

## ETHICAL PRACTICES AND EMPLOYEE'S CREATIVITY IN ORGANIZATION IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

By

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### ABSTRACT

Scandalous incidents that have occurred in well-known firms around the world have brought attention to the need of best practices in forming an organization's ethical culture. Additionally, success in business depends on understanding its regulations. However, after a thorough and selective review of numerous studies conducted in various organizational occupational contexts and countries, it was conclusively shown that employees' creativity was positively correlated with ethical leadership. This study aimed to contribute to the literature on organizational behavior in developing nations by investigating the effects of creative employees in south-south Nigeria on ethical practices in the context of rule breaking, psychological safety climate, shared leadership, and knowledge sharing. In this study, a cross-sectional survey questionnaire was used. Quantitative research methodology comes next. The study's sample consisted of 375 workers from agro-based industries, transportation corporations, financial institutions, tourism/hospitality enterprises, and petroleum companies that operate in Nigeria's south-south states. Using measures of ethical behavior, rule breaking, psychological safety climate, shared leadership, and knowledge sharing, data from 375 employees (450 men and 150 women) during two time periods were calculated. STATA 13.0, a statistical software program, was used to analyze data. According to the statistical studies, employees' creativity was positively correlated with rule breaking, psychological safety, shared leadership, and information sharing. By highlighting ethical behavior as a crucial component of creativity, the current study expands on the social learning theory. The results have some ramifications for people management, particularly with regard to the practicality and selection of best practices. In order to improve employees' inventive solutions in firms, managers may find the study useful in addressing the aspects that impact creativity.

**Keywords:** *Ethical leadership; rule breaking, psychological safety climate; knowledge sharing; innovation and creativity.*

**JEL Classification:** *I31, G41, D80, D83, M10*

### INTRODUCTION

Organizational leaders and regulators must create best practices to prevent financial and ethical fraud. Unpredictable behavioral outcomes of prominent corporate organization dealings have been shown by a survey (Eze, Nnabuko & Etuk, 2014). Unabated scholars, academics, and management consultants have established the need for creativity and ethical behavioral outcomes as a pivotal for change, which is why organizations are placing a great

deal of emphasis on developing and nurturing a culture of creativity (Thompsons 2018). Well-established facts about corporate dishonesty have been displayed by organizations like Enron, Tyco, and World Com (Mayer et al. 2011). Through well-established ethical standards among employees, creative leaders inspire and create standards for sustainability and resilience in addressing complex and ambiguous challenges (Masianoge & Govender, 2023; Yan et al., 2023). The impact of ethical leadership on rule-breaking, psychological safety, shared leadership, and knowledge sharing has not yet been addressed, although numerous studies have looked at the relationship between ethical leadership and creativity (Mastanoga & Governder, 2023; Hae-Ryong Kim & Byung-lik Kim, 2021, Boldogan & Aksoy, 2023; Petrou, Linden & Salcescu, 2018; Tu, Lu, Choi & Guo, 2018).

First, the existing research on the relationship between creativity and ethical leadership has shown conflicting findings. Nonetheless, some research has shown that ethical leadership enhances workers' creative qualities, such as idea generation, idea exploration, and idea championing (Masianoga & Govender, 2023), while other studies have found no connection between leadership and creativity (Feng et al., 2018; Mo et al., 2019). Moral leaders and managers are better able to foster an environment where doing the right thing is valued (Brown et al., 2005). This is one example of how ethical leadership has been connected to employee misconduct (Mayer, Kuenzi & Green Baum, 2011). Mayer et al. (2009) expressed similar concerns and called for a review of more theoretical justifications that link creative outcomes to ethical leadership. These justifications should also be empirical in nature. Therefore, there is a strong need to investigate the topic due to the link's theoretical foundation and empirical investigations' inconclusive character. Second, prior research has mostly concentrated on topics pertaining to the conditions of routine work practices, ignoring contextual issues like ethical rule-breaking activities. Since creativity is arguably all about novelty, experimentation, idea generation, exploration, championing, and implementation (Pet Rove et al, 2018; Dickson et al 2001; Kuenzi & Schminlu, 2009), empirical studies are necessary at this point. Third, and perhaps most importantly, previous research on ethical leadership and employee creativity has not fully examined the conditions of psychological and environmental safety for creativity (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

Furthermore, this is because psychological safety captures the qualities of an environment where employees are taking risks and expressing uncertainty when putting forward a new solution, challenging the status of earlier research (Chen & Hou 2016; Nwachukwu et al., 2022; Madjar et al., 2002; Geoge & Zhou, 2007). Efforts to examine the supportive role of leadership in creativity must be addressed. Investigate the relationship between ethical leadership and team and employee creativity in four Nigerian economic sectors (banking,

manufacturing, construction, and education) in order to address the concerns raised above. This study also explores dependent and contextual aspects that explain how ethical leadership influences information sharing, psychological safety climate, shared leadership attributes, and breaching engagement rules. In contrast, this study will provide empirical results to clarify the literature on creativity and leadership and build on earlier research that was mostly done at the individual level (e.g. Chen and Hou, 2016). This allows us to incorporate three aspects of team creativity within the conceptual domain of team-level creativity. Based on uncertainty reduction theory, we identify the psychological safety environment/climate as a critical thought process through which leadership affects team creativity. Secondly, ethical leadership may be especially relevant in reducing the dispersion of creativity among members of the same team, which has been neglected in the literature (Pirola-merto & Mann 2004). This gives this idea fresh perspective.

Third, as a boundary condition of originality, we suggest idea generation, expiry, championing, and execution as creatively supportive strategies that can enhance the impact of moral leadership on fostering team creativity. Theory and practice can be gained from the interaction of these unique creative processes. This study is basically broken up into many components. A theoretical overview, varied conceptualizations, and the hypotheses of our suggested model are briefly introduced at the beginning of this article. The methodology is presented in the second section, the key findings are summarized in the third, and the discussion, conclusion, implications, and future research directions arising from this work are summed up in the fourth.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

Employees undergo change because of their role model, according to the social learning hypothesis. Someone who is regarded by others as credible and attractive is a role model. Being believable and appealing depends on the person's standing and level of authority (Bandura, 1986). Almost anything that can be taught directly can also be learned through vicarious experiences, which involve anticipatorily witnessing the conduct of others and its causes and effects (Bandura, 1986). Therefore, in order to be seen as role models, managers and supervisors must demonstrate excellent credibility in their behavior and adhere to standards of engagement that are seen morally right by their subordinates. The five factors of personality are the main emphasis of this study since they are a suitable way to describe creativity (Madjar et al, 2002; Gong et al, 2012). Individual creativity is influenced by five elements, according to the personality theory: conscientiousness, openness, neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, scholastic success, and workplace performance (Mccvae & Mullet, 2003). Openness involves both intellectual and sensory curiosity and is associated with feelings of pleasure, beauty, and feeling (Mccvae & Costa, 1996). The neuroticism factor is a measure of emotional stability that includes despair, anxiety, rage, and hostility. Extroversion is characterized by warmth, assertiveness, gregariousness, friendliness, and good disposition (Igier & Muller, 2003). In order to understand moral leadership and worker creativity, few studies have applied the five-component personality theory and social learning theory. (George & Zhno, 2011; Baer & Oldham, 2006, Shin 2012, significant, Kuenzi & Green bum, 2010; Omofowa & Omofowa, 2023) This research recommend that the interaction of social learning theory and five personality dimensions enhances leadership quality of integrity, which empowers creativity.

### **Conceptualizing Ethical Leadership**

The display of normative rules toward the activities of individual groups and the development of interpersonal relationships through two-way communication to reach decisions are the definitions of ethical leadership (Hoang et al, 2021; Omofowa et al., 2023; Nazir et al 2021). According to Omofowa et al. (2021) and Na-Nan & Ekkasit (2019), ethical leadership has also evolved into a set of rules for interaction and social communication between leaders and followers. Being normatively acceptable is acting in a way that aligns with the common expectations of how leaders should act in a business setting. Two key components make up ethical leadership. Moral management (e.g., communication, reward, standard, and role modeling) and moral person (e.g., integrity, honesty, and justice) components. The processes via which ethical leadership is linked to employees' creativity have not been thoroughly studied. When an employee tries to come up with new ideas, they use behavioral and corrective processes that are referred to as employee creativity (Hughes et al, 2018). Businesses that aim to obtain a competitive edge through the investigation and exploitation of market opportunities can benefit greatly from creativity, and ethical leadership is a crucial contextual element that must be taken into account (Zhang et al, 2017). One of the most basic demands of employees is autonomy and flexibility, which empowers them to reconsider strategic and risk-taking decisions that may foster innovation, as suggested by Zhang et al. (2017). First, considering how creativity is first defined as improving work inside an organization. As a result, it is logical to believe that, as the definition above suggests, autonomy may nurture creativity or encourage uniqueness. Unrepressed innovative ideas like these could diverge from the objectives of the organization. This demonstrated that certain checks and balances are necessary for autonomy. While ensuring that such innovative or creative ideas do not diverge from organizational goals, ethical leaders must use control measures. Establishing a hierarchical framework, maintaining power distance, and maintaining interpersonal relationships are all necessary for ethical leadership to foster creativity inside an organization. Employee inventiveness is enhanced, and inherent flaws are overcome. Third, leaders that practice ethical leadership treat their subordinates equally regarding their abilities, interests, and tasks, which encouraged team innovation. Employees and the team offer a chance to share information under this system, which depends on team innovation (Dong et al., 2017; Omofowa et al., 2023).

### **Conceptualization of Creativity**

In terms of service delivery, creativity is the result of new and practical ideas (Oldhanz & Cummings, 1996). According to Farh et al. (2010), team level creativity received a lot of research attention because teams are crucial operational units in modern organizations. However, there is still a lack of agreement and understudies of the multi-level characteristics of creativity (Pirola et al., 2004; Tagger 2002). Team creativity, average

member creativity, and dispersion creativity are the three assessment techniques Sacramento et al. (2015) identify for evaluating team level creativity. While the last technique is motivated by the compilation process involving the configuration features of lower-level units, the first two ways represent the composition process in which the group fulfills specific functions of lower-level units (e.g., inter-member interaction, simple combination) (Chan 1998). Researchers have discovered a mixed antecedent for these three measurements, which reflect different aspects of a team's creativity. For instance, mistrust between team leaders and members, personality differences, and differences in ideas and generations can all be barriers to team creativity (Han et al, 2017). Rosso (2014) also discovered that the most significant barriers to team creativity can be related to time, equipment, and human resources. Research on team creativity indicates that members who feel psychologically safe may offer insights into practical and innovative solutions (Han et al, 2017).

### **Conceptualizing Rule Breaking and Employees Creativity**

Normally, situational limitations like time, pressure, or lack of freedom would hinder creativity (Amabile et al., 1996), but occasionally, by viewing limitations as challenges rather than obstacles, they might actually inspire employees' creative potential. Breaking the rules is a unique phenomenon that is motivated by admirable ideals and aspirations that result in constructive problem-solving when rules and roles are only revised. Breaking the rule is associated with homological networks of behavioral concepts, such as creative deviance (i.e., violations of a management order on novelty) and positive deviance (i.e., behavioral inclination that deals with departing from the norms and standards in homological ways Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). Mainemells, 2010, p. 560) and boot legging, which is described as working on concepts without official organization backing in order to innovate (Criscuolo et al, 2014). Breaking the rules raises an important topic about how limitations and issues become predictive of innovation. It is possible to answer this question using the dual pathway to creativity approach.

The De Dreu group (2008). Employees can be creative in two ways, according to this theory: one is through greater flexibility, which fosters creativity (Amabile et al., 1996), and the other is through perseverance, which is defined as making extra efforts in the face of obstacles, hardships, or negative emotions (Nijstad et al., 2010). By using the less-than-ideal environment factors (like organizational constraints) as moderators, this paradox can be resolved (Mainemells, 2010; Omofowa et al., 2023). The results of empirical studies on the positive aspects of breaking the law are fascinating, albeit not entirely consistent. Morrison (2006) discovered a correlation between breaking the rules and increased professional autonomy and risk-taking. While Dahling et al. (2012) validated a questionnaire to capture behavior through which employees break rules to help clients, the latter found a negative relationship between rule-breaking and employees' creative performance, despite the fact that this frontier study offers qualitative evidence that rule-breaking may promote innovation and efficiency in an organization. These results cast doubt on the idea that employees' creative output can be enhanced by disobeying the rules. Furthermore, the empirical results of Petrou et al. (2018) acknowledged the favorable impact of rule-breaking on employees' creativity. Our focus is on creativity, which is described as the original and practical ideas (Amabile 1988, Tierney et al, 1999). This results from employees' propensity to circumvent organizational rules and procedures to achieve their goals in a creative way (Dajling et al., 2012). According to Dajling et al. (2012), breaching the rules is considered

pro-social, which is in line with our logic. The hypothesised relationship between employee creativity and breaching rules is addressed in this study as follows: *Ho: Rule-Breaking is negatively related to Employees creativity*

### **Conceptualizing Psychological Safety Climate and Employees Creativity**

The psychological safety climate is the degree to which workers feel confident in their capacity to handle change (Schem & Berinis, 1965; Khan, 1990). Furthermore, psychological safety climate is a shared belief among individuals or teams regarding the degree of safety in engaging in interpersonal risk-taking behavior at work. Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety climate as the feeling that one will not be rejected by colleagues for expressing oneself (Omofowa et al., 2021). The idea of uncertainty reduction (Lind & Van Den Bos, 2002) states that uncertainty is an unpleasant experience that threatens one's sense of control by making things less predictable and manageable (Tangirala & Alge, 2006, Van den Bos et al, 2008). Psychological safety in the workplace is a condition that gives workers enough assurance and predictability to be innovative (Gong et al, 2002). According to Lind and Van den Bos (2002), who cite Edmondson (1999), it is an atmosphere that values individuality and teamwork, role clarity, and interpersonal trust. It has been demonstrated in previous research that ethical leadership fosters individual or group creativity through a variety of unique processes, including knowledge exchange (Ma et al., 2013), voice behavior (Chen & Hon, 2016), and motivation (Tu & Lu, 2013, Feng et al., 2018).

The current study focuses on team-level setting that can influence individual and team members' creative processes (Madjar et al, 2002). In addition to fostering team creativity, a psychologically secure environment also helps members of a high psychological safety climate balance their levels of creativity. Because they do not fear criticism for questioning the status quo or potential failure, team members are free from interpersonal risk and potential harm if their personal image, which may arise from the free expression of creative half-baked ideas, fails (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liang et al, 2012). Psychological safety enables team members to concentrate on their tasks and identify areas for growth (Edmondson, 1999). Thus, an atmosphere of psychological safety fosters confidence in each team member and the team overall. The psychological safety climate strengthens employee creation in a favorable way, according to an empirical study by Yang et al. (2019) that used data from 139 supervisor employee dyads in 4 Chinese enterprises. Compared to individuals with poor psychological safety, the study found that employees with high psychological safety had a more favorable impact on their creativity and ability to thrive at work Akhtar et al.'s (2022) study, which

involved 132 employees and 32 supervisors and self-administered questionnaires in Pakistani public sector organizations, demonstrated that psychological safety climates encourage people to come up with innovative ideas. Research has indicated that psychological safety climate and employee creativity are positively correlated (Han et al., 2019; Bradley et al., 2012). This study investigates the premise that psychological safety climate and employee creativity are related as

*H<sub>02</sub>: psychological safety climate is negatively related to employee's creativity.*

### **Conceptualizing Shared Leadership and Employee's Creativity**

Most of the leadership literature has been on traditional leadership, where people have a downward influence on other members of the organization (Peace & Sims 2000). However, as teams get more complex, shared leadership may be a more effective way to lead them (Pearce et al, 2009). More and more research has looked into shared leadership teams, also known as distributed and collective leadership, and researchers have found that shared team leadership can influence team creativity (Day et al, 2004; Itan et al, 2018). Although there have been several definitions of shared leadership proposed recently by researchers (Zhou, 2012; Peace & Sims, 2000), this study found that these definitions share comparable characteristics (Day et al, 2004)..shared leadership via team unity and "collective achievement, shared of responsibility." According to Carson et al. (2007) and Pearce and Conger (2003), shared leadership is an emergent team phenomenon in which team members share leadership duties and responsibilities in order to better accomplish team objectives. This study adopts these definitions.

In this study, the creative process and understanding are predicted and influenced by the concepts of creativity. By removing structural barriers, an environment of trust and unity encourages innovation, fosters the development of fair and trusting relationships, and leads to better collaborative outcomes, according to shared leadership theory. Three categories of shared leadership traits were established by Zhu et al. (2018): leadership influence, unit of analysis, and distribution of leadership influence. According to Pearce and Conger (2003), shared leadership provides a complex network of influence within the group because it encompasses not only the top-down hierarchical influence that forms team leaders to team members, but also the horizontal/lateral influence among team members and even the bottom-up influence that forms team members to team leaders. The unit of analysis, shared leadership views, comes in second. Leadership as a team-level phenomenon is different from leadership models that emphasize the individual level, like participative leadership, empowering leadership, and self-leadership (Carson et al., 2007). Thirdly, there are many leader-follower dualistic relationships inside the groups as a result of the leadership positions and influence being widely distributed among team members under shared leadership conditions (Drescher et al, 2014). Meanwhile, team members may play both the leader and follower roles at the same time, making the distinction between the two positions increasingly hazy (Nicolaidis et al, 2014; Pearce & Congen, 2003). The aforementioned attributes make shared leadership a more successful leadership model in forecasting both individual and team creativity (Dlnnocenzo et al., 2016; Lorinkova & Bartol, 2021); however, it also has severe negative effects, including power struggles (Jc, 2018), role stress (Wang & Peng, 2022), and poor decision-making efficiency (Zhn et al, 2018). For instance, empirical research on shared leadership and employee creativity has yielded conflicting findings. Employee creativity and role stress in shared leadership have a detrimental impact on team creativity by raising role stress among team members, according

to Wang and Peng's (2022) research. Although Wang et al.'s (2021) study on shared leadership and team creativity found a positive relationship between the two, Zhn et al. (2018) found that shared leadership may have negative effects on creativity, such as conflict, coordination failures, and information overload. Because of these contradictory findings, an empirical investigation into the context is required. Thus, the hypothesis below was put forth in this study.

*H<sub>03</sub>: shared leadership is negatively related to employee's creativity.*

### **Conceptualizing Knowledge Sharing and Employees Creativity**

In the management literature, the idea of knowledge sharing is frequently explored. It is one of the fundamental steps in knowledge management that comes before knowledge exploitation. People exchange information, skills, and experience with one another through a behavior process or operation known as knowledge sharing (Mirzaee & Ghaffarz, 2018). More specifically, sharing knowledge fosters innovation, creativity, and the production and application of ideas (Kim & Park, 2017; Michna, 2018; Pittino et al, 2018). In knowledge sharing, four distinct active processes are identified: media richness, organizational transparency, knowledge donation, and knowledge collection. The process of gathering knowledge involves asking colleagues about phenomena that employees are still unsure about and seeking insight from others in their intellectual capacity (Van den Hooff & Ridder, 2004). By communicating the transfer of knowledge for the appropriate domestication of one's own intellectual aptitude to others requires trust, loyalty, and persistence (De varies et al, 2006), the term "organizational transparency" describes a company's goal to preserve information transparency by communicating corporate information to its stakeholders, whether in a favorable or bad way. This transparent aspect of information sharing produces an open organizational structure that fosters innovation in business by helping employees and stakeholders with data or knowledge sharing action plans. Openness in the exchange of knowledge is a basic quality that directs behavioral and business actions. Transparency.

The tone that a company uses to communicate knowledge to its employees is greatly influenced by the richness of its media. The growth of managerial knowledge sharing has been guaranteed by advanced media technologies (such as internet platforms, verbal and nonverbal signal signals, and text with end users). Social media platforms greatly speed up organizational information transfer and sharing procedures, which in turn boosts individual innovation. Additionally, video conferences have made it easier to share knowledge and are a key tool for fostering creativity. Research on creativity has shown that team creativity depends on knowledge sharing (Zhang et al, 2011). Three crucial elements of creativity are knowledge sharing expertise, creative thinking abilities, and creative self-efficacy, according to the componential theory of creativity (Amabile, 19996, Bandura, 1997). According to study, exchanging knowledge can help people gain experience and abilities (Hnang et al, 2014). It has also been demonstrated that knowledge sharing improves team members' understanding of one another and encourages innovation by allowing them to expand their knowledge base and gain insight from other team members, both of which are crucial sources of team creativity (Gong et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2014). Additionally, team members who share knowledge are more likely to use a range of viewpoints and expertise that are connected to new and creative ideas (Shin et al., 2012). Additionally, empirical data indicates that the link has been well studied in the literature (Liao & Chen 2018, thanh, 2020, Zeb et al, 2019). Knowledge sharing improves self-confidence

(Martinez, 2015), organizational performance (Lee et al., 2020), and problem-solving (Alshwayat et al., 2021). When and how knowledge sharing fosters team creativity in China was the subject of an empirical study by Men et al. (2017). The study tested the hypothesis using a sample of 86 knowledge employees co-working with 381 employees, and the findings showed a positive relationship between knowledge sharing and team creativity. Additionally, a related study by Bozdogan and Aksoy (2023) included 280 workers from corporate sector enterprises in the provinces of Osmaiye, Gaziantep, and Adana. Based on the review studies, the study hypothesised that information sharing has a good impact on employees' creativity.

*Ho4: knowledge sharing is negatively related to team creativity*

## Research Methods

The post-positivism perspective, which supports the objective assessment of empirical hypotheses, serves as the foundation for this investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2003). A descriptive, quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design is used in this study. Through a cross-sectional survey, researchers can gather data about current events. The researcher can quantitatively test hypotheses with this study approach.

## Population, Sample and Data Collection

Ethnic leadership practices in emerging markets work in a distinct institutional setting because of the need to test ideas in advanced economies and to offer light on ethical, all-practices, and employee inventiveness. As a result, ethical leadership practices are likely to have a different impact on employees' creativity in emerging economies than in industrialized ones. The existing problems in the banking, manufacturing, construction, education, transportation, tourism/hospitality, and petroleum sectors must thus be addressed. Data from a survey that focused on these sectors operating in Nigeria, namely the South-South area (Edo, Delta, Rivers, Cross-River, Akwa-Ibom, and Bayelsa), was used in the study. There are 6000 workers overall from these industries, with 450 men (75%), and 150 women (25%). All participants were native to their respective states, and the majority were permanent managers, supervisors, and employees. The participants were given printed hard copies of the questionnaires. Through the human resources department, the questionnaire was distributed. Participants received a thorough explanation of the survey's instructions and the goal of the study. In light of sample availability, all participants were persuaded that the data was genuine and private. The study chose middle managers as leaders, and each leader is in charge of assessing the corresponding four to eight subordinates. To lessen the impact of homologous errors, survey data were gathered at two time points separated by four weeks: (1) a month later at time (2) supervisor/managerial staffs; and (2) employees' evaluations of rule-breaking, psychological safety climate, shared leadership, and knowledge sharing. The sample size was derived by applying the Taco Yamani formula (1964). Sample size for the study would be determine for a finial population, and the adopted formular is addressed as following:

$$N = \frac{N}{1 - e}$$

Where;

N	=	Sample
N	=	total population
e	=	error margin 5%

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n = 375 employees

Employees of agro-based businesses, transportation companies, financial institutions, construction companies, tourism/hospitality enterprises, and petroleum companies operating in South-South states of Nigeria were surveyed using a standardized questionnaire.

The questionnaires were intended to be completed by 375 workers in these industries. The poll, which covered these businesses in several South-South economic sectors, was conducted between January and April of 2024. Only 350 of the 375 questionnaires that were delivered had valid answers. This amounts to a 93% response rate, which is deemed sufficient for correlational research. For this study, a sample of 375 employees is deemed sufficient. By comparing the first third of respondents to the last third and by comparing the responder to non-respondents in terms of important study variables, this study assessed for non-response. The findings indicate that there is no non-response bias in the data because the responses of the early and late responder groups are indifferent. These companies were selected based on their ability to create jobs and provide opportunity for individuals with different skill levels.

### **Handling Common Method Bias**

Employees of these companies were requested to contribute information on the topic in order to reduce prejudice. Participants in this category were able to provide accurate information on rule-breaking, psychological safety, shared leadership, employee innovation, knowledge sharing, and ethnic leadership practices. By guaranteeing respondent confidentiality, the study reduced evaluation anxiety. Participants were told that measuring the independent factors was unrelated to measuring the dependent variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Conway & Lance, 2010; Uford, Charles & Etuk, 2022).

### **Measures**

Constructs in this study were measured with previously established and validated multiple item scale. All items were written in English language. Responses were score on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from (1) strongly disagreed to (5) strongly agreed. The survey questionnaires consisted of scale representing the variables described above.

### **Psychological Safety Climate**

To gauge member impression, Edmondson's (1999) psychological safety scale was employed. Five items on a five-point Likert scale made up the psychological safety climate measure. "Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized" is an example item. Shared Leadership: Grille and Kauffeld's (2015) questionnaires were used in the study to evaluate shared leadership. Because the task-oriented leadership scale and the relation-oriented shared leadership scale are more applicable to a corporate environment, the questionnaire assessed various aspects of shared leadership behavior, task-relation-change, and micropolitical-oriented leaderships.

The study used a five-item, unidimensional ethical leadership scale to evaluate ethical leadership (Broron et al., 2005). According to research, the ethical leadership scale is primarily used to evaluate ethical leadership because it has well-established psychometric properties (e.g. Shin 2012; Neubert et al, 2009). Respondents were asked to rate each statement on a 5-point scale from (1) strongly disagreed to 5 strongly agreed, indicating how much they felt it described their leadership. The sample item included making fair and

balanced decisions. Employee Creativity: Using Shin and Zhou's (2007) four-item scale, which includes questions like "How creative do you consider your team to be?" and "How well does your team produce new ideas?" leadership and supervisors evaluated the team's creativity. Supervisors were reminded by the study to evaluate the team's creativity in relation to the creativity related to that phase. Knowledge sharing: The study used Huang et al. (2014) to measure knowledge sharing behavior using a five-item scale that included both explicit and tacit knowledge sharing. The study used two items to measure explicit knowledge sharing, such as "I provide my methodologies, manuals, and models for members of this team," and three items to measure tacit knowledge sharing, such as "Share my experience or know-how from working with members of this team frequently." The study also aggravated the person who was responsible for computing team-level knowledge sharing. Employee Rule Breaking: The prosocial rule-breaking

scale by Dahling et al. (2012) used a 5-item efficiency subscale to measure rule breaking. Items (e.g., I break organizations' rules or policies to do my job efficiently) were rated on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) completely agree.

### Variables and Theoretical Underpinning

S/N	Variables	Status	Concordance
1.	Ethical leadership	Independent	Omofowa et al (2021) Hoang et al (2021) Mazir et al (2021) Hughes et al (2028)
2.	Rule-Breaking	Independent	Amabiye et al (1996) Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2003) Mainemehs (2010) Morrison (2006) Dahling et al (2012) Tirney et al (1999)
3.	Psychological safety	Independent	Khan, 1990, Edmondson, (1999) Tu & Lu, (2013) Ma et al (2012) Madgar et al (2002) Liang et al (2012) Akhtar et al (2022)
4.	Shared Leadership	Independent	Pearce & Sime (2000) Han et al (2018) Carson et al (2007) Pearce and Conger 2003).
5.	Knowledge sharing (2018)	Independent	Michna (2018), Pittino et al  Men et al 2017) Bozdogan and Aksoy (2023) Alshwajac et al, (2021)
6.	Employees Creativity	Dependent	Pirola et al (2004) Taggar (2002) Sacramento et al (2015) Han et al (2017) Hoever et al (2012) Chan (1998).

### Model Specification

The model specialization is specified in the functional form of:

Where;

<i>ETLAD</i>	=	Ethical leadership practice.
<i>RBRK</i>	=	Rule-breaking practices
<i>PSSC</i>	=	Psychological safety climate
<i>SHLD</i>	=	Shared leadership
<i>KNSH</i>	=	Knowledge sharing
	=	Error term
<i>1</i>	=	Constant
<i>B1-B4</i>	=	regression coefficient

The statistical program STATA 13.0 was used in this study to analyze the data. The design, collection, and analysis of the questionnaire were all closely monitored by the research. In order to guarantee the quality and viability of the research, the study first employed established scales in the survey. Secondly, questionnaires were dispersed throughout six states in the South-South region of Nigeria, resulting in participants from various states within the federation. After gathering and analyzing all relevant data, the study used Cronbach alpha to assess reliability, and content validity and a pilot testing survey were used to assess validity.

### Reliability

The ability of an instrument to quantify a phenomenon across time and across many populations with accuracy and consistency is known as reliability. It literally refers to the degree of trustworthiness of the data and its source. The study evaluates the internal consistency of the questionnaires using Cronbach alpha, which was computed to gauge the internal consistency of the questionnaires. Sekaran states that the acceptance dependability value should be higher than 0.60 (Sekaran 2004), as shown in table (1) below.

**Table 1:** Reliability Test

Item	Obs	Sign	Item-test correlatio n	Item-rest correlatio n	Average interitem covariance	Alpha
rbrk	370	+	0.7325	0.4769	.2014075	0.6586
pssc	370	+	0.7471	0.5623	.2023743	0.6145
shld	370	+	0.6550	0.4078	.2380539	0.6819
knsh	370	+	0.4490	0.2661	.3158878	0.7212
etlad	370	+	0.7854	0.6374	.1934483	0.5881
Test scale					.2302344	0.7057

**Source:** Author desk, 2024.

## Validity

Two measures of validity are used in the study. The first is content validity (Ihantola & Kihu, 2011), which looks at whether a tool is measuring what it seems to measure or what the researcher wants to assess" For evaluation and suitability, the study questionnaire was given to a group of management services academics from Delta State University, the University of Benin, and other management specialists from the Nigeria Institute of Management Benin branch. Their results show that the questionnaire measured what it should have and was valid in both content and scope. A pilot survey was also carried out to determine the validity of the instrument; the findings indicated that the questionnaires were valid in terms of their wording, sequence, and layout, and that the participants were prepared to answer and finish them on time.

## The Kaiser-Meyer Oikin (KMO) and Bartlett Splenicity test

All of the available data was evaluated collectively using the K.M.O. and Bartlett test. Significant correlation in the data is indicated by a KMO value greater than 0.5 and a significance level for the Bartlett test less than 0.05. Furthermore, the degree of correlation between one variable and other variables is shown by the term collineanty. The sampling is sufficiently measured by the KMO. In order to make working with complex data sets with many variables easier, the study uses factor analysis to condense the huge number of variables into a few manageable and intelligible data sets.

**Table 2:** Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of Sampling Adequacy

Variable	K.M. O	Interpretations
rbrk	0.753	Excellent
	5	
pssc	0.755	Excellent
	2	
shld	0.771	Excellent
	9	
knsh	0.838	Excellent
	3	
etlad	0.718	Excellent
	0	
Overall	0.750	
	8	

**Source:** Authors desk, 2024.

## Descriptive Analysis

Table (3) indicates that the structure has a maximal value of (5) showing that all of the questions were answered with clear agreement at some stage, the average response is (4) agree, indicating that the respondent agreed with the questions.

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics Results

Variable	Mean	P50	Max	Min	N
rbrk	3.810811	4	5	1	370
pssc	4.154054	4	5	1	370
shld	4.143243	4	5	1	370
knsh	4.283784	4	5	1	370
etlad	4.156757	4	5	1	370

**Source:** Author’s Desk, 2024.

**Table 4:** Multiple Regression

Source	SS	Df	Ms	No of obs = 370 F(4,295) = 65.28 Prob > F = 0.0000 R- squared = 0.4171 Adj R-squared = 0.4107 Root MSE = .59933			
Model	93.8000181	4	23.4500045				
Residual	131.10809	365	.359200247				
Total	224.908108	369	.609507068				
etlad	Coef.	Std. Err.	T	P> t	[95% Conf.	Interval	Decision
rbrk	.242683	.0331595	7.32	0.000	.1774753	.3078906	Accept H1
pssc	.2855839	.0432433	6.60	0.000	.2005466	.3706212	Accept H2
shld	.1541943	.0380775	4.05	0.000	.0793154	.2290731	Accept H3
knsh	.1271517	.0559572	2.27	0.024	.0171127	.2371907	Accept H4
cons	.8620522	.2710053	3.18	0.002	.3291243	1.39498	

**Source:** Author’s Desk, 2024.

**Correlation**

The result in table (4) suggest that rule-breaking practices (r = 0.5021), psychological safety climate (r = 0.5232), shared leadership (r = 0.3931) and knowledge sharing (r = 0.2496) are positively correlated with employees creativity. This implies that both the dependent and independent variables move in the same direction, thus, as the organization implement ethical practice it will lead to employee’s creativity.

**Table 5:** Correction Result

	rbrk	pssc	shld	knsh	Etlad
rbrk	1.0000				
pssc	0.3776	1.0000			
shld	0.2278	0.4213	1.0000		
knsh	0.2391	0.1882	0.1136	1.0000	
etlad	05021	0.5232	0.3931	0.2496	1.0000

**Source:** Author’s Desk, 2024.

**Table 6:** Bartlett’s test result

Source	Analysis of Variance				F	Prob > F
	SS	df	MS			
Between groups	66.6808238	4	16.6702059	38.45	0.0000	
Within groups	158.227284	365	.433499409			
Total	224.908108	369	.609507068			

**Source:** Author’s Desk, 2024.

**Table 7:** Skewness/Kurtosis tests for Normality

Variable	Obs	Pr(Skewness)	Pr(Kurtosis)	Adj chi2(2)	Prob>chi2
Rbrk	370	0.0000	0.2205	36.31	0.0000
Pssc	370	0.0000	0.0000	.	0.0000

Shld	370	0.0000	0.0000	73.47	0.0000
Knsh	370	0.3490	0.0043	8.45	0.0146
Etlad	370	0.0000	0.0000	71.28	0.0000

**Source:** Author's Desk, 2024.

## Discussion

Importantly, while many scholars have studied ethical leadership over the years, few studies have thoroughly examined the ways in which rule-breaking, psychological safety, shared leadership, and knowledge sharing affect employee creativity in a company. Therefore, this study fills this research vacuum by shedding light on the dynamic impact of these variables in fostering creativity (both individually and collectively) across various economic sectors. These factors, when combined with moral leadership, are essential for increasing the creative potential of a team. In light of earlier studies, this section seeks to bolster the study's findings. The direct and important relationship to the study's core findings is also covered in this section. The study complements earlier scientific studies with new methods and insights. The study found that in order to manage the creative potential of their employees, managers in the banking, tourism, manufacturing, construction, petroleum, agricultural organization, transportation, and educational institutions must act within the framework of ethical standards. This is because such practices demonstrate that businesses have the ability to shape their social context, which in turn affects their capacity for innovation. Rule-breaking encourages team innovation in the workplace, according to the study. This finding refutes Ho1, which claims that rule-breaking has a negative relationship with employee creativity. According to the study, employee creativity and risk-taking are positively correlated ( $\beta = 0.242683$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ), hence H1 is approved. This result is consistent with research conducted by Dahling et al. (2012), Petron et al. (2018), and Morrison (2006). Employee creativity is consistent with theories that define creativity as thinking outside the box, which includes establishing new norms and processes and departing from the norm. Workers are not driven to break the rules because they wish to hurt the company; rather, they do it to help them achieve their goals (Danling et al., 2012).. When organizational cooperation and creative problem-solving demands are high, employees who break the rules are more likely to exhibit creativity. This is especially true when they are faced with the pressure to be creative and the lack of organizational resources to do so. They may become rebellious as a result of this situation and seek different methods to achieve the unattainable but desired levels of creativity. However, breaching the rules shouldn't be tolerated or pursued carelessly since it could lead to immoral or even unlawful behavior. The study's empirical results refuted the second hypothesis, which claimed that psychological safety climate had a negative impact on employees' creativity. Instead, the results showed that psychological safety climate had a positive impact on employees' creativity ( $\beta = 0.2855839$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ). As a result, H2 is accepted, supporting the findings of Yang et al. (2019), Akhataur et al. (2022), Han et al. (2019), and Bradley et al. (2012). The significance of a psychologically safe environment in fostering team creativity was bolstered by these earlier studies. By concentrating on the impacts of psychological safety climate on team creativity in particular ways, this study builds on Edmonds' (1999) research. Our study highlights the significance of a psychologically safe environment, which promotes moral behavior and boosts team creativity. When members of a team create a social environment where they feel comfortable speaking up, they may be more inclined to develop their creative potential, which leads to an openness to sharing ideas with their teammates and producing original and practical solutions. Addressing each member's concerns, praising exceptional work, encouraging team cohesion, and helping one another resolve conflicts within the team are

all examples of how to create a psychologically comfortable environment that fosters creativity in the team. These improve a fundamental requirement of people and groups and are an essential prerequisite for workers' creativity. Additionally, regular work fosters the psychological safety climate's impact on workers' creativity. In order to shed light on the relationship between psychological safety climate and team creativity, researchers might also incorporate other variables like task conflict or trust. Despite being a novel kind of leadership, the effects it has on workers and organizations have spawned a large body of research. According to Ho3, shared leadership has a detrimental effect on team innovation. Nonetheless, the study's findings indicate that shared leadership enhances workers' creativity ( $\beta = 0.1541943$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ), hence H3 is approved.

The study's conclusions are consistent with other research demonstrating the beneficial impact of shared leadership on workers' creativity (Wang et al, 2021). The results of this study confirmed that ethical leaders protected the interests of workers both inside and outside the company in order to preserve the integrity and transparency of information. Leaders who focus on the application of ethics may find that their staff' capacity for creativity is influenced. To preserve their reputation, shared leaders keep a distance from their staff, but they make an effort to stay in touch. They treat staff members fairly and give duties based on their interests and abilities rather than just as subordinates. Employees are free from fear of reprisals and new environmental challenges in this situation, which creates an environment conducive to learning and innovation; Employees flourish at work when learning and vitality are both present. Learning allows employees to acquire professional knowledge, which in turn encourages innovative behavior. Additionally, thriving workers experience happy feelings and moods, which lays the groundwork for broad cognitive thinking and innovative problem-solving, two other traits that boost workers' creativity. Organizations can think about offering suitable incentives to keep workers more engaged in information sharing in this age of intense competition and to improve the environmental adaptability of knowledge sharing behaviors that foster creativity. According to the fourth hypothesis, employees' creativity is adversely affected by knowledge sharing. However, the study's results refuted these assertions, demonstrating that knowledge sharing enhances workers' creativity ( $\beta = 0.1271517$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ). As a result, H4 is approved, which is consistent with research by Zhang et al. (2011), Huang et al. (2014), Bozdogan & Aksony (2023), Gong et al. (2013), and Shin et al. (2012). In order to ensure that employees' knowledge sharing is more scientifically based and effectively supports their creative lives, the design of the corporation's knowledge sharing incentive mechanism should be tailored to meet the needs of employees at various levels. As employees gain more knowledge, their demand level for knowledge sharing manifests in two aspects: whether the value of knowledge matches the returns, and whether their knowledge can be demonstrated and recognized at work. Video conferences, emails, WhatsApp, and phone conversations should all be emphasized as cutting-edge tools that encourage employees' inventiveness.

### **Theoretical Implication**

The results primarily have two implications for future research and theory. On the one hand, this study explores the consequences of the notion by offering a fresh viewpoint for better comprehending employees' creativity in a complex and chaotic setting, based on social learning theory. Additionally, this study demonstrates that employees' creativity is enhanced by thriving at work when rules are broken, shared leadership, a psychologically safe environment, and knowledge sharing behavior, encouraging further research into the mechanism relationship. Furthermore, based on the function of social learning theory, this

study preliminary integrated ethical leadership practices with rule-breaking, shared leadership, knowledge sharing, and psychological safety climate. In support of the claim that ethical leadership practices are auxiliary and complimentary, the results indicated that ethical leadership practices as an antecedent condition can foster employees' creativity.

### **Practical Implication**

In terms of training and learning culture, mentorship, role modeling, and instructional design, the current findings have a number of implications for managers and organizations. Supervisors and managers can teach each team member how to practice effective shared leadership behavior and teaming behaviors that can boost team creativity. Furthermore, managers must recognize that modern learning and innovative solutions are more flexible and adaptive, which would cause them to depart from accepted norms and values and result in rule-breaking. Thus, encouraging team members to take charge of their own education and creating a psychologically safe environment will promote innovative learning. One could argue that information sharing requires a psychologically comfortable setting, which could boost group learning creativity.

### **Conclusion**

Through ethical leadership practices among employees, this study has demonstrated a connection between rule-breaking, shared leadership, knowledge sharing, and team creativity. All of which are essential for enhancing team effectiveness, creativity, learning, and novelty. All things considered, the study discovered how crucial it is to consider creativity when defining the process model. It is easy to see that moral leadership continues to be a crucial component of team innovation. Scholars are now focusing on how to foster innovation rather than stifle it, as well as how to evaluate ethical standards and values in enterprises. The study's findings demonstrate that encouraging team and individual participative management styles fosters employee creativity.

### **Limitations and Future-Research Suggestions**

There are a few limitations to this study. Firstly, the results may not be as generalizable as they could be because the study only included a sample of organizations from the South-South region, which may not be feasible when examining a single organization across the federation. Second, respondent identification is a low limitation; the organizations are primarily public organizations or institutes, which emphasizes their advantage in developing ethical norms and values in ethical leadership practice. However, they are less critical in perspective when compared to innovation and knowledge work.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study advances knowledge in the following ways: first, it demonstrates the importance of ethical standards in evaluating supervisors, employees, and creative phenomena. This suggests that management can successfully encourage innovation, which can act as a moral model and ethical guideline for workplace creativity. Second, this study offers a framework for understanding leader integrity as a moral compass for managers, leaders, academics, and organizations in the modern period. This helps them incorporate ethical practices and encourages employees to explore, generate, promote, and implement ideas.

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