



A Systemic Perspective on Visionary Leadership and Employee Creativity: The Roles of Knowledge Donating and Organizational Inertia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how visionary leadership relates to employee creativity by investigating the mediating role of organizational inertia and the moderating role of knowledge-donating behavior within an integrated organizational framework. Prior research has often examined these constructs separately; however, limited empirical evidence has tested their combined mediation-moderation structure in knowledge-based firms. Using survey data from 118 managers in knowledge-based companies located in Mashhad's Science and Technology Park, the proposed model was analyzed using PLS-SEM. The findings indicate that visionary leadership is negatively associated with organizational inertia and positively associated with employee creativity, whereas organizational inertia is negatively associated with creativity. Knowledge-donating behavior strengthens the relationships between leadership and inertia and between inertia and creativity, reinforcing the indirect association between leadership and creative outcomes. By examining these interrelated constructs within a single empirical model, the study provides a more integrated understanding of how leadership behaviors and knowledge processes are linked to creativity in organizational settings. The systemic perspective adopted in this study is conceptual and considers multiple interdependent organizational factors simultaneously, rather than a dynamic system modeling approach.

Keywords

Organizational inertia, Visionary leadership, Employee creativity, Knowledge donating behavior.

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1. Introduction

Due to the rapid pace of technological change, global competition, and economic uncertainty, organizations increasingly rely on new ideas, products, and services that emerge from employees' creative efforts. Employee creativity enables organizations to survive and remain competitive by generating and implementing novel and useful ideas related to products, services, procedures, and performance ([Khairabadi and Ranji-Jafroudi, 2023](#)). Accordingly, identifying the factors that shape employee creativity and fostering conditions that support it have become strategic priorities ([Shariat-Nejad et al., 2023](#)). In knowledge-intensive environments, creativity is not merely desirable but essential for sustaining organizational dynamism and competitive advantage.

One contextual factor that may constrain employee creativity is organizational inertia. In turbulent environments characterized by rapid change, organizations must adapt continuously. When organizations resist environmental developments or fail to respond adequately to emerging changes, they may exhibit organizational inertia. Organizational inertia reflects the tendency to preserve established routines, structures, and resource allocations despite environmental shifts. Such rigidity may limit the identification of external threats, hinder innovation, restrict the adoption of new technologies, and reduce employees' capacity to generate creative ideas. Overcoming inertia depends, in part, on how organizations interpret environmental signals, particularly perceived threats and emerging opportunities that create pressure for change ([König et al., 2021](#)).

Leadership plays a central role in shaping these interpretations and responses. In this regard, visionary leadership has been described as the ability to articulate a compelling image of the future and mobilize organizational members toward shared long-term objectives. Visionary leaders are often attentive to environmental developments and can recognize strategic threats and opportunities ([Mascareño et al., 2020](#)). Through such orientation, they may be associated with reduced structural rigidity and greater openness to change. Moreover, visionary leaders may introduce inventive approaches and innovative techniques to address organizational stagnation ([Lee et al., 2020](#)). By communicating a clear direction and aligning employees around a shared vision, visionary leadership may be positively associated with employee creativity while negatively associated with organizational inertia.

In addition to structural conditions and leadership orientation, knowledge processes represent another critical contextual factor. Knowledge donating behavior refers to employees'

willingness to share expertise, ideas, and insights with colleagues. It involves the intentional and explicit dissemination of knowledge within the organization and contributes to collective learning (Matić et al., 2017). Although fostering knowledge donating behaviors may require organizational support, such behaviors facilitate idea exchange and may reduce resistance to change. Prior research suggests that increased knowledge sharing can enhance creativity and reduce rigidity in organizational communication processes (Luu, 2021). Therefore, knowledge donating behavior may strengthen the relationships among leadership, inertia, and creativity by facilitating information flow and collaborative problem-solving.

The relevance of examining these constructs is particularly salient in knowledge-based companies. In contemporary economies, scientific knowledge and innovation constitute primary drivers of development, commercialization, and wealth generation. Knowledge-based companies enable countries to diversify beyond single-product economies and capitalize on scientific capacities for producing goods and services (Torkiantabar and Asayesh, 2022). Such organizations rely heavily on employees' intelligence, expertise, and creativity to achieve strategic objectives and maintain competitiveness. Accordingly, understanding the organizational factors associated with employee creativity in knowledge-based firms is of substantial practical and theoretical importance.

Although prior studies have examined employee creativity, organizational inertia, visionary leadership, and knowledge sharing separately, limited empirical research has integrated these constructs within a single mediation–moderation framework. In particular, empirical evidence remains limited regarding (1) whether organizational inertia functions as a mediating mechanism linking visionary leadership and employee creativity, and (2) whether knowledge donating behavior conditions these relationships within knowledge-based firms. Addressing these issues contributes to a more integrated understanding of how leadership orientation, structural rigidity, and knowledge processes interact to shape creative outcomes.

The systemic perspective adopted in this study is conceptual and refers to the simultaneous examination of multiple interdependent organizational constructs within an integrated empirical model rather than a dynamic system modeling approach (Okhravi, et al., 2023; Okhravi & Rafizadeh, 2025). Accordingly, this research investigates whether visionary leadership is associated with employee creativity in knowledge-based companies in Mashhad, with organizational inertia as a mediating variable and knowledge donating behavior as a moderating variable.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it integrates visionary leadership, organizational inertia, and knowledge donating behavior into a unified empirical model, extending prior research that has examined these constructs in isolation. Second, it empirically tests organizational inertia as a mediating mechanism that may explain the relationship between visionary leadership and employee creativity. Third, it identifies knowledge donating behavior as a contextual boundary condition that may strengthen the associations among leadership, inertia, and creativity in knowledge-based firms.

2. Literature review

2.1. *LMX(Leader–member exchange) theory*

Drawing on social exchange theory, prior research conceptualizes leader–member exchange (LMX) as a reciprocal process in which leaders provide task-related resources, information, and opportunities for participation, while employees reciprocate with higher levels of involvement and contributions to organizational decision-making (Xie et al., 2020). Beyond this exchange mechanism, LMX quality reflects employees' perceptions of relational closeness and mutual understanding between leaders and subordinates (Kerrane et al., 2019). High-quality LMX relationships are characterized by trust, respect, and open communication, enabling leaders and employees to share responsibilities and collaborate beyond formal job requirements (Hu et al., 2009). In contrast, low-quality LMX relationships are typically limited to contractual obligations, with restricted communication and minimal relational engagement. Employees experiencing high-quality LMX are commonly categorized as members of the in-group, receiving greater support and developmental opportunities, whereas those in low-quality exchanges are positioned in the out-group with fewer relational resources.

Although LMX is not the focal construct of the present study, its relational logic provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how leadership quality shapes employees' access to informational and socio-emotional resources. In particular, the reciprocal nature of leader–subordinate interactions helps explain why leadership styles that emphasize vision articulation and relational engagement may influence knowledge processes and creative behaviors. Thus, LMX theory offers a complementary lens for interpreting the relational mechanisms through which visionary leadership may operate.

Importantly, LMX has been identified as a key relational mechanism that facilitates employee creativity, as empirical evidence indicates a significant positive relationship between LMX, innovation, and employee performance outcomes (Kim et al., 2021).

2.2. Visionary leadership

From a theoretical standpoint, leadership has long been regarded as a central antecedent of innovation. Recent studies, however, increasingly emphasize transformational forms of leadership as particularly influential in fostering creativity and innovation at both individual and team levels (Hughes et al., 2018; Shafique et al., 2020; van der Voet and Steijn, 2021). Within this stream, scholars have highlighted the strategic and symbolic role of vision, especially in relation to charismatic leadership, underscoring its importance for guiding organizational direction (Liu et al., 2020). Articulating a compelling vision that attracts and motivates followers is therefore viewed as a core mechanism through which transformational leadership stimulates change and enhances productivity. In this regard, visionary leadership can be understood as the articulation of an attractive future state that mobilizes individuals to support and enact it (van Knippenberg and Stam, 2014). Visionary Leadership Theory (VLT) emphasizes the development and effective communication of such a vision (Avolio et al., 1991). Prior research identifies three fundamental elements of visionary leadership: the formulation of a clear and meaningful vision (Carton et al., 2014); the effective communication of that vision by translating desired outcomes into actionable guidance for employees; and the ability to persuade and motivate followers to actively participate in realizing a shared future (Dvir et al., 2004).

From a systems-oriented perspective, visionary leadership operates not merely as an individual trait but as an integrative mechanism that aligns cognitive frames, behavioral expectations, and organizational routines around a shared future direction (Okhravi and Shakibamanesh, 2019). By shaping how organizational members interpret environmental signals, visionary leaders influence collective sensemaking processes, thereby affecting whether change is perceived as a threat or as an opportunity.

When employees perceive alignment between the articulated vision and leadership behaviors, they are more likely to internalize organizational goals and maintain focus on collective objectives (Shafique et al., 2020). Such alignment may reduce structural rigidity by challenging entrenched routines and encouraging adaptive reinterpretation of established practices.

Consequently, visionary leadership not only directs attention toward a common purpose but also helps reduce organizational inertia and enhance employee creativity.

2.3. Organizational inertia

Organizational Inertia Theory (OIT) explains the tendency of established organizations to persist along existing trajectories, even when environmental conditions change (Le Mens et al., 2015). In a similar vein, organizational inertia has been described as the limited capacity of organizations to initiate internal transformation in response to substantial external shifts (Silic, 2019). While stability and consistency in organizational structures and routines can initially support efficiency and continuity, they may also constrain adaptation and restrict the organization's ability to revise existing processes, technologies, and practices (Stieglitz et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2015).

From an integrative standpoint, inertia can be conceptualized as a systemic property emerging from the interaction of routines, resource allocations, managerial cognition, and organizational culture (Okhravi, et al. 2022). Once embedded, these elements reinforce one another, creating path dependence that limits flexibility and responsiveness.

Organizational inertia is widely regarded as a critical obstacle to growth and strategic renewal, particularly in highly competitive and fragmented markets where survival depends on continuous adaptation (Gilbert, 2005; Huang et al., 2013; Zhen et al., 2021). Rapid changes in market dynamics-including technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, and the entry and exit of competitors-pose significant challenges for organizations that attempt to maintain established routines, investments, or managerial mindsets.

Empirical research suggests that overcoming organizational inertia is closely linked to how leaders and organizations perceive environmental threats and opportunities. Leadership plays a pivotal role in disrupting reinforcing cycles of rigidity by reframing external pressures and legitimizing experimentation. In this regard, visionary leaders are more inclined to pursue innovative approaches to challenge stagnation and promote renewal (Mishra and Mishra, 2017; Shin and Zhou, 2003). However, in the absence of such leadership, employees may underestimate the urgency of transformation, thereby limiting innovative initiatives (van Knippenberg and Hirst, 2020).

2.4. Service employee creativity

Employee creativity in service settings constitutes a micro-level foundation for organizational

creativity and competitive advantage (Hur et al., 2016). Service organizations increasingly seek managerial practices that stimulate employees' creative contributions (Geng et al., 2014; He et al., 2021; Sok et al., 2018), particularly in markets characterized by high personalization demands (Wilder et al., 2014).

Creativity in such contexts depends not only on individual ability but also on the organizational environment that enables idea generation, experimentation, and knowledge recombination. From the perspective of OIT, internal rigidities may constrain timely responses to environmental changes (Gilbert, 2005). Excessive inertia may undermine adaptability and expose even high-performing organizations to decline (Zhen et al., 2021).

Organizational inertia is thus considered a significant impediment to innovation (Bertels et al., 2020; Geer and Barnes, 2006; Klammer et al., 2019). These rigidities gradually become embedded in routines and dominant practices. Empirical research on the direct influence of inertia on service employee creativity remains limited, despite increasing calls for adaptive innovation.

Prior studies suggest that inertia negatively affects organizational learning (Chang et al., 2014; Eggers and Kaul, 2017), which is closely linked to creative performance. At the individual level, creative self-efficacy plays a key role in shaping creative behavior (Hughes et al., 2018). However, when inertia constrains information flow and limits leaders' ability to communicate strategic priorities, employees may experience reduced cognitive flexibility and diminished motivation to propose novel ideas.

2.5. Knowledge-donating behavior

Knowledge sharing is conceptualized as a reciprocal process enabling the creation of new knowledge within organizations (Carmeli et al., 2011). It involves cognitive and behavioral changes in how individuals acquire, interpret, and contribute knowledge (Dysvik et al., 2015). Prior research distinguishes between knowledge collecting and knowledge donating (Van Den Hooff and De Ridder, 2004).

Knowledge-donating behavior reflects employees' willingness to voluntarily provide expertise to colleagues and requires deliberate communication and engagement (Kim and Lee, 2013; Matic' et al., 2017). From a collective perspective, shared understandings facilitate the generation of novel ideas (Xie et al., 2011).

Within an integrated organizational framework, knowledge-donating behavior can be viewed as a boundary condition that shapes how leadership and structural factors translate into creative

outcomes (Okhravi, et al., 2023). When knowledge flows are active and trust-based, the positive effects of visionary leadership may be amplified, and the constraining impact of organizational inertia may be attenuated. Conversely, in low-knowledge-donating contexts, even strong visionary signals may fail to diffuse throughout the organization.

Timely recognition of environmental threats requires adaptive responses, including reductions in inertia supported by intensified knowledge-donating activities (Luu, 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that service employee creativity is associated with engagement in knowledge donating processes (Kim and Lee, 2013; Hussain et al., 2017; Park and Kim, 2018; Thuan and Thanh, 2020; Hao et al., 2019).

Beyond these theoretical foundations, the relationships examined in this study can also be interpreted through a systems thinking perspective. Organizations may be viewed as dynamic configurations of interdependent elements, where changes in one component influence the behavior of others over time (Senge, 2006). Accordingly, visionary leadership, organizational inertia, knowledge-donating behavior, and employee creativity should not be treated as isolated constructs, but as interconnected components of a learning system characterized by feedback processes (Sterman, 2002). This systemic lens offers a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership practices, knowledge dynamics, and structural constraints interact to shape organizational performance.

2.6. Theoretical explanation and development of research hypotheses

Market dynamics are constantly evolving, technological advancements accelerate competitive pressures, and customer preferences shift unpredictably, creating environmental turbulence that challenges the stability of established organizational routines and cognitive frames. Organizational inertia is therefore conceptualized as a structural and behavioral rigidity that constrains strategic responsiveness and limits adaptive capacity, rather than merely resistance to isolated change initiatives. Combating organizational inertia requires reframing organizational assumptions, reallocating resources, and fostering openness to alternative courses of action.

In this context, visionary leadership plays a critical role. A visionary leader articulates a compelling vision of the future that reorients collective attention toward long-term opportunities and away from path-dependent routines. Through strategic sensegiving and motivational framing, visionary leaders may reduce entrenched patterns that sustain inertia. Prior studies (AlKayid et al., 2023; Ashok et al., 2021; Yulindasari et al., 2020; Saher and

Ayoub, 2020) report significant associations between visionary leadership and organizational inertia. Drawing on this theoretical rationale, the present study proposes an association between visionary leadership and organizational inertia in knowledge-based firms.

H1: Visionary leadership is significantly associated with organizational inertia in knowledge-based companies in Mashhad.

Organizational inertia may have substantial implications for employee-level outcomes. In unstable environments, organizations must continuously adapt to external pressures. When inertia becomes embedded in organizational procedures, resource allocation patterns, and cultural norms, it constrains experimentation, weakens opportunity recognition, and reduces employees' cognitive flexibility. Over time, such rigidity may limit employees' willingness or ability to generate novel and useful ideas.

Empirical studies (Sepahvand et al., 2023; Mousavi, 2023; Jafari et al., 2018; AlKayid et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022; Hongdianto et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2020) indicate a significant relationship between organizational inertia and employee creativity. Conceptually, inertia restricts access to new knowledge, discourages deviation from established norms, and thereby may weaken creative performance.

H2: Organizational inertia is significantly associated with employee creativity in knowledge-based companies in Mashhad.

Visionary leadership is defined as the articulation of an inspiring, future-oriented vision that mobilizes collective effort. By promoting strategic clarity and emphasizing opportunity recognition, visionary leaders can help employees reinterpret environmental uncertainty as a platform for innovation. At the same time, visionary leadership may reduce organizational inertia by challenging entrenched routines and legitimizing change-oriented behaviors.

Prior research (Shariatnejad et al., 2023) suggests that leadership influences creativity through intervening mechanisms. Building on this logic, organizational inertia is conceptualized in this study as a mediating mechanism linking visionary leadership to employee creativity. Rather than assuming direct causality, the model posits that visionary leadership is associated with lower inertia, which in turn is associated with higher creativity.

H3: Organizational inertia mediates the relationship between visionary leadership and employee creativity in knowledge-based companies in Mashhad.

Organizational inertia develops gradually through deeply embedded routines and shared assumptions. Knowledge donating behavior—defined as employees' voluntary sharing of

expertise, skills, and information with colleagues—may serve as a contextual factor that influences how leadership translates into organizational outcomes.

When knowledge donating is high, employees exchange insights that challenge existing routines and facilitate adaptive reinterpretation of organizational practices. In such contexts, the influence of visionary leadership on inertia may be strengthened, as shared knowledge deepens collective understanding of the leader's vision. [AlKayidet al. \(2023\)](#) reported a significant moderating effect of knowledge donating behavior on the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational inertia.

Accordingly, knowledge-donating behavior is conceptualized as a moderating variable that conditions the strength of the association between visionary leadership and organizational inertia.

H4: Knowledge-donating behavior moderates the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational inertia in knowledge-based companies in Mashhad.

Knowledge donating is widely recognized as a critical mechanism for creativity enhancement. When employees actively share knowledge, they expand cognitive resources, recombine diverse perspectives, and generate innovative solutions. A climate of trust and openness in knowledge sharing increases opportunities for experimentation and idea refinement.

Prior studies ([Bakhtiyarian, 2023](#); [Jahanipour and Rahimi, 2021](#); [Ebrahimi, 2016](#); [Wang et al., 2024](#); [AlKayid et al., 2023](#); [Zhou et al., 2022](#); [Ashok et al., 2021](#); [Fu et al., 2021](#)) indicate that knowledge donating may influence the relationship between structural conditions and creative outcomes. In this study, knowledge donating behavior is proposed to moderate the association between organizational inertia and employee creativity, such that the negative association may be weaker when knowledge donating is high.

H5: Knowledge-donating behavior moderates the relationship between organizational inertia and employee creativity in knowledge-based companies in Mashhad.

3. Methodology

constructs were derived from established measurement scales in prior empirical studies to ensure construct validity and comparability. Data were collected using both library research (a review of academic articles and theses) and a field survey via a structured questionnaire.

The research instrument consisted of standardized scales adapted from prior studies. Visionary leadership was measured using the five-item scale developed by [Elbaz and Hadud](#)

(2017). Organizational inertia was assessed using the five-item scale of [Liang et al. \(2017\)](#). Knowledge donating behavior was measured using the four-item scale developed by [Van der Hoof and De Ridder \(2004\)](#). Employee creativity was measured using the eight-item scale of [Liao and Chen \(2018\)](#). All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Table 1 shows the research tools.

Table 1. Research Instruments

Variable	Item number	Source
Visionary Leadership	1-5	Elbaz and Hadoud (2017)
Organizational Inertia	6-10	Liang et al. (2017)
Knowledge Donating Behavior	11-14	Van der Hoof and De Ridder (2004)
Employee Creativity	15-22	Liao and Chen (2018)

Given the study's predictive orientation and the presence of mediation and moderation effects in the conceptual model, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 3. Descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS 23, whereas measurement and structural model analyses were conducted using PLS-SEM.

The analysis followed a two-step approach: (1) evaluation of the measurement model (factor loadings, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using HTMT and Fornell–Larcker criteria); and (2) evaluation of the structural model (path coefficients, effect sizes f^2 , coefficient of determination R^2 , predictive relevance Q^2 , and SRMR as a model fit index).

Common method bias was assessed using procedural remedies and statistical diagnostics to ensure that results were not substantially influenced by single-source data.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive statistics

The sample consisted of 58.5% male and 41.5% female respondents. In terms of education, 23.7% held a bachelor's degree, 37.3% a master's degree, and 39% a doctorate. Regarding age distribution, 23.7% were between 20–30 years old, 44.1% between 31–40 years old, and 32.2% were over 40 years old.

Table 2. Indicator-Level collinearity assessment (VIF Values)

Scale	VIF	Scale	VIF
Q1	4.442	Q12	2.124
Q2	3.888	Q13	1.826
Q3	1.482	Q14	2.116
Q4	1.933	Q15	2.82
Q5	1.357	Q16	2.132
Q6	1.747	Q17	2.247
Q7	2.774	Q18	2.25
Q8	2.409	Q19	1.969
Q9	2.46	Q20	2.447
Q10	1.744	Q21	1.57
Q11	1.441	Q22	1.79

Collinearity at the indicator level was examined using VIF values. As shown in Table 2, all VIF values were below 5, indicating no multicollinearity among the indicators.

4.2. Inferential statistics

4.2.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

Although PLS-SEM does not require normality, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was conducted for descriptive purposes.

As summarized in Table 3, the results indicate that the data distributions deviate from normality ($p < 0.05$).

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for all constructs exceeded 0.70, confirming internal consistency reliability.

Convergent validity was established as Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 for all constructs. Discriminant validity was confirmed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with HTMT values below the recommended threshold of 0.90.

Table 3. Checking the normality of variables

	Employee Creativity	Knowledge Donating Behavior	Organizational inertia	Visionary Leadership	The whole
Z	0.199	0.240	0.211	0.246	0.212
Significance Level (Sig)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Result	Non-normal	Non-normal	Non-normal	Non-normal	Non-normal

4.2.2. Confirmatory factor analysis results

As shown in Table 4, all factor loadings for the measurement items exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.50, demonstrating adequate indicator reliability.

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis

Scale	Factorial load	Scale	Factorial load
Q1	0.837	Q12	0.852
Q2	0.841	Q13	0.831
Q3	0.723	Q14	0.851
Q4	0.783	Q15	0.806
Q5	0.621	Q16	0.794
Q6	0.724	Q17	0.817
Q7	0.861	Q18	0.785
Q8	0.848	Q19	0.774
Q9	0.785	Q20	0.810
Q10	0.761	Q21	0.555
Q11	0.723	Q22	0.504

4.2.3. Cronbach's alpha coefficient and Composite Reliability

As shown in Table 5, all constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency reliability. Both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement scales were reliable.

Table 5. Internal Consistency Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability
Organizational inertia	0.856	0.897
Employee creativity	0.791	0.855
Knowledge donating behavior	0.831	0.888
Visionary leadership	0.819	0.875

4.2.4. Coefficient of determination index (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for organizational inertia was 0.777, and for employee creativity, 0.865 (Table 6). According to established PLS benchmarks, these values indicate substantial model explanatory power.

Table 6. R^2

Variable	Coefficient	Evaluation
Organizational inertia	0.777	Strong
Employee creativity	0.865	Strong

As reported in Table 7, Effect sizes (f^2) were calculated to assess the magnitude of exogenous constructs' impact on endogenous variables. The results indicate small to moderate effect sizes, suggesting that relationships, while significant, should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Table 7. Effect size (f^2) for Structural Paths

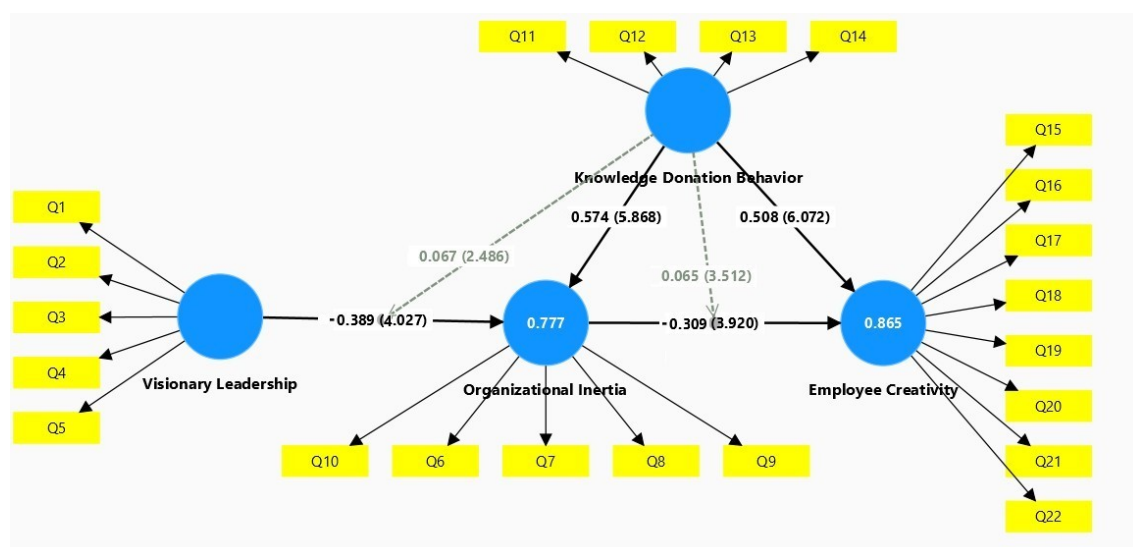
	Employee creativity	Knowledge Donating Behavior	Organizational Inertia	Visionary Leadership	Knowledge Donating Behavior *Organizational Inertia	Knowledge Donating Behavior * Visionary Leadership
Employee creativity						
Knowledge Donating Behavior	0.440		0.404			
Organizational Inertia	0.154					
Visionary Leadership			0.048			
Knowledge Donating Behavior *Organizational Inertia	0.08					
Knowledge Donating Behavior * Visionary Leadership			0.045			

The SRMR value was below the recommended threshold of 0.1, suggesting an acceptable model fit.

Table 8. Predictive relevance (Q^2) results

Variable	$Q^2 = 1 - SSE/SSO$
Organizational inertia	0.453
Employee creativity	0.357

Predictive relevance (Q^2) values were positive for both endogenous constructs, indicating acceptable predictive capability. As shown in Table 8, all endogenous constructs exhibited Q^2 values greater than zero, indicating adequate predictive relevance of the structural model

Figure 1. Final Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients and R^2 Values

As shown in Figure 1, the structural relationships were estimated using bootstrapping procedures in SmartPLS. The standardized path coefficients (β) and R^2 values are displayed for all endogenous constructs.

As presented in Table 9, the total effects among the study variables provide initial evidence supporting the proposed mediation model.

Table 9. Total Effects of the Structural Model

Structural Path	Total effects
Visionary Leadership -> Organizational Inertia	-0.389
Visionary Leadership -> Employee Creativity	-0.055
Organizational Inertia -> Employee Creativity	-0.293
Knowledge Donating Behavior x Visionary Leadership -> Organizational Inertia	0.067
Knowledge Donating Behavior x Visionary Leadership -> Employee Creativity	0.020
Knowledge Donating Behavior x Organizational Inertia -> Employee Creativity	0.065
Knowledge Donating Behavior -> Organizational Inertia	0.574
Knowledge Donating Behavior -> Employee Creativity	0.694

The mediation effect was examined using bootstrapping. The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.120$, $t = 2.027$). The VAF value was greater than 0.80, indicating a strong mediating effect.

4.2.5. Hypothesis testing

The proposed hypotheses were tested using the structural model estimated through the PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedure. The standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, and significance levels were used to evaluate the proposed relationships.

H1: Visionary leadership $\rightarrow$ Organizational inertia $\beta = -0.389$, $t = 4.026$, $p < 0.05$

This coefficient indicates a statistically significant and moderate negative association between visionary leadership and organizational inertia.

H2: Organizational inertia $\rightarrow$ Employee creativity $\beta = -0.31$, $t = 3.88$, $p < 0.05$

The result suggests a significant, moderate negative association.

H3: Mediation effect $\beta = 0.120$, $t = 2.025$, $p < 0.05$

The indirect effect is statistically significant, indicating partial mediation of organizational inertia in the relationship between visionary leadership and employee creativity.

H4: Moderation of knowledge donating behavior (VL $\rightarrow$ OI) $\beta = 0.067$, $t = 2.472$, $p < 0.05$

The interaction effect is statistically significant but small in magnitude, indicating that knowledge-donating behavior conditions the strength of the association.

H5: Moderation of knowledge donating behavior (OI → EC) $\beta = 0.069, t = 3.627, p < 0.05$

This interaction is significant and small, suggesting that higher knowledge donating weakens the negative association between organizational inertia and creativity. The results of hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Hypothesis testing

No	Hypothesis	Path coefficient (β)	Significance	Confidence level	Results
1	Visionary Leadership → Organizational Inertia	-0.389	4.026	%95	Confirmation
2	Organizational inertia → Employee creativity	-0.31	3.88	%95	Confirmation
3	Visionary Leadership → Organizational Inertia → Employee Creativity	0.120	2.025	%95	Confirmation
4	Visionary Leadership → Organizational Inertia (Moderating Knowledge Donating Behavior)	0.067	2.472	%95	Confirmation
5	Organizational inertia → Employee creativity (moderating knowledge donating behavior)	0.069	3.627	%95	Confirmation

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Market dynamics, technological advancement, and shifting consumer preferences continuously reshape competitive environments. In such contexts, organizational inertia represents a structural constraint that limits adaptive capacity and reduces responsiveness to environmental signals. Consistent with prior studies (Aghababaei and Konani, 2022; Ashok et al., 2021; Yulindasari et al., 2020; Saher and Ayoub, 2020), the findings of this study demonstrate that visionary leadership is negatively associated with organizational inertia. This result reinforces the argument that forward-looking leadership behaviors function as cognitive and motivational mechanisms that weaken entrenched routines and facilitate organizational adaptability. Accordingly, managers of knowledge-based companies are encouraged to adopt a long-term strategic orientation, articulate compelling future visions, and emphasize emerging opportunities and threats in order to reduce rigidity and foster constructive change.

Organizational inertia, when embedded in routines, procedures, and organizational culture, restricts innovation capacity and limits employees' ability to respond creatively to environmental challenges. In line with previous research (Sepahvand et al., 2023; Mousavi, 2023; Jafari et al., 2018; AlKayid et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022; Hongdianto et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2020), the results confirm that higher levels of inertia are associated

with lower employee creativity. This finding highlights the structural nature of creativity constraints and suggests that creativity is not solely an individual attribute but is significantly shaped by organizational rigidity. Therefore, managers should actively identify institutionalized barriers, redesign inflexible routines, and cultivate adaptive cultures that encourage experimentation and idea generation.

Beyond direct effects, this study contributes to the literature by examining the mediating role of organizational inertia in the relationship between visionary leadership and employee creativity. Consistent with [Shariatnejad et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Al-Kayid et al. \(2023\)](#), the results indicate that visionary leadership enhances creativity indirectly by reducing inertia. This mediation mechanism provides a more integrated explanation of how leadership behaviors translate into creative outcomes through structural transformation processes. Thus, fostering visionary leadership competencies—such as strategic foresight, inspirational communication, and developmental support—can indirectly stimulate creativity by dismantling structural resistance to change.

Furthermore, this study extends prior research by investigating the moderating role of knowledge donating behavior in two structural relationships. The findings indicate that knowledge donating strengthens the negative association between visionary leadership and organizational inertia. This suggests that knowledge-sharing climates amplify the effectiveness of leadership interventions aimed at reducing rigidity. Organizations should therefore encourage voluntary knowledge exchange through supportive policies, fairness in organizational practices, and incentives that enhance employees' willingness to share expertise.

In addition, in line with [Bakhtiyarian \(2023\)](#), [Jahanipour and Rahimi \(2021\)](#), [Ebrahimi \(2016\)](#), [Wang et al. \(2024\)](#), [AlKayid et al. \(2023\)](#), [Zhou et al. \(2022\)](#), [Ashok et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Fu et al. \(2021\)](#), knowledge donating was found to moderate the relationship between organizational inertia and employee creativity. When knowledge-sharing behaviors are strong, the negative impact of inertia on creativity becomes weaker, indicating that collective learning processes can buffer structural constraints. Managers are therefore advised to establish transparent communication systems, reduce bureaucratic obstacles to idea submission, and create regular forums, such as brainstorming sessions and cross-functional discussions, to stimulate collaborative innovation.

Overall, the primary contribution of this study lies in its integrated examination of visionary leadership, organizational inertia, and knowledge donating behavior within a single mediation–moderation framework ([Okhravi, 2025](#); [Okhravi and Karimi, 2023](#)). Rather than treating these

constructs independently, the findings demonstrate their interdependent roles in shaping employee creativity in knowledge-based firms. By empirically validating this combined structural mechanism in the context of Mashhad's science and technology park companies, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how leadership and knowledge processes jointly influence creative performance.

5.1. Systemic Interpretation and Discussion

From a systems thinking perspective, the conceptual model of this study can be understood as an interconnected set of feedback loops rather than a linear cause-and-effect structure (Hashemifard and Okhravi, 2025; Okhravi and Nazari, 2025). Visionary leadership, organizational inertia, knowledge-donating behavior, and employee creativity form a dynamic learning system in which each component continuously influences and is influenced by the others (Senge, 2006).

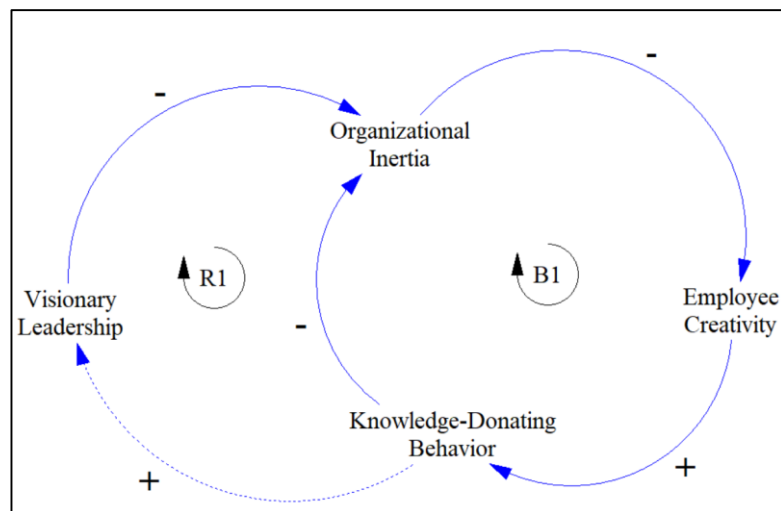


Figure 2. Causal loop diagram illustrating the systemic relationships among the study variables

Note. Dashed arrows indicate conceptually inferred feedback that were not directly tested in the present empirical model (e.g., Knowledge-Donating → Visionary Leadership). These inferred links are grounded in the literature on organizational learning and leadership, and are proposed for future empirical testing.

Building on the empirical findings, the model's dynamic structure can be expressed as two interrelated feedback loops (Figure 2). As shown in Figure 2, two interrelated feedback loops describe the systemic dynamics revealed by the empirical model.

The first reinforcing loop (R1) is directly supported by the results: visionary leadership significantly decreases organizational inertia ($\beta = -0.389$, $p < 0.05$) and increases employee

creativity ($\beta = 0.120$, $p < 0.05$). As knowledge-donating behavior moderates both relationships positively, it can be inferred that leadership and knowledge sharing jointly reinforce creative performance. This mechanism aligns with the transformational and learning organization perspectives (Senge, 2006).

The second balancing loop (B1) represents the systemic influence of knowledge-donating behavior on organizational inertia. Although the direct path was not tested, empirical evidence suggests that greater knowledge sharing weakens the negative effect of inertia on creativity ($\beta = -0.31$), consistent with the dynamic organizational theory of Hannan and Freeman (1984). Thus, knowledge-donating behavior acts as a systemic leverage point, counterbalancing structural rigidity and sustaining creative performance over time.

Together, these reinforcing (R1) and balancing (B1) loops provide a holistic explanation of how leadership, inertia, and knowledge processes interact as a dynamic system rather than a linear set of causal relations. Although the empirical model confirmed a direct positive path from visionary leadership to employee creativity, this relationship was omitted from the causal loop diagram to emphasize the dominant systemic pathways—particularly the mediating and balancing roles of organizational inertia and knowledge-donating behavior.

This systemic configuration provides a conceptual bridge between quantitative findings and qualitative system dynamics, demonstrating how leadership and knowledge processes can jointly enhance adaptive capacity in learning organizations.

From a systemic perspective, the findings underscore that employee creativity in knowledge-based firms cannot be explained by isolated organizational factors. Instead, creativity emerges from the dynamic interplay among leadership orientation, structural rigidity, and knowledge processes. Visionary leadership shapes interpretive frames and strategic direction; organizational inertia reflects embedded structural constraints; and knowledge-donating behavior conditions how leadership signals diffuse across the organization. By examining these interdependent elements simultaneously, the study highlights that organizational outcomes are the product of mutually reinforcing mechanisms rather than linear cause-and-effect relationships. In this sense, the systemic perspective adopted here emphasizes conceptual integration and structural interdependence, providing a holistic explanation of how leadership behaviors translate into creative performance through both mediating and moderating processes.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Second, data were collected from managers within a specific regional

and industrial context, which may constrain generalizability. Third, reliance on self-reported measures may introduce perceptual bias. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, multi-source data, and cross-cultural samples to validate and extend the proposed framework. Additionally, exploring other contextual moderators-such as organizational learning culture or digital transformation capability-may further enrich understanding of creativity-enhancing mechanisms.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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