Chapter 1

Introduction
Ben: Do you have time today, I would like to speak to you about the diversity stuff?
I look surprised and respond:
Dagmar: Diversity stuff?
Ben: Sorry, that expression is due to my bad English – I meant “diversity topic”. I would like to speak to you about the topic, to see which next steps you would propose. Should we have lunch today?
Dagmar: Yes, sure, let’s have lunch together today.
During the lunch meeting, Ben states:
Ben: Diversity is an important topic. The very important thing is that I have it on my agenda and that I want to advance the topic! I am also thinking about you and your future role. However, I am wondering if the “potential Dagmar” is utilized in the best possible way, or whether the diversity topic would force you into a niche. From the organization’s perspective it would be good if you would be responsible for the diversity topic, but what would be the best for your future? I see your next role in Global HR, you have a very unique skill set. You have the ability to drive things and to finish things. While we have lots of people in the team who are good at starting things, you are one of the few individuals who keep going like a “German Shepherd dog” until things are achieved.
Diversity is ‘an important topic’, according to Ben - the Director of the Personnel Development department at SPARK, a large international company operating in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry based in the Netherlands. Yet, as supervisor of my direct manager Ben also suggests that the ‘diversity stuff’ is not the best investment for advancing a career at SPARK. This was somewhat surprising to me. As I saw it at the time, talent management and diversity management were closely connected, and the timing seemed perfect to implement this link within the company. Diversity was also a new priority on Ben’s delivery agenda, which was to be realized by the talent management team at SPARK. More widely, talent management and diversity management had been high on the agenda of both HR theory (Collings, Scullion, & Vaiman, 2015; Dries, 2013; Özbilgin, Tatli, & Jonsen, 2015) and practice (e.g. BCG, 2014; SHRM, 2015).

At first glance, diversity management and talent management seem to build on overlapping or complementing aims and principles. Diversity management, broadly defined as organizational activities to reduce intergroup inequalities (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999), is concerned with the promotion of an organizational culture that leverages the overall diversity within the entire organization (Özbilgin et al., 2015). In other words, diversity management aims to foster work environments in which every employee - irrelevant of their personal attributes such as gender, race or educational background - can realize their potential in order to add value to the organization. In a similar vein, talent management is concerned with the development and implementation of a human resource architecture to fill key positions with high potential and high performing (i.e. talented) employees, in order to sustain the organization’s competitive advancement (cf. Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Together, diversity management builds on the underlying assumption that all employees count and have something valuable to offer for their organization; talent management aims to identify and develop the few ‘best’ employees to ensure the organization’s future success. Thus, the more inclusive the talent management processes are, the more likely an organization will create a strong talent pipeline that meets the future demands of an organization. From this perspective, talent management and diversity management together secure that an organization benefits from the qualities of all potential talents within its entire staff.

However, despite the apparent connection between talent management and diversity management, Ben made me realize that the ‘diversity stuff’ was not necessarily connected with talent management. Working on diversity would ‘force’ me into a ‘niche’, as if ‘diversity’ tainted me negatively as a talent at SPARK. Thus, on a personal level, there seemed to be a misalignment between diversity and talent management. The literature on diversity management and talent management mirrors this gap. The diversity management literature acknowledges the tension between talent shortages and underutilization of diverse
talent and calls for integrating diversity management with talent management research (e.g. Singh & Point, 2004; Tatli, Vassilopoulou, & Özbilgin, 2013; R. R. Thomas, 2010). The talent management literature remains largely silent about the connection to diversity management. Sheehan and Anderson (2015) even suggest there might be negative effects of talent management for the diversity and inclusion of employees - and highlight avenues for future research that could uncover ‘the shadow side’ of talent management. The authors articulate the risk that talent management actually reproduces existing inequalities – and therefore adversely impacts the organizational activities aimed at increasing diversity (Sheehan & Anderson, 2015). So, perhaps, talent management and diversity management do not sit well together after all?

The clash between the underlying aims and benefits of talent management and diversity management queues up within other tensions that have previously been described and discussed in the human resource management (HRM) literature (Boselie, Brewster, & Paauwe, 2009; Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Evans, 1999; Francis & Keegan, 2006). Examples of management tensions include the conflicting poles of human relations and efficiency improvement, tensions between employee advocacy and top management agency, or the temporal tradeoff between short- and long-term orientation (Evans, 1999). Evans (1999) criticizes the mainstream field of HRM for ignoring dualistic forces and advocates adopting a duality lens as a theoretical framework for HRM. Adopting a duality lens implies to accept that opposing forces characterize the practice of HRM (Evans, 1999). Boselie et al. (2009) provide a literature review of the HRM literature that evolved in the last 30 years and derive a list of dualities that should receive further attention in HRM research. One of the highlighted dualities is the friction between pluralist approaches versus unitarist approaches in HRM research. While the unitarist approach builds on the assumption that HRM practices are equally relevant and beneficial for both the employee and the employer, the pluralist approach promotes considering potential different interests and perceptions of organizational actors, such as employees, line managers, HR professionals or top managers (Boselie et al., 2009; Janssens & Steyaert, 2009).

Resulting insights from addressing and proactively dealing with tensions or dualities in HRM literature are twofold. First, they point to the potential negative effects of HRM practices for individual employees, such as traditionally marginalized groups like women or older workers (Janssens & Steyaert, 2009). Second, dealing with tensions in HRM literature provides insights into the active role of HR actors and thus emphasizes the positive effects of engaging with unavoidable tensions (Ehnert, 2009; Evans, 1999). Rather than considering tensions as something negative that has to be suppressed, these contributions suggest frictions
in theory and practice to be positive - as they provide sources for change and innovation (Aust, Brandl, & Keegan, 2015).

Going beyond the description of two opposing poles (i.e. dualities), paradox theory has recently been advocated in HRM research in order to systematically analyze HRM tensions (Aust et al., 2009; Ehnert, 2009). Adopting a paradox lens means to consider conflicting demands or opposing perspectives, with the awareness that in practice the simultaneous existence of tensions cannot be avoided and persists over time (Eisenhardt, 2000; Lewis, 2000). Thus, living with tensions is an inevitable part of work life. Examples include being a parent and careerist (Masterson & Hoobler, 2015), or being a manager and change agent (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002). This implies that the move from conceptual thinking to practice (living) is key - although thinking dualities or tensions are only recently proposed in HRM research, living dualities is happening every day. For that reason, adopting a paradox perspective facilitates the thinking in tensions for theoretical considerations. Rather than looking at either/or options with the aim to give priority to one pole of a tension and not to the other, adopting a paradox lens implies to embrace a both/and approach, in which all contradicting poles of the tension are considered to a more equal extent. In doing so, adopting a paradox lens acts as analytical tool (Ehnert, 2009) that allows for new perspectives, for rethinking existing contradictions and for recognizing more complex relationships (Lewis, 2000).

In sum, building on the relevance of talent management, diversity management and paradox theory in the HRM literature, this dissertation aims to connect the concepts in theory and to explore what happens in practice when considering talent management and diversity management simultaneously. Therefore, I propose to adopt the paradox perspective to provide a systematic description and analysis of frictions between talent management and diversity management. To do so, I will both theorize and empirically explore inherent tensions - or so-called dualities - that exist between talent management and diversity management. Theoretically, I will create space for discussion by adopting a paradox lens when considering the talent management and diversity management literature simultaneously. Empirically, I will explore how various organizational actors live (that is experience and express) the dualities between talent management and diversity management. For this purpose, I will analyze the lived experiences of talent and diversity practitioners in their day-to-day working lives, including my own experiences as a diversity practitioner and a so-called ‘talent’.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that other dualities - aside from those addressing talent management and diversity management issues – exist for organizational actors. Therefore, the final empirical chapter addresses one duality that is central to myself, but also
increasingly common in business schools and for HR practitioners: the tensions that arise for researcher-practitioners (Lynham, 2002). I apply this term to denote individuals who are engaged in both scholarly activities (research) and who complete assignments for nonacademic constituents (practice). Extending the focus of my dissertation beyond the talent management and diversity management literature, I will address how I dealt with the duality of being both an academic and a practitioner and, in this sense, was in-between or ‘liminal’. This allows me to offer additional insight into how organizational actors may come to terms with contradicting demands, conflicting loyalties and multiple professional identities. Together, these activities feed into the overall purpose of this dissertation, as outlined in the following section.

**Purpose of the dissertation**

I began my exploration by introducing an empirical phenomenon that I experienced during my employment in a multinational organization. I then moved on to highlight that although talent management and diversity management seem at first to build on complementing goals and principles, there also appears to be little overlap between the fields, neither in research nor in practice. Seemingly, a clash exists between underlying aims and benefits of talent management and diversity management. I introduced the paradox lens, which has recently been promoted in HRM research to systematically analyze tensions with the awareness to simultaneously consider opposing forces.

Extending the relevance of addressing tensions in the HRM literature to the HRM sub-domains of talent management and diversity management, I will adopt a paradox lens for analyzing the tensions between these fields. Doing so implies to actively address and respond to the frictions that become apparent when simultaneously considering talent management and diversity management, in both theory (i.e. when thinking the tensions) and in practice (i.e. when living the tensions). In these circumstances, the formulation of ‘either/or decisions’ is not instrumental (Evans, 1999). Instead, in order to gain a more balanced view on the opposing and complementing forces that affect talent management and diversity management, I suggest investigating the conceptual and empirical dualities more closely that arise when considering talent management and diversity management simultaneously. In line with this suggestion, my research purpose is to gain an enriched understanding of both theorized and lived tensions between the practices of talent management and diversity management. By drawing upon interview data and extensive empirical material from my employment in a multinational organization, I provide insights how the dualities between talent management and diversity management unfold in organizational practice. The guiding research questions reflecting my purpose statement are:
Chapter 1

- How can a paradox perspective contribute to conceptualizing the frictions, tensions and dualities between talent management and diversity management?
- How are talent management and diversity management related in organizational practice?
- How do organizational actors experience and respond to dualities in the context of talent management and diversity management?

I explore these questions based on a theoretical engagement with the talent management and diversity management literatures through adopting a paradox lens. Thus, similar to previous studies that have connected HRM topics with a paradox perspective (e.g. Ehnert, 2009), the general contribution of this dissertation lies in systematically describing, explaining and understanding the emergence and meaning of dovetailing talent management with diversity management - both in theory and in practice. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2015), the noun ‘dovetailing’ describes the “integration” or “fusion” of initially unrelated concepts, with the intention “to form a continuous whole”. In line with this definition, I use the denotation ‘dovetailing’ in this dissertation to describe the attempt of reaching closer alignment and integration between talent management and diversity management both in research and in practice. By doing so, this dissertation adds to the emerging scholarship that advocates bridging the gap between talent management and diversity management (e.g. Al Ariss, Cascio, & Paauwe, 2014; Böhmer & Schinnenburg, 2016; Festing, Kornau, & Schäfer, 2015; Sheehan & Anderson, 2015; Singh & Point, 2004; R. R. Thomas, 2010), and provides empirical evidence on the extent to which the two fields are currently connected in multinational organizations. More specifically, the key problems addressed in this dissertation are the challenges that arise for talent management and diversity management scholars, as well as practitioners, on how to conceptualize (policy-making, thinking) and respond (acting, living) to the frictions that arise when linking the fields. Furthermore, this dissertation also zooms in on the problem that arises for individuals who are affected by the organizational-level tensions between talent management and diversity management. In sum, this dissertation deals with the conceptual and practical dualities between talent management and diversity management.

Moreover, I extend the focus of this dissertation beyond the talent management and diversity management literature as I conceptually and empirically explore the intrinsic duality of simultaneously being an academic researcher and a practitioner during the course of my PhD trajectory. This contributes to the purpose of this dissertation - gaining an enriched understanding of the theorized and lived tensions between the practices of talent management and diversity management - because the findings provide insight as to how organizational actors may actively respond to dualities that pertain for an extended period of time. By
exploring how I come to terms with co-existing professional identities (i.e. as researcher and practitioner) that place me in a permanent state of in-betweenness or liminality, this dissertation also contributes to the body of literature on liminality, a sub-domain of the identity literature. In the identity literature, the concept of liminality has recently been extended beyond its traditional meaning of describing the temporally limited phase in-between two identity positions towards a more ongoing in-betweenness. Ybema, Beech and Ellis (2011) label this new form of structural in-betweenness as *perpetual liminality*. On the basis of my contributions to the liminality literature, I theorize on the relevance of perpetual liminality for defining possibilities to actively respond to the tensions that arise when dovetailing talent management and diversity management practices.

Together, this dissertation caters to the purpose of increasing the understanding of the (dis-) connections between talent management and diversity management in an attempt of dovetailing the fields. Doing so is grounded in a qualitative, mixed-method approach as outlined in the following section.

**A note on method and data collection**

In order to address the research purpose and to respond to the outlined research questions, this dissertation builds on empirical data that I collected throughout my PhD research trajectory. Methodologically, drawing close to everyday organizational life and adopting an approach that combines research and practice provides valuable insights into the (in-) consistencies and (lack of) connection between talent management and diversity management, and into the shapes of perpetual liminality. This calls for qualitative, exploratory research that uncovers seemingly mundane experiences of actors featured in contemporary organizational life. Here, organizational ethnography offers its contribution, as it is concerned with the ethnographic study of organizations and their organizing processes (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). Ybema and Kamsteeg (2009) describe ethnographic fieldwork as a “process of puzzling over and struggling to solve paradoxes” (p. 107). Drawing on my own experiences of working in a multinational organization, I therefore apply organizational autoethnography – a method that has been described as a lens to understand organization and management through the use of personal experiences (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). According to Doloriert and Sambrook (2009), one characteristic of autoethnography is to present a sense of ‘vulnerability and nakedness’ in writing about the self and others. This dissertation contains elements of self-presentation in form of vignettes that highlight how I perceived selected situations at work. The personal descriptions are enriched with interview data from professionals working in
talent management and diversity management functions to shed light on frictions that become apparent when considering talent management and diversity management simultaneously.

Considering myself as a research object implies that I captured field notes, recordings and observations during my employment at SPARK, a Dutch multinational organization operating in the FMCG sector. In line with Ellis et al.’s (2011) description on the process of doing autoethnography, these activities enabled me to act as a participant observer within SPARK’s organizational culture. In this dissertation I present critical experiences or “epiphanies” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276) that stem from my participation in SPARK’s day to day business in the period from March 2011 to December 2013. I complement my own experiences of being identified as a talent and working as a diversity practitioner at SPARK with interview data of other organizational actors working in various large multinational organizations based in Europe. During April to October 2014, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 diversity practitioners - and with 3 talent practitioners working in the same organizations as 3 of these diversity practitioners. All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim, resulting in more than eleven hours long interview material. I gained access to the respondents via my participation in a European diversity network – a self-initiated network of diversity practitioners who are responsible for diversity initiatives within multinational organizations based in Europe. Through the diversity practitioners, I gained access to the talent practitioners in the same organizations. Although initially all interviewed diversity practitioners offered their support to connect me with their talent management peers, only three interviews with talent practitioners actually resulted – indicating the first sign of misalignment between talent management and diversity management in practice.

On reflection, the chosen methods of autoethnography and semi-structured interviews go hand in hand with my professional development and experiences as a researcher. Initially, when I started the PhD trajectory in March 2011 as an external researcher alongside my employment at SPARK, I envisioned conducting a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods with a focus on the case organization SPARK, complemented by data from other large organizations. However, although my managers at SPARK had initially agreed to this idea, they either rejected my concrete research proposals or delayed the discussion about them due to other priorities. These explicit and implicit acts of rejection made me increasingly wonder: what did these seemingly insignificant and all-too mundane experiences mean, and what was their relevance when studying the (lack of) connection and frictions between talent management and diversity management? What was the relevance of having two professional identities, being a researcher and practitioner at the same time? Puzzled and interested, I embarked on a journey to capture my own experiences more systematically. I familiarized myself with the methods of ethnography and autoethnography, and visited
conferences that stimulated this form of research where I presented my preliminary data and research findings. The interest and positive feedback in academia encouraged me to stay on this path. Furthermore, the openness and endorsement from my supervisors in the faculty of economics and business administration - and their suggestion and support to add a third supervisor from the faculty of social sciences - reinforced my desire to investigate this novel form of conducting research for a doctoral thesis. The support from my third supervisor in writing and analyzing my personal experiences and to theoretically lift them to contributions in relevant bodies of research was fundamental. Besides the encouragement in academia, I obtained formal confirmation within SPARK to conduct autoethnographic research, enabling me to record and analyze my personal experiences encountered during my employment. I agreed to use a synonym for the organization instead of the real name and to omit company specific operating figures and information. Together, these experiences and the chosen qualitative mixed-method approach create the empirical foundation for this dissertation: Chapter 3 presents the interview data of the 16 diversity and talent practitioners, and chapter 4 and 5 present autoethnographic data. The empirical material is supplemented with the theoretical engagement with the different bodies of literature outlined so far.

**Dissertation outline**

This dissertation is structured into six chapters. Following this introduction, I theorize the frictions between talent management and diversity management in chapter 2. I do so by dovetailing the literatures of talent management and diversity management - and by conceptually developing a paradox that becomes apparent when considering the respective literatures simultaneously. In this chapter, I introduce relevant definitions and existing tensions within and between talent management and diversity management. This builds the theoretical foundation for the chapters 3 and 4, in which I explore the dualities between talent management and diversity management empirically. Chapter 5 focuses in on the intrapersonal dualities of identity formation, as it explores the relevance of self-positioning for dealing with dualities at work. In chapter 6 I integrate the findings of the previous chapters and conclude with implications of this dissertation for research and practice. Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the structure of this dissertation.

I have presented the four main chapters in earlier forms at peer-reviewed academic conferences, and ultimately I aim to submit them to academic journals for publication. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the conferences where the chapters have been presented. The subsequent outline presents the focus and the structure of each of the remaining chapters.
Figure 1.1: Overview of the dissertation

Introducing the friction between TM* and DM**
(Chapter 1)

Thinking the dualities between TM and DM
Dovetailing TM and DM through formulating the exclusion-inclusion paradox
(Chapter 2)

Living the dualities between exclusion and inclusion through the practices of TM and DM
Lived dualities between talent and diversity practitioners: proposed model for collaboration
(Chapter 3)
Lived dualities for a talent: formulating the talent paradox
(Chapter 4)

Dealing with dualities of identity formation
The relevance of self-positioning for dealing with dualities at work: shapes of perpetual liminality
(Chapter 5)

Discussing overarching contributions and conclusions
(Chapter 6)

Note. * TM = Talent management; ** DM = Diversity management
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Acceptance to and presentation at the following conferences</th>
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| 2       | Relevance of paradoxes in diversity and talent management: The exclusion-inclusion paradox | 4th Workshop on Talent Management 24 - 25th September 2015 in Valencia, Spain  
| 3       | Exploring the interaction between diversity and talent practitioners in multinational organizations: Creating a collaboration framework | 3rd Workshop on Talent Management 13 - 14th October 2013 in Berlin, Germany |
| 4       | Talent management and autoethnography: Being and studying talent     | 2nd Workshop on Talent Management 7 - 8th October 2013 in Brussels, Belgium  
10th Annual Liverpool Symposium on Current Developments in Ethnographic Research 25 - 28th August, 2015 in Liverpool, UK |
| 5       | Appearances of perpetual liminality: An autoethnographic study on self-positioning in multiple work settings | 9th Annual Liverpool Symposium on Current Developments in Ethnographic Research 27 - 29th August, 2014 in Ipswich, UK  
International Symposium "Biographies of Belonging" 10 - 11th March 2015 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands |
Chapter 2, entitled *The relevance of paradoxes in diversity and talent management: The exclusion-inclusion paradox*, introduces and connects the concepts of paradox, diversity management and talent management that are then applied throughout this dissertation.

In this conceptual chapter, I first critically review the diversity management and talent management literature, before connecting the fields through the formulation of a paradox that becomes apparent when considering the two fields simultaneously. I coin this paradoxical tension the exclusion-inclusion paradox, formulated as the quest for multinational organizations to establish an exclusive talent management architecture for identifying and developing those deemed as high potential employees - while simultaneously embracing inclusive diversity management principles that allow each and every employee to uncover and develop their particular talents. Once uncovered, considering both talent management as well as diversity management simultaneously through a paradox lens contributes to the development process of the talent management field, which has currently not yet reached its maturity (Thunnissen, Boselie, & Fruytier, 2013).

Chapter 3, entitled ‘Exploring the interaction between diversity and talent practitioners in multinational organizations: Creating a collaboration framework’ provides insights into the relationship between diversity management and talent management practitioners in multinational organizations based in Europe. On the basis of 16 semi-structured interviews (13 with global diversity practitioners and 3 with global talent practitioners), the study presented in this chapter uncovers a tension between diversity and talent practitioners on the relevance of collaboration. The diversity practitioners report high relevance of collaboration with their talent peers. They express a struggle for legitimacy and power in their organizations to achieve success in the wider organization. The diversity practitioners’ frustration is echoed by the talent practitioners’ implicit criticism of their work - and by the fact that for talent practitioners, the collaboration with their diversity peers is considered to be a non-issue. Yet, reports from the diversity practitioners on the effective collaboration with talent practitioners present a more optimistic picture - and convey the impression that effective collaboration can be developed over time. Based on the input from the diversity practitioners, I develop a collaboration framework and propose that this model can be applied to assess the quality and improve the relationship between diversity and talent practitioners. Doing so supports the organizational actors to actively deal with the existing dualities between talent management and diversity management.

Chapter 4, entitled ‘Being and studying talent: The talent paradox’ narrows the focus down to the individual talent perspective, and describes how conflicting organizational interests may lead to a paradoxical situation for identified talents. In this chapter, I link my personal story of career events with the talent management literature - thus providing an
account of the intimately personal and dynamic nature of talent management. I argue that the understanding of talent management would benefit from autoethnography, a research approach that thus far has not been used in talent management research. This chapter offers three contributions to the existing knowledge base of talent management. First, I identify the limitations of traditional approaches to research in talent management, dominated by surveys and structured interviews that typically fail to capture the individual and evolving experiences of being identified as talent in an organization. Second, I propose autoethnography is particularly well suited for getting at the core of talent management, weaving together personal experiences in the context of a global HR function to yield greater insights. Third, by providing personal insights into my own lived experiences of being identified as a talent in a large organization, I present a phenomenon that I coin the talent paradox: the simultaneous co-existence of opportunities as well as risks that exist for identified talents.

Chapter 5, entitled ‘Shapes of perpetual liminality: An autoethnographic study on self-positioning in multiple work settings’ zooms in further on the individual level of analysis, by exploring the state of in-betweenness, or so-called liminality. While this chapter does not address talent and diversity management explicitly, it provides insights into the identity formation processes of perpetual liminars, i.e. individuals who find themselves in a state of in-betweenness for an extended period of time. Building on my personal experiences of constantly switching between the two work settings of academia and practice, I extend the understanding of perpetual liminality through providing further specifications on this form of liminality. Developing and analyzing the various shapes of perpetual liminality enables me to theorize the findings (1) for shifting between the work settings of academia and practice, (2) for other work settings, and (3) for the broader context beyond multiple work settings. First, I highlight how the four forms of perpetual liminality can facilitate the integration of the relatively unrelated - and at times conflicting - contexts of academia and practice. Second, I argue that the four forms of perpetual liminality may be applied to other work contexts. Third, I move beyond work related contexts and suggest that the appearances of perpetual liminality offer potential for application in other contexts.

Chapter 6, entitled ‘General discussion’ provides a brief summary of the previous chapters. I relate the findings of the studies to each other and reflect on their significance within the talent management and diversity management research fields as well as their practical implications. Also, I indicate the strengths and limitations of this dissertation as well as outline suggestions on future research. I conclude with a personal reflection.

All in all, adopting a paradox lens, this dissertation explores various conceptual and empirical dualities between the areas of talent management and diversity management. Combined, these six chapters advocate the increased integration of diversity and talent
management research and practice, and provide theoretical and practical suggestions on what active responses to the outlined dualities and paradoxes could look like.
References


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