

The Role of Strategic Human Resource Development and Project-Based Learning in Developing Cross-Functional Marketing Talent

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Abstract: The growing interaction of marketing with such domains as technology, analytics, operations, and customer experience has resulted in a set of competencies needed from a modern marketer and the emergence of the demand for cross-functional marketers able to operate with different organizations and participate in decision-making process. The purpose of the current research is to systematically analyze the role of SHRD and PBL in the development of cross-functional marketing competencies. Using SLR, articles from 2020 to 2026 available in Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar have been used. Among 142 articles found in the process of screening, 20 articles were included in the qualitative synthesis. Four key themes were revealed: Strategic HRD Practices for Marketing Talent Development, Project-Based Learning and Experiential Skill Building, Cross-Functional Competencies of Modern Marketers, and Workforce Planning and Future Marketing Roles. Based on the review, SHRD helps in continuous learning and development of talents, adaptation and capability development in an organization. Meanwhile, PBL helps in developing practical skills through experiential learning, cooperation and communication.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Development; Project-Based Learning; Cross-Functional Marketing Talent; Talent Development; Experiential Learning; Marketing Competencies; Workforce Planning; Digital Transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation, technological innovation and an increasing degree of interconnectedness are transforming the way businesses work today, forcing marketers to think outside the functional box. Today's marketers are required to work closely with other teams and departments like sales, human resources, operations, product development, information technology, and data analytics to develop solutions that focus on the customer and help the organization grow (Umezurike et al., 2025). For instance, companies like Amazon, Google, and Unilever apply cross-functional teams that combine marketers with data scientists, product managers, and tech experts for personalized customer experiences and data-driven business strategies (Chavan & Jindal, 2024). This transformation has added to the need for professionals with a strong ability in marketing skills, but also with skills in other areas such as strategic thinking, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and digital literacy (Malek et al., 2023). Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) is one of the most common practices that many firms are embracing in order to ensure that the skills of employees match long-term objectives and make the organization more adaptive. As Alnajim (2022) notes, SHRD is very significant in enhancing learning, training, workforce development, and developing sustainable capabilities.

At the same time, the Project Based Learning (PBL) strategy has become a successful learning method that emphasizes learning-by-doing and the transferable and practical skills that are needed in today's workplace. PBL



differs from traditional training, where the participants are exposed to projects addressing real problems, which require them to collaborate and think critically, as well as inter-functionally (Lavado-Anguera et al., 2024). When a new digital product is introduced, for example, marketers and business analysts may need to collaborate with software developers, customer service, sales teams, and specialists to ensure that the product is developed and launched correctly (Li & Zhu, 2023). In other cases, the introduction of a new product may necessitate collaborative efforts between various disciplines, such as marketers, business analysts, customer service, sales, and software developers, thereby creating a learning and strategic development opportunity. Integrated project-based learning models not only improve the innovative and collaborative capabilities required for the digitally transformed workplace but also become more critical for organizations that depend on strategic talent development and learning programs in preparation for future challenges in the world of artificial intelligence (Muta'al & Widayanti, 2026), but, even though there is a growing interest in SHRD and PBL, literature is scattered in terms of HRD, organizational learning, and marketing areas, requiring a systematic literature review for assessing the cumulative impact on CFMT development.

Objectives

1. To analyze the use of Strategic Human Resource Development approaches in developing knowledge, skills, and competencies of cross-functional marketing personnel.
2. To study the influence of Project-Based Learning on the development of cross-functional skills, collaboration, and strategic thinking of marketing personnel.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study used a Systematic Literature Review approach to synthesize scholarly evidence on the role of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) in creating a cross-functional marketing talent. To guarantee transparency, rigor and replicability in the literature selection and analysis process, a structured review protocol was adopted. The use of keywords such as SHRD, project-based learning, marketing talent, cross-functional competencies, with talents and workforce planning was used in Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar to identify relevant studies. The year range of the search was narrowed to 2020-2026 to include most recent advances and developments in talent development and marketing capability enhancement. In the first search, 142 records were retrieved, 28 of which were duplicate records and were therefore omitted in the title and abstract screening, leaving 114 studies for title and abstract screening. After the screening process, 76 records were rejected because they were not relevant and 38 articles were considered for full text review. Based on the eligibility assessment, 13 studies were excluded due to a lack of direct focus on cross-functional marketing talent, SHRD, or PBL, and 5 studies were not retrieved. Thus, 20 studies were included and remained for final qualitative synthesis. Thematic analysis was used to extract and analyse data about the publication details, research background, methods and main results. Based on the review, a few prominent themes were identified: Strategic HRD Practices for Marketing Talent Development, Project-Based Learning and Experiential Skill Building, Cross-Functional Competencies of Modern Marketers, and Workforce Planning and Future Marketing Roles. These themes covered the topic of how organizations can develop marketing practitioners who are able to operate effectively within inter-functional settings in an ever-changing and digital business world.

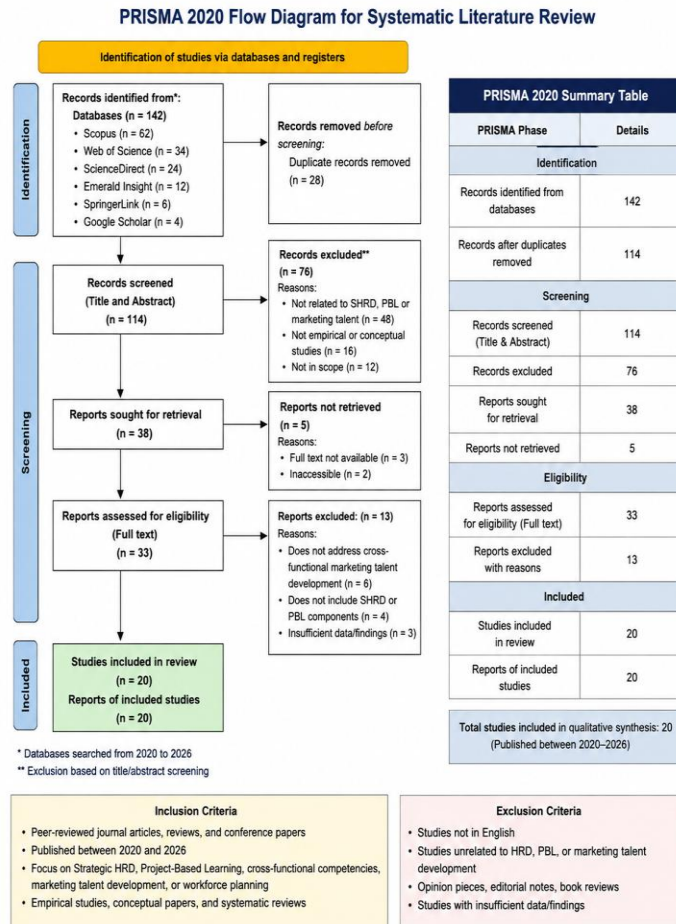


Figure 1. Prisma Flow Diagram.

Table 1. Study Selection Summary.

Selection Criteria	Number of Studies
Initial records identified	142
Duplicate records removed	28
Records screened	114
Records excluded after title and abstract screening	76
Full-text articles assessed	33
Full-text articles excluded	13
Final studies included in review	20

Study Selection & Descriptive Results

Relevant literature on Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD), Project Based Learning (PBL) and cross-functional marketing talent development was selected using a systematic study selection process. A preliminary search on the Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar databases resulted 142 records. Removal of 28 duplicates resulted in 114 studies being screened by title and abstract. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 76 records were eliminated, and 38 were selected for full text. There were 13 studies that were excluded because they were not relevant to cross-functional marketing talent, SHRD, or

PBL, and 5 studies were not able to be retrieved. As a result, 20 studies published from the year 2020 to 2026 were incorporated in this final qualitative synthesis. Selected studies span a range of geographical contexts and methodological approaches such as conceptual papers, empirical studies, literature review and framework-based research. The descriptive results suggest that there is increasing academic focus on strategic talent management, employer branding, project-based learning, knowledge transfer, knowledge management and cross-functional cooperation. A common finding across the studies reviewed is the growing need for marketing professionals to have a variety of functional skills and competencies, particularly related to managing stakeholders, working collaboratively, communicating, thinking strategically, being adaptable, and being digitally literate.

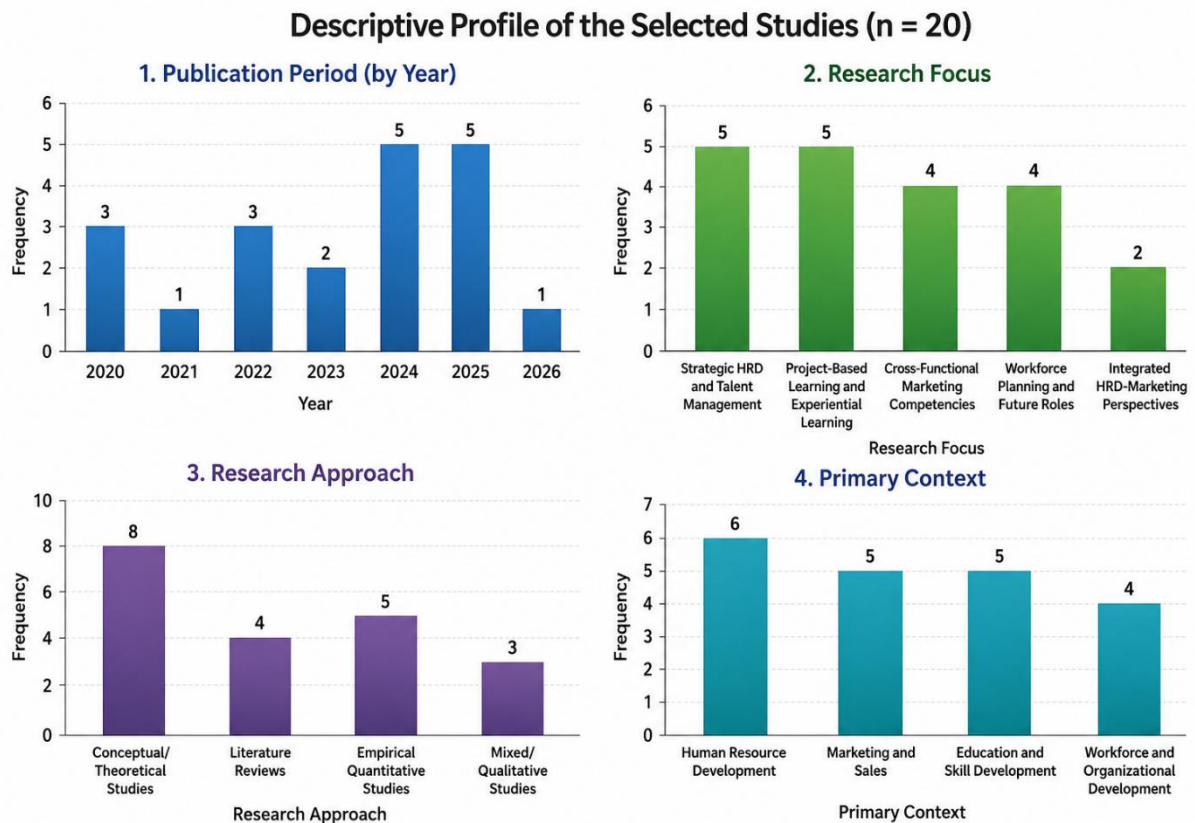


Figure 2. Descriptive Profile of the Selected Studies (n = 20).

Comparative Synthesis Table

Table 3. Comparative Synthesis.

Author(s)	Focus Area	Key Contribution	Implications for Cross-Functional Marketing Talent
Shet (2020)	Strategic Talent Management	Emphasized learning agility, adaptability, and strategic talent ecosystems.	Supports the development of marketers capable of functioning across organizational boundaries.
Itam et al. (2020)	HRD and Employer Branding	Demonstrated the role of HRD in attracting and retaining skilled employees.	Helps organizations build a pipeline of multidisciplinary marketing talent.

Sthapit (2021)	Strategic HRD	Highlighted the alignment of HRD initiatives with organizational goals.	Enhances workforce readiness and long-term capability development.
Pandita (2022)	Innovative Talent Management	Examined employer branding strategies for attracting Generation Z talent.	Encourages recruitment of adaptable and innovation-oriented marketers.
Malek et al. (2023)	Marketing Talent Management	Proposed a framework integrating analytical, technological, and interpersonal skills.	Identified core competencies required for future marketing professionals.
Miranda et al. (2020)	Project-Based Learning	Found that experiential learning improves critical thinking and teamwork.	Strengthens collaborative and problem-solving capabilities among marketers.
Yap & Shavarebi (2022)	Experiential Competency Development	Showed that practical projects accelerate skill acquisition.	Improves communication and cross-functional collaboration skills.
Li & Zhu (2023)	Blended Project-Based Learning	Identified communication, adaptability, and leadership as key outcomes.	Develops transferable competencies relevant to marketing roles.
Lavado-Anguera et al. (2024)	Project-Based Learning Review	Established PBL as an effective approach for experiential learning.	Enhances innovation and collaborative capability development.
Chavan & Jindal (2024)	Cross-Functional Collaboration	Demonstrated the value of integrating market knowledge across departments.	Reinforces the importance of teamwork and knowledge sharing.
Umezurike et al. (2025)	Agile Marketing Teams	Highlighted collaboration and flexibility as drivers of marketing success.	Supports the development of agile and responsive marketing professionals.
Mardikaningsih & Essa (2025)	HRM-Marketing Collaboration	Examined interdisciplinary collaboration for innovation outcomes.	Shows how HR and marketing integration enhances organizational performance.
Atefi et al. (2025)	Growth Teams and Leadership	Identified the emergence of cross-functional growth teams.	Indicates increasing demand for marketers with broad strategic competencies.
Lindblom & Martins (2022)	Knowledge Transfer	Explored HR practices supporting R&D-sales collaboration.	Demonstrates the importance of knowledge sharing in capability development.
Emma (2024)	Strategic Workforce Planning	Addressed future workforce challenges arising from digital transformation.	Highlights the need for continuous reskilling and workforce adaptability.

Shah et al. (2025)	Conflict Resolution in Teams	Identified communication and shared goals as determinants of team effectiveness.	Reinforces interpersonal competencies required in cross-functional environments.
Khan & Minghai (2026)	Career Development	Discussed the impact of technological advancement on professional growth.	Supports lifelong learning and competency diversification among marketers.

Table 4. Cross-Study Synthesis.

Theme	Key Findings	Representative Studies
Strategic HRD Practices for Marketing Talent Development	Talent management, employer branding, and workforce development enhance adaptability and organizational readiness.	• Shet (2020) • Itam et al. (2020) • Sthapit (2021) • Pandita (2022) • Malek et al. (2023)
Project-Based Learning and Experiential Skill Building	Experiential learning improves communication, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.	• Miranda et al. (2020) • Yap & Shavarebi (2022) • Li & Zhu (2023) • Lavado-Anguera et al. (2024)
Cross-Functional Competencies of Modern Marketers	Collaboration, knowledge integration, digital literacy, and agility are increasingly important.	• Chavan & Jindal (2024) • Umezurike et al. (2025) • Mardikaningsih & Essa (2025) • Atefi et al. (2025)
Workforce Planning and Future Marketing Roles	Future marketing roles require continuous learning, adaptability, and interdisciplinary expertise.	• Lindblom & Martins (2022) • Emma (2024) • Shah et al. (2025) • Khan & Minghai (2026)

Thematic Analysis

Strategic HRD Practices for Marketing Talent Development

Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD), which has been the spotlight of the literature reviewed, has been identified as one of the most important strategies for training marketing professionals to work in several organizational roles. Traditional marketing has grown beyond customer's acquisition and brand management to work in a team with product development, analytics, technology, operations, and sales. As a result, there is a growing demand for marketers who have a marketing specialization and general organizational skills.

The literature shows that strategic talent management is a key part of SHRD activities. Shet (2020) says that companies are moving away from traditional time and attendance systems to strategic talent ecosystems focused on adaptability, learning agility and cross-functional cooperation. This is especially important for marketers who need to adapt to the rapid pace of technology change and evolving customer demands. Likewise, strategic HRD programmes should be tailored to meet the organizational needs and ensure that employees have the skills and competencies required to achieve long-term competitive initiatives (Sthapit, 2021).

Another interesting SHRD practice that has emerged as a major influence on marketing talent development in the eyes of SHRD is employer branding. Itam et al. (2020), and Pandita (2022), show that the application of employer branding has not only become a recruitment strategy but is also being leveraged to attract employees with interdisciplinary skills. Generation Z professionals, especially, are extremely interested in organizations that offer

learning opportunities, career mobility and innovation in work atmosphere. All these make a big contribution to the development of marketing professionals who can relate to different organizational stakeholders.

The need for cross-functional capability development is also noted in literature on marketing talent management. Malek et al. (2023) suggest that the future marketing professionals should have a mix of analytical, technological, interpersonal, and strategic skills. Their model proposes that HRD systems need to shift their emphasis from functional training to creating capabilities that allow marketers to work effectively in an inter-organizational context. Overall, the literature indicates that the practices of SHRDs are enablers of cross-functional marketing talent as they enable ongoing learning, strategic flexibility and collaborative competency.

Project-Based Learning and Experiential Skill Building

Secondly, Project Based Learning (PBL) and Experiential Learning (EL) are explored as strategies for teaching transferable skills for cross-functional marketing positions. PBL is not a lecture or class-based instructional approach, but rather a way to engage students in the process of solving real-world problems that involve interaction, communication, and problem solving in various domains.

The observed research papers have shown the project-based learning method consistently improves technical and behavior skills. Miranda et al (2020) concluded that experiential environments in the project significantly enhance the critical thinking, teamwork and reflective learning skills. Likewise, Yap and Shavarebi (2022) demonstrate that competency building can be sped up when people work on practical projects that demand collaboration between a variety of parties. The results are especially important for marketers who work closely with sales, product management, data analysis and customer service teams.

Recent literature also shows that blended project-based learning environments support the transferable skills needed for the workplace in the 21st century. The key outcomes of project-based learning interventions identified by Li and Zhu (2023) are communication, adaptability, leadership and problem-solving. Some of these skills are comparable to those needed in cross-functional roles, such as marketing roles, where the individual needs to work in a complex organizational environment and needs to combine knowledge from several disciplines.

In addition, there is a strong focus on the innovative and organizational learning aspects of PBL in literature. Project-based approaches foster experimentation, creativity, and collaborative knowledge creation, as suggested by Lavado-Anguera et al. (2024). These outcomes are especially beneficial in marketing contexts where technology changes rapidly, digital transformation is occurring, and consumer behaviors are changing. The findings suggest that project-based learning appears to be successful as a developmental approach to training marketing professionals for the effective functioning in the multi-functional organizational system.

Cross-Functional Competencies of Modern Marketers

A significant shift has occurred in the skill set required of today's marketing professionals as evidenced in the literature. Marketers are no longer expected to work in silos, but are more likely to be knowledge, resource and organizational integrators. As a result, the ability to be cross-functional has become a crucial trait of marketing success.

One thing that has been consistently identified in the research is the need for collaboration and integration of knowledge. Chavan and Jindal (2024) state that the cross-functional team collaboration is beneficial to integrating market intelligence and organizational expertise to bring about a greater competitive advantage. This view implies that marketers add value when they manage to coordinate the work of the different departments rather than work in isolation.

With the rise of agile marketing practices, the need for cross-functional skills is emphasized even more. Umezurike et al. (2025) point out that agile marketing teams need to work together, be flexible, and solve problems together. In such a setting, marketing professionals need to have communication skills, stakeholder management skills, and be able to understand and act on information from multiple functional viewpoints. These abilities allow companies to better adapt to market fluctuations and consumer demands.

Another important development mentioned in the literature is the integration of HRM and marketing functions. According to Mardikaningsih and Essa (2025), work relations between the HR and marketing function help create innovation results in the creation of products that focus on sustainability. Likewise, Atefi et al. (2025) outline the evolution of Chief Growth Officers and growth teams that cut across conventional hierarchical lines. Here, there's a need for specialists able to overcome silos and facilitate strategic projects across departments.

All the reviewed studies suggest that cross-functional marketers have collaborative orientation, strategic thinking, effective communicator, digital literacy, and knowledge integration capabilities. These skills are becoming more and more valued for the growth of an organization and for their ability to provide a competitive edge in the rapidly changing business world.

Workforce Planning and Future Marketing Roles

The last theme is on workforce planning and the changing roles of marketing jobs in the era of digital transformation and organizational transformation. Future marketing careers will demand much more expansive marketing skill sets than those traditionally thought of as in marketing, the literature notes.

Knowledge transfer becomes a significant element in the process of workforce planning. Lindblom and Martins (2022) shows that cooperation between R&D and sales functions is effective if it involves structured sharing and HR practices. These insights point to the need for innovative workforce systems that support multi-unit learning and collaboration.

The strategic workforce planning need has been further exacerbated by digital transformation. Increasingly, Emma (2024) suggests, organizations are finding it difficult to respond to skill gap challenges resulting from technological change. The new skills that marketing professionals need include those that involve data analytics, artificial intelligence, digital communication, and customer experience management. Accordingly, organizational success demands adopting pre-emptive workforce planning approaches that take into account future competency needs instead of the ones at present.

The other aspect highlighted by the literature review pertains to the increasing role of interpersonal and conflict management competencies in cross-functional teams. In this regard, Shah et al. (2025) note that communication competence and goal consistency are vital factors that determine the success of cross-functional teamwork. This means that marketing experts of the future will need to combine their competencies of a purely technical nature with good interpersonal skills.

Thus, career development literature shows that technological progress affects professional development trends in all fields of activity. Khan and Minghai (2026) believe that career progress now depends on continuous learning and diversification of one's competencies and not on hierarchical career mobility anymore. For marketing experts, this trend means that they should not only master marketing-related competencies but also learn new ones related to technology management, innovation, and strategic leadership. Thus, the analysis of the literature shows that workforce planning for future marketing specialists requires focusing on flexibility, continuous learning, interdisciplinarity, and collaboration competencies.

3. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Results of this review make it clear that Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) and Project Based Learning (PBL) are complementary tools in developing cross-functional marketing talent in business environments that are becoming increasingly dynamic and tech-infused. According to the literature, the skills of a modern marketer include marketing skills, digital literacy, collaboration, communication, adaptability, and strategic thinking, which are necessary to effectively perform across organization functions (Malek et al., 2023). SHRD supports these through ongoing development, talent management, and workforce development programs (Alnajim, 2022), while PBL enhances practical skills with a focus on practical learning, collaboration and problem-based learning (Mygal et al., 2026). Additionally, it shows there are more integrated talent development and more workforce agility and innovation

training options becoming available. There is still fragmented research, however, that mainly focuses on a single dimension of SHRD and PBL, and there is limited empirical research that investigates the combined effect of SHRD and PBL on marketing performance and organizational outcomes. Therefore, future research needs to be carried out in the field of creating integrated frameworks and relationships between HRD practices, experiential learning, and cross functional competency development, as well as studying the impact of new technologies like artificial intelligence and advanced analytics on the future of marketing careers (Muta'al & Widayanti, 2026). Further, there is need for the longer-term and across industry investigations to gain better understanding of the development and impact of cross-functional marketing skills on long-term organizational competitive performance.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review reveals the importance of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) and Project Based Learning (PBL) for developing cross-functional marketing talents that can respond to the requirements of the business world. The review shows that today's marketing professionals need to have a range of skills and abilities beyond marketing skills and knowledge, such as digital skills, collaboration, communication, adaptability, problem solving and strategic thinking. These capabilities are fostered continuously by SHRD's ongoing learning, talent management, and workforce development efforts, and by PBL's experiential and collaborative learning environment. The results also show an increase in the level of organizational transformation to integrated talent development practices with a focus on cross-functional cooperation, agility and innovation. SHRD and PBL can be a strategic route for developing future-oriented marketing professionals who will be able to make positive contributions to organizational performance, innovation, and sustainable competitive advantage as organizations continue to evolve and face greater market complexities.

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