

# Workforce in Green Transformation: Perspectives of Employees in Environmentally Friendly Sectors on Green Human Resources Management

Yeşil Dönüşümde İşgücü: Çevre Dostu Sektörlerde Çalışanların Yeşil İnsan Kaynakları Yönetimine Bakışı

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## Abstract

This qualitative study explores the perceptions of employees working in environmentally friendly sectors, focusing on the opportunities and challenges related to green transformation. It aims to uncover the effects of the rapidly expanding green job market on employees, alongside the benefits and risks they perceive. Employing a phenomenological qualitative design, the research involved employees from 14 distinct positions within green companies located in Ankara's Çankaya and Yenimahalle districts. Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview form comprising eight questions. The findings highlight that Green Human Resources (GHR) practices enhance employees' sense of environmental responsibility and positively influence job satisfaction. Participation in sustainability projects has fostered stronger commitment among employees, while training programs have been instrumental in enhancing skills and raising environmental awareness. The study concludes that environmentally friendly projects significantly boost employee motivation and job satisfaction. However, to ensure the long-term sustainability of these initiatives, it is crucial to raise public awareness, strengthen governmental support, and implement cost-reduction strategies. Overall, the research underscores the importance of adopting a comprehensive perspective towards experiences in green sectors and emphasizes the necessity of integrating sustainability policies into business processes for the future of the business world.

**Keywords:** Green Human Resources Management, Sustainability, Green Workforce, Working Life.

## Öz

Bu nitel çalışma, çevre dostu sektörlerde çalışanların yeşil dönüşümle ilgili fırsat ve zorluklara yönelik algılarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında, hızla büyüyen yeşil işlerin çalışanlar üzerindeki etkileri ile onların algıladığı fayda ve risk unsurlarını ortaya koymak hedeflenmiştir. Fenomolojik nitel desene sahip olan araştırma, Ankara'nın Çankaya ve Yenimahalle ilçelerinde bulunan yeşil şirketlerde, 14 farklı pozisyonda istihdam edilen çalışanların katılımıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, sekiz sorudan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Yeşil İnsan Kaynakları (YİK) uygulamalarının çalışanların çevresel sorumluluklarını artırarak iş tatminine olumlu katkı sağladığı görülmüştür. Çalışanların sürdürülebilirlik projelerine katılımı, işlerine olan bağlılıklarını güçlendirmiştir. Ayrıca, eğitim programlarının çalışanların becerilerini geliştirmek ve çevresel farkındalıklarını artırmak açısından önemli bir rol oynadığı belirlenmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucunda, çevre dostu projelerin çalışan motivasyonu ve iş tatmini üzerinde olumlu etkiler yarattığı tespit edilmiştir. Ancak, bu projelerin sürdürülebilirliği için toplum bilincinin artırılması, devlet desteklerinin güçlendirilmesi ve maliyetlerin azaltılmasına yönelik adımlar atılması gerektiği sonucuna varılmıştır. Çalışma, çevre dostu sektörlerdeki deneyimlerin daha geniş bir perspektifle ele alınması gerektiğini ve sürdürülebilirlik politikalarının iş süreçlerine entegrasyonunun, geleceğin iş dünyası için vazgeçilmez olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yeşil İnsan Kaynakları Yönetimi, Sürdürülebilirlik, Yeşil İşgücü, Çalışma Hayatı.

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Article Info / Makale Bilgileri:

Received / Gönderim: 27.02.2025 Accepted / Kabul: 26.05.2025

To cite this article / Atf için:

Şen, H. (2025). Workforce in green transformation: Perspectives of employees in environmentally friendly sectors on green human resources management. *Curr Res Soc Sci*, 11(1), 246-258.

To link to this article / Bağlantı için:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.30613/curesosc.1648165>

## **Workforce in Green Transformation: Perspectives of Employees in Environmentally Friendly Sectors on Green Human Resources Management**

The world is raising a silent scream with its depleting natural resources every passing day, and some resources are being lost irreversibly. For many years, the echoing calls of scientists and environmentally friendly organisations have shown that our planet is sounding the alarm and inviting humanity to take action for a sustainable future. Accordingly, sustainability has now become one of the primary goals in our lives.

The concept of sustainability first emerged at the 1972 United Nations Environment Conference (Tıraş, 2012, p. 23). Companies that offer high levels of welfare with low environmental damage and use economic resources at an optimum level offer ideal economic sustainability (Gedik, 2020, p. 210). Sustainability goals such as protecting ecosystems, combating climate change and using natural resources efficiently have become not only an environmental imperative but also a critical element for economic and social progress. In this context, the green transformation process includes restructuring economic activities with an environmental sustainability perspective (Daly, 2005, p. 34; Hart, 1997, p. 67; Jabbour & Santos, 2008, p. 53).

Green transformation, which focuses on the environmental dimension of sustainability, has emerged as a concept that needs to be addressed from environmental, social and economic perspectives (Daly, 2005, p. 2). While eliminating the climate crisis and ecological imbalances lies at the origin of the concept, the collaboration of international organisations, governments, business life and non-governmental organisations plays an important role in this quest. (Renwick et al., 2013, p. 4).

Green transformation has become a philosophy of life rather than just a concept, and this general situation has deeply affected working life. How to close the labour shortage that occurred with the new economic system established to reduce the impact of environmental problems without harming the environment has also taken its place among the leading issues. In work-life, where we deeply feel the traces of green transformation; naturally, the workforce has been reshaped with new norms. The new management process called green human resources management refers to integrating sustainable business strategies into the human resources dimension (Baş & Kesen, 2024, p. 175; Sharma and Gupta, 2015, p. 825). Green human resources management covers a wide area, from increasing the environmental awareness of employees to implementing policies that encourage behavioural changes in line with sustainability goals (Renwick et al., 2013, p. 6). Sustainable human resources management aims to simultaneously achieve both institutional goals and sustainability of human resources in the long-term work process through current and planned human resources strategies. (Ehnert, 2009, p. 74; Müller-Christ & Remer, 1999, p. 76)

Economic stability is necessary to preserve future generations' valuable resources (Tooranloo et al., 2017, p. 13). Economic sustainability, on the one hand, affects company achievement; on the other hand, it appears as a significant factor determining this achievement. Therefore, it requires a meticulous analysis of the internal and external environments (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 64). The impact of our daily activities on the environment and the apparent fact that natural resources are rapidly depleting have directed not only individuals but also institutions to environmentally friendly practices (Mehta & Chugan, 2015, p. 74). Companies that do not provide the value they deserve to human resources, which have been the most important resource of businesses for many years, may face the risk of being eliminated from the competitive environment of their operating sector. In order to eliminate the disadvantage at this point, it has become necessary to provide the necessary importance to human resources and improve them (Acar, 2021, p. 349).

Sustainable human resources management includes a management approach that should not be considered as a short-term strategy and is effective in all departments of the company. First of all, it is expected that a roadmap analogous to the company's vision, mission, goals, and strategies will be drawn, and progress will be made in this direction. Human resources managers should be effective throughout the process to define the company's sustainability strategy and ensure its integration among all stakeholders (Özgül & Gürol, 2019, p. 113). In this context, it is of utmost importance in terms of environmental policies that businesses adopt digital documentation systems in line with sustainability principles, implement strategies that increase energy efficiency, encourage public transportation, diversify and develop recycling processes, and adopt more effective methods in waste management (Elkington, 1997, p. 85).

This study aims to deeply analyse the perceptions of employees operating in environmentally friendly sectors regarding the opportunities and challenges related to the green transformation process within the scope of green human resources management practices. In this context, how employees' experiences, motivations, and job satisfaction in the green transformation process are shaped will be evaluated, particularly within the scope of rapidly growing green jobs.

## **Materials & Methods**

### **Research Method**

The interpretative phenomenological qualitative study method was used in the research (Creswell, 2013, p. 83; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 25; Saldana, 2011, p. 7; Van Manen, 1990, p. 362). An inductive approach was used in analysing the data obtained (Creswell, 2014, pp. 234-235). In this context, the research aimed to examine the concept of "Green human resources practices" in depth.

### **Participants of the Research**

There is no definite rule regarding the number of participants in qualitative research, and the sample size varies depending on the research's purpose, design, and data collection method (Tracy, 2019, p. 138). However, in the literature, there are different numbers ranging from 3-4 to 19 participants who are interested in and experienced with the concept being investigated in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013, pp. 76-77; Lapan et al., 2012, p. 90; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). In this context, in parallel with the purpose of this study, people working in different positions in green companies related to the subject investigated were included in the scope of the research. The employees were determined by using the purposeful and snowball sampling method among the people working in different positions in green companies located in Ankara Çankaya and Yenimahalle Districts. When the obtained data reached saturation, the research was completed with 14 employees. In this context, the purposive sampling criteria are listed below;

- Working in green companies that stand out with their environmentally friendly practices in the Çankaya and Yenimahalle districts of Ankara Province,
- Having command of environmental management systems,
- Having at least 3 years of experience in the field,
- Having at least one year of experience with "Green Human Resources Management" (GHRM) practices,
- Being willing to participate in the research.

## **Data Collection Tools**

A semi-structured interview questionnaire consisting of eight questions was used to collect research data. Questions deemed necessary were asked according to the course of the interview within the framework of the researched concept of “Green Human Resources Practices”.

## **Collection of Data**

The study is a qualitative research conducted in two central districts of Ankara between December 8, 2024 and January 8, 2025. In order to conduct the study, ethics committee approval was received from the Health Sciences University Trabzon, Faculty of Medicine Scientific Research Ethics Committee, dated 05.11.2024 and numbered 2024/11.

A qualitative research approach was adopted, and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a “Participant Information and Consent Form,” and their written consent was obtained. The form included information on the study's purpose, scope, and researcher details.

The interviews were scheduled according to the participants' availability and were conducted at their workplaces during time slots they selected. Audio recordings were made with participants' permission. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interview form consisted of introductory questions related to participants' professional background, followed by eight open-ended questions designed in alignment with the study's objectives. The questions were developed through a literature review and expert consultation.

During the data analysis process, both descriptive analysis and content analysis methods were employed in combination. Within the scope of descriptive analysis, the data obtained from the interviews were categorized and summarized according to predefined themes. Subsequently, through content analysis, recurring expressions, patterns, and concepts were identified, and the sub-dimensions of the themes were elaborated. For instance, participants' frequent emphasis on the issue of “insufficient human resources” was descriptively presented under the theme of “institutional resource shortage,” while content analysis was used to explore how this issue affected their work motivation. By integrating these two methods, both the surface structure of the data and the deeper layers of meaning were revealed.

## **Analysis of Data**

Content analysis and descriptive analysis were used inductively to analyse the data obtained from the interviews. Content analysis is an analysis technique that aims to reveal the meaning found in the data in a more concise approach. In other words, content analysis aims to reveal a “broad perspective” from the available data. Descriptive analysis aims to explain the phenomenon under investigation by presenting the critical statements obtained as a result of the interviews in the form of quotations (Erdoğan et al., 2014, p. 154).

## **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher has been actively involved in social policy and human resources management. The researcher, who holds a PhD in labour economics and industrial relations, aimed to conduct a comprehensive analysis of green human resources practices.

## Validity and Reliability of the Research

In order to ensure the validity of the research data, an independent researcher transcribed and compared the obtained audio recordings. The coding was done and checked using Nvivo 10 software. For the reliability of the research, the transcribed text was shared with the participant, and content approval was obtained. The relationships between the coding and themes were checked conceptually by the researcher.

## Findings

The average age of the participants in the study was 41.36, and the gender distribution was determined as 57.14% male and 42.86% female. Regarding education level, 64.29% of the participants had a bachelor's degree, 28.57% had a master's degree, and 7.14% had an associate's degree. When the occupational distribution is examined, 21.43% are senior managers, 21.43% are engineers, 21.43% are general managers, 7.14% are unit managers, 7.14% are unit supervisors, 7.14% are sales managers, 7.14% are sales representatives, and 7.14% are sustainability consultants.

**Table 1**

### *Socio-Demographic Characteristics*

No	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Professional Status/Position	Work Experience (Years)
1	Male	45	Married	Associate Degree	Unit Manager	20
2	Male	38	Married	Bachelor degree	Sales Representative	14
3	Male	47	Married	Bachelor degree	Sales Manager	25
4	Female	28	Single	Bachelor degree	Sustainability Consultant	4
5	Female	32	Married	Master's Degree	Senior Manager	8
6	Female	50	Married	Master's Degree	Senior Manager	26
7	Female	41	Married	Bachelor degree	Senior Manager	18
8	Female	31	Married	Bachelor degree	Unit Supervisor	7
9	Female	36	Married	Bachelor degree	Engineer	11
10	Male	45	Married	Bachelor degree	Engineer	23
11	Male	47	Married	Bachelor degree	Engineer	24
12	Male	46	Married	Master's Degree	General Manager	22
13	Male	38	Married	Bachelor degree	General Manager	15
14	Male	55	Married	Master's Degree	General Manager	32

**Table 2***Interview Themes and Frequencies*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Source (n)	Reference (n)
Contribution to Employees	Job satisfaction and motivation enhancing effects.	7	12
	The effect of environmental awareness on employee behaviours.	5	8
	The meaning of active participation in environmental projects.	4	6
Policy Challenges	Customer resistance and price perception.	6	9
	Difficulties in the adaptation process of employees.	5	7
	Difficulties caused by technical infrastructure and cost.	4	6
The Role of Projects	Increasing environmental awareness through collaboration with society.	6	10
	Employee participation in recycling projects.	4	6
	Impact of social awareness and social responsibility projects.	5	8
Technical and Communication Skills	The role of technical knowledge in environmental projects.	5	9
	The importance of persuasion and communication skills in environmentally friendly practices.	6	10
	The contribution of data analysis and analytical thinking to sustainable projects.	5	8
Organizational Culture	Long-term benefits of an environmentally conscious business culture.	7	11
	The impact of business culture on employee engagement and job satisfaction.	6	9
	An environmentally friendly business culture increases a company's reputation and social value.	5	7

**Table 3***Most Frequently Used Words*

Word	n	Weighted (%)
Environment	102	3,05
Sustainability	78	2,33
Recycling	65	1,94
Employee	58	1,73
Green	51	1,52
Education	48	1,43
Customer	46	1,35
Awareness	38	1,13
Project	34	1,02
Participation	27	0,81

### **Theme 1. Contribution to Employees**

Green Human Resources practices have positively affected job satisfaction by increasing employees' environmental awareness. Employees have stated that these policies have increased their motivation and even positively affected their daily lives. However, human resources management processes have been found to be demanding. Increasing awareness of environmentally friendly practices among employees increases job satisfaction and also positively affects personal life. In this context;

*"Thanks to Green Human Resources policies, my environmental awareness has increased, and this has improved not only my business life but also my daily life; now I can recognise my contribution to the environment more clearly, and I find my job more meaningful." (Male, 45)*

*"The fact that the company I work for is involved in environmentally sensitive projects has connected me more to my job because this job is not only a place where I make a living but also an area where I contribute to the world." (Male, 47)*

*"GHR practices allow me to find meaning in my job, and taking an active role in environmental projects both motivates me and increases my professional satisfaction. Of course, I must say that it takes extra time" (Female, 28)*

This findings indicates that environmentally friendly policies can add meaning to employees' work when aligned with their personal values.

### **Theme 2. Policy Challenges**

It was determined that various challenges were encountered during the integration of environmentally friendly policies into business processes. Participants stated that customers increased resistance to environmentally friendly practices because they found sustainable products to be high-cost. Regarding this finding;

*"It is not always easy to explain the long-term benefits of sustainability to customers who find the prices of environmentally friendly products high; some are reluctant to be convinced." (Female, 31)*

*"When trying to explain recycling practices, it was sometimes difficult for me to argue against the indifference of employees and customers because people were reluctant to change their habits." (Female, 32)*

*"One of the toughest challenges in sustainable projects is that the initial costs of these applications are high, and the results are not clear in the short term." (Male, 36)*

These findings indicate that the adoption of environmentally friendly policies is hindered by customers' perception of high costs and resistance to behavioral change.

### **Theme 3. The Role of Projects**

Recycling projects and awareness campaigns carried out within the scope of cooperation were found to be effective in spreading environmental awareness. Employees stated that participating in these projects made them more committed to their jobs. Participants stated that participating in recycling projects and taking part in social awareness campaigns provided them with personal satisfaction. Employees stated that these projects were not limited to environmental contributions only but also strengthened team spirit and loyalty in the workplace. In this context;

*“Conducting joint recycling projects with the local community has made the company’s environmental contribution visible, and being a part of this process has made me a more conscious individual. Social cooperation projects make me very happy.” (Female, 28)*

*“Participating in zero waste projects not only fulfils my responsibilities at work but also makes me feel like I am directly contributing to the environment. We have many initiatives within the scope of reducing our carbon footprint” (Male, 50)*

*“Projects carried out to create environmental awareness have strengthened not only employee loyalty but also team spirit in the workplace.” (Female, 41)*

*These findings reveal the potential of social and environmental projects to strengthen employee motivation and company image.*

#### **Theme 4. Technical and Communication Skills**

The necessity of technical knowledge, analytical thinking and effective communication skills to be successful in environmentally friendly projects has come to the fore. Participants emphasised the importance of a person’s persuasiveness as well as technical knowledge in spreading environmental awareness.

*“I used my communication skills to explain the value of environmentally friendly products because it is necessary to convince customers not only with price but also with environmental contributions. Price is just a number for customers who have environmental awareness.” (Female, 45)*

*“Developing innovative solutions in sustainability projects, as well as presenting these solutions effectively and spreading environmental awareness, is critical in my job. If you cannot convey the significance of the work you do, your project does not mean anything.” (Male, 45)*

*“In addition to good technical knowledge, it is not possible to be successful in this sector without persuasiveness because sustainability is not only a technical process but also a social process.” (Female, 32)*

These findings indicate that, in environmentally friendly projects, technical knowledge as well as effective communication and persuasion skills are considered critical for success.

#### **Theme 5. Business Culture**

An environmentally friendly business culture has enabled companies to provide long-term environmental and social benefits. Employees have stated that this type of business culture increases their individual commitment and job satisfaction. An environmentally friendly business culture has been shown to impact increasing employee job satisfaction and commitment strongly. Participants have stated that this type of culture can potentially increase not only the individual level but also the company’s reputation and social benefit. The adoption of this business culture by employees to achieve long-term environmental goals has created a strong team bond within the company.

*“Environmentally friendly work culture not only provides economic but also social and environmental benefits, creating a more meaningful atmosphere at work and connecting me to my job. I have always been sensitive about the environment.” (Female, 46)*

*“Contributing to the company’s sustainability vision is not only professional but also personal, which is great. It is also very critical in instilling corporate culture to employees.” (Female, 38)*

*“Green Human Resources practices not only help us achieve our environmental goals but also increase harmony and loyalty within the team.” (Male, 54)*

These findings indicate that employee commitment and motivation are enhanced by an environmentally friendly organizational culture.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed that environmentally friendly human resources practices generate multidimensional impacts on employees. Under the theme of contribution to employees, it was observed that green policies increased environmental awareness and added meaning to employees' work. Participants perceived these policies as effective not only in a professional context but also in their personal lives, which strengthened their motivational value. These results are in line with studies by Leavy (2017) and Tracy (2019), which suggest that sustainability practices aligned with personal values positively influence job satisfaction.

The second theme, policy challenges, pointed to both structural and behavioral barriers in the implementation of green practices. In particular, customer resistance, high cost perceptions, and employees' reluctance to change existing habits were found to undermine the sustainability of these practices. These challenges reflect broader issues identified in institutional reports such as those by the European Commission (2020) and the World Bank (2021), which emphasize the role of public acceptance in the success of sustainability policies. In this regard, the achievement of environmental goals appears to depend not only on technical capacity but also on cultural and economic perceptions.

The role of projects was also emphasized through the active participation of employees in environmental and social initiatives. Such involvement was found to enhance not only job performance but also the sense of organizational belonging. Reuse within production processes is seen as a significant alternative (Yavuz, 2010), and was frequently supported in green projects. Collaborations with local communities and participation in recycling and awareness campaigns helped employees perceive themselves as meaningful contributors, thus reinforcing the importance of corporate social responsibility at the individual level.

The theme of technical and communication skills highlighted the need to combine environmental knowledge with effective communication strategies in the execution of sustainability initiatives. Participants stressed that success in these projects depended not only on technical expertise but also on the ability to communicate persuasively. This finding supports the perspective that sustainability must be addressed as both a technical and social process. Accordingly, it is recommended that training programs be structured to include both technical and foundational communication components.

In his work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith emphasised that every business within the capitalist order should balance both ethical values and profit targets (Smith, 1776, p. 456). Within the framework of the concept of ethical investment that emerged towards the end of the 20th century, corporate sustainability aims to create long-term value by addressing the social, environmental and economic responsibilities of businesses with a holistic approach (Porter & Kramer, 2011, p. 62). Building a business culture around ethical values can contribute not only to the individual level but also to the potential of increasing the reputation and social benefit of the business.

Finally, under the theme of organizational culture, it was found that integrating environmentally conscious values into corporate culture produced positive outcomes in terms of employee commitment and job satisfaction. Participants noted that an environmentally focused corporate identity strengthened

not only individual engagement but also the public image of the organization. This supports Porter and Kramer's (2011) assertion that sustainability has the potential to generate competitive advantage. It can be concluded that building a values-based organizational culture may be a key determinant of long-term success.

Overall, the findings show that green human resources practices foster diverse outcomes in organizational commitment, motivation, environmental awareness, and corporate responsibility. However, for these practices to be sustainable, comprehensive efforts are needed in strategic communication, structural support, and cultural transformation.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the experiences of individuals working in environmentally conscious sectors and evaluated the effects of human resources management practices on work processes and employee satisfaction. Given that institutional policies exert a direct influence on individuals, the distinction between individual and organizational factors is sometimes difficult to delineate (Şen & Uğrak, 2024, p. 3159). Possessing a job that allows an individual to sustain their life, or feeling a sense of gratitude toward one's current position, can be associated with significant impacts on both social and professional aspects of life (Uğrak, et al., 2025, p. 102). In recent years, green human resources practices have become a prominent topic within the broader context of sustainability. These practices not only enhance employees' environmental responsibility in the workplace but also improve job satisfaction through elements such as flexible working hours and environmental training. Although the procedures related to environmental activities and processes may initially be perceived as increasing operational costs, they are observed to strengthen corporate reputation and improve employee commitment in the long term.

While technical expertise is essential in environmental projects, it has been understood that effective communication and persuasion skills are also critical for success. Therefore, training programs should be redesigned to include both technical and social competencies. Furthermore, an environmentally oriented organizational culture has been shown to positively influence employee loyalty and corporate image. Integrating such a culture into strategic documents, and actively considering environmental responsibility in recruitment and reward systems, is vital for achieving long-term sustainability goals. In general, the successful implementation of green human resources practices requires not only technical infrastructure but also a holistic approach that encompasses social, cultural, and managerial support mechanisms aimed at empowering employees.

In conclusion, the effective implementation of environmental projects is likely to depend not solely on individual efforts, but on a comprehensive approach supported by social and institutional cooperation. The findings of this study suggest that evaluating the experiences of those working in eco-conscious sectors from a broader perspective, and integrating sustainability policies into business processes, may become one of the indispensable directions of the future of work.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

### Ethical Approval

In order to conduct the study, ethics committee approval was received from the Health Sciences University Trabzon, Faculty of Medicine Scientific Research Ethics Committee, dated 05.11.2024 and numbered 2024/11.

### Author Contributions

The author confirms the sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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