AOSIS

Intellectual humility: Perspectives of early career academics in South Africa

Check for updates
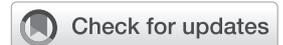
Authors:
Ophelia Veldkornet[1]
Amanda Werner[1]
Wayne Macpherson[1]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences, Nelson Mandela University, Gqeberha, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Wayne Macpherson,
wayne.macpherson@mandela.ac.za

Read online:
Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Orientation: In a constantly changing environment, intellectual humility is required for being receptive to diverse ideas, rigorous debate and novel solutions.

Research purpose: This study explored the perspectives of early career academics on the concept of and need for intellectual humility in an academic environment.

Motivation for the study: Early career academics in South Africa may experience uncertainty when entering the academic sphere in which acquired knowledge and academic status prevail as symbols of achievement. In response, these academics may feel compelled to assert themselves, disregard intellectual humility and consequently become less open to learning from others.

Research approach/design and method: A generic qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews was adopted with a sample of 10 early career academics at a South African institution of higher learning. The method of analysis was thematic.

Main findings: Early career academic participants conceptualised humility as intentional self-reflection and human-centredness. In terms of intellectual humility, three main themes emerged: owning one's limitations, respecting others' viewpoints and learning and sharing.

Practical/managerial implications: The study sensitises academic managers to the value early career academics place on intellectual humility. Intellectually stimulating but psychologically safe environments are required where early career academics can freely collaborate with others to identify innovative solutions to persistent problems.

Contribution/value-add: The study adds richness to the current limited literature on intellectual humility, and specifically in an academic environment and from the perspective of early career academics in South Africa.

Keywords: academic environment; change; early career academic; intellectual humility; imposter phenomenon.

Introduction

Orientation

The study explores early career academics' conceptualisation of intellectual humility and intellectual humility being an important attribute for academics within an academic environment. Early career academics are presented as emerging academic scholars with less than 10 years of academic experience. These academics are typically in need of not only career support and mentoring but also want intellectual stimulation, opportunities to apply their skills and autonomy (Barnes et al., 2021; Lesenyeho et al., 2018; Owusu-Agyeman, 2022). With transformation in South Africa, and the academic environment being more diverse, early career academics may find themselves in spaces where their knowledge is contested by more experienced academics, and where they themselves may contest traditional knowledge, especially within the context of decolonisation (Maluleka, 2024). In this respect, Nästesjö (2024) notes that if early career academics feel intimidated by those with more academic experience, they may subsequently hold back from sharing their perspectives or alternatively feel compelled to display their knowledge. Early career academics may also expect leaders to display and create a culture of intellectual humility in which awareness of intellectual fallibility and diverse views are encouraged (Krumrei-Mancuso & Begin, 2022).

Intellectual humility within an academic environment is considered essential because of a variety of reasons. Firstly, technological advancement, economic challenges and power dynamics result in a

constantly changing world, requiring critical thinking, new insights and creative solutions rather than relying on traditional knowledge bases (Cousins, 2018; Ehlers & Lazenby, 2019). Holding on to traditional knowledge bases without considering changing contexts could reflect a lack of intellectual humility. As such, intellectual humility is necessary to prevent dogmatism and confirmation bias, foster interactions with diverse others and formulate innovative solutions to emerging challenges. Secondly, higher educational institutions need to foster learning and intellectual capital among scholars enabling them to deal with complexity and find innovative solutions to persistent wicked problems (Selesho & Naile, 2014). Academic institutions should therefore establish a culture of intellectual humility that encourages diverse perspectives and collaboration. Thirdly, academic institutions in South Africa need to enhance equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging, and therefore promote diverse perspectives that may be in conflict with traditional ways of thinking and doing (Breetzke & Hedding, 2016; Dhanpat et al., 2019). In this respect, the voices of previously marginalised groups in South Africa, such as black people and women, need to be elevated and heard, requiring intellectual humility from especially white male leaders and senior academics (Maluleka, 2024; Urban & Kujinga, 2017). The above scenarios call for an openness to new information, knowledge sharing, collaboration and a disapproval of intellectual arrogance.

The study draws from seminal work on intellectually humility performed by Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse (2016). According to these researchers, being intellectually humble makes one cautious of one's own knowledge and more open to diverse perspectives, a stance which is deemed essential for learning, collaboration and innovation within a rapidly changing environment (Cousins, 2018). The study adopts a qualitative approach to empirically explore the knowledge and understanding of early career academics of intellectual humility and its importance in a diverse academic environment (Owusu-Agyeman, 2022). In terms of social identity, the study sheds light on the identity of early academics in terms of their contribution to the academic discourse, and questions such as: Who am I as an academic? Do I fit? How do I fit? Do others see me as a fit? As such, the study sheds light on the cognitions of early career academics of the phenomenon of intellectual humility within an academic environment, which may have implications for their career growth, satisfaction and retention as well as for transformation (Hlatshwayo & Majozi, 2024).

Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of the study was to explore intellectual humility in an academic environment from the perspective of early career academics. The objective was to explore how they conceptualise intellectual humility and whether they deem intellectual humility as necessary in the academic environment.

Literature review
Humility

Intellectual humility is a form of humility, with humility being presented as a core trait of leaders and a trait associated with moral behaviour, empathy, perspective-taking and kindness towards others (Friedman et al., 2017; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2018). Humility is defined as having an accurate view of oneself, an accurate view of others and an accurate awareness of being part of something bigger (Council & Sowcik, 2021; Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2021). Humility had been interpreted as either a positive or negative characteristic. The negative view depicts a humble person as being submissive and lacking self-esteem, while the positive view posits humility as recognising, valuing and appreciating the abilities and strengths of others, rather than having a negative view of oneself (Council & Sowcik, 2021; Friedman et al., 2017). From a positive perspective, humility is considered key in reducing power differentials and building constructive relationships (Krumrei-Mancuso, 2018). A concept associated with positive organisational scholarship (POS), humility was first classified as a character strength but then reclassified as a virtue with an understanding that humility can be learned, as evidenced in leadership studies (Hendijani & Sohrabi, 2019; Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2021; Ross & Wright, 2021; Wright et al., 2016).

Intellectual humility

Intellectual humility as a scholarly concept emerged within the field of psychology and gained attention in disciplines such as philosophy and theology (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016; Mitu, 2021) with less exploration of the concept in studies on leadership and organisational behaviour. Intellectual humility is defined as a non-threatening awareness of one's intellectual fallibility, rendering one more open to the teachings and wisdom of others (Deffler et al., 2016; Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016; Porter et al., 2021). Thus, individuals who have a high level of intellectual humility recognise that despite their acquired knowledge, their cognitive abilities may be fallible and that their perspectives may be limited or skewed. This self-knowledge or self-awareness of one's cognitive limitations prevents one from accepting one's own viewpoints as ultimate or superior and renders one open to new insights or information that can improve problem solving. It is therefore deduced that intellectual humility is important in an academic environment, especially in institutions of higher learning where the emphasis is on generating and disseminating knowledge for developing future leaders and future sustainability. Intellectual humility improves learning and a culture of continuous learning as it requires the learner to acknowledge gaps in existing knowledge and become receptive to new perspectives (Krumrei-Mancuso, 2018). Intellectual humility had been linked to an increased desire to learn for the sake of learning, enjoyment of the process of learning and academic efficacy (Huynh et al., 2025). Factors contributing to the development of intellectual humility include metacognition, personality, curiosity and cultural norms (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2020; Zhu, 2024).

Four dimensions of intellectual humility

Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse (2016), leading authors in the field of intellectual humility, identified four main aspects of

intellectual humility, demonstrating its multifaceted nature. These dimensions are depicted in Table 1 with descriptives of each dimension provided.

The dimensions of intellectual humility depict a person with intellectual humility as one having a viewpoint on an issue, but at the same time, being open to learning from others and willing to adjust one's viewpoint as new insights become evident. Stanley et al. (2020) describe intellectual humility as both cognitive and interpersonal, emphasising intellectual humility in terms of knowledge gain as well as in terms of relating to others. Jarvinen and Paulus (2017) and Jayawickreme and Fleeson (2022) present intellectual humility as a virtue and as intellectual character. From the other side, a lack of intellectual humility is reflected in incivility, arrogance and dogmatism, which Barrett (2017) indicates is often prevalent in public discourse and in academia. Porter and Schuman (2017) found a link between a growth mindset of intelligence and intellectual humility, demonstrating that intellectual humility can be developed. They also found that intellectual humility is consistently linked to respect for and openness to opposing views.

Academics and intellectual humility

Intellectual humility may appear incompatible with an academic environment where knowledge is an attribute of academic achievement. Knowledge creation and dissemination are crucial in an ever-changing world where new solutions to problems need to be created (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Budevici-Puiu, 2020) and elevates the role that higher education institutions and academics play in the economy and society (Budevici-Puiu, 2020; Matsepe et al., 2020). However, academics may display resistance to change and alternative views and become resolute in promoting their own ideas and traditional knowledge bases (Leary et al., 2017). Buchheit (2020), for example, bemoans the rush among academics to publish for personal gain and calls for more humility and less hubris. Roberts and Zigarmi (2014) and

TABLE 1: Dimensions of intellectual humility.

Dimension	Description
Independence of one's intellect and one's ego	Having an expectation that others' viewpoints might differ from one's own (which is critical for cognitive processing); not feeling threatened or defensive about others having different views; being attentive to others' views, seeking understanding and demonstrating empathy.
Openness in revising one's viewpoint	Being open to counter arguments, developing greater understanding of others' viewpoints; showing compassion and valuing others' insights (being willing to change one's opinion).
Respect for others' viewpoints	Respecting the diverse viewpoints of others (critical in cognitive processing); acknowledging the existence of diverse knowledge experiences, seeking to understand the viewpoints of diverse others.
A lack of intellectual overconfidence	Avoiding intellectual overconfidence by being open to others' views.

Source: Own construction based on the work of Krumrei-Mancuso, E.J., & Rouse, S.V. (2016). The development and validation of the Intellectual Humility Scale. *Personality and Individual Differences, 97*, 165–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2015.106817; Leary, M.R., Diebels, K.J., Davisson, E.K., Jongman-Sereno, K.P., Isherwood, J.C., Raimi, K.T., Deffler, S.A., & Hoyle, R.H. (2017). Cognitive and interpersonal features of intellectual humility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 43*(6), 793–813. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217697695; Mitu, S.M. (2021). Intellectual humility – A moral construct, an intellectual virtue. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, 14*(63), 9–18. https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2021.14.63.1.1; Porter, T., Baldwin, C.R., Warren, M.T., Murray, E.D., Cotton Bronk, K., Forgeard, M.J.C., Snow, N.E., & Jayawickreme, E. (2021). Clarifying the content of intellectual humility: A systematic review and integrative framework. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 104*(5), 573–585. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2021.1975725

Mitu (2021) also opine that academics may hold on to traditional knowledge bases in resistance to change, with downstream consequences for students' ability to address real-life issues with fresh perspectives and critical thinking. Holding on to traditional views without interrogating the truth is counterproductive to constructive discourse on political and social issues and not indicative of intellectual humility (Porter & Schumann, 2017). Using a series of experiments, these researchers found that participants who displayed intellectual humility were more open to learning and exposed themselves more to opposing views and different political perspectives, making debate more constructive. As such, institutions of higher learning play a critical role in creating platforms for debate, dialogue and knowledge generation and should initiate complex conversations that include faculty members as well as students (Engelbrecht, 2022; Frantz et al., 2022; Porter & Schuman, 2017).

Academic leaders should visibly demonstrate intellectual humility in academic spaces (Beerkens & Van der Hoek, 2022; Idahosa & Vincent, 2019). This is especially relevant to institutions of higher learning in South Africa in addressing societal issues such as inequity and poverty and in developing social consciousness among academics and students (Urban & Kujinga, 2017). In South Africa, decolonisation, which is high on the transformation agenda for higher education, calls for intellectual humility and the promotion of alternative knowledge bases, and especially indigenous knowledge bases (Lumadi, 2021). In this respect, student protests of the past decade aimed at highlighting perceived failures in the transformation of institutions of higher learning. A decolonised curriculum presents diverse perspectives, encourages critical thinking and addresses issues relevant to marginalised communities (Lumadi, 2021). Leary et al. (2017) opine that teaching should promote intellectual humility, as teaching and learning should both cement and challenge one's beliefs and views. This presents intellectual humility as a balance between one's own knowledge and being open to new learning and highlights that collective intelligence and innovation are required to address cultural, societal and technological changes (Misevic et al., 2023). As such, academic leaders should be intentional and proactive in promoting debate of diverse ideas in a collaborative manner (Beerkens & Van der Hoek, 2022; Higgs, 2016; Idahosa & Vincent, 2019).

Academics may however be conflicted about being intellectually humble. Having legitimately demonstrated knowledge and expertise through obtaining a qualification in a specific field and producing subsequent academic outputs such as research articles may stimulate arrogance (Buchheit, 2020; Leary, 2017; Mitu, 2021). In this respect, Porter et al. (2021) note that intellectual humility is 'a virtuous balance' between intellectual arrogance and intellectual hesitancy, while Cousins (2018) highlights the importance of integrating diverse knowledge bases and holistic thinking for dealing with global and humanity problems. This requires purposeful inquiry and curiosity, collaboration and learning from non-homogeneous others rather than continuous improvement in traditional knowledge. Academics need to acknowledge the

fallibility of knowledge in a changing world and promote diverse perspectives and collective problem solving. Misevic et al. (2023) use the term collective intelligence to describe intentional openness and collaboration in responding to local and global issues.

Early career academics' experiences of intellectual humility

Early career academics as emerging scholars are typically appointed at the rank of associate lecturer or lecturer (Barnes et al., 2021) but may also have a doctorate with work experience outside of academia (Bosanquet et al., 2016). Early career academics are within the establishment phase of their academic career which, based on Super's Career Development Model, is a period of commitment, career advancement and growth (Bosanquet et al., 2016). In South Africa, the development of early career academics is perceived as a national need (Moosa, 2020). Early career academics regard intellectual stimulation and opportunities to apply their skills as important (Barnes et al., 2021; Lesenyeho et al., 2018; Owusu-Agyeman, 2022) but may find themselves in situations where their intellect is not acknowledged or valued because of a lack of intellectual humility among senior academics. In this respect, Maluleka (2024) asserts that in South Africa, early career academics are often disempowered based on age differences and gatekeeping tactics. Maluleka indicates that senior researchers and university professors are often being regarded as legitimate knowers whose knowledge is valued, while early black career academics are delegitimated knowers. This may reflect a lack of intellectual humility and hubris among senior academics. Gatekeeping, a related concept, refers to more experienced academics controlling information that leads to career opportunities and access to resources, with early career academics being excluded from such opportunities.

Early career academics may, irrespective of their achievements, could feel like imposters when they enter the academic environment, especially in fields such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics if they feel their knowledge may be questioned (Chakraverty, 2022). Imposter syndrome, described by Shinawatra et al. (2023), occurs when individuals, even when equally skilled to their colleagues, question their own accomplishments, develop an internal fear of being exposed and a sense of not belonging. This may lead to lower self-efficacy, a lower sense of belonging, feelings of stress and result in academics moving out of education (Maradoglu et al., 2022; Phelan, 2024). The experience of being an imposter is aggravated when early career academics are confronted with senior academics who, based on rank, gender, race or ethnicity, display a lack of intellectual humility and do not consider their ideas (Maluleka, 2024; Phelan, 2024). Colombo et al. (2020) assert that intellectual humility weakens the relationship between perceived dissimilarity and prejudice.

Early career academics, leadership and intellectual humility

Early career academics' perceptions of intellectual humility may also be influenced by their experiences with academic leadership, such as heads or supervisors. Humble leaders are preferred and perceived as more effective than arrogant leaders, especially among followers who consider themselves as intellectually humble (Park et al., 2020). In addition, intellectually humble leaders are perceived to promote a culture of intellectual humility (Krumrei-Mancuso & Begin, 2022). Krumrei (2022) notes that managers with a greater need for personal achievement and recognition may lack intellectual humility, while some employees may prefer leaders who come across as infallible. However, she asserts that intellectually humble leaders are more likely to adopt a follower-centred leadership style (e.g. servant leadership), empower followers and increase job satisfaction. Chughtai et al. (2023) found a significant indirect link between leader humility and employee career success, based on the perceptions of a sample of 293 respondents within manufacturing and service organisations. Their study showed that leader intellectual humility positively influenced employees' psychological coping resources (adaptability), resulting in career success, specifically for employees with proactive personalities. The conclusion is that humble leaders increase employees' confidence through empowerment and appreciation and motivate them to learn new skills and abilities.

Research design
Research approach and method

To explore perceptions of early career academics of intellectual humility in an academic environment, an interpretivist paradigm and a generic qualitative research approach were adopted using semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. This approach was deemed suitable for this study to explore the authentic perspectives of early career academics on intellectual humility, its importance within the academic environment and how they make sense of their lived experiences in relation to intellectual humility in academia. Ethics approval for conducting the study was obtained before the empirical study was conducted.

Research setting

The study explored perspectives of early career academics on intellectual humility and its importance within an academic environment. The research was conducted at an institution of higher learning in South Africa and included early career academics from four faculties, representing fields of business (accounting, management, tourism and human resources), health sciences, nature conservation and education. Early career academics are in the establishment phase of their careers (Bosanquet et al., 2016) and may have conflicting perspectives of intellectual humility and its importance in an academic environment.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

This study was motivated by the experience of an early career academic of a lack of intellectual humility within the academic space. On entering the academic space as a lecturer, the early career academic's qualifications and level of professional

registration were juxtaposed with those of a senior academic in an interpersonal conversation that was experienced as provocative. Despite years of experience in the field, the incident made the early career academic doubt their knowledge and academic competence. The early career academic has a strong sense that age and experience were creating a divide. In subsequent readings, the early career academic came across the concept of intellectual humility, was intrigued by this phenomenon and wanted to explore it further.

Ethics and gatekeeper's approval was obtained before the empirical study was conducted at the selected institution of higher learning. The criteria for inclusion were that participants had to be employed for less than 10 years at the university and appointed as either associate lecturer or lecturer. Barnes et al. (2021) identified early career academics as those appointed as associate lecturer or lecture, while Lesenyeho et al. (2018) considered early career participants as those with one to 15 years of teaching experience. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to recruit 10 participants. Potential participants were identified via the university's portal. They were then invited via email to participate in the study, with the email explaining the nature of the study and ethical considerations, including issues of consent, recording of the interviews, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Those who agreed to participate had to complete and sign a consent form before online sessions were scheduled on Microsoft Teams. The researcher conducting the interviews reiterated confidentiality and established rapport, and applied principles of good listening and clarification, while assuming an objective stance, following the guidelines presented by Adams (2015).

Profile of the research participants

Table 2 presents a descriptive profile of the early career academics who participated in the study.

The participants were early career academics with less than 10 years in academia and representing groups (black and mixed race) who, before South Africa became a democracy, were subjected to limited educational and professional work opportunities. Five were female. Seven

TABLE 2: Descriptive profile of the participants.

Participant	Race	Gender	Academic rank	Qualification	Years in academia
1	Black African	Male	Lecturer	PhD	9
2	Mixed race	Female	Associate lecturer	Postgraduate Diploma	1 month
3	Black African	Male	Lecturer	Masters	8
4	Mixed race	Female	Lecturer	Masters	5
5	Mixed race	Female	Associate lecturer	Honours	6
6	Black African	Female	Associate lecturer	Bachelor of Technology	3
7	Mixed race	Male	Associate lecturer	Honours	3
8	Black African	Male	Lecturer	Masters	8
9	Black African	Female	Associate lecturer	Postgraduate Diploma	20 months
10	Black African	Male	Lecturer	PhD	9

of the 10 participants were lecturers, with half of the participants not yet at a master's level.

Data collection method

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews. During the last two of 10 interviews, data saturation became evident. Each interview lasted between 45 min and 60 min. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. An interview schedule was used and included the following questions:

- What is your understanding of humility and specifically intellectual humility?
- How does intellectual humility present in an academic environment and what can be gained from intellectual humility?

Where necessary, follow-up questions were used to elicit more detailed information or gain greater clarification (Adams, 2015).

Data recording

In line with the *Protection of Personal Information Act* (*POPIA*), consent was obtained to record the online interview as well as to have the camera on for the duration of the interview. All interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy by systematically cross-referencing them with the audio recordings. Any potential identifiers such as a participant's name were removed, and each participant was allocated a code such as P1 (B, M, PhD) (race, gender, qualification) to ensure anonymity. Collected data were securely stored and password protected.

Strategies employed to ensure data quality and integrity

Trustworthiness was ensured through a rigorous research process in which scientific principles of truth, value, applicability, consistency and neutrality were applied (Cypress, 2017; Mouton, 2016). Trustworthiness of the qualitative data collected was ensured through careful selection of participants to ensure that they met the criteria selection, presenting a psychologically safe space for the interviews, allocating enough time to each interviewee, using consistent questioning across the participants, accurately recording and transcribing the data and following an acknowledged process for data analysis. The accurate extraction of themes was monitored by the researchers. To ensure the credibility of the findings, participants were purposefully selected to ensure that they would be able to contribute meaningfully to the study. Dependability was attained by ensuring that the extracted codes were representative of the responses, and this was checked by all three researchers independently. Confirmability was ensured by transcribing all interviews to capture the authentic responses of all participants and by double-checking that the codes did reflect the content. Transferability was addressed by comparing results with existing literature and similar previous studies, and specifically in terms of early career academics.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was based on the protocol suggested by Creswell (2014) and Cope (2014), which includes organisation and preparation of the data, transcription, reading and reflection on the content, considering meaning, depth and credibility, coding and segmenting, and identification of themes. Data were systematically analysed to identify similarities and repetition, to allocate codes, and these were then re-checked to ensure that the codes were typical of the responses. Thereafter, the codes were categorised according to themes.

Reporting style

Themes are presented following the sequence of inquiry, starting with perspectives on humility and intellectual humility within an academic environment and then moving to perspectives on the need or space for intellectual humility in an academic environment. Verbatim quotes are integrated into the discussion to provide rich, authentic examples that illustrate key themes, as well as to ground the analysis in the academic participants' own words.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Nelson Mandela Research Ethics Committee (No. H23-BES-HRM-004).

Results

Perspectives on humility

Being aware of the potential impact of diversity, the researchers kept in mind that gender, race and age may potentially have influenced the perceptions of the participants. In addition, participants representing social sciences may potentially be more attentive to the concepts of humility and intellectual humility. However, the sample represented early career academics from different disciplines, gender and race. Two main themes were extracted in relation to the concept of humility: intentional self-reflection and being human-centred (Table 3).

Theme 1: Intentional self-reflection

The first theme, intentional self-reflection, as described by the early career academic participants, entails thoughtful consideration of one's beliefs, characteristics and actions, being aware of one's strengths and limitations and subsequently being modest. P7 (C, M, Honours) and P10 (B, M, PhD) articulated this as follows:

TABLE 3: Themes related to humility.

Theme Humility	Codes
1. Intentional self-reflection	1.1 Being aware and realising what one's strengths but also limitations are
	1.2 Being and acting modest
2. Being human-centred	2.1 Being human, even without the titles
	2.2 Being approachable and relating to others
	2.3 Being other-oriented by being gentle, kind, serving

Source: Adapted from Veldkornet, O. (2024). The influence of leader intellectual humility on employee engagement and retention in an academic environment. Phd thesis, Nelson Mandela University.

'I think the quality of being humble. I think it is also just being aware and recognising your strengths, your weaknesses, your flaws, the mistakes you make, your own personal limitations. It is being aware of all of that.' (P7, C, M, Honours)

'[T]o first and foremost acknowledge you are not smarter than everybody else, you do not know better than everybody else, and you can always learn something from other people. Therefore, you do not need to be arrogant in any way whatsoever. I think humility is really a good quality. For example, I really would not appreciate someone who is not humble. For me, it is a positive quality and it is a trait that, I think, would make the world a better place.' (P10, B, M, Phd)

The participants saw humility as an act of self-reflection, of being aware and of acknowledging one's strengths and weaknesses. Both P7 (C, M, Honours) and P10 (B, M, Phd) described humility as a quality, or trait, while P10 (B, M, Phd) contrasted humility with being arrogant. They referred to self and other awareness, explaining that others may be more knowledgeable and that one can learn from them. P10's (B, M, Phd) notion that humility can contribute to a better world is aligned with a description of humility as an awareness of being part of something bigger (Council & Sowcik, 2021; Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2021).

Theme 2: Being human-centred

The early career participants identified human-centredness, the second theme, as a key characteristic of humility. They described human-centredness as being authentically human, being open and approachable while relating to others in a kind, gentle and serving manner. The responses address the self (being humble), relationships (being approachable) and as well as behaviours (being kind, serving). P4 (F, M, M) and P5 (C, F, Honours) articulated this as follows:

'For me, being humble means being you without the titles, without the things. So, who are you if you did not have a certain title or if you did not own certain labels? And also serving others, or rather, thinking about others before you think of yourself or thinking more of others and less of yourself. To me, that is humility.' (P4, F, M, M)

'I think of being open and gentle. Compassion is not dominating. As someone who does not know everything, you want to know it all.' (P5, C, F, Honours)

Human-centredness as an aspect of humility was explained in terms of authenticity, the person without the rank, title, label or symbols of power. After posing the question, 'so, who are you?', P4 (F, M, M) described the self and others as the human being without trimmings. The human-centredness of humility was also described in terms of relationships, being open and approachable (not dominating) and being considerate of others. P4 (F, M, M) perceived being humble as other-oriented (thinking of others first), while P5 (C, F, Honours) referred being open, gentle and compassionate.

In contrast to the above, a participant, P1 (B, M, PhD), expressed some tension about being humble and presented a dual perspective on humility, firstly by equating humility with Ubuntu and Botho, which are African terms reflecting

mutual respect and human dignity, secondly by adding that 'being too humble is not necessarily a good thing', especially 'if you triumph over something', and thirdly, by stating that 'even if … people may see it as being arrogant'. This response confirms the human-centredness of humility, and that this view should also extend to the self. In this respect, Friedman et al. (2017) stated that while humility involves recognising, valuing and appreciating the abilities and strengths of others, it does not imply a negative view of the self.

Perspectives on intellectual humility

Three themes related to intellectual humility were extracted, these being owning one's intellectual limitations, respecting other's viewpoints and learning and sharing (Table 4). These themes depict three dimensions of intellectual humility, the first being a focus on the self, the second a focus on others and, lastly, a focus on learning and sharing.

Theme 1: Owning one's intellectual limitations

The early career academic respondents perceived owning one's intellectual limitations, the first theme, as a conscious acknowledgement and acceptance that one's knowledge and reasoning may be fallible, requiring intellectual temperance (reigning oneself in) and being open to correction. P10 (B, M, PhD) explained this as follows:

> 'When I think of intellectual humility, I think it would be a quality or a trait of being aware of my own limitations as a person. I should be aware of my own limitations in terms of knowledge. I must actually know that even my beliefs are not the right beliefs. These can be cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, beliefs about any other thing. But I have to know that these are just my views or beliefs, but they are not necessarily the best or the only view or belief in the world. And also, I think it has to do with keeping an open mind, be open minded, having a humble attitude, and also acknowledging that you can always learn and understand things better over time.' (P10, B, M, PhD)

P10 (B, M, Phd) illustrates being conscious of one's intellectual fallibility by using the words 'must actually know', and depicts intellectual humility as a quality or trait. The acceptance of a lack of knowledge is also seen to apply to cultural and religious beliefs, which is relevant within the diverse South African context. Intellectual humility requires a realisation that there are limitations to knowledge, knowledge accuracy and knowledge acceptance, and therefore a willingness to learn from others.

In addition, P4's (C, F, M) notion that 'you don't know everything … a second person may know more' shows that it is unnecessary to make excuses or hide one's ignorance as learning should be seen as a logical and natural phenomenon. This is in line with Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse's (2015) definition of intellectual humility being a non-threatening awareness of one's intellectual fallibility. Intellectually humble people understand and accept their cognitive limitations and therefore do not insist that their views are superior, thus 'not throwing one's weight around', in the words of P1 (B, M, PhD). The responses obtained from the participants suggest that one should not be embarrassed about one's intellectual limitations, but accept not knowing as natural, and be keen to learn.

Theme 2: Respecting others' intellectual viewpoints

The second theme extracted in relation to intellectual humility is respecting other's intellectual viewpoints, which includes their dignity. This theme reflects a dual perspective, that of being respected as a person (respect for diversity) and being respected for one's knowledge.

In the words of Participant 4 (C, F, Masters):

> 'Respecting differing viewpoints is not just about tolerance, it is about appreciating the diverse experiences that inform those views. It enriches our discussions.' (P4, C, F, Masters)

Urban and Kujinga (2017) noted that respecting others' intellectual viewpoints and upholding dignity are particularly important in South African educational institutions, which are expected to promote social consciousness, equality and fairness in teaching, research and practice.

The respondents emphasised that others should be respected for their insights based on their diverse cultural and learning experiences. This view was reiterated by P7 (C, M, Honours) who, in the context of research, valued the indigenous knowledge gained from communities even when they were largely uneducated, and by P6 (B, F, BTech), who called being humble and approachable as being 'very smart'. The participants' collective views suggested that intellectual humility was about respecting diverse view points and knowledge regardless of the status of others. The respondents perceived respect as going beyond tolerance to a genuine appreciation of the intellectual views of others, with learning seen as an inclusive process.

Theme 3: Learning and sharing

The third theme reflects the description of intellectual humility as an act of learning and knowledge sharing, fostering personal and collective growth. The participants perceived learning and sharing as members actively contributing their insights, while remaining open to the learning from others. In this respect, P1 (B, M, PhD) shared the following:

> 'It is really just about being conscious or being aware of what you are capable of and what you are limited in, and how you can always learn from others, and how you can always teach others without coming across as a "know it all."' (P1, B, M, PhD)

TABLE 4: Themes related to intellectual humility.

Themes Intellectual humility	Codes
1. Owning one's intellectual limitations	1.1 Reigning oneself in 1.2 Realising one may be wrong and uninformed. Being open to correction
2. Respecting others' intellectual viewpoints	2.1 Being open and approachable 2.2 Respecting others' views and their dignity
3. Learning and sharing	3.1 Openness to learning from others 3.2 Owing one's knowledge space

Source: Adapted from Veldkornet, O. (2024). The influence of leader intellectual humility on employee engagement and retention in an academic environment. Phd thesis, Nelson Mandela University.

P6 (B, F, BTech) added:

> '[E]ngage with the best, discuss with the best and interact with the best; I know that my ideas would be embraced, however ridiculous or simple they may be, they would still be embraced as a contribution.' (P6, B, F, BTech)

Both P1 (B, M, Phd) and P6 (B, F, BTech) depicted learning and sharing as a two-way process with opportunities for sharing and opportunities for learning. The participants' responses suggest that intellectual humility requires an inclusive environment where collective learning takes place.

Perspectives on the need for intellectual humility within an academic environment

In terms of the need or space for intellectual humility within an academic environment, four themes emerged: ensuring academic freedom, addressing change, promoting engagement and fostering learning (Table 5).

Theme 1: Ensuring academic freedom

The early career participants associated intellectual humility with academic freedom, firstly allowing them to freely pursue their interests in academia, and secondly, to freely contribute to debate and alternative views. While some early career participants highlighted intellectual humility as important for debate and change, others bemoaned their experience of a lack of intellectual humility within the academic environment.

P1 (B, M, Ph) regarded intellectual humility, including among academic leaders, as a basis for young researchers to pursue alternative ideas, participate in change-related debate and grow:

> '"[I]t supports freedom, academic freedom first and foremost, allows researchers to do research that interests them and excites them. But secondly, we work in a space where there is constant change and constant advances in what we do … to have space where one really has freedom to voice and be heard and contribute to the debates that shape the discourse." In addition, "freedom to test things in my courses, experiment in my courses, learn and get better and define what I do."' (P1, B, M, Ph)

For P1 (B, M, Ph), a lack of intellectual humility, especially among academic leaders, means having to follow in their footsteps without the freedom to experiment and innovate in

TABLE 5: Perspectives on the need for intellectual humility in an academic environment.

Themes	Codes
1 Ensuring academic freedom	1.1 To pursue personal interests in specific academic focus areas 1.2 Freedom to express alternative views in pursuit of change
2 Demonstrating change competence	2.1 Critical thinking and problem solving
3 Promoting engagement	3.1 Build partnership among stakeholders: staff, students in different spheres – teaching, research
4 Fostering learning	4.1 Personal development, advancement of knowledge, intellectual growth, learning organisation

Source: Adapted from Veldkornet, O. (2024). The influence of leader intellectual humility on employee engagement and retention in an academic environment. Phd thesis, Nelson Mandela University.

research and teaching. P1 (B, M, Phd) wanted to be trusted and given opportunities to innovate, have space to learn and develop an own academic identity, in addition to being included in debate and acknowledged for their intellectual contributions.

P9 (B, F, PG Dip) also stated that, if early career academics were not allowed or given space to share their opinions, senior academics would also not learn or grow or be open to new ideas or constructive criticism. As such, both less experienced and senior academics were to benefit from intellectual humility and being exposed to alternative perspectives and learning opportunities.

Two participants complained that the academic space was not always characterised by intellectual humility, and that alternative views in pursuit of change were not always welcomed, limiting freedom of expression. In this respect, P2 (C, F, PG Dip) referred to intellectual humility as a 'touchy subject', stating that, 'the minute its challenged … it is as if you are going to outcast yourself'. The participant indicated that, in their experience, the academic world was 'a very closed niche of people', and that few academics or academic units were open to challenging what was 'cast in stone'. P6 (B, F, BTech) added that one could not blame some senior academics for showing a lack of intellectual humility, as 'that is how they were taught'. These remarks reflect a traditional system devoid of diversity and a stagnant mindset.

The participants suggested that intellectual humility was vital for academic freedom, allowing early career academics to pursue their own interests, express alternative views, foster change and ultimately innovation. However, academic freedom was challenged by a perceived lack of intellectual humility among senior academics resulting in frustration, fear of expressing differing views and the continuation of traditional approaches.

Theme 2: Demonstrating change competence

The second theme extracted highlights the importance of intellectual humility for change competence and specifically for critical thinking and problem solving. A lack of intellectual humility makes one defensive, not being open to revising one's viewpoint, and dogmatic, as postulated by Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse (2016), Learly et al. (2017), Mitu (2021) and Porter et al. (2021) in their conceptualisation of intellectual humility.

P1 (B, M, PhD) commented on a need for critical thinking and problem solving within the academic environment:

> '[T]here are always new ways of doing things and innovations coming through, and I think being allowed space to experiment with those innovations and try new methodologies, be it pedagogical or research, being allowed to experiment.' (P1, B, M, PhD)

P1 (B, M, PhD) also mentioned that the practice of critical thinking equated to being humble, accommodating different perspectives and not being arrogant. This required active listening, empathy for the perspectives of others and being

adaptable. A lack of intellectual humility results in dogmatism, bias and a lack of innovation.

P5 (C, F, Honours) associated intellectual humility with knowledge creation in a changing academic environment. This is in line with the view of Maluleka (2024), who claims that higher education institutions play a vital role in the development of knowledge, skills and critical thinking. The responses received confirm the importance of intellectual humility for effectively navigating and addressing constant change within an academic environment and for promoting critical thinking and problem solving.

Theme 3: Promoting engagement

With the third theme, the early career academic participants posited intellectual humility as a means for promoting engagement among leaders, colleagues and students. P2 (C, F, PG Dip) summed it up as follows:

> 'I just think it [*intellectual humility*] will build better partnerships, better relationships, better engagement, better synergy between people, between departments, between levels within a department.' (P2, C, F, PG Dip)

P10 (B, M, PhD) added: 'To collaborate with other people. I think when working in a team and you are humble enough, you are actually able to work well with people, and acknowledge other people'. (P10, B, M, PhD)

The participants perceived intellectual humility as necessary for quality engagements across horizontal and vertical levels within their institution, as well as for engagement on team level. A climate of intellectual humility also enables new academics, and specifically early career academics, to engage and voice their views. In addition, a lack of intellectual was perceived as alienating new academics, forcing them to withdraw.

Theme 4: Fostering learning

The fourth theme that emerged was a strongly belief among the early career academic participants that intellectual humility was vital for learning, personal development, advancement of knowledge, intellectual growth and being a learning organisation. P7 (C, M, Honours) remarked:

> 'Someone who is not intellectually humble, is someone that is very stagnant. … so, I think it is very important within the academic environment because it is a learning situation. It is an institution that always learns, always collaborates, that needs to grow, and you cannot grow if you are not humble. You cannot grow and you cannot collaborate. You cannot grow when there is not a willingness to collaborate and engage.' (P7, C, M, Honours)

P7 (C, M, Honours) recognised the far-reaching effects of intellectual humility, not only for the academic but also for institution, its members and students. P1 (B, M, PhD) felt that their manager demonstrated intellectual humility by delegating responsibilities beyond the job scope to them and exposing them to learning opportunities. As an early career academic, P9 (B, F, PGDip) valued constructive feedback for personal development and saw a lack of intellectual intelligence as a barrier to growth.

The results suggest that intellectual humility is vital for fostering a learning environment in academia, promoting personal development, critical thinking and openness to constructive feedback. This is particularly beneficial to early career academics for developing their confidence in engaging with others and learning from diverse perspectives, as well as from criticism.

Discussion

Intellectual humility within the South African context

The study was motivated by an event in which an early career academic with years of industry experience felt belittled after being interrogated by a senior academic about their qualifications and professional registration. Maluleka (2024) noted the vulnerability of early career academics in situations where senior academics claim knowledge and assume a gatekeeping role (Krumrei-Mancuso, 2018). Through demonstrating intellectual humility, the senior academic could have gained more insight into the work experience of the early career academic, and the early career academic could also have gained knowledge, leading to collective intelligence.

The 10 early career academics interviewed for this study were associate lecturers or lecturers, male and female, and represented racial groups in South Africa that historically had been marginalised. It was, however, notable that the participants did not attribute a lack of intellectual humility to ethnic or racial bias. They rather associated a lack of intellectual humility with rank-consciousness and a fixed mental set.

Humility – A basis for intellectual humility

Two themes emerged from the qualitative analysis related to humility: intentional self-reflection and human-centredness. The early career academics described humility in the academic environment as involving self-awareness, specifically in terms of recognising one's strengths and weaknesses, and being modest. They did not view humility as a sign of weakness, which Mulinge (2018) and Wright et al. (2016) described as being the traditional view of humility. In the past, humility had been associated with submissiveness or low self-esteem, but it is currently framed in a positive light, that of recognising and appreciating the strengths of others without ignoring one's own strengths (Council & Sowcik, 2021; Friedman et al., 2017). The early career academics indicated that humility should apply to all academics, irrespective of title or achievement. The findings echo observations by Porter et al. (2021), Ross and Wright (2021), Leary et al. (2017) and Krumrei-Mancuso (2016) about humility being a character strength rather than a weakness. A notable contribution made by the early career academics in this study was the

focus they placed on human-centredness, as reflective of the value of Ubuntu or Botho, as mentioned by interviewee.

Intellectual humility – Respecting one's intellect and those of others, and learn

The early career academics conceptualised intellectual humility in terms of three themes: owning one's intellectual limitations (reigning oneself in, realising one may be wrong or misinformed, being open to correction), respecting other's viewpoints (being approachable, showing respect for others and their dignity) and learning and sharing (openness to learning; owning one's knowledge space). These dimensions can be seen in sequence: the self, relationships with others and mutual growth. A comparison between this conceptualisation and the theoretical conceptualisation by Mitu (2021); Porter et al. (2021) and Krumrei-Mancusa and Rouse (2016) is presented in Table 6.

The conceptualisation of intellectual humility by the early career academics was closely aligned with the conceptualisation by Krumrei-Mancuso and Rouse (2015) and Porter et al. (2021). Whereas the literature presents four dimensions of intellectual humility, the empirical study revealed three themes incorporating the self (owning one's intellectual limitations), others (respecting others' intellect) and learning and sharing, as indicated in Table 6.

Intellectual humility is a prerequisite for academic freedom, change competence, engagement and learning

In terms of the need for intellectual humility within an academic environment, four themes emerged: ensuring academic freedom, developing change competence, promoting engagement and fostering learning. Early career academics wanted freedom in expressing alternative views. They perceived intellectual humility as essential for change competence (critical thinking and problem solving), which is in agreement with the views of Budevici-Puiu (2020), Cousins (2018), Ehlers and Lazenby (2019) and

TABLE 6: Early career academics' conceptualisation of intellectual humility.

Early career academics' conceptualisation of intellectual humility	Theoretical conceptualisation
Owning one's intellectual limitations • Reigning oneself in • Realising one may be wrong and uninformed • Being open to correction	Independence of intellect and ego Lack of intellectual overconfidence
Respecting others' intellectual viewpoints • Being open and approachable • Respecting others' views and their dignity	Respect for others' viewpoints
Learning and sharing • Openness to learning from others • Owing one's knowledge space	Openness to revising one's viewpoint

Source: Own construction based on interviews conducted with academic participants, as well as Krumrei-Mancuso, E.J., & Rouse, S.V. (2016). The development and validation of the Intellectual Humility Scale. *Personality and Individual Differences, 97*, 165–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2015.106817; Mitu, S.M. (2021). Intellectual humility – A moral construct, an intellectual virtue. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, 14*(63), 9–18. https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2021.14.63.1.1; Porter, T., Baldwin, C.R., Warren, M.T., Murray, E.D., Cotton Bronk, K., Forgeard, M.J.C., Snow, N.E., & Jayawickreme, E. (2021). Clarifying the content of intellectual humility: A systematic review and integrative framework. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 104*(5), 573–585. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2021.1975725

Matsepe et al. (2020). They wanted to be empowered, supported and heard, and also to craft their own growth. They perceived intellectual humility as essential in fostering partnerships within the academic space, a view aligned with that of Cousins (2018) who advocates for critical thinking, rigorous debate and innovation across different fields.

Practical/managerial implications and recommendations

The study highlights the role of intellectual humility in creating a climate of engagement, learning, growth and change, specifically in the context of higher education, where teaching, research and engagement are core functions. It is noteworthy that the study was conducted from the perspective of early career academics, which gave them an opportunity to voice their opinion on intellectual humility. The results reflect the expectations they have of academics, including senior academics and academic managers. As such, the study sensitises academic management, leaders and academics in institutions of higher learning to the value of intellectual humility, as well as the perceptions and needs of early career academics.

For academic managers to be effective, they need to continuously develop themselves, others as well as academic system. As such, the first recommendation is for academic managers to reflect on themselves, and specifically on their own levels of intellectual humility. The hard question to ask is whether they exhibit intellectual overconfidence and hubris, as this will negatively influence the development and satisfaction of early career academics. Managers should be taught the value of intellectual humility, which can be linked to contemporary leadership approaches such as servant, transformational and Ubuntu leadership.

The second area for academic managers is to focus on their relationships with others, including early career academics reporting to them. They need to establish respectful relationships with others, create opportunities to listen and learn from others and approach alternative perspectives with an openness. Early career academics expect managers to be open and approachable and to respect their views. Managers should be guided in terms of how they communicate with early career academics to maximise information sharing, perspective-taking and integrated problem solving. Managers should also promote inclusivity and prevent situations in which in- and out-groups are formed that limit participation and development.

The third focus for academic managers is to establish a culture of intellectual humility, focusing on fostering engagement, critical thinking, problem solving and learning. This recommendation is aligned with the perspective of Cousins (2018), who emphasises diverse ideas, rigorous debate and novel solutions, generated in collaboration with diverse stakeholders, for addressing the greater problems in the world. As such, academics managers should purposefully

create spaces for discussion and debate. They need to connect academics from different disciplines and create platforms for sharing emerging perspectives in addressing national and global challenges. Such engagements should take place in psychological safe spaces where diverse ideas can be brainstormed and debated irrespective of background, level, discipline or academic rank.

The early career academics highlighted self-reflection, humaneness and respect for alternative perspectives as important aspects of intellectual humility, and for promoting engagement and fostering learning. They also expressed a need for academic freedom to pursue alternative views and experiment with new approaches. This can be done through joining multidisciplinary interest groups and academic discourse groups.

Contribution

The study contributes to theory and practice. It adds to an understanding of the nature and importance of humility and intellectual humility from the perspective of early career academics at a South African institution of higher learning. The study produced an extended conceptualisation of humility by also including the aspect of humaneness. It highlights intellectual humility as a three-dimensional concept, relating to the self, the relationship with others and learning. The study emphasises that intellectual humility is required for a collaborative, respectful and innovative academic culture.

The study also has practical value in terms of guidelines provided to academic managers and leaders in creating an environment in which academics, and early career academics, can authentically contribute to critical thinking, debate and problem solving. The study contributes to the relatively underexplored area of intellectual humility within institutions of higher learning, and specifically in the South African context.

Limitations and recommendations for future studies

This study was exploratory in nature and conducted at a selected institution of higher learning. A recommendation for future research is to explore how intellectual humility is fostered with the teaching practices utilised by early career academics in higher education institutions and the strategies they use to promote or elevate student voice and critical thinking rather than focusing on teaching content.

Conclusion

In a world challenged by change and global sustainability issues, critical thinking and innovative solutions from diverse stakeholders are required. This study explored the conceptualisation of intellectual humility in an academic environment, particularly from the perspective of early career academics at an institute of higher learning in South Africa. Through the qualitative analysis component of semi-structured interviews with early career academics, three key themes emerged: learning and sharing, owning

one's limitations and respecting others' viewpoints. These findings highlighted the importance of intellectual humility in enhancing collaboration, professional development and shared respect among academics. The academic participants identified intellectual humility as a crucial virtue in creating a continuous learning academic environment where diverse opinions are valued and individual limitations are openly acknowledged. In conclusion, this research highlights the need for institutions of higher learning to encourage intellectual humility, not only as a personal virtue but also as a collective academic value that can lead to improved collaboration, retention and academic freedom.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

O.V. was responsible for data collection, data analysis and preparing the manuscript – the work is based on her PhD studies. A.W. and W.M. supervised the study. All authors discussed the findings and contributed to the final manuscript.

Funding information

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, W.M., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

Adams, W.C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. In J.S. Wholey, H.P. Harty, & K.E. Newcomer (eds.). *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (pp. 492–505). Jossey-Bass.

Barnes, N., Du Plessis, M., & Frantz, J. (2021). Institutional culture and academic career progression: Perceptions and experiences of academic staff. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology/SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde, 47,* a1878. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v47i0.1878

Barrett, J.L. (2016). Intellectual humility. T*he Journal of Positive Psychology, 12*(1), 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1167945

Beerkens, M., & Van der Hoek, M. (2022). Academic leaders and leadership in the changing higher education landscape. In C.S. Sarrico, M.J. Rosa, & T. Carvalho (eds.), *Research handbook on academic careers and managing academics* (pp. 121–136). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bolisani, E., & Bratianu, C. (2018). The emergence of knowledge management. In E. Bolisani & M. Handzic (eds.). *Knowledge management and organizational learning* (pp. 23–47). Springer.

Bosanquet, A., Mailey, A., Matthews, K.E., & Lodge, J.M. (2016). Redefining 'early career' in academia: A collective narrative approach. *Higher Education Research and Development, 36*(5), 890–902. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1263934

Breetzke, G.D., & Hedding, D.W. (2016). The changing demographics of academics in South African higher education institutions: A case study of the University of Pretoria. *Transformation in Higher Education, 71,* 59–80.

Buchheit, M. (2020). Whom do we publish for? Ourselves or others? *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance, 15*(8), 1057–1058. https://doi.org/10.1123/ijspp.2020-0656

Budevici-Puiu, L. (2020). The necessity of change and development of the higher education institution in the age of globalisation. *Revista Romancasca Pentru, 12*(1), 350–356. https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/218

Chakraverty, D (2022). *Faculty experiences of the imposter phenomenon in STEM fields.* The American Society for Cell Biology.

Chughtai, M.S., Khalid, Y., Guan, R., & Razzaq, T. (2023). When does leadership humility nurture career success: A moderated mediation model of career adaptability and proactive personality. *Journal of Innovative Research in Management Sciences, 4*(1), 35–53. https://doi.org/10.62270/jirms.v4i1.42

Colombo, M., Strangmann, K., Houkes, L., Kostadinova, Z., & Brandt, M.J. (2020). Intellectually humble, but prejudiced people. A paradox of intellectual virtue. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology, 12,* 353–371. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-020-00496-4

Cope, D.G. (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(1), 89–91. https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.89-91

Council, A., & Sowcik, M. (2021). Exploring humility to address the need for authentic leadership. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics, 18*(2), 117–130. https://doi.org/10.33423/jlae.v18i2.4259

Cousins, B. (2018). Design thinking: Organizational learning in VUCA environments. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal, 17*(2). Retrieved from https://www.abacademies.org/articles/design-thinking-organizational-learning-in-vuca-environments-7117.html

Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Cypress, B.S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization, and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing, 36*(4), 253–263. https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000253

Deffler, S.A., Leary, M.R., & Hoyl, R.H. (2016). Knowing what you know: Intellectual humility and judgments of recognition memory. *Personality and Individual Differences, 96,* 255–259. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.03.016

Dhanpat, N., Geldenhuys, M., & De Braine, R. (2019). Preliminary development of the Higher Education Hindrance Demands Scale amongst academics in the South African context. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 45*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v45i0.1595

Ehlers, T., & Lazenby, K. (2019). *Strategic Management. Southern African concepts and cases* (4th ed.). Van Schaik.

Engelbrecht, P. (2020). Inclusive education: Developments and challenges in South Africa. *Prospects, 49*(3–4), 219–232. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09499-6

Friedman, H.H., Fischer, D., & Schochet, S. (2017). Humility and tone at the top. *International Leadership Journal, 9*(2), 54–79.

Frantz, J., Marais, J., & Du Plessis, M. (2022). Exploring the views of academics on an academic leadership programme in higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 36*(1), 136–153. https://doi.org/10.20853/36-1-4327

Higgs, P. (2016). The African renaissance and the transformation of the higher education curriculum in South Africa. *Africa Education Review, 13*(1), 87–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2016.1186370

Hlatshwayo, M.N., & Majozi, N.G. (2024). Young, gifted and black: Black early career academics' experiences in a South African university. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur, 22,* a2365. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2365

Idahosa, G.E., & Vincent, L. (2019). Enabling transformation through critical engagement and reflexivity: A case study of South African academics. *Higher Education Research and Development, 38*(4), 780–792. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1581142

Jayawickreme, E., & Freeson, W. (2022). Understanding intellectual humility and intellectual character within the dynamic personality framework. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 18*(2), 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2022.2154701

Krumrei-Mancuso, E.J. (2018). Humility in servant leadership among Christian student leaders; a longitudinal pilot study. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 46*(4), 253–267. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091647118807177

Krumrei-Mancuso, E. (2022). Three reasons for leaders to cultivate intellectual humility. In *Workplace.* Retrieved from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/three_reasons_for_leaders_to_cultivate_intellectual_humility

Krumrei-Mancuso, E.J., & Begin, M.R. (2022). Cultivating intellectual humility in leaders: Potential benefits, risks, and practical tools. *American Journal of Health Promotion, 36*(8), 1104–1411. https://doi.org/10.1177/08901171221125326c

Krumrei-Mancuso, E.J., Haggard, M.C., LaBouff, J.P., & Rowatt, W.C. (2020). Links between intellectual humility and acquiring knowledge. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*(2), 155–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1579359

Krumrei-Mancuso, E.J., & Rouse, S.V. (2016). The development and validation of the Intellectual Humility Scale. *Personality and Individual Differences, 97,* 165–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2015.106817

Krumrei-Mancuso, E.J., & Rowatt, W.C. (2021). Humility in novice leaders: Links to servant leadership and followers' satisfaction with leadership. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 18*(1), 154–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.1952647

Leary, M.R., Diebels, K.J., Davisson, E.K., Jongman-Sereno, K.P., Isherwood, J.C., Raimi, K.T., Deffler, S.A., & Hoyle, R.H. (2017). Cognitive and interpersonal features of intellectual humility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 43*(6), 793–813. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217697695

Lesenyeho, D.L., Barkhuizen, N.E., & Schutte, N.E. (2018). Factors relating to the attraction of talented early career academics in South African higher education institutions. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur, 16,* a910. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v16i0.910

Lumadi, M.W. (2021). Decolonising the curriculum to reinvigorate equity in higher education: A linguistic transformation. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 35*(1), 37–53. https://doi.org/10.20853/35-1-4415

Maluleka, P. (2024). Ageism and gatekeeping: My experiences as an early career academic at a historically black university in South Africa. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning (CriSTaL), 12*(2), 60–80. https://doi.org/10.14426/cristal.v12i2.2252

Maradoglu, M., Horne, Z., Hammond, M.D., Leslie, S., & Cimpian, A. (2022). Women – Particularly underrepresented minority women – And early-career academics feel like impostors in fields that value brilliance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 114*(5), 1086–1100. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000669

Matsepe, D., Cross, M., & Maluleke, M. (2020). Negotiating successful academic careers in South African higher education institutions. *Gender and Behaviour, 18*(4), 17022–17033. Retrieved from https://www.ajol.info/index.php/gab/article/view/203476

Misevic, D., Atal, I., Bedard, D., Cherel, E., Escamilla, J., Evans, L., Hannon, V., Huron, C., Irrmann, O., Kizilcec, R., Lazega, E., Lemoie, K., Lindner, A., Macedo, M., Mainguy, G., Mann, R., Masselot, C., Michelucci, P., Nikolayeva, I., Ogan, A. et al. (2023). Harnessing collective intelligence for the future of learning – A co-constructed research and development agenda. *Human Computation, 10*(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.15346/hc.v10i1.141

Mitu, S.M. (2021). Intellectual humility – A moral construct, an intellectual virtue. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov, 14*(63), 9–18. https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2021.14.63.1.1

Moosa, R. (2020). Early career academic development and talent management in the South African higher education context. In E. Heinrich & R. Bourke (Eds.), *Research and development in higher education: Next generation, higher education: Challenges, changes and opportunities* (Vol. 42, pp. 73–84). Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, Inc.

Mulinge, P. (2018). Altruism and altruistic love: Intrinsic motivation for servant-leadership. *International Journal of Servant-Leadership, 12*(1), 337–370. https://doi.org/10.33972/ijsl.80

Nästesjö, J. (2024). *Uncertainty, worth, identity: How early career academic evaluate landscapes.* Lund University. Retrieved from https://portal.research.lu.se/en/publications/uncertainty-worth-identity-how-early-career-academics-navigate-ev

Owusu-Agyeman, Y. (2022). The mentoring experiences of early career and senior academics in a multicampus university in South Africa. *Educational Process: International Journal, 11*(1), 65–85. https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2022.111.5

Park, R., Van de Vyfer, J., & Bretheron, R. (2020). The humble leader: Understanding perceptions and implications of humility in leadership. *European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology, 4*(14), 1–12.

Phelan, J. (2024). Impostorization in academia, psychological distress, and class reproduction. *Society and Mental Health, 14*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/21568693231222626

Porter, T., Baldwin, C.R., Warren, M.T., Murray, E.D., Cotton Bronk, K., Forgeard, M.J.C., Snow, N.E., & Jayawickreme, E. (2021). Clarifying the content of intellectual humility: A systematic review and integrative framework. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 104*(5), 573–585. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2021.1975725

Porter, T., & Schumann, K. (2017). Intellectual humility and openness to the opposing view. *Self and Identity, 17*(2), 139–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2017.1361861

Roberts, T.P., & Zigarmi, D. (2014). The impact of dispositional cynicism on job-specific affect and work intentions. *International Journal of Psychology*, *49*(5), 381–389. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12051

Ross, L.T., & Wright, J.C. (2021). Humility, personality and psychological functioning. *Psychological Reports, 126*(2), 688–711. https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941211062819

Selesho, J.M., & Naile, I. (2014). Academic staff retention as a human resource factor: University perspective. *Economics Research Journal, 13*(2), 295–304. https://doi.org/10.19030/iber.v13i2.8444

Shinawatra, P., Kasirawat, C., Khunanon, P., Boonchan, S., Sangla, S., Maneeton, B., Maneeton, N., & Kawilapat, S. (2023). Exploring factors affecting impostor syndrome among undergraduate clinical medical students at Chiang Mai University, Thailand: A cross-sectional study. *Behavioural Sciences, 13*(976), 2–14. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13120976

Stanley, M.L., Sinclair, A.H., & Seli, P. (2020). Intellectual humility and perceptions of political opponents. *Journal of Personality*, *88*(6), 1196–1216. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12566

Urban, B., & Kujinga, L. (2017). Towards social change: South African university students as social entrepreneurs. *South African Journal of Higher Education, 31*(1), 243–259. https://doi.org/10.20853/31-1-872

Veldkornet, O. (2024). *The influence of leader intellectual humility on employee engagement and retention in an academic environment*. Phd thesis, Nelson Mandela University.

Wright, J.C., Nadelhoffer, T., Perini, T., Langville, A., Echols, M., & Venezia, K. (2016). The psychological significance of humility. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 12*(1), 3–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1167940

Zhu, H. (2024). Intellectual humility: What shapes its expression and interventions for its promotion. In *Proceedings of the 2nd international conference on social psychology and humanity studies*, *1 March 2024*. EWA Publishing, Oxford. https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/61/20240481