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Police and Performance Related Pay: An Exploratory Study of Rewarding Individual Performance in the Police Service

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Abstract

The objective of this exploratory study is to assess the perceptions of a group of serving police officers of relating pay and performance within a county police service. The research project has two key elements - a literature survey and a qualitative case study which together form the basis for the study. The study includes interviews with a sample group of police officers of varying rank.

The police service relies on the use of multi-skilled teams in order to work effectively. Academics have suggested that PRP can be divisive and this paper concludes that an individually based PRP system will act to demotivate frontline police officers. The consensus of participants was that the introduction of such a system would be at expense of the quality of service delivery.

Key Words: Police, individual performance related pay (PRP), new public management, frontline officers.

Introduction

The objective of this exploratory study is to assess serving police officers' views of relating pay and performance in the context of a county police service. The research focuses on the governmental changes and reforms that have been aimed at modernising the police service of England and Wales to create a performance related culture. It is into such a culture that performance related pay (PRP) for all ranks could be potentially implemented.

Individually based PRP schemes may encourage undesirable behaviour, whereby workers may shirk important activities, in favour of those that are measured and upon which payments and rewards are based. This paper explores the attitude of serving police officers to such a system, through interviewing serving police officers. Its objective is to discover their attitudes and opinions in a previously neglected research area.

Literature Review

PRP systems have been developed in public sector services (PSS) over the past 25 years as part of a government modernisation agenda. This being in the context of the new public management model (NPM) (Alcock, P. 2003) aimed at improving governance and efficiency (Christensen, T. Laegreid, P. 2005). Through developing a business orientated approach to the delivery of public services (Hood 1995, Laurence (2006)) a transformation has taken place - with (*inter alia*), an emphasis on outcomes rather than processes, there has been a shift from fixed pay towards at least acceptance (and beyond in certain services) of the concept of variable pay. This as a means of potentially improving performance within a culture where economy, efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery is the priority (Alcock, P. 2003).

PRP was introduced as early as 1986 for National Health Service (NHS) managers. Dowling and Richardson (1997) concluded that the scheme was working to some extent, but with a limited impact on motivation and behaviour. O'Donnell's (1998) view was the scheme contained a general assumption that staff would be motivated to work harder if pay was directly linked to performance. This conjecture was a practical one if using Vroom's Expectancy Theory of motivation¹ as a basis. McCausland, Pouliakas, and Theodossiou, (2005) use expectancy theory as a basis for arguing that PRP are likely to impact on the motivation of individuals. Dowling and Richardson (1997) show for the NHS that, although the scheme had been classed as successful this was not directly related to the financial reward itself. They also note complaints that the sizes of the payments were seen to be insultingly small, that financial rewards have been unpredictable and significantly smaller than first stated.

1 Vroom's Expectancy Theory - Individual employees are expected to choose to perform to the level that maximises their best interests.

Marsden *et al*, (2004) found that PRP is a system by which the pay bill could be reduced. In their survey of 5000 Civil Servants over 60% believed a quota was applied in order to keep wage payments down, 55% supposed they would not be rewarded even if their attainment was sufficient and 40% regarded the system as a subjective means by which managers could reward favourites. Their research indicates that if too many targets/objectives are set or they are too complex a successful incentive system will not result. They also stated that the underlying principle for the use of PRP was outlined in Kaplan's principle-agent moral hazard model². Where workers are rewarded on attainment of pre-stated objectives and there is an inability for managers to directly monitor the effort of the worker there may be a possibility of rewarding a number of undesirable outcomes. This issue was also raised by Kerr (1975) where incentive systems were 'fouled up' because there is an over emphasis on visible behaviour and an obsession with objective criterion.

Burgess and Metcalfe (1999) suggest that where there are multiple objectives from multiple principals, the presence of PRP may be inappropriate. Burgess and Ratto (2003) suggest that only when output is perfectly observable does it provide a perfect indicator of the agent's effort. There is evidence, however, for the argument that the clearer classification of objectives brought about by PRP schemes does have a positive effect on motivation and effort even where the financial rewards do not. This may be a result of the reduction of the moral hazard mentioned by McCausland *et al* (2005), whereby the interests of the worker and the organisation were aligned through clearer performance objective setting. This can be seen as independent of pay.

The Matkinson Report 2000, (cited in Marsden, 2004) determined that motivation for public employees was not effected by PRP. Marsden argues that PRP must introduce certain positive elements, other than increasing motivation, due to the support of the scheme by three consecutive governments; as such motivation is regarded as a secondary function. Although a number of employees may resent the introduction of the scheme and therefore do not perceive it as an incentive, this may not be reflected in an obvious deterioration in performance. It is may also be claimed that despite PRP in the public service employees may remain in their jobs irrespective of their performance. Naff and Crum (1999) using Perry's (1990) model, however, discovered that there was a 23% positive differentiation in performance from those workers with high levels of motivation compared to those with lower performance.

Brough (1994, cited in Hanley, 2005) states with limited resources, the distribution of payments can be restricted and as such organisations may opt only to reward those outstanding performers. This method of awarding payments may produce higher motivation in those already performing to the required standard and further de-motivating the majority of those whose performance needs improvement. O'Donnell (1998) claims that, not only does PRP negatively effect motivation it also has the ability to undermine teamwork and work place relationships.

Research, such as that conducted by Hanley (2005), demonstrates where teamwork was predominant the competition created discouraged collaboration and cooperation amongst staff. Further such a scheme creates 'single-minded', inflexible individuals who concentrate on the measurable and achievability in the short term. This is consistent with Vroom's prior mentioned expectancy theory, whereby the employee is maximising their best interest, in this case the most money in the shortest time possible. A comparison with the bonus culture in banks 'credit crunch' may be speculated as relevant here. Grimshaw (2000, cited in Schofield, 2001) agreed with the concept that PRP is individualistic and can have a detrimental effect on teamwork.

2 In the standard models of moral hazard, incentives to encourage the required level of effort are delivered by linking the agent's compensation to his performance.

Marsden (2003) argues that PRP schemes conflict with modern patterns of team working particularly where individuals have differing pay and working patterns. Hanley (2005) also sees PRP schemes in place in the public service as potentially divisive for staff relations. There were also claims of the schemes examined undermining co-operation with management.

The argument for team-based incentives made by Baker, Jensen and Murphy (1988) is the encouragement of mutual monitoring due to each individual performance effecting the likelihood and size of the team reward. Burgess and Ratto (2003), fifteen years on from Baker concede that free riders (individuals rewarded for others team members hard work), are a considerable problem when using team based incentives. Burgess *et al* (2004) state that the larger the team or the organisation the bigger the free rider problem becomes. Analysis by Kandal and Lazear (1992), however, of the interaction connecting peer monitoring and effort, identifies that particularly in smaller groups, peer monitoring can reduce such problems. The reduction is explained to be a result of the increased possibility of getting caught and the feelings of guilt when relationships are established within long-term groups. Burgess *et al* (2004) support these findings but state that the free riding problem is overcome in small teams but still likely in larger groups.

In order to implement the necessary changes of NPM in to the PSS and in particular the police, various reforms were required. Savage (2002) reveals that the police service has been one of the last PSS to undergo reform and arguably not subject to such radical reforms as seen elsewhere. Reform broadly only began during the 1990's with the Sheehy inquiry of 1993 resulting in a report of 272 recommendations. They included elimination of three supervisory ranks (Chief Inspector, Chief Superintendent and Deputy Chief Constable) and more ten-year contracts were proposed subject to renewal at five-year intervals there after. The new type of contracts would be renewable on a performance basis and unsatisfactory performance would result in the power to terminate employment. As with the recommendation to abolish the three supervisory ranks, these contracts have not yet been implemented widely.

Pay was suggested to be set according to skills and experience, which would be measurable on a 12-point matrix with the abolition of automatic pay increases, overtime and allowances. Some allowances, such as clothing allowances for plain clothed officers, were abolished as a result of the 1993 White Paper that followed the report. However automatic pay increases overtime are still very present in the Police Service of England and Wales. The Audit Commission (2000) claimed there was no coherent link between performance improvements and the rise in spending (mainly pay) in police forces.

A simple pay structure where pay was determined by rank and service length was seen not to reflect the varying responsibilities and roles of officers; for example a police officer serving in a rural area would not be seen to face the same challenging problems as those of inner city officers. The system of pay created disincentives for officers to work in the roles most valued by the public.

The policies set out in the 2001 white paper, Policing a New Century: a Blueprint for Reform, signified an important change to many elements of policing in England and Wales. The White Paper was an attempt to improve service delivery and increase contact with local communities and, as a result, improving public confidence. In addition the paper looked to improve morale and performance within the service itself. Laying the foundations for the future, this paper looks to enabling police to meet the ever changing and developing needs of the 21st century society through flexibility. Moreover the paper sought to improve professionalism within the police service. The arrangements suggested in 2001 for police pay were an amalgamation of basic payments determined by length of service and rank, with increased pay for overtime.

The pay reforms provided a reward system to aid in attracting and retaining police officers in those posts regarded as unattractive. Implemented in May 2002, in preparation for the initial payments in April 2003, a competence-related threshold pay system was introduced for officers who have served a minimum of one year at the maximum increment of their pay scale. The scheme was devised to recognise and reward experienced officers who are able to demonstrate high professional competence under criteria based on national standards.

Also introduced by the 2002 pay reforms were bonuses for senior officers whereby four long-term individual objectives were set, as part of a three year deal. These objectives were within their personal control, and are broken down into annual performance targets, which once achieved generate payment at the end of a twelve-month cycle.

Research Methodology

As the research is exploratory a qualitative approach has been adopted to allow the opportunity for a hypothesis to be developed without obligation for testing, as well as permitting an unstructured format that gave flexibility to the research (Silverman, 2000). The research focuses on one local authority police force although it is recognised that it is difficult to assume that similar results would be achieved in other forces (Bryman, 2001).

Qualitative interviews were chosen as a means of collecting information. In total fourteen police officers were interviewed but it was only possible to use data on thirteen of those officers (5 constables, 6 sergeants, 1 inspectors and a chief inspector) as the confidentiality of the fourteenth officer would have been compromised due to the role performed. Officers had a range of experience from under one year to over twenty.

The sampling methodology adopted a 'snowball approach' to obtain the sample of officers for interview. David and Sutton (2004) define snowball sampling as a process whereby the researcher makes contact with a single or small number of individuals appropriate for research participation, who will subsequently establish contact between the researcher and other suitable participants. The process of each new participant recruiting another potential participant continues until the required sample size has been reached (Heckathor, 1997). In the instance of this project a Detective Sergeant was contacted, and through this individual the other officers were recruited.

Bryman (2001) describes this type of sampling method as one of convenience and in no way random since the sample is derived from the social networks of those who choose to participate. As a consequence the method is said to produce a bias sample and can create immense difficulties when assessing the extent to which the sample is representative (David and Sutton, 2004). On the other hand Bryman (2001) argues that external validity and the ability to generalize is less of a problem when the sample method is used as part of qualitative, rather than quantitative research. Furthermore he states that the theoretical strategy³ used for qualitative research is much better suited to the snowball sampling method than the statistical sampling⁴ approach of quantitative research.

The snowball sampling method, was persuasive for an exploratory study in that it was recognised that associated officers were more inclined to set aside time from their busy schedule if someone familiar rather than a stranger had originally approached them. A time limit on interviews was put in place in order to seek permission from senior officers and agreement from participants themselves.

3 Theoretical strategy refers to sampling carried out so that emerging theoretical considerations guide the selection of cases or research participants.

4 Statistical Sample refers to a randomly selected sample from which results are able to be generalised to the population from which the sample was drawn.

Face-to-face interviews were utilised and semi-structured interviews were adopted to allow officers the freedom to discuss some areas in more depth should they wish. The researchers had no influence over who volunteered to take part in this study.

In investigating and evaluating a contemporary issue that has been subject to little research, it was seen as important not to restrict the respondent's discussions by only asking the prepared questions. The opportunity for open conversation assisted in relaxing the participants, whereby questions were eased into conversation rather than subjecting the participant to quick fire groups of questions. The use of open-ended questions and a semi structured interview thus assisted in the collection of broader answers and allowed participants to respond to questions in their own words (Singleton *et al*, 1988).

Findings & Evaluation

The initial focus of the project was on a set of questions that attempted to establish attitudes and perceptions towards how performance is and could be rewarded. Five of the thirteen respondents believe they were not currently paid in accordance with their performance, experience, qualifications, responsibility or the skill required for their position. Two constables, the chief inspector, and three sergeants comprised this group. The three remaining sergeants stated they were paid in accordance with these elements in their role. Of the four remaining respondents three constables claimed they were paid in relation to their experience and the inspector stated his pay reflected the responsibility of the position.

The interviews continued with interviewees receiving a set of statements to which they were required to apply a ranking followed by an explanation. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that officers, with work related qualifications, should receive additional pay. Of the majority of officers with ten or more years experience 2 strongly agreed, 2 agreed and 1 was neutral with regard to this statement. For officers with less than 10 years service 3 strongly agreed, 2 agreed and 3 disagreed. The general consensus from the comments of both groups was that an officer's personal development should be recognised and encouraged, but only rewarded when those skills are utilized for specific tasks or roles. Those who disagreed suggested that officers who attain qualifications are still performing the same roles as those equal to them. They also stated that studying theories and hypothetical situations couldn't prepare an officer for the decisions and actions required by individuals in high-pressure situations. To follow on from this questions the interviewees were asked if they did not have a qualification, but skills or experience that was in short supply, would they feel it was appropriate to receive an additional payment. The opinion of the majority of interviewees was that, if experience and skills are utilized and relevant to the role, the officer should be rewarded with an additional payment.

In response to the statement '*individuals should be paid solely on individual performance*'; as shown in Table 1, nine officers disagreed with this statement, four of whom did so strongly. Their views were based on the complexity of police work, the teamwork required in police work and the difficulty in measuring individual performance accurately and fairly. In addition, the hours and measurable performance of each officer was seen as varying according to the variety of tasks assigned to them. If performance were to be measured solely on individual performance, the majority of officers interviewed thought that this would divert attention from providing a good quality service to an emphasis based purely on the measurable and anything not measured would suffer. Qualitative aspects of policing were seen as likely to suffer in such a system.

Q5 'Individuals should be paid solely on individual performance' To what extent do you agree with this statement?					
Rank	Length of Service				
	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20+ years
1 Constable	Strongly Disagree				
3 Constable	Disagree				
5 Constable, Detective			Strongly Disagree		
8 Constable, Detective		Strongly Agree			
9 Constable, Detective	Strongly Disagree				
4 Inspector					Neutral
11 Inspector, Chief				Disagree	
2 Sergeant			Disagree		
6 Sergeant		Neutral			
10 Sergeant	Neutral				
12 Sergeant		Strongly Disagree			
13 Sergeant		Disagree			
7 Sergeant, Detective					Disagree

Table 1: Individual Pay and Performance

In terms of the principle of PRP seven participants agreed with the principle of rewarding performance and that excellent performance should be recognised. Four officers, who disagreed with this principle did so on the basis that it would be divisive, de-motivating and detrimental to teamwork and morale. These views related to the inability of measuring performance, especially in instances where a task requires a more thorough and lengthy investigation process, where there is an emphasis on victim support, or does not result in detection, such as that of a missing person case. Two officers remained neutral.

The following quotation is an example of the divergent behaviour foreseen by officers which will be created by competing for performance related pay. In the words of a constable who does not currently receive any form of additional pay;

"Officers will actually wind up drunk people on a Friday and Saturday night until they swear just so they can get an easy public order arrest and detection, they will most likely get assaulted in the process, that officer will then have two detections out of a situation they created themselves, which in turn increases the violent crime figures."

(Taken from field interview transcript of Subject 1)

Although the officers recognised that PRP would impact on competition the majority denied it could have a positive influence on standards. Essentially they believed competition arising from the introduction of PRP would, in one way or another, be detrimental to the service as a whole. Three officers agreed with the suggestion that performance related pay would indeed increase competition. However, a further three were neutral, two of whom did not give further information. The remaining officer went on to highlight the possibility of corruption and conflict of interest. Similarly another officer whom initially agreed with the statement further explained that the increase in competition would be to the detriment of serving the public.

Approximately 70 percent of the sample took the view that PRP would not re-enforce service objectives, whilst the residual 30 percent agreed that it may. The common understanding amongst participants is that achieving objectives and good figures is not necessarily indicative of good performance. The respondents predict PRP may increase the temptation to cut-corners and manipulate figures in order to achieve targets at any cost. Once more, the issue of morale and de-

motivation was highlighted in addition to the suggestion that PRP may encourage those officers who achieve their targets to then hold back until the next performance period commences. The police service already has well defined objectives of which there are areas that are concentrated on, at the expense of other worthwhile police activities.

There was 100 percent agreement amongst interviewees that PRP was not necessary to highlight poor performance irrespective of the length of service (Table 2). A system to monitor poor performance already existed in the force studied to tackle the problems arising from under achievers. The widespread opinion was that poor performers are the responsibility of supervisors and training and support should be given to those not reaching required service standards.

Q8 To what extent do you believe performance-related pay is needed in order to highlight poor performance?					
Rank	Length of Service				
	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20+ years
1 Constable	Not needed				
3 Constable	Not needed				
5 Constable, Detective			Not needed		
8 Constable, Detective	Good way - Not needed				
9 Constable, Detective	Not needed				
4 Inspector					Not needed
11 Inspector, Chief				Not needed	
2 Sergeant			Not needed		
6 Sergeant					
10 Sergeant	Not needed				
12 Sergeant		Not needed			
13 Sergeant		Not needed			
7 Sergeant, Detective					Not needed

Table 2: Performance Related Pay and Poor Performance

Faced with options, such as performance subjective pay increments or a 5% bonus as an incentive to work more effectively towards service targets, all officers having served 15 years or more believed the receipt of a bonus would increase the incentive to do just that. Furthermore two of the participating sergeants and two constables with less than 10 years experience also came to the same conclusion. Officers with 10-14 years service clearly stated that neither, increments nor bonuses would be an incentive as they believe it would create an "if your face fits" culture. Other officers who also rejected the use of performance subjective pay increments and bonuses did so because they did not join the service for monetary incentive, and believe that all officers should be striving for targets regardless. One officer stated:

"It gives me the incentive to find a new career"

(Taken from field interview transcript of Subject 1)

When issued with the statement 'Performance related pay does not contribute to the motivation of staff' 62 percent of respondents agreed. Many officers said they were motivated by job satisfaction and the personal achievement that entails. PRP was seen as potentially resulting in pay penalization of competent officers, who did not prioritise performance-related tasks in favour of other worthwhile activities, therefore creating a negative effect on morale and motivation. Such a system might also prevent these officers being promoted. The minority that challenged this statement believed PRP would eventually have a positive effect on motivation due to the lack of recognition and incentives currently in place. After implementation these respondents claimed those staff initially opposed to the scheme would begin to work toward payments. Goal congruence was thus be imposed by the system.

As raised in the literature review the three 'E's' are the underlining principles of police reform aimed at providing an efficient and effective police service at the lowest cost. Officers indicated that it was the lack of resources that would have the predominant impact on motivation rather than the absence of financial reward; 10 of the 13 officers felt the most significant factor affecting motivation was related to resourcing issues rather than pay.

One officer with more than a decade of experience argued that money could be much better spent, instead of employing an ever-increasing amount of police staff to check police officers paper work, monitor performance and producing endless lists of figures stating;

"Save money, go back to trusting your officers to give a days work for a days pay. Trust the Supervisors to monitor their staff's sickness, paperwork and work effort after all that's what supervising is.

From the findings it was evident that officers do not feel PRP is required to reinforce service objectives as such objectives are already well established and under PRP it was unlikely that objectives could be clearer or more accepted such that a positive impact on motivation would not be achieved (as per Burgess and Ratto (2003)). It was peer review and self pride which was seen as important in motivating officers with the inspector stating;

"Self and peer recognition of individual performance has a far greater impact on self esteem"
(Taken from field interview transcript of Subject 4)

The officers saw additional payments as a reward for personal development through achievement of additional qualifications receiving a better response from officers than that of PRP

It has been suggested that motivation is often key to performance, however Marsden (2004, 2003, 2001), Burgess *et al* (1999, 2003, 2004) and The Matkinson Report (2000, cited by Marsden, 2004) state PRP in general does not affect motivation in a public service environment. Marsden (2004) also states that this may be reflected by a decline in performance. The majority (8) of officers interviewed (especially with longer service) likewise agreed that PRP does not contribute to motivation; this is represented in Table 3.

Q11 'Performance-related pay does not contribute to the motivation of staff' To what extent do you agree with this statement?					
Rank	Length of Service				
	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years	20+ years
1 Constable	Strongly Agree				
3 Constable	Disagree				
5 Constable, Detective			Strongly Agree		
8 Constable, Detective		Disagree			
9 Constable, Detective	Strongly Agree				
4 Inspector					Agree
11 Inspector, Chief				Neutral	
2 Sergeant			Agree		
6 Sergeant		Disagree			
10 Sergeant	Disagree				
12 Sergeant		Strongly Agree			
13 Sergeant		Strongly Agree			
7 Sergeant, Detective					Agree

Table 3: Question 11 Breakdown as Per Length of Service

As can be seen officers gave varying responses but the most common response is that many police officers do not see PRP as contributing to motivation. In developing this during the interviews officers commented that colleagues are unlikely to see such payments as fair, (coinciding with Marsden *et al* (2001)) and that many officers are driven by other satisfaction factors, such as a job facilitates, the nature of the police work etc. The majority of officers interviewed chose job satisfaction, providing a public service, rewarding work, and others along the line there of, as reasons for joining the service and aspects most important to them in their work. Although salary was mentioned, it was done so with significantly less frequency than other factors, thus supporting Houston's (2000) findings that public sector employees position meaningful work above that of high income. Houston's study also showed that job security can be one of the most important extrinsic factor when officers chose to join the police service.

It was reiterated by many officers during interviews that should a PRP scheme be implemented, a divide between officers would be created. A number of statements were also made, not dissimilar to that of the following taken from Subject 9's interview transcript;

"In a job as diverse as that of a police officer there is no way to fairly and accurately measure performance"

(Taken from field interview transcript of Subject 9)

This statement supports Wragg *et al* (2003) study where it was found that within the education system a number of heads were opposed to PRP due to the scheme being divisive and impossible to implement fairly amongst other things.

In terms of the police this divisiveness is seen by officers to be caused by the resulting unhealthy competition, whereby officers would be concerned only with their individual achievements at the expense of the team. Similar to the NHS, the Police Forces of England and Wales require the use of teams that consist of multi-skilled personnel and whose contribution to measured tasks will vary. In some cases, work completed may not result in a measurable outcome; officers therefore suggested that it would be increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to establish an individual's performance. Individuals are required to work not only towards their personal development objectives, but toward local and national objectives also, which Burgess and Metcalfe (1999) suggest may be indicators that PRP schemes are inappropriate for an organisation like the Police Service.

The Home Office (2001) white paper 'Policing a New Century: a Blueprint for Reform' stated that neither detection rates nor convictions rates can be used solely to assess the effectiveness of the police service. However, recent news over the resignation of DC Johnno Hills has brought to light the emphasis placed on detections when measuring police performance. A BBC news article (2007) states how DC Hills was placed under pressure to massage detection figures. During interviews with participants, a number of officers described this kind of divergent behaviour would almost certainly occur were PRP to be implemented for frontline officers.

"It can lead to people taking short cuts, massaging figures etc"

(Taken from field interview transcript of Subject 7)

Conclusion

While it is recognised that this is an exploratory study the suggested hypothesis developed from the findings of this preliminary research supports the view of a negative potential impact of individually based PRP system in a team based environment such as the police service. The aim of the research was to assess the impact PRP may have on the behaviour of frontline officers. Serious issues and concerns were raised with regard to the introduction of PRP for frontline officers by such officers ultimately suggesting that a system may do more harm than good. The interviews suggest that where performance cannot be directly monitored there is the risk of rewarding undesired behaviour. The evidence collected is supportive of a view that an incentive systems can be 'fouled up' because there is an over emphasis on visible behaviour and an obsession with measureable so termed 'objective' criterion. Qualitative factors so potentially important in police work can thus suffer. The conflict between team working in the police and individually based PRP was found to potentially adversely affect team work with a growth in the cult of the individual. This problem was emphasised by the complexity of police work. The evidence gathered suggests that the adoption of PRP by the police service would be divisive, de-motivating and detrimental to team work.

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