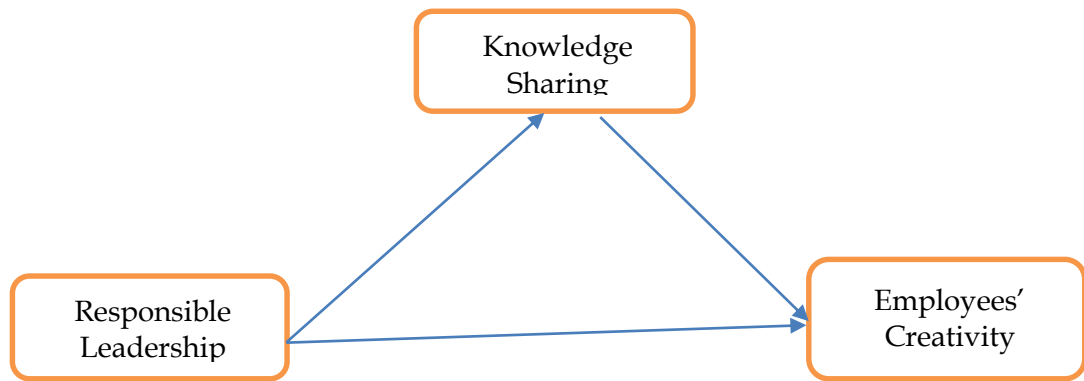
Fig. 1. Conceptual model

## Material and Methods

The objective of the study was to determine a quantitative hypothesis testing method to confirm our research hypotheses. Administrative employees serving in public sector universities were the respondents, selected through using convenient sampling. More respondents can be accessed via online platforms (Newman et al., 2021). a Google Form was used for data collection. The first section of the concerned questionnaire contained the questions relevant to the demographics of the participant. The content of the questionnaire was checked in terms of its being comprehensible to the participants. For this, the questionnaire was sent to 40 persons prior to data collections. The respondents were asked to indicate if they found any item incomprehensible. Changes were made on the basis of their suggestions. With reference to age, 111 respondents were among 18 to 25 years, 146 respondents were among 26to 33 years old, 116 respondents were aged between 34 to 41 years and remaining 61 were above 41 years. As far as the gender is concerned, 248 were male and 186 were the female respondents, out of these respondents, 129 were bachelors, 135 were masters, 107 were M.Phil. degree holders, and 63 were PhD in their credit. From the viewpoint of work experience, 139 respondents had 1-5 year work experience, 130 respondents had 6-10 year work experience, 119 respondents had 11-15 year work experience and 46 respondents had more than 16 years of work experience.

### Measures

Employees' creativity was measured by the variables (Fig. 1). Responsible Leadership (RL) as independent variable, Employees' creativity as a dependent variable, Knowledge sharing as mediating variable., An analysis of the data was undertaken using Smart-PLS 4, which is a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree - strongly agree). Hare, Sarstad, Ringel, and Mena (2012) suggested using bootstrapping for path coefficient results obtained using PLS-SEM (Sarstad et al., 2012).

### Results

### Measurement Model

Convergence validity, loading values, and composite reliability were checked (CR). Cronbach's alpha, AVE was extracted satisfactorily. Factor loadings were also above 0.6, In accordance with Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011), the factors with loadings lower than the minimum threshold were deleted. The AVE values were all greater than 0.5 (Kline, 2023). Cronbach's alpha was above 0.7 for all variables (Hardy and Bryman, 2009) and CR was above 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). (Table 1). Using Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria, discriminant validity was determined (Table 2) for all variables square roots values are less than the values of average variance. Figure 2 shows the PLS algorithm.

**Table 1**
**Factor Loadings, AVE, Cronbach's alpha, CR,**

| Constructs- | Items- | Factor Loadings- |
|---|---|---|
| Responsible Leadership-<br>AVE= 0.504<br>Cronbach's Alpha= 0.82<br>Composite Reliability=.841 | RL1 | 0.676 |
| | RL2 | 0.758 |
| | RL3 | 0.732 |
| | RL4 | 0.745 |
| | RL5 | 0.735 |
| | RL6 | 0.601 |
| Knowledge Sharing.<br>AVE= 567<br>Cronbach's Alpha= 0.746<br>Composite Reliability= 0.742 | POS 1 | 0.774 |
| | POS2 | 0.766 |
| | POS3 | 0.793 |
| | POS4 | 0.673 |
| Employees' Creativity.<br>AVE.= 798<br>Cronbach's Alpha. = 0.874<br>Composite Reliability.= 0.877 | EC1 | 0.883 |
| | EC2 | 0.894 |
| | EC3 | 0.904 |
| | EC4 | 0.06* |

Note. *Item was deleted.

**Table 2**
**Fornell and Larcker**

| | EC | KS | RL |
|---|---|---|---|
| **EC** | 0.893 | | |
| **KS** | 0.679 | 0.753 | |
| **RL** | 0.397 | 0.543 | 0.71 |

**Discriminant Validity**

Notes: EC: employees' creativity; KS: Knowledge Sharing; RL: responsible Leadership, The square root of a variable is its diagonal element.
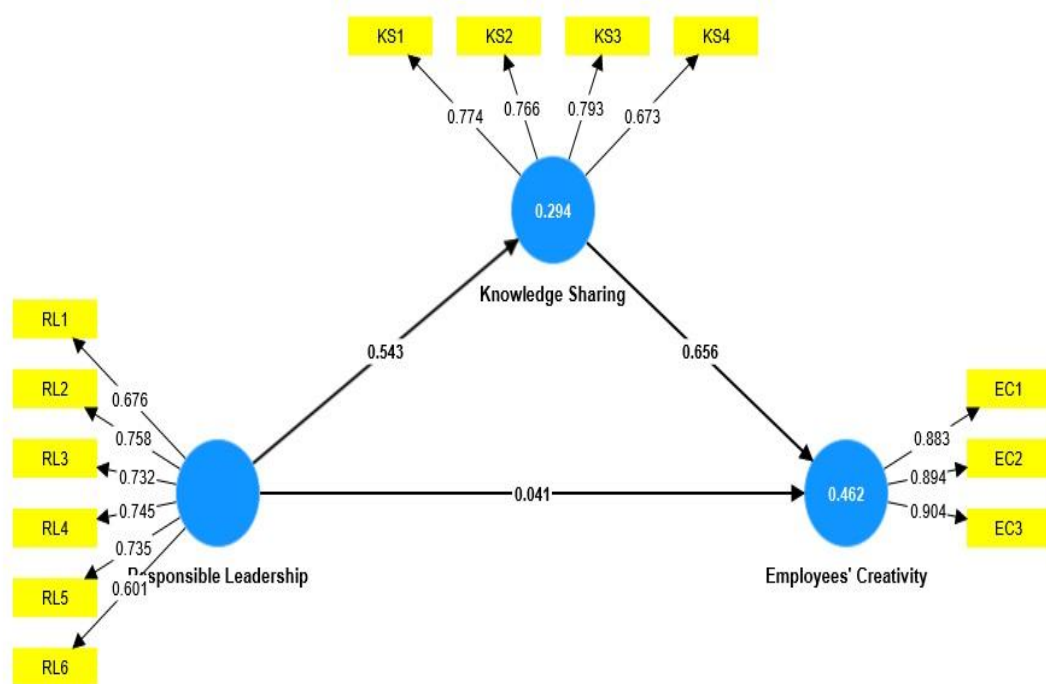


Figure 2 is PLS Algorithm

**Structural Model**

A PLS-SEM analysis was performed on the path coefficients. Variables in Table 3 with their path coefficients. Knowledge sharing is significantly impacted by RL, according to the results ($\beta$=0.03, <0.001), H1 is therefore supported. Additionally, the results indicate that KS positively affects creativity of employees ($\beta$=0.04, <0.001), hence H2 is supported. Employees' creativity is significantly affected by RL, according to the results ($\beta$=0.039, <0.001), hence H3 is accepted. KS mediates the relationship between RL and EC ($\beta$=0.034, <0.001), It is therefore, possible to support H4. Figure 3 shows bootstrapping.

**Table 3**
**Path coefficients**

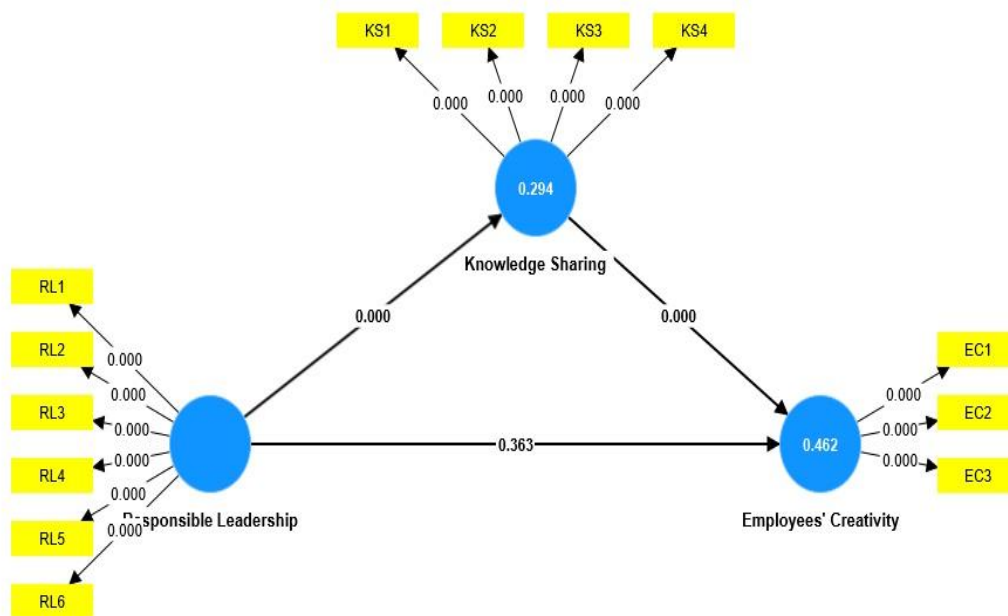| Measure | β | t-value | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Direct Path coefficient** | | | |
| Responsible Leadership. → Knowledge sharing | 0.03 | 18.093 | 0.000 |
| Knowledge sharing → Employees creativity. | 0.04 | 16.602 | 0.000 |
| Responsible Leadership → Employees creativity | 0.039 | 10.125 | 0.000 |
| **Mediation** | | | |
| RL→KS→EC | 0.034 | 10.521 | 0.000 |



Figure 3. Bootstrapping

**Discussion**

The responsible leadership was found to have a significant impact on employee creativity. It is suggested that responsible leadership influences employees' creativity. Moreover, the study found a significance relationship of RL and KS. In addition, the study also found a significance relationship of KS and EC. The study also revealed that responsible leadership and employees' creativity are mediated significantly by knowledge sharing

**Implications**

The present research adds to the literature on the mediating role of KS on the relationship between RL and PSC. Therefore, the present study provides several implications. First, there should be a focus on the administrative staff as well as the teaching staff in public sector universities. This study takes a limited theoretical stance in relation to earlier research on responsible leadership. This research creates a framework based on SLT and SET, one of the paradigms in organizational behavior with

the highest conceptual way. This study is one of the few to concentrate on the various aspects of responsible leadership, demonstrating how RL may be a major stimulant of employees' creativity in public sector universities.

This research varies from prior studies in that the previous studies focused on the teaching area only (i.e. Al-Husseini, Beltagi, & Moiser, 2021; Siswanto et al., 2022; Hassan, et al., 2019), but the present study focused on the administrative staff in the public sector higher education institutions, (universities), which is often overlooked in the literature.

## Conclusion

This study examined employees' creativity through the mediation of knowledge sharing to examine the effects of responsible leadership. There is a significant impact of RL on EC in higher education institutions. Furthermore, responsible leadership was found to be an effective leadership style to improve creative abilities in administrative employees in educational settings. Knowledge sharing plays an important role in mediating the relationship between RL and EC.

## Limitations and future directions

This research has presented the comprehensive model for employees' creativity, but still it has some limitations. These limitations can be considered by the future studies focusing on employees' creativity and leadership. First, this study has focused on the administrative employees. Future studies can consider the academic employees and investigate their creativity. Secondly, this study focus on responsible leadership style, other leadership style can be examined by future researchers. Thirdly, present study focused only on public sector universities of the province Punjab, Future researchers may expand the horizon to HEIs across the country, with an emphasis on private sector universities. other variables i.e. organizational culture, knowledge donation and knowledge can also be accumulated as mediating variables to gain deeper insights.

## Recommendations

It is important that universities should focus not only on the creativity of teaching staff members but also the creativity of administrative employees, since the administrative employees are responsible for the smooth functioning of teaching activities. A responsible leadership style is recommended from a practical perspective to encourage knowledge sharing among employees and encourage their creativity in HEIs.

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