

# Solutions to Promote Innovative Work Behavior: case of Ho Chi Minh City's Software Sector

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## Abstract

Amid rapid growth and rising competition in Ho Chi Minh City's software sector, innovative work behavior is essential for sustaining competitive advantage. This study investigates its key antecedents and examines the mediating role of functional flexibility, grounded in social exchange theory and the dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. Using a quantitative design, data were collected through non-probability sampling, combining on-site convenience surveys in selected software firms with online snowball sampling among software engineers, producing 380 valid responses. SmartPLS3 was used to assess structural relationships. Results showed that transformational leadership and knowledge sharing positively influenced innovative work behavior, while functional flexibility mediated these relationships and converted leadership and knowledge resources into innovative action.

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Received 09/02/2026

Accepted 25/03/2026

Published 28/04/2026

## Keywords

Transformational leadership;  
knowledge sharing;  
functional flexibility;  
infrastructure capability;  
innovative work behavior.

## 1 Introduction

In the rapidly expanding and highly competitive software sector in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), employees' innovative work behavior (IWB) has become a critical determinant of organizational adaptability and long-term performance. However, despite increasingly strong technological and organizational infrastructures, innovative outcomes at the employee level remain uneven. A key paradox in HCMC's software sector is that available knowledge resources and managerial support do not automatically translate into IWB when employees lack the functional flexibility (FF) needed to move across tasks, absorb new knowledge, and respond to rapidly changing project demands. In this sense, FF can be viewed as a crucial mechanism that helps convert organizational resources alone into IWB in practice. As technological

complexity accelerates, numerous firms increasingly depend on knowledge-based resources and effective leadership mechanisms to stimulate employees' capacity to generate, promote, and implement novel ideas. Transformational leadership (TL) plays a pivotal role in shaping innovative outcomes by cultivating psychological safety, intrinsic motivation, and proactive engagement among employees [1]. Simultaneously, knowledge-intensive environments require a robust knowledge management infrastructure capability (KMIC), which includes organizational culture, structure, and information systems that support knowledge creation, exchange, and utilization [2]. Complementing this infrastructure, knowledge sharing (KS) enhances employees' cognitive resources, facilitates collaboration, and serves as a key antecedent of innovation.

Recent studies have also highlighted FF as a critical adaptive capability that enables employees to apply diverse skill sets, responds effectively to dynamic task demands, and translates accumulated knowledge into innovative behaviors. Despite its importance, empirical studies investigating FF as a mediating mechanism linking leadership and knowledge-related factors to IWB remains limited, particularly within Viet Nam's software sector. Therefore, the present study examined the effects of TL, KS, and KMIC on IWB and the mediating role of FF using data from 380 software engineers working in major software firms in HCMC. By integrating TL, KMIC, KS, and FF into a unified analytical framework, the study advanced theoretical understanding and provided practical insights for fostering innovation in knowledge-intensive organizations.

## 2 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

### 2.1 Transformational leadership (TL)

TL is a leadership style that motivates employees to move beyond personal interests toward collective goals through four key components: *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation*, and *individualized consideration* [3]. Through these components, TL fosters positive changes in followers' values, beliefs, and emotions

### 2.2 Knowledge management infrastructure capability (KMIC)

The KMIC reflects an organization's competence in establishing a foundational framework comprising a supportive culture, a flexible structure, and effective information systems. These components enable efficient creation, sharing, and utilization of knowledge, thereby fostering organizational learning, stimulating innovation, and strengthening core competencies.

Specifically, a flexible structure promotes interaction and empowerment. A supportive culture nurtures collaboration, learning, and KS [3], while information technology systems provide the basis for rapid knowledge exchange and connectivity, reinforcing core capabilities [5].

### 2.3 Knowledge sharing (KS)

KS is defined as the process of exchanging skills, experiences, and information among individuals within

an organization, encompassing both explicit and tacit knowledge. This process occurs through communicative interactions where individuals acquire and actively disseminate knowledge. Consequently, recipients are able to apply the acquired knowledge effectively in their work, thereby fostering innovation at both individual and organizational levels .

### 2.4 Functional flexibility (FF)

According to [4], FF denotes employees' capacity to leverage their knowledge, skills, and expertise to undertake a range of tasks beyond their routine duties. This capability enables them to adapt swiftly, participate in varied activities, and respond effectively to shifting demands in dynamic work environments. Such flexibility is underpinned by a holistic set of competencies, encompassing skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

### 2.5 Innovative work behavior (IWB)

IWB is regarded as a purposeful sequence of individual actions aimed at generating, promoting, and realizing new ideas. It encompasses the exploration, creation, dissemination, and implementation of creative ideas in the workplace, thereby enhancing individual, team, and organizational effectiveness. This behavior reflects proactivity and the capacity to solve problems through novel approaches [5].

### 2.6 Hypotheses development

#### 2.6.1 TL on IWB

According to SET [6], individuals are more likely to engage in constructive and proactive behaviors when their contributions are acknowledged and appreciated by the organization. TL, which includes intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation, fosters employee trust and enhances organizational commitment. This leadership approach contributes to the development of a psychologically safe environment that encourages innovation by reducing fear of failure and promoting open communication. When employees feel supported and recognized, they are more inclined to demonstrate creative behaviors and pursue continuous improvement [1]. In the context of the software sector, such recognition and encouragement from leaders increase employees' willingness to experiment, generate novel ideas, and embrace the risks associated with innovation.

H1: Transformational leadership positively influences IWB in the software sector in HCMC.

#### 2.6.2 KS and IWB

SET posits that individuals seek to maintain a balance of benefits within relationships. When benefits are received, a norm of reciprocity tends to emerge prompting individuals to engage in positive reciprocal behaviors. In organizational settings, knowledge contributors often anticipate future rewards, while recipients are inclined to reciprocate, fostering mutual support that promotes innovation [7]. KS enhances employees' depth of understanding, facilitates the application of insights, and stimulates creativity, it also initiates novel ideas and increases motivation for innovation through peer learning. Empirical research across manufacturing, automotive, hospitality, and education sectors has consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between KS and innovative behavior. In the software sector in HCMC, where the environment is both dynamic and innovation-intensive, KS facilitates effective team collaboration, problem-solving, and development of novel solutions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Knowledge sharing positively influences IWB in the software sector in HCMC.

#### 2.6.3 FF and IWB

According to the theory of organizational knowledge creation, organizations generate new knowledge through the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge as conceptualized in the SECI model [10]. FF enables individuals to move across different "ba" spaces, thereby promoting KS, combination, and internalization which are essential processes for fostering innovative behavior [11]. Organizations must enhance employees' knowledge, skills, and multi-functional competencies to empower proactive creativity. FF serves as a foundation for innovation, enabling employees to go beyond the formal boundaries of their job roles. Studies conducted in manufacturing firms and SMEs in Pakistan have confirmed the positive impact of FF on IWB [12, 13]. In the context of software sector in HCMC where technology evolves rapidly and customer demands are diverse, FF enables employees to adapt, innovate, and continuously improve.

H4: Functional flexibility has a positive impact on IWB in the software sector in HCMC.

#### 2.6.4 KS and FF

According to the theory of organizational knowledge creation, knowledge is formed through the dynamic interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge, and its diffusion enhances both understanding and FF [8]. The sharing of knowledge, particularly tacit experiences, enables individuals to internalize insights and collaborate more effectively. Research has consistently demonstrated that KS is a foundational factor contributing to FF [10]. An empirical study conducted in Pakistan involving SME employees revealed that KS positively influences FF. Similarly, another study with SME employees confirmed that KS significantly enhanced FF. In the software sector where agile methodologies are prevalent, KS frequently occurs through daily stand-up meetings, code reviews, and technical workshops.

H6: Knowledge sharing has a positive effect on FF in the software sector in HCMC.

#### 2.6.5 KMIC and FF

According to the theory of organizational knowledge creation [8], knowledge is developed through continuous interactions among individuals, groups, and organizational systems, and becomes valuable when supported by an appropriate infrastructure for its creation, sharing, and application. When the KMIC is effectively designed, employees can access to information more easily, develop skills, enhance motivation, and improve adaptability, thereby contributing to the overall effectiveness of human resources. According to [10], such infrastructure strengthens learning processes, which in turn fosters FF. In the software sector, which is characterized by a knowledge-intensive and innovation-driven environment, knowledge management infrastructure promotes continuous learning, supports multi-role capabilities, and enhances adaptability to new technologies.

H2: The capability of knowledge management infrastructure is positively associated with FF in the software sector in HCMC.

#### 2.6.6 TL and FF

Social Exchange Theory suggests that employees reciprocate leaders' trust and support through positive behaviors, including greater adaptability beyond formal job boundaries [6]. Multiple research highlight the mediating role of employee adaptiveness in the relationship between paradoxical leadership and employee creativity, this thesis shifts the focus to TL. FF is conceptualized as a tangible expression of adaptability, reflecting employees' capacity to adjust their roles and competencies in response to changing demands. TL cultivates a proactive disposition among employees and enhances their adaptability, thereby establishing the foundation for FF. Within the dynamic and rapidly evolving software sector, TL plays a critical role in fostering multi-skilling and strengthening employees' FF by promoting inspiration, empowerment, and continuous learning.

*H5: Transformational leadership positively influences FF among employees in the software sector in HCMC.*

#### 2.6.7 FF mediates the relationship between TL and IWB

According to SET, employees tend to reciprocate positive support from leaders by engaging in behaviors that contribute to the organization [6]. In the software sector in HCMC, TL promotes innovation by inspiring employees, fostering continuous learning, and empowering them in task execution. Such support enhances employees' perceptions of trust and developmental opportunities, thereby encouraging them to proactively broaden their roles, undertake multiple responsibilities, and adapt flexibly to changing project demands.

This FF enables employees to access to diverse knowledge sources, experiment with novel solutions, and propose effective improvements, which in turn facilitates IWB. Therefore, FF is expected to act as a mediating mechanism through which TL influences IWB.

*H7a: FF mediates the relationship between TL and IWB in the software sector in HCMC.*

#### 2.6.8 FF mediates the relationship between KMIC and IWB

According to [8], through the SECI model, and [11], via the concept of "Ba," the process of knowledge creation and diffusion depends on supportive infrastructure, including technology, organizational structure, culture, and interactive space. Knowledge management infrastructure facilitates employees' access sharing, and application of knowledge, thereby enhancing their skills, knowledge, motivation, and proactivity. Numerous studies have confirmed that such infrastructure increases FF, which is a critical driver of creativity and innovative behavior. Previous research [9] indicated that knowledge management infrastructure positively influences functional flexibility, subsequently impacting innovative behavior. In software sector where technological changes occur rapidly, knowledge management infrastructure enables employees to reskill, adapt to new projects, and foster innovation. Therefore, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H7b: FF mediates the relationship between KMIC and innovative behavior among software employees in HCMC.*

#### 2.6.9 FF mediates the relationship between KS and IWB

Organizational knowledge is continuously shaped through interactions among individuals, groups, and organizations with KS as a core mechanism [8]. SECI model and "ba" concept highlight the role of dynamic context in facilitating knowledge creation and diffusion [11]. FF, which is the ability to apply knowledge across diverse tasks, is essential for converting knowledge into innovation. Studies have suggested that intrinsic motivation and risk-taking may mediate this process. KS expands understanding, boosts proactivity, and enhances flexibility, thus fostering innovation. Moreover, it supports knowledge processes that improve adaptability. Prior research [12] found that FF mediated the indirect effect of KS on IWB. In competitive software sectors, FF drives innovation while KS updates technical know-how. Thus, this study proposed:

*H7c: FF mediates the relationship between KS and IWB in software firms in HCMC*

Proposed Research model

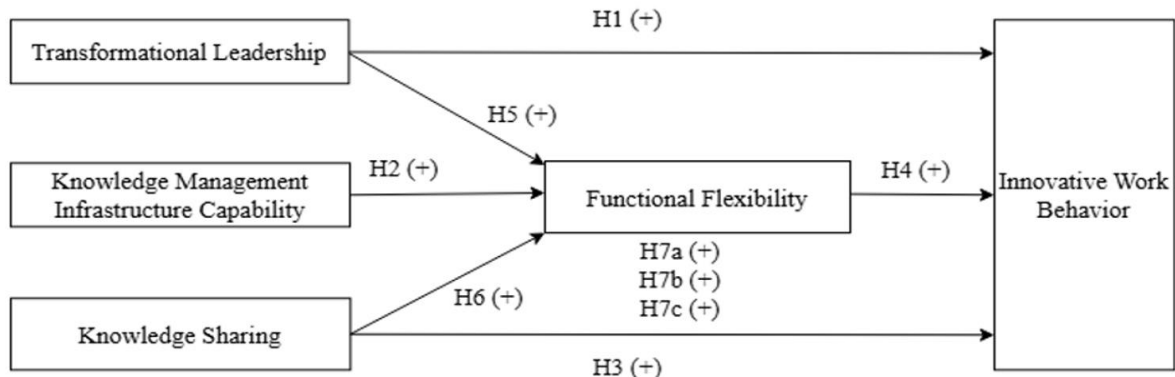


Figure 1 Proposed research model

Measurement scales

The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale. TL was measured using seven items developed by [13]. Respondents, who were subordinates, evaluated their supervisors based on four dimensions: (i) idealized influence, (ii) inspirational motivation, (iii) intellectual stimulation, and (iv) individualized consideration. KS was assessed through six items drawn from [14], capturing behaviors related to the sharing of information, experiences, and insights among individuals. KMIC of five items covering: (i) organizational culture (2 items), (ii) flexible structure (2 items), (iii) IT support (2 items) adapted from [2] respectively.

FF was measured with six items based on works by assessing employees' ability to adapt to change through modifications in roles, tasks, and skill sets. IWB included five items from, evaluating the frequency with which individuals engage in innovative actions within the workplace [15].

3 Research Methods

3.1 Data analysis

In this study, SmartPLS3 was employed to test the proposed hypotheses. The PLS procedure consisted of two steps: (1) assessing the measurement model to examine the reliability and validity of the scales, and (2) testing the hypotheses using the bootstrapping technique.

3.2 Sample and data collection

A non-probability sampling method, combining convenience and snowball sampling, yielded a total of 400 responses. After screening, 20 invalid responses were removed, leaving 380 valid responses collected between October 18 and December 18, 2025. The

sample consisted primarily of male participants, most of whom are from 26 to 30 years old and held a bachelor's degree. Participants mainly work in Testing/Quality Assurance, Software Engineering, or Data Analytics, with nearly half having less than five years of professional experience. Most respondents are employed at limited liability companies with at least 100 employees. The 26-30 age group represents the largest proportion of the sample.

4 Results

4.1 Measurement model analysis

The  $R^2$  values exceeding 0.26 indicated a large effect, while values between 0.13 and 0.26 represented a medium effect. As shown in Table 1, the model accounts for 42.9% of the variance in FF, indicating a large explanatory effect. For IWB, the  $R^2$  of 22.2% reflected a medium effect size. The close alignment between the  $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$  values suggests that the model is both stable and appropriately estimated.

Table 1 R square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
FF	0.429	0.424
IWB	0.222	0.215

The study employed the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio for discriminant validity. As shown in Table 2, the square roots of AVEs for all constructs exceeded their inter-construct correlations, thereby satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The HTMT values reported in Table 3 fell below the threshold of 0.90, indicating low conceptual overlap and clear construct distinctiveness. Collectively, both criteria

confirmed strong discriminant validity of the measurement model, providing a robust foundation for subsequent structural model analysis.

**Table 2** Fornell-Larcker criterion

	FF	IWB	KMIC	KS	TL
FF	0.867				
IWB	0.397	0.852			
KMIC	0.573	0.385	0.854		
KS	0.278	0.281	0.260	0.846	
TL	0.568	0.390	0.549	0.249	0.851

**Table 3** Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	FF	IWB	KMIC	KS
FF				
IWB	0.440			
KMIC	0.635	0.424		
KS	0.304	0.306	0.283	
TL	0.645	0.437	0.617	0.278

The measurement model provides strong evidence of convergent validity. Table 4 shows that all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold, confirming indicator reliability. Regarding internal consistency, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs were above the acceptable threshold, reinforcing the reliability of the measurement scales. Overall, the results indicate that the constructs demonstrate satisfactory reliability and convergent validity.

**Table 4** Validity and Reliability results

Variables	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
TL	TL1	0.854	0.873	0.913	0.725
	TL2	0.849			
	TL3	0.854			
	TL4	0.847			
KMIC	KMIC1	0.841	0.907	0.931	0.729
	KMIC2	0.853			
	KMIC3	0.849			
	KMIC4	0.856			
	KMIC5	0.869			

Variables	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
KS	KS1	0.849	0.921	0.938	0.716
	KS2	0.852			
	KS3	0.843			
	KS4	0.848			
	KS5	0.862			
	KS6	0.823			
FF	FF1	0.863	0.890	0.923	0.751
	FF2	0.876			
	FF3	0.866			
	FF4	0.861			
IWB	IWB1	0.858	0.906	0.930	0.726
	IWB2	0.849			
	IWB3	0.856			
	IWB4	0.858			
	IWB5	0.839			

#### 4.2 Hypothesis testing

The study employed PLS-SEM with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to evaluate the proposed hypotheses, in accordance with established methodological recommendations for examining mediation effects. The results presented in Table 6 indicated that all hypothesized relationships (H1– H6) were statistically supported.

The findings indicated that all six hypotheses were supported. Specifically, H1 was supported, showing that TL had a significant positive effect on IWB ( $\beta = 0.220$ ,  $t = 3.958$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). H2 was also supported, indicating that KMIC positively influenced FF ( $\beta = 0.356$ ,  $t = 8.406$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Likewise, H3 confirmed that KS significantly and positively affected IWB ( $\beta = 0.163$ ,  $t = 3.114$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ). H4 was supported as FF exerted a positive effect on IWB ( $\beta = 0.227$ ,  $t = 4.281$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). In addition, H5 demonstrated that TL significantly enhanced FF ( $\beta = 0.348$ ,  $t = 7.759$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Finally, H6 was supported, revealing that KS had a positive and significant effect on FF ( $\beta = 0.099$ ,  $t = 2.435$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ). Overall, the results confirm the proposed structural relationships in the model.

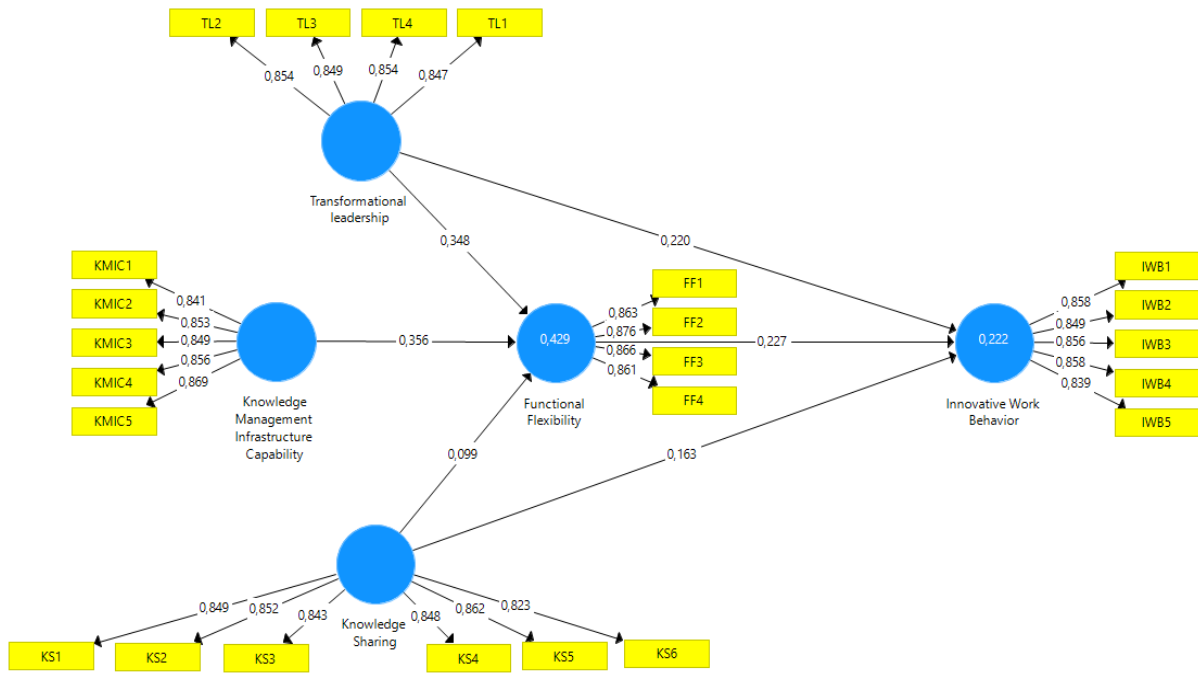


Figure 2 Structural equation model results

Table 6 Path coefficients

Hypothesis	Direct effects	$\beta$	T Statistics	P Values	Result
H1	TL → IWB	0.220	3.958	0.000	Supported
H2	KMIC → FF	0.356	8.406	0.000	Supported
H3	KS → IWB	0.163	3.114	0.002	Supported
H4	FF → IWB	0.227	4.281	0.000	Supported
H5	TL → FF	0.348	7.759	0.000	Supported
H6	KS → FF	0.099	2.435	0.015	Supported

Table 7 Specific indirect effects

Hypothesis	Specific Indirect Effects	$\beta$	P Values	Result
H7a	TL → FF → IWB	0.079	0.000	Supported
H7b	KMIC → FF → IWB	0.081	0.000	Supported
H7c	KS → FF → IWB	0.022	0.039	Supported

Table 8 Mediation analysis

Mediated Relationship	$\beta$ (Indirect)	P Values	$\beta$ (Direct)	P Values (Indirect)	Mediation (%)	Mediation Type
TL → FF → IWB (H7a)	0.079	0.000	0.220	0.000	26.4	Partial mediation
KMIC → FF → IWB (H7b)	0.081	0.000	-	-	100	Full mediation
KS → FF → IWB (H7c)	0.022	0.039	0.163	0.002	11.9	Partial mediation

### 5 Discussions and Implications

This study provides a more nuanced understanding of IWB in software sector in HCMC by showing that innovation is shaped not only by knowledge-related resources but also by leadership style and employees' adaptive capacity. This finding suggests that in

software project environments, where tasks are dynamic, deadlines are tight, and requirements frequently change, employees are more likely to generate, promote, and implement new ideas when they are inspired, empowered, and supported by leaders who encourage experimentation and learning. TL appears to

exert the strongest influence because it directly affects the motivational and psychological conditions under which innovative behavior occurs.

The findings also indicate that KMIC does not directly produce IWB, but works through FF. This implies that organizational culture, structure, and IT-based knowledge systems are important enabling conditions, yet they do not automatically lead to innovation unless employees are able to flexibly apply, transfer, and recombine knowledge across different tasks and project demands.

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

This study made several contributions to management theory. First, it extended Social Exchange Theory and the theory of organizational knowledge creation by integrating TL, KS, and KMIC into a unified framework for explaining IWB in the software sector. In doing so, the study showed that both relational mechanisms and knowledge-related organizational conditions were necessary for understanding how innovation emerged in knowledge-intensive workplaces.

Second, the study highlighted FF as a key mediating mechanism through which leadership and knowledge-related resources were translated into IWB. This finding enriched existing theory by showing that innovation was not merely the result of available support systems, but of the interaction between those systems and employees' adaptive capabilities.

Third, the study provided context-specific evidence from software firms in HCMC, where work was typically organized around projects, iterative development cycles, and cross-functional collaboration. By linking innovation outcomes to the project-based nature of software work, the study contributed to a more grounded understanding of how leadership, knowledge processes, and flexibility interacted in fast-changing professional environments.

### 5.2 Practical implications

The findings offered several practical implications. First, firms should invest in developing TL capabilities. In project-based environments, where uncertainty and

interdependence were high, such leadership was particularly important for sustaining creativity and adaptive problem-solving.

Second, firms should not assume that investments in knowledge management infrastructure alone will automatically improve innovation. Accordingly, software firms should strengthen FF through multi-skilling, cross-functional training, job rotation, and continuous skill development.

Third, organizations should foster a knowledge-sharing culture in which employees feel safe to discuss mistakes, exchange lessons learned, and collaboratively improve work processes. In software development, activities such as code reviews, retrospectives, technical sharing sessions, and peer learning forums can create opportunities for knowledge conversion and innovation. Building a trustworthy environment in which errors were treated as learning opportunities rather than personal failures can further strengthen both FF and IWB.

This study had several limitations. The use of convenience sampling might have reduced the representativeness of the findings, and the cross-sectional design limited causal inference.

Future research should consider using longitudinal designs and broader sampling strategies to improve robustness and generalizability. It would also be valuable to compare different types of software firms, such as outsourcing companies, product-based firms, startups, and large-scale technology enterprises, in order to examine whether the relationships identified in this study varied across organizational contexts. Such comparative research would provide a deeper understanding of how leadership, knowledge management infrastructure, and FF influence IWB under different business models and work structures.

### **Acknowledgement**

We would like to thank Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam for the support of time and resource for this research.

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## **Giải pháp thúc đẩy hành vi đổi mới sáng tạo: trường hợp ngành phần mềm tại Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh**

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**Tóm tắt** Trong bối cảnh ngành phần mềm tại Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh tăng trưởng nhanh và cạnh tranh ngày càng mạnh, hành vi đổi mới sáng tạo trong công việc là yếu tố quan trọng để duy trì lợi thế cạnh tranh. Nghiên cứu này phân tích các tiền tố của hành vi này và kiểm định vai trò trung gian của tính linh hoạt chức năng, dựa trên lý thuyết trao đổi xã hội và lý thuyết động về sáng tạo tri thức tổ chức. Dữ liệu định lượng được thu thập từ 380 phản hồi hợp lệ bằng chọn mẫu phi xác suất, kết hợp khảo sát trực tiếp thuận tiện và lấy mẫu dây chuyền trực tuyến. SmartPLS3 được sử dụng để kiểm định mô hình. Kết quả cho thấy lãnh đạo chuyển hóa, chia sẻ tri thức và năng lực hạ tầng quản trị tri thức góp phần gia tăng tính linh hoạt chức năng; đồng thời, tính linh hoạt chức năng giữ vai trò trung gian trong việc chuyển hóa các nguồn lực lãnh đạo và tri thức thành hành vi đổi mới của nhân viên.

**Từ khóa** Lãnh đạo chuyển đổi; chia sẻ tri thức; linh hoạt chức năng; năng lực hạ tầng quản trị tri thức; hành vi đổi mới sáng tạo trong công việc.

