

Overcoming the Challenges of Intercultural Communication for Managing Multiethnic Church Community

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Abstract

With advancements and the advent of technologies and modern and pioneering methods, miscommunication has become common. Miscommunication takes place when individuals experience barriers within the course of communication. Miscommunication not only imposes disadvantages in the implementation of communication processes but also within the system of the overall functioning of the organizations. Challenges of Intercultural Communication for Managing Multiethnic Church Community stem from communication lapses leading to discrimination, discontent and ethnic divisions arising from cultural affiliations of the members, which hinder smooth relationships in churches, thus creating unhealthy church tendencies, leading to the proliferation of tribalized churches across the globe. This paper seeks to discover the challenges of Intercultural Communication in Managing Multiethnic Churches and offer suggestions for overcoming them. Through a qualitative approach, the article aims to explore the concept of intercultural communication, highlight its challenges and suggest possible solutions for overcoming the challenges of managing a multiethnic Christian community. This writer believes that implementing different communication styles, depicting clarity in verbal communication, giving feedback directly or indirectly, establishing the right amount of structure, understanding time differently, avoiding uncertainty, promote teamwork and collaboration and integration with each other. Others are building (personal) relationships, recognizing the significance of personal relationships, participating in intercultural group relations, improving cultural sensitivity and awareness, and being open-minded to receiving feedback. These challenges would be minimized, proficient and skillful communication would be developed among church leaders and members across cultures within the Christian folds, and the management of the multiethnic church community would ultimately be enhanced.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communication, Management, Multiethnic Church*

Introduction

Diversity is typical in most churches today based on cultural dispositions, which any organization could not ignore its possible challenges. Culture, cultural differences, and communication posed many global problems to worshipers in some Christian denominations. Language barriers make communication more challenging, and cultural differences inhibit certain members from being comfortable enough to open up, socialize, or relate in churches. There have been hitches stemming from communication lapses and challenges occasioning discrimination, discontent and ethnic divisions arising from cultural affiliations of the members, which hinder smooth relationships in churches, thus creating unhealthy church tendencies, leading to the proliferation of tribalized churches across the globe.

It will be noted that all communications occur in a culture; therefore, cultural differences have become the primary obstacle in intercultural communication, as different cultures are characterized by other languages, values, behaviors and attitudes towards time, context, customs, distance, and non-verbal signs (Handford, 2019). Overcoming the challenges of intercultural communication will help develop proficient and skillful communication among church leaders and members across cultures within the Christian folds, ultimately enhancing the management of the multiethnic church community. Therefore, the article seeks to explore the concept of intercultural communication, highlight its challenges and suggest possible solutions for overcoming the challenges associated with managing a multiethnic Christian community.

Intercultural Communication

Many scholars have given explicit definitions for intercultural communication, but some are not deep enough to make it more transparent and understandable. Some scholars noted that intercultural communication is between persons or groups from various cultures (Izzulhaq & Simanjuntak, 2022). Several scholars have used different terms in referring to the same word of intercultural communication, such as 'trans-racial communication,' 'inter-racial communication,' 'cross-cultural communication,' and 'inter-ethnic communication (Hassan, 2022). This clarifies the definition of intercultural communication as a communication process between two or more individuals of distinctive cultures to achieve a specific goal. Moreover, it could also be the process of exchanging ideas between sub-cultures. Therefore, it is essential to note that intercultural communication refers to communication between individuals from distinctive cultures. Intercultural communication describes interaction between people from different cultures, focusing mainly on communication. When more than two people from different cultures interact and exchange information, intercultural communication is called (Chen, 2017).

In general, it is understood that intercultural communication occurs when people from different cultures and ethnicities start communicating (Xiaodong & Guo-Ming, 2022). Intercultural communication concentrates on the interaction between members of different cultures or across diverse cultural boundaries and explores their communicative practices in interaction with each other. It involves sharing information on various stages of awareness and control amongst people with different cultural experiences and circumstances, including national cultural diversity and participation in multiple activities within a national unit. Intercultural Communication could occur when individuals influenced by other cultural communities negotiate shared meaning in interactions (Matveev, 2017).

However, using culture and communication as a base, intercultural communication is termed as the sharing of information on diverse levels of awareness and control amongst people with different cultural backgrounds, where diverse cultural backgrounds include both national cultural differences and differences that are connected with participation in the various activities that exist within a national unit (Jimerson & Chen, 2022). In other words, intercultural communication connotes a process in which people from different cultural backgrounds interact and create a shared understanding to achieve personal goals and create relationships with others.

Management of Healthy Multiethnic Church

All organizations (including churches) are purposive entities that achieve their objectives with limited resources. Management integrates scarce resources in a productive relationship to achieve organizational goals with optimum efficiency and effectiveness (Agarwal, 2020). Management theories and principles possess universal application in organized and purposive activity, though the application may differ from organization to organization (Drucker & Maciariello, 2018). This implies that churches need to be educated on management issues and apply these principles in church management to achieve ministry effectiveness, irrespective of the nature of the congregation.

Management is vital to the church in three aspects: First, it calls church leaders to organize the institution to achieve its vision, focusing on adequately utilizing resources. Second, church leadership does not provide ministry in a vacuum but within the context of persons, as such ministry is not about the program but about people (Chatira & Mwenje, 2018). However, individual church members have strengths, weaknesses, gifts and desires, which require the church leadership to have some management skills to serve the people more efficiently (Khulani, 2022). Third, the church has a mission and vision, which cannot be accomplished apart from the coordinated effort of people. Materials must be obtained, support lines must be established and protected, individuals must be selected, and training must be provided. Each of these activities is at the heart of strong and sound management. They require applying management functions critical for ministry operation; otherwise, the church is compromised and negated (Harwanto, 2022).

The establishment of churches is solely a place of worship and delivery of spiritual guidance and nourishment; the governance and management structures are typically developed within the specific church context and rely on laws enforced within these same contexts. Therefore, the compositions of governance and management vary widely from one church to another across the globe. However, the author explains managerial functions within the church organization for healthy congregation management (Akinloye, 2019).

1. They oversee the ministry's operations and management of the church's resources to ensure their sustainable, effective and efficient usage. This may include ministry budgeting, capital expenditures, legal compliances and risk management within the church operations.
2. Set measurable and appraisable strategies to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of its growth. The essential requirements for effective church management include the following (Lussier, 2020).
 - i. Developing a growth and development plan strategy, which entails setting goals,
 - ii. Engaging in productive budgeting processes,
 - iii. Managing performance,

- iv. Managing facilities and legal
- v. Risk management.
- 3. The church properly conducts its activities to ensure accountability and sustainability, leading to performance and growth.
- 4. The church structures its planning and develops strategies considering its vision, mission and values. The individuals within the management of the church must subscribe to the church's mission, vision and values to have a straightforward means of executing the mandate (Hodapp, 2018).

The church as an organization is made up of numerous departments, including the adults, the youth, and the kids of different ethnic dispositions who have concurrent plans of growth and development that must be kept in check to ensure their viability and sustainability in terms of the ultimate church plans and objectives (Fabrizio, Barth & Yanfei, 2019).

Church structure and leadership are essential to ensure its continued health and growth; the ability of any church to objectively manage the human resources available within its reach becomes the force factor for healthy growth (Awuku-Gyampoh, Kwabena & Asare, 2019). Meanwhile, four significant behaviors shape the ministry of a multiethnic church that should be attended to by the church management, and they are;

a. Segregation Management

The multiethnic biblical church was able to manage and counteract segregation. The contemporary churches are located in a multiethnic society, which is God's desire for the church to embrace the multiethnic diversity of her context. The inability to manage it is dissonant with the new humanity in the church, the eternal perspective that transcends national identities, and the practice of hospitality (Awuku-Gyampoh, Ransford & Asare, 2021). The church should be ready to embrace countercultural diversity and counteract the human tendencies that can bring fragmentation: regionalism, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination and segregation, thus keeping the church healthy.

b. Cultivation of Inclusion Identity

The multiethnic biblical church also managed the cultivation of the identity of inclusion. Inclusion is countercultural, and the contemporary church has to proactively prepare the ground and plant the seed of inclusion in people's hearts. The church management should provide theological instruction to help Christians embrace their identity of inclusion, live with an eternal perspective, and practice hospitality (Sarah, 2017). A multiethnic church will benefit from intentionally training the members to engage in this theological reflection and practice. The management of identity of inclusion to counteract the underlying beliefs that feed on segregation to be a healthy multiethnic congregation that loves the stranger. The church's equipping to counteract segregation must be done preventively and correctly.

c. Implementation of Multilingual Platform

The multiethnic biblical church was able to implement and manage a multilingual platform. The previous biblical analysis revealed that the New Testament's social context was multiethnic and multilingual. The early church did not attempt to assimilate all languages into one, but the church embraced multilingualism. Contemporary churches in a multiethnic society need to implement a well-managed multilingual platform that will incorporate all languages in the congregation into

one (Robbins, 2018). Despite the predominant language of the church's location, relating with a bilingual approach is appropriate. Adopting a multilingual platform will expand her engaging capacity for ministry impact and healthy growth if the church is in a multilingual society.

d. Formulation of Multiethnic and Culturally Intelligent Leadership Team

There is a need for the church to form a well-managed multiethnic and culturally intelligent leadership team. The church began a group of multiethnic leaders who understood the culture of the community when Jerusalem faced ethnic tension. There is a need for contemporary churches to establish and manage a competent leadership team with a multiethnic and cultural disposition to run the church's affairs (Awuku-Gyampoh & Asare, 2019). It reveals the value of a church's leadership team that embodies and understands cultural diversity and embraces ethnic and linguistic diversity. The church will benefit from having a leadership team that can engage effectively with that diversity.

In summary, the rationale of a healthy multiethnic church is based on a ministry philosophy that is consonant with the new humanity in Christ, the heavenly citizenship, and the practice of hospitality informed by Christ Jesus. As a result, when a church is located in a multiethnic and multilingual society, the management of the church will benefit from developing a ministry framework that includes counteracting segregation, cultivating an identity of inclusion, implementing a multilingual platform, and forming a multiethnic and culturally intelligent leadership team (Awuku-Gyampoh, Kwabena & Asare, 2018).

Barriers in Intercultural Communication to Healthy Multiethnic Community

All communication occurs in a culture; cultural differences are the primary obstacle in intercultural communication. Different cultures are characterized by other languages, values, behaviors and attitudes towards time, context, customs, distance, and non-verbal signs (Barreto, 2021). Every culture has rules and standards about behaviors, so no one can learn a culture perfectly. All actions are bound to be wrong in some cultures or offend someone's view. Communication between cultures is likely less effective because of the violation of cultural norms. People would never know if they are expected to follow another culture's norms or behave according to their culture (Tabassum & Bhabani 2021). Many communication barriers across cultures prevent effective communication, but six are briefly discussed below.

a. Anxiety: Anxiety is a feeling most people have in a completely new and different environment. They could be nervous due to not knowing what they are expected to do during the communication transaction. Since people feel uneasy, they might not be focused on the communication process. As a result, common mistakes or appearing awkward to others are likely to be made when anxious. For example, when people of different cultures gather for interaction for the first time, most become incredibly nervous about their speaking and hearing skills, leading to everyday accents or pronunciation mistakes (Xiuwen & BakarRazali 2020).

b. Assuming Similarity Instead of the Difference in Cultures: Assuming similarity instead of difference becomes a barrier when communicating across cultures. People are expected to think it is okay to behave the same way as in their culture in a new culture. However, this assumption makes people forget the essential differences. Consequently, this could lead to miscommunication. Each culture is distinguished and unique. For example, the display of emotions differs from culture to culture; under certain circumstances, some cultures might seem to lack emotions compared to

other cultures (Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian 2020). Moreover, the situation is similar if people only assume differences instead of similarities. This could make people unaware of the everyday things between cultures; people should think nothing but ask questions.

c. Ethnocentrism: Ethnocentrism affects intercultural communication. It means negatively judging aspects of another culture by the standards of one's culture (Rings & Rasinger, 2022). For example, people believe their culture is better than others in some regions. Every culture has its rules and standards. That's why applying the same means of one's culture to others is impossible. This barrier has adverse effects on intercultural communication. Ethnocentrism leads to restriction and limitation of obtaining knowledge and values of other cultures.

d. Stereotypes and Prejudice: Stereotypes and prejudice are both challenges to intercultural communication. Both terms refer to judgments about a person based on a group's shared values. Stereotypes are a broad term and can be used for either negative or positive assessments of individuals. Meanwhile, prejudice usually refers to unjust behaviors and hostility towards a group, race, religion or sexual orientation. The most readily available image is what has been expected to be seen. Stereotypes are one's expectations about someone or something based on knowledge about it (Nomnian, 2018). With the way humans perceive things, people can easily reject any information unrelated to their expectations. Every culture uses stereotypes, but they can impede communication. Most people learn about stereotypes from movies, news and maybe other people's perspectives. That information causes people to assume a wide belief is true when the information might not be accurate or apply to everyone (Guido & Rasinger, 2022). Therefore, they also hurt the individual stereotyped as well. The mentioned individual can be distracted or misjudged because of those stereotypes. However, not all stereotypes are negative judgments.

Prejudice usually refers to irrational dislike based solely on the individual's belief. Highly prejudiced persons are identified as having authoritarian personalities. They tend to overgeneralize things. They are not likely to change their attitudes or ideas, even when facing new and conflicting information. Prejudice exists in all cultures; many still view black men as bad guys even when the world changes. Discrimination prevents effective communication since the person might reject the new information that does not suit their standards or beliefs (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018).

e. Language: Language is a set of codes a community shares to communicate meaning and experience. People with the same cultural background and native language are expected to understand the implications better as their ways of thinking are similar. However, people from different cultural groups tend to misinterpret each other's meanings in intercultural communication. Invariably, language is an obvious obstacle to intercultural communication. Even when cultures use the same language, there are differences, such as vocabulary. There is no way to translate a language perfectly. For translation problems, five possible issues were identified: lack of vocabulary equivalence, idiomatic equivalence, grammatical syntactical equivalence, experiential equivalence, and conceptual equivalence (Okunola & Umar, 2021).

f. Non-verbal Misinterpretation: Effective intercultural communication is a mix of both verbal and non-verbal communication. During an international workshop interaction, non-verbal behaviors can help communicate the message to foreign partners than verbal behaviors. However, there is also a risk of misinterpretation, confusing the partners. Most people know that languages are different but are less likely to be aware that non-verbal messages are added. Non-verbal

communications are also unique and distinguishable from culture to culture (Brunet, 2021). Therefore, the meanings of non-verbal communication also vary in different cultures. And those differences are what creates confusion and misunderstanding in intercultural communication. As a result, non-verbal misinterpretation could create misunderstandings and miscommunication, especially when non-verbal behaviors' meanings don't match verbal behaviors (Rovan & Shannon, 2022).

Improving Intercultural Communication Competence in Multiethnic Community Management

With advancements and the advent of technologies and modern and pioneering methods, miscommunication has become common. Miscommunication takes place when individuals experience barriers within the course of communication. Miscommunication not only imposes disadvantages in the implementation of communication processes but also within the system of the overall functioning of the organizations. Therefore, it is vital to identify the causes of miscommunication and implement measures to overcome those hurdles. Therefore, measures suggested by scholars to overcome cross-cultural obstacles to effective communication are as follows (Irwin, 2020).

1. Implementing Different Communication Styles

When communicating with others, it is not appropriate to implement one communication style into operation; in other words, one needs to implement different communication styles. When individuals pursue training programs, especially regarding communication, they generate awareness regarding communication styles (Phumpho & Nomnian, 2019). When individuals create awareness and augment their understanding of different communication styles, they will not only contribute significantly to promoting the communication process in a well-organized manner, but these will assist in overcoming cross-cultural barriers. When the church leadership provides training or supervisors guide the workforce, they generate information that implementing different communication styles will significantly contribute to overcoming cross-cultural obstacles (Chung, 2019).

2. Depicting Clarity in Verbal Communication

In some cases, when communication takes place, it is not clear. The individuals may speak indirectly, which may not be understandable to others. In other words, when communication is unclear, individuals experience problems overcoming cross-cultural barriers and inefficiently implementing job duties (Thapliyal & Mahendra, 2022). Hence, when individuals impart information, ask questions, express their responses, or convey ideas or suggestions to anybody, they must ensure clarity. When the communication processes are transparent and clear in verbal communication, the individuals will understand well and carry out their job duties appropriately (Caputo, 2019).

3. Giving Feedback in a Direct or Indirect Manner

The leaders and supervisors provide feedback to the members regarding their performance. When the church members and workers within the Christian organizations obtain feedback, they can generate information about where they stand and how they perform. Feedback can be given in a direct as well as in an indirect manner (Pauna, 2022). Immediate feedback can be presented in verbal as well as written form. It is understandable in a manageable way: indirect feedback can

also be given in oral and written forms. One of the significant disadvantages of this feedback is that it does not enable the individuals to understand the information appropriately. However, giving feedback directly or indirectly contributes satisfactorily to overcoming cross-cultural barriers to communication (Adler & Aycan, 2018).

4. Establishing the Right Amount of Structure

Establishing the proper structure is indispensable in overcoming cross-cultural barriers to effective communication. Setting the right amount of system is crucial in promoting communication processes and the appropriate functioning of the organization. The members must ensure that the structure is well-defined within various types of organizations. When the system is well-defined, the organization's members will concentrate and carry out their job duties organizationally and systematically (Dinkevych et al., 2017). In this manner, they will recognize that it is indispensable to maintain amicable terms and relationships with other individuals and overcome cross-cultural barriers (Finuras, 2019).

5. Understanding Time in a Different Manner

Understanding time differently is crucial in ensuring that individuals allot proper time to various tasks and activities. Individuals in leadership positions, such as clergies, heads, directors, and so forth, have busy schedules with several job duties to carry out (Kecskés, 2019). When they have several job duties to carry out, they assign priorities. The more important tasks are carried out first, whereas the less critical functions are procrastinated. But efficiency in the individuals is depicted when they can promptly carry out their job duties. Individuals can understand time differently and promote effective communication when assigning task priorities (Zusman, 2021).

6. Avoiding Uncertainty

Uncertainties, problems and barriers hinder the communication processes and the overall functioning of organizations. Hence, individuals need to avoid tensions and implement measures to overcome them. In some cases, uncertainties are unavoidable and do take place. But what is essential for the individuals is to ensure they put into practice the measures, which leads to the avoidance of uncertainties (Szöke, 2019). When these measures are implemented effectively, the individuals will not only find solutions to their problems and difficulties, but they will also be able to overcome cross-cultural barriers to communication (Owen, Razali & Elhaj, 2019). They must coordinate when the individuals augment their understanding and implement these measures.

7. Promoting Teamwork

Teamwork is dynamic in the success of any organization. Creating an efficient team to facilitate collaboration and mutual understanding is necessary. The church leaders and supervisors generate awareness among members of the need to promote teamwork. Promoting teamwork will contribute to developing mutual understanding and generating the desired outcomes. When collaboration is encouraged, and individuals are working with each other on assignments and projects, they overcome cross-cultural barriers to promote effective communication as it is apparent that when they need to work in integration with each other and need to obtain support and assistance from others, they need to accept other individuals' cultures, norms, standards, religions, ethnicities, caste, creed, race and so forth (Yeasmin, Koivurova & Heikkilä, 2019).

8. Working in Collaboration and Integration with each other

Working in collaboration and integrating are regarded as fundamental in overcoming cross-cultural barriers, promoting the effective functioning of the organizations, achieving organizational goals and increasing job satisfaction. Research has indicated that group projects are encouraged in higher educational institutions and various Christian organizations. When working on group projects, they need to collaborate and integrate.

(Bargheer, 2017). On the other hand, when members work on individual projects, they must communicate well with supervisors, colleagues, etc. Hence, individuals cannot work in seclusion within various organizations but must collaborate (Rosenthal, 2019).

9. Building (Personal) Relationships

Building personal relationships is a measure that is of utmost significance in overcoming cross-cultural barriers and promoting effective communication. Several factors need to be considered to create intimate relationships (Wagner & Byram, 2017). These are generating awareness in terms of personal interaction, accepting viewpoints and perspectives of others, implementing effective conflict resolution methods, generating information in terms of communication styles and techniques, forming constructive views in terms of individuals, creating pleasant working environmental conditions, satisfactorily managing resources, generating awareness in terms of modern and innovative methods, developing mutual understanding and not discriminating against anybody based on many factors (Yeung, 2021). When individuals are aware of these factors, they will contribute effectively to building personal relationships and overcoming cross-cultural barriers to communication.

10. Recognizing the Significance of Personal Relationships

To overcome cross-cultural barriers to effective communication, individuals must recognize the significance of personal relationships. Individuals spend long hours with other members in the working environment, mainly when they are in worship service. Therefore, there is a need to establish mutual understanding and professional relationships (Malazonia et al., 2017). In Christian organizations, to ensure overall functioning appropriately, the members must develop pleasant and amiable terms and relationships with each other and incur personal satisfaction. Furthermore, individuals need to recognize the significance of personal relationships. When individuals realize the importance of personal relationships, they can work as one unit. In other words, promoting unity is crucial in fostering effective communication, overcoming cross-cultural barriers, and efficient functioning (NiLan, Wang & Bey-Ling, 2018).

11. Participating in Intercultural Group Relations

One way to improve intercultural communication skills is by actively participating in intercultural group interactions. These can be planned interactions, such as duo work for the church or group projects at work. Intercultural Teamwork has benefited people by developing critical skills for graduates' employability and improving students' academic and religio-social adaptation (Rosenthal, 2019). Working in a small group with members from diverse cultural backgrounds can also lead to more varied and supportive social networks within a broad environment, positively impacting the overall experience of individuals (<https://www.mindtool.com> 2020). Meanwhile, it is worth noting that mere insertion into intercultural groups does not immediately lead to productive communication and collaboration (McGarry et al., 2018).

Likewise, conscious sharing and a learning process within intercultural groups will help you gain a broader perspective on cultural diversity and improve your intercultural communication skills.

12. Improving Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness

Cultural awareness is crucial to improving relationships with people from different backgrounds. When communicating with people of varying cultural backgrounds, one must know that specific topics or assumptions may be unresponsive. It could bring other cultural implications of what is said or different communication styles as communication may be more subtle (Xiuwen & BakarRazali, 2020). One must operate with the awareness that cultural differences exist between oneself and others. There is a need to demonstrate respect and appreciation for different cultures. Every aspect of awareness has an accurate historical context to better understand each other's experiences. Indeed, learning and understanding everything around oneself in a multicultural setting is challenging. It is more about an individual's willingness to seek understanding and show empathy instead of spiking stereotypes and making judgments (Sun, 2019). The most consistent tools are always your level of sensitivity and observation. It could also be beneficial to be more self-aware about one's actions, thoughts, or emotions, ensuring a person is heading in the right direction by improving intercultural communication skills.

13. Be Open-minded to Receiving Feedback

Individuals participate in cultural learning activities in which they receive direct input from the system and reflect on the appropriateness of their study process. The training was an effective educational tool for learning intercultural communication skills. The response and feedback from the system directly reflect the learner's intercultural skills and help them improve efficiency (Moore & Díaz, 2019). Feedback is essential for people to reflect upon and determine what they can improve. Receiving feedback helps know what has been done right or wrong, especially when people do something they are unsure of. The church will always have countless firsts for cross-communication. Individuals may not be aware of the skills needed for cross-cultural interactions, even as simple as what not to say and things to say. Meanwhile, one should remember that open-mindedness is critical in the process, as it allows people to accept and be willing to hear from others (Rittle et al., 2019). Remember that feedback is only effective if you are ready to accept it and take action to make a change.

Conclusion

The paper explored overcoming the challenges of Intercultural Communication for Managing Multiethnic Church Communities. It affirmed that cultural differences have become the primary obstacle in intercultural communication, as different languages, values, behaviors and attitudes towards time, context, customs, distance, and non-verbal signs characterize different cultures. The paper discussed intercultural communication, significant church managerial behaviors for shaping the ministry of a multiethnic church and communication barriers across cultures that could prevent effective communication. Therefore, leaders could implement different communication styles, depict clarity in verbal communication, give feedback directly or indirectly, establish the right amount of structure, understand time differently, avoid uncertainty, promote teamwork and work in collaboration and integration with each other. Others are building (personal) relationships, recognizing the significance of personal relationships, participating in intercultural group relations, improving cultural sensitivity and awareness, and being open-minded to receiving feedback. These

challenges would be minimized, and proficient and skillful communication would be developed among church leaders and members across cultures within the Christian folds, which will ultimately enhance the management of the multiethnic church community.

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