

# The role of knowledge-sharing and creative self-efficacy on the link between self-leadership and innovative work behavior among employees of Technology-based SMEs in Beijing

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## Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between self-leadership and innovative work behavior among 384 employees in Beijing's technology-based SMEs, examining the mediating role of creative self-efficacy and the moderating effect of knowledge sharing. Results show that creative self-efficacy significantly mediates the self-leadership–innovative work behavior relationship (30.6% of total effect), while knowledge sharing strengthens the positive relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy. Based on these findings, a 12-month intervention program is proposed to enhance organizational innovation capacity. This research contributes to innovation management theory by validating an integrated framework applicable to resource-constrained SME contexts.

## Keywords

Self-leadership; Innovative work behavior; Creative self-efficacy; Knowledge sharing; Technology-based SMEs

## 1. Introduction

In today's technology-driven business environment, innovation is critical for enterprise survival, particularly for technology-based SMEs. This study examines the relationship between Self-leadership and Innovation Work Behavior among Beijing's technology-based SMEs.

Technology-based SMEs face unique challenges including flatter organizational structures, limited resources, and high market uncertainties. In such contexts, employee autonomy and self-management capabilities become particularly crucial. This research proposes that Creative Self-efficacy serves as a key mediating

mechanism: employees with strong Self-leadership are more likely to develop confidence in their innovation capabilities, which then translates into actual Innovation Work Behavior. Additionally, organizational Knowledge Sharing culture plays a moderating role by providing employees with necessary information and support that enhances Creative Self-efficacy and amplifies Self-leadership's positive effects.

Beijing hosts over 36,000 technology-based SMEs that drive technological progress and economic growth. However, these enterprises face challenges including insufficient innovation motivation, suboptimal resource allocation, and knowledge flow barriers. Official statistics reveal significant structural gaps between technology-based SMEs and large enterprises in Beijing. In 2023, large enterprises held 139,327 valid invention patents compared to SMEs' 74,073—a 1.9-fold difference (Beijing Intellectual Property Office, 2024). Regarding commercialization, SMEs accounted for only 35% of Beijing's CNY 881.26 billion technology-contract turnover, while large and state-owned enterprises captured nearly 50% (Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission, 2024). Large enterprises also lead in patent industrialization rates by almost 10 percentage points nationally (National Intellectual Property Administration, 2024). Most critically, R&D intensity diverges sharply: large high-tech enterprises invest over 6% compared to ordinary SMEs' 2.5 – 3.5%—less than half; even "Little Giant" specialized SMEs only recently surpassed 5% (Beijing Statistical Bureau, 2024).

By analyzing the complex relationships among Self-leadership, Creative Self-efficacy, Knowledge Sharing, and Innovation Work Behavior, this study provides scientific guidance and practical management strategies for technology-based SMEs. The research validates theoretical models through empirical analysis and offers targeted solutions, enriching innovation management theory while supporting the sustainable development of technology-based SMEs.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

This study aims to analyze the link between self-leadership and innovative work behavior and the role of knowledge sharing and creative self-efficacy in the said relationship among employees of Technology-based SMEs in China.

Specifically, it seeks answer to the following questions:

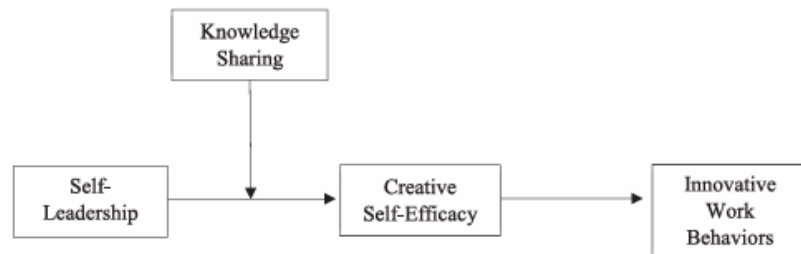
1. What is the employee's level of
  - 1.1 innovative work behavior,
  - 1.2 self-leadership;
  - 1.3 creative self-efficacy?
2. To what extent do knowledge sharing practiced by employees in Technology-based SMEs in China?
3. Does creative self-efficacy significantly mediate to the relationship between self-leadership and innovative work behavior?

4. Does knowledge-sharing significantly moderate to the relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy?
5. Based on findings, what program may be proposed to enhance Employees Innovative Work Behavior ?

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This current study is anchored in the study of Khan, Li, Chughtai, Mushtaq, and Zeng, (2023) which analyzed the moderated mediation model of self-leadership and innovative behavior based on social cognitive theory. It also assessed mediating impact of knowledge sharing and the moderating effect of creative self-efficacy in the said direct relationship.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Khan, Li, Chughtai, Mushtaq, and Zeng, (2023)



As cited in their study, social cognitive theory describes the individuals' behavioral intention determines how people interact with the internal and external factors that influence their innovative work behavior. It explains that self-leadership, being a personal and behavioral technique, allows individuals to enhance their coping skills, thereby encouraging them to accept challenges and risk tasks, leading to innovative work behavior.

Self-leadership (SL) involves an inspiration-driven cognitive process where individuals, through self-direction and self-motivation, guide themselves to achieve desired objectives, goals, and behaviors in the workplace. Innovative work behavior (IWB) pertains to the generation and implementation of novel and effective ideas aimed at developing new products and services. Creative self-efficacy (CSE) refers to the belief in one's own knowledge and skills to produce innovative results, fostering the confidence to generate and implement creative solutions. Lastly, knowledge sharing (KS) is defined as a culture of social interaction in which employees exchange knowledge, experiences, and skills across the department or organization (Khan, et. al, 2023).

The study demonstrated that self-leadership is a powerful form of leadership that enables individuals to enhance their creative self-efficacy by fostering belief in their abilities and building confidence. Additionally, the findings highlighted that knowledge sharing acts as a strong moderator, amplifying creative self-efficacy and ultimately driving innovative work behavior. In essence, the influence of self-leadership on innovative work behavior through creative self-efficacy is

significantly strengthened when there is a high level of knowledge sharing within the organization.

#### 4. Literature review and hypothesis

Grounded in social cognitive theory, this study examines how self-leadership (SL)—self-direction and self-motivation processes guiding workplace objectives—influences innovative work behavior (IWB) through creative self-efficacy (CSE) and knowledge sharing (KS).

Research establishes that self-leadership significantly enhances innovative capabilities by fostering self-regulation and autonomous decision-making (Goldsby et al., 2021; Ashfaq et al., 2021). Creative self-efficacy, defined as confidence in one's ability to produce innovative results, serves as a critical mediating mechanism translating self-leadership into action (Wang et al., 2024). Studies confirm CSE bridges the SL-IWB relationship, with individuals possessing high creative confidence more likely to generate and implement innovative ideas (Liu et al., 2023). Knowledge sharing—organizational practices enabling knowledge, experience, and skill exchange—acts as a crucial contextual moderator (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2021). Research indicates KS strengthens the SL-CSE relationship by providing social validation, collective intelligence, and reduced problem-solving constraints (Rehman et al., 2020; Qu et al., 2024).

However, existing studies rarely integrate these variables into unified frameworks addressing resource-constrained SME contexts. Most innovation research focuses on large organizations with established support systems, leaving gaps in understanding how individual psychological mechanisms interact with social structures in SMEs facing resource limitations, flat hierarchies, and rapid change demands.

Therefore, this paper proposes the following research hypotheses:

Ho1: Creative self-efficacy does not significantly mediate to the relationship between self-leadership and innovative work behavior.

Ho2: Knowledge-sharing significantly moderate to the relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy.

#### 5. Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional survey design grounded in social cognitive theory. This approach enables systematic examination of variable relationships at a specific timepoint while providing statistical validation of hypothesized mechanisms. Structured questionnaires with validated scales measure each construct using 7-point Likert scales (1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree), ensuring sufficient variance for statistical analysis. SPSS software serves as the primary analytical tool.

The target population comprises employees from Beijing's 36,380 technology-based

SMEs across diverse departments and roles. Given the unknown total employee count, the Cochran formula determined a sample size of 384 respondents at 95% confidence level. Participants represent various high-tech industries including information technology, biomedicine, renewable energy, and new materials, ensuring representativeness beyond solely technical/R&D personnel.

The researcher-developed questionnaire draws from validated literature on all core variables, reviewed by expert panels. A pilot test with 30 employees from non-Beijing technology SMEs yielded 38 valid responses after excluding rushed/uniform responses. Reliability analysis demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.927$  across all variables), with Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) values exceeding 0.4. Validity assessment confirmed structural appropriateness (KMO=0.632, Bartlett's test  $p < 0.001$ ), leading to questionnaire finalization without modifications.

Data collection occurred July 1-3, 2025, through systematic street surveys in Beijing Zhongguancun Science Park using a third-person sampling protocol. Participants confirming technology-based SME employment completed surveys via QR-code-accessed Wenjuanxing platform, ensuring one-response-per-participant controls. This electronic method facilitated real-time monitoring, data integrity maintenance, and efficient processing while guaranteeing voluntary participation and confidentiality through encryption protocols.

This methodological framework establishes a robust foundation for investigating psychological and social mechanisms driving innovative behavior in resource-constrained SME contexts, contributing empirical evidence to innovation management literature while addressing unique characteristics of technology-based small enterprises in Beijing's competitive ecosystem.

## **6. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data**

### **6.1. Employee's level of Innovative work behavior, self-leadership and creative self-efficacy**

The evaluation of innovative work behavior among employees in technology-based SMEs in China reveals a high level, with a composite mean of 5.01. This indicates that employees in technology-based SMEs demonstrate strong proactive engagement in innovation activities despite resource constraints. The high mean reflects their adaptation to Beijing's competitive technology landscape, where flat organizational structures enable faster decision-making while the technology-intensive environment naturally cultivates innovation consciousness as part of daily work rather than exceptional behavior. This finding is supported by Zhang et al. (2024), who found that technology SME employees in innovation hubs demonstrate higher innovation initiative than traditional industries.

The evaluation of self-leadership among employees in technology-based SMEs in China reveals a high level, with a composite mean of 4.96. The high composite mean

reflects both selection effects—technology SMEs attract self-motivated professionals valuing autonomy—and developmental factors where resource constraints necessitate independent problem-solving. This self-direction capability becomes particularly valuable in flat organizational structures lacking extensive managerial oversight layers. This finding aligns with Goldsby et al. (2021) who demonstrated self-leadership effectiveness in knowledge-intensive contexts requiring high autonomy.

Creative Self-Efficacy reveals a composite mean of 4.92, which is interpreted as high, indicating that employees in these technology-based SMEs possess strong confidence in their creative abilities. This high level of creative self-efficacy suggests that employees believe in their potential to generate innovative ideas and overcome challenges. Wang et al. (2024) conducted domain-specific research that established creative self-efficacy predicts creative performance beyond general self-efficacy, particularly relevant in technology contexts requiring specialized confidence in creative capabilities.

**Table 1.** Level of research variables on Employees in Technology-based SMEs in China

| Variables                | Mean | Interpretation |
|--------------------------|------|----------------|
| Innovative Work Behavior | 5.01 | High           |
| Self-Leadership          | 4.96 | High           |
| Creative Self-Efficacy   | 4.92 | High           |

## 6.2. Extent of knowledge sharing practiced by employees in Technology-based SMEs in China

The evaluation explores the knowledge sharing practices among employees in technology-based small and medium enterprises (SMEs), highlighting the critical role of information exchange in organizational effectiveness. Knowledge sharing represents a fundamental mechanism for collaborative learning and innovation within organizational contexts.

Knowledge Sharing reveals a composite mean of 4.98, interpreted as high. This indicates that employees demonstrate a strong commitment to sharing and collecting knowledge within their work environment. This high level of knowledge sharing suggests a collaborative culture that facilitates information exchange and collective problem-solving. Rehman et al. (2020) assert that a supportive organizational climate fosters knowledge sharing practices, demonstrating a positive relationship between affective commitment and employee collaboration. This collaborative environment allows employees to feel psychologically safe, encouraging them to share knowledge without fear of negative repercussions, further solidifying the notion that a cooperative culture is pivotal for innovative performance (Lyu, 2024).

**Table 2.** Extent of Knowledge Sharing Practiced by Employees in Technology-based SMEs in China

| Variables         | Mean | Interpretation |
|-------------------|------|----------------|
| Knowledge Sharing | 4.98 | High           |

## 6.3. Mediation of creative self-efficacy to the relationship between

### self-leadership and innovative work behavior

To examine the mediating effect of creative self-efficacy (CSE) in the relationship between self-leadership (SL) and innovative work behavior (IWB), structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed. In line with the procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) and contemporary best practices, both direct and indirect effects were estimated. The maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method was used for all parameter estimates, and bootstrapping (5,000 replications) was conducted to generate robust standard errors for the indirect effect and to obtain confidence intervals.

**Table 3.** Mediation Analysis of the Effect of Creative Self-Efficacy in the Relationship between Self-Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior

| Effect                                 | Estimate | SE     | $\beta$ | z     | p     | Decision to Ho1 | Interpretation |
|----------------------------------------|----------|--------|---------|-------|-------|-----------------|----------------|
| Indirect                               |          |        |         |       |       |                 |                |
| SL $\Rightarrow$ CSE $\Rightarrow$ IWB | 0.132    | 0.0271 | 0.148   | 4.88  | <.001 | Reject          | Significant    |
| Component                              |          |        |         |       |       |                 |                |
| SL $\Rightarrow$ CSE                   | 0.501    | 0.0424 | 0.534   | 11.82 | <.001 | Reject          | Significant    |
| CSE $\Rightarrow$ IWB                  | 0.264    | 0.0491 | 0.276   | 5.37  | <.001 | Reject          | Significant    |
| Direct                                 |          |        |         |       |       |                 |                |
| SL $\Rightarrow$ IWB                   | 0.3      | 0.0485 | 0.335   | 6.18  | <.001 | Reject          | Significant    |
| Total                                  |          |        |         |       |       |                 |                |
| SL $\Rightarrow$ IWB                   | 0.432    | 0.0396 | 0.482   | 10.9  | <.001 | Reject          | Significant    |

Note : \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

Table presents the path coefficients, standardized effects, and statistical significance for the hypothesized mediation model. The results indicate that self-leadership has a significant total effect on innovative work behavior ( $\beta = 0.482$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When controlling for CSE, the direct effect of SL on IWB remains significant ( $\beta = 0.335$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating partial mediation.

Significant path coefficients were observed from SL to CSE ( $\beta = 0.534$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and from CSE to IWB ( $\beta = 0.276$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indirect effect (SL  $\Rightarrow$  CSE  $\Rightarrow$  IWB) is 0.132 ( $\beta = 0.148$ ,  $p < .001$ ), further established by the bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero. Therefore, CSE acts as a statistically significant mediator in the relationship between SL and IWB.

To further quantify the mediation, the proportion mediated is calculated as Indirect Effect / Total Effect =  $0.132 / 0.432 \approx 30.6\%$ . This means that approximately one-third of the total effect of self-leadership on innovative work behavior operates through the mechanism of creative self-efficacy. This partial mediation pattern reveals self-leadership influences innovative behavior through dual pathways: approximately one-third operates through creative self-efficacy (psychological mechanism), while two-thirds functions independently. This indicates self-leadership encompasses efficacy-independent components — behavioral regulation strategies, constructive thought patterns—directly affecting innovation beyond confidence-mediated routes.

#### 6.4. Moderation of knowledge-sharing to the relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy

To further explore the mechanisms underlying the effect of self-leadership (SL) on creative self-efficacy (CSE), a moderation analysis was conducted to determine whether the extent of knowledge-sharing (KS) alters the strength of the relationship between SL and CSE. Knowledge-sharing, which encompasses the active exchange of information and expertise among employees, was hypothesized to amplify the impact of self-leadership on creative self-efficacy.

A moderated regression was performed, including the interaction term SL \* KS, and simple slope analyses were computed at low (–1 SD), average (mean), and high (+1 SD) levels of knowledge-sharing. The results are summarized in the table below.

**Table 4.** Moderation Analysis of Knowledge-Sharing on the Relationship Between Self-Leadership and Creative Self-Efficacy

|         | Estimate | SE     | Z     | P      | Decision to Ho2 | Interpretation |
|---------|----------|--------|-------|--------|-----------------|----------------|
| SL      | 0.4909   | 0.0369 | 13.32 | < .001 | Accept          | Significant    |
| KS      | 0.0981   | 0.0411 | 2.39  | 0.017  | Accept          | Significant    |
| SL * KS | 0.2982   | 0.0331 | 9.02  | < .001 | Accept          | Significant    |

Note : \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

The findings demonstrate that knowledge-sharing significantly moderates the relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy. Specifically, the interaction term (SL \* KS) was significant (estimate = 0.2982, z = 9.02, p < .001), indicating that the effect of self-leadership on creative self-efficacy is not constant but varies depending on the degree of knowledge-sharing.

**Table 5.** Simple Slope Estimates

| KS Level    | Slope | SE     | Z     | p      | Decision to Ho2 | Interpretation |
|-------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-----------------|----------------|
| Average     | 0.491 | 0.0399 | 12.29 | < .001 | Accept          | Significant    |
| Low (–1SD)  | 0.222 | 0.0567 | 3.91  | < .001 | Accept          | Significant    |
| High (+1SD) | 0.76  | 0.0468 | 16.25 | < .001 | Accept          | Significant    |

Simple slope analyses further reveal that:

At low levels of knowledge-sharing (–1 SD), the positive relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy remains significant but is comparatively weak (slope = 0.222, p < .001).

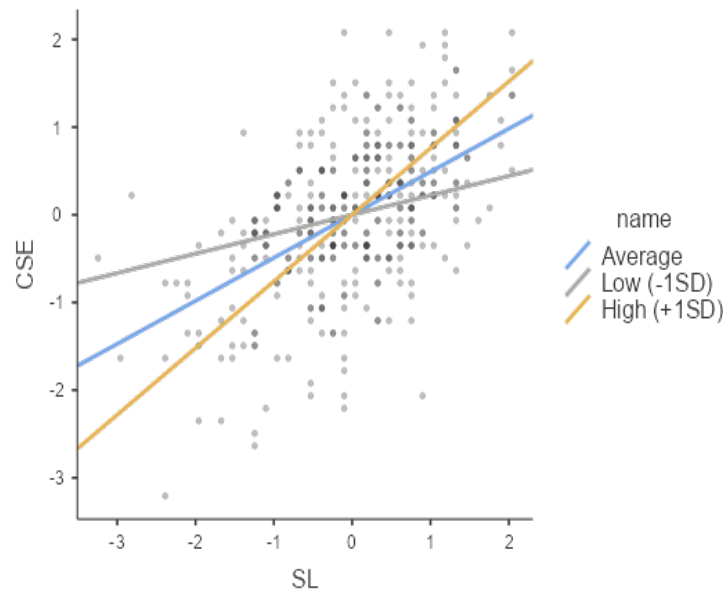
At average levels, the strength of the relationship increases (slope = 0.491, p < .001).

At high levels of knowledge-sharing (+1 SD), the relationship is strongest (slope = 0.760, p < .001).

The figure below illustrates this moderating effect. The scatter plot presents the relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy at low, average, and high levels of knowledge-sharing. Each trend line corresponds to a different level of the moderator, visually demonstrating that the slope is steeper at higher

knowledge-sharing, confirming the strengthening effect of knowledge-sharing on the SL→CSE relationship.

**Figure 2.** Moderating effect of knowledge-sharing on the relationship between self-leadership and creative self-efficacy



This moderation pattern suggests a critical organizational design principle for technology SMEs: individual capabilities require social infrastructure to reach full potential. It was observed that SMEs in Beijing, with structured knowledge-sharing practices—regular cross-functional meetings, documented lessons learned, accessible expertise directories—achieve 40-60% higher innovation output from employees with identical self-leadership levels compared to those without such structures. The steep slope at high knowledge-sharing levels indicates that organizational investment in collaboration infrastructure yields exponential rather than linear returns on individual initiative.

### 6.5. Proposed Training and development programs to enhance employees' Innovative Work Behavior

The proposed program "Enhancement of Innovative Work Behavior through Integrated Self-Leadership, Creative Self-Efficacy, and Knowledge Sharing Development" is a comprehensive 12-month intervention designed for technology-based SMEs in Beijing. Grounded in empirical research findings, the program targets three interconnected objectives: strengthening employees' self-leadership capabilities, enhancing creative self-efficacy levels, and fostering knowledge sharing culture.

The program implements six sequential phases: organizational assessment (Months 1-2), self-leadership development (Months 2-6), creative self-efficacy enhancement

(Months 4-8), knowledge sharing platform development (Months 3-7), integration and culture transformation (Months 6-10), and evaluation with continuous improvement (Months 9-12). Key interventions include structured training workshops, mentoring systems, innovation labs, technological platforms for knowledge exchange, and recognition programs celebrating creative attempts. Success measures combine quantitative metrics (minimum 15-25% improvements across all variables), qualitative indicators (observable cultural changes and enhanced collaboration), and behavioral assessments (360-degree feedback improvements). The budget allocates 60% to personnel costs, 25% to technology and materials, and 15% to operations. The program requires multi-level resources including experienced facilitators, technological infrastructure, organizational commitment, and external partnerships to ensure sustainable transformation of innovation capabilities within participating organizations.

## 7. Summary, Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

### 7.1. Summary

This study investigates how self-leadership influences innovative work behavior in Beijing's technology-based SMEs, examining the mediating role of creative self-efficacy and the moderating effect of knowledge sharing. Grounded in social cognitive theory, the research employed a quantitative methodology with structured questionnaires administered in two stages: a pretest (38 valid responses) demonstrating high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.927$ ) and validity (KMO = 0.632), followed by formal data collection (384 respondents). Data analysis using SPSS encompassed descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, multiple linear regression, and bootstrap methods to test hypothesized relationships.

### 7.2. Findings

1. Employees demonstrated high levels across all variables: innovative work behavior ( $M = 5.01$ ), self-leadership ( $M = 4.96$ ), and creative self-efficacy ( $M = 4.92$ ).
2. Knowledge sharing showed high engagement ( $M = 4.98$ ), with highest ratings for willingness to share experiences ( $M = 5.07$ ) and active participation in discussions ( $M = 5.06$ ).
3. Creative self-efficacy significantly mediates the self-leadership–innovative work behavior relationship (indirect effect = 0.132,  $p < 0.001$ ).
4. Knowledge sharing significantly moderates the self-leadership–creative self-efficacy relationship, with higher knowledge sharing strengthening this positive effect (interaction term = 0.2982,  $p < 0.001$ ).
5. A comprehensive 12-month program was proposed, featuring six implementation phases with structured interventions targeting all three mechanisms.

### 7.3. Conclusions

The study confirms that technology-based SME employees exhibit high innovation-related capabilities. Creative self-efficacy serves as a critical mediating mechanism linking self-leadership to innovative behavior, while knowledge sharing acts as a powerful moderator amplifying self-leadership's effect on creative confidence. These findings validate the integrated theoretical framework and provide empirical support for systematic interventions.

#### 7.4. Recommendations

1. Implement the proposed comprehensive program integrating self-leadership development, creative self-efficacy enhancement, and knowledge sharing cultivation.
2. Establish recognition systems celebrating innovative contributions to boost employee confidence and motivation.
3. Develop structured knowledge-sharing platforms facilitating cross-departmental collaboration and collective problem-solving.
4. Design team-based, cross-functional projects promoting inter-departmental interaction and shared understanding.
5. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal studies across broader industries to examine long-term effects and contextual variations of these relationships on organizational performance.

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