Title:	How and When Competitive Climate Becomes a Hurdle for Employees? Exploring the Effects of Fear of Failure and Challenge Avoidance
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How and When Competitive Climate Becomes a Hurdle for Employees? Exploring the Effects of Fear of Failure and Challenge Avoidance

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Abstract
Research on the dark side of competitive climate is still in nascent stages. Drawing on the conservation of resource theory, we have contributed in the existing literature by examining the negative effects of competitive climate on employee silence behavior such as quiescent silence. We further propose that fear of failure acts as an underlying mechanism between competitive climate and quiescent silence. The research also examines the moderating effect of challenge avoidance in relationship between competitive climate and fear of failure. Data was collected in three waves of time from 300 employees of service sector organizations of Pakistan through personally administered questionnaires by using Hayes' Process Macro. The results of the study indicated the direct relationship between competitive climate and quiescent silence. Furthermore, results revealed that fear of failure mediates this relationship. Results also confirmed that challenge avoidance moderates the relationship between competitive climate and fear of failure. The findings have important implications for the service sector organizations which have been discussed at the end along with limitations and future research directions.

Keywords: Competitive Climate, Fear of Failure, Challenge Avoidance, Quiescent Silence, Conservation of Resource Theory, Pakistan.

1. Introduction
In today's competitive work environment, organizations are facing conflicting demands to deal with the employee's psychological needs and organizational performance requirements (Meng et al., 2023). Globalization brings different types of challenges for many businesses that ultimately effects employee lives (Babar et al., 2022). In this regard, organizational culture plays a critical role in improving or declining the performance of the employees. Positive competitive climate or work environment helps the organizations to improve the job performance and organizational performance (Li et al., 2016) but it may not be true in all cases. According to these researchers, competitive climate is one of the environmental pressures that can make a person uncomfortable if employees are not behaving according to the policies and guidelines of the competitiveness.

A competitive climate is based on verbal and written procedures that evaluates the performance of employees against their peers and other members in their work context (Lam et al., 2015). Competitiveness can have positive or negative effects on employee job outcomes (Keller et al., 2016). For example, when competition is perceived as positive, it increases employee's motivation level as well as results in high job performance and employee engagement (Ye et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2017). However, if competition is perceived as negative, it brings

negative outcomes in the form of emotional exhaustion (Spurk et al., 2021), conflicts among employees (Semerci, 2019), counter productive workplace behavior (Hernaus et al., 2019) and turnover (Ng, 2017). Despite these results, findings are still inconsistent and less attention has been devoted to dark side of competitive climate that necessitates a dire to explore this relationship in diverse organizational settings (Bani-Melhem et al., 2023).

As competitive climate is based on high competitiveness, it creates the pressure among employees (Brown et al., 1998). When employees perceive that competition only brings rewards for those people who outperform all their peers, they feel stress and engage in negative behaviors (Shukla et al., 2023). In this case, people who lack motivation and energy to perform their tasks may get the benefit of the situation by engaging in silence behaviors (Ju et al., 2019). In current years, employee silence has emerged as an increasingly important concern throughout the world that has grasped the attention of many researchers (Hao et al., 2022; Morrison et al., 2015). "Silence in organizations refers to a state in which employees refrain from calling attention to issues at work such as illegal or immoral practices or developments that violate personal, moral, or legal standards" (Knoll & van Dick, 2013, p.349). Employee silence or withholding of information has been viewed as an obstruction in individual and organizational effectiveness (Knoll et al., 2021).

Silence has been viewed as a multidimensional construct and one of the most important dimensions of the silence is quiescent silence that is based on fear or self-protection motives to avoid adverse consequences of speaking up (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). For example, an employee may withhold information due to some fear and he/she may perceive that the expression of ideas is personally risky (Hao et al., 2022). Moreover, this form of silence also helps the employees to hide personal mistakes as a self-defense mechanism (Dyne, et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important to investigate that under what conditions employee prefer to remain silent in their workplace (Morrison, 2023; Wo et al., 2023). In this regard, competitive climate has become a matter of concern for organizations. Although service industry is based on competition (Li et al., 2016) and healthy or positive competition in the work environment plays a major role in organizational effectiveness (Wang & Chen, 2020), there is a dire need to explore the effects of competitive climate on employees negative behavioral outcomes (Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023).

The adverse effects of competitive climate are not only limited to employee behavioral outcomes but may also elicit emotional reactions in employees (Crawford et al., 2019). When employees perceive their work environment highly competitive and they see themselves as less capable to cope up with the demands of that climate, they become fearful that develops a fear of failure in them. Fear of failure emerges from a threatening situation in a given context (Lebel, 2017). Threat occurs when people face a stimulus which they believe will endanger their significant goals and values (Tamir, 2016). In case of high competitiveness, employees who perceive themselves less capable to deal with the challenging demands of the organization (Li et al., 2016) are more prone to fear of failure because competitive climate puts a pressure on them and becomes threat for those employees. Thus, fear of failure further leads the employees to adopt self-protective behaviors such as quiescent silence (Lebel, 2017). In this case, as a self-defense mechanism, employees conceal certain facts and figures about a particular problem due to fear of being caught (Dyne, et al., 2003). Based on above arguments, it becomes imperative to investigate the dark side of competitive climate because it not only highlights the stressful working conditions but also leads to negative employee outcomes (Bani-Melhem et al., 2023; Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023).

This study employs conservation of resource (COR) theory as a theoretical foundation, positing that people use their key resources to respond to the stress. Moreover, people build a reservoir to sustain their valuable resources for future use (Hobfoll, 1989). COR emphasizes that people

experience stress when they perceive threat of resource loss or an actual loss (Hobfoll, 2001). Grounded in COR theory, we theorize that competitive climate serves as a source of stress in the workplace. Competitive climate develops a perception that individuals are rewarded based on performance comparisons, developing a fear of failure among employees. The loss of resources resulting from fear of failure leads the employees to remain silent in their workplace. We further propose that competitive climate as a source of threat puts pressure on employees that their performance has been compared with their coworkers (Li et al., 2016). This perception encourages negative experience in employees who perceive that they are less competitive than their counterparts (Ng, 2017). Therefore, it becomes important when and how competitive climate effects employee outcomes (Bani-Melhem et al., 2023; Han et al., 2021). In this regard, competiveness in the work environment motivates the employee to engage in some sort of avoidance behaviors such as avoiding challenging assignments and tasks. Research on employee avoidance behaviors is obscure that necessitates a need to explore these behaviors in organizational settings (Peltokorpi, 2019). Challenge avoidance behaviors lead the employees to engage in negative outcomes (Zhou & Kam, 2017). Challenge avoidance behaviors as maladaptive strategies are linked with low wellbeing, low self-esteem, less involvement and high anxiety (Wimmer et al., 2018; King & McInerney, 2014). Drawing upon COR theory, the loss of resources in the form of competitive climate is likely to increase employee quiescent silence. This loss is further intensified through fear of failure. Thus, to manage the loss of valuable resources, employees focus on resource gain mechanisms in the form of challenge avoidance.

In sum, this study contributes to the existing literature by addressing following objectives. First, this research highlights the dark side of competitive climate because research is still inconclusive pertaining to the relationship between competitive climate and employee outcomes (Bani-Melhem et al., 2023; Han et al., 2021). Second, this study explores the role of fear of failure as an underlying mechanism between competitive climate and quiescent silence. Third, this study investigates how and when competitive climate leads the employees to negative outcomes by examining the moderating role of challenge avoidance. Forth, this study draws on conservation of resource (COR) theory to explain the theoretical understanding of the proposed relationships. Overall, the results of this study provides valuable implications to policy makers in service sector organizations of Pakistan as well as academic and research scholars. Section two describes the study variables followed by theoretical support and hypothesis development. Section three focuses on research methodology. Section four explains results and discussion followed by implications, future research directions and conclusion in section five.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Overview of Variables
2.1.1 Competitive Climate
Competitive climate refers to the work environment that views organizational rewards as contingent on performance comparisons among employees (Brown et al., 1998). It focuses on written and verbal protocols that evaluates the performance of one individual against their peers (Lam et al., 2015). In previous studies, competitive climate has shown different effects on employee attitudes and behaviors. For example, when competition is perceived as positive, it increases employee creativity (Marino & Zábojník, 2004) and job performance (Ye et al., 2020). However, if competition is perceived as negative, it brings negative outcomes in the form of emotional exhaustion (Spurk et al., 2021), conflicts among employees (Semerci, 2019) and counter productive workplace behavior (Hernaus et al., 2019).

2.1.2 Fear of Failure

Fear of failure represents a "temporary cognitive and emotional reaction towards environmental stimuli" (Cacciotti & Hayton, 2015, p. 181). Individuals feel fear of failure when they perceive that they cannot cope up with demands of their work environment (Henry et al., 2021). Previous research shows that fear of failure shows a negative relationship with employee well-being and job performance (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997).

2.1.3 Quiescent Silence

Quiescent silence as a proactive self-defense strategy deals with the withholding of relevant information in order to protect the self from environmental threats (Dyne et al., 2003). In previous research, it is negatively associated with employee attitudes i.e. job satisfaction and organizational commitment, however it is positively associated with turnover intentions. Furthermore, results showed that quiescent silence has a negative association with employee task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Hao et al., 2022).

2.1.4 Challenge Avoidance

Challenge avoidance deals with the behaviors which motivate the people to avoid challenging work assignments in a given situation (Shim & Ryan, 2005). Previous research showed that avoidance of challenging tasks is negatively associated with employee job outcomes (Zhou & Kam, 2017) such as reduced performance, less involvement, low wellbeing, low self-esteem and high anxiety (Wimmer et al., 2018; King & McInerney, 2014).

2.2 Theoretical Support

We have used conservation of resource (COR) theory to support our hypotheses. COR begins with principles that individuals strive to acquire, retain, protect and foster their valuable resources which can be in the form of objects, energy or personal characteristics (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). COR theory posits that stress occurs in three conditions. It suggests that loss of resources can occur due to a perceived threat of loss, actual loss of resources or failure to gain resources after significant efforts (Hobfoll, 1989). The framework suggests that loss of resources can occur due to a stressful situation or a threat. When people perceive a threat in their environment, they react to the situation in order to protect themselves from the resource loss and to maintain valued resources. The reaction usually manifests to withdrawal state or depletion of resources until employees gain some resources to cope up with the resource loss (Hobfoll, 2001).

According to COR theory, we theorize that competitive climate serves as a source of stress for employees because it imposes pressure on employees to outperform their peers (Brown et al., 1998). As resources vary from person to person so different people react differently in stressful conditions (Hobfoll, 1989). Due to high competitiveness in the work environment, employees may feel inadequate in their roles, fostering a fear of failure. This fear further hinders them to speak up due to fear of aversive consequences, leading them to choose quiescent silence. Relying on COR theory, we further propose that people use challenge avoidance behaviors as a strategy for resource gain and retention. People high on challenge avoidance, use it as a resource gaining mechanism in order to avoid further resource loss in the form of fear of failure within a competitive climate.

2.3 Hypothesis Development
2.3.1 Competitive Climate and Quiescent silence

Competitive climate refers to the perceived competitiveness in the work environment (Schneider et al., 2011). In such a climate, people are rewarded on the bases of competition with relevant others (Brown et al., 1998). For example, competitive climate is one of the

environmental pressures that can make a person uncomfortable if employees are not behaving according to the policies and guidelines of the competitiveness (Li et al., 2016). Competition is very important in the workplace that may have positive or negative effects on employee attitudes or behaviors (Keller et al., 2016). In positive terms, it enhances employee's motivation level as well as results in high job performance and employee engagement (Ye et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2017). Although competitive workplace increases the organizational effectiveness but in many cases it has harmful and unhealthy effects on employee outcomes (Henson & Cushing, 1996). When people lack resources, they are unable to cope effectively with the demands of competitive climate which may result in the negative outcomes in the form of unhealthy strain and burnout (Crawford et al., 2010). Furthermore, competitive climate also decreases the energy level of employees in the form of disengagement and emotional exhaustion (Spurk et al., 2021) as well as develops stress and uncertainty among employees (Fletcher et al., 2008). Recent research has shown that high competitive climate in the service sector organizations of Pakistan brings injustice in the form of unequal pay raise, promotions and other incentives that ultimately leads to negative employee outcomes such as envy (Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023).

In today's competitive environment, organizations demand employees who can speak up, take initiatives, and accept responsibilities (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997) but this competition becomes a hurdle when it is based on the notion that best employees outperform all their peers and ultimately they should be recognized for the rewards (Fletcher et al., 2008). Thus, it is important to draw our attention on the critical issue of when and why employees choose to remain silent at work (Morrison, 2023). Due to lack of good working environment, employees do not raise their voices and feel reluctant to share their point of view that ultimately results in employee silence behavior in banking sector of Pakistan (Khan et al., 2021). Thus, work context is one of the predictors of employee silence (Morrison, 2023). Previous research has also found a positive relationship of employee silence with leadership style, personality traits, job perceptions and employee attitudes and behaviors but despite this enormous research, findings remain quantitatively inconclusive (Hao et al., 2022). Recent research shows that competitive climate does not look good because of negative behaviors of peers and stressful working conditions (Shukla et al., 2023). Thus, competitive climate is perceived as a stressor because high competition in the workplace develops the perceptions of uncertainty among employees (Gim et al., 2015). As competitive climate is based on the performance comparisons with relevant others, this pressure to outperform others becomes a source of stress for employees (Gim et al., 2015), ultimately leading them to engage in silence behaviors in the form of quiescent silence.

The employees who perform well become a threat to their coworkers in a highly competitive climate (Akgunduz et al., 2023) that leads the employees to engage in quiescent silence in their work context because they believe that speaking up may yield negative or threatening consequences for them (Dyne et al., 2003). To deepen our understanding of the relationship between competitive climate and quiescent silence, we draw upon conservation of resource theory; COR (Hobfoll, 2001), which is based on workplace stress resulting from actual or threatened loss of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). According to COR, workplace stress results in loss of valuable resources, leading to resource scarcity for task completion and achievement. COR posits that resource loss occurs when people are compared with each other based on their performance in a competitive climate. This competiveness puts pressure on employees that hampers their ability to perform better and results in quiescent silence. Therefore;

H₁: Competitive climate is positively associated with quiescent silence.

2.3.2 Competitive Climate and Fear of Failure

Competitive climate plays an important role in focusing the attention of employees on performance criteria and creates a demand on employees to focus on the goal oriented activities (Brown et al., 1998). According to these researchers, different types of people perceive the environment of their organization differently, leading to variations in employee responses. High competitive climate put pressures on employees to exert more effort in order to deliver high job performance (Li et al., 2016). Research shows that negative working climate negatively effects employee's positive energy and emotions in baking sector of Pakistan (Khan et al., 2021).

When employees perceive that their organization gives rewards only to those people who outperform others, they feel stress and develop negative feelings (Shukla et al., 2023). It further develops a pressure in those employees who feel that their performance is not according to the policies and guidelines of the competitive climate (Li et al., 2016). In this case, employees develop a fear of failure because they perceive that things are not going their way (Reidy et al., 2008). When employees perceive that their work environment is threat to them, it develops fear in them (Lebel, 2017) as a response to the organizational climate (Ashkanasy & Nicholson, 2003). Based on COR, competitive climate becomes a threat for the valuable resources of employees, leading in depletion of those resources in the form of fear of failure.

H₂: Competitive climate is positively associated with fear of failure.

2.3.3 Fear of Failure and Quiescent Silence

Quiescent silence is based on the active withholding of relevant information, based on fear in order to protect oneself from the unpleasant consequences of speaking up (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). In past different predictors of quiescent silence have been discovered such as leadership styles, individual dispositions, job perceptions and beliefs (Chamberlin et al., 2017). Despite this ample research, still there is a need to explore when and why employee choose to remain silent. According to previous research, people prone to fear are more likely to engage in silence behaviors, helping them to protect from the situation that caused fear (Lebel, 2017). In quiescent silence, fear is a powerful motivator that provokes a person to withhold information and opinions (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). According to COR, fear of failure depletes the emotional resources of employees and leads them to quiescent silence.

H₃: Fear of failure is positively associated with quiescent silence.

2.3.4 Mediating Role of Fear of Failure

Competitive climate has become an important area of research in organizational behavior which has constructive as well as destructive effects on employee outcomes (Han et al., 2021). In organizational context, a competitive climate is based on the perceived determination of rewards in comparison with co-workers' performance (Brown et al., 1998). Previously it has been proved that competitive climate has positive effects on employee career success, employee engagement and job performance (Ye et al., 2020; Spurk et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2017). Although competition is healthy in the work environment which helps the employees to keep their performance at optimal level (Schrock et al., 2016) but sometimes it negatively effects employees' outcomes in terms of stress, burnout, turnover and conflicts among employees (Spurk et al., 2021; Semerci, 2019; Keller et al., 2016).

When organizational rewards are based on performance comparisons among employees, they are more likely to develop negative feelings (Shukla et al., 2023). In this case, individuals perceive that they are unable to outperform, creating a fear of failure in them (Reidy et al., 2008). The fear of failure as sign of incompetence, leads employees to engage in avoidance behaviors (Lebel, 2017). For example, employees may choose to remain silent as an avoidance strategy (Ju et al., 2019). Employees make the decision to remain when they face problematic

situations in their work environment (Nechanska et al., 2020). This silence can be in the form of quiescent silence which means that individuals intentionally withhold information, ideas or knowledge due to fear of unpleasant consequences (Dyne et al., 2003).

In line with the assumptions of COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), a competitive climate works as a stressor for employees. When employees perceive that organizational rewards are based on the performance comparisons and they can only receive rewards and promotions by outperforming their peers (Brown et al., 1998). This perception develops a fear of failure in employees who feel that they are not able to perform according to the standards and policies of their organization. Using COR as a foundation, we argue that competitive climate as a source of stress results in employee depletion of useful resources, leading to fear of failure which further results in quiescent silence. Hence, we hypothesize;

H₄: Fear of failure mediates the relationship between competitive climate and quiescent silence.

2.3.5 Moderating role of Challenge Avoidance

Challenging assignments play a very important role in employee development and on-the-job learning (Dragoni et al., 2009) leading to reduced turnover intentions and job search behaviors (Preenen et al., 2011). Employees always show a keen interest in the tasks which are based on challenge and goal oriented assignments resulting in employee learning and development (Preenen et al., 2011). Although challenging assignments are key contributor in organizational excellence (DeRue & Wellman, 2009) but it is not always the case for all employees in organizational settings. Thus sometimes employees may avoid challenging tasks and prefer to engage in challenge avoidance behaviors. When employees work in a climate that is highly competitive in nature, based on performance comparisons of individuals within a work unit (Nerstad et al., 2013), this type of climate promotes a sense of negative interdependence among employees, and they shift their focus to self-interest instead of collective interest (Černe et al., 2014).

As competitive climate only rewards (i.e. money, promotion and recognition) to those employees who are best and successful (Fousiani & Wisse, 2022), thus individuals who are less competitive perceive competitive climate as a negative experience for them (Ng, 2017). Competitiveness develops a sense of challenge avoidance in employees who perceive that they are unable to perform at the optimal level of their performance (Li et al., 2016). Avoidance of challenging tasks allows the employees to engage in negative outcomes (Zhou & Kam, 2017). When people are unable to perform better and they could not get organizational rewards, it develops a fear of failure in employees. Poor performance in a highly competitive climate becomes a threat for employees that ultimately brings fear of being worst and an unsuccessful person (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Relying on COR theory, we propose that a competitive climate works as a threat for employees and becomes a source of loss to their valuable resources that results in the fear of failure. When employees perceive competiveness a threat to their resources, they become motivated to develop some resource gaining strategies in order to protect their valuable resources (Hobfoll & Shirom 2000). In this regard, employees allocate resources in specific behaviors in order to counter the harmful effects of the resource draining working climate (Hobfoll, 2001). For example, in a competitive climate employees prevent further resource loss by engaging themselves in challenge avoidance behaviors and they intentionally avoid the situations which are based on challenging assignments and performance oriented goals. This type of behavior gives a personal satisfaction to employees and works as a resource gain strategy (Hobfoll & Shirom 2000). Therefore, we hypothesize;

H₅: Challenge avoidance moderates the relationship between competitive climate and fear of failure in such a way that the relationship will be stronger when challenge avoidance is high.
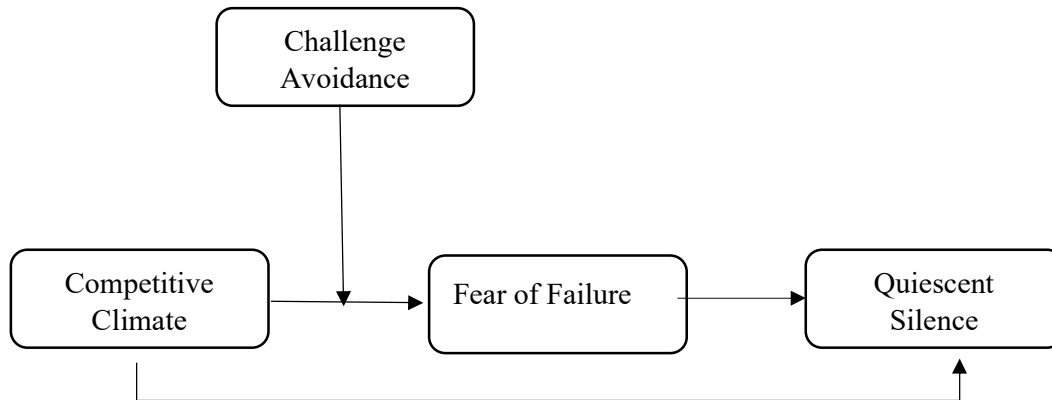
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Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Subjects/Participants
In the current study, data was collected through personal and professional contacts of authors by using self-administered questionnaires. Using non probability-convenience sampling, data was collected from diverse sample of public and private service sector organizations working in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. Using paper-pencil survey approach, authors attached a cover letter with each questionnaire to explain the purpose of research as well as to ensure the anonymity of responses provided by respondents. To deal with the issues of social desirability and acquiescence biases (Spector, 2006), authors ensured the respondents that there were no right or wrong answers. Furthermore, all the respondents participated on voluntary bases in the current research. A unique ID was provided to all participants who ensured their participation in all three times of data collection. The ID was created on the basis of first and last alphabet of respondent's name followed by month of birth. This unique ID helped the authors to match the responses of all participants in three lags of time. After completion of survey at each time lag, all the questionnaires were place in a sealed envelope to ensure their confidentiality. Authors used the unique ID to match the responses of all the respondents. The questionnaires with the missing responses were dropped from the survey.

3.2 Procedures
For the current study, data was collected from the same source which can lead to the issue of common method bias that threats the validity of statistical results. To deal with the risk of common method and self-serving bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) authors used different procedures. First, authors ensured confidentiality of data by attaching the cover letter with all questionnaires. It also helped the authors to deal with social desirability issues. Second, data was collected in three time lags with a gap of two weeks in each lag. Third, all the responses were psychologically and physically separated that decreased the probability of the respondents to maintain consistency in reposes. At the time of data collection, data on the competitive climate and challenge avoidance behaviors was collected at time 1. In time 2, respondents completed data on the items of fear of failure. In time 3, respondents provided data on the items of quiescent silence.

For time 1, authors distributed 420 questionnaires among respondents. Out of which, authors received 380 questionnaires and 360 were found usable making a response rate of 86%. For time 2, authors distributed 360 questionnaires to those who participated in the survey at time 1. At this stage, authors received back 335 questionnaires and they found 325 questionnaires as useful which make a response rate of 77%. For time 3, authors sent 325 questionnaires to those respondents who participated in the survey at time t1 and t2. At the final stage of data collection, authors received back 308 responses. After discarding incomplete questionnaires, authors found 300 valid responses for analysis yielding a response rate of 71%.

Furthermore, data on demographic information i.e. age, gender, type of organization, work experience, designation and education was also collected. In the current study, 53% respondents were male and 47% were female. Average age of the respondents was 30 years. Most of the respondents were doing jobs in private organizations (70.3%), 4.7% were in semi government and 25% in government organizations. Majority of respondents have master degree (49.3%), bachelors were 33%, MPhil were 17% while PhD were 0.7%. Regarding designation of respondents, 96.6% were first line and middle level managers and only 3.4% were top level managers. The average experience of respondents was 6.5 years.

3.3 Measures

For the current study, all the constructs were measured through standardized scales using English language. In Pakistan, English language is a medium of instruction in schools and colleges as well as it is an official language in offices (Abbas et al., 2014; Nauman et al., 2018).

3.3.1 Competitive Climate

A four items scale was used to measure the perceptions of competitive climate (Brown et al., 1998). Sample item includes "My manager frequently compares my performance with that of my coworkers". Individual scores were used for competitive climate. Response choices range from 1(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha was 0.72.

3.3.2 Challenge Avoidance

Challenge avoidance was measured by using 5 items scale developed by Urdan et al., 2002. Sample item includes "I prefer to do tasks that are not very different from what I am used to doing". All items were measured on a Likert scale from never = 1 to always = 7. The reliability of this scale was 0.86.

3.3.3 Fear of Failure

Fear of failure was measured by using 5 items scale of Conroy et al. (2002). Sample item includes "When I am failing, I am afraid that I might not have enough talent". A seven point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 7" was used. The alpha reliability of this scale was 0.85.

3.3.4 Quiescent Silence

Quiescent silence was measured by using three items from Knoll and van Dick (2013). Example of item includes "I have fear of negative consequences". A seven point Likert scale, consisting of anchors 1 (does not apply me at all) to 7 (does apply me entirely) was used. In the current study, alpha reliability of this measure was 0.83.

3.3.5 Control Variables

One-way ANOVA test was done to examine the possible effects of demographics on dependent variable. In the current study, age, gender, type of organization, qualification, designation and work experience were included as demographic variables. Based on the results of one-way ANOVA, three demographic variables were controlled due to their significant effects. The

results revealed that age (F = 1.58, p < 0.05), qualification (F = 3.44, p < 0.05), organization type (F = 4.97, p < 0.01), and work experience (F = 1.50, p < 0.05) were significantly related to dependent variable. These demographic variables were controlled in further analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to test the discriminant validity of the measures (Table 1). For this purpose, we did full factor analysis which included all the variables i.e. competitive climate, challenge avoidance, fear of failure, and quiescent silence. CFA revealed that results of full factor or four-factor model showed better model fit with χ^2= 141.65, DF = 113, χ^2/Df = 1.25, CFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.95, RMR = 0.11, NFI = 0.94 and RMSEA = 0.03 as compared to the results of one-factor model which showed poor fit with χ^2 = 068.26, DF = 119, χ^2/Df = 8.14, CFI = 0.60, GFI = 0.65, RMR = 0.40, NFI = 0.57 and RMSEA = 0.15. These results proved model fitness of our theoretical model.

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Measurement model	χ^2	Df	χ^2/Df	CFI	GFI	RMR	NFI	RMSEA
CC-CA-FoF-QS (4 factor)	141.65	113	1.25	.98	.95	.11	.94	.03
CC-CA-FoF-QS (1 factor)	968.26	119	8.14	.60	.65	.40	.57	.15

Note: CC = Competitive Climate; CA = Challenge Avoidance; FoF = Fear of Failure; QS = Quiescent Silence

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2 shows the correlations, descriptive statistics and alpha reliabilities. Results reveal that competitive climate is positively and significantly related to quiescent silence (r = 0.14, *p* <.05), fear of failure (r = 0.23, *p* <.01.) and challenge avoidance (r = 0.17, *p* <.05). Fear of failure is positively and significantly related to quiescent silence (r = 0.42, *p* <.01) and challenge avoidance (r = 0.25, *p* <.01).

Table 2. Correlations, descriptive statistics, and reliabilities for study variable

Sr. No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Competitive Climate	4.37	1.38	(0.72)			
2	Fear of Failure	3.60	1.40	0.23**	(0.85)		
3	Quiescent Silence	2.94	1.43	0.14*	0.42**	(0.83)	
4	Challenge Avoidance	3.60	1.42	0.17*	0.25**	0.26**	(0.86)

*Note: N = 300; *p < .05, **p < .01. Cronbach alpha reliabilities are in parenthesis.*

4.3 Direct and indirect effects

Process Macro by Hayes (2015) was used for direct and indirect effects (see table 3). Process Macro results indicated that the direct effect of competitive climate (in the absence of a mediator i.e. fear of failure) on quiescent silence was significant (b = 0.14, p < 0.01) leading to the acceptance of hypothesis 1. Similarly, competitive climate showed a significant relationship with fear of failure (b = 0.24, p < 0.001) and fear of failure was significantly related to quiescent

silence (b = 0.42, p < 0.001) which results in acceptance of H2 and H3. The bootstrapping results for indirect effects between competitive climate and quiescent silence (B = 0.10, SE = 0.03, 95% CI: [0.05, 0.17]) through fear of failure were also significant. Sobel test further confirmed mediation (Quiescent silence, 3.63 at p < 0.001), leading to the acceptance of mediation hypothesis (H4).

Table 3. Bootstrap results for direct and indirect effects (Fear of Failure)

	Path	Estimate		SE	Decision
H1	Competitive Climate →Quiescent Silence (without mediator)	0.14**		.06	Supported
H2	Competitive Climate→Fear of Failure	0.24***		.06	Supported
H3	Fear of Failure →Quiescent Silence	0.42***		.06	Supported
Indirect Effect (Bias Corrected Confidence Interval)					
	Paths	**Effect**	**Boot SE**	**LLCI 95%**	**ULCI 95%**
H4	Competitive Climate→Fear of Failure→Quiescent Silence	0.10	0.03	0.05	0.17
					Supported
Indirect effect through normal distribution		**Effect**	**SE**	**Z**	**P**
Sobel for Quiescent Silence		0.11	0.03	3.63	0.000

*Note. N = 300. **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. Un-standardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size =5,000. LL = Lower Limit; CI = Confidence Interval; UL = Upper Limit.*

4.4 Moderation Analysis

The results for moderation are shown in table 4. It was hypothesized that challenge avoidance will moderate the relationship between competitive climate and fear of failure. Process Macro was used to test the moderation hypothesis. Results indicated that challenge avoidance significantly moderates the relationship between competitive climate and fear of failure (b = 0.10, p < 0.01), leading to acceptance of hypothesis 5 of the study.

Table 4. Moderation analysis (Moderator: Challenge Avoidance)

Challenge Avoidance				
	β	SE	LLCI 95%	ULCI 95%
Constant	3.57***	0.08	3.42	3.72
Challenge Avoidance	0.20***	0.05	0.09	0.30
Competitive Climate	0.20	0.06	0.09	0.31
CC x CA	0.10**	0.03	0.04	0.17
R^2 due to interaction		0.03**		
F		9.22		

Conditional effect of X on Y at values of the moderator: Slope Test					
Fear of Failure					
Moderator: Challenge Avoidance	**Effect**	**SE**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**	**Decision**
Challenge Avoidance -1 SD (-1.42)	0.06	0.07	-0.08	0.20	
Challenge Avoidance M (0.00)	0.20	0.06	0.09	0.31	
Challenge Avoidance +1 SD (1.42)	0.34***	0.07	0.20	0.49	Supported

*N = 300. CC = Competitive Climate; CA = Challenge Avoidance; LLCI, lower limit confidence interval; ULCI, upper limit confidence interval. **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.*

The moderating effect of challenge avoidance on fear of failure is depicted in figure 2 by using a slope test through Process Macro. We plotted the graph of significant interactions for high and low (mean ± SD) values of the moderator. Figure 2 illustrates that competitive climate-fear of failure relationship was insignificant for low value of challenge avoidance (B = 0.06, n.s.), although this relationship was significant for high value of challenge avoidance (B = 0.34, p < 0.001). Thus, our results provide support for H5 suggesting that individuals who avoid challenging tasks in high competitive climate are more prone to fear of failure.
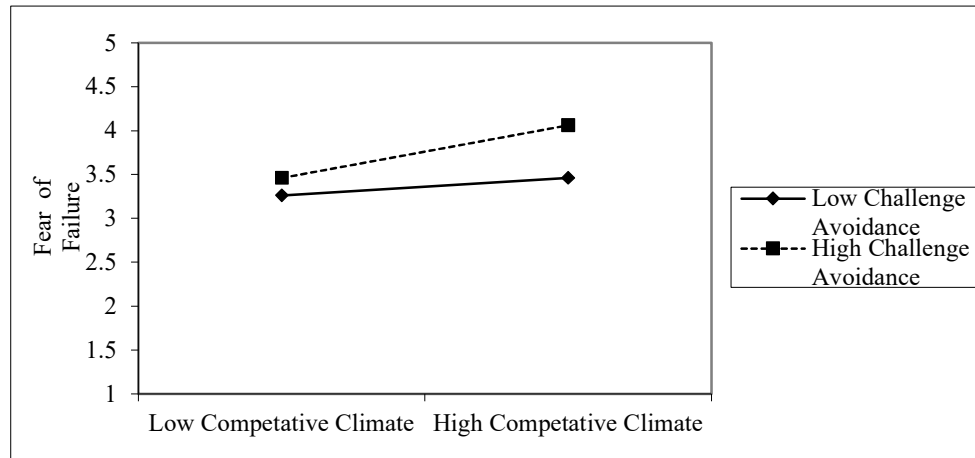

Figure 2. Interacting effect of Competitive Climate and Challenge Avoidance on Fear of Failure

5. Discussion

Since its inception, competitive climate has been an important construct because it creates competiveness among employees and helps to improve employee performance (Li et al., 2016). Mainstream literature has enormously focused on the positive outcomes of competitive climate (Ye et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2017). However, despite this ample research, significantly less attention has been devoted to dark side of competitive climate that ultimately leads to negative attitudes and behaviors (Bani-Melhem et al., 2023). In addition, literature does not provide sufficient evidence on the boundary conditions of competitive climate which may lead to positive or negative outcomes (Han et al., 2021). Thus, current study answers the call for more empirical research by integrating competitive climate, challenge avoidance and quiescent silence in service sector organizations of Pakistan. Workplace settings are becoming competition oriented due to complex and dynamic environmental challenges (Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023). Intense competition posits a pressure on employees, making the competition unhealthy (Jung et al., 2017). In service sector organizations of Pakistan, high competition has become inevitable but it results in adverse employee outcomes (Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023). High competition creates a social stress for employees because they perceive that rewards are based on the performance comparisons with their peers. Taking into consideration COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), this study aims to investigate the dark side of competitive climate which is more likely to lead towards fear of failure and ultimately quiescent silence with challenge avoidance as boundary condition.

We hypothesized that competitive climate is positively related to employee quiescent silence as a negative outcome. Our results empirically support that service sector organizations of Pakistan have high competitive climate that does not sound healthy resulting in negative outcomes such as employee quiescent silence. Our findings are consistent with previous findings reported by Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023 and Spurk et al., 2021. When employees perceive their work environment as highly competitive and see that their performance is

compared with their peers for the rewards and promotions (Arnold et al., 2009), this type of competition creates a pressure on employees (Brown et al., 1998). For example, high competitiveness leads the people to avoid the challenging and performance oriented situations (Shim & Ryan, 2005) and they prefer to remain silent to hide their mistakes. Congruent with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), competitive climate acts a stressor, resulting in the loss of valuable resources for employees. When employees perceive that their promotions and rewards are based on the performance comparisons, resource loss occurs, ultimately leading to quiescent silence. The current study also provides evidence for competitive climate-fear of failure relationship and fear of failure-quiescent silence by using COR theory.

Furthermore, this study contributes in the existing literature by finding the evidence for mediating effects of fear of failure between competitive climate and quiescent silence. Previously most of the research has focused on competitive climate and employee outcomes such as disengagement, emotional exhaustion (Spurk et al., 2021), conflicts among employees (Semerci, 2019), counter productive workplace behavior (Hernaus et al., 2019) as well as job performance and employee engagement (Ye et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2017) without addressing how and why employees prefer quiescent slice in the presence of competitive climate. Leveraging the premises of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we have proposed that a competitive climate based on the performance comparisons with relevant others (Brown et al., 1998) results in the adverse employee outcomes. For example, perceived competitiveness in the organizational policies and practices (Schneider et al., 2011) becomes an environmental pressure for the employees, making them uncomfortable if their behavior does not align with competitiveness policies and guidelines (Li et al., 2016). This discomfort develops a fear of failure, further leading to employee quiescent silence. Our results are aligned with COR theory which posits that employees perceive loss of their valuable resources due to stress. Previous research shows that workplace stressors provoke unfavorable reactions in employees (Hewlin 2009). Thus, a competitive climate is a source of social stress and fear of failure is an outcome of that stress. In line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), employees experience fear of failure due to resource loss, leading them to remain silent as an escape strategy in the form of quiescent silence.

Finally, we hypothesized that employees who are exposed to competitive climate are more likely to respond to fear of fear if they avoid challenging tasks. Previous research has proved that challenge avoidance behaviors are maladaptive (Elliot & McGregor, 1999), leading the employees towards negative outcomes in the form of fear, worry or anxiety (McGregor & Elleiot, 2002). This situation becomes more intensive if work environment is not favorable for the employees (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Consistent with COR theory, employees allocate resources in specific behaviors in order to counter the harmful effects of the resource draining working climate (Hobfoll, 2001). When employees perceive the competitive climate as a threat to their resources, they are motivated to avoid the negative outcomes by developing adequate resource gaining strategies (Hobfoll & Shirom 2000). In this case, employees' avoidance of challenges increases their sense of personal satisfaction and acts as a resource gain strategy. According to COR, a competitive climate is considered as a resource loss, demotivating employees and fostering a fear of failure in the competitive work environment. Consequently, employees seek to protect their valuable resources by engaging in challenge avoidance behaviors. For instance, employees deliberately avoid the situations that involve challenging tasks as a resource gain strategy to safeguard their valuable resources in a competitive climate.

5.1 Theoretical Implications
This study makes five important contributions from theoretical perspective. First, it adds to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the dark side of competitive climate (Bani-Melhem

et al., 2023). This is a significant contribution because when competitive climate is perceived as negative, it leads towards negative employee outcomes (Shukla et al., 2023). Second, this study demonstrates that competitive climate significantly impacts employee's quiescent silence. Third, this study establishes that the competitive climate is a stronger predictor of fear of failure in service sector organizations. Fourth, the study adds to the existing literature by focusing on fear of failure as an underlying mechanism between competitive climate and quiescent silence. This finding is crucial as it connects competitive climate and fear of failure with quiescent silence by using the premises of COR theory, within the context of Pakistan. Fifth, this research introduces challenge avoidance behaviors as boundary condition between competitive climate and fear of failure. In this regard, this study contributes to the existing literature on avoidance behaviors, such as challenge avoidance, which needs exploration and discussion in organizational settings.

5.2 Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical implications, this study also provides valuable suggestions for practitioners in service sector organizations. First, organizations should offer training to their employees in leadership positions. This will help to educate them about the overall benefits as well as drawbacks of the competitive climate. It is very important for the managers and policy makers to understand the dark side of competitive climate while developing and implementing policies, as high competition in the workplace is unhealthy and can lead to negative outcomes (Murtaza & Rasheed, 2023; Jung et al., 2017). Furthermore, employers need to provide a supportive work environment to their employees, enabling them to share their emotions and workplace issues (Khan et al., 2021). This, in turn can help to mitigate the fear of failure and quiescent silence.

This study also recommends that policy makers and managers should develop and adopt policies which can help them in allocation of resources e.g. incentives, salaries, promotions etc. Overall fairness in the work environment positively affects emotions and behaviors of the employees (Murtaza & Rasheed, 2022; Koopman et al., 2020). Thus, fairness perceptions in the form of recognition and promotions will enhance the self-esteem of employees (Ceschi et al., 2017), ultimately helping managers to reduce the fear of failure and quiescent silence in a competitive climate.

If jobs are designed to promote as shared reward system then it will help the managers to enhance cooperation and reduce competition among employees (Ye et al., 2021). In this regard, confidential feedback can also be collected from employees that will help the managers to assess the positive or negative effects of competitive climate. Moreover, interventions such as training programs can be introduced for employees to encourage their engagement in the challenging assignments rather than avoiding them. These interventions will help the employees to focus on their goals by accepting the challenges of workplace and their jobs.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study has many useful implications but it also bears some limitations. First, the current study used self-reported measures at all three times which can lead towards issue of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Authors have addressed this concern by using time lag data design that helps the researchers to address the issue of reverse causality between variables in mediation models (Nauman et al., 2018). In future, researchers may test this model by using pure longitudinal design. Furthermore, other reported data (i.e. supervisor-reported or peer-reported) can be collected in the future research to deal with the issues of social desirability and common method bias.

Second, this research focused on the service sector organizations of one country i.e. Pakistan but future researchers can conduct this research in other countries to increase the generalizability of findings. Third, current variables should also be tested with other positive moderating variables such as Islamic work ethics, bright side of personality traits and leadership styles, psychological capital, emotional intelligence and social support. As this research focused on the dark side of competitive climate, thus future researchers can focus on the bright side by focusing on positive employee outcomes. Finally, future researchers can focus on other underlying mechanisms such as dehumanization, work alienation, emotional exhaustion. In future, negative emotions i.e. anger, disgust or fear can also be studied as underlying mechanisms by applying affective events theory (AET).

5.4 Conclusion
The current study extends research on the dark side of competitive climate by showing that competitive climate has a negative effect on employee outcomes i.e. fear of failure and quiescent silence. Findings have proved that competitive climate results in quiescent silence via fear of failure. Furthermore, interaction of challenge avoidance with competitive climate shows positive effects on fear of failure. This study has provided important implications for the service sector organizations of Pakistan which can help the managers in mitigating the negative effects of competitive climate on employee outcomes.

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