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LOCAL WISDOM AND LEADERSHIP VALUES IN BUGIS GOVERNANCE: INSIGHTS INTO INDIGENOUS POLITICAL ETHICS IN SOUTH SULAWESI

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the indigenous political ethics of Bugis governance by exploring local wisdom and leadership values in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Using a qualitative design supported by document analysis, interviews, and field observations, data were collected from 122 civil servants and community representatives. Findings show that Bugis leadership is guided by six key principles: lempu (honesty), getteng (steadfastness), ada tongeng (truthful speech), assitinajang (appropriateness), acca (wisdom), and warani (courage). These values, rooted in the pappaseng tradition, serve as ethical guidelines for governance. A paired-samples t-test revealed significant gaps between subordinate expectations and actual leadership practices. The study demonstrates the continuing relevance of traditional values in modern political leadership and offers insights for integrating cultural ethics into leadership development and governance policies in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS: Local Wisdom, Bugis Leadership, Indigenous Political Ethics, Governance, South Sulawesi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration, which has been practiced since the 17th century, stands as historical evidence of the Bugis people's nomadic spirit and has become a defining characteristic of their identity (Kesuma, 2004). The Bugis migrated extensively to other regions and countries including their early 18th-century migration to Johor driven by political instability such as the VOC-Makassar War in the 17th century, as well as economic pressures and natural disasters in their homeland. These migrations were closely linked to trading activities and have continued from the past to the present, reflecting the Bugis' enduring social mobility across Indonesia and beyond. Volkstelling data, as cited by Kesuma (2004), identifies the Bugis as a seafaring community, recording 1,546,228 individuals migrating, a figure that surpasses all other ethnic groups in Indonesia. Historical records confirm that since the 17th century Bugis migration has reached all corners of the archipelago, including the Malay Peninsula and surrounding areas, with Bugis migrants dominating among South Sulawesi ethnic groups, particularly in Johor, Malaysia (Kesuma, 2012).

A region's history becomes meaningful when it is tied to its cultural heritage and the preservation of local wisdom (Hasyim, Arafah, & Kuswarini, 2020; Arafah et al., 2025). Indonesia, enriched by diverse rituals, traditions, and customs, illustrates this through the culture of the Bugis people (Arafah et al., 2020; Takwa et al., 2024). The Bugis' political and economic activities from early migration to contemporary life reflect enduring values of local wisdom, particularly the moral principles embedded in *pappaseng*. These cultural values have been internalized within governance systems, shaping patterns of social life (Arafah et al., 2023; Arifin, Arafah, & Kuncara, 2022; Takwa et al., 2025). Values, in this context, serve as behavioral standards, guiding principles, and social benchmarks (Afiah, Arafah, & Abbas, 2022; Takwa et al., 2022; Suhadi et al., 2022). As Pelras (2006) notes, the Bugis are renowned for their strong character and profound sense of honor (*pappaseng*). Such adherence to local wisdom influences political communication and guides conduct in politics, trade, and education.

These cultural values also play an important role in the educational sphere, where they help to shape students' character development (Arafah et al., 2024; Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022). Literature, as a medium rich with values, can be used in both printed and digital forms to foster awareness of human life and its socio-environmental context (Arafah et al., 2023; Arafah et al., 2025; Yudith et al., 2023). Incorporating

cultural elements into the learning process creates a vital connection between schools and their surrounding communities (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023; Halil et al., 2024). Moreover, the broad distribution of Bugis people across the Indonesian archipelago has been reflected in various state and leadership roles, including vice presidents, governors, regents, council members, and business leaders. Notable national figures of Bugis descent such as General Muhammad Yusuf, Baharuddin Jusuf Habibie, Baharuddin Lopa, and Muhammad Yusuf Kalla, who served twice as Vice President of Indonesia, demonstrate this influence. At the central government level, many Bugis have held roles as ministers and directors-general, while at provincial and regional levels, Bugis leaders have contributed significantly to governance both in South Sulawesi and other parts of Indonesia.

Despite the long-standing presence of Bugis people in leadership roles, empirical studies that systematically examine how Bugis cultural values, particularly those codified in *pappaseng* are internalized and enacted within modern governance remain scarce. Previous research has largely addressed Bugis migration, trade, and cultural traditions (Kesuma, 2004; Kesuma, 2012; Arafah et al., 2020; Takwa et al., 2024), but has not thoroughly explored how these indigenous ethical frameworks influence contemporary political communication and leadership practices. This gap is particularly relevant in the current context, where the integration of cultural wisdom into governance is increasingly recognized as a way to strengthen ethical leadership.

To address this gap, the present study distinguishes itself from previous works by integrating a phenomenological approach with statistical analysis specifically the use of paired-samples t-test—to examine the practical application of six core Bugis leadership values in a modern bureaucratic setting. Unlike earlier studies that focused mainly on cultural traditions or historical narratives, this research captures the lived experiences of government officials within the South Sulawesi Provincial Government, thereby providing a unique, context-specific understanding of indigenous political ethics.

Responding to this gap, the present study aims to investigate the leadership values rooted in Bugis local wisdom and their role in shaping political ethics and governance practices in South Sulawesi. By adopting a qualitative approach supported by field observations, document analysis, and survey-based data, this research examines six key principles *lempu* (honesty), *getteng* (steadfastness), *ada tongeng* (truthful speech), *assitinajang* (appropriateness),

acca (wisdom), and warani (courage) and their application within the provincial government. Furthermore, these indigenous values are conceptually linked to established global leadership theories, such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, and authentic leadership, thereby situating the findings within broader international discourse. This study contributes to the literature by offering insights into how indigenous political ethics inform leadership behavior in a modern bureaucratic setting and by highlighting the continuing relevance of traditional cultural values as a framework for promoting accountability, integrity, and public trust in governance.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomena experienced by research participants, including their behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions, as expressed in words and language (Asri *et al.*, 2023; Asriyanti *et al.*, 2022). A phenomenological approach was adopted, which focuses on exploring participants' lived experiences and examining the subjective meanings they assign to social and cultural phenomena (Abubakar, 2021). Within this framework, the study specifically investigates how government officials interpret and apply the principles of Bugis local wisdom in leadership and governance.

Data collection combined three techniques: (1) literature study, particularly of pappaseng texts and previous scholarship; (2) in-depth interviews with informants who hold positions in the provincial government; and (3) direct field observations of the daily interactions and decision-making processes of these officials. This multi-source approach allowed for the identification of key themes and patterns associated with Bugis leadership values in contemporary governance.

The data comprised both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained from interviews, direct observations, and responses to a questionnaire distributed among government officials at the South Sulawesi Provincial Governor's Office. Secondary data were collected from written texts, particularly pappaseng manuscripts, and scholarly studies relevant to Bugis cultural values.

A total of 122 respondents participated in this study. Data collection involved direct observation and the administration of questionnaires, distributed both in person and online. Respondent characteristics included demographic information such as age, gender, educational background,

employment status, and institutional affiliation.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (*n* = 122).

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	45.9
	Female	66	54.1
Age	< 26 years	12	9.8
	27 – 36 years	46	37.7
	37 – 46 years	44	36.1
	> 46 years	20	16.4
Educational Background	Senior High School	10	8.2
	Diploma	12	9.8
	Bachelor's degree	66	54.1
	Master's degree	32	26.2
Employment Status	Doctorate	2	1.6
	Civil servant (PNS)	92	75.4
Institutional Affiliation	Non-civil servant	30	24.6
	SATPOL PP (Municipal Police)	16	13.1
	DISKOMINFO SP (Communication and Informatics)	32	26.2
	BPSDM Sulsel (Human Resources Development Agency)	28	23.0
	DP3AP2KB (Women & Family Agency)	8	6.6
	DPM PTSP Sulsel (Investment & Licensing Agency)	12	9.8
	National Unity and Political Agency	8	6.6
	Bureau of Public Welfare	6	4.9
	Department of Culture and Tourism	8	6.6
	Department of Food Crops and Horticulture	2	1.6
	RSUD Labuan Baji (Regional Hospital)	2	1.6

The demographic profile indicates that a slightly higher proportion of respondents were female (54.1%) than male (45.9%). The majority of participants were between 27 and 46 years of age, suggesting that the sample largely consists of individuals in their productive professional years. Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (54.1%), with a significant proportion also having a master's degree (26.2%), reflecting a relatively well-educated sample. In terms of employment status, civil servants formed the dominant group (75.4%), consistent with the study's focus on governance. Respondents represented a variety of provincial offices and agencies, with the largest groups coming from DISKOMINFO SP (26.2%) and BPSDM Sulsel (23.0%).

2.1. Data Analysis

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, the data were analyzed through a combination of qualitative thematic analysis and descriptive-inferential quantitative analysis, allowing both the depth and breadth of the findings to be captured effectively. The qualitative component involved inductive thematic analysis of interview transcripts, field observation notes, and culturally embedded texts such as pappaseng.

The analysis began with open coding to identify recurring themes associated with the six core Bugis leadership values: lempu (honesty), getteng (steadfastness), ada tongeng (truthful speech), assitinajang (appropriateness), acca (wisdom), and warani (courage). These codes were then organized into broader thematic categories to interpret how the values are internalized, expressed, and practiced by provincial government officials in their day-to-day administrative and leadership roles.

The interpretive framework was grounded in the phenomenological paradigm, emphasizing participants' lived experiences and sociocultural contexts. In parallel, the quantitative component utilized data from structured questionnaires distributed to 122 respondents. Descriptive statistics comprising frequency and percentage were used to summarize respondent demographics and their perceptions of the extent to which the six leadership values were implemented by their superiors.

To evaluate the alignment between respondents' expectations and their perceptions of the actual practices of Bugis leadership values, a paired-samples t-test was conducted. This inferential test measured whether there were statistically significant differences between the idealized expectations of public servants and the perceived reality of leadership behavior within the South Sulawesi provincial government.

By integrating these two complementary approaches, the study not only provided rich insight into the cultural dimensions of leadership but also quantified perceptual gaps that exist within the governance context. This mixed-methods strategy ensured a nuanced and empirically robust analysis of how indigenous values continue to shape ethical leadership in a modern bureaucratic setting.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Concept of Local Wisdom of the Bugis Leadership

The analysis of interview data, textual studies, and field observations indicates that the concept of

Bugis leadership is deeply rooted in the pappaseng tradition as recorded in lontarak manuscripts such as Latoa and Pappaseng: Wujud Idea Budaya Sulawesi Selatan. Semantically, the term pappaseng originates from the expression *saloe na dek uwaena* "a river without water" in which water symbolizes life.

A river flowing with abundant water metaphorically represents leadership that nourishes society. In this sense, pappaseng functions as a repository of local wisdom, reminding leaders to be honest, trustworthy, and responsible for the welfare of their people. It also promotes the ideal of leaders as "pillars of the world," encompassing honest rulers, devout scholars, generous individuals, and patient citizens.

South Sulawesi, home to the Bugis and Makassar ethnic groups, has a rich cultural heritage that includes traditions, customs, oral arts, and indigenous knowledge. Language in this context becomes an important vehicle for the transmission of values (Hasyim et al., 2020; Arafah et al., 2020; Takwa et al., 2024). Local languages carry the norms and worldview of a community (Arafah et al., 2023) and thus serve not only as a medium of communication but also as a medium for intergenerational transfer of culture and values (Arafah et al., 2025).

These forms of cultural wisdom, inherited and cultivated across generations, play a fundamental role in shaping character and social behavior (Abbas et al., 2022; Suhadi et al., 2022). Parents and community elders have a key role in this transmission, ensuring that each new generation is prepared to preserve cultural sustainability (Mokoginta & Arafah, 2022). The pappaseng manuscripts are considered sacred texts that contain messages, advice, guidance, and social commentary. They not only preserve ethical and moral principles but also function as a socio-cultural system for the Bugis people.

As emphasized by Pelras (2006), pappaseng represents a body of ancestral guidance that continues to shape ethical standards in the community. Historically, pappaseng has been addressed to kings, leaders, and parents as a way to instill virtues. The messages can be explicit (through direct statements, lectures, or examples) or implicit (in the form of figurative warnings and symbolic communication).

They also include social criticism aimed at correcting leaders or wealthy individuals who fail to uphold community expectations, such as in cases of corruption or abuse of power (Sikki et al., 1998; Tang et al., 2025). Among the most renowned pappaseng figures are *Tomaccae ri Luwu*, *Kajao Laliddong ri*

Bone, and Arung Bila ri Soppeng, whose counsel remains an authoritative reference in Bugis society. In practice, pappaseng is a form of ethical communication that must be respected and preserved; for centuries, it has guided Bugis people to navigate conflicts, maintain social harmony, and resolve challenges collectively.

Analysis of pappaseng reveals six key principles of Bugis leadership: lempu (honesty), getteng (steadfastness), ada tongeng (truthful speech), assitinajang (appropriateness), acca (wisdom), and warani (courage). These principles have been passed down from generation to generation and are consistently invoked in the selection and evaluation of leaders.

Viewed through the lens of global leadership theories, these six values reveal strong conceptual parallels with widely recognized leadership models. Lempu (honesty) and ada tongeng (truthful speech) align with the ethical foundation and idealized influence dimensions of transformational leadership, fostering trust and moral authority.

Getteng (steadfastness) reflects the consistency and authenticity central to authentic leadership, ensuring reliability and credibility. Assitinajang (appropriateness) mirrors the servant leadership principle of placing individuals in roles suited to their competencies, promoting fairness and empowerment. Acca (wisdom) resonates with the foresight and strategic decision-making emphasized in adaptive leadership, enabling leaders to navigate complexity prudently. Warani (courage) corresponds to the resilience and principled risk-taking that leadership scholars identify as essential for driving change and defending ethical standards.

By connecting these indigenous values to established international leadership frameworks, this study not only highlights their enduring local significance but also demonstrates their universal relevance, fostering cross-cultural dialogue in leadership ethics.

3.1.1. Lempu (Honesty)

Honesty is the cornerstone of Bugis leadership. It emphasizes upright conduct, integrity, and consistency between words and actions. Lempu also involves upholding siri' (shame) as a safeguard against misconduct and practicing vigilance in fulfilling responsibilities. Pappaseng expressions highlight that honesty is as challenging as taming a wild bird; it must be confined by shame, sustained by vigilance, and nurtured by conscience (Sikki et al., 1998).

Table 2: Leadership Values of Lempu (Honesty).

No	Leadership value
1	Work with sincerity in fulfilling primary duties.
2	Ensure that a leader's words correspond with their deeds.
3	Execute responsibilities in accordance with one's role.
4	Avoid taking what does not rightfully belong to oneself.
5	Keep promises as stated.
6	Act for the collective benefit rather than personal gain.
7	Be forgiving toward those who make mistakes.
8	Be trustworthy and avoid cheating.
9	Provide accurate and truthful information.

3.1.2. Getteng (Steadfastness)

Getteng means firmness, decisiveness, and consistency in principles. It also requires leaders to take responsibility for their decisions and resist external influences.

Table 3: Leadership Values of Getteng (Steadfastness).

No	Leadership value
1	Maintain a firm and calm stance while carrying out duties.
2	Demonstrate decisiveness without hesitation.
3	Uphold the principle that right is right and wrong is wrong.
4	Take responsibility for spoken words.
5	Take responsibility for actions.
6	Fulfill promises.
7	Remain resilient despite rejection.
8	Avoid breaking agreements.
9	Never cancel or change decisions arbitrarily.
10	Accept only tasks one is capable of completing and do so to the end.
11	Avoid breaking promises.
12	Remain unaffected by undue influence.
13	Resist temptation and corruption.

3.1.3. Ada Tongeng (Truthful Speech)

This principle emphasizes truthfulness in speech and consistency between words and actions.

Table 4: Leadership Values of Ada Tongeng (Truthful Speech).

No	Leadership value
1	Speak truthfully, without lies or doubt.
2	Align words with actions.
3	Ensure clear and audible communication to subordinates.
4	Control emotions while speaking.
5	Honor oaths and promises.
6	Adhere to consensus agreements.
7	Protect mutual respect and dignity.
8	Avoid ill intent toward others.
9	Place truth above all else.
10	Uphold firmness in exercising authority.

3.1.4. Assitinajang (Appropriateness)

Assitinajang reflects fairness and suitability in appointing individuals to positions and distributing tasks.

Table 5: Leadership Values of Assitinajang (Appropriateness).

No	Leadership value
1	Assign duties based on competence.
2	Ensure fairness in appointments.
3	Decline tasks beyond one's capabilities.
4	Fulfill tasks responsibly.
5	Possess the necessary qualifications to hold a position.

3.1.5. Acca (Wisdom)

Acca relates to intellectual ability, careful decision-making, and foresight.

Table 6: Leadership Values of Acca (Wisdom).

No	Leadership value
1	Exercise careful consideration before deciding.
2	Approach problems sincerely and seek solutions.
3	Anticipate the consequences of policies and learn from past events.
4	Work for the prosperity of the community.
5	Ensure the welfare of subordinates.
6	Treat all fairly and without discrimination.
7	Show honesty in all interactions.
8	Make honest and just decisions.
9	Act with authority and fairness

3.1.6. Warani (Courage)

Warani highlights courage, resilience, and responsibility in leadership.

Table 7: Leadership Values of Warani (Courage).

No	Leadership value
1	Face criticism boldly and with confidence.
2	Avoid being influenced by flattery.
3	Take full responsibility for tasks.
4	Protect subordinates from danger.
5	Be bold and principled.
6	Defend the rights of the people.

These findings show that pappaseng principles are more than cultural relics; they remain a living ethical framework that influences leadership in Bugis society. This moral foundation has contributed to the Bugis community's reputation as a resilient, ethical, and principled ethnic group whose leaders are guided by integrity and responsibility.

3.2. Implementation and Evaluation of Bugis Leadership Values in Government

This study analyzed how six Bugis leadership values lempu (honesty), getteng (steadfastness), ada tongeng (truthful speech), assitinajang (appropriateness), acca (wisdom), and warani (courage)—are manifested in the provincial governance context of South Sulawesi. Through field observations, interviews, and a structured questionnaire distributed to 122 respondents at the South Sulawesi Provincial Governor's Office, the research captured both qualitative insights and quantitative assessments regarding the application of these indigenous values.

The qualitative findings indicate that these six values function as fundamental ethical benchmarks in the workplace. Respondents described that leaders who embody these values are expected to lead with integrity (lempu), demonstrate consistency and firmness (getteng), ensure alignment between words and actions (ada tongeng), assign responsibilities fairly (assitinajang), make decisions prudently (acca), and show courage in taking responsibility (warani).

Quantitative data from the questionnaires show how respondents rate the actual implementation of each of these values in their organizational environment. Tables 8 to 13 present the distribution of perceptions (low, moderate, and high) for each value:

Table 8: Lempu (Honesty).

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	14	11.5	11.5
Moderate	86	70.5	82.0
High	22	18.0	100.0
Total	122	100	100.0

Table 9: Getteng (Steadfastness).

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	12	9.8	9.8
Moderate	80	65.6	75.4
High	30	24.6	100.0
Total	122	100	100.0

Table 10: Ada Tongeng (Truthful Speech).

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	14	11.5	11.5
Moderate	84	68.9	80.3
High	24	19.7	100.0
Total	122	100	100.0

Table 11: Assitinajang (Appropriateness).

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	12	9.8	9.8
Moderate	86	70.5	80.3
High	24	19.7	100.0
Total	122	100	100.0

Table 12: Acca (Wisdom).

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	8	6.6	6.6
Moderate	90	73.8	80.3
High	24	19.7	100.0
Total	122	100	100.0

Table 13: Warani (Courage).

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low	18	14.8	14.8
Moderate	78	63.9	78.7
High	26	21.3	100.0
Total	122	100	100.0

The tables demonstrate that most respondents assessed the practice of these leadership values at a moderate level across all six dimensions. Specifically, acca (wisdom) and lempu (honesty) received the highest proportions of moderate to high ratings, suggesting that prudence and honesty are relatively more evident in leadership practices. Conversely, warani (courage) and getteng (steadfastness) had the lowest overall ratings, indicating that the values of firmness and courage are less consistently applied.

This pattern indicates a gap between cultural

ideals and daily practice: while Bugis leadership values are acknowledged and respected, their application within the provincial government is perceived as not yet fully optimal. These findings underscore the challenge of aligning traditional cultural ethics with the demands of a modern bureaucratic system.

These integrated findings (qualitative and quantitative) provide the basis for the subsequent analysis, which examines discrepancies between leaders' performance and staff expectations using paired-sample t-tests.

3.3. Expectations with the Reality of Leaders in Implementing Bugis Leadership Values

Researchers use variable analysis as a paired sample t-test as a parametric test that can be used on two data pairs. The Paired Sample T-test test aims to see if there is an average difference between two paired or related samples. Whether there is a difference can be seen in the significance value. If the Sig. If the value is smaller than 0.05, then there is a difference between the two data/variables. This study wants to see whether or not there is a difference in expectations from the reality of leaders applying Bugis leadership values.

Table 14: Differences between Expectations and Actual Practices in Implementing Bugis Leadership Values.

Pair	Leadership Value Compared (Expectation vs. Reality)	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Constancy (<i>Getteng</i>)	0.000
2	Appropriateness (<i>Assitinajang</i>)	0.000
3	Wisdom (<i>Acca</i>)	0.000
4	Truthful Speech (<i>Ada Tongeng</i>)	0.000
5	Courage (<i>Warani</i>)	0.000
6	Honesty (<i>Lempu</i>)	0.000

Based on Table 14, it can be explained the difference between the desired expectations and the actuality obtained by respondents (staff of the Governor's Office of South Sulawesi Province) **in the application of Bugis leadership values (principles)**

- Pair 1-Firmness: Based on the table above, obtained Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between reality and expectations/expectations of employees and leaders in being firm.
- Pair 2-Appropriateness/Feasibility: Based on the table above, the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05, so there is a

significant difference between reality and employees' expectations of Leaders regarding appropriateness/feasibility in leading.

- c) Pair 3-Wisdom: Based on the table above, the Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between reality and expectations/expectations of employees and leaders regarding wisdom in leading.
- d) Pair 4-True Words: Based on the table above, the Sig. (2-tailed) is 0.000, which is smaller than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between reality and the expectations of employees and leaders regarding telling the truth.
- e) Pair 5-Brave: Based on the table above, a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 is obtained, so there is a significant difference between Reality and Employee Expectations/Expectations for Leaders related to the courage to lead
- f) Pair 6-Honesty: Based on the table above, a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000 is obtained, which is less than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between Reality and Employee Expectations/Expectations of Leaders related to honesty in leadership.

4. CONCLUSION

The study of Bugis leadership values demonstrates that local wisdom serves as a medium of political communication and a guiding principle in governance. The concept of leadership within the Bugis ethnic tradition has become both a distinctive characteristic and a source of identity in the practice of state duties in Indonesia.

The six values lempu (honesty), getteng (steadfastness), ada tongeng (truthful speech), assitinajang (appropriateness), acca (wisdom), and warani (courage), are expected by civil servants at the Governor's Office of South Sulawesi to be consistently applied by their leaders. However, the findings show a noticeable gap between these expectations and actual leadership practices.

This gap underscores the need for more substantial efforts to embed cultural ethics within governance systems. The study suggests that these values should be systematically integrated into leadership training and policy development. By doing so, it can promote accountability, integrity, and public trust while ensuring that indigenous wisdom remains relevant in modern bureaucratic contexts.

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