Public service in Algeria: practices and modernization requirements

الخدمة العمومية في الجزائر: بين واقع الممارسة ومتطلبات العصرنة

Benamraoui abde eddine

University of Boumerdes

benamraoui@univ-boumerdes.dz

Saadaoui Kamelia

University of Boumerdes

k.saadaoui@univ-boumerdes.dz

Abstract :

No one denies the public service provided in Algeria since independence until today.However, citizens complain about the weakness in delivering these services in various sectors and their low quality. This indicates that the institutions responsible for overseeing these services still face challenges at various levels and aspects, particularly in terms of management. The reform process adopted by the Algerian state for decades has not yielded the desired results and has failed to satisfy citizen's expectations regarding the quality of services provided to them. Therefore, it is imperative and necessary to consider the process of improving and modernizing public services in our present day.

Keywords: public service؛e-governance؛reform ؛ administration ؛modernization.

ملخص:

لا ينكر أحدالخدمة العموميةالمقدمة في الجزائر منذ الاستقلال إلى اليوم، لكن ما يشكوه المواطن من ضعف في تقديم هذه الخدمات في مختلف القطاعات ونقص في جودتها، يبين أن المؤسسات التي تسهر عليها لازالت تعاني من تحديات على مختلف المستويات والجوانب، لاسيما الجانب التسييري، كما أن عملية الإصلاح التي تبنتها الدولة الجزائرية منذ عقود طويلة من الزمن لم تأت بالنتائج المأمولة، ولم تحقق رضا المواطن عن مستوى جودة الخدمات التي تقدم له، وهذا ما يجعل من إعادة النظر في عملية تحسين الخدمة العمومية وعصرنتها في يومنا هذا أمر حتمي وضروري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخدمة العمومية؛ الحوكمة الإلكترونية؛ الإصلاح؛ الإدارة ؛ عصرنه

Auteur respondant : Benamraoui Abdeddine

1. Introduction:

The supreme and first objective of public services is satisfaction of citizen's public needs. Therefore, Algeria as other states works to reform the administrative bodies to achieve better results and increase the productivity of the public service. Despite the successive reforms, the Algerian public institutions and the process of its reform still face a set of challenges mainly the improvement of the relation of the administration and the citizen, followed by the big challenges of the Algerian administration that manifest in the technological, social, and economic challenges. This imposed the necessity of reforming the public institutions and improve public service provided to achieve the development objectives.

This study aims to determining the challenges of reforming the public services in Algeria to improve the quality, promote the efficiency of the administration, and modernize it. On this basis, the questions of the study arise as follows: **what is the effectiveness of national efforts in reforming public service and did they actually contribute to improving these services and bringing administration closer to citizens?**

In the light of these questions, our study relies on the analytical descriptive method that suits such studies, in addition to the analytical method.

2. The general obstacles/ challenges of reforming the public service in Algeria in the first period of political reforms:

Despite the big efforts of the Algerian government in the process of reforming the public service, the reforms failed mainly due to political, economic, and administrative factors.

2.1 The political obstacles:

The political instability and absence of security affected negatively the public administration. In this context, the sharp political crisis that led to quasi-shut down of all the bodies and public services since October 1988 and the occupation of the various governments with the insecurity and terrorism made the administrative reform a secondary issue compared to the dangerous security situation Algeria had lived[1].

In addition, the severe centralization plays a big role in hindering the process of the reform of the public service in Algeria. Therefore, the state must provide a political system that believes in the necessity of the democracy of its institutions, give the full prerogatives and independence to the public authorities instead of the hegemony and control over them, create an efficient administration that relies on the standards of quality and competency, and put the right person in the right position[2].

2.2 The economic obstacles:

The economic strategy that relies on the heavy industry in the first place did not succeed in Algeria. The decreased oil prices aggravated the situation leading to a financial and economic crisis that increased the external indebtedness. Thus, many urgent measures were taken mainly:

- Reducing the budget of the public administrations.
- The independence of the economic public institutions and the declaration of the bankruptcy of many of them.

Due to these causes, most of the governments and even the political parties focused on the economic problem in the first place because they have a clear impact on the social life of the citizens, without enough focus on the administrative reform among the development programs[3].

2.3 The administrative obstacles:

The set of the reforms initiated by the governing elite in Algeria seem to be partial, discontinuous, and arbitrary. For instance, in 1988[4], a Decree was issued to organize the relation between the citizen and the administration showing the rights and duties of the citizen. However, the reforms of the local communities that are close to the citizen were issued after two years with the Laws: nunber 90-08 dated April 07, 1990 concerning Municipalities[5], and law n° 90-09 dated April 07, 1990 concerning Wilayas[6].In addition, if the duties and rights of the citizen were identified, the basic law of the employees of the public administrations and institutions that includes the rights and duties of the public agents kept as it is since 1985 despite the declaration to amend it. Some of its provisions are overcome compared to the current changes[7].

2.4 The obstacles related to the administrative bodies:

Some administrative bodies resist the reform because of their conviction about the reform plans. In this context, because their officials consider the reform as a proof of their inefficiency and a risk to their interests, they refuse to implement it[8]. Among these administrative obstacles, we mention:

- The instability of the bodies responsible for the administrative reform which are sometimes under the Ministry of Interior Affairs and other times under the Public Function Directorate. Thing that contributes to the lack of clear goals. Additionally, the turnover of the employees results in a lack of experience in the administrative field.
- Underestimating the process of the administrative reform of public service In all levels: from leadership to the base of the hierarchy. This manifests in the delay of the strategies.
- The unclear required goals in administrative reform: A confusion that hinders the direction of the right path is noticed and makes a deviation in the application of the set plans[9].
- The programs of the administrative reform had not been reflecting the problems of the administration at the various levels because many of the reforms were inspired from other models such as the basic law 85/59 issued on 23 march,1985 for employees of public administrations and institutions[10]. This led to the inefficiency and the refusal in many times by the employees because they were strange to their social and cultural environments[11].

In addition to these basic obstacles, there are others that hindered the administrative reform of the public services such as:

- **Obstacles related to the civil society:** whose main fear may be the impacts of the reforms on the reduction of the jobs that will increase unemployment[12].
- **Obstacles related to the scientific style:** adopted in the administration, the weak control, its inefficiency, the weak incentives system, the weak public relations and communication.
- **Social obstacles:** the low awareness of the citizens, the rejection of the brains and experiences…)
- **Obstacles related to the human resources:** the mismatch of the wages with the production and efforts ,the spread of ethical and administrative corruption.
- **Obstacles related to the financial resources:** the lack of financial resources, the failure to accurately diagnose developmental work priorities …
- **Obstacles related to the legislations:** old legislations and the necessity of issuing new laws those feet with the international developments[13].

As a conclusion we can say that, the reform projects made by Algeria in that period did not meet the required level as the results kept partial, not comprehensive. The critical reading of the contents

of these reforms shows how the legal content inside the reforms of the public service is neglected, the dominance of political connotation and the limited contents and the absence of clear strategy for the reforms of the public service,

In addition, the process of improving the public service in Algeria and modernizing it knew and still knows many obstacles that can be summed up in the organizational and behavioural obstacles of individuals[14], the imbalance of the pricing system, the administrative bureaucracy, nepotism, and corruption[15].

3. The initiative undertaken by Algerian government to reform the public service:

The Algerian government has recognized the need to reform and improve the delivery of public services to meet the evolving needs of its citizens.

The first initiative to reform public services emerged within the public administration update program in the government's action plan for the year 2009.It was mentioned in the content of the government program, especially in the first chapter "enhancing the rule of law and rationalizing governance; the prime minister at that time promised to increase the space of reform in this area. This would be achieved through improving the training of public officials, enhancing the public service, providing greater incentives to its employees, restructuring various public institutions, and modernizing administrative practices.

The government's action plan for implementing the president's program may 2014, focused on Enhancing governance quality and eliminating bureaucracy and corruption are ongoing objectives of the Government. Continuing the modernization of public services and improving their quality to meet the increasingly high expectations of citizens, and Accelerating decentralization by empowering local authorities, supported by the effective practice of participatory democracy that involves local stakeholders and civil society in local governance, as well as the gradual implementation of the new administrative division.

The government's action plan 2017-2019 recognizes the efforts made in updating public administration and improving public service. It emphasizes the importance of ongoing initiatives such as training and retraining public administration employees, computerizing public services, and digitizing administrative documents. The program also aims to simplify administrative procedures, enhance organizational structures within public administration, update regulations governing the relationship between administration and users of public services, improve citizens' satisfaction by implementing a specific charter for public department users, and foster consultation and dialogue between administration and citizens. These measures collectively contribute to the promotion of public service quality and the eradication of bureaucratic practices[16].

In this context we can take examples of some reforms in certain ministerial sectors such as interior ministry which succeeded in completing "17.225.301biometric passports ,26.252.547 biometric national ID cards and 2.782.075 biometric driver's license"[17]. In addition to that in 2020,the ministry officially launched of a new electronic service allowing citizens or a parent to extract their civil status documents(birth certificates, marriage certificates and death certificates), via internet in real time,24/7,with electronic signatures and QR codes ,this service is available on the ministry website's www.interieur.gov.dz.

In 2023 many other services are provided on the aforementioned website like the electronic portal for complains and correspondence exchange with ministerial sectors.

The ministry has also developed many electronic applications and platforms such as the call center "1100",and "NECHKI" application, all these procedures aim to bring the administration closer to the citizen under the slogan of " **the administration in constant communication with you**" and facilitate the citizens life.

4. Modernization requirement:

The development of the state's intervention, the multiplicity of its roles, the increase of the state-run institutions, and the absence of a search for economic and financial profitability made the state face difficulties in managing them. This led to looking for other ways that are more efficient in managing the public institution and service to cope with the economic and political openness, and imposed the necessity of making mechanisms that embody this point. Among the most important mechanisms and requirements of reforming the public service, we find:

4.1 The efficiency requirement:

The public institutions are characterized with a negative efficiency that can be summed up in the facility being a tool at the hand of the government while the new challenge lies within the shift towards a positive efficiency based on a qualitative approach to the public service.

Efficiency and Streamlining: There is a need for modernization efforts to improve the efficiency of public service delivery. Simplifying bureaucratic procedures, reducing red tape, and streamlining processes can help enhance service quality and responsiveness.

4.2 The democracy requirement:

This is due to the development of the political and social awareness and the demand for the participation in the public management. This pushed the public institutions to formulate new values that govern them such as the efficiency, equality, transparency, and responsibility. Despite the clear recognition of the importance of opening ways for the participation in the management of the local issues by the citizens, the practical status-quo proves the opposite. Thus, the local administration must put that legal frame under real execution through working to promote the principle of the participative democracy[18].

Encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes and service delivery can lead to more inclusive and citizen-centric public services. Establishing feedback mechanisms, conducting public consultations, and involving civil society organizations can help shape policies and improve service delivery.

4.3 The requirement of the ability to compete:

The public service has been so long considered unconcerned with the rules of productivity and competition. However, it is agreed upon today that in the light of the new frame of the internal and external markets, the economic competition is related to the political and institutional competition, i.e., the competition of the public institutions[19].To achieve this goal training and Capacity Building is an obligation, investing in the training and capacity building of public servants can enhance their skills, knowledge, and professionalism. Continuous learning opportunities and performance evaluation systems can contribute to a more competent and motivated workforce.

4.4 The transparency and accountancy as two mechanisms for the administrative reform and limiting corruption:

These two mechanisms have importance in making the successful administrative development, in addition to their contribution to the development of the public services and the achievement of a good organizational structure that can face the new challenges and the surrounding changes[20].

Strengthening mechanisms for transparency and accountability is crucial to combat corruption and ensure the effective use of public resources. Implementing measures such as whistleblower protection and financial audits can enhance trust in public institutions.

4.5 The collaboration between the public and private sectors as a mechanism to reform and enhance the public services:

The state is no more the unique factor in the achievement of the public benefit because the civil society and the private sector have a role in realizing, designing, and executing the projects that have public benefits. The continuous increase of the demand on the public services due to the demographic development and the development of the cities made the resort to the collaboration between the private and national sectors a fatal thing mainly that these contracts are a chance to provide qualitative public services for reasonable prices. In addition, the difficulty of finance in a state that lives recurrent financial crises and indebtedness is among the justifications that hinder the adoption of collaboration between the two sectors as a tool to enhance the performance of the public services[21].

4.5 The collaboration between the public and private sectors as a mechanism to reform and enhance the public services:

In this context, we praise the achievements of the Algerian state in its experiments in the field of delegating public infrastructure management, including the experience of public-privatepartnership in the management of public water services, and the experience of public-privatepartnership in the establishment of irrigation facilities and structures.

Moreover, among the requirements of reforming the public service we find the revision of the laws. The system of the public function has been reformed as an introduction to the reform of the public services. In this context, Algeria rejected the open system of the public function that had been prevalent and opted for the closed system of the public function because it was influenced by the French system of the public function after independence. The state amended the laws and made them more stable and applicable as an attempt to reform the administration to guarantee the stability of the employees in their professional careers.

The closed system of the public function provides that the function is a mission that the employee devotes his life for. Under this system, the public function is characterized with stability until the employee reaches the retirement age that differs from one state to another[22]. Algeria adopted this system to provide material and psychological insurance for the employee so that he continues his job as required. Among the causes that pushed Algeria to adopt this system we find:

- Enshrining the principle of democracy in joining the public function which manifests in the adoption of new recruitment ways far from coercion.

- Ensuring, training, and rationalizing the public functions and maintaining the balance and stability of the public service.

The mission of the Algerian government in making the administrative reform was not easy due to the absence of the technical potentials in this field and due to the fact that the public function is the tool through which the government exercises its policy. In this line, it chose the closed system of the public function that guarantees the stability of the professional career of the employee[23].

5. Modernization mechanism:

5.1 ”The electronic governance as a mechanism to modernize and improve the quality of public service”:

Due to the national and international importance of the electronic government from one side, and to the problems, mainly bureaucracy and corruption, that face the administration in Algeria and hindered the achievement of the target objectives from another side, there emerges an urgent need to modernize the (administrative) body locally and centrally in order to provide quality services for the citizen through promoting its activity, making it more efficient, and applying the mechanism of the electronic governance which has a big role in modernizing the administrative performance and achieving development. In addition, the electronic governance is a tool that enshrines, promotes, and fosters the pillars and mechanisms of the governance and is the main introduction to improve the quality of the public services, foster the citizens' participation to decision making, and guarantee the transmission of the administrative data. Moreover, it helps achieve the goals through which it creates an atmosphere of trust and respect between the administration and citizen that embodies electronic democracy.

In the Algerian administration, we can notice the problems of inefficiency, poor response, bad management, and the spread of corruption which negatively affect the various policies and development programs and create a trust issue between the administration and the citizens. In this line, thanks to the roles and potentials of the electronic governance that enable it to improve the performance and regain trust, the need to establish a suitable environment that enables the citizens to participate e in various development programs and encourages the communication of the local institutions with their citizens emerged. The adoption of the governance policy at the central and local levels is a fertile field that works to foster decentralization and electronic democracy. Information and communication technologies play the role of the manager of the various governance actions and, thus, the local administration in Algeria found itself in front of the necessity of applying and fostering the principles of the governance through the adoption of the electronic governance[24].

This axis of the study aims at determining the requirements and strategies of applying the electronic governance. In addition, it sheds light on how it contributes to the improvement of the administrative performance and overcome the various obstacles that limit its efficiency to improve the public service and achieve the development.

5.2 The electronic governance in Algeria: status-quo and requirements:

Algeria adopted the electronic governance in response to the decisions of the international summit of the data society in 2003 that issued decisions that serve the good governance that manifests mainly in the electronic government as a general frame for that. Thus, it shifted towards the development of its general policy with what suits the data of the era, the political and techno-economic changes, and the development of the technical tools and mechanisms used[25]. Nevertheless, the idea did not mature and develop as there are only primary applications that manifest in the digitalization of some services and departments[26].

It is worth mentioning that the importance of installing the concept of the electronic governance in the Algerian case needs recognizing the fact that the world today with its changes sees the society as developed based on 03 main conditions that are the accountancy, the transparency, and the good rule. These three elements are in fact the pillars of the electronic government. The emergence of the electronic governance coincided with the increase of the financial and administrative corruption in the society and its institutions. Besides, the requirements of the administrative reform oblige the governmental institutions to apply transparency and clarity in their work and to provide access to the information about their actions[27]. Thus, the core of the electronic government is the fact that it is a factor that helps alleviate the susceptible and illegal

relations in the management of the (local/national) administrative development. It means the free explicit flow of information through the communication tools. Thus, it contributes to the reduction of corruption through providing communication means between the citizens and decision makers[28].

On this basis, the project of establishing an electronic government revolves around a basic notion based on investment in the communication and information techniques, the necessary preparation of the human element, and linking the citizen and the government institutions, businesses, and the civil society institutions in one electronic system that allows making various transactions between them easily and rapidly. This would save time, effort, and costs and achieve very important privileges for the private sector companies[29].

Algeria has realized the importance of e-government in supporting and developing governmental performance and achieving comprehensive development. This is evident through the legal initiatives aimed at establishing the foundations of e-government, primarily embodied in Executive Decree No. 98-275, dated August 25, 1998, which regulates the conditions and procedures for practicing internet services. Additionally, Executive Decree No. 2000-307, dated October 14, 2000, specifies the conditions and standards for organizing and benefiting from the internet. Law No. 03-2000 establishes the general rules related to postal services, wired and wireless communications, and further emphasizes the use of electronic signatures, electronic authentication, and electronic payment.

One of the major initiatives undertaken is the "Algeria e-Government 2013" project, which aims to elevate services in order to meet the requirements of Algerian citizens in all local units where they reside. However, despite all that has been said about this project, there are still challenges and uncertainties regarding its implementation and the key issues it faces. One of the most significant concerns revolves around the mechanisms of its application and the major challenges it encounters[30].

The UN index of the electronic government shows reports of the social and economic assembly about the situations of the electronic government in 192 states. The reports include a measurement of the situations of the member states governmental programs. The measurement is based on 05 indexes that are the electronic participation citizen in the program of electronic government, the readiness of electronic government, the human capital, the electronic readiness to execute the programs of the electronic government, and the infrastructure in the field of information and communication technologies ICTs. The measurements in Algeria showed a palpable weakness mainly in the electronic participation, the readiness of the electronic government, and the electronic readiness. Thus, the program of applying an electronic government is good technically but poor from the societal and organizational sides. Hence, Algeria must improve the conditions related to all what is societal, administrative, and organizational, not only technical[31].

In order to move forward in this program, we must provide the requirements of the electronic government such as[32]:

- **The spread of the internet use:** which is one of the basic pillars of the electronic government because it is a phenomenon that generates an efficient field to establish a communication between internet users either between private and national sectors or both, regardless the geographical positions because internet connects sectors. The connection among the widespread of internet and the electronic government manifests in the fact that internet facilitates the mission of the electronic government as a complementary project. Internet provides the necessary infrastructure for communication and imposes the necessity of proving computers and internet subscription and increasing its flow and efficiency.
- **The necessity of providing the necessary legal environment and legislations:** the process of preparing the legal environment to implement the electronic government is one of the

necessary tools and important requirements. In this line, the complete legal legislative frame is a cornerstone whose importance manifests in the stability of the governmental measures that set the legislations. This confirms the necessity of making a comprehensive legislative survey by the governments on the laws, systems, regulations, and orders to know to what extent they cope with the electronic government measures. This is done through:

- Giving legitimacy to the electronic actions of the electronic government;
- Obliging the governmental administrations and bodies to upload their data, orders, and measures on internet to achieve the easy access to information, and uploading the measures that govern this process;
- Setting transparent and constant criteria for the governmental measures and requirements to limit the need for the officials' intervention;
-Giving legitimacy to the use of the electronic documents and adopting them as evidence to the electronic personality;
- Generalization of use the electronic signature and fingerprint and facilitating the electronic transactions such as the adoption of email and giving legitimacy to the electronic commerce and all the other transactions that are related to the applications of the electronic government.

- **Cross-sectors collaboration:** the electronic government cannot be implemented without the private sector that represents the most affecting economic pillar on the promotion of the development. In addition, the electronic government cannot be implement without the local citizen because this project serves all the society and enables the government and non-governmental businesses to collaborate effectively and rapidly in facing the obstacles of the electronic government and, thus, facilitate the management of the projects and the achievement of the citizen's needs.

- **Reforming the administrative process:** The electronic government makes new relations and actions between the government, the citizens, and the businesses. The use of ICTs is not just for making revenues and saving costs and time; rather, it provides a core solution to the governmental development. Thus, when developing the electronic government, it is necessary to make good planning for the projects and determine the spots of activation and use of the tools that must be found in the light of serving the local citizen and achieving his needs as efficiently as necessary.

5.3 The importance of the electronic government in the administrative management and its impact on the development and the improvement of the public service in Algeria:

The promotion of the development is part of the promotion of the mechanisms that improve the status-quo of the development and the improvement of the public services. The direction Algeria followed through the adoption of the electronic administration in the administrative management at the governmental and local levels aims at improving the quality of services provided to the citizens throughout the state. In this context, we would like to shed light on the importance of the electronic government in the administrative management and its impact on the development and the improvement of the public service in Algeria mainly in fighting and limiting corruption in the local and central administrations and providing the organization and stability that result from using it in management. Among the advantages of the electronic government we find[33]:

- The speed of providing qualitative services to the customers;
- The transmission of the documents electronically in a more efficient way;
- The reduction of the costs thanks to the simplification of the measures, and the reduction the costs and time;
- The reduction of the need for employees mainly those who deal with paper documents;
- The local evaluation of the employees' performance and the development of a system that discloses the lazy employees;

- The reduction of the mistakes because the electronic system is less subject to the administrative mistakes;
- The reduction of the breaches thanks to the easiness and exactitude of the system;
- The clarity and easy understanding of the required documents by the citizens;
- The reduction of the investments in buildings, estates, etc;
- The reduction of the effect of the interpersonal relations on performing the tasks.

In addition to these paramount points, there are other advantages of the use of the electronic government at the level of the public and local administration that help fighting the administrative corruption as such[34]:

- Providing services with a pre-organized system so that the citizen can get the services at any time in 24 hours per day without the need for employees;
- Transparency in the transactions without bias between the benefiters through following measures provided for in the system of the electronic administration;
- The participation of the citizens in the treatment of the negative points through surveys about the electronic government issues;
- Providing an exact system for accountancy and audit;
- Reducing the administrative, organizational, and social problems that help bribery and gifts;
- Attracting and selecting the employees in a neutral way based on the competency and experience without personal considerations.

Implementing e-government initiatives can improve accessibility, efficiency, and transparency in public service. Online platforms for citizen engagement, digital document management, and e-services can simplify processes and reduce administrative burdens.

5.4 The use of artificial intelligence in providing public service:

The use of artificial intelligence is new in public service and it can be a real revolution in this area, because the use of this new technology can bring many benefits to both administration and citizens as examples:

- Analysing data to guide governmental policies: with using AI, government can analyses big data in several sectors like geographic, medical, economic and so on to identify the current needs and adopt the best policies.
- AI can be used in developing automatic communication's system by chatbots that response to all citizens inquiries quickly and effectively and results the citizens satisfaction.
- Improving human resources management by using AI in recruitment, training and analysing data to enhance the capacity and the productivity of human resources.
- Providing special guidance for citizens through their data analysis thing that facilitate the access to the appropriate public services.

6. Conclusion:

The success of the process of reforming ,improving and modernizing the public service in Algeria is related necessarily to the existence of a legal system to manage and organize the public institutions that provide this services, and enshrine the mechanisms of good governance that ensures transparency that governs the public authority's behaviours. This improves the relation between administration and citizen . In addition, reforming the Algerian public service requires focus on the quality and competency, a good recruitment system, openness on the foreign experiences, and making collaborations with them to exchange experiences.

Furthermore, it requires continuous to focus on the suitability of the cost to the desired objectives and the reliance on the management sciences and the modern techniques. In this context, it may currently require the promotion of the principle of the public interest priority. On the other hand, the internal, political, and judicial control on the finance of the public service and its management is very important for the improvement of the performance mainly the control of the financial courts that must be enlarged and equipped with the necessary human and material tools to exercise the tasks. However, this control is partial if it is not accompanied by the civil society that is a paramount chain in any controlling action. In addition to the control principle, we must enshrine the principle of participation as mechanism of good governance in public services management.

Moreover, the success of reforming and the improvement of the public service, and the achievement of the development in the Algerian case depend on the mechanisms of the electronic governance because the modernization of the public service and the optimal use of ICTs by the administrations foster the communication between the administration and the citizen at the level of providing services, for this it is very important to use AI (artificial intelligent) as a new method to enhance the quality quantity of public services provided.

But It's important to note that modernization efforts and its requirements may vary based on the sector and the priorities set by the Algerian government.

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