

#### CHAPTER 5

# Development of Consciousness-Based Leadership from Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Sutras

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# CONTEMPORARY MODELS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

The world has changed; human beings have steadily evolved towards higher states of consciousness, but companies have not kept pace (Laszlo et al., 2021; Sisodia, 2009). As a result, there is a lack of effective leadership running these institutions. Therefore, there is a need to develop and

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educate and produce more leaders at a greater pace in order to reduce and even prevent stumbling from one crisis to the next (Harari, 2018). The world needs the right changes in the environment such that it nourishes both intellect and inner transformation of the soul. Such a higher consciousness-based environment would lead to wealth creation for all human beings (Bozesan, 2009).

Van Wart (2008) classifies the current methods of leadership development into three broad categories: self-study, structured learning experiences and formal training and development programmes. Self-study is argued to be the heart of leadership development. Ross (2013) has labelled self-study as self-driven leadership development. Van Wart (2008) says, "without self-study-which is to say self-recognition of issues and skills of leadership, no leadership development can occur." It requires raising one's consciousness and self-awareness before, during and after leadership episodes. Self-study is initiated and driven by the individual. It comprises a range of activities, such as self-recognition, selfdirection, self-support, self-perception, self-efficacy, self-achievement and self-inspiration, which can all be executed both independently and in any of the collective configuration. The effectiveness of self-driven leadership development stems from the simultaneous creation of constructive thought patterns and the elimination of dysfunctional thought patterns (Van Wart, 2008). Other individual-driven methods for improving the quality of consciousness are meditation practices (Gunaratne, 2011; Maheshwari, 2021) as well as kriya yoga exemplified by the practice of asanas and pranayama (Iyengar, 2012).

Structured learning experiences provide a systematic method of accelerating the leadership development and sustaining a flowing pipeline of good leaders. It can potentially supply ample leadership talent to sustain the growth and expansion of the organisations. Structured learning experiences for leadership development are based on two premises: first, that experience, if reflected upon, will prove to be a powerful teacher (Kolb, 2014); and second, that leaders prefer action-centred learning to classroom learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997). Job rotation, challenging assignments, action learning, learning from one's superior, coaching and mentoring, counselling, action learning, developmental opportunities, as well as meta-challenges involving ongoing learning as well as adaptive learning are some examples of structured learning (Bass, 2008). On the flip side, the persistent inability to deal with VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) situations and the inability to generate trust

and confidence in stakeholders, shows the limits to this approach. A more flexible and adaptive leadership has been suggested by Glover et al. (2002) who propose that a high degree of both assimilation (by making sense of the external world) and accommodation (undergoing internal changes to the structure of one's beliefs, ideas and attitudes) are required for adaptive leadership. And, of these two factors, assimilation and accommodation, the latter is more likely to be the Achilles heel of current leadership! Structured learning experiences thus, perhaps, fall short of creating truly flexible and adaptive leaders.

Formal training and development programmes have been a bedrock of corporate efforts at leadership development (Bass, 2008). A broad set of techniques such as lectures, group discussions, role-playing, role reversals, sensitivity training, assessment and development centres and training in leadership styles are utilised as part of formal management and executive development programmes (Bass, 2008). These techniques have played a significant role in the leadership development in the past. Despite a decline in popularity on account of the requirement of interactions in a classroom as a medium in a pandemic and work-from-home situation, these could make a comeback in a digital avatar. The strength of these methods is that they deliver a regular supply of leadership talent for stable business operations. However, these methods, too, have the weakness that they do not really prepare leaders with agility to deal with the VUCA world.

Snook et al. (2012) offer a framework of leadership development called Knowing, Doing and Being. Conger (1992) offers a four Key Approach viz. (1) personal growth, (2) conceptual analysis, (3) skill development and (4) feedback. Both of these frameworks have much in common as they include all three traditional domains of psychology viz. cognitive (knowing/conceptual analysis), behavioural (doing/skill development) and affective/attitudinal (being/personal growth). Tables 5.1 and 5.2 summarise the constructive takeaways in the above two frameworks:

Further, Table 5.3 presented is a novel framework for Being,

The techniques of leadership development in the Being framework (Table 5.3) aim to enhance the soft quality of leadership through an intangible internal process of development and consequently may be very demanding in contrast with the first two frameworks viz. Cognitive (Table 5.1) and Doing (Table 5.2). However, Allen and Martin (2012) observe that self-study and personal growth are not emphasised in the current curricula of leadership development to the extent they ought to be.

Table 5.1 Framework of leadership development: knowing/conceptual analysis/cognitive

Approach	Purpose	Constructive takeaways
Sense-making	Supports environmental assessment	Handling Meta-challenges through Adaptive Learning
Case study	Understanding complex and realistic situations	A case study should help prevent history from repeating itself
Leadership Literature	Contemplation of great leadership literature from classical to contemporary	Recognition of recurrent/ perennial leadership paradigms
Leadership Templating	Imbibing a set of leadership principles generic and yet specific	Retention in the active memory of leaders is critical for implementation

Table 5.2 Framework of leadership development: doing/behavioural/skill development

Approach	Purpose	Constructive takeaways
Theatre	Developing leadership presence	Centring on the current moment of communication to build an authentic relationship depends on self-knowledge of the leader
Balancing authenticity and skill	Understanding that leadership is situational, relational and non-hierarchical	Being Yourself with Skill
Self-awareness through feedback from structured learning situations	Self-assessment transferable to leadership situations	Personal growth through behavioural modification is possible only through self-awareness

There is a scope for adding methods to improve self-study (raising one's consciousness before, during and after a leadership event) and enhancing Being (self-awareness of mental and emotional states).

Approach	Purpose	Constructive takeaways
Transformational leadership	Increasing Self-awareness, overcoming personal blockages	Faculty of such programmes are not just repositories of
development	to demonstrate a wider repertoire of leadership behaviours	knowledge but guides, confidants and mentors while challenging the participants as well as empathising with them
Values-based leadership development	Inculcating Leadership based on helping followers realise their own needs	Faculty's role as a moderator and Socratic questioner is critical for this technique
Identity workspaces for leadership development	Helping Leaders to understand how to learn through cognitive, emotional and practical engagements	Faculty who has the competence, sensitivity and integrity to facilitate participant's inquiry into their experience

**Table 5.3** Framework of leadership development: being/attitudinal/personal growth

## HIGHER STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

To realise its full potential, the human mind should be working from a higher state of consciousness (Yogi, 1963). There are many scriptures that refer to higher states of consciousness. Given the richness of the traditions and multiple perspectives, the taxonomy systematised by Rao and Paranjpe (2016) is illuminating and comprehensive with the broad division into Transcendental and Transactional Consciousness. Indic traditions accept transcendental consciousness as the basis of underlying reality (Yogi, 1963). Table 5.4 summarises some of the wisdom approaches on this theme.

Building upon Wilber's (1993) All Quadrants All Lines (AQAL) integral approach to consciousness, Bozesan (2009) suggests that consciousness-based leaders are integral leaders, who have evolved after interior development and are engaged in the wealth creation for the benefit of all and thus help their culture, societies and environment. Pappas (2010) investigated the integral leadership of ethologist and primatologist Dr Jane Goodall. Her findings suggest that Dr. Goodall has a *spiritual essence* in the way she approaches her life and life's work. She is motivated by a *higher purpose* to be a messenger of hope and peace. There is mindfulness that leads to *compassionate action*. She goes about her work with a *quiet confidence* knowing that all she does has a purpose that is

Table 5.4 Wisdom approaches

S. No	Scripture	Characteristics of persons/leaders with higher consciousnes.
1	Bhagavad Gita	A person with the higher state of consciousness is described as <i>Sthithapragna</i> . One has given up all his desires and his mind is turned inward. The person is undisturbed by adversity, indifferent to happiness and free from fear and anger. That person can withdraw his senses and have a stabilised mind. All his suffering has been destroyed and he becomes blissful. In that blissfu state, his intelligence is firmly established
2	Ashtavakra Gita	The qualities of a person with a higher state of consciousness are described. One is sincere, compassionate, content, happy, peaceful and unattached. One experiences its limitless nature and is equal in pain and pleasure, hope and disappointment. One is fearless in actions and silent from within
3	Dhammapada of Buddhism	It mentions the qualities of an awakened person. One is free from desires, passions and conditioning. The person is established in meditation and lives in freedom. Their mind is still and has reached the supreme goal of life. The individual is never angry and never causes harm to others. That person radiates love for all. They do not cling to pleasure, nor do they fear death or prison
4	Atma Siddhi Shastra of Jainism	It describes the qualities of a person whose consciousness is evolved, such as self-realisation, rational attitude, desire for liberation, wisdom, inner joy, harmony between speech and actions, forgiveness and freedom from all discriminations
5	The commentary by Sri Sankara on Brihadaranyaka Upanishad	The <i>Buddhi</i> , being transparent and next to the <i>Atman</i> catches the reflection of the intelligence of the <i>Atman</i> . Therefore, the wise men happen to identify themselves with Atman first, next comes the Manas. Thus, the <i>Atman</i> successively illuminates with its own intelligence, the entire aggregate of <i>Buddhi</i> , <i>Manas</i> , <i>Indriya</i> and <i>Deha</i>

greater than herself. Also, she is *relationship-oriented* in her approach to change. Thus, there are five important characteristics of integral leaders which are (a) spiritual essence, (b) motivated by a higher purpose, (c) relationship-oriented, (d) the practice of compassionate action and (e) quiet confidence. Sengupta (2021) presents a 5-level Integral leadership model. The leaders at the higher levels of integral leadership exhibit self-discipline, self-control and self-knowledge. They create a culture of

self-organisation within the organisation for organisational excellence and employee well-being. Such leaders work on the principle of *Lokasam-graha* or the welfare of all. Such leaders optimise the health and value of the interdependent system. They focus on "How can I help?" and "What can I do?" for the present state of the world (Barrett, 2006). These leaders have explicit intention to act for the benefit of all society (Ranganathananda, 2000). Such leaders develop a higher and deeper purpose for the organisation that can energise all the stakeholders. Development of consciousness is essential for discovering such a higher or deeper purpose (Arora et al., 2019; Nader & Maheshwari, 2023).

## DEVELOPING HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS LEADERSHIP

Maheshwari (2021) provides a few principles for developing higher-consciousness leaders:

- 1. Consciousness is primary. This principle highlights that consciousness is pure existence and is the source of all manifestation (Nader, 2021). This is the true nature of existence of every person and organisation and environment.
- 2. Love is all we need. All wisdom traditions highlight unconditional love for the almighty god and love for others. Also called agape, unconditional love drives people to work selflessly for humanity.
- 3. Unboundarise oneself. Individual needs to continually develop their own so they can see themselves as unbounded and capable of achieving anything. This will lead to manifesting their full potential.

These principles enable a process approach to action, while trusting nature to provide the right situations and results. Leadership should treat everyone as a part of one family and help each other to grow and learn.

Harung et al. (1995) made a pioneering attempt to understand whether world-class leaders experience higher states of consciousness, based on self-reports. Frequency of momentary experiences of higher states of consciousness was significantly higher in the experimental group as compared with two control groups. They suggest that by accelerating the development of consciousness, it should be possible to develop leaders who can meet the organisational challenges of the twenty-first century.

Leaders operating from higher level of consciousness would exhibit the following features (Harung et al. (1996):

- 1. Expanded consciousness: They are aware of their own true nature and find greater connections in all aspects of life. Such a leadership would tend to appreciate the situation from multiple perspectives and find the best action choice. They would evaluate and learn from the situation rather than judging it prematurely.
- 2. Being Present: A conscious leader is focused on the present only and not dwelling on the past and future. It is a precious quality of awareness cultivated over time. Such persons would also be transparent and reveal their true selves to others in every situation. With the expanded consciousness there is the activation of the intuitive mind. Such an intuition will be attuned to all the laws of nature and will attract the support of nature for its manifestation.
- 3. Enhanced human experience: Conscious leaders value and give importance to human experience. They understand that human experience is a complex one and respect everyone's human experience in the situation. Conscious leaders keep on questioning their intent and organisation direction and have a sense of reality. It means whatever personal values, beliefs system, the vision they have has a realistic notion.

Bhagavad Gita (BG) and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (YS) are popular guides for the development of consciousness.

# BHAGAVAD GITA ON CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP

BG describes the mental condition of a person living with a higher state of consciousness as sthitaprajna, or steady in wisdom. Such a person realises his true nature as pure consciousness or Atman. The individual will be atmanicatman tustah that is he or she is fully delighted in the self by the Self. Swami Ranganathananda (2000) quotes Sri Ramakrishna who said "Siva dances with joy realising his own infinite nature." BG also refers to such leadership as "Raj rishi leadership" which means a person is a monk (rishi) from the inside and a king (raja) on the outside (Chakraborty, 1995). Such a person realises the interconnectedness and mutual interdependence among the species of this universe and works for the benefit of all. Such a leader realises the philosophy of working for the welfare of the society (*lokasamgraha*) by first giving to the divine and living on what remains (*principle of yajna*).

The substratum of the universe is pure consciousness which is called Brahman and is described as "destruction-less, and by Which all this (universe) is pervaded; no one is capable of causing destruction to this changeless One" (BG: 2.17). "Brahman is neither born; nor ever dies; nor, having not been at one time, will This come to be again. This is unborn, destruction-less, eternal and ancient and is not slain [even] when the body is slain" (BG: 2.20). The Brahman, called the Atman also, is experienced through meditation." Some perceive the self (Atman) within the self (body) by meditation by the self (mind) others by the jnana-yoga; and others by the action-yoga" (BG: 13.24). As a result of the individual's perception of the Atman within, the following changes occur: "One becomes free from worldliness, free from the qualities of sattva and rajas and tamas, and becomes established in the higher Self" (BG: 2.45). "An individual thus poised becomes eligible to lead as he/she has the right attitude: Therefore, unattached always, one should perform action that is to be performed; for, the person, performing action without attachment, attains the Supreme" (BG: 3.19). And the raison-d'etre of leadership: "Even recognizing its necessity for the guidance of the world, you must perform action" (BG: 3.20). "Whatsoever a great man does, that the other men also do; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world (mankind) follows" (BG: 3.21).

The foundation of all leadership development from BG is self-referral: One should raise oneself by one's Self alone; let not one lower oneself; for the Self alone is the friend of oneself, and the Self alone is the enemy of oneself. (BG: 6.5). The practical outcome of all of this is: "Wherever is the pure consciousness, I am more than convinced that good fortune, victory, happiness and righteousness will naturally follow" (BG: 18.78). The following two verses present the internal and external paradigm of a leader:

BG:3.35 Better is one's own duty, though ill-done, than the duty of another well-performed. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is fraught with fear.

BG 18.14. The body, the doer, and diverse sense, and activity of various kinds, and Divine Providence, are the five factors of action.

## Yoga Sutras on Development of Consciousness

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (YS) highlight the importance of *sadhana* or practice. This is the path of action or kriya. Inspiring leadership is created by sacred *sadhana* (Chakraborty, 1995). By the continuous practice of yogic techniques, a person is led towards spiritual illumination. The *Sadhak* (practitioner) learns to apply their mind and intelligence with skill, dedication and devotion. The eight-fold of kriya yoga (Ashtanga yoga) is as follows (Maheshwari, 2023):

Yama (Moral injunction)—These are the universal vows which a yoga practitioner (*sadhak*) must inculcate in his/her lifestyle. It includes wishing no harm in word, action and speech. A person must be sincere, truthful, honest, not stealing and possessing only what one needs without being greedy.

Niyama (fixed observances)—It refers to individual practices which build the practitioner's (*sadhak*) own character. It includes external and internal cleanliness. External cleanliness includes bathing of the body and internal cleanliness is maintained through the practice of postures (Asana) and pranayama.

Asana (Postures)—Each posture (asana) helps in the rhythmic functioning of the various systems of the body which affect the senses, mental and intellectual levels. By carefully observing and adjusting, each posture will bring calmness and sobriety to the mind. The practitioner (sadhak) learns compassion through this practice (Iyengar, 1965).

Pranayam (Regulation of breath)—Prana is an auto-energising force that provides the fundamental energy and the source of all knowledge. In pranayama, there is the regulation of breath through the right and left sides of nostrils and lungs. It involves three steps of inhalation, exhalation and retention.

Pratyahara (Internalisation of the senses)—Through pratyahara, the *sadhaka* develops willpower and detaches themselves from the sense organs and acquires clarity of thought.

Dharana (concentration)—Dharana means the focus of attention on a chosen point or area, within or outside the body.

Dhyana (Meditation)—It refers to the maintenance of an uninterrupted flow of attention on a fixed point or region without intervention or interruption. In dhyana, psychological and chronological time comes to stand still as the mind observes its own behaviour.

Samadhi (Absorption of consciousness)—When the attentive flow of consciousness merges with the object of meditation, the consciousness of the meditator, the subject, appears to be dissolved in the object. The union of subject and object becomes samadhi.

The above eight steps of kriya yoga (Ashtanga yoga) are interwoven. By practising any and all of these limbs of yoga, one can experience different levels of consciousness and integration within themselves (Maheshwari, 2023; volume 1).

# Levels of Existence

The Vedic model speaks of several inhering systems of existence, or koshas, that are nested like Russian dolls, each subtler than its predecessor. Kak (2023, volume 1) spoke of five levels: annamaya kosha (physical body), pranamaya kosha (life currents in the body), manomaya kosha (mind), vijnanamaya kosha (knowledge) and anandamaya kosha (happiness and wisdom). All of them are informed by consciousness that transcends the five.

Yama and niyama are said to purify the physical and physiological sheaths. Asana, pranayama and pratyahara work on the psychological and intellectual sheath. Dharana and dhyana clean the intellectual and joy sheaths. The practitioner of yoga unboundarises through all the yogic practices and integrates themselves at all levels and lives in harmony with the natural world. The leaders from this level of integration work for the welfare of the whole universe (Table 5.5).

Table 5.	5 Koshas	and :	Integration	levels
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Sheath	Body sheaths (Kosha)	Stage of integration
1	Physical body/Annamaya Kosa	Sarira sanyam/integration of body
2	Physiological body/Pranamaya Kosa	Indriya samyama/integration of senses
3	Psychological body/Manomaya Kosa	Prana Samyama/integration of energy
4	Intellectual body/Vijnanamaya kosa	Mano samyama/integration of mind
5	The body of joy/Anandamaya kosa	Buddhi Samyama/integration of intellect

# COMMON LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM BHAGAVAD GITA AND YOGA SUTRAS

Both BG and YS discuss higher levels of consciousness and the path to achieve it. BG describes the paths of Karma, Bhakti and Jnana as a medium to raise to human consciousness. YS emphasises Tapas, Swadhyaya and Isvara Pranidhana as ways to raise human consciousness. When a person has clarity of understanding of their true nature, their beliefs change. As a result, one withdraws their senses and sees the world differently according to their dharma or moral duty. There are many common qualities of conscious individuals which various verses of both the scriptures mention:

## 1. Compassion

Without any hatred towards all beings, friendly and compassionate, without any sense of possessiveness, without any egoism, equal in pleasure and pain and forgiving. (BG, Ch-12, V-13)

Through cultivation of friendliness, compassion, joy, and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively, the consciousness becomes favourably disposed, serene and benevolent. (PY, Ch-1, V-33)

#### 2. Tolerance

Heat and cold, pleasure and pain arise merely because of the contact of the senses with the sense objects. They are fleeting. Therefore, O Arjuna, try to tolerate them. (BG, Ch-2, V-14.)

When the sadhaka is firmly established in continence, knowledge, vigour, valour and energy flow to him. (Py, Ch-2, V-38).

#### 3. Fearlessness

Said Lord Supreme, Fearlessness, excessive Sattva (purity), preoccupied with knowledge and yoga, charity, self-control, rituals and worship, study of scriptures, penance and simplicity. (BG, Ch-16, V-1)

Practice must be pursued with trust, confidence, vigour, keen memory and power of absorption to break this spiritual complacency. (PY, Ch-1, V-20)

## 4. Equanimity of mind

O chief among men, that person is eligible for immortality who is not troubled by the senses and who is equal in both happiness and sorrow. (BG, Ch-2, V-15)

From then on, the sadhaka is undisturbed by dualities. (PY, Ch-2, V-48)

#### 5. Control of senses

The qualified karma yogi, who is pure in his heart and has conquered his mind and his senses, sees his self in all selves and remains free even though engaged in action. (BG, Ch-5, V-7)

Withdrawing the senses, mind and consciousness from contact with external objects, and then drawing them inwards towards the seer, is pratyahara. (PY, Ch-2, V-54)

#### 6. Meditation

Through the practice of Yoga and meditation with the mind not moving in other directions, one can attain the Supreme Purusha, O Partha. (BG, Ch-8, V-8)

Meditation on God with the repetition of AUM removes obstacles to the mastery of the inner self. (PY, Ch-1, V-29)

#### 7. Contentment

Non-cruelty, equanimity, contentment, austerity, donation, fame, disrepute, these feelings of all beings arise from Me only according to their nature. (BG, Ch-10, V-5)

From contentment and benevolence of consciousness comes supreme happiness. (PY, Ch-2, V-42)

# 8. Love for almighty pure consciousness

Those men who follow my doctrines regularly with utmost faith and without envy are liberated from the bondage of actions. (BG, Ch-3, V-31)

Burning zeal in practice, self-study and study of scriptures, and surrender to god are the acts of yoga. (PY, CH-2, V-1)

#### 9. Truthfulness

Non-cruelty, truthfulness, without anger, self-sacrificing nature, peace of mind, being non-critical, compassionate to all beings, without greed, gentle, modest, firm-minded. (BG, Ch-16, V-2)

Non-violence, truth, abstention from stealing, continence, and absence of greed for possessions beyond one's need are the five pillars of Yama. (PY, Ch-2, V-30)

#### 10. Rational attitude

All these men are definitely magnanimous souls. But the man of wisdom in my opinion is verily like Myself. He is certainly situated in Me and attains the highest end. (BG, Ch-7, V-18)

By dedicated practice of the various aspects of yoga impurities are destroyed: the crown of wisdom radiates in glory. (PY, Ch-2, V-28)

The above are some of the qualities of a person in higher consciousness as described in the BG and YS. Both scriptures emphasise the relation of presence of love-based qualities at the deeper levels of awareness. The main focus of the leader is on the welfare of mankind rather than satisfying their self-greed. The individual's focus is to nourish the inner self of others and create an environment where the consciousness of the others can be raised. YS provides a pathway to raise the consciousness. As an individual gets established in their experience of higher states of consciousness, they develop an inner stability and realise their own unbounded nature and develop the ten qualities mentioned above.

# CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Ancient wisdom traditions have much to offer to help create higher consciousness-based leadership to solve the grand challenges facing mankind. Bhagavad Gita approaches Consciousness as the overarching canopy underlying all action. Patanjali's system of kriya yoga is a complete package of tools and techniques for leaders to help achieve higher states of consciousness (Maheshwari, 2023). Einstein said, "Only those who attempt the absurd will achieve the impossible."

Management development programmes should include a systematic and regular study of Bhagavad Gita. Mahatma Gandhi was a global and effective leader who modelled his life and leadership on the basis of the BG and YS (Maheshwari, 2023). Gandhi's writings on the Bhagavad Gita are prolific. Several scholars (Bhawuk, 2011; Chatterjee, 2012; Dhiman, 2019; Kaipa & Radjou, 2013) have written commendable efforts to present and encapsulate the organisational leadership and managerial insights from BG. Several practitioners (Garg, 2004; Malhotra, 2010; Mishra, 2019; Piparaiya, 2004; Roka, 2008) have also selected and presented their practical and application-oriented interpretations of the BG in the context of their own experience of leadership and professional work. BG should be considered a resource for all leadership development and education courses. Without introspection and stabilisation in the inner self, the equanimity required for quick and critical decisionmaking and judgement of people and situations would be impaired. The Bhagavad Gita deserves to be the universal text of righteous living and effective leadership as a gem of condensation of universal truths and advice to leaders. It can inspire and accelerate consciousness-based leadership which will bring peace, prosperity and happiness to one and all.

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