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Does Leadership Style Matter in Change Management Success? Employee Performance as a Proxy of Effective Change

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ABSTRACT

Past researchers have indicated that an effective change requires influencing employees positively and accomplishing group objectives. Managing change effectively in an organization is dependent on various factors and one of them is leadership style. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the change effectiveness' dependence on leadership style. Data collected using a structured questionnaire showed that leadership style does influence effectiveness of change although out of the 3 styles used only one; participative leadership style was a significant predictor of success. The paper outlines a clear link between various leadership styles and the success of change management. Furthermore this paper identifies a major new source of strategic leadership value added in the companies' attention to creating processes and encouraging efforts for change management. Implications of the findings, potential limitations of the study, and directions for future research are suggested.

Keywords: *Leadership style, effective change, performance*

Introduction

Most modern industrial societies value the person who is willing and able to initiate and respond positively to change, and yet organizations that attempt to initiate such changes are often stymied by individuals or groups within the organization who resist the changes (Oreg, 2003). While change must be well managed, it also requires effective leadership to introduce change successfully as it is leadership that makes the difference (Gill, 2003). Thus, leadership role is crucial to effective performance (Bartlett & Ghoshall, 1994).

Leadership style plays an important role in managing employees to accept change. Leadership is a process of interaction between leaders and subordinates where a leader attempts to influence the behavior of his or her subordinates to accomplish organizational goals (Yukl, 2005). The lack of communication or inconsistent messages, and the resulting misunderstanding of the aims and process of change lead to rumors that demoralize people and to a lack of commitment to change (Gill, 2003).

Human resource management faces challenges of bringing better fitted workers into the organizations and meeting the workers' needs and expectations. Thus, there is a compelling demand to develop better ideas, strategies to improve the interface between employees and employers, and to elaborate comprehensive insight that can help human resource managers get better results and improved performance (Vigoda & Cohen, 2003). As leaders are undeniably at the forefront of changes that take place in an organization, it is then of interest to explore the relationships between the kinds of leadership style that is more suitable to manage organizational change effectively.

Malaysia, as a fast developing country that practices an open economy, is constantly affected by changes that take place in and around the world. The technological, social, and economic environment is rapidly changing and an organization will only be able to survive if it can effectively respond to these changing demands (Harvey & Brown, 1996). The strategic challenges that Malaysian leaders are facing are the ability to maintain organizational growth and renewal; pursue excellence; and better prepare for the millennium within the context of our multiracial and multi-religious society. All of these are in response to changes which would occur in a typical organization.

Despite the enormous breadth of the literature on the relevance of leadership style to effective change in general, and to an understanding of leadership in particular, research studies of leadership style and change management are not well integrated. In a multi-racial country like Malaysia, it would not be surprising to find that more than one leadership style exists as there are significant differences in the cultural attributes of each ethnic group (Kennedy & Mansor, 2000). Hence, the focus of this paper is to examine the relationship among leadership style and effective change management.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, discussion of the relevant literature is presented, followed by a discussion of the methodology used. Thirdly, the findings are presented and then discussed. This is followed by the conclusions that look at academic and managerial implications and finally, limitations are highlighted.

Literature Review

Effective Change Management

Organization change refers to the process by which organizations move from their present state to some desired future state in order to increase their effectiveness (Bhambri, 1992; Paton & McCalman, 2000). As stated by Burnes (1996), the future survival of organizations depend on how successful the organizations manage change and view change as a process of continually adapting to align with its environment. Managing change, in whichever way one looks at it, is a huge challenge. In the past, it took years for product development, corporate restructurings, and emerging technologies to happen but now these developments are measured in months.

Past researchers which dealt with efforts were mostly aimed at technological change but less emphasis was placed on change management with regards to people which is the most difficult category of change to handle. As noted by Brunaker and Kurvinen (2006), change in the work organization of capital-intensive industries is traditionally seen as related to physical production facilities. Competitive factors or innovations within an industry often require change agents to introduce new equipment, tools, or operating methods (Robbins, Waters-Marsh, Cacioppe & Millett, 1994). It is almost an uphill task to execute an effective change especially with the wave of change that takes place almost everyday. Hence, keeping up with the rest of the world becomes a challenge itself, and maintaining status quo in the way business is done may not be an option to companies that seek outstanding achievements. It was reported that the key factor in effectiveness of cultural change and improved productivity in implementing total quality management was management support (Abraham, Morris, Crawford, John & Fisher, 1998). Burke (1980) had implied that it is important to understand that change management in organizations is driven by three major factors such as interdependent subsystems, training and management style. Hence, management support was paramount in achieving successful conversion to a quality culture and leaders must act in ways congruent with the message contained in the vision.

Researches in the past have indicated that one of the ways to find out whether an effective change has happened is through performance measurement. Performance measurement has three roles which are, to identify the expected contribution (e.g., higher quality decision making), faster cycle time in order to assess whether the realized performance levels are contributing to the primary objectives, and opportunities for reengineering activities (Atkinson, Waterhouse & Wells, 1997). As noted by Nissen, Snider, and Lamm (1998), whether radical changes have indeed occurred can be measured through decreased process

cost and cycle time, increased flexibility and agility etc. In addition to that, performance ratings must be based on a systematic job analysis and should be behaviorally based in order to meet technical standards and legal precedents (Nathan & Cascio, 1986). Previous researchers have defined performance measurement as a process of quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of what have been done in the past (Neely, Adams & Kennerley, 2002). This is further supported by Moulin (2007) that there is clear relationship between performance measurement and organizational excellence where organizational excellence is defined as outstanding performance in managing organizations and delivering values to their customers and also stakeholders in the companies (Moulin, 2002). Hence, an objective performance measure requires objective criteria such as production and quality indices which measure results instead of behaviors (Hoffman, Nathan & Holden, 1991). To address this issue this research uses data from 2 sources, one from the subordinates and the second for performance rating, the superiors will rate the performance of the subordinates. This approach was taken to overcome common method variance and to overcome limitations in previous research which used self reports of performance.

Leadership Style

According to Yukl (2005), numerous studies on the theory of leadership can be summarized into five broad theories, namely, trait, behavioral, contingency or situational approach, contemporary integrative approach, and power and influence approach. On the other hand, most of the published literatures on Malaysian leadership have focused on four distinct yet related theoretical frameworks such as, leadership preferences, leadership behavior, leader-member exchange approach to leadership, and power-influence approach to leadership (Ansari, Ahmad & Aafaqi, 2004). Organizational leadership has been moving from a basic functions approach to define the values of effective leaders, to situational or contingency approaches that propose more of a flexible adaptive style for effective leadership.

In view of the fact that Malaysia's colonial heritage, coupled with more recent foreign direct investments by Japanese and Westerners, the traditional patterns of leadership and business management have been modified (Sin, 1991). It is evidenced that Malaysians' management styles and practices are being westernized especially in those working in manufacturing companies that reported directly to their foreign partners and/or bosses. In spite of the above statement, it has been found that Malaysian leaders are not expected to be self-serving such as placing their own interest ahead of the group, as they are still governed by their key cultural and religious values which underpin their behavior, beliefs, and attitude (Kennedy & Mansor, 2000).

The appropriateness of leadership style is even more important in managing change effectively when viewed from the expectancy theory of motivation

standpoint. The central concept of expectancy theories is that the force of an individual to engage in a specific behavior is a function of his expectations that the behavior will result in a specific outcome and the sum of the valences, that is, personal utilities or satisfaction that he derives from the outcome (House, 1971). Galbraith and Cummings (1967) pointed out that some of the valences associated with a specific behavior are intrinsic to the behavior itself and some are the extrinsic consequences of that behavior. Since past researchers on leadership styles have developed several taxonomies from theory and empirical research to classify various styles of leadership, the following sections focus on discussing those important leadership approaches in change management, particularly in the Malaysian context.

Participative Leadership

Lewin, Lippit, and White (1939) have indicated that participative leadership is generally the most effective leadership style. Participative leaders offer guidance to group members, at the same time, they also take part in the group and allow input from other group members. As noted by Brunaker and Kurvinen (2006), when management initiates change, the approaches could either be a traditional autocratic or a participative style. The assumption given in the participative leadership style is that it is the management who initiates change and sets the agenda but at the same time, the employees also participated in the process. In fact, inviting employees to participate through suggestions is a classical tool for management to get new ideas (Lloyd, 1999). Studies have indicated that participative management styles helps to boost the employee morale and motivation, influencing the employees' attitude and behavior in a positive manner which would bring about employees' commitment and loyalty (Ghebregiorgis & Karsten, 2006).

Nurturant-task Leadership

Ansari et al. (2004) have further proposed a transitional model of leadership that is based on the watch-and-win principle, called the nurturant-task style of leadership in Malaysia. The nurturant-task model states that an effective leader is one who carries his or her subordinates toward a shared goal. It is generally agreed that the effectiveness of a leadership style in a work organization is contingent on task characteristics and the nature of the leader-subordinate relationship (Sinha, 1984). The nurturant-task style of leadership was developed in India as a result of 25 years of research (Ansari et al., 2004). The nurturant-task model states that an effective leader is one who helps his subordinates to mature and take on responsibilities towards the achievement of a goal.

A nurturant leader cares for his subordinates, shows affection, takes personal interest in their well-being, and above all is committed to their growth (Sinha,

1984). He makes his nurturance contingent on the subordinate's task accomplishment. Those who meet his expectations are reinforced by nurturance. The progression from a nurturant-task to participative style is a gradual and interactive process. In certain instances the process can become regressive. Besides, a nurturant-task leader who continues to assist on close supervision which matured subordinates may unintentionally regress towards the authoritarian style. Although Sinha's (1984) findings leaned towards nurturant-task leaders as being the most suitable one for an organization, there have also been cases of failures whereby in a number of studies, the nurturant task style did not lead to greater effectiveness of subordinates.

Autocratic Leadership

On the other hand, Brunaker and Kurvinen (2006) posited that initiating change using the autocratic approach is quite different as compared to the participative style as most of the time, the overriding objective may be clear to the entire management team, but might face problems when implementing it. Schyns (2006) further added that autocratic and democratic leadership behaviors may result in the same standard of performance; nonetheless, autocratic supervisor may consider discussing things with followers to be inappropriate behavior for leaders. Hence, past studies have indicated that organizations with many autocratic leaders have higher turnover and absenteeism than other organizations. The following section will be highlighting the research model and hypotheses testing.

Research Model and Hypotheses

Based on the review of the literatures, the following research model was proposed.

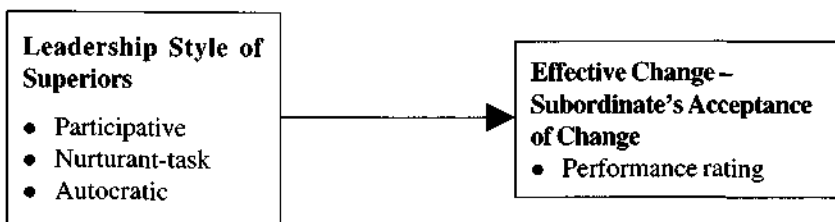| Leadership Style of Superiors	Effective Change – Subordinate's Acceptance of Change
• Participative • Nurturant-task • Autocratic	• Performance rating

Figure 1: Research model

The model posits leadership styles as the independent variable and performance rating as the dependent variable. One of the ways to find out whether an effective change has happened is through performance measurement. The reason job performance was used as a measure towards acceptance of

change is because an effective change would have taken place in the organization when the performance improves whereas the opposite will be true otherwise. Similar approach was used by other researchers such as Abraham et al. (1998), Ramayah et al. (2003), and Ahmed et al. (2006).

Mitchell (2006) indicated that leadership is a key ingredient in the success of new development and business in a sustained way. He further added that if a CEO does not think that improving the company's business is important, then little may be done. On the other hand, effective changes could not be possible without the acceptance and participation of the subordinates.

Researchers in the past have not found entirely consistent effects in the relationship of leadership style and effective change management. Hence, there appears to be a gap in extant literature because no research has been done to examine the plausibility of leadership style as a predictor of subordinates' acceptance to change. Most of the past literatures on these two constructs have been done almost independently of each other. Thus, literature lacks consensus on a definite leadership style among supervisors particularly in Malaysia, in the process of effective change management, and this has resulted in leadership styles being operationalized in many ways.

While change must be well managed, it also requires effective leadership to be successfully introduced. Kotter (1990) stated that management produces orderly results which keep something working efficiently but leadership creates useful change. Measurement of change is important for improvement because it focuses attention on essential factors, shows how resources are used and provides means of knowing whether one is winning of losing among other benefits (Harrington, 1991). This study also intends to understand the effectiveness of change through the evaluation of performance rating, job satisfaction, and non performance indicators by the supervisor/manager on the subordinate.

The effectiveness of leadership style in a work organization advocated that the nurturant task style is the one which is most likely to be received well in India (Sinha, 1984). Ansari et al. (2004) proposed a transitional model of leadership, nurturant-task leadership that is based on the watch-and-win principle, in the context of Malaysia. Besides, past researchers (e.g., Dames, 2001; McCarthy, 2006; Mason, 2000) have posited that autocratic managers appeared to value teamwork less than participative managers. They added that care for employees was not a hallmark of the autocratic managers. Hence, participative and nurturant-task styles of leaderships are generally known to be better accepted by subordinates. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H_1: Participative leadership style will lead to better performance rating
H_2: Nurturant-task leadership style will lead to better performance rating
H_3: Autocratic leadership style will lead to lower performance rating

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Methodology

The population of this study was made up of managers and their respective subordinates in selected US-based manufacturing companies in the Northern Region of Peninsular Malaysia, specifically at the Bayan Lepas Free Industrial Zone (FIZ), Penang, where the actual population was about 12,000 employees, is known as the top region for the electronics industry in Malaysia and commonly referred to as the Silicon Island. Penang is crowded with a pool of relatively skilled and professional labour force that is capable of handling and developing technologies. Prior to the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot testing was to ensure the clarity and readability of the instructions and contents of the questionnaires.

Two sets of questionnaires were distributed, one set to supervisors and a different set to their immediate subordinates. The questionnaires, which were numbered in paired sequence, were given to the respective managers and they would then be distributed to their subordinates depending on the managers' span of supervision. Respondents were made up of managers who were asked to evaluate their subordinates towards the acceptance of change that has occurred in the organization in the past one year. The subordinates must have worked in the current job for at least six months to experience a change that has happened in the organization. The managers must have at least one subordinate whom he manages.

A total of 8 items were adapted from the study by Becker et al. (1996) on job performance as a measure of acceptance of the change which implies that an effective change has taken place in the organization. Job performance was evaluated by the respondents' immediate supervisors or managers. Performance was assessed along a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (7) Strongly Agree. The items include descriptions such as (1) "completed work in a timely manner," (2) "performed high quality work," (3) "completed large number of tasks" (4) "completed work effectively" (5) "meets all formal performance requirement", (6) "quality of work", (7) "completed tasks in an unsatisfactory manner" (reverse-coded), and (8) "overall performance". The performance was rated by the superior based on the subordinates performance after the change has occurred. On the other hand, the predictor variable, leadership style measurement was based on a seven-point Likert scale starting with (1) Strongly Disagree to (7) Strongly Agree for a total number of 36 items related to participative, nurturant-task and autocratic leadership style was adapted from Ansari et al. (2004).

A total of 350 questionnaires of each set were distributed, out of which 223 manager/supervisor-questionnaires and 235 subordinate-questionnaires were received. Out of these, only 215 sets were good to be used as the others were either missing a full pair set or were incomplete. Therefore, the response rate was 61.4%.

Findings

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the supervisors' and subordinates' respondents.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

	Subordinate		Manager/Supervisor	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Age (Years)				
Below 21	9	4.2	-	-
21-30	107	49.8	23	10.7
31-40	91	42.3	110	51.2
41-50	8	3.7	82	38.1
Gender				
Male	90	41.9	116	54.0
Female	125	58.1	99	46.0
Ethnicity				
Malay	26	12.1	24	11.2
Chinese	154	71.6	136	63.6
Indian	28	13	42	19.5
Others	7	3.3	13	6
Job Position				
Production staff	18	8.4		
Engineer	33	15.3	7	3.3
Administrator	42	19.5	44	20.5
Executive	71	33	-	-
Manager	37	17.2	164	76.3
Others	14	6.5	-	-
Job Tenure				
1-10	180	83.7	159	76.3
11-20	35	16.3	48	20
21-30	-	-	8	3.7
Type of Industry				
Electronics	46	21.4	9	4.2
Design & Development	12	5.6	-	-
Manufacturing	130	60.5	206	95.8
Others	27	12.6	-	-
Educational level				
High school	-	-	-	-
Diploma	19	8.8	-	-
Degree	108	50.2	117	54.4
Post graduate	86	40	85	39.5
Others	2	0.9	13	6

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the reliability of the various items used in the study. The means, standard deviations, correlations among study variables, and reliability statistics are presented in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the internal reliabilities of scales were between .71 and .94, which were clearly acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Whereas standard deviations of the variables were either close to or exceeded 1.0.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficient

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reliability
Leadership Style			
Participative	4.54	1.27	0.88
Nurturant	4.79	0.95	0.92
Autocratic	4.46	1.00	0.84
Effectiveness of change			
Performance rating	5.51	0.98	0.95

Table 3 shows the intercorrelations of the main variables used in this study. From the analysis we can see that there is not much issue of collinearity problem in this data set as the correlations between the independent variables are not high. This suggests that a multiple regression analysis can be conducted to test the hypotheses generated.

Table 3: Intercorrelations of the Main Variables

	Nurturant	Autocratic	Participative	Performance
Nurturant	1.000			
Autocratic	-.287**	1.000		
Participative	.411**	-.363**	1.000	
Performance Rating	.092	-.138**	.2227**	1.000

**p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

A two-step hierarchical multiple regression was carried out to analyze the effect of leadership style on effectiveness of change. In a leadership study by Ronk (1993), no differences were detected between male and female leadership styles based on personality traits and their leadership quality (Campbell, Bommer & Yeo, 1993). In contrast, other researchers (e.g., Bartol & Butterfield, 1976; Eagly, Harau & Makhyani, 1995; Haccoun, Sallay & Haccoun, 1978; Jago & Vroom, 1982; Rodrigues, 1993) have disputed the findings that leadership style is independent of gender. They claimed that gender has substantive impact on leadership style. Other studies have confirmed that gender is an extremely salient stimulus characteristic which could affect both the manner in which men and

women perceived themselves and are perceived by others (Korabik, 1997; Ridgeway, 1992). Based on the above discussion, it is therefore not surprising that researches on leadership incorporating gender have produced mixed results. Hence, it is essential to control the effects of demographic variables such as gender to prevent the spurious results from regression analysis and to isolate the effect of predictor variables on criterion variables.

Table 4 summarizes the regression results for performance rating. It can be noted that there was a significant increase in R^2 from step 1 to step 2. Leadership style has a direct effect on performance rating whereby R^2 change was 0.05, explaining 5% of the additional variability. Nurturant-task and autocratic leadership style were insignificant predictors of performance as such H_2 and H_3 of this study is not supported. Participative style leadership, on the other hand, was found to be a significant predictor and was positively related to effectiveness of change, thus supporting H_1 of this study.

Table 4: Summary of Results of the Two-Steps Hierarchical Regression

	Performance rating	
	Step 1	Step 2
	Std. Beta	Std. Beta
Control-Gender		
Subordinate	-0.089	0.060
Manager	0.117*	0.056
Direct Effects-Leadership style		
Nurturant-task style (NT)		-0.005
Autocratic style (F)		-0.000
Participative style (P)		0.237**
R^2	0.022	0.074
R^2Change	0.022	0.052
F change	2.318	3.783**

Note. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

Discussion

Numerous leadership theories have been established as a consequence of the continued search for effective leaders. Nonetheless, no known research has attempted to empirically investigate leadership style and effective change management in a single study. This study was an attempt in that direction. Most of the existing research is about leadership style but it does not relate to effective change which this study is trying to substantiate.

The hypotheses were analyzed using multiple hierarchical regressions. The result of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated that there is a

significant relationship between leadership style and effectiveness of change. Participative leadership style was found to be significantly and positively related to performance rating. This was consistent with Saufi, Wafa, and Hamzah's (2002) findings that Malaysian managers preferred participative and delegative styles. Nevertheless, according to Mosadegh and Yarmohammadian (2006), participative management is not always a good management style, and the selection of best leadership style would also need to rely on the organizational culture and employees' organizational maturity. This is consistent with previous researchers who reviewed that Malaysian leaders are known to be self-effacing, demonstrate patience, modesty in their undertakings, and have compassion for others (Kennedy & Mansor, 2000). Therefore, the results of this research provided evidence that leadership style affects the effectiveness of change.

Gender was found to also significantly impact the rating of effectiveness of change, which is congruent with past researchers that some demographics variables such as gender were often cited by past researchers as a source of influence in the supervisor-subordinate relationship (e.g., Bartol & Butterfield, 1976; Eagly, Harau & Makhyani, 1995; Haccoun, Sallay, & Haccoun, 1978; Jago & Vroom, 1982; Rodrigues, 1993). This finding is also in line with other studies that have confirmed that gender is an extremely salient stimulus characteristic which could affect both the manner in which men and women perceived themselves and are perceived by others (Korabik, 1997; Ridgeway, 1992). The influence of gender roles on organizational behavior occurs not only because people react to leaders in terms of gendered expectancies and leaders respond in turn, but also due to most people have internalized gender roles to some extent.

Implications

Results from this study revealed that different leadership style will elicit different effectiveness of change, and since there was no research done about Malaysia's leadership style in the context of effective change management specifically, there should be more effort channeled to undertake such a study for the benefit of the country.

Leadership style is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration in the Malaysian manufacturing organizations to manage change effectively. Continuous effort by the organization to consciously include this factor in its planning, leading, organizing, and coordinating processes will help to achieve the right dynamics to survive in the ever changing business environment. On a similar note, the organizations that decide to explore the type of leadership style will need to be cautious about overlapping styles which are needed. Different employee levels such as executive level and production operation level may require different type of leadership style as the level of individual resistance may

differ. The autocratic leadership style may not necessarily always bring negative results and likewise it is with participative and nurturant-task leadership style which may not guarantee positive results.

A leader can exhibit different types of leadership depending on whom he or she has to deal with. This is explained by Ansari et al. (2004) that, in order to be effective, the leader has to use a nurturant-task style with a subordinate who is high on both preferences for relationship and hierarchy. However, for a subordinate who is medium on those preferences, the leader has to go for a blend of nurturant-task and participative leadership style. Nonetheless, this study has demonstrated that only participative style is found to be significant in impacting performance rating.

As stated by Stewart (1994), subordinates nowadays are more educated and articulate. Hence, they cannot be commanded in the same as before. Subordinates would expect more involvement and participation at work. This is further confirmed by our study that participative style leadership is found to be significant of performance rating. Mosadegh and Yarmohammadian (2006) indicated that the best way to motivate subordinates is through the employee's actions and more participative attitudes created by the employers.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study revolves around sampling issues as the study has relied primarily on sample drawn specifically from a limited geographical area in Malaysia. Hence, the findings may not represent the entire workforce of Malaysia's manufacturing companies in general. A majority of the respondents were exempt staff and therefore, the lower level grade jobs such as production operators and technicians were not sufficiently covered. Cross-sectional studies will only provide a static perspective on the studied variables. The data were collected from both the employees and their supervisors at a single point in time; hence the direction of causality cannot be determined.

Conclusion

Leaders spearhead organizations, and that is why they are called leaders. In the battlefield, the army becomes disarrayed when there is no leader because there is no synchronized direction. The wind of change is here to stay in every organization, and although employees are the support group that drives an organization to success. In order to manage change effectively, the management needs to handle employees well and work through them to get things done. Results from this study revealed that different leadership style will elicit different

effectiveness of change, and since there was no research done about Malaysia's leadership style in the context of effective change management specifically, there should be more effort channeled to undertake such a study for the benefit of the country.

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