



# Transformational Leadership and Consequences: The Role of Organizational Identification

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this research is to test the impact of transformational leadership on subordinates' performance (job performance and creativity) in Chinese companies. In addition, it intends to verify the mediating effect of subordinates' organizational identification on the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance.

**Research design, data, and methodology** – To this end, a survey was conducted on the members of Chinese companies. Out of 400 returned responses to the final questionnaire, 349 were used for analysis after excluding invalid responses. Data were analyzed using SPSS 24 and AMOS 24.

**Result** – The analysis results are as follows. First, transformational leadership has a direct effect on subordinates' job performance and creativity. Second, transformational leadership was found to increase subordinates' organizational identification. Third, the mediating effect of organizational identification was verified in the relationship between transformational leadership and performance (job performance and creativity).

**Conclusion** – This study analyzed the effect of the transformational leadership on subordinate's job performance and creativity amid the deepening of China's market economy policies after economic opening. The study expands the related studies.

**Keywords:** Transformational Leadership, Organizational Identification, Job Performance, Creativity.

**JEL Classification Code:** M12, M19, M50, M54, M59

## **1. Introduction**

Since 1978, with the deepening of market economy policies and globalization of the economy, Chinese companies are interested in strengthening their competitive advantage. Many organizations want to utilize human resources to adapt to the rapid pace of change. Among them, the management and development of human resources using leadership is evaluated as an effective method. In particular, transformational leadership has received the most attention after China's reform and opening-up (Bass, 1985).

A transformational leader raises the level of awareness of the members about the value and importance of the ideal goal, enables them to transcend their own interests for the organization, and draws attention to higher-level needs. Transformational leadership has a positive effect on the behavior and attitude of members through the leader's charisma, understanding and motivation for members, and ability to work (Bass & Avolio, 1994). And transformational leaders strive to continuously interact with their members and lead them to create their own performance. In particular, the leader has a continuous interest in the growth and development of individual members and motivates the members. This results in effective results. A number of previous studies have showed the effectiveness of transformational leadership. However, studies explaining the mechanisms of transformational leadership in privatized enterprises after economic reform in China are still insufficient.

Meanwhile, China has traditionally developed a "community tradition" under the influence of Confucian values. Therefore, there is a question as to whether Chinese companies can cope with the rapidly changing current business environment even with the past management methods. In a rapidly changing business environment, not only the abilities of leaders and members, but also organizational identification among organizational members is important. Identification is a psychological concept that refers to an intrinsic tendency or psychological phenomenon to feel the same as other groups, individuals, or objects. Organizational identification originated from the social identity theory, which has a cognitive aspect in the concept that a person is dependent on the organization as a member of the organization and a judgmental aspect in terms of having values and intrinsic attachment as a member of the organization (Tajfel, 1978).

In the field of organizational behavior and human resources management, studies on organizational identification of organizational members are increasing (Edwards, 2009; Haslam, 2004; Ngo, Loi, Foley, Zheng, & Zhang, 2013). In particular, the Confucian cultural values of cooperation have been deeply ingrained in the hearts of Chinese people over thousands of years. Although the social environment has changed and people's way of thinking has changed, Confucian cultural values are still being embodied in people's attitudes and actions. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between transformational leadership, organizational identification, creativity, and job performance based on social identity theory in the Chinese context. This study will serve as an opportunity to promote related research in the future, and will provide theoretical as well as practical implications.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses**

### **2.1. Transformational Leadership, Employee Creativity, and Job Performance**

Bass (1985)'s study suggested the elements of transformational leadership. Since then, Bass, Avolio, and Goodheim (1987) established the transformational leadership concept of four components and has been widely recognized. First, inspirational motivation is "to stimulate enthusiasm among members of an organization, to achieve performance through success, and to elicit the confidence of members" (Yukl & Fleet, 1992; Wang & Moon, 2021). Second, intellectual stimulation induces more creative perspectives by encouraging subordinates to increase their understanding and rationality in solving problems and to recognize new directions in solving problems. Due to the intellectual stimulation of the leader, members increase their problem-solving ability and learn the ability to find and solve problems on their own (Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, 1987). Third, individual consideration is to pay special attention to the needs of individual members for growth and development as transformational leaders. Members increase their satisfaction with the leader who cares for them, which leads to improved organizational performance and productivity (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Masi & Cooke, 2000). Fourth, idealized influence suggests a vision and inspires loyalty, thereby increasing a sense of mission and awakening the potential of members. Because subordinates have a strong belief in their superior's judgment and ability, they put more effort into it with the belief that they can overcome any adversity or problem (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

Leadership is a very important factor in the work environment and organizational culture for subordinates (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009). According to social cognitive theory, individuals acquire skills and knowledge through task experience and observational learning (Bandura, 1977; Gong et al., 2009). From this perspective, transformational

leadership can be seen as an important external factor in the creative behavior of subordinates. Transformational leadership can improve employee motivation and organizational identification by presenting a vision and emphasizing organizational goals (Judge & Bono, 2000; Shin & Zhou, 2007).

Transformational leaders can enhance their subordinates' ability to develop innovative ideas and question outdated ways of operating (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Gong et al., 2009). And to generate new ideas or methods, it provides a thinking space for subordinates to seek ways from a new perspective (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Accordingly, the transformational leader stimulates the creative motivation of his subordinates.

In previous studies, transformational leadership was analyzed to have a positive effect on employees' intrinsic emotion and attitude-related variables such as job satisfaction, turnover intention, and organizational commitment as well as job performance or organizational performance (Bass, 1985; Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003; Meyer & Allen, 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Previous studies related to job performance have suggested that transformational leadership can have a positive effect on subordinates' job performance (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). Also, according to previous studies, transformational leadership has a positive effect on the results of employees' work activities (Brewer, Selden, & Facer II, 2000) and task achievement (Farh, Dobbins, & Cheng, 1991).

**Hypothesis 1:** Transformational leadership is positively related with creativity of employee.

**Hypothesis 2:** Transformational leadership is positively related with the job performance of employee.

## 2.2. Transformational Leadership and Organizational Identification

Kreiner and Ashforth (2004) defined organizational identification as "a sense of unity and recognition among members of an organization or group to which they belong". This process can be referred to as "a cognitive process in which certain characteristics of one's own organization or group are integrated with self-concept or characteristics" (Dutton, & Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

Organizational identification is a concept based on social identity theory (Turner, 1982). According to social identity theory, individuals tend to classify themselves and others by various social categories or differences such as race, religion, gender, age, and hobbies (Turner, 1982). Organizational identification is an important factor in determining the individual behavior of members and their behavior within the organization like organizational culture (Jeong & Choi, 2021).

Patchen (1970) defined organizational identification as a synthetic ideology in which three cases were synthesized. First, people form close ties with the organizations to which they belong. Second, the success or failure of the organization can be recognized as one's own. Third, it is the organizational resource that the members of the organization defend and support the norms and goals of the organization or group. Mael and Ashforth (1992) argued that organizational identification with the organization is formed by forming a psychologically strong intrinsic bond and emotional attachment to the organization members in general.

People with high organizational identity in an organization or group put more effort into the organization or group, and thus organizational performance is improved (Worchel, Rothgerber, Day, Hart, & Butemeyer, 1998). Individuals with high organizational identity make voluntary efforts to improve the image and organizational performance of a group or organization to which they belong, even if they are not required to perform their duties (Allameh & Alinajimi, 2012).

Previous studies have demonstrated that transformational leadership can lead to organizational members' trust and intrinsic motivation (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Accordingly, members of the organization can develop a sense of identification with the organization. Also, in the studies of Dvir et al. (2002) and van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Cremer, and Hogg (2004), it was confirmed that transformational leadership has a positive effect on organizational identification of members.

Based on the above discussion and the results of previous studies, the following hypothesis was established.

**Hypothesis 3:** Transformational leadership is positively related with organizational identification of members.

## 2.3. Mediating Effect of Organizational Identification

Organizational identification is an important variable that affects overall organizational performance, such as

giving members a sense of belonging to the organization, pursuing organizational efficiency, and bonding between the organization and its members (Smidts, Riel, & Pruyn, 2001). The stronger the identification with the organization, the easier it is for members to comply with the norms required by the organization, and the more individual efforts are made to achieve organizational goals (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994).

Many previous studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between organizational identification and organizational effectiveness. For example, organizational identification has a positive effect on job satisfaction (Van Knippenberg & Van Schie, 2010) and organizational commitment (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Organizational members with high organizational identification share knowledge or information (Grice, Gallois, Jones, Paulsen, & Callan, 2006) and actively participate in the decision-making process for the organization.

According to social identity theory and self-categorization theory, it is explained that if there are many characteristics in common between an individual and an organization, the individual's recognition and commitment to the organization are strengthened (Dutton et al., 1994). Miller, Allen, Case, and Johnson (2000) proved that there is a consistent and high positive correlation between organizational identification, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment through different subjects, and Topa, Fernández, and Palací (2006) suggested that organizational identification is an important antecedent to employee job satisfaction or organizational commitment. Such job satisfaction or organizational commitment has a positive effect on organizational performance and goal achievement by improving task productivity and creating a sense of responsibility and cohesion to the organization (Woods & King, 2002).

The stronger the identification with the organization, the more appropriate actions are taken for the organization, and it also affects organizational commitment or organizational citizenship behavior, which is a voluntary effort for the benefit of the organization (Dutton et al., 1994). Furthermore, by expressing one's intrinsic psychological involvement as behavior, it indicates loyalty behavior such as development of innovative ideas and support for organizational goals (Zdaniuk & Levin, 2001). In addition, individuals are more likely to comply with organizational requirements or norms, and members are more likely to exert efforts and actions to achieve organizational goals or performance (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994).

As suggested in the rationale for Hypothesis 3 above, leadership has been studied to influence the formation of organizational identification. In particular, it was found that members' organizational identification was strengthened when the leader showed many exemplary behaviors and when there was trust between leader members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). According to the transformational leadership theory of Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders can influence members by presenting organizational goals and motivating them. In addition, transformational leaders align the goals of the members with the organization, and the members perceive a high degree of identification with the organization (Humphrey, 2012).

Therefore, it can be inferred that transformational leadership has a positive effect on employees' organizational identification, and that members with high organizational identification will exert commitment to the organization and demonstrate high creativity, thereby creating high job performance.

Based on the above theoretical basis and the results of previous studies, the following hypotheses were established.

**Hypothesis 4:** Organizational identification will mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and creativity.

**Hypothesis 5:** Organizational identification will mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Model

The purpose of the study is to empirically test whether the perceived transformational leadership of superiors affects the job performance and creativity of employees in Chinese companies, and whether organizational identification plays a mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance. Figure 1 shows the research model based on the hypothesis.

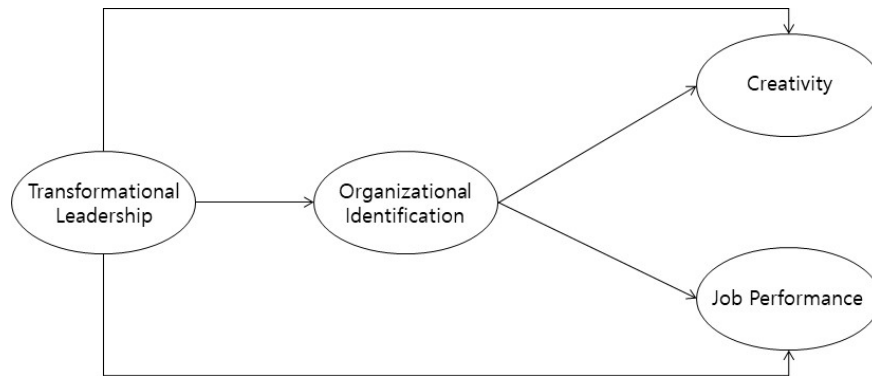


Figure 1: Research Model

### 3.2. Data

In this study, a survey was conducted using the Internet survey method targeting Chinese company employees. 400 questionnaires were collected; among them 349 valid questionnaires were used for analysis after eliminating incomplete answers. The 349 respondents included 194 males (55.6%) and 155 females (44.4%). In terms of age, the respondents were divided into four age groups, i.e., 20-29 (21.8%), 30-39 (25.5%), 40-49 (20.9%), and above 50 (31.8%). In terms of educational level, high school (25.2%), college (12.3%), bachelor's degree (46.1%), master's degree (10.3%), and doctoral degree (6%). In terms of service length, less than one year (12.9%), 1-3 years (8.9), 4-5 years (6.3%), 6-10 years (16.0%), 11-20 years (55.9%).

### 3.3. Measurement

For the convenience of analysis, all measures previously confirmed as being effective and credible in previous studies were adopted for use in this study. All the questions were based on the 5-point Likert scale (1=highly disagree, 5=highly agree).

#### 3.3.1. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is defined as the process of instilling confidence to pursue performance and achieve job performance by changing the values and goals of members (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). To measure transformational leadership, 20 questions on transformational leadership were used out of a total of 45 questions in MLQ-5X (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) of Bass and Avolio (1995). Specifically, 8 items of charismatic influence, 4 items of intrinsic motivation, 4 items of intellectual stimulation, and 4 items of personal consideration were measured on a Likert 5-point scale.

#### 3.3.2. Organization Identification

Organizational identification is defined as the degree to which one perceives oneself as a member of the organization (Mael & Ashforth 1992). Organizational identification consisted of a 6-item questionnaire developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). It was measured on a Likert 5-point scale.

#### 3.3.3. Creativity

Creativity was defined as a specific process of perceiving difficult problems, generating ingenious ideas to solve problems, establishing and testing predictions, and delivering the results (DiLiello & Houghton, 2008). It was measured on a Likert 5-point scale using 5 items out of 17 items developed by DiLiello and Houghton (2008).

### 3.2.4. Job Performance

Job performance is defined as the expectation that an individual will be able to complete one's job. It was measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 6 items developed by Bouckenoghe, Raja, and Butt (2013).

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Reliability and Validity

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the transformational leadership, organizational identification, job performance, and creativity were 0.969, 0.899, 0.917, and 0.909 respectively. They were all bigger than 0.8, suggesting that all the measurements are reliable.

As a result of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), most goodness-of-fit indices were found to satisfy the recommended acceptance criteria ( $X^2/df=1.983$ ,  $GFI=0.906$ ,  $AGFI=0.876$ ,  $CFI=0.966$ ,  $NFI=0.934$ ,  $IFI=0.966$ ),  $TLI=0.959$ ,  $RMR=0.029$ ,  $RMSEA=0.053$ ). That is, the path diagram of the measurement model fits well with the observed data, and the construct validity of the scale is supported by statistics (Kwak & Moon, 2021).

**Table 1:** Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Variables	Items	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Cronbach's alpha
Transformational leadership	1~8	1	-	-	-	0.969
	9~12	0.932	0.046	9.892	***	
	13~16	0.897	0.040	9.393	***	
	17~20	0.867	0.048	9.653	***	
Organizational identification	1~2	1	-	-	-	0.899
	3~4	0.929	0.041	9.321	***	
	5~6	0.814	0.057	9.421	***	
Creativity	1~2	1	-	-	-	0.909
	3~4	0.822	0.042	9.918	***	
	5~7	0.906	0.043	9.991	***	
Job performance	1~2	1	-	-	-	0.917
	3~4	0.953	0.035	10.761	***	
	5~6	0.854	0.051	15.130	***	
Goodness-of-fit		$X^2=416.374$ , $df=210$ , $P=000$ , $X^2/df=1.983$ , $GFI=0.906$ , $AGFI=0.876$ , $CFI=0.966$ , $NFI=0.934$ , $IFI=0.966$ , $TLI=0.959$ , $RMR=0.029$ , $RMSEA=0.053$ ( $LO90=0.046$ , $HI90=0.061$ )				

### 4.2. Correlation Analysis

In this study, correlation analysis was performed to identify the relational outline between each variable prior to hypothesis testing. The analysis results are as shown in Table 2. There is a positive (+) correlation between the variables used in the analysis, such as transformational leadership, organizational identification, creativity, and job performance. Therefore, a hypothetical relationship can be expected.

**Table 2:** Result of Correlation Analysis

Factors	AVG	S.D	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Transformational leadership	4.12	0.729	1			
(2) Organizational identification	3.35	0.470	0.492**	1		
(3) Creativity	3.85	0.586	0.692**	0.524**	1	
(4) Job performance	4	0.548	0.463**	0.460**	.584**	1

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

### 4.3. Hypotheses Test

Structural equation model was analyzed to verify the hypothesis of this study. The path coefficients of the research model are as presented in Table 3. First, the path coefficient of Hypothesis 1 was 0.504 ( $\beta=0.461$ ) and C.R=5.633 ( $p<0.001$ ), so the hypothesis that the leader's transformational leadership is positively related to creativity was supported. And the path coefficient of hypothesis 2 that the leader's transformational leadership has a positive effect on job performance was 0.287 ( $\beta=0.252$ ) and C.R=3.534 ( $p<0.001$ ), which supported the hypothesis. Hypothesis 3 on the effect of transformational leadership on employees' organizational identification was also supported by path coefficients of 0.836 ( $\beta=0.600$ ) and C.R=11.765 ( $p<0.001$ ).

On the other hand, the path coefficient between organizational identification and creativity was 0.161 ( $\beta=0.223$ ), C.R=1.619, and the path coefficient between organizational identification and job performance was 0.114 ( $\beta=0.140$ ) and C.R=2.305. Therefore, it was found that the employee's organizational identification had a significant direct effect on creativity and job performance, respectively.

**Table 3:** Results of Path Analysis

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p	Standardized
H 1 TL → CT	0.504	0.084	5.633	***	0.461
H 2 TL → JP	0.287	0.071	3.534	***	0.252
H 3 TL → OI	0.836	0.051	11.765	***	0.600
H 4 OI → CT	0.161	0.128	1.619	.010	0.223
H 5 OI → JP	0.114	0.103	2.305	0.02	0.140
Goodness-of-fit	$\chi^2=416.374$ , $df=210$ , $P=000$ , $\chi^2/df=1.983$ , $GFI=0.906$ , $AGFI=0.876$ , $CFI=0.966$ , $NFI=0.934$ , $IFI=0.966$ , $TLI=0.959$ , $RMR=0.029$ , $RMSEA=0.053$ ( $LO90=0.046$ , $HI90=0.061$ )				

Note: TL: Transformational Leadership, OI: Organizational Identification, CT: Creativity, JP: Job Performance

Bootstrapping was conducted to verify the mediating effect of organizational identification in the relationship between transformational leadership, creativity, and job performance (Sample=2,000). As shown in Table 4, organizational identification has a significant mediating effect in the relationship between transformational leadership,

creativity, and job performance. That is, the indirect effect on the path between transformational leadership → organizational identification → creativity was significant ( $p = 0.018$ ), and the indirect effect of transformational leadership → organizational identification → job performance was also statistically significant ( $p = 0.003$ ).

**Table 4:** Result of Mediation Effect Analysis

Path		Estimate	Indirect	Sig.
H 4	TL → OI → CT	0.836	0.274	0.018
		0.161		
H 5	TL → OI → JP	0.836	0.287	0.003
		0.114		

Note: TL: Transformational Leadership, OI: Organizational Identification, CT: Creativity, JP: Job Performance

According to the analysis result, it can be confirmed that transformational leadership directly and positively affects the creativity and job performance of employees, and also indirectly affects the creativity and job performance of employees through organizational identification. In conclusion, it can be seen that the organizational identification of employees plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership, employee creativity, and job performance.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Results and Implications

After China's economic reform, the role of transformational leadership has been emphasized. According to previous studies, it is reported that transformational leadership improves the organizational atmosphere and has a positive effect on the performance of members. This study explored the role and mechanism of transformational leadership in the Chinese context. Specifically, the purpose of this study is first, to determine whether transformational leadership directly affects organizational identification, creativity, and job performance of members. Second, this study aims to determine whether organizational identification mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and performance (job performance and creativity).

The empirical results of this study are as follows. First, it was confirmed that transformational leadership had a positive effect on organizational identification of members. Second, based on social identity theory (SIT), the antecedent of organizational identification and its consequences were further explored. In this study, it was confirmed that organizational identification plays a mediating role between transformational leadership and employees' job performance and creativity. Organizational identification is a psychological state in which members accept the organization's policies and directions and share their destiny, so it can be interpreted that members with a high level of organizational identification want to contribute to the improvement of organizational performance through active participation.

In order to respond to changes in the Chinese economic system and corporate privatization, it is necessary to change the mindset of leaders of organizations. For the survival and development of a company in China, it is important to induce the voluntary cooperation of its members toward the organization's goals and strategic directions. Therefore, the need for transformational leadership is high. Meanwhile, China has a unique socio-cultural background that values a sense of community, and the sense of unity among its members is considered important not only in corporate organizations but also in society as a whole. In this background, the identification of leaders and subordinates in the organization needs to be considered important. Low organizational identification can reduce cooperative relationships among members, negatively affect work performance, and even become a fatal factor in achieving organizational goals. Leadership is an important factor in resolving this situation and can be viewed as a key driving force influencing members (Shalley & Gilson, 2004).

According to empirical studies, leadership has a significant effect on members' sense of organizational identity. Among them, transformational leadership was recognized as the most typical leadership style. In previous studies, transformational leadership not only motivates members internally, but also identifies individual needs and



characteristics (Bass & Avolio, 1990), provides a comfortable working environment for members, and builds bonds and organizational identity (Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Therefore, it can be seen that transformational leadership plays an important role in enhancing the sense of belonging and identification of members with the organization. Until now, research on organizational identification has not received much attention in the fields of human resources and organizational behavior. This study confirmed that the organizational identification of members is directly affected by the leadership of their superiors and affects the performance of members. In a certain environment, when organizational identification is high, the emotional bond between members and the organization is strengthened, and members more positively accept the organization's goals and strive to identify the organizational goals with their own. Therefore, this study suggests that improvement of organizational identification of members is necessary to realize continuous organizational development.

## 5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The limitations and research directions of this study are as follows. First, since the data used in the analysis was collected through a self-report based survey, it is difficult to escape from errors caused by 'subjective perception'. In future research, it is necessary to supplement the lack of 'subjective response', including not only the self-report method but also the method of observing from a third party's point of view. Second, since this study analyzed a hypothesis using questionnaire data collected at a certain point in time, there is a limitation in identifying the causal relationship between variables. In the future, longitudinal investigations and studies will be needed. Third, the analysis results of this study were consistent with those of previous studies, but it is difficult to generalize the study results because the number of samples and types of occupations used in the analysis are limited. In future research, it will be necessary to expand the sample size and include various occupational types to increase the generalizability of the research results. Fourth, we used measurement scales that has been verified for reliability and validity in previous studies. However, since these tools were developed in foreign countries, it may be questioned whether they are appropriate for China's specific situation. Lastly, this study focused only on the job performance and creativity of employees as performance variables. In the future, research should be conducted to analyze the impact of organizational identification by distinguishing between individual and organizational performance. Also, although this study focused on transformational leadership, we propose an extension of the research model to study other leadership styles such as charismatic leadership and servant leadership.

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