

EXAMINING LEADERSHIP APPROACHES AND THEIR ROLE IN FACILITATING EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: Effective knowledge management has become a critical determinant of organizational success in an increasingly competitive and information-driven environment. Leadership plays a central role in shaping how knowledge is created, shared, stored, and applied within organizations. This paper examined various leadership approaches and their influence on facilitating effective knowledge management practices. It explores how different leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, democratic, and distributed leadership, contribute to or hinder knowledge processes within organizational settings. The paper emphasized that leadership behaviors significantly affect organizational culture, collaboration, and communication, which are essential components of knowledge management. Transformational leadership, for instance, fosters innovation, motivation, and knowledge sharing by inspiring employees toward shared goals. In contrast, transactional leadership may enhance compliance and structure but may limit creativity and open knowledge exchange if overly rigid. Democratic and distributed leadership styles are highlighted as particularly effective in promoting participatory decision-making and collaborative knowledge environments. The paper also identified the challenges affecting the alignment of leadership styles with knowledge management, including resistance to change, hierarchical organizational structures, and inadequate communication channels. It further discussed strategies for improving leadership effectiveness through capacity building, organizational learning initiatives, and the adoption of supportive digital knowledge platforms. Relevant theoretical and empirical literature constituted the major sources of information, the paper concluded that no single leadership style is universally effective; rather, the success of knowledge management depends on contextually appropriate leadership practices. Organizations that adopt flexible and adaptive leadership approaches are more likely to achieve sustainable knowledge sharing, innovation, and improved performance outcomes. The paper emphasized the importance of leadership development in strengthening knowledge management systems across sectors.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Leadership Approaches, Knowledge Management.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Fuludu, L. E., & Benson, M. N. (2026). Examining leadership approaches and their role in facilitating effective knowledge management. *International Journal of Leadership, Quality Education and African Development*, 3(2), 235-247. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21229323>

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership approaches play a crucial role in shaping how knowledge is managed within organizations. Different leadership approaches influence knowledge sharing, collaboration and innovation. Understanding these styles is essential for improving knowledge management

practices and enhancing organizational effectiveness in dynamic and competitive environments. Organizations operate in environments where knowledge serves as a primary source of competitiveness, innovation, and sustained performance. The ability to generate, store, share, and apply knowledge determines how effectively institutions respond to change and solve complex problems. Knowledge management therefore represents a structured effort to ensure that valuable information, expertise, and experience are accessible and utilized across the organization. Leadership remains central to this process because leaders influence the climate in which knowledge is either shared openly or withheld. Empirical research confirms that leadership behavior shapes employee attitudes toward collaboration, trust, and learning, all of which directly affect knowledge management practices (Donate & de Pablo, 2015). When leaders cultivate supportive environments, employees are more inclined to exchange insights and contribute to organizational learning.

Different leadership styles guide knowledge processes in distinct ways. Transformational leadership encourages vision, inspiration, and intellectual stimulation, creating conditions that support creativity and voluntary knowledge sharing. Studies indicate that transformational leaders enhance knowledge acquisition and dissemination through motivation and empowerment of employees (Le & Lei, 2019). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on structured supervision, rewards, and corrective actions. This style can reinforce knowledge management systems through accountability and performance monitoring, yet its emphasis on formal exchanges may limit spontaneous knowledge sharing if not balanced with supportive communication. Democratic leadership promotes participation in decision making, which strengthens dialogue and collective problem solving. Employees under participatory leaders tend to feel valued, increasing their willingness to share experiences and lessons learned. In contrast, autocratic leadership centralizes authority and may restrict knowledge flow when communication channels are tightly controlled.

Servant leadership and distributed leadership further highlight the relational dimension of knowledge management. Servant leaders prioritize employee development and ethical responsibility, building trust that encourages openness and collaboration. Evidence shows that servant leadership positively influences knowledge sharing behavior through enhanced organizational commitment (Eva et al., 2019). Distributed leadership extends influence across teams, recognizing that knowledge resides at multiple organizational levels. This approach allows expertise to emerge from diverse sources, strengthening collective learning and innovation. Organizational culture often reflects the dominant leadership style, shaping whether knowledge becomes embedded in daily routines or remains confined to isolated individuals or departments.

Examining leadership styles and their impact on knowledge management offers valuable insight into how organizations can strengthen learning systems and improve performance outcomes. Leadership does not merely support knowledge management structures; it determines whether those structures function effectively. Understanding how various leadership approaches facilitate or hinder knowledge processes is therefore essential for organizations seeking sustainable growth and adaptability in dynamic environments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Organizational Learning Theory as articulated by Basten and Haamann (2018) explained that organizations develop sustainable capability through structured processes of knowledge

acquisition, reflection, integration, and institutionalization, emphasizing that learning is not a spontaneous activity but a deliberate and socially embedded practice shaped by leadership orientation, communication systems, and cultural support mechanisms; the theory argues that learning occurs at individual, group, and organizational levels where experience is interpreted collectively, shared through dialogue, embedded into routines, and preserved within organizational memory systems so that insights gained from action become accessible resources for future decision making, innovation, and performance improvement; leadership occupies a central position within this framework because leaders influence whether learning opportunities are encouraged, whether mistakes are treated as sources of insight, and whether collaborative reflection is prioritized as part of everyday operations,

The theory maintains that supportive leadership behaviors strengthen knowledge transfer, reinforce feedback systems, and cultivate climates that value experimentation and shared understanding; relevance of this theory to the present study emerges from its direct linkage between leadership style and knowledge processes since different leadership approaches determine how effectively organizations create, disseminate, and retain knowledge, with participative and transformational leadership styles likely to enhance open dialogue and collective interpretation while rigid control oriented styles may restrict interactive learning.

Application of Organizational Learning Theory to the study therefore provides a conceptual foundation for examining how leadership behaviors facilitate knowledge creation, encourage sharing across teams, and institutionalize best practices into organizational systems, particularly within knowledge management frameworks that depend on continuous adaptation and innovation, as leaders who promote inquiry, reflection, and structured feedback loops enable organizations to convert individual expertise into collective capability, strengthen knowledge repositories, and sustain long term performance through ongoing learning cycles that align strategy, culture, and technological systems with evolving environmental demands.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The Concept of Knowledge Management



Knowledge management refers to the systematic process through which organizations create, capture, organize, store, share, and apply knowledge to enhance effectiveness and sustain

competitive advantage. Contemporary organizations operate in environments driven by information, expertise, and innovation, which makes knowledge a central organizational asset rather than a mere support resource. Knowledge management integrates people, processes, and technology to ensure that valuable insights are not lost but are transformed into collective organizational memory. According to Alavi and Leidner (2016), knowledge management involves structured practices that facilitate knowledge creation, storage, transfer, and application across organizational units.

Modern perspectives emphasize that knowledge exists in both tacit and explicit forms. Tacit knowledge resides in individuals' experiences, skills, and insights, while explicit knowledge is documented and easily communicated. Effective knowledge management bridges the gap between these two forms, ensuring that individual expertise becomes accessible to the wider organization. North and Kumta (2018) explained that organizations that institutionalize knowledge systems are better positioned to adapt to rapid technological and market changes.

Digital technologies, collaborative platforms, and organizational learning systems have strengthened knowledge management practices in recent years. However, technology alone cannot guarantee effective knowledge flow. Organizational culture, trust, and leadership commitment determine whether employees willingly contribute their knowledge. Masa'deh et al. (2017) noted that supportive organizational environments increase employees' willingness to share expertise, which enhances overall performance. Knowledge management therefore extends beyond information storage; it represents a strategic framework for innovation, problem solving, and sustainable growth.

The Role of Leadership in Knowledge Creation and Sharing

Leadership shapes the environment within which knowledge is created and shared. Organizational leaders influence culture, communication patterns, motivation, and trust, all of which determine whether employees feel safe contributing ideas. Effective leadership establishes a climate that values learning, openness, and collaboration. Such an environment encourages employees to move beyond personal knowledge ownership toward collective contribution.

Leaders determine priorities and allocate resources for training, research, and technological infrastructure that support knowledge initiatives. When leaders actively promote learning opportunities, employees perceive knowledge sharing as an expected organizational behavior. Mittal and Dhar (2015) observe that leadership behaviors directly affect employees' willingness to exchange information and collaborate across functional boundaries.

Knowledge creation often emerges from dialogue, experimentation, and reflection. Leaders who facilitate team discussions and cross departmental engagement stimulate idea generation. Sumbal et al. (2020) argue that leadership commitment strengthens both knowledge acquisition and knowledge dissemination processes within organizations. Trust plays a central role in this process. Employees are more inclined to share insights when leaders demonstrate fairness, transparency, and recognition of intellectual contributions.

Leadership also ensures that knowledge sharing aligns with organizational goals. Clear strategic direction helps employees understand the relevance of their contributions. In the absence of supportive leadership, knowledge initiatives may remain fragmented and underutilized. Effective leadership therefore functions as the driving force that transforms individual expertise into shared organizational capability.

Transformational Leadership and Knowledge Innovation

Transformational leadership promotes inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and a compelling vision. Leaders who adopt this approach encourage employees to challenge conventional practices and explore new ideas. Such leadership fosters a culture of creativity and continuous improvement, which directly supports knowledge innovation.

Intellectual stimulation motivates employees to question existing assumptions and develop novel solutions. Jaiswal and Dhar (2015) found that transformational leadership positively influences innovative work behavior through supportive organizational climates. Employees under this leadership style feel empowered to experiment and contribute ideas without fear of criticism. This psychological safety enhances knowledge creation and exploration.

Transformational leaders articulate a shared vision that connects individual contributions to broader organizational objectives. When employees understand how their ideas contribute to long term goals, they become more engaged in knowledge generation. Le and Lei (2019) report that transformational leadership strengthens knowledge sharing behaviors through trust and intrinsic motivation.

Knowledge innovation requires collaboration and the integration of diverse expertise. Transformational leaders encourage teamwork and cross functional learning, which enhances creative problem solving. Recognition and encouragement further reinforce employees' commitment to knowledge development. Organizations guided by transformational leadership often demonstrate strong research capacity, adaptive learning systems, and continuous improvement mechanisms. This leadership style therefore acts as a catalyst for converting intellectual potential into innovative outcomes that advance organizational performance.

Transactional Leadership and Knowledge Performance Control

Transactional leadership emphasizes structured supervision, performance monitoring, and reward systems. Leaders clarify expectations and establish measurable objectives that guide employee behavior. Within knowledge management contexts, this approach supports compliance with established procedures and documentation standards.

Clear policies regarding data entry, reporting, and participation in knowledge systems ensure that organizational knowledge remains organized and accessible. Obeidat et al. (2016) indicate that structured leadership practices enhance knowledge exploitation, particularly in environments requiring precision and accountability. Employees understand the consequences of meeting or failing to meet knowledge related targets, which promotes consistency.

Reward mechanisms can motivate employees to contribute to databases, attend training sessions, and participate in organizational learning programs. Performance evaluations that include knowledge sharing indicators reinforce the importance of documentation and collaboration. Nguyen et al. (2019) explain that transactional leadership strengthens knowledge utilization when supported by clear operational guidelines.

However, emphasis on control may limit creative exploration if not balanced with supportive practices. Employees may focus primarily on fulfilling minimum requirements rather than generating new insights. Despite this limitation, transactional leadership plays a vital role in maintaining order, ensuring data accuracy, and aligning knowledge practices with organizational

standards. Its strength lies in establishing accountability and structured performance management within knowledge systems.

Servant Leadership and Collaborative Knowledge Cultures

Servant leadership centers on prioritizing the growth and well being of employees while advancing organizational objectives. Leaders adopting this style emphasize empathy, listening, stewardship, and empowerment. Such behaviors create a collaborative climate where knowledge flows freely across hierarchical levels.

Trust forms the foundation of servant leadership. When employees feel respected and valued, they are more willing to share experiences and lessons learned. Eva et al. (2019) described servant leadership as a relational approach that enhances team cohesion and knowledge exchange. Collaboration becomes a shared responsibility rather than a mandated task. Servant leaders invest in employee development through mentoring and coaching. Continuous learning strengthens the collective knowledge base of the organization. Karatepe et al. (2020) demonstrate that servant leadership fosters knowledge sharing through increased organizational commitment and psychological empowerment. Employees perceive knowledge contribution as a meaningful act that supports collective progress.

Collaborative knowledge cultures thrive in environments where open communication is encouraged and competition among employees is minimized. Servant leadership reduces barriers to communication and promotes mutual support. Organizations guided by this leadership approach often experience improved teamwork, stronger learning communities, and sustainable knowledge retention. Commitment to service and empowerment therefore cultivates a culture in which knowledge sharing becomes a natural and valued organizational practice.

Democratic Leadership and Participatory Knowledge Sharing

Democratic leadership emphasizes participation, shared decision making, and collective responsibility. Leaders who adopt this approach actively seek input from employees and encourage open dialogue across hierarchical levels. Participation strengthens employees' sense of ownership and accountability, which increases their willingness to contribute knowledge to organizational systems. When individuals perceive that their opinions matter, they are more inclined to share experiences, insights, and lessons learned.

Participatory environments promote transparency and trust, which are central to knowledge exchange. Open forums, team discussions, and collaborative problem-solving sessions create platforms for collective learning. Bhatti et al. (2020) explained that participative leadership enhances employee engagement, which in turn promotes knowledge sharing behaviors within teams. Employees become partners in decision processes rather than passive recipients of directives.

Democratic leadership also encourages cross functional collaboration. Diverse perspectives are integrated into organizational decisions, which broaden the knowledge base available for innovation and strategic planning. Ali et al. (2018) reported that inclusive leadership practices strengthen collaborative knowledge cultures and improve organizational learning outcomes. Through shared dialogue and inclusive practices, democratic leadership builds an environment where knowledge sharing becomes voluntary, consistent, and aligned with organizational objectives.

Autocratic Leadership and Knowledge Flow Limitations

Autocratic leadership centralizes authority and limits employee participation in decision making. Decision processes remain concentrated at the top of the organizational hierarchy, which can restrict communication channels and reduce opportunities for collaborative learning. Knowledge tends to move vertically rather than horizontally, limiting cross departmental exchange.

Controlled environments may ensure quick decision making, especially during crises, yet they often discourage open discussion. Employees may hesitate to share ideas due to fear of criticism or rejection. Harbi et al. (2019) found that authoritarian leadership negatively influences knowledge sharing intentions because it weakens trust and psychological safety. When employees perceive that their contributions are undervalued, they may withhold expertise.

Limited communication flow under autocratic systems also reduces creativity and innovation. Knowledge management systems may exist formally, yet actual participation remains low if leadership does not encourage engagement. Al Kurdi et al. (2020) indicate that supportive leadership behaviors are necessary for effective knowledge exchange, suggesting that rigid control structures may constrain organizational learning. Although autocratic leadership may provide order and discipline, its restrictive nature often impedes open knowledge flow and collaborative development.

Laissez Faire Leadership and Knowledge Autonomy

Laissez faire leadership grants employees substantial autonomy with minimal direct supervision. Leaders provide limited guidance and allow teams to determine their own methods of accomplishing tasks. Autonomy can encourage creativity and independent problem solving, particularly among highly skilled professionals.

Freedom to explore ideas enables employees to experiment and develop innovative solutions. In knowledge intensive environments such as research institutions, autonomy may support self-directed learning and knowledge creation. Ololube (2024) suggested that leadership styles characterized by low control can stimulate individual initiative when employees possess strong intrinsic motivation.

However, absence of direction may weaken structured knowledge management processes. Without clear expectations regarding documentation and collaboration, knowledge sharing may become inconsistent. Khan et al. (2022) observed that lack of leadership involvement can reduce coordination in knowledge transfer activities. Organizational goals may suffer when employees operate independently without alignment.

Effective knowledge autonomy requires a supportive culture and clear strategic objectives. Laissez faire leadership can promote innovation if combined with accountability mechanisms and collaborative norms. Autonomy therefore serves as both an opportunity and a risk within knowledge management systems, depending on organizational maturity and employee capability.

Leadership Communication and Knowledge Transfer

Communication represents the primary channel through which knowledge is transferred within organizations. Leadership communication style influences how information is interpreted,

valued, and shared. Clear, consistent, and transparent communication fosters understanding and trust, which enhances knowledge exchange.

Leaders who communicate expectations effectively help employees recognize the relevance of knowledge management initiatives. Open communication encourages dialogue and feedback, enabling continuous improvement. Men and Yue (2019) emphasized that authentic leadership communication strengthens employee trust and engagement, both of which are essential for knowledge transfer.

Interactive communication channels such as meetings, workshops, and digital platforms support knowledge dissemination. Leaders who listen actively and respond constructively create psychological safety for idea sharing. Nguyen et al. (2021) found that communication quality directly affects employees' intention to share knowledge within organizations.

Effective leadership communication also bridges generational and departmental gaps. Shared understanding reduces misunderstandings and promotes collaboration. Knowledge transfer becomes more efficient when leaders articulate vision, clarify processes, and encourage two-way dialogue. Communication therefore functions as a strategic leadership tool that sustains knowledge flow and organizational learning.

Organizational Culture as a Mediator Between Leadership and Knowledge Management

Organizational culture reflects shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape employee behavior. Leadership influences culture through modeling, decision making practices, and reinforcement of expected behaviors. Culture then determines whether knowledge sharing becomes a natural practice or a forced obligation.

Supportive cultures emphasize trust, collaboration, and learning. Such environments encourage employees to exchange ideas without fear of negative consequences. Anwar et al. (2017) reported that organizational culture mediates the relationship between leadership style and knowledge sharing, highlighting the indirect influence leaders exert through cultural development.

Leaders establish norms regarding openness and cooperation. When leadership behaviors align with collaborative values, employees internalize these norms and participate actively in knowledge systems. Farooq (2018) indicated that learning oriented cultures strengthen the impact of transformational leadership on knowledge creation.

Culture also shapes attitudes toward innovation and risk taking. Organizations that reward experimentation foster continuous knowledge development. Leadership actions therefore shape cultural expectations, which in turn influence knowledge management effectiveness. Strong alignment between leadership practices and supportive cultural values enhances sustainable knowledge growth.

Leadership Styles and Technological Support for Knowledge Management

Technological systems provide infrastructure for storing, retrieving, and disseminating organizational knowledge. Leadership determines how effectively these systems are adopted and utilized. Strategic leaders allocate resources for digital platforms, training programs, and information systems that enhance knowledge accessibility.

Successful technology implementation requires employee acceptance and active participation. Leaders who demonstrate commitment to digital tools encourage employees to

integrate technology into daily routines. Santoro et al. (2018) argued that leadership orientation toward innovation positively affects the adoption of knowledge management technologies.

Transformational and participative leaders often promote collaborative platforms that facilitate interactive knowledge exchange. Transactional leaders may emphasize compliance with documentation standards within digital systems. Autocratic approaches might focus on control and monitoring functions of technology. Each leadership style shapes how technology is perceived and used.

Technological infrastructure alone cannot guarantee effective knowledge management. Leadership guidance ensures alignment between digital systems and organizational goals. Alshanty and Emeagwali (2019) opined that leadership support enhances employees' willingness to engage with knowledge sharing technologies. Integration of appropriate leadership practices with technological resources strengthens knowledge storage, transfer, and utilization across the organization.

CHALLENGES LEADERS FACE IN IMPLEMENTING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Implementing knowledge management systems presents a range of challenges for organizational leaders. Knowledge management is not only a technical initiative but also a cultural and behavioral process that requires collaboration, trust, and strategic alignment. Leaders are responsible for creating an environment in which employees willingly contribute, share, and apply knowledge. Despite its importance, several obstacles can impede successful knowledge management initiatives, ranging from resistance to change to technological limitations. Understanding these challenges helps leaders develop strategies that enhance knowledge creation, sharing, and utilization, ultimately improving organizational performance and innovation.

Resistance to Change

One of the primary challenges leaders encounters is resistance to change. Employees often feel uncertain about new systems, processes, or expectations related to knowledge sharing. Resistance may arise from fear of losing control over specialized expertise, concerns about increased workload, or skepticism about the benefits of knowledge management. Leaders must address these concerns by communicating the purpose, benefits, and long-term value of knowledge initiatives. Alavi et al. (2017) argued that resistance to change can slow adoption of knowledge management systems and reduce employee participation. Overcoming this challenge requires building trust, demonstrating leadership commitment, and providing continuous support and training to ease the transition.

Lack of Trust and Collaboration

Trust is critical for effective knowledge management, yet establishing it remains a significant challenge. Employees may withhold knowledge due to fear of criticism, competition, or misuse of information. Leaders must foster a culture of openness and collaboration, ensuring that employees feel safe sharing insights without negative consequences. Sumbal et al. (2020) highlighted that low trust environments inhibit knowledge flow and reduce organizational

learning. Building trust involves modeling transparency, recognizing contributions, and encouraging teamwork. Leaders who fail to cultivate collaborative relationships risk having knowledge remain siloed, limiting organizational innovation and problem-solving capabilities.

Technological Limitations

Technological infrastructure is essential for storing, accessing, and disseminating knowledge, but leaders often face limitations in implementing effective systems. Challenges include inadequate IT resources, incompatible platforms, or lack of employee technical skills. Effective knowledge management relies on user-friendly systems that encourage adoption and reduce friction in knowledge sharing. Santoro et al. (2018) emphasized that technology alone cannot guarantee success; leadership guidance, training, and alignment with organizational objectives are equally important. Leaders must invest strategically in technologies that support knowledge capture, integration, and retrieval while ensuring employees are equipped to use them efficiently.

Aligning Knowledge Management with Organizational Culture

A critical challenge involves aligning knowledge management initiatives with existing organizational culture. Cultures that prioritize hierarchy, competition, or individual performance can conflict with collaborative knowledge practices. Leaders must work to integrate knowledge management into daily operations and reinforce behaviors that support learning and sharing. Anwar et al. (2017) indicate that misalignment between culture and knowledge initiatives reduces adoption and limits organizational learning outcomes. Effective leaders engage employees in co-creating knowledge processes, emphasize shared goals, and reward collaborative behaviors to ensure that cultural norms support, rather than hinder, knowledge management.

Measuring Knowledge Management Impact

Assessing the effectiveness of knowledge management initiatives presents a further challenge for leaders. Quantifying knowledge creation, sharing, and application is complex because knowledge is intangible and often embedded in people and processes. Leaders may struggle to link knowledge management activities to measurable performance outcomes. Puni et al. (2018) note that lack of clear metrics can undermine leadership support and employee motivation. Leaders must develop assessment frameworks that capture both qualitative and quantitative outcomes, such as improvements in innovation, decision-making, efficiency, and employee learning, to demonstrate the value of knowledge management initiatives effectively.

CONCLUSION

Leadership styles play a decisive role in shaping how knowledge is created, shared, and utilized within organizations. The effectiveness of knowledge management systems depends largely on the behaviors, values, and priorities demonstrated by leaders. Organizational culture often reflects the prevailing leadership approach, influencing whether knowledge flows freely across teams or remains confined to specific units. Effective leadership ensures that knowledge management is not reduced to formal systems alone but becomes embedded in daily activities

and decision making. Leaders who encourage collaboration, transparency, and mutual respect create conditions where knowledge becomes a shared organizational resource. Understanding the impact of different leadership styles therefore provides essential insight for strengthening learning processes, enhancing innovation, and sustaining long term organizational performance.

Suggestions

Based on the literature reviewed the following suggestions were made:

- Organizational Leaders should create a culture that promotes openness, trust, and accountability in knowledge sharing. Clear expectations regarding documentation, collaboration, and information exchange must be communicated consistently.
- Employees should take active responsibility for sharing expertise, experiences, and lessons learned with colleagues. Participation in meetings, collaborative projects, and knowledge platforms enhances organizational learning. Constructive feedback on knowledge systems and leadership practices can support continuous improvement and ensure that processes remain practical and relevant.
- Human Resource Departments should align performance management systems with knowledge management objectives. Evaluation and reward structures must acknowledge collaboration and information sharing. Training initiatives focused on communication, teamwork, and leadership development can reinforce a culture that values learning and cooperation.
- Senior Management and Policy Makers should allocate adequate resources for technological infrastructure and professional development that support knowledge management. Clear policies that protect intellectual contributions and encourage ethical information use are essential for building trust.

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