

# Assessing Local Administrations In Respect Of Public Relations: Eskişehir Tepebaşı Municipality Sample

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## ABSTRACT

Today, local administrations have an important position in societies. Concepts particularly including participation, citizen orientation and transparency started to gain important position within management approach. Accordingly, local administration restructuring gained significance.

Local administration services should be managed in a professional manner. Good servicing, satisfaction of the local community from the services offered and trouble-free performance of works related with local administration are examples for most significant issues pertaining to local administrations. Accordingly, it is extremely important for local administrations that they understand expectations of citizens very well in order to strengthen communication with the citizen and that they even make efforts to create optimum structure via measuring those expectations. Undoubtedly, establishment of this structure cannot be considered independent from the concept of public relations, since significant part of studies conducted for satisfaction of the citizen is included within scope of public relation activities. For example, announcement of studies conducted by local administration in fields such as environment, infrastructure, culture and art, and measurement of citizens' satisfaction level due to those studies can be perceived as an extension of public relations.

When current customer relations management is viewed from the market perspective, it is included in the marketing approach. This requires a differentiation process. When the literature is reviewed, the most significant stage of the differentiation is customer relations. Just in the case of companies, local administrations should pay attention to this relation. Customer Relations Management (CRM) operationally and analytically addresses the establishment of desired relations with customers. This is a new management approach. This study also analyzes the relation between the local administration and the citizen based on this method within the context of public relations.

Based on the concept of public relations which reserves an important position within the field of communication, this study intended to measure how the Tepebaşı Municipality affiliated to the Eskişehir province is perceived by the citizen. Intending to investigate whether citizens are satisfied with the municipality and whether citizens are aware of studies conducted by the municipality, this study is primarily based on concepts of public relations and customer satisfaction. In the second section of the study, a questionnaire form and a scale were created based on those concepts. The questionnaire form was applied to approximately 400 subjects residing at the settlement areas affiliated to the Tepebaşı Municipality. In conclusion, data was analyzed and efforts were made to draw conclusions on how the local community perceives and views the municipality.

**Key Words:** Public Relations, CRM (Customer Relations Management), Local Administrations

## ÖZET

Günümüzde toplumlarda yerel yönetimler önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Özellikle katılımcılık, vatandaş odaklılık, şeffaflık gibi kavramlar yönetim anlayışı içinde önemli yer tutmaya başlamıştır. Bu yüzden yerel yönetimlerin yeniden yapılanmaları önem kazanmıştır.

Yerel yönetim hizmetleri profesyonel bir biçimde yönetilmek durumundadır. İyi hizmet verme, verilen hizmetten yerel halkın memnun olması ve yerel yönetime bağlı işlerinin sorunsuzca yürümesi yerel yönetimlerin en önemli konularından biridir. Bu nedenle yerel yönetimlerin vatandaş ile iletişimleri

güçlendirmeleri için vatandaşın beklentilerini çok iyi anlaması hatta bu beklentileri ölçerek daha mükemmel bir yapıyı oluşturmaya çalışmaları önem kazanmaktadır. Kuşkusuz bu yapıyı oluşturma halkla ilişkiler kavramından ayrı düşünülemez. Çünkü vatandaşın memnun olması için yapılan çalışmaların büyük bir kısmı halkla ilişkiler faaliyetleri içerisinde yer almaktadır. Örneğin, yerel yönetimlerin çevre, altyapı, kültür ve sanat gibi alanlarda yaptıkları çalışmaların hem duyurulması hem de bu çalışmalardan halkın memnun olup olmadığı ölçülmesi halkla ilişkilerin bir uzantısı olarak algılanabilir.

Günümüzde müşteri ilişkileri yönetimi piyasa açısından bakıldığında pazarlama anlayışının içinde yer almaktadır. Bu bir farklılaşmayı getirmektedir. Literatüre bakıldığında bu farklılaşmanın en önemli ayağı müşteri ilişkileridir. Şirketler gibi yerel yönetimlerde bu ilişkiye dikkat etmek durumundadır. CRM müşterilerle istenilen ilişkilerin sağlanmasını operasyonel ve analitik olarak ele almaktadır. Bu yeni bir yönetim anlayışıdır. Yapılan çalışmada halkla ilişkiler bağlamında bu yönetime dayanarak yerel yönetim, vatandaş ilişkisini analiz etmektedir.

Çalışmada iletişim alanı içerisinde önemli bir yer tutan halkla ilişkiler kavramını temel alarak Eskişehir iline bağlı Tepebaşı Belediyesi'nin vatandaş tarafından nasıl algılandığını ölçmeye yönelik bir araştırmadır. Vatandaşın belediyeden memnun olup olmadığını ve belediyenin yaptığı çalışmalardan vatandaşın haberinin olup olmadığını araştırmak amacıyla yapılan çalışma öncelikle halkla ilişkiler ve müşteri memnuniyeti kavramlarından yola çıkmıştır. Çalışmanın ikinci bölümünde bu kavramlar temel alınarak bir ölçek oluşturulmuştur. Hazırlanan anket Tepebaşı Belediyesine bağlı mahallelerde yaşayan yaklaşık 400 kişiye uygulanmıştır. Sonuç olarak veriler çözümlenmiş ve yerel halkın belediyeyi nasıl gördüğü ve algıladığı üzerine sonuçlara ulaşılmaya çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Halkla İlişkiler, Müşteri İlişkileri Yönetimi (MİY), Belediye

## Introduction

Local administrations in Turkey are organized under three groups including special provincial administrations, municipalities and village administration (MIGM, 2006:8-9). Municipalities are the first type of local administration coming due to mind, which are very close with the public, both due to organization type and duties and responsibilities. In terms of authorities and responsibilities, municipalities are continuously in contact with the society. Today, intensity and variety of this interaction increased. In the contemporary municipal work, policies are generated over concepts such as “social municipal work” and “increasing awareness of being urban dweller”. Traditional management techniques had lost effect and validity in the globalizing world. Public relations are regarded as a function of management in the contemporary municipalities and its significance is increasingly felt in the developing media environment (Atik, 2009). Communication is important for human to adapt to the various needs and wishes and to restructure. The power ensuring the balance between enterprises and customer is provided by continuous and open communication, but not by order and organizational structure (Granstedt, 2002: 287). This also necessitates scheduled and regular public relations activity with regards the service efficiency.

The municipalities, the non-profit organizations providing public service, are required to recognize and execute communication with the society as a function of

management both due to duties and political qualifications. Communication management or public relations management is planning, implementing and assessing results of the communication process, which correctly operates from the municipality towards the public and from the public towards the municipality. This bidirectional flow states the communication strategy, which should be implemented by a successful municipality (Yayınoğlu, 2005: 196). The customer oriented service management, originating from total quality management, is defined as the top level organizational aim for meeting needs of clients. Webster defines the being customer oriented as organizing all activities in order to offer top level service and regarding customers at first rank for each work performed by the organization (Cited by Chen et al., 2004: 415). Organizations need to attach importance to customer oriented management philosophy in order to survive in the intense competition environment. Undoubtedly, the customer satisfaction is one important measure of the success for activities undertaken by organizations.

Espejel et al. (2008) define the customer satisfaction as an expression for or an overall evaluation about goods and services. It is suggested that customer satisfaction has three principal components.

- Customer satisfaction is an emotional or cognitive reaction.
- This reaction occurs as a consequence of focusing on a particular issue (expectations, product and consumption experience).
- The reaction evolves at a particular time point (following consumption, following a preference and based on cumulative experience) (Cited by Yıldırım, 2009: 102).

Communication strategy is based on the view that the informed status of the society is natural right in terms of operating public services in the recent modern societies. Each citizen desiring to benefit from the services offered by the public organizations is informed about both the completion phase of his own processes and the official approach of the organization and he also wants to apply to relevant authorities. During these phases, public relations department is regarded as the unit which is felt closest to him. At this stage, public relations activities are the pioneering process, which is highly significant for public institutions and organizations.

The most significant reason, which emerges the public relations and makes it important, is the increasing need of information exchange by human and institutions.

Tortop (1990) states that public relations are regarded as an obligation and duty for public management and private enterprises of our age. The reason originates from two points: The first one is that the desire and obligation to inform the public has increased: second one is about feeling the necessity to establish close relations with managers for public authorities and other institutions (Cited by Canöz, 2008: 357). Whether it originates from the need of informing the public or the need of relation with managers, mutual dialog, influencing and being influenced by the human, in other words bidirectional communication and feedback are the basis of public relations. Based on this perspective, the necessity to convey correct information to correct address via correct channels within the pre-defined time emerges in the public relations.– After the information reaches the target within pre-defined time and it causes anticipated effect, it should also return to the original source together with the reaction of the target in a safe and rapid manner. As a result of smooth and lapse-free realization of the above mentioned process, public relations study may gain the desired outcome. Otherwise, the information failing to return to the source has no positive value from the perspective of the source. Because the target sending the message learns the views of target audience on the subject via feedback and thus, it will endeavor to create a common ground in accordance with the need of the institution and the target audience using the feedback data (Canöz, 2008: 358). Within context of public relations particularly in local administrations, customer relations management is also of a significant position.

The concept of Customer Relations Marketing is the result of current marketing approach. For markets, competitive power always needs differentiation from others. Today, as differentiations arising out of the technological advances are not long-term, it will not be possible in the long term to provide a unique sale offer to the customers. Therefore, customer relations is indicated as one of the most important ways of differentiation (Demir & Kırdar, 2009: 300). Customer relations is a process, which is established between the institution and the customer, involves all pre- and post-sale acts and includes mutual benefit and need satisfaction (Odabaşı, 2003:3). In order to strengthen the relation development process, marketing experts advocates that companies should meet with individual customers and use customer relations management tools that enables arrangement of marketing programs in accordance with the reactions given by the customer to the marketing elements. Customer Relations Management (CRM) is the means of communicating with consumers. However, in

another aspect, it also implies the peer-to-peer communication of the customer with the company. CRM systems involve any and all types of services ranging from call centers undertaking the consultancy services of the Company to communication with customers/citizens. A phone call or mail reminding your appointment tomorrow in the institutions about an issue related with you is also originating from the CRM service. Or a phone call asking your expectations from the institution is also a part of CRM (Solomon; 2003,123). As it is stated by Solomon, local administrations should perfectly operate the process of communication particularly with the citizen within context of CRM in order to compete with local administrations affiliated to different political parties.

As it is widely known, CRM is consisted of four stages. These stages are customer selection, customer acquisition, customer protection and customer retention. Considering local administrations, among above mentioned stages, customer protection and customer retention gain importance. Customer protection process is about ensuring loyalty of the customer, retaining him/her in the institution and ensuring loyalty and sustainability of the relation. From the perspective of local administrations, customer retention process is the long-term protection and sustainability of the citizen's loyalty (Demir & Kırđar, 2009: 302).

### **Method**

In the public administration, local administrations are the unit which has closest relations with the public. Recently, trends of change also started in local administrations, and making differentiation efforts via local economic structuring, local administrations began to develop strategies for improving services offered to the public. Local administrations and institutions are established for fulfilling demands and needs of the local community. One of the important points required to considered is the ability to measure the extent of public satisfaction with regards the fulfilling services and to realize citizen oriented service offer by developing corrective-preventive activities.

Recently, when customer relations management is examined from perspective of market, it is included in marketing approach. This is associated with differentiation. When literature is searched, the most important component of the differentiation is the customer relations. Just as it is the case for companies, local administrations should also take this relation into account. CRM addresses establishment of relations with customers from operational and analytical windows. This is a new management

approach. This study also analyzes the relationship between local administration and the citizen based on this method within context of public relations.

In the public management, the unit with closest relations with the public is local administration. Recently, winds of change started to blow in local administrations and they appear to have efforts towards differentiation based on local economic structures and thus, local administrations started to develop strategies in order to improve services offered to the public. Local administrations are establishments which are founded in order to fulfill needs and demands of local community. One point requiring special interest is about measuring level of satisfaction on side of public when such services are offered and achieving citizen oriented service offer by developing corrective – preventive activities.

In the light of this fact, this study is a research conducted for determining way of citizens perceiving the Tepebaşı Municipality affiliated to Eskişehir province, based on the concept of public relations which has a significant position in the field of communication.

A study is designed in order to determine whether citizens residing at quarters affiliated to Tepebaşı Municipality are satisfied with municipal public relations activities and to emphasize the significance of the satisfaction for public relations. Under umbrella of this overall purpose, the sub-aims requiring analysis are as follows:

- Are citizens satisfied with solutions offered by municipality to social problems (environmental pollution, human health, city planning etc.)?
- Is the citizen satisfied with services offered by municipal officers?
- Is the citizen satisfied with awareness level of municipal social and cultural services?

In the light of above mentioned purposes, the study is conducted to determine whether citizen is satisfied with the municipality and whether citizen is aware about works of the municipality and this study is primarily based on concepts of public relations and customer satisfaction. In the second section of the study, based on those concepts, a scale is developed. The survey phase is conducted, for one month, with around 400 subjects residing at quarters affiliated to Tepebaşı Municipality. Those subjects were selected among citizens who visited Tepebaşı Municipality for a particular issue and the questionnaire forms are applied in face-to-face form by interviewers.

In conclusion, analysis of data was performed with SPSS (Statistical Packace For Social Sciences) software pack. In the definitive data analysis, frequency, percent, mean and standard deviation analyzes were used.

### **Results**

Some of the main findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

- The survey applied to visitors of Tepebaşı Municipality, which affiliates 51 settlement areas, was largely consisted of subjects residing in the Yeşiltepe, Yenibağlar, Çamlıca and Ertuğrulgazi settlement areas.
- The questionnaire form was applied to approximately 400 subjects residing at settlement areas affiliated to the Tepebaşı Municipality. Of them, 65 % was male and 35 % was female. When age distribution of the group selected as the study sample was considered, it was observed that 28 % was in the age group of 25-30 years.
- When income level of the sample group was examined, it was found that 51 % of subjects had income level of ranging between 501 TL and 1000 TL.
- With regards the education level of survey participants, 26 % graduated from primary school, 21 % from university and again 21 % from high school. Consequently, it was found that more than half of the sample group gained high school and university education. Moreover, 50% of survey participants had been residing in the same settlement area for more than 16 years.

In addition to above demographics, percents of answers given to questions aiming to measure satisfaction of the citizen are given in the Table 1.

- Sample group was asked satisfaction about studies conducted in the residing region and about regional arrangements and 58 % stated satisfaction whereas 33% stated dissatisfaction.
- Fifty four (54) percent was satisfied with the services offered by the municipality such as road, street and sidewalk and 38 % stated dissatisfaction.
- Satisfaction rate of social and cultural services provided by the municipality was 53 %, whereas 25 % reported dissatisfaction and 22% had no idea on the subject.
- Considering cleaning of places open to the public, 62 % of survey participants reported satisfaction and 30 % stated dissatisfaction.

- With regards the hygienic audit of food and beverage sold in places open to public, 44 % reported satisfaction, 31 % reported dissatisfaction and 25% had no view about this subject.
- Citizens reported satisfaction from studies for protecting environmental pollution by 56 %, but 31 % reported dissatisfaction.
- Satisfaction rate for efforts of municipality's public works department of the municipality was 43 %, whereas 26 % reported dissatisfaction and it was found that 31% had no idea on the subject.
- Citizens reported satisfaction by 47 % for regular collection of municipal taxes, but 22% stated the dissatisfaction. However, it was observed that 31% had no idea on this subject.
- Considering attitudes and behaviors of municipality officers to the citizens, it was found that satisfaction rate was 60 % and 25 % reported dissatisfaction.
- Considering eagerness of municipality officers to help and solve problems, 57 % of survey participants was satisfied, while 28 % reported dissatisfaction.
- With regards the question about knowledge level of citizens on the works and services performed and offered by municipality officers, 56 % reported satisfaction, 24 % stated dissatisfaction and it was observed that 21 % chose the answer of no idea.
- Forty four (44) percent was satisfied with the good knowledge and awareness on problems experienced in the Tepebaşı district and on the contrary, 27% reported dissatisfaction. Twenty nine (29) percent stated that they had no idea.
- Considering fulfillment of words given by municipality officers, it was found that 46 % reported satisfaction, 29 % reported dissatisfaction and 25% had no idea on this subject.
- With regards the removal of problems by municipality officers within short time, it was observed that 47 % was satisfied and 33 % was dissatisfied. Moreover, 20% reported no idea on this subject.
- Forty seven (47) percent reported satisfaction for the question about adequate number and qualification of municipality officers, while 47% reported dissatisfaction and 26% had no idea.



- Citizens were satisfied by 47% from eagerness of municipality officers to correct errors, where 29% reported dissatisfaction. A group of 24% reported that they had no idea on the subject.
- It was found that of the citizens, 50 % was satisfied with the actual operation of municipal departments, 25 % was dissatisfied and 26 % had not idea.
- Considering sufficiency and quality of cleaning services provided, it was observed that satisfaction rate was 63 % and 26 % was dissatisfied.
- It was found that satisfaction rate for quality and sufficiency of the garbage collection services was 74 % and 21 % reported dissatisfaction.
- With regards the efforts towards creating new green areas and protecting present ones, it was observed that 65 % of survey participants reported satisfaction and 25% was dissatisfied.
- A rate of 59 % was obtained for sufficiency and quality of services for protecting the environment and 26% reported dissatisfaction.

**Table 1** The Relation Between The Local Administration And Citizen In Eskişehir Tepebaşı Municipality

	I strongly disagree		I agree		I have no idea		I agree		I strongly agree		Total	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Missing	Total
Satisfaction from studies and arrangements performed in the settlement region	54	13,7	73	18,5	36	9,1	168	42,5	64	16,5	5	400
Satisfaction from services such as road, street and sidewalk etc.	56	14,4	92	23,6	30	7,7	151	38,7	61	15,6	10	400
Satisfaction from social and cultural services	40	10,1	60	15,2	86	21,8	137	34,7	72	18,2	5	400
Satisfaction from cleanliness of places open to the public	47	12,0	69	17,0	66	8,4	177	45,2	66	16,8	8	400
Satisfaction from hygienic audits for food and beverage sale in places open to the public	57	14,4	66	16,7	100	25,3	125	31,6	47	11,9	5	400
Satisfaction from studies conducted for preventing environmental pollution	47	12,2	75	19,5	49	12,7	160	41,5	55	14,2	14	400
Satisfaction from studies of public works department	46	12,0	54	14,1	117	30,5	119	31,1	47	12,3	17	400
Satisfaction from regular collection of taxes	39	9,9	46	11,7	121	30,8	128	32,6	59	15,0	7	400
Satisfaction from attitudes and behaviors of municipality officers towards citizens	47	12,0	51	13,0	58	14,8	155	39,6	80	20,5	9	400
Satisfaction from eagerness of municipality officers to help and solve problems	39	9,9	70	17,7	59	14,9	150	38,0	77	19,5	5	400
Satisfaction from knowledge of municipality officers on works and services	36	9,2	56	14,3	83	21,2	156	39,8	61	15,6	8	400

Satisfaction from good knowledge and awareness of municipality officers on Tepebaşı district	43	11,0	64	16,3	115	39,3	119	30,4	51	13,0	8	400
Satisfaction from fulfillment of words given by employees	43	11,1	70	18,0	98	25,2	134	34,4	44	11,3	11	400
Satisfaction from removal of problems within short time by officers	50	12,7	78	19,7	79	20,0	135	34,2	53	13,4	5	400
Satisfaction from adequate number and qualification of municipality officers	48	12,2	59	15,0	102	25,9	136	34,5	49	12,4	6	400
Satisfaction from willingness of employees to correct errors	43	10,9	71	17,9	96	24,2	132	33,3	54	13,6	4	400
Satisfaction from operation of individual municipality departments (public relations, tourism, city police)	34	8,7	59	15,1	103	26,3	144	36,8	51	13,0	9	400
Satisfaction from sufficiency and quality of cleaning services	40	10,1	63	15,9	43	10,9	180	45,5	70	17,7	4	400
Satisfaction from sufficiency and quality of garbage collection services	45	11,5	37	9,4	18	4,5	165	42,1	127	32,4	8	400
Satisfaction from creating and protecting green areas	51	13,0	49	12,5	39	9,9	159	40,5	95	24,2	7	400
Satisfaction from sufficiency and quality of services for protection of environment	47	12,1	55	14,1	58	14,9	156	40,0	74	19,0	10	400

### **Conclusion**

Solomon states that successful institutions may only be involved in the competition by establishing peer-to-peer communication with customers via dialog and feedback. (2003: 125). There is a well-known saying of Heraklitus providing support to this view: “Future of a human is determined by his character”. This saying also applied to the institutions and future of institutions is determined by his character comprised of the basis culture and values. Values forming the character of the institution include ethical approach of the institution, sensitivity in the social responsibility field, quality working environment, qualified working power, care about quality product and/or service and achievements in the practices of corporate vision and corporate leadership. The approach of institutions to those organizational values also determines the level of corporate reputation they have. For ensuring this respect is permanent, institutions require to attach real importance to public relations activities. Firstly, public relations is based on the principle of honesty. Everything should be reflected as is to the target audience without deviating from the truth, exaggerating issues or making them seem worse than actually it is. Thus, trust of the target audience will be gained. Steward and Clarke (1999) define characteristics of a citizen oriented culture in the public services as follows:

- Tasks and activities performed by a public organization solely aim to serve citizens.
- Organizations are assessed according to the quality of service provided using current resources.
- If the service provided is shared by all members of the organizations, it is characterized as common (shared) value.
- Efforts are made in order to reach a high quality service.
- The quality in services requires a realistic approach to citizens.
- Citizens play a fundamental role in the extent of values shared.
- There is frequent contact with citizens.
- Problems occurring in public services are in-depth analyzed.
- All departments and divisions of public management strive for precise service (Cited by Yıldırım, 2009: 107-108).

Because public relations studies require a continuous patient effort with outcomes obtained in the long term. Just same as the real friendship is dependent on the time, establishment of a good public relation requires continuous and patient efforts. Effort towards better or more beautiful should be made by evaluating the reactions of the target audience within relevant period. Being the public administration units with closest relations with the society, local administrations should emphasize the public relations activities.

Both private institutions and public organizations need to compete in order to survive. The importance attached to the competition is based on the belief that human will be happier, when they are offered more options (Brown, 2007: 561).

Data obtained as an outcome of survey study conducted in 1-month period on 400 subjects in order to measure satisfaction of citizen from Eskişehir Tepebaşı Municipality indicates that citizens are, in general, satisfied with the Tepebaşı Municipality. It was found that settlement areas of Tepebaşı Municipality, where the survey study was conducted, are consisted of young individuals in the age range of 25-30 years and in the lower – mid income level. Income level and socio-economic characteristics of participant settlement areas seems to verify the above comment.

In the Tepebaşı District, it was observed that there is, in general, a satisfaction from services provided by the municipality such as road, street and sidewalk. Similarly, satisfaction rate for social and cultural services seems high. However, high rate of subjects with no idea on those services indicates that social and cultural services need somewhat more introduction. Besides them, it was observed that satisfaction rate of the

society was high in studies pertaining to cleanliness of places open to the public, cleaning services and particularly garbage collection and creation of green areas. Satisfaction rate around 40 % and rate of subjects with no idea around 30 %, with regards the efforts of public works department and tax collection, also demonstrates that advertorial efforts in those fields are not well performed.

For questions about municipality officers, satisfaction rate was again over 50 %, but the fact that rate of no-idea on the question about knowledge of officers about the region and fulfillment of words given by officers indicates that in-service training of officers should be continued.

All above findings are indicative of the fact that the interest towards concept of CRM shall be increasingly continue in the future. It will not be a misstatement that in addition to companies desiring to be successful in the future, local administrations should be prepared for CRM. Within this context, approach of the local administrations should not be only towards investments for information technologies, but the approach should also aim change or improvement of the management philosophy or corporate structure in this direction.

Public relations experts should examine behaviors of consumers, customers and they should determine factors, which formalizes their buying behaviors. There are many authors who had developed models which reveal out factors motivating target audience. Grunig and Hunt (1984) divided the target audience into four:

- Ones actively dealing with each problems (problems about nature, rights of minority and rights of consumers)
- Irrelevant subjects
- Subjects dealing with only problems influencing the majority of the society.
- Subjects focusing on only one problem Theaker, 2006:332)

As it is stated by Grunig and Hunt, consumers / citizens are no more irrelevant to the problems of the society. Local administrations are face to face with a target audience sensitive in each subject ranging from environmental pollution to any other issue which may damage human health. Therefore, responsibilities of local administrations increase and satisfaction of citizens is of importance.

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