

# Effect of a Sport Leadership Programme on Students' Perception of their Professional Development as a Measure of Involvement\*

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## Abstract

**Abstract:** The European Union stresses the importance of sport as a tool for social and economic development, although there are still few intervention programmes that have been analyzed, it is justified that this type of programme should be carried out in universities. The main objective of this intervention was to analyze whether significant differences would occur after the programme intervention in the analyzed transversal competences of the student volunteers as a measure of involvement. Participated 61 university students (29 female and 32 males, Mage = 23.20 years, SDage = 9.79). Two tests were carried out, at the beginning of the intervention (pre-test) and after 24 months of the intervention (post-test). There were improvements from pre-test to post-test in organization and planning ( $\Delta = .07$ ,  $d = .35$ ), management of knowledge and information ( $\Delta = .10$ ,  $d = .32$ ), emotional control ( $\Delta = .09$ ,  $d = .39$ ), autonomous work ( $\Delta = 0.03$ ,  $d = .40$ ) and adaptation to new situations ( $\Delta = 0.01$ ,  $d = .35$ ). According to the effect sizes, the differences were significant in practical terms. Consequently, this means that the students were more involved regarding the pre-test measures. The present work was the first one carried out enacting a European programme on sport leadership assessed on students' own perception of relevance about their

\* This research is the result of the European project 'European Sport Leadership Programme' (590801-EPP-1-2017-1-ES-SPO-SCP). Call: European Union. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. Erasmus+ Sport Programme. Call EAC-A03-2016 "Collaborative Partnerships". Agreement number: 20172477. Coordinator: Antonio Sánchez-Pato.



competences as a measure of involvement. In future studies it must be analyzed the actual effect of this program on participants' competences.

**Keywords:** Leadership, transversal competences, recreation, university

**Abstract:** La Unión Europea destaca la importancia del deporte como instrumento de desarrollo social y económico, aunque todavía son pocos los programas de intervención que se han analizado si han quedado justificados que este tipo de programas se lleve a cabo en las universidades. El objetivo principal de esta intervención fue analizar si se producirían diferencias significativas después de la intervención del programa en las competencias transversales analizadas de los estudiantes voluntarios como medida de su implicación. Participaron 61 alumnos universitarios (29 mujeres y 32 hombres, Medad = 23,20 años, SDage = 9,79). Se realizaron dos pruebas, al inicio de la intervención (Pre-test) y después de 24 meses de la intervención (Post-test). Tras los análisis estadísticos, se obtuvieron mejoras en organización y planificación ( $\Delta = .07$ ,  $d = .35$ ), gestión del conocimiento e información ( $\Delta = .10$ ,  $d = .32$ ), control emocional ( $\Delta = .09$ ,  $d = .39$ ), trabajo autónomo ( $\Delta = 0.03$ ,  $d = .40$ ) y adaptación a nuevas situaciones ( $\Delta = 0.01$ ,  $d = .35$ ). De acuerdo con el tamaño del efecto, las diferencias fueron significativas en términos prácticos. En consecuencia, esto significó que los estudiantes se implicaron más con respecto al pre-test. El presente trabajo fue el primero que se llevó a cabo implementando un programa de intervención basado en el liderazgo deportivo evaluando la autopercepción de los estudiantes sobre la relevancia de sus competencias como medida de su implicación. En futuros estudios deberá analizarse el efecto real de este programa en las competencias de los participantes.

**Palabras clave:** Liderazgo, competencias transversales, recreación, universidad

## 1. Introduction

Despite the fact that the European Union emphasizes the importance of sport for the social and economic development, there are few programmes that analyze the practices, mechanisms, strategies and resources to achieve a good governance, education, training, employment and volunteering, among others, from the university environment (Griffiths, Bullough, Shibli & Wilson, 2017). In this sense, the development of skills that favour the employability of students in the field of physical activity and sports is one of the main lines of the Erasmus + Programme for the Sports Action (2016a). So it seems fully justified the development of extracurricular training programmes that, developed from within the University, contribute to the long-awaited professional future, so questioned and at the same time so demanded in the university context. This impact in their future employment is a rational way to increase their involvement in their tasks as students and formative career. In this sense, it is necessary to know the students' own perception of the relevance of their competences as a cornerstone on which of their skills to strengthen in the future professional world and thus opt with a greater possibility of employability (Dugan, Turman & Torrez, 2014).

The employability of graduates is one of the fundamental pillars of any university, so it has become a matter of reflection for the adequacy of their training offer, since they seek to generate a competency learning with sufficient professional relevance (Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002; Teichler, 2005, 2015; Yorke, 2006; Jimenez Vivas, 2009; Rodríguez Espinar, 2010; Mora, 2011). In this sense, it is necessary to recognize the importance of cross-sectoral competences in the professional development of university students, but it is necessary as well to know different opinions and diverse points of view. This point of view is essential for this research, since at the time of the intervention they are living the different curricular and extracurricular experiences, and this information would be very valuable to create a training that could reduce this skills mismatch between working life and curricular academic training.

This study analyzes the relevance, which is understood as the importance they attribute to the different cross-sectoral competences in the professional development of university students (Martínez Clares & González Morgia, 2018). According to Kolb's concepts (1981) related to learning through practice and/or thinking (Komives et al., 2013), if educators do not distinguish the leadership results incorporated in cross-sectoral competences, the practical application is less significant. There are several investigations that include relevance as one of the study variables regarding the development of the competences of university students (e.g., Martínez, Pérez, González, González, & Martínez, 2013; González Morgia, Pérez Cusó, González Lorente, Martínez Juárez, & Martínez Clares, 2015; González Lorente, Martínez Clares, & González Morgia, 2015; González Morgia, González Lorente, Pérez Cusó, & Martínez Juárez, 2014). In all these studies it is possible to highlight the importance of the relevance attributed by the students to the analyzed cross-sectoral competences for their professional development and involvement, even above those specific to the university degree. Therefore, it is proposed to rethink the development and planning of the university curricular training and the difference between what is taught, learned and is considered important for future incorporation into the labour work.

Numerous important outcomes of the working life are associated with the development of these cross-sectoral competencies and students' involvement, including the increased productivity, psychological empowerment, job satisfaction and professional success, and a reduced absenteeism and stress (Stewart, Courtright, and Manz, 2011). For example, Sitzmann and Johnson (2012) found that interventions to help people plan their development were only effective when accompanied by interventions to promote self-regulation, which suggests the role of learning's self-monitoring and the developmental needs as important regulations of the learning processes.

Despite the former studies, no research has previously examined the self-perception of the relevance of the cross-sectoral competences in the context of learning and development in the higher education as a measure of involvement. The advantage in an educational context is that these types of interventions cannot only improve the short-term achievement, but also represent competencies and skills for the lifelong learning. The objective of the present work was to verify whether a sport leadership programme allowed to increase the involvement of sports leaders, evaluated based on the improvement in the relevance of cross-sectoral competences (organization and planning, oral and written communication in the own language, use of information, communication & technology, communication in a foreign language, development of planning and decision making, management of knowledge and information, team work, social interaction, ethical and social commitment, emotional control, autonomous work, entrepreneurial attitude, adaptation to new situations, motivation and research competence). Based on previous studies, the hypothesis was that the sports leaders would improve their perceptions of relevance after the application of the programme in all the dimensions and consequently in their involvement, without differences due to country of origin or gender.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**

Participants in this research were 35 students, 7 from Malta (3 males and 4 females), 7 from Greece (5 males and 2 females), 7 from Turkey (5 males and 2 females), 7 from Italy (1 males and 6 females), and, 7 from Spain (3 males and 4 females). Participants ranging in age from 19 to 40 years of age ( $M = 23.28$ ;  $SD = 5.06$ ).

### **2.2. Design**

The design was pre-test-post-test, following a longitudinal approach of 24 months to evaluate the effects of a sport leadership intervention programme on variables related to the leader's perception of relevance regarding 15 competences. First, organization and planning competence

was defined as their capacity to manage time and structure work correctly. Second, oral and written communication in the own language was related to their capacity to express in a coherent way and organized ideas orally and in writing. Third, use of information, communication and technology assessed their capacity to manage information through search, selection and integration and use different software for information management (word processor, statistical packages...). Fourth, communication in a foreign language was defined as their understanding about both texts and discourses in another language, being able to interact with others. Fifth, development of planning and decision making was the competence regarding their knowledge about how to make decisions (evaluate different alternatives before making a decision). Sixth, management of knowledge and information was defined as their capacity to search, analyze and understand information from different sources from a critical perspective. Seventh, team work was the competence regarding their work as a team, collaboratively and cooperatively in an interdisciplinary team with the ability to solve problems together with others. Eighth, social interaction referred to their ability to establish relationships and contacts (networks) by actively and empathetically interacting with others. Ninth, ethical and social commitment was the competence related to be responsible and have an ethical and professional commitment respecting diversity and multiculturalism. Tenth, by means of emotional control we referred to how they manage stress and performance under pressure. Eleventh, autonomous work was defined as their capacity to be self-critical and actively involved in continuous learning and ongoing updating. Twelfth, entrepreneurial attitude referred to be creative and innovative with initiative to generate new projects. Thirteenth, adaptation to new situations was defined as their capacity to tolerate change and uncertainty. Fourteenth, motivation was related to their positive attitude to involvement in work. Finally, research competence referred to detect needs, collect and analyze information, and prepare a research report.

### **2.3. Procedure**

The research was developed with five groups (five universities corresponding to five countries), following two research phases: (a) analysis of university sport governance; and (b) design, implement and evaluate a sport volunteering scheme to provide. For this, to each group, a pre- post design was used in order to assess the effects of one intervention programs on each group. The students demand it was measured during the first 3 months of the programme through a consultation process provided by each university. The European Sport Leadership Programme was implemented during 24 months. The aim was to promote their involvement throughout enhancing both personal and professional development opportunities for students to increase graduate employability; and to improve the participation/recreational sporting opportunities for all students at each university. For this, five sports would be delivered to provide new recreational activities for the university students at each organization based on student demand. For this, five workshops were developed during the program regarding to: (a) Training the Sport Leaders, (b) careers Action Planning Session with the Sport Leaders, (c) Mid-way reflection and action planning, (d) Review and final action planning and interview technique, and (e) Final Reflection on Work skills, Abilities and Competencies and Future Action. During the programme, the leaders designed and managed five different recreational activities. They were supported by mentors and employers. Mentors supported the leaders by means of additional training in order to help them find work and / or form their own company. Employers carried out three mock interviews with students on a 1:1 during their visit to the employers' companies.

### **3.3. Instrument**

The CECTGRA questionnaire (Martínez & González, 2018) was administered, which has 57 items and 15 dimensions based on students' perception on their professional development as a measure of involvement: (a) organization and planning (4 items; e.g., manage and administer time

correctly and have an anticipatory attitude; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.73$ ), (b) oral and written communication in the own language (3 items; e.g., communicate to expert and non-expert audiences; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.71$ ), (c) use of information, communication and technology (3 items; e.g., knowledge basic aspects of the use of computing; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.75$ ), (d) communication in a foreign language (4 items; e.g., make oral speeches in another language; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.71$ ), (e) development of planning and decision making (4 items; e.g., know how to make decisions; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.75$ ), (f) management of knowledge and information (3 items; e.g., analyze and synthesize information; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.79$ ), (g) team work (5 items; e.g., motivate groups; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.80$ ), (h) social interaction (4 items; e.g., establish relationships and contacts; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.81$ ), (i) Ethical and social commitment (4 items; e.g., value and respect diversity and multiculturalism; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.71$ ), (j) emotional control (3 items; e.g., perform under pressure; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.77$ ), (k) autonomous work (4 items; e.g., be self-critical; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.80$ ), (l) entrepreneurial attitude (5 items; e.g., be creative and innovative; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.76$ ), (m) adaptation to new situations (3 items; work and study in another national or international context; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.71$ ), (n) motivation (4 items; e.g., positive attitude towards work; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.78$ ), y (o) research competence (4 items; e.g., examine and interpret information; Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.79$ ). Agreement with the items was rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The leaders completed the questionnaire on-line using the Google Forms® tool the same day at the same time with the on-line presence of the main researcher to answer any questions. The students completed the questionnaire individually and anonymously. The main author explained that it was not a test and that the students should complete it in the teacher's absence. The participants responded for 20 min.

### 3.4. Data analysis

Descriptive analyses, through means and standard deviations, were calculated for each dimension. We determined the normality of the data through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. We used three separate t-tests to explore the efficacy of the intervention: (a) on pre-test-post-test differences, (b) to determine whether there were significant differences among countries on post-test, and (c) to determine whether there were significant differences between genders on post-test. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ . Effect sizes (ES) for significant differences of each variable were also determined using Cohen's *d*. Statistical analysis of the quantitative data was conducted using SPSS v. 22.0.

### 3. Results

Internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha about the dimensions was between .71 and .81 and McDonald's Omega coefficient was .70. The reliability of the instrument ( $FC = .75$ ,  $VME = .44$ ) and its dimensionality ( $KMO = .70$ , Bartlett's sphericity:  $p < 0.01$ ) was confirmed. The results showed no statistically significant pre-test-post-test improvements in any competence (Table 1). However, there were improvements from pre-test to post-test in organization and planning ( $\Delta = .07$ ,  $d = .35$ ), management of knowledge and information ( $\Delta = .10$ ,  $d = .32$ ), emotional control ( $\Delta = .09$ ,  $d = .39$ ), autonomous work ( $\Delta = 0.03$ ,  $d = .40$ ) and adaptation to new situations ( $\Delta = 0.01$ ,  $d = .35$ ). According to the effect sizes, the differences were significant in practical terms.

Table 1.  
Descriptive statistics and comparison of means by factors in the pre-test - post-test

Competence	Pre-test <i>M(SD)</i>	Post-test <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Organization and planning	4.56(.76)	4.63(.52)	-.90	.369	.35
Oral and written communication in the own language	4.39(.70)	4.36(.67)	.26	.795	.29
Use of information, communication and technology	4.15(.81)	3.87(.98)	1.98	.052	.31
Communication in a foreign language	4.31(.95)	4.22(1.01)	.57	.570	.25
Development of planning and decision making	4.64(.55)	4.57(.47)	.69	.490	.28
Management of knowledge and information	4.38(.72)	4.48(.59)	-.91	.362	.32
Team work	4.68(.58)	4.66(.53)	.21	.829	.45
Social interaction	4.62(.60)	4.56(.51)	.49	.624	.39
Ethical and social commitment	4.61(.68)	4.56(.51)	.47	.640	.40
Emotional control	4.60(.63)	4.69(.45)	-.92	.360	.39
Autonomous work	4.55(.54)	4.58(.58)	-.29	.766	.40
Entrepreneurial attitude	4.76(.55)	4.59(.54)	1.61	.111	.31
Adaptation to new situations	4.49(.53)	4.50(.62)	-.13	.890	.35
Motivation	4.72(.57)	4.68(.49)	.34	.735	.37
Research competence	4.88(3.07)	4.37(.67)	1.24	.217	.34

Note: M: Mean; SD: standard deviation; \* $p < .05$ . Cohen's *d* effect sizes (small  $< 0.20$ ; medium  $1/4 0.20-0.80$  large  $> 0.80$ ).

The results revealed significant differences between Malta and the rest of countries regarding oral and written communication in the own language, use of information, communication and technology of them, and research competence (Table 2). Overall, the leaders from Malta reported the lower values of perception. On the contrary, there were no differences for students' perception according to gender (Table 3). Furthermore, the effect size was lower in all the analysis, what justified the absence of significant differences and the absence of practical effects.

Table 2.  
Descriptive statistics and analysis post-test students' perception according to country

Competence	Malta <i>M(SD)</i>	Greece <i>M(SD)</i>	Turkey <i>M(SD)</i>	Italy <i>M(SD)</i>	Spain <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Organization and planning	4.44(.83)	4.88(.26)	4.75(.31)	4.48(.38)	4.61(.29)	1.53	.205	.04
Oral and written communication in the own language	3.90(.75)	4.40(.62)	4.54(.63)	4.38(.35)	4.80(.42)	4.01	.006*	.20
Use of information, communication and technology	3.05(.75)	4.40(.49)	3.90(1.22)	4.61(.23)	4.20(.61)	6.83	.000*	.32
Communication in a foreign language	3.67(1.28)	4.72(.29)	4.27(1.19)	4.21(.26)	4.60(.51)	2.40	.060	.14
Development of planning and decision making	4.45(.42)	4.72(.36)	4.58(.67)	4.64(.19)	4.55(.42)	0.54	.777	.03
Management of knowledge and information	4.19(.55)	4.50(.36)	4.58(.76)	4.66(.33)	4.66(.54)	1.60	.185	.11
Team work	4.71(.47)	4.72(.37)	4.69(.63)	4.68(.53)	4.48(.64)	.36	.834	.00
Social interaction	4.52(.43)	4.40(.41)	4.60(.69)	4.75(.38)	4.60(.51)	.51	.723	.04
Ethical and social commitment	4.64(.45)	4.22(.49)	4.47(.66)	4.78(.26)	4.75(.33)	2.12	.089	.13
Emotional control	4.66(.44)	4.63(.36)	4.64(.65)	4.80(.17)	4.80(.28)	.34	.849	.01
Autonomous work	4.58(.57)	4.47(.59)	4.58(.70)	4.71(.33)	4.60(.61)	.16	.956	.01
Entrepreneurial attitude	4.76(.36)	4.62(.38)	4.49(.69)	4.42(.70)	4.56(.55)	.72	.581	.06
Adaptation to new situations	4.35(.63)	4.36(.57)	4.45(.72)	4.80(.50)	4.80(.42)	1.42	.236	.07
Motivation	4.80(.39)	4.57(.39)	4.50(.71)	4.85(.37)	4.80(.25)	1.34	.265	.08
Research competence	3.88(.68)	4.42(.56)	4.48(.71)	4.92(.12)	4.60(.42)	4.82	.002*	.23

\*Level of significance for  $p < 0.05$

Table 3.  
Descriptive statistics and analysis post-test students' perception according to gender

Competence	Female <i>M(SD)</i>	Male <i>M(SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Organization and planning	4.61(.35)	4.65(.64)	.90	.765	.00
Oral and written communication in the own language	4.35(.66)	4.37(.69)	.01	.915	.07
Use of information, communication & technology (ICT)	3.88(1.00)	3.87(.97)	.00	.969	.18
Communication in a foreign language	4.15(1.03)	4.29(1.00)	.29	.590	.23
Development of planning and decision making	4.60(.36)	4.54(.56)	.21	.648	.18
Management of knowledge and information	4.51(.47)	4.45(.68)	.14	.701	.11
Team work	4.74(.39)	4.60(.63)	1.11	.296	.01
Social interaction	4.65(.41)	4.48(.58)	1.68	.199	.06
Ethical and social commitment	4.62(.42)	4.50(.59)	.72	.398	.01
Emotional control	4.74(.30)	4.64(.55)	.75	.387	.15
Autonomous work	4.70(.44)	4.47(.68)	2.37	.129	.26
Entrepreneurial attitude	4.62(.47)	4.56(.60)	.13	.714	.13
Adaptation to new situations	4.55(.52)	4.46(.70)	.26	.607	.39
Motivation	4.77(.39)	4.60(.57)	1.72	.194	.28
Research competence	4.38(.64)	4.36(.70)	.01	.906	.16

\* Level of significance for  $p < .05$

#### 4. Discussion

The objective of the present work was to verify whether a sport leadership programme allowed to increase the involvement of sports leaders, evaluated based on the improvement in relevance in cross-sectoral competencies. The hypothesis was partially fulfilled because although the participants improved in organization and planning, management of knowledge and information, emotional control, autonomous work, and adaptation to new situation; they did not improve in oral and written communication in the own language, use of information, communication and technology, communication in a foreign language, development of planning and decision making, team work, social interaction, ethical and social commitment, entrepreneurial attitude, motivation, and research competence. Consequently, it seems that they were more involved regarding the pre-test measures. Nevertheless, as we had expected, no differences were found by gender, while there were differences between Maltese leaders and the rest of leaders in only three competences, without practical differences, which is an indicator that the programme was carried out equally in the different universities for both men and women.

As in recent research that has suggested that student employment on and off campus benefited the students in terms of cross-sectoral skills development and involvement (Perozzi, 2019; Peck & Callahan, 2019), this work also found results in that direction. These include the ability to influence others, make decisions and solve problems, plan complex projects and verbally communicate. However, many other studies also reported that students often acquire primarily career-specific knowledge of avant-garde, quantitative reasoning, and computer skills (Griffin, Peck, & LaCount, 2017).



In this work, as in the Project Co-curricular Experience Outcomes (Project CEO), the university students indicated which of the competencies of The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) have had the opportunity to develop in the university (Project CEO Benchmarking Report, 2018). Same as in this study, few students indicated that they were not acquiring these skills at all. This suggests that, for example, employers' perception that university students do not possess the skills they want (often referred to as "skills mismatch") is actually, as Markowitz (2017) suggests, a "gap in consciousness brought about by students who fail to connect the dots between the academic world and the real labour market." However, in the present work, although the participants were influenced by what they perceived that their mentors and employers believed about them, the perception of neither mentors nor employers was evaluated. So in future studies it should be information to consider.

According to the programme developed in the present work, two seemed to be the keys for the students' improvements and involvement. On the one hand, the mentors, given that they helped students to understand the educational context of potential employment experiences, and how they will benefit from their participation in the fundamental principles of leadership, in terms of knowing, being and doing (Komives et al., 2013). On the other hand, employers had the opportunity to work hand in hand with the leaders to help make them more effective in their jobs, give them the opportunity to refine these skills by applying them in their work on and off campus, and in doing so, make them more desired by employers in the future (Markowitz, 2017).

As has been partly demonstrated in this paper, it stands to reason that the students who are developing extracurricular activities at university could benefit from the leadership development that focuses on these cross-sectoral competencies (Peck & Callahan, 2019). Doing so could make them more effective in their jobs, give them the opportunity to refine these skills by applying them to their work on and off campus, and in doing so make them more desired by employers in the future, as these competencies are often listed by employers as the skills they want from new graduates (Seemiller, 2014). These perceptions are a good reference to promote students' involvement.

However, as the results of this work also reflect, the selection of the students for their training as leaders would have been influenced by their previous training and the skills they showed before the selection, which could influence their subsequent development (Komives et al., 2013). In this sense, the participants of this work were intentionally selected for their academic results and demonstrated skills, as can be seen in the method section. This reflection suggests that future studies should select participants with homogeneous characteristics in the skills to be developed or, at least, knowing their starting level and consider it in the presentation of the results. This could be another measure to consider in relation to involvement.

In general, the programme developed in the present study contributes to the report produced by the European Commission (EC) in the White Paper on Sport (EC, 2007), on improving the quality of learning and teaching in higher education institutions in Europe (CE, 2013) by providing extracurricular activities to improve teaching and learning at universities across Europe. However, the obtained results point to the fact that it seems a good starting point, since the students increased their perception of relevance in five competences, but they also indicated that it should be improved given that they did not improve in ten other competencies. Overall, these results revealed the higher involvement of the participants.

## **5. Conclusion**

The developed programme allowed the improvement of the relevance perceived by the participants in terms of organization and planning, management of knowledge and information, emotional control, autonomous work, and adaptation to new situation, meaning an increase in their involvement. However, there were much more competences that did not improve. In practical terms, this suggests that further intervention programmes must focus on the

development of this kind of competences, at least to promote higher participants' perception of relevance. In this sense, future programs should include activities related to communication, social networks, decision making, social interaction, and research. Nevertheless, the present work was the first one carried out enacting this programme intervention assessed on students' own perception of relevance about their competences as a measure of involvement. In future studies it must be analyzed the actual effect of this program on participants' competences.

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