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Research paper

Corporate Social Responsibility Collaborative Strategies for Local Communities

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Abstract

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been identified as an early concept that provides a platform for corporations and community relationship. It is also being discussed that through CSR initiatives corporations would be able to assist in community development efforts. However, to achieve this objective, CSR strategies were required to be implemented according to the needs for community development. This paper will discuss how corporate and community relations through CSR strategies are being implemented for this purpose. The research was conducted on a qualitative case study on a CSR contract farming project by a multinational corporation towards the local farmers' community in Pasir Puteh, Kelantan, Malaysia. A total of 45 farmers who were involved in the project were interviewed. Verbatim data were analyzed to develop themes that could help to provide an understanding of the implementation strategy based on the perspective of the farmers as the recipients of the project. This study has identified the roles played by each of the parties involved based on 38 basic themes emerged from the analysis. These basic themes have been clustered into seven main themes (MT), namely MT1 - Strong Farmers Relationships, MT2 - Support by LFA, MT3 - Positive Attitude of Farmers, MT4 - Farmers Initiative, MT5 - Guaranteed Markets by Corporations, MT6 - Leadership of LFA and MT7 - Learning Process. These themes indicated that the implementation of the CSR project by the corporations was executed in collaboration with the relevant development agency that is the Local Farmers Association (LFA) with the farmer's active involvement. This project is seen to be executed as Public-Private Partnership approach and has assisted the local farmers' community to develop components of community development through the development of skills, attitudes and opportunities for the larger market.

Keywords: *CSR and Community; Collaboration Effort; Qualitative Case Study*

1. Introduction

In the academic research involving the relationships between business and society, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been acknowledged as one of the early concepts that give the opportunity to corporations and the communities to mutually develop a relationship among them. Thus, this decade has seen more frequently the involvement of the community with the corporations (1). Through CSR initiatives, corporations have started to develop relationships with the community with the efforts to be more sensitive towards the culture and the needs of the community and to play a more proactive role to increase the quality of life of the community (Epstein, 2008). The corporation had realised that the benefit of improving and increasing resources and quality of life of the community was not only beneficial presently but also would be beneficial for the future (2-4). This article will discuss the implementation strategy of a CSR initiative by a multinational corporation in Pasir Puteh, Kelantan, Malaysia in pursuing their relationship with the local community and in assisting the development of the community.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative

According to The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (5), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was defined as the continuing commitment by businesses to behave ethically and contribute to the economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large. It is a social initiative by the corporation towards its stakeholders besides the economic objectives of its existence. However, CSR initiatives for development purposes which fulfill the community's needs are incapable of being implemented alone by corporations. Hence, CSR programmes and projects towards the community have to be implemented by roping in the government, development agency, corporations, civil society or the local community to ensure that the implementation of the initiatives shall be parallel to the policy and the need of the country and also to avoid implementing initiatives that may be dysfunctional to the community. Therefore, corporations have begun to undertake CSR efforts through a strategic partnership with the relevant parties (6).

This implementation strategy has attracted more attention when, at the global level, world countries have put Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as the primary objective in the formulation of state policy upon the conclusion of the World Summit On Sustainable Development in 2002. Thus, the strategy of partnering with the corporations had become an avenue to generate effective and efficient developmental assistance to attain the MDGs that generated the society's well-being in 2015. Discussions on the matter had identified various CSR partnership strategies that could be implemented involving corporations and NGOs, corporations

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and the government or the three parties comprising the corporation, the government and the NGOs as discussed by Kolk, van Tulder (7) (please refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Partnership Approaches of CSR Initiatives

Partnership Approach	Role of each party involved
Private-Nonprofit Partnership	*Corporation*: as fund provider *NGO*: undertaking activities according to the specific objective of incorporation.
Public-Private Partnership	*Government*: assisting in networking for community' development efforts. *Corporations*: contributing funds or expertise that are relevant to their business activities.
Tripartite Partnership	*Government:* provides funds to minimize the risk of failure. *NGO*: connecting the CSR efforts with the local community. *Corporations*: provides relevant skills.

These collaboration strategies were very much needed particularly in the situation where assistance or subsidy from the government in assisting the community has been reduced. When there is a reduction of support from the government to the community, corporations will have a higher social mechanism power to elevate the change level within the community, especially in the developing nations or where the economic transition is taking place. In this situation, co-operation between government bodies, community and corporations, including multinational companies, could help to contribute and assist in community development efforts in the country (7, 8).

Contributions from the corporations through this collaborative effort had been recognised by many parties. It was through such efforts that the skills and expertise of the organisation could be shared with the local community. These strategies may be carried out not only with government bodies or non-governmental entities but may also be carried out with relevant individuals for community development (9). According to Elsig and Amalric (10), in the fields of development, a partnership between two sectors comprising the government and the industry was the tradition that has long been practised, but the partnership involving the three sectors was a relatively new phenomenon in the field.

In the context of CSR initiatives, when the corporation implemented CSR strategies by way of a partnership, such CSR efforts have indirectly attained a level of maturity in its implementation plan. According to (11), CSR and the development agenda that was carried out by adopting a partnership approach would become a challenge to the corporations which undertook CSR only on the tokenistic basis. CSR efforts based on the partnership approach would not be implemented in the form of a philanthropic contribution but would be more integrative by involving primary activities of the parties concerned. Obviously, a corporation which implements CSR efforts through this collaboration strategy would also require active participation from the community. Such CSR initiatives would not only develop the capacity of the community but through it, the values generated shall include values of all the parties involved (7, 8).

A study by Muthuri (12) on the CSR strategic partnership concluded that community development could only be achieved when development effort was implemented strategically and when all parties involved with the effort are mutually complimenting one another in the aspects of capacity, competency and resources apart from benefiting from the existing social capital. Hence, CSR efforts for long-term development need to be performed based on the core business activities of the corporation (7, 8). Accordingly, Fox in 2004, was of the opinion that core business activities involving purchase activities were believed to have an impact on the community's development.

Idemudia (13) discussed the relationship between the CSR initiative and community development and viewed CSR initiatives for community development as not only based on the CSR initiative's ability to assist in the attainment of the said objective, but there was also a need to focus on the reciprocal responsibility from the community as part of the effort of attaining it. Similar emphasis was made in most definitions of community development, which underlined the realisation that community development would be established through active involvement of the community themselves (14, 15). Therefore, the mechanism to select the partner in the implementation of the collaborative effort has to be developed to ensure that social performance that enhanced the community could be attained through the strategy (16).

3. Methodology

This research is an exploratory case study aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding (17) of a CSR project undertaken by a multinational corporation with a community in Malaysia. According to (18), a case study approach allowed an investigation to be done to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Hence, through a case study approach, the inquiry was able to take place within the situation in which the activity occurred. For this purpose, a CSR chilli farming project was selected as a case study because this CSR project had been implemented since 1994 and continued to-date. The inquiry process was conducted with those involved in the project.

3.1. Case Study: Chilli Contract Farming Project in Pasir Puteh, Kelantan

The CSR initiative which was selected for this study was a chili contract farming project, which was also known as 'spicing community project' undertaken by a multinational corporation (MNC). The corporation which has been operating in Malaysia under the Food and Beverages Industry since 1912 was working with Pertubuhan Peladang Kawasan or Local Farmers Association (LFA) of Bukit Awang, Kelantan in implementing the contract farming project for the farmer's community. Based on the information made available in the corporation's annual report, the chili contract farming project carried out in Kelantan was one of the projects under the corporation's CSR initiatives with an objective of creating income opportunities for the rural local farmers. The project was introduced to apply the corporation's philosophy of 'creating shared values' by initiating investment, which not only brought benefits to the corporation, but also to the local community. The process of 'creating shared values' by the corporation was intended to create value for the stakeholders within the community with a long-term strategy of generating consistent annual performance to the parties involved. Apart from that, the project was undertaken as an effort to achieve the objectives of the MDGs, which among others, was to contribute towards the community development. The MNC is a producer of chili-based products which used the chilies produced by the community as part of the core ingredients of one of the corporation's food products.

On the other hand, the corporation was working with its partner, the LFA which is an organisation or an institution owned by the farmers incorporated under the Farmers Association Act 1973 (Act 109). The objective of the LFA is to increase the economic and social levels of its members. The LFA is the agency that renders assistance in managing the implementation of the project and provides detailed production plans for harvesting, storage, and grading of the farmers' produce. Other than that, the LFA also provide regulated micro-credit facilities to the farmers to assist them in getting resources to start cultivation.

The project was initiated in 1994 at Bukit Awang, Pasir Puteh, Kelantan as an effort of the corporation in creating job opportunities, increasing income, introduce the farmers to Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) and to assist the farmers to be more self-reliant. The objective of the project was to increase agricultural produce and to improve the quality of the farmers' cultivation practice by employing to the maximum the available agricultural resources. Through the project, it was hoped that the agricultural produce of the farmers could be increased. The farmers were introduced to

commercial farming approach and emphasised on a more systematic and professional farm management according to international accepted standards. Beginning with four farmers with a total land area of only four acres and a harvest of 8.5 metric tons in 1994, the project continued and had succeeded in recruiting 242 participants and a land area of 242 acres with a total harvest of 489 metric tons as in 2009.

It was obvious that the project involved not only the corporation and the farmers but also the LFA. Each party had specific roles to play to ensure that the project could be successfully implemented. The study had identified the roles of each of the party involved.

A). *Role of the Corporation*

The corporation suggested the idea for the project to the then director of LFA in 1994. In the early stages of the project, the corporation assisted the community in providing the seeds plant and technical know-how in the process of cultivation. The corporation also supervised the project to help in ensuring good production and farm security. More importantly, the corporation provided a ready market for the farmers to sell their products.

B). *Role of the LFA*

The LFA is the agency which rendered assistance in the management of the project. They were actively involved in advising the participants of the project in ensuring the smooth implementation of the project. The LFA provided detailed production plans for harvesting, storage, and grading the farmers' produce. Other than that, the LFA also provided micro-credit facilities to the farmers to assist them in getting resources to start cultivating such as purchasing seeds fertilizers and other necessary items related to the cultivation. Nevertheless, the LFA also acted as the agent that connected market opportunities created by the corporation with the farmers.

C). *Role of the Farmers*

The farmers provided lands to be cultivated with the chilies. The said lands could be owned by the farmers themselves, leased or tenanted by them. The farmers were required to follow the suggested method of cultivation by the corporation's farm supervisor to ensure that the plants were of high quality. The quality of the cultivated chilies had to be of paramount importance to the farmers as the produce will be processed for domestic and international markets. As participants of the project, the farmers were required to sell their produce directly and exclusively to the LFA, which in turn would sell the same to the corporation.

3.2. Data Collections and Analysis

A total of 45 chili contract farmers who were involved in the project were interviewed face-to-face to get first-hand information on their experience in the CSR project. The study adopted the abductive research strategy, which referred to the process of theory construction emerging from the language and meaning within the context of daily activities of the social actors which were made as the basis for understanding and clarifying of a particular problem (19).

Narratives data from of the interviews with the farmers were analysed using thematic analysis method to develop themes that were relevant to the project under study. The interview data were recorded and transcribed verbatim in the form of transcript documents before the thematic analysis was carried out with the assistance of *NVivo* software. The researcher chose and extracted every significant statement from the transcripts that have been read and understood. Significant statements to the phenomena being studied were extracted and coded (20). The initial coding was known as *open-coding*. The coded statements were then combined to similar meanings to form *Basic Themes* (BT). These basic themes were compared and clustered into categories according to its meanings, which were then referred to as *Main Theme* (MT) (21, 22). These themes will help researchers to understand the phenomena being studied. The meaning given by the CSR program participants about their experience involved with the program would be the essence of the study. It would then be interpreted to help researchers understand the reality of the program according to the community being studied.

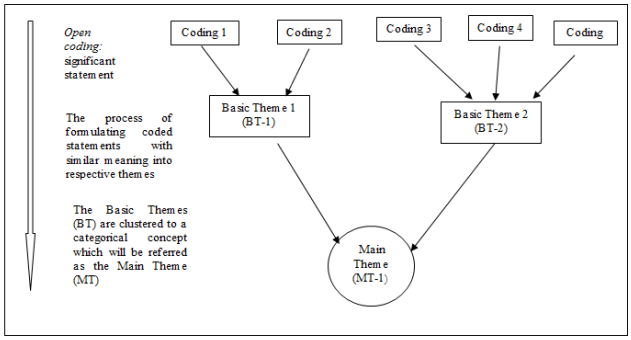


Fig. 1:: The Process of Developing Research Theme (23)

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4. Results and Findings

Table 2: Background of Farmers and Years of Involvement with Chili Farming Project

Farmer's Information	Years of Invovement				
	1-5	6-10	10-15	Total No	%
Age of farmers					
20-30	1	-	-	1	2%
31-40	7	-	-	7	16%
41-50	3	2	5	10	22%
51-60	1	5	5	11	25%
61-70	3	7	4	14	31%
71-80	-	1	-	1	2%
81-90	-	-	1	1	2%
Gender					
Male	8	13	10	31	69%
Female	7	2	5	14	31%
Job before involved					
No Work	9	-	1	10	22%
Farming tobacco and vegetables	-	8	11	19	42%
Farming tobacco and rubber tapper	-	3	-	3	7%
farming Tobacco and rice	-	3	2	5	11%
Construction worker	4	1	-	5	11%
Government employee	2	-	1	3	7%
Job after involved					
Farming chili	6	4	3	13	29%
Farming chili and vegetables	2	5	6	13	29%
Farming chili and rice	3	3	3	9	20%
Farming chili and rubber tapper	-	3	1	4	9%
Farming chili and small business	2	-	1	3	7%
Government employee and farming chili	2	-	1	3	7%
Average annual income before involved					
No income	5	1	4	10	22%
Less than RM500	4	-	1	5	11%

RM500-RM999	1	3	5	9	20%
RM1000-RM1999	4	7	5	16	36%
RM 2000-RM3000	1	2	-	3	7%
More than RM3000		2	-	2	4%
Average annual income after involved					
Less than RM1000	2	-	-	2	4%
RM1000-RM5000	3	1	-	4	9%
RM5000-RM9999	6	2	-	8	18%
RM10000-RM19999	4	8	11	23	51%
RM20000-RM30000	-	2	2	4	9%
More than RM30000	-	2	2	4	9%
Education Level					
No school	1	8	4	13	29%
Primary school	2	3	5	10	22%
Secondary school	10	4	5	19	42%
College/ Diploma/Degree	2	0	1	3	7%
No of household					
1-3	1	-	2	3	7%
4-6	12	10	8	30	66%
7-9	2	5	4	11	25%
10-12		-	1	1	2%

The study interviewed a total of 45 chili farmers who have been involved with the CSR chili farming between one and fifteen years continuously. The study found 31 percent of the farmers involved in this project are in the age range of 61 to 70 years, 25 per cent in the age group 51 to 60 years and 22 per cent in the age group 41 to 50 years. Only 16 percent of farmers interviewed were between 31 and 40 years and two percent, and one person aged less than 31 years. The researchers also had the opportunity to interview a farmer aged more than 70 years and another who had reached the age of 90 years. Both of them are still involved with this contract chili farming projects (see table 2).

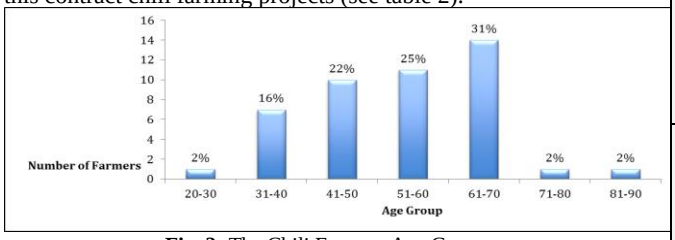


Fig. 2: The Chili Farmers Age Group

4.2. Thematic analysis

A total of 205 statements had been coded from the narratives of the farmers. The analysis identified 38 basic themes (BT) that was being clustered to form seven main themes (MT), which explained the farmers' experiences of their involvement in the project. The main themes that emerged from the analysis were MT-1: Strong farmers' relationship, MT-2: Support by LFA, MT-3: Positive attitudes of farmers, MT-4: Farmers' initiatives, MT-5: A Guaranteed market by cooperation, MT-6: LFA leadership, and lastly MT-7: A Learning process. The basic themes that developed each of the main themes are listed in table 3.

Table 3: Basic and Main Themes on CSR Chili Farming Project

Basic Themes (Combined Coded Narratives Of The Respondents)	Main Theme
BT-1: Frequently having discussions and meetings (14) BT-2: Close relationship among farmers (13) BT-3: Preparedness to guide among farmers (12) BT-4: Sharing of problems, skills and information (8) BT-5: Effort to cultivate in a team (2)	MT-1: Strong Farmers Relationship
BT-6: LFA as reference point (13) BT-7: LFA provide credit farming (9) BT-8: LFA assists in management of sales and finance (6) BT-9: LFA concerns on members to succees (6) BT-10 LFA provide needed equipment (2) BT-11 LFA as the middle person between farmers and corporation (2)	MT-2: Support by LFA
BT-12 Highly motivated (8) BT-13 Not giving up, persevering (5) BT-14 Confident (5) BT-15 Trustworthy (4) BT-16 Dare to try (2) BT-17 Learning from mistakes (2) BT-18 Visionary (1) BT-19 Taking opportunity (1) BT-20 Planning (1) BT-21 Obedient (1) BT-22 United (1)	MT-3: Positive attitude of Farmers
BT-23 Encouraging other farmers to join (15) BT-24 Motivation from the success of other farmers (6) BT-25 Cultivation with own initiative (4) BT-26 Constantly improving quality of produce (3) BT-27 Having a leader among farmers (3) BT-28 Remain committed with farming (2)	MT-4: Farmers' Initiatives
BT-29 Discovery of guaranteed market (6) BT-30 Overcoming marketing difficulties (6) BT-31 Market at fixed price (5) BT-32 Overcoming problems relating to marketing System (5)	MT-5: Guaranteed Market by Corporation
BT-33 LFA officers very concerned (9) BT-34 LFA director highly motivated (4) BT-35 LFA director motivates the farmers (3)	MT-6: LFA's Leadership
BT-36 opportunity to attend courses (9) BT-37 courses offered by multiple agencies (5) BT-38 corporation assisting in improvement of skills (3)	MT-7: Learning Process

Note: numbers within the parenthesis refer to the number of coded narratives to develop the themes.

4.1. Discussion on research findings

The result of the thematic analysis found the emergence of main themes MT-2: Support by LFA, MT-6: LFA's leadership and MT-7: Learning process that showed the roles of the government, which was represented by the LFA. While the main themes MT-5: a Guaranteed market by corporation and basic theme BT-38: Corporation assisting in the improvement of skills, which was part of the main theme MT-7: Learning process had depicted the roles played by the corporation. Therefore, the combined effort of the parties, namely the LFA and the corporation, demonstrated the approach of public-private partnership strategy in implementing the project. This was evident, as according to Kolk, van Tulder (7), CSR efforts that adopted Public-Private Partnership strategy would collaborate the efforts between the government and the private sector in implementing CSR projects towards the community for development.

The CSR project undertaken through this strategy had been recognized as a strategy that was being implemented by the corporation to ensure that the CSR project towards the community shall be in line with the policy and the needs of the nation. Accordingly, the research outcome also indicated that the corporation was undertaking the CSR activity together with relevant parties. This strategy was in line with the suggestion by Utting (16) that CSR project should be able to fulfil the needs of the community. While in the context of the CSR discussion, CSR with a partnership strategy may indirectly fend off criticism on its philanthropic or tokenistic

implementation as discussed by Fox (11) due to the project's integrative activities with the parties involved.

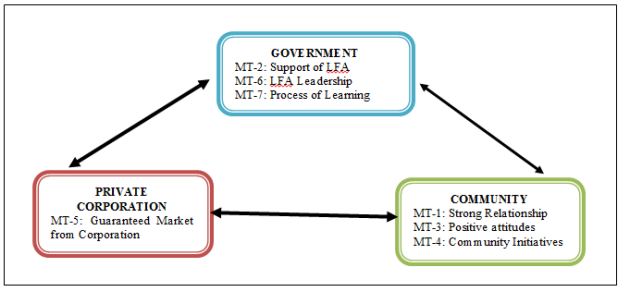


Fig .3: The Roles of Corporation, Government and Community in CSR Chili Farming Project

Taking into consideration all the emerging themes, the research also found that the implementation of CSR initiatives in Pasir Puteh, Kelantan had some differences from the partnership strategy previously discussed about the CSR strategy (refer to Table 3). It was found that the roles performed by the LFA were represented by the main themes (MT-2) as an agency which gave support to the community. Among the basic themes underlying this main theme were that the LFA became the party that connected the corporation with the community (BT-11) and provided credit farming facility to the farmers to ensure that they have sufficient capital to continue with the chili farming activities (BT-7). These roles were in line with the ones discussed by Kolk et al., (2008) as an effort to reduce the risk of failure of the project. Nevertheless, other than extending credit facilities to mitigate the possibility of failure of the project, the research found that the LFA had also served as the reference point (BT-6) for the farmers' community, assisting in aspects of management and also providing the required equipment (BT-10). Above all, the LFA was seen by the farmers as an agency that was very concerned to see their success in the project (BT-9). Hence, the LFA had contributed towards providing a leadership style which was being accepted by the community in their efforts to implement the project (BT-9). This factor had been identified as one of the factors contributing towards the success of the project. This role had not been discussed in detail by previous researchers on the CSR partnership strategy.

Table.3: Comparison Between the Roles of Parties Involved in Partnership Strategy

CSR Implementation Strategy	Discussion by previous research	Current Research Finding
Public-Private Partnership	• *Government*: providing network of communication and assistance against risk of project failure. • *Corporation*: contributing expertise related to core business activities.	• *Government (LFA)*: providing a network of communication, assistance against the risk of project failure (financial assistance and management), assisting in enhancement of expertise, providing leadership needed by the community. • *Corporation*: contributing expertise related to core business activities and providing for market opportunity.

On the other hand, in analysing the roles played by the corporation, the study found that the corporation had played the role of contributing towards the enhancement of skills among the farmers as shown by BT-38 and had also prepared a guaranteed market opportunity to the community as represented by the main theme MT-5. This role had indirectly assisted in reducing the risk of failure of the project as it overcame the community's problems with their marketing system and marketing difficulties. Nevertheless, this role also had not been mentioned by previous researchers in relation to corporate contribution or the corporation's roles in the CSR partnership strategy. However, the roles played by both parties towards the community were in the form of contribution that were in line with the primary role of both parties' core business as suggested by Goddard (8) and Kolk, van Tulder (7). Both organisations had played their roles in accordance to their objective of incorporation.

In addition, the outcome of the research also demonstrated the functions of the community that contributed towards the implementation of the CSR project other than the contribution from the corporation and the government. The farmer's community had played the roles of creating a strong relationship (MT-1), positive attitudes (MT-3), and community initiatives (MT-4) in ensuring that the project was able to be implemented successfully (refer to Table 2 and Diagram 3). This situation fulfilled the suggestion by Idemudia (13), who stated that in ensuring that the CSR project could contribute towards community development, reciprocal responsibility must come from the community themselves. Accordingly, the role played by the community of farmers was also in line with the need for community development as discussed by Biddle and Biddle (15) and Kingsbury (14)

5. Conclusion

The research concluded that the CSR project by the corporation, which had been implemented at Bukit Awang, Pasir Puteh, Kelantan was referred to as a CSR project with a partnership strategy between the corporation, the LFA and the local farmer's community. The ability of the project to sustain for more than 15 years was contributed by the roles played by the parties involved. The corporation had developed a project which was much needed by the community. Positive participation of the farmers' community in the project had helped the successful performance of the project while the role of the development agency (LFA) had allowed the project to be implemented by the corporation in the community and at the same time reducing the risk of failure. Therefore, in conclusion, the implementation of CSR initiatives by the corporation at Pasir Puteh through collaboration with the LFA, together with the active participation of the community concerned with their positive attitudes and initiatives, had given a clear picture of the necessary and suitable mechanisms for the implementation of the CSR project for the community.

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