
UNIT 7 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)*

Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Objectives
- 7.3 Role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in Success and Happiness
 - 7.3.1 Can EI be Learned
- 7.4 Strategies to Improve Emotional Intelligence (EI)
 - 7.4.1 Strategies related to Intrapersonal Aspect
 - 7.4.2 Strategies related to Interpersonal Aspect
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 Key Words
- 7.7 Answers to Self Assessment Questions
- 7.8 Unit End Questions
- 7.9 References
- 7.10 Suggested Readings

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Our emotions hold the key to our life's success and happiness. The emotions that we experience affect our own health, relationship with others, work performance, achievement and life satisfaction. But are we really aware of the nature and degree of the impact of our emotions? Emotions can make or mar a situation. They are in reality a powerhouse whose effective use will lead us on the path to success and happiness. As we have learned in the previous Units, emotions when combined with the rational thinking part of our brain can work wonders. Instead of being guided only by thoughts or only by emotions, there is a need to put the head and the heart together to be effective in different aspects of our life. Head represents our intelligence and heart represents our emotions. Thus, emotional intelligence as the term suggests is being intelligent about our emotions and how these impact us and others.

As Goleman has said, "*Our emotions have a mind of their own, one which can hold views quite independently of our rational mind.*" Hence it is necessary that the two are integrated so that one can manage the emotions in an effective way and be able to take proper decisions, solve problems, reduce conflicts, handle stress, cope properly and enhance one's well-being.

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7.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through the Unit, you would be able to:

- learn the importance of emotional intelligence.
- know the strategies to improve emotional intelligence.

7.3 ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI) IN SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS

Society has always emphasized academic intelligence. Children learn various subjects and this facilitates the development of their cognitive abilities. However, the overemphasis on securing high marks/scores in examination has led to the neglect of the development of affective aspects. As we know, for a wholesome growth of children and their effective functioning, there needs to be an all round development covering the cognitive, physical as well as affective and social aspects. You may have seen instances where despite having great academic performance, people have not been successful and happy in life. Or people have earned material success, but they have relationship failures and stressful life.

Nisha has been a bright girl and was very good in studies, always securing the highest in the class. She was also a great karate player and had won competitions at school level. She finished her school and joined a reputed college away from her city. So she had to stay in the hostel there sharing the room with another girl Kirti. Being good in studies, Nisha could impress her classmates and they wanted to be friends with her. However, over a few months, Nisha started having problems with her roommate Kirti in the hostel over small things. Kirti had complaints of Nisha not being sensitive to her needs and doing things her way. Gradually, it proceeded from small arguments to bitter fights that were noticed by the college authorities.

What do we see here in the above example? It reflects that though Nisha was very good in studies - academic intelligence, she was not able to pay attention to the emotional aspects in her relationship with her roommate Kirti that resulted in arguments. We need to be able to know our own emotions and also understand the emotions of others around us. Further, we need to learn to manage our emotions also in an effective manner. Thus, the four main aspects of emotional intelligence are *Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Empathy* and *Relationship management*. You have learned about these components in detail in Unit 3.

Emotional intelligence can make our personal as well as professional life more effective. Being good in the language of emotions along with cognitive abilities will make us successful as well as happy in life. Hence the importance of emotional skills cannot be overemphasized. Whatever we do, be it study, pursue a goal, interact with someone, carry out an activity, play with friends, perform in a team or lead a group, our emotions play an important role to make us effective in the situation. An emotionally intelligent person displays the following characteristics:

- Understands one's own emotions in the situation.

- Knows how does one feel in mind and body.
- Know the triggers leading to a particular emotion.
- Able to manage one's emotions properly and express them effectively.
- Sensitive to the emotions of other person.
- Understands the requirement of the situation.
- Thinks from alternative perspectives.
- Takes a solution-oriented approach instead of focusing on the problem only.
- Is flexible and open to new ideas.
- Listens attentively and understands the body language of others.
- Engages in effective communication and interpersonal interaction.
- Able to think through the situation, are not impulsive.
- Engage in mindful practices.

Thus, emotional intelligence helps in understanding oneself as well as others– it involves knowing, controlling and expressing one's emotions effectively in life. The ability to motivate oneself and understand others' emotions also facilitate one's functioning and makes one effective. It contributes to our success and happiness in a positive way.

7.3.1 Can EI be Learned

Given the importance of EI in our success and well-being, it is pertinent to ask 'can emotional intelligence be increased?' It may be noted that unlike intelligence quotient (IQ), EI can be gained and improved at any point in life (Goleman, 2014). This gives us a great scope to make our life successful and happy. One can follow a three-fold approach in the direction of learning of one's emotional intelligence. *First* is assessment of one's EI level. Unless one knows the level of EI, how will one improve? In Unit 4, you have learned about different assessment to find out one's emotional quotient, the measure of emotional intelligence. *Second* is finding out which aspects of EI needs more attention out of self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation or social skills. The assessment will provide you information on specific components. And *third* is receiving proper feedback and training in the area that needs to be addressed.

As we know, intelligence is assessed through intelligence quotient (IQ) whereas emotional intelligence is expressed in terms of Emotional Quotient (EQ). Let us remember that IQ is not equal to EQ. They are different. While IQ includes the cognitive abilities – thinking, reasoning, language, logical, analytical, decision, judgement, problem solving; EQ combines these skills with the emotional skills and the emotional language – empathy, self-control, accurate self-assessment, interpersonal skills, sensitive to the needs and requirements of the situation, thoughtfulness, assertiveness and optimism. These skills can be learned at any stage of life.

7.4 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)

As the training provided in the school and education context helps us to develop the cognitive aspects, similarly training can also be provided to develop and improve the affective /emotional aspect of our development. Besides professional/structured training, different strategies can also be used by the individuals themselves to improve emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence involves both intrapersonal aspects – self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation; and interpersonal aspects – empathy and social skills. Hence we can discuss the strategies under these two categories:

- (i) strategies related to intrapersonal aspect
- (ii) strategies related to interpersonal aspect

The first one relates to the factors within the individual whereas the second one relates to the factors operating in the relationship of the individual to the social context.

7.4.1 Strategies related to Intrapersonal Aspect

(i) Focusing on the aspects of emotions

One of the first thing one needs to do to improve emotional intelligence is to focus on one's emotions. One needs to understand the nature of emotions, their meaning and relevance in the particular context. What does the emotion tell us, how does it impact others, what does it lead to, how it is helping us or hindering? One needs to understand all these so that one can control the emotions and manage these for a better outcome. Any emotion has three components - *cognitive*, *affective* and *conative*. Cognitive refers to what are my thoughts; affective is what do I feel, what are the physiological and bodily changes related to this feeling; and conative refers to what do I do, my actions and behaviours in the particular moment or situation.

Activity: Your boss gives harsh and negative comments on your project work in a meeting; Or you get the news that there is riot in the city where your parents live. In both these situations, reflect and write down what thinking comes to you? What are the feelings experienced by you? How does your body react to this? What actions will you take?

(ii) Being aware of yourself

Knowing about the nature and aspects of emotions as described in the previous point will help you to be aware about your own self. Being aware of yourself consists of two parts – *awareness of one's emotions* and *accurate self-assessment*.

Emotional self-awareness will help you to get in touch with your emotions with regard to its three aspects. How do you think, feel and behave when you are sad or in a joyous mood or irritated and so on. This will also help you to know how the emotions affect others also. Getting to know the origin of our emotions will also help us be aware of our emotions and take control of these. Mersino (2007) talks about

retracing our steps to determine why we are feeling in a certain way. This process of back tracking will help us arrive at the point/situation responsible for our current mood. One can also use the scanning techniques (Mangal & Mangal, 2015) to develop emotional self-awareness which involves scanning of the self and scanning of the others. In *scanning of the self*, you can pay attention to how do I behave?, am I feeling sad, irritated, worried, scared, challenged etc.; what is happening inside my body?, rapid heart beat, irregular or fast breathing, feeling choked, feeling tense in the stomach, feeling weak; what thoughts are coming to my mind?, what are my beliefs, values etc?. *Scanning of the others* includes active listening, attending to what others are saying, noticing their body language, observing their facial expressions, eye contact, mannerisms, their feelings, their actions etc.

Accurate self-assessment will also help you in truly knowing yourself. Being aware of one's emotions help one to assess oneself. Besides this focus on finding out your strengths, weaknesses, desires, aspirations, interests, fears, anxieties, value system, goals that will give a comprehensive picture about yourself. Reflect on yourself in different situations and experiences, take feedback from others – all these will help in proper self-assessment and enhance our awareness and understanding about ourselves.

Activity: *Think of a situation/occasion where you have felt very happy or had positive good feelings or an event where you had negative feelings, felt sad or angry or worried and anxious. Use the back tracking and scanning techniques and write down your observations.*

(iii) **Being assertive**

Assertiveness helps in being confident and clearly communicating to the other person what you want to communicate. This is possible when you are clear about your objectives and the future relationship with the other person or the situation. This takes place in an atmosphere of ensuring the rights of both the parties where no one feels disrespected or devalued. You have learned about assertiveness in Unit 5 which you can refer to for a quick reference.

Being assertive includes the what, how and why of communicating. You are clear about what to say or convey, how to convey and why to convey. The mode of expression throughout the communication is calm, confident and respect.

Activity: *Think of a situation you have been avoiding or feel anxious about, eg., in the earlier example of Nisha and Kirti having problems being roommates in the hostel, how can Kirti be assertive in the situation? Similarly you can think of a situation in your context and write down the what, how and why of communicating. Practice by role playing how will you convey this with respect, sensitivity, calm and confidence, and then actually convey it. Remember that assertive communication requires practice and it depends on the context as well as preparation and an accurate self-assessment.*

(iv) **Cognitive restructuring**

Cognitive restructuring refers to becoming aware of one's thoughts and changing the way you think about a situation. Changing the perspective can

open up new possibilities and get you through the problem. One needs to avoid various cognitive distortions, i.e., irrational or maladaptive thoughts. These include among others overthinking or ruminating about the problem; negative predictions about a situation; negativity bias – seeing only the negative things; all or none thinking – if I don't get into a particular college, I am not worthy; should and musts – I should get all A's in my exam; catastrophizing – thinking of any unpleasant or negative event as a catastrophe.

Activity: Think of any situation in your current life that is a cause of worry and stress for you. Catch hold of your thoughts regarding the situation. Are the thoughts being helpful and positive or they lead to more worries and stress? Are they continuing the problem instead of arriving at a solution? What are the unhelpful automatic thoughts going on in your mind? Write down and reflect on this.

(v) Being mindful

Being aware about our state of mind helps us to develop self-control and regulate our emotional expression. Stress occurs when we are not mindful of our thoughts and feelings, and jump to conclusions and react in a haste. Hence, it is important to check our thoughts and feelings and respond mindfully. When we are under stressful situations and experiencing intense emotions, it activates amygdala, the part of our brain responsible for our feelings and emotions, also called our emotional brain. This together with hippocampus which is the seat of our memories and past experiences influence our decision and action in the situation. Goleman calls this emotional hijacking as amygdala hijacks or bypasses the higher cortical functioning which results in emotionally reactive behaviours. Mindfulness practice through focus on breathing trains our attentional capacity in the present moment. Hence we are able to be aware of the emotions in the moment and engage our higher cognitive functioning to decide appropriate response in the situation.

Activity: Engage in mindfulness by practicing it regularly. Choose a time of the day you can sit for sometime undisturbed. Sit comfortably, relax your body and focus on your breathing as you are inhaling and exhaling. Do not try to change it, just notice, be aware the way you are inhaling and exhaling - be it fast, slow, irregular, with sound of breathing or no sound. If other thoughts and events are coming to mind, just notice it and then gently bring your attention back to the breath.

(vi) Being resilient

Resilience is the ability to face an adversity or a difficult situation, overcome it and bounce back to life again. It represents a strengths approach to life having a positive outlook and never say die attitude. Being resilient involves facing the adversity and coming out of it with renewed vigour. When you are resilient, you are in control of your emotions, self-confident and have a positive attitude. This helps in dealing with stress and facilitates mental well-being. It also reflects an internal locus of control, that is attributing the personal outcome not to the chance or external factors like fate, family, situations etc. but relating it to one's own effort, attitude and motivation.

Activity: Think of a current adverse situation or suffering in your life. What is your approach and mindset towards this? Write about it and reflect on how you can show more resilient traits in the situation?

(vii) Coping strategies

Coping strategies used by the individuals can be *emotion-focused* or *problem-focused coping* (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping aims at addressing the emotional responses of the individual especially when the situation is not under one's control. It employs methods such as distracting oneself from the problem situation, emotional disclosure (Pennebaker, 1995), journaling (Cheng, Tsui & Lam, 2015), cognitive reappraisal (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964), meditation and prayer, and use of substances and alcohol. Such coping aims at managing the expressed emotions only and does not address the root cause of the problem or stressful situation. Whereas, problem focused coping involves addressing the problem itself and usually occurs in people having internal locus of control. It addresses the cause of the problem and uses problem solving and time management strategies. Although emotion-focused strategies are often less effective than using problem-focused methods in relation to health outcomes (Penley, Tomaka & Weibe, 2012), use of the strategies depend on the control over the situations and the stressors, nature of the problem and the situational context. When individuals have control over the sources of stress, problem –focused coping is more effective.

Activity: Notice and recall the different situations and events in your life earlier and at present. Reflect what kind of coping strategy you have used or are using now. Were/Are these strategies effective?

(viii) Developing positive attitude

What is the framework of our mind? Is it oriented towards positive or negative thinking? Do we see opportunities in every situation or we complain about the negative situations/happenings in our life? A positive attitude comprises of having positive thoughts, positive feelings and taking positive actions. Being aware of your emotions, having a proper perspective and being flexible will help one to develop a positive attitude and inculcate an optimistic outlook. Being optimistic is not just having positive thoughts only, but it involves a proper self-assessment, self-acceptance, acceptance of the situation, being flexible, being realistic, creativity, problem solving ability, motivating oneself, perseverance and a constructive approach. Developing a proper perspective towards the problem/difficulty is a crucial thing. It helps you in consciously finding out or looking for the good in any situation. As the saying goes, “learn to surf in the waves”. Two things that matter here is using a language of affirmation and developing an internal locus of control. One needs to take responsibility and use self talks that are not constraining, rather affirming in nature.

Activity: Think of a situation/event where you have faced problem or suffered. How did you deal with this difficulty? Were you optimistic or had negative thoughts and anxieties related to the situation? Write down your thoughts, emotions and behavior during that situation.

How different could you have behaved that time? Or if you are facing a difficult scenario at present in your life, practice having a positive attitude; observe yourself what you are saying to yourself, how are you motivating and how are you looking at the situation.

Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Mention the three components of emotions.

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2. What is retracing or back tracking?

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3. What is emotion focused coping?

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4. What is negativity bias?

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7.4.2 Strategies related to Interpersonal Aspect

(i) Developing empathy

Empathy as we know refers to putting ourselves in the shoes of others and to understand the things from their point of view. It basically refers to the cognitive ability of thinking from the other person’s perspective and recognize their feelings and emotions. Thus, it involves being sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of other persons and not imposing our beliefs and assumptions on them. Empathy differs from sympathy which predominantly relates to the expression of one’s emotional feelings congruent to the other person. For example, crying when the other person is in pain and crying also; using first person language, ‘I am really sorry to hear about your loss’. On the other hand, empathy focuses on the other person and uses statements like, ‘you must be feeling very angry about it’. While the importance of sympathy cannot be denied, empathy is required to develop emotional intelligence and establish an effective interpersonal relationship, leading to mutual trust and closeness. Empathy is also not about being nice and saying nice things only, or doing as others want you to do. Rather it involves visualizing the situation from the other person’s perspective, showing genuine interest in the other person, using empathetic statements and actions.

Activity: Think of any past situation or a present situation where you needed to interact with someone in a difficult or stressful situation. Write down what statements you had used in the past or would be using in the present. Does it show sympathy or empathy?

(ii) Developing effective communication skills

When we talk about improving our emotional intelligence skill, an important skill related to the interpersonal arena is listening skill. The basic block of any effective communication is active listening skills. It means you are paying attention to not only what the other person is saying (verbal language), but also their non-verbal language or body language – their eye-contact, facial expression, gestures, body postures etc. One needs to listen first and then respond rather than reacting on an impulsive manner. Further, one is also required to be self aware of one's own emotions, thoughts, intentions and goals in any communication.

As pointed by Friedemann Schulz von Thun (1981) in his Four-Sides model of communication, every message has four facets to it. It is like we use different ears while communicating with others.

- Fact: What I inform about (data, facts, statements).
- Self-revealing: What I reveal about myself (information about the sender).
- Relationship: What I think about you (information about how we get along).
- Appeal: What I want to make you do (an attempt to influence the receiver).

(Source: Birgit Ohlin, 7 ways to improve communication in relationships, 2019, www.positivepsychology.com)

In any communication there is a sender and a receiver, and the underlying emphasis given by each of them to the four facets can create a barrier to effective communication. Hence it is important to understand that what we hear may not be what the other person was trying to get across.

Activity: Observe yourself consciously when you are in any interaction, be it with family members, friends, colleagues or your boss. Are you really listening or you are thinking of what to say when they are talking?; what is their body language?; how is the tone, pitch of voice; hand movements etc.?; what are they trying to convey? Further, analyze the communication using the four facets of communication given above. As a receiver, which ear are you using – factual ear, self-revealing ear, relationship ear or appeal ear?

(iii) Enhancing decision making and problem solving ability

Problem solving as a component of one's emotional intelligence can be defined as “the ability to identify and define problems as well as generate and implement potentially effective solutions” (Steven and Book, 2006: 163). An emotionally intelligent person has the capacity to take understand the problem in the context, take appropriate decisions and come up with adequate solutions. The following measures can help one to enhance decision

making and problem solving ability: (a) knowing about the problem in detail such as the nature (identifying, labeling and describing it), aspects, duration, frequency of the problem, and its impact on individual's life, (b) knowing about oneself in terms of interests, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, emotions, goals, beliefs, values etc., (c) knowing about the reality or the context in which the problem has occurred, (d) developing the ability for self-regulation, (e) cultivating optimistic thinking, (f) enhancing one's creative thinking, and (g) learning various problem-solving strategies such as algorithms and heuristic techniques.

Activity: Think about a problem that you are facing now that you need to solve. Apply the measures described above for effective decision making and problem solving.

(iv) Developing conflict management skill

Conflict arises when one party feels that her/his interests are not being met or are ignored, threatened, suppressed and are not valued. As a result, one may become aggressive in ensuring one's interests or become submissive to the other person out of fear or feeling of inferiority and withdraw and avoid. The outcome becomes unproductive and gives rise to hostility. One way of conflict management is to communicate things in an assertive manner, expressing what one wants and at the same time considering the rights of other person. Thus, there needs to be respect and acceptance both for oneself and the other person. It is a win-win situation for both the parties involved in a conflict. Here as well, self awareness, understanding the conflict in detail, and focusing on the context are important steps in conflict management.

Activity: Take a situation of conflict that you are facing at present related to any aspect of your life. Analyze the matter of conflict, develop self-awareness, understand the style of communication – avoidance, aggressive, passive, submissive, fearful, or assertive. Think how can you make it a win-win situation for both the parties involved in the conflict.

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 2

1. What is empathy?

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2. What is active listening?

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3. Which kind of communication will help in a conflicting situation?

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7.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you learned about different strategies for improving emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EI) is a skill that can be developed and enhanced at any stage of life by anyone. It plays a significant role in the success and happiness in one's life as it combines the intellect with the emotional skills. The strategies for improving emotional intelligence can be described under (a) strategies related to intrapersonal aspect (knowing aspects of emotions, self-awareness, assertiveness, mindfulness, coping strategies, positive attitude and resilience) and; (b) strategies related to interpersonal aspect (developing empathy, communication skills, decision making and problem solving skill, conflict management skill). Earlier (in Units 5 and 6), you learned about self-control, assertiveness, self-regard and self-actualization. Along with an understanding of these concepts, the strategies described in this Unit will help you to develop and enhance your emotional intelligence which will usher in more success and happiness in your life.

7.6 KEY WORDS

- Empathy** : refers to the cognitive ability of thinking from the other person's perspective and recognize their feelings and emotions.
- Cognitive restructuring** : Cognitive restructuring refers to becoming aware of one's thoughts and changing the way you think about a situation.
- Emotion focused coping** : Emotion-focused coping aims at addressing the emotional responses of the individual especially when the situation is not under one's control.
- Problem focused coping** : Problem focused coping involves addressing the problem itself and usually occurs in people having internal locus of control.
- Resilience** : Resilience is the ability to face an adversity or a difficult situation, overcome it and bounce back to life again.
- Assertiveness** : Assertiveness includes the what, how and why of communicating. One is clear about what to say or convey, how to convey and why to convey. The mode of expression throughout the communication is calm, confident and respect.

7.7 ANSWERS TO SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 1

1. Emotion has three components - cognitive, affective and conative.
2. Retracing, also known as back tracking refers to retracing our steps or going back to determine why we are feeling in a certain way. This process will help us arrive at the point/situation responsible for our current mood.
3. Emotion-focused coping aims at addressing the emotional responses of the individual especially when the situation is not under one's control. It employs methods such as distracting oneself from the problem situation, emotional disclosure, journaling, cognitive reappraisal, meditation and prayer, and use of substances and alcohol.
4. Negativity bias refers to seeing only the negative things in a particular situation/ event/happening.

Answers to Self Assessment Questions 2

1. Empathy refers to the cognitive ability of thinking from the other person's perspective and recognize their feelings and emotions.
2. Active listening refers to paying attention to not only what the other person is saying (verbal language), but also their non-verbal language or body language – their eye-contact, facial expression, gestures, body postures etc.
3. Assertive communication

7.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1. Explain the role of emotional self-awareness and accurate self-assessment in the development of emotional intelligence.
2. Explain the four sides model of communication.
3. Discuss empathy as a tool to improve emotional intelligence.
4. Elaborate on the importance of optimism in enhancing one's EI.
5. How mindfulness can improve our EI?

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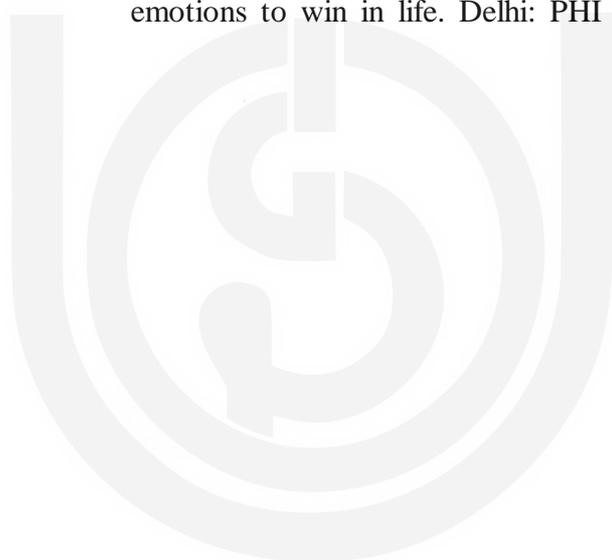
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