Leadership Styles and Their Effects on Employee Satisfaction in Empowering Happiness at Workplace

Toong Hai Sam[1], Khairunesa Isa[2], Peng Siqi[3], Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan[4], Heng Chin Hong[5], Ng Miew Luan[6]

Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between leadership styles and employee happiness, presenting a comprehensive guide for leaders aiming to foster happiness in the workplace. Drawing upon theories of positive psychology and organizational behavior, we delve into the impact of leadership behaviors, such as empathy, support, and autonomy, on employee well-being and job satisfaction. This paper presents the main concepts and theories underpinning the research, including transformational leadership, inspirational, servant, autocratic and authentic leadership, to support the findings. This quantitative study involved 400 people from public sector companies, ranging in employment grades from 41 to 54, who were selected at random for the study. The data were analyzed descriptively by identifying and categorizing themes related to the leadership styles employed within the employees' organizations. The study reveals that Transformational, Authentic, Inspirational, and Servant Leadership styles have a positive impact on workplace happiness through traits such as empowerment, trust, and support, while Autocratic Leadership has a harmful effect due to its rigid and pressure-inducing nature. Organizations should focus on positive leadership styles and steer away from Autocratic approaches to improve employee happiness at work. The study uniquely highlights how Transformational, Authentic, Inspirational, and Servant Leadership styles contribute to workplace happiness, providing valuable guidance for organizations to foster a supportive work environment while mitigating the negative effects of Autocratic Leadership.

Keywords: *Employee Happiness, Employee Well-Being, Impactful Leadership, Organizational Performance.*

Introduction

Employees play a fundamental role in organizational success, serving as indispensable catalysts in achieving organizational goals. Individuals demonstrating exceptional potential significantly impact the organization's trajectory. Similarly, organizations depend on deeply committed staff to enhance overall performance. Hence, it is imperative for organizations to prioritize aspects such as employee happiness, loyalty, and retention, which are pivotal for fostering a healthy workplace environment. Cultivating conditions that promote job satisfaction, as well as physical and mental well-being, not only enhances productivity and innovation but also contributes to stability and diminishes turnover rates issues of paramount importance for high-performing companies. By investing in employee well-being, organizations not only prosper financially but also contribute to the comprehensive wellness of their workforce.

Problem Statement

Workplace happiness refers to a psychological state enabling individuals to maximize productivity and fulfil their potential, characterized by experiencing both peak enjoyment and engagement while working, whether independently or collaboratively (Freites and Morales, 2017). The quality of the relationship between employer and employee significantly influences job satisfaction, as evidenced by Isa et al. (2019), who found

[1] Faculty of Business and Communications, Inti International University, Malaysia, Email: toonghai.sam@newinti.edu.my. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7145-5625

[2] Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia, Email: nesa@uthm.edu.my. Orcid: https://orcid.org/ 0000-0002-4971-1829.

[3] Faculty of Business and Communications, Inti International University, Malaysia, Email: i20019663@student.newinti.edu.my. https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2972-2807.

[4] Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM), Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia, Email: sarala@uthm.edu.my. Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1641-2846.

[5] Faculty of Business and Communications, Inti International University, Malaysia, Email: i22022767@student.newinti.edu.my. https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7245-5381

[6] Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts, Inti International University, Malaysia, Email: miewluan.ng@newinti.edu.my. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0949-5858

leadership to be the most impactful factor in enhancing employee happiness, with an 86% rating. Similarly, Salas et al. (2018) suggest that leadership styles emphasizing individual empowerment, such as transformational, authentic, and creative leadership, have a substantial effect on workplace happiness. However, it is not uncommon in modern organizations to encounter CEOs who fail to treat their employees respectfully (Arnetz, 1999), with certain leaders displaying rudeness towards subordinates who fail to offer innovative perspectives (Abdul Raziq and Raheela, 2015).

Psychologically, incidents of rudeness can cause employees to feel embarrassed, leading to demotivation and unhappiness within the organization (Ma'arof, 2001). Sulaiman (2014) identifies several factors contributing to employee dissatisfaction, including poor communication, lack of investment in workforce development, disregard for employee ideas, absence of welfare benefits, and lack of employer appreciation. Additionally, research by Cao et al. (2022), Mackey et al. (2017 and 2019), and Zhang et al. (2019) consistently show that destructive leadership negatively impacts subordinate outcomes such as performance, creativity, and well-being. Moreover, a study by Khin Marlar Win (2016) found no significant relationship between autocratic leadership and employee performance or retention.

Leadership in organizations should embody ideals such as pragmatism, fairness, compassion, and empathy. Chiumento (2006) suggests that various leadership elements, including management cooperation, decision-making authority, and employer recognition contribute to employee stress levels. Therefore, leaders must ensure logical and cautious execution of all the actions within the organization, including decision-making, trust-building, appreciation, active listening, and instruction. Prioritizing these leadership attributes not only promotes employee happiness but also significantly impacts the overall health and well-being of both employees and the organization. A leadership approach emphasizing empathy and compassion can reduce workplace stress, foster work-life balance, and enhance job satisfaction, ultimately, leading to higher productivity, lower turnover, and improved organizational performance. This study aims to identify and understand the leadership attributes that promote employee happiness within public organizations in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Jain (2013) stated that happiness is the outcome of one's emotional state, pleasurable sensations, and a good disposition towards something. Those who are happy are more inclined to provide assistance to others, exhibit creativity in their actions, engage in pro-social behavior in society, contribute to charitable causes, and experience better physical and mental well-being (Diener and Dean, 2007). As mentioned by Sharma and Jain (2013) people who experience happiness and contentment tend to be successful in multiple areas of life, including obtaining high levels of work performance.

Happiness in the workplace encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In addition to individual factors, such as personal satisfaction and autonomy, organizational environment, relationships with colleagues, and task-related factors like job satisfaction, leadership, salary (Isa et al., 2019), and rewards also contribute to commitment which is referred to as the positive effect of the employees. Chinanti & Siswati (2020) stated that the positive effect of employees in the workplace can promote Organizational Citizenship Behavior. Meanwhile, Knez et al. (2019) reveal that positive affect is a positive feeling that arises from within the employees. One of the positive feelings that can arise is happiness at work (Extremera & Fernández-Berrocal, 2014). Happiness at work is categorized as a mindset that allows employees to maximize their performance and reach their potential, which is achieved by realizing the highest and lowest feeling of happiness when working alone or with other employees (Freites & Morales, 2017).

Previous studies have found that employees who have fun at work will improve employee commitment (Kim, 2018), innovative work behavior (Bani-Melhem et al., 2018), and career advancement (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008). Bohn (2002) posits that there is a clear correlation between a leader's behavior and organizational effectiveness. Leadership directly influences organizational success by shaping the roles and contributions of individuals inside the organization. Hence, the workforce's performance, and consequently the organization's performance, is influenced not just by the leaders' physical attributes but also by their

talent, attitude, knowledge, and abilities. As mentioned by Teoh et al., (2022), dimensions of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence and inspirational motivation, have a significant positive influence on employee performance.

Leadership plays a role in mediating employee commitment (Isa, 2012), behavior patterns, influencing relationships between individuals, task performance, and behaviors within the organization (Lopez Perrez, 2023). A study conducted by Semedo and Ribeiro (2019) found that the element of Authentic Leadership can explain employees' happiness at work and predict affective commitment and Authentic Leadership both directly and through the mediating effects of happiness at work. Effective leaders possess the ability to envision the future, particularly when it comes to strategizing their desired accomplishments and the corresponding actions necessary to attain those objectives. Rayan et al. (2018) also found that empowering leadership would make employees more involved or work extra on their jobs. Empowering leadership can improve a work climate by amplifying the positive effects of a highly cognitively demanding work context and high cognitive resources (Tuckey et al., 2017).

According to Kim and Beehr (2020) and Cheong et al., (2019), a leader needs to adopt a different approach to empower and motivate their team members. They should also involve each other in decision-making, believe that they can achieve high performance, and streamline paperwork and administrative rules. Zhang and Bartol (2010) established a connection between empowering leadership and employee creativity. They discovered that empowering leadership had a beneficial impact on psychological empowerment, which in turn benefited both intrinsic motivation and participation in the creative process. This finding is supported by the study conducted by Ah Meng (2024), which contrasts value-based leadership and growth mindset in relation to lecturers' intrinsic work motivation across younger and older groups in Chinese higher education settings (Zhao et al., 2024).

The correlation between leadership and workplace happiness has not been a frequently discussed subject in literature studies. Earlier leadership theories developed such as Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), Great Man Theory (Thomas Carlyle, 19th century), Trait Theory (Stogdill, 20th century), Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967), Path-Goal Theory (House, 1971), and Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns and Bass (1978) found that there are relationships between leadership style to positive (Win, 2016; Midhun Raj, 2023; Loppez Perez, 2023), moderate (Cheda-oh, 2011), and negative effects (Li et al., 2023) to employee performance and commitment.

Bass (1985) defined Transformational Leadership as a leadership approach in which a leader transforms his followers, inspires them, builds trust, encourages them, admires their innovative ideas, and develops the employees. Transformational Leadership which is the leader's competency to get the performance of employees beyond expectations can be more helpful and beneficial in enhancing one's ability to intrinsically motivate them. Furthermore, these types of styles can improve psychological empowerment as well (Thomas, 1990). Also known as transformative leadership, this style moves the follower beyond their own immediate interests, through idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass, 1998). Khan et al., (2020) found that Transformational Leadership has a significant positive relationship with the mediator intrinsic motivation of employees, and they can conclude that work performance has a positive significant relationship with Transformational Leadership.

According to the research by Piyanuch Sirisopapong et al. (2023), Inspirational Leadership emerges as a contemporary leadership approach in the 21st century, which is rooted in the tenets of Transformational Leadership, particularly within the domain of Inspiration Motivation. This leadership model underscores the significance of visionary leadership capable of adapting to evolving societal dynamics, possessing proficiency in information technology, and adeptly motivating employees to unleash their full potential. It fosters an environment wherein employees are emboldened to confront challenges, exercise creativity, and contribute to the cultivation of a novel organizational culture. Furthermore, it advocates for inclusivity by providing avenues for employee participation in decision-making processes, thereby fostering collective determination towards organizational success. The core components of Inspirational Leadership encompass Inspiration, Visionary Thinking, Effective Communication, Team Collaboration, and

Trustworthiness and Dependability. Consequently, Muhammad Ybnu et al. (2021) discovered that Inspirational Leadership exerts a positive and significant influence on job innovation.

Ciulla (1998) claims that ethics and integrity are fundamental to effective leadership and should be prioritized for the success of business operations and the long-term survival of the organization. The ethical conduct of leaders has received significant scrutiny following widely publicized leadership scandals in the business world, particularly the failures of prominent organizations such as leading financial institutions (Treviño, Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014), which contributed to the global recession in the recent past. Bhana and Bayat (2020) found in their study that ethical leadership style was not prevalent at the line management level. However, their data revealed that the leadership style of line managers significantly influenced employee performance and behavior within the institution. Complementing these findings, Wang et al. (2023) demonstrated that employee ambidexterity plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between ethical leadership and work outcomes. Specifically, their results indicated that employee ambidexterity significantly mediates the relationships between ethical leadership and work engagement, as well as between ethical leadership and employee creativity. These findings collectively suggest that while ethical leadership may not always be directly observable at all management levels, its effects on employee performance, engagement, and creativity can be substantial, often operating through intermediate factors such as employee ambidexterity.

Rooted in the underpinnings of Transformational Leadership, Authentic Leadership diverges from conventional leadership models by prioritizing benevolence over hierarchical power structures. Scholars posit that authentic leadership underscores genuine, transparent, and self-aware leadership conduct, whereby leaders align their behaviors with personal values, demonstrate integrity, and cultivate trust through genuine interactions. This leadership approach, as articulated by Harter (2002), centers on leaders leveraging their personal experiences to enact authenticity, articulating themselves in manners congruent with internal convictions and emotional states. Moreover, Shahin's research (2020) underscores the pivotal role of ethics within authentic leadership frameworks, particularly evident in contexts such as Egypt. The study reveals that ethical considerations exert a substantial influence on authentic leadership, with specific authentic leadership attributes positively correlating with power dynamics in Egyptian organizational contexts. These findings underscore the relevance and ramifications of authentic leadership principles across diverse cultural milieus, illuminating the intricate interplay between authenticity, ethics, and leadership dynamics.

The democratic style of leadership has been found to have a greater impact on employee performance compared to the authoritarian style of leadership. Hackman and Johnson (1996) claimed that democratic leadership relates to increased follower productivity, satisfaction, involvement, and commitment. Often this style of leader has the vision to realize what people need and ensure that they get it. In the process of leadership, they generate successful and sustainable organizations (Jibon and Keshorjit, 2013). However, Iqbal et al. (2017) found that autocratic leadership has a limited impact in the short term when compared to democratic leadership.

Russell et al. (2002), Sendjaya et al. (2002), and Wong et al. (2003) suggest that being a servant to being a leader and how a leader can become a servant seem difficult to accept. This is because the humility and meekness of a leader in the servant leadership style are considered weak or ineffective in a social environment without democracy, the rise of the master. In the individual sense, modesty, collectivism, and the sharing of power are not appropriate (Mcfarlane, 2011). However, Kiechel (1995) stated that the presence of the receiver as a servant also received support from the leader. When practising a Servant Leadership style, the outcome of leadership can be stubbornly slower than practising another style, even though employee engagement is higher. It focuses on the success of the individual mission where the servant leader leads the staff collectively and their team to achieve their leadership goals (Gandolfi, 2017) with sustainable results because employees are inspired and they know who they are serving for and what motivates them so, it creates human cohesion. Many studies have shown that the Servant Leadership style creates a very positive psychological effect on the employee and the servant leader has filled this gap by building a sense of social identity among their followers (Van Dierendonck et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015; and Chiniara, 2016).

Authoritarian Leadership, also known as autocratic leadership, describes a model of management in which superiors hold absolute authority and demand obedience from their subordinates, which is the exact opposite of democratic leadership (Yi, 2022). A highly authoritarian leader completely controls the team and makes all the decisions. The authoritarian leader manages the team by setting rules, introducing rewards and punishments, and reinforcing authority by emphasizing the status of roles. The Authoritarian Leadership style compels employees to perform their work, whereas the Democratic Leadership style encourages employees to work openly and voluntarily (Yi, 2022); and involves a high level of control over subordinates (Chiang et al., 2020). Superiors adopting these leadership styles tend to centralize their power and accentuate the power distance between them and their subordinates (Schaubroeck et al., 2017). Furthermore, evidence from the study by Li et al., (2018) found that authoritarian leaders press their subordinates to achieve demanding objectives and to follow the rules. According to Shen et al. (2019), even though Authoritarian Leadership styles may not seem to ensure a good work climate or facilitate high performance (Shen et al., 2019), there are several studies which prove that some specific conditions under which Authoritarian Leadership styles can positively affect workgroup performance, for example, positive results can be achieved in groupworks characterized by high levels of traditionality and guided by authoritarian leaders (Shen et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al. (2021) also highlighted that Authoritarian Leadership styles can positively affect communication if authority is not exaggerated.

Methodology

This paper presents a quantitative study in which a sample of 400 people from public sector companies, ranging in employment grades from 41 to 54, was selected randomly. This grade category is relevant to the implementation of leadership strategies. Every participant received a questionnaire with open-ended questions focused on leadership characteristics expected to improve employee satisfaction in the workplace. The data were analyzed descriptively by identifying and categorizing themes related to the leadership styles employed within the employees' organizations.

Findings

This section provides an analysis of the gathered data to obtain insights into the specific leadership traits that influence employee happiness in the workplace. Table 1 shows the demographic attributes of the respondents, encompassing age, gender, highest degree of education, and years of work experience.

Table 1 shows the respondents' demographic analysis. Most of the respondents were aged 31-40 years old where most of them were females (n=251) and only 149 were males. About 170 out of 400 respondents had master's degrees and only 81 respondents had bachelor's degrees. This number is slightly in line with the age of respondents who were between 21-30 years old. In terms of work experience, the majority (n=241) of respondents had 11-16 years of work experience, followed by 6-10 years of experience (n=112). Relatively, most respondents demonstrated substantial experience in interpreting the prevailing leadership styles implemented within their respective organizations.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Analysis

Item	Description	Number of respondents (n)
Age	21 – 30 years old	12
	31 – 40 years old	221
	> 41 years old	167
Gender	Male	149
	Female	251
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	81
	Master's Degree	170
	Doctorate Degree	149
Work Experience	< 5 years	10

6 – 10 years	112
11 – 16 years	241
17 years and above	37

The study shows that managers who allow employees to make decisions on their own and operate without supervision promote higher levels of employee contentment and calmness. Granting employees, the autonomy to make decisions at their own level fosters a sense of encouragement from leaders towards their ingenuity, creativity, and critical thinking. Employees were emotionally supported and underwent the learning process at work because of this event. Within this context, employees experience an elevated level of trust conferred upon them within the organization. From this perspective, when employees observe trust and empowerment, they are more inclined to encounter satisfaction and fulfilment in their positions and perform well in their jobs. This finding is similar to Ben et al. (2012) who found that there is a significant positive relationship between Transformational Leadership style and organizational performance. Recommended leaders and managers adopt this style that will enable him or her to successfully integrate and maximize available resources within the internal and external environment for the attainment of organizational and societal goals. Bass (1985) found that Transformational Leadership traits, such as intellectual stimulation, charisma, and individual-centered thinking, can foster employee commitment. Additionally, Isa et al. (2018) observed that employees who are satisfied with their work environment are more likely to be committed.

The subsequent section revealed that the satisfaction of employees would be enhanced if the leader possessed the ability to listen actively. The item with the highest rating asserts that a leader who demonstrates active listening would contribute to the employees' happiness by being readily available to receive their thoughts, ideas, or concerns at any given time. In addition, the participants also held the belief that achieving happiness in the workplace would be more achievable if the leaders adopt an effective leadership style that is more supportive of the employees. This study also demonstrates that employees experience an increase in their feelings of security and contentment in the workplace when their leaders consistently uphold their values, beliefs, and principles. In support of this, Semedo et al., (2019) suggest that authentic leaders play an essential role in creating a positive and attractive organizational context. In other words, employees' effective connections with their organization make their followers happier. This leads employees to regard their leaders as trustworthy and dependable. When leaders exhibit their own characteristics, it will enhance the confidence of employees and make them feel appreciated and encouraged, resulting in heightened happiness and overall welfare. This is evident from the research results, which demonstrate that qualities like as thoughtfulness, respect, empathy towards employees, politeness, and tolerance are crucial for promoting employee satisfaction when working under a leader. According to Lopez Perrez (2023), an authentic leadership style is also considered influential in happiness in the workplace.

Respondents stated that leaders who recognize and appreciate the contributions and celebrate employees' achievements foster a culture of gratitude and positivity in the workplace. This character will motivate the employees and encourage them to work more happily and efficiently. Being an inspirational leader to employees, most of the respondents agree that leaders who lead by example and demonstrate passion, dedication, and resilience inspire their employees to emulate similar behaviors. On the other hand, by leading by example, the leader will demonstrate resilience and optimism in the face of challenges and inspire confidence and hope among their employees. Furthermore, leaders who empower and encourage their employees to take initiative and innovate will unleash their full potential, leading to greater satisfaction and happiness in their roles. Indirectly this will create a harmonious culture that will enhance employee happiness at the workplace. Supporting this, Harolds (2020) provides insights that a leader should demonstrate excellent listening skills, recognize followers as individuals to create a culture of mutual respect among all members of the healthcare system, and increase job satisfaction.

The results show that leaders who put the needs of their followers ahead of their own self-interest will create a work environment where employees feel valued and content. Respondents assert that leaders who implement and cultivate trust in the workplace will enable employees to engage in open communication.

This will foster trust among people and companies, empowering them to make autonomous decisions. In addition, when employees experience a sense of trust and are given the authority to make decisions, they are more inclined to feel involved and content with their jobs, resulting in heightened workplace satisfaction. As suggested by Bani et al. (2022), relationships with supervisors based on respect and trust allow employees to feel more valued, secure, and better understood, playing an important role in employee happiness and engagement. From another perspective, respondents concur that leaders must communicate the purpose and values of work to employees. This will result in a heightened sense of significance and satisfaction in their work, ultimately leading to higher happiness and job satisfaction. This finding is in line with Alahbabi et al. (2021) who confirmed that the hypothesis of Servant Leadership has a significant effect on employee happiness. In other words, the authors deduce that the type of characteristics of the servant leader makes employees happier and more satisfied with their work.

Autocratic leaders induce feelings of pressure and apprehension among employers. This condition ultimately leads to a decrease in the employees' sense of worth and an increased likelihood of them resigning or abandoning their current roles. This finding also supported Oh et al. (2023) who found that Autocratic Leadership was negatively related to organizational trust. This can happen as Holye (2012) claimed that an Autocratic Leadership style might be described as a hierarchical arrangement with leaders at the top and employees at the bottom. One-way communication, which characterizes this form of leadership, indicates that employees have little authority or influence over decision-making and autocratic leaders are not concerned about feedback. As embedded in the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), autocratic leaders are equipped to create "low-quality" levels of trust. Therefore, the participants recommended that to attain a state of happiness, the employer should refrain from being self-centered and authoritarian, but rather exhibit greater empathy towards the needs and well-being of their employees.

Based on the findings, the relationships found between the types of leadership and happiness at work are synthesized in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationship between Leadership and Happiness at Work

Type of Leadership	Relationship between leadership and happiness at work	Traits of Leader
Transformational Leadership	Positive	Intellectual Stimulation, Trust, Empowerment, Individualized Consideration
Authentic Leadership	Positive	Adaptability and Flexibility, Empowerment and Support, Authenticity and Integrity
Inspirational Leadership	Positive	Recognition and Appreciation, Role Modeling Behavior, Resilience and Optimism, Empowerment and Encouragement
Servant Leadership	Positive	Empowering, Empathy and Support, Trust and Collaboration, Shared Purpose and Values
Autocratic	Harmful	Pressure and Apprehension, Rigid Work Environment, Top-down Decision-making

Conclusion

Work is an important determinant of a person's ability to achieve happiness in life, serving as a platform for growth and development that enables individuals to realize their full potential. Therefore, organizations must prioritize the cultivation of a positive work culture to create a harmonious environment that influences employee commitment and happiness. While the Autocratic Leadership style may yield efficient decision-making, its detrimental impact on employee well-being limits its contribution to organizational success to mere survival. In contrast, leadership styles such as transformational, servant, inspirational, and authentic foster a positive relationship with employee happiness and well-being. These styles prioritize traits such as appreciation, trust, and empowerment, nurturing an environment where employees feel valued and motivated to excel. By promoting such leadership cultures, organizations not only enhance employee satisfaction but also cultivate future leaders capable of driving sustained success through a supportive work environment. This underscores the critical importance of integrating organizational excellence with employee well-being as a fundamental component of long-term success.

The study's findings carry significant implications for both organizational leaders and policymakers alike. Firstly, understanding the impact of different leadership styles on employee happiness and well-being highlights the critical role leaders play in shaping organizational culture and employee experiences. By recognizing the positive correlation between Transformational, Servant, Inspirational, and Authentic Leadership styles with employee well-being, organizations can prioritize the development and implementation of these approaches to foster a supportive work environment.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of considering employee well-being as a crucial metric of organizational success. Beyond traditional performance indicators, such as productivity and profitability, prioritizing employee happiness can lead to numerous benefits, including higher retention rates, increased morale, and improved overall organizational performance. For policymakers, these findings suggest the need to incorporate measures that promote positive leadership practices and support employee well-being within broader workforce development initiatives. By encouraging organizations to adopt leadership approaches that prioritize employee happiness, policymakers can contribute to the creation of healthier and more sustainable work environments, ultimately benefiting both employees and employers.

Acknowledgement

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