

# Human Resources and LGBT+ Inclusion: Creating an Equitable and Inclusive Workplace

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**Abstract:** *This research paper examines the relationship between Human Resources (HR) practices and the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and other related identities (LGBT+) in the workplace. It explores how HR departments can play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive environment, promoting diversity, and supporting the well-being and career advancement of LGBT+ employees. The paper also highlights the challenges faced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace and the potential benefits of implementing inclusive HR practices.*

**Keywords:** Human resources, inclusive environment, diversity, well-being

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the background and importance of LGBT+ workplace inclusion. LGBT+ workplace inclusion refers to creating a work environment that is supportive, respectful, and inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Over the years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity in the workplace, and this extends to the LGBT+ community. The significance of this study lies in the recognition of the unique challenges faced by LGBT+ individuals in the workplace. Discrimination, bias, and lack of awareness can create a hostile environment, leading to lower job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being. By understanding the background of LGBT+ workplace inclusion, organizations can implement strategies and policies that promote diversity, inclusion, and equality. Moreover, promoting LGBT+ workplace inclusion is not only a matter of social justice but also a smart business move. Research consistently shows that diverse and inclusive workplaces lead to better employee engagement, creativity, innovation, and overall organizational performance. Therefore, this study aims to highlight the benefits of LGBT+ workplace inclusion and provide insights for organizations to create more inclusive work environments<sup>1</sup>.

### 1.1 Purpose and significance of the study

Overall, the study of LGBT and HR is crucial for promoting equality, protecting human rights, understanding intersectionality, informing policy and legal advancements, and fostering social and cultural transformation towards a more inclusive society for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is important for employers to actively foster an inclusive, diverse, and accepting workplace culture that supports LGBT+ employees and addresses these challenges. Creating policies that prevent discrimination, providing diversity training to employees, and promoting an inclusive environment can help mitigate these challenges and create a more positive workplace experience for all employees. The study of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) rights and human rights (HR) is significant for several reasons<sup>2</sup>:

- Promotion of Equality:** The study of LGBT and HR aims to promote equal rights and non-discrimination for LGBT individuals. It seeks to challenge social prejudices and promote the acceptance and inclusion of LGBT people in all aspects of society.
- Protection of Human Rights:** LGBT individuals face widespread human rights violations, including discrimination, violence, and denial of basic rights such as access to healthcare, employment, and housing. By studying LGBT and HR, we can identify these violations and work towards addressing them, ensuring that everyone's human rights are protected regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Understanding Intersectionality:** The study of LGBT and HR also recognizes and explores the intersectionality of identities, considering how factors like race, ethnicity, class, disability, and age intersect with sexual orientation and gender identity. This intersectional approach helps us understand the unique challenges and experiences faced by LGBT individuals from diverse backgrounds and inform more effective advocacy and policy-making.
- Policy and Legal Advancements:** Research in LGBT and HR helps inform policy and legal advancements to protect the rights of LGBT individuals. It can provide evidence-based arguments and data that support the introduction of anti-discrimination laws, legal recognition of same-sex relationships, and access to gender-affirming healthcare, and other measures that promote equality and respect for LGBT rights.
- Social and Cultural Transformation:** The study of LGBT and HR contributes to social and cultural transformation by challenging homophobic and transphobic attitudes and norms. It encourages dialogue, education, and awareness-raising about LGBT rights, fostering a more inclusive and accepting society.

### Understanding the LGBT+ Workplace Experience

The LGBT+ workplace experience is an important topic to understand and address in order to create an inclusive and diverse work environment. It's important to note that the LGBT+ workplace experience is not limited to these points, as it can vary greatly depending on individual circumstances and cultural factors. Remember, fostering an inclusive workplace benefits both the employees and the organization

as a whole. Here are some key points that can help you develop a better understanding<sup>3</sup>:

- 1) **Discrimination and Bias:** LGBT+ individuals may face discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. This discrimination can manifest in various ways, such as unequal treatment, exclusion, or micro aggressions.
- 2) **Legal Protections:** Laws and protections for LGBT+ individuals can vary by country or region. It's important to be familiar with the legal framework in your jurisdiction to ensure equal rights and fair treatment.
- 3) **Coming Out:** Many LGBT+ employees face the decision of when and how to come out at work. This can be a stressful process, as individuals may fear negative reactions or discrimination. Organizations should create a safe and supportive environment where employees feel comfortable being open about their identities.
- 4) **Supportive Policies:** Organizations can implement policies explicitly addressing LGBT+ issues, such as anti-discrimination policies and inclusive healthcare benefits. These policies should be communicated clearly and consistently to all employees.
- 5) **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** ERGs provide a space for LGBT+ employees to connect and support each other. They can also help educate others in the organization about LGBT+ issues and promote inclusivity.
- 6) **Inclusive Language and Practices:** Using inclusive language, such as using preferred pronouns or gender-neutral terms, helps to create an inclusive workplace. Additionally, organizations should consider making workplace facilities, such as restrooms, gender-neutral to accommodate all employees.
- 7) **Training and Education:** Providing diversity and inclusion training can raise awareness and help employees understand the experiences and challenges faced by LGBT+ individuals. This education can help create a more empathetic and inclusive work environment.
- 8) **Allies and Advocates:** Allies play a crucial role in creating an inclusive workplace by supporting and advocating for LGBT+ colleagues. Organizations can encourage allyship through education and recognition programs.

#### Challenges faced by LGBT+ employees in the workplace

LGBT+ employees often face unique challenges in the workplace due to discrimination, bias, and lack of inclusive policies. Some of the common challenges they may encounter include<sup>4</sup>:

- 1) **Discrimination and Harassment:** LGBT+ employees are often targets of discrimination and harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, which can create an unwelcoming and hostile work environment.
- 2) **Lack of Inclusivity:** Many workplaces lack inclusive policies and practices that address the specific needs and concerns of LGBT+ employees. This can lead to feelings of exclusion and a lack of support from management and colleagues.
- 3) **Closeted or Forced Outing:** LGBT+ employees may feel pressured to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace, especially in environments

where being open about their identity may result in negative consequences.

- 4) **Unequal Opportunities and Career Progression:** LGBT+ employees may face barriers to career advancement due to biased practices such as pay gaps, limited access to promotions, or exclusion from networking opportunities.
- 5) **Lack of Role Models and Support Systems:** A scarcity of visible LGBT+ role models and supportive policies can make it challenging for employees to find mentors and connect with peers who share similar experiences.
- 6) **Insensitive or Exclusionary Language and Behavior:** Inappropriate jokes, derogatory language, or assumptions about heterosexuality can contribute to a hostile work environment for LGBT+ employees and create discomfort or distress.
- 7) **Mental Health and Well-being:** The cumulative effect of these challenges can significantly impact the mental health and well-being of LGBT+ employees, leading to higher rates of stress, anxiety, and depression.

#### Impacts on Mental Health, Job Satisfaction, and Productivity

The impacts on mental health, job satisfaction, and productivity of LGBT individuals can vary based on their personal experiences, workplace environment, and societal factors. It's important to note that these are general considerations, and individual experiences may vary. Creating an inclusive and supportive workplace environment is crucial to supporting the mental health, job satisfaction, and productivity of LGBT individuals. Here are some potential impacts to consider<sup>5</sup>:

- 1) **Mental Health:** LGBT individuals often face unique challenges, such as discrimination, stigma, and societal pressure, which can negatively impact their mental health. Studies have shown higher rates of mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among LGBT individuals compared to their heterosexual counterparts.
- 2) **Job Satisfaction:** LGBT individuals may experience lower job satisfaction due to a hostile work environment, lack of acceptance or inclusion, and fear of discrimination. Feeling unsupported or unable to be their authentic selves at work can contribute to negative job satisfaction.
- 3) **Productivity:** Negative impacts on mental health and job satisfaction can potentially affect productivity. LGBT individuals who experience discrimination or feel marginalized may struggle to focus on their work, leading to decreased productivity levels.

#### Mitigating the impacts:

- 1) **Inclusive Workplace Policies:** Organizations should implement inclusive policies and practices that promote diversity and provide support for LGBT individuals. This can include non-discrimination policies, equal opportunities for advancement, and diverse representation at all levels.
- 2) **Safe and Supportive Environment:** Creating a safe and supportive workplace environment is crucial for LGBT individuals. Encouraging open communication, providing resources and support groups, and actively

addressing discrimination and harassment can help promote a positive work atmosphere.

- 3) **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Establishing LGBT employee resource groups can provide a platform for networking, advocacy, and sharing experiences. ERGs can offer support, mentorship, and educational initiatives, creating a sense of belonging and connection.
- 4) **Awareness and Training:** Conducting diversity and inclusion training programs for employees can raise awareness about LGBT issues, foster empathy, and create a more inclusive work culture.
- 5) **Access to Mental Health Support:** Providing access to mental health resources, including counseling services and employee assistance programs, can help LGBT individuals address and manage mental health challenges effectively.

### The Role of HR in LGBT+ Inclusion

The role of Human Resources (HR) in LGBT+ inclusion is crucial in creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. HR professionals play a pivotal role in supporting and advocating for LGBT+ employees, ensuring their equal treatment and protection against discrimination. Overall, HR plays a critical role in promoting LGBT+ inclusion by developing inclusive policies, fostering an inclusive workplace culture, and supporting LGBT+ employees throughout their employment journey. Here are some key aspects of HR's role in promoting LGBT+ inclusion<sup>6</sup>:

- 1) **Policy development:** HR is responsible for developing, implementing, and communicating inclusive policies that protect and support LGBT+ employees. These policies can address issues such as non-discrimination, equal opportunity, gender-neutral benefits, and transitioning guidelines.
- 2) **Training and education:** HR should provide training programs to educate employees on LGBT+ issues, fostering empathy, understanding, and respect. This can include diversity and inclusion workshops, unconscious bias training, and sensitization sessions to promote a more inclusive culture.
- 3) **Recruitment and hiring:** HR professionals should ensure a fair and bias-free recruitment process that welcomes and attracts LGBT+ candidates. They can review job descriptions, interview questions, and screen potential biases to create an inclusive environment for all applicants.
- 4) **Employee resource groups (ERGs):** HR can support the establishment of LGBT+ ERGs or similar affinity groups, providing a platform for employees to connect, share experiences, and offer support. HR can facilitate these groups by allocating resources, promoting their activities, and encouraging senior leadership to engage with these communities.
- 5) **Benefits and policies:** HR should review company benefits and policies to ensure they are inclusive of LGBT+ employees. This includes offering equal access to healthcare benefits, family leave policies that accommodate diverse family structures, and addressing gender identity and expression rights.
- 6) **Reporting and addressing discrimination:** HR professionals should establish a robust reporting system

for incidents of discrimination or bias based on sexual orientation or gender identity. They should ensure a confidential and safe reporting process, investigate complaints, and take appropriate actions to address incidents promptly.

- 7) **Inclusive communications:** HR can help foster an inclusive workplace by promoting inclusive language and imagery in employee communications, including newsletters, internal websites, and policies. This helps create a welcoming environment that encourages open dialogue and supports diversity.
- 8) **Allies and mentorship programs:** HR can facilitate allyship programs, encouraging employees to become advocates for LGBT+ inclusion. This can include mentorship programs where allies can support and guide LGBT+ employees, creating a sense of inclusion and professional development.

### Benefits of LGBT+ Inclusive HR Practices

There are several benefits to implementing LGBT+ inclusive HR practices in an organization. Some of the key benefits include<sup>7</sup>:

- 1) **Increased diversity and talent pool:** By creating an inclusive work environment, organizations can attract a wider range of talent. LGBT+ individuals bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and skills that can contribute to the overall success of the organization.
- 2) **Improved employee morale and satisfaction:** When employees feel accepted and included, they are more likely to be engaged and satisfied with their work. This can lead to increased productivity, higher retention rates, and a positive company culture.
- 3) **Enhanced reputation and brand image:** Embracing LGBT+ inclusive policies can demonstrate an organization's commitment to diversity and equality. This can improve the organization's reputation and attractiveness to clients, customers, and potential employees who value inclusivity.
- 4) **Better understanding of customer needs:** A diverse workforce that includes LGBT+ individuals can provide insights into the needs and preferences of LGBT+ customers. This can help organizations better serve these customers and remain competitive in the market.
- 5) **Compliance with legal and regulatory requirements:** Many countries and jurisdictions have laws that protect LGBT+ individuals from discrimination in the workplace. Implementing inclusive HR practices ensures compliance with these laws and reduces the risk of legal issues and reputational damage.
- 6) **Increased innovation and creativity:** Inclusive environments promote the sharing of diverse ideas and perspectives. This can lead to more innovative and creative solutions to business challenges, as different viewpoints are considered and valued.
- 7) **Positive impact on mental health and well-being:** An inclusive workplace that values and supports LGBT+ employees can positively impact their mental health and well-being. This can reduce stress, increase job satisfaction, and ultimately contribute to higher productivity.

Overall, LGBT+ inclusive HR practices not only benefit individual employees but also the organization as a whole,

leading to a more diverse, productive, and inclusive work environment.

### Best Practices for HR Departments for Promoting LGBT+

Promoting inclusivity and supporting LGBT+ employees is essential for creating an inclusive and diverse workplace. Remember, promoting LGBT+ inclusivity should be an ongoing effort. Regularly assess the effectiveness of your strategies, gather feedback from employees, and make necessary adjustments to ensure the equality among LGBT+<sup>8</sup>.

Here are some best practices for HR departments to promote LGBT+ equality:

- 1) **Develop an inclusive workplace policy:** Create a comprehensive policy that explicitly prohibits discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. Ensure that this policy is communicated to all employees and strictly enforced.
- 2) **Provide education and training:** Conduct diversity and inclusion training programs that raise awareness about LGBT+ issues and promote understanding. Offer workshops or webinars to educate employees on LGBT+ terminology, challenges faced by the community, and how to be an ally.
- 3) **Create LGBT+ employee resource groups (ERGs):** Establishing ERGs provides a safe space for LGBT+ employees to connect, share experiences, and provide support. Promote and encourage the participation of all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 4) **Support gender transition:** Develop a supportive transition plan for employees who are transitioning gender. This should include guidelines for name and pronoun changes, restroom usage, and dress code policies. Respect confidentiality and maintain open communication with the transitioning employees.
- 5) **Recognize LGBT+ holidays and events:** Celebrate LGBT+ holidays and events like Pride Month by organizing inclusive activities, such as diversity fairs, panel discussions, or awareness campaigns. Show support by displaying LGBT+ - friendly symbols, like the rainbow flag, at the workplace.
- 6) **Review benefits and policies:** Regularly review the company's benefits and policies to ensure they are inclusive of LGBT+ employees. Consider offering same - sex partner benefits, gender - neutral restroom facilities, and inclusive dress codes.
- 7) **Foster a culture of inclusivity:** Promote a workplace culture that embraces diversity and inclusivity throughout the organization. This includes encouraging open dialogue, fostering a psychologically safe environment, and debunking stereotypes related to LGBT+ individuals.
- 8) **Address any complaints or concerns:** Implement a clear procedure for reporting and addressing discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. Investigate any complaints promptly, ensuring confidentiality and providing appropriate support to all parties involved.

- 9) **Partner with LGBT+ organizations:** Collaborate with local LGBT+ organizations or community groups to gain insights, share best practices, and stay connected with the broader LGBT+ community. Attend events or support initiatives that promote LGBT+ equality and inclusion.

### Case Studies: Successful Inclusive HR Practices

#### Case Study 1: IBM

IBM is known for its inclusive HR practices, including those specifically aimed at supporting LGBT employees. The company has consistently scored high on the Corporate Equality Index, a ranking of LGBT inclusive policies and practices. Some of the successful inclusive HR practices implemented by IBM include<sup>9</sup>:

- 1) **Non - discrimination policy:** IBM has a comprehensive non - discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.
- 2) **Employee resource groups:** The company supports several employee resource groups, such as "IBM PRIDE, " which provides a supportive community for LGBT employees and allies. These groups organize events, training, and mentorship opportunities.
- 3) **Benefits and support:** IBM offers equal benefits to same - sex partners and transgender employees, including health insurance coverage, parental leave, and gender transition support.
- 4) **Diversity and inclusion training:** IBM ensures that its workforce receives training on diversity and inclusion, including addressing LGBT issues and fostering an inclusive workplace culture. The success of IBM's inclusive HR practices has been recognized through awards and recognition, demonstrating the positive impact they have had on their LGBT employees' experience and overall organizational performance.

#### Case Study 2: Google

Google is renowned for its inclusive and diverse workplace culture, and the company has been proactive in implementing successful inclusive HR practices for LGBT employees. Some of these practices include<sup>10</sup>:

- 1) **Supportive policies:** Google has clear policies in place that protect its LGBT employees from discrimination and harassment, including sexual orientation and gender identity in its non - discrimination policy.
- 2) **Transition support:** Google offers comprehensive resources and support for employees who are transitioning genders, including medical benefits and time off for gender - affirming procedures.
- 3) **Employee resource groups:** The company has various LGBT - focused employee resource groups, such as "Gayglers, " which provide networking opportunities, mentorship, and support for LGBT employees.
- 4) **Inclusive benefits:** Google provides equal benefits to same - sex partners, including health insurance coverage, parental leave, and bereavement leave.

Google's inclusive HR practices have been recognized by various organizations, showcasing their success in creating an inclusive environment for LGBT employees and fostering an atmosphere of respect and acceptance. These practices have contributed to Google's reputation as an LGBT -

friendly workplace. Overall, both IBM and Google have showcased successful inclusive HR practices for LGBT employees, which have positively impacted their workplace culture and reinforced their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

### Examples of organizations leading in LGBT+ workplace inclusion

**Google:** Google is widely known for its commitment to diversity and inclusion, including its support for the LGBT+ community. The company has a number of employee resource groups dedicated to supporting LGBT+ employees, such as the Gayglers, and has consistently received high ratings on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index.

**IBM:** IBM has a long - standing commitment to LGBT+ workplace inclusion and has received numerous accolades for its policies and practices. The company actively supports LGBT+ employees through its LGBT+ diversity networks and offers comprehensive benefits, including transgender - inclusive healthcare coverage. Accenture: Accenture is a global consulting firm that has established itself as a leader in LGBT+ workplace inclusion. The company actively promotes diversity and inclusion through its LGBT+ employee resource group called 'Pride at Accenture' and has implemented various policies to support LGBT+ employees, such as gender transition guidelines and inclusive healthcare benefits. American Express: American Express is known for its inclusive workplace culture and has consistently earned high scores on the Corporate Equality Index. The company provides comprehensive LGBT+ inclusive policies and benefits, including gender transition support and non - discriminatory healthcare coverage. Microsoft: Microsoft has made significant strides in promoting LGBT+ inclusivity in the workplace. The company has active employee resource groups such as the GLEAM (Gay and Lesbian Employees at Microsoft) and provides comprehensive benefits, including transgender - inclusive healthcare coverage.

**Airbnb:** Airbnb is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace for its employees. The company has implemented inclusive policies that protect LGBT+ employees from discrimination and has been a vocal advocate for LGBT+ rights. Airbnb also offers resources and training to promote understanding and acceptance within its workforce. Procter & Gamble: Procter & Gamble has made significant efforts to champion LGBT+ inclusive practices and policies within its organization. The company actively supports LGBT+ employees through its employee resource group, LGBTQ+ Affinity Network, and has implemented inclusive policies to ensure a safe and inclusive work environment. Sales force: Sales force is well - known for its commitment to diversity and inclusion, including supporting the LGBT+ community. The company actively promotes LGBT+ inclusivity through its employee resource group, out forces, and has taken strong stances on LGBT+ rights, including advocating for marriage equality. These organizations are just a few examples of those leading the way in LGBT+ workplace inclusion. Many other companies

have also taken steps to create inclusive and accepting environments for their LGBT+ employees<sup>11</sup>.

### Overcoming Challenges and Potential Barriers OF HR FORTHEPROMOTING LGBT+

Promoting LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace is essential for creating a supportive and diverse environment. However, there may be challenges and potential barriers that HR professionals need to overcome. Here are a few strategies to address them:

- 1) **Culture and Awareness:** One of the main challenges is changing the organization's culture and increasing awareness about LGBT+ issues. HR can organize training sessions and workshops to educate employees about diversity and inclusion, including LGBT+ topics. This can help create a more inclusive environment and reduce potential biases<sup>12</sup>.
- 2) **Policies and Practices:** Ensure that the organization has clear policies and practices that support LGBT+ employees. This may include implementing non - discrimination policies, updating dress code policies to be gender - inclusive, and providing specific benefits for same - sex partners. HR should work closely with management to develop and enforce these policies.
- 3) **Leadership Support:** HR can collaborate with senior leaders to gain their support and commitment to LGBT+ inclusion. When leaders demonstrate their dedication to creating an inclusive workplace, it inspires others to follow suit. This can involve senior executives participating in diversity and inclusion initiatives or publicly advocating for LGBT+ rights.
- 4) **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Encourage the formation of ERGs for LGBT+ employees. These groups can provide a safe space for employees to seek support, share experiences, and offer mentorship opportunities. HR can actively support and promote the ERGs, ensuring that they have the necessary resources to thrive.
- 5) **Training and Development:** Offer training programs on unconscious bias and sensitivity to LGBT+ issues. These programs can help employees recognize their biases and teach them how to be more inclusive and respectful. HR should also provide resources and support for employees who want to improve their understanding of LGBT+ topics.
- 6) **Transparent Communication:** Encourage open and transparent communication regarding LGBT+ inclusion. HR can engage in regular, honest conversations with employees to address any concerns or questions they may have. Also, consider creating channels for anonymous feedback, allowing employees to express their concerns without fear of repercussions.
- 7) **External Partnerships:** Collaborate with external LGBTQ+ organizations, consultants, or experts. Their expertise can help HR professionals navigate challenges, provide best practices, and guide the implementation of inclusive policies.
- 8) **Celebrate Pride Month and LGBTQ+ Events:** Organize activities and events to celebrate Pride Month or other important LGBTQ+ events. This can help create a sense of belonging and show support for the community. Collaborate with ERGs, and seek their input and involvement in planning such events.

## 2. Conclusion

The role of HR in supporting and advocating for the LGBTQ+ community is essential for creating an inclusive and diverse workplace. HR departments play a critical role in implementing and enforcing policies and practices that protect the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ employees. In conclusion, HR plays a critical role in championing LGBTQ+ inclusion in the workplace. By developing and implementing comprehensive policies, providing training and support, and fostering an inclusive environment, HR helps create a workplace where all employees feel safe, valued, and empowered to bring their authentic selves to work. In conclusion, HR policies that promote inclusivity and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity are beneficial for both the organization and its employees. By implementing such policies, companies can create a more diverse and inclusive work environment that values and respects every employee, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. These policies can enhance employee morale, job satisfaction, and overall well-being, leading to increased productivity and retention rates. They can also attract top talent from a diverse pool of candidates, as many LGBTQ+ individuals actively seek out inclusive workplaces. Moreover, HR policies that address the unique needs and concerns of LGBTQ+ employees contribute to a culture of acceptance and support within the organization. This can foster a sense of belonging and psychological safety, allowing employees to be their authentic selves at work. It is important for companies to regularly review and update their HR policies to ensure they align with evolving societal norms and laws related to LGBTQ+ rights. It is equally important to provide training and resources to HR professionals and managers to ensure the effective implementation of these policies. Overall, HR policies on LGBT inclusion are critical for promoting equality, diversity, and a positive work environment for all employees. By embracing and supporting the LGBTQ+ community, organizations can create a more inclusive and equitable workplace for everyone.

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