Newspaper Leadership Competence and Sustainability in Nigeria

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Abstract
The study was carried out to examine the influence of leadership competence on the growth of select newspaper organisations in Nigeria. The researchers adopted a survey research design. The population was 2,820 staff of 10 newspaper organisations. The newspaper organisations are *Business Day*, *Daily Independent, Daily Times, Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune, The Guardian, The Nation, The Punch, The Sun* and *Thisday*. A sample size of 621 respondents was derived using the Taro Yemane formula (1967). Questionnaire was used to collect data and data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that leadership competence significantly influenced the growth of newspaper organisations (*Adj.* $R^2 = 0.378$, $F(4, 585) = 90.349$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, it was concluded that leadership competence plays a determining role in the growth and sustainability of newspaper organisations in Nigeria. It was recommended, therefore, that newspaper leaders should make every effort to strategically improve on their decision-making skills and knowledge to enable them detect changes in internal and external factors for growth and sustainability of the newspaper industry.

Keywords: Leadership Competence, Newspaper Growth, Newspaper Organisation, Ownership Interference, Sustainability

Introduction

Media organisations, including the newspaper industry operate in an aggressive and competitive market. This is more so with global economic pressure and the demand for efficiency and productivity. In this regard, leadership competence comes to the fore. Leadership competence is measured against the ability of coordinating work activities both from the internal and external environments of the organisation with desired results. Câmpeanu-Sonea (2016) viewed competence as the quality of the organisation's services. He further observed that the efficiency with which services are achieved depends on the quality and degree of competencies of the human resources owned by the organisation. Hambrick, Cho & Chen (2015) corroborate this viewwhen they noted that leaders should take responsibility for their actions and in-actions. This

is because the actions and perceptions of leaders are the fundamental cause of organisational growth or failure. Leadership has a direct cause and effect relationship upon organisations and their success. Leaders determine vision, values, culture, change tolerance and employee motivation. They shape institutional strategies including their execution and effectiveness.

According to Germano (2010), successful leaders influence those around them in order to reap maximum benefit from the organisation's resources and personnel. To grow and sustain media organisations, leadership competence is required, just like in any other business venture. Leaders directly affect every facet of the media organisation's existence. This obtains in all categories of media organisations whether they are publicly or privately owned, or whether they are for profit or not for profit. The scope of leadership role and competence expectation includes vision formation, successful execution of stated missions, resource allocation, editorial management and editorial integrity, management of advertising agencies, newspaper distributors, staff development and strategies for delivering returns on investment. The influence of leaders and their effectiveness based on their competencies in directing workforce on shared vision has great potentials in determining the growth or decline of any newspaper organisation.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, newspaper work has metamorphosed from being a social tool to a massive business venture. Incidentally, this comes with a global trend of threat to its existence and sustainability. Nigeria has had and continues to grapple with survival. Within the period of about a hundred and fifty years of active commercial newspaper work in Nigeria, over one hundred and three (103) newspapers and 59 magazines have been established with a larger percentage of these newspapers going into extinction (Ige, 2013). Though decline in itself is a stage in the life cycle of a phenomenon, but when the decline rate is unusually higher than growth rate as in the Nigerian newspaper industry, it calls for an internal evaluation (Ajasa & Okere, 2019). With low readership rate, high cost of production, drop in advertising patronage and devaluation of Nigeria's currency (The Naira), there is every need for emphasis on the newspaper industry needing tested hands to provide competent leadership to manage its affairs on a day-to-day basis. It is in this light that this paper set out to examine the role of leadership competence on the sustainability of the newspaper industry in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The following constitute the objectives of this study:

1. Find out the influence of organisational leadership competence on the growth of Nigerian newspapers.
2. Determine the mediating effect of internal factors on organisational leadership competence of Nigerian newspapers.

3. Assess the mediating effect of external factors on the relationship between organisational leadership competence and growth of Nigerian newspaper organisations.

Study Hypotheses

The following three null hypotheses were designed for the study:

H_{01}: Organisational leadership competence does not significantly influence the growth of selected Nigerian newspaper organisations.

H_{02}: Internal factors do not mediate the effect of organisational leadership competence on growth of selected Nigerian Newspaper organisations.

H_{03}: Mediating effects of external factors do not significantly influence the relationship between organisational leadership competence and growth of select Nigerian newspaper organisations.

Nexus between Leadership Competence and Sustainability of Newspaper Organisations

The role that leadership competence plays in the sustainability of any business organisation is indeed quite enormous. Every effective leader does not only ensure the growth of their organisation but also channels every available resource to ensure that there is significantattainment of sustainability within the organisation. While examining the strategic role of competence as a needed resource for sustaining a business entity, Armstrong (2017, p. 159) came up with an apt definition. For him, competence could be described as "skills and behaviours that organisations expect from employees when performing work." In the same vein, Mansfield (2015, p. 51) defines competence "as a fundamental characteristic of a person, which translates into superior performance or efficiency." The *Oxford Dictionary* gives a very concise definition. It sees competence as the "ability to do" something or the "ability for a task." While the Macquarie Dictionary also defines competence as "the quality of being competent", where competent means "properly qualified" or "capable." Significantly, in both of these dictionaries' definition, the thrust of the discourse is on competent newspaper managers having the ability or capability, which will enable the satisfactory completion of theirtask of newspaper growth and sustainability.

In general terms, sustaining the quality of the organisation's products, services and the efficiency with which they are achieved depends on the degree of the quality of the human resources owned by the organisation. Workers' competence implies certain acquisition of knowledge, certain skills and a certain experience required to perform specific and professional tasks in order to ensure a rapid and sustainable growth for an organisation. However, capitalisation of individual competence is not done only by linking people's training with the technique and technology used or the requirements of the result obtained, but also within a certain system of formal and informal relationships and a certain degree of involvement of workers in the organisation. Competence, at the organisational level, is the result of the existence and

functioning of a particular culture based on a specific management system including a specific organisational structure. Information, knowledge, technology, technique and manufacturing recipes do not lead to the same result in different cultures.

Presumably, in the newspaper industry, what determines the growth and sustainability of newspaper companies is leadership competence. Competence at the leadership level is the result of a complex process, being embarked upon by the newspaper leaders. This will invariably determine the growth of such newspaper company. This no doubt will involve attracting the human resources adequate for the organisation's activities from the labour market. Therefore, to win and sustainthe larger share of the newspaper market requires the employment of appropriate workforce. Newspaper sales and advertising patronage are driven by the quality of news stories and editorial being published. So, if the journalists that are entrusted with the responsibility of managing the newspaper organisation demonstrate unprofessionalism in their everyday handling of issues within the organisation, such a newspaper organisation will surely not experience accelerated sustainable-growth.

The increase of the leadership competence level is primarily a matter for newspaper sustainability, which must ensure the quality of newspaper products required by the consumers. Secondly, the employees of the newspaper companies are required to improve their professional training and experience to a level of individual competence necessary for their career development and integration. Aside from the foregoing, the following factors count: quality of services at a given time, activity continuity, the development and adaptation to the business environment and correlating individual competencies at group level, additional and replaceable training of personnel (Câmpeanu-Sonea & Sonea, 2016).

Sustainability of the newspaper hasbecome a global concern, as the industry has witnessed slumping advert sales, drops in circulation figures and newspaper sales (Pew Research Centre, 2021). The centre further affirmed that the industry's financial fortunes and subscriber base have been on the decline since the mid-2000s, but their website audience traffic has again begun to grow in the US newspaper industry. The report further reveals that since 2001, the industry shed a fifth of its journalists in the United States. The sustainability struggle madecompetent leadersof newspapersdiversifyinto the entertainment industry as less than 20 per cent oftheircontent is allocated to political, economic and social issues (Curran & Seaton, 2017). This leadership ingenuity is what other newspaper managers in other climes are just coming to terms with.

The task of sustaining the industry is not limited to Europe and America alone; Africa hasher own share of the sustainability challenge. In Nigeria for instance, the newspaper industry haswitnessed a lot of sustainability issues.The harsh reality of economic meltdown has changed the outlook of the media industry dramatically leading to high debt profile, downsizing, retrenchment, drop in circulation and in extreme cases, closing operations (Toyosi & Eamonn, 2013). Jackson (2018) identified a combination of factors that account for the unsustainability of the newspaper

companies; prominent among these are nature of ownership, economic, political, social, technological developments and inefficient and ineffective leadership. Leadership, however, has been identified as the key determinant factor in organisational growth and sustainability (Mujis**,** 2010).

With reference to paucity of scholarly work as observed by Albarran (2015); Kung (2004); Redmond & Trager (2004); Wicks, Sylvie, Hollifield, Lacy & Sohn, (2004), the situation is not too bleak. Wang, (2013), through the use of content analysis, assessed media ownership and objectivities of media content The study revealed that most newspaper owners are more concerned about their political ideology and interest than running a professional newspaper. A study by Bolin (2006) in Sri Lanka revealed that some of the journalists had more loyalty to especially those working in the state-owned newspaper thought they were rather working in the interest of the politicians than the public. A survey by Rosenstie, Mitchell, Purcell & Rainie (2011) indicated that most Americans do not feel that their local newspaper is a key source that they rely on for local information. A study by Singh & Arya (2012) on newspaper readership patterns among the urban population of Punjab- Kanwal, India showed that there was no decline in newspaper readership in the three cities investigated.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically hinged on contingency theory. Contingency theory is an organisational theory that claims that there is no best way to organise a corporation, to lead a company, or to make decisions. Instead, the optimal course of action is contingent (dependent) upon the internal and external situation (Morgan, 2007). Its basic assumption is that leadership – success or failure – is situational. Contingent leaders effectively apply their own style of leadership to the right situation. Contingency theories put forth the idea that the success of a leader depends on the specific situation at hand. Certain factors come into play that defined whether a particular leader or leadership style will be effective for the given situation. Those factors include the task, the personality of the leader and the composition of the group that is meant to be led. Its basic assumption is that leadership – success or failure – is situational.

The contingent theories are based on four main assumptions: There is no universal or best way to manage; the design of an organisation and its subsystem must "fit" with the environment; effective organisations do not only have a proper "fit" with the organisation but also within its sub-system. The needs of an organisation are better satisfied when it is properly designed and the management style is appropriate both to the task undertaken and the nature of the work group.

As in the case of newspaper management, this theory puts forth the idea that effective newspaper leadership hinges not only on the style used by the leader but also on the control held over the situation. In order for a newspaper organisation to succeed, there must be strong leader-member relations. Leaders must also present tasks clearly,

with goals and procedures well outlined. They need to possess the ability to hand out punishments and rewards as well.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design. The population is 2,820 staff of the 10 newspaper organisations that were selected for the study. Using the Taro Yamane formula (1967), a sample size of 621 respondents was derived. The stratification sampling procedure was used to select the sample size; this is because of the need to break the samples into stages using smaller units *of* samples at each stage. First, the newspaper organisations were stratified into old and new generations. Old generation newspapers were established from 1926 when *Daily Times*, Nigeria's oldest surviving newspaper was established while new generation newspapers were established from 2000 when Nigeria's medialandscape experienced an upsurge in the establishment of newspapers. In all, three hundred and fifty-three (353) staff were selected from old generation while two hundred and sixty- eight (268) staff were selected from the new generation.

A validated questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The reliability test yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the constructs ranging from 0.81 to 0.87. Data collected with the questionnaire were analysed using frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation through descriptive statistics. Tables were used to represent data. Linear regression and the process analysis (models 4 and 6) were applied to test the hypotheses since it can predict the proportion of variation which occurs when the independent variables interact with the dependent variables. The Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 22 was used as the software to analyse the data. The testing of the hypotheses was done at the level of 0.05 significance.

x_2=Decision making
x_3 = Knowledge
x_4 = Style
β_0 =Constant factor
u = error term
β_1 ....β_4 =Stanardised partial regression coefficients

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Multiple Linear Regression Testing Significant Influence of Organisational Leadership Competence on Growth of Nigerian Newspaper Organisations

		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	*T*	*Sig.*
Model	Construct	*B*	Std. Error			
	(Constant)	15.585	1.297		12.012	0.000
	Vision	-0.073	0.094	-0.038	-0.773	0.440
	Decision making	0.136	0.032	0.189	4.183	0.000
	Knowledge	0.836	0.109	0.443	7.681	0.000
	Style	0.147	0.081	0.090	1.818	0.070

Dependent Variable: Newspaper Organisational Growth

Table 1 tested the first research hypothesis which states thus: H_{01}: Organisational leadership competence does not significantly influence the growth of selected Nigerian newspaper organisations. Data screening was performed to ensure that the assumptions of multiple linear regression were fulfilled. Consequently, test for multicollinearity was carried out and it showed that it was not a concern for vision, decision making, knowledge and style because they all had greater than 0.1 as tolerance values.

Table 1 shows that the linear combination of organisational leadership competence indicators significantly influenced the growth of Nigerian newspaper organisations ($F(4, 585) = 90.349$, $p<0.001$). This implies that when vision, decision making, knowledge and style are adopted in a Nigerian newspaper organisation, there will be a very high probability of growth experience for such organisation. From the relative perspective, decision making ($B= 0.136$, $R^2= 0.04$, $t(585)= 4.183$, $p<0.001$) and knowledge ($B = 0.836$, $R^2= 0.20$, $t(585)= 7.681$, $p<0.001$) positively and significantly influenced the growth of Nigerian newspaper organisations. However, vision ($B = -0.073$, $R^2= 0.001$, $t(585)= -0.773$, $p>0.05$) and style ($B = 0.147$, $R^2=0.008$, $t(585)=1.818$, $p>0.05$) did not significantly influence the growth of Nigerian newspaper organisations. This implies that the leadership competence of newspaper managers in terms of decision making and knowledge influenced the growth of the select newspaper organisations. Furthermore, the model shows that leadership competence experienced 37.8 per cent (*Adj.* $R^2= 0.378$) variance of organisational growth of the select newspapers.

Consequently, the hypothesis that organisational leadership competence does not significantly influence the growth of select Nigerian newspaper organisations was not accepted. Hence, theinfluence of leadership competence on the performance of an organisation is in agreement with the position of Hambrick, Cho & Chen (2015) that newspaper leaders should take responsibility for their actions and in-actions. The authors maintained that the actions and perceptions of leaders are the fundamental causes of organisational sustainability or otherwise. They further stressed that, leadership has a direct cause and effect relationship upon organisations and their success. Leaders determine vision, style, culture, change, make decision and employee motivation. The findings also corroborated the submission of Câmpeanu-Sonea (2016) who viewed competence as the quality of the organisation's services and observed that the efficiency with which they are achieved depending on the quality and degree of competencies of the human resources owned by the organisation.

Similarly, the study conducted by Tan, Hee & Piaw (2015) on the effectiveness of leadership on the growth and sustainability of an organisation validated the findings of this study when the author reflected the vice-chancellor implementation of an effective leadership style and a high level of cognitive ability, which is important for organisational sustainability. Ashok (2018), however, disagreed with the notion that leadership competence is solely responsible for organisational sustainability or decline. He typically assumed a deterministic role of the environment and argued that managers are confronted by exogenous industrial and environmental constraints, leaving them with little real strategic choice; hence, managers' role and competence should be ignored.

Table 2: Mediating Effect of Internal Factors on the Relationship between Organisational Leadership Competence and Growth of Nigerian Newspaper Organisations

Testing paths	**Unstandardised (B)**	**SE(B)**	**T**	**95% CI**	**Standardised β**	**P**
Path c: DV = Growth of Newspaper Organisations						
$R^2 = 0.38$, $F(1, 588) = 356.64$, $p < 0.001$						
IV = leadership Competence	0.24	0.01	18.89	0.21, 0.26	0.61	<0.001
Path a DV = Internal Factors						
$R^2 = 0.25$, $F(1, 588) = 197.59$, $p < 0.001$						
IV = leadership Competence	0.21	0.15	14.06	0.18, 0.24	0.50	<0.001
Path b and c′ DV = Growth of Newspaper Organisations						
$R^2 = 0.47$, $F(2, 587) = 260.63$, $p < 0.001$						
IV = leadership Competence (c′)	0.17	0.01	12.61	0.14, 0.20	0.44	<0.001

IV = Internal factors (b)	0.32	0.03	10.14	0.26, 0.39	0.35	<0.001
Total Effect (path c)	0.24					<0.001
Direct Effect (path c')	0.17					<0.001
Indirect Effect (X on Y through $M_i = a_i b_i$)				B= 0.07, t = 7.41 (CI= 0.05 to 0.09), p<0.05		

CI= Confidence Interval

Table 2 tested the second hypothesis for this study which states thus:**$H_0$2:** Internal factors do not mediate the effect of organisational leadership competence on growth of selected Nigerian newspaper organisations. The aim was to find out the mediating effect of internal factors on the relationship between organisational leadership competence and growth of the select Nigerian newspaper organisations. The test on the hypothesis showed that internal factors have partial (CI= 0.05 to 0.09) mediating effect on the relationship between leadership competence and growth of newspaper organisations is in agreement with Lazzari (2018) who is of the view that effective leaders have a style or a combination of multiple styles that make them successful in guiding and inspiring employees. The implication of these findings is that newspaper managers who manage successfully the internal factors indicators (Frequent ownership interference, operations are ICT driven, frequent staff training and re-training, improved employees' welfare package and Journalists uphold industry ethical standard among others) are likely to attain growth and sustainability for their organisations.

The survey findings revealed low ownership interference and unhindered performance of watchdog function corroborating Akinfeleye's (2008) advocacy for separation of the function of the journalists and the investors. Although, the survey findings also showed preponderance of "Brown Envelope" syndrome, one must align with the view of Kayode & Akasoro (2010) that "gifts" do not hinder Nigerian journalists from being objective, fair and truthful in their reports. Thus, the real challenge is focused on conclusion from the interviews which shows problem of coordinated training before and after employment, inadequate staffing, poor work tools, poor remuneration and welfare policies and general condition of service.

Table 3: Mediating Effect of External Factor on the Relationship between Organisational Leadership Competence and Growth of Nigerian Newspaper Organisations

Testing paths	**Unstandardised (B)**	**SE(B)**	**T**	**95% CI**	**Standardised β**	**P**
Path c: DV = Growth of Newspaper Organisations						
R^2 = 0.38, F(1, 587) = 356.72, p< 0.001						
IV = leadership Competence	0.24	0.01	18.89	0.21, 0.26	0.61	<0.001
Path a DV = External Factors						
R^2 = 0.45, F(1, 587) = 482.44, p< 0.001						

IV = leadership Competence	0.26	0.01	21.96	0.23, 0.28	0.67	<0.001
Path b and c′ DV = Growth of Newspaper Organisations						
R^2 = 0.41, F(2, 586) = 203.48, p< 0.001						
IV = leadership Competence (c′)	0.17	0.02	10.58	0.14, 0.21	0.45	<0.001
IV = External factors (b)	0.24	0.04	5.62	0.16, 0.33	0.24	<0.001
Total Effect (path c)	0.24					<0.001
Direct Effect (path c′)	0.17					<0.001
Indirect Effect (X on Y through $M_i = a_i b_i$)	0.06, t = 4.22 (CI= 0.03 to 0.09), p<0.05					

CI= Confidence Interval

From table 3, process analysis (model 4) was used to asses each component of the proposed mediation model adopting bootstrapping method with bias-corrected confidence estimate and with 95% confidence interval, which was obtained with 5000 bootstrap resamples. It was found that path-a which includes external factor was positively associated with leadership competence (*B*= 0.26, *t*(587) =21.96, *p*< 0.001). Analysis of path-c indicates that leadership competence was positively associated with growth of newspaper organisations (*B*= 0.24, *t*(587) =18.89, *p*<0.001). In addition, analysis of path b and c′, where growth of newspaper organisations was the dependent variable and both leadership competence (c′) (*B*= 0.17, *t*(586) =10.58, *p*<0.001) and external factor (b) (*B*= 0.24, *t*(586) =5.62, *p*<0.001) were independent variables showed that both were positively correlated with growth of newspaper organisations.

Further interrogation of the data through process analysis revealed that the total effect where the predictability of path-c was assessed (leadership competence on organisational growth) was found to be significant (*p*<0.001). In addition, leadership competence had a direct effect (path c′) on growth of newspaper organisations (*p*<0.001). However**,** external factors mediating effect on the relationship between leadership competence and growth of newspaper organisations was found to be partial (*B*= 0.06, *t*(587)= 4.22, *p*<0.05), (*CI* = 0.03 to 0.09). External factors have a partial effect because the direct effect was still significant with its introduction as mediator. This implies that external factor is partially a mechanism through which leadership competence ensuresgrowth of newspaper organisations. Consequently, the hypothesis that external factors do not mediate the effect of organisational leadership competence on growth of Nigerian newspaper organisations was not accepted.

The third objective focused on assessing the mediating effect of external factors on the relationship between organisational leadership competence and growth of the select Nigerian newspaper organisations. Findings revealedfurther interrogation of the data through process analysis revealed thatexternal factors have partial (CI= 0.03 to 0.09) mediating effect on the relationship between leadership competence and growth

of newspaper organiations. This implies that some managers of the select newspaper organisations may have managed the external factor indicators competently, but its effect is partial on growth of selected newspaper organisations. From the findings, the survey shows that newspaper managers have problems in managing the newspaper distributionprofitably.

On readership, the findings from the survey showthat in most of the selected newspaper organisations, managers do not put the interest of the readers first in their operations. The findings also revealed that decline in newspaper readership in Nigeria among other factors is as a result of newspaper managers' ineptitude towards the needs of their readers. This report is at variance with the findings of Singh & Arya (2012) in their study of newspaper readership patterns among the urban population of Punjab-Kanwal, India. The result of their study shows that there was no decline in newspaper readership in the three cities investigated.

However, Bolin (2006) advanced reasons for the decline in newspaper readership thus corroborating the findings of this study. His report reveals that some of the journalists, especially those working in the state-owned newspapers thought they were rather working in the interest of the politicians than the public. This attitude contributed to the growth situation of newspaper organisations. Findings from this study evidently showed that newspaper managers of the select newspaper organisations do not manage the advertising agencies competently. Advertising agencies are the middlemen between the newspaper organisations and the advertisers. The study reveals that advertising agencies are kept in the dark when it concerns relevant details (circulation figures, spread, and catchment areas) from the newspaper organisations that inform the placement of the adverts in the newspapers. However, very few of the selected newspapers under review are managing the advertising agencies well.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In line with the quantitative data analysed, this study concludes that newspaper managers' leadership competence influenced the growth of the select newspaper organisations. However, it is important to note that few of these organisations under review had negative growth or in a state of struggling to survive. The distinctions between these categories of organisations were brought to fore by the quality of the managers' vision, leadership style and overall managerial competence in managing the day-to-day affairs of these organisations.

Newspaper administration is essentially business management. Media leaders will succeed only if they operate as business operators with a desire to make profit and run their businesses on the basis of well-defined business plans. This approach is important for Nigerian newspapers to experience growth. More so, for a newspaper to survive in a harsh business environment like Nigeria, managers of newspaper organisations must have a clear cut objective, particularly in relations to getting, retaining, and increase patronage of their newspapers. Also, of significance to the newspaper organisational growth was the managers' competence in managing the

mediating effect of the internal factors (ownership influence, technology adoption, staff training and re-training, employees' welfare and upholding the ethical standard of the profession) and external factors (Government policies, newspaper distributors, internet, readers and Advertising agencies) which directly or indirectly affect the growth of their organisations.

For any newspaper organisations to assume the growth position, according to the study, certain indicators must be evident; among these indicators are increased readership, circulation, advert patronage, workers output, regular payment of workers salary; and training and re-training of their workers. The inability to perform the basic obligations to the staff for instance was responsible for the various ethical and professional misconducts which consequently limit growth in the industry.

In line with the contingency theory on which this study was hinged, the study recommends that media managers should be more creative in how they respond to the challenges confronting the industry. Managers should have different approaches in military and democratic climes in order to remain viable and sustain growth. Also, for more newspaper organisations to ensure continuous growth, newspaper companies should aggressively promote and market their various products on other forms of media. Any firm not involved in constant marketing of its product and services is not likely to grow in the Nigerian environment. Diversification into other areas would also help the newspaper organisations to stay above waters. Furthermore, for credibility to be maintained with the readers, Nigerian newspapers must subscribe to basic ethical standards, ensure job security and good welfare for their staff members.

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