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Issues and Themes in Publishing

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Publishing Newsletters and Associated Information Products in Organisations

By

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1. Introduction

Organisations are entities like institutions and associations that exist to achieve a particular purpose and collective goal. They do not exist in isolation. They are linked with relationships both within and outside their environments. For internal and external relationships to thrive, there is need for accurate and adequate communication. Therefore, organizations are left with no choice than to publish information channels that will enhance effective and efficient information dissemination, productivity and good public image. One of the most important channels of information published by organisations is newsletter. Newsletters are cost-effective media for communicating with staff, building good relationships with customers, advertising new products and gaining prospective markets. This chapter focused on types of organisations, the processes and importance of publishing newsletters in organisations. It also examined the publication of associated information products in organisations.

2. Meaning of Organisation and Types

An organisation simply denotes a group of individuals driven towards the achievement of defined goals and objectives. It is 'constituted of humans, therefore we can safely refer to it as a social and economic

entity. Ganguly (2015) quoting Hecht (1980) opined that an organisation is 'a complicated system of interactions between people working at various levels and reacting with the social, economic, cultural, political and competitive systems'. The Business Dictionary (2015) defined an organisation as 'a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. All organizations have a management structure that ensures relationships between various activities and the members, subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities and authority to carry out varying tasks.' The word organisation is derived from the greek word *organon*, (which got its root from the word *ergon*) which means organ; it could also be defined as an entity, an institution or an association which is decked with unique collective goals and linked to an external environment (Wikipedia, 2015). The underlining features of any organisation is its objectives or goals and the existence of individuals who are decked primarily with the responsibility of seeing to the prompt attainment of these outlined goals and objectives. The attainment of these goals is also closely linked to the kind of structures and systems laid down by the management team in that organisation. The management team of any organisation is responsible for building structures and taking conscious, targeted, deliberate and coordinated efforts to ensure goals are attained and this requires formal planning, division of labour and leadership (Bernard, n.d.). These structures are put in place to ensure controlled and effective performance of individuals on the organisation.

Various types of organisations exist and these variations come as a result of established structures, values and culture. The values and cultures of any organisation play a major role in the vision, policies and mission of that organisation. The different types of organisation include:

- Formal and Informal organisations
- Profit-oriented and not-for-profit oriented organisations

Formal and Informal Organisations

A formal organisation is made up formally recognised, laid down and established statuses of the members (Sociology Guide, 2015); there is less situation of personal relationship between its members unlike the informal organisation where the reverse is the case. Bizstudyportal (n.d.)

defined formal organization from the management point of view as 'the organisation structure which is designed and prescribed by the management of an enterprise; he however noted that it is not necessarily represented in the form of an organisation chart revealing designation of various people employed in the organisation, the hierarchical levels, reporting relationships and other channels for control and coordination. A simple definition of formal organisation was given by Ganguly (2015) as 'an official hierarchy and lines of authority, with their spans of control. On the contrary, an informal organisation as defined by Bizstudyportal (n.d.) is 'the interlocking social structure that governs how people function and work together in practice; it is the aggregate of behaviours, interactions, norms, personal and professional connections through which responsibilities are achieved and cordial relationships are nurtured among people who share common organisational affiliation or cluster of affiliations, goals and objectives'. Hartzell (2003) reiterated that the term informal organisation was brought to light by Chester Bernard; 'who compared informal organisations to cliques or exclusive groups of people that naturally forms over time; this comparison was fuelled by some of the defining features of informal organisations which include the level of personal relationship that exists among workers and the level of interaction among workers in the informal organisation setting.

Puraji (2015) opined that the formal organisational structure outlines vividly the activities to be performed by every individual in the organisation and also the superior-subordinate relationship without leaving out the designations of every single individual in the organisation; there are usually no rooms for assumptions as all activities are clearly spelt out.

The level of flexibility of the operations in informal organisations is higher as compared to formal organisation; hence the level of productivity is usually higher. Individuals in the informal organisation are given more room for creativity and innovation, collaborations and better problem solving methods are also practiced.

In a formal organisation setting, power and authority is attached to the position not the person occupying the position but the case is different in the informal organisation where power is given to the

individual and not the position. It is however paramount to note that in any formal organisation, there is usually the existence of numerous informal organizations. Some of the defining features of formal organisations include:

- Hierarchical structure of operation and defined methods of coordination of activities in order to achieve stated goals.

- Laid out delegation of authority among individuals in the organization. There is well defined span of control with each subordinate reporting directly to one superior

- No sentiments or personal relationship exists between staff

- Activities are based on division of labour and specialization in order to achieve efficiency; everyone in the organisation has their responsibility clearly outlined and spelt out hence there is no issue of overlapping/duplicating functions or breaking of ranks

- Focus and attention is place on the jobs to be achieved and the individuals who are saddled with the responsibility of carrying out these jobs.

- The organisation is deliberately formed and created

Some of the distinguishing characteristics of informal organisations include:

- The existence of social and informal relationships and interactions exist among individuals

- There is the existence of cordial, friendly and even hostile interactions among individuals. There is high level of independency in the channels of communication existing in the organisation; someone in a lower cadre can easily have contact with a fellow in a higher cadre.

- High level of flexibility exist and the structures are fairly loosed; there is no clearly written rules and regulation governing activities of interrelationship in the organisation

- Its creation is dependent on the existence of a formal organisation, that is, it is based on a formal organization where people have informal relations (Pujari, 2015)

- Unlike the formal organisation, informal organisations are not deliberately created

- Informal organisations do not have its own rules and regulations, they do not have any laid down system of coordination and authority (Akrani, 2011).

Profit - Oriented and Non-Profit Oriented Organisations

Profit - oriented organization just like the name goes is an organisation that carries out operations with an aim of making profit. The Business Dictionary (2015) defined profit - oriented organisation as 'a business or other organisation whose primary goal is making money (a profit). Non - profit oriented organisations are defined as those organisations that focuse on helping the community and they are usually concerned with money only as much as necessary to keep the organisation operating.' Similarly McNamara (n.d.) defined profit - oriented (Business) organisations 'as organisations that exist primarily to generate profit, that is, to take in more money than it spends while he viewed non-profit organisations as organisations that exist to provide a particular service to the community, that is the word 'non-profit' here implies a business that has rules that forbid the distribution of profits to owners.' In a profit - oriented organisation, the management team ensures that the marginal profit exceeds the marginal cost or at a worse case they break even that is the marginal cost is equal to the marginal profit. Non-profit organisation utilizes its surplus revenues to further achieve its objectives and mission instead of distributing its surplus income to the organisation's members as profits.

Not-for-profit making organizations possess features that are in opposition to profit oriented business organizations. Some of these features as highlighted by Fritz (2015) include:

- The main mission of these organizations is to carry out activities not with the primary aim of making profit

- Incomes generated are never shared among members but rather there is a system of recycling where the income is put back in any form into the operations of the organizations

- The ownership of non-profit organizations are not in the hands of a single individual but usually it is owned by the public and the control is usually exercised by the board of directors or trustees and these trustees act as a group.

Organizations (whether profit or non – profit oriented, formal or informal) disseminate information to their staff, customers, other stakeholders and the general public from time to time. They utilize different channels for information dissemination. Arguably, one of the most important channels of information dissemination is newsletter.

3. Newsletters

A newsletter can simply be defined as a periodically produced and published material by a group of individuals, body or organization, which contains certain information for audience viewing. Wikipedia (2015) defined a newsletter as 'a regularly distributed publication that is generally about one main topic of interest to its subscribers'. In a similar vein, Business Dictionary (2015) defined a newsletter as 'a small, printed (generally on letter-size paper), or published through other means, newspaper or digest aimed for a select audience on a narrow subject, or for circulation within an organization.

Some of the main features of any newsletter are that it is highly customer - oriented or customer - centered; Newsletters are directed towards the interest of the customers and other stakeholders. Newsletters serve as formal feedback channels between the organization and stakeholders. In the case of profit – oriented organizations, customers are expected to properly internalized the contents of the newsletter and revert back to the organization if the need arises. It is important to note that organizations also make use of the medium of the newsletters to publicize new products and services to their customers; this medium is fast and highly efficient. Some examples of newsletters include news bulletins, pamphlet, etc.

3.1. Types of Newsletters

- Employee Newsletters: this kind of newsletters serves as a link between the employers and employees in an organization. This newsletter serves as a means of notifying and informing the employees on current happenings, activities, achievements and objectives of the organization.

- Consumer Newsletters: this kind of newsletters contains information that is of benefit to the customers or clients. Singer (2015) reiterated that 'the primary function of a customer newsletter is as a public relations/low key advertising device sent to customers.' We can therefore say that a consumer newsletter publicizes information about the organization to the consumers.

- Thematic Newsletters: These kinds of newsletters concentrate on a single subject area. The articles or write up contained in the newsletters could be very brief or lengthy but they are restricted to one subject area.

3.2. Forms of Newsletters: Print and Electronic

Print Newsletters: Print Newsletters are tangible, printed document which may appear in various shapes, sizes, styles, and even content. The print newsletter is a short publication that contains specific information about an organization. It must be attractive and appealing to the eye of members of the public. The contents of a newsletter must be accurate, factual, brief and impartial and should be an effective communication tool. Some of the advantages of print newsletters are as listed below:

- you can read a print newsletter anywhere
- Easy reading especially for longer documents which could pose tiresome when scrolling on a computer screen
- Stands out more because most people get fewer letters than e-mails

Disadvantages

- High costs of production, it requires an investment for printing and mailing, and in some cases, design.

- Production and delivery take longer than for e-newsletters

E-Newsletters: Many organizations/ institutions struggle to find creative ways to keep in touch with staff/ clients. E-newsletters are one option to consider. In this electronic age, email has become the most pervasive and fastest growing means of connection and communication between individuals and organizations. An email newsletter is a message that is sent out to subscribers typically on a regular interval. Email newsletters may be sent daily, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or even annually. The content of email newsletters varies with each edition. Some email newsletters are so popular that they can sell advertising space. Email newsletters typically focus more on providing information and less on sales promotion, which helps businesses establish themselves as experts in their fields. Organizations often use them to announce upcoming events to members and volunteers. (Emaillogics Corp, 2006)

Advantages

- It can be Interactive, and you can include links direct to your website
- we can instantly track to know how many and who opened our e-newsletter; how many clicks per day
- It can facilitate easy and immediate interaction with clients prompting dialogue with feed-back.
- instant delivery
- cost effective as there is no cost for printing or postage
- It serves as a vehicle for promotional content, competitions and news feeds
- Provides instant contact for urgent announcements or releases.
- Customers can receive messages wherever they are, either at home, at work or mobile.

Many customers spend a majority of their time at a computer where the message is delivered.

Disadvantages

- an e- newsletter might not get through to those who have subscribed because it may get caught in spam filter
- It is easy to ignore and delete e- newsletters
- problem of obtaining the e-mail addresses of all intended recipients
- You need permission to add e-mail addresses to your distribution list
- Not so good for long articles

3.3. Editorial Boards of Newsletters

Depending on the scope of a newsletter, the editorial board could be made up of between 2 to 12 persons who may or may not be geographically close owing to IT (information technology).Their brief is to ensure that quality is maintained and articles are produced in a timely and accurate manner, with few or no writing errors.

Editorial boards usually consist of experts in their disciplines, persons who have established themselves as authority in their fields. The editorial board among other assignments, set policy for the publication. The composition of a newsletter board varies from one organization to another but more often than not, it comprises of: the editor - in - chief, the secretary, the Managing Editor, the Copy Editor and other Assistant Editors. An editorial board may also include Associate, Assistant, and Topic Editors, that are nominated or appointed by and report to the editor.

3.4.   Function of Editorial Boards

- Advertorial/ solicitation: responsible for soliciting materials to be published
- Content: the board is responsible for the type of content produced by their newsletter, the nature and number of stories/articles to

Disadvantages

- an e- newsletter might not get through to those who have subscribed because it may get caught in spam filter
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3.4.   Function of Editorial Boards

- Advertorial/ solicitation: responsible for soliciting materials to be published
- Content: the board is responsible for the type of content produced by their newsletter, the nature and number of stories/articles to

be written, check article facts and ensuring that an article matches in-house style guides.

- Packaging: The board is also responsible for packaging newsletter into an attractive publication; this involves determining the look and features of any given edition of the newsletter.

- Timing: setting and enforcing deadlines, coordinating frequency of publication

- Policy/guidelines: sets guidelines and expectations for contributors.

- Legal boundaries: determine legal boundaries and to keep the newspaper or magazine from being sued to a law court.

3.5. The Newsletter Editor-in-Chief

The Editor-in-Chief is responsible for defining the roles of every member of the editorial board which in most cases are appointed by him or the parent institution. Every other member of the board reports to him. The Editor-in-Chief ensures that the members of editorial board are identified and recognized in the newsletter and that they receive the necessary training/briefing which would equip them to adequately perform editorial functions and responsibilities.

Skills and competencies of Editor-in-Chief

- A newsletter Editor –in- Chief must have excellent written and verbal communication skills. This skill will enable him to proofread, write articles and place advertisements.

- Social skills: he needs to know how to relate with different people as he will also have to work with contributors, advertisers, printers and other people involved in the newsletter's production.

- Layout and design skills are useful, as some editors determine the basic setup of the newsletter and choose illustrations or edit photographs.

- The newsletter editor puts all the parts of the newsletter together. Articles, sidebars, the masthead, illustrations and photographs,

columns and other special features are all under the editor's control. She may create the newsletter's design or fit the pieces into a predetermined layout.

- Prepares a budget of estimated income and expenses for Board meetings and considerations.

- Making editorial decisions with reasonable speed and communicating them in a clear and constructive manner.

- Must be IT Savvy: A newsletter editor needs to know how to use a computer and professional desktop publishing software. He may also need to know how to do image editing using the editing software.

- Time management skills: The newsletter editor must have skills in managing time so as to meet up with publication dates.

- To produce a newsletter, an editor must understand the design, goals, writing techniques, assembly procedures, printing and distribution concepts.

4. Importance of Publishing Newsletters in Organisations

The importance of newsletters cannot be over emphasized. As earlier noted, newsletters are channels of communication. They are used to communicate organizational decisions, achievements and recent developments to staff, customers and other stakeholders. Bruce, Ellis and Delury (2006) stressed that a newsletter is an inherent part of an organization, as it acts as a glue to bind people together or as 'oil' to lubricate serial and economic relations in any organization . It is also a web to mark lines, influence and interactions.

Kenidi (2002) noted that newsletter as a form of organizational communication tool enables an organization to foster social cohesion. Newsletters open lines of communication, they encourage active participation and at the same time increase awareness about important issues in organizations.

Newsletters are veritable methods of disseminating information about organizations and keeping customers in touch. Daniel (2007)

enumerated the importance of a newsletter in any organization as follows: it influences and improves the general public perception about the organization; it raises awareness about an imminent or current effort change or any other important issue that require action on the part of investors and partnership and so on.

Furthermore, newsletters are also used in organizations to promote products and services, build relationships with customers and prospects; they provide valuable information to organizational members and customers; they are used to keep employees informed of organizational developments. Experts, consultants and professionals of all types have used newsletters for many years for communication of advice, insights and wisdom (Griffin, 2015).

United Square Dancer of America (2013) stated that newsletter is essential to successful organizational operations; it is a picture of the organization and it reflects on the organizational operations. The publishing of newsletters will ensure that stakeholders are aware of organizational plans and schedule of events so that members can plan ahead.

5. Planning, Design and Production of Newsletters

Planning, design and production of newsletters encapsulate critical processes, stages and strategies of any newsletter life circle. According to LIFE factsheet (2015), the following issues must be considered in the designing, planning and production processes:

1. Timely production
2. Simple and user-friendly format
3. Attractive presentation
4. Easy to read text
5. Careful editing

i. **Timely production**: in planning newsletter production, it is important that the newsletter is issued timely and at a regular interval. Therefore, there is need for proper planning and pro-

activeness in the management of the production process. Any delay or failure could lead to inability to meet the publishing deadline. The production process begins with collation of publishable information materials from individuals or units ranging from management to the marketing department. The publications or public or corporate affairs unit is usually responsible for collation, editing, packaging and final production of newsletters. The Editor (or his representative) is saddled with the responsibility of closely working with the printing press to ensure that the production dates are sacrosanct.

ii. Simple and User-Friendly Format

Having a format for your newsletters production implies that you don't need to start from scratch each time you begin preparing a new issue. It also provides the newsletter with identity, integrity and credibility.

Newsletters can as well be produced in print or/and electronic format. The latter version is easy to handle and allows a broad and cost-effective dissemination. The print version can be issued because there are some people who may be interested in hard copies of the organizational newsletters. In this case, a limited amount of printed copies can be sent to selected target groups who may be interested. The trend these days is producing newsletters in electronic format. The advantages of electronic format have been discussed earlier.

iii. Attractive presentation

First impressions are very important. A newsletter that is attractive and which also appears relevant and uncomplicated will encourage people to read further. Newsletters should be attractive but simple in their presentations. Basic newsletter contents include lead stories, a number of shorter news items and a message from the management. More sophisticated publications can extend their content to include features, columns, an editorial, news in-brief sections, cartoon, associated beneficiary progress reports and advertisements

iv. **Easy to read text**

Articles should be written concisely and it should be written in the active voice. Articles should be edited for clarity, conciseness, jargons, length and accuracy. Newsletter articles are more interesting and better understood when they are told as stories. There should be appropriate layout. The quality of photographs must be taken into consideration; there should be colour moderation. Colours can used for logo of the organization, the title of the newsletter and as well as the background. Subheadings and columns should also be used to break up long text and make it easier to read and comprehend.

v. **Careful editing**

Editing of the articles must be done professionally. Editors must take care to ensure that they check how the newsletter reads as well as what it looks like. Interesting illustrations can obscure important content messages. Relevant and well-written content should be able to stand on its own, even as plain text.

Bear (2015) further stressed that in designing a newsletter for any organization, the newsletter must have at least a nameplate which act as the banner on the front of the newsletter. The nameplate helps to identify and distinguish the newsletter. Following the nameplate is the body of the newsletter. The body contains the bulk of the text; other important parts of standard newsletters are the table of contents, the masthead, page numbers, bylines which indicates the name of the author of an article in a newsletter. Others are continuation lines that are used to span two or more pages of an article in a newsletter. Others are end signs, pull-quotes usually to attract the reader's attention especially in long articles. Other part includes photo or illustrations.

A good newsletter is a combination of relevant and high value-added content, interactive resources, and effective layout and design. (Griffin, 2015)

6. Publishing Associated Information Products in Organisation

Apart from Newsletters, there are other important information products published by organizations in order to enhance proper information dissemination, build good public image and increase productivity. Associated information products include the following:

6.1. Annual Reports

An annual report is a comprehensive report on an organization's activities throughout the preceding year. It is meant to give shareholders and members of the public information about the organization's activities and financial performance. In librarianship, annual reports are considered as grey literature. Legally, organizations are to prepare and disclose annual reports, and may be required to file such reports with the relevant Government regulatory body. Organizations which are listed on a stock exchange are required to report at more frequent intervals, depending on existing law. The content of a typical annual report will include:

- General Corporate Information
- Accounting policies
- Balance sheet
- Cash flow Statement
- Contents: non-audited information
- Profit and loss account
- Notes to the financial statements
- Chairpersons statement
- Director's Report
- Operating and financial review
- Other features
- Auditors report

Other important information and notices for the organization's

stakeholders may be included. These could include such a report on operations or corporate social responsibility reports for organizations with environmentally or socially sensitive operations. In the case of very large organizations, annual reports are usually sleek, colorful and high-gloss publications.

The details provided in the report are of use to investors to understand the company's financial position and future direction. The financial statements are usually compiled in compliance with relevant Government regulatory agencies. A public owned organization may also issue a much more limited version of an annual report, which is known as a "wrap report." A wrap report is more or less a summarized version of an annual report.

Preparation of Annual Reports: The Executive Directors of the organization are responsible for preparing the Annual Report in accordance with applicable Law. The directors would need to confirm that they have complied with all necessary requirements in preparing the financial statements.

6.2. Technical Reports

A technical report (also referred to as scientific report) is a document that describes the process and methodology, progress, and results of a technical or scientific research. It also describes the state of a technical or scientific research problem. Also included in a technical report are recommendations and conclusions of the research. An important feature of technical reports is that unlike other published researches, they are not subjected to external peer review mechanism.

Organizations prepare technical reports to serve as major sources of scientific and technical information for decision making and further research. Technical reports are often prepared for purposes of either auditing or sponsorship. Many organizations collate their technical reports into a series. The reports are then assigned volume and issue number and share a common cover-page layout. The entire series might be assigned an international standard serial number (ISSN).

Technical reports usually have the following features:

- Title page
- Table of Contents
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methodology
- The body of the report
- Summary
- Conclusions
- References
- Appendices
- Figures and Tables

The title page carries the title of the report while the table of contents shows contents and the pages on which they appear. Abstract is very brief summary of the report that may give insights into the purpose, procedure or methodology and findings. The introduction gives the objectives of the report and enumerates its outlines. The body of the work is usually divided into numbered sections and subsections. The summary is a brief description of the whole report including important issues discussed, findings and conclusions. Technical reports end with short and logical concluding remarks.

6.3. Feasibility Studies

A Feasibility study is an evaluation and analysis of the viability of either an existing business or a proposed project or venture. It is an investigative research carried out to support the process of decision making. Organizations carry out and publish feasibility studies mainly to objectively determine the strength and weaknesses of either an existing business or a proposed venture. Two major considerations in feasibility studies are cost of project and value to be derived from it. Through feasibility studies, organizations are able to determine the long term profitability and viability of a business venture or project. Feasibility

study is different from business plan. Feasibility study is essentially an investigation and it addresses the question – 'how viable is this venture? Business plan outlines the actions needed to execute an approved venture.

There are five areas of feasibility:

- Technology and System Visibility
- Legal Visibility
- Operational Visibility
- Economic Visibility
- Technical Visibility
- Schedule Visibility

Organizations publish feasibility studies for in – house (or internal) use only.

6.4. Trade Literature

Trade literature is a generic term for trade collections like catalogues and magazines published for the sole purpose of marketing an organization's products and services. They advertise, promote and provide instructions on using products. They also give descriptions of products, with colorful pictures provided. Sometimes they provide testimonials from satisfied customers. They range in size from small pamphlets to magazines.

6.5. Policy Statement

A policy statement is a document that prescribes acceptable methods, behaviours and practices in an organization. They are usually written in clear terms, such that they are well understood. They provide directions to the acceptable way of doing things in a specific organization. Policy statements address such areas as human resources, legal and regulatory issues, financial issues, safety and operational issues. They guide both employers and employees in procedures and decision making in organizations.

6.6. Press Release/Statement

A press release is a written statement issued by an organization to the news media. It is meant to announce a range of news items like upcoming events, promotions, sales, new products and services, as well as awards and accomplishments. It is an important tool which organizations utilize in creating good relations with members of the public and the press. A Press release can also be issued to clarify public misconceptions about the activities, products and services of an organization.

6.7. Fact Sheet

A fact sheet is a compilation of data that presents key points concisely. In fact sheets, data are presented in simple but standardized language. Facts are presented using bullet points and simple headings. Fact sheets are most times a summary of a longer document. They often contain product information, statistics and answers to frequently asked questions.

6.8. Data Sheet

A data sheet (also written as datasheet or spec sheet) is a document that describes the technical characteristics of an item or product. It summarizes the technical details of an item or product. Data sheets are often used by design Engineers in integrating the components of an electronic system

7. Summary

This chapter has examined the importance and process of publishing newsletters and associated information products in organizations. An organization simply denotes a group of individuals driven towards the achievement of defined goals and objectives. It is constituted of humans, therefore we can safely refer to it as a social and economic entity. Various types of organizations exist and these variations come as a result of established structures, values and culture. They include formal and informal organizations, profit-oriented and non

profit-oriented organizations. However, irrespective of the type, organizations are linked with relationships both within and outside their environments. For these relationships to thrive, adequate and accurate information is needed. Newsletters are veritable channels of information that help organizations to communicate their objectives, plans and products to stakeholders. A newsletter can simply be defined as a periodically produced and published material by a group of individuals, body or organization, which contains certain information for audience viewing. They exist in print and non print format. Other associated information products published by organizations, which have been examined in this chapter include technical reports, annual reports, trade literature, feasibility studies and so on.

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