

BUILDING A

SKILLS-FIRST ORGANISATION

THROUGH WORK TRANSFORMATION



A project partnering organisations to guide them through the process of work redesign, to enable their transition into skills-first organisations and strengthen workforce resilience.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global economy stands at an inflection point. Trade tensions, technological advancement, demographic shifts, and climate transitions are placing unprecedented demands on workforce agility. In Singapore, all jobs have experienced changes in their skills requirements between 2019 and 2024, reflecting significant transformations taking place at workplaces (WSG & SSG, 2025). Correspondingly, the need to update workforce skill sets has intensified as businesses transform their business models, operating structures, and talent-skills strategies.

To address these complex challenges, Singapore has set its sights on a skills-first approach: Prioritise demonstrated skills over formal qualifications and experience in hiring, training, and workforce development, positioning skills as the core currency for articulating, developing, and recognising capabilities across the labour market. This shift to skills-first raises an important question: how can employers leverage skills to drive both organisational performance and workforce resilience?

The Centre for Skills-First Practices at the Institute for Adult Learning conducted a pilot study with Crager Industries and the Centre for Healthcare Innovation to guide their transition towards becoming skills-first organisations through a structured process of work transformation.

Anchored in a five-step Work Transformation Framework, the pilot brought organisations through a systematic process to examine how work is structured, organised, and delivered, while integrating technology, workforce skills, and business strategy. The framework guided participating enterprises to deconstruct work into tasks, assess task value, identify opportunities for automation and work alternatives, redeploy tasks strategically, and reconstruct work into higher-value, future-ready roles.

The findings show that the five-step Work Transformation Framework provides a structured pathway for organisations to align people strategies with business priorities, strengthen workforce capability, and sustain competitiveness amid change. Effective implementation depends on leadership commitment, active stakeholder participation, and organisational readiness, while constraints such as time, data availability, and lack of familiarity with the concepts of the framework may affect depth of application. The study affirms that the Work Transformation Framework not only enhances organisational agility and workforce resilience but also builds the foundation for sustainable enterprise transformation.

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INTRODUCTION





INTRODUCTION

Global economy stands at an inflection point. Trade tensions, technological advancement, demographic shifts, and climate transitions are placing unprecedented demands on workforce agility. Around the world, businesses are under pressure to adapt to new requirements while equipping their people with the right skills to perform evolving tasks and roles. By 2030, an estimated 100 million workers globally will need to change jobs due to automation and artificial intelligence (AI), with 60% of companies expecting to transform their business models (Mckinsey, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2025).

In Singapore, these trends are equally pronounced. All jobs have experienced changes in their skills requirement over the past five years (2019–2024). Of which 43% of the job roles have a high job requirement index, reflecting substantive shifts in the tasks performed, while the remaining 57% also experienced shifts with less intensity (WSG & SSG, 2025). These figures highlight significant transformations taking place at workplaces. Correspondingly, the need to update workforce skill set intensified as businesses transform their business model, operating model, and talent-skills strategy.

To address these complex, intersecting challenges, Singapore has set its sights on a skills-first approach: Prioritise demonstrated skills over formal qualifications and experience in hiring, training, and workforce development, positioning skills as the core currency for articulating, developing, and recognising capabilities across the labour market (Gog et al, 2025; OECD, 2024). This shift to skills-first raises an important question: how can employers leverage skills to drive both organisational performance and workforce resilience?

Work transformation through work redesign has been identified as a strategic organisational capability, that enables organisations and their employees to adapt to evolving roles, responsibilities, and technologies, while building resilience and sustaining competitiveness (Jesuthasan & Kapilashrami, 2024). It is not just about adopting technology; it is about rethinking how work is structured, who performs it, and downstream implications. Work transformation is therefore not a one-off exercise but an ongoing and iterative process. At the core of this is a change in the type of work that employees will do, which in turn requires changes in skills.

Against this backdrop, the Centre for Skills-First Practices at the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL), established to build the capability and mindshare of stakeholders to embrace skills-first practices, conducted a pilot study with Cragar Industries and the Centre for Healthcare Innovation (CHI) to co-design interventions that support their transition into skills-first organisations through a structured work transformation process.

Anchored in a five-step Work Transformation Framework, it brings the organisations through a deliberate, hands-on journey to transform jobs by examining how work is structured, organised, and delivered across the organisation, while also integrating technology, workforce skills, and business strategy. The project further aims to build organisational capability and confidence, enabling participating organisations to scale and sustain work transformation practices and apply them to a broader range of roles in the future.

Specifically, the pilot study was designed to address the following key questions:

- 1. How can a structured work transformation approach be implemented to facilitate an organisation's transition into a skills-first organisation?
- 2. What are the key enablers and challenges organisations face when implementing work transformation, considering their resource constraints and organisational structures?

This report is organised as follows:

- Chapter 1 introduces the context, purpose, and scope of the study.
- Chapter 2 outlines the Work Transformation Framework that underpins the methodology of the pilot study.
- Chapters 3 and 4 detail the implementation process and lessons drawn from the study.
- Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations for organisations seeking to undertake similar transformation journeys.



FIVE-STEP WORK TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK





CHAPTER 2

FIVE-STEP WORK TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK

Building on Mercer's three phases of Work Design model (Jesuthasan & Ramanathan, n.d.) which is rooted in the principles of agility, sustainability and human-centricity, this Work Transformation framework has been adapted to reflect Singapore's organisational contexts. This framework enables leaders and employees to rethink how work is organised, fostering greater autonomy and adaptability within the organisation. It strengthens leaders' ability to align talent with business priorities, unlocks productivity by leveraging internal capabilities, and connects people to work in ways that enhance organisational agility. For employees, it provides clarity on the skills and capabilities required for evolving roles, thereby building employability and supporting long-term career development.

The Work Transformation Framework (see Figure 1) consists of the following steps:



The process may begin by examining either the work is being/to be done or an existing/emerging job role, depending on the organisation's entry point and objectives.

Conceptually, work represents a broader construct than the job role, encompassing the full range of activities, tasks, and responsibilities that contribute to organisational outcomes. A job role, in contrast, reflects how these tasks are currently organised and allocated within formal structures. To undertake meaningful analysis, the work or job role must first be deconstructed into its constituent tasks. By breaking work/jobs into tasks, organisations gain clarity on the work/job, its significance and the skills required. This step shines a light on redundant processes, critical capabilities and future skill needs, all essential for identifying where transformation should start. At this task level, the nature of work can be analysed along three dimensions: whether tasks are repetitive or variable, independent or interactive, and physical or mental. This analytical decomposition provides the foundation for identifying which aspects of work can be redesigned, augmented, or reconfigured to create higher-value and future-ready roles.



After evaluating the nature of work, the next step is to assess the value of each task and the opportunity it represents based on four categories:



Achieve Breakthroughs: Tasks that make significant contributions to the organisation, often with a disruptive improvement to established processes. An increase in performance of such tasks shows an exponential increase to the value of an organisation.



Productivity Improvement: Tasks that generate steady incremental increase in strategic value when there is performance improvement.



Reduction in Variance: Tasks where maintaining consistency are the priority.



Elimination of Errors: Tasks that generate negative value if the performance drops below a minimally acceptable level.



With a clear understanding of tasks, organisations can assess how each can be best executed. What can be substituted by automation, augmented by AI, performed by gig workers or outsourced to external partners? This analytical step broadens organisational thinking beyond traditional workforce models, unlocking access to non-traditional talent pools and alternative work arrangements. It also enables more informed decision-making regarding cost efficiency, capability optimisation, and risk management. For example, if the nature of a task is mental, repetitive, and independent, it may be suitable for Robotic Process Automation (RPA). The three main categories of automation are as follows:



RPA: For tasks that are routine and high volume.



Al: For tasks that are non-routine, complex, creative and often exploratory tasks. This includes machine learning and deep learning where pattern recognition to understand meaning in big data is required.



Social Robotics: For tasks that are routine and collaborative. These robots are mobile and can handle physical tasks.



Another form of redeployment involves work alternatives, which allocate tasks to alternative talent sources. Unlike automation, determining the appropriate alternative depends on the organisation's strategic priorities, values, and desired outcomes. Common options include centralisation or shared services, internal talent marketplaces, contract or gig workers, and role reallocation within existing structures.



After deconstructing the work and redeploying tasks through automation and work alternatives, the final step is to strategically reassemble the work, creating new jobs and workflows that leverage current tools, talent and business priorities. Reconstruction often requires defining the future state of each role, including its scope, performance expectations, and contribution to business outcomes. As new tasks emerge, new skills will also be needed. Conducting a skills gap analysis at this stage helps organisations identify learning and development needs to support role transitions.



The Work Transformation Framework ultimately fosters adaptive ways of working, leading to new roles, leaner teams and scalable workflows. Rooted in flexibility and sustainability, this approach can evolve alongside technological advancements and changing workforce preferences.

DECONSTRUCT

the work

- Task classification
 Define the key activities and tasks, skills needed, and the nature of the work
 - · Repetitive/Variable
 - · Independent/Interactive
 - Physical/Mental

Return on Improved Performance (ROIP) Assess the ROIP, risk, speed and value of each task; alternative work opportunities Negative Constant Incremental Exponential value value Polygod Negative Value Value Value Level of Performance

REDEPLOY

the work

Automation type
Automation opportunities,
augmentation



Robotic Process
Automation



Social Robotics



Cognitive Automation

4 Work alternatives

Alternative work options that can substitute/augment the work, risks and considerations



Centralisation/ Shared Services



Contractor/ Gig Worker



Opportunity Marketplace



Outsourcing/ Third Party

RECONSTRUCT

the work

5 Reconstruction

Reconstruct the remaining/ new work into existing/ new roles



Identifying the optimal source of work for each activity (automation, centralisation/shared services, agile talent pool, etc.)



Redefining new skills for new roles/tasks



Ensuring the continued relevance of talent through the mapping of developmental interventions to emerging skills demand



Identifying any constraints to deployment

Figure 1: 5-Step Work Transformation



PILOT PROCESS





CHAPTER 3

PILOT PROCESS

This chapter describes the processes adopted to design and implement the Work Transformation pilot project, which was conducted in collaboration with two participating organisations: Crager Industries and the CHI. Crager Industries is a long-standing manufacturer serving both global and local partners in the supply chain. Founded in 1990, it specialises in the precision manufacturing of component parts for the optics and biomedical industries. The CHI, on the other hand, is a Singapore-based institution that drives sustainable and value-based healthcare through thought leadership, workforce transformation, and systems-level change.

For more information on the case studies of Crager Industries and CHI, please visit https://www.ial.edu.sg/resources/publications/skills-first-publications/skills-first-transformation-projects



Preparation Stage

The preparation phase laid the conceptual and methodological foundation for the pilot, focusing on capacity building, framework alignment, and contextual adaptation. Over a three-month period, the team engaged in iterative design and prototyping processes to ensure methodological rigour and contextual relevance to Singapore's enterprise landscape.

The process began with conceptual alignment which deepened the research team's understanding of the Mercer's 3 phases Work Design methodology and its application in organisational transformation. Building upon this foundation, the team contextualised this approach by integrating elements from the IAL's Workplace Consultancy Framework (DoCIE) and adopting a skills-first perspective. This synthesis produced the Work Transformation Framework, along with tailored enterprise workshop materials and coaching mechanisms.





Workshop Implementation with Organisations

The implementation phase operationalised the pilot through enterprise engagement and workshop delivery. Pre-engagement consultations were conducted with participating organisations to align objectives, clarify roles and commitments, and tailor facilitation tools to organisational contexts.

The pilot adopted a two-part workshop model designed to be experiential, iterative, and capability-building. Each participating enterprise undertook:

- Needs Analysis Workshop (3.5 hours): Examining strategic context, key tasks, current skills, and performance gaps to identify opportunities for work transformation.
- Work Transformation Workshop (3.5 hours): Aligning performance metrics with organisational outcomes, exploring redeployment options, and identifying emerging skill requirements.

Each workshop convened a cross-functional cohort comprising senior management, human resource practitioners, line managers, job incumbents and related departments representatives. The sessions fostered both tangible transformation outcomes and enhanced organisational capability to undertake future work transformation independently.

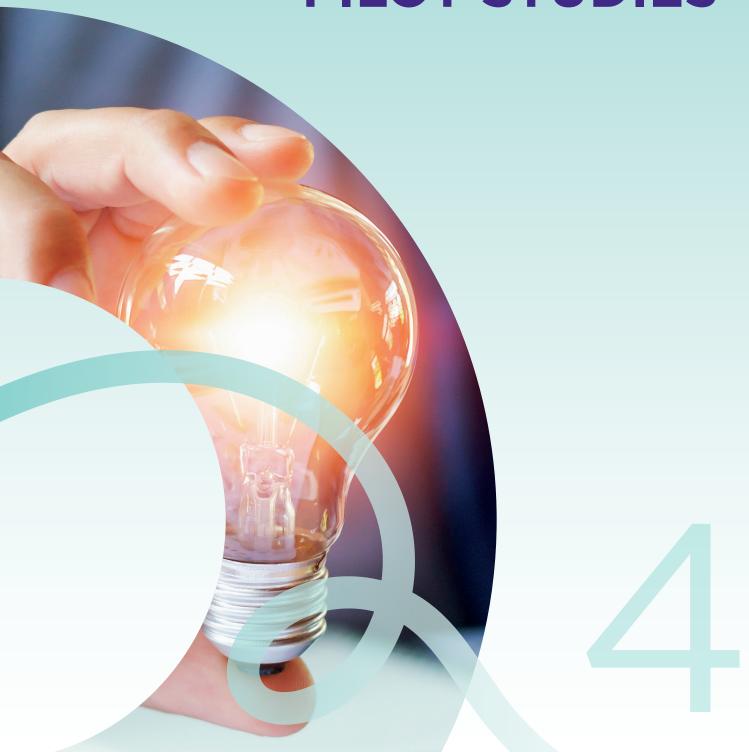


Review Stage

The review phase consolidated learning, documented reflective insights, and distilled implications for future practice. It involved huddles with participating organisations to synthesise feedback, evaluate the efficacy of the workshop interventions, and surface contextual factors influencing implementation outcomes. Two case studies were subsequently developed to capture key lessons, emergent themes, and observed organisational impacts. These case studies serve as an institutional knowledge base to inform the iterative refinement of the Work Transformation Framework and to translate its insights into future Capability Development Programmes, thereby strengthening the sustainability and scalability of enterprise work transformation initiatives.



KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM PILOT STUDIES



CHAPTER 4

KEY LEARNING POINTS FROM PILOT STUDIES

The pilot project was implemented with two participating organisations, Crager Industries and CHI, bringing together cross-functional participants from management, Human Resources, Organisation Development, job incumbents, and related departments to reimagine existing roles and design future-ready, higher-value work.

At Crager Industries, the workshop focused on transforming the Finance Executive role into a Business Data Analyst (see Figure 2), while at CHI, the process reimagined a Nursing role (see Figure 3) and explored opportunities within Allied Health. In both pilots, the Work Transformation Framework provided a structured, strategic approach to work redesign, enabling participants to examine work that is being/needs to be done (see Figure 4), identify blind spots in existing job scope, uncover opportunities to enhance job value by augmenting with technology and work alternatives, align tasks with evolving company needs, and determining capabilities needed of the employees.

Together, these pilot implementations served as practical testbeds for validating the relevance, usability, and impact of the framework. They also offered valuable insights into the organisational factors that enable or constrain successful implementation. The following section distil these observations into two key areas:



- **Enablers that supported effective application of the Work Transformation Framework**
- 2. Learnings that point to opportunities for further enhancement





OVERVIEW OF ORIGINAL VERSUS CHANGED JOB-TASKS-SKILLS

Job Role	CURRENT Finance Executive			TRANSFORMED Finance Analyst	
	Current Tasks	Time Spent		Transformed Tasks	Time Spent
Tasks	Generate invoices	16 hr		Generate invoices	3 min
	Prepare GST submissions	0.5 hr	Transforming Work with AI and Alternative Ways	Prepare GST submissions	15 min
	Collate finance documents	28 hr	of Working	Collate finance documents	60 min
	Produce financial reports and insights	4 hr	Augmented with digitalisation (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, Robotic Process Automation, Enterprise Resource Planning System)	Produce financial reports and insights	45 min
				Perform internal finance control	8 hr
			>>>	 Produce BI dashboards 	8 hr
	Total Time: 48.5 hr			Total Time: 18 hr 3 min	
	Current Skills			New Skills	
Skills	Transactional Accounting			Transactional Accounting	
	2. Financial Transaction			2. Financial Transaction	
	3. Audit Compliance			3. Audit Compliance	
				4. Financial Analysis	
				5. Business Acumen	
				6. Digital Technology and Innovation	Adoption

Figure 2: Transformation of Finance Executive into Business Data Analyst

OVERVIEW OF ORIGINAL VERSUS CHANGED JOB-TASKS-SKILLS

Job Role	CURRENT Senior Staff Nurse	111	REIMAGINED Senior Staff Nurse	
	Current Tasks		Reimagined Tasks	
Tasks	Patient Care		Patient Care	
	 Process & System Improvements People Development 	Transforming Work with AI and Alternative Ways of Working Augmented with digitalisation (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, Robotic Process Automation,	 Process & System Improvements People Development Customisation of Development Pathways Managing AI Project Management/ Automation Too 	
	Current Skills	Enterprise Resource Planning System)	New Skills	
Skills	 Patient care delivery core competency and complex patient case management Critical thinking & decision making Effective communications, interpersonal and influencing skills Project management Developing people & leadership skills 	>>>	 Patient care delivery core competency and complex patient case management Critical thinking & decision making Effective communications, interpersonal and influencing skills Project management Developing people & leadership skills 	
			 6. Advanced digital fluency with data, AI, machine learning, wearable devices, telehealth and electronic health records 7. Strategic & adaptive skills 	

*Note: For the purpose of this workshop, it only focuses only on tasks that require a nurse's professional license and not ward administrative tasks. This list of tasks is not exhaustive and was examined for the purpose of learning with CSFP.

Figure 3: Reimagine the Role of Senior Staff Nurse

KEY ENABLERS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

The successful application of the Work Transformation Framework was grounded in a human-centred approach that sought to integrate people strategy with business strategy. This integration ensured that work transformation efforts not only enhanced organisational efficiency but also supported employee growth and adaptability at work. Several critical enablers underpinned this process:



Active participation of key stakeholders including management, HR, line managers, and job incumbents, which fostered shared ownership of the transformation outcomes.



Strategic alignment with organisational goals and transformation priorities, ensuring relevance and executive sponsorship.



Forward-looking leadership
that prioritised long-term workforce planning
and capability development, to anticipate
future skills demands.



Collaborative dialogue between management and employees, which promoted mutual understanding, transparency and trust throughout the transformation process.



Organisational readiness to explore and experiment with new models for work redesign, workforce redeployment and job enrichment.



Awareness of emerging technologies and Al solutions that can augment human capabilities and enable redesigned roles.

KEY LEARNINGS AND AREAS FOR ENHANCEMENT

While both pilots validated the value and practicality of the Work Transformation Framework, several insights emerged that highlight areas for refinement and system-wide institutionalisation.



Time Constraints

Workshops were time-intensive, particularly as participants were new to the methodology. Although initially designed as two full-day sessions, both organisations adopted a two half-day formats due to scheduling constraints. This adaptation constrained opportunities for more applied practice and iterative reflection on the transformation process.



Availability of Work Process Data and Metrics

A recurrent challenge concerned the limited availability of comprehensive data on existing workflows, task structures and performance indicators. The absence of such empirical baselines resulted in greater effort and time in mapping tasks, identifying skill requirements, and progressing through analytical components such as ROIP and task-skill classification.



Terminology and Concept Familiarity

Participants initially struggled with the terminology and analytical concepts used in the framework. Additional guidance and contextual examples proved effective in enhancing comprehension, for instance, by clarifying distinctions between "Breakthrough" and "Improve Productivity" categories within the ROIP framework.



Navigating the Skills Framework

Certain job roles were not classified under the relevant sector's Skills Framework but were instead located within other sectoral frameworks. Developing mechanisms to enable cross-sector navigation would facilitate the identification of tasks and skill requirements associated with such roles.





Facilitation Capability

Effective facilitation was identified as a key success factor. Facilitators must be skilled to guide the discussions objectively, elicit diverse perspectives, validate relevant inputs, and manage group dynamics to ensure high-quality outputs and participant ownership of outcomes.



Participant Composition

Optimal results were achieved when workshops with the organisations included job incumbents, line managers, HR managers, and business leaders. The integration of these perspectives enabled a more holistic understanding of job functions, tasks, performance metrics, and workforce implications.



Employee Engagement and Change Communication

Transparent communication was essential for managing employee perceptions, particularly for job incumbents whose roles were subject to redesign. Consistent managerial messaging that the process sought to enhance rather than displace roles fostered psychological safety, trust and engagement throughout the transformation process.



Value Proposition of Work Transformation

The framework should be positioned as a strategic enabler of workforce planning and business transformation. By demonstrating its capacity to align roles, skills, and processes with future needs, organisations can strengthen internal commitment and build long-term capability for workforce resilience.



Figure 4: Key Artefacts from the Workshops with Participating Enterprises



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING WORK TRANSFORMATION





CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING WORK TRANSFORMATION

Drawing on insights from the pilot study, this chapter outlines a set of recommendations for organisations seeking to implement work transformation in their organisations. The proposed steps are designed to guide organisations in integrating people strategies with business strategies and in institutionalising work transformation practices.



Define Strategic Direction and Needs of Organisation

Organisations should begin by articulating their strategic priorities and identifying challenges they face, such as technological disruption, workforce shortages, inefficiencies in workflows, or emerging capability gaps. This initial step requires a deliberate diagnosis of organisational pain points to determine whether and how work transformation through work redesign can meaningfully address them. Establishing a clear problem statement creates clarity about why work transformation is needed, and helps organisations distinguish between issues better solved through process improvement, technology adoption, or talent development, and those for which work transformation is an appropriate and strategic intervention. Only when there is a clear line of sight between pain points and the potential of work transformation should organisations proceed to the subsequent task-level analysis.



Deconstruct Work and Assess Performance

A team of relevant stakeholders/participants should be convened to undertake a systemic analysis of existing work/job. This process involves deconstructing existing work/jobs into their core tasks and skills, assessing performance metrics and identifying opportunities for automation and work alternatives.



Reconstruct Work and Create Higher-Value Roles

Building on the deconstruction analysis, organisations should reconstitute jobs by reallocating time and tasks from low-value, repetitive activities to higher-value tasks that contribute to more strategic and innovation-oriented outcomes. This reconstruction process may involve the integration of technology-enabled solutions, job enrichment strategies, and new forms of work organisation that strengthen alignment between business priorities and workforce capability.



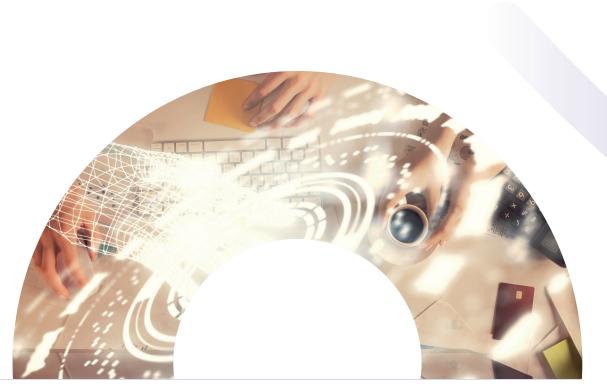
Identify and Develop New Skills

Once the new/transformed roles are defined, organisations should identify the skills required to perform them effectively. This includes undertaking a skills gap analysis and developing a personalised learning and development plan to bridge these gaps through upskilling, reskilling, or redeployment pathways. A skills-first orientation ensures that individuals are equipped not only for current roles but also for emerging job functions.



Pilot, Scale, and Sustain with Stakeholder Buy-in

Work transformation should be piloted at a manageable scale to refine the process and gather feedback before scaling. Active engagement of key stakeholders throughout the process is critical for building ownership and mitigating concerns about job redundancy. Lessons from pilot implementation should inform a systematic plan for scaling and institutionalising Work Transformation practices across the organisation, thereby embedding continuous work transformation as a capability within organisational systems and culture.



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