



# **Impact of Transformational Leadership on Service Quality in Saudi Arabia's Hotel Industry with Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment: A Conceptual Study**

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## **ABSTRACT**

An organization's ability to provide superior service has become increasingly vital in the current rapid and competitive business setting. To keep up with the increasing demand for superior service quality (SQ), organizational services must adapt fast to these changes. To achieve organizational goals and ensure sustainability, it is essential to have service employees with advanced skills, extensive knowledge, and a high organizational commitment (OC) toward their organization. Therefore, this study aims to extensively investigate the effect of transformational leadership (TFLD) on organizational commitment (OC) and service quality (SQ), and the mediating role of OC between TFLD and service quality (SQ) in the hospitality sector, through utilizing a conceptual integration method to explore the connection of TFLD, the OC of front-line service employees and the SQ perceived by customers. The finding revealed that, the commitment shown by employees to the organization and the customer's perceived service quality are both significantly affected by TFLD. Additionally, the current findings revealed that OC significantly improves SQ. According to the results, organizational commitment (OC) specifically, affective (AC) and continuous commitment (CC) participate as the mediator in the links between TFLD and SQ. This study improves upon previous methods by linking organizational commitment (OC) to the customer perception of SQ. Leadership that inspires and motivates followers to take action is crucial for improving SQ as perceived by customers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the current highly dynamic and competitive environment, the quality of service has emerged as a pivotal element of success in the service sector, especially the hospitality and tourist industry which is considered one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding global economies (Abu Talib et al, 2022a). Organizational services must respond quickly to these rapid changes, particularly to fulfill rising customer demand for superior services (Al-refaei et al, 2023; Ateeq et al, 2024). To meet these demands, organizations must continuously speed the improvement of creative new services or products, by adopting new technology and digitalization as sustainable solutions to improve SQ (Ateeq et al, 2024a, Al-Muhrami et al, 2021, Ateeq et al, 2024b), this needs to include employees with advanced skills, extensive knowledge, and

commitment to their organization, which is critical for attaining organizational goals and ensuring sustainability as mentioned by Talib et al, (2019a), Al-refaei et al (2019), and Zumrah et al, (2021).

The importance of providing high-quality service to customers has long been acknowledged (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). As a result, service providers looking to acquire a competitive advantage ought to focus on improving consumer satisfaction. The tourism and hospitality sectors rely greatly on customer satisfaction and loyalty for long-term economic sustainability (Talib et al, 2019b; Dam & Dam, 2021; Syapsan, 2019). Service quality is crucial in the service industry as it gives organizations a competitive advantage by distinguishing them in a saturated market. Furthermore, it fosters consumer loyalty, a crucial factor in achieving sustainable growth over time (Talib et al, 2022b). Through the regular delivery of excellent service, organizations may establish strong customer relationships and foster positive customer experiences.

Scholarly literature has given considerable emphasis to the role of leadership in attaining customer satisfaction (e.g., Shi & Zhou, 2023; Budur & Poturak, 2021; Suriyankiekaew, 2016). Throughout the whole service delivery process, frontline service employees are greatly impacted by leadership. As in the cases of defining and establishing the brand identity (Mao et al, 2024; Xiong, 2023), serving as a connection between employees and the brand (Terglav, Ruzzier, & Kaše, 2016; Zhang, & Xu, 2021; Liu et al, 2020), and fostering an environment that supports skill development so that staff members can deliver competent and assured customer service (Shi, & Zhou, 2023; Jauhari, Kumar, & Pandey, 2024), to name a few, leaders are important players in these processes. From all the leadership philosophies, transformational leadership is well known for motivating employees to match their individual goals with the aims of the company (Budur, & Poturak, 2021; Jauhari, Kumar, & Pandey, 2024).

Transformational leadership (TFLD) is a style in which leaders inspire their followers to change their attitudes and expectations, behaviour and beliefs, in order to achieve individual and organizational goals (Bass, 1999). Essentially, its goal is to successfully attract new followers for the organization's advantage (Bass et al, 2003; Al-Atwi, & Al-Hassani, 2021). Since employees have a substantial impact on customer perceptions of service, the organization must have high-performing employees to achieve success (Al-refaei Zumrah & Al-Shuhumi, 2019). Transformational leaders (TFLDs) have the capacity to significantly impact the cognitive processes, charges, and actions of their subordinates within organizational contexts. When leaders implement their expertise to initiate transformation in individuals and organizations, it empowers employees to exceed their typical productivity and achieve their greatest capacity (Salim, 2024). According to Amankwaa, Gyensare & Susomrith (2019), transformational leaders (TFLDs) create a strong sense of optimism and confidence in their team members, inspiring them to exert extra effort to accomplish their objectives. Pradhan and Jena (2019), and Kim, Yang, and Lee (2023) discover how transformational leadership motivates people to stay committed to their responsibilities, work hard towards goals, and display innovative behaviours. This highlights the significance of effective leadership in improving hospitality companies' performance (service quality)

Many researchers have emphasized the importance of leadership in promoting and advancing quality initiatives (Jabnoun & Juma AL Rasasi, 2005; Andersen, et al., 2018; Skendzel, et al.,

2019; Portela Maquieira et al, 2020). However, there has been limited research conducted on identifying the types of leadership that contribute to enhancing the quality of services delivered. Some studies suggest that TFLD is essential for the successful implementation of high-quality services (Ismail et al, 2011; Boamah, 2018; Su, Cheng, & Wen, 2019; Mahdikhani & Yazdani, 2020; Jauhari et al, 2024). Over the past twenty years, research has intensely focused on the phenomenon of TFLD. Extensive literature indicates that transformational leadership improves employee morale and productivity (Bass, 1999). However, studies on TFLD have primarily concentrated on objective performance metrics such as productivity and profitability (Para-González et al., 2018), job performance (Alwali & Alwali, 2022), social capital, social value, and performance (Naderi et al., 2019), effectiveness and efficiency (Orabi, 2016), team performance (Rao & Kareem Abdul, 2015), while less attention has been paid to investigate the effect of transformational leadership on service quality, especially in middle east countries such as Saudi Arabia, therefore, the current study comes to fill this gap.

However, when the hospitality industry encounters internal changes as well as domestic and international challenges, effective leadership becomes vital for fostering positive developments in hotels (Pasaman et al., 2019). Transformational leaders (TFLD) can guide employees in alignment with the hotels' vision and mission, inspiring a sense of commitment that enhances both performance and service quality (Pasaman et al., 2019; Al-Refaei et al, 2024a). Without such leadership, employees are unlikely to alter their attitudes and behaviors positively, which can impede organizational change and performance (Alsamawi, Darun, & Panigrahi, 2019; Al-Refaei & Zumrah, 2019; Ghumiem, & Alawi, 2022). Nevertheless, the leadership must acknowledge that a lack of sustained commitment among employees can potentially result in difficulties in managing the organization (Alshuhumi et al, (2024). Thus, fostering employee attitudes and behaviors through TFLD is essential for boosting performance and achieving organizational objectives, particularly in the dynamic hospitality sector of Saudi Arabia. This sector has been not extensively studied, and this indicates that, further research is needed to efficiently investigate the impact of TFLD on employee attrition and behavior in the context of the hospitality sector. Therefore, the current study comes to fill this gap.

In the existing hospitality sector, the combination of TFLD and OC has a beneficial effect on developing SQ. This is mostly attributed to the effect of TFLD on enhancing employees' behaviors (Dung & Hai, 2020; Salim, 2024), and the influence of employees' attitudes and behaviors on service quality (Zumrah 2019; Al-refaei et al, 2024b). Insufficient research and relevant literature currently exist on the topic of the effects of TFLD and organizational commitment (OC) on service quality (SQ) in the hotel industry in Saudi Arabia. The researcher's strong motivation to examine the subject further was driven by a dearth of relevant studies, to enable the hospitality industry in Saudi Arabia to effectively compete in the current globalized and highly competitive market. Specifically, it would be beneficial to investigate how TFLD affects the level of commitment of employees in the Saudi Arabia hospitality industry have toward their organization, and how this in turn influences customers' perceptions of the services they receive. This relationship can be examined by considering organizational commitment as a mediator variable. Therefore, the current study comes to fills this gap, by investigating the mediating role of OC in the effect of TFLD on SQ.

Organizational commitment (OC) is described by Lambert et al (2020) and Ghaderi et al (2023) as how employees perceive their sense of belonging and connection to an institution. Although

the significance of organizational commitment in the context of the hospitality sector has been recognized, there is a surprising lack of research examining its relationship with service quality within this context. In our study, we address this gap by exploring the link of employees' OC and SQ in the hospitality sector. We categorize organizational commitment following Allen and Meyer's (1996) framework, which includes affective, normative, and continuance commitment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership (TFLD) is the ability to seamlessly integrate subordinates' goals and desires with the organizational objectives, leading to increased commitment and performance in the workplace (Bass, 1999; Pradhan, & Jena, 2019; Nasser et al, 2024). Furthermore, this leadership style promotes a culture that improves the leaders- followers' connection through open communication, whereby followers are actively urged to articulate their perspectives along with suggestions (Surjanti & Kistyanto, 2022). Additionally, it functions as a reservoir of motivation, questioning existing standards and promoting individual development and progress (Bass, 1999). Transformational leadership (TFLD) includes four key attributes: charisma, inspiring motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Bass, 1990). This technique fosters substantial change in followers, enhances their expertise, recognizes their distinct capabilities and constraints, and aligns their goals with the organization's mission. Crucially, TFLDs assist as person models and motivate their followers to achieve significant and attainable goals (Surjanti & Kistyanto, 2022).

### Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment (OC) refers to a profound inclination to continue inside the organization and apply significant efforts to achieve its goals. It demonstrates the extent to which the employee's goals are aligned with the organization's objectives and desires to remain with the organization. Organizational commitment (OC) according to Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) refers to the extent of employees' identification and connection to the organization. Employees that are highly committed may remain a member and contribute to their organization and successfully accomplish its objectives (Alsamaw et al., 2019; Zumrah et al, 2021; Ghumiem, 2022).

On the other hand OC refers to an individual's attachment and loyalty and participation to the institution's vision, mission, values, and goals (Sunarsi et al, 2020). According to Allen and Meyer (1990), high OC is defined as a deep acceptance and belief of the organization's values and goals and a strong motivation to achieve success. An employee's decision to continue with a company is influenced by the comparative economic advantages of staying or departing. Employees may experience concerns regarding the gradual erosion of their firm investments. Normative commitment (NC) is a component of OC where an employee feels obligated to remain with the organization owing to external factors (Al-Jabari & Ghazzawi, 2019). Employees with a high NC are concerned about disappointing their managers and coworkers if they were to leave.

### Service Quality

Over the years, service quality has emerged as a critical research focus across numerous fields due to its significant influence on service assurance, customer satisfaction and retention, business profitability, and organizations' success (Ahmad, Ahmad, & Papastathopoulos, 2011;

Al-refaei et al, 2024). Service quality (SQ) is evaluated by how well the provided services align with customer expectations (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). One widely recognized model for assessing perceived SQ is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al., (1988), also known as the Gaps Model. This model includes a 22-item scale that evaluates customer expectations and their perceived experience of SQ across various sectors such as banking, telecommunications, education, health care, airlines, hospitality, and tourism. The items are organized into five dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1988):

1. Reliability: Relates to the ability of staff to consistently deliver the promised service accurately and within the expected time frame. This is considered the most significant factor influencing perceptions of service quality.
2. Tangibles: Involves the influence of physical facilities, equipment, the appearance of staff, and communication materials on how consumers perceive the service.
3. Responsiveness: Refers to the readiness of employees to help customers and provide timely service, especially when it comes to addressing requests, inquiries, complaints, and issues.
4. Assurance: Encompasses the expertise and politeness of employees, along with their ability to foster trust and confidence in customers. This is particularly important for clients in sectors like healthcare, finance, and law.
5. Empathy: Relates to the individualized and caring attention given to customers. Smaller service providers often excel in offering a more personalized experience compared to larger, more standardized businesses.

## HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### TFLD and SQ

Transformational Leadership Theory provides a foundation for understanding how specific leadership behaviors shape employee attitudes and actions. This theory highlights the importance of inspirational and supportive leadership, which directly corresponds to the model's key dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Research by Zhu et al. (2021) supports the relevance of this theory, demonstrating that transformational leadership significantly enhances organizational commitment an essential factor in driving service excellence.

Transformational leadership (TFLD) can enhance collaboration among employees by promoting teamwork, OC, motivation, and reaching optimal performance and goals (Ali et al. 2015). Employees are encouraged to maintain a high level of attention and commitment to attain group and organizational success (Ali et al, 2015; Breevaar et al., 2016). Previous research has shown that customers place greater importance on SQ provided by frontline service employees rather than the overall expenses of the service (Chang et al., 2021). Service quality (SQ) is the fundamental criterion for customers, surpassing the significance of the amount they are willing to pay for exceptional service. Intrinsic motivation among employees has been proposed by academics as a crucial determinant of creativity and innovation, ultimately resulting in improved job performance and service quality (Moon et al., 2019; Al-refaei, 2024a). Studies have indicated that leader support is the primary driver of intrinsic motivation for employees. This incentive pushes them to utilize their creativity to address any challenges they may have while providing services, drawing inspiration from their transformational leaders. Employees exhibit innovative activities while providing services to customers (Jeevan, 2015). Transformational managers and employees actively seek suitable

opportunities to display their innovative behaviors when engaging with consumers in order to enhance customer satisfaction. Increased effectiveness and innovation foster the ability of staff to deliver more personalized services that respond to the interests, desires, and demands of customers, hence enhancing service quality (Chang et al., 2021).

However, Previous studies have established that employee innovation behavior significantly affects customer service performance and consequently SQ (Yang, 2022; Kim, Park, & Kim, 2019; Moon et al., 2019; Sok et al., 2018). To provide high-quality service, transformational leaders (TFLDs) must offer innovative service development as a general goal so that service employees develop innovative concepts and seek new resources to create new ideas that can support them in accomplishing their goals (Kim, Yang, & Lee, 2023). The TFLDs play a key role in motivating employees and supporting them to experience meaningful work stimulating work performance and delivering a high level of SQ that meets customer needs and desires. Therefore, the current study suggests the following:

- *H1: TFLD positively affects SQ*

### **TFLD and OC**

TFLDs inspire and motivate individuals to exceed organizational expectations by engaging their emotions, prioritizing their interests, meeting their developmental needs, and fostering a drive for personal growth (Bass et al., 2003). The joint influence between transformational leaders (TFLDs) and their employees can be understood through the theory of social exchange (SET) and the principle of reciprocity (Dahleez & Abdelfattah, 2022; Al-refaei et al., 2024a). Key components of this mutual relationship include financial benefits, trust, and the achievement of long-term objectives. Transformational leaders encourage their followers to focus on long-term goals rather than immediate personal gains, thus motivating them to achieve higher performance levels (Udin, 2020a; Al-refaei et al, 2024b).

However, Research has revealed that transformational leadership (TFLD) positively affects various aspects of employee attitudes and behaviors, including OC (Suhana et al., 2019; Udin, 2020b). Transformational leaders (TFLDs) often exhibit a creative and innovative leadership style that inspires their followers to make informed decisions and advance in their roles (Abouraia & Othman, 2017). Additionally, there is a significant effect of TFLD and OC across different contexts (Abouraia & Othman, 2017; Dahleez & Abdelfattah, 2022). Based on this discussion, the current study posits that:

- *H2: TFLD has a positive effect on OC*

### **OC and SQ**

Employees perceive their sense of belonging and connection to an institution described as commitment (Lambert et al., 2020; Ghaderi et al, 2023). Literature review shows multiple studies in the field of service quality have investigated the link of OC to SQ. These studies consistently show that OC has an important impact on SQ (Al-Refaei and Zumrah, 2019; Chu, Tseng, and Tsai, 2014). Jauhari et al (2024) highlight the significance of customer-contact employees' organizational commitment, as it has a positive influence on their work-related behaviors and desired service encounters. In their study, Chu, Tseng, and Tsai (2014) discovered that factors such as affective commitment (AC) among frontline staff have significant positive effects on SQ.

The three distinct forms of OC continuance (CC), affective (AC), and normative (NC) discovered by Malhotra and Mukherjee (2004) have a considerable impact on the delivery of SQ. In their previous study (2003) Malhotra and Mukherjee found that both continuous (CC) and affective (AC) have a positive effect on SQ. However, normative (NC) did not have a significant impact. In contrast, Kansal (2012) discovered a notable correlation between NC and SQ, while Wong and Cheung (2014) determined that AC has a more significant impact on SQ. In addition, affective AC plays a crucial role in determining service quality (Wong & Cheung, 2014). Furthermore, Mikic and Dean (2006) and Ashill, Rod, and Carruthers (2008) found There is evidence of a direct relationship between employee OC and their ability to provide high SQ (Mikic & Dean, 2006; Ashill et al, 2008). This implies that by improving organizational commitment, organizations can achieve higher levels of service quality for their customers. Therefore, this study assumed that:

- *H3: OC has a positive effect on SQ*

### **The Mediating Role of OC between TFLD and SQ**

Transformational leadership (TFLD) is essential in enhancing employees' commitment to their organizations. A study conducted by Almutairi (2016) discovered employees who express satisfaction toward their supervisors tend to experience a stronger sense of connection with their organization. TFLDs can direct individuals or groups to achieve objectives and develop a strong sense of OC in their employees. Therefore, TFLD significantly contributes to determining the level of commitment inside the organization (Dahleez & Abdelfattah, 2022). Abouraia & Othman, 2017 It has been emphasized that style of leadership is a crucial aspect in shaping employee engagement (Abouraia & Othman, 2027). Organizational commitment refers to the arrangement or balance of individual goals with the goals of the organization, which enhances employee productivity and loyalty in the hospitality sector (Yao, Qiu, & Wei, 2019; Farrukh et al, 2020). Consequently, bolstering organizational commitment can result in enhanced employee performance to deliver high service quality (Esmaeilpour & Ranjbar, 2018). Therefore, the current study assumed that:

- *H4: OC mediates the relationship between TFLD and SQ*

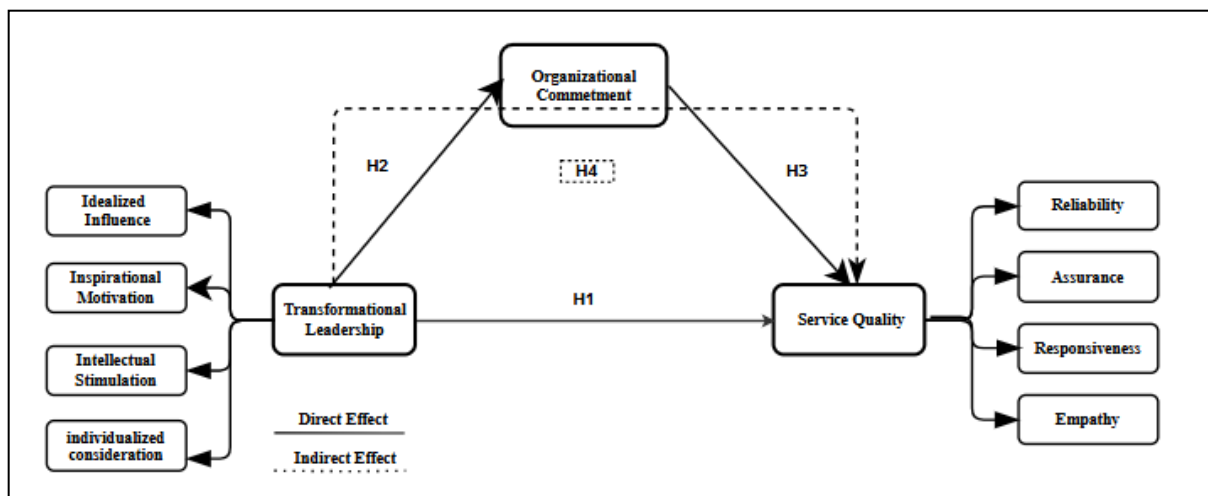
## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a comprehensive methodology to review the existing literature, to explore the complex connection between TFLD, employee OC, and SQ in the hospitality industry. To do this, the authors employed a range of reliable resources to gather an extensive and comprehensive collection of literature relevant to the factors of the investigation. The materials comprised of scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles, and empirical research, collectively enhancing comprehension of the influence of TFLD on employee commitment and SQ within the hospitality sector. A comprehensive and methodical search was conducted in various well-regarded scientific databases recognized for their trustworthiness and scholarly rigor, including Science Direct, Emerald, Taylor & Francis, MDPI, and Google Scholar. The study employed many databases to ensure the comprehensive retrieval of an extensive range of scholarly literature and empirical results related to the topic. We used a methodically selected group of keywords and phrases, including TFLD, leadership style, employee organizational commitment, and service quality, to gather relevant research covering these themes. Specific criteria were set to ensure the selection of relevant and high-quality sources, including a preference for publications published after 2015. However, exceptions were made for seminal works that contain fundamental concepts necessary for the study. This study systematically

synthesizes the findings to provide a thorough knowledge of the correlation between TFLD, employee organizational commitment, and service quality.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The conceptual framework of this study encompasses three constructs: TFLD, employee OC, and SQ. In this framework, TFLD and employee OC act as the independent variables, while SQ is the dependent variable. Additionally, organizational commitment functions as the mediating variable (see Fig. 1).



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of this Study**

### CONCLUSION

This study investigates the interrelationship between TFLD, employee OC, and SQ provided by frontline employees in the hospitality sector. An analysis of the existing literature indicates that TFLD exerts an important and direct influence on both the SQ provided to customers and the level of OC exhibited by employees towards the organization. The findings also demonstrate the positive and significant effect of OC on SQ. The study findings suggest that the impact of TFLD on service quality is partly influenced by OC, namely affective and continuous commitment.

The findings suggest that TFLD in the hospitality industry has a direct impact on motivating frontline personnel to deliver excellent service to visitors. However, there is also an indirect influence by fostering organizational commitment. Organizational commitment (OC) acts as a partial mediator in the link between TFLD and SQ. To clarify, the impact of TFLD on employees' SQ performance can be linked to the leader's motivation of frontline personnel to strive for a shared objective that fulfills their desires and ensures a competitive edge for the organization. Nevertheless, if frontline employees perceive that their leader is making genuine efforts to convert their skills and intellect into tangible results to enhance SQ and overall performance, they develop an emotional connection with the leader, demonstrate commitment to the organization, and exhibit loyalty towards the organization's brand. This discovery aligns with earlier, limited research that has indicated the crucial role of OC in mediating the relationship between TFLD and the achievement of positive employee behavior and desired outcomes (Stinglhamber et al., 2015; Jauhari, et al., 2024). The significance of front-line personnel's



emotional and continuity attachment to the organization is highlighted by the fact that customer service requires a brand-aligned experience, emotional commitment, and continuity (Jauhari et al, 2024). The hospitality sector is highly dependent on the interpersonal relationships and dynamics that exist between personnel and consumers. Multiple studies have consistently shown that emotions and emotional commitment play a vital role in attracting customers in the hospitality industry (Nyadzayo et al, 2020). Hence, our study emphasizes the need of front-line staff having a strong emotional connection to the organization in order to ensure the delivery of the promised service. Front-line staff serve as the initial interaction for highly valued customers (Lindsey-Hall et al, 2023). Hence, front-line employees need to construct and maintain strong, favorable interactions with customers. However, this task is more challenging than it may seem as establishing interpersonal connections necessitates a substantial allocation of individual and institutional resources. Hence, proactive service behavior demands more than just the motivation and support of a transformational leader.

### **LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCHES**

transformational leadership on service quality. future research has to investigate more mediating or moderator variables, such as organizational identification, empowerment, leader-member exchange (LMX), and perceived leadership support. However, future research may repeat this examination to include more service sectors, also future studies can empirically reexamine this model. Moreover, the outcomes of this model have not been examined yet, thus, future research can examine the outcomes of this model such as word of mouth, customer satisfaction or loyalty, as outcomes of the effect of TFLD on OC and SQ

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