Work Socialization and Workplace Conflict in Major Oil Companies in Nigeria

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author URS designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript as part of A thesis submitted to the Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Authors IZO supervised the work as part of the thesis of author URS. Author URS and KTK managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between work socialization and workplace conflict in major oil companies in Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary data was generated through the self-administered questionnaire. The population for the study was two hundred and fifty-three (253) employees of seven (7) selected manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt. A total of 7 major multinational oil companies were investigated. 35 administrative management staff were sampled using the stratified sampling technique. The spearman correlation statistic was used in testing the hypotheses formulated. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. Results from analysis of data revealed that socialization had both significant and negative influence on interpersonal, intrapersonal, inter-group and intra-group conflicts. The study recommends that socialization should be part and parcel of

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organizational fabric to attain great heights in terms of workforce cooperation which eliminates workplace conflict; and multinational oil companies should develop means to have a well-defined employee-oriented culture as this will boost socio-cultural diversity management within the employees and as such lead to constructive workplace conflict and harmony.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's society and workplace, it is common to interact with numerous individuals throughout a workday, including supervisors, co-workers, and customers. While one may hope that each of these interactions is pleasant and meaningful, this is not always the case. For various reasons, employees who interact with a variety of people throughout the workday may occasionally experience conflict at work. Conflict at work is commonly associated with numerous outcomes. As noted, most commonly, conflict at work manifests itself in petty arguments, spreading rumors, and gossiping [1].The omnipresent nature of conflict has led Tjosvold [2] to argue that, "to work in an organization is to be in conflict" and as such, to take advantage of joint work requires conflict management. Although conflict is ubiquitous in nature and embedded within the structure of organizations, the formal process of dealing with conflict in workplaces is prescribed by statute and workplace policies and procedures. Although no workplace is devoid of antagonisms, tensions, aggressions, stereotypes, negative attitudes, competition and frustration as long as workers (men and women) are from different cultures, religion, status, lifestyle, and personality work together [3]. These factors have both positive and negative reactions on the workers in terms of their behaviors. A veritable tool for managing workplace conflict is through the instrumentality of work socialization.

Socialization is often referred to as the process by which individuals learn the norms, values, and required behaviors that allow them to become participating, active members of an organization [4]. Becoming an active member in an organization means that an individual is participating in the 6 organizational culture by taking on roles, norms, and values associated with the organization and the work position. According to Waldeck & Myers [4] the process of acquiring organizational norms and practices is known as organizational assimilation. Jablin [5] preferred the term assimilation over the term socialization to describe the process of joining, participating in, and leaving organizations. Socialization—the "process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" [6]—can occur before, during, and after a work experience.

In the fields of sociology and psychology, socialization is viewed more broadly as the process by which people learn culture, roles, and norms in order to function within a society [7]. While this idea could be applied in various ways to issues of interest to organizational communication scholars, the organizational communication discipline has primarily conceived of socialization narrowly as pertaining to the process of joining organizations.

According to Sandor [8] work, socialization is the ways in which individuals make sense of work and come to understand the appropriate and expected behaviors associated with work—complements research that defines socialization as learning an organization's culture and expands the concept of socialization to also include the process by which individuals learn broader cultural ideologies and norms of work. Work socialization seeks to explain how individuals are socialized into working more broadly. Sandor [8] used the concept of work socialization because it refers to the process of learning and can be applied more broadly as the process of learning that begins in early childhood and extends on into adulthood. Work socialization is broader and fundamentally different from organizational socialization because it is less about managing uncertainty and fitting in—a common theme underlying organizational socialization literature [9]—and more about developing a broad understanding of what work is, what it means to work, and how individuals learn how to do work.
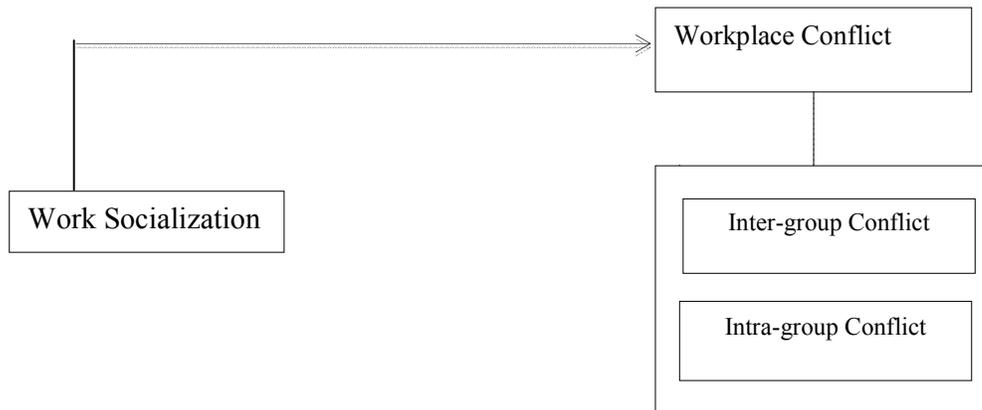
Fig. 1. Conceptual framew ork for the relationship work socialization and workplace conflict
Source: Author's desk research, 2020

Work socialization provides an avenue for understanding the meanings of work and the values and norms individuals come to recognize as accepted behaviors related to work. This occurs not only before one enters full-time employment (i.e., anticipatory socialization) but also throughout the working life. Work socialization is interested in questions such as "How do individuals make sense of work?" and "What do individuals learn about what it means to work?" Research on anticipatory socialization—as discussed previously—has attended a bit to such questions; however, it frames such socialization as occurring prior to "real" work. In essence, research orients socialization toward possible future vocations or an organization rather than to work more broadly [8].

This study therefore examines the relationship between work socialization and workplace conflict in major oil companies in Nigeria. Furthermore**,** this study was also guided by the following research questions:

i.   To what extent does work socialization affect inter-group conflict in major oil companies in Nigeria?
ii. To what extent does work socialization affect intra-group conflict in major oil companies in Nigeria?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

2.1.1 Social cognitive theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) describes the interactions between the person and their situation [10]. This theory focuses on how individuals interpret and respond to various situations. According to Davis and Powell [11], individual and their environment are said to influence each other. SCT explains a triadic relationship where the individual psychological factor, their environment and the behavior they engage in are determinants that influence each other given but not simultaneously [12,13]. It was also determined that employees might behave based on their observation of others which then leads to self-corrective judgments and improvement in self-efficacy [12,13]. The past research on conflicts literature has examined behavior with the environment [14,15] or personality with organizational culture [16]. Thus the present study aims to fill in the gap by using the social cognitive theoretical lens as a baseline in analyzing the relationship between socio-cultural diversity management and workplace conflict.

2.2 Work Socialization

Socialization is often referred to as the process by which individuals learn the norms, values, and required behaviors that allow them to become participating, active members of an organization [4,17]. Becoming an active member in an organization means that an individual is participating in the organizational culture by taking on roles, norms, and values associated with the organization and the work position. According to Waldeck & Myers the process of acquiring organizational norms and practices is known as organizational assimilation. Jablin [5] preferred the term assimilation over the term socialization to describe the process of joining, participating in, and leaving organizations.

Socialization, the "process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" [6] can occur before, during, and after a work experience. Socialization centers on three stages of socialization: (a) anticipatory, (b) encounter, and (c) metamorphosis. The first stage, anticipatory socialization, represents the level to which an individual forms expectations about careers, jobs, and organizations before occupying organizational positions. The second stage, encounter, involves one's actual experiences as a new member of an organization. The third stage, metamorphosis, is the period when new workers attempt to become accepted as members of the organization. Individuals are most commonly described as progressing from one stage to the next in order to become active members of a new organization.

Work socialization seeks to explain how individuals are socialized into working more broadly. Work socialization it refers to the process of learning and can be applied more broadly as the process of learning that begins in early childhood and extends on into adulthood. Work socialization is broader and fundamentally different from organizational socialization because it is less about managing uncertainty and fitting in a common theme underlying organizational socialization literature [9,18], and more about developing a broad understanding of what work is, what it means to work, and how individuals learn how to do work. The term socialization as used here Feij [19] is defined as an interdisciplinary approach to answer the question "how does one become a successful worker?" Work socialization is defined to include orientations to work more generally [20]. Work socialization is the process of learning the norms, values, and accepted behaviors associated with working as well as what work is [20]. Furthermore, they noted that work socialization occurs through working and is not simply something that occurs prior to one's employment. Secondly, work socialization also acknowledges that individuals are an integral part of the meaning making process; therefore, a one-way indoctrination into working culture is not viable because the individual is as important as the work. Thirdly, the concept of work socialization goes beyond anticipatory socialization in that it does not imply that individuals are being socialized into a particular vocation or organization, an assumption that leads to the over-emphasis on socialization into vocations and organizations.

Work socialization provides an avenue for understanding meanings of work and the values and norms individuals come to recognize as accepted behaviors related to work. This occurs not only before one enters full-time employment (i.e., anticipatory socialization) but also throughout the working life. Work socialization is interested in questions such as "How do individuals make sense of work?" and "What do individuals learn about what it means to work?" however, it frames such socialization as occurring prior to "real" work. In essence, research orients socialization toward possible future vocations or an organization rather than to work more broadly. A qualitative, social constructionist approach to the study of work socialization would provide insight into how individuals make sense of what it means to work and how they come to understand and negotiate the norms, values, and behaviors that dominate the working world. In seeking a broader sense of work, work socialization acknowledges that reality and knowledge are constructed and reproduced by people through communication, interaction, and practice [21].

2.3 Workplace Conflict

Workplace conflict has been defined in several ways by many authors. Obi [22] defined workplace conflict as an act of discontentment and contention which either the workers or employers of labour utilize to put excessive pressure against each other so as to get their demands. This view is consistent with Henry [23]; Ikeda, Veludo and Campomar [24]; Azamosa [25] and Ajala and Oghenekohwo [26] descriptions of workplace conflict as a dispute that occurs when interests, goals or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with each other in organizations. On this premise, workplace conflict within the context of the employment relationship can be regarded as an inevitable clash of interests and resulting disputes of varying intensity between and within any or all of the active actors in organizations. Thus, in the absence of common values in organizations, conflict is bound to occur.

The popular conception of workplace conflict is that a normal harmonious state is disturbed and something is wrong. Consequently, conflict is something to be avoided and must be resolved or at least managed [27,28]. Tjosvold [29] challenges this conceptualization, arguing that

the problem with conflict is the inadequacy of its definition. He argues that limited scrutiny of the definition of conflict has contributed to the way it is characterized as destructive, and the widespread belief that "conflict escalation just happens without human choice" [29]. The prevailing definition has typically reflected the assumption that conflict arises from both opposing interests and incompatible goals [30,31,32]. Rubin, Pruitt and Kim [33] argue that conflict was "a perceived divergence of interests or a belief that the parties" current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously". Consistent with this theme of opposing interests and incompatible goals De Dreu, Harinck and Van Vianen [34] conclude that conflict involves "the tension an individual or group experiences because of perceived differences between him or herself and another individual or group", and Jehn and Bendersky [35] define conflict as "perceived incompatibilities or discrepant views among the parties involved".

Tjosvold [29] argues that this consistent approach to defining conflict is not realistic: Not every conflict involves a perceived divergence of interests or goals. He states that "our common definitions are misleading and have significantly disrupted our understanding" [2]. Tjosvold's [2] definitional preference is drawn from Deutsch's [36] theory of co-operation and competition, which indicates that defining the conflict as opposing interests is fundamentally flawed. Deutsch [36] defines conflict as incompatible activities: one person's actions interfere or obstruct another person's action. Incompatible activities occur in co-operative and competitive contexts and the protagonists determine whether their interests are different or compatible. How protagonists negotiate their conflict will be determined in part by the extent to which they believe their goals are co-operative or competitive. A co-operative context tends to facilitate constructive controversy, whereas a competitive context tends to promote destructive controversy.

2.4 Measures of Workplace Conflict

2.4.1 Intergroup conflict

This is also known as interdepartmental conflict. It refers to conflict within an organization between two or more units or groups. Examples of this form of conflict are disputes between managers and workers, production and marketing, headquarters and field personnel. Between labor and management is one

particular case of intergroup dispute. For example, one group of employees can unite against another group. Such conflicts can arise from the differences in status and contradicting goals of the groups. Intergroup conflict usually leads to miscommunication or even to no communication, affecting an organization's ability to function. The manager can try to resolve the problem through problem-solving tactics or following an internal dispute resolution process. Sometimes a facilitator can be useful to help discuss issues of conflict and related concerns. Such types of conflicts should be solved quickly but if the problem continues it can destroy the organization [37]. The conflict between different groups or teams can become a threat to organizational competitiveness [37]. One of the main seeds of Intergroup Conflict can be cohesiveness, but a certain amount of it can make a smooth-running team, but too much of it can be harmful. The study of in-groups has revealed such changes connected with increased group cohesiveness: Firstly, members of in-groups view themselves as unique individuals but they stereotype members of other groups as all alike. Secondly, In-group members see themselves positively as people with high moral standards, as opposite to viewing members of other groups negatively and as immoral people. Thirdly, outsiders are viewed as a threat to the group and fourthly, In-group members exaggerate differences between their group and other groups. Lastly, In-group thinking is an inseparable part of organizational life, which is why it guarantees a conflict. Managers cannot eliminate in-group thinking, but they shouldn't ignore it [37].

2.5 Intra-group Conflict

This is also known as intradepartmental conflict. It refers to conflict among members of a group or between two or more subgroups within a group in connection with its goals, tasks, procedures, behavior and attitude [38]. Such a dispute can often arise as a result of disputes or conflicts between any or all of the members of a party and its members.

Harmony with the company's divisions is important. Among other aspects, such as healthy relationships and efficiency, it helps to sustain productivity and organizational morale. When two or more people do not get along together, that personal conflict can affect everyone around them. Intra-group conflict may

be connected with ethnic, religious or gender prejudice, and also various personality differences. Depending on how strong the conflict is, a manager may need outside help to resolve the issues for effective running of the organization. Intra-group conflict describes a situation in which group members hold discrepant views (have different opinions, attitudes, knowledge) or have interpersonal incompatibilities with each other [28]. Several sources and types of disagreements and tensions were reported in the literature, starting with the scarcity of resources, affective states (stress and tensions) or cognitive states (difference in perceptions, opinions and attitudes. These qualitative differences in the nature of conflict were identified rather long ago, yet it was in the 1990s when the literature on conflict frames of reference [39] and intra-group conflict [28] made a clear distinction between task (or cognitive) and relational (or emotional) conflict.

Task conflict refers to the disagreements among the group members about the content of the task due to different viewpoints, opinions and ideas, while relationship conflict refers to interpersonal incompatibilities and frictions among the group members resulting in tension, annoyance and animosity. Some empirical studies supported the independence of these two types of conflict [39,40], while others doubted their conceptual independence [28].

Task conflict is expected to be beneficial for group performance, increasing the quality of decision as well as the acceptance of decisions and satisfaction with the group outcome, while relationship conflict has a negative impact on group performance, group satisfaction and commitment with the group, due to the fact that it increases stress and anxiety and therefore it limits the information processing abilities of the group members [39]. Although intuitively appealing, these differential effects were not supported by the meta-analysis exploring the impact of task and relationship conflict on group performance and group members' satisfaction and showed that both types of conflict have detrimental effects for group outcomes [28]. When the effects of task and relationship conflict are examined simultaneously, the unique effect of task conflict beyond relationship conflict is weak or nonexistent [41,42]. In response to the weak finding for task conflict, scholars have recently proposed a contingency model whereby the effects of each form of conflict depend on contextual factors such as task characteristics [35].

2.6 Work Socialization and Workplace Conflict

Both situational and personal factors are essential to account for the variation in work socialization behaviours [43]. In other words, both organizational context and worker's own efforts are important for effective work socialization.

Work socialization is the process of learning the norms, values, and accepted behaviors associated with working as well as what work is [20]. Furthermore, work socialization occurs through working and is not simply something that occurs prior to one's employment, and also acknowledges that individuals are an integral part of the meaning making process; therefore, a one-way indoctrination into working culture is not viable because the individual is as important as the work. This concept of work socialization introduces a level of openness and honesty where necessary so as to build high trust levels in the organization [44].

Uncertainty was reduced with open and honest communication, and resulted in the ability to better collaborate and engage in constructive disagreement [44] which results in maximum cooperation. Openness and honesty were about clear, timely and credible socialization channels. Employees must feel safe and free to address problems in the workplace by collaborating freely and building high trust levels facilitates an environment free from conflict. An environment with a lesser degree of conflict will result in much improved performance. Gajda (2004) proposed that cooperation is focused on networking, partnering, merging, and unifying, and these are central to the activity of socialization.

From the foregoing point of view, we hereby hypothesized thus:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between socialization method of socio-cultural diversity management and inter-group conflict in major oil companies in Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between synergistic approach of socio-cultural diversity management and intra-group conflict in major oil companies in Nigeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary data was generated through self- administered questionnaire. The population for the study was two hundred and fifty-three (253) employees of seven (7) selected manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt. A total of 7 major multinational oil companies were investigated. 35 administrative management staff were sampled using the stratified sampling technique. The spearman correlation statistic was used in testing the hypotheses formulated. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Bivariate Analysis

The Spearman Rank Order Correlation coefficient is calculated using the SPSS 21.0 version to establish the relationship among the empirical referents of the predictor variable and the measures of the criterion variable. Correlation coefficient can range from -1.00 to +1.00. The value of -1.00 represents a perfect negative correlation while the value of +1.00 represents a perfect positive correlation. A value of 0.00 represents a lack of correlation. In testing hypotheses one to nine, the following rules were upheld in accepting or rejecting our alternate hypotheses: all the coefficient values that indicate levels of significance (* or **) as calculated using SPSS were accepted and therefore our alternate hypotheses rejected; when no significance is indicated in the coefficient r value, we reject our alternate hypotheses. Our confidence interval was set at the 0.05 (two tailed) level of significance to test the statistical significance of the data in this study.

Ho$_1$: There is no significant relationship between socialization and intergroup conflict in the multinational oil companies in Nigeria.

Table 1. Correlation socialization and inter-group conflict

			Socialization	Intergroup
Spearman's rho	Socialization	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.834**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	35	35
	Intergroup	Correlation Coefficient	-.834**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	35	35

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Source: Research Data, 2019

Table 2. Correlation for socialization and intra-group conflict

			Socialization	Intra-group
Spearman's rho	Socialization	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.861**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	35	35
	Intra-group	Correlation Coefficient	-.861**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	35	35

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Source: Research Data, 2019

The above table shows a negative and significant relationship between socialization and intergroup conflict with a rho value of -0.834. This indicates that there is 83.4% explanation of the relationship between both variables, while 16.6% are explained by other variables not considered in this relationship. However, this statement is true as the level of significance of 0.000 is lesser than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and its alternative form is accepted. This states that there is a significant relationship between socialization and intergroup conflict in the studied multinational oil companies in Nigeria.

4.2 Socialization and Intra-group Conflict

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between socialization and intra-group conflict in the multinational oil companies in Nigeria.

The above table shows a negative and significant relationship between socialization and intra-group conflict with a rho value of -0.861. This indicates that there is an 86.1% explanation of the relationship between both variables, while 13.9% are explained by other variables not considered in this relationship. However, this statement is true as the level of significance of 0.000 is lesser than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and its alternative form is accepted. This states that there is a significant relationship between socialization and intra-group conflict in the multinational oil companies in Nigeria.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Association between Socialization and Intergroup Conflict

The findings from the data analysis revealed that there is a negative and significant relationship between socialization and intergroup conflict in the multinational oil companies in Nigeria. Socialization leads to organizational performance and learning. According to Cheney, Zorn, Planalp and Lair [20], companies that encouraged the emergence of work socialization and managed those that were critical to achieving desired organizational performance results were more successful. Organizations that had reduced the work socialization gap allowed better resource allocation by monitoring and developing organizational competencies related to key business activities [45].

Socialization at work takes many forms. It has been documented extensively that work socialization is a necessary element for improved organizational achievement and success [46]. Naturally, forms of work socialization takes place throughout the day in both formal and informal settings, but recent trends have prescribed more formal means of work socialization structures be placed among the workers to promote teaming, innovation and productivity.

A work socialized organization is one in which all the workers routinely work together in problem-solving, examine work challenges and combine resources to promote successful organizational objectives attainment. According to Tracy [21] work socialization practices which are focused on workers, allow the power of collaboration to harness multiple professional adults to focus and provide opportunity and/or intervention strategies for a particular work challenge through defined teamwork. In a study by Edwards, Edwards, Wahl, & Myers [47] preliminary results indicated that work improvement through socialization had positive effects on group work achievement. Work socialization practices have also been found to affect team level perceptions of collegiality, trust, and efficacy through internal accountability.

5.2 Association between Socialization and Intra-group Conflict

The study finding revealed that there is a negative and significant relationship between socialization and intra-group conflict in the multinational oil companies in Nigeria. Work socialization leads to organizational performance and learning. Socialization is an inherently communicative process [48,49]. Individuals learn and influence the process through communication, or the simultaneous experience of self and other [47]. In other words, our realities are socially constructed through communication, and we only come to know ourselves based on our relationships, interactions, and experiences with others. A communicative perspective acknowledges that we are an active part of the socialization process and that we are not simply indoctrinated into the cultures that we are a part of but that we shape, influence, and navigate the process as it occurs. This helps to enhance integration and cooperative within groups [47].

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDA-TIONS

This study presented fourteen conclusions depicting the research questions that were conceptualized and obtained from the main purpose of the study. Below are the various conclusions reached from the findings of the study:

i. Socialization contributes negatively and significantly to inter-group conflict in the multinational oil companies in Nigeria.
ii. Socialization contributes negatively and significantly to intra-group conflict in the multinational oil companies in Nigeria.

Based on the discussion and conclusion above, the following recommendations are hereby made: As a result of the foregoing, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

i.   Organizations' are advised to use interactive and inclusive procedures to appear synergistic in the eyes of the workers so as to enable them become compatible both to tasks and social ethics as this reduces interpersonal conflict.
ii. Socialization practices is advised be part and parcel of organizational fabric so as to attain great heights in terms of workforce cooperation which eliminates interpersonal conflict.
iii. Multinational oil companies in Nigeria need to develop measures that inculcate socialization as this will foster cooperation and reduce intrapersonal conflict.
iv. Multinational oil companies can create a socialization team for herself as a role model for the establishment of a cooperative team workforce in order to achieve organizational objectives easily.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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