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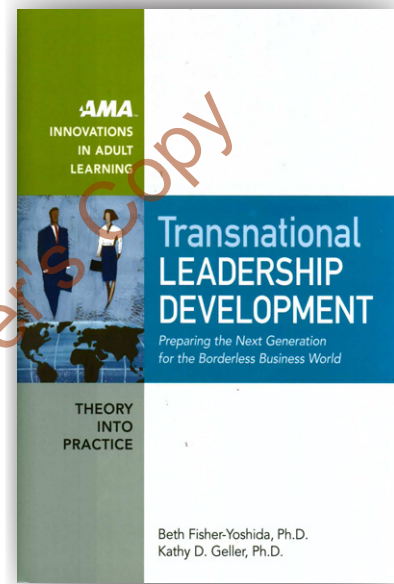
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Transnational Leadership Development

*Preparing the Next Generation for the
Borderless Business World*

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Kathy D. Geller, Ph.D

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INTRODUCTION

Advances in technology have broken down borders, bridged oceans, and linked people together living in different hemispheres. This has created relationships between people and cultures where none had existed before. Because the world's wealth is no longer centered in the West – having found its way to Asia and the Middle East – cultural differences need to be acknowledged, respected and embraced.

In their book **Transnational Leadership Development**, Beth Fisher-Yoshida and Kathy D. Geller identify five paradoxes of transnational leadership, the focus of which is letting go of a desire for sameness while learning to understand that corporate effectiveness can be enhanced by knowing, honoring, and welcoming the differences between cultures.

TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Transnational organizations have grown out of a confluence of three variables that have helped create today's corporate globalization: deterritorialization (borders becoming less important or dissolving), interconnectedness, and speed of change. Deterritorialization is occurring because of the increasing number of virtual social activities such as Facebook and YouTube and the creation of virtual work teams among people from different geographic locations. When people participate in processes and belong to organizations that accept that decisions made in geographically distant locations affect local life, there is interconnectedness. Finally, globalization is also impacted by technology as well as how quickly information is communicated and goods are transported.

This is speed of change, and its impacts are social and cultural (affecting purchasing habits), economic (as money moves globally), and political (due to easily accessible information online).

The existence of a global marketplace creates the need for cultural sensitivity. The first step to achieving this is to create leaders who are able to relate to others across cultural differences, understanding others as well as themselves. These leaders will set the tone for the rest of the organization. Because of the increasing diversity in the workplace, traditional leadership development models may not be effective, and the definition of leadership success may need to be rewritten as someone who has been successful in a homogenous setting may not be so in a diverse one. In addition to modeling appropriately sensitive behavior, leaders must also set expectations for their staff in the same vein and hold them accountable. They must encourage others in the organization to be supportive of the expression of differences so that creativity may flourish.

Transnational leadership is influenced by a foundation of three dynamics: relational leadership, intercultural communication, and transformative learning. The goals of relational leadership are to create a more inclusive environment based on mutuality and to ensure the commitment and engagement of others by creating a community.

When communication is poor, personal satisfaction and organizational results are negatively impacted. Communicating across cultures provides greater opportunities for understanding. Intercultural communication entails incorporating the tenets for effective communication across cultures into the psyche so that those tenets can be applied naturally. Learning to experience situations in ways that they have never been experienced before and holding onto those changes so that things are never seen the same way again is what transformative learning is all about. Seeing new situations with a new openness creates new possibilities.

By approaching situations as paradoxes that need to be managed instead of as problems that need solutions, conversations can take place between the involved parties so they are able to work together to address the issue. When treated as a problem instead

KEY CONCEPTS

The authors present several ideas to help people work successfully within a culture other than their own, or on a multicultural team.

1. Conflicts in multicultural business settings should be viewed more often as paradoxes than as problems.
2. Leaders need to be aware of themselves as well as how others react to and perceive them and their behaviors in the context of cultural differences.
3. Some cultures value individualism over the group; others are vice versa. Both affect expectations and reward systems.
4. Cultural differences can affect the intent and impact of communication.
5. There should be a balance between being and doing; an allowance for reflection is necessary.
6. Understanding how a culture frames its time helps focus attention appropriately on activities.



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of a paradox, often only one element of the situation is addressed, ignoring others that may be just as important. The authors identify five paradoxes:

1. Knowing: Knowing Self and Honoring Others
2. Focus: "I"-Centric, "We"-Centric
3. Communication: Communicating across Differences
4. Action: Doing and Reflecting
5. Response: Short Term and Long Term

PARADOX OF KNOWING: KNOWING SELF AND HONORING OTHERS

Self-awareness is not a new concept when it comes to leadership development. However, tweaking the idea from "Leadership, it's about you!" to "Leadership is about you *in the context of others*" is more appropriate in today's diverse workplace. This tension between self and the other is the framework for the paradox of knowing.

The cultural mores and standards learned through family, schools, the media, and religious teachings program the *personal operating system* within everyone. This system aids awareness of how others' personal experiences have shaped them, revealing both simi-

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larities and differences between the parties.

In order to develop self-awareness, a transnational leader must have the following three attributes:

1. clarity about values that guide actions
2. awareness of social identity
3. a deep awareness of the implicit assumptions that drive both actions and responses

The first attribute – clarity about values that guide actions – means that leaders are most effective when they know who they are, what they stand for, and when they act with authenticity. It is also important to note that although others may share a leader's values, they may not act on them in similar ways and may not appear to have satisfied the same value with their actions.

Crucial to the paradox of knowing self and honoring others is an awareness of one's social identity because people like to belong to groups with which they share commonalities. Mapping social identity begins with exploring one's earliest personal history, including:

- the context in which one was raised
- life choices that were planned and made
- recognizing personal attributes

Assumptions – beliefs held to be true and which allow things to be taken for granted as fact – are drawn from both life experiences and the surrounding culture and are the basis for most actions. If they are never challenged, one may be unaware of the assumptions he holds, even though those assumptions are a powerful influence on his decisions. Transnational leaders need to learn that assumptions can limit their effectiveness in other cultures.

To prevent misunderstandings based on assumptions, leaders should utilize a "kaleidoscope perspective," which means the leader views a situation through her experience, but then adjusts those elements to view them from another angle. Doing so enables her to see

The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them. – Albert Einstein

how her assumptions affect her behavior. In order for the leader to fully recognize her assumptions and how they influence actions and behavior, she needs to take time to reflect on the situation. This reflection will also enable her to appreciate the differences between people from the same and different cultures.

Leaders entering into new cultural surroundings or working globally without a conscious awareness of how their own approach to people, to problem solving, to decision making, and to taking action fits within the new cultural context find themselves in a world where the game appears the same, but the rules have changed.

The authors present a five-step development process to know one's self and appreciate the other:

1. When first put in charge of a multicultural team or relocated to another country, differences will be noted by the leader, but because of his personal operating system, his actions and behaviors will continue as they normally would. These "normal" behaviors will only become noticeably ineffective when he stumbles, is faced with opposition, or reflects as a next step to understanding.
2. Although the leader has become aware of the different beliefs and values that are guiding others' actions, she remains unaware of her underlying assumptions and continues to believe her perspective is correct. She tries to convert others to her way of thinking.
3. At this stage, a leader is ready to consider how differences in values, beliefs, and assumptions influence others' choices and actions. He recognizes there may be more than one correct perception of the situation and that different operating systems lead to different ways of being.
4. Here, a leader internalizes the differences she has discovered and considers what an authentic connection with each person requires. Her personal operating system is now changed by incorporating this new programming which will influence future interactions.
5. A leader at the final step fully validates the other

and emphatically views others with an acknowledgment of the differences between them and without judgment. He effectively interacts within and out of his own culture with true honor and respect for the other with little conscious effort.

An effective transnational leader continually considers those with whom she works, recognizing the value of other worldviews. She strives to determine the assumptions at work in the interactions between herself and others, while she also strives to determine how to remain true to her own values and at the same time appreciate those of others.

PARADOX OF FOCUS: "I"-CENTRIC AND "WE"-CENTRIC

"I"-Centric cultures are those that focus on the individual and include the United States, Canada, England, Switzerland, Northern Europe, Germany, and Australia. The following characteristics are representative of "I"-Centric cultures:

- minimal group connections
- little sharing of responsibility beyond the family
- independence in thought, action, recognition, and reward
- making things happen by self-determination
- the necessity and expectation of speaking up for one's self to be successful
- ensuring one's voice is heard
- making points directly

"We"-Centric cultures focus on the group, whether that group is the family, a work team, an organization, or society. These cultures are found predominantly in China, Egypt, Bahrain, India, Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, Mexico, Central and South America, and a majority of Africa. Some characteristics of "We"-Centric cultures are as follows:

- group solidarity
- responsibility for well being of each other
- subordination of one's personal needs for the good of the group

- belonging to a social network valued above need for self-expression
- emphasis on maintaining harmony and showing loyalty
- indirect communication
- deference given to authority and seniority
- preference for decisions made by group consensus
- success and failure are group events

The cooperative approach to work found in “We”-Centric cultures provides security to those who work in that environment. Teams are rewarded as whole units, therefore one would not want to praise an individual in a group for fear of embarrassing the individual and insulting the rest of the team members. Status within a “We”-Centric environment comes from the group’s success. When there are failures, the team leaders accept the responsibility for it, but the entire group shares the impact.

Indirect communication is utilized in a “We”-Centric culture to maintain harmony and show loyalty to superiors. Relationships take priority over task accomplishment. Because of this, messages can be unclear. Team members may say they agree with a superior’s decision while in a public meeting, when in fact they may strongly disagree and refuse to actually carry out the actions desired by their supervisor, creating distrust on both sides. A leader who respects and values a difference of opinions needs to hold private conversations with individuals where they will feel comfortable expressing their disagreement with the leader personally. Saving “face” is critical in “We”-Centric cultures, which means it is important that no one is thought less of because of the treatment received from someone else. Maintaining face ensures that trust continues and authority is honored.

The concept of rewarding individuals based on personal performance is at the center of “I”-Centric cultures, as its proponents believe it encourages everyone to try harder and improves overall performance. Personal goals are set in alignment with the organization’s, and promotions and salary increases are

directly linked to meeting and exceeding those goals, which challenges each individual to outperform the others. Proponents of the collectivist approach (“We”-Centric) believe teams are negatively impacted by this competitiveness and that the ability to work together effectively is limited, especially because – with the emphasis on self-achievement – asking for help is difficult.

In an “I”-Centric culture, debate is common as disagreement and conflict are accepted as logical. People say what they think and challenge their boss’s ideas publicly. Proponents of this culture believe that expressing different opinions improves outcomes.

According to the authors, people in an “I”-Centric culture will say and do whatever is necessary at the time to accomplish their goals. It is too time-consuming to build relationships and coordinate efforts. The main focus is accomplishing goals because time is of the essence.

Successful leaders in a transnational setting lead from a stance of curiosity and discovery, seeking to understand who they are in relation to others and who these others are in relation to them.

PARADOX OF COMMUNICATION: COMMUNICATING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

When communicating across differences, it is not always easy to understand the true intention of the message. Because of this, it is necessary to focus on three key points:

1. interaction between speakers
2. shared and disparate meaning of words, expressions, phrases
3. message delivery style

Language determines how people relate to each other, what they see, and what they know. It is the core of a culture, and each person’s method of communication is part of their preprogrammed personal operating system mentioned previously. Even though English is the common business language for multinational companies, high context cultures and low context cultures use and understand the language differently.

Characteristics of communication within high context cultures (China, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and Indonesia) include the following:

- highly implicit communication (what is not said but is left to be understood)
- clues taken from the setting, the past, and nonverbal cues
- indirect, restrained, circular communication

The authors note that 70 percent of the world's population now lives in high context cultures.

In contrast, communication within low context cultures places a strong reliance on words, which are explicit and which are used to fully explain situations and ensure agreement with ideas. Communication in low context cultures (Australia, Canada, the United States, and Western Europe) is direct, expressive, and linear.

There is a belief [in we-centric cultures] that when an individual accepts the burden of responsibility for any wrong-doing it negates the responsibility of a corporation or government and restores credibility and trust.

Noting the differences between the two cultures, it is easy to see how misunderstandings can occur which can ultimately risk one's position within an organization. There are different rules, protocols, and expectations as to what is said and what is not said.

The key purpose of communication in any culture is to create shared meaning between the parties, with each party behaving in a certain way. In low context cultures, the responsibility for successful communication lies with the speaker, who is expected to communicate in a way the listener will understand and who is to check for understanding. Assumptions are to be surfaced between the parties and explored. However, in high context cultures successful communication is the listener's responsibility. People in this culture believe words are insufficient to express meaning, so the listener must ascertain the speaker's meaning through inference and reflection. Acting on assumptions in this culture is encouraged.

Members of low context cultures speak linearly, which

means messages are delivered logically and in a matter-of-fact fashion with little imagination, a method that works well for short-term task accomplishment, but is less effective for developing inclusive relationships, or for broadening views on a topic. Those from a high context culture may view this type of speaker as arrogant or even simple minded.

Conversely, those who belong to high context cultures speak around a topic using metaphors, stories, and analogies, allowing the listener to read between the lines and come to an understanding through reflection. This method facilitates collaboration and relational development, but those from low context cultures may see it as slow and indecisive.

To work successfully in a transnational environment, communication must occur in the *space between* each party in addition to *within* each party, acknowledging each member's different mental programming or personal operating system. When meaning is created only within each party, there is a greater chance for misunderstanding. Co-creating communication takes longer, but it increases understanding between the parties, giving each a voice and creating a partnership between them.

To facilitate this co-creation of communication, the authors suggest transnational leaders engage in LIVE dialogue which allows for alternative behaviors, surfacing assumptions, and creating relational dynamics. The acronym itself refers to the necessary components of this type of communication:

- *Listening* with an openness to understand
- *Inquiry* with curiosity to learn
- *Voicing* thoughts and feelings to be heard
- *Empathy* with respectful understanding of others

Listening refers to being fully present to the other person, listening to understand the other's perspective, not seeking to disagree or find fault with the other, revealing underlying assumptions, and identifying common ground between the parties. *Inquiry* requires one to enter a conversation with curiosity, acknowledging there is more to learn, and asking for more information when needed. *Voicing* refers to

having the power to say out loud what one wants others to hear without fear of reprisal or criticism, which leads to one feeling valued as a member of the team and thus becoming more productive. *Empathy*, the final component, allows one to understand how others come to their beliefs, even if one does not share those beliefs. This acknowledgment of others' positions fosters relationships which will lead to collaboration.

PARADOX OF ACTION: DOING AND REFLECTING

American business people are used to working at a fast pace that eventually takes its toll, limiting effectiveness and impacting health and well being over time. This heavy engagement in active life does not allow time for reflection on what is actually being done, trapping people in patterns of action that may be unproductive or not in their – or their organization's – best interests. Without time to reflect, people cannot reenergize themselves, and their creativity is not allowed to flourish. In addition, relationships do not have the necessary time to grow.

There are seven points to consider when it comes to reflection. The first is reflecting *on action*, which refers to looking back at a completed action to see what has taken place and if the objectives were achieved, what the outcomes were, and what the next steps should be. The purpose of the exercise is to identify what worked well and what should be changed.

It is also possible to reflect *in action*, which means a leader is viewing his actions as he performs them. This provides him with the opportunity to make changes to the process if desired. Because he is viewing his actions as if from an outside vantage point, he may have to step outside his culturally created comfort zone to adjust his style to that of others.

Next, it is normal for people to have *assumptions*, but problems arise when one does not realize she is making them and instead believes her assumptions to be True (what the authors refer to as the overarching True with a capital T). When her expectations – based on her assumptions – are not met, she may become disappointed, confused, or angry. Addressing this

third point, the challenge for her is to surface her assumptions, address them, and decide whether or not they are true.

Reflecting from the fourth – or *meta-view* – point refers to visualizing being perched in a bird's nest above the communicating parties, looking down on the process taking place between them. Viewing a process from this perspective – as if one is a third party and not a participant in the process – makes it easier to see what might be going wrong and how one's actions are being viewed by the other.

In the movies, directors can isolate individual frames of film to change scenes. *Freeze frame* reflection uses the same idea, suggesting one stop a communication process in the middle when it is failing and make adjustments to fix it.

When the outcomes you desire are achieved, it is said that *intent and impact* are in alignment, which is the sixth point. However, when you do not accomplish what you intended, then intent and impact are not aligned. Reflecting on this lack of alignment allows you to see whether it is your behavior or actions that caused the problem. If you question your listener regarding the listener's understanding and ask the listener to paraphrase what you just said, together you can monitor if intent and impact are aligned. If there is alignment, the process should continue. If they are not aligned, adjustments should be made to prevent future misunderstandings.

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said. – Peter Drucker

Finally, when parties are in alignment, then *unintended consequences* can have positive effects. When parties are out of alignment, however, a snowball effect may occur, wreaking havoc in unexpected ways. Anticipating possible side effects helps increase preparedness to manage them.

Transnational leaders must be able to reflect on action and in action, both individually and as part of a group. To facilitate this, the authors provide a chart that is divided into quadrants with five guiding questions (per quadrant) for leaders to ask themselves.

The questions are all similar across the quadrants and have cultural implications.

The implications for the first question in each quadrant refer to how the benefits you reap from a situation are linked to what you value, noting that your values are developed in the context of your culture.

Reflecting *on action* and *in action*, whether as an individual or as part of a group, you need to make explicit your implicit assumptions, which are linked to your culture as well. This is the implication behind the second question in each quadrant.

The implications of the third set of questions have to do with the alignment of intention and outcome. If the two are aligned, you are able to continue to function in the same way or even enhance what you are doing. If intention and outcome are not aligned, however, you should take a step back and ask what you are able to do differently to achieve the desired outcome, engaging in this step from the standpoint of curiosity, not judgment.

You need to realize you may face challenges when making changes because you are doing something different from what you are used to doing. This is the implication of the fourth set of questions.

...reflection is . . . part of the lifeblood of organizations in today's turbulent economic environment. – Victoria Marsick

For the fifth question in each quadrant, the implication has to do with the need to be strategic in engaging in efforts to overcome any potential obstacles. You may rely on approaches that have been helpful in the past, but you may also need to “think outside the box” and engage in new approaches. If you have multiple ways to approach situations, you are better prepared to select the most appropriate approach, and this can come from entertaining various cultural viewpoints.

When incorporating a reflection process, a transnational leader needs to keep in mind several points:

- continue to let the team know that results are still important in measuring success
- consider a more balanced approach
- remember the toll a fast pace takes on interper-

sonal relationships and long-term performance

- reflection is critical to conducting business
- model the desired behaviors
- provide opportunities for people to learn and practice the skills

PARADOX OF RESPONSE: SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM

Although the demand for results is increasing and the time frame is shrinking, it is important to note that time is lived differently in different locations around the world.

The first aspect of time involves orientation. For example, Swiss arrive at 1:50 “on time” for a 2:00 meeting, but an Indian dinner meeting set for 7:00 p.m. would find dinner not served until 10:00 p.m. and no team members would arrive before 8:00 p.m.

Time culture (what time one arrives at work and leaves for home, how lunches are handled) influences the number of hours worked as well as free time. In transnational organizations, work hours are determined by headquarters. The implications of this are that, in an organization with offices and divisions around the world, someone, somewhere is working before dawn or after midnight. Although flex time is advocated in Europe and North America, it is not favored in Asia and the Middle East because of its individualistic orientation.

Incorporating flex time, however, allows employees more flexibility in determining work hours, making them more autonomous and motivated. Inherent risks include tension because of scheduling issues and the possibility that some employees may become ineffective without a schedule.

Another source of tension regarding time that crops up between those from different cultures revolves around differing views of the importance of short-term and long-term perspectives. Cultures with longer histories (such as China) tend to take a longer view when approaching a situation, whereas Eurocentric cultures take a short-term view which may provide a solution for the immediate problem but often does not consider long-term implications of the actions being taken. Taking a long-term focus recognizes the

need to build relationships and allows organizations to also make socially and environmentally responsible decisions, which the public is demanding more and more frequently.

It is important to note that different cultures see the passage of time differently and that those differences can cause misunderstandings and conflicts as well. Some cultures believe in a sequential flow of time, which means one event happens after another and there is only one chance to make that event successful. This requires a constant state of preparedness so that more can be achieved faster. Following this framework may mean one activity is completed at the expense of another. Conversely, other cultures view time as synchronous, which means that life happens in cycles and what goes around once will come around again. Time flows in a circular pattern and the synchronicity of several forces is desired and cannot be rushed. A possible downside to this framework is that teams may try to accomplish too many tasks at once and not complete anything in a timely manner.

Another set of opposing frameworks are called monochronic and polychronic. A monochronic time frame follows a linear pattern and adheres strictly to clock time, preferring to operate sequentially. There is a focus on one activity at a time and being on time (meeting deadlines) is critical. A polychronic time frame, however, allows several activities to happen simultaneously or to overlap. There is no strict adherence to clock time, and agreed upon completion times are more akin to suggestions than deadlines.

Time frames, and the way they differ from culture to culture, are important to consider because they affect several aspects of an organization's functioning:

- goal structures
- workflow
- expected output
- responses to requests
- management of demands

EMBRACING THE PARADOXES

The first step to becoming a transnational leader is to learn about yourself and experience yourself as others

do. You need to open yourself to the differences that surround you and embrace the diversity of thought and behavior in your organization. Because of this diversity, you need to transform established ways of interacting and conducting day-to-day business. Visions, strategies, and goals need to be rethought.

Planning becomes secondary to accomplishing the task at hand.

In order to develop transnational leaders, the organization needs to support these efforts and help make the changes systemic and not piecemeal. Making the changes as a group also builds in a support network for the members going through the process. It is also important for human resources to look at their hiring, development, and promotion practices to ensure they are in line with the diverse composition of the organization.

When the authors design a workshop to aid an organization in developing transnational leaders, they take eight principles into consideration.

1. They identify the staff's current awareness, skills, and abilities by conducting a survey targeting the five paradoxes.
2. They create situations for the participants to experience the paradoxes which are more powerful than engaging only at a conceptual level.
3. Participants then compare their original assessments with their experience, looking for patterns of consistency as well as contradictions that aid self-awareness.
4. They debrief the participants using the five paradox guidelines. (The prior simulations aid the participants in their understanding of the concepts.)
5. They provide time for praxis, doing, and reflecting, which allows the participants to understand the paradoxes, their behavior and others' reactions to them and to see how it all aligns with their desired outcomes. This step slows the pace, allowing the participants to absorb more. It also models reflection.
6. They include activities to develop awareness, knowledge, and skills for each paradox and how they interact with each other by exploring case

studies, role-playing, and practicing communication techniques. The participants are working to internalize the concepts so that they can properly identify each one and not confuse them with each other.

7. They provide exercises so that the participants can directly connect their learning with an application back in the workplace. The participants must be specific about how the learning will be applied.
8. They provide more opportunities for praxis, doing, and reflecting.



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time: 5-7 Hours, 201 Pages in Book

Transnational Leadership Development is written with members of transnational and multinational companies in mind. Anyone, regardless of their position, would find the authors' advice and insight helpful when working with others from different cultures, whether or not they have been relocated to another country. The authors emphasize business practices common to Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, which may make those who are more familiar with the modern American business model uncomfortable. Readers should remember that the insights are being offered by women who have spent many years in the countries they discuss.

The book is not a difficult read, but it is densely packed with information. There are many footnotes and attributions throughout giving credit to research that the authors relied on to write their book. It is also important to read the book from beginning to end as the concepts build on each other.

Throughout each chapter there are several diagrams, two-dimensional models, and worksheet-type tools intended to actively involve the reader in the learning process. In addition, the first appendix is a second offering of the tools interspersed in the chapters. Additionally, throughout the book the authors use different stories from their experiences of people who struggled with the paradoxes. They then reflect back on those stories as they discuss the paradoxes and their suggested solutions to the problems presented

in the scenarios. The second appendix is clinical support for the methods the authors espouse as well as illustrations of successful applications of their ideas.

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