

USE OF HR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES IN DEVELOPING THE SYSTEM OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

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Abstract

The authors explored the possibility of using the expertise of human resource communities (HR Communities) to develop a sub-system of professional qualifications in human resources. First, the authors studied the demand for HR communities' establishment; defined the members of professional communities; highlighted the key qualities of professional community leaders; and identified the problems that these communities face when promoting and implementing their goals. Second, the authors analysed a whole range of current issues in human resources that appeal to HR Communities. And finally, the authors studied the willingness of HR communities to implement the nationwide goals aimed at the development of professional qualifications system in human resources. The authors studied 97 Russian HR communities by using the information from communities' official websites, participating in HR communities' activities, and analysing the findings of the HR communities' monitoring survey carried out in 2010-2016. The study identified a number of important activities for Russian HR communities, including the introduction of professional standards in human resources, the development of an independent qualifications assessment. For all the importance of the topic, not all professional communities are ready to implement these activities.

Key words: human resources, professional communities, the system of professional qualifications, professional standards.

JEL Code: L3, M12

Introduction

The professional community is traditionally understood as a self-regulating union of people representing one particular work environment and sharing the same values and norms.

This concept has been used for a long time; professional communities have existed for many years as guilds, unions, communities, associations, etc. Recently, however, with the transition to the post-industrial society, with the development of computer technologies and the ongoing

changes that many organizations are exposed to, the meaning of this concept is changing. Nowadays, to belong to a particular profession is less important as the primary requirement is to be an expert in one's field (Martyanova, 2013).

When previously the primary activity of professional communities was to protect its members, it is obsolete now, as now the main activity of professional communities is to develop its members' professional potential and sustain professional growth. From our point of view, the professional community can be defined as the union of specialists from different organizations within a particular professional field, networking regularly with the aim of sharing knowledge, experience, best practices; seeking new ideas and more effective approaches to achieving their objectives. (Dolzhenko, 2015).

Two examples of such world class communities are the European Association for People Management established in 1962 as an umbrella body for national associations and professional organizations in Human Resources Management from Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the World Federation of People Management Associations established in 1976.

1 Literature review

Professional communities attract the attention of many scientists; however, most of them study professional communities of teachers. The most cited works that discuss different issues of professional communities focus on the creation of communities in schools through organizational learning (Scribner et al., 1999), and the impact of professional communities on student achievement (Lomos, 2011).

The ways to use professional communities in personnel management are analyzed in the work of Nancy J. Adler and Susan Bartholomew (Adler et al., 1992). The authors of the paper highlight that by uniting scientists and personnel management specialists professional communities encourage the generation of knowledge that, in future, can be used by the members of this community.

As the scientists state the most important aspect of the collaboration between theorists and practitioners in professional communities is the exchange of knowledge. This opinion is expressed by A. Ardichvili (Ardichvili et al., 2003). However, for the knowledge to be spread it must be of public interest. Another important factor in spreading knowledge and practices is the trust between participants that can be developed using various tools.

We reviewed several scientific works and made a conclusion that theorists and practitioners still pay little attention to the opportunity of using external professional communities.

We believe that this opportunity should be explored. If the company does not use the resources available externally then it can undermine its personnel management (Fedorova, Dvorakova, 2015).

From our point of view, with crowdsourcing the members of professional communities can become involved in solving tasks and achieving objectives of the state, society and organizations (Dolzhenko, Ginieva, 2016).

As the system of professional qualifications is being currently developed in the Russian Federation, we researched the opportunity to use the experience and knowledge of the members of HR professional communities for developing the system of professional qualifications in HR.

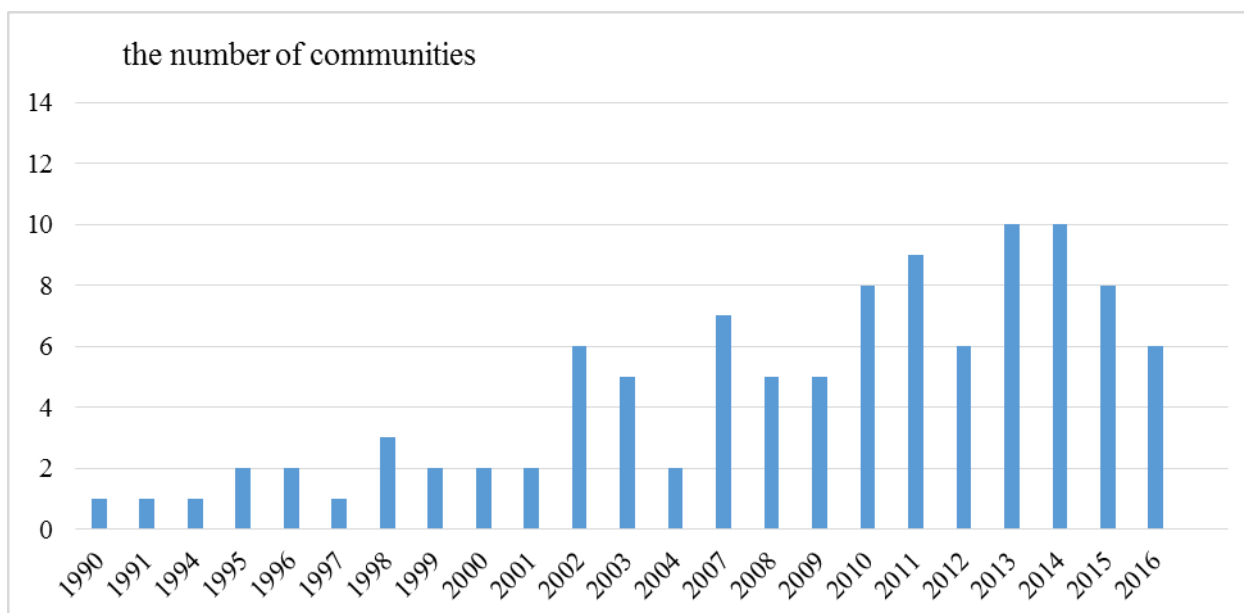
2 Methods and Data

The present study covers the period from the year of 2010, when most Russian HR communities were established and started operating, to the first quarter of 2017 when the results of the survey were summarized. To conduct the study we used the information publicly available on official websites of over 100 Russian professional communities; participated in activities of the communities (the authors of the present study are members of the Sverdlovsk Regional Public “Sverdlovsk Oblast Human Resources Management Association of Executives and Specialists”); and analyzed the results of the monitoring survey conducted in professional communities for the period from 2010 to 2016. (The final stage of the study was completed in February 2017 and is a part of the monitoring conducted by the Professional HR qualifications Council, and the authors of the study participated in this monitoring).

2.1 The first stage of the study. General description of HR communities

First, publicly available data presented on open sites of 104 Russian professional communities was analyzed. It should be noted that the first professional HR communities now operating in the Russian Federation were founded in the late 1990 and the early 2000s. Figure 1 represents the data on the foundation of professional communities in Russia.

Fig 1: The foundation of professional communities in the Russian Federation for the period from 1990 to 2016



Source: the work by the author of this article

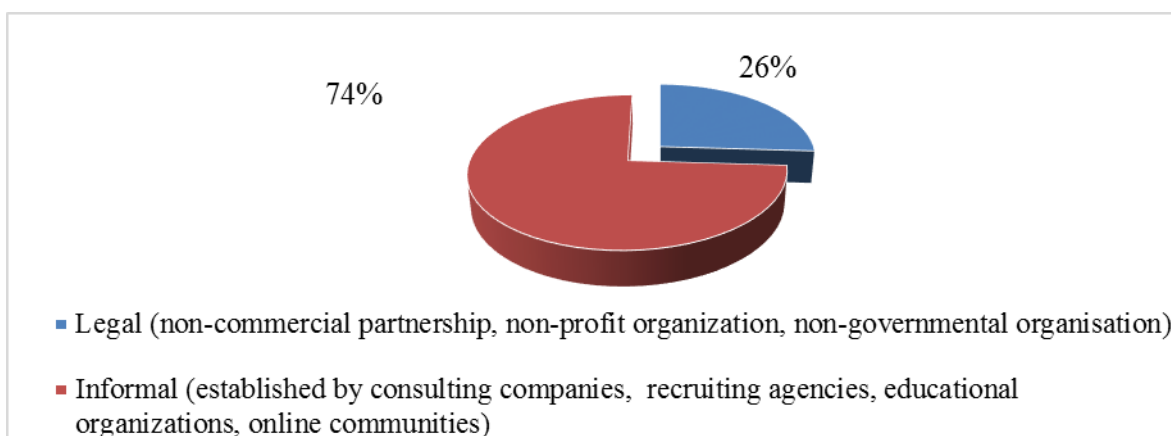
As can be seen in Figure 1, the foundation of professional communities experienced growth in 2002, with the largest number of communities emerging in 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014.

When analyzing the activities of the communities, the authors of the study identified several criteria for the classification of the communities, including:

The classification by ownership:

1. Legal (with a registered legal status);
2. Informal (without a registered legal status).

Fig 2: The structure of HR-communities by ownership



Source: the work by the author of this article

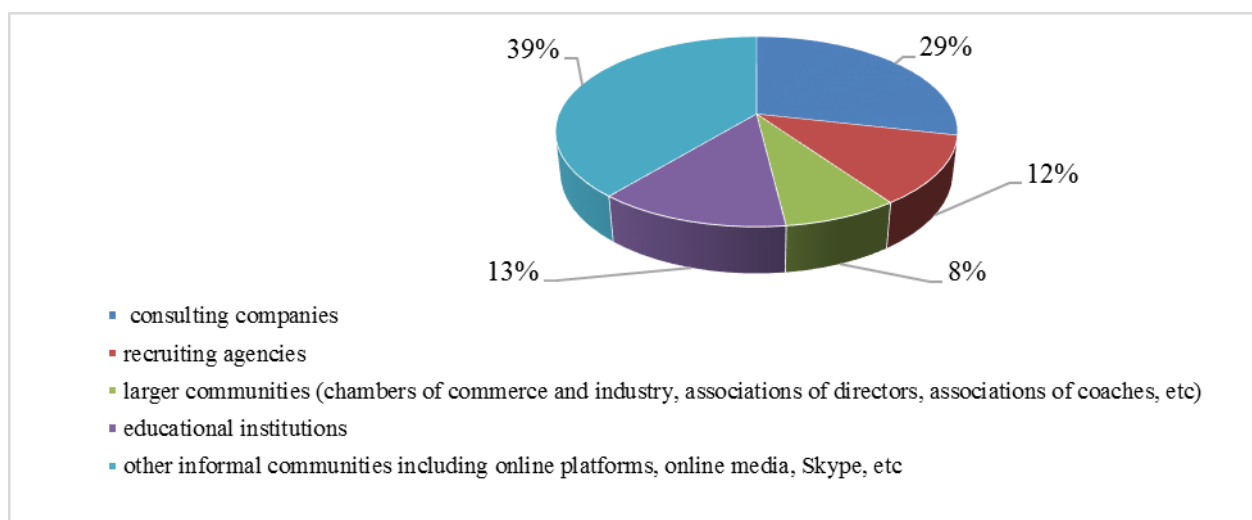
As can be seen in Figure 2, about 26% of the communities (27 organizations) have a registered legal status and, as a rule, are registered as non-profit organizations regulated by the Federal Law "On Non-Profit Organizations" as of 12.01.1996 # 7-Federal Law. (Federal

Law "On Non-Commercial Organizations" as of 12.01.1996 # 7-Federal Law. The study shows that the most popular forms of non-commercial organizations are: non-profit organizations (associations) which are voluntary associations; non-commercial partnerships, non-governmental organizations established by citizens and (or) legal entities.

The fact that only a small number of communities is legally registered is explained by the lack of necessary time, finance, human resources required for the legal registration of this community, along with the liability of subsequent reporting of the organization activities to the relevant authorities.

Therefore, today HR communities without registered legal status prevail, accounting for 74% of the total number of HR communities. A more detailed analysis of these communities (Figure 3) revealed that over a half of them were established by commercial companies (29% were established by consulting companies, 12% by recruiting agencies, 13% by educational organizations). As a rule, heads of the companies establishing the communities become the heads of these communities. In this case, the key objective of establishing a professional community is to attract HR specialists who will become potential customers of this commercial company in future.

Fig 3: The structure of HR communities without registered legal status



Source: the work by the author of this article

The following classification of communities is based on the way of interaction:

1. Offline (traditional interaction, in which, as a rule, Internet communications are not used);
2. Online (Internet resource; web portals, uniting HR specialists and arranging online interaction and discussions of certain areas of HR activities).

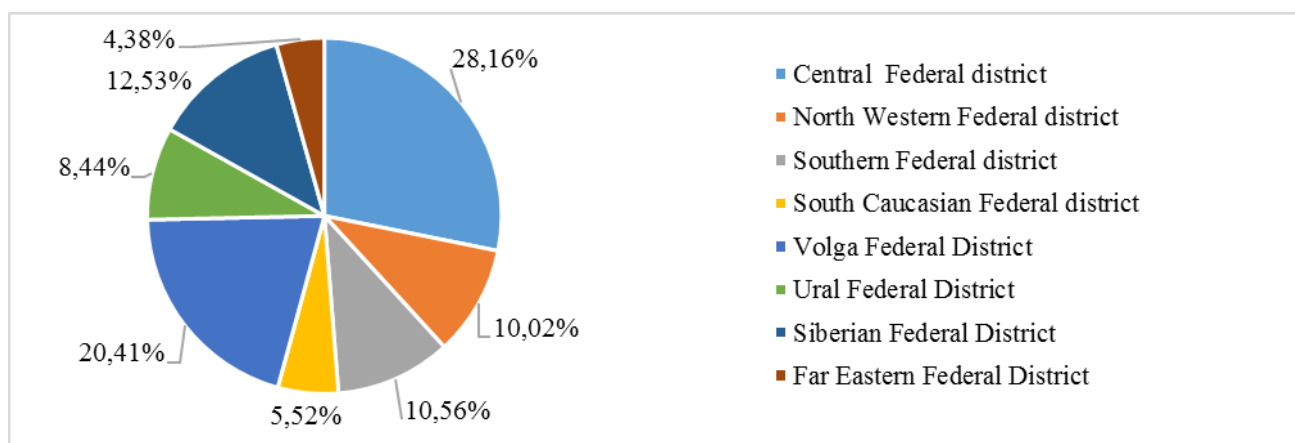
The findings of the study showed that less than 4% of the total number of professional communities work offline only. And the number of professional communities that operate

online only is growing every year. According to the research, today 17% of the communities operate online only and carry out their work using websites, social networks, and chats. This is especially true for HR communities in IT industry. Currently, there are 10 communities using chat rooms in Skype as their communication platform. We believe that in the near future the number of professional communities working exclusively online, using social media for interaction, will become predominant.

Another classification of professional communities is based on their location.

The distribution of professional communities across the regions of Russia can be assessed through the presence of HR specialists in these regions. To determine the employment structure in personnel management in the regions of the Russian Federation, we also took into account the data of the official statistical report "The number of the employed by the subjects of the Russian Federation".

Fig 4: The employment structure in personnel management in the Federal districts of the Russian Federation in 2016.



Source: the work by the author of this article

As can be seen in Figure 4, the largest number of HR specialists works in the following districts:

- The Central Federal District (28.16% of the total number of employees engaged in personnel management)
- Volga Federal District (20.41% of the total number of employees engaged in personnel management)
- Siberian Federal District (12.53% of the total number of employees engaged in personnel management).

The largest number of communities (the first and the second places) is found in those districts, where the number of people engaged in personnel management prevails: Central Federal

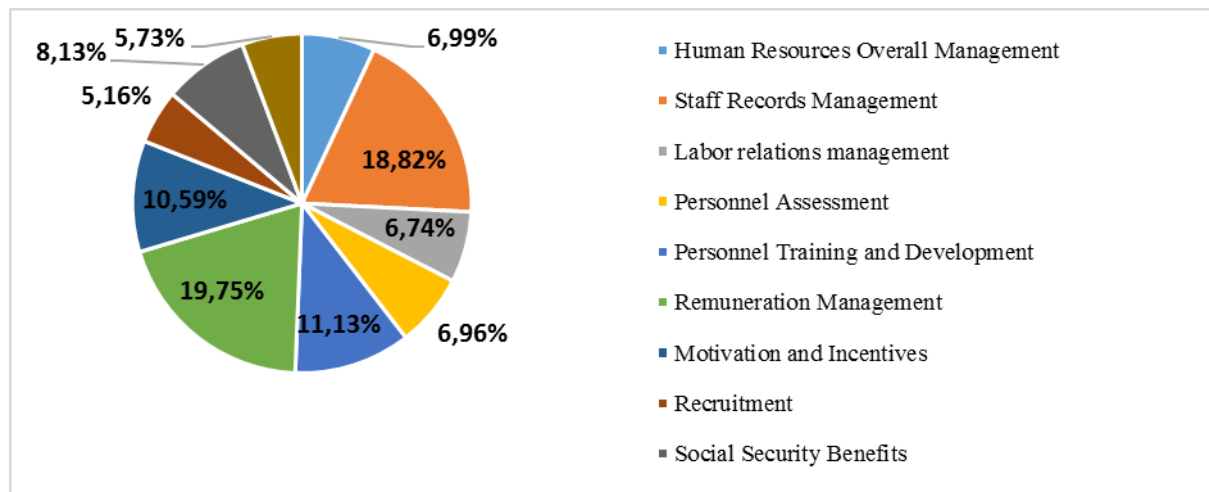
District (31% of the total number of HR communities), Volga Federal District (17%), and Internet platform (17%).

2.2 The second stage of the study. Personnel management issues of current interest to HR communities.

The study identified the issues of current interest to HR specialists and reflected the state of human resources management in economic entities, eliciting bottlenecks in personnel management: such as the problems and methods of qualified personnel retention; managing personnel during restructuring; headcount and payroll costs optimization; the development of corporate culture and HR brand; the development of the system of professional qualifications (the introduction of professional standards in personnel management, the independent assessment of qualifications); and the development of the system of labour management.

The authors of the present study believe that the employment structure of specialists should be taken into account when identifying priority topics of interest to representatives of HR communities. According to the findings of labour market research conducted by the Professional HR qualifications Council (Ginieva, Dolzhenko, 2017), the structure of the specialists in personnel management is as follows (Figure 5):

Fig 5: The structure of the specialists in personnel management



Source: the work by the author of this article

As can be seen in Figure 5, 6.99% of the total number of those employed in personnel management hold managerial positions, and that is approximately 17000 people (Ginieva, Dolzhenko, 2017). Considering the creation of a pool of HR community experts, it can be assumed that this number represents a potential quantitative characteristic of leaders or experts who could participate in or lead professional communities in an organization, city, region or higher level.

The analysis of the employment structure in personnel management allows for the conclusion on the most popular areas of interest for professional communities: HR records management (18.82%); payroll management (19.75%); training and development of personnel (11.13%); motivation and incentives (10.59%).

Obviously, the opportunities to share experience in solving problems, to develop professional competence, to obtain easy access to information and databases are the most valued by the members of professional communities. At the same time, some HR professional communities, as the analysis has revealed, set more ambitious goals, such as:

- assistance in public discussions and proposing the improvement of the legislative and regulatory framework of the Russian Federation in human resources management;
- proactive participation in the development of the human resources management services in the region;
- perfecting the culture of the personnel management, labour relations, and human resources management;
- the introduction of innovations in the personnel management policy in enterprises (Ginieva, Fedorova, 2010).

2.3 The third stage of the study. The assessment of the communities' readiness to implement federal objectives aimed at the development of the system of professional qualifications in personnel management.

In 2015 the Professional HR Qualifications Council (PQC) was established to deal with the issues related to the design and development of the system of professional qualifications in personnel management. The Council represents all the interested parties – representatives of All-Russia associations of employers, professional communities, employers, representatives of the system of vocational education and training, and public authorities¹. The role of professional communities in the work of the Council seems to be a key one, which is why one of the stages of our study was devoted to finding out if the leaders of professional communities are willing to develop the system of professional qualifications in their regions.

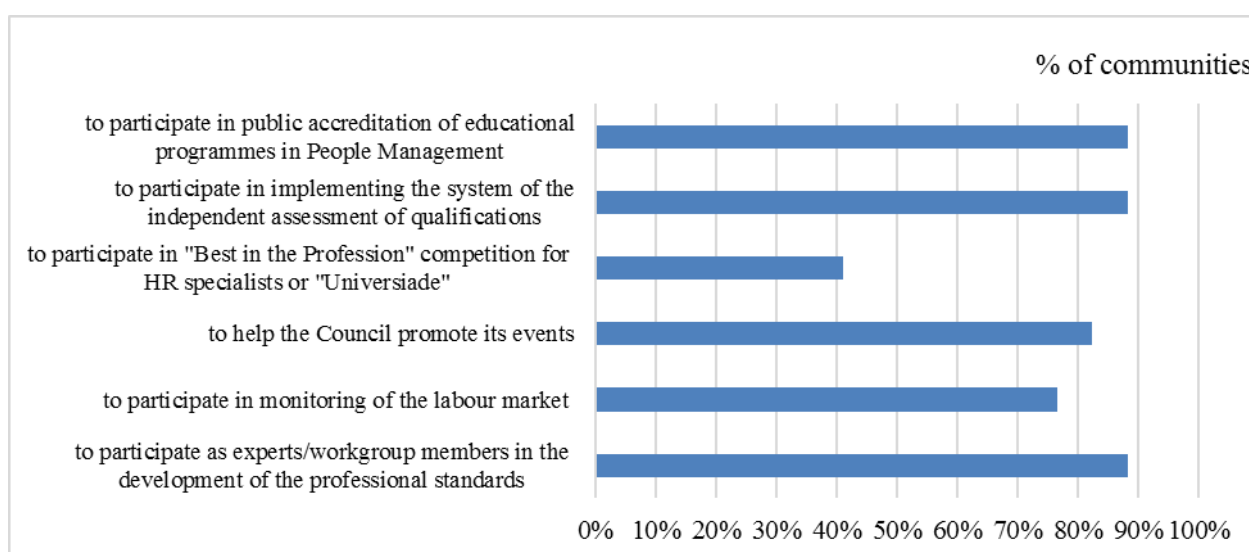
The authors of the study together with the experts of the labour market monitoring group of the Professional HR Qualifications Council invited 55 out of the studied 104 communities to participate in the survey. And the findings of the survey showed that not all of the selected communities are ready to implement the required activities: only 17 communities (31% of the total number of the respondents) expressed their willingness to cooperate. According to the

¹ Internet site of the Professional HR Qualifications Council (PQC) // <http://sovethr.ru/>

survey participants, the main reasons for being unprepared to cooperate were the lack of sufficient number of experts competent in the field; the lack of finance to promote the topic and to introduce the independent assessment of qualifications in the regions; the lack of feasible economic benefit from working in this sphere (this being especially important for profit making associations).

The HR communities that expressed their willingness to participate in the development of the system of professional qualifications in personnel management identified the following areas of cooperation presented in Figure 6.

Fig 6: The ways HR communities can cooperate to develop the system of professional qualifications in personnel management



Source: the work by the author of this article

As can be seen in Figure 6, the most popular areas that HR communities are willing to participate in, are:

1. The participation of the professional community experts in the development and approbation of the professional standards in personnel management (88% of communities are prepared to participate).
2. The participation in the development or implementation of the independent assessment of qualifications, including obtaining official approval as the Qualifications Assessment Center (88%).
3. The participation of the professional community experts in the public accreditation of educational programs in the human resources management (88%).

The communities expressed less interest in participating in "Best in the Profession" competition for HR specialists, or "Universiade" (41% of the communities).

We believe that this breakdown is due to the fact that the independent assessment of qualifications, the expert participation in the assessment of qualifications and accreditation of educational programs involve financial rewards and competitions do not.

We consider appropriate to take into account the social attitude of communities when they are accredited by the Professional HR Qualifications Council. To be eligible to provide the independent assessment of qualifications, the communities should fully cooperate with the Professional HR Qualifications Council in all the activities related to the development of the HR profession, the identification and support of the best people in the profession, activities related to conducting researches of the labor market and forecasting trends in the HR profession, etc.

Conclusion

Under the current conditions, the significance of professional communities in organizations, in the labour market, in the economy as well as in society, is more important than ever. As the situation is constantly changing, and the existing regulatory authorities cannot guarantee the effectiveness of relations between entities, professional communities are created to solve internal problems. This is especially relevant to personnel management as the independent system of competencies and qualifications is being currently developed by the state. We believe that the professional standards and the independent assessment of qualifications will not be of the high standard if representatives of professional communities are not engaged in the development process.

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