PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN LITHUANIA: THE THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Abstract

The article aims at designing the coherent and sustainable system of school leadership development in Lithuania. The article provides a theoretical insight on main principles of sustainable education that could be implemented in the system of school leadership development. Hence the organization of school leadership development system is highlighted in two aspects: as a requirement to ensure that leadership development process is coherent and is adjusted to school leaders needs at different stages of their career as well as the need to provide opportunities for aspiring, newly-appointed, and established leaders to acquire and develop the skills and competences necessary to accomplish leadership tasks. It is emphasized in the article that the principles of sustainable education make a premise for optimization of the system of school leadership development in Lithuania.

Key words: school leadership development, sustainable education.

Introduction

School leadership is now an education policy priority around the world. As countries are seeking to adapt their educational systems to the needs of contemporary rapidly evolving society, expectations for schools and school leaders are changing. School leadership practice has been greatly influenced by changes in educational governance and school contexts. Leadership development is a strategic necessity because of the intensification of school leader's role in result of change processes (greater complexity of school contexts; devolution of powers to school level; etc.) in education. School leadership and questions concerning the optimum approaches for effective recruitment, assessment and development of principals have become matters to which increasing concern has been devoted in education systems internationally. Hence school leadership development requires a systemic approach that would be based on the principles of sustainable education.

Systems of preparatory training, certification, selection, assessment, induction and ongoing development for school leaders are necessarily rooted in specific national conditions and contexts. In evaluating these diverse approaches, researches should first of all acknowledge the vital importance of

culture and context shaping education, leadership and leadership development in each country (Bolam, 2004). However, despite such differences, there has been a global trend toward more systematic provision of leadership and management development for school leaders. The paradigm of sustainability provides a holistic perspective on school leadership development requiring consideration of economic, social and ecological forces.

In Lithuania it is widely accepted that school heads play a vital role in setting the direction for successful schools, but existing knowledge on the best ways to prepare and develop highly qualified candidates is sparse. Among major publications it should be mentioned Arbatauskas (1996); Kučinskienė, Kučinskas (2002); Želvys, (2003). The quality of school leadership is seen as critical in Lithuania to bringing about the changes required to implement reform agenda as well as for quality of education. It became apparent that considerable progress has been made in stimulating leadership development system improvements in the education system over the past few years. However, specific empiric researches on how to improve school principals' preparation and training programs haven't been carried out yet in Lithuania. The recent survey disclosed that training for school leadership roles in Lithuania is often inadequate, uncoordinated (Kontautienė, Melnikova, 2007, 2008; Melnikova, 2011). Despite the quite wide range of various professional development opportunities in Lithuania school heads face some problems. Firstly, school leadership development programmes should go along with leadership standards and attend to school heads' needs both for theory and for practice. However, a majority of school heads reported that the average leadership programmes were not aligned with the actualities of what is needed to effectively direct today's school systems. Secondly, the content of various leadership development programmes is strongly academized and is being delivered only through academic methods with no processes for applying the learning back in schools. There is no differentiation, personalization or contextualization of the programmes. Thirdly, the process of leadership development should be more systemic, coherent and controlled. There could be provided assistance in elaborating individual leadership competences development plans. That would help to save time and make leadership development process more purposeful and focused. Finally, there is a lack of competent lecturers-specialists in school leadership and management. In the result of the research an assumption has been made that school heads in Lithuania are neither fully prepared nor well trained and are likely to experience difficulties in their leadership roles (Kontautienė, Melnikova, 20011).

The absence of clear theoretical background for the analysis of school leadership development system as well as the results of the exploratory research on school leadership development in Lithuania inspired authors to analyze scientific literature in order to design a theoretical model of a coherent and sustainable school leadership development system that would ensure development of leadership competence required at different stages of leadership career.

Hence**, the aim of the article is** to design a theoretical model of a coherent and sustainable school leadership development system in Lithuania that would ensure development of leadership competencies required at different stages of leadership career.

The objectives of the article are:

- to define the notion of school leadership development as well as to highlight the principles of sustainable leadership development;
- to design a theoretical model of school leadership development

The theoretical analysis of school leadership development system is based on postmodern paradigmatic theory emphasizing the role of a school leader as facilitator of change, promoter of organizational learning that enhances schools' ability to pursue intelligent learning processes in a way that increases the organization's effectiveness and capacity for continuous improvement (Bush, Jackson, 2002; Hallinger, 2003) as well as on adult learning theory (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Hence, training and development of school leaders has to be based on clear conception of the aims of education in general and processes in school as learning organization in particular. This idea has to shape the leadership development programmes with regards to contents, methods, patterns, etc.

So, the article provides an insight on main concepts and notions in leadership development and highlights the principles of sustainable organization of school leadership development system. Approaches and methods used to support continuing professional learning of school leaders are highlighted as well. As the result, the theoretical model of leadership development system is designed. The number of criteria for model's analysis is introduced. The **main method of the research** is scientific literature analysis.

Definition of school leadership and principles of sustainable leadership development

The managing and leading tasks of school leadership are both complex and interrelated, so that there is no clearly defined concept of *leadership*. Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person or group over other people or groups to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization (Yukl, 2002). Leadership can not be regarded as a singular activity carried out by the principal. Most schools now have an extensive leadership apparatus, including deputies and/or assistant principals. Recently the developing interest is connected to *distributed leadership* (Hargreaves, Fink, 2006), which means involvement of larger numbers of staff in school leadership. The emphasis of this article is on school leaders, including but not confined to school principals.

The analysis of scientific literature on the questions of school leadership development as well as sustainable education allowed extracting main principles of sustainable leadership development process:

The content of school leadership development programs

The analysis of leadership development programs (Bush, 2008; Bush, Jackson, 2008; Huber, 2004; Pont et al, 2008) allows generating a "*content model"* for leadership development. Programs may vary in structure, content and effectiveness. Some of the differences perceived depend on how the role of school leadership is conceived. Whether school leadership development focuses on managerial responsibilities, including business skills and resource management, and/or on instructional leadership skills will depend on the level of autonomy and decentralisation granted to schools and the roles leaders are asked to play. However, a core curriculum most likely comprises five main themes: *Instructional leadership*: the topics related to teachings and learning, pedagogical leadership, managing teaching and learning. Leaders seek to achieve good outcomes by influencing the motivation, commitment, capability of teachers. They monitor teaching and learning to check that high standards are being achieved. So the course modules on instructional leadership need to address these themes. *Law:* The purpose of a module is to ensure that leaders understand the main requirements effecting schools and their management. *Finance:* Principals need skills to set and manage budget, audit spending and ensure that expenditure is targeted and meets school objectives. *Managing people:* Principals may be responsible for the full range human resource management: staff selection, induction, mentoring, staff development, deployment, appraisal, discipline. Module should include these themes. *Administration:* administration should be regarded as a function that supports the educational purpose of a school.

School leadership development based on leadership standards

The standards are being used for certification as a principal, for principal evaluation and for professional development programmes. These principles underpin the knowledge requirements, personal qualities, and actions of leaders certain leadership areas. These standards offer a framework to guide professional learning and a basis for the development of leadership programmes. Standards should be used as a basis for the design and accreditation of leadership programs for school leaders and for the development and implementation of assessment tools for the licensure/certification of beginning principals and the re-licensure of practicing principals.

There are two basic approaches to standards of school leadership: competency based approach and performance based approach (Louden, Wildy, 1999). A competency framework for standards of school heads work usually identifies key areas of principal's responsibility. Within each of key areas there is a subdivision of further competencies. The standard of performance in each competency is to be judged by certain indicators of principal's work. The competency based model for standards is one that describes observable behaviors based on a close scrutiny and analysis of the role of school principals. The weaknesses of this approach are the hierarchical lists of dispositions, knowledge and duties; the decontextualizing of performance and the promise of false dichotomies of those who reach a prescribed standard and those who fail. The purpose of the performance based model for leadership standards is to specify and illustrate the range of performance within the school principal's work. The project consists of three stages. The first stage is an initial research into selecting dimensions of school head's work and establishment of a continuum of performance. The second phase provides an account on of the content of principal's work. The third stage is designed to develop progress maps that describe the progression in development in performance in each dimension. Rich in reality of case studies, performance based approach appears a potential alternative to lists of hierarchical duties and responsibilities in competency based model as well as provides insight to leadership development programmes.

Differences in approach reflect deeply held differences in philosophy regarding professional learning and career planning. On the one hand, it is argued that the presence of standards and mandatory requirements creates hurdles that function as disincentives for people who might consider applying for leadership positions. On the other, the determination and assessment of standards and certification is necessary in order to enhance professionalism and ensure quality.

School leadership development involving the identification of school leaders needs

One of the key questions of leadership development systems is *needs analysis*. Watson (2003a) points out that training may be related to the needs of individuals, to the needs of schools or to the needs of the national system. Needs analysis provides the crucial information to ensure that professional learning is appropriate, valid and relevant. The needs diagnostic processes (e.g. 360-degree feedback) usually are based around national leadership standards. The principle of *needs analysis* requires the process of leadership development to be based on consistent analysis of needs for competencies. Needs analysis provides the crucial information to ensure that competencies development is purposeful, appropriate, valid and relevant.

Leadership development needs to be seen as a lifelong learning process

The school leadership career needs to be supported through the different stages in a balanced manner, including pre-service, induction and in-service provision and be complemented when important changes come about.

The significance of pre-service preparation of school leaders has been analyzed by Browne-Ferrigno (2003), Bush, Jackson (2002), Hallinger (2003). The notion of *preparation* suggests a preconceived orientation towards career development by the potential principals and/or other education system participants. Hallinger (2003) argues that the considerable criticism of pre-service courses reflects their lack of coherence and detachment from the realities of the principal's workplace. The predominant mode of delivery usually is lecture and discussion. Recognizing the importance of pre-service preparation for aspiring principals (Bush, Jackson, 2002) it is agreed that there is a need for a fundamental rethinking of the content, structure, delivery, and assessment of leadership learning. This involves the development of a framework for leadership preparation to ensure that formal university based programs and programs offered by and other providers of leadership development are complementary.

Preparation for leadership should be part of a continuous process involving both formal study and field based learning. The important connections between the self-identity and career goals of individuals need to be taken into consideration when planners are designing leadership learning opportunities.

Great attention in education management literature is dedicated to the process of induction to school leadership (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Bush, Middlewood, 2005). *Induction* is the process by

which new incumbents become familiar with the context in which they are leading, including the school culture. All first time participants need professional socialization (preparing to enter profession) and organizational socialization (learning how to lead in a particular context) is also required. Induction has three main dimensions (Bush, Middlewood, 2005): 1) Socialization: enabling the employee to become part of the organization; 2) Achievement of competent performance: enabling the new employee to contribute to the organization effectively; 3) Understanding the culture: enabling the employee to appreciate the core values of organization.

Successful induction should smooth the path for new principals, accelerate their socialization, enable them to make sense of the complex reality of the school leadership and built their confidence to perform the role effectively. Inadequate or tacit induction is likely to slow down the learning process, and leave principals with damaging sense of uncertainty about whether they are leading effectively or not. Where induction occurs, it may be regarded as a key stage in the ongoing process of continuing development.

Researches draw attention on the significance of professional development for successful school leadership (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Bush, 2008; Hallinger, 2003). *Leadership development* is often a generic term to describe any form of preparation or training for headship, or it is specifically used to refer to activities undertaken following appointment as a principal, that is in-service training. Induction is one phase of this process but leadership development should be seen as any professional activity undertaken once principals have taken their posts. Such provision may be complimentary to pre-service preparation or as a substitute for it.

The continuing professional renewal of experienced principals is an important part of what is essentially a process of lifelong learning. At the same time as programs of professional development should be made available to principals seeking to enhance their own professional growth and development, principals themselves can play an important part in the professional advancement of aspiring principals and others who have been newly appointed to the position of principal, and indeed to other positions of leadership in schools and educational institutions more generally.

School leadership development should be continuous and on-going

Consistent with the concept of lifelong learning, and assuming school leadership involves a career - the *stages in a school leader's career* are receiving growing attention. For example, implicit in the data collected in Earley at al's (2002) recent study is a call for a coherent school leadership

professional development framework which begins shortly after qualification as a teacher and continues through and beyond headship. A number of models have been developed to describe various *stages of school leadership career* (Bush, Jackson, 2002; Bush, 2008). The eminent among them is a five stage structure: *Emergent leadership* for teachers who are beginning to take on management and leadership responsibilities, including heads of subject/area. *Established leaders* for experienced leaders who do not intend to pursue headship, including assistant and deputy heads. *Entry to headship* for aspiring to first headship and newly-appointed first-time headteachers. *Advanced leadership* for experienced headteachers looking to develop their professional qualities, competences and expertise. *Consultant leadership* for experienced headteachers and other school leaders who are ready to further develop their facilitation, mentoring and coaching skills. The framework is thought to provide a coherent and flexible model for the development and support of school leaders at all stages of their career.

Leadership succession and leaders at many levels

Succession planning needs attention at all levels. Questions concerning the optimum approaches for *leadership succession* have become matters to which increasing concern has been devoted in education systems internationally. Effective succession means having a clear strategy to create positive and coordinated flows of headship (Bush, 2008; Hargreaves, Fink, 2006). Researchers should investigate the optimum conditions for successful succession as much as we focus on new leaders and startups.

Researches (Bush, 2008; Hargreaves, Fink, 2006; Pont et al., 2008) argue that more emphasis should be put on nurturing and developing leadership within schools, it should be focused on how best to identify and support future leaders early in their careers. That is why succession planning is essential to widen the applicant pool for school leadership and increase the quantity and quality of future school leaders. Succession planning involves fostering interest in leadership by providing opportunities for teachers to participate in leadership and to learn more about the day-to-day tasks it involves, as well as offering training for aspirant leaders. Individuals who have gained some experience in leadership or aspects of it are more likely to be interested in leadership and to be confident in their capacity to do it. It is therefore important that potential leaders are given opportunities to participate in leadership early in their careers. This can be done by distributing leadership within the school and encouraging teachers to take on responsibility for certain areas or aspects of leadership. Interest in leadership can also be

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fostered by shadowing programmes which allow teachers to observe and learn more about the concrete activities it entails.

High potential teachers need to be identified proactively and encouraged to develop their skills. Professional development opportunities can be a good way for teachers to test their potential for management and leadership. Training opportunities may be targeted to develop leaders for schools particularly in need, or they may be embedded in larger strategies for school leadership development. In addition, including leadership topics in initial teacher training can foster interest among teachers with leadership potential in the longer term (Pont et al. 2008).

Succession planning is essential to increase the quantity and quality of future school leaders. It is a way to counteract principal shortages and to ensure that there is an adequate supply of qualified personnel to choose from when the incumbent leader leaves the position. Succession planning involves proactively identifying potential leaders and encouraging them to develop their leadership practices. This can be done by offering training programmes for aspiring leaders and providing opportunities for young teachers to learn more about leadership through close contact with current leaders. It can also be done by including leadership topics in initial teacher training.

School leadership development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of provision

One of the issues of a major importance is a necessity to ensure **coherence of provision by different institutions.** A broad range of providers can cater to the varied training needs for school leadership. Training is provided by Ministries of Education or local governments, or outsourced to specialized institutions, to teacher training institutions or to a specialized body established to focus on school leadership training. Universities have also a broad range of supply. In addition, teacher and school leaders' institutions have developed their own training programmes. Where there is no national orientation but a range of institutions catering to local or regional needs, it is important to have clear standards that ensure that suppliers focus on good leadership development. Designing, delivering and assessing leadership programmes require complex skills, including leadership experience, understanding of relevant research and literature, and highly developed oral and written communication skills. That is why a lack of suitable course leaders and stuff may be experienced. Bolam (2004) discusses the challenge facing research-ambitious universities to produce high-quality research and publications on school leadership development. Another strategy is to encourage practitioner research,
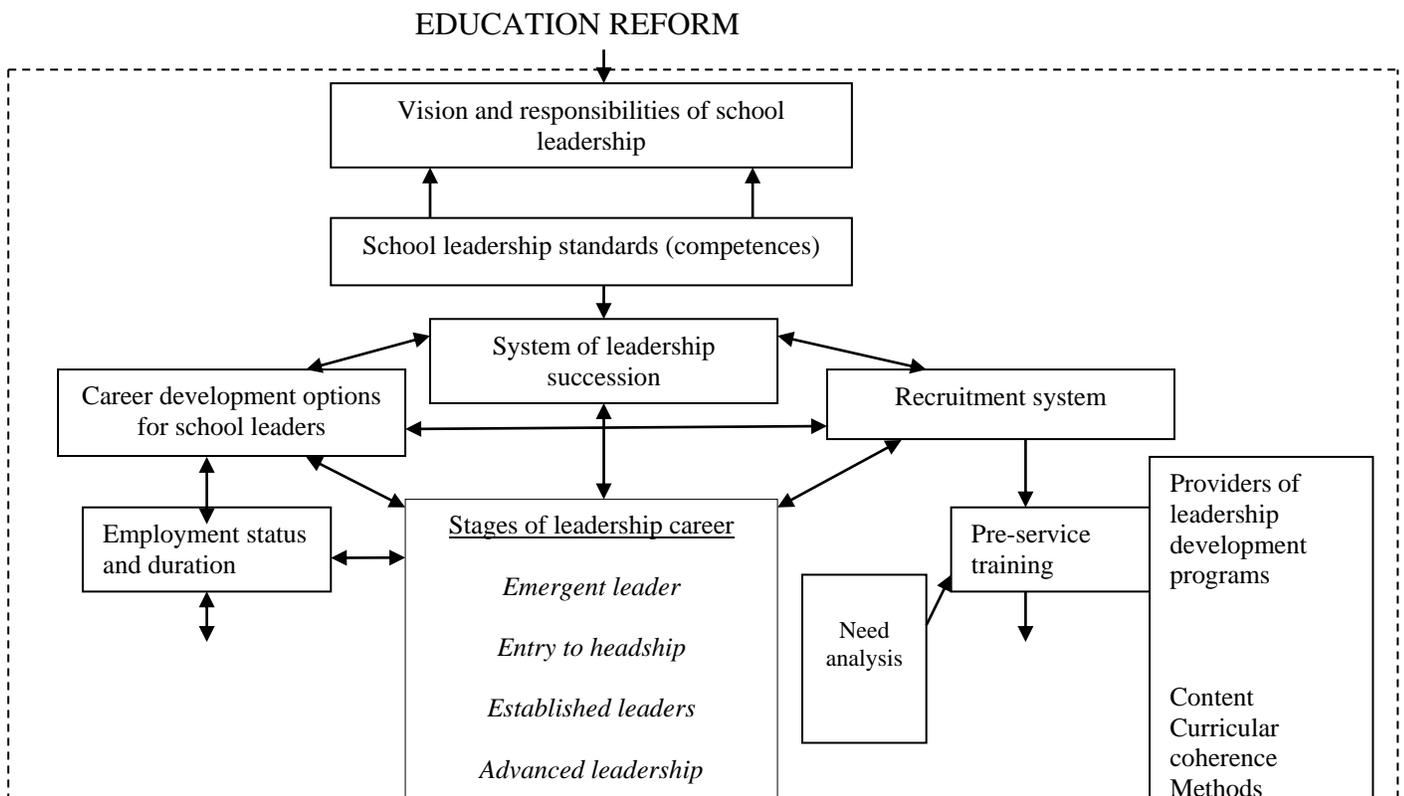
develop school leaders to become consultant leaders and contribute to programmes as facilitators, consultants and coaches.
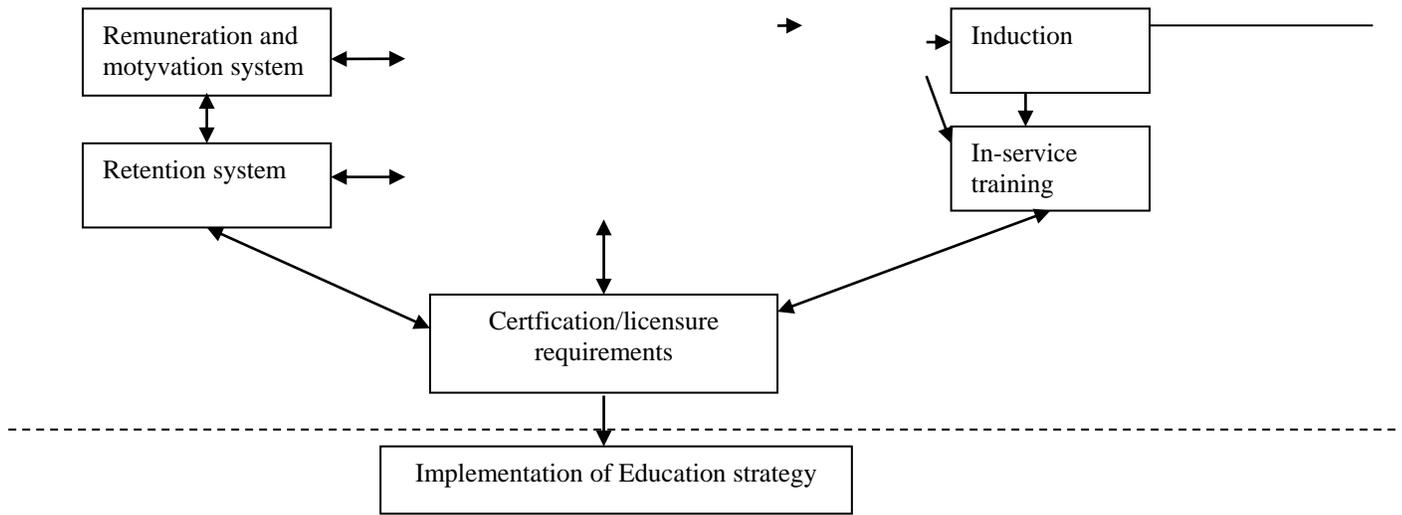
The content of leadership development programmes needs to be tailored specifically to the changing needs of the participants, whether it is pre-service preparation, induction during the first years, or in-service provision for more experienced leaders. An overview of how the programmes for each stage link with each other and with leadership standards and/or certification requirements is vital for a strategic view of leadership development. Of particular importance is the need to contextualize approaches to ensure relevance and to customize approaches to ensure responsiveness to particular needs. The number of continuing professional learning approaches identified is of particular importance. These approaches – reflective practice, action science, mentoring, field based learning, etc. – are considered to be essential elements in a framework intended to support continuing professional development for school leadership.

On the basis of the theoretical analysis of the principles of sustainable school leadership development organization the model of school leadership development system is designed

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1 fig. Theoretical model of sustainable school leadership development system (Source: author)

Discussion

As the expectations of what schools should achieve have changed dramatically over recent years, Lithuania as well as other European countries needs to develop new forms of school leadership better suited to respond to current and future educational environments. In order to do so, according to Pont et al (2008), Lithuania needs to address two sets of challenges simultaneously.

First, Lithuania needs to support and retrain the school principals who are currently on the job. Most of them were hired into schools in educational environments that were fundamentally different from today. Over time the rules of engagement for principalship/leadership have changed. As the roles and responsibilities of principals have evolved, the terms and conditions of service also need to be revised. Today's school leaders need to learn to adopt new forms of more distributed leadership. They need in-service training to develop and update their skills and they need more adequate rewards and incentive structures to stay motivated on the job and provide high quality leadership.

Second, Lithuania needs to prepare and train the next generation of school leaders. Especially at a time of high demographic turnover in leadership, thinking about and caring for the future is an essential aspect of system leadership. Lasting improvement depends on a clear definition and better distribution of leadership tasks within schools, planned succession mechanisms, professionalized recruitment processes, preparatory training, mentoring of new leaders, working conditions that attract

high quality graduates to educational leadership and a commitment to greater leadership density and capacity within schools from which future high level leaders can emerge.

At the same time, it is important to contextualize school leadership policies. There is no single model of leadership that could be easily transferred across different school-level and system-level contexts. The specific contexts in which schools operate may limit school leaders' functions, or provide opportunities for different types of leadership. Depending on the school contexts in which they work, school leaders face very different sets of challenges. Approaches to school leadership policy need to be based on careful consideration of the context in which schools operate and their particular challenges.

A theoretical model of school leadership development introduced in the article provides a starting point for the construction of a methodological framework for school leadership development studies in Lithuania that would respond a global trend towards more systematic provision of leadership development, particularly for school principals.

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