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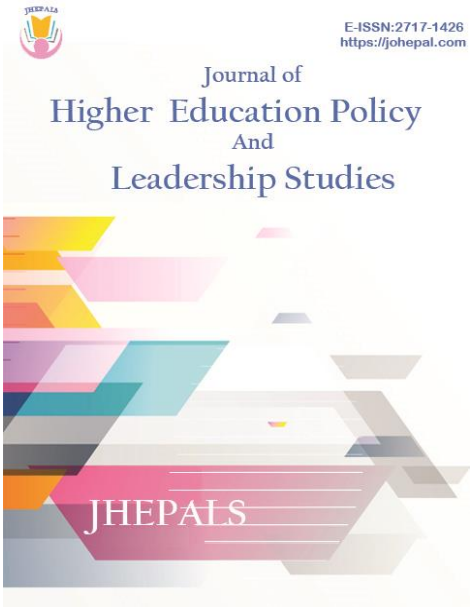
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# Examining the Relationship between Knowledge Sharing and Leadership Learning among Staff in Higher Education Institutions




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# Examining the Relationship between Knowledge Sharing and Leadership Learning among Staff in Higher Education Institutions

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## Abstract

College and university personnel contribute directly and indirectly to leadership learning in higher education. Academic and administrative staff often contribute to leadership development, whether through formal training or as a byproduct of their daily work. However, the contributions of these individuals— particularly in knowledge sharing and management— remain underexplored in higher education research. This literature review identifies key gaps in the existing scholarship and offers directions for future inquiry into leadership learning among staff in higher education settings. The review highlights individual factors (such as attitude, behavior, and motivation) and organizational factors (including culture, trust, and workplace spirituality) that influence knowledge sharing. By examining the dynamic process of knowledge management in colleges and universities, this article emphasizes the critical role staff play in cultivating individual and collective leadership capacity.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Sharing; Leadership Learning; Staff; Higher Education; Distributed Leadership

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## Introduction

College and university personnel contribute directly and indirectly to leadership learning in higher education. Many of the individuals engaged in this work include academic and administrative staff, some of whom hold formal training in leadership education and others for whom leadership development is an unplanned byproduct of their efforts. In their leadership learning framework, Guthrie and Jenkins (2018, 2024) call attention to the ways in which leadership educators intentionally create and contribute to a learning experience. Leadership learning occurs through a variety of practices, including ways that are direct (engagement), indirect (observation), reflective (development), skills-based (training), and systemic (metacognition) (Guthrie and Jenkins; 2018, 2024). Invoking the imagery of a steering wheel, the authors describe how educators create meaningful opportunities for leadership learning when students possess have agency to steer their learning (Guthrie & Jenkins, 2018). This paper attempts to broaden the framework beyond students to consider the role of college and university staff who play a central or peripheral role in the leadership learning of others throughout the community. Furthermore, by introducing the subject of knowledge sharing among this population, we can explore more fully the ways in which this practice contributes to the leadership learning framework.

In organizational contexts characterized as distributed, loosely coupled, and highly relational, college and university staff play an increasingly significant role in the leadership learning of colleagues, students, and other members of the community with whom they engage. To extend the imagery of the steering wheel, how might staff share knowledge and cultivate relationships with others as they engage directly or indirectly in the collective work of leadership education? Within the context of higher education, this investigation into knowledge management and knowledge sharing among professional staff may help shed insight into the processes and mechanisms of leadership learning—a dynamic exchange that contributes to the development of one's leadership identity, capacity, and efficacy.

## Knowledge Management and Knowledge Sharing

The intersection of knowledge management, knowledge sharing, and leadership learning in higher education remains a fruitful area of research. The section that follows provides an overview of these focal concepts, a summary of the relevant literature in these areas, and a synthesis of points of connection to the context of higher education. As discussed more fully in later sections, beginning with a set of shared definitions and concepts may prove especially useful in helping to advance future research at the intersection of these domains.

### Knowledge Management

The concept of knowledge management was initially introduced and outlined in the 1970s by Peter Drucker and Paul Strassman, both management practitioners and researchers. Knowledge management was defined as a system that captured knowledge, made personal knowledge available to others, contributed to a people-to-knowledge-to-people loop, and finally, used this knowledge to facilitate the management of resources within an organization. Building upon Drucker and Strassman's writing, knowledge management systems focused on the use of information and knowledge as an organizational resource. Early knowledge management systems included "Augment" in 1978, an application that

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interfaced with other computer applications, and the "Knowledge Management System" created by Rob Acksyn and Don McCraken.

Academic and practical research into knowledge management and sharing in organizations was pioneered at MIT. This body of research included examinations of information and technology transfer within an organization and the ways that computer technology could be used to store and access this information. In the period to follow, knowledge was increasingly seen as a commodity and as an organizational advantage that could allow companies to be more competitive (Sullivan, 2016). The research conducted by organizational scholar, Ikujiro Nonaka (1991, 1994, 2007), were particularly influential in describing knowledge creation and the role of explicit and tacit knowledge.

### *What is Knowledge?*

The expansion of social science research in the last two decades have continued to shape our understanding of issues related to both knowledge and knowing within the context of organizations. As explained by Kuhn and Jackson (2008), "knowledge" is a noun and "connotates stable objects, facts, and dispositions," while "knowing" is a verb that "suggests action as the active and ongoing accomplishment of problem solving" (p. 455). These definitions can be deconstructed further into examinations of both explicit and tacit knowledge. For example, explicit knowledge involves knowledge that is "formal and systematic" (Nonaka, 2007, p. 165), and able to be expressed easily using communication tools (visual, audio, or written). This form of knowledge—described as "what you know you know" —can be passed along to others. Examples of explicit knowledge in organizations include analytic codes, standard operating procedures, and official organizational policies. Conversely, tacit or implicit knowledge is "highly personal…hard to formalize" (Nonaka, 2007, p. 165), and is not easily expressed using communication tools because of the ways in which it is embedded in how work is accomplished. This form of knowledge may be understood as "what you don't know you know." Examples of implicit knowledge in organizations include choosing the appropriate language in an email to influence a decision, selecting which angle to pursue when engaged in a negotiation, or determining which prospective candidate may be the "right fit" for one's team.

### *Knowledge Sharing:*

The process of knowledge sharing involves the dissemination of information, skills, ideas, and experiences between individuals or groups. The sharing of explicit knowledge is objectively easier since it can be written down and shared via documents, lectures, webinars, or any variety of written and oral communication methods. Converting the knowledge that is tacit to explicit is more nuanced. In addition to the complex thought processes and time commitment required to turn these embodied practices into easily sharable communications, there may be additional reasons for hesitation in organizations. When "knowledge is power," individuals may not be easily convinced to distribute this power. Giving up or sharing this knowledge may be uncomfortable, particularly for individuals who view access to information as a symbol of status or as critical to maintaining their job and progressing in one's career. However, in the context of organizations, and

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certainly across colleges and universities, there is a need to rely on others in order to accomplish tasks or achieve goals (Lin, 2007).

An alternative to tacit-to-explicit knowledge sharing is tacit-to-tacit knowledge sharing. This can be accomplished via "mentoring, on-the-job experiences, and apprenticeships," although these methods limit the sharing to a smaller group than what might be possible through tacit-to-explicit methods (Bukowitz & Williams, 1999). As opposed to being written down, silent transfers of knowledge often become ingrained through socialization and active acts of "doing."

### *Organizations and Knowledge Sharing:*

Nonaka's (1995) knowledge-creating model brings together the need for explicit and tacit knowledge management and the interactions between the two in what he calls a "knowledge-creating" model. He focused on the importance of converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge in organizations, which would help to make this knowledge available to others through a process involving the linking of seemingly unrelated or contradictory ideas, making sense and ordering these ideas, and developing a model that could be shared with others (Nonaka, 2007). It is this conversion of tacit-to-explicit knowledge that builds an innovative organization—and hinges upon the sharing and exchange of knowledge for organizational success. Eventually, tacit knowledge becomes explicit and new knowledge is allowed to develop during a cyclical process, allowing for more knowing to develop as knowledge becomes routine.

Many have noted that knowledge sharing is vital to an organization's success. As Gure and Sharma (2019) noted, "having knowledge is meaningless unless it is shared and allowed to be used by others" (p. 7). Producing and sharing knowledge with others is one of the fundamental pillars of education. Indeed, long before the written word, scholars have been sharing knowledge and using existing knowledge to advance new knowledge. While the sharing of this knowledge with others is vital to organizational success, it is not without potential barriers. These barriers may include culture (organizational, personal, national), levels of trust between members of an organization, perceived or actual time commitment, support from leadership, budget for knowledge management tools, and varying levels of willingness to use knowledge management technology (Al-Kurdi et al., 2018; Mazorodze & Buckley, 2019).

## Knowledge Sharing in Higher Education

Institutions of higher education are exemplars of knowledge creation and dissemination. Students from across the globe attend these institutions to advance knowledge for personal and professional reasons and then continue to share this newly acquired knowledge with others. Within the context of leadership education and development, for example, explicit knowledge is shared through lectures and readings, while tacit knowledge is shared through advising meetings, internships, and mentorship opportunities. Students may seek to absorb new knowledge from expert faculty, and as indicated through the leadership learning framework and other models, students must often take on an active role in their own learning journeys. Research institutions serve an important role in not only sharing knowledge, but also in producing and generating new knowledge.

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### *Knowledge Sharing & Leadership among Staff*

If one equates teaching and learning with knowledge sharing, we might expect institutions of higher education to be exemplars for effective knowledge-sharing. However, as a topic of research, knowledge sharing in higher education is a relatively new area of inquiry, with more research in this area being conducted in the context of business and public settings. Calling attention to the importance of this practice in higher education, Rowley (2000) noted the following: "Universities need to be consciously and explicitly managing the processes associated with the creation of their knowledge assets, and to recognize the value of their intellectual capital to their continuing role in society, and in a wider global marketplace" (p. 331).

An exploratory investigation of the existing literature detailed in this article indicates that much of the research on knowledge sharing in higher education institutions has focused on the organization as a whole and the knowledge sharing practices of individuals serving in faculty roles. Contributing to the limits of knowledge-sharing practices within colleges and universities at all levels are the silos that are created and enforced via existing disciplinary structures. Disciplines provide a mechanism for the organization, production, and sharing of knowledge in higher education (Menand, 2001). These organizational silos are long-standing and are the result of hundreds of years of practice and policy. As colleges and universities expand in size and scope, these silos are often reinforced and have the potential to contribute to the creation of additional siloes. Each new unit, department, and school remains connected at only the top levels of leadership, while the connections across the most local levels remain less stable.

Referring to this feature of weak interdependence across parts of a system as "loose coupling" (Weick, 1976), these decentralized entities remain individual and separate, and disturbances in one part of the system have little impact on other loosely connected individual units or the entire organization. In such a structure, the lack of interdependence influences the extent to which individuals and units share knowledge across the enterprise. This pattern seems to then reinforce the natural silos organized around discipline, which in turn create potential barriers to knowledge sharing.

It has been said that "there are few more rigid and siloed organizations than American universities" (LeBlanc, 2018, p. 23). The top of the hierarchy is more tightly coupled given the relationship between the president and their leadership team, and this coupling tends to loosen in the relationships between units and divisions. The organization tends to become more siloed as one moves further down the vertical structure, resulting in an expanded pyramid marked by breadth and complexity. Many of the individuals who work across the organization are staff—an employee group who may be a largely untapped resource for understanding knowledge sharing and management within the context of their daily work. For example, staff who work in academic departments, centers, or institutes may perform similar tasks with others in comparable roles, and depending on the size and culture of the institution, they may have few opportunities to engage with others to discover this overlap. It is very possible that because of the vertical structure, staff within each unit may reinvent the wheel for routine tasks. Why, when, what, and how these staff share knowledge remains largely unexamined. As it relates to the scope of this article, leadership learning is both dynamic and multifaceted, and both research and practice may benefit from additional investigations into the interplay of knowledge management and leadership learning. More

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specifically, what might be perceived as limited opportunities for interaction and knowledge sharing among staff also raises important questions and implications for leadership learning across this population and may influence how these individuals lean upon one another in their direct and indirect leadership education and development efforts across the institution.

## Distributed Leadership in Higher Education

One final area of existing research that requires specific acknowledgement involves the practice of distributed leadership in higher education. Initially outlined by Jones et al. (2012), the distributed leadership framework within colleges and universities involves a collaborative approach to leadership that considers and draws upon the collective expertise of faculty and staff who work across an institution. While more traditional leadership frameworks tend to center on hierarchical forms of influence, distributed leadership is characterized as more inclusionary and reflective of the spirit of colleges and universities (Holcombe et al., 2022; Ruben et al., 2021). Distributed leadership in higher education consists of five pillars—context, culture, change, relationships, and activity—and we might consider the role of knowledge sharing at the intersection of culture and relationships. While faculty often concentrate on their specific disciplinary areas, staff work is generally more collaborative and cross-functional in nature. By leveraging the distinct expertise of each constituent group, a distributed leadership model increases the potential for innovation and leads to more successful project outcomes (Jones, 2012, p. 73).

Some previous research has been conducted on the relationship between distributed leadership and the dynamics of knowledge sharing. Recent work in Malaysia, for example, proposed a distributed leadership framework to improve the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in higher education institutions, using knowledge sharing and management as an independent variable in the success of their program (Lei et al., 2024). Another study conducted in Cambodia reported a significant positive relationship between knowledge sharing and distributed leadership across employees from ten private and public universities (Hem, 2022).

Traditional assumptions of leadership in higher education include a generalized “lack of systemic approaches” to developing leaders as well as limited attention devoted to succession and transition planning for future leadership positions (Ruben et al., 2021, p. 19). For college and university staff, this may mean that they are limited in, or perhaps losing out on, opportunities for mentorship that may provide some of the tacit knowledge sharing necessary as they take on more formal leadership positions and responsibilities within the organization. Using a dynamic leadership model can promote knowledge sharing in colleges and universities (Asbari et al., 2023), ultimately allowing for continued innovation and improved organizational outcomes. The expertise of staff may be overlooked by some throughout the organization; however, when staff are meaningfully included, we see the ways in which their contributions shape the ultimate success of new initiatives, strategies, plans, and processes. Indeed, the work of leadership in higher education is distributed, and the challenges facing contemporary colleges and universities hinge upon the effective coordination, collaboration, and engagement of both faculty and staff personnel. To succeed in this effort, both knowledge sharing and leadership learning serve a critical function.

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## Research Questions

This article aims to identify research gaps surrounding knowledge sharing among staff in higher education institutions and to interrogate what these gaps might mean for the study and practice of leadership learning in higher education. Fan and Beh (2024) exhibited the distribution of published articles on knowledge sharing in higher education, without including distinction among faculty and staff personnel, beginning in 2008 with one article and increasing to ten in 2020, before decreasing to five the following year. Despite making up a more sizeable percentage of the higher education workforce at an estimated ratio of 4.5 to 1 at R1 universities, research related to staff remains an understudied area of focus. In 2022, the reported counts include 623,895 non-instructional employees and 139,272 instructional employees (assistant through full professor). Non-instructional employees include operations, finance, management, research, administrative, IT, and librarians among others (Doctoral Universities, n.d.). There is a rich opportunity to study university staff across the full range of positions they occupy in terms of how these individuals come to understand, manage, and share their professional knowledge and to explore questions and considerations for how knowledge sharing might contribute to and enhance leadership learning. Given the critical role staff play in the work of higher education, their contributions to the creation and sharing of knowledge that allow for organizational excellence, and their direct and indirect involvement in leadership education and development efforts, we use the following research questions to guide the work of this article:

- $RQ_1$: How does the current literature address issues related to the practice of knowledge sharing among staff at institutions of higher education?
- $RQ_2$: What questions and implications might the research gaps related to staff knowledge sharing in higher education suggest for the study and practice of leadership learning in higher education?

## Methodology

The methodology for this article followed a modified version of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) 2020 Statement for conducting systematic literature reviews (Page et al., 2021). The statement was developed to assist in reporting on reviews in a transparent manner and includes a flow chart and checklist for authors to utilize before, during, and after conducting systematic reviews. Although initially designed for reviews of health intervention literature, parts of the checklist are also applicable to reviews with different aims, including mixed methods systematic reviews as well as original, updated, or living reviews. This review will utilize the flow diagram (Figure 1) for new systematic reviews using a search of databases and registrars.

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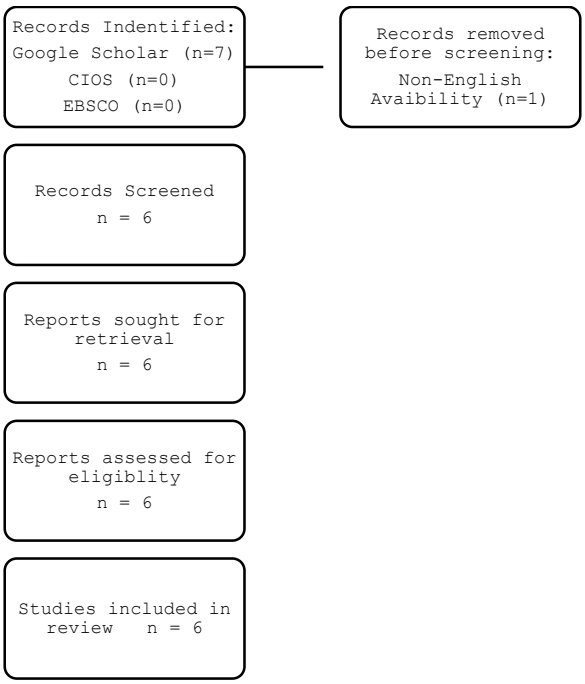



Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow chart for final sample selection of publications to be included in literature review for knowledge sharing among non-academics in higher education institutions.

## Search Strategy

After conducting an initial exploratory search to develop an overall impression of the topic, the keywords and phrases were narrowed to include those ultimately used in the included electronic databases. For example, distinguishing among faculty and staff roles in peer-reviewed publications took trial and error to determine a consistent word choice across journals and domains. Colloquially, "faculty" is used to encompass employees who hold titles of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor. The "Instructor" and "Lecturer" titles may be collapsed under the faculty title. For these searches, "academic staff" was used in place of "faculty" or specific titles.

The term "staff" encompasses an even broader group of individuals employed by higher education institutions. This group includes office and administrative support, service personnel, operations, management, research, IT, maintenance, legal, and communications professionals among others (Doctoral Universities, n.d.). For these searches, and this article, "non-academic staff" is used to incorporate all of these employees. Occasionally, "non-instructional" or "professional" staff are also used to describe this population.

Searches were conducted using three electronic databases: Google Scholar, EBSCOhost- Communication & Mass Media ("EBSCO"), and the Communication Institute for Online Scholarship ("CIOS"). The search and subsequent sample selection were done manually, with no use of assisted technology to sort returned results.

## Inclusion Criteria

All three databases were searched using the keyword phrase "knowledge sharing" and "non-academic staff" within the title of the article. To be included, both search keywords needed to be in the title and the article needed to be published between 2014 and 2024. Book

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chapters, dissertations, duplicates, non-peer reviewed articles, and articles not available in English were removed before abstract screening.

Final Sample Selection

Of the three databases searched, only Google Scholar returned articles that met the inclusion criteria (n=7). There were no duplicate articles and only one was removed prior to screening due to non-English availability. The remaining six records were sought for retrieval and successfully acquired. All six were assessed for eligibility based on the inclusion criteria and included.

## Results

Although the systematic review returned only a limited number of articles that met all inclusion criteria, an analysis of the final sample of articles led to the identification of individual and organizational factors that influence knowledge sharing among staff in higher education. The decision to utilize a narrow set of inclusion criteria allowed for a more focused article review, and the initial results from this exploratory study point to various research gaps that might provide future directions for scholars and practitioners with interests in this topic. Finally, as will be discussed in the forthcoming sections, the initial findings from this literature review raise questions regarding the impact of knowledge sharing on leadership learning among this population, and may also contribute to how we think about the role of staff in contributing to formal and informal leadership learning opportunities throughout their institutions.

### Descriptive Summary

Of the six articles included in the final sample, four had the same first author and utilized one survey for separate analysis. The two remaining articles had the same first and second authors and used one set of data for separate analysis per publication. Table 1 lists the included publications.

Table 1.
Publications Included in Review

| First Author | Title | Journal | Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eletter et al. | The impact of attitude and subjective norm on knowledge-sharing behaviour among the non-academic staff: Behavioural intention as a mediating variable | *Journal of Information & Knowledge Management* | 2023 |
| Kaba et al. | Demographic differences in attitude, subjective norms, behavioral intention, and knowledge sharing behavior: an empirical study of non-academic staff from India and the UAE | *VINE Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems* | 2025 |
| Rahman et al. | Knowledge sharing behaviour among non-academic staff in higher learning institutes: The role of trust and perceived risk | *Knowledge Management & E-Learning* | 2018 |
| Rahman et al. | Generation "X" and "Y" knowledge sharing behaviour: The influence of motivation and intention on non-academic staff of higher learning institutions | *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* | 2017 |

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|---|---|---|---|
| Rahman et al. | Knowledge sharing behaviors among non academic staff of higher learning institutions: Attitude, subjective norms and behavioral intention embedded model | *Library Review* | 2016 |
| Rahman et al. | Trust and work place spirituality on knowledge sharing behaviour: Perspective from non-academic staff of higher learning institutions | *The Learning Organization* | 2015 |

## Findings

Findings from the literature review were categorized using the Amin Tuni-Durga Prasad Knowledge Sharing Practices Framework (AT-DP KSPF) (Gure & Sharma, 2019). The framework was developed based on previous studies that proposed barriers affecting knowledge sharing within institutions of higher education, including both individual and organizational factors, with technology helping to facilitate knowledge sharing. The primary goals of the framework are:

1. To identify the factors that hinder academic staff to not share their professional knowledge like research findings, project outcomes, and failure stories.
2. To transform the work culture from legacy or traditional practices to modern ones with scientific approaches and technology-enabled practices.
3. To develop a common and standard framework to help and support the salient stakeholders of the higher learning institutions towards adopting such practices with next-generation tools and techniques (Gure & Sharma, 2019).

During screening of the included studies, individual and organizational factors to knowledge sharing were discussed heavily, while there were no mentions of technology as a facilitator or otherwise. Further close reading of each article confirmed that technology was not considered and thus this element of the framework will not be discussed in this article.

### Individual Factors

Staff from higher education institutions in India, UAE, and Malaysia were invited to consider the individual factors that may affect their professional knowledge sharing. Of the studies included, questionnaires were designed to assess these factors by Rahman et al. (2015) and either used directly or slightly modified/added to by Eletter et al. (2023).

Attitudes on knowledge sharing were evaluated using a series of four questions utilizing a Lickert scale response, initially developed by Rahman et al. (2016) and later used by Eletter and Kaba (2023). Questions probed knowledge-sharing with fellow staff as positive, enjoyable, valuable, and "wise." Findings showed that staff over 50 years old and those with at least 10 years of experience indicated a more positive attitude towards knowledge sharing (Eletter et al., 2023; Kaba et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2016). Additionally, staff who reported a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing found it to be a more enjoyable and valuable practice Eletter et al., 2023).

The intention to share knowledge was studied by Eletter et al. (2023) with findings suggesting that staff of the age of 30–39, with four years or less of experience, and engaged in non-managerial positions showed greater likelihood of intention to share. Overall,

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intention to share among colleagues and across departments was determined to be seen as positive. Intention was also a mediating factor in attitude towards and behavior of knowledge sharing.

The actual behavior of knowledge sharing was assessed using four questions (e.g., knowledge sharing as a benefit, knowledge sharing should be conducted with colleagues only when approached, knowledge sharing should be done voluntarily, and knowledge sharing occurs when considering the needs of others). Findings from Rahman et al. (2016), Eletter et al. (2023), and Kaba et al. (2025) again found that those over 50 years of age and those with at least 10 years of experience were most likely to participate in knowledge sharing behaviors. Eletter et al. (2023) found that non-managerial staff were more likely to engage in these behaviors as were males. They also determined that voluntary knowledge sharing was seen as a benefit to all staff. Rahman et al.'s (2016) findings included positive association with an agreement to share knowledge and one's ability to solve problems, model fairness and patience in interactions with others, and higher personal satisfaction, particularly among those who engage with colleagues who reciprocate with their own knowledge sharing behaviors.

Relationships between individual factors were included in the findings from these studies. Among them, the motivation to share knowledge and behavior. Motivation to share knowledge was explored in the Rahman et al. (2017) article focusing on differences in GenX and GenY staff. Motivational constructs included manager support, rewards (financial and non-financial), decision-making, positive relationships with colleagues, trust, and enjoyment in helping others. Findings included intergenerational differences in motivation as a moderator of intention and knowledge sharing behavior.

Workplace spirituality emerged as an additional variable influencing knowledge sharing, functioning as both an individual and organizational factor. It reflects an individual's internal experiences and how these are shaped or expressed through the external workplace environment (Rahman et al., 2015). Findings from this literature review indicate that a positive work culture, which was embedded within workplace spirituality, was necessary to improving knowledge sharing behaviors.

## Organizational Factors

Two primary organizational factors were identified as impacting knowledge sharing among staff personnel—subjective norms and culture, which consists of trust, perceived risk, and workplace spirituality.

Subjective norms, which include perception of social expectations, were found to be most positive for staff in management positions (Rahman et al., 2016; Kaba et al., 2025), but more positive for non-management positions in Eletter's et al. (2023) analysis. Again, males and those 50 years or older and those with four years or less of work experience showed higher positive responses to subjective norms. Eletter et al. (2023) reported responses that staff follow their boss's decision on knowledge sharing and respect others' decisions on knowledge sharing. Findings also reported that intention mediated subjective norms (Eletter et al., 2023).

A culture of knowledge sharing was found to be supported by both Generation X staff (born 1965–1980) and Generation Y, or Millennials (born 1981–1996). A culture that

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included recognition, participation in decision-making, and the presence of high interpersonal trust was a positive indicator of knowledge sharing behaviors (Rahman et al., 2017). When staff perceived a higher risk associated with knowledge sharing, trust in colleagues and the frequency of knowledge sharing behaviors were limited and generally less positive (Rahman et al., 2015). Behavior was influenced by trust of fellow staff and staff who were more willing to share when perceived risk is low (Rahman et al., 2018).

## Discussion

These initial findings demonstrate that despite making up a more than sizable portion of all employees at higher education institutions, our understanding of knowledge sharing activities among college and university staff remains shallow and preliminary. Although some research has been done to explore issues related to this population, little is known about how, when, why, what, and with whom knowledge is shared among this group. The studies described in this review tended to focus on who, when, and why staff engage in these behaviors. We would encourage an extension of this scholarly and practical inquiry to consider both the individual and organizational factors that shape knowledge sharing among staff in higher education.

The findings from this systematic literature review point to several preliminary themes. First, those over 50 years in age, who have at least 10 years of professional experience, are more likely to share knowledge. Second, those in managerial positions sometimes contribute to behavior that either inhibits, encourages, or facilitates knowledge sharing. Third, intention to share knowledge mediates knowledge sharing behavior. Fourth, there are generational differences in knowledge sharing behaviors and beliefs. Fifth, organizational culture around knowledge sharing is important, and includes trust, perceived risk, and workplace spirituality. These initial findings provide a foundation upon which future research might build.

As it relates to the leadership learning focus of this special issue, a culture that supports and encourages knowledge sharing may be the ultimate basis for successful knowledge sharing across higher education—and these cultural elements may also shape the ways in which college and university personnel, including staff, engage in the multidimensional approaches to leadership learning. Referring to the various approaches detailed by Guthrie and Jenkins (2018, 2024), leadership learning occurs through a number of practices: direct (engagement), indirect (observation), reflective (development), skills-based (training), and systemic (metacognition). As we build upon this shift from an educator-centered to learner-centered paradigm, we might consider the extent to which a positive organizational culture can help to cultivate the conditions for knowledge creation and knowledge sharing among staff. With greater opportunities for knowledge sharing, the leadership learning that might result in these interactions may ultimately contribute to deeper levels of individual and organizational excellence, especially given the highly relational and distributed features of contemporary higher education institutions. Leaders in higher education, including those in staff roles, who create an environment of trust and who encourage knowledge sharing, may likely help to attract and retain personnel who engage in similar knowledge sharing behaviors. Future research may explore the factors

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involved in creating this culture, especially given the rapidly changing work context across higher education.

## Research Gaps

The findings from this preliminary review seem to signal a dearth of research related to knowledge sharing in higher education, and based upon our review, we seek to highlight various gaps that are particularly important to consider as we prompt future research on this topic and population.

### *Gap 1: Staff are not a primary research focus*.

An initial search using keywords such as "knowledge sharing," "knowledge management," and "higher education institutions" primarily yielded studies focused on faculty, with a few including both faculty and staff. Fewer than ten peer-reviewed publications specifically examined non-academic staff.

### *Gap 2: Primarily international studies.*

The articles included in this review included studies of non-academic staff at universities in Malaysia, India, and UAE. A systemic literature review published in 2024 reviewed knowledge sharing among academics in higher education. Of the 50 articles included in their review from 2001-2021, only one study reviewed knowledge sharing in North America, focusing specifically on faculty at a public higher education institution in the United States (Khalil & Shea, 2012). This article did not solicit responses from the institution's nonacademic employees.

### *Gap 3: Includes all staff, not narrowed into categories.*

Of the articles included in this review, "non-academic staff" were grouped together as one cohort. However, as noted previously, this group consists of many groups with vastly varied functions, responsibilities, and levels of experience. It is reasonable to expect that different categories of staff may identify distinct individual and organizational factors influencing their willingness to engage in knowledge sharing.

### *Gap 4: Evolving work environments post COVID-19.*

The studies included in this review appear to have been conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the significant shifts in the workplace that resulted from this pandemic, it is likely that one might also identify a shift in the individual and organizational factors that impact knowledge sharing. Thes changes in the workplace include more fully remote and hybrid work environments, an increase in the variety and use of technology to communicate, and a new generation of employees beginning their careers during and immediately following the highly disruptive period.

## Future Research

Building upon these identified gaps, we propose the following implications for future research that responds to the strategic knowledge management directions outlined by

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Barley, et al. (2019) who frame knowledge management as a process of organizational change with an additional focus on knowledge networks. Two of their research questions focus on how different levels of organizational networks' knowledge sharing influence knowledge management at others levels of the network and how describing an organizational knowledge network provided by knowledge management efforts influence shared and new knowledge within the organization.

As a process of change, knowledge (and knowledge sharing/management) should not be viewed as a static event, but rather as a process that is both active and ongoing. Much like the process of leadership learning, it might take on many different forms and is likely to extend throughout the lifecycle of one's employment. To understand how organizations manage their knowledge dynamically, it may prove beneficial to conduct extended studies that focus on the "networks of action" (Barley, 2018, p. 297). These types of network research may provide additional insight into multi-level organizational knowledge management and sharing processes.

In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been dramatic shifts in how organizations accomplish work (Zuzul et al., 2023). Institutions of higher education were not immune to these changes as hybrid and remote work became options for many staff whose primary functions do not include face-to-face requirements (Gigliotti, 2020, 2021; Kim, 2023). With these changes, come changes in how these organizations manage and help to support the exchange, creation, and distribution of knowledge. This shift in work modality also creates new options for how we share knowledge using technologies to facilitate these communications. Future research may explore how staff engage in the creation and sharing of knowledge in an increasingly hybrid or remote workplace, and the implications for how they lead, learn about leadership, and encourage the leadership development of others.

Technological facilitators in knowledge sharing were not discussed in the articles featured in this review, however these facilitators likely play a significant role for staff working in higher education. Consider, for example, the use of social media as a tool for knowledge sharing. Referred to as "enterprise social networking," this involves the use of social media as a tool for workplace communication and collaboration (Corcoran & Duane, 2018). Examples of this form of social media include MS Teams, Google Workspace, Yammer, or Slack. In a study of enterprise social networking in higher education in the UK (Kazemian & Grant, 2023), researchers focused on the reasons for academics' use of platforms in knowledge sharing, including receipt and contribution. We might consider how staff leverage existing technologies to create and share knowledge related to their work responsibilities, and the impact these technologies play in how staff exercise leadership and social influence in these distributed and decentralized organizations. This area of focus will be especially critical as we consider the evolving role of digitally native employees in the higher education workplace.

Another gap exposed in this research centers on the lack of focus placed on the different types of staff in higher education. In much of the current literature, staff are grouped together despite the wide variety of jobs they hold. As we consider the diverse staff who help to support the mission of the institution, we can recognize the active role that many play in the work of developing student leaders and the ways in which staff help to nurture and cultivate the leadership development of others in the workplace. Certainly, this happens through formal leadership development mechanisms and learning opportunities,

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and it also seems to be a byproduct of active collaboration that bring together faculty and staff in curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular endeavors. As it relates to the creation and sharing of knowledge, the ability to forge meaningful collaborations across knowledge networks may play a key role in helping to streamline work processes and allow for increased knowledge in helping to develop and contribute to innovation and increased leadership effectiveness (Corcoran & Duane, 2019).

Finally, as evidenced by many of the studies featured in this article, the study of knowledge sharing among staff in the United States remains an area for future investigation. Future research may expand upon these various lines of inquiry to explore the impact of culture, norms, environment, and a shifting policy landscape to consider the practice of knowledge sharing in the collaborative efforts across American higher education institutions—and the role that formal and informal approaches to employee leadership development may have on these knowledge sharing practices (Gigliotti et al., 2025). Given the many challenges and pressures weighing on these institutions, this research will help to deepen our understanding of the role staff play in helping to broker knowledge in pursuit of shared institutional goals and strategies.

## Conclusion

An underserved research population, higher education staff make up a sizeable segment of the workforce and play a critical role in the mission and vitality of these institutions. Gaining a better understanding of their knowledge-sharing behaviors and beliefs surrounding knowledge-sharing will contribute to the advancement of a culture that supports and promotes these behaviors, with the potential for more engaged and satisfied employees who positively impact the mission of our colleges and universities. Furthermore, in the spirit of this volume, the ability to co-construct and share knowledge will likely contribute to one's leadership effectiveness and efficacy (Guthrie & Devies, 2024). The growth, development, and evolution of one's leadership efficacy hinges upon the ability to tap into the knowledge and insights of one's community, and the ability to learn from and support others in the pursuit of shared goals, tasks, and mission. As the higher education workplace continues to evolve and as the federal policy landscape continues to undergo dramatic shifts, this subject remains a critical area of focus as knowledge sharing practices and knowledge sharing networks likewise evolve with these changes.

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