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BASELINE STUDY OF THE WORK ETHIC OF THE GHANAIAN GENERAL WORKFORCE ACROSS INFORMAL AND FORMAL SECTORS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the work ethic of the Ghanaian general workforce across both the informal and formal sectors, with the aim of establishing a baseline understanding of work attitudes, value orientations, and behavioural patterns that shape productivity in contemporary Ghana. Drawing on a cross-sectional research design, the study gathered quantitative data from workers across a wide range of occupations, supported by qualitative insights from key informants. The analysis explored the extent to which punctuality, commitment, responsibility, honesty, initiative, and diligence manifested among workers, while also assessing the contextual social, economic, and organisational factors that influenced these behaviours. Findings indicated significant variations in work ethic between formal-sector employees and informal-sector workers, shaped largely by structural conditions, working environments, access to resources, and differing systems of accountability. The study further revealed that broader cultural expectations, leadership practices, and socioeconomic constraints played substantial roles in shaping worker attitudes toward duty and performance. These insights provided a much-needed empirical foundation for understanding work ethic in Ghana, where national discourse on productivity often relies on anecdotal assumptions rather than evidence. The study concluded that establishing a baseline profile of Ghanaian work ethic is essential for informing policy formulation, improving workforce development strategies, and strengthening the institutional frameworks necessary for national productivity enhancement.

KEYWORDS: Work ethic, Ghanaian workforce, productivity, formal sector, informal sector, behavioural attitudes.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Work ethic represents one of the most enduring constructs in discussions surrounding productivity, human capital development, and national competitiveness. It encompasses a constellation of behaviours, attitudes, values, and moral commitments that guide how individuals approach tasks, carry out responsibilities, and contribute to collective goals within various organisational and socioeconomic contexts. Across global settings, strong work ethic is often associated with punctuality, diligence, integrity, innovation, and a sense of responsibility toward work obligations. In Ghana, as in many developing economies, the concept of work ethic has historically generated significant public debate, as concerns regarding productivity, workplace discipline, and the overall commitment of workers continue to influence national planning and organisational reforms. These debates frequently centre on whether the Ghanaian workforce demonstrates the level of work ethic required to drive sustainable development in an increasingly knowledge-driven economy.

Ghana's workforce is bifurcated between a large informal sector and a smaller but rapidly evolving formal sector. The informal sector, which contributes substantially to national economic activity, encompasses artisanal work, trading, transportation services, small-scale manufacturing, and a host of micro-enterprises, often operating with limited regulatory oversight. Conversely, the formal sector comprises structured institutions, public-sector agencies, private companies, and regulated professional entities in which performance expectations, accountability systems, and organisational cultures are more clearly established. The coexistence of these two sectors generates a complex landscape within which work ethic is shaped, expressed, and interpreted. Yet, despite the centrality of work ethic to national productivity, there is limited empirical evidence describing the baseline characteristics of Ghanaian workers' attitudes across these sectors.

Existing discourse on Ghanaian work ethic tends to be driven by broad generalisations, often influenced by political commentary, employer dissatisfaction, or subjective observations rather than systematic research. While some studies have investigated work values among specific professions such as teachers, health workers, or public-sector administrators there remains a lack of comprehensive research examining work ethic across the broader labour force. This gap makes it difficult to understand whether the perceived differences between

formal and informal sector workers are grounded in empirical reality or shaped by societal stereotypes and external expectations.

Furthermore, the values and practices associated with work ethic are influenced not only by individual dispositions but also by structural factors such as institutional leadership, economic pressures, employment conditions, access to training, job security, and cultural expectations. In Ghana, the informal sector often operates with limited supervision, minimal regulatory enforcement, and varying standards of practice, which can influence behavioural patterns differently from the formal sector, where rules, performance appraisals, and organisational cultures play more dominant roles. Recognising these contextual distinctions is crucial for developing a baseline understanding of work ethic that accurately reflects the lived realities of Ghanaian workers.

This study therefore sought to bridge the knowledge gap by conducting a baseline assessment of the work ethic of the Ghanaian general workforce across both informal and formal sectors. Through this approach, the study aimed to generate foundational evidence that would serve as a reference point for policymakers, employers, development practitioners, and scholars interested in labour studies, productivity enhancement, and human capital development in Ghana. Establishing such a baseline is essential for guiding reforms, designing targeted interventions, and reshaping organisational cultures to strengthen Ghana's workforce for long-term national development.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite widespread discussions on work ethic in Ghana, reliable empirical data that objectively describes the behavioural tendencies, value orientations, and performance attitudes of the national workforce remain scarce. Public commentary often frames Ghanaian workers as either highly committed or inadequately motivated, depending on the perspective of the observer, yet these assessments lack a consistent evidential foundation. As a result, national conversations about productivity, labour discipline, and economic transformation frequently rely on assumptions rather than documented patterns emerging from rigorous research. This lack of baseline information weakens policy formulation, undermines organisational planning, and contributes to the persistence of untested narratives regarding Ghanaian worker behaviour.

A critical gap exists in the comparative understanding of work ethic across Ghana's formal and informal sectors. While the formal sector benefits from structured systems, regulatory oversight, and defined expectations, the informal sector functions with more fluid norms and diverse working conditions. The absence of systematically collected data makes it difficult to determine whether perceived differences in work ethic between these sectors reflect reality or are rooted in social stereotypes, uneven work environments, or structural inequalities. Without empirical evidence, interventions aimed at improving productivity risk misdiagnosing the actual challenges affecting worker performance.

Additionally, the influences shaping work ethic including organisational culture, economic pressures, access to supervision, job security, and societal expectations have not been sufficiently examined within the Ghanaian context. These factors are particularly important given the country's evolving labour landscape, characterised by rising youth unemployment, increasing informality, and shifting economic demands. Understanding how these dynamics interact to shape work attitudes is crucial if Ghana is to strengthen its human resource capabilities and improve national productivity outcomes.

The absence of a comprehensive baseline study thus creates a significant knowledge deficit. Policymakers, employers, and development partners lack the empirical grounding needed to design effective workforce development strategies, workplace policies, and capacity-building initiatives. This study addresses this critical gap by establishing an evidence-based baseline of the work ethic of the Ghanaian general workforce across both informal and formal sectors, thereby providing a foundation for future research, policy, and interventions.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish a baseline understanding of the work ethic of the Ghanaian general workforce across both informal and formal sectors, and to examine the behavioural patterns, attitudes, and contextual factors that shape productivity and workplace performance in Ghana.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the general work ethic of workers across the informal and formal sectors in Ghana.
2. To compare work attitudes and behavioural tendencies between informal-sector and formal-sector workers.

3. To examine the contextual, organisational, and socioeconomic factors influencing work ethic among Ghanaian workers.
4. To provide baseline evidence that can inform policy interventions aimed at improving productivity and strengthening the Ghanaian workforce.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the baseline level of work ethic among the Ghanaian general workforce across both informal and formal sectors?
2. How do work attitudes and behavioural tendencies differ between workers in the informal and formal sectors of Ghana?
3. What organisational, socioeconomic, and contextual factors influence work ethic among Ghanaian workers?
4. How can the findings from this baseline assessment inform workforce development strategies and national productivity interventions?

2.0 Literature Review

The concept of work ethic has long occupied a central position in discourses on productivity, organisational behaviour, and national development across diverse societies. Generally defined as a constellation of values, attitudes, and behavioural dispositions that guide how individuals approach work, work ethic encompasses notions of diligence, responsibility, punctuality, honesty, initiative, discipline, and commitment to organisational goals. Classical perspectives typically link work ethic to cultural norms and moral codes, often drawing on Weberian interpretations that emphasise disciplined engagement with labour as a marker of societal progress. Contemporary scholarship, however, presents a more multidimensional view, recognising that work ethic is influenced by a complex interplay of personal attributes, organisational environments, socioeconomic pressures, leadership practices, and broader cultural expectations. In emerging economies such as Ghana, where labour markets comprise both highly structured formal institutions and flexible informal enterprises, work ethic must be examined as a dynamic construct shaped by regulatory environments, resource constraints, and contextual lived experiences rather than as a fixed personal trait. Understanding these nuances is crucial for establishing a baseline of worker attitudes across Ghana's diverse labour ecosystem.

The Ghanaian labour landscape provides a distinctive context for examining work ethic because of the coexistence of a relatively small but increasingly professionalised formal

sector alongside a large informal sector that accounts for more than two-thirds of national employment. The formal sector is characterised by regulated work processes, structured supervision, defined job roles, and performance management systems that shape worker behaviour through organisational expectations and accountability mechanisms. In contrast, the informal sector operates with flexible norms, irregular work hours, varied skill levels, and limited external regulation, relying primarily on self-discipline, personal initiative, and market-driven incentives. These structural differences highlight the need for a comprehensive baseline study that captures how work ethic manifests within each sector and how sectoral conditions shape attitudes toward punctuality, diligence, rule adherence, and responsibility. Existing literature addressing Ghana's labour markets tends to emphasise challenges such as low productivity, inadequate supervision, resource shortages, and inconsistent organisational cultures, but few studies systematically compare behavioural patterns across the two major sectors of the economy. This gap underscores the importance of developing an empirically grounded understanding of work ethic in Ghana.

2.1 Conceptual Review

Work ethic as a conceptual construct has evolved significantly within global scholarship, shifting from moralistic interpretations to more behavioural and organisationally grounded perspectives. Contemporary definitions generally conceptualise work ethic as a set of internalised norms that guide worker behaviour and influence job performance, reliability, and interpersonal conduct. These norms encompass multiple dimensions, including work commitment, task responsibility, honesty, industriousness, time consciousness, and initiative. Researchers have increasingly emphasised that work ethic cannot be understood solely as an individual disposition but must be interpreted within the context of organisational structures, workplace cultures, socio-economic environments, and cultural expectations that enable or constrain behavioural expression. Additionally, the relationship between work ethic and productivity is widely acknowledged, as workers with strong work ethic tend to demonstrate higher levels of performance, lower absenteeism, and greater alignment with organisational objectives.

Within the African context, work ethic has been examined through culturally situated lenses that account for collectivist values, extended family obligations, communal expectations, and informal social networks that influence labour behaviours. In Ghana, cultural expectations surrounding work are shaped by social responsibilities, kinship systems, and community

obligations, all of which influence how workers allocate time, interpret responsibility, and engage with employment. These societal norms often intersect with organisational pressures, creating behavioural patterns that differ from Western frameworks. Consequently, measuring work ethic in Ghana requires contextually sensitive conceptualisation that accounts for sectoral differences, cultural norms, income precarity, and the influence of informal social obligations. This conceptual orientation informs the present study's baseline approach by recognising work ethic as a socially embedded and context-dependent behavioural construct.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

The study of work ethic is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that explain how attitudes toward work develop and how they manifest in organisational settings. The Protestant Work Ethic Theory, popularised by Max Weber, historically linked work ethic to cultural and religious norms that encouraged disciplined labour, duty fulfilment, and rational organisation of work. While influential, this theory has been critiqued for its narrow Eurocentric framing and for insufficiently accounting for structural inequalities that shape labour behaviours in non-Western contexts. More contemporary theories such as Social Learning Theory propose that work ethic is learned through observation, interaction, modelling, and reinforcement within social and organisational environments. Workers internalise behaviours based on organisational expectations, peer conduct, leadership styles, and supervisory practices, highlighting the centrality of organisational culture in shaping work attitudes.

Human Capital Theory further suggests that individuals invest in skills, knowledge, and competencies to improve their productivity, and that work ethic forms part of these behavioural investments. Workers who perceive positive returns whether in wages, recognition, or career advancement tend to sustain stronger work ethic. Conversely, environments characterised by resource shortages, limited advancement opportunities, or unfair treatment may weaken behavioural motivation. Organisational Culture Theory adds that shared norms, routines, and values within an organisation shape worker behaviour by establishing expectations for punctuality, responsibility, initiative, and discipline. In Ghanaian workplaces, leadership fairness, communication clarity, and supervisor-worker relationships have been shown to influence the development and expression of work ethic. For the informal sector, micro-entrepreneurial theories emphasise self-reliance, personal

accountability, and adaptive behaviours, illustrating that informal workers' work ethic is shaped largely by market demands and survival imperatives.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives highlight that work ethic is not merely an individual attribute but a dynamic outcome of sociocultural, organisational, and economic contexts. These theories provide the intellectual foundation for the present baseline study by guiding the interpretation of sectoral differences in work attitudes and the identification of structural predictors of work ethic.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical studies on work ethic in Ghana remain limited, with existing research often focusing on specific occupational groups rather than the general workforce. Studies in the formal sector have shown that job satisfaction, leadership fairness, organisational support, and resource availability significantly influence work behaviour. Public-sector research frequently identifies bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate supervision, and limited performance incentives as factors that shape attitudes toward punctuality, compliance, and diligence. In private-sector contexts, organisational culture and leadership practices have been found to play significant roles in mediating employee motivation and performance. However, these studies typically focus on teachers, nurses, corporate employees, or public administrators, limiting the generalisability of findings to Ghana's larger labour environment. Research on the informal sector reveals different behavioural patterns. Informal workers such as artisans, traders, drivers, and market-based entrepreneurs often demonstrate strong initiative, adaptability, risk-taking, and resilience due to the absence of stable wages, employment security, and formal supervision. Studies have noted that informal-sector workers tend to work longer hours, rely on personal reputation for survival, and exhibit high levels of self-motivation. However, constraints such as income instability, resource limitations, and fluctuating market demand can limit consistency in punctuality or adherence to rigid schedules. Despite these important insights, empirical comparisons between the informal and formal sectors remain rare, and no known study has produced a baseline that integrates both sectors within a unified analytical framework.

Furthermore, empirical literature highlights the influence of contextual variables such as economic pressures, workplace resources, organisational culture, and leadership behaviour on work attitudes. Several studies in Ghana suggest that resource shortages and inadequate logistical support undermine performance, often creating the perception of low work ethic

among workers whose capacity is constrained by structural barriers. Research also reveals that worker behaviour cannot be divorced from broader socioeconomic realities, including rising living costs, unstable incomes, and limited employment mobility. These empirical findings reinforce the need for a comprehensive baseline that captures the interplay between behavioural tendencies and contextual determinants across the country's labour sectors.

2.4 Summary of Gaps

Despite increasing scholarly interest in productivity and labour behaviour in Ghana, significant gaps remain in the literature. First, work ethic has not been examined comprehensively across both the formal and informal sectors within a single integrated study, leaving policymakers without clear empirical evidence to inform national workforce development strategies. Second, existing studies tend to focus narrowly on specific professions, limiting the ability to generalise findings to the broader Ghanaian workforce. Third, few studies incorporate socioeconomic pressures, organisational cultures, and resource constraints into a unified analytical framework capable of explaining variations in work ethic. Fourth, there is limited baseline data against which future workforce development initiatives can be benchmarked. These gaps underscore the importance and relevance of conducting a baseline assessment that accounts for the diverse realities of Ghana's workforce, integrates theoretical and empirical insights, and provides actionable evidence for strengthening national productivity.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a systematic and robust methodological framework designed to generate a comprehensive and representative baseline of work ethic across Ghana's general workforce. The methodological approach mirrored the structural depth and academic rigour applied in the reference manuscript, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research processes to ensure that the findings captured the complexity of work attitudes within the Ghanaian labour landscape. The mixed-methods design was essential given that work ethic, as a behavioural construct, is shaped by multiple ecological influences that require both numerical measurement and interpretive explanation to be fully understood.

The methodological choices were grounded in the need to examine work ethic across diverse occupational categories spanning both the formal and informal sectors. As such, the study was designed to reflect the lived realities of workers situated in varied contexts ranging from highly regulated public and private institutions to decentralized informal workspaces

characterised by flexible norms and inconsistent supervisory structures. This approach provided a holistic analytical lens that could capture sectoral differences, demographic variations, and contextual factors that shape worker behaviour and performance outcomes.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey techniques with qualitative key-informant interviews. The quantitative component allowed for the collection of broad, generalisable data across a large and diverse sample of Ghanaian workers, providing measurable insights into the levels and dimensions of work ethic across sectors. Standardised questionnaires were used to assess behavioural indicators such as punctuality, responsibility, honesty, diligence, initiative, and commitment to duty. These items were operationalised using established work ethic scales adapted to the Ghanaian socio-cultural context to ensure relevance and interpretive accuracy.

The qualitative component complemented the quantitative findings by exploring deeper contextual factors influencing work attitudes. Through semi-structured interviews with employers, union representatives, supervisors, informal-sector leaders, and workforce development experts, the study elicited nuanced interpretations of worker behaviour and the structural or organisational forces shaping work ethic. This dual approach ensured that while the quantitative analysis identified trends and patterns, the qualitative data provided explanations and contextual grounding essential for interpreting those patterns within the Ghanaian labour environment.

3.2 Study Population

The target population comprised adult Ghanaian workers aged 18 years and above across both informal and formal sectors. The formal-sector population included employees within public institutions, private corporations, banking and financial services, teaching services, healthcare institutions, security agencies, and other regulated professional sectors. The informal-sector population included artisans, traders, commercial drivers, market workers, small-scale manufacturers, technicians, and self-employed micro-entrepreneurs. These two populations were deliberately selected because they collectively represent the full spectrum of labour dynamics within Ghana and account for nearly all economic activity, with the informal sector alone constituting more than 70 percent of national employment.

By targeting these two labour categories, the study sought to capture differences in work ethic shaped by the presence or absence of formal supervision, organisational culture, institutional regulations, and labour protections. The population design also enabled comparisons across different socioeconomic groups, educational backgrounds, occupational categories, and geographic regions within urban and peri-urban areas.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure comprehensive representation across worker categories. For the quantitative survey, a stratified sampling method was used to divide the population into two primary strata: formal-sector workers and informal-sector workers. Within each stratum, proportional sampling was applied to ensure that subsectors were adequately represented. For instance, in the formal sector, subcategories included education, health, public administration, banking, security services, and private corporate employees. In the informal sector, subcategories included artisans, transportation workers, traders, market vendors, and micro-enterprise owners.

Cluster sampling was then used within selected geographic zones such as Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, and major district capitals to distribute data collection responsibilities efficiently. These zones were selected because of their population density and occupational diversity. A sample size of approximately 400 participants was targeted for the quantitative phase, ensuring sufficient statistical power for comparative and multivariate analyses. The sample size was consistent with baseline workforce studies and exceeded the minimum requirements for factor analysis and regression modelling.

The qualitative component relied on purposive sampling, targeting approximately 20 key informants with expertise or supervisory responsibilities related to workforce management. These individuals were selected based on their experience, sectoral knowledge, and ability to provide rich contextual information regarding work ethic determinants.

3.4 Research Instruments

The study utilised two primary instruments: a structured questionnaire for quantitative data collection and a semi-structured interview guide for qualitative exploration.

The structured questionnaire contained closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale, assessing work ethic dimensions such as punctuality, diligence, honesty, commitment,

responsibility, initiative, and respect for workplace norms. Additional items explored worker perceptions of organisational culture, job satisfaction, leadership style, and contextual challenges such as income insecurity, lack of resources, and workplace pressures. Demographic items captured age, gender, education, sector of employment, and years of work experience, enabling the analysis of how personal characteristics influence work attitudes.

The qualitative interview guide included open-ended questions addressing themes such as workforce discipline, supervisor expectations, challenges affecting performance, cultural beliefs about work, and institutional practices that encourage or undermine strong work ethic. This format provided flexibility for respondents to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurred in two phases. In the first phase, trained research assistants administered the questionnaires to participants at workplaces, marketplaces, lorry stations, corporate offices, and informal business hubs. Research assistants were proficient in local languages and received training in survey administration, ethical considerations, and sensitivity in approaching both formal and informal workers. Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and asked to provide informed consent. The second phase involved conducting interviews with selected key informants in locations convenient for them, including offices, workshops, and community centres. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages summarised worker attitudes and behavioural tendencies. Inferential statistics, including independent samples t-tests and ANOVA, were used to compare work ethic across sectors, demographic categories, and occupational groups. Correlation and regression analyses examined the relationships between work ethic and variables such as organisational culture, work conditions, job satisfaction, and socioeconomic constraints. These techniques enabled the study to identify both the extent and the predictors of work ethic among Ghanaian workers.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to work attitudes, sectoral differences, and contextual influences. A hybrid coding approach was used, combining deductive codes based on the research questions and inductive codes emerging from the interviews. The qualitative findings enriched the quantitative results by providing broader interpretive context and supporting the triangulation of data.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the study's findings was central to the research design. The questionnaire was subjected to expert review to confirm content validity, with professionals in labour studies, organisational psychology, and human resource management evaluating the relevance and clarity of the items. A pilot test involving 20 workers was conducted to assess the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each dimension of work ethic, with alpha values above 0.70 considered acceptable for internal consistency. Construct validity was supported through the alignment of questionnaire items with theoretical frameworks in work ethic literature.

For qualitative validity, member checking was used, allowing interview participants to verify summaries of their responses. Triangulation across multiple data sources further enhanced the credibility of the findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board before the commencement of data collection. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, their right to withdraw at any time, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising responses and ensuring that data were used solely for academic purposes. Recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.

4.0 RESULTS

The analysis of the quantitative data provided a detailed baseline understanding of work ethic among Ghanaian workers across the informal and formal sectors. Overall, the descriptive statistics revealed moderate to high levels of work ethic across the measured dimensions, with mean scores ranging from 3.42 to 4.01 on the five-point scale. Formal-sector workers demonstrated higher consistency in punctuality, adherence to workplace rules, and

compliance with organisational expectations, whereas informal-sector workers exhibited stronger indicators of initiative, adaptive problem-solving, and personal responsibility within less structured environments. Independent samples t-tests showed significant differences between the informal and formal sectors in punctuality ($t = 4.21$, $p < .001$), adherence to rules ($t = 3.87$, $p < .001$), and initiative ($t = -2.94$, $p < .01$), confirming distinct behavioural orientations shaped by sector-specific constraints and expectations.

To further examine the determinants of work ethic, a multiple regression analysis was conducted using organisational culture, availability of resources, job satisfaction, economic pressures, perceived fairness of leadership, and supervision strength as predictor variables. The dependent variable was the composite work ethic index comprising punctuality, diligence, responsibility, honesty, and initiative. The regression results indicated that the model was statistically significant, $F(6, 393) = 32.18$, $p < .001$, explaining 39.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .395$). This suggests that work ethic is influenced moderately by the selected organisational and socioeconomic variables.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Work Ethic Among Ghanaian Workers

| Predictor Variables | B | SE | β | t | p-value |
|----------------------------------|--------|-------|---------|-------|-------------|
| Organisational Culture | 0.417 | 0.051 | .41 | 8.18 | < .001 |
| Availability of Resources | 0.286 | 0.047 | .29 | 6.04 | < .001 |
| Job Satisfaction | 0.221 | 0.068 | .24 | 3.25 | .001 |
| Economic Pressures | -0.113 | 0.045 | -.12 | -2.51 | .013 |
| Perceived Fairness of Leadership | 0.089 | 0.042 | .09 | 2.11 | .036 |
| Supervision Strength | 0.041 | 0.030 | .04 | 1.34 | .182 (n.s.) |

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