Law Enforcement Leadership and Resiliency

Andrew J. Winter
University of the Cumberlands

Leadership styles are a contributing factor to the culture of policing. Efficacious leadership styles will contribute to cultural change. Senior management's interactions with frontline leadership and followers create a cultural footprint. This will differentiate one organization from another and establish internal boundaries for management and follower interactions. Crime scene professionals are tasked with stressors unique to their amplified exposure to critical incidents over a career and the attention to detail required to accomplish the job demands. Leadership must recognize the specialized needs of these professionals and create an organizational structure laced with servant leaders and not simply managers and policymakers.

Keywords: leadership, resiliency, organizational leadership, management, crime scene

INTRODUCTION

Senior leadership must recognize that effective organizational support is viewed in two fundamental forms: emotional (empathy, understanding, and sympathy) and instrumental, which is material assistance (resiliency and psychological support). A fundamental flaw exists when organizational leadership assumes the work demands are reasonable and manageable based on the crime scene professional's voluntary willingness to take on the role (Sollie et al., 2017). In addition, given the potential or organizational notion that the work is reasonable and manageable, resiliency is not a fixed circumstance from one traumatic incident to another (Sollie et al., 2017). Resiliency needs are based on both occupational stressors and those stressors or contributing factors that may exist personally outside of the daily work routine. Contributing stressors at work may include conflicts with colleagues, a lack of training, the demands of the job, and even organizational policies and administrative procedures (Sollie et al., 2017). There must be an investment originating from organizational leadership to create a culture of support for followers (Kelty & Gordon, 2015). Leadership must recognize that resiliency among crime scene practitioners may likely result from exposure to work-related traumatic incidents as well as to the overall law enforcement agency support and life outside of work (Sollie et al., 2017). It is noteworthy that occupational stressors and successful resiliency are connected to wellness programs and law enforcement agency policies, practices, and overall morale (Clark et al., 2015; Denk-Florea et al., 2020).

CRIME SCENE PROFESSIONALS

Some of the most challenging law enforcement investigative work is tasked to the crime scene professional (Fisher & Fisher, 2022). This work requires a significant attention to detail and efforts made to preserve evidence. A misinterpretation of scene evidence can make positive case progression or case

prosecution impossible (Fisher & Fisher, 2022). Crime scene investigators may also be tasked with investigations into terrorist attacks, building collapses, death investigations, sexual assaults, child molestation, police involved shootings, aircraft and rail incidents, and explosions (Fisher & Fisher, 2022). These events and other high profile critical and mass incidents rely heavily on the expertise of these highly trained professionals (Gardner, 2005). Previous research suggested that incidents involving mass casualties, sexual assaults, domestic violence, potential exposure to infectious disease, and any case investigation where a professional may have known the victim resulted in the highest level of occupational stress. This includes scenes involving the death of a fellow law enforcement officer (Leone & Keel, 2016). The result is that crime scene professionals are exposed routinely to stressful environments (Leone & Keel, 2016; Sheard et al., 2019).

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

Senior leadership should focus on expanding the organization's and its followers' needs. The notion is that an agency-based emphasis on subordinates will foster a more positive workplace environment, allowing the organization to achieve more and invigorating all followers within the agency (Black & La Venture, 2018). A subordinate centered culture means that leaders are first fostering an organization with better communication and more responsive to the needs of team members (Black & La Venture, 2018). A commitment to followers means putting them first, leading to an agency centered on developing personnel and building trust within the organization (Black & La Venture, 2018). Value based leadership is based on "…loyalty, helpfulness, fairness, predictability, reliability, honesty, responsibility, integrity, competence, consistency, and openness" (p.447). These characteristics will build a stronger organization and enhance resiliency based on trust and mutual admiration (Black & La Venture, 2018).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRESSORS

Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies must refrain from suggesting that occupational stressors solely originate from the obligations of the job to draw attention away from itself or the real origin or cause of the stressors (Crank & Caldero, 2010). Evidence suggests that while occupational stressors may originate from day-to-day work requirements, there are those occupational stressors that are fostered from an oppressive chain of command, a lack of organizational support, a strictly managed administration, and unnecessary accelerated timelines for casework (Purba & Demou, 2019; Stinchcomb, 2004). Workplace values, as instilled by senior organizational leadership, will be essential and fundamental to the resiliency of these public servants (Purba & Demou, 2019). Effective leadership will impact the ability for the agency to change in culture (Cohen et al., 2019). Organizational stressors can create a negative climate and impact job satisfaction. These stressors should not be overlooked and can resonate with team members' views regarding unjust promotions, personnel favoritism, mercurial discipline, and internal office politics (Carlson-Johnson et al., 2020; Kula, 2017).

LEADERSHIP VS. MANAGEMENT

Northouse (2019) expressed that leadership is centered on establishing a direction for an organization, creating a vision for the future, and setting the track for followers to get motivated and exhilarated to accomplish organizational goals as established by senior leadership. Management focuses on agendas, budgeting, and organizational procedures (Northouse, 2019). It is acknowledged that leadership and management skills are imperative to organizational success and operability. Still, while management is focused on order, leadership is what builds organizational excitement and allows for followers to embrace the vision and mission of the organization (Northouse, 2019).

Trust

While it is acknowledged that leaders create the vision and mission of the organization, it is trust that establishes a feeling that agency decision-making will be prudent and beneficial or at a minimum not detrimental to the interest of followers (Purnomo et al., 2020; Northouse, 2019). Trust in leadership makes effective leadership possible (Maxwell, 2007). The foundational characteristic of trust is character (Maxwell, 2007). Trust is at the core of organizational cohesiveness and performance and this begins with developing a mutual trust between leaders and followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2010).

Trust is crucial to effective leadership and must be mutual between leaders and followers to create an organizational climate advocating a free flow of ideas and information. This will create an organizational climate of openness (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Maxwell (2007) stated, "…people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" (p.122). Senior organizational leadership must focus on the needs of followers to create an environment where team members feel safe and supported (Cohen et al., 2019).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership contradicts the general notion of leadership as most would suggest that leaders lead and servants follow. The servant leader focuses on their own conduct accentuating the needs of followers (Northouse, 2019). This leadership viewpoint centers attention on the greater good of the organization and community over self-gratification. The followers' needs supersede the leader's needs or personal aspirations (Northouse, 2019). The servant leadership model allows for each team member to have a voice and fosters collaboration (Carlson-Johnson et al., 2020).

The servant leader is a servant first and foremost to ensure those they lead are prioritized over individual goals and aspirations (Greenleaf, 2002). Servant leadership has been shown to improve followers' loyalty and reduce occupational stressors and burnout based on a genuine, supportive, and communicative leadership style (Sheikh et al., 2019). Burnout has been noted to result in increased absenteeism, poor health, and reduced occupational performance (Kaltiainen & Hakanen, 2022). Most notably, Greenleaf (1977) stated that servant leadership is based on a preference to serve others with understanding, selflessness, and a bona fide concern for followers. A condemnation of government is that there is too much organizational control and less furtherance of leadership (Greenleaf, 1977).

RESILIENCY

Resiliency is one's capacity to traverse, control, and adjust to occupational stressors (Rosansky et al., 2019). Resilient people are best able to cope with occupational stressors and lead a more psychologically stable existence. Adversity and stress can modulate from a variety of exposures to work-related traumatic and critical incidents. The more resilient the team member is within the organization, the less likely employee isolation (Andersen et al., 2018). Those crime scene professionals capable of maintaining a resilient life are less vulnerable to angst, anxiety, and depression (Craven et al., 2022; Di Nota et al., 2021). Team members want to be treated with respect, as adults, with some control over decision-making. This has been shown to elevate personal status and trust with leaders. Many law enforcement agencies have decided to mandate resiliency services after those incidents deemed traumatic by leadership with little or no review of organizational nuisances, such as an overbearing administration or micromanaging leadership (Stinchcomb, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to provide insight into the lived experiences of crime scene practitioners (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Smith et al., 2022). The qualitative phenomenological research work was constructed with a descriptive approach using semi-structured personal interviews to reveal the lived experiences of these highly trained professionals. The face-to-face interviews were carefully transcribed for validity and to minimize implicit bias and subjectivity prior to

coding and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sutton & Austin, 2015). This research consisted of 16 participants actively employed as crime scene professionals in the state of New Jersey at either the county or state level. This study did not include any local law enforcement agencies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1. Do crime scene practitioners receive appropriate support for occupational stressors through agency resiliency-based programming?

RQ2. Do frontline supervisors assigned to crime scene units provide the necessary support and leadership to crime scene practitioners who experience occupational stressors through resiliency support programs?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study explored whether crime scene investigators receive the necessary support through resiliency-based programming for occupational stressors, highlighted in Table 1 and Figure 1. There was also an exploration into the crime scene practitioner's perception of frontline and senior leadership and whether the necessary and appropriate support is offered to followers to mitigate work-related occupational stressors. This was explored from both the unit and organizational perspective based on the lived experiences of those participants and memorialized in Table 2 and Figure 2. The research findings in this study were based on a qualitative phenomenological study with face-to-face semi-structured personal interviews of 16 active crime scene professionals in New Jersey.

RQ1. Do crime scene practitioners receive appropriate support for occupational stressors through agency resiliency-based programming?

TABLE 1
MAJOR THEMES

Themes & Codes	Frequency	Percent
1. Speak to Someone Trained in Crime Scene due to Trust and Relatability	12	75
(trust, someone more relatable, do not relate to them, no crime scene experience, should be geared toward crime scene)		
2. Individualized, Victim-Driven Resiliency, With No Affiliation to Law Enforcement	11	68.75
(one-on-one, no affiliation to law enforcement, individualized, victim-driven, victim-based)		
3. The Current Resiliency Program is too Generalized and not Specific to Serve the Needs of Crime Scene Professionals	10	62.50
(police culture, fear of being labeled, old school mentality, rumors start, keep to myself, stigma)		

Themes & Codes	Frequency	Percent
4. Fear of Being Negatively Labeled for Pursuing Resiliency Support	8	50
(cop-to-cop, generalized, check the box for everyone, could be better, not specific to crime scene investigators)		

Note: N = 16

This research question explored whether crime scene practitioners receive support for occupational stressors through agency sponsored resiliency-based programming. Several themes were identified in the research. The study revealed that 75% of the participants would prefer speaking to someone more relatable to ensure a clear understanding of the nuances and occupational stressors associated with crime scene work. Several participants believed that relatability between parties would lead to a better understanding of what they were going through at work and the origin of the stressors. Participants overwhelmingly thought this person was the unit frontline supervisor provided they had an open-door leadership style, was approachable, and was trained as a practitioner within the field of crime scene. Participants held a steadfast notion that relatability and trust in the frontline supervisor was a prerequisite for disclosure consideration (Winter, 2024).
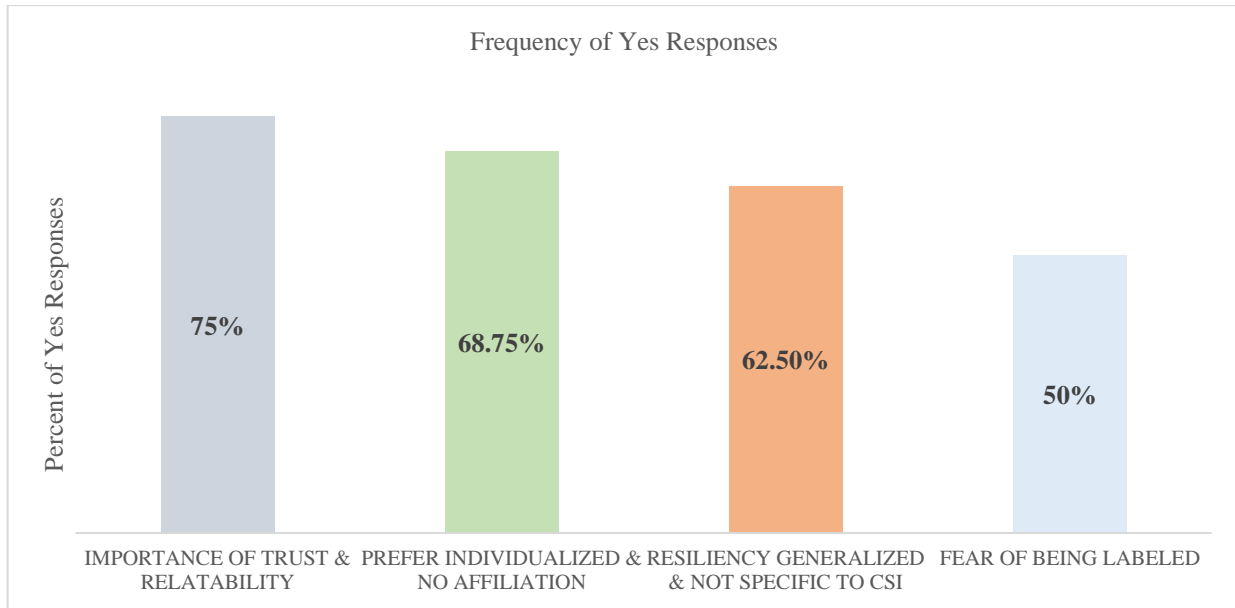
Largely, participants stated they would not report or divulge a need for assistance to someone they did not trust, which was contradictory to the idea of agency-based sponsored and mandated resiliency. Study participants who had previously attended agency sponsored group resiliency noted that coworkers in attendance not trained and assigned to a crime scene function could not understand the work-related occupational stressors associated with crime scene work. Shared experiences among officers involved in critical incidents or scenes was not enough to build the necessary trust or bond which would allow for open group resiliency dialogue. In fact, 50% of the study participants were concerned that disclosure would lead to negative stigmas or labeling within the law enforcement agency. In addition, participants felt agency assigned resiliency officers and hired professionals running group resiliency sessions could not understand their plight for the same reasons (Winter, 2024).

A lack of trust within the organization and relatability issues were barriers to reporting occupational stressors to frontline supervisors and in-agency-mandated resiliency sessions. Many participants in this study noted they most trusted colleagues assigned within the crime scene unit to include their supervisor over outside sources. This was based on relatability and trust. Privacy and peer understanding were critical elements leading to elevated trust levels within the unit, reaffirming that mental health reporting was most likely with a frontline supervisor or colleagues who share in the journey and best understand the occupational stressors of crime scene professionals (Winter, 2024). Most participants expressed a unique and stronger bond with colleagues assigned to the crime scene unit.

While several participants felt current mandated resiliency options were an effort in the right direction, 62.50% believed the current state mandated program is too generalized and not specific to the needs of crime scene professionals. In addition, 68.75% of the participants thought resiliency-based agency programming should be individualized or offer an individualized option, victim-driven and not agency mandated. These notions were built on the basic principle of trust with an expressed need to ensure privacy in exchange for disclosure. A desire to speak with a trained clinician or doctor with no affiliation to the law enforcement agency was also appealing to some participants based on privacy concerns and potential stigmas associated with agency disclosure. While others felt satisfied that resiliency was already received within the unit through interactions and time with peers and in private conversations with their trained frontline supervisor (Winter, 2024).

Noteworthy is the fact that 50% of all participants remain concerned about mental health disclosure leading to negative stigmas or labeling within the law enforcement agency. These feelings led to a lack of willingness to report through senior chain of command. That said, a much stronger established base of trust appeared within the unit's confines between coworkers and the trained frontline supervisor (Winter, 2024).

FIGURE 1
MAJOR THEMES

Frequency of Yes Responses

75% — IMPORTANCE OF TRUST & RELATABILITY

68.75% — PREFER INDIVIDUALIZED & NO AFFILIATION

62.50% — RESILIENCY GENERALIZED & NOT SPECIFIC TO CSI

50% — FEAR OF BEING LABELED

Percent of Yes Responses

N = 16

RQ2. *Do frontline supervisors assigned to crime scene units provide the necessary support and leadership to crime scene practitioners who experience occupational stressors through resiliency support programs?*

TABLE 2
MAJOR THEMES

Themes & Codes	Frequency	Percent
1. Leadership Style Matters Within the Crime Scene Investigation Unit	13	81.25
(micromanaging, treat everyone like adults, space to breathe, very approachable, don't send people out alone, involved supervisors, budgeting and supplies, not a micromanager, willing to work with us, trust my direct supervisor, leadership style based on experience level, hands-on supervisor, passive leadership)		
2. Trained Leadership in the Field of Crime Scene Investigation Matters	11	68.75
(should know the job, respect for staff, technical knowledge is important, supervisor goes out to scenes, understanding of the job, technical experience, better communication, support for decision-making on scene)		

Themes & Codes	Frequency	Percent
3. Crime Scene Unit Techniques to Provide Support and Mitigate Occupational Stressors	11	68.75
(barbeque, book of the month, daily/monthly meetings, eat together, holiday celebrations, birthday celebrations, go home early, time off, dark humor, approachable supervisor)		
4. Lack of Support in Leadership to Mitigate Occupational Stressors	8	50
(failure in leadership, they don't ask if you are okay, no debriefing of jobs, no accountability, don't check on their people, I don't trust anybody, nothing proactive, just get the job done, no inquiry regarding mental health)		

Note: N = 16

This research question explored if frontline supervisors assigned to crime scene units provide the necessary support and leadership to crime scene practitioners who experience occupational stressors through resiliency support programs. Overwhelmingly, 81.25% of participants in this study believed that leadership style matters. This finding was consistent with relatability in research question RQ1. Research question RQ2 revealed how imperative leadership style is to the success of unit cohesiveness, even outweighing the preference that the frontline supervisor be trained in the crime scene discipline at 68.75%. Several participants in the study noted the importance and preference of a trained frontline supervisor who can actively respond to crime scenes for technical support, decision making, and as a buffer to the other units and senior administrator demands. There appeared to be respect for those frontline supervisors willing to provide a hands-on approach at crime scenes. This is not to imply a need for supervision, as the crime scene practitioners in this study were generally confident and capable of decision-making and working independently at the scene, but they respected internal unit leadership (Winter, 2024).
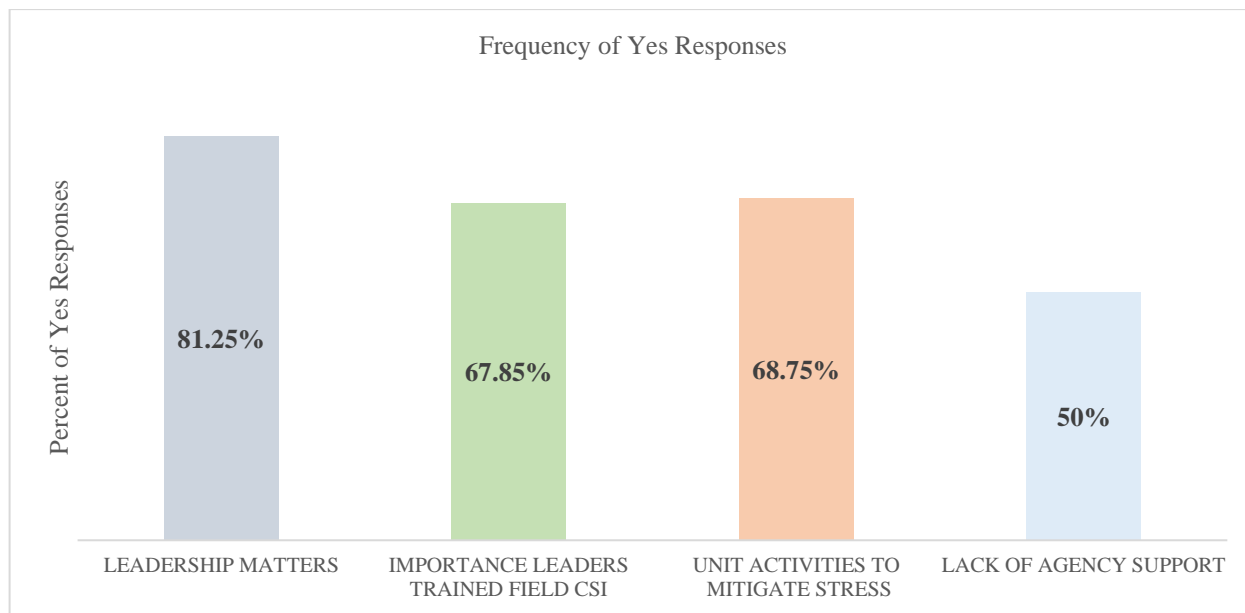
At times in their career, a few participants noted that frontline supervisors had little knowledge of crime scene investigation and no technical experience, resulting in a destructive environment. Those supervisors are either relegated to management and budgeting responsibilities, passive in leadership, or excessive to overcompensate for their ineptitude resulting in a micromanaging style of leadership. Participants in this study expressed that a lack of knowledge in this type of technical field as a supervisor will lead to mistakes and create an environment where team members do not have a trained supervisor to lean on for technical experience and as a liaison to other units and senior chain of command. Participants went on to note that trained leadership was important, stating those not formally trained cannot understand the complexity of forensic-related cases or at the granular level even the sights and smells associated with the crime scene. Furthermore, an untrained frontline leader is difficult to communicate with technically or emotionally based on the fact they simply do not understand the complexity of the scene investigation or the emotional toll involved in crime scene work. This, too, would include the related occupational stressors associated with the crime scene unit (Winter, 2024).

Most participants, 68.75%, indicated that their specific crime scene units internally make notable efforts to mitigate occupational stressors and build morale through unit events to include meals together, birthday and holiday celebrations, and simply spending time together during the day. Several mentioned using dark humor as a coping mechanism to deal with critical and traumatic events on the job. The time together is used to vent and cope with the horrific crime scenes. In fact, several participants in this study expressed time spent with colleagues as a form of resiliency.

It was revealed in this study that 50% noted a lack in organizational leadership to mitigate occupational stressors. Participants were frustrated with unnecessary chain of command issues due to a lack or unwillingness to make decisions. Some expressed that leadership is sometimes disingenuous with no

accountability and no real interest in being proactive. A few participants stated this produced a lack of trust in leadership. As this study revealed, a lack of trust equated to a lack in seeking assistance for occupational stressors by team members (Winter, 2024).

FIGURE 2
MAJOR THEMES

Frequency of Yes Responses

- LEADERSHIP MATTERS: 81.25%
- IMPORTANCE LEADERS TRAINED FIELD CSI: 67.85%
- UNIT ACTIVITIES TO MITIGATE STRESS: 68.75%
- LACK OF AGENCY SUPPORT: 50%

N = 16

CONCLUSION

This research study illustrated the importance of relatability and trust as it relates to interactions with colleagues and frontline supervisors within the crime scene unit. This study revealed that 75% of participants found trust and relatability to be important for resiliency-based mitigation for occupational stressors. In addition, there was a connection between participant willingness to disclose occupational stressors in the workplace based on two inherently important factors. First, 81.25% of participants in this study believed that leadership matters. Second, 67.85% of study participants revealed that leadership assigned to the crime scene unit should be trained within the discipline and be a practitioner. I believe these strong participant responses revealed in RQ2 were confirming the notion that leadership matters as reflected in RQ1. Leadership style and approach were most important to building a unit with cohesiveness and trust. Positive affirmations were made stronger when relatability existed in dealing with colleagues assigned to the same unit coupled with a trained crime scene supervisor. Many participants believed some resiliency was being offered within the unit based on internal interactions with team members. However, half of all participants believed a lack of agency support to mitigate occupational stressors exists.

Law enforcement agencies must accept the notion that they are the origin for some intended or unintended occupational stressors and make the necessary effort through self-reflection to foster a more positive work environment (Stinchcomb, 2004). To accomplish this, senior chain of command must accept responsibility for creating stress among followers and work to identify those shortcomings. This will only be accomplished through honest self-reflection and a commitment to improving the workplace (Stinchcomb, 2004). The underlying theme that resonated in this study was the notion that trust is essential to effective supervision (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). While trust must always be reciprocal, it was revealed in this study that trust in frontline leadership was necessary to a pragmatic leader and follower relationship. While law enforcement agencies may believe they are providing the necessary and appropriate resiliency-

based programming to followers, several participants in this study preferred either an individual resiliency-based option due to a lack of trust in organizational leadership or simply accepted the notion that unit colleagues and a trained supervisor in the discipline was an adequate mechanism in place to cope with occupational stressors. Fostering trust and relatability in leadership is necessary to build faith among followers. The servant leader best accomplishes this. At a minimum, it appears that resiliency begins within the unit between trusted colleagues and a trained supervisor navigating the same terrain and sharing the same lived experiences.

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