6. *Opportunities for challenge and development.* Making the most of other people's strengths, and the least of their weaknesses, is a surefire formula for managerial success. Many employees enjoy the experience of being deeply immersed in their work, and some have a need for growth and learning (Theory Y). By contrast, the lack of meaningful work challenges is a demotivator for productive and creative people. Chapter 9 discusses training and development that can be used to provide growth opportunities, which are associated with increasing engagement and career development.

7. *Meaningful control over the work environment.* Being in control is a source of motivation, as it allows people to tailor their job experiences in ways that affect their satisfaction (e.g., choosing office decor; setting flextime schedules or telecommuting, both discussed in Chapter 8). The lack of such control reduces satisfaction. More important is the extent to which the employee is subject to the whims of others, especially when preferences collide and communication is poor. Exhibit 6.2 looks at one way in which employees may benefit from having control over their work (i.e., how and when they take breaks).

8. *Minimizing the demotivating effect of rules and regulations.* The job of the manager is to make it possible for workers to accomplish their tasks, and that includes finding ways of meeting the requirements of rules and regulations or working around them when appropriate. While recognizing that many requirements have been adopted for good reason (such as to ensure accountability), Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) long ago noted that demotivators such as bad rules and regulations get in the way of workers' performance and motivation; the negative side effects of these rules are recognized, and a task of the manager is to reduce the impact of these effects. Increasingly, organizations are trying to meet accountability needs in post hoc and less burdensome ways.

9. *Reducing negative supervisory relationships.* People need to get along, especially with their bosses. The failure to get along with supervisors can be a source of serious stress and distraction that severely demotivates many employees (Van Wart, 2005). Traditionally, supervisory relations were thought to have more downsides than upsides, being sources of control, stress, and disappointment. The cost of supervisor–employee conflict can be high for organizations, and today's focus on employee engagement includes the recognition that supervisory relations are key and need to emphasize support, encouragement, development feedback, and opportunity.

10. *Selecting the right people for the job.* Last but not least, selecting the right person for the job is key. It should no longer be enough that applicants are qualified for jobs; they must be well motivated, accomplished, and able to get along with others in supportive and engaged ways (recruitment and selection are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively). The selection of supervisors is especially important, as supervisors set the tone for engagement for their work groups.

The conditions described above provide for a work environment in which many employee needs can be met. The entire set of these practices and policies matters, and

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Exhibit 6.2 The Effective Manager . . . Takes a Break

Being motivated does not always mean working hard at all times. Berman and West (2007) show that managers who take breaks report themselves as being more effective, with less stress, than those who do not take breaks. Some managers take breaks during lunch, whereas others take short breaks during the day, often about 10 or 15 minutes each. Quite some people enjoy an afternoon catnap—President Kennedy is said to have a well-known example. A brief rest clears the mind and restores energy for the rest of the day.

Yet, U.S. culture sometimes confuses break taking with slacking off or not being motivated or serious: "Attitudes have not always been very positive about managers taking breaks. Managers experience very busy schedules . . . and they may perceive that taking a break will set a bad example, encouraging workers to work less, thereby feeding negative stereotypes of public sector employees" (Berman & West, 2007, p. 381). Managers also do well to break stereotypes and allow themselves and others to take short breaks.

human resource management is concerned with ensuring that the entire range of these practices is fulfilled. People vary in their needs, and while they may be unclear about them and reluctant to disclose them, the above practices and conditions provide a broad range of ways to satisfy employee needs.

In broader context, federal workers are quite satisfied with their work and their working conditions as they relate to the above factors: 91 percent agree or strongly agree that the work they do is important, 96 percent agree or strongly agree that "when needed I am willing to put in the extra effort to get a job done," 80 percent know what is expected of them, 82 percent agree or strongly agree that their supervisors treat them with respect, and 74 percent agree or strongly agree that employees in their work units share job knowledge with each other. Overall, 68 percent agree or strongly agree that, overall, they are satisfied with their jobs, and 66 percent would recommend their organizations as good places to work. There are, however, some areas for further improvement: 60 percent agree or strongly agree that their talents are well used, 50 percent agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with the recognition they receive for doing a good job, and only 32 percent agree or strongly agree that their units are able to recruit people with the right skills. Variation surely exists. About half, 61 percent, also agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with their pay (U.S. Office of Personnel Management [U.S. OPM], 2017). By and large, most measures are up a few percentage points over 2013. While not perfect measures of motivation or engagement, these survey results paint a favorable picture of the climate for motivation which, in a previous report, was found to be comparable with (or only slightly less than) conditions found in the private sector. In short, using workers' talents and input well is a matter not only of motivation but also of workplace performance. However, a notable decline in 2017 is being able to recruit people with the right skills (down from 40 percent), showing further deterioration.

Organizations can use the above items to create a **climate for motivation checklist.** For each item, managers and other employees can rate whether they strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree that each element is present in their organization or workplace. What improvements do they suggest?

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TOOLS OF MOTIVATION

Managers have a broad array of tools at their disposal for increasing the motivation of workers. Some of these, such as compensation, promotion, and relevant benefits, are discussed in later chapters. In the remainder of this chapter, the focus is on some interpersonal strategies. Supervisors should be supportive, helping workers to succeed in their work, providing channels for intrinsic motivations, and, where possible, facilitating other needs (such as for career development or raising a family). The strategies below help managers know and shape the goals of workers (or, in terms of motivation theory, their needs and valences), assess and address workers' *instrumentality* (the feasibility of the goal of need attainment), and assess and take corrective action to ensure performance and goal attainment. Managers and employees surely need to be proficient in the matters discussed below that affect their interpersonal relations at work.

Psychological Contracts

While the policies and practices described above set the climate for motivation, managers and employees are likely to find that some tailoring and accommodation are necessary. Managers will need to know the extent to which any specific worker desires a challenging assignment or seeks to learn a new skill, and they will need to deal with factors that cause some workers to not grow themselves. Managers cannot read the minds of employees, and they are apt to make errors if they assume these matters. Moreover, employees are not always aware of what opportunities exist for them, or how they might overcome perceived barriers, nor are supervisors always clear about employees intentions and underutilized skills. So, more communication on these matters is needed that help managers and employees know needs, motivations and constraints, and we believe that more communication can often make both workers and their managers better off. (Note: The following focuses on understandings between specific supervisors and subordinates, rather than any broad perceptions of employee in general with their organization.)

One tool for increasing employee motivation and performance is the **psychological contract** (Guest, 2007; Rousseau, 1995). It builds on the famous management-by-objectives insight that involvement of workers in goal formation increases buy-in and mutual understanding many times over. Whereas the original MBO efforts focused on formal and documented aspects of joint goal setting (Drucker, 1954), psychological contracts are unwritten understandings about mutual needs, goals, expectations, and procedures. Such agreements go beyond employment contracts, which typically specify salary, benefits, modes of feedback, and working hours; it can be said that psychological contracts begin where formal employment contracts leave off. These informal understandings improve and expand alignment between individuals and the organization, and better fit is associated with increased motivation and reduced turnover (Birtch et al., 2016).

Psychological contracts are a somewhat new tool. Some managers refer to psychological contracts as *informal agreements* or *mutual understandings*, too. Psychological contracts increase engagement and motivation by allowing managers to better understand the needs of individual employees, by helping to provide rewards and conditions that address individual needs, and by ensuring clarity about roles and expectations. Psychological contracts are sometimes limited to highly valued concerns, but they are potentially far-reaching and any issue is fair game. Topics can include the amount or nature of work, work schedules, growth

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opportunities, responsibilities and performance objectives, the frequency and nature of managerial feedback, preferred work styles, behaviors that are bothersome, job security, possible rewards, workplace autonomy, support in dealing with child care responsibilities, and so forth. The extent of psychological contracts can be as broad or narrow as people choose them to be. The purpose is to increase alignment on these matters, typically though some give-and-take.

Psychological contracts are used at any level of the organization, involving employees in the very highest to the very lowest positions. Fifteen years ago, a survey of senior local government managers found that 57.3 percent of them established psychological contracts with employees, but only about a fifth of these (20.7 percent) said that they fully employed the processes described below (Berman & West, 2003). The study also found that the use of psychological contracts was associated with encouraging employees to take up new challenges and promoting a productive organizational culture. More recently, Berman, Chen, Jan, and Huang (2013) examined the use of psychological contracts between very senior civil servants and deputy ministers in Taiwan. About half of the civil servant respondents reported having psychological contracts with their deputy ministers, and among those who did, 75 percent agreed that their agencies frequently developed innovative programs, compared with only 46 percent of respondents who did not.

This is how psychological contracts are established and made to work. For example, a manager may go to an employee and note that it has been some time since their last conversation. The manager says that she would like to know how things are going and asks whether there is anything that (s)he can do to help the employee's work go better. Following the employee's (perhaps surprised) response, the manager asks whether the employee has anything (s)he would like to achieve or improve or do over the next few months. Then, as the employee answers, the manager discusses each possibility with the employee. Note that a subordinate wanting something does not mean that managers can make it happen. The manager provides evaluative responses to the employee's ideas, explaining why each can be done (e.g., training or flextime), cannot be met (a salary increase over which the manager might not have control), or can be met in a modified form only (the manager might not have control over promotion but can help through assignments to make the employee more competitive). The manager's job is to help the employee embrace these understandings and facts.

Next, the manager informs the employee that while the list is a good one, the manager has some job-related needs as well. Perhaps some project needs to be completed, such as a pilot test on a new strategy. In addition, the manager may raise concerns she has about the employee's performance or skills. She then suggests a way to resolve the paradox of needs, for example, by asking the employee to make an increased commitment to improvement in return for her assisting him in meeting some of his needs. Thus, some employee contributions are seen as conditions for the manager's helping to meet the employee's needs. In a schematic way, Exhibit 6.3 shows the basic give-and-take that the psychological contract entails. Some managers use this form, as well.

After the worker and the manager have agreed on all their needs, the manager summarizes the discussion and notes that situations and other things do change. The door remains open for communication between worker and manager, especially regarding perceived misunderstandings. The manager should mention the psychological contract to the employee at least twice over the next few weeks, because people sometimes *forget* things or do not take them very seriously unless they are repeated.

While it is easier for a manager to initiate a psychological contract with a subordinate than for a subordinate to take the lead, sometimes subordinates can initiate such dialogues

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Exhibit 6.3 The Psychological Contract (or, informal agreement)

	Psychological Contract	
	Expect to Get	Expect to Give
Worker		
Supervisor or other		

Source: Adapted from Osland, Kolb, & Rubin (2000).

with their supervisors or with coworkers. Making a psychological contract is especially (but not only) useful when people begin a new employment relationship. At that point there is considerable uncertainty, and interaction and communication patterns are still fluid and subject to change. Agreements can also be made among group members, or between a group and the group leader. This can be accomplished through a discussion about what the group wants to get or do and what the group is willing to give (and give up) to get what the members want. The understandings are then written down, distributed, and reviewed a few weeks later. Later review is helpful for demonstrating commitment to the understanding and allowing for dealing with whatever may have come up in the meantime.

Four factors make psychological contracts effective as a tool of engagement: (1) they help bring to light workers' goals or the needs that motivate them, (2) they allow managers to clarify workers' aims and evaluate the extent to which those needs can be met, (3) they are perceived as a fair balance between what workers want and what workers are expected to give, and (4) they have mechanisms for following up, ensuring that the agreement is put to work and addressing changes that may occur. The motivational properties of psychological contracts come from managers' earnest efforts to reach out and increase mutual involvement. The psychological contract process is a vehicle for strengthening expectations about mutual contributions, and performance improvement comes from agreement and information that otherwise might not be brought up.

Psychological contracts are rooted in modern Western culture. The assumption that employees and managers welcome talking about their needs and reaching alignment with others is not universal. In some Confucian (East Asian) workplace cultures, it is assumed that the boss knows what is good for employees and that employees show loyalty by working hard in return. Such assumptions work against communication, and young workers often leave when their needs and expectations go unmet, rather than trying to talk about them. In the United States, members of the now-retiring Baby Boomer generation may not be very good at talking about these matters; they often prefer that others just do their

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duties and act their roles (Berman & Berman, 2011). Such attitudes are seen as increasingly dated, furthering mediocrity, and being incompatible with the younger generation and increased diversity in the United States.

Many employees are pleasantly surprised by how receptive or helpful their supervisors are to requests that make their performance and work life better; a little courage and initiative to approach one's supervisor can leave workers better off. Of course, all tools have limits, and a psychological contract clearly assumes that people can have a rational dialogue and are susceptible to reason—where this is not the case (e.g., see dealing with difficult people, below), stronger approaches are needed (e.g., employee progressive discipline or changing supervisors/jobs). Exhibit 6.4 shows an example of an actual psychological contract between a supervisor and her employee. One manager who used a psychological contract provides this positive feedback:

> I am pleased to say that all is going well with the psychological contract entered into with Ms. Johnson, Director of Development. We have continued to meet on a regular basis and discussion continues to be open and fruitful. Our meetings include each of us going over any project we feel the other needs to know about. While my door is always open to any staff member, Gail has taken the initiative to stop in more often just to touch base on pending projects.
>
> Over this past month, we have had to deal with some difficult issues, including the postponement of our largest event of the year, due to delays in a major project. She continues to work with a great deal of autonomy that is important to her, and

Exhibit 6.4 Sample Psychological Contract

What supervisor wants from employee:

- Timely arrival at work
- More engagement in oversight of Web maintenance and postings
- Preparation of weekly employment scorecard
- Preparation of weekly updates of orders, account totals, and monetary shortfalls
- Ensuring that orders are processed in compliance with joint forces travel regulations

What employee is willing to give to supervisor:

- Greater attention to punctuality
- More commitment to professional training in department
- More engagement in daily operations and more frequent updates on account balances and pending orders

What employee wants from supervisor:

- Training in new IT program
- Better understanding of use of weekly and monthly products
- Time to finish associate's degree

What supervisor is willing to give to employee:

- Enrollment in off-site training for IT upgrades
- Greater visibility on internal decision-making processes as well as feedback on internal politics and how they affect products
- Time off work to finish associate's degree

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because I see the result of her working within this capacity, I am happy to give her more independence. It has been a good experience, one that will continue. I hope to enter into such contracts with the other five department heads.

Exhibit 6.5 provides a case in which a psychological contract could be useful, perhaps along with some other practices and theories already mentioned. What do you think?

Giving Feedback

Feedback is evaluative information given to employees about their performance or behavior, the purpose of which is to influence future performance or behavior. It is increasingly being recognized as affecting motivation and behaviors. Employees should receive feedback frequently and consistently, in a timely and positive way. The effectiveness of feedback is lost when feedback is given sporadically, is far removed from the moment of performance, or is presented in less than constructive ways. Thus, feedback needs to be timely and frequent. A common error that managers make is to assume that workers are receiving feedback, such as through others, when in fact they may not be.

The term *positive feedback* is usually given for feedback that appraises and reinforces performance and behaviors that managers regard as positive and which they would like to see continue. The role of feedback is strongly present in motivation theories, such as MBO, as *4. Let me know how well I am doing in my work.* Most people enjoy a positive a comment, which validates (e.g., that impact has occurred) and, motivationally, lets people know that they are achieving job outcomes and that their efforts are being valued. These are important needs that motivate, and positive feedback may add to later review and reward

Exhibit 6.5 Short Case

"Congratulations! You have just been appointed as head of a city's environmental permitting unit. You supervise a staff of nine people—three (3) administrative assistants and four (4) regulatory analysts and two (2) senior regulatory analysts. Your initial observations about your unit are as follow. The former head has had a *loose and easy*, laissez-faire management style. While your new group seems to function and most people get along, a few people do take quite some liberties and at least three people, including one of the two senior regulatory analysts, are not up to speed on the latest science and regulations. One person is also a bit of a loner and though her performance ratings are satisfactory, she does not much participate in the group. Administrative systems are also a bit behind (though not so uncommon), and the backlog seems to be increasing, along with appeals and challenges. You are not facing any crisis, but it is clear that your boss expects some improvements in the next year. Last, you have extensive experience in this line of work, you surely do not wish future crises, and poor budget conditions, generally, imply that you will have to work with what you have (e.g., few, if any, extra resources available and employees who leave are not certain to be replaced). These are the fact as you see them.

Questions: (1) List the challenges that you face. (2) For each, what steps might you undertake? (3) How could establishing a psychological contract with each worker help manage performance and uncover further relevant facts?" What other practices, theories or aspects of motivation mentioned in this chapter can help you?

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processes, that also affect motivation. However, studies show that managers, according to employees, often fail to give them enough praise, hence, contributing to worker demotivation by default. Some research suggests that need for feedback is strongest among those with high needs for achievement (McClelland), and much less among those high power needs. This may well explain why managers fall short in this area according to others, and the nature and frequency of feedback is, anecdotally frequently observed in psychological contracts, too (e.g., Berman, 2006, 2003; Herold & Greller, 1977).

However, the point of feedback is sometimes to provide a balanced, evaluative assessment that include opportunities or even requirements for improvement, too. Such feedback must be given in ways that does not unduly demotivate (e.g., "You did wrong!"), but which includes an opportunity for further development that is being mutually supported, including for meeting future needs (say, continued career development). Theoretically, the approach is a bit akin to path-goal theory where the new goal is clarified and workers and managers agree on the path. Managers must be skilled in conversations that include negative feedback (i.e., feedback that intends to arrest or modify behavior). No one likes managers who avoid communication and give only praise, only until harsh criticism is delivered in unexpected meetings with HR staff and during annual reviews. Managers need to be able to deliver feedback that intends to make change, and, as mentioned above, do so in a timely and direct fashion.

The **strategy for feedback** is straightforward. Managers should specifically do the following:

- Provide balanced assessments of employees' performance (including both positive and negative aspects)
- Emphasize the objective nature of service outcomes (although some facts are indisputable)
- Establish their commitment to helping subordinates achieve positive results
- Work collaboratively with employees to develop strategies for improving performance (without imposing solutions)
- Help employees develop the perspective that they have the power to affect conditions for success
- Agree with employees on timetables for monitoring improvement
- Provide employees with strategies for obtaining support and feedback
- Offer employees future rewards for improvement

This approach helps minimize three problems that occur in practice: (1) Workers do not receive sufficient feedback, (2) feedback is given that does not contain adequate information, or (3) feedback is interpreted in ways that do not result in desired changes. Inadequate feedback can be frustrating for those who seek to do better but do not know exactly what is expected or required of them. Feedback that is curt or disrespectful is clearly dysfunctional. Impulsive or emotional outbursts of managers are apt to have negative and demotivating effects; such outbursts usually contain nothing that can be construed as being helpful and while they may induce short-term improvement, they can also cause long-term resentment.

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Managers are often less skilled in giving feedback than they think they are, even if they avoid the above issues. People who need little feedback think that others are just like them, and so they give little feedback, too. Some managers give feedback a bit too directly, perhaps with little social tact. It is therefore most helpful for supervisors to receive periodic feedback from subordinates—something some organizations now require. For example, one human resource director described her experience:

> I was evaluated by the city manager, assistant city manager, department directors, legal department, and other direct reports. Each responded anonymously to about 50 close-ended questions (scale from one to ten) and a half dozen open-ended questions. Some questions dealt with social and communication skills. The summary report by the consultant was 12 to 18 pages, outlining my strengths and weaknesses. (quoted in Berman & West, 2008, p. 747)

Feedback from managers is also needed in groups and teamwork. It is not easy or wise for individual employees to speak up (why alienate oneself from one's colleagues?), and managers have a key role in norming social interactions and performance expectations of groups. Psychological contracts are keenly useful in helping groups to articulate desired group norms and for later holding them accountable. It is common and productive to start new teams asking group members how they want to interact and how they think they should communicate with each other on specific matters. Then, when groups fail they can have discussion about this, and when one member deviates strongly from what has been accepted, managers can follow the above strategy for feedback dealing with the behavior or performance of such individual team members.

As has been stated, all tactics have their limits. Individualized approaches also exist for dealing with unsatisfactory performance and behaviors. There are instances in which feedback cannot wait until the next formal performance appraisal—sometimes performance is exceedingly poor and needs to be corrected quickly. The nature of underlying problems can be highly diverse. Sometimes a person might be in the wrong position and unable to get the work done well. There may not be a viable path to improvement in the current position; perhaps the supervisor or organization would do best to find another job for that person. Agreeing that any specific job is not the best obvious involves a process in which negative feedback has been given and has been accepted. It then allows for the possibility of mutually exploring alternative jobs and dealing with steps to make the transition as least disruptive, and demotivating, as possible for everyone.

In other instances, however, as the 25–50–25 rule predicts, some employees stubbornly refuse to be motivated. For example, some people are just plain unhappy, and others use being upset as a tool for gaining attention and control over others. Still, others bully coworkers and are destructive influences at work. And what is a manager to do when feedback based on rational discourse and a spirit of cooperation seem impossible or bear no fruit? The basic strategy of **dealing with difficult people** is to arrest patterns of interaction with the difficult person through avoidance, setting boundaries, and confronting each difficult behavior in appropriate and controlling ways (Bramson, 1981; Heathfield, 2018; Lubit, 2004). Typically, after several well-documented interactions, managers would do well to contact their human resource directors and discuss next steps. One such action is to remove the employee from interaction with mission-critical functions until he or she demonstrates improved performance and behaviors. A second action is for the manager to stand his or her ground on boundaries, setting limits that are not to be crossed (such as speaking rudely or coming in late). Over

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time, consistently and immediately responding to such problems can result in a pattern of documented poor performance that can be used in progressive discipline (see Chapter 10).

Unhappily for some supervisors and their organizations, the story is not always so straightforward. Difficult employees may seek to avoid being disciplined by corrupting, compromising, or blackmailing their supervisors through social or ethical embarrassment. Some threaten legal action, such as discrimination or harassment lawsuits. The possibility of people gathering *dirt* on others with whom they work over several months or years is very real, of course—everyone has said or done something that other people could try to use to their advantage. The quid pro quo of such silent agreements (or standoffs: "I won't embarrass or sue you if you don't . . .") can allow difficult employees to stay on the job for years. Sometimes, organizations even deal with such people by promoting them out of their current jobs. While we do not know what percentage of employees may be *difficult* in these extreme ways, a reasonable guess is that one out of every 15 to 30 employees could be described as (very) difficult, depending on how broadly one defines the term. Indeed, studies put the incidence of borderline and narcissist personalities, who typically exhibit manipulative (say, Machiavellian) behaviors at about 1-3 percent of the general population (Cohen, 2018). Hence, most administrators and workers will experience such employees sooner or later and, worse still, successful Machiavellians will be attracted to the power of managerial positions. Human resource directors earn their pay not only by creating conditions for motivation but also by being effective in helping managers and their organizations dealing with the darker side of human motives. Exhibit 6.6 provides a bit more reflection on poor people management in general.

Exhibit 6.6 Poor People Management

Good management is not only about doing the right thing; it is often about avoiding doing the wrong things. Being a manager means being confronted with one's own ways and instincts, which may not always be right. But it is not always easy to avoid these, and most managers have a few areas of weakness, for sure. Numerous sources of information about bad management and things that managers should avoid, many of which are the flip side of those stated here, are available online. For example, Heathfield (2017) identifies 10 mistakes that managers make:

- Not getting to know employees as people
- Failing to provide clear direction
- Failing to trust
- Failing to listen
- Failing to get input before decisions are made
- Failing to react to problems
- Trying to be friends with those who report to them
- Failing to communicate and withholding important information
- Not treating everyone equally
- Blaming employees rather than taking responsibility for when things go wrong

Many of these are mentioned or implied in this chapter—people skills are essential to performance, but when managers just do not see or correct their own deficiencies they become a source of worker demotivation and poor or mediocre performance. Getting managers to see their behaviors as problematic is often the first step toward improvement. Managers, too, benefit from receiving feedback.

Source: Adapted from Heathfield (2017).

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