



Emotional Culture, Communication Climate, and Creative Idea Withholding: A Curvilinear Perspective

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Abstract: Creative idea withholding constitutes a significant yet insufficiently examined obstacle to organizational innovation, as unexpressed ideas cannot be evaluated or implemented. Although previous research has generally depicted emotional environments as uniformly advantageous for creativity and voice, recent perspectives indicate that emotional norms may also restrict expression by fostering self-censorship. Drawing on emotional culture theory, the present study investigates how shared norms of emotional expression influence employees' intentional withholding of creative ideas and introduces a curvilinear framework to reconcile these divergent views. Survey data from 451 employees in Islamic banking institutions in South Punjab, Pakistan, supplemented by contextual information from managers, were analyzed using a moderated curvilinear model in Mplus. The findings reveal a U-shaped relationship, with creative idea withholding being highest when emotional culture is either weak or excessively strong, and lowest at moderate levels. Furthermore, the communication climate was found to moderate the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding. By reframing creativity from a cognitive capability to a strategic behavioral choice, this study advances emotional culture theory, extends research on voice and silence, and underscores the paradoxical influence of emotional norms on the expression or suppression of creative ideas. The results suggest that organizations should foster balanced emotional cultures that support emotional norms without imposing excessive pressure for conformity. Additionally, the importance of open and dialogic communication practices in mitigating employees' tendency to withhold creative ideas is emphasized.

Keywords: Emotional Culture, Creative Idea Withholding, Communication Climate, High-Context Culture, Process Innovation, Developing Countries

1. Introduction

Creativity remains a central driver of organizational adaptation, innovation, and long-term competitiveness (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014). While much of the creativity research has traditionally focused on how novel and useful ideas are generated, an equally critical yet less examined question concerns whether such ideas are ever expressed in the first place (Batool, Ibrahim, Adeel, Jiang, & Samad, 2024). Employees often refrain from sharing potentially valuable creative ideas due to perceived social, emotional, or relational costs (Adeel & Batool, 2025; Erez, Shani, & Carmeli, 2025; Zhang, Jiang, Adeel, & Yaseen, 2018). This phenomenon is commonly referred to as creative idea withholding, which represents a critical bottleneck in the innovation process, as employees' creative ideas that are never voiced cannot be evaluated, refined, or implemented (Ahmad, Thurasamy, Adeel, & Alam, 2023; Horton, 2020). Understanding the workplace conditions under which employees choose to suppress rather than express their creative ideas is therefore essential for advancing the theory and practice of organizational creativity.

An expanding body of management research underscores the influence of employees' emotions on workplace behaviors, including creativity, voice, and silence (Kuška, Trnka, Mana, & Nikolai, 2020; Sakai, Yoshida, Maeda, & Tanikawa, 2025). The broaden-and-build perspective posits that positive emotional experiences in the workplace enhance employees' attentional scope and cognitive flexibility, thereby increasing the likelihood of creative thinking and expression (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004). Meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that employees' affective states, particularly activating positive moods, are associated with improved creative performance (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008). Within this framework, emotionally supportive workplace environments are generally assumed to encourage employees to speak up, share creative ideas, and engage in creative behaviors.

However, this predominantly enabling perspective on workplace emotions overlooks a critical counteracting mechanism: emotions also serve as a normative control that regulates what can be expressed, by whom, and at what emotional cost (Gip, The Khoa, Guchait, Fernando Garcia, & Pasamehmetoglu, 2022). Recent research on workplace emotional culture emphasizes that organizations are not solely cognitive or instrumental systems, but also emotional systems characterized by shared norms regarding appropriate emotional expressions

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(O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017; Adeel, Batool, Kee, & Madni, 2023; Ahmad & Mehmood, 2025). Emotional culture shapes how employees monitor, regulate, and display their emotions in daily workplace interactions, thereby influencing interpersonal risk perceptions and regular behavioral choices (Batool, Ibrahim, & Adeel, 2024; Lindquist, Jackson, Leshin, Satpute, & Gendron, 2022). In this context, emotional culture refers specifically to the strength of shared norms governing appropriate emotional expression in workplace interactions, rather than the valence of particular emotions. Importantly, emotional culture functions as a collective expectation system that signals which employee emotions and, by extension, which behaviors are acceptable. The literature on emotional labor has also highlighted the relevance of emotional norms in service organizations. Emotional labor was initially conceptualized as the process by which employees regulate their emotional expressions to conform to organizational expectations (Hochschild, 1983), and was later extended to broader organizational emotion regulation contexts (James, 1989). While emotional labor focuses primarily on the regulation of individual emotional displays, emotional culture explains the shared organizational norms that define which emotions are appropriate or valued in workplace interactions (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). In service industries such as banking, where employees frequently interact with customers and are expected to maintain professionalism, both emotional labor and emotional culture jointly shape how employees communicate and whether they feel comfortable expressing unconventional ideas.

This normative perspective on workplace emotion introduces a fundamental debate in the literature. Some researchers contend that emotionally supportive cultures foster employee trust, belonging, and engagement, thereby reducing defensive silence and encouraging creative idea expression (Hao et al., 2022; Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes, & Morling, 2008). Conversely, when emotional norms become strong or prescriptive—particularly regarding harmony, positivity, or emotional appropriateness—these norms can heighten self-monitoring and conformity pressures, increasing employees' reluctance to express creative ideas that might cause discomfort, disagreement, or emotional disruption (Erez et al., 2025; Nguyen & Hunter, 2022). Research on organizational voice and silence demonstrates that individuals often withhold input when they anticipate negative interpersonal consequences, fear social exclusion, or perceive expressing their views as emotionally risky (Ajmal, Sareet, & Islam, 2025; Elizabeth W. Morrison, 2014). Thus, emotional workplace cultures can paradoxically discourage the sharing of creative ideas by increasing expectations and perceived emotional costs associated with deviation.

Despite the significance of this issue, existing research has not fully reconciled these competing perspectives. Prior studies have often assumed a linear relationship, treating workplace emotional support or positive emotions as uniformly beneficial for employee voice and creativity (Adeel & Batool, 2025). Additionally, much of the creativity literature has focused on creative performance or idea generation, rather than on employees' intentional decisions to withhold creative ideas (Chen, Kim, Gong, & Liang, 2025; Al Sarayreh et al., 2025; Amoozegar et al., 2025; Song et al., 2025). This emphasis on idea generation obscures a crucial distinction: employees may generate novel and useful ideas but strategically choose not to share them, particularly when emotional norms suggest that deviation could threaten relational harmony or emotional standing, even if the ideas are valuable for the organization.

This gap in the literature is particularly significant in the context of emotional workplace culture. At the same time, the recent research has begun to investigate how specific emotional cultures (e.g., joy, companionate love) influence the employee outcomes such as resilience or risk-taking (Hartmann, Weiss, Hoegl, & Carmeli, 2021; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017), we still know little about how the emotional culture shapes creative idea withholding as a form of self-censorship by the employees. Furthermore, the possibility that emotional culture may have a nonlinear effect has received limited theoretical and empirical attention. Both weak emotional cultures (marked by low emotional connection and engagement) and overly strong emotional cultures (marked by high emotional prescription and conformity) may increase withholding of creative ideas, but for different reasons. Such patterns of emotional cultures and employee creativity cannot be captured by linear models that assume monotonic effects. Accordingly, this research seeks to understand how the strength of emotional culture influences employees' decisions to withhold their creative ideas and under what communication conditions this relationship becomes stronger or weaker.

Drawing on Emotional Culture Theory, which explains how shared norms regarding emotional expression emerge and shape behavior in organizations (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017), this research explains that the effects of emotional culture are particularly important in culturally embedded contexts. In South Asian developing countries, where collective orientations and high power distance are dominant, employees' emotional expressions are commonly shaped by norms that emphasize social harmony, respect for hierarchy, and emotional restraint (Hofstede, 2001). In Islamic banking, these emotional norms are culturally grounded. They may heighten sensitivity to social evaluations, making employees more inclined to withhold creative ideas to avoid disrupting workplace relational equilibrium or attracting negative judgments from others. These patterns of culturally grounded workplace emotional norms are also consistent with Hall's (1976) concept of high-context communication cultures, in which indirectness and emotional regulation are the primary mechanisms for managing dissent and innovation. Although scholars have debated the universality of the high–low context distinction, subsequent research continues to demonstrate that communication norms emphasizing relational harmony and indirect expression remain influential in many organizational environments. Therefore, integrating Emotional Culture Theory with the intercultural communication literature offers a theoretically grounded explanation for why employees' withholding of creative ideas, rather than the obvious expression of creativity, emerges as a salient behavioral outcome in this context. The banking sector provides a particularly relevant context for examining these dynamics because employees typically operate under strict regulatory frameworks and hierarchical structures that emphasize risk control and professional conduct. In Islamic banking, these organizational characteristics and regulatory requirements have become more rigid as the religion stresses social responsibility, integrity, and interpersonal respect. Thus, employees working in Islamic banking may experience stronger, more rigid expectations to maintain relational harmony and emotional composure in workplace interactions, which may influence whether they voice or suppress unconventional ideas.

To address these limitations, the present research adopts a curvilinear perspective on the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding. It is proposed that emotional culture exhibits a U-shaped relationship with employees' withholding of creative ideas. At low levels of emotional culture, weak emotional norms may diminish relational attachment and psychological investment, leading employees to disengage and withhold creative ideas out of indifference or a lack of ownership. At moderate levels, emotional norms provide sufficient safety and legitimacy for expression without imposing

excessive conformity, thereby minimizing withholding. At high levels, however, strong emotional prescriptions increase self-regulation and anticipated social costs, prompting employees to withhold creative ideas that could disrupt emotional harmony. Thus, emotional culture functions both as a resource and a constraint, resulting in nonlinear behavioral outcomes.

Furthermore, emotional norms do not operate in isolation. Communication processes play a critical role in shaping how emotional signals are interpreted and enacted in the workplace (Taylor, Simpson, & Hardy, 2025). Specifically, the workplace communication climate can either mitigate or amplify the emotional costs associated with expressing creative ideas. Open and dialogic communication climates can lessen the negative effects of strong emotional cultures by legitimizing dissent and reframing emotional cues as informational rather than prescriptive (Kim & Wang, 2024). Conversely, evaluative and judgmental communication climates can heighten emotional monitoring and fear of negative evaluations, thereby increasing employees' tendency to withhold creative ideas under strong emotional norms (Kim & Wang, 2024). By considering communication climate as a contextual moderator, this research elucidates the communicative mechanisms through which emotional cultures influence behavioral outcomes.

This research makes several contributions. First, it shifts the conventional focus of creativity research from idea generation to idea suppression, addressing a critical yet underexplored stage in the innovation process. Second, it extends emotional culture theory by demonstrating that workplace emotional norms can have paradoxical effects on the expression of creative ideas, depending on their strength. Third, it reconciles competing perspectives on emotions as resources versus constraints through a curvilinear framework. Collectively, these contributions enhance understanding of how emotional and communicative contexts determine whether employees' creative ideas are voiced or silenced within organizations.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Emotional Culture and Creative Idea Withholding

Emotional culture theory suggests that organizations develop shared workplace expectations regarding the appropriateness of emotional displays, which, in turn, regulate employees' behavior by shaping perceived norms, social approval, and interpersonal risk (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). These emotional norms do not operate linearly; rather, they can simultaneously enable employee coordination and impose conformity pressures on employees, depending on their intensity. Emotional culture refers to shared norms regarding which emotions are appropriate to express within an organization and how such emotions should be enacted in everyday interactions (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Unlike employees' transient affective states, workplace emotional cultures represent a collective, enduring system that shapes employees' emotional self-regulation and the behavioral choices they make in the workplace. Previous research has largely emphasized the empowering role of positive workplace emotional contexts, arguing that these emotions, such as joy, enthusiasm, and warmth at work, broaden the cognitive repertoires, increase employee engagement, and encourage employee exploration (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004). From this perspective, emotionally supportive environments should reduce defensive silence and foster the expression of novel ideas. In the present study, emotional culture is conceptualized in terms of the strength of emotional norms governing workplace interactions rather than the valence of specific emotions.

However, an emerging body of research suggests that emotional norms may also function as mechanisms of social control (Brauer & Chaurand, 2010; Nugier, Niedenthal, Brauer, & Chekroun, 2007). When emotional expectations become strong or prescriptive, employees are likely to engage in heightened emotional monitoring to ensure alignment with prevailing norms. Such monitoring increases sensitivity to potential interpersonal consequences and encourages conformity, particularly when behaviors such as voicing creative ideas risk disrupting emotional harmony or eliciting discomfort. The employee voice and silence literature consistently shows that individuals withhold input when they anticipate social costs, fear negative reactions, or perceive expressing their views as emotionally risky (Huang, Wilkinson, & Barry, 2024; Elizabeth W. Morrison, 2014; Elizabeth Wolef Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Emotional culture, by defining what is emotionally acceptable, directly shapes these anticipations.

Overall, the previous research suggested that the emotional culture may exert nonlinear effects on the employees' decisions to withhold their creative ideas. At low levels of emotional culture, emotional norms are weak, and employees experience fewer relational expectations or emotional monitoring. Under such conditions, employees may experience limited relational attachment and lower psychological investment in organizational processes, which can increase the likelihood of disengagement and passive withholding of creative ideas. At moderate levels, emotional norms provide sufficient safety and legitimacy for employees to express ideas without imposing excessive conformity, thereby minimizing withholding. At high levels, however, strong emotional prescriptions heighten self-regulation and perceived emotional sanctions, prompting employees to suppress ideas that could disrupt established emotional expectations. Thus, we propose here:

H1: *Emotional culture has a curvilinear (U-shaped) relationship with employees' creative idea withholding, such that creative idea withholding is lower at moderate levels of emotional culture and higher at both low and high levels.*

2.2. The Moderating Role of Communication Climate

While emotional culture establishes shared emotional expectations, it does not operate independently of communication processes. Communication climate plays a central role in shaping how emotional norms are interpreted, enacted, and experienced in daily work interactions (Nordin, Sivapalan, Bhattacharyya, Ahmad, & Abdullah, 2014). Open and dialogic communication climates are characterized by mutual exchange, legitimacy of voice, and tolerance for divergent viewpoints (Kang & Moon, 2023). Such climates signal that disagreement and emotional discomfort are acceptable components of collective sensemaking rather than violations of social norms. In emotionally strong cultures, open communication may mitigate the constraining effects of emotional prescription by reframing emotional cues as informational rather than evaluative (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). When employees perceive communication channels as open, they are less likely to interpret emotional norms as rigid constraints and less likely to anticipate negative emotional consequences for expressing unconventional ideas.

Emotional culture theory further suggests that the behavioral implications of emotional norms depend on complementary communication structures. An open communication climate shows psychological safety and legitimizes exploratory dialogue,

thereby weakening the constraining effects of strong emotional norms. Under such conditions, employees are less likely to perceive emotional expectations as restrictive, thereby reducing the tendency to withhold creative ideas, even when emotional culture is salient. Prior research indicates that open communication reduces fear of speaking up and lowers the perceived costs of voice, even in contexts with strong social norms (Elizabeth W Morrison, 2014). Accordingly, open communication should reduce the tendency for strong emotional cultures to lead to increased idea withholding. Moreover, open communication can counteract disengagement at low levels of emotional culture by providing alternative sources of relational connection and meaning, thereby reducing withholding driven by indifference. In this way, dialogic communication attenuates the U-shaped relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding, leading to the following hypothesis:

H2: *An open and dialogic communication climate moderates the curvilinear (U-shaped) relationship between emotional culture and employees' creative idea withholding, such that the U-shaped relationship becomes weaker when open communication is high and stronger when open communication is low.*

On the other hand, the evaluative communication climate amplifies the regulatory function of the emotional culture by increasing social scrutiny and the fear of negative judgments. Emotional culture theory implies that when emotional norms operate alongside evaluative communication, employees become more vigilant about emotional appropriateness, intensifying self-regulation and increasing the withholding of creative ideas, particularly at the extreme levels of emotional culture. Evaluative and judgmental communication climates emphasize assessment, scrutiny, and normative judgment (Keashly & Neuman, 2010). Such climates heighten employees' awareness of being evaluated and increase sensitivity to social approval or disapproval. Under evaluative communication, emotional cues are more likely to be interpreted as signals of acceptability or deviance, thereby amplifying emotional self-monitoring and fear of negative evaluation (Cologna, Baumberger, Knutti, Oreskes, & Berthold, 2022; Falcione & Kaplan, 1984).

In emotionally strong cultures, evaluative communication reinforces the perception that emotional norms are rigid and enforceable. Employees operating in such environments may anticipate that expressing novel or controversial ideas could trigger emotional disapproval, embarrassment, or relational strain. This anticipation strengthens self-censorship and increases deliberate withholding of creative ideas. Prior research on silence suggests that evaluative contexts intensify perceived risks associated with voice, particularly when norms emphasize harmony or appropriateness (Kim & Wang, 2024; Elizabeth Wolef Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Furthermore, evaluative communication may exacerbate withholding at low levels of emotional culture by increasing uncertainty about acceptable expression in the absence of clear emotional support. Thus, evaluative communication is likely to strengthen the U-shaped relationship between emotional culture and idea withholding. Accordingly, we propose:

H3: *An evaluative and judgmental communication climate moderates the curvilinear (U-shaped) relationship between emotional culture and employees' creative idea withholding, such that the U-shaped relationship becomes stronger when evaluative communication is high and weaker when evaluative communication is low.*

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this research and illustrates the hypothesized relationships among emotional culture, open communication climate, evaluative communication climate, and creative idea withholding.

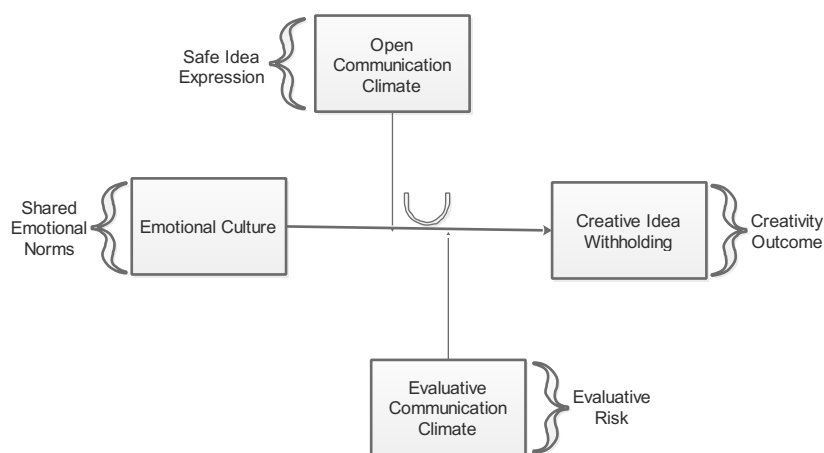


Figure 1: Research Model

3. Method

In this research, a quantitative survey was used to collect data from employees and their supervisors at Islamic banks operating in Pakistan. For the proposed curvilinear relationships and moderation effects, the organization selected was particularly suitable for this study because Islamic banking is characterized by strong normative systems, value-laden practices, and pronounced emotional and ethical expectations, making emotional culture especially salient. Islamic banking in Pakistan emphasizes harmony, mutual trust, moral conduct, and collective responsibility among employees, creating an appropriate context for examining how emotional norms shape employees' decisions to withhold their creative ideas. Employees working in both controlling offices and branch banking operations in South Punjab provided data, as these operations involve both standardized, compliance-driven tasks and discretionary problem-solving at the branch and controlling-office levels. The South Punjab region represents a significant operational hub for Islamic banks, consisting of urban and semi-urban branches and having a diverse customer base. Thus, Islamic banking in the South Punjab region makes creative idea expression and withholding highly consequential for organizational effectiveness. Subordinates provided data for emotional culture, communication climate, and creative idea withholding, whereas managers provided contextual information about work unit characteristics. Before the data collection process, one of the authors visited regional offices in Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan and explained the significance and purpose of this research with the regional and area managers through personal and

professional contacts. After approval, the authors visited branches and control offices, informed employees about the academic purpose of the study, assured them of confidentiality, and made participation voluntary.

Initially, 623 subordinates and 120 managers agreed to participate and were contacted. Branches were approached using a convenience sampling strategy based on organizational access and managerial approval. This approach is commonly used in organizational field research where access to financial institutions requires managerial authorization. A total of 487 subordinates' questionnaires and 97 manager questionnaires were returned. After excluding incomplete responses and unmatched supervisor-subordinate questionnaire data, our final sample yielded a response of 451 (72.7%) subordinate responses and 89 (74.2%) managers as a final sample. Because the focal constructs in the study (emotional culture, communication climate, and creative idea withholding) were reported by subordinates, the subordinate sample ($N = 451$) was used as the unit of analysis in all regression models. Although managers provided contextual data, their responses were not linked to specific subordinates, making it infeasible to structure the data hierarchically or link individuals to higher-level units with sufficient reliability. As a result, the analysis was conducted at the individual employee level rather than using a multilevel modeling approach. This decision was based on the fact that the available dataset did not support accurate assignment of employees to unique work units or supervisors, preventing correct modeling of nested data or group effects. Consequently, potential clustering effects could not be explicitly modeled, and residual dependencies at the work-unit or managerial level may not be fully captured. Nonetheless, because the focal variables were measured at the individual level and no reliable grouping structure could be retained, a single-level analysis was considered appropriate for this dataset. This analytic approach is consistent with prior research using similar data conditions, but results should be interpreted with the understanding that potential between-group variability may not be fully captured. It should be noted that the use of convenience sampling and the focus on Islamic banks in South Punjab may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions, sectors, or types of organizations. The sample may not represent the full diversity of the banking sector or the broader population of organizations, and findings may be specific to the unique cultural, regulatory, and organizational environment studied here. Future research could address these limitations by employing probability-based sampling methods and replicating this study in different geographical locations, industries, or cultural contexts to assess the robustness and generalizability of the results.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Item	Standardized Loading	CR	AVE
Emotional Culture	EC1	0.78	0.91	0.67
	EC2	0.82		
	EC3	0.85		
	EC4	0.80		
	EC5	0.76		
Open Communication Climate	OC1	0.81	0.90	0.69
	OC2	0.84		
	OC3	0.79		
	OC4	0.83		
Evaluative Communication Climate	EVC1	0.77	0.88	0.65
	EVC2	0.81		
	EVC3	0.85		
	EVC4	0.79		
Creative Idea Withholding	CIW1	0.82	0.92	0.70
	CIW2	0.86		
	CIW3	0.84		
	CIW4	0.79		
	CIW5	0.83		

Source: by the author. Note. $N = 451$. All factor loadings are standardized and significant at $p < .001$. CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted. CR values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, and AVE values exceed 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity

3.1. Measures

Emotional culture was measured using five items on a five-point Likert-type scale (O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). The scale assessed the extent to which certain emotional displays (e.g., warmth, calmness, harmony, emotional restraint) are expected and are valued within the organization. Although the items refer to specific emotional expressions, they are used to capture the extent to which such expressions are normatively expected and reinforced within the organization, thereby reflecting the strength of emotional norms rather than a particular emotional culture profile. Sample items include "There are clear expectations about which emotions should be expressed in the workplace" and "Displaying calm and emotionally appropriate behavior is valued here." ($\alpha = 0.89$). Employees' creative idea withholding was measured with five items on a five-point Likert-type scale (Dedahanov & Rhee, 2015; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Items assessed the extent to which employees chose not to share ideas due to anticipated reactions, perceived emotional costs, or concerns about appropriateness. Sample items include "I choose not to voice certain new ideas, even when they could be useful" and "I withhold creative suggestions to avoid possible negative reactions." ($\alpha = 0.88$). An open communication climate was measured with four items on a five-point Likert-type scale (Detert & Burris, 2007; Elizabeth W. Morrison, 2014). The items assessed the extent to which employees perceived communication in their organization as open, two-way, and tolerant of divergent viewpoints. Sample items include "Employees are encouraged to openly discuss different viewpoints" and "Communication in this organization is open and two-way." ($\alpha = 0.90$). Evaluative communication climate was measured with four items on a five-point Likert-type scale (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). The items assessed the degree to which communication was perceived as judgmental, critical, or evaluative and scrutinizing. Sample items include "When people express ideas, they feel they are being closely judged" and "Communication here often feels evaluative rather than exploratory." ($\alpha = 0.87$). To assess potential common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The unrotated factor solution showed that the first factor accounted for less than 50% of the total variance, suggesting that common method variance was unlikely to pose a serious concern in this research.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Emotional culture	0.01	1.00								
2. Open communication climate	0.02	1.01	-.22**							
3. Evaluative communication climate	0.03	1.02	.29**	-.26**						
4. Creative idea withholding	0.47	0.87	.18**	-.31**	.37**					
5. Age	36.4	8.9	.06	-.04	.05	.08*				
6. Gender (1 = male)	0.73	0.44	.02	-.03	.04	.05	.01			
7. Organizational tenure	8.7	6.3	.07	-.05	.06	.09*	.61**	.03		
8. Job level	2.1	0.8	.05	-.02	.04	.07*	.34**	.09*	.41**	
9. Work unit (1 = branch)	0.69	0.46	-.04	.03	-.02	.06	-.08*	.02	-.11*	-.06

Source: by the author. Note. $N = 451$. Emotional culture (EC), open communication climate (OC), evaluative communication climate (EVC), and creative idea withholding are scale-level variables. Gender is coded 1 = male and 0 = female. Job level reflects increasing hierarchical responsibility. The work unit is coded as 1 = branch banking and 0 = controlling office. Pearson correlations are reported. For the regression analyses, emotional culture (EC), open communication climate (OC), and evaluative communication climate (EVC) were mean-centered prior to estimating curvilinear and interaction effects. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 3: Moderated Curvilinear Regression Results

Predictor	Estimate	SE	p-value
Intercept	0.073	0.030	0.0166
Main Effects			
EC_c	-0.024	0.026	0.3537
EC ²	0.394	0.018	0.0000
OC_c	0.007	0.025	0.7769
EVC_c	-0.020	0.024	0.4227
Interactions			
EC x OC	-0.146	0.025	0.0000
EC x EVC	0.304	0.025	0.0000
EC ² x OC	0.019	0.020	0.343
EC ² x EVC	-0.022	0.021	0.298

Source: by the author. Note. $N = 451$. Emotional culture (EC), open communication climate (OC), and evaluative communication climate (EVC) were mean-centered prior to analysis. EC² represents the squared term of mean-centered emotional culture. Interaction terms were constructed using the mean-centered variables (EC × OC and EC × EVC). Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. R^2 for the full model = .086. Additional interaction terms (EC² × OC and EC² × EVC) are reported for transparency and were not statistically significant.

3.2. Control Variables

In this research, several control variables were included. At the individual level, age, gender, organizational tenure, and job level were reported by subordinates. At the organizational level, work unit type (branch vs. controlling office) was obtained from managers. These variables were included because prior research suggests that demographic and job-related characteristics may influence employees' willingness to express or withhold ideas. For example, age and tenure reflect experience and organizational embeddedness, while job level captures hierarchical position and associated voice opportunities. Work unit type was controlled to account for differences in task structure and interaction patterns across operational contexts.

4. Results

Hypotheses were tested using Mplus, which is well-suited for estimating models involving curvilinear and interaction effects. Supplementary regression analyses were conducted to generate descriptive statistics and correlation matrices consistent with the Mplus specification (Muthén, Muthén, & Asparouhov, 2017). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the measurement model. The four-factor model demonstrated satisfactory fit to the data ($\chi^2(123) = 240.5$, $p < .001$; CFI = .94, TLI = .93; RMSEA = .046; SRMR = .041). As shown in Table 1, all factor loadings were significant and above recommended thresholds, and the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded commonly accepted benchmarks. The results supported the distinctiveness of the four constructs. Specifically, the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlations, providing additional support for discriminant validity. These results indicate satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Zero-order correlations among the study variables are reported in Table 2. The correlations in Table 2 show that emotional culture is positively correlated with creative idea withholding, providing initial evidence that a stronger emotional norm may be associated with higher levels of withholding creative ideas. Open communication was negatively correlated with creative idea withholding, whereas evaluative communication climate was positively correlated with withholding of creative ideas. These correlational patterns are directionally consistent with the proposed model. Moderated curvilinear regression results are reported in Table 3. The model explains 8.6% of the variance in creative idea withholding ($R^2 = 0.086$). In practical terms, this effect size indicates that, while emotional culture and communication climate are significant predictors, there are additional unmeasured factors that also account for employees' tendency to withhold creative ideas. An R^2 value of 0.086 is broadly comparable to those reported in field studies of creativity and workplace behavior, reflecting the complex, multifaceted nature of organizational dynamics. For theory, this underlines the importance of considering emotional and communication factors as part of a broader network of influences on creative expression and withholding. For practice, even modest increases or decreases in idea withholding, as captured by this effect size, can have a substantively meaningful cumulative impact on organizational innovation, particularly when such behaviors influence group norms and long-term organizational learning. The model included

linear and quadratic terms for emotional culture, along with interaction terms between emotional culture and the communication climate variables. Additional interaction terms between the quadratic emotional culture term and the communication climate variables ($EC^2 \times OC$ and $EC^2 \times EVC$) were estimated to test moderated curvilinearity. However, because these quadratic interaction terms were not statistically significant, the findings do not provide strong support for moderated curvilinearity. Rather, the significant $EC \times OC$ and $EC \times EVC$ terms indicate that communication climate moderates the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding primarily at the first-order level. These effects were not statistically significant and did not alter the overall pattern of results.

Moderated curvilinear regression analysis results are reported in Table 3 to confirm the curvilinear relationship proposed in Hypothesis 1. Both the linear and quadratic terms of emotional culture were included in the model after mean-centering. The quadratic term of emotional culture was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.394, p < .001$), while the linear term was not significant. Figure 2 demonstrates the curvilinear relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding. This pattern of results supports a U-shaped relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding. The results confirm that creative idea withholding is lowest at moderate levels of emotional culture and increases at both low and high levels, supporting Hypothesis 1. An open and dialogic communication climate was hypothesized to moderate the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding in Hypothesis 2. The results are presented in Table 3. The interaction between emotional culture and open communication climate was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.146, p < .001$). Figure 3 demonstrates the moderating effect of open communication climate. The results indicated that open communication moderates the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding, such that the association becomes weaker at higher levels of open communication. Confirming that under the conditions of high open communication, the increase in the creative idea withholding associated with strong emotional norms was significantly reduced, thus, Hypothesis 2 received partial support from this research. However, given that the quadratic interaction terms were not statistically significant, these findings should be interpreted as evidence of the moderation of the relationship rather than strong moderated curvilinearity.

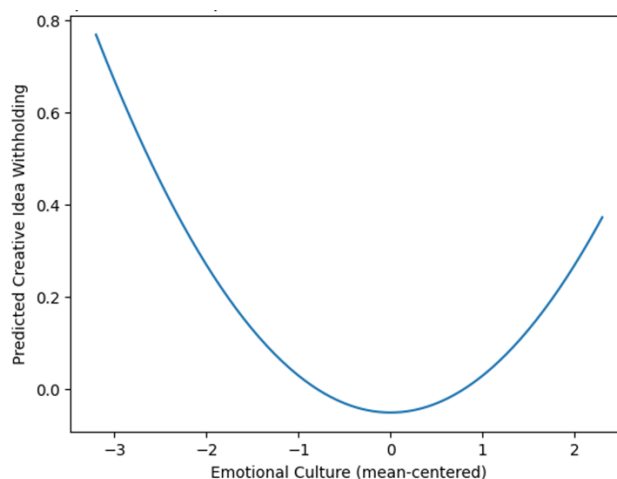


Figure 2: U-shaped relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding.

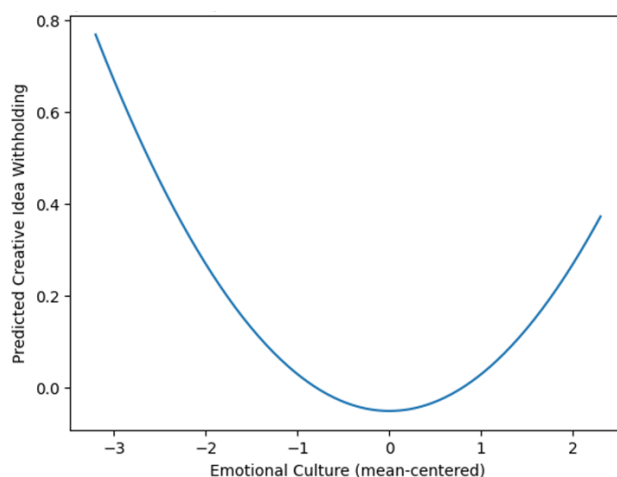


Figure 3: Moderating effect of open communication climate on the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding

Evaluative and judgmental communication climate was hypothesized to strengthen the curvilinear relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding in hypothesis 3. The results, presented in Table 3, are consistent with hypothesis 3: the interaction between emotional culture and evaluative communication climate was positive and highly significant ($\beta = 0.304, p < .001$). Figure 4 demonstrates the moderating effect of evaluative communication climate. The results confirmed that evaluative communication strengthens the perceived emotional costs of deviating from established norms, thereby increasing self-censorship as emotional culture becomes stronger. Thus, Hypothesis 3 received partial support from this research, strengthening the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding. The results, as presented in Table 3, confirmed that emotional culture has a nonlinear effect on employees' creative idea withholding and that communication climate plays a significant role in shaping how emotional norms translate into expressive behavior. The results

also confirmed that open communication mitigates, however, evaluative communication increases, the tendency for the emotional culture to suppress the creative idea expression. Importantly, the findings suggest that communication climate conditions the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding, although the evidence does not support strong moderation of the curvature itself.

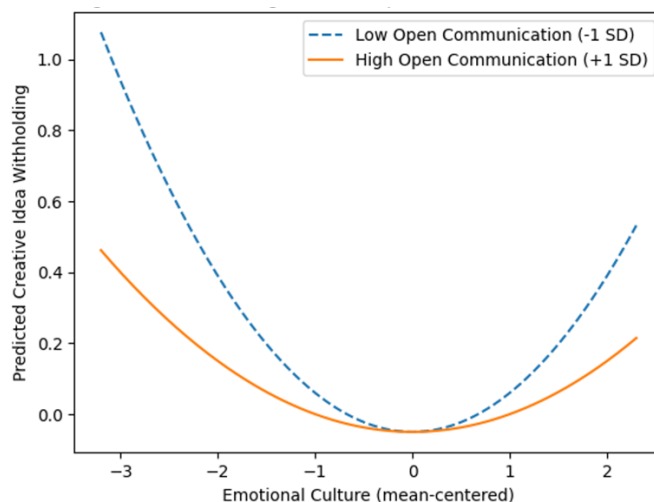


Figure 4: Moderating effect of evaluative communication climate on the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding.

5. Discussion

This study examined whether emotional culture influences employees' creative idea withholding in a nonlinear way and whether communication climate conditions that relationship. The findings support a U-shaped relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding, showing that withholding is lower at moderate levels of emotional culture and higher when emotional norms are either weak or overly strong. This result extends prior research that has generally portrayed emotionally supportive environments as beneficial for creativity, voice, and engagement (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004; Baas et al., 2008; Hao et al., 2022). Instead of confirming a uniformly positive effect, the present findings suggest that emotional culture has a more complex role: moderate emotional norms may create sufficient relational safety for expression, whereas weak norms may foster disengagement, and overly strong norms may heighten self-monitoring and conformity pressures.

The findings also align with studies suggesting that emotional norms can function as mechanisms of social control (Brauer & Chaurand, 2010; Nugier et al., 2007; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017). In line with research on employee voice and silence, employees appear less willing to express ideas when they anticipate interpersonal risk, negative evaluation, or emotional costs (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Huang et al., 2024). The present study adds to this literature by showing that strong emotional norms may suppress idea expression, while weak emotional norms may also increase withholding because employees feel less psychologically invested in the workplace. In this way, the findings help reconcile prior views that emotional environments are either enabling or constraining by showing that both effects may occur at different levels of emotional culture.

The results further show that the communication climate is an important contextual condition. Open and dialogic communication is associated with a weaker relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding, which is consistent with research showing that open communication reduces fear of voice and legitimizes divergent viewpoints (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2014; Kang & Moon, 2023). By contrast, evaluative communication is associated with a stronger relationship, supporting earlier work that links judgmental communication with greater scrutiny, social risk, and employee silence (Keashly & Neuman, 2010; Falcione & Kaplan, 1984; Kim & Wang, 2024). However, these findings should be interpreted carefully. Although the first-order interaction terms are significant, the quadratic interaction terms are not. Therefore, the results provide stronger evidence that communication climate conditions the relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding than that it strongly moderates the curvature itself.

The Islamic banking context also helps explain why these patterns may be especially visible in this study. In value-laden and relationally sensitive environments, where harmony, hierarchy, and emotional appropriateness are salient, employees may be particularly attentive to the social consequences of speaking up. This interpretation is consistent with emotional culture theory (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014; O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017) and with high-context communication perspectives emphasizing relational sensitivity and indirect expression (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). Overall, the findings suggest that organizations should not assume that a stronger emotional culture will automatically encourage idea expression. Rather, balanced emotional norms and open communication practices appear more effective in reducing employees' tendency to withhold potentially valuable creative ideas.

6. Theoretical Contributions

This research offers some distinct research contributions. First, the results confirmed our understanding of how the emotional culture shapes the expression of creativity at workplaces by explaining that workplace emotional culture exerts a curvilinear (U-shaped) impact on the employees' creative idea withholding. The results indicate that creative idea withholding is lowest at moderate levels of emotional culture but increases when emotional norms are either weak or excessively strong. These results help us understand the competing perspectives available in the current literature that alternately present emotional environments as uniformly enabling or constraining workplace creative outcomes. Instead of supporting the predominantly linear assumptions found in prior research on emotional culture and creativity, the results of this research confirmed that Instead of supporting the

predominantly linear assumptions found in prior research, the results suggest that emotional culture simultaneously operates as a resource that legitimizes expression and as a normative control system that heightens self-censorship when emotional expectations become overly prescriptive. By shifting the traditional focus on workplace creativity from capability to withholding as a deliberate behavioral choice, this research highlights how emotional norms regulate not only how employees generate creative ideas but also whether they choose to express them.

Second, this research identifies communication climate as a critical boundary condition that shapes how the emotional culture is translated into employees' creative idea-withholding behavior. Open, dialogic communication is associated with a weaker relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding, particularly at higher levels of emotional culture; such exchanges can reduce the constraining effects of strong emotional norms. On the other hand, evaluative and judgmental communication is associated with a stronger relationship, increasing the employees' withholding of creative ideas as the emotional culture intensifies. These results suggested that the emotional cultural norms do not operate in isolation; rather, their behavioral consequences depend on the communication practices through which they are interpreted and enacted. Importantly, these findings indicate that communication climate conditions this relationship, although they do not provide strong evidence that the curvature itself is moderated. Given that this research finds that communication climates can either buffer or amplify the self-censorship effects of emotional culture, it integrates emotional culture research with communication-based perspectives on workplace voice and silence behaviors.

Third, this research also contributed to workplace and creativity and employee voice behavior literature by reframing creative idea suppression as a context-sensitive, nonlinear phenomenon. Previous research has predominantly attributed employee withholding and silence to deficits in leadership, psychological safety, or individual courage. The findings of the current research suggest that even well-intentioned emotional cultures can inadvertently reduce employees' willingness to express creative ideas when emotional expectations become overly prescriptive. This perspective challenges the implicit assumption that strengthening positive emotional norms will necessarily reduce employee silence and increase voice behavior. Instead, the findings of this research confirmed the importance of balance in emotional cultures and the need to caution against the overprescription of workplace emotional expressions, especially in contexts where employee creativity requires deviation, discomfort, and constructive tension.

Finally, by placing and testing this model in the context of Islamic banking, this research extends the emotional culture theory and research into a context characterized by strong moral, ethical, and relational norms. The results of this research also confirmed that the value-laden organizational contexts, which are normally assumed to be uniformly supportive, can actually produce paradoxical outcomes for creative expression. This contextualization of Islamic banking strengthens the generalizability of research on emotional culture by showing that the constraining effects of emotional culture are not limited to Western or secular organizational settings. The research also contributes to organizational theory by explaining how cultural norms, emotions, and communication jointly shape employees' micro-level decisions to withhold their creative ideas, offering a more nuanced understanding of why potentially valuable ideas remain unspoken in organizations. In high-context communication environments characterized by relational sensitivity and hierarchical respect, emotional norms often regulate how disagreements in the workplace and innovation are expressed and shared by employees. Findings of this research, therefore, contribute to intercultural communication research by demonstrating how such norms can simultaneously support relational harmony and shape employees' willingness to voice creative ideas.

7. Practical Contributions

This research also offers some important implications for managers and organizations seeking ways to reduce the loss of valuable creative ideas. First, the primary implication for managers is the finding of a curvilinear relationship between emotional culture and creative idea withholding: more emotionality is not always better. Organizations that lack clear emotional norms may experience employee disengagement, whereas excessively prescriptive emotional norms may unintentionally encourage self-censorship. Similarly, organizations that strongly emphasize harmony, positivity, or emotional appropriateness may also inadvertently encourage employees to self-censor creative ideas by making them overly concerned about emotional disruption or social judgment in the workplace. The managers are recommended to cultivate an organizational culture that can be characterized as a balanced emotional culture, one that provides emotional support while legitimizing the expression of divergent ideas without imposing rigid expectations from outsiders that constrain dissent and experimentation.

Second, the results on the moderating role of communication climate also have important implications for managers. The results of this moderation confirmed the importance of how managers communicate, not just of what emotional values they promote. Open and dialogic communication in the workplace practices, such as inviting questions, acknowledging divergent viewpoints, and framing disagreement as constructive, can reduce the employees' tendency to withhold their creative ideas, even when the culture is emotionally strong. On the other hand, evaluative and judgmental communication styles can further amplify employees' perception of the emotional risks of speaking up, especially when emotional norms are salient. Specifically, this indicates that organizations need to design training programs for managers on dialogic communication and non-evaluative feedback; such programs may be an effective way to prevent the loss of creative ideas without the need for large structural or cultural changes.

Finally, the results of this research are particularly significant for the organizations operating in the highly normative or value-driven sectors, such as Islamic banking, healthcare, education, and public service. In such organizational contexts, emotional and moral expectations are typically deeply embedded in daily workplace practices, increasing the likelihood that well-meaning emotional norms become restrictive. For example, Islamic banking institutions may introduce structured innovation meetings or cross-branch idea forums where employees are encouraged to discuss service improvements without fear of interpersonal evaluation. The managers and leaders in these organizational sectors should be more attentive to signals of employees' rising self-censorship, such as reduced creative idea-sharing or excessive agreement in meetings. Implementing formal and informal workplace mechanisms such as online and offline anonymous creative idea channels, discussion forums, structured debate sessions, or rotating "devil's advocate" roles where employees are encouraged to speak up can help in reducing the negative effects of emotional culture and the unintended silencing effects of strong emotional cultures while preserving their relational and ethical benefits.

8. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this research also has several limitations that offer some promising avenues for future research. First, this research employed a survey-based, cross-sectional research design, which constrains strong causal inferences. During data collection, emotional culture and creative idea withholding were captured at a single point in time, although both constructs are likely to evolve as organizational norms and interaction patterns change. Future research should use a longitudinal or a time-lagged research design to collect data; these measures will help us understand how things develop and shift over time in emotional culture, such as those cultures that are triggered by leadership changes, crises, or organizational restructuring, which also shape trajectories of creative idea withholding over time. Such research designs would allow researchers to determine whether the curvilinear pattern observed in this study remains stable or varies across the different stages of the organizational development process.

To address potential common method bias, several procedural and statistical remedies were used. Procedurally, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality both prior to and during data collection to reduce evaluation apprehension and encourage honest responses. The survey instructions emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and that participation was voluntary, minimizing pressure to respond in a socially desirable manner. Different response formats and item order randomization were used to limit pattern responses. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test was conducted, and the results indicated that the first factor accounted for less than 50% of the total variance, suggesting that common method variance was unlikely to pose a serious concern in this research. Regarding social desirability bias, while self-reported behavioral measures may sometimes reflect respondents' desire to present themselves favorably, steps were taken to minimize this concern. These included reframing sensitive questions to be nonjudgmental and reiterating confidentiality. Nonetheless, the main study variables, emotional culture perceptions, communication climate, and creative idea withholding were reported by subordinates, which may still introduce some bias. Future research could further address these issues by collecting data from multiple sources, such as peer reports, supervisor evaluations, or behavioral indicators of idea expression and withholding.

Second, this research focuses on Islamic banking, a very specific cultural context in South Punjab, Pakistan. While this context was theoretically appropriate for this research, we are not sure whether the results can be generalized to other organizations, sectors, and contexts. Emotional cultures are embedded within the broader national, religious, and institutional frameworks, and the meaning and consequences of the emotional norms may also differ across sectors and societies. Future research should test the proposed curvilinear model in other value-laden contexts (e.g., healthcare, education, public administration) as well as in more market-driven or secular industries. Additionally, while this research conceptualized emotional culture at the organizational level and examined individual-level withholding behavior, it is important to recognize the methodological limitations associated with drawing inferences across different levels of analysis. Interpreting relationships between organizational-level constructs and individual-level outcomes can introduce the risk of ecological or atomistic fallacies, potentially leading to misleading conclusions if contextual effects are not properly disentangled. Future research should employ multilevel modeling to systematically investigate how unit-level or organizational-level emotional cultures interact with organization-wide or team-level norms to influence creative idea withholding at the individual level. By explicitly modeling cross-level relationships, subsequent studies can provide stronger evidence regarding the mechanisms through which emotional culture operates, helping to clarify whether observed effects are truly situated at the intended level of analysis.

Finally, future research should also extend the current model by integrating upstream and downstream processes. The creative idea withholding may have cumulative effects on the team learning, innovation outcomes, and employee well-being. Similarly, repeated experiences of creative ideas being rejected or validated may reshape emotional culture itself. There is a possibility of feedback loops between the culture and employee behavior. Future research should explore these dynamics to further understand how emotional cultures are sustained, challenged, or transformed through everyday acts of expression and silence.

9. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that emotional culture has a U-shaped relationship with employees' creative idea withholding. Moderate emotional norms appear to reduce withholding by providing sufficient relational safety for idea expression, whereas weak emotional norms may foster disengagement, and overly strong emotional norms may increase self-censorship. The findings also show that communication climate matters. Open communication weakens the relationship between emotional culture and the withholding of creative ideas, whereas evaluative communication strengthens it. Overall, the study highlights that emotional culture is not uniformly beneficial or harmful; rather, its effects depend on its strength and the surrounding communication environment. These findings contribute to research on emotional culture, voice, and silence by showing how emotional and communicative conditions jointly shape whether employees express or suppress potentially valuable creative ideas.

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