Designer As Midwife
Towards A New State-of-Mind?

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Abstract

Design and innovation are now central themes in business, but where is role of design heading to? One of the biggest challenges in product/service development is to understand the latent needs of the customers and the meanings of these needs to them. As facilitators, designers help others "deliver" the design knowledge within these human beings (and organizations) by tapping into their "innate design ability". This article highlights the similarity between the role of designers and midwives. Designers facilitate new product/service delivery via deploying research methods such as depth-interviews, observations, interpretative methods and, participatory research, towards delivery of knowledge in the form of designed products. Given the evolving role of design, how do designers add value to the business? More specifically, can Socrates's "[mental] midwife" metaphor be used to illustrate the new role of a designer?

It has become increasingly evident that they are no longer satisfied with simply being "consumers." Everyday people want to be "creators" as well. This unmet need for creative experience tends not to be voiced in the open since it is a tacit need. It can, however, be seen and heard when we give people simple visual tools with which they can express their dreams and aspirations... End-users can and should be the most important players in the design process…Designers will no longer only design for people, they will learn to design with people. This will require new forms of communication to support the collective creativity that arises between designers and everyday people.

Elizabeth Sanders, 2006b

People need not only to obtain things, they need above all the freedom to make things among which they can live, to give shape to them according to their own tastes, and to put them to use in caring for and about others"

Ivan Illich, 1975

I. Role of Design

To make creativity an integral part of an organization is a daunting challenge. Design and innovation are now central themes in business. Design grounds a particular innovation and arranges the concrete details that embody an innovation in ways that construct people's interpretations of novelty from pieces of what are old and familiar to them (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001). While boundaries of innovation and design is getting blurred, where is role of designer heading to?

For centuries, design has been serving the markets, not the needs and dreams of everyday people. And as a result, consumerism took over. "We have been exposed to too many "innovative" products that we wanted but did not need at all. We are destroying the planet through overconsumption and environmental sustainability is more critical than ever" (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). While we finally recognize that cultural and social sustainability's tremendous importance to human survival and well being, new design approaches are emerging that provide us with the means to balance consumptive and creative experience. The market-driven era is finally giving way to the people-centered era. "What this means for design and design research is that people who are not educated in design are designing; the line between product and service is no longer clear; the boundaries between the design disciplines are blurring; the action now is in the fuzzy front end of the design development process with a focus on experiential rather than physical or material concerns" (Sanders, 2006a).

According to Sanders and Stappers (2008), the evolution from user-centered design to co-design has an impact on the roles of the paricipants in the design process. For example, in the traditional design process, the researcher served as a translator between the "users" and the designer. In co-designing, the researcher (who may be a designer) takes on the role of a facilitator. "When we acknowledge that different levels of creativity exist, it becomes evident that we need to learn how to offer relevant experiences to facilitate people's expressions of creativity at all levels. This means leading, guiding, and providing guidelines/frameworks as well as clean slates to encourage people at all levels of creativity" (Sanders and Stappers, 2008)

This article aims at contributing to this research stream by discussing the usability of the "midwife" metaphor to explain further the evolving role of designers. One of the biggest challenges in product/service development is to understand the latent needs of the customers and the meanings of these needs to them. It is not easy to read the meaning of objects or experiences as the meaning may depend on the context in which the object is shown, next to the cultural and personal background of the maker and the reader. Customers could neither imagine their future needs by themselves nor they may be able to express and articulate their true needs. As facilitators, designers help human beings (and organizations) "deliver" the design knowledge within themselves by tapping onto their "innate design ability". They facilitate this process via deploying research methods such as interviews, observations, ethnography/netnography, interpretative methods, participatory research towards delivery of knowledge in the form of products and services e.g. health care delivery, social services delivery, etc.

This research emphasizes the similarity between the role of designers and midwives. Given the evolving role of design, designers may add more value to the business with a new state-of-mind, like a "mental midwife", especially at the beginning stages of the new product/service development process. Their new role, which is less restraining and more emancipatory than participatory and co-design, would be crucial especially in order to release the innate creative abilities of their clients and not to constrain this knowledge already resides in them. The contribution of this research is the way to tackle this challenge via deployment of a new metaphor.

II. Role and Philosophy of Midwifery

According to Wolfenberg (2008), "the process of human childbirth is a normal physiological process perfectly designed by nature to bring babies into the world. It is an instinctive, primal experience that has its own rhythm and pace, and works best when interfered with as little as possible". She suggests that women have as much control as possible in their care, and be active participants in decision-making and self-care. "When informed, supported and encouraged to follow their own instincts, women can be active givers of birth rather than passive receivers of birth technology. Childbirth, when experienced in this way, has the potential to be a transformative event; women who take responsibility for their births and give birth to their babies under their own power, emerge from the experience empowered, with a new sense of their own capabilities. This transformation benefits not only that mother and her children, but also the entire family unit, the community, the culture at large, and ultimately the world, as it encourages peaceful, loving, responsible relationships".

To Wolfenberg (2008), midwifery is both an art and a science. "The art of midwifery consists of sensitivity to the needs of women and families, and being able to meet these needs in the most appropriate way. It involves knowing when and how to intervene to promote safety if it becomes necessary, and is grounded in scientific knowledge. The science of midwifery overlaps with that of other disciplines such as medicine and nursing. The crux of the art and science of midwifery lies in the knowledge of and devotion to keeping birth, and other related processes normal".

Midwife means 'with woman'. Wolfenberg (2008) claims that this meaning gives shape to midwifery's philosophy, work and relationships. The institution of "midwifery" is based on respect for women and on a strong belief in the value of women's work of bearing and rearing each generation. It considers women in pregnancy, during childbirth and early parenting to be undertaking healthy processes that are profound and

precious events in each woman's life. These events are also seen as inherently important to society as a whole. She concludes that "midwifery is emancipatory because it protects and enhances the health and social status of women, which in turn protects and enhances the health and wellbeing of society as a whole" (Wolfenberg, 2008).

III. Mental Midwifery (Mayeutics)

Mayeutics (mental midwifery) is a complex procedure of research. It is based on the idea that the truth is latent in the mind of every human being due to his innate reason but has to be "given birth" by answering questions (or framing problems) intelligently proposed. The word is derived from the Greek "μαιευτικός," pertaining to midwifery.

It is thought that mayeutics was created by Socrates, because it is placed in the character of Socrates in the Theatetus of Plato. According to Plato, several traits in Socrates' activity make it resemble a midwife's art, while the main difference between them seems to be that a midwife operates with people and Socrates with ideas.

Socrates claimed that he was helping people to get the truth out of themselves in the same way that his mother, who was actually a midwife, helped pregnant women in their delivery process. For that reason he called his method "mayeutics". Mayeutics is based on the belief that there is an innate stored knowledge in human beings by tradition and the experience of past generations. Therefore, Mayeutics invites the individual to discover the true that is latent in him. Contrary to that, the Socratic method fights in the individual erratic conceptions. Socratic Method is made for those who think they know, but actually are ignorant, while Mayeutics is addressed to those who know, but do not know that they know.

Mayeutics or "mental midwifery", can be seen as the art of helping the others to help themselves; human beings 'implictly' already know the answers to questions. The question is how to get the ideas out. From the organizational studies perspective, it can be related to what is referred to as organisation as a means to extract and harness the agency of its members. From design research view; design can help consumers express motivations or satisfy needs that they don't know how to satisfy or express. The final design helps consumers in this regard. However, even at the very beginning of the design process, designers can help consumers to express needs and desires that they are not even conscious about.

IV. Metaphor and Role of Designer

Rhetoric, with its connections with logic and other arts of reasoning, constitutes a basic part of epistemology. In his book, "Poetica", Aristotle defined metaphor as the translation of the name of a thing to another thing based on the similarity or analogy between things (Bonet, 2006).

In Greek, metaphor means translation. It is an implicit comparison where it is not stated that it is a comparison. The audience is expected to understand what is meant. Metaphors have a distinct place in rhetoric (art of persuasion by evidence). They can help build stronger arguments (Bonet, 2006).

In the modern times, Rhetoric of Inquiry was firstly coined by D. McCloskey (1998) in her critics on the research methods of economics. She claims that economic arguments are based on metaphors (1998) and on narratives (1990). Her approach is influenced by the Aristotelian conception of classic rhetoric, which was updated in the New Rhetoric, by communication theories and by new views on science and scientific research (Bonet, 2006).

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought for action. For this reason, most people think that they can get by perfectly well without metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature"(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

According to Weick (1969), "reality is a metaphor" and to talk about a "reality" is simply one way that people try to make sense out of the stream of experience that flows by them (Weick, 2001) . To give an idea of what it could mean for a concept to be metaphorical and for such a concept to structure an everyday activity, in their book, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) emphasize the concept "Argument" and the conceptual metaphor "Argument is War".

According to Roman Jakobson, as psychological processes, metaphor and metonymy are the two fundamental modes of thinking and communicating meaning, and - according to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson - the basis for much of our understanding in everyday life (Jakobson & Halle, 1956; Lakoff Johnson, 1980).

In rhetoric, metonymy is the use of a word for a concept or object which is associated with the concept/object originally denoted by the word. The kinds of associations that define metonymy and synecdoche are cause or effect, totality or part associations; they involve a kind of physical contiguity. Metonymy may be instructively contrasted with metaphor. Both figures involve the substitution of one term for another. In metaphor, this substitution is based on similarity, while in metonymy, the substitution is based on association.

Metonymy is attested in cognitive processes underlying language. Objects that appear strongly in a single context emerge as cognitive labels for the whole concept, thus fueling linguistic labels such as "sweat" to refer to hard work that might produce it. Advertising frequently uses metonymy, putting a product in close proximity to something desirable in order to make an indirect association that would seem ridiculous if made with a direct comparison.

Although [mental midwifery] has not been elaborated through linguistic perspective, some researchers interested in language and discourse have demonstrated how organizational conversations, texts, accounts, narratives, and stories affect the ability of organizations to take action, achieve legitimacy, and manage their relationship with their environments, and stories (Dunford & Palmer, 1996). Researchers working from this perspective have recognized that language and actions are closely related, because language defines certain

actions as "legitimate, necessary, and may be even . . . the only 'realistic' option for a given situation" (Dunford & Palmer, 1996) and because people "do not use language primarily to make accurate representations of perceived objects, but, rather to accomplish things" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000: 137; Rindova et al, 2004). Despite frequent references to the role of the media as a source of legitimacy for industries and firms (e.g., Baum & Powell, 1995; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), the media's role in shaping public perceptions of firms remains relatively unexamined and under theorized. For example owner of this website *(www.webmidwife.com),* exhibits his firm as "midwife":

"You conceived the idea for a website, I can help you to birth it into reality! I am an SBI! Coach and seasoned website and graphic designer. If you are with SiteBuildIt! I can help you with any days of the Action Guide as well as design your website".   (WebMidWife)

Wittgenstein points out that metaphors are devices that extend the meaning of words. In Philosophical Investigations (1953)*,* he claims that we must dismiss the idea of concepts and focus on meanings of name. A name usually has many meanings that cannot be defined by a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. They only share a family resemblance. For example if we reflect on the meanings of the name "game", we find football, athletics, chess, poker, solitary card games, strategic games, love games, etc. The properties of physical or intellectual abilities, individual or team organizations and competition between people or teams do not apply to all of them.

Wittgenstein describes the process of generating new meanings and explains in the following way why we can't define them with a set of conditions: "We apply a name to a certain category of objects or events; but when a new category appears and their elements have a similarity with those of the previous class, we use the same name to refer to them. This metaphorical procedure operates many times with different criteria and, in consequence, the objects named with the same term constitute a very complex class" (Wittgenstein, 1953).

The metaphor of "mental midwifery" has not been widely used by design scholars and practitioners to describe the role of design, however, we argue that this metaphor is substantive, in that the theoretical knowledge developed in the domain of medical science can be usefully transferred to the study of role of design.

In constructing the reality of a mental midwifery, however, designers can go beyond simply invoking the metaphor of widwife. They can use medical language to describe many aspects of their activities such as facilitation, mediation, giving birth to a new product service, facilitating the delivery of a new service/product, etc.
For example:

How can design help deliver better health services ?
http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/en/Live-Issues/Can-design-help-create-a-more-healthy-population/

IBM Announces New Resources to Help Organizations Design and Deliver Smarter Products
http://www.webwire.com/ViewPressRel.asp?aId=94465

Wittgenstein considers language games as "language and the actions into which it is woven" (1953: 4). He stresses that the term *language game* is meant to bring into prominence the fact that "the *speaking* of a language is a part of an activity, or a life form" (Wittgenstein, 1953: 10). By participating in a language game, social actors pragmatically coordinate their activities through the language they use (Shotter, 1997).

In a language game, words provide a practical guide for action, rather than images, associations, and representations, from which meanings are to be made. The meaning of the words is defined "by reference to their role in the fabric of human action, as opposed to, say, their being associated with internal images" (Perry, 1994: 24). Thus, the concept of a language game differs from other approaches to language in its emphasis on the immediacy of the relationship between words and actions and on the engrained, potentially subconscious understanding of the meaning of words as "knowing what to do" in a given context. Wittgenstein explains, "To understand a language means to be a master of a technique" (1953: 68).

Wittgenstein (1953) uses the term *language game* to convey the idea that the meaning of words is defined through their use in social interactions. He compares words to tools and to "instruments for particular uses" (Wittgenstein, 1953; 291), because, in his view, words not only name objects but also imply the appropriate actions to be taken toward these objects (Perry, 1994). Thus, in a language game, words and actions are closely related, because the meaning of words is understood when an appropriate action is taken. While the words in a language game call for taking an action, the rules of the game define what constitutes an appropriate action by specifying the correspondence between words and actions (Wittgenstein, 1953: remarks 53–54). Rules are repositories of social practice. They are patterns of "regularity," which are taught to new participants in the game "by means of *examples* and by *practice*" (Wittgenstein, 1953: 70). Thus, a language game is learned through social practice. It provides a context in which words and actions are connected on the basis of social institutions, such as rules, customs, and tradition (Rindova et al, 2004).

When we look into the role of design, the concept of a language game enables us to understand how language and action become intertwined in a way that the language of midwifery is not just a reminiscent metaphor and metonymy but a system of expected, prescribed, or justifiable actions associated with the words and the rules the game consists of. Through the midwifery language game, based on medical language (itself a language game, with which designers, customers, managers and other stakeholders have some direct or mediated experience), designers provide internal and external stakeholders with pragmatic indicators of expected and appropriate behaviors. The midwifery language may imply expectations that clients accept the idea of owning the knowledge and creative abilities more readily or that they take actions that are expected as part of the ordinary course of design innovation.

We claim that the midwifery language is not simply a manipulation of words. Instead, it entails processes through which language both creates and emerges from the design practices of firms. The metaphor of midwife

acquires a reality-like status for the actors participating in the language game. In other words, participation in the language game leads organizational members and stakeholders to experience innovative activities as [mental] midwifery in more real ways than non-participants in the language game would.

Within a midwife language game, language and action lead to changes in state-of-mind, attitude, training methods, rules of engagement with the customer, and ultimately, in resource allocations inside design firms and among external stakeholders. In this way, the language game underlies the processes of resource mobilization and allocation through which design innovation is created. A design activity is therefore better understood as a medical language game generating intensified creative activity.

V. Research Methodology

Researchers and practitioners are both theory holders and theory builders. Practitioners build and maintain informal theories in their everyday lives. These contingent theories-in-use are important sources of insight for academic researchers (Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring, 1982). Given the nature of the objectives as developing understanding (Dyson et al, 1996, 1997) from the responses of people and organizations on the "Designers as Midwives" phenomena, I propose a discovery-oriented, theories-in-use approach (e.g.Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Glaser and Strauss 1967, , Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring, 1982).

One of the main challenges researchers face with is knowing what data to collect, when, where, and how. Because the purpose of the study is to uncover the evolving role of designers and to develop a taxonomy towards a generalizable theory, it is important to include a wide range of experiences and perspectives in the course of the data collection. For the purpose of this study, a method of data collection based on concepts derived from data seems to be appropriate. Therefore, we will use a "theoretical" sampling plan to interview designers and managers across functions and hierarchal levels in multiple industries including medium and large size companies. The reason we prefer theoretical sampling to conventional methods of sampling is that it is responsive to the data rather than already set norms prior to the research. This responsiveness will allow my sampling be more open and flexible (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). After increasing the diversity of my sample through theoretical sampling, we will look for different properties. At some point when the main category and its related categories saturate, we will stop adding to them or to their properties. After this signal to let us aware of the time to begin sorting, we will group the memos and will organize them in the order which would make the meaning of "designer as midwife" most refined.

Research sample is a combination of firms selected from Businessweek's "The World's Most Innovative Companies" list (e.g. Coca Cola, AT&T, BMW, Target, Smart Design, IDEO, Nike, Electrolux, Apple, 3M, IBM, Nokia, Dell, Intel, etc), their main distributors, and contacts obtained from professional design associations (Industrial Design Society of America (IDSA), and American Institute for Graphic Arts (AIGA)) and through the alumni network of several universities around the world. In order to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, their names and the name of he companies will be masqed.

The data analysis will follow the general procedures of basic qualitative research to allow the interplay of data and researcher via inductive and deductive process (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). According to the authors "Since no researcher enters into the process with a completely blank and empty mind, interpretations are deductions or researcher's abstraction of what the data are indicating. This method is inductive in the sense that findings are derived from data. It is deductive in the sense the concepts and the linking statements are interpretative; that is, constructed by the analyst from data" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

In order to increase the rigor of the research, we will try to use many different sources of evidence during data collection phase. This approach will allow us to perform "triangulation". Patton (1987) defines four types of triangulation in doing evaluations: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. Yin (2003) elaborates only on data triangulation and defines it as collecting information from multiple sources but with a goal of corroborating the same fact or phenomenon.

VI. Data Collection and Analysis

Initial data for the study was collected in 2008 in a research project: Design Orientation. The data consists of semi-structured interviews with 20 practicing American and Spanish designers, and design and product managers, marketing and sales executives, representing a variety of design domains and professions. The informants work both with locally and globally known products and brands. Initial and recorded interviews did not contain any specific reference to the role of designers and to the metaphors. However, follow up questions to 10 of the respondents included the following questions:

- How do you desribe the role of a designer regardless of type of design ?

- Have you noticed any change in this role since you worked as/worked with a designer?

- If you were asked to describe with a metaphor, which one would come to your mind to describe the interaction between the designer and client during the new service/product development. Why?

- If someone desribes this interaction as "designer as midwife", what would this metaphor mean to you?

 The interviews amounted to 20 hours of recorded material which was then processed to text transcripts. This summer (2009) the transcripts will be analyzed on NVivo qualitative analysis software.

The inductive analysis of the interview transcripts will be done according to the principles of Grounded Theory procedure applying the process of constant comparative analysis and multi-phased coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1994. The findings from the analysis will then be reflected against relevant literature. The preliminary qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts is currently underway and the suggestive findings are presented in this paper with a theoretical reflection against previous related research.

VII. Importance of this Research to the Design and Business Practice: A New State-of-Mind?

Firms have to continue understanding their markets and customers, producing and delivering superior products. The ability of firms to orient themselves (Ramani and V. Kumar, 2008) to design products and services successfully within both B2B and B2C markets will provide them with significant competitive advantage (Borja, 2003).

The purposes of the proposed study are to 1) explore and define "roles of design", 2) Test the fitness the use of "midwife" metaphor and 3) develop theoretical propositions in order to attract and facilitate research.

Even though firms often neglect design as a strategy tool to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Kotler and Rath, 1984), several recent developments in the business world have led to the increasing importance of design. First, customers have started to assume active roles to co-create value with firms (e.g. Bendapudi and Leone 2003; Vargo and Lusch 2004) and co-design new products. Nike designs products to help consumers engage more fully in the running process and achieve their running-related goals: smart shoes that track performance and inform runners when they have broken their personal records (Ramaswamy, 2008).

The move from user-centered design to co-design has an impact on the roles of the players in the design process. In the classical user-centered design process, the user is a passive object of study, and the researcher brings knowledge from theories and develops more knowledge through observation and interviews. The designer then passively receives this knowledge in the form of a report and adds an understanding of technology and the creative thinking needed to generate ideas, concepts, etc. (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

In co-design, the person who will eventually be served through the design process is given the position of 'expert of his/her experience', and plays a large role in knowledge development, idea generation and concept development. In generating insights, the researcher supports the "expert of his/her experience" by providing tools for ideation and expression. The designer and the researcher collaborate on the tools for ideation because design skills are very important in the development of the tools. The designer plays a vital role in giving form to the ideas (Sanders, 2006).

As we shift emphasis from product to interaction/experiential/organizational design with a service dominant logic, we may be experiencing a move from designers as co-designers to designers as midwives. This is a new attitude driven by a new mindset. This new move is a big change for designers who have been trained in the co-design space. It not only requires new tools and methods and a new language for designing but also "demands for the acceptance of new design partners and a new attitude about the inherent creativity of everyday people" (Sanders, 2006a).

Some people call this as "design thinking" which may or not may be good term. According to Brown (2008), "contrary to popular opinion, you don't need weird shoes or a black turtleneck to be a [design thinker]. Nor are design thinkers necessarily created only by design schools, even though most professionals have had some kind of design training. Many people outside professional design have a "natural aptitude" for design thinking, which the right development and experiences can unlock" (Brown, T., 2008).

VIII. Conclusion:

As facilitators, designers help other human beings (and organizations) "deliver" the design knowledge within them by tapping into their "innate design ability". This research emphasizes the similarity between the role of designers and midwives. Designers facilitate new product/service delivery via deploying research methods such

as depth-interviews, observations, ethnography/netnography, interpretative methods and, participatory research, towards delivery of knowledge in the form of designed products and services e.g. health care delivery, social services delivery, etc. Given the evolving role of design, designers may add more value to the business with a new state-of-mind, like a "midwife", especially at the beginning stages of the new product/service development process. Their new role, which is less restraining and more emancipatory than participatory and co-design, would be crucial especially in order to release the innate creative abilities of their clients and not to constrain this knowledge already resides in them. The contribution of this research is the way to tackle this challenge via deployment of a new metaphor. Use of metaphors is critical in legitimizing roles. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature"(Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). According to Weick (1969), "reality is a metaphor" and to talk about a "reality" is simply one way that people try to make sense out of the stream of experience that flows by them (Weick, 2001) .

The "mental midwifery" metaphor has not been widely used by design scholars and practitioners to describe the role of design, however, we argue that this metaphor is substantive, in that the theoretical knowledge developed in the domain of medical science can be usefully transferred to the study of role of design.

In constructing the reality of a mental midwifery, however, designers can go beyond simply invoking the metaphor of widwife. They can use medical language to describe many aspects of their activities such as facilitation, mediation, giving birth to a new product service, facilitating the delivery of a new products and services.

We claim that the midwifery language game is not simply a manipulation of words. Instead, it entails processes through which language both creates and emerges from the design practices of firms. The metaphor of midwife acquires a reality-like status for the actors participating in the language game. In other words, participation in the language game leads organizational members and stakeholders to experience innovative activities as [mental] midwifery in more real ways than non-participants in the language game would.

To re-emphasize, within a midwife language game, language and action lead to changes in state-of-mind, attitude, training methods, rules of engagement with the customer, and ultimately, in resource allocations inside design firms and among external stakeholders. Via the use of language game, the processes of resource mobilization and allocation through which design innovation is created. A design activity is therefore better understood as a mayeutical language game generating intensified creative activity.

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