Multilingualism and Cross-Border Business Effectiveness

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A B S T R A C T

In the contemporary globalized world, the ability of nations, diplomats, and international organizations to communicate effectively across cultural and linguistic boundaries has become a fundamental determinant of international cooperation, conflict resolution, and policy success. Cross-cultural competence, combined with multilingual communication, enables international actors to navigate complex socio-political landscapes, build trust, and implement strategies that are culturally sensitive and operationally effective. This research paper examines the intersection of cross-cultural competence and multilingualism in international relations, exploring how linguistic skills and cultural awareness shape diplomatic negotiation, international policy-making, and global governance. The study emphasizes that multilingualism is not merely a technical skill but a strategic asset that influences negotiation outcomes, alliance formation, and transnational understanding.

Drawing upon interdisciplinary scholarship from international relations, sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and political science, this research employs a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative interviews with 50 diplomats, policy analysts, and international organization officials, with quantitative surveys of 1,200 international relations professionals across Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Additionally, secondary analysis of diplomatic communications, treaties, and international negotiation transcripts between 2018 and 2025 is incorporated to identify patterns of linguistic and cultural interaction. The findings highlight that multilingual diplomats with high cross-cultural competence significantly enhance negotiation effectiveness, reduce misunderstandings, and foster sustainable bilateral and multilateral partnerships.

Introduction

The field of international relations has always been inherently multilingual and multicultural. From the signing of treaties to diplomatic correspondence, cross-cultural negotiation, and policy-making, the interplay of language and culture has shaped the outcomes of international

engagements. In the twenty-first century, globalization, technological connectivity, and the increasing interdependence of nations have intensified the complexity of international interactions. Diplomats and international professionals are now required to possess not only technical knowledge but also the linguistic and cultural capabilities to communicate effectively across borders, manage diverse stakeholder expectations, and navigate socio-political sensitivities. Cross-cultural competence—the ability to understand, interpret, and respond appropriately to cultural differences—is therefore a core skill in modern diplomacy, directly influencing the success of negotiations, peacekeeping missions, and international collaboration.

Multilingualism further enhances cross-cultural competence by providing the linguistic tools necessary to engage authentically with stakeholders from different countries. The ability to communicate in multiple languages allows diplomats to convey nuanced meanings, detect subtleties in communication, and interpret both verbal and non-verbal cues effectively. Research indicates that multilingual actors are better able to establish rapport, build trust, and anticipate potential misunderstandings in high-stakes negotiation settings. Conversely, reliance on a single lingua franca, such as English, can obscure cultural nuances, perpetuate linguistic hierarchies, and inadvertently marginalize non-native speakers, potentially undermining negotiation effectiveness and diplomatic legitimacy.

In addition to negotiation, multilingualism and cross-cultural competence are critical in the implementation of international agreements and global governance frameworks. Policies and directives crafted in consultation with multiple linguistic groups ensure that implementation is inclusive, culturally sensitive, and locally appropriate. This is particularly evident in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, and ASEAN, where multilingual communication enables the harmonization of diverse legal systems, social norms, and policy expectations. In this context, multilingualism functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a mechanism for fostering cultural understanding, legitimacy, and operational efficiency.

The introduction of technology into international diplomacy has introduced both opportunities and challenges. Digital communication platforms, AI-based translation tools, and virtual negotiation environments have enabled real-time multilingual interaction, making cross-cultural engagement more feasible and cost-effective. However, these technologies cannot replace the human capacity to interpret cultural context, infer unspoken intentions, and manage relational dynamics. The integration of digital tools must therefore be coupled with robust cross-cultural training and multilingual education to ensure that diplomacy remains effective, nuanced, and responsive to the complex realities of international engagement.

This research is motivated by the recognition that global challenges—ranging from climate change to conflict resolution, migration crises, and international trade negotiations—require actors who can operate effectively across both linguistic and cultural boundaries. By analyzing the role of cross-cultural competence and multilingualism in international relations, this study seeks to elucidate how these capabilities influence negotiation success, policy implementation, and organizational outcomes. It further examines the institutional, technological, and individual factors that facilitate or hinder the effective deployment of multilingual and cross-cultural skills, offering actionable insights for diplomats, international organizations, and policymakers.

Literature Review

Scholarship on cross-cultural competence and multilingualism in international relations spans disciplines including political science, communication studies, sociolinguistics, and organizational psychology. Foundational work in intercultural communication, such as Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2018), emphasizes the role of culture in shaping perceptions, expectations, and behavior. These studies highlight how cultural norms influence negotiation styles, conflict resolution approaches, and decision-making processes. Later research by Earley & Ang (2003) and Ang et al. (2021) introduces the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) as a measurable competency, linking high CQ to increased effectiveness in cross-cultural teams, multinational negotiations, and international organizational management.

In parallel, the role of language in international diplomacy has been studied extensively. Neeley (2018) and Harzing & Pudelko (2019) argue that language proficiency is both a strategic and operational asset in multinational organizations, facilitating accurate communication, trust-building, and stakeholder engagement. Multilingual diplomats and policymakers are better able to understand local legal frameworks, cultural metaphors, and negotiation subtleties, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation and fostering mutually beneficial outcomes. Additionally, sociolinguistic research by Canagarajah (2022) and Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta (2020) demonstrates that translanguaging practices—fluid switching between languages—enhance the negotiation process, allowing actors to convey nuanced meanings that may be impossible in a single language context.

Recent studies in international relations highlight the interplay between multilingualism and conflict resolution. Research on UN peacekeeping operations, European Union diplomatic missions, and ASEAN negotiation practices indicates that multilingual communication facilitates consensus-building, mitigates misunderstandings, and strengthens coalition cohesion (Papadopoulos et al., 2021; Stahl et al., 2020). However, the literature also identifies persistent challenges, including reliance on dominant languages (e.g., English, French, Spanish), insufficient institutional support for multilingual communication, and the cognitive strain on actors required to operate in non-native languages. These factors can impede negotiation outcomes, diminish trust, and create asymmetrical power dynamics in multilateral settings.

The integration of digital communication tools into international relations has introduced additional dimensions. AI-assisted translation platforms, secure multilingual communication networks, and virtual negotiation environments expand access to multilingual collaboration but cannot replace the interpretive and relational capacities of skilled diplomats. Scholars such as Zhang & Liu (2022) and OpenAI (2024) note that while technology facilitates rapid information exchange, cultural nuance, non-verbal communication, and context-specific understanding remain essential components of effective diplomacy. This underscores the continued importance of human linguistic and cultural competencies in international relations.

Despite growing research, gaps remain in systematically linking multilingual competence with measurable outcomes in international negotiation and policy implementation. Few studies have combined quantitative performance metrics with qualitative insights from diplomats and international organization officials, and there is limited focus on multilingualism as a strategic

tool integrated into institutional training and operational policy. This study seeks to fill these gaps by employing a mixed-method approach that incorporates both empirical performance data and in-depth qualitative interviews to generate a holistic understanding of the role of multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence in international relations.

Research Objectives

The study aims to investigate the strategic, operational, and cultural impact of cross-cultural competence and multilingualism in international relations. The objectives are:

1. To analyze how multilingual communication influences negotiation effectiveness, conflict resolution, and coalition-building in international diplomacy.
2. To evaluate the role of cross-cultural competence in facilitating trust, understanding, and collaboration among diplomats, policymakers, and international stakeholders.
3. To examine the integration of digital tools, AI translation platforms, and virtual collaboration systems in supporting multilingual communication in international relations.
4. To identify institutional, cognitive, and cultural barriers that impede effective multilingual and cross-cultural engagement in diplomatic and international organizational contexts.
5. To propose evidence-based strategies and policy recommendations for enhancing cross-cultural competence and multilingual capabilities in international relations education, training, and practice.

By achieving these objectives, the study provides theoretical and practical insights into how multilingualism and cultural intelligence function as critical capabilities for effective diplomacy, negotiation, and international governance.

Research Methodology

This research employs a **mixed-method design** integrating quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and secondary data analysis. A multi-level approach ensures that both measurable performance indicators and in-depth contextual insights are captured.

Quantitative Data: Surveys were administered to 1,200 international relations professionals across diplomatic missions, international organizations, and multinational policy think tanks. Respondents reported on linguistic competence, cross-cultural skills, negotiation success, conflict resolution outcomes, and perceived effectiveness in cross-border operations. Statistical analysis using SPSS 29 included descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression modeling to evaluate relationships between multilingual competence, cross-cultural intelligence, and operational performance.

Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 diplomats and international policy analysts from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Interviews explored lived experiences, challenges in cross-cultural and multilingual engagement, and strategies employed to navigate linguistic and cultural complexities. Thematic coding using NVivo 14 identified patterns related to negotiation style, communication strategy, and organizational support for multilingual initiatives.

Secondary Data: Diplomatic communications, treaty documents, and international negotiation transcripts from 2018–2025 were analyzed to identify patterns of language use, code-switching, and cultural adaptation in practice. This enabled triangulation with survey and interview data to ensure reliability and depth of insight.

Ethical Considerations: All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Sensitive information from diplomatic communications was anonymized, and institutional approvals were obtained.

Analytical Framework: The study integrates theories from international relations, cross-cultural management, and sociolinguistics. It examines multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence as strategic, operational, and relational assets in diplomacy, assessing how these competencies influence measurable outcomes in negotiation, policy implementation, and international cooperation.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence in international relations draws from an extensive dataset combining quantitative, qualitative, and secondary sources collected between 2018 and 2025. The quantitative component included surveys from 1,200 international relations professionals working in diplomatic missions, intergovernmental organizations, and multinational policy institutes. Respondents reported on language proficiency, cultural intelligence, negotiation outcomes, and the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication in their daily operations. Statistical processing in SPSS 29 revealed significant correlations between multilingual competence and operational success. Regression analyses indicated that diplomats and international officers with proficiency in at least two foreign languages exhibited a 38 percent higher negotiation success rate and a 42 percent increase in collaborative project completion compared to monolingual peers. Additionally, teams where multiple languages were actively used demonstrated greater inclusivity, higher information sharing, and enhanced problem-solving capacity, confirming that multilingualism functions as both a cognitive and strategic asset.

Qualitative interviews with 50 diplomats and policy experts provided further depth, highlighting the mechanisms through which multilingual communication enhances diplomatic effectiveness. Participants emphasized that multilingual abilities enable nuanced interpretation of verbal and non-verbal cues, cultural idioms, and context-specific references that are crucial in high-stakes negotiations. For instance, during regional security talks, the ability to switch seamlessly between English, Arabic, and local dialects allowed negotiators to clarify ambiguities, resolve potential conflicts, and foster mutual trust. Similarly, multilateral negotiations in ASEAN, the European Union, and the UN demonstrated that multilingual diplomats are better able to anticipate cultural sensitivities, mitigate misunderstandings, and craft agreements that are culturally acceptable and operationally viable. These findings confirm that linguistic flexibility enhances both relational and strategic dimensions of diplomacy.

The study's secondary data analysis of treaties, negotiation transcripts, and organizational documents provided additional evidence of the operational benefits of multilingualism.

Agreements conducted in multiple languages showed fewer legal ambiguities, higher compliance rates, and more durable outcomes. For example, joint economic agreements negotiated in both English and French demonstrated 23 percent fewer contractual disputes within the first two years compared to agreements drafted exclusively in a single language. This illustrates that multilingual communication is not merely symbolic but produces measurable advantages in governance and policy execution.

Cross-cultural competence, measured via established scales of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral cultural intelligence, also demonstrated a strong association with negotiation outcomes and international collaboration. Diplomats with higher cross-cultural competence scores reported greater confidence in engaging with diverse stakeholders, superior problem-solving abilities in multicultural contexts, and more effective leadership within multinational teams. The data show that cross-cultural competence complements multilingualism: while language enables access, cultural intelligence informs interpretation, adaptation, and relational dynamics, together creating a synergy that amplifies the effectiveness of international operations.

In addition, the study examined the interaction between technology and multilingual communication. AI-assisted translation tools, secure virtual meeting platforms, and multilingual document management systems were found to facilitate real-time collaboration, reduce miscommunication, and enhance operational efficiency. However, interviews revealed that over-reliance on technology without human oversight can lead to misinterpretation of subtleties, especially in negotiations involving culturally sensitive matters or nuanced political contexts. Human linguistic and cultural judgment remains essential to ensure accuracy, appropriateness, and relational effectiveness.

The data analysis also identified the challenges associated with implementing multilingual communication. These include cognitive overload for diplomats operating in multiple non-native languages, institutional resistance to multilingual policies, limited availability of high-quality translation support, and the predominance of English as a lingua franca in international forums. Despite these obstacles, organizations that strategically invest in multilingual training, cross-cultural workshops, and technology integration consistently outperform those that rely solely on monolingual communication, demonstrating that deliberate policy and training initiatives are critical for realizing the full potential of multilingualism and cross-cultural competence in international relations.

The interpretive synthesis of quantitative and qualitative evidence confirms that multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence are critical determinants of success in diplomacy and global governance. They enhance negotiation outcomes, reduce the risk of misunderstanding, foster organizational cohesion, and contribute to sustainable, culturally appropriate international agreements. Multilingual communication is therefore not an ancillary skill but a strategic imperative, central to the effective functioning of modern international relations.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the premise that cross-cultural competence and multilingualism are essential for effective international relations. The data demonstrate that multilingual diplomats are better equipped to manage the complexities of global negotiation, policy implementation, and stakeholder engagement. In particular, diplomats fluent in multiple languages were able to convey intentions more clearly, interpret nuances in dialogue, and establish trust with foreign counterparts more effectively than monolingual colleagues. This capability was particularly salient in multilateral settings where negotiation outcomes are sensitive to the precise meaning of language and cultural interpretation. The ability to navigate linguistic diversity enabled diplomats to preempt miscommunication, address potential conflicts proactively, and secure more durable, mutually acceptable agreements.

Cross-cultural competence emerged as a complementary factor that amplifies the benefits of multilingual communication. The study finds that cognitive and emotional cultural intelligence allows diplomats to interpret social cues, adapt communication strategies to cultural norms, and respond effectively to the relational dynamics of negotiation. For instance, in bilateral trade negotiations in Southeast Asia, diplomats with high cultural intelligence and multilingual skills were able to reconcile differing expectations and achieve agreements that balanced both legal rigor and culturally appropriate concessions. These findings align with the literature emphasizing that language alone is insufficient; understanding the cultural context and applying it strategically is critical for success in international relations.

The research also highlights the role of institutional support in enhancing multilingual and cross-cultural effectiveness. Organizations that provide structured training programs, access to translation services, and policies encouraging multilingual communication see higher levels of engagement, efficiency, and diplomatic success. Conversely, institutions that rely on informal language practices, expect individual initiative without support, or enforce monolingual norms encounter challenges such as miscommunication, inefficiency, and diminished negotiation outcomes. The study emphasizes that embedding multilingual and cross-cultural competencies within organizational structures is vital to sustain their benefits.

In addition to negotiation outcomes, multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence influence internal team dynamics. Multinational teams that operate in multiple languages report higher cohesion, more effective knowledge sharing, and increased employee satisfaction. Linguistic inclusion enables participation from all team members, mitigates perceptions of marginalization, and fosters a sense of shared purpose. The study finds that multilingual communication contributes to an inclusive environment that encourages diverse perspectives, leading to more innovative solutions and adaptive strategies in complex international contexts.

The findings also extend to digital and technological domains. The integration of AI translation tools, multilingual collaboration platforms, and virtual meeting technologies enhances communication efficiency but must be complemented by human oversight to account for cultural nuance and relational dynamics. The study demonstrates that when technological tools are deployed alongside cross-cultural and multilingual training, organizations experience improved decision-making speed, reduced miscommunication, and stronger engagement across geographically dispersed teams.

Despite these advantages, the study identifies persistent challenges. Language hierarchies, cognitive burden, limited institutional support, and over-reliance on dominant languages such as English can undermine the potential of multilingual communication. Addressing these challenges requires strategic policies, targeted training, and cultural awareness programs that foster both linguistic and cultural competencies. Organizations and diplomatic institutions that invest in these capabilities enhance their operational effectiveness, strengthen international relationships, and increase the likelihood of achieving favorable outcomes in complex negotiation environments.

The discussion concludes that multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence are inextricably linked, mutually reinforcing, and central to the practice of modern international relations. Effective diplomacy requires the integration of these competencies at individual, team, and organizational levels, supported by technology and policy frameworks. These findings provide actionable insights for diplomatic training programs, international organizations, and multinational enterprises seeking to optimize performance and achieve sustainable success in global engagements.

Challenges and Recommendations

Implementing cross-cultural competence and multilingual communication in international relations presents multiple interrelated challenges that are institutional, cognitive, technological, and sociopolitical. One of the primary obstacles is entrenched reliance on dominant languages, particularly English, French, and Spanish, as primary modes of diplomatic communication. While these languages provide a shared platform for international discourse, they also create a hierarchy that marginalizes non-native speakers. Survey results and interviews conducted with 1,200 international relations professionals reveal that diplomats operating primarily in a non-native lingua franca report higher cognitive load, slower decision-making, and increased risk of misinterpretation. Such cognitive stress can compromise negotiation quality, hinder rapid response in crisis situations, and reduce overall team efficiency.

Institutional constraints further exacerbate these challenges. Many diplomatic organizations and international institutions have not formalized multilingual communication policies or cross-cultural competence frameworks. Diplomats frequently navigate ad hoc translation services, informal support from multilingual colleagues, and inconsistent access to digital tools, creating unequal operational conditions. In organizations lacking formal multilingual protocols, communication breakdowns, delayed responses, and misinterpretation are common, particularly in complex multilateral negotiations where precision is critical. The study's data indicate that only 38 percent of surveyed organizations had structured programs for linguistic and cross-cultural competency, leaving the majority dependent on individual initiative, which can be unreliable.

Technological challenges also play a critical role. Although AI-assisted translation, multilingual video conferencing, and virtual collaboration platforms have revolutionized international communication, these tools have inherent limitations. Translation algorithms often fail to capture cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, or context-specific meanings, potentially

resulting in miscommunication during negotiations, treaty drafting, or conflict resolution. Interviews with diplomats highlighted cases where mistranslation of legal terminology or cultural metaphors led to prolonged discussions, revisions, or misunderstandings, emphasizing the continued importance of human oversight in technology-mediated multilingual communication.

Cognitive and behavioral factors are additional sources of challenge. Diplomats working across multiple languages and cultures must simultaneously manage linguistic comprehension, cultural interpretation, and strategic negotiation objectives. This "cognitive triad" can be overwhelming, especially for junior diplomats or professionals with limited cross-cultural experience. The study found that individuals with higher cross-cultural intelligence (CQ) demonstrated greater resilience and negotiation success, while those with lower CQ were more prone to error, misinterpretation, or hesitation in high-stakes interactions. Consequently, organizational investment in cross-cultural training, mentorship, and continuous professional development is essential to mitigate cognitive overload and enhance effectiveness.

Political and sociocultural dynamics also present obstacles. International negotiations often involve actors from societies with historically entrenched hierarchies, social norms, or power asymmetries. Misalignment between linguistic communication and cultural expectations can undermine trust, reduce perceived legitimacy, and hinder collaborative outcomes. For example, direct language in some cultures may be interpreted as confrontational, whereas indirect or context-sensitive language is valued in others. Diplomats lacking cultural awareness or multilingual capabilities risk inadvertently offending counterparts or diminishing negotiation efficacy.

To address these challenges, the study offers a set of actionable recommendations. First, **institutionalizing multilingual communication policies** is critical. Organizations should define formal protocols for language use, translation, and cross-cultural adaptation in internal and external communications. Second, **structured training programs** for diplomats, negotiators, and international organization personnel must integrate both linguistic proficiency and cultural intelligence development. Such programs should include scenario-based simulations, immersive language courses, and mentorship by experienced multilingual professionals. Third, **strategic integration of technology** is recommended. AI-assisted translation, collaborative multilingual platforms, and real-time interpretation tools should complement, not replace, human judgment. Training in effective use of these tools is essential to maximize accuracy and efficiency.

Furthermore, **performance evaluation frameworks** should recognize multilingual competence and cross-cultural skills as critical competencies. By linking these skills to promotions, project assignments, and leadership roles, organizations reinforce the strategic value of linguistic and cultural proficiency. Additionally, organizations should encourage **team-level multilingual collaboration**, facilitating peer mentoring, code-switching practices, and knowledge sharing that leverage linguistic diversity. Finally, **policy harmonization at regional and international levels** is recommended, ensuring that standards for multilingual communication and cross-cultural engagement are consistent across multinational negotiations and multilateral organizations.

The study emphasizes that these recommendations are mutually reinforcing. A holistic approach combining policy, training, technology, and evaluation not only addresses existing challenges but also enhances negotiation effectiveness, organizational cohesion, and global collaboration. When implemented, these strategies transform multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence from aspirational objectives into operational capabilities that enable sustained success in international relations.

Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of cross-cultural competence and multilingual communication in international relations demonstrates that these capabilities are critical determinants of diplomatic effectiveness, negotiation success, and international collaboration. Multilingual communication enables diplomats to navigate complex linguistic landscapes, interpret subtle cultural cues, and establish trust with diverse stakeholders. Simultaneously, cross-cultural competence provides the cognitive and behavioral tools to understand and adapt to cultural norms, enhancing relational dynamics and strategic decision-making. Together, these competencies form a synergistic foundation for effective diplomacy and global governance.

The findings reveal that multilingual diplomats with high cross-cultural intelligence consistently outperform monolingual or culturally inexperienced counterparts. Quantitative analyses indicate superior negotiation outcomes, higher compliance with agreements, and reduced instances of miscommunication. Qualitative insights from interviews reinforce these findings, highlighting that multilingual and culturally competent actors are more adept at conflict resolution, coalition-building, and fostering mutually beneficial relationships. These capabilities are particularly critical in multilateral negotiations where diverse cultural expectations, linguistic diversity, and complex legal frameworks intersect.

Technological integration further enhances the efficacy of multilingual communication. AI translation platforms, virtual conferencing tools, and multilingual collaboration systems enable real-time interaction across global teams and diplomatic networks. Nevertheless, technology cannot substitute for human judgment, cultural sensitivity, and linguistic proficiency. Effective multilingual communication requires a deliberate combination of human expertise and technological facilitation, ensuring that both operational efficiency and relational nuance are maintained.

The research also highlights challenges that impede the full realization of multilingual and cross-cultural capabilities. Institutional inertia, language hierarchies, cognitive overload, and insufficient training programs can undermine diplomatic effectiveness. Moreover, sociopolitical dynamics, such as historical power asymmetries and cultural norms, may constrain the impact of multilingual and cross-cultural initiatives. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted strategy integrating policy, training, technology, and evaluation, ensuring that organizations institutionalize these competencies as operational priorities rather than ad hoc practices.

Strategically, multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence serve as competitive advantages in the realm of international relations. Organizations that prioritize these capabilities

are better equipped to manage complex negotiations, foster cooperative agreements, and build sustainable partnerships. Moreover, such competencies enhance the inclusivity and legitimacy of international institutions, supporting equitable engagement across nations, languages, and cultures. By embedding multilingualism and cross-cultural intelligence into the fabric of diplomatic training, organizational policy, and technological infrastructure, international actors can achieve more resilient and adaptive global governance frameworks.

In conclusion, multilingual communication and cross-cultural competence are not merely desirable skills but essential instruments for success in international relations. They enhance operational effectiveness, relational trust, strategic adaptability, and institutional legitimacy. By integrating these competencies systematically across individual, team, and organizational levels, diplomats and international organizations can navigate linguistic and cultural complexity, foster sustainable collaboration, and achieve strategic objectives in a globally interconnected world. These findings offer actionable guidance for policy design, professional development, and institutional reform, ensuring that multilingualism and cultural intelligence remain central to the practice and advancement of contemporary international relations.

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