

Records management practices and administration of public institutions in central equatorial state, South Sudan: a cross-sectional study.

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Abstract

Background

It is unmistakable that the pace of business activities within organizations in contemporary society is increasing daily due to evolving technology. The study aims to assess the records management practices and administration of public institutions in Central Equatorial State, South Sudan.

Methodology

A descriptive cross-sectional design in Central Equatorial State, Juba, South Sudan. A sample of 50 participants from Central Equatorial was used in the study. The sample was selected through a non-probability sampling technique that aimed at selecting participants from the records management department and records management champions within the organization.

Results

4.17% of the respondents have 3 years and below working experience, and 37.5% of the champions have spearheaded the management of records in their departments for 3 to 6 years. 10.42% of the respondents were from the records management department. A correlation coefficient calculation reveals a 0.95, which implies a positive correlation between the variables. 81.25% agreed that indeed they experience challenges. 5 respondents indicated that they do not experience it.

Conclusion

Records management is an imperative element in any organization. It is through records management that the everyday activities of any organization can be accounted for.

Recommendations

Organizations should ascertain that the top management has the required skills, such as effective records management, and that they should act as role models for their followers.

Keywords: Records management practices, Administration of public institutions, Central Equatorial State, South Sudan.

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Background

It is unmistakable that the pace of business activities within organizations in contemporary society is increasing daily due to evolving technology. The productivity involves volumes of both electronic and physical documents that contain critical information. In many cases, organizations do not understand the complexity of tasks involved in records management until they fail to access a vital record (Abdulrahman, 2015). Therefore, records play a significant role in the effective and efficient management of an organization because they store plans and implementation processes of an organization's services. In both conventional and digital organizations, records stored in

either electronic or physical form continue to be viewed as essential documents for administrative documentation. Records provide support for all activities carried out within organizations. Without proper records management, organizations cannot provide the necessary information and support, which in turn may lead to the loss of critical information in institutions. Proper records management practices are essential for an organization's administration and the smooth running of its operations. Records management involves the incorporation of various practices aimed at proper information management. It also entails the systematic control of all records an organization maintains during its life cycle for the attainment of operational

business needs, fiscal and statutory requirements, as well as the expectations of stakeholders (The National Archives of Scotland, 2013). Effectual maintenance of corporate information enables fast, reliable, and accurate access to or retrieval of records. It also ensures that redundant information is timely damaged and that important historical records are efficiently protected. Systematic records management enables organizations to: identify the records that they have, increase effectiveness and efficiency, support decision-making, achieve business targets and objectives, meet regulatory and legislative requirements, protect the clients', employees', and stakeholders' interests, and be accountable. Consequently, records are critical legal and historical tools that are necessary for the effective running of an organization. Records are valuable administrative instruments without which an institution's operational functions and processes cannot be efficiently carried out. For instance, a successor to a certain organizational rank may need the institution's records to find his or her bearings when he or she takes over the new position. The new employee or successor can use such records to decide whether he or she will continue with the previous organizational leader's practices and techniques or modify them (Abdulrahman, 2015). Records play various roles in organizational administration because administrators and managers use them on a routine basis to carry out various administrative roles, such as decision-making. Recorded information helps in enlightening and educating organizational managers and administrators on matters relevant to the organization. Records can also help in strategic plans and the successful implementation of organizational processes. They can also serve as sources of research for information that can be used as evidence. Timely access to recorded information is essential for decision-making, planning, and organizational control. Public institutions in South Sudan create, keep, and use records daily for administrative, legal, and audit functions, among other purposes. The study aims to assess the records management practices and administration of public institutions in Central Equatorial State, South Sudan.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive cross-sectional design was suitable for this study. Historically, descriptive research design has been useful in social science fields. Descriptive data are a source of rich descriptions and explanations of well-grounded processes in identifiable local contexts. Descriptive data provides a chronological flow of information, which can enable a researcher to identify which events led to certain consequences. Therefore, the technique can enable a researcher to derive fruitful explanations of events. Descriptive data can also allow a researcher to gain

unanticipated results and new integrations, which can help in arriving at details beyond the initial conceptions. Such findings can also allow the revision of the conceptual framework. Finally, descriptive study findings also have the advantage of 'undeniability'. The concept behind descriptive research is that not only do social phenomena exist in the mind, but they also exist in the objective world and can enable a researcher to find some reasonably stable and lawful relationship. To gather such social phenomena and generate connections of various relationships, qualitative researchers can collect various forms of data that can enable them to make meaningful conclusions from their study subjects. It is through the research design that a researcher achieves the objectives. Hence, a research design is a general plan concerning the processes through which a researcher goes about answering the research questions. Cooper and Schindler (2011) also define a research design as a blueprint that helps a researcher in gathering, evaluating, and analyzing data. This study used a descriptive research design to help in describing phenomena as they exist. A descriptive research design can help in gathering and identifying data concerning the characteristics of a certain phenomenon or problem. Therefore, the descriptive research design was of significance in this study as it allowed the gathering of extensive data and description of the findings.

Area of Study

The study location was in the Central Equatorial State, Juba, South Sudan. The institution is located in Juba City. In particular, a sample of 50 participants from Central Equatorial was used in the study. The sample was selected through a non-probability sampling technique that aimed at selecting participants from the records management department and records management champions within the organization.

Target Population

Population involves a complete set of subjects or individuals, events, or objects that have common observable characteristics that are of interest to a researcher (Agyedu et al., 2010). In other words, a population constitutes a full group of individuals that a researcher is interested in and aims to generalize the findings from a selected sample. The target population for this study involved all staff at Central Equatorial State. The figures of the target population, 150, were obtained from the human resource department, and they comprised all employees working at the Corporation as of July 2017. Although the entire population did not participate in the study, the findings are a representation of the whole population and can be generalized to this population.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

This section clarifies the sample size and sampling techniques employed in the study.

Sample Size

A sample refers to a small accessible group of individuals acquired from an entire population. Sampling refers to the procedures involved in selecting the sample that will take part in the study to represent an entire population. Sampling enables a researcher to fairly select a group of representative individuals to take part in the study. Consequently, this research used a sample of 50 staff at Central Equatorial out of a total of 150 employees at the organization. The sample was selected through a non-probability sampling technique, convenience sampling, because of their background and experience in records management. They constituted records management staff, records management champions from each department, and heads of departments. The

organization has 5 records management staff, 25 records management champions, and 20 heads of departments, which explains the sample size. The records management champions include records management representatives from each department. The sample was selected due to their knowledge concerning records.

Sampling Techniques

A non-probability sampling technique was helpful in accessing the study sample. A purposive sampling technique and Simple Random sampling helped in purposively selecting these respondents from whom the best responses were gathered for the study (Agyedu et al., 2010). The sample was likely to have an understanding of the requirements of the research topic due to their direct link and affiliation with the records management department. The table below illustrates the sample and sampling technique.

Table 1: Sample and Sampling Technique

Segment	Population	Number	Sampling Techniques
Records management staff	40	5	Purposive
Records management champions	60	25	Simple random
HOD and Senior mgt.	50	20	Simple Random
Total Sample	All	50	

Data Collection Methods

Data collection involves implementing various procedures to gather information that supports specific claims. Thus, the current study employed a survey comprising open and closed-ended questionnaires. The questionnaire significantly aided in the collection of relevant information required for this study. Questionnaires were issued to the sampled respondents from different job categories and levels, including senior and junior staff.

Research Instruments

The study used questionnaires as the main research instrument, as elaborated below.

Questionnaires

The data collection instruments for this study were open and closed-ended questionnaires. A

A questionnaire refers to a list of carefully identified research questions arrived at after a considerable assessment. The questionnaire aims to elicit specific responses from study respondents to help meet the research objectives. The questionnaires contained both closed and open-ended questions to enable respondents to give comprehensive responses for an in-depth analysis. They were structured based on the study objectives as stated in

Chapter One above. 50 questionnaires were issued to the respondents at the organization.

Validity

Traditionally, researchers associate reliability and validity with the evaluation and testing of qualitative studies. Validity and reliability are significant to any qualitative researcher, especially in the study design, judging the quality of the study, and in the analysis of the results. It is also a way through which the inquirer can persuade the audience that the study findings are worth paying attention to. The findings of the current study are valid as they involved peer examination and correction of any contradictions. The process involved scrutiny of the findings by peers and academics and the incorporation of their perspectives. The observations and questions were valuable in refining the study methods and developing a clear explanation of the study design for the strengthening of the study arguments.

Reliability

Reliability promotes the aspect of dependability in qualitative research. Consistency also communicates truth in the data collected. The main question is whether the study findings show consistency with the collected data. A researcher can achieve consistency by verifying the steps of

the research by analyzing raw data, notes, and reduction products.

The achievement of both internal and external validity is a significant aspect of qualitative studies. In internal validity, the researcher should ensure that his or her presence does not alter the natural occurrence of events and actions. A researcher can achieve internal validity by ensuring that the findings comply with reality. The concept of external validity, on the other peer examination, and examinations of previous research were the primary techniques used to ensure reliability and validity. In particular, the study findings were compared with those from the literature review to ascertain the degree of congruency and applicability. The ability of the research outcomes to relate to previous findings was significant in evaluating the qualitative inquiry.

Data Collection Procedures

The respondents were given time and space to fill in the questionnaires with the most appropriate responses for the questions. The questionnaire is attached in the appendix section of this proposal. Copies of the same were made and distributed manually during the study period and collected upon completion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis, according to Kothari (2014), entails statistical operations aimed at arriving at conclusions concerning certain information gathered during research. After data collection, data analysis was conducted, and responses were categorized according to the responses that the respondents provided. The responses correspond to each research objective; hence, the data is analyzed as per each research objective and presented in tables and charts to represent the figures. Version 16.0 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) has been used to analyze the data collected. The data has also been presented and interpreted in frequency distribution tables, bar charts, and percentages. SPSS provides the flexibility and capabilities of analyzing data more quickly and efficiently for the generation of simple, sophisticated, and unlimited amounts of statistical findings that can be inferred to generate descriptive findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns refer to a set of guidelines that direct a researcher's behavior during s study. In the current study, approval was obtained from the organization's Records Management Board. The respondents were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and they could

withdraw from the research at any point during the study. Their identities were also confidential because they were not required to include their names in any part of the questionnaire.

This study was conducted in compliance with the ethical issues in research as recommended by Creswell (2014). For instance, it was important to ensure that the literature supports the relevance of the current study and the acquisition of support and letters of participation from the Central Equatorial State. The research strictly complied with the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, and fairness throughout the research. Informed consent was sought from the study participants to ensure that they participated in the study willfully and without coercion. Finally, this research also complies with research ethics by ensuring that the final report is free of any form of plagiarism, concealed information, or false information (Creswell, 2014). The researcher made all the possible effort to ensure that the report is thorough, accurate, and precise. The final report will be shared with the relevant stakeholders, including the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Results

Background Information of Respondents

Biographical attributes are critical elements in augmenting an understanding of the defining characteristics of a sample. Importantly, such features as gender, age, and affiliation can create insight into their impact on the outcome of a phenomenon being investigated. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the total sample selected to participate in this study was 50 participants. However, only 48 questionnaires were valid as two did not complete their questionnaires. Thus, data collection on background information was critical in this study as it enriched the findings for solid conclusions, as illustrated below.

Experience

This section required the respondents to indicate their years of experience at the organization. Years of experience in a particular working environment determine their familiarity with organizational operations. In the current study, this attribute highlighted the respondents' familiarity with not only the organization's operations but also the experience they have in spearheading records management activities in their departments. The findings in this objective reveal that a majority of the respondents have a working experience of 6 to 9 years at the organization. Only two, 4.17% of the respondents have 3 years or below working experience at the organization, as illustrated in Table 2

Table 2: Period of experience in the organization

	RANGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Year of Experience	Below 3 years	2	4.17%
	3-6 years	8	16.67%
	6-9 years	19	39.58%
	10-13 years	11	22.92%
	13 and above	8	16.67%
Total		48	100.0%

This segment was targeted at the records management champions. In particular, the respondents were to indicate their years of experience as records management liaisons. The findings show that the majority, 37.5% of the champions, have spearheaded the management of records in

their departments for 3 to 6 years. The findings are valid because the Champions Committee was established in 2014; therefore, the existing members are likely to have worked as champions for less than six years.

Table 3: Duration of experience as records management champions

	RANGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Year of Experience	Below 3 years	7	29.17%
	3-6 years	9	37.5%
	6-9 years	4	16.67%
	10 -13 years	1	4.1%
	13 and above	3	12.5%
Total		24	100.0%

Respondents Department of Affiliation

Concerning the respondents' specific department of affiliation, a majority of the respondents, 34.42% as illustrated in the table below. Only 10.42% of the

respondents were from the records management department. The other departments were represented by records champions. Therefore, the outcome is also valid as it mirrors the representation of staff managing records in Central Equatorial State.

Table 4: Respondents' Departments of Affiliation

DIVISION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Records Management	5	10.42%
Record management champions	17	34.42%
Finance	9	18.75%
MDs	4	8.33%
Property and Administration	13	27.08%
Total	48	100%

Role of records management in the administration of organizations

This section required the respondents to indicate the roles of records management in organizational administration. Regarding the research objective, the respondents provided

feedback concerning various records management activities that they carry out at the organization. Emerging activities included record creation and filing, record maintenance and storage, record use, record indexing and classification, and record disposal, as illustrated in Figure 1



Figure 1: Record Management Practices

Significance of Effective Records Management at Central Equatorial

This section required the respondents to indicate the significance of effective records management at the organization. The majority of the respondents indicated that records management is important in ensuring easy access to information, fulfillment of financial requirements, accountability and transparency in processes, and effective organizational administration as the benefits of effective

records management in an organization. The next sections highlight the statistical outcomes for each variable.

Significance of Records Management Practices in Auditing

The majority of the respondents, 27, strongly agreed that records management practices are important in the auditing process. Another 21 agreed that indeed, records management practices are important in the auditing process, which is a critical aspect of organizational administration.

Table 5: Opinion concerning the significance of records management in the audit process

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	27	56.25%
Agree	21	43.75%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	48	100%

All the respondents attested that records management practice is indeed important in the audit process. The findings indicate that the respondents are aware of the significance of records management in critical administrative activities such as auditing. These findings are similar to those of Marx (2013), who agrees that effective records management enables easy access to records for verification and accountability purposes.

Significance of Records Management in Risk Mitigation

The majority of the respondents strongly agreed that indeed records management practices play a critical role in risk mitigation, as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: Opinions concerning the significance of records management in risk mitigation

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	35	72.91%
Agree	13	27.08%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	48	100%

The findings reveal that; indeed, records management practices are important in mitigating risk at the organization. Thus, it can be inferred that, given the unpredictability of risks, the ability of an organization to have effective records can mitigate the negative impacts of risks on the organization.

Correlation Coefficient

Based on the data in the two variables above, a correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between organizational administration and records management. Therefore, the H_a and Null hypotheses are as follows:
 H_1 : Better records management facilitates effective organizational administration
 H_0 : Better records management does not facilitate organizational administration

Table 7: Relationship between variables

Records Management Practices	Organizational Administration
4	62
3	34
2	0
1	0

Recorded management practices are represented by the Y axis, while organizational administration is shown by the X axis. Therefore, it is evident that as the value of records management increases, the value of organizational administration also increases.



Figure 2: Correlation Coefficient

A correlation coefficient calculation reveals a 0.95, which implies a positive correlation between the variables. In other words, as one variable goes up, the other also increases.

A majority of the respondents, 39 out of 48, representing a total of 81.25% agreed that indeed they experience challenges. On the other hand, five respondents indicated that they do not experience any challenges in their places of work.

Challenges Experienced in Records Management

Table 8: Challenges experienced regarding records management

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	39	81.25%
No	9	18.75%
Total	48	100%

The respondents went further to elaborate on the challenges they encountered at their working stations. Some of the challenges identified include a lack of enough space to store records, a lot of work, a lack of funds to purchase better record-keeping technologies, and a lack of skills on how to handle some records. These findings affirm that records management staff at Central Equatorial experience various challenges as indicated and that there is a need for the organization to look into such issues.

Role of Heads of Departments in the Organization

Heads of departments in any organization play a strategic role in ascertaining the coherence of work processes in a

department. Therefore, this segment of an organization's staff was essential in this study as it informs the functionality of records management departments and operations in respective departments. Therefore, according to the findings of the survey, some of the roles of heads of departments at Central Equatorial State include overseeing tasks conducted by other employees, solving problems that may arise concerning records management, creating procedures that should be followed regarding record management practices, and establishing and implementing a disposal program. These findings are relevant as they mirror those from the literature review section of this study, from studies such as that from the Public Procurement Oversight Authority (2010). The study highlighted some of the roles of

organizational heads of departments including coordinating and directing organization-wide record management

practices. The figure below illustrates the statistical findings of the survey on this question.

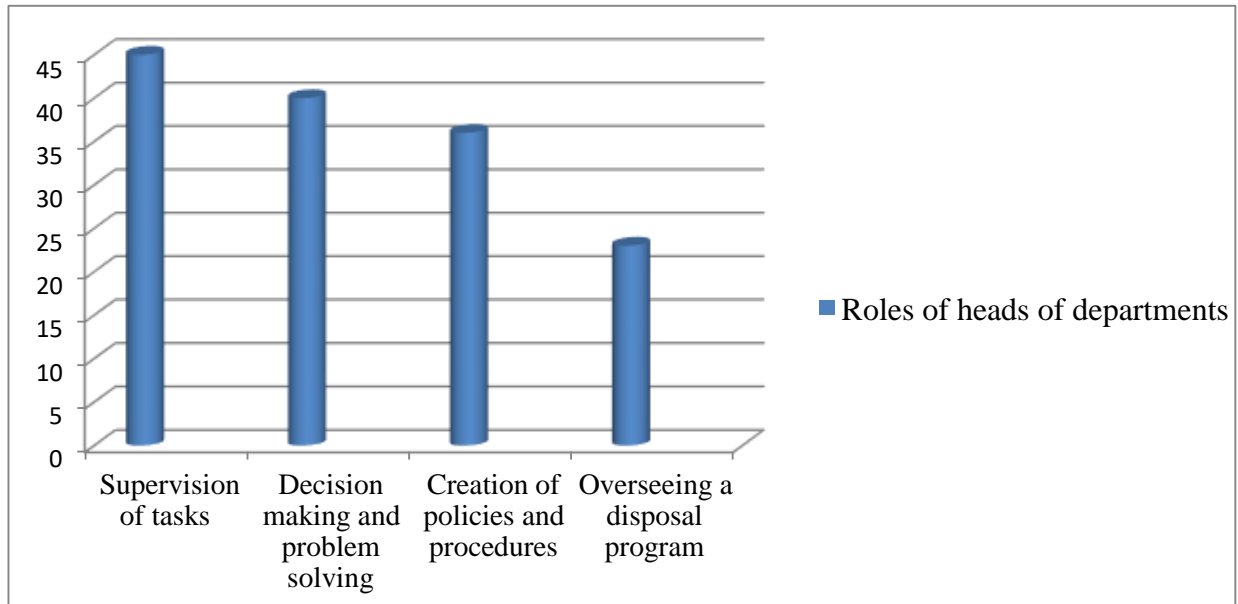


Figure 3: Role of heads of Departments

Appropriate Model for Effective Records Management Practices at Central Equatorial State.

This study also sought to establish the most appropriate model for records management practices as a countermeasure against the challenges that records management officials experience in organizations. Therefore, the respondents provided a range of approaches that they deemed best for adoption. The approaches include the provision of funds for the purchase and implementation of better records management technologies, employment of more records management staff to help in completing the numerous tasks at the organization, on-the-job training and refresher courses, and implementation of policies and procedures to ensure effective records management.

Summary of findings

Record Management Practices Central Equatorial State

The study attested to the existence of record management practices such as the creation of a records management committee, the establishment of an effective communication platform for records management, the application of policies and procedures in records management, access and indexing, auditing, risk management, and records disposal.

Role of Sectional Heads of Departments in the Management of Records

Some of the identified roles include overseeing tasks conducted by other employees, solving problems that may arise concerning records management, creating policies and procedures that should be followed regarding records management, and establishing and implementing a disposal program. These findings attest that organizational heads of departments have a contributory role in the overall effectiveness of record management practices.

Role of Records Management in Facilitating Accountability and Transparency

The majority of the respondents agreed that effective management of records can enable easy access to information, fulfillment of financial requirements, and accountability, as well as effective organizational administration. These findings clearly show that effective records management can enable the attainment of organizational accountability, especially regarding financial accountability.

Auditing relates to financial accountability. The majority of the respondents, 100 percent, agreed that indeed, records are essential in the auditing process. The last question tackling this objective was question eight in the questionnaires. The question required the respondents to indicate whether records management is essential in risk mitigation. Financial

risk is the most common worry of many organizations across the globe. Thus, findings on risk management can create insight into the role of records in risk management. Thus, all 48 respondents agreed that records are essential documents in overall organization risk mitigation.

A correlation coefficient on the relationship between records management and organizational administration showed an outcome of 0.97, which is a positive correlation. It implies that records management positively impacts organizational administration, and records management practices are likely to improve organizational administration, especially with regard to enhancing accountability and auditing, risk management, and tracing organizational operations and progress.

Most Appropriate Model for Effective Records Management Practices at Central Equatorial State.

Factors identified include the provision of enough resources for effective records management practices, the employment of more records management staff, and the implementation of policies for effective records management. A statistical computation of the relationship between records management and organizational administration attested to a positive correlation. Hence, improved records management practices are likely to improve the organizational administrative functions, including risk management, auditing and accountability, and tracing organizational activities and progress. Therefore, based on the findings, it is apparent that effective records management is vital for successful organizational operations. Organizational heads of departments should also be aware of their significant role in effective records management and take the initiative to lead their followers toward the attainment of effective organizational operations.

Conclusion

Records management is an imperative element in any organization. It is through records management that the everyday activities of any organization can be accounted for. Such activities can be recorded and provided as verification documents. Thus, records management is a critical element in organizational administration, risk management, auditing, and financial accountability. Therefore, organizations should set aside sufficient funding for effective records management, including hiring more staff. Training of records management staff should also be made mandatory in all organizations to attain effective records management practices. Effective organizational records management enables easy access to records to expedite accountability and verification processes. Through

effective records, impending risks can be identified, measured, and mitigated before they occur.

Recommendations

Organization leaders, such as heads of departments and general managers, have a critical role in overseeing the actions of their staff in records management. Effective organizational operations trickle down from organizational leaders to employees. Thus, organizations should ascertain that the top management has the required skills, such as effective records management, and that they should act as role models for their followers.

Despite the critical role of records in an organization. Unfortunately, records management departments experience challenges such as insufficient space. Lack of space leads to the congestion of processes, hence inadequate operations. Thus, there is a need for the Central Equatorial State to provide sufficient resources and space for effective records management, as it is critical for organizational administration purposes.

Another challenge of records management departments, based on the study findings, is the inadequate staff training lack of skills for effective records management, and negligence of the health and safety of records management staff, given the vulnerability of tasks involved, such as working with dusty files. Thus, the organization should put in place mechanisms such as setting aside enough financial resources for staff training and ensuring staff health.

Statistical findings reveal a positive correlation of 0.97 between records management and organizational administration. Therefore, heightening activities aimed at realizing better records management is likely to improve the administrative function within the organization. As a result, this research recommends that all organizations, including Central Equatorial State, recognize the critical role of their records management segment and set aside sufficient resources, such as finances and space, for effective records. Employment of adequate records management staff and onsite training can also improve records management outcomes.

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List of abbreviations

HODs: Heads of Departments

SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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Conflict of interest

The author did not declare any conflict of interest

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