



VISION, MISSION AND THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

K. A. Bakareⁱ

Deputy Registrar,
Obafemi Awolowo University,
Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract:

Marketing big organizations requires deep thinking and extraction of the essence in a nutshell fashion. It is an exercise in epiphany, that projects **thinking** and **motivation** as guides towards value-adding; what underlines the renowned 'Yo shinai, Yo kangai' Japanese philosophy, popularized by the Toyota Motor Company. The 'good thinking, good product' statement is a philosophy that is self-sustaining, needing the energy to drive the market, and sell its potentials to prospective clients. A new economic paradigm has emerged in the Nigerian university space as a result of recent proliferation of private universities. This development which encourages healthy rivalry and competitiveness calls for a compulsory revision and re-modelling of vision and mission statements for some universities, to project values and drive market orientation in an expansive client-based knowledge economy. In an economy harboring 43 Federal universities, 48 State universities, and 79 Private universities, the competition is getting stiffer by the day, and the contest between the traditional first generation universities and the *avant-garde* private universities is widening. The government-owned public universities have to catch up with the ideals of modernity and global competitiveness presented by the 21st century. A population of over 200 million people provides a vibrant market for university business. In this study, we shall probe the relevance of vision and mission as structuring principles in the Nigerian university space, and interrogate their perspectives on goals and objectives in a developing nation. We shall seek to know how realistic the statements are, given contextual challenges, and given that the statements in some instances, show obvious misunderstanding of basic meanings and expected functions of vision and mission statements. We shall posit that lack of proper setup of the structuring pattern is comparable to a derailed locomotive heading for oblivion. Drawing from a few number of concrete examples, we shall conclude by reiterating the importance of getting the foundation right to be able to revolutionize and reposition our universities.

Keywords: vision, mission, marketing, Nigerian universities, clients, organizations

ⁱ Correspondence: email tunjibakare@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

A university of the 21st century is expected to attain to certain laudable ideals and incontestable standards that set it apart from its precursors. The Nigerian tertiary space can boast of a number of such universities despite innumerable factors that militate against the attainment of standards and make their growth stunted and almost nonexistent. The concepts of vision and mission have been a much misunderstood concepts, and have suffered misinterpretations and misrepresentations in our various universities. Their marketability in a highly competitive global space is suspect, hence, the need to get informed on means to avoid over-simplification and over-complications. In this paper we have done a selective study of vision and mission statements in some notable Nigerian universities, taking into cognizance the differences between the two terms, and how these differences are reflected. The conceptual and contextual frameworks of selected statements are interrogated, while suggestions are proffered on possible re-modelling. Visions and missions are pathways to enduring standards in universities all over the globe. Therefore, it is important for universities in Nigeria to give them the attention and craftsmanship they deserve, in order to expressly make their goals and objectives in the immediate and near future clear and sound.

Vision, mission, and the new age orientation are three key issues that dominate discourse on university mantra. It would continue to be the trend for a long time because apart from being the structuring principles that invariably market and ensure standards, they equally mirror the '*timelessness*' of the university as a brand merchandise.

Misused, abused, confused and mismanaged, these concepts remain tools used to etch and structure the direction of every university in the now and in the foreseeable future. Forming a community of passionate stakeholders require innovative, imaginative, strong and convincing vision and mission statements. Unfortunately, only a few number of universities have been able to impact convincingly through adroit disposition of vision and mission statements, while most universities appear perfunctory about the difference between the two concepts and what each of them stand for. We fail to show interest in these key words and their abilities in structuring the role expectations and role actualization of the Ivory towers. For most organizations, mission and vision are treated as two sides of the same coin that requires turning the one on its head as a definition for the other. In other cases, these words are usually taken at their face values, not minding the underlying principles and the pattern they should necessarily take and maintain for quality and finesse.

Having said much, vision and mission should be deciphered as the engine that drives the university organization through the present into the future. They are the principles that ensure that universities climb to the limits of their potentials, structuring the ambitions of the organization for direction and purposeful interpretations. However, in order to achieve these heights, they must be crafted appropriately and in such a manner that exhibits and asserts their relevance. Hence, a good vision or mission is that which is strong, creative, motivational, and culture-specific. They must have the

capabilities to align every member of the organization under a unifying principle and philosophy.

2. Justification

2.1 Background of the Problem

Mission and vision dovetail into purpose. For an organization, it is imperative to get the terminologies right and to give them contextual expressions and relevance in order to correctly position its aims and objectives. It is jaw-dropping and awe-inspiring to note how big university organizations in Nigeria oftentimes steamroll these defining principles into a macaronic mismatch. In some instance, vision statements are presented as mission. In other instances, mission statements are presented as vision; or core values, presented as vision and mission. The cascading roles of vision and mission are often collapsed and served to the public as a *mélange*, leaving prospective clients and staffers more confused.

2.2 Review of Literature

The abundance of materials on this subject cannot be controverted. However, high-sounding theorists and researchers often leave readers more confused as they continually complicate simple scenarios and lose readers in a mire of bookish gobbledygook. Still, the internet is populated with extensive texts on the subject and some of them have been very helpful. Books written by authors like Shelley Kirkpatrick¹, Cynthia Scott, Dennis Jaffe *et al*², and Jeffrey Abrahams³ have been helpful in defining the principles in simple and clear terms. Along with a few number of writers on internet sites, delving into the topic have been exhilarating, though it is clear that a contextual analysis of the Nigeria's situation has been paltry or nonexistent to date.

2.3 Methodology

The purpose of this study is to attempt to clarify these structuring statements with a view to enhancing simple understanding of them and probably prompting a revision and a re-alignment of the patterning principles.

In expounding the vision-mission principles and their ancillaries, and in showcasing how these were put to use by our universities in Nigeria, we have settled for a descriptive analysis to validate our statement of the problem that the principles have not been carefully crafted in a number of our universities, and that this has led to an overwhelming neglect and lack of interest on the part of the concerned stakeholders.

Our research design for this work is documentary, and the secondary sources of data collection remain the internet, paper publications and relevant textbooks.

4. Strategic Planning, Vision and Mission

4.1 Strategic Planning

Vision and mission are necessary outcomes of strategic planning. In simple words, strategic plan is a plan put in place to project change and pre-empt problems in an organization, for good, effective and widely accepted service-delivery. Strategic plans are therefore used as conduits for change in organizational structures with a view to improving on products and services. It is,

“...intended ...to enable the university to renew itself, to strengthen its finances, and to improve its vision on the way forward (emphasis mine)”⁴

In a strategic plan project, vision and mission are the tools used to get the employees engaged, enhance the employer-employee relations, and enroll the confidences of the consumer or the clients as the case may be. They make the workforce stay engaged in the strategic planning process as well as communicating the goals of the strategic plans to the outside world. All these they are able to do *‘in a jiffy’*.⁵

Strategic planning in a university or in any organization at that, comes with emphasis on specific *‘target areas’* within a relatively short length of time. In Obafemi Awolowo University for instance, the highpoints of its 2010-2015 Strategic plans include human resources development, academic programmes, governance structure, the University estate and maintenance as well as welfare. It is true that in strategic plans, the aim is to create the future and identify ways to achieve the projected goals.⁶ It is in an attempt to answer the question *‘where do I want to see my university in the next five or ten years, and how do I get to the expected destination’* that we have strategic plans for universities and organizations. The strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) are cardinal to the plans, and the tools to achieve these objectives are mission and vision.

4.2 Mission Statement

In a university organization, the mission statement gives the *‘economical expression’* of the aims and objectives. It is the overall purpose of an organization. Its purpose is similar in some respect to that of vision in that they both attempt to identify key roles of an organization and chart a trajectory for them. However, while one is more concerned with promoting organizational patronage and attracting clients by packaging products **as they operate in the present**, the other emphasizes both the present and more especially, the future. A good mission statement must be compact and *‘quick culture-specific,’*⁷ i.e. make use of methods that are highly analytical, rational, *‘matter of factly’* and creative. In other words, it must concern itself with communicating the *‘hard facts’* about the organization while at the same time, it should be creative. In doing these, the following must be taken into consideration:

a. Organizations' Products

The nature and qualities of the product is understood and the '*positives*' underlined. In order to sell the products, a world of words is densely compacted where every word shall be '*a stroke of a master painter towards a perfect finish.*' The operating word should be, **precision**⁸;

b. Services and Values

The services being presented should be qualitative and not to be trumped up. It is when this is done, when the values of the services or the products are trusted that it could be supported by the mission statement⁹;

c. Market

Markets or target clients must be taken into consideration in crafting a mission statement. Mission and vision statements are vividly client-centric¹⁰;

d. Public Image

The primary purpose of a mission/vision statement is to enhance the public image of products and consequently enhance patronage, and the system ¹¹

e. Survival Possibilities

Surviving in the midst of stiff competitions should be of paramount concern for the organization. A mission statement should therefore emphasize what sets the organization apart from other organizations, i.e. what makes it stand out from others, what is called the '*winning idea*' or *unique selling point (USP)*'.¹²

Overall, a good mission statement must have management and the workforce in mind and make use of statements that they can identify with. The statement can also be updated from time to time from recent strategic planning or whenever a change in scope is necessary. In other words, a mission statement is not sacrosanct or unchangeable and only considered for its relevance and effective communication from time to time. It must however be concise, concrete and friendly such that management, the workforce and the public will be able to commit it to heart.

f. Vision Statement

A good vision statement should give vivid description of the operations undertaken by the organization. It should by all means, avoid idealistic portrayal of goals and targets that the organization cannot realistically achieve. Like mission statement, it is also **quick culture-specific** and tends to prioritize core values of the organization which should take into consideration, values of clients, shareholder (or stakeholders where it concerns universities), employees and the community at large. In it, values are ranked in terms of their importance.

Thus, while a mission statement states and underscores the present state and purpose of an organization, a vision statement concerns itself with the future state. For mission statement, the proclivity is to answer '*what an organization does, who it does it for,*

and how it does what it does'. Vision statement however answers a sole and inevitable question of *'where an organization intends to be in the next few years.'* It also answers the question: *'why do we exist'* as an organization, embracing the theme of *'purpose'* as part of its principles. The summation would be that while a mission statement expresses the *'purpose'* of an organization, a vision statement explains a future-state showing what the organization wants to become *'based on the purpose expressed in the mission statement.'*

According to Shannon Sage, a vision statement is a declaration of where you are headed, that is, the future state, while a mission statement is how to get there:

"We always explain your vision as 'knowing what mountain you're climbing and your mission as 'how you're going to get there.' Your vision is the ambitious future Point B to your Point A." ¹³

Your core values are what you will do or won't do to get to where you want i.e. what you stand for, what you believe in.

In all cases, the target is to make all the statements succinct, creative and straight to the point, ensuring that every word is a strike towards precision.

5. Human Factor

Our job is about forming relationships. Management theories have never shied away from the fact that achieving success in managing the people determines effective service-delivery in workplace cultures. The traditional *cum* scientific approach of Frederick Taylor, the systems/contingency approach, all give credence to the human relations school of thought based on the belief that:

"...if management is concerned with getting things done through other people, the priority of management should be on how to improve interpersonal relations in the work environment..."¹⁴

In operating vision and mission therefore, it is inevitable that the emotional investment of the stakeholders is considered and that they are made to feel as part of the process. In essence, mission and vision should be made to fit into the planning, organizing, leading and control (P-O-L-C) framework by mandatorily treating employees as key stakeholders in order to drive the notions.¹⁵ It is imperative to consider the human elements in the organization and encourage the workforce to imbibe a sense of ownership of the statements, make them believe in the dreams of the organization and be emotionally involved in achieving the aims and objectives of the organization. Vision and mission statements should be widely understood and collectively shared by all stakeholders. To make this easy, it is imperative that the statements are made succinct, memorable, unique, inspirational, ambitious and realistic.¹⁶

6. Mission and Vision Statements in Nigerian Universities: Findings

The attempts to differentiate between the *'big picture'* and *'what obtains now'* have been an exercise mired in confusion on the websites of various universities in Nigeria. While a number of them endeavored at least, to present their mission and vision statements on the websites with no clearly defined difference between the two statements, some universities do not bother to even include coherent mission and vision statements. Still, others present vision statements as mission statements, and vice versa, and these are written in long, windy, confusing, uninspiring and encyclopaedic statements that are not only bland but are difficult to memorize. In an attempt to impress and with a vacuous knowledge of the terms, these universities besiege the websites with various presentations that could pass for anything but the vision/mission roadmaps. It is however, highly important to get it right so as to have a focus and stay on track with a view to ensuring sustainable developments in the ivory towers.

Let us see some examples and try to digest and analyze them as presented:

A. University of Benin

a. Mission

To establish a model institution of higher learning which ranks among the best in the world and is responsive to the reactive and innovative abilities of the Nigerian people.

b. Vision

To develop the human mind to be creative, innovative, research oriented, competent in areas of specialization, knowledgeable in entrepreneur and dedicated to service.¹⁸

c. Interpretation

- Its vision is to nurture a high ranking university with a place among the best, responsive to the needs of Nigerians.

- Its mission is to regenerate the creative minds of the clients through imparting specialized knowledge in innovation, entrepreneur and research.

This university has a focus and is not able to distinguish vividly between vision and mission. Although, the two statements are economical and adequately catchy and capture the ideas and ideals of the University, both the vision and the mission are two sides of the same coin which could as well stand as rendition of two vivid visions. However, it bungles what could have stood out as decent declarations with swopping of captions for vision which it calls mission, and for mission which it calls vision. The mission is understandably, the vehicle to the vision. That notion is evidently missing here where both the mission and the vision are presented in a *'To-do'* format thus making both of them future-oriented.

With a rework, the mission could read like this, while the vision could be retained:

d. Mission (suggestion)

“Nurturing a model institution of higher learning which ranks among the best in the world and is responsive to the reactive and innovative abilities of the Nigerian people.”

B. University of Ibadan

a. Vision

To be a world-class institution for academic excellence geared towards meeting societal needs.

b. Mission

- To expand the frontiers of knowledge through provision of excellent conditions for learning and research;
- To produce graduates who are worthy in character and sound judgment;
- To contribute to the transformation of society through creativity and innovation;
- To serve as a dynamic custodian of society’s salutary values and thus sustain integrity.¹⁹

c. Interpretation

- The vision of this University is contestably one of the best in the country for its economy, knowledge and precision. It is also straightforward and easy to learn.
- Its mission however, could do with a little re-engineering and refurbishing as it appears to answer the question ‘*what to be done to get to the top*’ rather than ‘*what is being done.*’ In other words it is more of guiding principles and core value statements than the mission.

One may wish to re-brand the many statements thus to make a mission statement:

d. Mission (suggestion)

“Producing graduates who are knowledgeable, creative, research-oriented and worthy in character and sound judgment.”

C. Ekiti State University

a. Vision

Producing graduates adequately equipped to handle contemporary socio-economic and environmental challenges through cutting-edge research in science, technology and humanities, driven by Information and Communication Technology.

b. Mission

To provide a high quality educational experience shaped by outstanding teaching and research that benefit cultures, societies and economies.²⁰

c. Interpretation

This is a clean swop between vision and mission. What is presented as vision is not a template for the future state of ideals being aspired to by the University, but rather it is an expression of the purpose and extant practice and ideologies of the school. In other words, the vision is actually presented as the mission and *vice versa*. However, the aptness and economy of what was presented as vision and mission is commendable.

D. Ahmadu Bello University

a. Vision

Ahmadu Bello University shall be a world-class university comparable to any other, engaged in imparting contemporary knowledge, using high quality facilities and multi-disciplinary approaches, to men and women of all races, as well as generating new idea and intellectual practices relevant to the needs of its immediate community, Nigeria and the world at large.

b. Mission

To advance the frontiers of learning and break new grounds, through teaching, research and the dissemination of knowledge of the highest quality; to establish and foster national and international integration, development and the promotion of African traditions and cultures; to produce high level human power and enhance capacity-building through retaining, in order to meet the needs and challenges of the catchment area, Nigeria and the rest of the world.²¹

c. Interpretation

There is no gainsaying the fact that the two statements are long, wordy, convoluted and unfriendly. While the vision is true to its term, filled with too many lofty ideals fighting for recognition within a limited format, the mission is an amalgam of the vision and core values, enumerating '*what to be done*' to achieve the lofty height set by the institution. This could be re-worked by preferably, starting the mission statement with a continuous tense to give the picture of purpose and on-going actions, e.g. advancing the frontiers of knowledge, etc.

However, let us attempt to say these whole lots in as few words as possible to make it less tortuous:

d. Vision (suggestion)

"To nurture a world-class university that shall impart knowledge in multi-disciplinary fields through quality facilities, for the benefit of the public."

e. Mission (suggestion)

“Advancing knowledge and producing high-level human power through capacity-building for Nigeria and the world over.”

E. Covenant University

a. Vision

To be a leading world-class Christian Mission University, committed to raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of human endeavor.

b. Mission

To create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black man via a Human Development and Total Man Concept driven curriculum employing innovative, leading edge, teaching and learning methods, research and professional services that promote integrated, life-applicable, life-transforming education relevant to the context of Science, Technology and Human Capacity Building.²²

c. Interpretation

The vision is a simple but resplendent rendition of the future aspirations of the University. It is apt, concise and commendable for its simplicity. However, the same cannot be said for the mission as it attempts to capture too many ideals within the confine of a limited format. The pruned down version of the mission will look like this:

d. Mission (suggestion)

“Creating knowledge and promoting research in Science, Technology and Manpower Development.”

F. Obafemi Awolowo University

a. Vision

“A top rated University in Africa that is the technological flagship of the West African sub-region, as evidenced by its application of modern technology to teaching, research and community service, and its provision of practical solutions to social, cultural and economic problems.”

b. Mission

- Promote by research and other means the advancement of knowledge and its practical application to social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological problems;
- To create a conducive teaching and learning community for imparting skills, knowledge, behavior and attitude;

- Advance and protect the independence of the academic enterprise;
- Engender the sense of selfless public service; and,
- Promote the African culture and tradition.²³

c. Interpretation

Simply put, the vision is about using technology to solve socio-economic and political problems through the established conduits of teaching, research and community service. Conversely, the first parts of the mission re-echoed the vision of asserting technology as a means of solving socio-economic *cum* political problems, while the other parts talk about acquisition of knowledge, academic freedom, best practice in public service, then about learning and culture. Obviously, while the vision has attempted to say a few things in a long, circumbendibus way, the mission is a collection of core values served as a wish-list. They all give vital information about the interests and focus of the University, but could do with a little re-engineering to make it catchy and appealing to memory.

d. Vision (suggestion)

“A top-rated University that shall expand the frontiers of technology, and enshrine teaching, research and community services.”

e. Mission (suggestion)

“Imparting knowledge and promoting academic freedom and best practices in all human endeavours.”

7. Recommendations

From indications, it is clear that certain attitudes and beliefs had contributed to the defective libraries of vision and mission in our universities. The 21st century, just like the millennium, calls for new ways and new attitudes towards addressing challenges. New realities have to be met with innovations and creativity. In all, we should look inwardly and consider the following recommendations towards updating the vision/mission culture in the Nigerian university space:

7.1 Periodic Review

Changing realities demand changing market philosophy. Attracting new clients and expanding on available market demand attuning to new market requirements that evolve with time. It is not realistic to stick to market statements that had been in existence for decades and intend to use them to address new requirements. For instance, market requirements in the 60's, when the first-generation universities were created have differed from what we have today. Then, it was a proclivity towards getting university education for prestige and profile enhancement. University education at that time easily provided 'meal tickets' for university graduates. With the recent population explosion and

the increased level of awareness, university education no longer guarantees automatic employment, thus, the needed orientation towards acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. Also, technology, i.e. aeronautics, robotics and artificial intelligence is today gaining ascendancy and determining the economic space. These new realities ought to reflect in the 21st century vision/mission statements, to show responsiveness to modern market tendencies;

7.2 Strategic Planning

Strategic plans constitute the life-wire of any university. Usually, each strategic plan has a tenure of mostly five years in Nigerian universities; but the tenure were not mostly followed. As a result, constant and periodic review is jettisoned and overstretched beyond the regulated time, owing to the lackadaisical attitudes put forth by the constituting body. The SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) framework hardly works in such a constricted environment where procrastination gives room for a cancerous spread of defects in the structure. Constant revision of SWOT gives ample opportunities for awareness on general restructuring as and when due, and this would inform the direction and new orientation to validate and energize the vision/mission framework;

7.3 Global Comparisons

University culture is not isolationist. It is a universal idea that serves the civilianized interest of people of the world. Hence, we should always be keen to not exist and formulate in isolation but compare standards with known purveyors of best practice. Our vision and mission could do better if we compare and contrast statements with some other institutions in other climes;

7.4 Unique Selling Point and Flagship Achievements

Despite the present amnesia in most of our universities, it is incontrovertible that our universities had attained excellence in recent past, and had continually done so amidst immense structural challenges. It is therefore expected that such achievements should be documented and sold to the world, and they should be creatively projected through the vision/mission statements;

7.5 Attachment to Vision and Mission

In crafting vision and mission, it is important to take cognizance of the need to make them the possessions of both the clients and the workforce. It is when people are able to remember the statements, identify with them and savor the aesthetics that they could easily be made to work towards achieving the ideals expressed by such statements. When they are proud to be part of the family, the emotional investments in the corporate targets become easily achievable.

8. Conclusion

We have defined vision as the aspirational picture that answers the question *'what'*, that is, what the future of an organization would look like and; mission as realistic picture that answers the question *'how'*, that is, how the future *'big picture'* is to be achieved through the services being presently offered. Another important, albeit, less emphasized term is *'purpose statements'* which are not as commonly used as the vision and mission, but answer the question *'why'*; leveraging on reasons for *'doing what we do.'* All of them are mutually inclusive. We have also inferred that, like in all management practice, people drive organizations; they either sell the ideas (leadership), drive the ideas (the workforce), or buy the ideas (clients). All actions and intent therefore inter-commingle.¹⁷ We have probed the vision/mission materials from six universities in Nigeria and analyze them *vis-à-vis* the standard template, and have submitted that many universities need to revisit, rethink and rework their vision and mission statements with a view to re-aligning and repositioning their universities to fit into the 21st century modern. We have espoused vision and mission as the structuring principles of the university, noted that they provide the crutches for universities to succeed, and that because they are often confused, vision and mission statements in our academic landscapes have engendered chaos for strategic planning and strategic implementation. Furthermore, our analysis has shown that through perfunctory handlings of the vision and mission statements, some universities have not been able to communicate effectively with partners, clients and stakeholders and as a result, they have not been able to effectively impart the dreams and ideals into them. Tectonic quality and public attractiveness have been compromised in the process, as the statements were taken at face values. This has accounted for weak, jejune, poorly written, duplicated, and often confused and confusing statements being issued as vision and mission. Another general mistake made by universities in this clime is the fact that empty pedantry is kept and left unchanging for decades. Vision/mission statements are never revised and are kept forever with otiose principles despite yawning gaps. Lastly, we note that in this era of globalization, issues of this dimension should never be taken with levity.

Well-written vision and mission statements have the capabilities of selling a University home and abroad. For knowledge economy to thrive, commensurate efforts must be invested in crafting virile vision and mission. This goes a long way in defining the nature, stature, qualities and propensities of the University. Verbose and incoherent vision and mission *clichés* should therefore be reviewed to meet the contemporary goals and aspirations. Strategic Planning should be embarked upon with consistency within a legitimized time-frame to update or upgrade outdated vision and mission. Efforts should always be made to ensure that the statements are free from utopian and unrealizable aspirations, while the institutions should not give the devastating impression that they want to achieve too many targets at the same time.

It is also pertinent to note at this juncture, that a university without a veritable website should not be counted among universities in this 21st Century. It is a fact that as we speak, a number of universities do not have active websites, while those that do have

not been updating them regularly. It is important to keep the websites up to date and in sync with contemporary realities as they serve as windows to the outside world.

Lastly, vision and mission statements are two important factors that structure the focus, aspirations, passion and ideals of the University and as such, ample time and efforts should be devoted to get them right.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

About the Author

Mr. Kamal Adetunji Bakare is an astute professional with over twenty years' experience in the field of University Administration in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He has served in many units in the registry and is presently, head of the Academic Staff Establishment of the University. He is also a student of Literature-in-English, and a connoisseur of knowledge. He has contributed articles published by Global Journal of Human Resource Management, Global Journal of Political Science and Administration, the British Journal of Education, and the European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies respectively.

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