FACTORS AFFECTING THE KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYEES: A CASE OF IMPORT AND EXPORT COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

Knowledge sharing is an extremely important factor for organizations and businesses, where knowledge is considered an intangible asset. Using a survey sample of employees from import-export companies in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, this research investigated how these factors affect employees' willingness to share knowledge in their daily work interactions. The results reveal that an innovative climate, perceived reciprocal benefits, and information technology have significant positive effects on knowledge-sharing behavior, while personality-based trust was not found to significantly influence knowledge sharing. These findings underscore the importance of fostering an environment that encourages innovation, mutual benefit, and effective use of technology to promote collaborative knowledge sharing. This study offers valuable contributions to both theory and practice by bridging the knowledge gap in the import-export sector and highlighting actionable strategies for enhancing knowledge-sharing behavior among employees.

KEYWORDS: Innovative climate, Information technology, Knowledge sharing, Perceived reciprocal benefits, Trust

1. Introduction

Today, along with the growth of the global economy, organizations are also facing various challenges, including competition from rivals. To increase competitive advantage, companies need to effectively utilize their capital, develop strategic planning capabilities, seize opportunities, optimize costs, expand customer reach, and maximize human resources specifically by leveraging intangible knowledge within the organization(Agustian et al., 2023). Knowledge plays a pivotal role in promoting the sustainable development of all organizations. In today's volatile and highly competitive market economy, knowledge provides companies with a competitive edge (de la Torre & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2022).

Organizations are increasingly aware of the value of knowledge and are better utilizing the available internal information(Massingham, 2004). Prior studies have demonstrated that knowledge sharing has become a key strategy in resource management and a solid foundation for knowledge management practices (Torraco, 2000). Knowledge sharing has also attracted the attention of managers, who recognize that knowledge management and its related processes are essential in human resource management (Torraco, 2000). It is widely acknowledged that knowledge plays a crucial role in driving organizational development and is a primary factor in enhancing the quality of life in society, even surpassing traditional resources and production tools such as land or labor.

Indeed, knowledge sharing is closely linked to positive outcomes such as improved organizational effectiveness, team creativity, innovative work behavior, knowledge creation, and job satisfaction (Ahmad & Karim, 2019). However, it is well-known that individuals might not like to share their knowledge, in part due to the pursuit of individual interests (Fuller, 2021). People often tend to keep valuable expertise to themselves to maintain their unique status within the organization. This reluctance to share knowledge can result in significant losses, especially when employees retire or leave, which poses a particular risk for organizations with high staff turnover (O'Neill & Adya, 2007). Knowledge that is created within the organization but held by only a single individual is less valuable to the organization as a whole (Ahmad & Karim, 2019). Therefore, fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and managing the processes of knowledge creation, transfer, and storage requires a deeper understanding of the dynamic knowledge-sharing process and the factors that influence it (O'Neill & Adya, 2007).

In Vietnam, the concept of knowledge sharing remains relatively new and is not yet widely adopted at either the individual or organizational level. Investigating knowledge-sharing behavior in collectivistic cultures is essential, as the dynamics of knowledge sharing may differ significantly and offer unique insights among different cultures (Bock & Kim,

2002). For example, in collectivist cultures, group and collective interests are prioritized over individual interests, contrasting sharply with individualistic Western countries, where personal interests often take precedence (Chow et al., 2000). Consequently, individuals in collectivist cultures may be more inclined to share knowledge within their organizations to enhance group benefits. Except for Chung & Anh (2022) focus on factors that affect knowledge sharing among academic staff in higher education institutions in Vietnam, research on knowledge sharing in other workplace environment settings remains limited. This study aims to investigate the factors influencing knowledge-sharing behaviors in collectivist cultures, using data collected from employees working in import and export companies in Vietnam. The findings will provide practical implications for managers to foster knowledge-sharing practices that align with cultural values and support organizational goals, ultimately encouraging a more collaborative and unified approach to knowledge management within collectivist settings.

This study targets employees working in the import-export industry as respondents and identifies the crucial factors affecting their knowledge-sharing behavior. Effective knowledge-sharing practices are essential for improving operational efficiency, adaptability, and innovation in this highly competitive and dynamic field like the import-export industry (Hsu, 2008). Knowledge sharing enables employees to exchange critical insights about market trends, customer preferences, regulatory changes, and logistical challenges, all of which are crucial in import-export operations (Yang, 2007). By fostering a culture of knowledge sharing, companies can reduce redundancies, minimize errors, and improve decision-making, as employees are better equipped to anticipate and respond to shifting demands in global trade. Furthermore, as the industry increasingly relies on digital tools and international networks, knowledge sharing helps to build a more collaborative and resilient workforce capable of navigating complex, cross-border processes (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Understanding the factors that influence knowledge sharing in this industry can provide managers with targeted strategies to enhance information flow, reduce knowledge hoarding, and ensure that valuable expertise is accessible across the organization, ultimately driving growth and maintaining a competitive edge.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Knowledge sharing

Knowledge is also considered a crucial resource for an organization's success and long-term viability. Organizations rely on the collective knowledge of their project teams to create innovative brands, which requires leveraging knowledge across the entire company (Alegre et al., 2013). Knowledge is widely regarded as a valuable asset and a foundation for building organizational strength (Ahmad & Karim, 2019).Ahmad & Karim (2019) state that knowledge sharing goes beyond merely exchanging information; it is a strategic activity aimed at achieving business goals. By sharing knowledge effectively, organizations can leverage their collective expertise to drive growth, foster innovation, and create a competitive advantage.

Knowledge sharing occurs when individuals are willing not only to help others but also to learn from them, fostering the development of new competencies (Yang, 2007). Knowledge sharing is the exchange of task-related information, advice, and expertise, where individuals collaborate to complete daily tasks, solve problems, and generate new ideas (Ahmad & Karim, 2019). The impact of knowledge sharing can be seen in work-related outcomes and changes brought about by these collaborative activities within an organization, influencing productivity, innovation, and overall organizational growth (Chow & Chan, 2008).

2.2. Trust and Knowledge-Sharing Behavior

Trust is the expectation of honesty and integrity among individuals within an organization. In close relationships within social communities, trust holds a significant and essential role, even more so than in economic exchanges (Hsu et al., 2007). Lewis & Weigert (1985) defined trust as a feeling of confidence and security in a partner's supportive response and the resilience of the relationship and involves a set of shared expectations between individuals engaging in interaction. Additionally, Mayer et al. (1995) described trust as the perception of the trustworthiness of another, determined by the extent to which an individual adheres to shared principles. If knowledge holders do not perceive potential benefits, they are unlikely to share their knowledge. A financial reward system alone is often insufficient to encourage knowledge sharing, as trust is the main determinant of social interaction (Vuori & Okkonen, 2012). Therefore, interpersonal trust is a key factor when employees decide to share knowledge. Numerous studies confirm that trust is essential for knowledge sharing, as people are more willing to share valuable information with individuals they trust (Ahmad & Karim, 2019). When relationships are built on trust, employees are more eager to provide useful insights and are also more open to listening and absorbing others' knowledge (Mayer et al., 1995). Human factors like trust are vital components for effective knowledge sharing and are integral to improving organizational performance (Yang, 2007). Trust can be divided into personality-based trust, institutional-based trust, and cognitive-based trust (McKnight et al., 1998). Unlike institutional-based trust, which relies on formal structures, or cognitive-based trust, which depends on perceptions of competence, personality-based trust fosters a deeper sense of connection and psychological safety among employees. In environments where personal connections and trustworthiness are prioritized, employees are more likely to share sensitive or valuable knowledge that they might otherwise withhold (Levin & Cross, 2004).

Personality-based trust, defined as the trust stemming from an individual's perception of a colleague's personal attributes—such as integrity, reliability, and honesty—affects knowledge sharing by influencing the level of openness and willingness to exchange information (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). When employees trust their colleagues based on these personal traits, they are more likely to share valuable knowledge without hesitation, confident that it will be used responsibly and reciprocated positively. This form of trust reduces barriers to communication, fostering a supportive environment where

individuals feel secure in sharing their expertise, discussing ideas, and collaborating on projects. Without personality-based trust, employees may hold back information due to concerns about competition or potential misuse, which can impede knowledge flow within the organization (Chiu et al., 2006). Therefore, cultivating personality-based trust is a valuable strategy for managers aiming to build a collaborative, knowledge-sharing culture that supports organizational learning and adaptability. The previous studies also confirm the positive link between trust and employees' knowledge sharing. For example, through a cross-sectional study conducted in a multinational company in Malaysia, Ferreira & Francisca Saldanha (2014), personality-based trust is significantly related to knowledge sharing. Based on those arguments, the authors propose the first hypothesis of the study as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Personality-based trust positively impacts knowledge-sharing behavior.

2.3. Innovative Climate and Knowledge-Sharing Behavior

A key foundation for promoting knowledge-sharing behavior is communication among individuals within the organization (Scott & Bruce, 1994). An innovative climate refers to an organizational environment that encourages and supports creativity, experimentation, and openness to change. In this climate, employees feel empowered to explore new ideas and take calculated risks without fear of negative repercussions (Scott & Bruce, 1994). An innovative climate promotes knowledge-sharing behavior by fostering an atmosphere where employees believe their insights, experiences, and suggestions will be valued and put to constructive use. In such environments, collaboration and the open exchange of knowledge become essential for developing new solutions, improving processes, and maintaining a competitive edge (Scott & Bruce, 1994). By reducing fear of judgment and emphasizing mutual learning, an innovative climate encourages employees to share their expertise and continuously develop their skills. This climate ultimately serves as a foundation for a knowledge-sharing culture, where the collective knowledge of the workforce drives organizational growth and adaptability.

This in line with Organizational Climate Theory (Schneider, 1975), which posits that employees' perceptions of their work environment impact their attitudes and behaviors, an innovative climate fosters a culture where employees feel empowered to explore new ideas and take calculated risks. In such a climate, employees are more likely to share their insights, experiences, and suggestions, as they believe their contributions will be valued and utilized effectively. Additionally, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) further explains how an innovative climate encourages knowledge-sharing behavior. According to this theory, social behavior is driven by reciprocal exchanges. In an innovative climate, employees perceive knowledge sharing as an exchange where they receive recognition, support, or further opportunities to innovate, fostering a sense of mutual benefit and trust. When innovation is emphasized, collaboration and open knowledge exchange become essential for developing solutions, improving processes, and maintaining a competitive edge. The combination of these theories suggests that an innovative climate not only motivates employees to share knowledge but also establishes a feedback loop that reinforces their engagement and commitment to continuous improvement, ultimately supporting organizational growth and adaptability. Previous studies (e.g. van den Hooff & de Ridder (2004) also found that communication climate can affect knowledge sharing. Based on those arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Innovative climate positively impacts knowledge-sharing behavior.

2.4. Perceived Reciprocal Benefits and Knowledge-Sharing Behavior

Perceived reciprocal benefits refer to an individual's belief that sharing knowledge will yield mutual advantages, such as receiving valuable insights in return or enhancing group success (Bock et al., 2005). This perception positively influences knowledge-sharing behavior by motivating employees to contribute their expertise, expecting that their efforts will be reciprocated in some form. When employees recognize that knowledge-sharing benefits both themselves and their colleagues, they are more likely to engage openly and actively in collaborative activities (Wang & Noe, 2010). In organizations, perceived reciprocal benefits foster a culture of trust and mutual support, where individuals feel their contributions are valued and rewarded, further strengthening their willingness to share knowledge. This factor is especially impactful in collectivistic or team-oriented environments, where shared success is a core value, making perceived reciprocal benefits a key driver in promoting consistent and effective knowledge-sharing practices (Chow & Chan, 2008; Kim & Lee, 2006).

This is in line with the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)in which perceived reciprocal benefits were described by human behavior from a social exchange perspective. Previous studies suggest that individuals share knowledge with the expectation that their future knowledge needs will be met by others (He & Wei, 2009). He & Wei (2009) also highlight the importance of reciprocity in the context of knowledge sharing. Similarly Hung et al. (2011) note that reciprocity is a prominent motivation for individuals to contribute knowledge to electronic knowledge repositories. Based on this, the authors proposed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived reciprocal benefits positively impact knowledge-sharing behavior.

2.5. Information Technology and Knowledge-Sharing Behavior

Information technology, in the form of knowledge management systems and information and communication technology, enhances collaboration and knowledge exchange (Tan, 2016). IT systems facilitate knowledge sharing and help increase productivity (Tan, 2016). In addition, technological variables include the availability of IT infrastructure that supports communication and knowledge exchange (Corso & Paolucci, 2001). Information technology (IT) plays a critical role in facilitating knowledge-sharing behavior by providing the tools and platforms necessary for efficient communication,

storage, and retrieval of information. IT systems, such as knowledge management platforms, collaborative software, and real-time communication tools, make it easier for employees to access and share knowledge, regardless of location or time constraints (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). By streamlining information flow and enabling seamless collaboration, IT reduces barriers to knowledge sharing and fosters a more connected and informed workforce. Furthermore, IT solutions can help organize and categorize knowledge, making it readily available for employees when needed, which encourages continuous learning and sharing. In addition to enhancing accessibility, IT also supports knowledge-sharing practices by providing a secure and structured environment where employees feel comfortable sharing information, knowing it can be retrieved, tracked, and utilized efficiently (Gold et al., 2001).

Previous studies on information and knowledge sharing have repeatedly emphasized the use of information and communication(Hendriks, 1999). Tools and technologies that are easy to access and use are likely to have a positive impact on knowledge-sharing behavior. Based on this, the authors propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Information technology positively impact knowledge-sharing behavior.

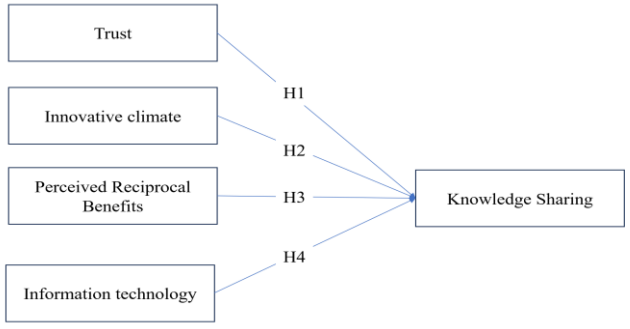

Figure 1. Conceptual model

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

A convenient survey was conducted, and the questionnaire was sent to 308 employees currently working at Trading & Import-Export companies. A total of 299 responses were collected, with incomplete surveys or those with patterned responses excluded. Among the participants, 49.8% were male. The participants' ages were primarily between 30 and 40 years old (47.2%), followed by those under 30 (32.8%), and those over 40 (20.1%). Regarding income, 43.8% earned over 5 million VND, while another 43.8% earned between 3.5 to 5 million VND. In terms of tenure, 40.1% had over 5 years of experience, 30.4% had between 2 to 5 years, and 29.4% had less than 2 years.

3.2. Measures

Personality-based trust was measured using four items adapted from Sarker et al. (2003). An example is "I believe my colleague is honest and trustworthy". *Perceived Reciprocal Benefits* was assessed using a three-item scale adapted from Kankanhalli et al. (2005). An example is "Sharing my knowledge with colleagues will result in valuable insights or help from them in return". *Innovative Climate* was measured with three items adapted from Bock et al. (2005). An example is "Employees here are supported when they propose innovative ideas". *Information technology* was measured using four items adapted from Jolaee et al. (2014). An example is "Our IT systems make it easy to share knowledge with colleagues". *Knowledge-sharing* was assessed using a four-item scale adapted from Bock et al. (2005). An example is "I share my work-related knowledge with colleagues whenever it is useful to them". Respondents rated their agreement on a Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree."

PLS-SEM is well-suited for this study due to its flexibility with complex models, moderate sample sizes, and predictive focus. It handles both formative and reflective constructs effectively, making it ideal for exploring relationships among multiple factors influencing knowledge-sharing behavior. Additionally, PLS-SEM's robustness to non-normal data distributions and its suitability for exploratory research align well with the study's objectives, allowing for accurate analysis even with limited theoretical foundations and a smaller sample size (Sarstedt et al., 2017). In this study, PLS-SEM was employed for both measurement model evaluation and structural assessment, ensuring an accurate and comprehensive analysis of the proposed relationships.

Evaluation of the Measurement Model and Structural Model

Reliability was assessed using two key indicators: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with results displayed in Table 1. The findings indicate that all Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability coefficients meet the required thresholds (>0.7), except for the Cronbach's Alpha for Perceived Reciprocal Benefits (PRB), which is 0.634. However, the authors retained this variable as it narrowly missed the threshold. Additionally, the CR indicators for this scale exceed 0.7, affirming the reliability of the measurement scales (Hair et al., 2013).

Convergent Validity was evaluated based on Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Outer Loadings. According to Hair et al. (2017), a measurement scale achieves convergence when the AVE is 0.5 or above. The AVE results in Table 1 meet this criterion, demonstrating that the model satisfies convergence standards. Hair et al. (1998) suggest that, for a sample size between 250 and 350, a factor loading of 0.35 or higher is necessary for significance. In this study, all factor loadings were above 0.35, ensuring the convergent validity.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Factor Loading (λ**)**

Items	**λ**
Innovative climate (IC): α = 0.821; CR= 0.903; AVE = 0.738	

IC1	0.917
IC2	0.781
IC3	0.874
Information Technology (IT) α = 0.8; CR= 0.885; AVE = 0.645	
IT1	0.423
IT2	0.918
IT3	0.863
IT4	0.903
Knowledge-sharing (KS); α = 0.893; CR= 0.926; AVE = 0.757	
KS1	0.908
KS2	0.838
KS3	0.882
KS4	0.850
Perceived reciprocal benefits (PRB); α = 0.634; CR = 0.753; AVE = 0.569	
PRB1	0.465
PRB2	0.876
PRB3	0.850
Personality-based trust (TR); α = 0.930; CR = 0.950; AVE = 0.826	
TR1	0.917
TR2	0.915
TR3	0.879
TR4	0.924

The constructs were tested for discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE for a construct should be greater than its correlation with all other constructs (Hair et al., 2013). The Fornell-Larcker analysis shows that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds the correlations with other latent variables, confirming the discriminant validity of the constructs (Table 2).

Table 2. Fornell-lacker criterion

	IC	IT	KS	PRB	TR
IC	0.859				
IT	0.492	0.901			
KS	0.565	0.648	0.893		
PRB	0.480	0.447	0.461	0.754	
TR	0.198	0.723	0.448	0.304	0.909

Structural Model Evaluation

Before testing the hypotheses, this study examined the potential presence of multicollinearity among predictor variables. After assessing multicollinearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values in the model were all below 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues among the latent variables (Hair et al., 2013).

Direct Relationship Testing

Table 3. Structural Model Results

Direct effect	β	t –values	p-value
H1. TR -> KS	0.099	1.484	0.138
H2. IC -> KS	0.299 ***	5.157	0.000
H3. PRB -> KS	0.116***	2.123	0.000
H4. IT -> KS	0.394 ***	4.962	0.000
*p<5%; **p<1%;***p<0.1%			

The table summarizes the results of hypothesis testing for the structural model, showing the direct effects of various factors on knowledge sharing behavior (KS). Hypothesis H1 tests the effect of Trust (TR) on Knowledge Sharing (KS), with a path coefficient (β) of 0.099 and a p-value of 0.138, indicating no statistically significant impact. Hypothesis H2 examines Innovative climate (IC), with a path coefficient of 0.299 and a p-value of 0.000, suggesting a statistically significant positive effect on Knowledge Sharing. Hypothesis H3 assesses Perceived Reciprocal Benefits (PRB) with a path coefficient of 0.116 and a p-value of 0.000, showing a significant effect. Hypothesis H4 tests Information Technology (IT) with a path coefficient of 0.394 and a p-value of 0.000, confirming a significant positive effect on Knowledge Sharing. Thus, Innovative climate, Perceived Reciprocal Benefits, and Information Technology have significant positive impacts on Knowledge Sharing, supported Hypotheses H2, H3, H4 while H1 was not supported.

4. Conclusion, Managerial Implications, and Limitations of the Study

Conclusion

Through a sample of 299 employees working at import and export companies, this study investigated the factors (Trust, Innovative climate, Perceived Mutual Benefits and Information Technology) that affect employees' knowledge-sharing behavior. The results indicate that Innovative climate, Perceived Reciprocal Benefits, Information Technology have significant positive impacts on Knowledge Sharing. Meanwhile, Personality-based trust was not found to significantly influence knowledge-sharing behavior. These findings provide insights for managers to focus on critical factors that can promote effective knowledge sharing among employees. The results support most of the hypotheses proposed, except for the association between Personality-based trust and knowledge sharing (H1). The results are consistent with the previous studies, showing a direct positive effect of Innovative climate, Perceived Mutual Benefits, and Information Technology on

employees' sharing behavior (e.g., Bock et al., 2005; Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Chung & Anh, 2022). The insignificant relationship between Personality-based trust and knowledge sharing could be explained by the nature of the organizational environment or cultural factors. In collectivistic cultures or highly structured organizations, employees may relymore on established systems and formal processes for knowledge sharing rather than personal trust (Chow et al., 2000). Additionally, personality-based trust may be less influential in environments where group norms and collective goals are prioritized over individual relationships. Therefore, employees might engage in knowledge sharing due to organizational incentives, expectations, or cultural values rather than trust based on individual personalities (Ardichvili et al., 2006)

Practical Implications

These findings highlight important areas for managers to consider in fostering effective knowledge-sharing practices among employees in import and export companies or similar structured environments. The positive impact of Innovative Climate, Perceived Mutual Benefits, and Information Technology on knowledge sharing suggests that managers should prioritize these factors to cultivate a collaborative workplace. Encouraging an innovative climate is particularly beneficial, as employees are more likely to share knowledge in an environment that rewards creativity and idea-sharing (Bock et al., 2005). Managers can facilitate this by organizing regular brainstorming sessions, offering innovation workshops, and recognizing employees who actively contribute fresh ideas. Such initiatives not only stimulate knowledge exchange but also enhance engagement and motivation within the organization.

Emphasizing Perceived Mutual Benefits further reinforces employees' willingness to share expertise by cultivating a sense of collective achievement. Managers can achieve this by setting up team-based goals, encouraging cross-departmental collaboration, and transparently communicating how shared knowledge supports organizational success (Kankanhalli et al., 2005) . Reward systems that recognize team accomplishments rather than individual achievements can also reinforce the perception of mutual benefits, motivating employees to contribute to knowledge-sharing initiatives for the broader organizational good.

Lastly, leveraging Information Technology tools is essential for breaking down barriers to communication and creating a streamlined knowledge-sharing process. Managers should invest in reliable and accessible platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, Slack, or centralized knowledge management systems, where employees can store, access, and share resources effortlessly (Ardichvili et al., 2006).

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

In addition to its contributions, this study has some limitations that should be considered and addressed in future research. First, this study focuses on employees working in import-export industries. Future studies could apply this analytical framework to other research contexts, allowing for the generalization of research results. Second, the data in this study primarily relies on the subjective perceptions of individuals, which may introduce potential biases and discrepancies. Subsequent research could benefit from measuring knowledge-sharing behavior using both subjective and objective data sources to provide richer and better reflections on the causal relationships between variables. Finally, the research model does not propose any specific characteristics of employees when assessing whether differences in these characteristics can affect knowledge-sharing behaviors. Further studies could explore how various factors, such as personality traits, cultural backgrounds, professional roles, or levels of expertise, influence employees' willingness to share knowledge. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of knowledge sharing and offer valuable insights for designing tailored interventions to foster a collaborative and knowledge-driven organizational culture.

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