

TELECOMMUTING & WORKING FROM HOME IN KENYA; A THEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the field of telecommuting in the Kenyan workspace and its development, by providing an overview regarding telecommuting culture. It is part of a larger research that involved a literature review of 42 relevant papers from which 8 were thoroughly analysed. From the analysis of this corpus, three main categories were identified: Communication and Marketing, Design and Production & Culture and Society.

This study is a thematic literature review focusing on the categories of telecommuting & working from home, which collectively gathered indicatively 48% of the selected literature. It presents its relevant studies and sub-categories, providing a rich and varied map of them and contributing to better design and further research in telecommuting & working from home. The study finding indicated that working from home will likely continue to grow as a practice in Kenya over the years. The shift from on-site working to telecommuting has proven beneficial in most industries.

Keywords: *telecommuting, working from home*

INTRODUCTION

“Telecommuting has given individuals the ability to participate in the global economy domestically. Technology has contributed to the modification of where work is executed and the manner in which it is executed. This in turn, has changed the way in which domestic interiors and environments need to be designed to become responsive to the changes on the job market” (Benny, A. (2020).

Variously, telecommuting has been defined from many perspectives. Among the many is that remote work defines any work performed by an

employee from a different physical location than their direct supervisor. When the remote work involves use of telecommunication technology it becomes telecommuting.

Telecommuting has further been defined as the type of remote working that uses telecommunications technology to partially or completely replace the commute to and from the workplace (Mokhtarian, 1991). Employers give their employees the option to physically work from an offsite location. For most remote workers, this location is their home (Uresha, 2020). Working from home (WFH) occurs when telecommuting or

remote work takes place in the residential setting.

Telecommuting is supported by a combination of ICT hardware and software including computing devices such as mobile phones and laptops, and apps such as “Slack” and “Google Meets” (Ilag, 2021).

THEORY

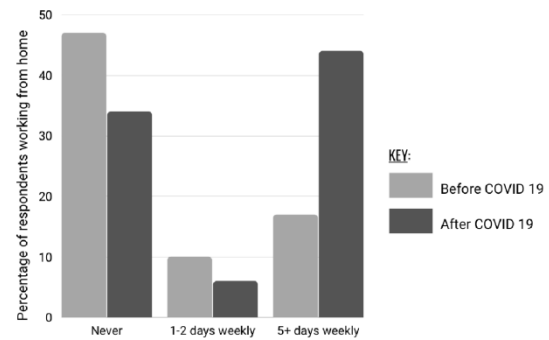
HISTORY OF TELECOMMUTING

Telecommuting arose from technology driven innovations, particularly with the digitization of tasks related to documentation. American companies had started to implement the practice as early as the 1980s. It was a chance to eliminate commutes to the workplace and instead dedicate those hours towards productivity (Streitfeld, 2020). The arrangement had advantages to both employers and employees.

The practice of remote working became unprecedentedly common during the global lockdown of 2020 (Fatmi et al, 2022). Because shelter-in-place directives had been issued by most governments to combat a pandemic, non-essential employees did not have the option of travelling to their workplaces. Businesses quickly adapted their work models to incorporate digital operations. Without the option to move operations online, many businesses would not have survived the COVID 19 pandemic.

Figure

1.1.1:



Remote Working Trends, 2019 & 2020

In statistics collected by *Statista* worldwide between September and December 2020, March 2021, June 2021, and 2022 among 1,200 respondents and released in January of 2022, there was a distinct upswing in the number of people working from home as compared to prior to the Coronavirus outbreak of 2020.

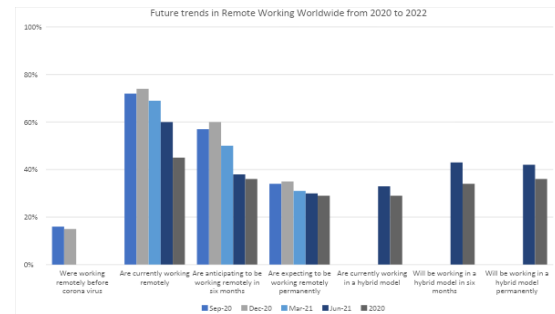


Figure 1.1.2: Remote Working Trends, 2020 & 2022

ADVANTAGES OF TELECOMMUTING

Improved Sustainability

Because employees work from an offsite location, businesses can reduce operational costs related to corporate headquarters. These operational costs are mainly incurred when hiring, furnishing and maintaining office square

footage. Even in the case where hybrid systems are being operated, there is still a cost saving, since employees working in shifts can occupy less office space.

From the perspective of the employee, telecommuting reduces transportation costs such as fuel or fares. Workers also save money on expenses associated with going to the office such as lunch, appropriate clothing and childcare (Benny, 2020). The costs forgone increase an employee's disposable income.

Widens Access to Expertise

Before the advent of telecommuting, work teams were made up of persons in the same geographic location. As a result, the expertise of the team was constrained to the talent base of the people present. Operating in an online setting allows employers to bypass the restrictions they might have when hiring for an on-site position. Through communication networks access to a global talent pool is created (Indeed Editorial Team, 2020). This furthers sustainability and innovation efforts by creating cross cultural teams with varied opinions.

Facilitates Collaboration Between Workers

Telecommuting facilitates collaboration between workers by providing communication paths. Communication is one of the factors that promotes teamwork. Online communication can be divided into synchronous and asynchronous modalities (Kenyatta University Module, 2022). Synchronous communication is carried out in real-time using apps such as Zoom and Google meets. It facilitates complex

tasks that need direct collaboration. Asynchronous communication is suitable for non-complex tasks because it doesn't happen in real time. It is carried out using tools such as e-mail (Hacquard et Montabone, 2022).

Telecommuting offers geographical flexibility, allowing users to participate in the global teams. This promotes exchange of ideas between users and capturing of best practice databases.

DISADVANTAGES OF TELECOMMUTING

Overworking and Over-employment

Some employers have chosen to offer telecommuting as a strategic way to increase employee workloads. This includes practices such as supervisors contacting their subordinates outside of work hours & addition of administrative tasks to be done outside of work hours (Lietor et al, 2021).

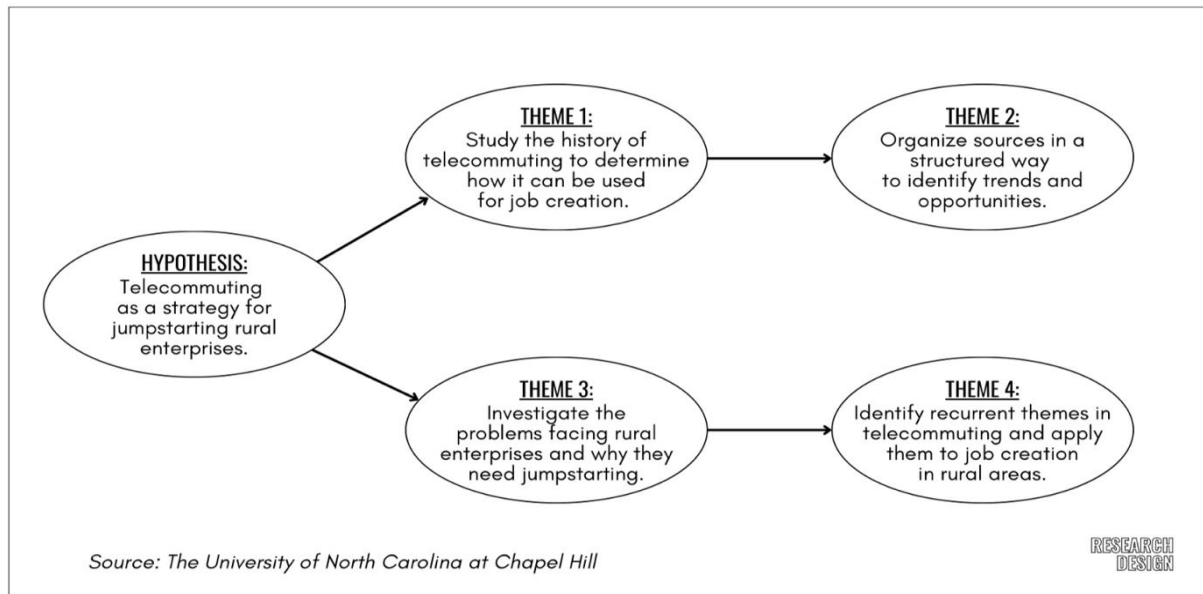
On the flip side, employees have begun taking on multiple full time work engagements in a practice referred to as over-employment (Kelly, 2021). The workers attempt to navigate between two or more remote jobs using various techniques. As a result, output quality may suffer.

Adverse Health Implications

The act of telecommuting requires most employees to use a computing device for extended hours. This has key adverse health implications. The most commonly reported health concerns associated with telecommuting are musculoskeletal stress and visual strain (Zalat et Bolbol, 2022). To put it more

simply, a sore back and aching eyes. These symptoms, if left unaddressed, lead to chronic conditions that may

Another privacy issue is the possibility of data breach. Depending on whether or not the teleworker is operating on a



reduce quality of life for remote workers.

Privacy Concerns

In 2022, approximately 78% of employers in the USA were digitally monitoring their employees using remote work tools. They reported doing so in order to ensure that employees were being productive and not wasting company time (Banfield, 2022). Productivity surveillance

software is designed to perform tasks such as logging keystroke patterns, tracking website usage and taking screenshots throughout the day (Rehman, 2022).

Continued surveillance erodes trust between employers and employees. Not only is this practice ethically questionable, but it also puts undue stress on workers, who feel pressure to work longer hours and perform duties beyond their job descriptions (Perna, 2022).

secure network or a public connection, malicious entities could hack into company files (Benny, 2020). The disadvantage of this is that most telecommuting resources are now digital. Loss of these resources is akin to experiencing robbery.

FUTURE OF TELECOMMUTING

Technological advancements have been occurring since the introduction of the concept of telecommuting. Cameras have gotten better, internet connections are now faster than ever and software has unmatched capabilities. Adopting the appropriate technology in terms of both hardware and software will elevate the telecommuting experience (Benny, 2020). Rural communities are well positioned to take advantage of these occurrences to enhance collaboration of users and the unrestricted exchange of ideas.

Legislation is bound to catch up with digital labour practices in the near future. Laws that support fair wages

(Wood et al, 2019), child labour protection laws and intellectual property laws (Mills, 2009) are examples of current legal concerns in the telecommuting workspace. It has been suggested that public participation is key when designing laws (Nabatchi et al, 2015).

Having labour boards/collectives where telecommuters band together to document best practices and raise their various concerns may well be a reality in the future of Telecommuting in Kenya.

Figure 1.2.1: Remote Working Trends, 2020 & 2022

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research was a thematic literature review. A thematic literature review refers to the evaluation of a specific subject matter by studying existing literature on the sink in order to identify themes and patterns (Charlesworth Author Services, 2022)..

A thematic literature review was selected because it allows the identification of strengths and weaknesses of a particular study topic (Charlesworth Author Services, 2022). In this case, it involved studying, organising, and synthesizing existing literature on telecommuting in Kenya.

The study themes are summarized in the diagram below. Theme 1 and theme 2 were the focus of this study. Theme 3 and theme 4 present an opportunity for further studies into the same subject matter.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The most relevant texts were organised into a thematic literature review matrix. This matrix facilitated the identification of recurring themes and patterns in telecommuting. Priority was given to texts by Kenyan authors since Kenya is the geographic context.

Thematic Literature Review Analysis

STUDY 1

Title: Telecommuting on employee performance in the vocational and technical training state department in Nairobi County.

Author(s): Gacheri, S. C., & Kiiru, D. (2022)

Publication: *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 9 (2), 929 – 939.

Aims & Objectives:

To examine the effects of telecommuting on employee performance in the Vocational and Technical Training State Department in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Methods:

A questionnaire with both closed ended and open-ended questions. Validity and reliability of the data collection instrument was ensured. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. SPSS Statistical Analysis was used to verify collected data and to generate descriptive statistics.

Sample Size: Population of 935 employees and a sample size of 252 participants.

Theory: Signalling Theory, Spill over and the Social Exchange Theory

Results/Conclusions:

The study concluded that telecommuting allows employees to be productive, happier, and less stressed; while firms are gaining from good personnel retention, increased output and lower absenteeism.

Implications:

The study recommended that the organisation needed to make sure pertinent information is easily and frequently communicated. The organisation should split the roles as effectively as possible in order to attain a higher overall quality of performance, which will likely result in more motivated staff. The study recommended that to allow workers to operate remotely, some level of technology may be required. This can be accomplished through simple methods like an instant chat app or platform, telecommuting, or email.

STUDY 2

Title: A Framework for Enhancing Employee Acceptance of Teleworking in Private Higher Education Institutions in Kenya

Author(s): Maluki Janet (2020)

Publication: *Unpublished Thesis, United States International University.*

Aims & Objectives:

To develop a better framework to enhance employee's acceptance of

teleworking in private higher learning institutions in Kenya.

Methods:

A descriptive research approach with cross-sectional survey data that was quantitative. Primary data collection instruments used were questionnaires with both open-ended and closed-ended questions.

Sample Size: Population of 120 employees and a sample size of 108 participants.

Theory: Socio-technical system (STS) theory and adaptive structural foundational theory, and Diffusion of Teleworking (DOT) frameworks.

Results/Conclusions:

From the findings, participants felt that lack of proper training before and after adopting the teleworking system, lack of employee motivation and commitment, inadequate IT support, lack of top management support, unclear teleworking policies, and technological readiness could lead to rejection of teleworking. Participants also thought that conducting proper training before and after adopting the teleworking system, adequate IT support, top management support, and well-defined teleworking policies, technological readiness, user participation, motivation and commitment, and user voluntariness can enhance employee acceptance to teleworking usage.

Implications:

A comparative study on the Acceptance of teleworking can then be carried out from model reviewers' comments. This

would be a very informative and interesting study to determine if moderator and mediator factors exist towards teleworking acceptance.

STUDY 3

Title: Telecommuting Model for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya.

Author(s): Mugwika Consolata, Waweru Mwangi and Okeyo George (2016)

Publication: *European Journal of Computer Science and Information Technology, Vol.4, No.4, pp.13-19.*

Aims & Objectives:

To assist stakeholders to use the available infrastructure and personnel to allow formal telecommuting.

Methods:

A mixed study design using both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected using in-depth interviews whereas quantitative data was collected using an online questionnaire designed in Google forms. Data was organised and analysed using SPSS version 22.

Sample Size: Population of 84 employees.

Theory: Adaptive structuration theory (AST)

Results/Conclusions:

Data from this survey indicates that most of the workers have reliable and fast internet access away from the office

and a reliable information support team. These employees also reported improvement in quality and efficiency in terms of service delivery. This was attributed to the time available to concentrate on their tasks unlike in the office where there could be interruptions or meetings.

Results showed that the SME had both the IT infrastructure and personnel in place. Based on these findings, an AST derived model was developed and tested. The study shows that adoption of the developed AST derived telecommuting model could lead to increased productivity, efficiency and quality of work.

Implications:

The success of their telecommuting programs has been due to incorporation of teleconferencing as a key to enabling technology use in their operations.

STUDY 4

Title: The Effect of Telecommuting on Employee Performance in Financial Institutions in Kericho Town, Kenya in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic.

Author(s): Joseph Mwendwa Musinga, Amos Musili King'ola (2023)

Publication: *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Volume 13, Issue 1, January 2023.*

Aims & Objectives:

To determine the influence of teleworking on employees' performance in the Public Universities of Mount Kenya region.

Methods:

The study employed descriptive research design. Open-ended questionnaires were distributed. Data analysis and interpretation was based on descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In addition, a multiple regression model was used to explore the relationship between the variables under study. Data was analysed using SPSS software version 28. Descriptive statistics were presented in frequency tables, percentages, mean, standard deviations and graphs. Inferential statistics were used in testing null hypotheses.

Sample Size: Target population of 3,012 employees and a sample size of 353 respondents.

Theory: Adaptive structuration theory (AST)

Results/Conclusions:

Teleworking and employee performance of public universities were positively and significantly related. Balance of

family, work and organisation's long work hours helped reduce work stress. They had managed their work and family responsibility due to teleworking.

They feel comfortable with the implementation of teleworking compared to the normal working schedule. They attend to their work in a timely manner. Workers feel free to voice innovative suggestions to top management. There is an improved work environment and a positive influence on employee performance. This enhances employee commitment. Employees who work away from the

office are overall more satisfied and motivated. Telecommuting improves employee productivity, good time management and benefits overall performance.

Implications:

Managers should improve the use of flexitime work arrangement because it enhances employee performance, reduces absenteeism and increases employee satisfaction. Universities should also build flexible work arrangements since they help employees in managing their workload, their personal life and helping them to assess their responsibilities.

STUDY 5

Title: Influence of Work Life Balance Practices on Employee Job Satisfaction in Commercial Banks in Machakos County, Kenya

Author(s): Felisters Nduta Muema (2018)

Publication: *International Journal of Economics, Commerce & Management* 2(4): 103-109

Aims & Objectives:

To examine Work -Life Balance practices influencing employee job satisfaction in Commercial Banks in Machakos County.

Methods:

A descriptive survey used to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Stratified random sampling. Structured questionnaires. Data analysed using SPSS. Regression & Pearson Correlation Coefficient used to analyse the

relationships between the study variables.

Sample Size: Target of 16 banks. Population of 380. Sample of 191 respondents.

Theory: Adaptive structuration theory (AST)

Results/Conclusions:

The study established that the use of modern technology enabled employees to carry out certain tasks from alternative locations which helped reduce commute-related stress. The respondents cited poor connectivity, gaps in the human resource policies and inadequate gadgets as some of the challenges encountered.

Implications:

Improve on flexible working arrangements, adopt telecommuting arrangements. Consider giving benefits like on-site childcare and longer leaves that help rejuvenate employees.

STUDY 6

Title: Effect of Adoption of Remote Working on Service Delivery Among Devolved Units During the Covid-19 Outbreak in Kenya.

Author(s): Peterson Murithi Maimbu, Motanya Omai Daniel (2021)

Publication: *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management United Kingdom; Vol. IX, Issue 2*

Aims & Objectives:

To investigate the effect of adoption of remote working on service delivery

among devolved units in Kenya during the COVID-19 outbreak in Kenya.

Methods:

Both descriptive survey research design and explanatory research design. Data collection instruments were questionnaires.

Sample Size: Target population of 2250 and a sample size of 278.

Theory: Stewardship Theory; a steward's main duty is shareholders' wealth protection as well as maximising via the performance of public institutions, since only then can the steward's utility functions be maximised.

Results/Conclusions:

The county government was not well equipped to facilitate working from home. Service delivery was negatively impacted. There was minimal support to workers to enable an efficient working from home environment. There was general indifference of the workers concerning the service delivery in county offices.

There was low and/or poor service delivery in the county offices due to lack of proper coordination and support from the right parties to ensure better service delivery. Home environments were not so conducive due to the nature of households in the county. Many respondents indicated living with other family members who disrupted them while they were working, leading to a low target achievement and low effectiveness in working. Lack of dedicated office space in homes, presented a challenge to working from home. Overall, there was no clear

indication of improvement of service to the public during the lockdown period.

Implications:

The study concludes that even though strategic responses had a significant influence on service delivery in the counties, inappropriate employee skills and inadequate employee support in terms of education sponsorships, customised training, poor infrastructure and lack of commitment from county leadership were issues of concern to be addressed.

STUDY 7

Title: Employee Work Life Balance and Organizational Performance of the County Governments in Kenya.

Author(s): Irene Namuki Wakhungu, Dr. Kadian Wanyama, Dr. Joshua Abuya Olang'o (2020)

Publication: *The International Journal of Business & Management; Vol 8 Issue 6.*

Aims & Objectives:

To examine the effect of Work Life Balance (WLB) ON organisational performance (OP) in the County Government of Busia.

Methods:

Descriptive survey design was adopted. Primary data (quantitative data) was collected with the use of the structured questionnaires.

Sample Size: 91 respondents

Theory: Exchange and Spillover Theories

Results/Conclusions:

There was a positive, linear and significant association between flexible work schedule, telecommuting, compressed work weeks and organisational culture on organisational performance. An increase in flexible work schedule and compressed work weeks at the County Government of Busia would lead to corresponding increase in OP.

The County Government of Busia should improve on cultural issues like belief in hard work among employees, work ethics, observe timeliness and respect and recognize employees' exemplary performance among others. Employees should be encouraged to practice work life balance where the workforce can work from home, or outside the office

Implications:

Organisations must strive to fully operationalize flexi time, compressed work schedule, shift schedule and job sharing since these constructs of WLB have positive influence. Organisations should make provisions of avenues like digital conferencing to enable employees to work away from their places of work thus saving on cost of space for operations. Organisations should continually use their *technology, collaboration and communication tools* to support their operations.

It has been noted that organisations that promote strategic employee work life balance such as employee technology, collaboration and communication tools can perform better because of the enhanced OP. Since telecommuting allows employee flexibility in choosing

their work location, the management should fully implement policies on work life balance. Organisations should strengthen cultural aspects of the organisation such as dress code, work ethics (professionalism), timeliness, beliefs in high standards of its products among others.

STUDY 8

Title: Organization Culture and Information and Communication Technology Dynamics Affecting the Adoption of Teleworking in The Healthcare Industry in Kenya.

Author(s): Kinyua Jacqueline Wanjaa, James Mwikya (2021)

Publication: *Global Scientific Journals; Volume 9, Issue 8, August 2021; Online: ISSN 2320-9186.*

Aims & Objectives:

To establish the factors affecting the adoption of teleworking in the healthcare industry in Kenya with a focus on the effects of organisational culture and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) dynamics affecting the adoption of teleworking in the healthcare industry in Kenya.

DISCUSSION

The analysis presented comprises eight studies exploring various aspects of telecommuting, work-life balance, and organizational performance in different sectors and contexts in Kenya. The studies collectively investigate the impact of telecommuting on employee performance, job satisfaction, and

organizational outcomes in diverse settings within Kenya.

Telecommuting and Employee Performance:

Studies 1, 3, 4, and 5 indicate a positive relationship between telecommuting and employee performance. They emphasize benefits such as increased productivity, reduced stress, and improved work-life balance.

Study 6, however, suggests challenges in the adoption of remote working, particularly in the context of devolved units during the COVID-19 outbreak. It highlights issues like inadequate infrastructure and lack of support affecting service delivery.

Factors Affecting Telecommuting Adoption:

Studies 2, 7, and 8 delve into factors influencing the adoption of telecommuting. They identify elements such as organizational culture, technological readiness, support from management, and work-life balance practices as crucial determinants.

Study 8 specifically focuses on the healthcare industry, highlighting the importance of organizational culture and ICT dynamics in teleworking adoption.

Recommendations and Implications:

Common recommendations across studies include the need for clear telecommuting policies, adequate IT support, training for employees, and fostering a supportive organizational culture.

Flexibility in work arrangements, including telecommuting options, is

seen as beneficial for employee satisfaction, retention, and overall organizational performance.

From the findings, it is suggested that while telecommuting offers numerous benefits, its successful implementation requires careful consideration of organizational policies, technological infrastructure, and cultural factors to optimize outcomes for both employees and organizations.

CONCLUSION

Working from home will likely continue to grow as a practice in Kenya over the years. The shift from on-site working to telecommuting has proven beneficial in most industries. This has been the case for both workers as well as employers. Telecommuters who work from home are generally less anxious and more productive.

Commuting, especially during rush hour, chews up 5 – 15 additional hours a week for the average employee (Benny, 2020). Eliminating this commute not only shrinks carbon footprints all round but frees up time for career development. Telecommuting could also be the solution to establishing work life balance, which has been a pressing issue for workers (Uresha, 2020). Having a healthy workforce reduces strain on an economy.

A work life balance and sustainability should be integrated into the work from home routine. Strategies such as time management, keeping spaces decluttered and embracing rest should be examined as possible solutions. These practices could result in a more well-rounded and productive telecommuter (Caringal-Go et al, 2022).

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Images Sources

Figure 1.1.1: data sourced from <https://statista.com/statistics/1122987/change-in-remote-work-trends-after-covid-in-usa/#statisticContainer>, graph generated by authors.

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