

# A Study on the Constraints and the Solutions in Silver Sport Industry

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the constraints that the workers in silver sport industry experience and the solutions. In this study, six workers in silver sport industry participating in the elderly job fair held in Ilsan in 2016 were selected as subjects and interviewed in depth. The sports equipment that the six subjects exhibited and their sales and PR (Public Relations) behaviors during the fair were observed, and they were interviewed about the current status of the sports goods industry, constraints as workers, and solutions to resolve the constraints. A senior sports goods developer analyzed sports goods development and PR process through a case study. The result of this study is as follows. The constraints of silver sport industry environment are constraints on investment and lack of research and development, legal and institutional constraints, and economic constraints. The constraints of the silver sport goods industrial field are anxiety for the production of unproven high-cost goods, constraints on unstable institutions, and constraints from the difficulties in collaboration. The solutions of such problems are as follows. First, it is needed to resolve the high production cost. Second, it is need to resolve the difficulties in delivery. Third, it is needed to resolve the difficulties in communication in the development stage.

## Keywords

Elderly, sports goods industry, employees, constraints, solutions

On February 3, 2016, the “Sports Industry Promotion Act” was completely amended. The “Sports Industry Promotion Act”, enacted in 2007, stipulated general matters concerning the sports industry, and had limitations in the encouragement and support of systematic sports industry development. The fundamental purpose of the amendment is that the sports industry is a field where the growth potential is very high considering the domestic and overseas markets and the field that needs to be encouraged and developed as a new growth engine that is responsible for the future of the country because it can create considerably good number of jobs compared to other industries. With the advent of the fourth industrial revolution era, the low birth rate and the increase of the aged have become global issues. They are serious

problems in Korea, too. In Korea, population aged 65 or older accounts for 11.2% of the population in 2010. It is forecasted to be 15.7% in 2020, and 30% in 2050. It can be said that an aging society has already arrived. As the tendency to place more importance on personal life becomes stronger, the number of single-family households, in particular, the number of the elderly single-family households increases. It is a social trend for the elderly to prepare for their own lives rather than to be taken care of by their family members. As part of a plan to support the difficulties of living due

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to changes in the industrial environment and the physical and mental health decline of the elderly, and to support the self-reliance of life through the necessary environment composition in the aged society, it can be tried to revitalize the silver sport goods market. Because exercises of the elderly can reduce medical expenses and help mental and psychological recovery of the elderly, it is required to develop silver sport goods such as exercise equipment considering physical characteristics and psychological desire of the aged. This can be a way to show the synergistic effect of organic development of sports and industry in Korea and solve the problem of the elderly. Sports goods and equipment have been developed in the dimension of welfare for the improvement of the quality of life, such as the development of sports science and the desire for improvement of sports performance, the sports policy for the improvement of the national health, and the reduction of the medical expenses, along with the development of high technology equipment based on ultra-modern technologies. Since the majority of the elderly in Korea stay at home, the importance of elderly household goods has been recognized in order to provide better assistance to the elderly and to assist the family and home nurses and health leaders in the care of the elderly as devices for assisting elderly or disabled people in relation to home care. There are many kinds of elderly health products on the market, such as health check products and physiotherapy goods, but most products are imported from overseas. These products are more expensive than domestic products and have a high market share. Silver products are household goods that the elderly maintain their normal life or those which are used for the elderly with disabilities to promote rehabilitation or the convenience of their daily lives. Since there is no legal concept for silver products in Korea, there is no unified management system for silver products. The most similar concept to the silver products is the "rehabilitation aids" for people with disabilities.

However, even the Rehabilitation Aids have been differently defined and regulated by many different laws and regulations such as "Welfare of Disabled Persons Act", "Honorable Treatment of Men of National Merit", "Customs Law", and "Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance Act". Therefore, it can be said that even the rehabilitation aids have no unified conceptual definition. Among the silver products on the market, the types of health appliances are classified as medical devices and general electric appliances. Medical appliances are controlled by the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law, and general household electrical appliances are managed by the Electric Appliance Safety Management Act. Most other household appliances are classified as industrial products and are managed by the Quality Management Promotion Act. However, since there is no management standard for silver products, it cannot be said that the good standards suitable for the elderly are being applied. New useful products for the elderly have attracted people's attention and become an important issue for the elderly. Optimal products have been developed and are making a big market. With the increasing demand of the elderly, silver appliances, supplies, and goods will be greatly increased and silver industry will prosper. In the future, policy support will be needed to improve the quality and expand demand base of silver products. Furthermore, the importance of product functionality, safety, and hygiene must be emphasized (Won et al. 2015). With the rapid increase of the elderly, the elderly sports goods industry should be stabilized not only in the dimension of sports welfare but also for continuous participation in sports activities. As the elderly population increases, the medical expenses for the elderly increase proportionally and it becomes a social issue. Through promotion of silver sport industry, it is possible to cultivate a sense of community among the generations by creating elderly related jobs as well as to improve the physical fitness of the elderly through exercise. However, in spite of the market size and

importance of silver sport industry, there is a lack of interest in silver sports field and few approaches have been made (Yang 2007). Currently, there are difficulties for developers and operators due to the restrictions on the laws related to the sports goods manufacturing industry. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to investigate the constraints of product development experienced by workers in the silver sport industry and to find out solutions. In this study, it was tried to investigate the constraints and the solutions in the development, sales, and promotion of silver sport products that the workers had experienced to stabilize the system that could guarantee desirable future of the silver sport industry. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, it was designed as a qualitative case study. The researcher induced the following research problems in the process of this study:

First, what are the environments of silver sport goods industry?

Second, what are the constraints of the workers working in the silver sport goods industry?

Third, what are the solutions of the problems that the workers have experienced?

## RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study is to investigate the participation constraints and the solutions for the product development, sales, and promotion of silver sports industry by applying qualitative research methods. In this chapter, the subjects of the study, the data collection method, the data analysis method, and the reliability and validity of the study are explained.

### *Subjects—Participants in the Study*

The subjects of the analysis in this study were special experiences of the workers in the silver sports equipment industry who participated in the silver industry exhibition. They were selected for the qualitative case study from the perspective of an

activist. The current situation of the silver sports industry and their perception of problems were examined. In addition, the subjects were selected among the participants of the Silver Industry Fair to examine the ways to stimulate the silver sports goods industry in the institutional dimension.

The reason why the employees of the elderly sports equipment industry were selected as subjects was to confirm the current status and problems of the elderly sports equipment based on the actual experiences of the workers in the silver sports industry. Through the subjects, their experiences in the current status and their perception on the problems of the silver industry were identified. Based on the findings, it was tried to find the solutions of the current problems.

The subjects were selected from the participants of the Silver Sport Fair using typical case sampling method (Glesne 2008). Those who were suitable for the study purpose within the category of sports and rehabilitation.

Subjects of this study were selected from the participants in the Ilsan KINTEX (Korea International Exhibition Center) Silver Industry Fair using the objective sampling method. Among the participants, the researcher selected those who were most proximate to the silver sports equipment field. The researcher explained the purpose and the contents of this study. The final subjects who were selected for this study were six people such as three sports goods developers and sellers and three PR (Public Relations) workers.

### *Data Collection Methods*

To carry out this study, the researcher prepared for four weeks, collected data for 12 months, and analyzed the data for another five weeks. Data were collected using interview method, which is the most-widely used general method, and participant observation method, in which the researcher participated in Silver Industry Fair and observed

characteristics of the participants. For the in-depth interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview methods were used together. First, the researcher participated in Silver Industry Fair as an observer for the 12 months' data collection period. Intensive observation was made on weekends and on weekdays, general activities of the subjects were observed. The semi-structured interviewing is a kind of interviewing method in which the interviewer transforms the content of the question or the way of asking questions to suit the situation, although it is conducted based on the questions of the appropriate questionnaire, in order to gather in-depth information on the personal background, participatory attitudes, and situation of the participating group. In the unstructured interviews, the questions raised from the observation of the activities of the cyber sports community were asked first. Questions derived from the answers of the subjects were followed. Using this interviewing method, the data were collected from formal interviews and informal interviews. In the formal interviews, the whole conversations were recorded with the permission of the interviewees. In order to ensure the reliability of the data, the recorded contents were transcribed in the word of the interviewee and converted to text, so that it could be used as basic data for analysis and interpretation. In addition, informal interviews were recorded using field notes. During the interviews, all the communicative behaviors such as the words, actions, and expressions of the subjects were recorded in the study notes as concrete as possible. The researcher tried to find out the constraints that the workers in silver sport industry experience and solutions of those constraints through in-depth interviews. For this purpose, the researcher selected the subjects participating in the fair through the participating observation and composed good relationship with the selected participants. Based on the good relationship, the preliminary interview was conducted. Preliminary interviews were conducted on the six subjects of this

study using an unstructured interviewing method. It was conducted for 30 to 40 minutes per subject. Based on the data obtained through the preliminary interviews, the interview scope and the interview contents for the in-depth interview were set. The interview questions were pre-edited with questions that were mixed with semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews, and efforts were made to obtain in-depth and high-quality information on related topics. From the six subjects, three subjects who were appropriate for the research themes were selected. The in-depth interviews were executed once per group for 50 minutes in average. The interviews focused on the opinions of the participants on the purpose of participation in the Silver Industry Expo, the status and prospects of the silver sports equipment industry, and the overall development, sales, and PR of sports equipment. In-depth interviews were held at the Silver Industry Expo site for the convenience of the participants. The exact place and time were selected where and when the participants could concentrate on the interview. The researcher, along with the role of the moderator in charge of the in-depth interview, tried to allow participants to talk freely by minimizing the intervention of the researcher. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and converted into text. Participation observation was conducted from November 3 to 5, 2016 at the 12th Korea Senior & Welfare Expo (SENDEX 2017, hereinafter referred to as SENDEX) hosted by Ilsan KINTEX. SENDEX started as the first government-sponsored senior-friendly industrial exhibition in Korea in 2005 and was appointed as an accredited exhibition by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy in 2009. It is the oldest event in the domestic senior welfare industry and is held annually. In 2016, Middle Aged & Senior Career Fair was held at the same time. The Korea Senior & Welfare Expo (SENDEX 2017) is the largest silver fair in Korea where you can experience various items and services of silver industry such as living &

lifestyle, life design, healthcare & beauty, senior friendly goods & nursing, auxiliary engineering, and rehabilitation. At the first day, the researcher was explained the purpose and the characteristics of the fair through presentations by the KINTEX Fair responsible officer. The participating observation sites of this study were mainly inside and outside of the fair. The researcher observed the site in general through participation and participated in the same event (SENDEX 2017) held from November 9 to 11, 2017 to see the changing trend.

### *Data Analysis*

In this study, the research articles, academic papers, and specialized books related to the silver sport industry were collected and used as supporting data to confirm the background and institutional basis of the silver sports goods industry. The materials obtained from literature review and in-depth interview notes were converted to texts for the textual analysis. The specific analysis processes are as follows:

First, it is the transcription stage. In this stage, non-participation observation contents and formal and informal interviews were recorded in the computer. Second, it is the coding stage. Raw materials were systemized and reorganized by categorizing them according to themes so that they can be expressed by compact phrases through repetitive reviews. Third, it is the stage of theme and meaning creation. Based on the rearranged concepts through the classification analysis to analyze the categorized data by area, the results are derived by conceptualization of the codes that are related or have similar contents. Among the various kinds of collected data, the transcript of in-depth interviews was used as the core data to derive the results of this study.

### *Validity and Reliability of the Study*

In this study, data were collected in various ways to secure the authenticity of the study. The multi-faceted collection of data such as literature review, in-depth

interviews, and participatory observation research notes were devices to ensure the authenticity of research. During the data collection and the research period, efforts were made to secure the authenticity of the research through concrete reports, meetings, and presentations about the research methods and processes with the experts. In particular, research participants were actively involved in the process of this study (reviewing whether the collected data were valid or not, and reviewing the transcript and research results), so that the research results could be persuasive through interactions between the researcher and the participants. The validity of the results of the study was confirmed by checking the members of the study participants, and the results derived from the study were described in depth to ensure the reliability (Guba and Lincoln 1981).

The researcher explained the purpose and the method of the study to the candidates before selecting the subjects of the study and distributed Research Participation Consent Form which contained the signature of the both parties such as the researcher and the participant (An Original Copy: For Researcher and For Participant). The conversations were recorded with the consent of the participant. The researcher took extra care not to leak the collected data to outside. In addition, in the document (Consent Form), the right of the participant to leave the research at any time during the process was specified and it was also notified verbally. The names of research participants were presented as aliases to prevent unnecessary leakage of personal information.

## **CONSTRAINS AND SOLUTIONS IN SILVER SPORT INDUSTRY**

The purpose of this study was to identify the constraints that the workers in the silver sport industry experienced and to find out the solutions of the problems through the qualitative research method. In order to elucidate this purpose in depth, the following

research problems were formed:

First, what are the environments of silver sport goods industry?

Second, what are the constraints of the workers in the silver sport goods industry?

Third, what are the solutions of the problems?

In this chapter, based on the data obtained through field observation and interviews, the concept was generated and patterns were formed according to the categorization and the formation of the mechanism was explained.

### *Environments*

In this section, the actual empirical materials were interpreted based on the discovered categories in order to elucidate the environment of the silver sport goods industry. Through such analysis, it was possible to identify the lack of industrial base of the small-sized companies, lack of products tailored for the seniors, and lack of domestic products in particular. First, it is about the poor industrial base of small- and medium-sized enterprises. It is hard for small-sized companies to invest in R&D (Research and Development) due to lack of funds and manpower. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is the lack of commercialization and follow-up support system of national R&D projects. If the same situation persists, it can be predicted that the silver sports goods industry may be stagnated. Additionally, most of silver products are not tailored for the elderly but transformed from the goods for the disabled. They are not convenient for the elderly to use in their everyday life as the needs of the elderly are different from those of the disabled. Finally, most of the silver products sold in the domestic market are imported. The elderly neglected those products as they are too expensive. Sports goods industry in Korea does not have a world-class global brand and does not escape from the primitive stage formed with small-sized companies because of insufficient brand strategy and absence of systematic management (Kim 2014). It is difficult for

a SME (Small Medium Enterprise) to invest in R&D due to lack of funds and manpower. One of the reasons for this is the lack of commercialization and follow-up support system of national R&D projects, and if the same situation persists, it could lead to the stagnation of the silver sports goods industry. In Korea, the law related to welfare equipment for the elderly has not been systemized yet and management and publicity have not been made properly. It is also very important to have a quality management system because the current certification system for the welfare equipment is industry autonomous certification. It is urgent to have quality management system for silver sport products. The reasons why there is no global brand in domestic sports equipment industry can be strong presence of existing brands, absence of domestic sport equipment brand, lack of market exploration ability, narrow market, and lack of marketing ability and technology (Yoo 2011). In order to create a good environment for sports industry, it needs to be improved.

### *Constraints*

In this section, the constraints of the workers in the silver sport industry were identified.

Through such analysis, it was found out that there were the problems such as anxiety about the production of expensive goods, the unstable system, and the difficulty of collaboration with experts. First of all, it is an element of instability for the production of expensive goods. Considering that most of the silver sport goods companies are small- and medium-sized enterprises, high production cost can be a burden. It is expected that they will have difficulties in continuous growth. In addition, in 2003, the government established the "Presidential Committee on Ageing and Future Society" which is a presidential advisory organization. Since March 2006, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy had launched and supported the Association of Senior Friendly Product Industry Association. It also propels the legislation of

the senior-friendly industry support law. Nevertheless, there are still many institutional difficulties in the field. On the other hand, it is frequently mentioned that the active participation of the experts is needed.

It can be confirmed by the following statements of the participants:

The body costs 330,000 won, and the main system costs 550,000 won. With this price we hardly have margin. If not, what is the acceptable price by the professional group. They were developed for training centers or senior citizen centers. We thought it would be good if those places have one or two of these products. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "A" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

Development costs much. It costs high to make even a single product. As almost everything is processed manually, the price has to be high. To make mass production, we need to know the demand. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "B" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

In institutional terms, it is a medical device. So it should be approved by the KFDA ... It is hard to say that it is difficult because it is an essential element. The most difficult part is the insurance. For example, if these products are installed in the hospital, and when patients go and exercise for about 30 minutes, the insurance will pay billions. However, the rental is not covered by the insurance. Beds and similar things are covered by the insurance but the exercise equipment like this is not covered. If the insurance company pays for this equipment, the market can grow. But as far as I know there is no such movement in the insurance. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "B" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

It is not clear what the law says on these products for seniors. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "B" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

When making a device, it is not easy to develop it because of the responsibility... Most of experts work in universities or medical schools as doctors or professors. It is difficult for them to be actively involved with the development. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "B" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

First, regarding the economics of silver products in the anxiety about the manufacturing high price equipment, it refers to "expenses to buy the equipment, time and convenience". It is consistent with the study result by Jang (2013) addressing that the economic

value of the product would be low, if the elderly could not buy it because of high price, no matter how good a product should be.

Second, it dealt with the things related to unstable institution. Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism introduced sports goods certification system with investment of .8 to .9 billion won annually from 2004 to 2011. The 78 kinds of facilities such as school physical education facilities enacted certification standards, developed certification computer system, and created certification marks (KISS—Korean Institute of Sports Science). They introduced 120 kinds of machineries for test and investigation (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism 2012). Regardless of various kinds of efforts by the government, the concerned complained the difficulties relating with insurance.

Third, most of sales people in silver sport industry are developers who majored in engineering. They felt that it was necessary for a PR expert to participate in the sales activities. They also felt it necessary for the field experts such as professors in sports and medicine and doctors to participate in the development.

### *Proposed Solutions*

Finally, in this section, in-depth interviews were analyzed to find out what would be the solutions:

Right now, it's a very expensive type. To make it cheaper, we need to make sure that there is a market and the market will be growing. We have been sponsored by universities and we have used all the possible aids from outside to reduce the unit price. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "A" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

For this product, we are aiming at the sports centers, senior citizens' centers, and the rehabilitation medical centers. The concept of selling the goods to senior citizens' centers is somewhat strange ... It is difficult to sell equipment to an individual senior citizens' center. It is better to promote to organizations or sell it to the local governments or institutions so that they will install them in the places where the aged can go frequently. You may see the exercise equipment in the Han River Park. To do that, we need to win the bid after submitting a proposal. But we are

not at that stage. Maybe it can be used in military... It is being discussed now. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "B" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

As our product aims at recycling, I think we need something like clinical trials. But we did major neither in medicine, nor sports. We majored in engineering. Therefore, there was actually a little difficulty in this area. We have consulted with some certified sports therapists to get help. But those experts focused on sports players or trainers and they did not focus on seniors or the disabled. They actually did not know very well about the rehabilitation of the elderly or the disabled. So I hope you get some help with those things. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "A" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

As all of us are engineers, we have a lot of difficulties in creating logos etc. This time we got help from the experts. Design no, I think it is a concept ... We wrote all of the texts, but it looks like the materials in the conference. We tried out best to make it nice and tidy ... but now the logo and the design. We get help from professionals. I think that we need something like this. If we want to do something professional, we should cooperate with the corresponding expert group. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "A" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

At first the professor of medicine intended to develop together. But the plan changed and he participated in this project as an advisor only. It's because he did not want to be considered as a businessman. He thought it would be better to contribute to the development of such a good product in others' eyes. (Developer and Seller of Senior Product "B" in the Silver Product Manufacturer R)

Based on these interpretations, we could approach the solution of the constraints of the silver sports equipment industry. Although the silver sport goods industry is recognized as a promising industry in the future, it is difficult to forecast the future demand and to identify the target customers. It is necessary to identify the needs of leisure welfare facilities by seniors through detailed survey. With the active research and development according to accurate demand survey results, the silver sports equipment industry will be able to develop and sell the products with more confidence. On the other hand, the developers and sales people in silver sports industry were expecting to collaborate with specialists in medicine and sports as well as PR. Most of the

developers and sales people working in silver sports goods industry majored in engineering. Therefore, they had to get consultation with experts in the field of sports, exercise, and rehabilitation of the elderly. If they can have more communication with those experts or if the experts can participate in the development directly, these problems can be solved.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the constraints of participation in the silver sports industry and solutions to establish a system that can guarantee the desirable future of the silver sport goods industry. The followings are the study results obtained from a case study. First, there are constraints of anxiety from the products that have not been proven yet. Second there are constraints related with unstable institution. Third, there are constraints from the lack of collaboration. The solutions to overcome those problems are as follows. First, to resolve the high production cost, they have supports and get some help for the material processing. Second, they appealed difficulties relating with sales of the product, lack of sales place. Third, it was found that they were overcoming difficulties with the advisory and consultation from medical professors, sports experts, and PR experts. As the society is ageing and the number of the elderly living alone is increasing because of nuclear family, the market for silver sport goods is growing. However, there is a lack of preparation of system and contents for such situation. Even companies, which specialize in silver products, rely on imported products rather than domestic products, raising concerns that the domestic welfare goods industry will be eroded because of foreign companies. It is necessary to identify the constraints and solutions at the present stage so that the silver sports industry workers can create new values focusing on future sports and prepare the new growth engine in preparation for the coming ultra-high aged



society and the fourth industrial revolution. We need to secure the administrative and financial ground to nurture this industry as new growth engine industry. Additionally, we should flexibly respond to the rapidly changing sports industry environment by providing institutional devices for the convenience of use and the activation of distribution. With those countermeasures, we can enforce the competitiveness in the international sports industry and contribute to the development of national economics. It is expected that it will propose contents development direction and countermeasure strategy development standards for silver sport goods industry. Korea Institute of Industrial Technology (2012) proposed in the policy task for future activation in the contents of policy report related to “Wellness Industry” centering on sports that consumer value-centered “Future Demand Exploration”, “Convergence Ecosystem Creation” between recognition concepts and fields for creating new values, and the formation of “Creative Economic Ecosystem” centered on knowledge economy value are the strategic directions to enhance the competitiveness of the industry (Kim 2015). The conclusion based on the findings of this study is as follows:

First, in terms of “convergence ecosystem creation”, detailed job sharing and strategic collaboration of development, sales, and PR are needed. It is necessary for the experts majoring in the elderly and sports to participate in the development of silver sport goods to maximize the safety and practicality of the products. Additionally, sales of the products can be expedited both at home and abroad by collaborating with professional companies for publicity and marketing.

Second, in terms of consumer value-centered “future demand exploration”, the access to the places where the products can be sold should be easier. Even if a good product is developed, it is useless if there is no customer. To this end, relevant market analysis and demand survey are indispensable. It is possible to link

with facilities such as silver towns and nursing hospitals. It can also be used as equipment for other people than the elderly such as military soldiers. They can be used as the equipment for basic physical strength training.

Third, it is necessary to develop silver sport goods for the improvement of physical fitness of healthy seniors by creating “creative economy ecosystem” centered on knowledge economy value. It is important to develop contents that meet the needs of middle-aged, young people and the healthy elderly, and the elderly with economic capability.

Korea has the fastest rate of aging and low birth rate in the world. In order to cope with social problems due to the low birth rate and quickly ageing society and to prepare for the fourth industrial revolution, we should focus on the silver sports goods industry and prepare for the market. Based on the above conclusions, the followings are proposed for future researches:

First, in this study, the case study method was used to analyze the silver sport goods industry. It is proposed that the future research should study the policy priorities of the related expert groups for the infrastructure construction of the silver sports goods industry.

Second, it is also meaningful to analyze relationship between the silver sport goods industry and various indicators to explain the industry.

Third, it is also necessary to study the market size and induction coefficient of the silver sports goods industry in order to identify the long-term growth and development processes.

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