WHY DO EMPLOYEES ACCOMMODATE ORGANISATIONAL INJUSTICE?

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ABSTRACT:

Many research in organizational behavior helps to understand the negative consequences of injustice perceptions. While few studies have been conducted on the cognitive processes that addresses organizational injustice. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between organizational injustice and employee's engagements. To do this, we rely on the *relational paradigm*. It is on this premises, this paper offers a more informed interpretation of the accommodation to organizational injustice centered on a coherent reasoning.

Keywords: Organizational injustice, Perceptions of justice, Self-ruse, Accommodation, Psychological distress.

1. INTRODUCTION

Until now, the literature on organizational behavior has been limited to emphasizing that justice determines attitudes and behaviors at work. Many researchers rightly point out that it is challenging to consider management without considering perceptions of justice at the workplace (Ben Mansour, Chiniara, & Bentein, 2009). According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), employees tend to reciprocate by adopting positive behaviors at work if they are treated with respect (Ma & Qu, 2011). Positive exchange can elicit feelings of gratitude and commitment on the part of employees (Blau, 1964). Researchers like Bartlett and DeSteno (2006) assert that gratitude encourages reciprocal and prosocial behavior between benefactor and recipient so that the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) leads to the state of psychological obligation, which prompts the recipient to reciprocate (Goei & Boster, 2005). As Belschak, Jacobs, Giessner, Horton, and Bayer (2020) assert, employees remain loyal and are less likely to quit the organization, despite potential difficulties. In contrast, dissatisfied employees are likely to rate their work situation as negative and, in

this vein, are willing to retire and seek more rewarding alternative employment (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

However, suppose the theory of social exchange makes it possible to understand organizational commitment. In that case, it remains incapable of explaining the maintenance of the "individual-organization" relationship when the commitments are not reciprocal since this situation can give rise to voluntary departure. To our knowledge, employees' ability to accommodate organizational injustice, to the point of remaining with the organization, has rarely been researched. Therefore, this reflection examines the value of understanding the cognitive mechanisms of organizational commitment beyond injustice situations.

In the current context, to initiate such a reflection is to face a preconstructed object where organizational injustice, such as the intention to leave, exists. Simultaneously, it is not a question of allowing this institutional problem to be imposed on oneself, because other points of view can be formed. Such an approach to the subject opens a gap by questioning the premise of intention to quit, associated with injustice perceptions since not all employees are motivated to leave (Brown, Manegold, & Marquardt, 2020). Management researchers and some sociologists, have been able to deal with the subject - many researchers consider that employees' accommodation to organizational injustice is linked to the perception of the sacrifice linked to costs of departure or the perception of lack of employment alternatives (McGee & Ford, 1987); or on contextual parameters such as the employment crisis, unemployment, weakening defenses of the work market in the world, (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011), we seek to direct our reflection towards what characterizes employees' trajectories as this focus allows us to consider that employees can accommodate organizational injustice despite perceptions of injustice.

Based on this consideration, it seems legitimate to ask why employees accommodate organizational injustice. "An era characterized by the advent of the individual king", considered by society as "having the right to everything" (Bajoit, 2004). In many ways, employees' accommodation to organizational injustice can be out of tune today, in the sense of coping with the immediate consequences of organizational injustice. When professional careers take less position within the same company, the psychological contract (Schein, 1978) cannot rely on its account for why employees choose to accommodate themselves to injustice situations. However, knowledge on the link between psychological distress and organizational commitment remains limited (Vandenberghe, Landry and Panaccio, 2009). For instance, the literature on organizational behaviour indicates that while affective commitment (emotional attachment to the organization) contributes to the employee's well-being, the commitment to continuity (perceived need to remain within the organization) is correlated with psychological distress.

Therefore, we approach the subject from the intra-individual level of Bajoit (2004) that if the employees do not rebel, it is mostly (although this does not explain everything) because they manage to sustain the deprivations imposed on them. Based on that, we suggest that employees' accommodation to organizational injustice can be justified by theoretical realism that considers employees' "disposition" to be "indifferent." Thus, we propose a reasoning on organizational injustice, which makes it possible to highlight identity construction, which is the mobilization of strategies for self-relational control.

Our article is organized into several sections. In the first section, we present previous organizational justice research, mobilizing accommodation research experience, and developing research proposals. Second, we extend these considerations with a theoretical reflection, based on Bajoit (2004), with the effect of discussing the reasons for accommodation to organizational injustice. Thirdly, we present the main limitation, the lessons drawn from our research as well as the related managerial implications.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, RESEARCH EXPERIENCE ON ORGANIZATIONAL INJUSTICE AND PROPOSITIONS DEVELOPMENT

This part of our reflection is devoted to the psychological mechanisms that play a role in the prediction of employee behavior. Our approach consists in addressing the concept of organizational justice in order to shed light on the reactions relating to it, as well as the variation of reactions linked to injustice feelings.

2.1 At the origins of perceptions of organizational injustice

The literature identifies three components of organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Within this research framework, we choose not to return to the controversies related to approaching the concept of interactional justice. Some researchers (e.g., Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001) have adopted a four-dimensional organizational justice structure: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational.

The first form of organizational justice, distributive justice, relates to the organization's perceived justice of rewards. Using the logic of cognitive dissonance, Adam (1965) observed that an employee who was not paid up to the task performed would experience anger or resentment. With a view to re-establishing fairness, they can adopt a new behavior - by working little, for example, modifying their cognitions - considering that the basic frame of reference was poorly adapted. Recognizing the importance of distributive justice, Tyler and Smith (1998) pointed out that this form of justice involves a partial and one-sided view of organizational justice.

While distributive justice relates to the criteria retained in the distribution of resources (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997), individuals are also interested in the process of resource allocation or the means used for retribution (Folger & Greenberg, 1985). Procedural justice is, therefore, the second form of organizational justice identified in the literature. Borrowed from legal thought (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), procedural justice is considered as one of the distinguishing criteria retained in the study of justice in the workplace (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001). It participates in the subjective perceptions that individuals have of distributing organizational resources, for example, how salaries or even benefits are allocated.

To gain a comprehensive view of organizational justice, Bies and Moag (1986) identified a third form of justice: interactional justice (the justice of interpersonal treatment received in the organization). This form of justice is concerned with how individuals rate the quality of interpersonal treatment they receive from others. Based on this diagnosis, El Akremi, Nasr and Camerman

(2006) ask themselves the following question: How do employees react when they feel unfairly treated?

Since Adams' theory of fairness (1965), researchers have sought to describe and understand the effects of fairness perceptions in the workplace. This work's main contribution is to reveal perceptions of organizational justice that perception' attitudes and behaviors. Among the variables that are ordinarily associated with perceptions of justice (attitudes and emotions), work performance, and counterproductive behaviors, many researchers have observed that perceived injustice feelings produce counterproductive behaviors and, consequently, negative results (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001).

Regarding distributive justice, Adams' theory of equity (1965) states that individuals can react negatively to perceived organizational injustice by adopting different behaviors to rebalance the contribution-retribution couple (Bies & Tripp, 1996). The consequences of injustice can be cognitive, emotional and behavioral (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001).

The link between procedural injustice and counterproductive behavior originates in a framework of social exchange (Blau, 1964) characterized by the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) or the obligation of reciprocity (Meeker, 1971) between the organization and the individual (Alexander & Ruderman, 1987). Employees exchange their knowledge, skills, abilities and motivation for rewards. These can be tangible (income) or intangible (being treated with respect, dignity and fairness). The benefits of this reciprocal exchange shape social interactions.

Folger and Konovsky (1989) argue that employees dissatisfied with their (unfair) treatment will be tempted to seek an alternative solution to restore fairness concerning interactional justice. They may therefore develop negative behaviors. On the other hand, a high level of equity will induce a high level of satisfaction (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Nadisic and Steiner (2010) argue that these three forms of justice interact. This observation leads to the formulation of the following proposition.

> *Proposition 1* : *Previous theories (social exchange, or social identity and equity) are unable to explain employees' accommodation to organizational injustice.*

2.2 About the "Person-Organization" Incongruence

Compatibility between an employee and the organization that employs them corresponds to the "person-organization" interface (Brown et al., 2020). Kristof (1996) observes that when a person's characteristics (e.g. values, goals, etc.) match those of an organization, this leads to the adequacy of the "person-organization" interface. Following Tremblay, Hill and Aubé (2017), the "Person-Organization fit", as a theory, postulates that people are more attracted and involved in organizations that correspond to their values also provide them with the necessary resources. This theory refers to the congruence of values between people and organizational characteristics (Chatman, 1991) and, to a lesser extent, the congruence of goals (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). In 1996, Kristof pointed out that compatibility between people and organizations can be determined if one party meets the other's needs or shares similar characteristics (Dahleez, Aboramadan & Bansal, 2020).

Adopting an interactionist approach, which underlies the existence of similarities and differences between employees and their organization, Brown et al. (2020) use the "person-organization" interface to explain how interactive effects can influence employee behaviors. The authors consider that "person-organization" corresponds to the similarity between individual values and the beliefs of the organization (additional adjustment); as to the extent to which each of the entities complements the strategic expectations of the other (complementary adjustment). This interface refers to the degree of correspondence between what is essential to an individual and an organization. So that complementary adjustment helps to understand why individuals may find themselves in an organization in which they will later feel a lack of additional adjustment. The additional adjustment encompasses the perceived alignment between individual and organizational values. Perceptions of justice are considered essential to individual identity. Perceptions are likely to be necessary to a person as long as they make value-based assessments of fit for their organization's changing relationship (Brown et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, if an employee can become attached to his organization, a mismatch can also occur between him and the organization (Wheeler, Coleman Gallagher, Brouer, & Sablynski, 2007), since the "person-organization" interface corresponds to the idea of the psychological contract (Silverthorne, 2004). As soon as an employee feels that this contract has been violated, it can have a negative effect on job satisfaction (Hallier & James, 1997). The congruence between an organization's values and those of the employee leads to positive outcomes such as increased motivation, less stress and high levels of engagement (Posner, 2010), while the incongruence of values can have a negative influence on the employee, thus generating negative attitudes and behaviors (Coldwell, Bilsbury, van Meurs, & March 2008). Based on this argument, we propose the following.

> *Proposition 2 : The "Person-Organization" incongruence does not allow us to understand attachment to the organization when commitments are not reciprocal.*

These two propositions highlight that organizational injustice can trigger negative reactions from employees. Hence the need to question the variation in reactions linked to organizational injustice feelings.

2.3 Reconstruct the Reactions Relating to Injustice Feelings in their Heterogeneity

With several years of experience as researchers, we stand to say that employees had not left the organization: they had stayed bonded to the organization despite injustice feelings experienced. These employees did not develop negative behaviours. They did not subscribe to the perspective of deviance, that of behaviours in opposition to the organization. Instead, they developed ambivalent behaviours: they were both sensitive to injustice and bonded to the organization.

Therefore, the challenge is to reconstruct the springs of injustice and understand what pushed employees to maintain this commitment. The theory of the plural man developed by Bernard Lahire (1998) is positioned here as a framework for highlighting these variations in the same individual's behaviour. Lahire considers the tendencies to be relatively heterogeneous. Some of them are

mobilized according to the particular context of the action. These are more or less consistent with a commitment to the organization. So, it is a question of studying the conditions of actualization, redefinition or inhibition, to accommodate organizational injustice.

Nonetheless, in the workplace, employees go through paradoxical experiences. These accumulate and persist over time, to the point of producing socialization effects. On the one hand, because they internalize the organization's commitment, employees can internalize the importance of their inclusion within the organizational system.

Our experience has been an interesting way to support the hypothesis of a contradiction in these employees' daily experiences. Organizational injustice does not rhyme exclusively with the development of organizational deviance, turnover intention or voluntary departure, etc. The reconstruction of transactions makes it possible to highlight forms of expression of crossed behaviour, suggesting the consideration of injustice feelings and the search for maintaining employee status (commitment to the organization about what this represents in the employee's eyes). The same employee can deplore the injustice experienced while developing strategies to stay within the organization.

It is, therefore, about being attentive to the context. Usually, employees do not oppose the company head-on. They sometimes activate and develop resistance favouring a particular relational context, more particularly in the specific context of their relationship with the business executive. Relationships in which a veiled conflict with the business leader can crystallize around the latter's loss of confidence (violation of the psychological contract). Employees begin to develop injustice feelings when they experience injustice situations, which seems to condition their commitment to the organization.

Employees are being committed to the organization rhymes with interactional justice. By dealing with injustice, employees can avoid being psychologically harmed by the executive's behaviour, reinforcing them in the form of organizational disqualification. By doing this, employees gradually build a habit of "indifference" that they mobilize daily. They learn that it is a way of dealing with conflictual situations in a context where they struggle to assert their point of view by demanding justice. From the perspective developed by Hirschman (1970), they learn that accommodation is a way of dealing with conflict situations, in a context where they struggle to assert their point of view by demanding justice. In the language of Hirschman, to manage conflictual situations, the individual has the choice between three attitudes: defection (exit), internal protest (voice) and loyalty (loyalty). The individual can defect just as he can express his discontent, individually or collectively, through speaking out. But if defection and speaking out, combined or taken in isolation, do not provide satisfactory answers, loyalty makes it possible to apprehend the dynamic coexistence of defection and speaking out. This form of attachment presupposes that the individual hopes and believes that the situation will improve and considers that he is able to influence the decisions taken. Hirschman rightly believes that this loyal behavior is likely to bear fruit, as the organization fears that its members will leave. Beyond the relevance of this reading grid, sociologists consider that loyalty and protest cannot be reduced to a cost / benefit trade-off. Because adopting such a posture is to challenge the role of ideals, beliefs and affects in engagement. Despite injustice feelings, employees do not

adopt negative behaviours: they remain durably worked by a commitment thought. This allows employees to bemoan organizational injustice while still ensuring that they stay with the company. We, therefore, propose the following.

>**Proposition 3** : *In view of injustice situations, employees can build a habit of "indifference" that they will mobilize on a daily basis.*

2.4 From the Transformation of the meaning given to Organizational Injustice: The Trajectory Pursued as a Process of "Self-Realisation"

To verify the hypothesis of a transformation of the meaning that young people give to work, Eme, Hinault, Misset, Bender and Rouxel (2005) used the turnover, aggressive behaviour towards colleagues, among other indicators absenteeism and sick leave. Sociologist like (Sainsaulieu, 1977; Dubar, 1991) has reformulated young people's expectations about work by mobilizing the different theories of identity in the workplace. Dubar (1991) opposed to the personal identity inherited or acquired and the identity proposed or attributed by the company or human resources, such as family life, leisure time, time for oneself.

Based on that, Eme et al. (2005) revealed that identities are fluid, plastic, individualized. They adapt to contexts, requirements, and turning points in life. In the construction of identity, the trajectory, considered as the process of self-realization, is positioned as preponderant with other dimensions, membership in the organization in particular. The value of work has been transformed profoundly concerning the production of oneself as a social subject in individualized and reflexive identity processes (Hinault, 2006). However, the trajectory cannot be reduced to the career.

On the one hand, in the context of this reflection, we acknowledge that it reflects the quest for the desire for achievement and self-expression as a living subject of commitments in multiple organizational spheres. Though, we believe it aims to bridge the gap between injustice and commitment to the organization. Projection in the desired trajectory indeed helps to reduce injustice feelings. To understand employee accommodation's manifestations of organizational injustice, it seems legitimate to exploit the hypothesis of "indifference" to injustice.

According to Etogo (2017), organizational injustice is becoming, in many companies, a structural management mechanism. While this behavior is not always openly contested by employees, it is subject to criticism. As Hinault (2006) observes, young people have difficulty identifying with the rules and criteria involved in their leadership.

Consequently, the forms of relationship with the manager are contrasted. Those who build a privileged relationship find in the latter; the legitimation of organizational injustice. The others, invisible to the leader's eyes, experience organizational injustice that could force their commitment at work. In the face of the material, social and existential uncertainties surrounding injustice, employees have no choice but to accept everything and submit to the executive's rules and expectations. These considerations suggest that accommodation stems from social relations of domination. From the perspective developed by Hinault (2006), the personal injury resulting from this experience of social and symbolic

disqualification is expressed in the register of "shame" and injustice. Thus, we make the following.

> **Proposition 4** : *The trajectory pursued is presented as an innovation factor constrained by the process of building employee identities*.

3. UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEES' ACCOMMODATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL INJUSTICE : AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

Apart from managerial approaches interested in perceptions of justice, we consider that injustice feelings do not all relate to forms of social contempt. Because employees' frustrations are symptomatic of individualization experience (Bazin, 2016), it seems normal to question the strategies that employees develop to accommodate injustice.

To discuss these individual strategies, we take up a text by Guy Bajoit (2004). By adopting a perspective anthropology approach, the Belgian sociologist defines ruse as a strategy consisting of an actor in masking his intentions to achieve his ends better, either bypassing a system (laws, norms, rules, rules) or "by abusing another actor." Bajoit further argues that humans regularly ruse with their fellow human beings and themselves like the fox in his demonstration. Hungry and not having the courage to "go up to the trellis," the fox convinces himself that the grapes "are too green and good for the goujats." He gives up catching them - even though they are "covered with ruddy skin" - and dies of hunger: he tricks self-ruse in the perspective of "feeling less hunger and relieving shame of his cowardice." By establishing a link with the accommodation of organizational injustice, we would like to point out that, if humans use self-ruse, this stratagem is useful and necessary. Self-ruse seems essential. Bajoit goes so far as to make it one of the distinctive and essential characteristics of human beings.

In the process of building personal identity, self-ruse constitutes an essential human psychic resource. Personal identity is the result of a human being's work on himself. Bajoit qualifies this work as "subject work" or "self-relationship management." The individual is continuously rebuilding his identity. It is an effort and, to achieve this, humans must mobilize "psychic resources." This process is challenging to achieve as the individual faces different "goods," generally opposites. To build his identity, Bajoit posits that individual needs three "goods": Personal fulfillment (the individual strives to reconcile what he is with what he would like to be). Social recognition (the individual undertakes to accord what he is with what he thinks others want him to do or be). Existential consonance (the individual intends to reconcile what he wants to be with what he believes others expect from him). Observing that it is difficult for him to reconcile what he is, not only with what he can expect of himself but also with what he believes others expect from him, the individual can interweave these three goals (identity goods) social life achieves to separate. The individual engages in this work because he would be in pain if he did not. It must achieve at least one of the goals, if possible, several goods. If not, he runs the risk of sensing an incompleteness in his consciousness that Bajoit calls existential

tension. However, how does the individual act to achieve this work of self-management in relationship to others?

The individual has two necessary psychic resources to achieve his ends. To return to La Fontaine's fable, Bajoit posits that the fox, hungry, not daring to go up to the trellis to reach the grapes' height, suffers doubly because it continues to be hungry and because it was ashamed of himself. By choosing to renounce, two speeches can be made: either "they are not ripe, and besides, I am not so hungry"; or "I do not dare, I am afraid of breaking my bones." The dissimilarity between the two psychic resources seems so crucial that the sociologist observes that in the first situation, the fox deludes oneself, thus avoiding any self-criticism, even though he sees clearly that the grapes are ripe and that he is hungry; he undertakes to delude himself into believing the contrary. In the second, the fox examines the situation and assumes its cowardice.

On the one hand, he "tells himself a story," trying to believe it, even though he knows that he is lying to himself. Although, he "sees things as they are," especially as they are for himself. The fox explains to himself what is happening to him and, ultimately, can choose between two paths: "accommodation" (ruse) and "distancing" (reflexivity).

Accommodation is a ruse in that it allows the fox, faced tension (he wishes to eat and at the same time does not dare to climb the trellis), to reduce his suffering by resorting to a stratagem (to convince himself that the reasons are not ripe), to the effect of obtaining a result: feeling less hunger and being less ashamed of one's cowardice. As Bajoit (2004) points out, the fox self-ruse: "he is deluded, he makes himself believe, he deludes himself." To be made up of a complex set of resources, accommodation allows humans to justify themselves, both to others and themselves, to fight to meet their expectations.

In the sense of social psychology, this ability to rationalize allows him to match his subjectivity (his convictions, his beliefs, etc.) with his objective conditions of existence (the position within the company, for example). Nevertheless, suppose the theory of rationalization states that humans seek consistency between their thinking and their conduct. In that case, we observe here that humans can also explain their inconsistencies to themselves and live with them (they take their responsibility away, exonerates, tells a story, and, above all, believes in it). Then, humans can develop the capacity to become sensitive, to no longer see what is happening to them, postponing the decision (the decision to leave the company, for example), to tell themselves that what is happening to them is natural, and therefore expected that it has always been so. Beyond that, he is not the only one in this situation, especially since others are even worse off than him after all, etc. On the last point, the employee will compare himself to other employees whose situation does not seem more favorable. It helps him to accommodate organizational injustice. In 2005, Dubet observed that workers do not compare themselves to managers, concerning injustice feelings in the workplace, rather than other workers. Finally, he can hope and tell himself that it is temporary that it will pass. In short, the employee will make his situation positive by basing all his hope on God or any other person or institution; he will dream and live with imaginary solutions, symbolic satisfactions. By adopting this strategy, the employee achieves to reduce identity tension and even forget it.

4. LIMIT, LESSON AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The paperwork that we have just developed has at least one limitation. In order to better understand the cognitive mechanisms that come into play in accommodation, we have not addressed the perverse effects of ruse identified by Bajoit (2004), namely: "boredom" and "anomie." Indeed, ruse aggravates existential tensions even when it is supposed to reduce them. The current era is a fascinating illustration in more than one respect. As the Belgian sociologist observes, nowadays, almost all young people are born under the reign of the individual "having the right to everything". The institutions worked to provide them with all the objects he wanted and make him interested in whatever they could provide. Those of the young employees who have everything (the included) no longer want anything, and the others (the excluded), who have nothing, aspire to everything. At the same time, society asks each other to be themselves, have a project, and carry it out. Thus, the included no longer know what to value since they have everything, while the others aspire to individual well-being but are unable to achieve it. So, if reflexivity makes everyone lucid, accommodation plays tricks on them. By a ruse, they included inventing identity vocations to a certain extent realistic, since they have always had everything. When they realize they have to work hard, they invest in other projects. For their part, the excluded, considering that there is no point in trying, live their project, in their imagination, in the mode of dreams, by trickery. Both thus comfort existential tensions.

As a lesson, understanding the cognitive mechanisms involved in accommodation emphasizes the need to establish a link between the transformation of self-image and individual emancipation. If the psychological contract designates, in the eyes of the employee, a set of beliefs in the existence of reciprocal obligations between himself and another individual or an entity such as the company, injustice feeling can give rise to the shaking of employee confidence and therefore, induce the search for the conditions for individual fulfillment outside the organization.

In terms of managerial implications, employees must "once again" become the object of managers' responsibility: Paternalism, so decried today, at least had the merit of placing the responsibility of the leader or central executive officer at the heart of that of his employees (Bernoux, 2009). Managers' responsibility depends on knowing their companies and their employees. Leaders and managers must reduce the gap between their representations of the real functioning of the company and what employees experience. In view of injustice situations, the search for sense leads them to leave contexts that no longer carry coherence. Sensitivity to inconsistency therefore occupies an important place in the process. Managerial behaviors participates in the construction of this sense.

5. CONCLUSION

At the end of this reflection, we have legitimately observed that employees' emotions and frustrations constitute daily life since companies' injustices are an integral part of our lives. Being interested in accommodating organizational injustice involves understanding the effects on both employees and the

organization (Bazin, 2016). With this theoretical development, we understand the individual strategies mobilized by employees to build individual identity, to accommodate injustice. This reflection can, therefore, be understood as a call for the personal emancipation of employees. In this regard, Bajoit concludes his article on an excerpt from the fox's fable and the grapes with this question: Didn't he do better than to complain? To this question from Jean de La Fontaine, the sociologist answers in these terms: He did better, in fact, because without self-ruse, the construction of identity would only produce individuals as lucid and cynical as social life would be an endless source of frustrations (2004).

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