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A Survey of Records Management Systems at the Institute of Continuing Education, Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This study assessed records management systems at the Institute of Continuing Education, Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State. The researchers adopted a case study research design. The population for the study comprises 20 staff, made up of the Director of the Institute, Deputy Registrar, Secretary to the Director and all registry officers. Due to the meager population, the study adopted the entire population as the sample size. The major instrument used to collect data was structured questionnaire, complemented by personal observation. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics including simple percentage and frequency count. Findings revealed that records kept by the Institute were mainly student academic records, students' admission letters, verification of results files, registration kits, students matriculation lists, incoming mails and outgoing mails. Records were kept both manually and electronically in some offices. Records management was beneficial for the smooth running of the Institute as it made it possible to attend to institutional and students demand on time. The study concluded that the practice of proper records

management has not been incorporated into the administration of the Institute. The study therefore recommended that practice of records management components should be incorporated holistically into the institute-wide strategic planning initiatives to take care of the different types of records from when they are generated to when they are destroyed or archived.

Keywords: Records management systems, Descriptive Statistics, Structured questionnaire, Strategic planning initiatives, Institute of education.

Introduction

Records are indispensable to the efficient and economic operation of organisations. They serve as organisational memory, the evidence of past events and basis for future action. When created, maintained and disposed of in a systematic and orderly fashion, records become tremendous assets to an organisation (State of Montana, Montana Historical Society, 2002). Records are also viewed as an important tool to ensure that obligations of an organisation are met. Furthermore, they are of value for reference and management decisions. Accuracy of records will also prevent excessive residues by ensuring that withdrawal time has been met (Poultry Industry Council, 2004).

The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (2009) defines a record as "recorded information, in any form, created or received and maintained in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business and kept as evidence of such activity". The University of Manchester (2010) states that any recorded information which is produced, received or kept by an institution as part of its business processes and which provides evidence of a specific activity can be defined as a record. The University of South Africa (2010), likewise points out that records refer to recorded information, regardless of format or medium, which has been created, received, used, accessed and maintained by an institution at large as evidence and information in pursuance of its legal obligations or in the transaction of business. These include e-mails, records in electronic form, and records other than correspondence. However, the concept of records management is linked to records.

According to Shepherd and Yeo (2003), records management embraces all the responsibilities that relate to the way in which records are created and managed. Thus, National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (2009) defines records management as the management

of information resources in a manner that makes information easily accessible, securely protected and stored, and correctly disposed of when necessary. Records management controls the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of records. Records management is also the process by which internally or externally generated physical or electronic records are managed from their inception, receipt and storage, all the way through to their disposal (Adeyemi, 2012).

Records management therefore, seeks to efficiently and systematically control records that are routinely created as a result of activities and transactions throughout their life cycle (creation, use, maintenance, archive or disposal). This means that records management is based on the principles of regular review and controlled retention or destruction with general aim of ensuring cost-effective business processes, legal and regulatory compliance, and corporate accountability. According to Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005), "proper records management involves establishing systematic controls at every stage of the record's life cycle in accordance with established principles and accepted models of records management." This therefore, means that practicing proper records management leads to good management because any institution activities are based on access to the information contained in records. In other words, effective records management systems provide information required for the proper functioning of organisations, including polytechnics.

According to Jahun(2017), the aim of establishing polytechnics in Nigeria is to train technologists, technicians in courses leading to the awards of certificates(ND, HND and Advanced Professional Diploma) which are relevant to the needs, aspirations and the development of the nation's diverse economy and industries. According to the author such acquired training from polytechnics would lead to the transformation of the country's economy and industrial development.

On the other hand, poor records management can be risky to polytechnics and hence jeopardise national development. Djorka and Conneen (1998) summarise the consequences of poor records management as follows: an institution where paperwork is poorly managed; the flow of records through the life cycle is retarded, chaotic, or non-existent; records and the information they contain are difficult to retrieve; and costly duplication of paperwork is a frequent occurrence.

The Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) was established by Federal Polytechnic, Offa in 1994. The goal of the management for the establishment of the Institute is to provide an avenue for teeming youths/adults who for some reasons cannot advance their formal

education through regular academic programmes of the Polytechnic. The Institute has grown over the years to be semi-autonomous. Approval for the semi-autonomous status was granted by the Academic Board in 2017. Managing records in this Institute is important because good records that are accurate, comprehensive and authentic store important information needed for administrative, historical and evidential purposes.

Statement of the problem

Perhaps it would not be an overstatement to say that record keeping problems are common to the different levels of the education sector. It is however becoming clearer that it is more pronounced in the polytechnic system because, accurate, reliable and trustworthy records that fulfill evidential requirements are being created but not properly managed (Aliyu, 2017). This therefore, becomes an issue of great concern to government, students, individuals and organisations.

In the past, frantic efforts to improve the situation in many institutions through the introduction of computers and Internet services as well as development of database management system do not seem to have helped the situation much, because the records management system is still conventionally paper-based and manual in operation. Many management staff complain of funds and material resources. The reality reveals gross inadequacy of qualified personnel, facilities, students' explosion and space problem. This study therefore, sought to survey records management systems at the Institute of Continuing Education, Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to survey the records management systems at the Institute of Continuing Education. The specific objectives were to:

1. identify the types of records kept at the Institute of Continuing Education, Federal Polytechnic Offa
2. assess the records management systems adopted by the Institute
3. identify the form of records management systems preferred by the records staff of the Institute
4. find out perceived benefits of proper records management to the Institute.
5. Identify challenges associated with records and information management in the Institute.

Literature Review

The term record has been defined by many scholars and organisations. International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) (2001) defines a record as information created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or a person in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. This implies that an institution in its business functions creates records as shepherd. According to Yeo (2003), records may be created either in the course of an activity or afterwards in conscious act of record keeping. Cox (2001) on the other hand, defines records as an extension of human memory, purposefully created to record information, document transactions, communicate thoughts, substantiate claims, advance explanations, offer justifications and improve lasting evidence of events. Records therefore, play a significant role in higher education management commencing from its establishment to the stages of development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and renewal of its programmes and these are essential information for the continued survival of the institution.

Records, in the views of Popoola (2003), Enemute (2005), Sapere-Obi (2014), are information received and kept, regardless of the form or medium received and maintained by an agency, institution, organisation or individual in pursuit of its legal obligations or in the transaction of business. Generally, these are documentary evidence of transactions made or received in pursuance of legal obligations, irrespective of the physical form or characteristics of the media. Such recorded information could be on paper, audiotapes, videotapes, microfilms, photographs, slides and computer readable such as computer tapes, disks, compact and optical disks. However, records management is based on the premise that records require managing, in the same sense that other higher education resources need managing.

Records management is therefore, a vital information tool by which records relay information about an activity, provide evidence that an activity occurred and therefore, serve as a benchmark by which decisions are made. To this end, Mnjama and Wamukoya (2004) submit that records are valuable assets that need to be managed and protected. Besides providing essential evidence of organisational activities, transactions and decisions, records management also supports business functions and is critical for organisational performance.

According to Sapere-Obi (2014), records management could mean a management science that deals with controlling the quantity, quality and cost of records and it encompasses the procedural system operations, space, equipment and staff required to administer the

records. Furthermore, records management means creation, control and disposal of records and it includes planning and developing classification schemes, operating and maintenance of files and other documents, checking undue proliferation of records, planning and maintenance of record rooms and preparation of indexes.

When records are managed properly, it could go a long way in enhancing the administration of institutions that keep them. Records management should therefore, be part and parcel of the strategic function of an organisation. Ambira and Kemoni (2007) state that, the objectives of records management are to set policies and procedures, assign responsibilities for records management at various levels within the organisation, set best practice standards, process and maintain records retention and disposal policy, process and maintain records in safe and secured storage, implement access policies, integrate records management into business systems and processes, assign, implement and administer specialised systems for managing records and provide a range of services relating to the management and use of records.

In essence, sound records management is the foundation any higher educational institution needs to provide services, to fulfill its obligation of accountability towards immediate community, students and staff and to protect their rights (Ngoepe, 2004).

Empirical Review

Akor and Udensi (2013) assessed records management systems of the Federal University of Technology, Minna-Nigeria and Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai, Nigeria. In carrying out the study, four (4) research questions were posed. The study sample population comprised 88 staff (46 staff from the establishment division of the Federal University of Technology, Minna and 42 staff from the establishment division of the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai). The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The research questions were answered using frequency and percentages. The major findings of the study revealed: ineffectiveness in record management practices, incompetent personnel, inadequate infrastructural facilities, constant power failure. Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made: effort should be made for provision of standby generator as an alternative to power supply; staff should be trained to handle the universities' records; and adequate fund and enough infrastructural facilities should be provided.

Tagbotor, Adzido and Agbanu (2015) equally carried out a study to determine the extent to which the information users' behaviour and

proper records management contribute to the performance of Ho Polytechnic, Ghana, to ensure competitive survival. The purpose of records management, records life cycle and electronic records management system were thoroughly explored. Simple random sampling was used to select a sample size of 30 respondents. Based on the survey results, it was revealed that Ho Polytechnic, Ghana as a tertiary institution practiced sound records management. It was also, observed that the institution's records management was shifting from manual to electronic system of managing records by using computers and the Internet. This allows the users to complete and submit the information on time. Furthermore, the electronic filing system prevents the users from making serious mistakes that could affect the operation and image of the institution.

Musembe (2016) probed into the business functions of institutions of higher learning as supported by proper records management. A case study research design was used to establish the records management policy of Moi University, Kenya. The study population consisted of 111 respondents drawn from the main campus. The sample size purposively selected based on the respondents' role, comprised 78 respondents including 6 top management representatives, 22 action officers, 6 records supervisors, 4 auditors, 30 records staff and 10 secretaries some of whom were interviewed while others filled copies of the questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches were applied. The study established that, the University lacked a clear records management policy. Consequently, development and implementation of a records management programme and policies to establish formal records management programme with clear policies, infrastructure, staffing, guidelines and clear qualifications for records personnel was recommended.

Research methodology

The study adopted a case study research design. This is because it specifically tended to focus on the Institute of Continuing Education, Federal Polytechnic Offa, Kwara State. The population for this study comprises 20 staff, made up of the Director of the Institute, Deputy Registrar, Secretary to the Director and all registration officers. Since the population is not large, the researchers adopted total enumeration technique.

The major instrument used to collect field data was structured questionnaire and complemented by personal observation. The questionnaire was designed by taking into account the objectives of the study. The researchers administered copies of the questionnaire to the staff in their various offices and collected them back after some days. The data collected from the field were analysed using descriptive statistics.

including simple percentage and frequency count. The descriptive statistical tool was adopted because of its simple and easy understanding pattern to different cadre of researchers that may be interested in reading this report.

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSIONS

Return rate

Out of 20 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the staff of the Institute, 18 copies were filled and returned. This represents 90% return rate and found useable for analysis.

Demographic information of the respondents

Analysis of demographic characteristics of the respondents is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

Age of Respondents		
Item	Frequency	%
31 - 35 years	4	22.2
36-40 years	4	22.2
41 and above	10	55.6
Total	18	100.0
Sex of Respondents		
Male	10	55.6
Female	8	44.4
Total	18	100.0
Qualification of Respondents		
HND	10	55.6
B.SC/B.A/B.Ed	6	33.3
M.Sc/M.Ed/MBA	2	11.1
Total	18	100

Age of Respondents		
Field of Specialization		
Information Management / Record Management	-	-
Library and Information Science	-	-
Archive and Records Management	1	5.6
Others	17	94.4
Total	18	100
Years of Experience		
0 - 3 years	8	44.4
4 - 6 years	5	27.8
7 - 10 years	3	16.7
10 and above	2	11.1
Total	18	100

Table 1 shows the age of the respondents. It was revealed that 10(55.6%) respondents were between age 41 and above, 4(22.2%) of the respondents were between the age of 31 to 35 years, while 4(22.2%) respondents were between age 36 to 40. The table also revealed that 10(55.6%) respondents, constituting the majority, were male, while 8(44.4%) respondents were female. On the educational qualifications, it was revealed that 10(55.6%) of the respondents were Higher National Diploma (HND) holders, 6(33.3%) respondents were B.Sc/B.A/B.Ed holders, while only 2(11.1%) respondents have Masters. This simply connotes that there were more HND holders at the Institute than holders of other degree qualifications. The table also revealed that 17(94.4%) respondents do not have related qualifications in records management, while 1(5.5%) respondent has related degree in Archival and Records Management. On the experience, the table showed that 8(44.4%) respondents have 0 - 3 years of experience, 5(27.8%) respondents have 4 - 6 years of experience, 3(16.7%) respondents have 7 - 10 years of experience, while 2(11.1%) respondents have over 10 years of working experience at the Institute.

Data Analysis based on the objectives

Objective 1: Types of record kept at the Institute

Table 2: Types of records kept

Types of Record	Yes		No		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Minutes of internal meetings	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18	100%
Minutes of academic board meetings	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18	100%
Students matriculation lists	16	88.9%	2	11.1%	18	100%
Students admission letters	16	88.9%	2	11.1%	18	100%
Examination time tables	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18	100%
Lecture time tables	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18	100%
Incoming mails	14	77.8%	4	22.2%	18	100%
Outgoing mails	14	77.8%	4	22.2%	18	100%
Students results	16	88.9%	2	11.1%	18	100%
Students' academic records	18	100%	-	-	18	100%
Students' registration kits	14	77.8%	4	22.2%	18	100%
O'level results verifications	16	88.9%	2	11.1%	18	100%
Addendum files	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18	100%
Request files	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18	100%
Staff records	5	27.8%	13	72.2%	18	100%

Table 2 indicates the types of record kept at the Institute of Continuing Education, Federal Polytechnic, Offa. Students' academic records were the most type of records managed by the Institute as majority of the respondents 18(100%) indicated that they have them in their custody. This was closely followed by records of students' matriculation lists, students' admission letters, students' results and O'level results verification 16(88.9%) respectively. Next, were the incoming mails, outgoing mails and students registration kits

14(77.8%). On the other hand, minutes of internal meetings, minutes of academic board meetings, examination time tables, lecture time tables, addendum files, request files and staff records, were indicated as types of record not kept by majority of the respondents 13(72.2%).

Objective 2: Records management systems by the Institute

Table 3: Records management systems

Item	Frequency	Percentage %
Manual	8	44.4%
Electronic	5	27.8%
Both	5	27.8%
Total	18	100%

Table 3 shows the record management systems in relation to the storage of documents/records at the Institute. It was revealed that majority of the respondents 8(44.4%), agreed that documents were stored manually. Next, 5(27.8%) respondents claimed that documents were stored electronically and also 5(27.8%) claimed that records were stored both manually and electronically.

Objective 3: Preference and reasons for records management systems

Table 4: Preference and reasons for record management systems

Item	Frequency	Percentage %
Preference for systems		
Manual	-	-
Electronic	4	22.2%
Both	14	77.8%
Total	18	100%
Reasons for preference		

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Item	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
Manual records management system allows for easy retrieval of document	4 22.2%	6 33.3%	-	3 16.7%	5 27.8%	18 100%
Electronic records management system assures accurate and reliable information	7 38.9%	8 44.4%	-	2 11.1%	1 5.6%	18 100%
Electronic records management system allows the Institute to fulfill legal mandates regarding protection of its records	2 11.1%	6 33.3%	-	7 38.9%	3 16.7%	18 100%

Table 4 shows the record management systems preferred by the staff of Institute of Continuing Education. 14(77.8%) respondents, constituting the majority, claimed that both manual and electronic systems were most preferred, while 4(22.2%) respondents agreed that electronic system was most preferred. The Table also shows reasons for the records management system preferred. It shows that 15(83.3%) respondents agreed that electronic records management system assures accurate and reliable information. 10(55.6%) respondents agreed that manual records management system allows for easy retrieval of document and 8(44.4%) respondents agreed that electronic records allows the Institute to fulfill legal mandates regarding protection of its records. Meanwhile, 10(55.6%) respondents disagreed that electronic records allow the Institute to fulfill the legal mandates regarding the protection of its records, while 8(44.4%) respondents disagreed that manual records management system allows for easy retrieval of needed documents.

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Objective 4: Perceived benefits of proper records management in the Institute

Table 5: Perceived benefits derived from proper records management

Benefits derived from record management	SA	A	N	D	SD
Proper records management leads to quick decision making	11 61.1%	7 38.9%	-	-	-
Space saving is a benefit the Institute derives from proper records management	1 5.6%	11 61.1%	-	4 22.2%	2 11.1%
Reduction of storage space is one of the benefits of effective records management	3 16.7%	4 22.2%	3 16.7%	-	8 44.4%
Proper records management promotes good governance	10 55.6%	8 44.4%	-	-	-
Effective records management saves employees' time	15 83.3%	3 16.7%	-	-	-
Proper records management sustains corporate and institutional memory	15 83.3%	3 16.7%	-	-	-
Proper records management helps to meet students' demands timely	10 55.6%	8 44.4%	-	-	-

Key: SA/A = Strongly Agree / Agree, N = Neutral,
D/SD = Disagree/Strongly Disagree

Table 5 depicts the perceived benefits derived from proper records management at the Institute. The result revealed that 100% of the respondents agreed that effective records management helps in taking quick decisions, promoting good governance, saving employee time, maintaining corporate and institutional memory and meeting students demands timely. 66.7% of the respondents also agreed that space saving was a benefit. Meanwhile, 44.4% respondents believed that reduction of storage space was not one of the benefits of records management.

Objective 5: Challenges associated with records and information management

Table 6: Challenges associated with records and records management practice

Challenges	SA	A	N	D	SD
Improper records management is a challenge in retrieving office documents.	10 55.6%	5 27.8%	-	3 16.6%	-
Lack of proper security for records affects effective records management at the Institute	3 16.7%	11 61.1%	1 5.5%	3 16.7%	-
Lack of professionally trained records managers contribute to problems of records management	4 22.2%	10 55.6%	1 5.6%	3 16.6%	-
Inadequate resources to facilitate proper records management is a problem	1 5.6%	17 94.4%	-	-	-
Insufficient space for records at the Institute is a challenge.	10 55.7%	7 38.7%	1 5.6%	-	-

Key: SA/A=Strongly Agree / Agree, N=Neutral,
D/SD=Disagree/Strongly Disagree

Table 6 shows the challenges associated with records and information management in the Institute. It was revealed that all the 18(100%) respondents agreed that inadequate resources to facilitate proper records management practice is one of the challenges associated with records and information management at the Institute. 17(94.4%) respondents believed that insufficient space for records and improper records management constitute a challenge in retrieving needed documents/records. 14(77.8%) respondents stated that lack of proper security for records affects records management practice at the Institute, while 14(77.8%) respondents claimed that lack of professionally trained records managers contributes to problems of records management.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are discussed below as guided by the objectives:

Types of records kept at the Institute

Records kept by the Institute were mainly student academic records, students' admission letters, verification of results files, registration kits, students matriculation lists, incoming mails and outgoing mails. This aligns with the findings of Aliyu (2017) study on archival materials and manuscript collections in selected polytechnics in North Central, Nigeria, where the author discovered some of the records kept to include students' admission letters, incoming mails, examination time tables, appointment and promotion letters and imprest among others. Meanwhile, minutes of internal meetings, minutes of academic board meetings, addendum files, request files and staff records were equally kept at the Institute.

Records management systems and reasons for preference at the Institute

The study revealed that most of the staff preferred both manual and electronic record management systems. Hence, majority of the records generated at the Institute were stored manually, while some were kept both manually and electronically in some offices like the Director's Office, Deputy Registrar's Office and offices of staff in charge of students result verification.

It was revealed that manual record management system assists in simple keeping of records and easy retrieval. Meanwhile, in this era of information technology, manual records management system is less relevant. The finding equally showed that electronic records management system assures accurate and reliable information. This is in line with Herbert (2008) findings that electronic records management system helps institution to control, avoid and decrease the costs associated with maintaining records and improve efficiency of the operations. Furthermore, electronic records system allows the Institute to fulfill legal mandates regarding the protection of its records. This aligns with the findings of Otuama (2010) that electronic record system allows organisations to fulfill legal mandates regarding the protection of their records.

Perceived benefits derived from proper records management

The study revealed that proper records management was beneficial for the smooth running of the Institute as it made it possible to attend to institutional and students demand on time. Specifically, the findings identified that proper records management sustains corporate and institutional memory, leads to quick decision making and helps to meet students' demand timely. This finding is in line with Blake (2014) who

expresses the view that properly managed records can help reduce operating expenses, enhance customer service and ensure that organisation is in compliance with relevant laws and regulations. Also, Shepherd (2010) states that proper records management ensures accountability, makes people and businesses account for their actions and obligations and when there is a need to prove that organisations have complied with legal or regulatory requirements. In other words, best practice-records management enables institutions to meet legal, regulatory, and financial requirements, and to protect their assets and rights.

Challenges associated with records and information management in the institute

The study exposed that despite the benefits attached to proper records management, there were some challenges which hinder effective records and information management at the Institute and these include lack of professionally trained records managers, improper records management which was as a result of lack of professionally trained records managers, inadequate resources to facilitate proper records management practice, lack of fund and insufficient space for records to be kept at the Institute. This result is corroborated by the study of Ndenje-Sichalwe, Ngulube and Stilwell (2011), whose findings revealed that records management best practices in the government institutions are accorded low priority. Absence of specific budgets allocated to registry sections, lack of support from senior officers, lack of records management policies and low levels of training for registry personnel were among the records management problems in government ministries. Furthermore, majority of government institutions in Africa lack records retention and disposition schedules which lead to the congestion of records which are also disorganised and poorly managed.

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the findings, it is concluded that records such as incoming and outgoing mails, students results, verification of results files among others were kept at the Institute of Continuing Education, Federal Polytechnic Offa. These records were stored manually and electronically. Basically, the practice of record management allows for quick decision making, saving of time and assists in meeting students and staff requests urgently. It is however, unfortunate that records management at the Institute has been confronted with the challenges of lack of professionally trained record managers, improper records management

practice, inadequate resources to facilitate proper record management practice, lack of fund and insufficient space.

In addition, practice of proper records management has not been incorporated into the administration of the Institute based on the fact that records created were filed and kept for referential, administrative and legal purposes only. Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

1. Practice of records management components should be incorporated holistically into the institute-wide strategic planning initiatives to take care of the different types of records from when they are generated to when they are destroyed or archived. Most importantly, senior staff should embrace the records management best practices to ensure its effectiveness and should incorporate it into the institute's policy.
2. Although, electronic record management system assures accurate and reliable information, many of the staff still preferred manual system of retrieving needed records because it assists in simple keeping of records and easy retrieval. Therefore, both manual and electronic records management systems should be retained. Besides, each of the two can serve as a backup for another if the need arises.
3. It is unfortunate that the Institute lacked trained record managers. As such, the Institute needs to recruit professionally trained records managers whose responsibilities will be compilation, implementation, maintenance and utilisation of approved filing systems among others.
4. Records management practice needs to be carried out by competent record staff who will know what has to be done. It is therefore, necessary for the Institute to train their staff on proper records management practice. Workshops and seminars should be organised regularly by the Institute to train staff on effective records management.
5. The Institute should adopt a records management policy that will serve as a guide to record officers and also ensures uniformity and continuity in the manner at which the Institute's records will be managed.

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