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### **RECOGNITION AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN ACTION: HOW LINE MANAGERS STRENGTHEN ENGAGEMENT THAT GOES BEYOND THE ROLE**

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# Recognition as an Organizational Culture in Action: How Line Managers Strengthen Engagement That Goes Beyond the Role

Mirit YEMINI<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Organizational culture plays a central role in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors, particularly through everyday interactions between managers and employees. Recognition provided by line managers represents one mechanism through which cultural norms regarding valued contributions are communicated in daily work settings. This study examines how such recognition is associated with employees' behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements. The analysis draws on data from the quantitative stage of a broader mixed-methods research project conducted among employees and managers in financial, high-technology, and industrial-technological organizations (N = 168). Recognition was measured as employees' perceived acknowledgment from their line manager, and engagement was operationalized as discretionary behaviors that exceed formal job duties. Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive association between recognition and behavioral engagement beyond formal role expectations ( $\rho = 0.607$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Additional analyses indicated variations across demographic groups, with female respondents reporting a stronger perceived impact of recognition on engagement than male respondents. The findings suggest that recognition by line managers functions as a key managerial practice through which organizational culture is enacted in everyday work interactions. Cultures that actively promote recognition may therefore encourage employees to contribute beyond formal responsibilities and support a more engaged and proactive workforce.

*Keywords:* organizational culture; recognition; employee engagement; line managers; extra-role behavior.

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## Introduction

Recent global research underscores the central role of organizational culture in shaping employee engagement and organizational effectiveness. According to Gallup (2025), workplaces characterized by supportive relationships, meaningful feedback, and recognition practices are significantly more likely to foster engaged employees who contribute positively to organizational performance. These findings highlight the growing importance of everyday managerial practices as vehicles through which organizational culture is experienced by employees.

Organizational culture reflects the shared values, assumptions, and norms that guide behavior within an organization and influences how employees interpret their roles and responsibilities (Schein, 1990, 2010). Culture is not only expressed through formal policies but also through daily interactions, particularly those between managers and employees. Within this context, managerial behavior plays a crucial role in translating abstract organizational values into concrete workplace experiences.

Recognition provided by line managers represents one of the most direct forms of such behavior. Recognition acknowledges employees' contributions and signals which actions are valued by the organization (Schein, 2010). Prior studies suggest that recognition practices are associated with higher levels of employee involvement, motivation, and retention, especially when recognition occurs as part of routine managerial interactions rather than solely through formal reward systems (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Towers Watson, 2012).

Employee engagement has been widely linked to organizational performance, well-being, and stability. Although definitions vary, engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct involving emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components. Importantly, engagement may be expressed not only through attitudes but also through observable actions. Early organizational research emphasized that effective functioning depends on employees' willingness to undertake behaviors that extend beyond formal job requirements, reflecting discretionary effort directed toward organizational goals (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Zeidan & Itani, 2020).

Despite the expanding literature on engagement and recognition, much of the research has focused on psychological states rather than concrete behavioral expressions of engagement in everyday work contexts. Moreover, relatively limited attention has been given to the specific role of recognition delivered by line managers in encouraging employees to engage in behaviors that exceed formal role expectations. This issue is particularly significant because line managers serve as the primary interface between organizational culture and employees' daily work experience.

The present study addresses this gap by examining how recognition by line managers is associated with employees' behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements. The analysis is based on data collected from employees and managers across financial, high-technology, and industrial-technological organizations as part of a broader mixed-methods research project on managerial communication and engagement.

By focusing on observable discretionary behaviors rather than solely on attitudes, the study seeks to provide a more concrete understanding of how recognition practices embedded in organizational culture may encourage employees to exceed formal expectations and contribute actively to organizational goals.

## Literature Review

Organizational cultures that promote recognition by line managers may encourage employees to go beyond formal role requirements and contribute to the development of supportive work environments.

### *Organizational Culture as a Theoretical Framework*

Organizational culture is widely understood as the shared system of values, assumptions, norms, and meanings that shapes how members of an organization interpret reality and behave within it (Schneider *et al.*, 2013). One of the most influential theoretical perspectives is offered by Schein (1990, 2010), who conceptualizes organizational culture as a pattern of basic assumptions developed by a group as it learns to address challenges of external adaptation and internal integration. Once these assumptions prove effective, they become accepted as valid and are transmitted to new members as appropriate ways of perceiving, thinking, and acting. In this view, culture operates in formal structures, providing an implicit framework that guides everyday organizational behavior.

Scholars have further emphasized that organizational culture functions as a social mechanism that promotes integration and shared understanding among members. It has been described as the "social glue" that holds organizations together, reduces fragmentation, and supports sense making processes (Alvesson, 2002; McShane & Glinow, 2005). Culture also differentiates organizations by establishing shared expectations, rituals, and norms that influence decision-making and workplace conduct (Ortega-Parra & Sastre-Castillo, 2013; Schneider *et al.*, 2013; Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014). Thus, organizational culture constitutes not merely a background condition but an active context shaping how employees relate to their work and to one another.

### *Organizational Culture Theory and Performance Implications*

Organizational culture has long been examined as a factor associated with organizational effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and coordinated problem-solving processes (Kotter, 2012). However, the relationship between culture and performance is not uniformly consistent; cultural characteristics that support effectiveness in one context may not do so under changing environmental conditions or stakeholder expectations (Ernst, 2001; Denison, 1990; Sorenson, 2002). Culture influences organizations partly by providing shared understanding of past practices and acceptable ways of operating, thereby guiding expectations about future behavior. It can also strengthen commitment to organizational values, foster alignment toward collective goals, and function as an informal control mechanism that channels behavior through norms rather than formal rules (Bulach *et al.*, 2012; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011).

A central theoretical perspective is Schein's model of organizational culture, which conceptualizes culture as a multilayered system consisting of visible artifacts, espoused values, and deeper underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990, 2010). Artifacts represent observable manifestations such as symbols, rituals, and organizational practices, while espoused values reflect formally stated goals and guiding principles and shaping how members interpret reality and respond to organizational situations. Together, these layers form a stable framework that influences behavior and organizational functioning over time.

### *Organizational Culture and Employee Behavior*

Research indicates that organizational culture is closely associated with a wide range of employee attitudes and behaviors. Prior studies have linked cultural characteristics to motivation, commitment, productivity, training, reward systems, and overall organizational effectiveness (Jegajothi & Sudha, 2015; Paramita *et al.*, 2020). Cultures perceived as open, supportive, or participative tend to foster stronger alignment between employees and organizational goals, whereas less constructive cultures may weaken engagement and comfort within the workplace.

Strong organizational cultures are often described as providing a shared sense of identity and purpose among members, which can enhance cooperation and coordination. Such cultures may contribute to cohesion by clarifying expectations, reinforcing acceptable behaviors, and reducing uncertainty in social interactions. Research has also associated strong cultures with sustained performance, consistent achievement, and improved communication, as shared values facilitate mutual understanding among employees (Baumgartner, 2020; Saad, 2018).

In addition, organizational culture has been described as a mechanism that supports organizational stability and continuity. By transmitting norms and expectations to members, particularly new employees, culture helps individuals understand appropriate conduct within the organization and fosters a sense of

belonging (Oluwayimika, 2020). Through these processes, culture shapes not only how work is performed but also how individuals experience their relationship with the organization and with one another.

### *Employee Engagement*

A global research report by Gallup (2024) highlights that employee engagement has consequences extending beyond organizational boundaries, influencing individuals' well-being and emotional experiences in daily life. Low engagement has been associated with elevated levels of stress, worry, anger, and loneliness, underscoring its broader social and psychological significance. Within organizational research, employee engagement is commonly conceptualized as the extent to which employees invest cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energy in their work and organization (Robertson & Cooper, 2010; Anitha, 2014). Engaged employees typically exhibit enthusiasm, persistence, and dedication to their roles, often described as vigor, absorption, and involvement in work activities (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; González-Romá *et al.*, 2006).

The foundational theoretical framework was introduced by Kahn (1990), who defined engagement as the active expression of individuals' selves in their work roles, enabled by psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability. However, engagement has also been conceptualized from a behavioral perspective that emphasizes employees' actions toward the organization. Early organizational theory suggested that effective functioning depends not only on formal task performance but also on employees' willingness to undertake activities beyond prescribed duties (Katz & Kahn, 1966). In this view, engagement involves discretionary behaviors that exceed formal job requirements, reflecting employees' readiness to contribute additional effort for organizational goals (Zeidan & Itani, 2020). Such behavior-oriented conceptualizations are particularly relevant in organizational contexts where engagement is expressed through tangible actions rather than attitudes alone.

### *Employee Recognition*

Employee recognition refers to acknowledging employees' contributions and efforts and is widely regarded as an important organizational practice. The literature distinguishes between formal recognition, such as structured awards and performance-based incentives, and informal recognition, including verbal recognition and peer acknowledgment (Kessler *et al.*, 2010; Lawler *et al.*, 2017). Informal recognition, often embedded in everyday interactions, is considered a key element of organizational culture. Leadership plays a central role in shaping recognition practices, as managers who express appreciation for employees' contributions help establish norms of respect and value within the workplace (Eisenbeiss *et al.*, 2008). Peer recognition has likewise been associated with improved collaboration and interpersonal relations (Tidd *et al.*, 2017).

From a sociological perspective, recognition by managers signals to employees that they are valued members of the organization, which often encourages stronger involvement and a willingness to contribute beyond formal role requirements Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005).

### *Recognition and Employee Engagement*

Research consistently indicates a positive association between employee recognition and engagement. Organizations characterized by stronger recognition practices tend to report higher employee involvement, better performance, and lower turnover intentions (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Towers Watson, 2012). Recognition may strengthen employees' sense of value and belonging, encouraging greater investment in organizational goals. Both performance-based recognition and ongoing recognition in daily interactions have been linked to enhanced motivation and sustained engagement over time (Lawler *et al.*, 2017).

Engagement may be expressed not only through attitudes but also through discretionary behaviors that extend beyond formal role requirements, reflecting employees' willingness to invest additional effort in organizational goals (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Zeidan & Itani, 2020).

### *Gap in research knowledge*

Despite extensive research on employee engagement, much of the literature focuses on psychological or attitudinal aspects, with less attention to concrete behavioral expressions of engagement in everyday organizational contexts. Similarly, although recognition has been widely discussed as a managerial practice, limited research has examined its relationship with employees' behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements, particularly when recognition is delivered by line managers.

## **Methodology**

This study reports findings from the quantitative stage of a broader mixed-methods research project examining managerial communication and employee engagement. The present analysis focuses specifically on the association between recognition by line managers and employees' behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements.

### *Research aim*

The present study aims to examine how recognition by line managers is associated with employees' behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements.

### *Research question and hypothesis*

RQ: How is recognition by line managers associated with employees' behavioral engagement, expressed as going beyond formal role requirements?

H1: Recognition by line managers is positively associated with employees' behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements.

### *Sample and Data Collection*

Data were collected from employees and line managers working in financial, high-technology, and industrial-technological organizations using convenience and snowball sampling. The questionnaire was developed based on prior qualitative findings and relevant literature on employee engagement and managerial communication and was pilot-tested to ensure clarity before full distribution. Responses were measured on a six-point Likert scale, designed to capture varying degrees of perceived recognition and engagement while avoiding a neutral midpoint. Due to information-security restrictions in some organizations, the questionnaire was administered in both digital and paper formats. A total of 168 valid responses were obtained from participants representing diverse organizational roles. The sample included 85 female and 83 male participants. Respondents ranged in age from 26 to 65 years, with approximately 84% aged 55 or younger. Most participants held an academic degree.

In terms of organizational roles, the sample included both managerial and non-managerial respondents. Managers with direct subordinates accounted for 45.24% of participants, while respondents holding managerial titles without direct supervisory responsibilities were treated as employees in the analysis, as presented in Figure 1.

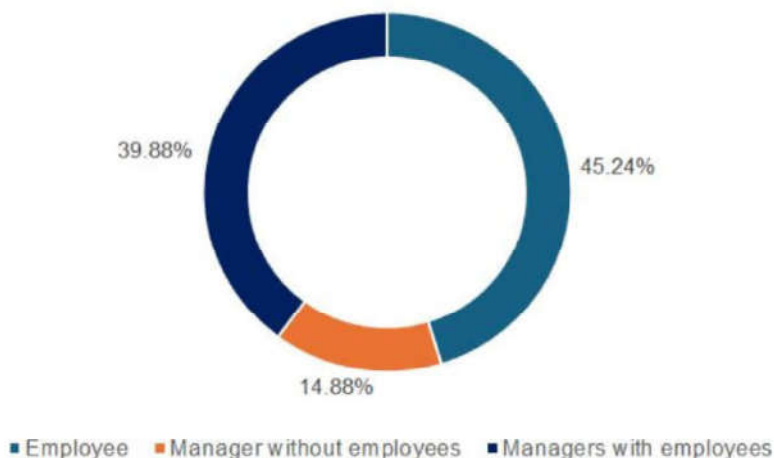


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by organizational role

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Regarding work experience, 60% had up to 10 years of tenure, while an additional 21% reported between 11 and 20 years of experience. Among those in managerial roles, 56.5% were male and 43.5% were female.

### *Recognition by line managers*

Recognition was measured through respondents' self-reported perception of the extent to which recognition received from their line manager is associated with their level of engagement. Responses were recorded on a six-point Likert scale (1–6), thereby avoiding a neutral midpoint.

### *Behavioral engagement beyond formal role requirements*

Behavioral engagement was operationalized as employees' tendency to perform actions that exceed formal job requirements, reflecting discretionary effort directed toward organizational goals. Although multiple engagement indicators were assessed in the broader study, the present analysis focuses on the behavioral dimension corresponding to going beyond formal role requirements.

### *Data Analysis*

Associations between perceived recognition and behavioral engagement were examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation due to the ordinal nature of the data. Descriptive comparisons between demographic groups, including gender and managerial status, were also conducted.

*Validity Considerations*

The measures used in this study were designed to capture respondents' perceptions and behaviors relevant to the research variables. Recognition was assessed using a single-item measure reflecting perceived recognition from the line manager, an approach commonly used in organizational research when examining concrete experiences. Behavioral engagement was measured in terms of actions that exceed formal role requirements, consistent with conceptualizations of engagement as active involvement in work roles and discretionary contributions to organizational functioning (Kahn, 1990; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

*Ethical Considerations*

Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and their right to decline participation or withdraw at any time. No identifying information was collected, and responses were treated confidentially. The data were used solely for research purposes.

**Results**

Descriptive analyses indicated that respondents perceived recognition from their line manager as moderately high. Both employees and managers reported relatively elevated scores regarding the extent to which recognition influences their engagement (employees:  $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ; managers:  $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ).

*Table 1.* Perceived impact of line manager recognition on engagement: Employees and managers

Survey item	Employees (n = 101)		Managers (n = 67)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Recognition received from the line manager as influencing engagement	3.23	1.17	3.90	0.82

Further analyses examined differences across demographic groups. Female respondents reported a stronger perceived impact of recognition on their engagement ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) compared to male respondents ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). This difference was statistically significant ( $t = -2.31$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Gender differences in perceived impact of recognition on employee engagement

Survey item	Male (95)		Female (73)		Statistic	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Recognition received from the line manager as influencing engagement	3.33	1.10	3.71	1.05	-2.31	0.022

To examine the association between recognition by line managers and behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements, Spearman’s rank-order correlation analysis was conducted. The results revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables ( $\rho = 0.607$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that higher perceived recognition is associated with greater involvement in discretionary behaviors beyond formal job duties.

Table 3. Spearman correlation between recognition by line managers and behavioral engagement: beyond formal role requirements

Engagement	$\rho$
Behavioral engagement: beyond formal role requirements	0.607**

(\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .)

Overall, the findings demonstrate a substantial association between recognition by line managers and employees’ willingness to engage in behaviors that exceed formal role expectations.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a substantial positive association between recognition by line managers and employees’ behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements. This result reinforces the view that engagement is not limited to psychological states or attitudes but can be manifested through discretionary actions directed toward organizational goals. Such behavior-oriented engagement aligns with earlier theoretical perspectives emphasizing that effective organizational functioning depends not only on formal task performance but also on employees’ willingness to undertake activities beyond prescribed duties (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Zeidan & Itani, 2020).

From a cultural perspective, the results suggest that recognition delivered by line managers may function as a concrete behavioral expression of organizational culture. Organizational culture has been described as a system of shared assumptions,

values, and norms that guide behavior and provide an implicit framework for action (Schein, 1990, 2010). Within this framework, managerial practices such as recognition can be viewed as artifacts that reflect deeper cultural values concerning respect, contribution, and interpersonal relations. When recognition becomes routine rather than episodic, it may signal to employees that discretionary effort is valued and expected, thereby encouraging behaviors that exceed formal role requirements.

This interpretation is consistent with the characterization of culture as a social mechanism that promotes integration, shared understanding, and coordination among organizational members (Alvesson, 2002; McShane & Glinow, 2005). By reinforcing norms of appreciation and acknowledgment, recognition practices may contribute to a climate in which employees feel aligned with organizational expectations and more inclined to contribute additional effort. Strong organizational cultures are known to enhance cohesion, reduce uncertainty, and clarify acceptable behavior (Baumgartner, 2020; Saad, 2018), conditions that may facilitate engagement expressed through proactive or extra-role actions.

The observed relationship between recognition and behavioral engagement also supports prior research linking recognition practices to higher involvement, motivation, and performance outcomes (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000; Towers Watson, 2012; Lawler *et al.*, 2017). Recognition may strengthen employees' sense of value and belonging, which in turn encourages greater investment in organizational goals. From a social exchange perspective, recognition can be interpreted as a positive relational investment by the organization, which employees may reciprocate through greater involvement and voluntary behaviors that exceed formal role requirements (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Informal recognition embedded in everyday managerial interactions may be particularly influential, as it reflects ongoing interpersonal appreciation rather than isolated reward events (Kessler *et al.*, 2010). Because line managers interact most frequently with employees, their recognition behaviors may serve as a primary channel through which organizational values are enacted in daily work life.

The findings also contribute to understanding engagement as a multidimensional construct shaped by contextual factors, including leadership behavior and work environment (Robertson & Cooper, 2010; Anitha, 2014). While engagement has often been conceptualized in terms of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; González-Romá *et al.*, 2006), the present results highlight the importance of examining observable behaviors as indicators of engagement. Behavioral expressions such as going beyond formal duties provide tangible evidence of employees' willingness to contribute additional effort and may be particularly relevant for organizations seeking measurable outcomes of engagement initiatives.

Moreover, the results can be interpreted in light of broader evidence regarding the significance of engagement for employee well-being and functioning. Low engagement has been associated with negative emotional experiences extending

beyond the workplace (Gallup, 2024b), suggesting that practices that enhance engagement may have implications not only for organizational performance but also for employees' overall work experience. Recognition by line managers, when embedded in everyday interactions, may therefore contribute to a supportive environment that enhances both organizational effectiveness and individual well-being.

Taken together, the findings suggest that recognition is not merely a motivational tool but a cultural mechanism through which organizations reinforce norms of contribution and commitment. When recognition is consistently practiced by line managers, it may help create a workplace climate in which discretionary effort is perceived as meaningful and valued. Such conditions can foster behaviors that extend beyond formal job requirements, thereby supporting organizational functioning and enhancing the cumulative experience of work.

The present findings extend existing engagement literature by demonstrating how recognition by line managers is associated with observable behaviors that exceed formal role requirements, thereby linking managerial practices, organizational culture, and concrete expressions of engagement.

### *Limitations*

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the research was conducted within a specific organizational and cultural context and at a single point in time, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other settings or periods. Organizational cultures and managerial practices vary across sectors and countries, and the relationship between recognition and engagement may differ accordingly.

Second, the data are based on self-reported perceptions of employees and managers. Such measures capture subjective experience but may be influenced by personal attitudes, recall bias, or social desirability. The study did not include objective behavioral indicators or longitudinal observations of engagement.

Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to examine changes in engagement over time, include multi-source data (e.g., supervisor ratings or performance indicators), and explore how recognition practices influence employee attitudes and behaviors across different organizational contexts.

### *Theoretical Contribution*

The study contributes to the literature on organizational culture and employee engagement by shifting attention from predominantly psychological or attitudinal perspectives to observable behavioral expressions of engagement. Specifically, it highlights recognition by line managers as a cultural practice that translates organizational values into everyday interactions.

By focusing on behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements, the findings provide a concrete operationalization of engagement that links managerial behavior, organizational culture, and employee actions. This perspective enriches existing engagement research by demonstrating how cultural norms of recognition can shape discretionary effort rather than merely attitudes toward work.

Moreover, the study integrates insights from organizational culture theory with engagement research by demonstrating that recognition serves as a mechanism through which organizational norms are communicated and reinforced in everyday managerial interactions. Recognition signals to employees which behaviors are valued and encouraged, thereby shaping patterns of discretionary effort. In this sense, recognition practices contribute not only to individual motivation but also to the maintenance of a culture that supports engagement beyond formal role requirements.

### *Practical Implications*

The findings offer several practical implications for organizations seeking to strengthen engagement and improve the work environment.

First, recognition by line managers appears to be a powerful yet relatively low-cost managerial practice associated with employees' willingness to invest effort beyond formal job requirements. Organizations may therefore benefit from embedding recognition into everyday managerial routines rather than relying solely on formal reward systems.

Second, the results suggest that fostering a culture of recognition can contribute to a more supportive and cohesive organizational climate. When employees feel acknowledged for their contributions, they may be more inclined to demonstrate initiative, cooperation, and discretionary behaviors that enhance organizational functioning.

Third, leadership development programs should emphasize interpersonal communication skills and recognition practices as core managerial competencies. Training managers to provide meaningful feedback and appreciation may help translate organizational values into daily work interactions.

Finally, organizations operating in complex or rapidly changing environments may view recognition as a strategic tool for maintaining employee motivation and commitment without extensive structural changes.

## Conclusion

This study examined the association between recognition by line managers and employees' behavioral engagement expressed as going beyond formal role requirements. The findings show a strong positive relationship between perceived recognition and employees' willingness to invest effort beyond their formal duties.

Recognition appears to play an important role not only in motivating individual employees but also in shaping a work environment that encourages initiative and contribution. When employees feel acknowledged by their supervisor, they are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that support organizational functioning.

Overall, the results highlight recognition as a key managerial practice through which organizational culture is reflected in everyday work. Organizations that embed recognition into routine managerial behavior may strengthen employee engagement, promote proactive actions, and enhance the overall quality of the workplace experience.

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