

School-Based Management and School Effectiveness: A Conceptual Framework of Decentralized Governance and Leadership Capacity

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Abstract

School-based management (SBM) has gained attention as a governance reform strategy for enhancing school autonomy, stakeholder engagement, accountability, and responsiveness to local needs. However, evidence regarding its impact on school effectiveness remains mixed, particularly when decentralization is treated merely as an administrative transfer of authority rather than a capacity-building process. This conceptual academic article aims to synthesize the relationship between SBM and school effectiveness and to propose a conceptual framework explaining how decentralized governance and leadership capacity contribute to effective school development. Methodologically, the article employs a conceptual synthesis approach informed by an integrative review of selected literature on school-based management, effective schools, school leadership, stakeholder participation, organizational learning, and organizational effectiveness. The synthesis identifies three interrelated dimensions: decentralized governance, leadership capacity, and organizational effectiveness. The article argues that SBM can enhance school effectiveness when school-level decision-making authority is supported by capable leadership, transparent accountability, collaborative participation, responsible resource management, and continuous improvement processes. The proposed framework positions leadership capacity as an enabling mechanism that translates decentralization into instructional, organizational, and community-level outcomes. The article recommends that SBM policy should move beyond structural decentralization by investing in leadership development, participatory accountability systems, transparent resource management, and school-level capacity building.

Keywords: School-Based Management; School Effectiveness; Decentralized Governance; Leadership Capacity; Organizational Effectiveness

Introduction

School-based management (SBM) is a significant reform strategy in educational administration because it decentralizes decision-making authority from central agencies to the school level. The underlying principle is that schools can respond more effectively to the needs of students and communities when principals, teachers, parents, and local stakeholders are involved in decision-making about school resources, curriculum, improvement, and accountability (Asad, 2021; Saputra & Hartati, 2024). Thus, SBM is not only about the devolution of authority over human, financial, and material resources, but also about expanding the participation of school and community actors in governance (Asad, 2021). Likewise, Viljo et al. (2020) explain SBM as a 21st-century model of school development that requires effective leadership, management strategies, staff development, and stakeholder participation.

The concept of effective schools is equally important to this discussion. Effective schools refer not only to schools with strong student achievement, but also to schools with organizational conditions that consistently support teaching, learning, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Effective school studies highlight that school effectiveness is not just about resources or policy directives, but also professional leadership, shared vision, learning environment, emphasis on teaching and learning, high expectations, monitoring progress, home-school partnerships, and organizational learning (Sammons et al., 1995). These features demonstrate that effective schools are characterized by effective organizational processes, collegial professional cultures, and a sustained focus on teaching and learning.

However, decentralization is not a guarantee of school effectiveness. Saputra and Hartati (2024) found that SBM can improve school organizational effectiveness through decentralized decision-making, community involvement, and accountability, but its effectiveness is contingent on contextual factors such as resource support, the managerial capacity of principals, and stakeholder engagement. Their review also highlights that the effects of SBM on student learning outcomes are not always consistent and that its implementation can lead to challenges such as bureaucratic overload and declining teacher morale.

The implementation of SBM is particularly complex in developing countries and centralized administrative contexts. Although SBM formally promotes school autonomy, schools may continue to operate under centralized regulations, hierarchical accountability systems, standardized reporting requirements, and limited decision-making space. In such contexts, decentralization may increase administrative responsibilities without necessarily providing sufficient resources, professional capacity, or institutional support for schools. These limitations suggest that SBM should not be assumed to improve school effectiveness automatically; rather, its success depends on whether school autonomy is



accompanied by capacity-building, trust, meaningful participation, and supportive governance conditions (Asad, 2021; Ghamrawi, 2023; Saputra & Hartati, 2024).

Thus, leadership capacity is a critical factor in converting SBM into meaningful school improvement. School principals are required to provide leadership, communication, staff development, problem-solving, resource management, and school evaluation. Sunaengsih et al. (2019) identified principal leadership as a key element in the implementation of effective school management, and Gonzales and Guevarra (2025) found that SBM dimensions, such as curriculum and teaching, learning environment, leadership, governance, human resource development, and finance, were positively associated with school effectiveness, with leadership showing the strongest relationship. In this sense, leadership capacity functions as an enabling condition that helps translate decentralized authority into coordinated instructional, organizational, and community-level improvement (Gonzales & Guevarra, 2025; Sunaengsih et al., 2019).

Despite these insights, an important research gap remains. Previous studies have examined SBM in relation to decentralization, leadership, stakeholder participation, resource management, teacher performance, and school effectiveness; however, these dimensions are often discussed separately rather than integrated into a coherent explanatory framework. Unresolved issues remain regarding how SBM contributes to school effectiveness, under what conditions decentralized governance becomes productive, and how leadership capacity enables the relationship between school autonomy and organizational outcomes. This gap is especially important in centralized or resource-constrained contexts, where policy decentralization may not necessarily lead to effective school-level improvement (Cheng, 2023; Saputra & Hartati, 2024).

This article addresses this conceptual gap by proposing an integrated framework that links SBM with school effectiveness through three interrelated dimensions: decentralized governance, leadership capacity, and organizational effectiveness. The article adopts a conceptual synthesis approach informed by an integrative review of selected literature on school-based management, effective schools, school leadership, stakeholder participation, organizational learning, and organizational effectiveness. Rather than conducting a systematic review or empirical investigation, the article synthesizes conceptually relevant studies and theoretical works to identify recurring dimensions and relationships. The synthesis was guided by three analytical concerns: how SBM functions as decentralized governance, how leadership capacity translates school autonomy into meaningful improvement, and how these processes contribute to organizational effectiveness and school effectiveness. Therefore, this article aims to develop a conceptual framework that can inform school leadership practice, policy design, and future research in educational administration.



School-Based Management as Decentralized Governance

SBM can be understood as a form of decentralized governance that gives schools greater authority to make decisions related to planning, resource management, curriculum implementation, and school improvement. SBM places the school as the unit of development, rather than just relying on top-down directives. The idea is that those who are most familiar with the needs of learners – principals, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders – are in the best position to understand local needs and develop solutions (Asad, 2021; Saputra & Hartati, 2024).

An important characteristic of SBM is that decentralization is not just about delegation. It also includes participation, accountability, transparency and responsibility. Schools should engage internal and external stakeholders in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Verzo (2024) reported that schools with high-level SBM practices focused on vision and planning, collaboration, shared governance, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and evaluation, accountability, resource allocation and transparency. Likewise, Casilla (2025) found that Level 3 SBM schools had stakeholder involvement, decentralized and visionary leadership, transparency, and empowerment for collective decision-making.

Decentralized governance also requires resource accountability. Castillo and Cay (2024) stress the need for resource allocation and the use of educational funds in SBM, implying that financial accountability is a key aspect of school governance. Their study suggests that SBM should not only involve participation and autonomy, but also transparent resource planning, allocation, monitoring and reporting. But decentralized governance does not guarantee school effectiveness. SBM implementation requires schools to be able to make the most of their autonomy. Saputra and Hartati (2024) stress that SBM can enhance organizational effectiveness with the support of resources, managerial competence of the principal, and participation. Thus, SBM should be understood as a governance system that connects autonomy and collective responsibility, rather than a mere devolution of power.

Leadership Capacity in School-Based Management

Leadership capacity is a key requirement for SBM. While SBM increases school autonomy, this autonomy is more likely to be realized when school leaders are able to convert decision-making power into planning, improving teaching and learning, engaging stakeholders, and improving school organization. In this way, leadership capacity serves as a catalyst to link decentralized governance to school effectiveness. In SBM, the principal's role goes beyond administrative tasks. School leaders are required to make decisions, communicate, coordinate school actors, develop staff, solve problems,



manage resources, and evaluate school activities. Sunaengsih et al. (2019) found that principal leadership facilitated effective school management in terms of decision-making, communication, staff development, problem-solving and evaluation. Gonzales and Guevarra (2025) also found that leadership was the SBM dimension most strongly associated with school effectiveness.

School heads' competencies are particularly important because SBM involves operating across the administrative, instructional, interpersonal and community areas. Asong (2022) reported that school heads were highly competent and SBM practices were strong in governance and management, accountability and continuous improvement, and resource management. These results indicate that leadership competencies help schools align their goals, people, resources and improvement processes. Leadership in SBM is also relational and transformational. This means that school leaders need to develop trust, foster collaboration, and engage stakeholders in improvement efforts. Laranang (2022) notes that SBM implementation requires planning, implementation, transformational leadership and improvement. Gaspar (2022) also discovered that transformational management styles were associated with school heads' SBM practice, suggesting that leadership style plays a role in implementing SBM at the school level.

As such, leadership capacity should be viewed beyond individual leadership. It is the capacity of school leaders and other stakeholders to exercise autonomy, enhance teaching and learning, manage resources, and engage in continuous improvement. In the proposed framework, leadership capacity is an enabling process for decentralized governance to impact organizational effectiveness.

Effective Schools and Organizational Effectiveness

Effective schools are not defined only by high student achievement, but by the organizational conditions that enable teaching, learning, and continuous improvement to occur consistently. The effective school literature describes a number of common characteristics, such as professional leadership, shared vision and goals, a learning environment, focus on teaching and learning, purposeful teaching, high expectations, positive reinforcement, monitoring progress, pupil rights and responsibilities, home-school partnership and a learning organization (Sammons et al., 1995). In this context, organizational effectiveness is the school's ability to leverage its structures, resources, people, culture and processes to achieve educational outcomes. School effectiveness is achieved when governance, leadership, teaching, relationships with stakeholders and improvement processes are focused on student learning and school improvement. Panigrahi (2014) found that primary school



effectiveness was linked to classroom teaching, suggesting that organizational effectiveness needs to support classroom teaching.

School culture is also important for school effectiveness. Uslu Gülşen and Çelik (2021) discovered that professional development, collegial support, collegial leadership, unity of purpose, self-efficacy, decision-making and teacher collaboration were significant predictors of teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness. They concluded that effective schools need a collaborative culture, professional development and unity of purpose, rather than just administrative structure. In SBM, school effectiveness is enhanced when school autonomy is linked to teacher performance, school competence, learner performance, stakeholder engagement and improvement. Gonzales and Guevarra (2025) found that SBM dimensions were positively associated with school effectiveness, such as student achievement, teacher performance, school environment, and school efficiency. Saura and Genton (2024) also reported positive relationships between SBM, school competence, and student performance. Nadilah et al. (2025) also indicate that SBM can enhance teacher performance and learning quality through autonomy, participation, transparency, accountability and collaborative leadership. Trust and teacher participation are also crucial for organizational effectiveness. Yıldırım (2022) found that organizational cynicism may decrease perceived organizational effectiveness by decreasing teacher participation in school decision-making. This implies that effective schools need not only formal structures of governance, but also positive organizational relationships, teacher voice and participation.

These studies indicate that organizational effectiveness is the intersection of school autonomy, leadership, stakeholder participation and school improvement. Figure 1 captures this dynamic, by showing how decentralized governance can be translated into leadership capacity, organizational processes and effective schools.



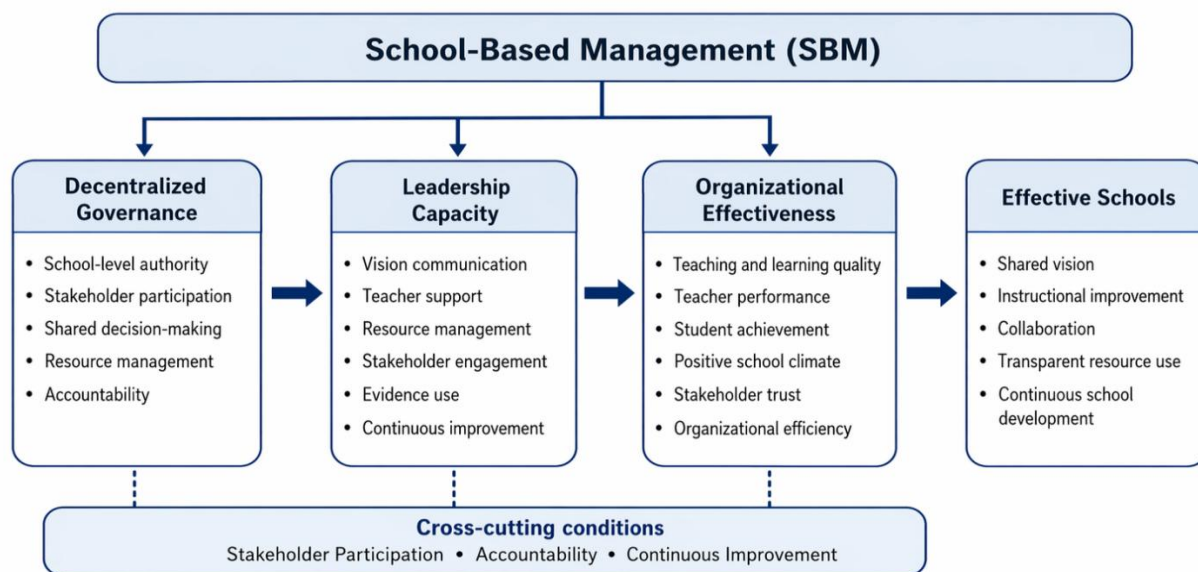


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of School-Based Management and Effective Schools

Source: Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature (Asad, 2021; Sammons et al., 1995; Sunaengsih et al., 2019; Cheng, 2023; Saputra & Hartati, 2024; Verzo, 2024; Gonzales & Guevarra, 2025; Casilla, 2025).

Therefore, and as summarized in Figure 1, organizational effectiveness is treated in this paper as the outcome dimension of the proposed framework. It captures how decentralized governance and leadership capacity are translated into school processes, such as vision, instructional improvement, trust, collaboration, resource allocation, and school development.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

This paper offers a conceptual framework to connect SBM with effective schools based on the above discussion. It consists of three dimensions: decentralized governance, leadership capacity, and organizational effectiveness. The framework contends that SBM does not necessarily contribute to school effectiveness because of decentralization. Instead, SBM is likely to lead to school effectiveness when decentralization is complemented by effective leadership, participatory governance, accountability and a culture of continuous improvement.

The first dimension, decentralized governance, refers to the structure of SBM. It involves school autonomy, stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, collaborative decision-making and accountability. This dimension allows schools to adapt to their context and design context-specific improvement plans (Asad, 2021; Saputra & Hartati, 2024).



The second dimension, leadership capacity, is the enabler of the framework. Decentralized authority requires leaders who can translate autonomy into coordinated action. School leaders need to communicate, support, manage, engage, use evidence, and improve (Gonzales & Guevarra, 2025; Sunaengsih et al., 2019).

The third dimension, organizational effectiveness, is the desired outcome of SBM. This involves enhanced teaching and learning, teacher performance, student achievement, school climate, efficiency, stakeholder confidence, and improvement.

These are the broader attributes of effective schools identified in school effectiveness studies (Sammons et al., 1995; Cheng, 2023). Cheng (2023) also locates SBM in a larger mechanism that links school effectiveness, leadership for change, staff development, school-based change and curriculum development.

Table 1 Key Dimensions of School-Based Management and Effective Schools

Dimension	Core meaning	Key elements	Expected contribution	Supporting references
Decentralized governance	The structural foundation of SBM through school-level authority and shared governance	Autonomy, stakeholder participation, resource management, shared decision-making, accountability	Enables schools to respond to local needs and develop context-sensitive improvement strategies	Asad (2021); Saputra and Hartati (2024); Verzo (2024); Casilla (2025)
Leadership capacity	The enabling mechanism that translates autonomy into coordinated school improvement	Vision communication, teacher support, resource management, stakeholder engagement, evidence use, continuous improvement	Converts decentralized authority into strategic action, instructional improvement, and organizational learning	Gonzales and Guevarra (2025); Sunaengsih et al. (2019); Asong (2022); Laranang (2022)



Dimension	Core meaning	Key elements	Expected contribution	Supporting references
Organizational effectiveness	The intended outcome of well-implemented SBM and effective school processes	Teaching and learning quality, teacher performance, student achievement, positive school climate, stakeholder trust, organizational efficiency	Strengthens effective schools through aligned governance, leadership, school culture, and continuous improvement	Sammons et al. (1995); Cheng (2023); Panigrahi (2014); Uslu Gülşen and Çelik (2021); Yıldırım (2022)

Source: Developed by the author based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature.

The proposed framework therefore offers the following dynamic: decentralized governance offers authority and participation; leadership capacity converts authority into strategy; and organizational effectiveness is more likely to be achieved when school processes, people, resources and accountability arrangements are focused on learning and improvement.

Stakeholder participation and accountability are cross-cutting conditions in this framework. Stakeholders are not just external supporters of school activities, but also co-participants in planning, implementation, monitoring and improvement. According to Verzo (2024) and Casilla (2025), advanced SBM schools focus on participatory governance, stakeholder participation, transparency, monitoring, empowerment and resource allocation. These enhance the connection between autonomy and effectiveness because they foster ownership, trust and accountability.

In conclusion, the proposed framework positions SBM as a dynamic process towards effective schools. It defines decentralized governance as a structural condition, leadership as a process and organizational effectiveness as an outcome. This model helps to explain why SBM may be more effective in some schools than others: it is not simply a matter of whether schools have autonomy, but whether they have the leadership, participation, accountability, and capacity to make good use of that autonomy.



Implications for School Leadership and Policy

The proposed framework has implications for school leadership and policy. First, SBM is not just a formal delegation of power from the central government to schools. While decentralization is a key feature of SBM, autonomy can be used to improve schools if schools have adequate leadership, resources, stakeholder involvement, and accountability (Asad, 2021; Saputra & Hartati, 2024).

Second, school leaders should be nurtured as instructional, organizational, and community leaders. In SBM, principals are expected to not only attend to routine administrative tasks, but also to enhance teaching quality, develop teachers, improve school culture, engage stakeholders, and drive continuous improvement. Both Sundaengsih et al. (2019) and Gonzales and Guevarra (2025) indicate that leadership is a key factor in linking SBM and school effectiveness.

Third, stakeholder engagement should be considered a prerequisite for SBM, not a school activity. Teachers, parents, communities, school committees and other stakeholders must be actively involved in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. According to Verzo (2024) and Casilla (2025), advanced SBM implementation is supported by shared governance, stakeholder participation, transparency, monitoring and empowerment for shared decision-making.

Fourth, SBM should have a developmental rather than bureaucratic approach to accountability. Schools should not only be judged by compliance reports or reporting systems, but also by how they use autonomy to enhance teaching, learning, resource allocation, school culture and trust. Castillo and Cay (2024) argue that resource allocation and fund utilization are crucial aspects of SBM accountability, especially when schools are expected to manage resources effectively.

Lastly, SBM policy should be linked to education quality agendas. Ghamrawi (2023) stresses that school autonomy, leadership, governance, professional development and appraisal are key to enhancing education quality in relation to Agenda 2030. This reinforces the notion that SBM should not be seen as a mere administrative policy, but rather as part of a broader strategy to improve leadership, equity, and sustainable school improvement.

In summary, the policy implication of this framework is that SBM should be implemented as a capacity-building reform rather than a purely administrative reform. Policy makers and school leaders should prioritize leadership development, stakeholder engagement, transparent resource management, participatory accountability, and continuous school improvement.

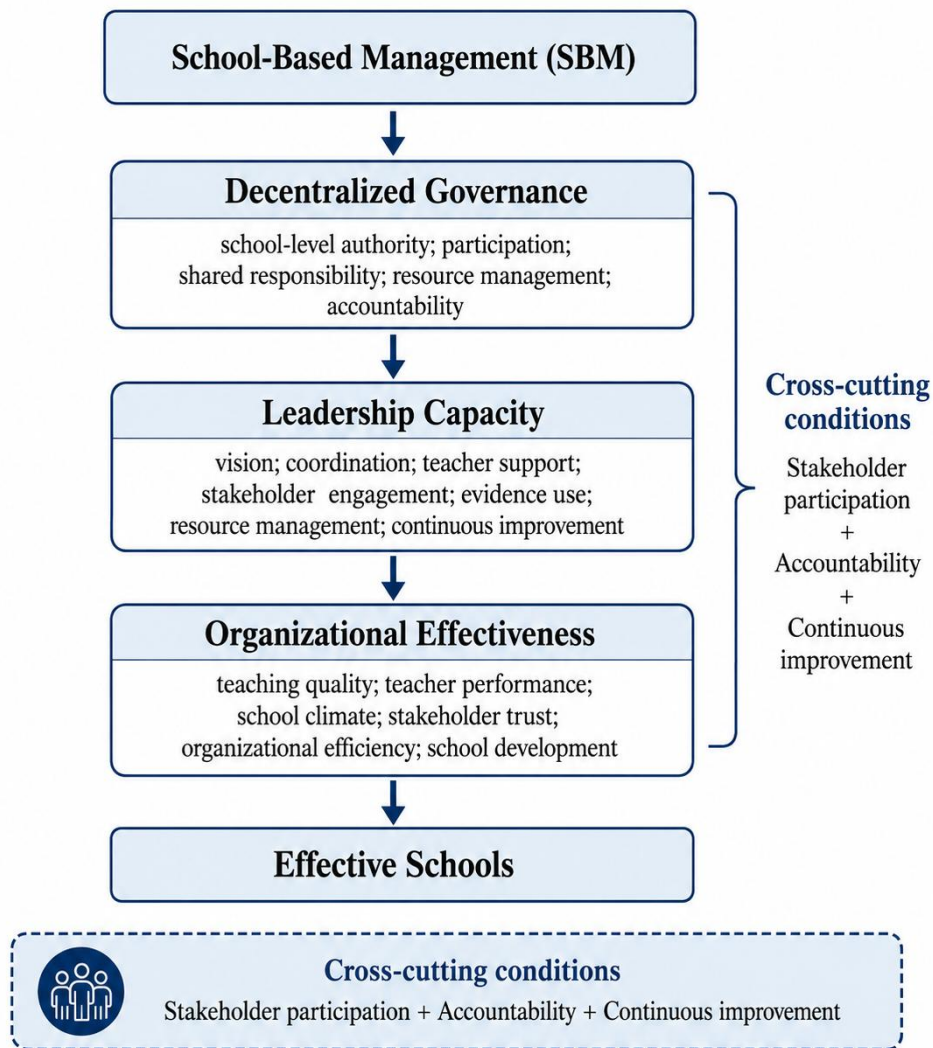


Knowledge Contribution from the Study

This study contributes a synthesized understanding of how school-based management (SBM) can support effective schools through a structured relationship among decentralized governance, leadership capacity, and organizational effectiveness. The most significant knowledge contributed by the synthesis is that SBM should not be considered simply as a reform for devolved governance. Instead, its educational significance is in the way school autonomy is converted into effective school processes and outcomes through leadership capacity, participation and accountability.

The study, in particular, proposes that decentralized governance is the structural precondition for SBM by facilitating school autonomy, participation and accountability. Leadership capacity is the enabling process that translates autonomy into action through vision, teacher support, resource allocation, stakeholder participation and improvement. Organizational effectiveness, on the other hand, is the outcome dimension, which is demonstrated in the improvement of teaching and learning, teacher performance, school climate, stakeholder trust, and school development. As illustrated in Figure 2, stakeholder participation and accountability are cross-cutting conditions that enhance the link between autonomy, leadership and effectiveness.





Source: Developed by the author based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature.

Figure 2. Knowledge Contribution of the Study

The knowledge contribution of this study is presented in a simple pathway in figure 2. School-based management is the foundation, which establishes a decentralized governance structure. This structure is not enough without the leadership capacity, which is the operational and developmental engine of the system. If leadership capacity is able to facilitate school autonomy through school action, then organizational effectiveness is likely. The end result is effective schools. Across all levels, stakeholder involvement, accountability and improvement are the supporting conditions.

Conclusion

School-based management can enhance effective schools when decentralization is connected to leadership capacity, stakeholder engagement, accountability and improvement. This paper has



proposed that SBM should not be seen simply as a delegation of power, but as an organizational strategy to enhance school governance and effectiveness. The framework put forward here suggests that decentralized governance is the structure, leadership capacity is the process, and organizational effectiveness is the outcome. Autonomy is meaningful when school leaders are able to engage teachers, stakeholders, resources and data in improvement efforts. Thus, autonomy alone does not produce effective schools. They are created when governance, leadership, collaboration, resource allocation and school culture are mobilized to support teaching and learning, and to drive improvement. In summary, this paper casts SBM as a capacity-building mechanism to build more responsive, accountable and effective schools.

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