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Beyond Engineering

How Planners Can Leverage Culture &
Systems Thinking for Safer Rural
Roads

Jay Otto

December 17, 2025



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We work alongside our clients to create cultures where new ideas and actions emerge and take root, creating effective and lasting positive outcomes.

- Traffic safety
- Prevention of misuse of substances
- Improving child development



Who is your “**missing partner**”
in regional traffic safety?
(the stakeholder you need
but can't effectively engage)



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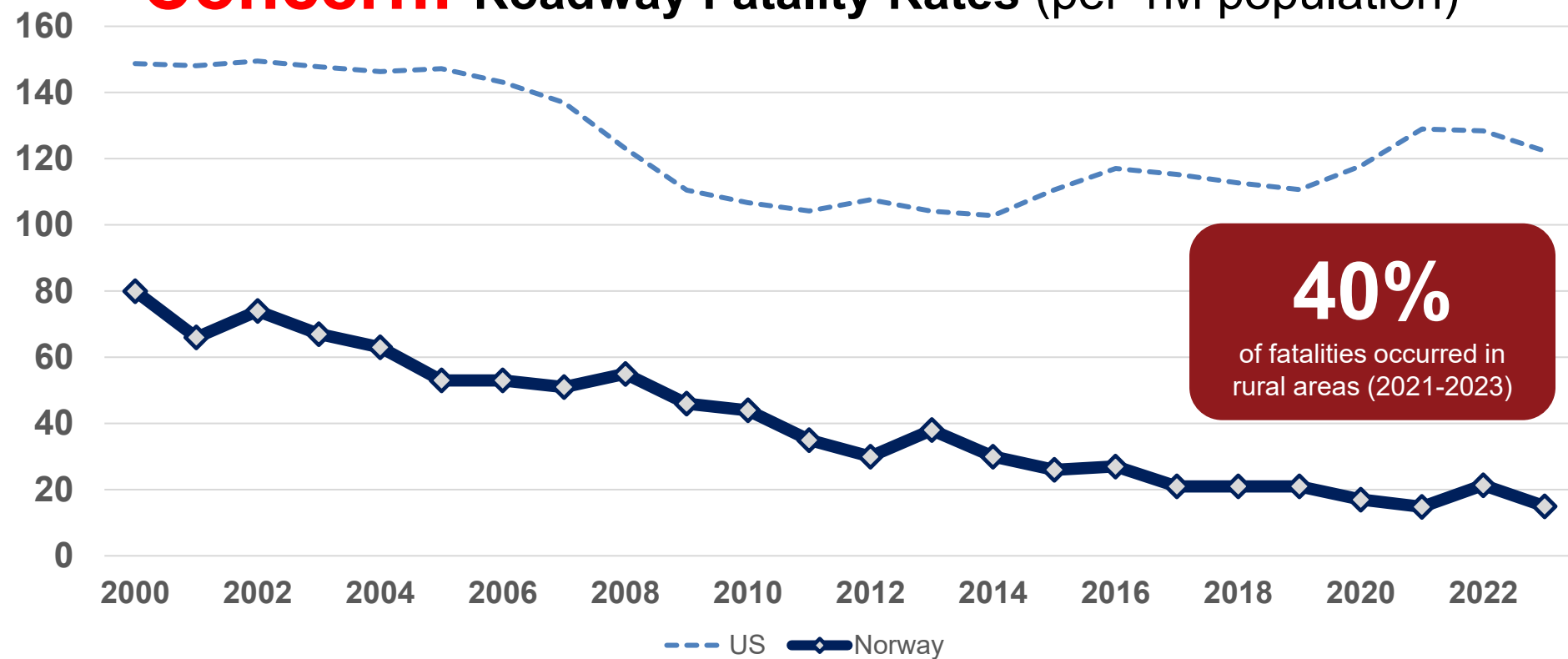
Improving Outcomes Framework



Concern: Traffic Safety is a **Public Health** issue



Concern: Roadway Fatality Rates (per 1M population)



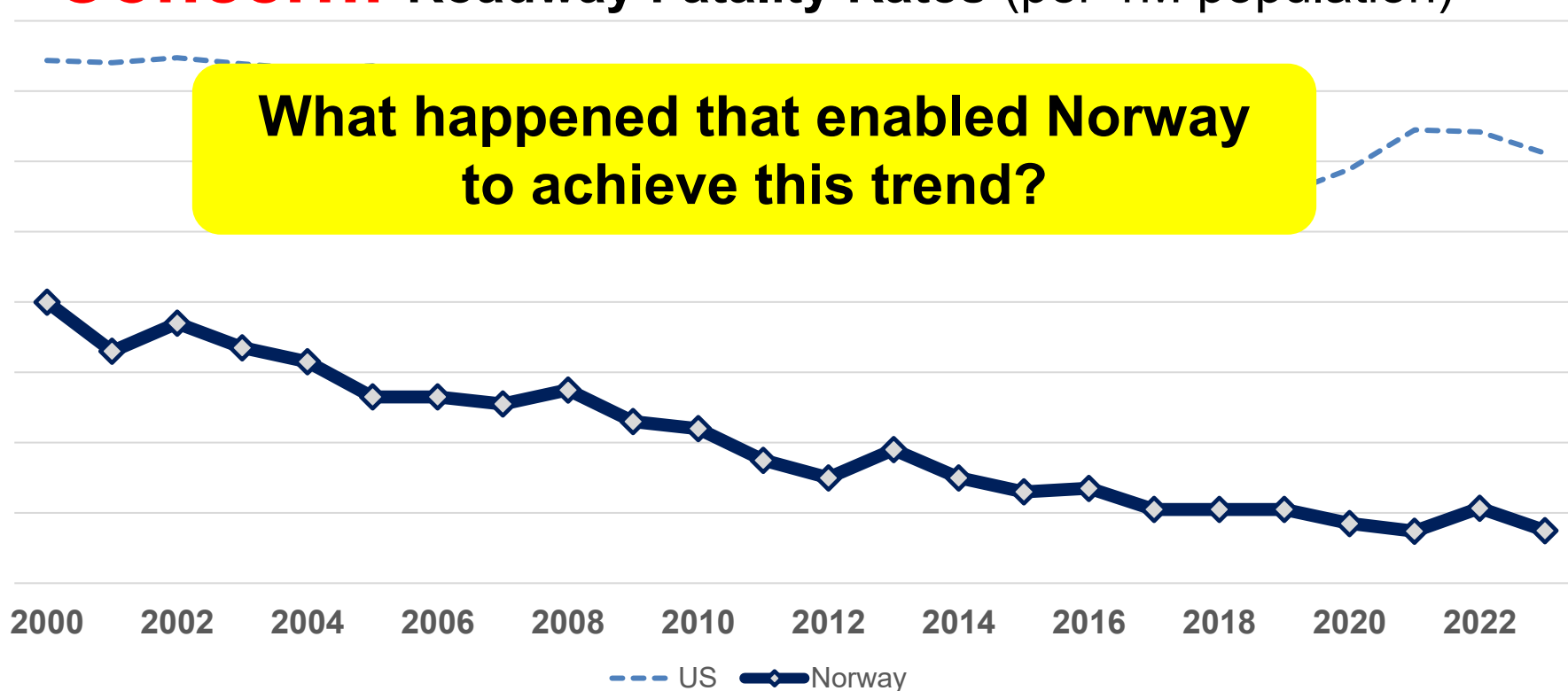
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Concern: Roadway Fatality Rates (per 1M population)

What happened that enabled Norway to achieve this trend?



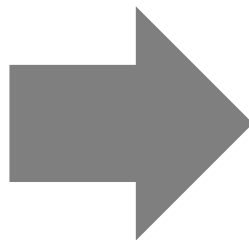
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Driver Error



Building a Resilient System



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Safe System Approach

- Deaths and Serious Injuries Are Unacceptable
- Humans Make Mistakes
- Humans Are Vulnerable
- **Responsibility is Shared**
- Safety is Proactive
- Redundancy is Crucial



Mindsets



Systems-Focused
vs.
Individual-Focused

Technical


Clear Problem
Expert Solution
Execution



Adaptive

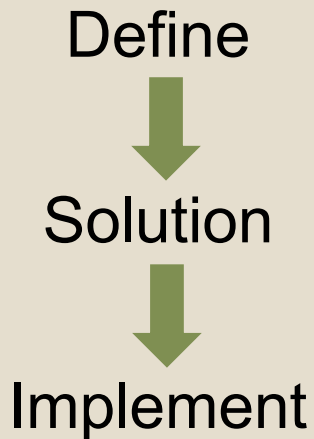
Unclear
Requires Learning
Stakeholder Values





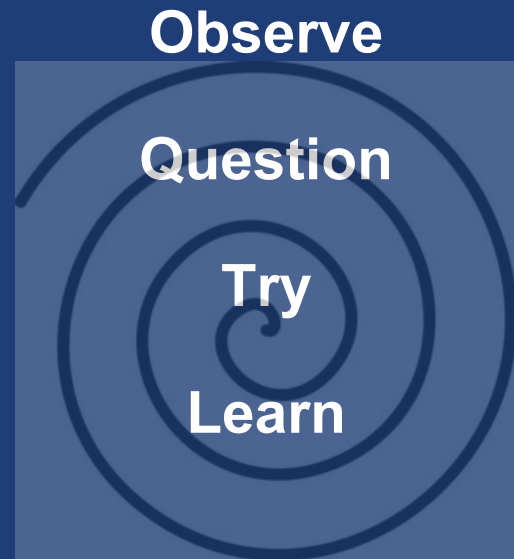
“The most common cause of **failure** in leadership is produced by treating **adaptive challenges** as if they were **technical problems.**”

Technical



Applying Expertise

Adaptive



Generating New Knowledge



Heifetz, R. A., Linsky, M., & Grashow, A. (2009). *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. Harvard Business Press.

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Mindsets



Systems-Focused
vs.
Individual-Focused



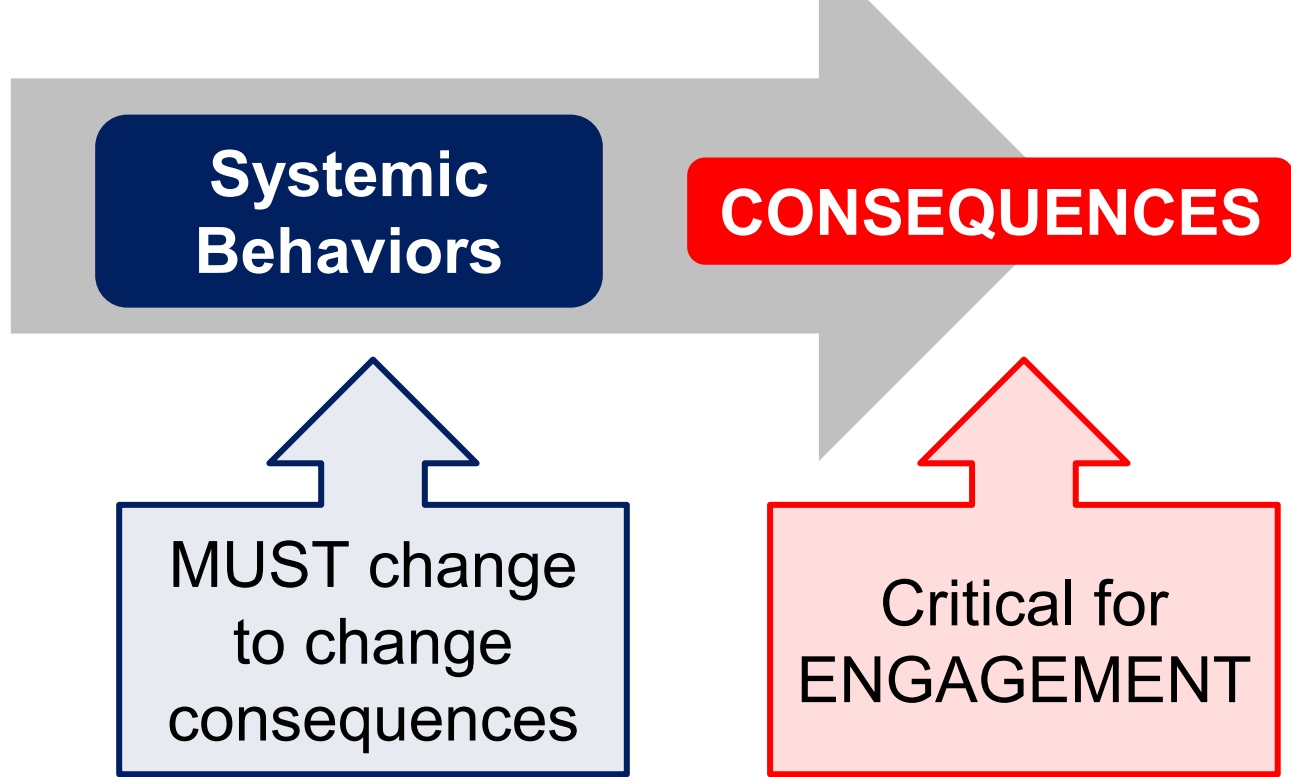
Adaptive
vs.
Technical



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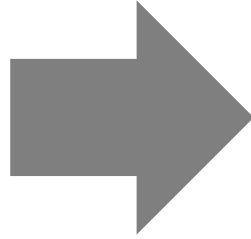
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Systemic Behaviors



Where did the
driver fail?



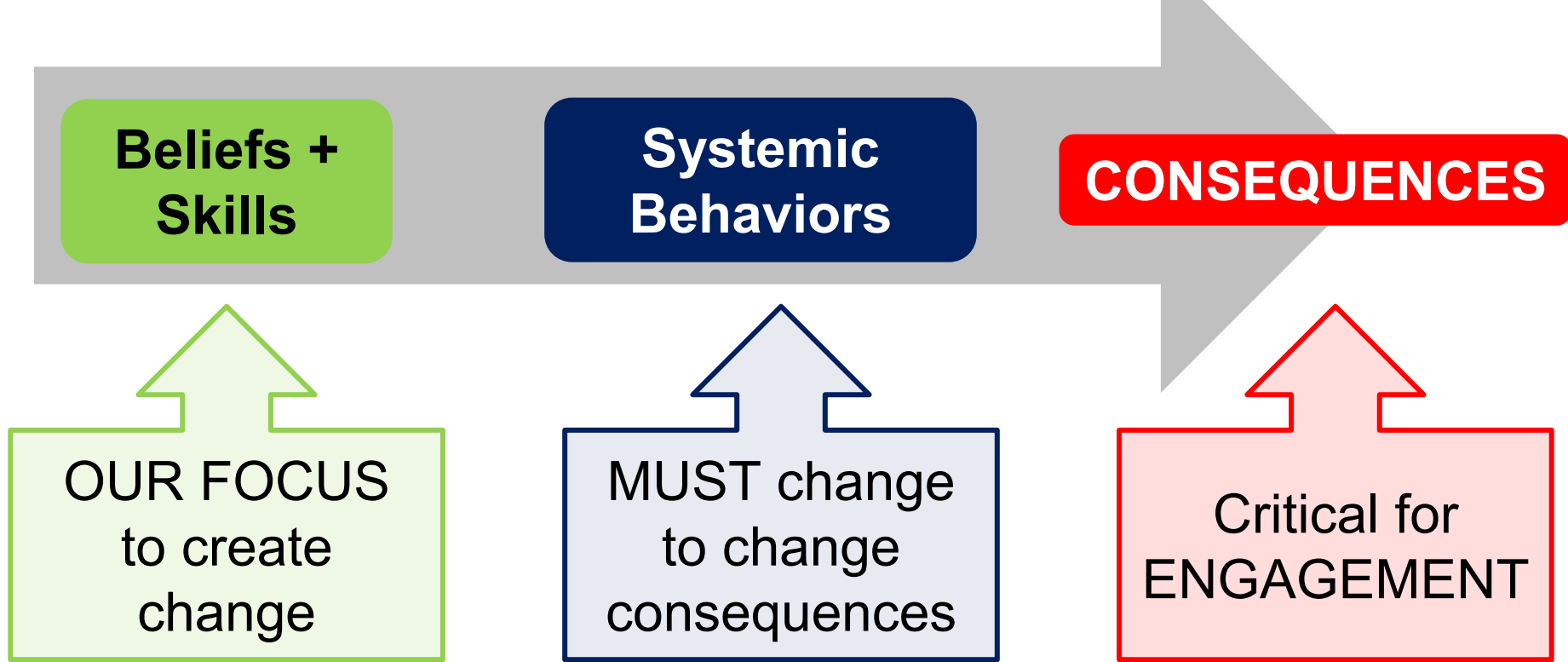
Where did the
system fail?



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Where do **beliefs**
about traffic safety
come from?



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Traffic Safety Culture
shared values and beliefs
of a group of people
that influence behaviors
that impact traffic safety



Mindsets



Systems-Focused
vs.
Individual-Focused



Adaptive
vs.
Technical



**Growing
Supportive
Beliefs + Skills**

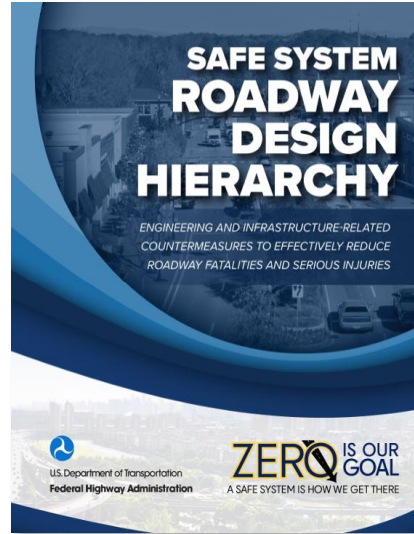


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Safe Systems Pyramid



Proven Safety Countermeasures



Countermeasures That Work



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Actions to **Grow** Traffic Safety Culture

1. Increase engagement by raising CONCERN and HOPE

Concern – focusing on **consequences**

Hope – a will and a way forward

Raise **CONCERN**

- Help others see traffic safety as a public health issue
- Begin engagement by focusing on **consequences**

Raise **HOPE** (a will and way forward)

- Work within your circle of influence
 - Does your family/organization have and follow TS rules/policies?
- Invest in your organization's Traffic Safety Culture
- Invest in your and your organization's SKILLS
- Engage more partners (50 cups of coffee)

Actions to **Grow** Traffic Safety Culture

2. Shift the focus to the **SYSTEM**.

- Invest in growing a system-focused mindset.
 - Relentlessly ask with others: Where did the SYSTEM fail?
 - Learn more about the Safe System Approach

Actions to **Grow** Traffic Safety Culture

3. Act with **courage**

- Courage is about choosing to move forward *despite* feeling discomfort or uncertainty.
- Courage is a skill that can be GROWN

Review

- Traffic safety is a PUBLIC HEALTH issue
- 3 Mindsets (System-Focused, Adaptive, Growing Supportive Beliefs)
- Grow Traffic Safety Culture (the shared values and beliefs of a group of people that influence behaviors that impact traffic safety)
- **Grow** Traffic Safety Culture by
 - Increasing **engagement** by raising concern and hope
 - Shifting the focus to the **system**.
 - Acting with **courage**



Improving Outcomes Framework Training

March 3-5, 2026

"This training is helping me be more intentional in considering a systems approach to the work we do."

"Being encouraged to speak up and inviting others to do the same is a key skill in improving health outcomes and this training provided tangible suggestions and practice to make that happen!"

"...truly transformative for professionals committed to advancing health and safety I found that the blend of mindset development, clear step-by-step guidance, and practical skill-building offered a valuable opportunity to refresh and elevate my skills. I left feeling energized, confident, and fully prepared to apply my renewed knowledge to help to create lasting, positive impact."



Visit our website to learn more!



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Brief Evaluation

We would greatly value
your feedback!

<https://forms.gle/ettXrEUrb2wgDX3b7>



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