Building and Sustaining Supportive Organizational Culture through Innovative and Strategic Leadership

Dr. Edward G. Eromafuru
Department of Business Administration
Delta State University
Anraka.

Abstract

The ultimate test of any corporate success is the quality of leaders it has helped to nurture and develop overtime. On the other hand, most corporate failures and disintegration in the recent past often had their antecedents in malfunctioned and questionable leadership practices that are inimical to smooth growth and group cohesiveness. As plausible as the above assertions are, leadership is often the most frequently abused of managerial functions the world over. Leadership practice in Nigeria is where there seems to be sharp contradiction between the promise of good governance and the reality of an act. Most Nigerian organization harbor dissident leaders that lack initiatives, foresight, entrepreneurial drive and undaunted will to survive in the long-run. As a result they have difficulty in competing in their business environment, and their prospects of realizing their missions are often dampened. It has therefore becomes imperative that the 21st century organizations design and sustain a supportive organizational climate for converting the dividends of sound leadership practice to their own advantage. The author strongly believes that with innovative and strategic leadership practice in place organizations are better positioned to win a war against competitive threats, dwindling profits, declining morale, product obsolescence, and group idiosyncrasies.

Key Words: organization, culture, innovation, strategy, leadership

1.1. Introduction

Success is managing modern day complex organizations demands that today's managers surrender their erstwhile conventional and dogmatic leadership styles which have been made unfashionable by unprecedented changes in the environments of their business. Unforeseen environmental changes in the form of global competition, startling break-through in technology, cultural diversity, group dynamism, unwholesome competition, the emergence of knowledge and empowered workforce, work autonomy are exerting pressure on managers to find innovative ways for managing the future of their organization.

The recent shockwaves in the Nigerian Banking and Telecommunication industry is challenging corporate managers to employ innovative and adaptive responses for customizing the emerging opportunities to own advantage while adopting a defensive and proactive measure to minimize incidence of environmental threats. In our fast-changing business environments, the capacity to introduce new strategies and organizational practices is a necessity if a company is to perform well over long periods of time Strategic agility and fast organizational response to new conditions requires a culture that quickly accepts and support company's efforts to adapt to environmental change rather than a culture that has to be coaxed and cajole to change.

To beat or to win the war for competition in today's dynamic business environments, the 21st managers must be adaptive, innovative and maintain a strong leadership culture that is sustainable. Good leaders or people oriented, are goal-driven, are ethically driven, are entrepreneurially committed and have inner impetus to succeed. An ability to instill strong individual commitment to strategic success and to create an atmosphere in which there is constructive pressure to perform is one of the most valuable strategy implementing skills. When an organizational performs consistently at or near peak capability, the outcome is not only more success but also a culture permeated with a spirit of high performance. An organization with a high spirit of performance emphasizes achievement and excellence. Its culture is results – oriented and its management pursues policies and practices that inspire people to do their best.

Companies with a high spirit of performance maintain leaders that are people-oriented, who reinforce their concern for individual employees on every conceivable occasion in every conceivable way. They treat employees with dignity and respect, training each employee thoroughly, encourage employees to use their own initiative and creativity in tasks performance, set reasonable and clear performance expectations, use full range of rewards and punishment to enforce high performance standards, hold managers at every level responsible for developing the people who report to them, and grant employees enough autonomy to stand out, excel and contribute. (Schneider, Bajamine, Sarah, Gunnarson and Kathryn, K. 1994).

Never in the history of leadership practices in Nigeria has there been need for visionary and transformational leaders to turn around low performing organizations that are on the verge of collapse or heading for abysmal disintegration. The events that orchestrated and climaxed the restructuring of some key Nigerian corporations in the recent times help to justify this claim. The strongest motivating factor was lack of task and people-oriented leaders with strong ethical backbone to enforce strategic visions and to infuse innovative and creative leadership mentality committed to meeting the goals sought. Such leaders in a quest to satisfy their personal aggradisements have neglected their legitimate roles of people-oriented leaders. They created and nurtured organizational climate that foster fraternization, sectionalism, idiosyncrasy, mediocricy, lousiness, organizational politics, bureaucracy and unfair reward practices. Being absolutely absorbed in the airs of presumptuousness and melancholy they bemoaned and demoralized their subordinates and followed up with the threats of sack or sanction of maximum repercussion in the event of subtle reprisal or frontal retaliation from their subordinates. This often reinforces and intensifies the climate of uncertainty, tension, appreciation, and fear.

Employees who could not afford to work under such conditions often backed out or may be induced to engage in practices and behaviour which may be concomitant to the reputation of the organisation as a corporate entity. Nigerian leaders have lost their credibility with the subordinates because of their frequent involvement in unwholesome organizational politics, extreme corruption and unethical practices of every sort. The reality of leadership situation is that most Nigerian managers are still deeply entrenched in their traditional notion of authority that they show little or no regard for employees' dignity and their self-worth. Today's employee's desire praises recognition, participation, autonomy, empowerment, and ambitious and achievable work targets. Success in doing today's business hinges on managers' being innovative, proactive empathetic and holistic in the use of their leadership styles. In this article, the writer posits that only a sound management practices anchored on strategic leadership can aid organizations to reap landmark success in the process of policy implementation and the design and enforcement of people-oriented organizational culture.

1.2. Holistic Review of Supporting Literature

It is imperative from the onset to clarify the Buzz-words that constitute the bedrock of this article. Organizational culture refers to a company's values, beliefs, traditions, operating style and internal work environment. Strategic leadership according to Hitt, Hoskisson and Duane (2007) is the ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility and empower others to create strategic change as necessary. Strategic leadership involves managing through others, managing an entire enterprise, rather than a functional subunit, and coping with change that continues to increase in the 21st century landscape. Because of this landscape complexity and global nature, strategic leaders must learn how to effectively influence human behaviour, often in uncertain environments. By word or by personal examples, and through ability to envision the future, successful strategic leaders help to stimulate the behaviors, thoughts and feelings of those with whom they work Green, Hassan, Marks and Meiland (2003).

Strategic Leadership in Action

The litany of good strategic management is simple enough: formulate sound strategic plan, implement it, execute it to the fullest, win!. But it is easier said than done. Exerting take-charge leadership, being a "spark plug", ram ridding things through, and getting things done by coaching others to do them are difficult tasks (Scholaz, 1987). A strategic leader must be visionary, must possesses excelling entrepreneurial skills, must be a good strategic thinker and effective strategy implementer, must be a cultural builder and process integrator, must be resource acquirer and capabilities builder, must coach, inspire, motivate, empathize, tactful or sanction unwarranted or unwholesome behavior. A strategic leader must be above all dynamic and proactive. (Kotler, 2000).

At one time, a strategic leader may be authoritarian and hard-nosed. At the other time he may turn out to be a perceptive listener, and a compromising decision maker. Sometimes a strongly participative, collegial approach works best. The differences in leader's behavior in this is in the context. Many occasion call for a highly visible role and extensive time commitments, while others entail a brief ceremonial performance with the details delegated to subordinates. A strategic leader must craft and design strategy that will facilitate prompt adaptation to unprecedented environmental change and that which will equip the organisation to: better respond to changing conditions, alert for new opportunities, bubbling with innovative ideas, and ahead of rivals in developing competitively valuable competencies and capabilities; staying on top of what is happening and how well things are going; building consensus, containing "power struggles"; enforcing sound moral standards and ethical behaviors; designing and maintaining a flexible organization that fosters initiative, autonomy, open communication, participation and effective reward strategy; building and customizing the organisation's intellectual capital base to usher in innovations, resourcefulness, creativity and virile and ambitious work-force and driving actions to improve strategy execution and overall organizational performance.

Strategic leaders have to be out front in promoting a strategy-supportive organizational climate and culture. When major strategic changes are being implemented, a manager's time is best spent personally leading the changes and promoting needed culture adjustment (Thompson and Strickland, 1999). It will thus be rather naïve or myopic to think or gradual process of getting things done as these may be overtaken by unpredicted events. Conservative incrementalism seldom leads to major cultural adaptation. Usually, gradualism is eroded by the stubbornness of entrenched cultures and the desperate ambitions of some vested interests to thwart or minimize the impact of piecemeal change. Only with daring leadership and concerted action can a company succeed in tackling so difficult a task as major cultural change. When only strategic turning is being implemented, it takes less time and effort to bring values and culture into alignment with strategy, but there is still a lead role for the manager to play in pushing ahead and prodding for continuous improvements.

The single most visible factor that distinguishes successful culture change efforts from failed attempts is competent leadership at the top. Great power is needed to force major cultural change, to overcome the spring back resistance of entrenched cultures and great power normally resides at the top (Porter, 1985). Miller and Collella (2005) posit that "the ability to manage human capital is the most critical of the strategic leader's skills. Competent strategic leaders also establish the context through which stakeholders can perform at peak efficiency. The crux of strategic leadership is the ability to manage the firm's operations effectively and sustain high performance overtime (Maccoby, 2001). As Hoskissan and Hilt (2007) argued, "a firm's ability to achieve competitive advantage and earn above –average returns is compromised when strategic leaders fail to respond promptly to changes in the complex global competitive environment. The inability of some corporate leaders to respond to and adaptive to change is one of the reasons for abysmal performance and inevitable failure. Strategic leaders if they are to succeed, must learn how to deal with diverse and complex competitive situations. Individual judgment is an important part of learning about and analyzing the firm's external conditions. However managers also commit errors in their assessment of the competitive conditions.

These errors in perception can produce less effective decisions especially when they are made in a highly uncertain environ mental conditions and with insufficient information. However to survive, managers do not have to make optimal decisions. They only need to make better decisions than their competitors. Effective strategic leaders are willing to make candid and courageous, yet, pragmatic, decision-decisions that may be difficult, but necessary, through foresight, as they reflect on the external conditions facing the firm. They also need to understand how such decisions will affect the internal system currently in use in the firm. Effective strategic leaders must be proactive and visionary in motivating employees to superior performance. In effect they must develops strong partners internally and externally to facilitate execution of vision (Maccoby, 2001)

1.3. The Role of Strategic Leaders in Transformation and Integrating Process

A strategic leader is a transformation leader, is visionary and proactive in his orientations. As a transformational leader he designs and supports a climate where employees are motivated to do more than expected, to continuously enrich their capabilities and to place the interest of the organisation above their own (Miller and Collellal 2005). Transformational leader develop and communicate a vision for the organisation and formulate a strategy to achieve the vision. To succeed therefore, a strategic leader must design and promote a supportive organizational climate for proper utilization of the firm's human and material resources required for success.

The following action plans may be contemplated by a strategic leader in designing and implementing strategies, visions and organizational culture.

A Strategic Leader Must Decide on the Strategic Direction of the Firm

This may imply for example that strategic leader specify the image and character the firm seeks to develop overtime. The strategic direction being framed must be within context of some environmental opportunities and threats which he expects his firm to face in five, ten years or more. The ideal long-term strategic direction has two parties: a core ideology and an envisioned future. While the core ideology motivates employees through the company's heritage, the envisioned future encourages employees to stretch beyond their expectations of accomplishment and requires significant change and progress in order to be realized. The envissioned future serves as a guide to many aspects of a firm's strategy implementation process, including motivation, leadership, employee empowerment and organizational design. (Levin, 2000)

A Strategic Manager Must be Committed to Effectively Managing the Firm's Resource Portfolio

This supposes to be the most important task for strategic leaders. Strategic leaders are required to manage the firm's portfolio of resources by organizing them into capabilities, structuring the firm to use the capabliti4es, and developing and implementing a strategy to leverage those resources and implementing a strategy to leverage those resources to achieve a competitive advantage. Essentially, strategic leaders must exploit and maintain the firm core competencies and develop and retain the firm's intellectual capital for sustainable growth. Firm most continuously develops and when appropriate, change their core competencies to stay a head of competitors. If they have a competence that provides advantage but do not change it in due time, competitors will eventually imitate that competence and reduce or eliminate the firm's competitive advantage. Furthermore, firms must guard against the competence becoming a liability thereby forbidding change.

Developing the Company's Intellectual Capital

Strategic leaders must acquire the skills necessary to help develop their company's intellectual capital. Although other resources in the organisation are of paramount importance, success-oriented organizations have discovered that their competitive advantage in today's business place hinge on their ability to source for, develop and use their intellectual capital in the most efficient and effective manner. The intellectual capital of any organisation according to Armstrong (2005) consists of intangible resources, which together with tangible resources comprise the market or total value of a business. It consists of the firm's human capital, social capital and organizational capital. Retaining quality human capital and maintaining strong internal social or organizational capital can be affected strongly by the firm's culture.

Developing Entrepreneurial Mind-set

The key role of a strategic leader is to encourage and promote innovation by pursuing entrepreneurial opportunity. Entrepreneurial opportunities are an important source of growth and opportunities. While the task of formulating and implementing strategy is a manager's responsibility, the task of generating fresh ideas, identifying new opportunities, and responding to changing conditions cannot be accomplished by a single person. One of the challenging tasks of the strategic leadership is generating fresh ideas from the rank and file, managers and employees alike, and promoting an entrepreneurial, opportunistic spirit that permits continuous adaptation to changing conditions. One useful leadership approach is to take special effort to foster, nourish, and support people who are willing to champion new technologies, new practices, better services, new products and new applications. As a rule the best champions are persistent, competitive, tenacious, committed and fanatic about an idea and seeing it through to success. The challenge before strategic leader therefore is to create and sustain a climate where champion innovators can thrive.

The culture has to nurture, even celebrate, experimentation and innovation. On the other hand, people with maverick ideas or out-of-the-ordinary proposal have to be tolerated and given room to perfect their entrepreneurial assets. Nevertheless, the would be champions who may advocate radical change must not be looked on as disruptive or troublesome. In the same vein, managers have to promote lots of "tries" and be willing to tolerate mistakes and occasional failures. Also to be effective strategic leaders should be willing to promote organizational climate that foster innovation, creativity, participation and team work.

Of equal importance is the need for strategic managers to ensure that the rewards for successful champions are enormous and visible and that people who champion an unsuccessful idea are encouraged to try again rather than being punished or sidelined. In essence the leadership task is to create an adaptive, innovative culture that responds to changing conditions rather than being reactive or passive. To sustain this culture a leader must be proactive as well as being dynamic. Proactive organizational cultures constantly use processes to anticipate future market needs and to satisfy them before competitors learn how to do so. Finally, to beat or outperform rivals, strategic leaders must be competitively aggressive and desist from being inactive or passive.

Strategic Leaders' Role in Enforcing Ethical Work Climate

Effective strategic implementation is facilitated by a climate attuned to sound ethical standards and moral probity. In companies that strive hard to make high ethical standards a reality, top management communicates its commitment in a code of ethics, in speeches, in policies and companies publications, in deeds of senior executives and in the action taken to ensure compliance. To properly influence employees' judgment and behaviour, ethical practices must shape the firm's decision making process and be an integral part of its culture. To foster ethically oriented climate, the strategic leaders including the Chief Executive Officer, must take the lead. They will thus have clear conscience and freeless of speech to advocate sound ethical practices and perfect actions for enforcing them. Senior management repeatedly tells employees that not only must they observe ethical codes but also to report ethical behaviours. Sound and progressive education and training for educating employees, managers and senior executives about ethical behaviours should be designed and implemented. Top management must be prepared to act as the final arbiter on hard calls, meaning that they take decisive actions to remove people from a key position or terminating them when they are guilty of gross ethical violation. The same punishment is also true for those who shabbily or permissively enforce ethical compliance.

Strategic Leaders as Change Agents

Changing an organizational culture is more difficult than maintaining it, but effective strategic leaders recognize when change is needed. Regardless of the reasons for change, shaping and reinforcing a new culture require effective communication and problem solving along with the selection of the right people, effective performance appraisal, and valuable reward system. Experience suggests that the success of any cultural change depends on the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other senior executives give active support. To effect change this way, middle level managers in particular need to be highly disciplined to energize the culture and foster alignment with the strategic vision (Axelrd, Handfield, and Michael, (2002). However, the strategic manager sincere intentions to change organizational culture may be frontally attacked by those who may feel that their existing status-quo would be severely affected. The strategic manager however can calm the storm if, he keeps the lines of communication open, is transparent and possesses the natural ability to pe5rsuade, reward or to sanction.

Strategic Leaders Role in Managing Organizational Politics

To effectively formulate and implement strategy, the strategist must be conversant with the organizational politics and being adept at political maneuvering (Zalezik, 2002). Political consideration play important role when formulating the strategic plan. In an organisation for instance, different individuals with vested interest can form a coliation so as to gain prominence of some concessions. Political factors enter into decisions about which objectives take precedence and which lines of business have top priority in resources allocation. The organizational politics affect whose area of responsibility get reorganized, who report to whom, who has how much authority over subunits, what individual should fill key positions and which units will get the biggest budget increases. A strategic leader must possess the political acumen to understand how organisation's power structure works who wields influence in the executive rank, which groups and individual are activists and which are defenders of status quo, who can be helpful and who may not be in a showdown on key decisions, and which direction the political winds are blowing on a given issue (Thompson and Strickland, 1998). Consequently when critical decisions have to be made, strategic leaders must be responsive and adaptive to the politics of managing coliations and reaching consensus. At the same time he must be firm and objective by not compromising sensitive organizational issues in the name of pleasing the unrelentless activities.

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Governance

Strategic leaders must be adept in creating and fostering organisational climates that protect and sustain the interests of the stakeholders. He owns the stakeholders obligation to protect their interest and desist from any action that may damage these interests. Openness, adaptability, self-control, cohesiveness, empathy and undaunted integrity, are among the traits a strategic leader must posses in order to secure and sustain environmental friendly climates with the stakeholders. A strategic leader must present clear financial report and statement of affairs, devoid of deceit and suspicion.

1.4. An Appraisal of Leadership Situations in Nigeria

Nigerian managers including government agencies had maintained a poor leadership profile over the decades. Leadership in Nigeria is freighted with poor vision, misplacement of priorities, managerial ineptitude, and redundancy, gross inefficiency, political squabbles, fraudulent practices, mediocracy, callousness managerial impropriety and persistent disputes and confrontations. Consensus and mutual agreement were not the basis of decision making. Suffice for a manager to initiate a decision and uses all coercion and intimidations to impose his vies on others. The leaders rather than protecting the interest of the workforce often intensify and push their selfish interest using the instruments of coercion, intimidations, demotion or even sack. Most Nigerian corporate leaders have not imbibed the tenets of corporate governance and as a result dabbles on the stakeholders legitimate interests. Most Chief Executive Officers see organizations as the quickest route and best avenue to siphon shareholders' fund and convert to own use. The Chief Executive Officers of some erring banks had to face to wrath of the law (and some have been convicted) on account of their gross misconduct and other questionable acts inimical to the survival of corporate institutions. They assume the air of presumptuousness and independency that they have neglected their role of stewardship and accountability. Rather than design and enforce ethical climate, they design and promote a culture that condole ethical principles and moral codes.

The motivating factors to involving in all these financial crimes is greed and lack of regard for human dignity. This situation often intensifies a climate of fear, insecurity, apprehension, disillusionment, dishonesty, and anarchy. The story is not different among Nigerian leaders who think that the shortest root to enrich themselves is to siphon the public fund through whatever nefarious means some soon turn their political offices into their private estate from which they embezzle and squander the nation's wealth think about any failed project in Nigeria that was not as a result of poor or weak leadership. The much hue and cry that greeted the restructuring and recapitalization of Nigerian banking industry was as a result of visionless and incompetent leadership. The failure of Nigerian government to maintain sound moral, economic and political standings with the international community gives indication of faulty and questionable leadership in place. The failure of Nigerian government to speed the pace of privatization of some public enterprises that have become redundant and unviable is also associated with lack of visionary and transformational leadership in place.

The prevalence of youth restiveness and acts of terrorism in some parts of the country is often adduced to lack of people-oriented and morally sound leadership in place. The gross inefficiency of some parastatals in both the private and public sector of the economy and their eventual collapse is also linked with poor leadership. Nigeria being ranked as one of the most notorious, corrupt and terrorist countries in the world will also give the impression of indecisive and permissive leadership in place. Out of greed Nigerian leaders have difficulty in delegating authority to the subordinates to exercise some initiatives and discretions. Nigerian leaders often create an unwholesome climate that heightens fears, insecurity, anxiety, poverty, apprehension and uncertainties among the people. The dilapidating conditions of Nigerian infrastructures and social amenities, the shabby standards of living of people, the failure of Nigerian judiciary to be transparent in adjudication of judicial cases, the failure of the legislatures and executive to dispense justice, the unfair labour practices and poor reward practices in both the private and public sectors are often traced to faulty leadership practices.

1.9. Methodology

The author deems it fit to employ an exploratory research approach in this study. The method tended to rely heavily on secondary data as well as some factual documents. The sampling technique employed was purposive non-probability sampling method. The choice of this technique was informed by the nature of the study which sought to explore ways to building and sustaining supportive organizational culture through innovative and strategic leadership.

Thus, some literatures and empirical documents relevant to the problem understudy were exhaustively reviewed in order to provide a well-round theoretical foundation upon which we shall draw conclusion and make appropriate recommendations.

1.5. Findings

1. The Nigerian organizational climate is bedeviled with incompetent and narrow minded leaders who lack ethical backbone and mental preparedness to lead.

2. The quest to achieve personal aggradisement and out of greed have led many Nigerian leaders to abandon their legitimate role of their duty of care, morale building and emancipators.

3. The nefarious activities of many Nigerian leaders both at corporate and national levels have undesirable effect on its public image at the international community.

4. Experience has shown that poor leadership practice negatively affect employees' job satisfaction, their motivation and perceptions of the work place.

5. That the recent restructuring in the Nigerian banking industry, the deregulation of the petroleum industry and the on going privatization of some public paralstatals were grand plans by the Nigerian government to revitalize and transform these erring industries which have long been poorly managed by their executives.

6. That many social unrest, youth restiveness, endless industrial disputes, uprising of act of terrorism and kidnappings, the level of poverty and unemployment and the public opprobrium that greeted them keep on rampaging give evidence of lack of people-oriented, visionary and transformational leadership which are pre-requisite for corporate success.

7. That most Nigerian leaders lack sound moral probity and ethical backbone to entrench organizational culture and value system that foster integration, knowledge sharing, autonomy, innovation, and participation.

1.6. Conclusion

Bad leadership has been the common source of anxiety, insecurity, uncertainty, deprivation, poor decision, inefficiency low productivity and other social vices among people. On the other hand good leadership tends to gain much popularity as it has prospect for impressive work outcome, group cohesiveness and integration, unhindered information and knowledge exchange, good decision, higher productivity, focused goals and missions and of course better decisions. The exigencies of the situation as well as the need to foster innovation, and creating a team spirit among people, today's managers must eschew their traditional notion of authority and embrace people oriented leadership culture. In the final analysis, a good leader must be a change agent, must develop the sensibility of a social worker, must be aglow with the insight of a psychologist, must sustain the stamina of a marathon runner, must be obsessed with the persistent of a bulldog, must need the self-reliance of a hermit and the patient of a saint.

1.7. Recommendation

Nigerian leaders both at national or organizational levels must imbibe the philosophy of people oriented leadership and suspend their intimidating and oppressive leadership postures. This requires that they possess leadership acumen and ethical backbone to act as a change agents and architect for transformation. The 21st century leaders must be proactive, visionary, adaptive, innovative and people – oriented in order to remain competitive in their present environment. To foster the spirit of commitment and moral standard among the 21st century leaders, Nigerian government should create an enabling climate where ethical behaviours are rewarded and unethical behaivour is punished. Furthermore, Nigerian leaders should be trained on the act and practice of sound leadership which organization require for success. Most Nigerian leaders are inexperienced, are permissive, are pemmistic, lack foresight required to manage and lead people to gain competitive advantage. Success in doing modern business also demands that employees should be involved in decision making and enjoy a measure of autonomy and empowerment as this will help to engender a spirit of commitment, proper motivation, knowledge-sharing, loyalty, self-dignity and mutual trust within the organisation. Nigerian leaders must employ all legitimate means to protect the interest of their stakeholders.

They must desist from dabbling with the corporate interests of their stakeholders through dubious and questionable means. Transparency, fidelity, humility, accountability, open communication, empathy and self-sacrificing spirit are among the numerous traits required of corporate leaders as agent of transformation and custodian of stakeholders' interests. This does not mean that a success-driven leader must not occasionally be authoritarian if situations eventual change. The focal issue is the appropriateness of the leader's action to the situation in the context and its bearing on prospect for success. Finally, corporate leaders in the new millennium must desist from the negative notion of " a winner wins all' mentality but rather embrace culture that is people-oriented, integrative, farsighted, and all-encompassing, They should also develop entrepreneurial mindset that challenge them to be adept in initiating changes and bringing about rapid transformation and innovative organizational culture that is sustainable.

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