

The Impact of Teaching “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” on Students’ Performance in Academic Activity

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Abstract: In his book, “*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*” Stephen R Covey claims that the Seven Habits, based on fundamental principles of effectiveness provide a strong foundation to flourish a person’s full potentials. He outlined the way to become effective and successful in each and every activity of daily life by introducing seven habits. His idea is well accepted and considered highly influential to enhance personal effectiveness. On basis of my 5 years teaching experience at BRAC University, I found some common bad habits of students like reactive behavior, propensity to compete with friends, less cooperative while working in a group, study more before exam instead of study on time, highly oblivious of their own fitness. In university, for effective learning in addition to classroom teaching many methods are being used e.g., assignment, case study, project work, flipping, reflection writing in blog. Moreover, in class group discussion and presentation, pair work, sharing reflection on selective topic are arranged to ensure students active participation. To cope with today’s evolved teaching system students have to be proactive, value driven and self motivated. Hence, Covey’s “seven habits” is being taught to second semester students as a part of Ethics and Culture course at BRAC University to develop a strong foundation of self-efficacy. The focus of this paper is to examine the impact of teaching seven habits on student’s academic activities. By nature this paper is descriptive, emphasized on quantitative and qualitative approaches where the tools are interview, reflection paper, discussion, observation and survey questionnaire.

Keywords: Seven Habits, Behavioral Change, Effectiveness, Self Motivation, University Education.

INTRODUCTION

According to Aristotle as focused in *Nichomachean Ethics*, excellence is not an act but a habit. To flourish a life he emphasized on virtue, which is excellence of character. BRAC University attempts to inspire excellence and whenever we take initiatives for our students to bring excellence through university education then emphasis is given on their habit because without changing their habit we cannot expect them to have real excellence. Are students proactive by taking responsibility of their deeds? Are they aware of time management? Can they work in a group? Are they aware of their fitness? Do they have interdependency skill? These important questions have been addressed to make university education successful. Any initiative to make students efficient must be based on a strong foundation, which can make them eligible to achieve personal effectiveness. The “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” developed by Stephen R. Covey can be considered as that kind of a foundation, where he focused on fundamental principles of effectiveness, unlike technique-based approaches for personal development. Principles are guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have permanent value and

that inevitably focus on the reality, not appearance. The teaching of principle-based habit in the very first stage of university life assists students to understand themselves in a practical way and motivates them to become value driven person which necessarily have a long term significant change in their personality to make university education successful. Revolutionary steps have been taken by Covey for personal development which is based on timeless principles. Unlike techniques principles never change. We follow techniques considering on the situation and go for temporary solutions but principles never change and work forever e.g. integrity, trust worthiness therefore real effectiveness should be based on principles. Being proactive, focusing on personal leadership and personal management once a student have become independent then he can move to work in a group. Moreover, to work in a group Covey put emphasis on three principles i.e. interpersonal leadership, empathetic communication and creative cooperation. Furthermore, to make individual work and group work successful he suggests moving through a balanced self renewal which covers four areas of our life i.e. physical, spiritual, mental and social /emotional. How effective role Covey’s idea can

play to make students' academic activities successful is a major concern of this paper.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In BRAC University all students of different disciplines have a compulsory three credit course titled "HUM-103: Ethics and Culture" which is offered to mainly second semester students. The course aims to create effective students, who would become ethically driven and thus flourish their life. With a view to achieving the goal the course curriculum has been designed considering the first lecture on "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" developed by Stephen R Covey. As a faculty of this course and based on my four years teaching experience I realize that teaching seven habits are playing significant role to make students more effective and this effectiveness is very important to accomplish academic activities successfully. Real effectiveness start from inner side of a student therefore initiatives should be taken in such a way so that students become motivated to develop themselves by their own. In the class we create an environment where students learn by themselves through active participation. Presenting own ideas and receiving feedback from others and, listening to others' reflections and giving feedback to them enhance students' critical thinking capability to understand the limitations of their existing thoughts and this learning impacts positively to bring change in students' behavior.

It has been observed over the semesters by all teachers of this course that after this class, students start thinking differently about themselves, their daily activities, future plan and become motivated to acquire these habits. This class replaces their existing paradigm of thought with a new paradigm and that necessarily changes their perception about their personality. They become proactive by taking responsibility instead of blaming the environment, can easily define the difference between reactive approach and proactive approach, understand their obliviousness about time management, realize the importance of empathetic communication, feel the importance of win-win paradigm of human interaction and know the importance of synergy to acquire interdependency skill. But how profoundly this learning is leading students to become an effective student? This question regarding the long term effect of teaching seven habits on university education, made me think about it as an issue of my study.

Area of Research

The focus of my research is to evaluate the effectiveness of changing students thought about their habits, by making them familiar with the success idea of Covey to make them more competent to accomplish academic activities successfully. I also emphasize on

the some bad habits which exist as constraints of enhancing students' efficiency from the perspective of Bangladesh.

In justifying the outcome of teaching 7 habits to second semester students it can be possible to come to a conclusion that to make students effective there is no alternative but motivate them to change their habit and it must be done at the beginning of the university education. What BRAC University is doing can be a valuable model to make students highly effective. Moreover, this research will try to explore how teaching seven habits can change students to be effective in each and every academic activity.

Literature review

Mamtazuddin Patwari truly emphasizes on one of the major problems of the education system in Bangladesh. He says the students and guardians are expeditiously more cautious about GPA or result than learning; therefore, students are getting good CGPA without ensuring quality education. Moreover, they are taking help from coaching centers; private tutors to learn techniques to get good CGPA. Education system should be devoted to flourishing hidden potentials of students. However, course curriculum and teaching learning process need to be based on a strong foundation by which students would understand themselves and become motivated to be successful in life [1]. In this regard teaching Covey's seven habits can play influential role as that reinforce students to lead a principle based life not technique based life to develop self efficacy.

J.P Thairox focused on excellence and habit while talking about Aristotle's virtue ethics. Aristotle emphasized on character based virtue ethics for the development of human excellence; he considered excellence as a habit not an action or initiative. Focusing on character or habit Thairox emphasized on a dictionary or philosophy which described the term virtue as it is explained in Aristotle's virtue ethics. "that state of a thing which constitutes its peculiar excellence and enables it to perform its function well ... in man [it is] the activity of reason and of rationally ordered habits." [2] Here, Thairox counsel to acquire habits what covey explicitly depicts in his 7 habits.

Peter Colwell while talking about long term success emphasizes on clear self-assessment. He says acknowledging our strength helps us to build up confidence in our self and produce the expected result we want to have in life. At the same time, recognizing our weak areas allows us to work on revitalizing our personality or behavior and help to make necessary changes in our life. However we must bring change in our thought and make new habit to become successful in life and this is equally applicable to ensure academic

success [3]. Covey's idea of paradigm shift and time management matrix goes with Peter Colwell's notion and helps somebody to assess himself very effectively.

To perform students must function well or to bring excellence students must acquire rationally ordered habit. Aristotle's idea serves my hypothesis. Covey's each and every habit requires three elements i.e. knowledge, skill and desire. Knowledge, the theoretical paradigm deals with what to do and why to do. Skill is the how to do and desire is the interest to do. Therefore, it is so evident to claim that Covey presented Aristotle's idea in a practical and understandable way. Aristotle while talking about making citizen virtuous emphasized on education system which deals with thought and reason to develop habits in students. In this regard teaching seven habits fulfill the demand of education to achieve goodness in life [4].

Students' self perceptions of ability pertains their confidence in academic activities. Bandhura says an individual's efficacy beliefs influence desire in various ways. It is obvious that an individual with low efficacy will refrain from difficult activities which goes beyond their capacity and will selectively choose easier activities to achieve success [5]. Moreover, the level of our self-efficacy necessarily determines our achievement. It is so evident to say that for lack of confidence and self-efficacy students very often become inspired to adopt unfair means or plagiarism. In this regard Covey's idea of private victory can lead a student to increase the level of self efficacy to ensure academic success.

Nichols and Miller found that students self perception of capacity is positively related to students motivation. If any academic activity goes beyond students' perception of self-capacity, then it would not be possible for the student to become motivated to go for that activity [6]. Nichols and Miller could not provide the complete idea of developing self efficacy what we found in Covey's idea. Covey's seven habits can help a student to reach the highest level of self- efficacy by developing independence skill and interdependence skill.

Research Question

The following questions had been considered as research question for the study.

- How can students become more effective?
- How do students receive Covey's success idea of seven habits?
- How effective teaching seven habits are to bring change in students' behavior?

Research Hypothesis

- Students get introduced to seven habits in class and this learning helps them to assess

themselves individually whether they are proactive or reactive, whether they think of the consequences before doing any action or not, whether they spend maximum of their time for not urgent but important work or not, whether they listen to others with empathy or not, whether they think from win-win paradigm or not, whether they try to make synergy in group work or not and whether they take care of their physical, mental, spiritual and emotional dimensions or not.

- Teaching Seven Habits of Stephen R Covey is successful enough to ensure positive paradigm shift.
- Teaching Seven Habits in second semester has strong positive impact on making academic activities successful.

An Overview of Seven Habits

Our habit represents our character, what we do repeatedly in our daily life. Whenever, we talk about the effectiveness of a person that necessarily implies that person's habit. Therefore, to have an expected future significant change in habit must be brought in present as future is created by present. To bring such change in thought and behavior before doing any action we must know the answer of what to do and why to do, and this is considered as knowledge. After getting knowledge we must know the way to do that. It might happen that, I know, I have to be proactive but I do not know how to act proactively. This way is considered as a skill. Knowledge and skill will not work unless we have desire or motivation. Therefore, creating a habit requires three dimensions respectively knowledge, skill and desire.

Habit 1: Be Proactive

We are the creator of our life, what activities we are doing those are to design our life. Habit 1: "Be Proactive" is based on the principles of personal vision and emphasized on taking responsibility of our action or choice. Reactive people always blame their circumstances while making such choice. The excellent way of being proactive is to spend time and energy where we have control over circumstances.

A proactive student takes responsibility of student life. S/he never blames circumstances (university, teachers, parents, and friends) rather they take over responsibility on their shoulder. They spend time and energy on those areas where they have control and can do something. On the other hand, a reactive student always blames his environment for his failure and never takes responsibility. Reactive students never realize that they are responsible for their action or choice.

Habit 2: Begin with the end in mind

From students perspectives begin with the end in mind means to start any course or academic activity with a vision to desired goals, focusing on goals moves their imagination to the real world. This habit is based on the principles that all things are created twice, mental creation and physical creation, without first creation second creation is impossible.

Habit 3: Put first things first

This habit is all about time management. Covey used 'urgent' and 'important' as important two factors to define an activity in his time management matrix. Urgent means it requires immediate action and important means it contributes to the mission or to achieve the result. "Not urgent but important/ quadrant-2" of time management matrix is one of the four ways or best way to spend time where alternative ways are "Urgent and important/ quadrant-1", "Not important but urgent" and "Not urgent and not important". Four key activities are important to become a quadrant-2 self manager. Those are selecting goals, identifying roles, scheduling and daily adapting. This habit helps a person to go for quality work and avoid procrastination.

Habit 4: Think win-win

This habit is all about human interaction which seeks mutual benefit while working in pair or in a group. Win/win is one of the six paradigms of interaction where alternative paradigms are Win/Lose, Lose/Win, Lose/Lose, Win and Win/Win or No Deal. With a win/win solution all group members feel committed to work according to the plan. It is based on the trust that there is plenty for everybody and this belief makes all group members more united.

Habit 5: Seek first to understand then to be understood

This habit focused on communication skill. For effective communication, emphasis should be given on four dimensions i.e. speaking, writing, reading and listening. It is obvious that we are oblivious about listening although listening is one of the components of effective listening. Most of us we do not listen to others with an intent to understand the speaker rather we listen with an intent to reply or project our own experience to others life. Therefore listening should be done to understand the speaker from the speaker's point of view and only then situation of trust would be created to learn through cooperation.

Habit 6: synergy

This habit is based on the principles of creative cooperation. It is all about valuing the mental, emotional and psychological difference among people many people do mistake by thinking that they see the world as it is and do not value others. Valuing the difference is to realize that we all see the world not as it

is rather as we are. Each and everybody, we do have core competency, focusing on that we can go for creative group work where difference are seen as strength, not weakness.

Habit 7: Sharpen the saw

This habit is for keeping ourselves fit and to do that we need to take care of four parts of our life i.e. physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual. To revitalize somebody, activities should be taken for each dimension. Here are some examples-
Physical: Balanced diet, exercise
Social/ Emotional: Service, social gathering
Mental: Reading, Writing, Watching TV programs
Spiritual: Meditation, prayer

This habit helps students to renew themselves and keeps them fresh to acquire and practice previous six habits. Without this renewal a person becomes unfit and stays far away from becoming effective and gradually lose competency to become effective in life.

Habit 1, 2 and 3 would help somebody to become independent or to achieve private victory and habit 3, 4 and 5 would help to achieve interdependence skill or to achieve public victory, habit 7 is important to acquire all other habits as it all about the person's fitness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My research is descriptive and qualitative, as descriptive research it includes survey with questionnaire to find out the description of the state of affairs that exist, and as qualitative research it is concerned with qualitative phenomenon to consider the change in students' behavior. In this regard, I used interview and discussion method and I took help from counseling unit of BRAC University.

Interview

To understand students' effort to strengthen their personality, their plan to complete university education successfully, their understanding and response towards principle-based habits, the change in their existing thoughts and the impact of new thought in changing their behavior I took the interviews carefully. Through some individual interviews I understood that learning seven habits rejuvenated students' understanding about their daily activities and showed the way to become more efficient for any academic work.

Reflection paper

To understand and explore the outcome of teaching seven habits I emphasized on students' reflection. I collected written reflection papers from students after conducting seven habits class. For this research 50 reflection papers were taken into account.

Considering reflection paper I understood, students received that positively and got motivated to assess themselves in a constructive way. They realized the importance of time and the right way to spend time by doing the right things.

Empirical Observation

Being a teacher of Ethics and Culture course I got opportunity to observe students’ understanding closely about their performance before learning 7 habits and their reaction after getting familiar with that. Since 2012 I have been observing the impact of teaching seven habits in students’ behavior. After learning this, students start using some important term of seven habits in daily conversations e.g. be proactive not reactive, spend time in quadrant 2, think win-win, synergy etc. Students take more responsibility instead of blaming others or environment, if they can not submit assignment or reflection paper on time or get poor marks in any examination, they take responsibility on their shoulder. I observed students carefully inside the class room and outside the classroom and found positive changes in their attitude.

DISCUSSION

One of my colleagues, a lecturer of Bangladesh Studies course, said after having classes on 7 habits, students’ use different terms from seven habits in his class as well. When a student is late and gives excuses, then other students start talking about proactive approach and reactive approach. His reflection strengthens the hypothesis of my research. As students are using their learning in other classes, therefore, without any doubt, it can be said that they are on the way to change their habit.

Sampling

In this research, for survey 50 second semester students (randomly selected 25 male and 25 female) who got familiar with seven habits through class-room

teaching and 50 students who did not get familiar with seven habits participated positively. All participants of this survey are BRAC University students. The survey was conducted twice in the same semester; once in the first week and another in the 11th week. As the duration of the semester is 12 weeks and 7 habits is taught in the second week, therefore, before teaching 7 habits first survey was conducted and second survey was conducted in the last part of the semester to observe the change in students’ behavior.

Analysis

For survey I used summated or likert type scale, where ten statements are given to express either a favorable or unfavorable attitude. The participants indicate their agreement or disagreement of each statement by selecting one option among five options. Each option is given a numerical score i.e. strongly agree=5; agree=4; neutral = 3; disagree=2; strongly disagree=1 and the overall score represents the students position. This scale would measure a student’s favorableness toward the given point of view. As it consists of ten statements, therefore, the following values would be revealing.

- 50*5=250 Most favorable response possible
- 50*4=200 Favorable response
- 50*3=150 A neutral position
- 50*2=100 Unfavorable response
- 50*1=50 Most unfavorable response

The score of any student would fall between 50 and 250. If the score is above 150, it shows the favorable position to the given point of view, and if the score is below 150, then that would show unfavorable position and a score of exactly 150 would be considered as neutral position. This survey attempts to explore the difference of students’ attitude toward various academic activities comparing two target groups. Considering the findings of this survey a comparison is shown below.

Chart

	Response before teaching 7 habits	Response After teaching 7 habits
A. Your role is most important to make your life successful than your environment (family, society, circumstances, socio economic condition of your country)	110	180
B. You do not blame your circumstances for your poor performance in any academic activity because being proactive you take responsibility of your action and result.	183	206
C. You combine your own effort with your friends effort to achieve greatest academic success	175	211
D. Before starting any course or academic activity you imagine the consequence or end result of your action.	185	214

E. You do not keep your lesson to study before the exam rather you study on time to learn.	155	171
F. While working in a group or in pairs you are cooperative and intend to go for mutual benefit.	192	237
G. While communicating with somebody you listen with intent to understand the speaker from speaker's point of view and not with intent to reply or say something from your own experience.	193	204
H. You see a problem from your perspective and others see the same problem from their perspectives therefore, you value others' opinions like yours	196	216
I. You are conscious about your own fitness to ensure academic success	190	208
J. To explore yourself you are trying to give up your bad habits and acquire new habits	177	213
Total:	1756	2060

Students' response to question number A. reports, Covey truly said that reactive people are guided by their environment. If the circumstances are good, they feel good and if not, they feel bad. They become defensive and judge themselves empowering others' weakness [7]. After teaching 7 habits, students' are coming out from reactive approach and their dependency level on environment is decreasing as their response has shifted to the favorable response from a neutral position. The achieved score shows that students are intended to take over more responsibilities as we see before teaching 7 habits the score is 110 whereas after learning that increases to 180.

It is noticeable that students have a propensity to blame others or environment for their poor performance in academic activities. This is a common bad habit that exists in human behavior. Covey says by having personal vision and taking responsibility of his action somebody can be proactive which necessarily enhances personal effectiveness [8]. Students' response to question no B reports that learning habit 1: be proactive has brought remarkable change in students' behavior as we see before learning the habit: "Be Proactive," the score is 110 whereas after learning the score increases to 180. The score shows that after learning the habit: be proactive, students have started taking more responsibilities.

While talking about group work Covey says people very often do not think from win-win paradigm of human interaction, as a result, they cannot combine their own effort with others, therefore, group work becomes unsuccessful. Students are not exception, as students response to question C shows that after getting different paradigms of human interaction they are more cooperative as we see before learning the habit: "Think win-win" the score is 175 whereas after learning the score increases to 211. The achieved score shows that students' tendency to cooperate with other students is increasing.

It is obvious to say that we can lead ourselves by focusing on the end of our activity. Covey explicitly outlined that the success of an activity depends on mental creation or planning [9]. Before taking a course or an academic activity students are less aware about the end or how that is going to help them, therefore, academic success goes under doubt. Response of question D implies that after learning the habit: "Begin with the end in mind" students are more aware about the end of their academic activity as we see the achieved score is 214 whereas before teaching the habit it was 185.

It has been observed by me and other teachers that most students are deadline-driven; they study more before exams when study is urgent and important. Some students spend time by doing unimportant work but those are very urgent to them and there are some students who waste their time by doing unimportant work and work that are not urgent to them. To avoid procrastination Covey developed time management matrix, which suggests us to spend time by doing not so urgent but important work to go for quality work. He claims time management can be captured in a single phrase: Organize and execute around priorities [10]. Students' response to question number E show's that after getting familiar with time management matrix students' are more motivated to study on time according to their plan as the score increases to 171 from 155.

Question number F remarkably indicates that after teaching the habit: "Think win/win" students are moving from competitive mentality to cooperative mentality. The achieved score of question number F shows that knowledge of Covey's six paradigms of human interaction has brought radical change in students' behavior as we see after learning the habit: "Think win-win" the score is 237 whereas before learning it was 192. Covey says Win-win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions [11].

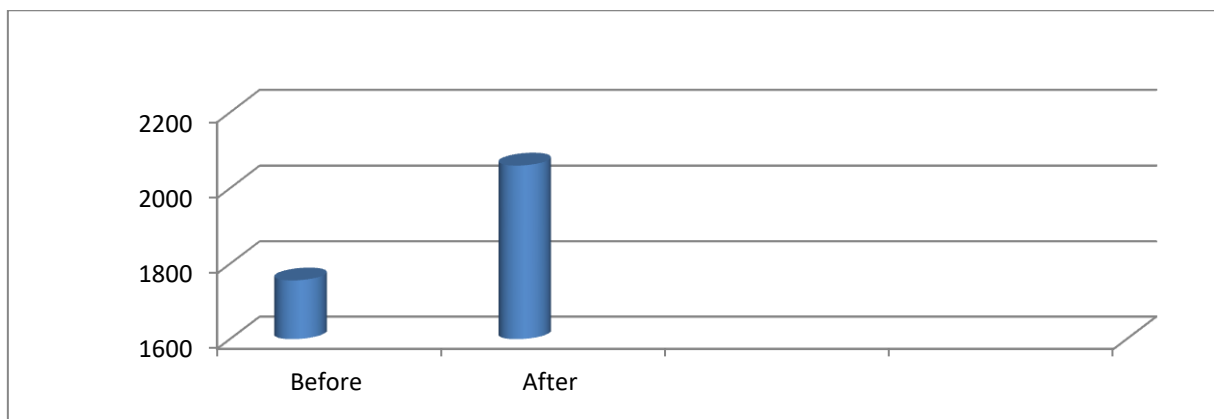
To ensure effective communication Covey emphasized on empathic communication. He says that very often we listen to project our life experience on others' life not to understand the person's understanding from his point of view and this bad habit hampers the situation of trust and thus makes group work impossible [12]. Students' response to question 7 got 204 score whereas before teaching the habit: "Seek First to Understand Then to be Understood" it was 193. Although the change is not much radical but it gets better.

Covey truly says that we never see the world as it is rather we see the world as we are, therefore, we should value others, opinions to get true knowledge.[13] While working in a group if students do not have this notion in their mind, they would not value others' opinions and this tendency would make the group work unsuccessful. Students' responses to

question 8 score 210 whereas before teaching the habit: "synergy" it was 196. The result shows that students are more aware to ensure synergy in group work.

A common bad habit exists in our students' behavior that they are unaware about their physical, mental, spiritual and social or emotional health. For becoming oblivious of their fitness they could not apply their potentials. Covey explained this as balanced self-renewal. If any dimension of our health is affected, inevitably that would impact on other areas. As students are going through different activities, therefore, academic success importantly depends on their fitness. Students' response to question 9 scores 208 whereas before teaching the habit: "Sharpen the Saw" it was 180.

The entire change in students' behavior after teaching 7 habits is presented in the following chart.



The above chart shows the total score of students' response after teaching 7 habits is 2060 whereas before teaching 7 habits it was 1756. The increasing score suggests teaching 7 habits is playing a very influential role in each and every aspect of academic activities by changing students' behavior. Therefore, teaching 7 habits can be considered as an instrumental tool to develop self efficacy.

Aristotle distinguishes two types of virtue: the intellectual and the moral. He said intellectual virtues can be taught as it is knowledge and moral virtues are habits. Virtue is the excellence of character and to bring this excellence both virtues are required [14]. From class-room teaching students are learning 7 habits and based on this knowledge they are trying to give up bad habits and acquire new habits. Students' response to question number 10 scores 223 after teaching Covey's habit whereas before teaching it was 177. The result shows that students are highly motivated to acquire seven habits to become more effective and thus complete academic work successfully.

Recommendation

The effectiveness of the rapid expansion of university education system mostly depends on students' self-efficacy. Covey's principle-based 7 habits are basis of a person's character by which an individual can move from dependence to independence and independence to interdependence. After teaching 7 habits at the beginning of university education, students can understand their hidden potentials and knowing ways to acquire new habits changes their existing paradigm and this paradigm shift motivates them to bring change in daily activities and thus habits. As in BRAC University teaching 7 habits are playing influential role to develop students' efficacy, therefore, other universities also can teach 7 habits to make students more effective to accomplish academic activities.

CONCLUSION

Real effectiveness comes from inside of a person. Therefore, to increase students' capacity, emphasis should be given on self-help. Through Ethics and Culture course students of BRAC University are

getting familiar with Covey's idea of seven habits in second semester which is remarkably helping students to enhance their proficiency. This capacity is helping them in academic arena and to become functional human beings in the society. Incorporating Covey's seven habits in course curriculum can be considered an effective initiative to make university education successful.

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