Infusing Emotional Intelligence in a Business Communications Classroom as a Workforce Readiness Strategy

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Abstract

Research has shown that emotional intelligence is critical to career success. Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to monitor one's feelings and emotions and understand how one's emotions impact others. Emotional Intelligence has been advocated as part of a business communications curriculum for quite some time and incorporating emotional intelligence training into a business communication curriculum to prepare students to function effectively in a global workplace is nothing new. There is compelling evidence regarding the relevance of emotional intelligence as an indicator of academic and career success. This paper discusses the extent to which emotional intelligence (EI) can be infused in a business communication classroom as a self-directed learning process among students in the College of Business using the WEITAC (Wilkerson Emotional Intelligence Test for Academics and Careers). Results have proven very successful to the extent that the instrument and self-development modules are used in a formal classroom setting.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as a "form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey and Mayer, p. 185). Goleman (1995) found that IQ alone was not a good predictor of job performance. Cherniss and Adler (2000) found that emotional intelligence was critical for effective work performance. Employers recognize a gap in emotional intelligence (EI) in the workplace among millennials and argue that many adults enter the workplace without it. A Department of Labor survey of entry-level workers indicated that EI-related traits included: "personal self-management, interpersonal effectiveness and confidence" (Cherniss, 2000, p. 434). Another survey indicates only four in ten workers have enough self-discipline in work habits (Harris Education Research Council, 1991).

Emotional Intelligence in the Classroom

According to the American College Personnel Association there is compelling evidence regarding the relevance of emotional intelligence as an indicator of academic and career success (Low, Lomax, Jackson & Nelson, 2004). Empirical evidence indicates that emotional control influences academic outcomes by diverting attention from worry, anxiety and frustration that can accompany navigating in uncharted waters of higher learning (Kanfer, Ackerman & Heggstad, 1996; Kremenitzer, Mois & Bracket, 2008). Several studies substantiate the connection between emotional intelligence and academic success. Lam and Kirby (2002) found that EI accounts for increases in cognitive-based performance above the level attributed to general intelligence in three of four EI subscales. Burgess-Wilkerson, Benson and

Frankforter (2010) conducted an analysis of EI in an academic setting and found that EI scores improved with the classroom interventions. Studies of college of business administration students (CBA) at two universities revealed that students in business programs at times struggle with certain aspects of EI despite high academic achievement and accounting students in particular were more vulnerable in areas such as empathy and self-awareness (Bay & McKeage 2006; Esmond-Kiger,Tucker & Yost, 2006; Maas, Burgess-Wilkerson, Lampe, & Frankforter, 2017).

Students with higher self-knowledge are more likely to make wise career choices; the inclusion of EI into the curriculum reduces behavioral/emotional problems; EI competence results in higher scores on standardized achievement tests; and EI leads to a tendency toward better support networks. Business schools are creatively infusing EI into the business curriculum as a workforce readiness strategy. Studies revealed an improvement in EI when coupled with an opportunity for self-development. These findings reveal the need for non-traditional teaching approaches and the infusion of EI into the business curriculum to encourage the regulation and appropriate expression of emotions.

Emotional Intelligence in the Business Communication Curriculum

Emotional Intelligence has been advocated as part of a business communications curriculum for quite some time now. Muir (2004) argued that EI enhanced student's abilities to negotiate the "interpersonal dimensions" of work life. Myers and Tucker (2005) stated that according to the mandate of the Management Education Task Force of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), instruction in leadership, communication and interpersonal skills are needed for a global workplace and employer feedback suggests a need to increase instruction in interpersonal skills. Business schools have since increased an emphasis on "people skills" by teaching soft skills such as EI in a business communications course to prepare students to become exemplary managers. Sigmar, Hynes & Hill (2012) suggested incorporating social and emotional intelligence training into a business communication curriculum to prepare students to function effectively in a global workplace. Research conducted by Fall, Kelly, MacDonald, Primm and Holmes (2013) examined emotional intelligence as a predictor of intercultural communication apprehension among college students and found three subscales: emotionality, sociability and self-control were predictors of intercultural apprehension. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence assists in the management or reduction of intercultural communication apprehension (Fall et., al, 2013). With the trend toward combining business communications and professional development, emotional intelligence is viewed as a relevant and necessary part of the curriculum for the development of "soft skills."

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Background

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As of 2015, millennials became the largest population in the workplace, and they are still growing. By 2030, 77 million millennials will make up 75% of the workforce. Studies have shown that they have two lives. They are becoming hyper socialized online (second life) but increasingly alienated in their real lives (IRL). Research indicates they most likely will go deeper into interactive media and less connected IRL spending even more time on the internet and less time interacting with individuals.

In March 2014, in partnership with Purdue University and the Lumina Foundation, Gallup launched the first ever nationally representative study of college grads in the US. The idea was to look at the quality of employment and quality of life among millennials. Gallup sorted those college grads who rated their lives the highest and found six emotional and experiential opportunities for students that predicted their

likelihood to have a better job and better life. Two of the six areas identified were: 1) professors who cared about them as persons and; 2. mentors/coaches who sat and thought about their futures with them.

Emotional Intelligence as a Workforce Readiness Strategy

For many decades during the early part of the century most people assumed that it was cognitive ability as measured by IQ tests that counted most. In the 1970's a body of research emerged with evidence that purely cognitive ability while important does not represent the whole picture. In fact, IQ accounts for a relatively small percentage of individual success. One factor that influences career and to a great extent academic success is emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional Intelligence is defined as the ability to accurately identify and understand one's own emotional reactions and those of others. It also involves the ability to regulate one's own emotions, to use them to make good decisions, and to act effectively (Goleman, 1995; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 1998; Goleman, 2001). Emotional intelligence is the basis for personal qualities such as self-confidence, integrity, knowledge of individual strengths and weaknesses, resilience, self-motivation, perseverance, and the ability to get along well with others (Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 1998; Cherniss & Adler, 2000; Boyatzis, 2001; Goleman, 2006).

According to Cherniss (2000) EI is critical for effective performance in most work settings. Two-thirds of the indicators of superior performance are emotional and/or social characteristics; and 90 percent of the leadership qualities are socio-emotional in nature.

While college graduates may be technically prepared for their disciplines, they are not necessarily prepared for the emotional aspects of work. Employers recognize a gap in EI in the workplace especially among millennials, arguing that many adults enter the workplace without it. The U.S. Department of Labor conducted a survey of entry-level workers and found that the list consisted primarily of EI-related traits including: "personal self-management, interpersonal effectiveness and confidence" (Cherniss, 2000, p. 434). Another national survey indicates that four in ten workers are not able to work cooperatively with fellow-employees and only 19% of entry-level applicants have sufficient self-discipline in work habits (Harris Education Research Council, 1991). Several arguments exist for improving EI at the college level: students with higher self-knowledge are more likely to make wise career choices; the inclusion of EI into the curriculum reduces behavioral/emotional problems; EI competence results in higher scores on standardized achievement tests; and EI leads to a tendency toward better support networks (Vandervoort, 2006; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Myers & Tucker, 2005; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Robbins, Oh & Button, 2009).

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Purpose

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss the extent to which emotional intelligence (EI) can be infused in a business communications classroom as an online self-directed learning process among students in the College of Business using the WEITAC (Wilkerson Emotional Intelligence Test for Academics and Careers) as part of a workforce readiness strategy for millennials. It further provides examples of online learning activities that accompanied the WEITAC test designed to provide opportunities for introspection and self-development short-term in a formal classroom setting.

The WEITAC

The WEITAC is a self-report measure of emotionally and socially competent behaviors and attitudes as an estimate of one's social and emotional intelligence. It is important to note that the WIETAC was not designed to measure traits or cognitive capacity.

The WEITAC comprises 129 brief items and employs a five-point Likert Scale ranging from "very seldom or not true of me" to "very often true of me or true of me." It requires 15 minutes or less to complete the online inventory. The assessment tool is divided into five general component scales along with subcomponents (see Figure 1). The first general component scale is *self-awareness*. The second is *self-regulation*. The third scale is *self-motivation*. The fourth scale is *social awareness*. Finally, the fifth scale is *social skills.* When combined, the 25 subcomponents form a total emotional intelligence score (Burgess-Wilkerson, 2015). The emotional intelligence item bank is based upon the generic Emotional Competency Framework from the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations EI Framework (www.eiconsortium.org).

The WEITAC controls for possible sources of bias. First, the positive impression score evaluates the possibility for bias out of attempts to create overly positive impressions. If this score is above 23, disregard the output. Second, the negative impression score evaluates the possibility for bias out of attempts to create overly negative impressions. If this score is less than 10, disregard the output. Third, the inconsistency index tests for randomness in an individual's answers. If this score exceeds 7 or is less than -3, disregard the output. Figure 1 displays the bias measures, components, subcomponents, and definitions for the WEITAC (Burgess-Wilkerson, 2015).

WEITAC Components and Subcomponents

After an individual completes the self-assessment, the WEITAC generates a Student Summary Report with subcomponent and component scores. Although specific ranges exist for every component and subcomponent, generally, scores ranging plus one from the medians are either areas of strength and those ranging minus one are areas warranting improvement.

Bias Measures	Components	Subcomponents	Definition
Inconsistency			Randomness in an individual's answers.
Positive Impression			Positive bias in an individual's answers.
Negative Impression			Negative bias in an individual's answers.
	Total Emotional Intelligence		A general indication of a respondent's level of emotional intelligence. Includes all 5 subcomponents.
	Personal Competence		Awareness of inward emotions and the extent to which one can understand, assess, and regulate emotions. Includes an ability to be self-motivating.

	Self Awareness	Emotional awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence	The ability to recognize one's emotions and their effect. Includes knowing strengths and limits/ sense of self-worth.
	Self-Regulation	Self-control Trustworthiness Conscientious Adaptability Innovativeness	The ability to manage disruptive emotions and impulses, stay composed under pressure, act ethically, build trust, meet commitments, is organized, careful with details, flexible, and open to new ideas.
	Self-Motivation	Achievement Drive Commitment Initiative Optimism	The ability to set a standard of excellence by being results-oriented, setting challenging goals, and improving performance; aligning with organizational goals, acting upon opportunities, and maintaining an optimistic attitude.
	Social Competence		Awareness of emotions and how they impact others. Includes the ability to be socially aware in a variety of settings and to use a variety of social skills effectively.
	Social Awareness	Empathy Service Orientation Developing Others Leveraging Diversity Political Awareness	The ability to sense the feelings and perspectives of others, attend to emotional cues, and are good listeners; recognize and meet clients' needs; reward and recognize other's contributions and offer thoughtful feedback; respect and understand diversity; accurately read political environments and power relationships; and cultivate meaningful social networks.
	Social Skills	Influence Communication Leadership Change Catalyst Conflict Management Building Bonds Collaboration Team Capabilities	The ability to use people skills at the appropriate time and place; are persuasive, influential, and able to build consensus; are effective communicators; are knowledgeable of give and take; can read verbal and non-verbal cues and adjust accordingly; can lead and inspire others by example; are change agents and negotiators who can manage conflict; can build bonds through networks; works well in teams, and, as a collaborator, is capable of building and maintaining high morale.

Figure 1. Components of WEITAC- Bias measures, components, sub-components and definitions.

Construct Validity of the WEITAC

A study conducted in 2017 of 101 students at a university in the Midwestern United States investigated the extent to which the WEITAC was free of multicollinearity, had construct validity and therefore could be used for EI self-directed learning in the College of Business Administration. The findings were reported in detail elsewhere but are summarized as follows:

The study sought to evaluate the possibility of multicollinearity in each instruments' scales with numerous components and subcomponents. The inquiry was conducted using two statistical tools; bivariate correlation and variation inflation factors (VIFs). All the VIF calculations disclosed were computed as an option in SPSS's linear regression calculation. Aside from the VIFs, no statistics from the linear regression analysis were used. The generally accepted threshold for evidence of multicollinearity is a VIF in excess of 10 (Netter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1989).

Bivariate correlations traditionally show evidence of multicollinearity, with statistics of .60 to .90 traditionally serving as rule-of-thumb cutoffs. (Emory & Cooper, 1991). The benefit of using bivariate correlations is that it identifies potential multicollinearity between independent variables, which may be managed by increasing sample size, deleting one of the variables with high correlation coefficients, or combining the independent variables with suspected multicollinearity. However, high correlation among variables can indicate multicollinearity, but is not an entirely reliable indicator. This is because multicollinearity is a multivariate problem, not just a bivariate problem. One advantage that VIFs have over bivariate correlations is that it examines the entirety of independent variables, not just pairs. However, calculating bivariate correlations can be helpful in targeting the specific pairs of independent variables for which multicollinearity may be an issue, with either dropping one of the two variables or combining them into a single variable.

The means, standard deviations, VIFs, and the correlation matrix for the WEITAC's bias measures and subcomponents indicated none of the 25 subcomponents showed a bivariate correlation coefficient that exceeds .73. None of the variables reported a VIF exceeding 4.51. In sum, we found no evidence to suggest multicollinearity issues among WEITAC's subcomponents. Furthermore, none of the five components reported a bivariate correlation coefficient that exceeded .84, nor a VIF exceeding 5.20. We found no evidence to suggest multicollinearity issues among WEITAC's components. In sum, we found that the WEITAC's components and subcomponents to be sufficiently free of multicollinearity.

Secondly, The WEITAC was tested for construct validity by comparing the components, subcomponents, and total scores of the two instruments, namely the TTI Emotional Quotient and the WEITAC. The findings indicated extensive statistically significant correlation coefficients with virtually all subcomponents and components. Significantly correlated total scores indicated that the instruments taken as a whole are interchangeable and appeared to measure similar phenomena. In other words, each of the components and subcomponents of each instrument had significant correlation with the components and subcomponents of the other. Similarly, the total scores of the instruments possessed statistically significant correlation. Given the strong association between the two total scores, it appeared safe to conclude that the instruments as a whole were measuring essentially the same phenomena.

The study found that WEITAC's components and subcomponents were sufficiently free of multicollinearity, and was proven to have construct validity, therefore, it could be used in a business communications classroom as part of a workplace readiness strategy with college students to encourage participation in a process of understanding and managing emotions (Burgess-Wilkerson, Lampe, & Frankforter, 2013).

WEITAC Student Summary Report Customization and Conversion

Qualtrics is used to manage the data collection process (i.e., provide surveys and obtain response data). Once an individual completes the WEITAC, their data is available as a downloadable CSV (comma

separated values) file. Data can also be downloaded for multiple individuals. Once downloaded, the data is imported into Excel where a script automates the process of converting data into individual reports.

The script is written in the Microsoft Visual Basic programming language and when it is run, it performs multiple functions on the WEITAC data set. The result of these functions are individualized Microsoft Word reports for each student. To accomplish this task, the script accesses specific data points for each individual, performs basic statistical calculations, and then generates charts and graphs based on the data. Once complete, the script then accesses a Microsoft Word template where it populates the created results, charts, and graphs into a new Word document. The final document is named after the user. The program takes seconds to process a new document for an individual. Once a report has been created, it is converted into an encrypted file that is password protected. An example of portions of the WEITAC Student Summary Report are provided in Figure 2.
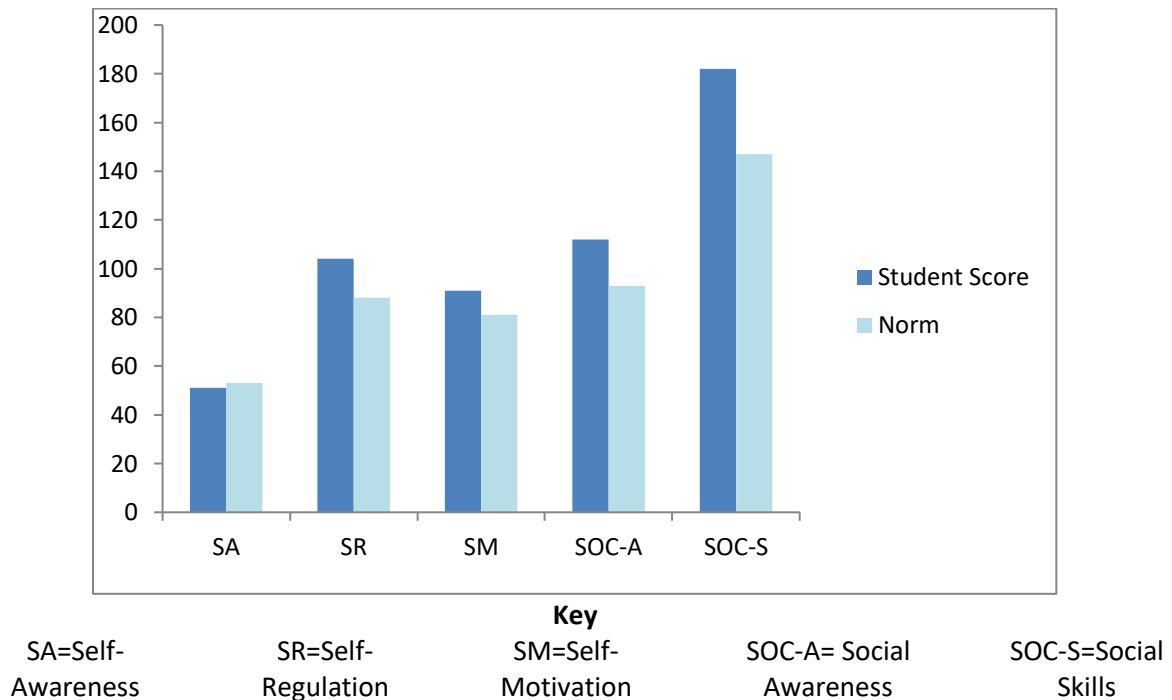

Key

| SA=Self-Awareness | SR=Self-Regulation | SM=Self-Motivation | SOC-A= Social Awareness | SOC-S=Social Skills |

Figure 2: Example of WEITAC Student Summary Report.

An aspect of the Student Summary Report is to provide suggestions for improvements by addressing the attitudes and behaviors that are indicative of low EI. The actions are designed to be carried out in either an academic or workplace setting. The recommendations are based on the level of competence for each of the 5 subscales and to a lesser extent the 25 subcomponents. Students are provided an understanding of how the EI attitudes and behaviors manifest themselves and are offered practical strategies for self- improvement. It is recommended that they address only 1-2 problem areas at a time for no less than 30 days. An example of the recommendations is provided in Figure 3.

Personal Competence

SELF-AWARENESS - refers to the ability to recognize one's emotions and their effect. People with this competence also know their strengths and limits and have a sense of self-worth.		
If you are…	What this means to you…	What you can do to change…
Low (0-47)	You struggle understanding your emotions and may not be fully aware of how they impact you and others. You may also lack awareness about your strengths, limits and sureness about your self-worth.	1) Pay attention to what you are feeling and why; 2) reflect on past experiences and lessons learned; 3) recognize how feelings affect your performance; 4) be open to honest feedback, continuous learning and self-development.
Average (48-57)	At times you understand your emotions and how they impact you and others. You have some self- awareness about your strengths, limits and some sureness about your self-worth.	1) Continue to pay attention to what you are feeling and why; 2) reflect on past experiences and lessons learned; 3) recognize how feelings affect your performance; 4) be open to honest feedback, continuous learning and self-development.
High (58-65)	You have a keen understanding of your emotions and how they impact you and others. You have self- awareness about your strengths, limits and sureness about your self-worth. You also are able to make sound decisions.	1) Continue to pay attention to what you are feeling and why; 2) reflect on past experience and lessons learned; 3) reflect on how feelings can assist your future performance; 4) seek honest feedback in a mentoring relationship; 5) seek continuous learning and self-development opportunities that can lead to promotions/advancement.

Figure 3: Example of WEITAC Student Summary Report recommendations for improvement.

Utilizing the WEITAC in the Classroom

Prior to the WEITAC's creation, EI has been part of the business communications course for 13 years therefore EI is well established as part of the business communications curriculum. However, over the years it evolved to become infused into all business communications courses as a requirement and has become less time-consuming thanks to Blackboard and the creation of self-development learning tools that require less in-class time. Currently the WEITAC is given toward the beginning of the semester following one lecture on emotional intelligence. Students are directed to the WEITAC learning modules in Blackboard and are asked to complete each assignment which includes: 1) watching two introductory videos, 2) taking the WEITAC test, 3) reviewing the Student Summary Report, 4) creating a self-development plan, 5) watching the 5 video tutorials and completing the short quizzes at the end, 6) maintaining an e-journal in Blackboard throughout the semester, and 7) reviewing the supplemental readings. Each video is 5-8 minutes and can be completed in one week. Most of the assignment consists of spending time working on deficit areas identified in the Student Summary Report. At the end of the

semester students are required to write a self-reflective final entry in the journal highlighting outcomes which are not graded but reviewed for feedback. The goal is to gain insight and possibly address behaviors and/or attitudes that can de-rail a career or academics.

The WEITAC Online Learning Modules

Utilizing the WEITAC in a business communication course requires creativity; however, the online learning modules require minimal teacher oversight, provides privacy and confidentiality, and provides opportunities to learn and develop EI over time. Below is an example of components used for the online learning modules which were housed in Blackboard as part of an individualized learning assignment.

Introduction to the WEITAC

This short video clip created by the instructor provides an overview of emotional intelligence, an overview of the WEITAC scales and subscales. It briefly describes the attitudes and behaviors of individuals with high EI across the five subscales.

Emotional Intelligence: Why it Matters

This short video clip was created by the instructor and provides a rationale of why EI is important from an academic and workplace viewpoint; it briefly describes the attitudes and behaviors of individuals with low EI across the five subscales.

WEITAC Instructions and Link

This short video clip was created to provide instructions for accessing and taking the WEITAC test. Because the test is a behavioral instrument, students are provided information ensuring compliance with Internal Review Board (IRB) regulations for privacy, security and confidentiality. The turnaround time between test and receiving the Student Summary Report is 5-7 business days.

WEITAC Student Summary Report – A Sample Report

The Student Summary Report template is posted with an audio that describes what the scores mean across the subscales and compares each score with an average. Scores are divided into three parts, low, average and high. Students are encouraged to consider an intervention in those areas determined to be low or that are most impacting their academic or future career success. They are encouraged to seek assistance in determining realistic goals from a qualified instructor or professional.

WEITAC Learning Modules and Quizzes

In this section, there are 7 video clips which were created and performed by students as part of their oral presentation assignments in the business communications course. These videos depict examples of how the five subscales manifest themselves in a workplace setting when there are both positive and negative behaviors. After reviewing the videos, students are required to complete the short quizzes to determine the appropriateness of a variety of attitudes and behaviors that can occur in an academic and/or workplace setting. (Note: the videos were created with the assistance of the mass communications department faculty).

Resources for Further Reading

This section provides students with scholarly reading resources for a variety of purposes including: on-going personal development, class assignments, and student research in EI. The information is also helpful for any instructor that chooses to adopt the learning modules in their course.

Outcomes

Over the past 13 years emotional intelligence has been part of the business communications curriculum. Prior research conducted of pre and post EI testing (Burgess-Wilkerson, et.al, 2010) during that time have proven that EI testing with a variety of instruments such as the EQi-Hed, the TTI and more recently the WEITAC as part of a workforce readiness strategy in an academic setting indicate higher post test scores; reports from employers indicate that young professionals demonstrate professionalism across the major areas of EI and students experience greater work satisfaction long-term. Recent results continue to demonstrate success when EI testing is accompanied by self-development opportunities in a formal classroom setting as a part of a workforce readiness strategy.

Conclusion

Instructors of business communications courses can consider creatively infusing emotional intelligence into the curriculum as an academic or workforce readiness strategy and can gain insights using proven EI systematic approaches designed specifically for college-level students. EI training and development can be infused into academic courses or as part of a professional development requirement to better prepare millennials both for academic and career success.

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