



Reimagining Islamic Educational Leadership: The Integrative Leadership Style of Kyai in Pesantren-based Higher Education Institution

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Received: July 2025; September 202; December 2025

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.33852/jurnalin.v9i2.643>

Abstract:

This research examines the dynamics of integrative leadership at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid, particularly how a leader not only performs managerial functions but also maintains a scholarly presence through direct involvement in the tradition of transmitting "Kitab Kuning". The purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of integrative leadership behaviour. The research used a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The collected data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's data analysis technique, which consists of data reduction, data display, and verification/conclusion drawing. The results show that integrative leadership behaviour at Ma'had Aly is manifested in the leader's willingness to internalise the Amanah value, exemplary and moral will in implementing the sorogan tradition, and epistemic anxiety that drives the development of a scientific literacy movement. This research has implications for strengthening the concept of values-based Islamic educational leadership, particularly in the dimensions of epistemic leadership and cultural leadership. Thus, these findings indicate that effective Islamic boarding school leadership is not a dichotomy between bureaucracy and science, but rather an integration of both within a single figure who can maintain tradition while managing modern institutional demands.

Key Words: Integrative leadership, Islamic boarding school scientific tradition, sorogan

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika kepemimpinan integratif di Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid, khususnya bagaimana seorang pemimpin tidak hanya melakukan fungsi manajerial tetapi juga mempertahankan kehadiran ilmiah melalui keterlibatan langsung dalam tradisi transmisi buku kuning. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang perilaku kepemimpinan integratif. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis data Miles dan Huberman, yang terdiri dari pengurangan data, tampilan data, dan penggambaran verifikasi/kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perilaku kepemimpinan integratif di Ma'had Aly

diwujudkan dalam kesediaan pemimpin untuk menginternalisasi nilai Amanah, keteladanan dan kemauan moral dalam menerapkan tradisi sorogan, dan kecemasan epistemik yang mendorong pengembangan gerakan literasi ilmiah. Penelitian ini berimplikasi pada penguatan konsep kepemimpinan pendidikan Islam berbasis nilai, khususnya dalam dimensi kepemimpinan epistemik dan kepemimpinan budaya. Dengan demikian, temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan pesantren yang efektif bukanlah dikotomi antara birokrasi dan sains, melainkan integrasi keduanya dalam satu sosok yang dapat mempertahankan tradisi sambil mengelola tuntutan kelembagaan modern.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemimpinan integratif, tradisi ilmiah pondok pesantren, sorogan*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) hold a strategic position as institutions that not only transmit knowledge but also shape character, ethos, and distinctive scholarly traditions. However, in the dynamics of modernisation of Islamic higher education, especially at the Ma'had Aly level, an interesting phenomenon has emerged: institutional leaders are not merely strategic managers but also function as scholarly figures actively involved in typical Islamic boarding school academic practices, including accepting copies of "*Kitab Kuning*"s from their students. This phenomenon reflects a unique blend of managerial and epistemic leadership that is rarely studied academically.

The importance of this study lies in how such a leadership model maintains the moral and scientific authority of Islamic boarding schools amidst the bureaucratisation of Islamic educational institutions. In modern educational management literature, strategic leadership is often understood within a rational and functional framework, but in the context of Islamic boarding schools, spiritual, cultural, and scientific dimensions play an equally dominant role (Sukarlan, 2025). Therefore, this study examines how integrating managerial functions and scientific authority can shape a distinct leadership pattern within the Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid environment.

Based on initial observations within the Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid environment, it was found that leaders (especially the headmaster) continued to uphold the Islamic boarding school's academic traditions by accepting copies of "*Kitab Kuning*" directly from students. This practice demonstrates that leadership is not separated from its classical scientific roots ('*turats*'), but rather is implemented as an integral part of the educational management system. This phenomenon appears contradictory to the modern management paradigm that emphasizes efficiency, bureaucratic structures, and a strict division of labor between managerial and academic. However, at Ma'had Aly, this duality of function prevails. Leaders act as both strategic decision-makers and guardians of the scientific chain of transmission. From a sociological perspective, this demonstrates a leadership model that is not only rational but also symbolic, as

the leader's legitimacy is derived not only from administrative positions but also from scientific authority and spirituality. This phenomenon is the focus of this research, namely how this form of Islamic boarding school leadership combines managerial and epistemic values within a single institutional practice.

Research on leadership in Islamic educational institutions has been conducted from various perspectives. First, studies by Hamidah (2025) and Hijazi (2025) show that strategic leadership in Islamic boarding schools tends to follow a bureaucratic pattern adapted to the modern university system, yet does not delve into the spiritual and traditional aspects of heritage. Second, Ahmad & Putra (2025) in the Journal of Educational Inspiration (ALFIHRIS) highlight the importance of value-based leadership in maintaining the identity of religious institutions, but do not explain how these values are practically realised in the academic tradition of Islamic boarding schools. Third, Chirzin (2025) examined the transformative leadership model in modern Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) that integrate digital technology into governance. Yet, the continuity of the sanad (traditional Islamic boarding school) and the teaching of classical texts remain marginalized.

These three studies demonstrate that the primary focus remains on managerial, transformational, and adaptive aspects. In contrast, the interconnection between the strategic role of leaders and the practice of traditional Islamic boarding-school knowledge has not been fully explored. This is where this research becomes relevant. There are conceptual and empirical gaps in the Islamic educational leadership literature. Most prior research has focused on the administrative and innovative functions of leaders in modern education. In fact, in the pesantren environment, especially Ma'had Aly, the authority of the leader cannot be separated from the epistemological dimension and classical scientific tradition. This gap shows that there are still few studies that examine pesantren leaders as dual figures: managers and scholars. Thus, this research will help bridge the gap through a contextual approach that highlights the role of leaders in maintaining the sustainability of Islamic science amid pressure to modernize the Islamic education system.

The novelty of this research lies in the identification of an integrative leadership model within the Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid environment, where leaders not only carry out strategic management functions but are also active in the process of scientific reproduction through the tradition of transmitting "*Kitab Kuning*"s. This approach offers a new perspective on the study of Islamic educational leadership: that scientific and spiritual authority can be part of an institution's managerial strategy. Furthermore, this research employs a qualitative, phenomenological approach, enabling in-depth exploration of how leaders interpret their roles as both managers and teachers. The findings of this study are expected to be a conceptual contribution to the theory of values-based leadership and spirituality in contemporary Islamic education.

This study aims to analyze and understand the forms and meanings of integrative leadership at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid, where the leader plays a dual role as both a strategic manager and a guardian of the pesantren's scholarly tradition. Specifically, this study seeks to uncover how the practice of depositing "*Kitab Kuning*" symbolizes epistemological continuity and a unique leadership strategy in maintaining the institution's moral and academic authority. The urgency of this research lies in the effort to present a leadership model capable of addressing the challenges of modernizing Islamic education without losing the roots of the pesantren's scholarly tradition and spirituality.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design because the focus is on a single leadership phenomenon in a specific context, namely Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid Paiton-Probolinggo. Ontologically, the case study was chosen to provide an in-depth, holistic understanding of the practice of integrative leadership, positioning the leader as both a strategic manager and a guardian of the Islamic boarding school's scientific tradition. The choice of this design is based on the consideration that the multi-layered leadership phenomenon, encompassing managerial, epistemic, and spiritual values, is more appropriately explored through a contextual approach that emphasises depth of meaning rather than generalisation. In a methodological context, the qualitative case study approach enables researchers to examine how interactions, decisions, and institutional symbols shape the nature of leadership at Ma'had Aly.

The units of analysis in this study include the location, institution, events, and scholarly and leadership practices that occur at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid. The area was chosen because it is a pesantren-based Islamic higher education institution that consistently maintains the tradition of book transmission amidst academic modernisation. The research material objects include the Mudir's leadership actions, the dynamics of the learning program (especially sorogan), the interaction patterns between leaders and students, and the organisational culture that supports the scholarly tradition. These units serve as a focus for understanding how integrative leadership is articulated through both structural and cultural roles.

The sources of information in this research come from three types of data: (1) the primary source, namely the Director of Ma'had Aly, who directly carries out integrative leadership; (2) additional informants (if necessary) who are close to academic activities for triangulation of meaning; and (3) institutional texts and documents such as sorogan program archives, curriculum documents, leadership decrees, and academic activity records. This source selection was carried out to ensure the completeness of perspectives from the personal, structural, and documentary perspectives.

Data were collected through three procedures: desk review, observation, and in-depth interviews. A desk review was conducted to examine the policy context and the scientific program's track record. Non-participatory observation was conducted to capture the behavioural patterns, interactions, and activities of leaders during academic activities, such as book donations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the Director's subjective understanding of leadership values, motivations, and will. This technique was chosen because the dimensions of will and spiritual values can be obtained only through reflective dialogue that allows informants to narrate their experiences.

Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and verification/conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, data were selected and coded into thematic categories. During the presentation stage, data were organised into matrices, tables, and narratives to connect themes systematically. In the verification stage, interpretation of findings was tested through source triangulation, member checking, and document rereading. The analytical methods employed included content analysis to identify patterns of meaning, discourse analysis to examine the symbolic construction of leadership, and interpretative analysis to understand the values, intentions, and spirituality underlying the leader's actions. This combination of analyses enabled findings that were not only descriptive but also revealed the depth of meaning in integrative leadership practices at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Internality of Leadership Trust Values

Research findings indicate that one of the main foundations of the Director of Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid's leadership lies in a deep understanding of the hadith "*Kullukum raain, wakullukum mas'ulun an raiyyatihi.*" This hadith is not only used as a normative quotation but also serves as an ethical framework guiding all of his leadership actions and policies. From the interview results, the Director stated that a pesantren leader must "maintain the institution in accordance with its vision and mission as a centre for developing ulama cadres," a phrase that indicates an awareness that leadership is a spiritual mandate, not just a structural position. This statement shows that he places the hadith as both a moral basis and a foundation for leadership actions.

The Director's quote in the interview reinforces this finding when he said, "*A kiai does not just sit in an office, but must be directly involved, because a leader is a ra'in... responsible for the knowledge imparted by his students.*" This statement indicates that a leader's responsibility encompasses two broad areas: moral responsibility for the educational process and epistemic responsibility for the continuity of knowledge. This understanding explains why he continued to

accept the "*Kitab Kuning*" deposit, even though it could, in principle, be delegated. This action is a practical manifestation of the leadership mandate as emphasized in the hadith.

Furthermore, this internalized value of trust finds its expression in concrete practice on the ground. Based on observations, the Director is directly involved in the book donation sessions on certain evenings, despite his busy schedule as the institution's leader. His interactions with the students are patient, corrective, and imbued with scholarly symbolism. Observations indicate that this leadership style creates an academic atmosphere that emphasizes clarity of the chain of knowledge and emotional closeness between the leader and students. This active involvement reinforces the perception that leadership at Ma'had Aly is inseparable from scholarship and spirituality.

Interpretation of these findings leads to the conclusion that the Director made the hadith "*kullukum raa'in*" the central pillar of integrative leadership, uniting administrative and academic functions. The value of trustworthiness became the moral energy that sustained his will to continue maintaining the tradition of turats through direct action, not merely through formal policies. Thus, leadership at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid demonstrates a unique model: leadership grounded in values, driven by spiritual awareness, and translated into daily scientific practice. This finding also explains how the interpretation of hadith can shape the leadership structure typical of Islamic boarding schools, which is not only managerial but also symbolic and epistemic.

Exemplary Behaviour and Moral Will in Preserving the Sorogan Tradition

The second finding demonstrates the leader's moral will and exemplary leadership in preserving the practice of transmitting "*Kitab Kuning*" (sorogan) at Ma'had Aly. Despite his structural position, the Director chose to continue his cultural role as a guardian of the sanad (scholarship chain of knowledge), a commitment that goes beyond administrative duties.

He explained: "*It is not surprising that I received sorogan... because of my role as a member of the pesantren who has a responsibility there. That is where we sometimes have more than one position.*"

This quote demonstrates that his willingness to be directly involved in the learning process was not a structural obligation but a calling rooted in the values and ethos of Islamic boarding-school scholarship. This exemplary practice emphasises that leadership in Islamic boarding schools is not merely about organisation but also about revitalising the spirit of learning through personal and spiritual closeness between teachers and students.

Elsewhere, he emphasises the significance of sorogan: "*To establish a closer spiritual connection, a personal relationship between students and kiai... because blessings lie in a good relationship with the teacher.*"

This demonstrates his commitment not only to maintaining the method but also to upholding the fundamental values of the Islamic boarding school, such as etiquette, blessings, and scientific intimacy (*ta'alluq*). Field observations revealed that the presence of a leader in the sorogan process fostered respect, closeness, and a passion for learning among the students, strengthening the cohesion between the academic structure and the Islamic boarding school culture.

Leaders' Epistemic Anxiety as the Basis for Willingness to Build a Scientific Literacy Movement

This research found that one of the strongest drivers of the Director's leadership was the emergence of epistemic anxiety about the decline in students' literacy, particularly their ability to read classical texts and their discipline in studying. In an interview, the Director explicitly expressed his concern, saying, "*The biggest challenge currently in Islamic boarding schools is the decline in students' literacy... the students' reading time is very low.*"

This statement demonstrates that he leads not only from an administrative perspective but also critically monitors the epistemological conditions of students at Ma'had Aly. This anxiety fueled strategic initiatives to strengthen the reading culture and academic traditions of Islamic boarding schools.

The observation results indicate that the Director's epistemic anxiety did not stop at rhetoric; it manifested in the design of a more targeted literacy program, including increasing book-reading activities, strengthening the halaqah (Islamic religious group), and encouraging students to expand their reading to modern sources. This aligns with the interview in which he explained, "*There must be three pillars of literacy: reading the Qur'an, reading classical books, and reading general literature... if this is done, religious, scientific, and social life will be good.*"

These findings demonstrate an integrated pattern of thinking that connects the traditions of the Islamic boarding school (pesantren) with contemporary needs, so that literacy is understood not narrowly as the ability to read, but as the foundation for the formation of future ulama (Islamic scholars).

The researcher's analysis indicates that this epistemic anxiety serves as a psychological driver, strengthening the leader's will to undertake institutional transformation. In the tradition of Islamic boarding school leadership, a kiai's intellectual anxiety is often an indicator of the quality of his spiritual leadership. In this case, the Director's anxiety gave rise to a literacy agenda oriented towards integrating the traditions of the Islamic boarding school (pesantren) with modern developments. These findings broaden the understanding of Leadership will, which stems not only from moral values or social legitimacy, but also from an epistemological awareness that, without a strong literacy culture, Islamic boarding schools will lose their intellectual foundation. Thus, the literacy

movement initiated by the Director is not merely a program but a strategy for preserving the Islamic boarding school's scholarly tradition amid changing times.



Figure 1. Three Pillars of Literacy

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the strategic significance of the leader of Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid's consistent acceptance of "*Kitab Kuning*" deposits as an integrative leadership practice. The study's core findings indicate that this action not only reflects spiritual and scientific commitment but also serves as a managerial instrument for maintaining epistemic authority, the continuity of turats, and students' academic motivation. In the interview, the Director stated, "*A leader is not only a director, but an educator; if I am not present in their learning process, how can I be responsible?*" This statement reflects the concept of *al-ra'iyyah* in the hadith "*kullukum ra'in wa kullukum mas'ūl 'an ra'iyyatihī*," which serves as a moral foundation for his leadership actions. This moral-religious understanding explains that his decision was not merely a matter of bureaucratic function but rather derived from an essential awareness of the epistemic and spiritual responsibilities of a pesantren leader.

The findings confirm Khasan's (2023) argument that knowledge-based leadership increases students' identification with the institution, as the leader is perceived not as an administrator but as a murabbi and mu'allim. The direct presence of the leader in sorogan gives rise to the transmission of presence, a concept popularised by Solich (2024). In the study of values education, the physical and spiritual presence of a leader creates a moral resonance that strengthens learning motivation. In the context of Ma'had Aly, this resonance is evident: students feel more valued, more emotionally engaged, and more committed to the learning process when the leader is present. This confirms that the leader's will is not an additional element, but rather a structural mechanism that maintains the stability and quality of the Islamic boarding school's academic culture.

Given the importance of leadership identified in this study, the discussion should be contrasted with international studies. In several recent studies, the

majority show a general pattern: educational institution leaders tend to get caught up in the bureaucratisation of their roles (Jabar & Frinaldi, 2025; Duryat, 2021; Devi et al., 2023). In many Islamic universities, leaders experience epistemic distance due to the ever-increasing administrative burden Tahir et al., (2025); Haboddin, (2024), Silitonga et al. (2022). This strengthens the finding that the phenomenon at Ma'had Aly does not follow international patterns, and is even contrary to trends considered normal in the world of higher education.

Study by Wicahyani (2025), Pratiwi (2023), and Nanang Trenggono et al. (2021) shows that overly administrative leaders lose scientific legitimacy, leading to a decrease in students' academic motivation. On the other hand, Muttaqien et al. (2024), Yusuf et al. (2024), and Hasba (2020) found that when leaders are directly involved in the institution's core activities teaching, research, or academic sessions the institution becomes stronger and academic performance significantly improves. The Ma'had Aly phenomenon aligns with the second group of findings rather than the first. Therefore, this research presents a productive contradiction in the literature. While most studies portray the bureaucratisation of leadership as inevitable, this finding suggests that leaders can significantly maintain their epistemic role without sacrificing administrative functions.

The continuation of the tradition of depositing "*Kitab Kuning*"s which directly involves leaders is a response to the cultural structure of Islamic boarding schools. Studies by Nor & Aslamiah (2025), Ihwan (2025), and Rachman et al. (2023) have stated that tradition-based organisations require visionary leadership capable of "nurturing the past while designing the future." The Director's commitment is a form of visionary cultural leadership: an effort to ensure that modernisation does not sever the chain of knowledge. This is evident in his statement regarding the low basic literacy of students at Islamic boarding schools, which he considers an epistemic threat to the tradition's continuity. Here, the leader's actions are proactive rather than reactive, maintaining the Islamic boarding school's scientific structure from within.

Various other studies, such as the results of research by Amtu, Souisa, et al. (2021), Amtu, Aralaha, et al. (2021), and Caliskan & Zhu (2020), emphasise that the quality of interactions between leaders and students determines a strong educational organisational culture. At Ma'had Aly, these interactions are not administrative or formal, but epistemic and personal. Field observations indicate that during sorogan sessions, the Director not only listens to readings but also provides in-depth corrections, reprimands grammatical errors, and checks the accuracy of interpretation. This epistemic relationship demonstrates the integration of leadership and pedagogical practices, a phenomenon rarely observed in other institutions. This phenomenon strengthens the theory. Muslim (2022) states that organisational culture persists through symbolic practices repeated by leaders. Sorogan is one such core symbol.

In addition, research by Collet et al. (2020) on hybrid leadership is relevant to this phenomenon. According to him, leaders in traditional and modern institutions must practice a hybrid leadership style that combines administrative effectiveness with the depth of scientific tradition. The findings of this study demonstrate how this hybrid style operates: leaders do not simply create academic policies; they implement them through direct involvement. Thus, the Director's actions are a concrete form of embodied leadership, namely leadership manifested in physical, symbolic, and epistemic actions.

If examined more closely, leaders' involvement in sorogan also has implications for institutional social stability. Study Mo'tasim & Alfiyat (2024), Ariqurrohman & Khasan (2025), Pribadi et al. (2024), Hendra et al. (2025). Studies have shown that leaders who are academically close to students can increase social cohesion and minimise academic conflict. At Ma'had Aly, the epistemic relationship between leaders and students has been shown to strengthen emotional bonds, making students feel more comfortable, more guided, and more confident in the direction of the institution's policies. This explains why students' learning motivation increases when leaders are present: not because of hierarchical fears, but because of the direct transmission of epistemic aspirations.

However, the literature also warns that academic traditions can become dysfunctional when leadership involvement is symbolic or inconsistent Duryat (2021). In this context, it is important to note that the Director's participation is not merely ritualistic but authentic, meaningful, and consistent. This authenticity distinguishes the Ma'had Aly phenomenon from many cases of leadership dysfunction in other institutions. Thus, the leader's involvement in sorogan serves as a stabiliser of scientific culture, not merely managerial ornamentation.

The findings of this study imply, in theory, that scientific authority cannot be separated from managerial authority. Likewise, this study makes a new contribution to the theory of epistemic leadership by showing that epistemic authority is built through direct practice rather than through the legitimacy conferred by titles or positions. Finally, this study strengthens the theory of cultural leadership in Islamic boarding schools by demonstrating that leaders are the primary guardians of symbols, rites, and mechanisms for reproducing knowledge. Fourth, this study challenges the dominant assumption in the educational management literature that leaders must be separate from pedagogical functions. Thus, this study shows that integrative leadership behaviour at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid, which serves as both a strategic manager and a guardian of the Islamic boarding school's scientific tradition, takes the form of Integrative Epistemic-Cultural Leadership. The Integrative Epistemic-Cultural Leadership leadership model is where scientific authority and managerial authority are united in one leader figure who is simultaneously an epistemic authority, guardian of culture and scientific traditions, and a performer of

managerial and pedagogical functions, especially in the context of Islamic boarding schools.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the leadership at Ma'had Aly Nurul Jadid displays a unique form of integrative leadership, where the leader not only plays a strategic manager role but also as a scholarly figure who actively maintains the academic tradition of the Islamic boarding school through the practice of depositing "*Kitab Kuning*"s. Academic anxiety about the separation of managerial and scholarly functions in many Islamic educational institutions is refuted by the finding that the Mudir's direct presence in the sorogan process serves as the primary source of epistemic authority, thereby increasing students' motivation, discipline, and identification with the institution. This study reveals that integrative leadership behavior that carries out the dual role of strategic manager and guardian of the Islamic boarding school's scholarly tradition is carried out in the form of; first, the leader's personal will becomes a moral-intellectual energy that maintains the continuity of the scientific sanad; second, the leader applies a hybrid leadership model that combines modern management and the role of traditional ulama; third, the leader's involvement functions as a mechanism for stabilizing academic culture that prevents the abrasion of values due to modernization. This finding confirms that Islamic boarding school leadership cannot be separated from the epistemic dimension, as the leader's legitimacy rests on the scientific capacity clearly demonstrated to students.

The findings of this study also contribute to a broader perspective on Islamic educational leadership, particularly through a case study that analyses the culture, values, and epistemic structures of an Islamic boarding school. This study advances the understanding of integrative leadership, arguing that leaders cannot be separated from the teaching function within the Islamic boarding school tradition. These findings enrich theories of epistemic, hybrid, and cultural leadership through empirical evidence from Ma'had Aly, a heritage-based higher education institution with a unique position. The in-depth research method, employing interviews and direct observation, makes a meaningful scientific contribution to contemporary Islamic leadership literature. The limitations of this study lie primarily in its focus on a single institution and a single leader, and in the specific context of Ma'had Aly. Therefore, the results cannot be broadly generalised to all Islamic boarding schools or Islamic higher education institutions. Furthermore, this study did not examine variations in perspectives by gender, age group, or across institutions. The limited use of interviews and observations also opens up the possibility of researcher bias. Therefore, further research is recommended that incorporates more cases, comparative approaches, quantitative surveys, or longitudinal analyses to more comprehensively understand the dynamics of Islamic boarding school leadership.

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