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Theoretical Approaches to Change Management in Islamic Education Organizations: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives

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Abstract

Changes in the organizational environment and technological developments require Islamic educational institutions to strengthen their adaptation capacity without losing their institutional identity. This condition makes change management an important perspective in understanding the process of reforming Islamic educational organizations. This study aims to analyze the development of theoretical approaches to change management from a classical to contemporary perspective, compare the characteristics and limitations of change models, and examine its relevance in the context of Islamic educational organizations. The research uses a qualitative approach through literature studies using *the integrative literature review method*. Data are obtained from scientific literature in the form of books and articles from relevant national and international journals, then analyzed descriptively-critically through identification, classification, comparison, and synthesis of ideas. The results of the study show that the Lewin, Kotter, and ADKAR models have different contributions in explaining organizational change, ranging from the stages of planned change, transformational leadership, to individual readiness. The perspective of continuous change expands the understanding of sustainable organizational adaptation. In Islamic education, the relevance of these models is related to leadership, organizational culture, human resource readiness, participation, and digital transformation based on Islamic values. This study emphasizes the importance of contextualizing change management theory so that institutional reform goes hand in hand with strengthening the identity of Islamic education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Change is an inherent character in organizational development. The dynamics of the social environment, technological advancements, shifting societal needs, and increasing demands for service quality encourage organizations to continue to adjust their structure, strategy, and work mechanisms (Faridawati, 2025). In this situation, change management has a strategic position because it relates to the organization's ability to systematically direct the transformation process. Change is not enough to be understood as a policy change or system update, but rather as a process that involves structural, cultural, and human behavioral dimensions. Stouten, Rousseau, and De Cremer (2018) emphasized that effective change management requires integration between managerial practices and scientific

findings in order for transformation to produce sustainable impacts (Firdaus & Anisa, 2025).

The development of change management thinking has led to the emergence of various theoretical approaches that offer explanations of organizational transformation processes and mechanisms. The classical approach introduced by Kurt Lewin through the concept Unfreezing, changing, and Refreezing provides a foundation for understanding change as a process that requires preparation, implementation, and reinforcement (Hakim & Winarto, 2025). This thinking then developed through more systematic models, such as John P. Kotter's eight-stage change model and the ADKAR model developed by Jeffrey Hiatt. Each approach has different pressure points, ranging from the dynamics of organizational change, the role of leadership, to the readiness of individuals to face transformation. This development shows that change management is a field of study that continues to be refined as organizational complexity increases.

In the context of education, change has more complex characteristics because educational institutions carry out the functions of knowledge development, character formation, value inheritance, and social services. Schools, madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and universities are required to adjust governance, curriculum, human resource competencies, and the use of technology without neglecting their institutional goals and identities (Alfauzi & Faslah, 2025). Studies on educational organizations show that the ability to make changes is related to a variety of factors, including leadership, organizational culture, human resource capacity, and institutional environmental support. Research in International Journal of Educational Management (2019), for example, identified the dynamics of changes in educational organizations through a review of 330 scientific publications, which shows the importance of understanding the driving factors, obstacles, and consequences of changes in the educational environment (Ahmad, 2026).

The issue of change management becomes increasingly relevant when associated with Islamic educational organizations. Islamic educational institutions face demands to develop professional governance, improve service quality, strengthen competitiveness, and respond to digital transformation (Munir & Su'adah, 2025). At the same time, this institution has an institutional character shaped by Islamic values, scientific traditions, leadership authority, and social relations with society. These characters influence the way changes are formulated, communicated, received, and implemented. The transformation of Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and schools, for example, shows the need to balance institutional modernization with the sustainability of Islamic educational values and identities (Saputra & Faridi, 2026). Therefore, the use of change management theory needs to consider the social and cultural context that shapes the life of Islamic educational organizations.

A number of previous studies have paid attention to the changes and transformation of Islamic educational institutions. Studies on institutional transformation generally discuss the modernization of Islamic boarding schools, the development of madrasas, curriculum integration, governance reform, leadership, and the use of technology. Research (Selvia, 2024) transformation of Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and integrated Islamic schools through institutional dimensions, curriculum, and values. Meanwhile, studies on the transformation of madrasah management have also directed attention to the development of policies and institutional management. These various studies contribute to explaining the form and direction of change in Islamic education, especially in responding to modernity and the development of the educational environment.

Nevertheless, there is still room for the development of studies on integration aspects and theoretical criticism of change management models in the context of

Islamic educational organizations. The literature on organizational change has developed a variety of models, but its application in educational institutions often requires adjustments to the organizational characteristics, institutional culture, and values that are the foundation of educational delivery. The study of Islamic educational transformation also tends to pay attention to the form of institutional, policy, leadership, or technological reform, while critical comparisons of the assumptions, orientations, advantages, and limitations of classical and contemporary change models have not always been the main focus. This study space is important because the model of change that develops in business organizations or general organizations cannot be applied mechanically to Islamic educational institutions without considering their institutional character and orientation.

Based on this study space, this article seeks to develop the discussion of change management through a comparative analysis of classical and contemporary approaches, then contextualize it in Islamic educational organizations. The study is directed to understand the development of the change management paradigm, analyze the characteristics and limitations of the main models, and identify its relevance for the management of the transformation of Islamic educational institutions. This perspective is expected to expand the understanding that change management theory is not just a procedural tool, but an analytical framework that needs to be interpreted based on organizational characteristics and the values that underlie it. The contextualization also opens up space for the development of change management thinking that is more responsive to the institutional needs of Islamic education.

In particular, this article discusses three main problems. First, how is the development of the paradigm and theoretical approach of change management from a classical to a contemporary perspective? Second, what are the characteristics, advantages, and limitations of change management models in explaining the dynamics of organizational transformation? Third, how is the relevance and contextualization of change management models in the development of Islamic educational organizations? These three questions are the basis for building a theoretical synthesis regarding the use of change management approaches that are in accordance with the characteristics, values, and institutional challenges of Islamic education.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method (Library Research) through the model Integrative Literature Review. This approach was chosen to review, compare, and synthesize various theoretical perspectives on change management, especially classical and contemporary approaches and their relevance in Islamic educational organizations. Snyder (2019) explained that literature review can be used as a research methodology to integrate various study results so as to produce a more comprehensive understanding of a scientific field (Yam, 2024). Research data sources include theoretical books, national and international journal articles, and scientific publications that discuss organizational change models, the development of change management paradigms, and the transformation of Islamic educational institutions.

Data collection was carried out through literature search in scientific databases, such as Google Scholar and Scopus, using the keywords change management, organizational change models, classical and contemporary change approaches, Islamic educational institutions, and Islamic education transformation. The literature was selected based on the relevance of the substance, the credibility

of the publication, and its contribution to the focus of the research. The analysis was carried out in a descriptive-critical manner through the identification of paradigms, classification of theoretical models, comparison of the characteristics and limitations of the approach, and synthesis of its relevance in the context of Islamic education. The results of the analysis are directed to build a conceptual understanding of the possibility of contextualizing change management theory based on the characteristics, values, and development needs of Islamic educational organizations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Paradigm Evolution and Theoretical Approaches to Change Management

Change management is a field of study that develops along with the increasing complexity of the organization and the environmental dynamics that affect it. In the early stages of its development, organizational change is widely understood through a planned approach that emphasizes stability, balance, and control of the transformation process. An organization is seen as a system that can be directed towards new conditions through systematically structured interventions (Zulha et al., 2026). The development of the business environment, technological advancements, globalization, and changes in the characteristics of human resources then broaden the perspective on change. Change is understood as a phenomenon that takes place in a sustainable manner, involving various actors, and is influenced by the interaction between organizational structures and the external environment.

Historically, one of the important foundations in the development of change management theory was introduced by Kurt Lewin through the approach of group dynamics and field theory (Field Theory). Lewin (1947) in (MM, 2023) views the behavior of individuals and groups as the result of interactions between various forces at work in a social environment. Change occurs when the balance of power that maintains the old conditions shifts. This thinking provides the basis for the planned change approach that comes to be known through the concept of Unfreezing, changing, and Refreezing. The main orientation of the classical approach lies in the importance of building readiness, directing the transformation process, and reinforcing new conditions in order to be accepted in the organizational system.

The paradigm of planned change was developed through the thinking of John P. Kotter who placed leadership as the main driver of organizational transformation. Kotter (1995, 1996) identified that failure of change is often related to a lack of urgency, inability to build a coalition of leaders, lack of clarity of vision, and low consistency in instituting change. The eight-stage model he developed expands the understanding of change from a mere process of system adjustment to a strategic agenda that requires leadership mobilization, communication, participation, and strengthening of organizational culture. This development shows that the success of transformation is greatly influenced by the organization's ability to build collective understanding and commitment.

Attention to the human dimension in organizational change is increasingly developing through an approach that places the individual as the

main actor of transformation. Jeffrey Hiatt (2006) introduced the ADKAR model which explains that organizational change requires awareness, desire, knowledge, abilities, and reinforcement at the individual level (Ikhram, 2019). This approach places emphasis on the psychological and human competency aspects that often determine the successful implementation of organizational policies. Structural or technological change can be designed through managerial decisions, but its implementation depends on the individual's willingness to accept and execute new work patterns. This perspective expands the orientation of change management by linking institutional transformation and personal readiness.

Entering the development of contemporary organizations, change is increasingly understood as a dynamic, complex, and difficult process that is completely controlled through linear planning. Burnes (2004) criticizes the tendency to use a universally planned change approach because each organization has different characteristics, environments, and dynamics. Modern organizations face uncertainties arising from technological innovation, competition, regulatory changes, and shifting stakeholder needs (Patricia et al., 2025). This condition encourages the development of a more adaptive perspective, by paying attention to organizational learning, flexibility, the ability to respond to change, and the involvement of various actors. Change management is no longer placed solely as a program that has a starting and an end point, but rather as an organizational capacity in dealing with evolving changes.

Paradigm shifts are also seen in the increasing attention to approaches to complexity and continuous change. Weick and Quinn (1999) distinguish episodic change from continuous change. Episodic change refers to transformations that are relatively infrequent, planned, and triggered by the need to abandon established organizational patterns. In contrast, continuous change takes place through small, repetitive adjustments in work practices, social interactions, and organizational processes. This distinction provides the perspective that change can take place through large, formally designed interventions as well as through gradual adaptations that grow out of the organization's day-to-day activities.

The development of digital technology further strengthens the need for an adaptive change management paradigm. Digital transformation has consequences for organizational structure, decision-making mechanisms, human resource competencies, communication patterns, and work culture. Vial (2019) explained that digital transformation is a process of change that is triggered by digital technology and has an impact on value creation and organizational change. In this context, change management needs to pay attention to the relationship between technological innovation and institutional readiness. The success of transformation depends on the organization's ability to integrate technology with strategies, human competencies, and work processes that are in accordance with environmental needs.

In Islamic educational organizations, the evolution of the change management paradigm has strong relevance because educational institutions are at the intersection between the demands of modernization and the sustainability of institutional values. Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, Islamic schools, and Islamic colleges face the need to update governance, improve the professionalism of human resources, develop learning systems, and utilize digital technology (Darmawan & Al Mu'allif, 2025). The institutional characteristics of Islamic education are also shaped by scientific traditions, religious values, social relationships, and leadership patterns that influence acceptance of change. A planned change perspective is still needed to provide direction and legitimacy for transformation, while an adaptive approach is needed to respond to evolving environmental dynamics and institutional needs.

The evolution of change management thinking shows a shift from a paradigm that emphasizes stages and control to a perspective that recognizes complexity, learning, and sustainable adaptation. The classical approach provides a foundation for the importance of planning and strengthening change, while the contemporary approach extends analysis through attention to uncertainty, social interaction, and organizational adaptive capacity. In Islamic education, these two orientations can be understood in a complementary manner. Change management requires a framework that is able to maintain the orderliness of the transformation process while providing space for innovation and adjustment based on institutional values and characteristics. The development of this paradigm is the basis for a more critical examination of the characteristics, advantages, and limitations of various change management models.

2. Critical Analysis of Change Management Models: Characteristics, Advantages, and Limitations

The development of change management theory has resulted in a number of models that have different orientations and assumptions in explaining the organizational transformation process. These differences are related to the way of viewing the source of change, the role of leadership, individual involvement, and organizational mechanisms in maintaining new conditions. The planned change model tends to pay attention to the stages and control of the process, while the more contemporary approach places adaptation, learning, and social interaction as important elements. This difference in orientation shows that there is no one model that can be universally used for all organizational situations. The choice of approach needs to consider the purpose of the change, institutional characteristics, resource readiness, and environmental complexity.

Kurt Lewin's three-stage model is one of the important foundations in the study of organizational change. This approach explains change through the process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. The strength of Lewin's model lies in the simplicity of his frame of mind in explaining the need for preparation, implementation, and reinforcement of change. Organizations gain the idea that transformation requires the process of building awareness of old conditions, developing new patterns, and maintaining the sustainability of the

results of change. This model also pays attention to the balance of social forces that affect the behavior of individuals and groups. Burnes (2004) reminds that Lewin's thinking needs to be understood more broadly through field theory and group dynamics, rather than being reduced to three stages of change that are mechanical.

Despite its fundamental contributions, the Lewin model faces a number of limitations when used to explain organizational changes that take place in a highly dynamic environment. The refreezing stage, for example, can be understood too rigidly if the organization considers new conditions as the final state that must be maintained. In an environment that continues to change, stability needs to be understood as the ability to maintain organizational functions while making adjustments in a sustainable manner (Stuart et al., 2026). Criticism of this model also arises when change is treated as a linear process that always moves through the same sequence of stages. In fact, organizational change can take place gradually, repeatedly, and even regressed due to differences in interests and internal dynamics. These limitations show that the Lewin model is more appropriate to be used as a basic framework for understanding the process of change, rather than as a standard procedure for all forms of transformation.

In contrast to Lewin's approach which provides a general framework regarding the stages of change, John P. Kotter developed an eight-stage model with a stronger emphasis on leadership and organizational mobilization. Kotter (1995, 1996) identified that change requires a sense of urgency, a coalition of leaders, a strategic vision, communication, member empowerment, short-term outcome achievement, momentum sustainability, and the institutionalization of new practices. The advantage of this model lies in a more detailed explanation of the role of leadership in directing transformation. Kotter's model also pays attention to communication and participation aspects, so that change can be understood as a collective agenda that requires the support of various organizational elements.

The strength of the Kotter model lies in its ability to connect the strategic direction of the organization with concrete actions during the change process. The eight stages developed provide guidance for leaders to build commitment, reduce barriers, and ensure the outcome of change is integrated into the organizational culture. Nonetheless, this model has limitations when it is treated as a sequence that must always be executed in a linear manner. Organizations facing rapid and complex change may require multiple change processes simultaneously, while certain conditions demand incremental adjustments based on the situation at hand. The emphasis on steering coalitions and formal leadership also has the potential to reduce attention to change initiatives that grow from organizational members. The Kotter model remains relevant as a framework for managing strategic change, but its implementation requires flexibility and sensitivity to institutional dynamics.

A different perspective is offered by Jeffrey Hiatt through the ADKAR model that places the individual at the center of the success of change. The five elements of ADKAR, namely awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and

reinforcement, describe the need for individuals to understand the reasons for change, have the desire to get involved, gain knowledge, develop skills, and maintain new behaviors. The advantage of this model lies in the attention to personal readiness which is often the determinant of the success of the implementation of organizational policies. ADKAR can also help leaders identify barriers to change at the individual level, such as lack of understanding, low motivation, limited skills, or weak reinforcement after the change is implemented.

The limitation of ADKAR lies in the scope of its analysis which is more oriented towards the process of individual change. The problem of organizational transformation often involves broader factors, such as authority structures, institutional policies, resource distribution, organizational culture, and relationships between work units. These factors cannot be solved only through increasing personal awareness or competence. The ADKAR model also needs to be complemented by an analysis of the structural conditions that allow or hinder change. Therefore, this approach is more appropriate to understand the readiness and involvement of individuals as part of the organizational transformation process, rather than as the only framework for managing change.

The development of contemporary approaches provides additional perspectives through the thoughts of Weick and Quinn (1999) on episodic change and continuous change. The perspective of continuous change explains that transformation can grow through small adjustments, learning, interactions, and daily practices of organizational members. Its advantage lies in the ability to explain changes that do not always come from formal decisions of leaders, but also develop through the experiences and initiatives of organizational actors. This approach is relevant for organizations that face constant environmental changes. Its limitations are related to the need for coordination and strategic direction, because spontaneous changes have the potential to result in fragmentation if they are not linked to institutional goals. The perspective of continuous change therefore requires a balance between the space for adaptation and the organizational coordination mechanism.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Change Management Models and Perspectives

Model or perspective	Main focus	Pros	Limitations
Lewin	Stages of change and balance of social power	Provides a systematic and easy-to-understand basic framework	Can be understood to be too linear when applied rigidly
Kotter	Leadership and management of organizational change	Explain the strategic stages, communication, and mobilization of members in detail	Tends to be sequential and oriented towards formal leadership
ADKAR	Readiness and change at the individual level	Help identify personal needs and barriers	Insufficient to explain structural and systemic

			problems comprehensively
Continuous change (Weick & Quinn)	Adaptation, learning, and changes in daily practice	Able to explain changes that take place dynamically and iteratively	Requires coordination to keep adjustments in line with organizational goals

Source: Processed from Lewin (1947), Burnes (2004), Kotter (1995, 1996), Hiatt (2006), and Weick and Quinn (1999).

The comparison shows that each model has a theoretical contribution as well as an explanatory limit. Lewin provides a foundation for the process and balance of change, Kotter explains the mechanism of leadership in driving organizational transformation, ADKAR describes individual readiness, while the perspective of continuous change expands the understanding of adaptation that grows through organizational practice. These differences do not need to be positioned as a conflict between theories, as each explains a different dimension of change. Perspective integration can provide a more comprehensive understanding as long as its use is adjusted to the problem and the level of analysis to be studied.

In educational organizations, the selection of change management models needs to consider the relationship between institutional policies, the readiness of educators and education, organizational culture, and stakeholder involvement. Curriculum and governance changes, for example, require strategic direction and leadership coordination as described in the Kotter model. Improving educators' competence in using technology requires attention to individual readiness as offered by ADKAR. Meanwhile, adjustment of learning practices and academic services can take place through a learning process and continuous adaptation. The diversity of educational issues shows that the application of change theory needs to be based on the compatibility between the characteristics of the model and the need for institutional transformation.

In Islamic education, the analysis of the change model requires broader consideration because institutions have an academic dimension as well as Islamic values and identity. Changes in governance, technological development, and improvement of the professionalism of human resources need to pay attention to institutional traditions, leadership authority, religious culture, and relationships with the community. Models that emphasize formal leadership need to be brought together with traditions of deliberation and participation, while individual-oriented approaches need to pay attention to the values of service, responsibility, and competency development. The perspective of continuous change is also relevant to understand the ability of institutions to develop innovation without breaking the continuity of scientific traditions and institutional values.

Based on comparative analysis, the effectiveness of change management models is not determined by the popularity or completeness of the stages offered, but rather by their suitability with the characteristics of the organization and the problems at hand. The classical approach still

provides an important foundation for change planning and control, while the contemporary perspective expands attention to adaptation, learning, and the complexity of social relations. In Islamic educational organizations, the use of theory requires a contextual reading so that institutional transformation can take place in a directional, participatory, and rooted in institutional values. This argument is the basis for discussing the relevance and contextualization of change management models in the development of Islamic educational organizations.

3. Relevance and Contextualization of Change Management Models in Islamic Education Organizations

Islamic educational organizations have characteristics that distinguish them from business organizations and public organizations. This institution carries out the functions of education, scientific development, character building, and inheritance of Islamic values. In its development, Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, Islamic schools, and Islamic universities face the demands of governance reform, education quality improvement, human resource development, and the use of digital technology. This situation makes change management a strategic approach to maintain institutional relevance while maintaining the institution's identity.

The contextualization of change management theory needs to consider the social, cultural, and value characteristics that shape the life of Islamic educational organizations (Susanti et al., 2025). The Lewin, Kotter, and ADKAR models can provide an analytical framework, but their application requires adjustments to the needs of the institution. The relevance of such approaches can be examined through the following key dimensions.

a. Leadership and legitimacy of change

Leadership plays a role in determining direction, building commitment, and gaining support for change. In Islamic education, leadership legitimacy can come from formal authority, scientific authority, example, and public trust. Kotter's (1996) thoughts on the coalition of leaders and vision communication are relevant to explain the importance of leadership in driving transformation. The process of change needs to connect the leadership authority with the participation of institutional elements so that policies gain collective acceptance.

b. Organizational culture and Islamic values

Organizational culture influences the way members understand and respond to updates. The values of trust, deliberation, justice, and devotion can be the cultural foundation in building a commitment to change. Schein and Schein (2017) explain that organizational culture is formed through basic assumptions and values that develop in the life of the organization. In Islamic education, institutional modernization needs to go hand in hand with the maintenance of scientific traditions and institutional identity. Renewal can gain legitimacy when it is understood as an effort to improve the quality of management without eliminating the principles that are the basis for the implementation of education.

c. Human resource readiness

The success of change depends on the individual's ability to understand and carry out updates. The ADKAR model from Hiatt (2006) is relevant to explain the importance of awareness, motivation, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement in the transformation process. The application of learning technology, digital administration systems, and updates to educational methods requires increasing the competence of educators and education personnel. The development of professional abilities also needs to be accompanied by strengthening integrity and responsibility for the goals of Islamic education.

d. Participation and decision-making

The tradition of deliberation provides space for the development of participatory change. The involvement of leaders, educators, education personnel, students, and stakeholders can enrich the process of identifying needs and implementing policies (Darmawan & Adzhar, 2026). This dimension is related to Lewin's thinking about group dynamics and Kotter's approach to empowering organizational members. Meaningful participation can strengthen a sense of belonging while reducing the gap between leadership decisions and the implementation of change.

e. Institutional adaptation and sustainability

Digital transformation requires Islamic educational organizations to adjust learning systems, academic services, information management, and decision-making mechanisms. The perspective of continuous change from Weick and Quinn (1999) provides an understanding that adaptation can take place through continuous learning and adjustment. Meanwhile, Lewin and Kotter's thinking helps explain the importance of strengthening and institutionalizing new practices. This blend of perspectives can support the development of institutional capacity in dealing with change without losing its institutional orientation.

Based on this description, the relevance of change management theory in Islamic education lies in its ability to explain the relationship between organizational transformation, human readiness, institutional culture, and value sustainability. Lewin's model provides a framework for the process of change, Kotter explains the management of strategic transformation, ADKAR emphasizes individual readiness, while the perspective of continuous change pays attention to organizational adaptation. The contextualization of these approaches confirms that change management in Islamic education requires a balance between institutional professionalism, innovation, and the maintenance of Islamic identity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that change management theory evolved from a classical approach that emphasizes planned change to a more adaptive and sustainable contemporary perspective. Lewin's model provides a basic framework for the stages of change, Kotter emphasizes leadership and management of strategic transformation, while ADKAR describes individual readiness to face change. The perspective of continuous change expands the understanding that organizational

change also takes place through a continuous process of adjustment. Each approach has its characteristics, advantages, and limitations so its selection needs to consider the needs and conditions of the organization.

In the context of Islamic educational organizations, the application of change management theory needs to consider leadership, organizational culture, human resource readiness, participation, and the demands of digital transformation. The values of trust, deliberation, exemplary, and devotion are contextual dimensions that can strengthen the legitimacy of change. The contribution of this study lies in the affirmation that classical and contemporary change management theories can be used in a complementary manner through readings that are in accordance with the institutional characteristics of Islamic education. Change is understood as a process of reforming organizational governance and capacity that remains oriented towards maintaining Islamic identity.

This study has limitations because it uses a literature study approach and has not tested the relevance of the model through empirical research on Islamic educational institutions. Further research can develop a multisite study to examine how change models are applied in the context of Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, Islamic schools, and Islamic universities. Empirical studies are also needed to identify supporting factors, hambsatan, and the possibility of developing a more contextual change management framework for Islamic educational organizations.

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