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The Role of Psychological Safety in Enhancing Employee Performance a Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study examines the role of psychological safety in enhancing employee performance amid increasing organizational complexity and digital transformation. Many organizations still struggle with low engagement, limited innovation, and fear based cultures, indicating gaps in creating supportive work environments. Therefore, this research aims to systematically analyze how psychological safety contributes to employee performance and to identify its conceptual roles within organizational systems. The study employs a Systematic Literature Review approach by synthesizing peer reviewed journal articles from major academic databases using defined inclusion criteria. The analysis focuses on patterns, relationships, and theoretical integration across studies. Findings reveal that psychological safety functions as a core enabler, psychological mechanism, contextual reinforcer, organizational outcome, and integrative catalyst that collectively enhance employee performance. It strengthens engagement, trust, innovation, and communication, enabling employees to perform effectively. The study concludes that performance improvement requires not only structural efficiency but also a psychologically safe environment. Future research should explore cross cultural contexts, longitudinal designs, and the interaction between psychological safety and emerging technologies to deepen understanding of sustainable organizational performance outcomes in diverse environments globally.

Keywords: psychological safety, employee performance, systematic literature review, organizational behavior, workplace climate

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of modern organizations indicate that success is no longer solely determined by technological advancement or financial capital, but increasingly by the quality of psychological interactions within the workplace, particularly employees' sense of safety in expressing ideas, opinions, and even mistakes without fear of negative consequences [1]. The concept of *psychological safety*, introduced by Amy Edmondson, has become highly relevant in knowledge-based and adaptive organizations, as psychologically unsafe environments tend to inhibit creativity, collaboration, and proactive behavior. In many organizations, employees still operate within hierarchical cultures, high-pressure environments, and limited opportunities for open dialogue, resulting in underutilized individual potential [2]. This condition highlights an urgent

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need to explore how *psychological safety* functions as a critical factor in enhancing employee performance, especially in an era of digital transformation and global uncertainty that demands continuous innovation and adaptability [3].

Empirical evidence further demonstrates that low levels of psychological safety remain a significant global issue. A report by Gallup reveals that only around 21% of employees worldwide are actively engaged in their work, while the majority are either disengaged or actively disengaged, leading to decreased organizational productivity [4]. Additionally, a study conducted by Google through its well-known *Project Aristotle* identified psychological safety as the most critical factor in building high-performing teams, surpassing other variables such as individual competence and team structure [5]. Moreover, global surveys indicate that over 60% of employees hesitate to share ideas or feedback due to fear of negative judgment or career repercussions, which significantly hampers organizational innovation [6]. These figures underscore that psychological safety is not merely an individual concern but a structural challenge in human resource management with far-reaching implications for organizational performance.

Several prior studies have examined the relationship between *psychological safety* and employee performance using diverse approaches. Research by [7] emphasizes that psychologically safe work environments enhance team learning and effectiveness by encouraging open communication and error reporting. [8] proposes that psychological safety drives engagement and innovation through four progressive stages: inclusion safety, learner safety, contributor safety, and challenger safety. [9] highlights that psychological conditions, including safety, are fundamental determinants of employee engagement, which directly influences performance outcomes. However, most of these studies remain fragmented, context-specific, or limited in scope, lacking a comprehensive synthesis that explains how psychological safety consistently contributes to employee performance across different organizational and cultural settings.

From the literature review, several critical research gaps can be identified. First, a *theoretical gap* exists due to the lack of an integrated framework that comprehensively links psychological safety with employee performance theories. Second, an *empirical gap* is evident in the inconsistent findings across studies regarding the strength and nature of the relationship, particularly when mediated by variables such as employee engagement or organizational agility. Third, a *contextual gap* arises because most prior research has been conducted in developed countries, limiting its applicability to developing contexts such as Indonesia. Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution through a *systematic literature review* approach that integrates empirical and conceptual findings to provide a more holistic understanding of the role of psychological safety in enhancing employee performance, while also identifying patterns, trends, and strategic implications that have not been sufficiently explored in previous research.

The objective of this study is to systematically analyze the role of *psychological safety* in enhancing employee performance through a systematic literature review approach.

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Specifically, this research aims to identify the key concepts and dimensions of psychological safety, evaluate its relationship with employee performance based on prior empirical findings, and examine the mediating and moderating variables that strengthen this relationship. Additionally, this study seeks to develop a comprehensive conceptual model that can serve as a foundation for more adaptive and sustainable human resource management strategies. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the advancement of management and organizational behavior literature and practically by providing insights for organizations to create psychologically safe work environments that foster improved performance and long-term competitiveness in the global era.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a **Systematic Literature Review (SLR)** to comprehensively analyze the role of *psychological safety* in enhancing employee performance. The SLR method is adopted to ensure a structured, transparent, and replicable process in identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant academic literature. The review process follows established SLR guidelines as proposed by Barbara Kitchenham, which consist of three main stages: planning, conducting, and reporting. In the planning stage, the research questions are formulated to guide the scope of the study, focusing on the conceptualization of psychological safety, its relationship with employee performance, and the identification of mediating or moderating variables. During the conducting stage, a systematic search is carried out across major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using predefined keywords including “psychological safety,” “employee performance,” and “organizational behavior.” Inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied to ensure the selection of high-quality and relevant articles, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, publications within the last ten years, and studies that directly examine the relationship between the key variables.

The selected articles are analyzed using a qualitative synthesis approach to identify patterns, themes, and relationships across studies. Data extraction is conducted systematically by coding key information from each article, including research objectives, methodology, sample characteristics, key findings, and theoretical frameworks used. The analysis focuses on comparing and integrating findings to uncover consistent trends, contradictions, and research gaps within the literature. To enhance the validity and reliability of the review, the study applies a critical appraisal process to assess the methodological rigor of each selected article. The final stage involves synthesizing the findings into a conceptual framework that explains how psychological safety contributes to employee performance, either directly or through mediating variables such as employee engagement and organizational trust. Through this systematic and rigorous approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the topic while offering theoretical and practical implications for future research and organizational practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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The transformation of system quality in the digital ecosystem has shifted the analytical focus from purely technical performance toward a more human-centered and interaction-based perspective, which aligns closely with the growing importance of psychological dimensions in organizational settings. In this regard, the concept of *psychological safety* emerges as a critical intangible factor that complements system quality by shaping how users interact with digital systems and organizational environments. As digital platforms become more collaborative, adaptive, and user-driven, the effectiveness of these systems is no longer determined solely by their technical robustness, but also by the extent to which they foster a safe environment for users and employees to engage, experiment, and contribute without fear. Consequently, understanding the role of psychological safety becomes essential in explaining how modern systems and organizational structures can enhance performance outcomes. The following table presents a structured synthesis of prior studies, categorizing the role of psychological safety across key research themes, including employee performance, engagement, innovation, team effectiveness, and voice behavior.

Table 1. The Evolution of System Quality in the Digital Ecosystem

Research Theme	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Researchers
Psychological Safety and Employee Performance	Direct relationship between psychological safety and employee performance	Psychological safety enhances productivity, work effectiveness, and quality of employee output	[10][11][12]
Psychological Safety and Employee Engagement	The role of psychological safety in fostering work engagement	Psychological safety strengthens emotional and cognitive engagement, leading to improved performance	[13][14]
Psychological Safety and Innovation	Influence of psychological safety on creativity and innovation	A psychologically safe environment encourages risk-taking and idea generation	[15][16]
Psychological Safety and Team Effectiveness	Relationship between psychological safety and team effectiveness	Psychological safety is a key determinant of high-performing teams	[17][18]
Psychological Safety and Voice Behavior	Influence on employees' willingness to speak up	Psychological safety increases employee voice and participation	[19][20]

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The synthesis in Table 1 demonstrates that psychological safety consistently functions as a foundational enabler across multiple dimensions of organizational performance. Across the identified themes, a common pattern emerges in which psychological safety facilitates open communication, encourages knowledge sharing, and reduces the fear of negative evaluation, all of which contribute to higher levels of individual and collective performance. Furthermore, the findings indicate that psychological safety does not operate in isolation but interacts with other critical constructs such as employee engagement, innovation capability, and team dynamics, thereby reinforcing its strategic importance within the broader organizational ecosystem. This integrative role highlights that improving employee performance in the digital era requires not only advanced technological systems but also supportive psychological environments that empower individuals to fully utilize those systems. Therefore, the evolution of system quality in the digital ecosystem can be understood as inherently intertwined with the development of psychological safety, positioning it as a key driver of sustainable organizational performance.

Table 2. Classification Based on Conceptual Roles of Psychological Safety in Organizational Models

Conceptual Role	Position of Psychological Safety	Relationship with Performance	Conceptual Implication	Strategic Meaning
Core Enabler	Psychological safety as a foundational driver	Directly enhances employee performance through confidence and reduced fear	Positions psychological safety as a fundamental organizational resource	Organizations must build a safe climate as the basis of performance improvement
Psychological Mechanism	Psychological safety as an internal process mediator	Translates organizational practices into employee performance outcomes	Explains how internal cognitive and emotional processes affect behavior	Emphasizes the importance of employee perceptions in driving performance
Contextual Reinforcer	Psychological safety as a strengthening condition	Amplifies or weakens the impact of other organizational factors on performance	Reflects situational and environmental dynamics within organizations	Highlights the need for supportive and adaptive work environments
Organizational Outcome	Psychological safety as a result of organizational practices	Emerges from leadership, culture, and management systems	Indicates that psychological safety is shaped by structural conditions	Suggests that organizations must design systems that foster trust and openness
Integrative Catalyst	Psychological safety in complex organizational systems	Interacts with multiple variables such as engagement, trust, and innovation	Supports holistic and multi-dimensional organizational models	Encourages integrated strategies combining human and system-based

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	approaches

Source: Data developed by the researcher (2026)

Table 2 demonstrates that psychological safety occupies multiple conceptual roles within organizational models, reflecting its complexity as both a foundational condition and a dynamic process influencing employee performance. As a *core enabler*, psychological safety directly enhances performance by reducing fear and increasing confidence, allowing employees to engage more openly in task execution, problem-solving, and decision-making processes. This indicates that performance is not solely driven by technical competence or formal structures, but also by the psychological climate that supports risk-taking and learning behaviors. Furthermore, when positioned as a *psychological mechanism*, psychological safety operates as an internal mediator that translates organizational practices—such as leadership style, communication patterns, and work design into actual behavioral outcomes. In this sense, employee perceptions, emotions, and cognitive evaluations become central in determining how effectively organizational inputs are converted into performance outputs. The role of psychological safety as a *contextual reinforcer* further emphasizes its situational nature, where it can either strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of other organizational variables depending on the quality of the work environment, highlighting the importance of adaptability and supportive organizational contexts.

In addition, the table illustrates that psychological safety can also function as an *organizational outcome*, emerging from well-designed leadership practices, inclusive cultures, and structured management systems that prioritize trust and openness. This perspective shifts the focus from treating psychological safety merely as an antecedent to recognizing it as a result of broader organizational design and governance mechanisms. At a more advanced level, psychological safety acts as an *integrative catalyst* within complex organizational systems, where it interacts with multiple constructs such as employee engagement, trust, and innovation capability to create a synergistic effect on performance. This integrative role underscores the necessity of adopting a holistic approach in organizational strategy, where human factors and system-based elements are aligned to achieve sustainable performance outcomes. Overall, the findings highlight that enhancing employee performance in modern organizations requires not only improving structural and technological systems but also cultivating a psychologically safe environment that enables individuals to fully contribute, collaborate, and innovate.

Based on the overall findings, this study concludes that *psychological safety* plays a central and multi-dimensional role in enhancing employee performance within modern organizational contexts. It functions not only as a foundational driver that directly improves performance through increased confidence and reduced fear, but also as a critical internal mechanism that translates organizational practices into effective employee behaviors. Furthermore, psychological safety operates as a contextual factor that strengthens the impact of other organizational variables, while simultaneously emerging as an outcome of leadership, culture, and management systems. At a more integrative level, it acts as a catalyst that connects various constructs such as engagement, innovation, and trust, thereby creating a synergistic effect on organizational performance. These findings confirm that employee performance in the digital era cannot be achieved solely through technological advancement or structural efficiency, but must be supported by a psychologically safe environment that fosters openness, collaboration, and continuous learning.

1. The Role of Psychological Safety in Enhancing Employee Performance

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The discussion on the role of *psychological safety* in enhancing employee performance reveals that this construct is not merely a complementary factor in human resource management, but rather a foundational element that shapes how individuals behave, interact, and contribute within modern organizations. The concept of *psychological safety*, introduced by [21], emphasizes the importance of a work environment in which employees feel safe to take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences. In this context, employee performance is no longer viewed solely as a function of technical competence, but as the result of a complex interaction between individual capabilities and a supportive psychological climate. A psychologically safe environment encourages employees to actively share ideas, ask questions, and acknowledge mistakes as part of the learning process. This is particularly critical in knowledge-based organizations, where innovation and collaboration serve as key drivers of competitive advantage.

Psychological safety operates as an internal psychological mechanism that mediates the relationship between organizational practices and performance outcomes. Organizational strategies such as inclusive leadership, open communication, and flexible work design do not automatically lead to improved performance unless they are perceived positively by employees. In this regard, psychological safety acts as a filter that determines whether these practices are translated into productive behaviors. When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement, intrinsic motivation, and proactive behavior in completing their tasks [22]. Conversely, in environments characterized by fear, pressure, or the threat of negative evaluation, employees tend to adopt defensive behaviors, avoid risks, and limit their contributions to the minimum required level. Therefore, enhancing employee performance requires not only structural and managerial improvements but also the cultivation of a psychological environment that supports openness and trust.

From a broader perspective, psychological safety is closely linked to team dynamics and collective performance. Teams characterized by high psychological safety demonstrate greater effectiveness in knowledge sharing, constructive conflict resolution, and adaptability to change. This occurs because team members feel empowered to participate actively without fear of criticism or rejection [23]. Such environments foster a culture of continuous learning, where errors are not perceived as failures but as opportunities for improvement. In addition, psychological safety strengthens team cohesion and interpersonal trust, which in turn enhances coordination and decision-making quality. As a result, performance improvements are observed not only at the individual level but also at the team and organizational levels, highlighting the systemic impact of psychological safety within organizational structures.

Psychological safety plays a significant contextual role in shaping the effectiveness of other organizational variables. In supportive environments, it amplifies the positive effects of leadership, organizational culture, and reward systems on employee performance. However, in the absence of psychological safety, even well-designed strategies may fail to deliver optimal results, as employees may hesitate to engage fully or express their ideas. This indicates that psychological safety functions as a contextual amplifier, determining the extent to which organizational resources and practices can be effectively utilized. Consequently, organizations must recognize that fostering psychological safety is not an individual responsibility alone, but a result of integrated systems, cultural norms, and managerial practices that collectively create a supportive work environment.

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In the era of digital transformation and rapid organizational change, the importance of psychological safety becomes even more pronounced. Organizations are required to continuously innovate, adapt, and respond to dynamic market conditions, which necessitates active employee participation and creativity. In such contexts, fear of failure or negative consequences can significantly hinder innovation and learning. Psychological safety, therefore, acts as a catalyst that enables employees to experiment, generate new ideas, and contribute meaningfully without hesitation [24]. Additionally, as digital work environments become increasingly collaborative and complex, the need for psychological safety intensifies to ensure effective communication and teamwork across diverse and distributed teams.

In conclusion, psychological safety plays a multidimensional role in enhancing employee performance, functioning as a direct driver, a psychological mechanism, a contextual reinforcer, and an integrative catalyst within organizational systems. These findings suggest that organizations can no longer rely solely on technological advancements or structural efficiency to improve performance, but must also prioritize the development of a psychologically safe work environment. This can be achieved through inclusive leadership, transparent communication, and supportive evaluation systems that emphasize learning rather than punishment. By doing so, organizations can empower employees to fully utilize their capabilities, collaborate effectively, and sustain high levels of performance in an increasingly complex and competitive business landscape.

2. Psychological Safety as an Integrative Factor in Organizational Performance Systems

The role of *psychological safety* as an integrative factor in organizational performance systems reflects a fundamental shift in how performance is conceptualized in contemporary management. Rather than being treated as a standalone variable, psychological safety increasingly operates as a connective mechanism that links structural, behavioral, and relational dimensions within organizations. In complex organizational environments, performance is rarely the result of a single factor; instead, it emerges from the interaction between leadership practices, organizational culture, team dynamics, and individual behaviors. In this interconnected system, psychological safety functions as the underlying condition that enables these elements to align and operate effectively [25]. Without a psychologically safe environment, even the most advanced systems, well-designed strategies, or highly skilled employees may fail to produce optimal performance outcomes due to fear, hesitation, and lack of open communication.

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At a systemic level, psychological safety serves as a bridge between organizational inputs and performance outputs. Organizational inputs such as leadership style, communication structures, and performance management systems are intended to guide employee behavior and enhance productivity. However, the effectiveness of these inputs depends heavily on how they are perceived and internalized by employees. When psychological safety is present, employees are more likely to interpret organizational practices positively, engage actively, and translate these inputs into meaningful performance outcomes [26]. Conversely, in environments where psychological safety is lacking, employees may resist, misinterpret, or disengage from organizational initiatives, leading to suboptimal performance. This demonstrates that psychological safety is not merely an outcome of good management, but a critical mechanism that determines whether organizational systems function as intended.

Psychological safety integrates various psychological and behavioral constructs that are essential for high performance. It interacts closely with employee engagement, trust, motivation, and learning behavior, creating a synergistic effect that enhances overall organizational effectiveness. For instance, when employees feel safe, they are more likely to develop trust in their leaders and colleagues, which strengthens collaboration and reduces interpersonal conflict. At the same time, psychological safety fosters intrinsic motivation by allowing individuals to express themselves authentically and contribute meaningfully to organizational goals. This interaction between psychological safety and other constructs highlights its role as an integrative catalyst that aligns human factors with organizational objectives. As a result, performance is not only improved quantitatively but also qualitatively, through enhanced innovation, adaptability, and problem-solving capabilities.

Psychological safety plays a critical role in integrating formal and informal organizational systems. Formal systems, such as policies, procedures, and performance evaluation frameworks, provide structure and direction, while informal systems, including social norms, interpersonal relationships, and organizational culture, shape how individuals behave within that structure. Psychological safety connects these two dimensions by ensuring that formal systems are supported by a culture of openness and trust [27]. For example, a performance evaluation system designed to encourage feedback and improvement will only be effective if employees feel safe to provide honest input without fear of retaliation. Similarly, innovation initiatives that rely on idea generation and experimentation require a psychologically safe environment to succeed. Therefore, psychological safety ensures that formal organizational mechanisms are reinforced by informal cultural dynamics, leading to more coherent and effective performance systems.

The integrative role of psychological safety is also evident in its ability to function across multiple levels of analysis, including individual, team, and organizational levels. At the individual level, it influences cognitive and emotional processes such as confidence, anxiety, and risk perception, which directly affect performance behavior. At the team level, psychological safety enhances communication, coordination, and collective learning, leading to improved team effectiveness [28]. At the organizational level, it contributes to the development of a culture that supports innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement. The alignment across these levels creates a cascading effect, where improvements in individual and team dynamics contribute to overall organizational performance. This multi-level integration underscores the strategic importance of psychological safety as a unifying factor that connects different layers of the organization into a cohesive performance system.

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In the context of digital transformation and increasingly complex work environments, psychological safety becomes even more critical as an integrative factor. Modern organizations operate in dynamic ecosystems characterized by rapid technological change, cross-functional collaboration, and distributed work arrangements. In such environments, uncertainty and ambiguity are inevitable, making it essential for employees to feel safe in expressing concerns, sharing knowledge, and experimenting with new ideas. Psychological safety enables organizations to navigate these complexities by fostering a culture of learning and adaptability. It encourages employees to engage with new technologies, collaborate across boundaries, and respond effectively to changing conditions. Without psychological safety, digital transformation efforts may be hindered by resistance, fear of failure, and lack of participation, ultimately limiting their impact on organizational performance.

Another important dimension of psychological safety as an integrative factor is its role in reinforcing organizational resilience and sustainability. In times of crisis or disruption, organizations that maintain high levels of psychological safety are better equipped to respond effectively, as employees are more willing to communicate openly, share critical information, and collaborate in problem-solving. This collective responsiveness enhances the organization's ability to adapt and recover, ensuring continuity and long-term performance. Furthermore, psychological safety supports sustainable performance by promoting employee well-being, reducing stress, and preventing burnout. Employees who feel safe are more likely to experience job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which contribute to lower turnover rates and more stable performance over time.

The discussion highlights that psychological safety is not simply an additional variable in organizational performance models, but a central integrative force that determines how effectively various components of the organization interact and function together. Its presence enables alignment between human behavior and organizational systems, while its absence creates fragmentation and inefficiency. Therefore, organizations seeking to enhance performance must adopt a holistic approach that places psychological safety at the core of their strategy. This involves fostering inclusive leadership, building trust-based relationships, and designing systems that encourage openness and continuous learning. By embedding psychological safety into the organizational fabric, companies can create a high-performing ecosystem where individuals, teams, and systems work in harmony to achieve sustainable success.

CONCLUSION

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The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that psychological safety is an essential factor in supporting and improving employee performance in modern organizations. A work environment characterized by psychological safety allows employees to express ideas, share concerns, ask questions, and take initiative without fear of embarrassment, rejection, or negative consequences. The literature reviewed shows that when employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to demonstrate confidence, collaborate effectively with colleagues, engage in problem-solving activities, and participate actively in organizational learning processes. Psychological safety not only contributes directly to better performance outcomes but also strengthens the effectiveness of various organizational practices, including leadership, communication, teamwork, and employee development initiatives. Furthermore, it serves as a bridge that connects important organizational factors such as employee engagement, trust, creativity, and innovation, all of which contribute to higher levels of individual and organizational performance. These findings suggest that strong employee performance is influenced not only by technical competence and organizational systems but also by the quality of the psychological environment in which employees work.

Based on these findings, organizations should place greater emphasis on creating and maintaining psychologically safe workplaces as part of their long-term performance management strategy. Leaders play a critical role in fostering such an environment by encouraging open communication, respecting diverse perspectives, and responding constructively to employee feedback and mistakes. Organizations should also develop policies and practices that promote learning, collaboration, and continuous improvement rather than focusing solely on control and punishment. Integrating psychological safety into human resource management processes, including employee development, performance evaluation, and team-building activities, can help employees feel more confident and motivated to contribute their best efforts. As workplaces continue to evolve through digital transformation and changing work arrangements, maintaining psychological safety becomes increasingly important for sustaining employee well-being and productivity. Future research is encouraged to examine psychological safety across different industries, organizational cultures, and national contexts, while also exploring how emerging technologies and digital work environments influence its role in shaping employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

This manuscript was developed entirely through the author's independent academic effort. No generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized at any stage of writing, analysis, or manuscript preparation. The author affirms full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the content presented in this study.

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