

# The Organization and Administration of Two-Year College Learning Resources

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THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE learning resources center (LRC) represents a relatively recent addition to the academic library population. This type of academic library, as well as the concept it represents, is an important area for study and discussion for several reasons. First, two-year colleges represent a significant percentage of the total number of academic institutions. In addition to this numerical strength, the community college LRC represents to some observers a suggestion of things to come. In *Academic Libraries by the Year 2000*, Hickey suggests that: "If one would see a possible image of the future academic institution and its library, the community college of today and its 'learning resources center' provides such a model."<sup>1</sup> The development of guidelines for learning resources programs in senior institutions indicates that some movement toward the implementation of this model may be taking place.<sup>2</sup>

Many factors have contributed to the unique nature of the LRC. In order to examine the trends and issues that have shaped the LRC and will do so in the future, an understanding of organization and administration is critical. Burack and Negandhi have used a model to examine the design of organizations which includes both environmental, external organizational and internal organizational factors and influences. They indicate that design-related matters which must be considered include "the organization structure, structuring of departmental and task units, and the allocation of responsibility and authority."<sup>3</sup> These

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Added to all of these influences must be the general trends affecting higher education, current management theories concerning organizational structure and governance, and technological developments and available innovations that are relevant to the two-year college setting. Also important are the trends affecting librarianship and instructional technology, as well as the views of the profession(s) toward organizational arrangements as set forth in the "Guidelines for Two-Year College Learning Resources Programs" and "Standards for College and University Learning Resources Programs."<sup>20</sup> Internally, the age of the college, pressures from staff concerning structure and governance, the nature of the task environment, the conditions under which staff work best, and the numbers and kinds of subsystems needed for all LRC services to be accommodated need to be considered as potential influences on design.

Organizational structures can be characterized in a number of ways. Two approaches are particularly relevant here—flat *v.* tall structures, and organic *v.* mechanistic design. The desire for one or the other of these approaches is also an influence on design. Flat structures have fewer authority levels and often extensive delegation. As Newport points out, potential advantages for such structures include, "improved vertical communication; more rapid decision-making at the point of action; better development of subordinates through their earlier involvement in a broader range of responsibilities; and a greater team feeling through a reduction of the administrative distance between levels of the hierarchy."<sup>21</sup> Tall structures, on the other hand, feature more authority levels with a generally smaller span of control for each manager.

From another perspective, mechanistic organizational units "are the traditional pyramidal pattern of organizing...roles and procedures are precisely defined...authority, influence, and information are arranged by levels...decision-making is centralized at the top."<sup>22</sup> This form is "efficient and predictable,"<sup>23</sup> providing a secure setting for individuals with a low tolerance for ambiguity, and is often appropriate when a unit performs essentially stable and well-defined tasks. However, it is decidedly less flexible, often hinders change, and may create low morale among employees in a highly professional setting.

In designing an organic organization, the system is left "maximally open to the environment in order to make the most of new opportunities."<sup>24</sup> This type of structure is characterized by a somewhat ambiguous task environment, decentralized decision-making, relative heterogeneity, and permeable boundaries. It tends to be more flexible and

learning theory which have incorporated many sources and modes of learning and delivery, and the advent of the so-called "Fourth Revolution."<sup>7</sup> The nature of the community college itself, with its outreach mandate and its open-door philosophy, also prompted a search for new approaches to learning. Gradually these new approaches to education had an impact on two-year college libraries. While the basic work of the library—the identification, acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, and delivery of information and learning materials—continues, the formats and delivery systems for that information have changed dramatically in the community college environment and have affected the organization and administration of the LRC itself.

It has already been noted that the learning resources concept presents difficulties in terms of discussion. From the institutional perspective, it is important to consider all learning resources, regardless of their form, location or means of organization and delivery. Attention in this discussion, however, will be devoted primarily to those functions contained within the domain of the learning resources center itself. Furthermore, in reviewing the development of the LRC as an organization, changes in the last decade will receive primary attention, since other authors have thoroughly covered the historical development of community college libraries and learning resources centers.

### **Factors Affecting Organization Structure and Design of the LRC**

The design of an organizational unit and its administrative procedures is affected by many variables. Some important factors which represent the views of various authors are summarized in table 1. It should be noted that the term "two-year college" can be used to describe public or private institutions, community or junior colleges, technical institutes, and two-year branches of senior institutions. Such variety means that any attempt to generalize about a model of influence on LRC organization is difficult.

Certain characteristics of the community college as an institutional type are likely to have an impact on individual colleges, as well as on their units of operation. Besides the persistent problems that deal with open and equal access, educational integrity and adaptation to societal trends, Cohen and Braver have identified three recent changes that will ultimately affect all of the organizational units of the two-year college. These are: (1) "an inversion in the uses of career and collegiate education," (2) reduction of the linear aspect of a student's enrollment as a proportion of the college's total effort, and (3) an accelerated "trend

TABLE 1  
SOME INFLUENCES ON LRC ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

<i>External Environment</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Professions (Librarianship, Educational Technology, Instructional Development)</i>	<i>Internal Environment (LRC)</i>
State laws	Size	Imitative patterns	Staff attitudes toward governance
District/state system	Age/Stage of development	Guidelines and Standards	Nature of task environment
Current management theories	History	Trends and developments in professional practice	Conditions of work
Trends in higher education	General administrative patterns	New learning theories/refinements	Desire for organic or mechanistic, flat or tall structure
Technological developments	Leadership style(s)		Number of subsystems needed
Community college characteristics	Philosophy of administration (conservative/innovative continuum)		Strengths and background of administrator
	Nature of change processes		Nature of cooperative efforts and provided services
	Finances		Faculty status/collective bargaining
	Building site		Staff interests/talents
	Perceived educational role of the LRC		Specialized LTA and/or media technician curriculum
	Defined scope of the LRC Curriculum		

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towards less-than-college-level instruction."<sup>8</sup> Phifer and Person have noted the effects of this level of instruction on the LRC.<sup>9</sup>

Certain other characteristics seem to prevail in the two-year college as well. These include *attitudes toward change*—the understanding of the need to change and the relatively rapid response rate to necessary changes (as opposed to other institutions of higher education), *diversity*—an acceptance of and a fostering of different kinds of programs, students, faculty, and staff, and the presence of an *entrepreneurial spirit*—what Mintzberg describes in terms of managerial role behavior as “searching the organization and its environment for opportunities and initiating improvement projects to bring about change.”<sup>10</sup>

Lippitt and Schmidt have suggested that the concerns of organizations may differ as they move through a development process from birth to maturity.<sup>11</sup> Concerns at birth are to create a new organization and to survive as a viable system. In youth, organizational focus is on gaining stability and reputation, and developing pride. At maturity, the organization may concentrate on achieving uniqueness and adaptability. It is entirely possible that an organization may utilize different structures at each of these stages.

As the youngest American higher educational institution, the two-year college has passed through birth and youth. Some authors now suggest that a kind of “midlife crisis”<sup>12</sup> is upon the two-year college. The three changes noted by Cohen and Brawer, the recent financial crisis in higher education, a stabilizing of enrollment as opposed to the monumental growth of the past two decades, and other factors have placed the community college at an important juncture in its history—a time for redefining its mission, questioning of certain assumptions, and fostering adaptability. The results of this midlife crisis may alter the configuration of academic units in individual colleges, including the LRC.

Administrative and organizational structure is at least partially determined by the nature of the overall organization and the place of the LRC within that organization. As McCaskey suggests, “an organization is a system of interrelated parts so that the design of one subsystem or of one procedure has ramifications for other parts of the system.”<sup>13</sup> Thus the objectives, structure and administrative philosophies and policies of the LRC are at least in part determined by the same characteristics of the overall organization, and changes in the college will ultimately have some effect on the LRC.

If the college is a part of a larger unit such as a community college district or statewide system, or is a multicampus facility, the LRC

organization may be affected. Certain services may be provided to the LRC, such as cataloging and technical processing, a book catalog, centralized ordering, or film circulation. The growing trend of cooperation among libraries themselves provides an even greater diversity of possible services and administrative arrangements.<sup>14</sup> The organizational structure may reflect these arrangements by omitting certain functions and accompanying positions. The administrative responsibility for seeing that required services are provided—whether by contract, through centralized units or some other arrangements—still exists, however, but certain personnel considerations may be removed.

Veit identifies nine factors that influence administrative organization of the LRC.<sup>15</sup> These include: (1) history (“the persistence of an established pattern even after the basis for its continued existence has disappeared”), (2) general administrative college patterns, (3) size of the institution, (4) preferred style of those who are in policy-setting positions, (5) imitative patterns (“inclination to adopt a pattern that has been successfully used in other institutions”), (6) impact of state laws and regulations, (7) “educational role the center is expected to play,” (8) district influence, and (9) scope of the LRC.

Bock and La Jeunesse note that the “configuration of the college building site, the philosophy of the college toward learning resources, and...the strengths and interests of the administrator in charge of learning resources all affect whether all components of a learning resources program are housed in one facility and/or are administratively organized under one unit.”<sup>16</sup> These authors stress the important role of institutional philosophy, as articulated by the board of trustees, in determining the nature of learning resources programs and other college support services. Their presentation of a model continuum of institutional philosophy (from “Conservative Board/Administration” to “Innovative Board/Administration”)<sup>17</sup> and its influence on possible learning resources components is particularly useful in identifying factors which affect LRC organizational design.

In looking at the adoption of the learning resources concept, Holleman suggests that, “realization of the concept has generally been dependent upon historical and political factors peculiar to the campus and upon the initiative and philosophy of the director.”<sup>18</sup> She notes that this concept may be easier to implement on a smaller campus and that decreased budgets and a movement toward LRC membership in cooperatives and networks may give the learning resources program concept a new significance.<sup>19</sup>

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responsive to change, but is often wasteful of resources and stressful because of its uncertainty.<sup>25</sup>

The discussion above suggests possible influences on the administrative organization of the LRC. With such a large number of variables, the development of a single model for the LRC could not realistically be expected. As detailed in the following discussion, both the relevant professional guidelines and survey reports from the past decade support this conclusion.

### **Organization of the LRC: Background**

As noted, the history and development of two-year college libraries has been examined by numerous authors. In these discussions, the pattern of initiation of services, experimentation, rapid change, tremendous growth, and struggle with challenges characterized the two-year college and its library. The need to provide learning and informational materials to an enormous variety of students, combined with the lack of commercially-available materials to address different learning styles, educational needs and new subject areas placed a great burden on learning resources programs.

The two-year college library gradually evolved toward the LRC concept to meet these challenges. This evolution was reflected in the guidelines and standards for learning resources that have been developed by professional associations. In the past dozen years, two sets of guidelines and a set of quantitative standards have been developed by a joint effort of the American Library Association, the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, and the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges to provide support for the development and management of learning resources programs in two-year colleges. In reviewing the development of these documents, Wallace notes that these are not merely *library* standards. They represent a significant change in philosophy from earlier documents in their support for "integration of library and audiovisual services, the inclusion of production of these services, and the involvement of learning resources actively in instruction."<sup>26</sup>

The 1982 "Guidelines" are both general and specific with respect to the organization and administration of the LRC. Differences between the learning resources *program* of a college and learning resources *units* which are subordinate to the overall program are carefully delineated. Governance and participation in the form of "involvement of the professional staff in all areas and levels of academic planning," "staff

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participation in policy, procedural, and personnel decisions," and the establishment of an advisory committee for the LRC are all specified. Management responsibilities, particularly those of the chief administrator, include budget development and the maintenance of appropriate statistics.<sup>27</sup>

However, the "Guidelines" reflect the difficulty of developing a single model of the LRC or even a learning resources program in that "no assumption is made that each two-year institution will be more or less identical to every other, and no pattern is prescribed for the administrative structure within the institution."<sup>28</sup> The new "Guidelines" represent a concern for all learning resources being provided by any type of two-year college, and are careful not to prescribe types of units needed by name. They do provide a general definition of learning resources programs and the ideal kinds of services that should be provided. To paraphrase Holleman's analysis: a learning resources program provides the people, equipment, facilities, materials, ideas, services, and management to facilitate and improve learning, and ideally incorporates, under a central administration, the following units: (1) audio-tutorial lab, (2) bibliographic control center, (3) library technical services, (4) library public services, (5) media production, (6) A-V equipment and maintenance, (7) computing services, (8) telecommunications, (9) reprographics, (10) learning labs, (11) institutional archives, (12) faculty/educational development.<sup>29</sup>

Looking at these units, and considering the many factors identified in table 1 that can influence organizational design, it is clear that there are many possible approaches to organizing the learning resources program of a two-year college. These include function, form, subject, language, geography, and clientele; in many cases, some combination of these may be used.<sup>30</sup> *Function* refers to the "division of work by activity, such as acquisition, cataloging, and reference."<sup>31</sup> *Form* refers to the arrangement of LRC activities and materials on the basis of their format (i.e., print or nonprint), *subject* to arrangement on the basis of subject disciplines (e.g., separate collections for nursing, psychology, or architecture), and *language* to arrangement of activities and materials by language. If services, activities and materials are determined by location, the arrangement is identified as *geographical* (as with branch or satellite facilities). *Clientele* becomes a criteria if collections and services are different for various groups of users (e.g., developmental program students, transfer students, continuing education students). Many of these designations are also used in other types of academic libraries as well as in the two-year college setting. In analyzing the

division of services, activities and collections in the two-year college LRC, therefore, it is important to keep both the academic and public nature of the LRC in mind.

### Structure in Practice

Studies of LRC organization and administration that are available in the literature reflect the inadvisability of developing a single LRC model and support the lack of specificity in the "Guidelines." While a few authors have been willing to suggest a model for LRC organization, most of the research studies which have examined LRC structure report a wide variety of practices.

In the past dozen years, numerous writers have examined the organizational structure and administration of the LRC. Nearly all of these authors report that the "learning resources" concept which has broadened library services considerably has become the major organizational pattern for most two-year colleges. The trend toward the central administration of learning resources has also been noted by Moore, Westphal, Dale, Veit, and Cohen and Braver.<sup>32</sup> Surveys by Bender and Person<sup>33</sup> indicate that by 1984, this unification was by far the rule, at least as reported in the published literature. The information available about the division of responsibilities and activities within the LRC is less straightforward, however.

In 1970, Fusaro proposed a model for a Library-College Media Center which envisioned a central administrator overseeing five major services each headed by a coordinator or an officer:<sup>34</sup> (1) study skills center and learning labs, (2) public services, (3) technical services, (4) instructional services, and (5) innovations and curriculum design center. Like the "Guidelines" which followed in 1972 and 1982, this model was (and is) useful for its attention to three major characteristics of the LRC—centralized administration, common services provided and staffing required for support.

Building on the ideas of the "library-college" concept, Allen and Allen also prescribed a merger of library and audiovisual facilities for three major reasons: (1) "Communication today requires a wide variety of materials for students and faculty members in a variety of formats"; (2) "as materials and services become more accessible, the potential for use, and, in turn, the potential for learning becomes greater"; and (3) "a very practical factor is that of control" (that is, if materials and/or equipment are scattered throughout the college, duplication and lack of accessibility may be the result).<sup>35</sup>

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Following these earlier prescriptive discussions was a decade of surveys which have incorporated some description of the administrative organization of two-year college learning resources centers/libraries. Berning examined LRCs in Colorado,<sup>36</sup> while Nieball provided a comparative analysis of learning resources programs in Texas junior colleges. In preparing his chapter on "Administrative Organization" for *The Community College Library*, Veit surveyed more than 100 institutions to ascertain organizational patterns. Fourteen of the colleges surveyed were represented in his text as being indicative of characteristic organizational structures. Veit reported that, unlike the past, by 1975 most heads of LRCs were reporting to the chief *academic* officer of the college as opposed to the chief administrator. These chief academic officers were often called "vice-president" in large colleges and "dean" in smaller schools. Veit also reported on the fluidity of organizational arrangements, noting the nature of change and its influence on the LRC environment.<sup>38</sup>

In 1975, Thomson examined the characteristics of public comprehensive community colleges in the United States in order to determine the interrelationship between expenditures and service programs for learning resources. Twenty-seven colleges and three district offices whose expenditures were in the top range of learning resources programs nationwide were selected for in-depth study. Twenty-two of the colleges had separate library and media programs, although fourteen had a common administrator of learning resources. Eight had no such administrator, although the heads of each unit might have both reported to a dean of instruction. The library was generally arranged according to conventional categories of "reference and readers' advisement," "circulation," "periodicals," "technical services" and the like. Media services were often split into two groups. Of the eight colleges which had totally separate library and audiovisual units, media services reflected division of clientele, function, facility, short *v.* long production, and television production *v.* "other" production. In spite of the separation of units, some libraries also serviced audiovisual materials and operated media labs.<sup>39</sup>

As part of a study of the implementation of the 1972 "Guidelines" among twenty-three state-supported two-year college libraries in Ohio, Clark and Hirschman reported that LRCs were "well integrated into the organization of the local campuses." The head of the LRC generally reported to the head of the campus or to the university library director in a branch campus situation. Interestingly, at the time of this study, "many of the LRCs did not have organization charts to define external and internal relationships."<sup>40</sup>

In 1977 Dale reported on assessments of thirty-one "outstanding" colleges. She noted that, "the administrative organization of community college libraries continues the trend toward unified centers noted by Moore and Westphal which house, service and circulate both print and audiovisual materials."<sup>41</sup> In her analysis, Dale also reported that the "typical" college in her survey was called either a library or a learning resources center, that the director had the title of either associate or assistant dean, and that production of A-V materials was handled in a separate area of the center. In the same year, Bock and LaJeunesse's *The Learning Resources Center: A Planning Primer for Libraries in Transition* outlined possible components of a learning resources program (public services, technical services, production services, and related instructional services) and identified specific activities for each.<sup>42</sup> Matthews also described the titles, reporting relationships and characteristics of learning resources administrators, noting that these individuals were confronted with a broader range of problems than those confined to library management.<sup>43</sup> The following year, Dennison also reported on a survey of twenty colleges, finding that patterns of organization were grouped either by: (1) function, (2) faculty (which cut across subject, form and function), (3) geography, and (4) form/function or (5) form/function/clientele.<sup>44</sup>

One of the more comprehensive studies available is Bender's 1980 nationwide survey of 150 learning resources programs. About three-fourths of Bender's respondents indicated that learning resources in their college were administered as one unit. The head of such a unit, most often called a "director," reported to an academic dean in 60 percent of the cases. This director developed the budget, as specified in the "Guidelines," in about 88 percent of the schools.<sup>45</sup>

When initiating the new journal *Community & Junior College Libraries* in 1982, the editor noted that there seemed to be some "disagreement about whether community college LRC's are moving toward or away from the integrated learning resources concept."<sup>46</sup> On behalf of the journal, Holleman conducted a nationwide survey of thirty campuses to see how many of the services outlined in the "Guidelines" were centrally administered by LRC directors. Most of the centers surveyed were large, and two-thirds were located in multicampus districts. One-half of the LRCs integrated at least fourteen of the eighteen services mentioned, with none of the thirty being responsible for computing services. Nearly all possessed other units of the "ideal" learning resources program such as a central location on campus and involvement in cooperative efforts, while nineteen had an advisory committee.

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Holleman's statement about the possible disagreement over LRC direction serves as a cautionary note to the information found in the surveys reported. In few cases would the research methodology used justify a generalizable conclusion about the status of *all* learning resources programs. What they may suggest, however, are continuing trends and issues.

### **1984: Has the Learning Resources Concept Succeeded Too Well?**

To supplement the surveys discussed previously, data from forty additional colleges were collected in 1984. This information included organization charts from both LRCs and their colleges. The colleges ranged in size from 1,900 to nearly 24,000 students, and were located in a representative sampling of geographic areas in the United States. Many overall organizational arrangements were represented, including single-campus institutions, multicampus districts and two-year branches of a state university system. For the most part, these colleges seemed to have embraced the integrated learning resources program concept.

At first glance, the data gathered from this brief survey simply confirm earlier reports. With a few notable exceptions, the chief administrator of the LRC or its equivalent reported to the chief academic officer of the college, who was generally the vice-president for academic affairs or instruction, an associate vice-president of the same areas, or a dean of instruction or administration. The most notable exceptions were several LRC administrators who reported directly to the president of the college and a few who reported to a nonacademic officer such as a vice-president for student development.

The average span of control for the individual to whom the LRC administrator reported was about four, meaning that the LRC may be a competitor with approximately three other units for administrative attention. These other units included a broad spectrum from subject-area division heads to administrators of counseling services or community education programs.

Internally the titles given to the LRC administrator ranged from "dean of learning resources" to "head librarian." This individual also had an average span of control of about 3.5. As with previous studies, internal LRC organization represented division primarily by form, function and geographic location. A few colleges had some division by clientele or subject area. For the most part, organizational structure included at least two of the above categories.

While much of this survey revealed little that is new in LRC development with respect to structure, it did suggest a potential trend that has also been noted in 1984 by Hisle. In conducting a similar study of forty large community colleges, this author noted that when the organizational structure of learning resources services includes units such as telecommunications, duplication centers, testing centers and the like, a "distorted view of the true size of the library and media services components of the college is given."<sup>47</sup> A substantial number of the colleges surveyed had some (if not all) of these services included under the direction of the LRC, as well as other services such as college word processing or college-wide printing services. While these services may reflect learning resources in the broadest sense, and may be mentioned in the "Guidelines" in the context of learning resources, they may tend to decrease emphasis on the central focus of learning resources—library and media services.

## Conclusions

The development of the two-year college LRC reflects continuous modification to accommodate the influences identified in table 1. All of the literature and the most recent surveys reflect the enormous difficulty of developing a model of the LRC. The great number of potential influences on design, the wide range of college sizes, and the numerous types of two-year colleges—all of these factors combine to prevent the development of a general description of LRC organization and administration. What seems most constant are the place of the LRC in the college, and the major components included in most learning resources programs.

Anspaugh has talked of a "lack of tradition"<sup>48</sup> in the LRC. In fact, there are now a number of patterns, some of which might be termed traditions, evolving in the two-year college learning resources center setting. The first is a pattern of accommodating change. The second is the tradition of uniqueness of structure. The third pattern may reflect a possible tension as colleges struggle to integrate library and media services with the other parts of the learning resources program and yet not lose focus.

Several factors may influence the organization and administration of LRCs in the near future. The uses of a variety of new technologies will undoubtedly have an evolutionary impact on organizational structure. In discussing such trends, Atkinson suggests that, "no matter where it is found in libraries, automation demands closer analysis of

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work,"<sup>49</sup> and may result in structural change. As a variety of automated systems become more accessible to community colleges and more adapted to two-year college needs, it is likely that the adoption of such systems and processes will alter the structure of the LRC. The increased membership of LRCs in national bibliographic networks<sup>50</sup> suggests that this trend may also alter structure. Bunson's description of micro-computer use in a learning resources program also suggests possible future changes to accommodate new technology in the teaching/learning process.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless of the directions such changes may take, two factors must be noted. Hall and others remind us that there are two organizations in any institution—the "official" decision-making organization shown in the organization chart (that) is...relatively passive"<sup>52</sup> and an informal organization. This second organization that does not appear on any diagram of structure is in fact involved in structuring information for decision-making, reality-testing and carrying on the informal negotiations necessary for operation. Given the number of potential influences on two-year college LRC organizational design, it is likely that many informal relationships exist that are not represented on organizational charts or in written documents of any kind.

Second, organizational structure should be a tool for effectiveness, structures should facilitate and not hamper progress, and the structure of each LRC should take into account the external as well as the internal environment. In particular, in the rush to accommodate change and to embrace the learning resources concept, colleges should not allow a zero-sum game involving library and media services and all of the other parts of the learning resources program to take place. That is, in broadening "instructional services" or "learning resources" to include computer facilities, testing centers, and the like, the library and its important contributions should not be undermined. Rather, it should remain an integral part of the broad spectrum of services provided to support the teaching/learning process in the two-year college.

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