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Assessing the predictive validity of emotional intelligence

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence has become a fashionable topic in the popular press, and has been heralded as an effective predictor of successful performance. However, little empirical evidence has borne out these claims. The present study was conducted in order to determine the relationship of emotional intelligence, cognitive ability, and personality with academic achievement. Emotional intelligence was assessed using the EQ-i (total EQ-i score and five EQ-i composite factor scores). Both cognitive ability and personality (in terms of extraversion and self control) were significantly associated with academic achievement. None of the EQ-i factor scores, nor the total EQ-i score, was significantly related to academic achievement. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. The incremental validity of emotional intelligence

Goleman (1995) suggested that successful life outcomes are more a function of emotional rather than cognitive intelligence. He proposed several definitions for this construct, including “a set of abilities which include self-control, zeal and persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself” (p. xii); and the ability to “control impulse and delay gratification, to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think, to empathize, and to hope” (p. 34).

The success of Goleman’s book and subsequent media reports concerning emotional intelligence and its measurement (e.g., Duffy, 1996; Gibb-Clark, 1996; Wigod, 1998) suggested this construct is novel, alluring, and popular. The internet contains many web sites for societies devoted to applying the principles of emotional intelligence, discussion groups related to the

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topic, and organizations marketing their own version of emotional intelligence tests. Capitalizing on the popularity of this construct, a new psychological instrument, the *Emotional Quotient Inventory* (EQ-i; Bar-On, 1997), is currently being marketed as the “world’s first scientific assessment of emotional intelligence” (Duffy, 1996, p.12).

1.1. Previous conceptions of emotional intelligence

However, over 70 years ago, [Thorndike \(1920\)](#) proposed the existence of a construct very similar to emotional intelligence, namely social intelligence. Thorndike suggested that intelligence could be organized under three broad dimensions: mechanical, abstract, and social. A person’s level of mechanical intelligence reflected an ability to manage things and mechanisms; abstract intelligence was an ability to manage and understand ideas and symbols; and social intelligence referred to an ability to understand and manage people (i.e., an ability to handle interpersonal situations).

Thorndike’s (1920) categorization prompted the development of instruments to assess each of these three types of intelligence. Although the majority of attention was devoted to assessing mechanical and abstract intelligence, some attempts were made to assess social intelligence. However, [Thorndike and Stein \(1937\)](#) expressed doubt that any verbally derived instrument could measure social intelligence. Over 20 years later, Cronbach (1960) concluded that after 50 years of intermittent investigation, social intelligence was yet to be fully defined and measured. He omitted discussion of this topic from subsequent editions of “*Essentials of Psychological Testing*”.

Despite Cronbach’s pessimism, other researchers continued to explore the viability of the social intelligence construct. For example, [Gardner’s \(1983\)](#) theory of multiple intelligences included interpersonal (understanding other people) and intrapersonal (understanding the self) intelligence. In studying individual adaption to the social world, [Cantor and Kihlstrom \(1989\)](#) suggested that social intelligence forms the cognitive aspects of personality and consists of declarative and procedural knowledge that is relevant to social life. Schneider, Ackerman, and Kanfer (1996) suggested that social intelligence is only one of several dimensions constituting the more global construct of social competence.

[Mayer and Salovey \(1997\)](#) argued that social intelligence is related to a more global construct, emotional intelligence, which comprises a group of abilities that are distinct from the traditional verbal–propositional/spatial-performance dimensions of intelligence. They presented a conceptual framework of emotional abilities that they believed constituted emotional intelligence. The framework reflected a four-level hierarchy ranging from basic psychological processes to more complex integrative processes. The ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotion is at the lowest level, the second level reflects an ability to use emotions to facilitate cognition. The ability to understand and analyze emotions constitutes the third level, and the ability to regulate emotions to facilitate emotional and cognitive growth reflects the most complex level of emotional intelligence ([Mayer & Salovey, 1997](#)).

Salovey and his colleagues have tried to operationalize some of these abilities through the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey & Palfia, 1995). This scale is reported to assess stable individual differences in attention given to moods and emotions (i.e., Attention), the discrimination among different moods and emotions (i.e., Clarity), and the

regulation of moods and emotions (i.e., Repair). Salovey et al. suggested that attention to clarity and repair of feelings is fundamental to the domain of emotional intelligence. Mayer and Gehler (1996) linked an ability to identify emotions in others with higher self-reported SAT scores. Mayer and Salovey (1997) stated that measures of emotional intelligence must assess actual abilities as opposed to self-reports of constructs such as optimism and motivation. They also stipulated that the existence of emotional intelligence cannot be demonstrated by asking people to report their level of emotional intelligence.

1.2. *The emotional quotient inventory*

Bar-On (1997) defined emotional intelligence as “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures”(p. 14). The emphasis on “non-cognitive” factors was a departure from more traditional conceptualizations of intelligence that reflect the importance of cognitive factors. Using this definition, Bar-On constructed the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) to assess emotional intelligence. The EQ-i is a 133-item self-report inventory that provides information on five composite factors (i.e., Intra-Personal Scale; Inter-Personal Scale; Adaptability Scale; Stress Management; General Mood Scale) and 15 sub-scales: (i.e., Emotional Self-Awareness, Assertiveness, Self-Regard, Self-Actualization, Independence, Empathy, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Responsibility, Problem Solving, Reality Testing, Flexibility, Stress Tolerance, Impulse Control, Happiness, and Optimism).

Unpublished reports cited in the *EQ-i Technical Manual* (Bar-On, 1997) suggested that scores on various sub-scales have been used to discriminate between successful and unsuccessful US Air Force recruiters (Handley, 1997; cited in Bar-On, 1997) and academically successful and unsuccessful students (Swart, 1996; cited in Bar-On, 1997). In the latter case, successful students scored significantly higher on total emotional intelligence, and on the sub-scales of Self-Actualization, Problem Solving, Reality Testing, Stress Tolerance, Happiness, and Optimism. Bar-On (1997) reported that such results suggest emotional intelligence is an important factor in predicting academic success.

1.3. *Emotional intelligence and personality traits*

Many of the EQ-i factors appear to be closely related to traditional personality traits. Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997) both conceived of emotional intelligence as a disposition or an affect rather than as cognitive ability. Bar-On’s (1997) definition of emotional intelligence specifically states that “. . . it is an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills” (p. 14). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), some popular interpretations of emotional intelligence may be misleading in that they pay little attention to the cognitive aspects of the construct. Furthermore, Mayer and Salovey (1997) suggested that cognitive abilities are often confused with temperament or personality traits.

Davies, Stankov and Roberts (1998) examined the relationships among various measures of emotional intelligence and personality. They concluded that objective measures of emotional intelligence are unreliable and that self-report measures show considerable overlap with traditional measures of personality.

Bar-On (1997) reported significant correlations between many sub-scales of the EQ-i and the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF 5th edition; Cattell, Cattell & Cattell, 1993). The 16PF of Emotional Stability assesses an individual's ability to manage life events and emotions. In data presented to support the construct validity of the EQ-i, correlations between the Emotional Stability factor and total EQ-i score ranged from 0.51 to 0.72 in several studies (Bar-On, 1997). Furthermore, Emotional Stability significantly correlated with Optimism ($r = 0.65$), Stress Tolerance ($r = 0.67$), and Self-Regard ($r = 0.64$). For a North American sample of 533 adults, Emotional Stability correlated significantly with all but the Empathy sub-scale of the EQ-i (Bar-On, 1997).

If we accept Mayer and Salovey's (1997) cognitively-oriented framework, the EQ-i may have questionable value as a measure of emotional intelligence. However, based on evidence of the high correlations between EQ-i and the 16PF (Bar-On, 1997), the EQ-i may provide a measure of affect or personality.

An increasing amount of research supports the view that measures of personality can add significantly to the prediction of both job performance (e.g., [Barrick & Mount, 1991](#); [Mount & Barrick, 1995](#); [Ones, Viswesvaran & Schmidt, 1993](#); [Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991](#)) and academic achievement ([Furnham & Medhurst, 1995](#); [Gallagher, 1996](#); [Tutton, 1993](#)). Bar-On (1997) claims that his model of emotional intelligence relates to the potential for performance rather than actual performance; nonetheless, recent reports in the media (e.g., [Duffy, 1996](#); [Gibb-Clark, 1996](#); [Murray, 1998](#); [Wigod, 1998](#)) and studies cited in *The EQ-i Technical Manual* (Bar-On, 1997; e.g., [Handley, 1997](#); [Swart, 1996](#)) make claims concerning the predictive validity of the EQ-i. The most notable of these claims is that the EQ-i is a more accurate predictor of success than are traditional measures of cognitive ability (Duffy, 1996). Wigod (1998) summarized an unpublished study reporting that EQ-i scores accounted for 27% of the variance in job performance, although cognitive ability accounted for less than 1%. Media reports also suggest that emotional intelligence has become part of management language (Gibb-Clark, 1996). Given the lack of published research regarding the criterion-related validity of the EQ-i, these statements are premature and a cause for concern.

1.4. Intelligence and performance

Cognitive ability tends to be a good predictor of academic performance. Measures of academic achievement (e.g., LSAT, GRE, SAT) correlate very highly with measures of cognitive ability (Ceci, 1996). Traditional tests of intelligence typically account for 25% of the variance in academic performance, depending on the test used ([Neisser et al., 1996](#)). The magnitude of the correlation is not surprising given that many tests of intelligence assess knowledge and skills obtained through formal education. However, 75% of the variance in academic performance remains unexplained.

The EQ-i purportedly measures the non-cognitive aspects of personal functioning, such as a student's ability to cope with environmental demands and pressures (Bar-On, 1997). In fact, *The EQ-i Technical Manual* claims that emotional intelligence is related to successful academic outcomes (Swart, 1996; cited in Bar-On, 1997). Therefore, we examined whether the EQ-i would account for variance in academic achievement scores after controlling for individual scores on a measure of cognitive ability. Furthermore, because there is evidence to indicate

significant correlations between scores on the EQ-i and measures of personality (Bar-On, 1997), individual scores on a personality measure were also controlled. That is, we examined whether the EQ-i was measuring aspects of personality (not measured by more traditional personality measures) that are related to academic achievement.

2. Method

Participants consisted of 180 students (118 women and 62 men) who were enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a Canadian university. They were told that their participation would involve completing several personality and intelligence inventories and that they would receive bonus points for course credit. The average age of respondents was 21 years old (ranging from 17 to 56). Participants were enrolled in either the Science, Arts, or Commerce faculties, and approximately one-third of the participants were first year students. Seventy-seven of the participants held full- or part-time jobs. Over two-thirds of the participants were single. Because of incomplete questionnaires ($n = 37$)¹ and exclusion of outliers ($n = 9$)², the data reported here are based on responses ranging from 137 to 160 students.

2.1. Predictor measures

2.1.1. General cognitive ability

Participants completed the Wonderlic Personnel Test (Wonderlic Personnel Test, Inc., 1992), as a measure of their cognitive ability. The Wonderlic, which was designed as a quick measure of general cognitive ability, has been described as a test of academic intelligence (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). It is a timed test consisting of 50 questions, and has a reported mean of 29.6 for college graduates (Wonderlic Personnel Test, Inc., 1992). The Wonderlic Manual reports that correlations between the Wonderlic and Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale range from 0.91 to 0.93 (Wonderlic Personnel Test, Inc., 1992).

2.1.2. Personality

In order to assess students' personality, respondents completed the 16PF (Cattell et al., 1993). Respondents indicated the extent to which 185 items were a true description of them (a = true; b = ?; c = false). Scores were then converted to STEN scores (i.e., range of 1–10). For the present study, the five global factors of the 16PF were used as an indicator of personality (i.e., Extraversion; Anxiety; Tough-Mindedness; Independence; Self-Control). Test–retest reliabilities for the five global factors have been reported to range from 0.84 to 0.91, with a mean of 0.87 (Russell & Karol, 1994)³.

¹ Because the tests were scored by the test distributor, the means could not be inserted for the missing data.

² Individual questionnaires containing responses that were ± 3 SD from the mean on the EQ-i and 16PF response style indices were omitted from the study.

³ Cronbach's alphas for the 16 sub-scales ranged from 0.64 to 0.85.

2.1.3. Emotional intelligence

In order to assess emotional intelligence, respondents completed the EQ-i (Bar-On, 1997). Emotional intelligence was calculated based on the total EQ-i score as well as scores from five composite factors (i.e., Intra-Personal Scale, Inter-Personal Scale, Adaptability Scale, Stress Management Scale, and General Mood Scale). As defined by Bar-On (1997), the Intra-Personal Scale measures the extent to which respondents are in touch with their own emotions, their self-confidence, and their degree of self-satisfaction. The Inter-Personal Scale assesses how the respondent interacts with and understands other people. The Adaptability Scale assesses how the respondent successfully solves problems and copes with demands. The Stress Management Scale measures the extent to which the respondent is able to withstand stress. The General Mood Scale assesses respondents' level of happiness and optimism (Bar-On, 1997). Respondents indicated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very seldom or not true of me; 5 = Very often true of me) the degree to which the statements represented themselves. Raw scores were standardized and transformed to yield a scale with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15 (Bar-On, 1997). As reported in the EQ-i manual, internal reliabilities of the 15 sub-scales that comprise the five factor scores range on average from $\alpha = 0.69$ to $\alpha = 0.86$ across 10 studies (Bar-On, 1997).⁴

2.2. Criterion measure

2.2.1. Academic achievement

Students gave the researchers permission to obtain their grade point averages (GPA; measured on a 4-point scale) in order to assess academic achievement. In accordance with the predictive design of the study, student's year-end GPA was collected four months after the administration of the cognitive ability, personality, and emotional intelligence measures.

3. Results

3.1. Correlates of academic achievement

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the study variables along with intercorrelations among the GPA, the Wonderlic, the five factors of the 16PF, and the EQ-i total score and its five composite factors. As expected, GPA was significantly correlated with the Wonderlic and with the Extraversion and Self-Control factors of the 16PF. That is, individuals who had higher cognitive ability, who were more introverted, and who had higher self-control, tended to have higher GPAs. Interestingly, the correlations between GPA and the

⁴ Bar-On (1997) does not report the reliabilities for the five composite factors. Because the tests were scored by the test distributor, reliability data for this scale in the present study were unavailable.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and internal reliabilities among the 16-PF and the EQ-i scales

	X	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. GPA	2.5	0.7												
2. Wonderlic	23.4	5.0	0.38***											
16PF:														
3. Extraversion	6.6	1.7	-0.23*	-0.18*										
4. Anxiety	6.0	2.1	0.02	-0.07	-0.38***									
5. Tough-Mindedness	5.4	2.1	-0.02	0.02	-0.26**	0.11								
6. Independence	6.1	1.8	-0.03	0.07	0.43***	-0.24***	-0.37***							
7. Self-Control	4.7	1.6	0.20*	-0.01	-0.06	-0.15	0.26***	-0.01						
EQ-i:														
8. Total EQ-i Score	100.7	16.4	0.01	0.08	0.46***	-0.77***	-0.11	0.44***	0.36***					
9. Intra-Personal Scale	98.5	27.3	-0.05	0.04	0.38***	-0.64***	-0.16*	0.56***	0.26***	0.92***				
10. Inter-Personal Scale	104.7	19.1	-0.04	-0.12	0.52***	-0.34***	-0.14	0.26**	0.39***	0.62***	0.49***			
11. Adaptability Scale	99.5	20.1	0.08	0.09	0.30***	-0.68***	-0.07	0.33***	0.35***	0.90***	0.73***	0.47***		
12. Stress Management	96.7	18.7	-0.04	0.12	0.23**	-0.71***	0.06	0.06	0.23**	0.75***	0.52***	0.26***	0.71***	
13. General Mood Scale	102.4	14.4	-0.09	-0.02	0.42***	-0.68***	-0.00	0.32***	0.16*	0.80***	0.74***	0.43***	0.59***	0.54***

*** $P < 0.001$, ** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$; n 's range from 137 to 160.

measures of EQ-i were all very low (coefficients ranged from $r = -0.09$ to $r = 0.08$, $P = \text{ns}$). The total EQ-i score and the five EQ-i factors were not associated with GPA.⁵ Of all scale scores of the 16PF and the EQ-i, only the Extraversion factor of the 16PF was significantly correlated with cognitive ability. That is, individuals who were more introverted tended to have higher cognitive ability scores.

3.2. Personality and EQ-i

The five factors of the 16PF were moderately correlated with each other (r 's = -0.24 to 0.43 all significant at $P < 0.01$), with four exceptions: Self Control was not related to Independence, Anxiety, nor Extraversion; and Anxiety was not related to Tough-Mindedness. The five EQ-i composite factors were positively intercorrelated with each other (ranging from 0.26 to 0.74 ; all significant at $P < 0.001$).

There was high multicollinearity among the factors of the EQ-i and the 16PF factors. With the exception of the Tough-Mindedness factor, all of the 16PF factors (i.e., Extraversion, Anxiety, Independence, Self Control) tended to be significantly correlated with the EQ-i total score and the five EQ-i composite factors (r 's = 0.18 to -0.77 , all significant at $P < 0.05$). Tough-Mindedness was correlated only with Intra-Personal EQ-i composite factor ($r = -0.19$, $P < 0.05$). Stress Management was not correlated with Independence. It is interesting to note that the Anxiety factor of the 16PF was highly correlated with Total EQ-i score ($r = -0.77$, $P < 0.001$) and with its five factors ($r = -0.38$ to $r = -0.71$, $P < 0.001$). That is, individuals who are low on emotional intelligence also tend to be highly anxious and neurotic.

We had planned to perform multiple regression analyses to examine the incremental variance explained by emotional intelligence. However, given that neither the total score nor the five factors scores were significantly correlated with GPA, these analyses were unnecessary. If none of the scores correlated with GPA, they would be unable to significantly predict an increase of variance in GPA.

4. Discussion

The initial purpose of this study was to examine the incremental validity of emotional intelligence in predicting academic achievement. However, when the correlation matrix was examined, further analyses were unwarranted. These results provide no support for claims of emotional intelligence's (as assessed by EQ-i) ability to predict academic achievement. That is, in contrast to reports in the EQ-i manual (Bar-On, 1997), neither the total EQ-i score, nor the five factors, were related with academic achievement (r 's ranged from -0.07 to 0.08). Despite the nonsignificant findings involving EQ-i, a different conceptualization and measurement of emotional intelligence may be more effective in predicting performance outcomes.

⁵ Because the EQ-i can also be assessed using 15 factors, and because Bar-On (1997) warns that overreliance on the total score or the composite scale scores may result in a loss of important information, the relationships between GPA with each of these 15 factors were also examined. However, none of these correlations were significant either (coefficients ranged from $r = -0.13$ to $r = 0.10$, $P > 0.05$).

4.1. Cognitive ability, personality, and academic achievement

The results do provide substantial evidence for the predictive ability of cognitive ability and personality measures. As expected, individuals who scored higher on the Wonderlic tended to have higher GPAs. This finding is supported by past research showing that cognitive ability tends to be associated with academic achievement ([Neisser et al., 1996](#)).

Two factors of the 16PF (Extraversion and Self-Control) were significantly correlated with academic achievement. That is, individuals who were more introverted and those individuals who were more serious, rule conscious, perfectionistic, and grounded tended to have higher GPAs. Past research involving personality and academic achievement support these results ([Furnham & Medhurst, 1995](#); [Gallagher, 1996](#)). These results are also understandable given that the Self-Control factor is positively correlated with the broad personality dimension of conscientiousness ([Russell & Karol, 1994](#)), which consistently relates to job performance ([Ones et al., 1993](#)).

4.2. What is emotional intelligence?

Correlations between the five 16PF factors and the five EQ-i composite factors ranged from 0.01 to -0.77 . Of the 25 possible correlations between the global factors of the 16PF and the five composite scales of the EQ-i, 20 were significant. These findings indicate considerable overlap in what the two scales are measuring. Even if we accept Bar-On's dispositional view of emotional intelligence, the 16PF does a better job of prediction of academic achievement. Moreover, of all of the 16PF factors, the EQ-i was most highly correlated with the Anxiety factor of the 16PF. These results support [Davies et al. \(1998\)](#), who concluded that self-report emotional intelligence scales tend to be "indistinguishable from established personality traits" (p. 1012).

4.3. Self-report data

This study was based largely on self-report responses that people may distort, particularly on personality measures, to create a favourable impression ([Barrick & Mount, 1996](#)). Furthermore, a distinction has been made between impression management and self-deceptive enhancement or denial ([Paulhus & Reid, 1991](#)). There was, however, no incentive for participants to try to create a favorable impression because responses were anonymous. Additionally, respondents with extreme scores on response-style indices (as defined by the technical manuals for the 16PF and EQ-i) were omitted from the analyses. The issue of self-deception is more complex. Although we acknowledge the possibility that unintentional self-deception plays a role in self-report indices, its impact on predicting outcome criteria remains unclear. However, the replication of well established relationships between cognitive ability and personality measures and academic achievement support the position that the response style of our sample was not atypical.

4.4. *Future research*

Despite the lack of strong support for emotional intelligence (as measured by the EQ-i) as a predictor of academic achievement, it remains an appealing construct. The lack of conclusive findings may be due, in part, to a lack of agreement among emotional-intelligence researchers on what constitutes emotional intelligence and how it should be measured. However, promising avenues of research into alternative measures of “emotionally-related” constructs are currently being explored.

One alternative area focuses on using basic emotions and moods to predict work-place behavior. According to Arvey, Renz and Watson (1998), emotions and moods may better predict specific behaviours in the short term because “unlike emotions, personality traits do not demand immediate attention.” (p. 113). In their summary of research in the area of emotionality and performance, Arvey et al. make a strong case for using measures of emotionality in the prediction of job performance.

Their argument leads into another research area that may be more directly related to emotional intelligence. Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) conceptual framework of emotional intelligence highlights the importance of connecting “emotions with intelligence (in order to ensure) the meanings of the two terms are ... preserved” (p. 3). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), the essence of emotional intelligence is the ability to manage moods. Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) conceptual framework bears directly on monitoring and regulating one’s emotions to achieve specific ends. They argue that in order to accurately measure emotional intelligence, objective measures that do not rely on self-assessment and that incorporate multiple emotional abilities must be designed (e.g., Salovey et al., 1995). Viewing emotional intelligence as an ability-related construct should result in the development of more promising assessment instruments.

4.5. *Implications for practice*

There is inadequate data, at the present time, to justify the use of the EQ-i as a selection device. Although Bar-On (1997) cautions users of the EQ-i to use scores only in conjunction with other sources of information, the manual claims that the EQ-i is useful as a selection tool in corporate and educational settings. Unfortunately, the general public, organizations, and popular press are very susceptible to claims made by test publishers concerning the usefulness of psychological tests. Such claims are often made based on research unavailable for review. It is premature to use measures of emotional intelligence as decision-making aids. Further research is necessary in order to better understand, define, and measure the construct of emotional intelligence.

4.6. *Concluding remarks*

Bar-On (1997) defined emotional intelligence as a collection of non-cognitive abilities. Our research strongly supports this claim. More specifically, our data provides evidence that the EQ-i is largely a measure of neuroticism that in turn, is unrelated to GPA and cognitive ability. Given the plentiful amount of research attesting to the lack of any substantial and

consistent relationship between neuroticism and cognitive ability (e.g., Ackerman & Heggstad, 1997; Brebner & Stough, 1995; Davies et al., 1998; Mayer, Caruso, Zigler & Dreyden, 1989), the lack of a significant relationship between the EQ-i and the ability measures is hardly surprising.

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