

Leadership–Reward Alignment and Talent Retention in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Sector: A Critical Literature Review

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper critically examines how leadership behaviour and performance-based reward systems influence talent retention within Nigeria's oil and gas sector. It investigates whether alignment between managerial conduct and formal compensation practices offers a more contextually meaningful explanation of retention than treating leadership and rewards as isolated organizational variables.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A structured critical literature review was conducted using thematic synthesis across literature published primarily between 2021 and 2026, supplemented by foundational theoretical works where relevant. Applying a critical realist philosophical framework, the study evaluates the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions underpinning contemporary retention evidence and examines one study from the review in methodological detail.

Findings: Three core themes emerged: leadership acts as a primary social mechanism fostering psychological safety and attachment; performance-based rewards appear to influence retention of talent through justice perceptions rather than financial value alone; and leadership reward alignment influences system credibility. Misalignment, such as rhetoric prioritizing safety while rewarding pure production, may trigger psychological contract breaches. Sector evidence is dominated by cross-sectional, post-positivist designs measuring turnover intention rather than actual retention, leaving causal mechanisms unproven.

Originality/Value: From a DBA perspective, this paper tries to bridge the post positivist interpretivist divide by exploring the utility of critical realism in talent management research. From a DBA perspective, it specifies leadership reward alignment as a construct with observable indicators and testable propositions, rather than as a general principle, and states the conditions under which the proposition would fail

Keywords: Talent retention, Leadership behaviour, Performance-based rewards, Organizational alignment, Critical realism, Nigerian oil and gas sector.

1. Introduction

Nigerian oil and gas organizations invest heavily in leadership development and in performance-based pay and continue to lose yet retaining experienced technical and safety-critical employees remains a challenge. This is the central problem addressed in this review. Leadership and reward systems are often considered separately, although employees may interpret them together as signals of what the organization values. Capability in these organizations rests on technical, operational, managerial, safety and commercial knowledge that is difficult to acquire and slow to develop. Odigie (2025), Omomehin (2025) and Aliyu and Adefioye (2025) indicate that turnover, dissatisfaction, career development constraints, salary, work-life balance, leadership and promotion are interconnected concerns rather than discrete human resource problems.

The qualitative multiple case study by Odigie (2025) revealed that competitive compensation and benefits, talent management, work-life balance, engagement, organizational culture, Leadership, and career advancement are key elements of retention strategy among the 26 organizational leaders across eight oil and gas service organizations in Nigeria (Odigie, 2025). Contrary to this, Aliyu and Adefioye (2025) in another study reported that in Lubcon Nigeria Limited, career development opportunities and work-life balance were significantly related to employees' intention to leave the organization. The two do not contradict each other so much as reveal how little agreement exists about which factors carry the weight, and neither examine whether the factors interact.

Talent retention concerns an organization's capacity to keep its workforce of employees whose skills, knowledge, experience, and/or future potential are deemed to be important to the organization's capacity (Nwaigwe, 2025). However, the term is unstable. Talent management is applied inconsistently across organizations differing in size, ownership, resources and employment practice, so a finding about the retention of talent in one setting may not concern the same population in another (Nwaigwe, 2025).

It is essential to distinguish between actual retention, turnover intention, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and engagement. Although these concepts are closely related, they are not synonymous; employee attitudes (satisfaction/commitment) influence their intentions (turnover intention), which may or may not translate into actual behaviour (leaving the organization). Turnover intention refers to an employee's reported likelihood of leaving, whereas actual turnover represents the subsequent behavioural outcome of departure from the organisation. A series of intervening variables, such as goal clarity, intrinsic motivation, perceived organizational support, leader member exchange, job satisfaction, and person organisation fit, may affect the process of leaving the organization (Silva et al., 2025). This distinction is

important because it determines what conclusions can reasonably be drawn from the existing evidence and remains relevant throughout the analysis.

Leadership style shapes employees' perceptions of support, recognition, communication, development, fairness and organizational membership. A meta-analysis of inclusive leadership found a negative association with turnover intention (Li, Ling, & Zhu, 2025), mediated by psychological safety, perceived inclusion, psychological empowerment, organizational identification and leader-member exchange. Ethical leadership corresponds similarly with fairness, trust and worker attitudes, although inconsistently across industries and countries (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). Omomehin (2025), surveying 94 employees in the Nigerian natural gas industry, found perceived transformational leadership explained 23.6% of the variance in job satisfaction.

Reward systems based on performance benefits the employee/team based on their performance assessment. They can range from bonuses to merit-based pay, recognition, promotion, benefits, career advancement opportunities, and/or coveted assignments. Pay for performance does not always have a positive impact. It can raise motivation and perceived recognition where employees value the reward and understand the link between effort, performance and return, and it can generate stress, uncertainty, unproductive competition, reduced intrinsic motivation and perceived unfairness where it is poorly designed or poorly implemented (Gerhart, Kim, & He, 2026).

Reward effectiveness therefore depends on conditions rather than on the reward itself: fairness of allocation, clarity of criteria, consistency of process and the manner of implementation. Evidence from outside the sector suggests procedural and interactional justice reduce turnover intention through organizational trust, although transferability to a different institutional setting should be assessed rather than assumed (Alyahya et al., 2024). Nigerian studies likewise indicate that compensation alone is insufficient, and that generational differences, career opportunity, work environment and employee expectations all bear on the outcome (Somtochukwu & Farhat, 2024).

What the Nigerian evidence establishes is association rather than causation. No study located for this review tests whether leadership behavior conditions how employees respond to performance-based rewards, and none follows employees long enough to observe whether reported intentions become departures. The key question is therefore not simply whether supportive leadership and attractive rewards are individually associated with retention, but whether employees experience them as consistent and connected organizational practices.

Social Exchange Theory suggests that employees will invest their commitment and stay in an organization if the organization complements the valuation of their treatment, and inequity theory suggests that

employees will compare the valuation of their inputs compared to their outputs in an organization to others (Blau, 1964; Adams, 1965). Read together, these positions imply that leadership behavior may govern how a performance-based reward is interpreted, and therefore what it is worth to the person receiving it.

This report critically examines research published primarily between 2021 and 2026 on the relationship between leadership behavior, performance-based reward systems and talent retention in the Nigerian oil and gas industry. It examines not only reported outcomes but the ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological and ethical assumptions that generated them. The position taken here is critical realist, and it is stated at the outset rather than arrived at by elimination: leadership practices and reward systems are held to be real organizational structures with causal powers, whose effects are activated, modified or defeated by the conditions in which they operate and by the interpretations employees place on them.

The following are the review questions:

1. How have leadership behaviour, performance-based rewards, and talent retention been conceptualised and measured?
2. Through which mechanisms are leadership and rewards associated with retention outcomes?
3. What evidence exists concerning alignment or misalignment between leadership behaviour and reward practices?
4. What philosophical, methodological, and ethical limitations characterise the evidence?

2. Method for Conducting the Literature Review

2.1 Review design and philosophical orientation

This is a structured critical literature review using thematic synthesis. A critical review interrogates the assumptions, methods and contexts from which prior evidence was produced rather than reporting the evidence alone (Farrukh & Sajjad, 2023) and suits a subject matter of contested social processes rather than a settled empirical question (Snyder, 2019). Quantitative approaches dominate the measurement of leadership behavior, reward satisfaction and turnover intention, yet have limited purchase on what employees in a specific setting count as fairness or as commitment.

The critical realist position adopted here has a definite structure, and stating it matters because it governs what this review claims to have found. Bhaskar (2014) distinguishes three domains: the real, comprising structures and their causal powers; the actual, comprising events those powers generate; and the empirical,

comprising the subset of events that are observed. Causal powers operate transfactually, which is to say they persist whether or not they are exercised and whether or not their exercise produces a regular outcome. In open systems such as organizations, several mechanisms operate simultaneously and may counteract one another, so the absence of a stable statistical regularity is not evidence that a mechanism is absent (Sayer, 2000; Fleetwood, 2005). The corresponding mode of inference is retrodution, which asks what must be true for an observed pattern to be possible at all, rather than induction from repeated instances or deduction from a covering law (Danermark et al., 2019).

Three consequences follow for this review. Firstly, a weak or inconsistent correlation between leadership behavior and retention is treated as a question about counteracting conditions rather than as disconfirmation. Secondly, employee interpretation is treated as causally efficacious rather than as measurement noise, because a reward acquires its meaning through the account an employee gives of it. Thirdly, the review does not seek a universal relationship but the conditions under which particular mechanisms are activated in the Nigerian oil and gas sector. This is what distinguishes critical realism from the positivism it is often contrasted with, and from the interpretivism with which it is sometimes confused (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

2.2 Search strategy

Searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Collection, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and Google Scholar. Three strings were run separately so that studies addressing only one construct were not lost: ("leadership" OR "transformational leadership" OR "ethical leadership" OR "inclusive leadership") AND ("retention" OR "turnover intention"); ("performance-based pay" OR "pay for performance" OR "reward system" OR "total rewards") AND ("retention" OR "turnover intention"); and ("HR system strength" OR "alignment" OR "psychological contract" OR "organizational justice") AND ("reward" OR "leadership") AND "retention". Each was run with and without the qualifiers Nigeria, oil and gas, and emerging economy, limited to 2021 to 2026, English language, and peer-reviewed or doctoral output. Foundational theoretical works were retrieved separately by citation chaining.

The database search identified 126 records. After removal of duplicates and preliminary screening, 58 records were assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Following full-text assessment, 20 studies were retained for final thematic synthesis. The screening process was guided by the principles of PRISMA 2020, with records assessed through identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages (Page et al., 2021).

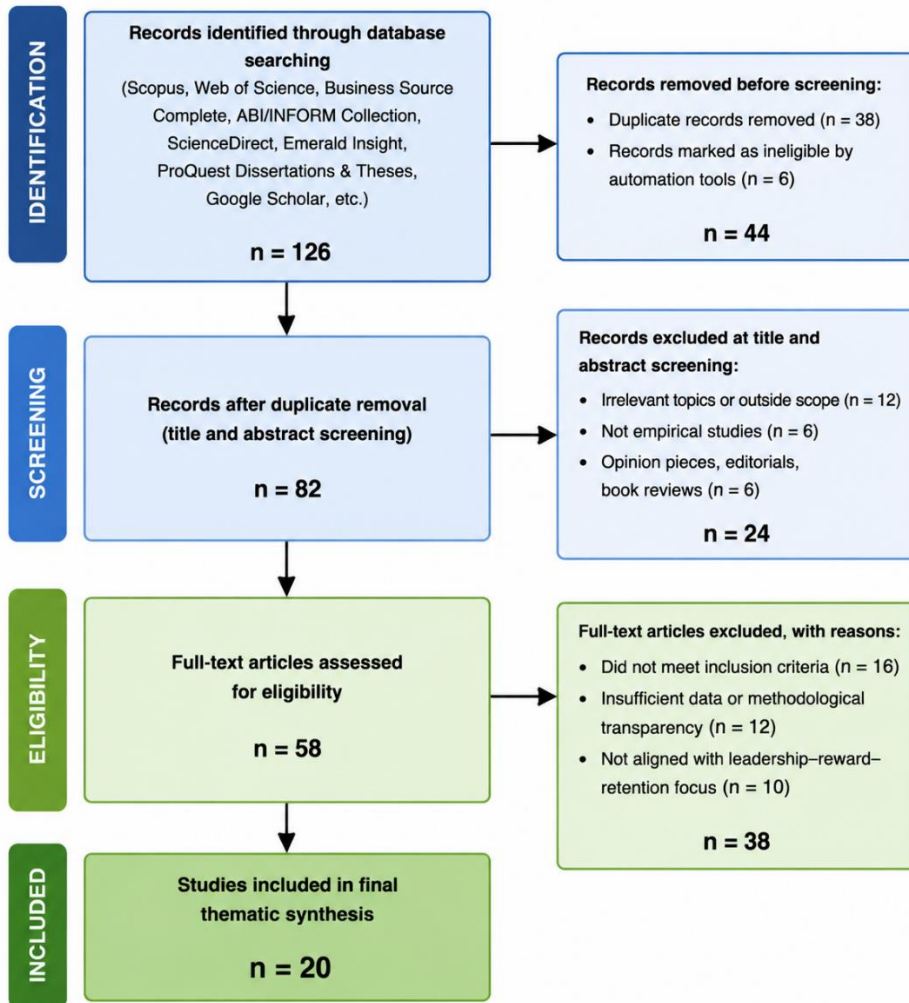


Figure 1 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram

2.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The review adopts the evidence hierarchy as there is not much direct Nigerian oil & gas research. Nigeria studies are prioritized, followed by Nigeria studies from other similar industries, Nigeria studies from other similar emerging economies, and lastly, evidence from other international management studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Period & Source	Published primarily between 2021 and 2026; peer-reviewed journal articles,	Published in non-credible online sources, opinion pieces, editorials,

	credible doctoral research, or authoritative industry/government reports.	or articles lacking empirical evidence.
Conceptual Focus	Focuses on leadership behaviours, performance-based rewards, talent management, employee retention, turnover intention, or related organizational mechanisms.	Focuses exclusively on consumer behaviour, unrelated non-organizational sectors, or general employee motivation lacking relevance to retention.
Population & Setting	Conducted among organizational employees, managers, or leaders within corporate or industrial settings.	Studies not involving organizational workforce populations or conducted outside employment contexts.
Methodological Rigor	Uses clear, identifiable, and transparent research methods (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods).	Studies lacking methodological transparency or lacking verifiable empirical procedures.
Geographic & Sector Hierarchy	Prioritizes direct Nigerian oil & gas research, followed by comparable Nigerian industries, emerging economies, and international management evidence.	Studies from unrelated industries or non-comparable contexts that offer no transferability to organizational talent retention.

The empirical evidence covered publications from 2021 to 2026, but key theoretical and foundational publications were included to provide context for the mechanisms underlying philosophy and theories.

2.4 Analytical procedure

Studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis in the sense developed by Thomas and Harden (2008), extracting context, theoretical framing, research philosophy, methodology, trustworthiness procedures, ethical considerations, principal findings and identified gaps. Coding proceeded from descriptive themes close to the source material to analytical themes that go beyond it, adopting the reflexive orientation of Braun and Clarke (2021), in which theme construction is an interpretive act by the reviewer rather than the discovery of patterns lying inert in the data. Three themes resulted: leadership as a mechanism influencing attachment; performance-based rewards and fairness; and the alignment of leadership practice with reward implementation.

2.6 Limitations of the review approach

The review acknowledges several limitations. Studies examining leadership behavior, performance-based rewards and retention simultaneously within Nigerian oil and gas organizations are few, so international evidence is included. Publication bias is likely, since studies reporting significant relationships are more

readily published than those reporting null findings. Much of the research uses cross-sectional self-report designs, which yield statistical relationships without explanation of the underlying behavior. A fourth limitation is specific to this review: screening, extraction and theme construction were carried out by a single reviewer, so there is no inter-rater check. Under the reflexive position adopted above this does not invalidate the synthesis, but the themes should be read as one defensible reading of the literature rather than the only one available.

3. Critical Literature Review

3.1 Theme 1: Leadership Behaviour as a Mechanism Influencing Talent Retention

Leadership behavior operates on retention as a mechanism rather than as a direct cause, and the recent literature is increasingly explicit about this. A growing body of research treats leadership behavior as an organizational process affecting attachment to or detachment from the organization (Li et al., 2025). In industries such as oil and gas, where technical, safety and operational expertise accumulate slowly, retaining experienced staff is a strategic rather than an administrative concern.

Recent empirical research is more in agreement with the idea that positive outcomes associated with employee retention are related to positive leadership behaviours which are ethical, are transformational, and are inclusive. Li, Ling and Zhu (2025) report, from a meta-analysis of inclusive leadership, a negative relationship with turnover intention, identifying psychological safety, psychological empowerment, perceived inclusion, organizational identification and leader-member exchange as explanatory mechanisms. The implication is that leaders influence retention less by what they instruct than by whether employees come to feel valued, respected and psychologically safe.

Reviews of ethical leadership point in a similar direction. Chaiyasat et al. (2025) finds that employees increasingly evaluate leaders on fairness, integrity and consistency as well as performance, and that ethical leadership is associated with lower intention to leave through perceptions of trust and justice. The same authors note continuing definitional instability in the construct. That instability matters more than it is usually allowed to. A construct defined differently in each study cannot function as a stable independent variable in a retention model, which is one reason this review locates its contribution in the relationship between leadership and reward rather than in leadership style.

Nigerian oil and gas organizations are a suitable setting for examining these relationships, being technically complex, hierarchical, safety-critical and subject to high-performance pressure. Omomehin (2025) examined transformational leadership and employee satisfaction in the Nigerian natural gas industry using

a quantitative correlational design with 94 participants, reporting that transformational leadership dimensions collectively explained 23.6% of the variance in job satisfaction, with idealised influence and inspirational motivation the strongest predictors. The finding supports the proposition that leader behavior affects employee attitudes in this sector. It cannot support more than that, because the design measures a single point in time and cannot establish whether a change in leadership behavior precedes a change in employee attitude, or whether either precedes a decision to stay.

This limitation matters in the Nigerian oil and gas sector, where the same leadership practice is encountered from very different positions. Seniority, length of service, contractual status, bargaining power and career prospects within a multinational employer all condition how a given behavior is read (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). Leadership is therefore better understood not as a set of capacities held by leaders but as a set of behaviors to which followers assign meaning within an organizational relationship.

The interpretation of critical realism is more nuanced and complex. The perspective here is that leadership behaviours are concrete processes in the organization, but their impact is not inevitable (Chaiyasat et al., 2025). Instead, it is the leadership qualities underneath the surface that have an impact on retention, such as trust, perceived organizational support, fairness, psychological safety, and satisfaction of the psychological contract. The mechanisms can vary from one organization to another, as well as from situation to situation. A leader who offers developmental feedback may raise retention where employees perceive real career opportunities and may achieve very little where advancement is structurally blocked (Silva et al., 2025).

The relationship is further complicated by the distinction between attitudes and behavior. Much recent research examines turnover intention, satisfaction or commitment because these are more readily obtained by survey than actual turnover records. Turnover intention predicts turnover but is not the same thing: labor-market conditions, family circumstances and the availability of alternatives all intervene (Silva et al., 2025). In this sector the gap is likely to be wide, since scarce alternatives, specialized skills and geographical concentration may hold dissatisfied employees in post. What an organization observes as retention may be continuance commitment, grounded in the perceived cost of leaving, rather than the affective attachment it believes it is generating (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Retention research also carries an axiological commitment that is rarely made explicit. Quantitative studies typically evaluate leadership against satisfaction, commitment, productivity and reduced turnover, embedding an assumption that retention is itself a good. It need not be. A leader may raise retention by increasing employees' dependence on the organization without improving their welfare, autonomy or prospects, and would be judged effective by that measure. Retention is not the only good measure of

successful Leadership, however, as it also needs to be measured by the quality and fairness of the employment relationship.

3.2 Theme 2: Performance-Based Reward Systems, Organisational Justice and Talent Retention

Performance-based rewards have long been studied as instruments of motivation and retention, and current research has displaced the assumption that financial value is what holds employees. Employee responses are grounded instead in perceptions of fairness, recognition, transparency, career prospect and the connection between personal effort and organizational outcome (Gerhart, Kim, & He, 2026; Sarkar, 2025). Expectancy theory holds that a reward motivates where the employee believes that effort produces performance, that performance produces the reward, and that the reward is of value (Vroom, 1964; Mohapi, Nzimakwe, & Utete, 2025). A performance measure regarded as inaccurate or inequitable can be actively harmful, generating unproductive competition, pressure and discontent (Gerhart, Kim, & He, 2026).

According to Organizational Justice Theory, the different reactions are related to distributive (fair allocation), procedural (fair processes), and interactional (dignified treatment) justice (Colquitt et al., 2001). Fairness perceptions reduce dissatisfaction where criteria are transparent, consistently applied and accepted as legitimate (Aldabbas, Elamin, & Ahmed, 2025). Mohapi, Nzimakwe and Utete (2025) found that pay for performance reduced intention to leave through the cognitive appraisal of fairness rather than through the financial value of the reward. Career progression, organizational support, recognition and work environment weigh alongside compensation (Somtochukwu & Farhat, 2024), and Nigerian oil and gas evidence points to culture, leadership and work-life balance operating in the same way (Odigie, 2025; Aliyu & Adefioye, 2025).

From a philosophical perspective, positivists have a different understanding of rewards. A positivist treatment takes rewards to be objective and measurable and can establish whether reward levels correlate with retention. An interpretivist treatment takes rewards to be constituted through the meanings employees assign to them and can establish what a bonus signifies to the person who receives it, but not how far that meaning extends beyond the case. The critical realist alternative holds both: reward structures are real and consequential, and their effects run through interpretation and are conditioned by context, management practice and perceived fairness (Ozigbo & Patrick, 2025).

3.3 Theme 3: Leadership–Reward Alignment and Talent Retention in the Nigerian Oil and Gas Context

Recent human resource literature treats employees as encountering organizational practice as a whole rather than as discrete interventions. Policies communicate priorities, and managers interpret those policies in

daily practice (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Manchia, Bal, & Khapova, 2026). The effect of performance-based compensation on retention therefore depends on whether the behaviors leadership reinforces are the ones the formal scheme claims to reward. Psychological contract theory holds that employees evaluate reward outcomes against the promises they believe the organization has made; fulfilment strengthens commitment, and breach produces withdrawal (Rousseau, 1995). Because leaders act as agents of the organization, a technically correct compensation system can still be delivered in a way that violates procedural and interactional justice (Colquitt et al., 2001; Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024).

Alignment must be defined before it can be argued about, and it is defined here in observable terms. Following Bowen and Ostroff (2004), a human resource system generates a strong situation when it exhibits distinctiveness, so that employees notice and understand what is being asked; consistency, so that the relationship between behavior and consequence holds across occasions and across managers; and consensus, so that those who administer the system agree about what it rewards. Leadership-reward alignment is accordingly defined as the degree to which the behaviors a leader recognizes, praises and sanctions in daily practice correspond to the behaviors the formal reward system pays for, assessed against those three criteria. So defined, alignment is observable independently of the retention outcome it is used to explain, through the reward criteria as documented, the behaviors managers' report reinforcing, and the criteria employees believe are being applied.

That independence is what makes the proposition testable, and it is worth stating what would count against it. The claim advanced here would fail if employees who report high perceived alignment showed no lower turnover than those who report low alignment once reward level and perceived alternatives are controlled; if perceived alignment proved to be nothing more than a restatement of general satisfaction; or if retention in this sector were explained almost entirely by labor-market constraint, in which case alignment would be a real mechanism with no room to operate. The third possibility is the most serious, and it cannot be dismissed on the evidence currently available.

Alignment carries particular weight in the Nigerian oil and gas sector, where technical complexity, safety protocols and specialized expertise combine. Misalignment, such as a reward system paying for individual production while stated values emphasize safety and teamwork, signals conflicting priorities (Antonsen, 2009). The mechanism is concrete. A drilling operation may publish a scorecard weighting safety observations and near-miss reporting, while the monthly bonus is driven by meters drilled and the supervisor's praise goes to the crew that made up lost time. The employee does not experience this as a policy inconsistency to be reported; it is read as information about what the organization actually values, and the published safety commitment is discounted accordingly. Where reporting a near miss costs the crew bonus, under-reporting is the rational response, and the organization loses both the safety data and the

credibility of every subsequent reward announcement. Social exchange theory predicts that reciprocal commitment rises where what leadership asks for is what the organization visibly rewards (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This challenges purely financial retention strategies and equally challenges the assumption that emphasizing appreciation and career development will succeed without supportive leadership and procedural justice (Somtochukwu & Farhat, 2024; Sarkar, 2025).

3.4 Synthesis and Research Gaps

The literature establishes that leadership behavior is associated with retention, and that performance-based rewards are associated with retention, but rarely examines the two together (Li, Ling, & Zhu, 2025; Gerhart, Kim, & He, 2026). The contribution of this review lies in that gap. Where the behaviors a leader reinforces match what the formal system rewards, employees judge the system credible; where they diverge, employees experience psychological contract breach, and retention suffers regardless of the generosity of the reward (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Rousseau, 1995; Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024). Moreover, the use of financial incentives is not effective if the criteria are ambiguous or seen as unfair (Gerhart, Kim, and He, 2026; Mohapi, Nzimakwe, and Utete, 2025).

Three conceptual gaps follow. Leadership and reward mechanisms have not been examined for their joint and simultaneous effect (Chaiyasat et al., 2025; Sarkar, 2025). Retention is frequently operationalized as turnover intention or job satisfaction, which is problematic in a sector where limited alternative employment means low satisfaction need not produce departure (Silva et al., 2025). And talent remains under-specified, leaving it unclear whether a finding applies to a technical specialist, a safety leader or operational staff (Nwaigwe, 2025).

The methodological pattern is equally consistent. The evidence base is dominated by post-positivist quantitative designs treating organizational phenomena as objective variables, measured cross-sectionally by self-report, with turnover intention standing in for turnover (Omomehin, 2025; Mohapi, Nzimakwe, & Utete, 2025; Silva et al., 2025). Nigerian research has examined the topic usefully but has not tested whether leadership conditions employee response to reward systems (Odigie, 2025; Omomehin, 2025; Aliyu & Adefioye, 2025). What is needed is a design capable of establishing both that a relationship holds and why it holds, which is the requirement that shapes the methodological argument.

4. Philosophical and Methodological Analysis of One Selected Study

4.1 Overview of the Selected Study

The study selected for detailed analysis is Omomehin (2025), Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Employee Satisfaction in the Nigerian Natural Gas Industry, a doctoral dissertation in management conferred by Walden University in May 2025. It was chosen because it addresses leadership behavior in the sector under review, and because its philosophical commitments are explicit enough in its design to be examined rather than inferred.

Omomehin (2025) investigated the relationship between employees' perceptions of transformational leadership and their job satisfaction in the Nigerian natural gas industry, motivated by concern over workforce productivity and satisfaction amid the sector's operational, institutional and economic pressures. The study drew on Bass and Avolio's (1994) conceptualization of transformational leadership, encompassing idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

A quantitative, non-experimental correlational design was used, with 94 employees in the Niger Delta completing Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and Spector's Job Satisfaction Survey. Multiple linear regression yielded a significant model, $F(5, 88) = 5.422$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .236$, indicating that the transformational leadership dimensions accounted for 23.6% of the variance in job satisfaction, with idealized influence and inspirational motivation the strongest predictors and individualized consideration the weakest. The five degrees of freedom in the numerator indicate five predictors rather than the four dimensions named above, consistent with the standard treatment of idealized influence as two components, attributed and behavioral. The distinction bears on the ontological argument that follows, since it concerns how finely the construct can be decomposed before its components cease to be separable.

The results are valuable to add to the body of knowledge on leadership and attitudes of employees in the Nigerian energy sector. However, from a research philosophy perspective, the research raises relevant questions: what counts as valid knowledge about leadership and retention, whether satisfaction is an acceptable proxy for retention, and whether quantitative measurement can capture the organizational relationships at issue in this setting.

4.2 Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

Ontological assumptions

Ontology concerns assumptions about the nature of reality and what is held to exist in the social world (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2023; Bell, Harley, & Bryman, 2022). Omomehin (2025) adopts a realist orientation, treating transformational leadership behaviors and employee satisfaction as organizational phenomena existing independently of the research process and assuming that the leadership dimensions can

be meaningfully decomposed, quantified and compared. This is based on a frame of mind that the attributes of leadership are fairly stable aspects of an organization that can influence employee outcomes.

The position has real advantages. Measuring the dimensions as constructs permits patterns to be identified and relationships between leadership and employee outcomes to be estimated, and the use of an established instrument allows comparison with the wider transformational leadership literature (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

It also carries restrictions. Leadership is a social relationship as well as a set of behaviors, and the same conduct is interpreted differently according to position, career objective, prior experience and organizational culture. A manager who assigns demanding work may be experienced as stimulating by one employee and as unreasonable by another; low involvement may be read as autonomy or as neglect. Leadership, therefore, would be seen not as just a set of observable behaviours of managers, but as "meaning making" by employees. This restriction is especially important for the natural gas sector in Nigeria, where role, employment status, hierarchical position and working environment differ sharply within a single workforce.

Critical realism resolves the tension rather than splitting the difference. Leadership practices are real and possess causal powers; whether those powers are exercised, and to what effect, depends on conditions and on interpretation (Bhaskar, 2014; Fleetwood, 2005). Applied here, the abductive question is not whether transformational leadership predicts satisfaction, but what must be true of the setting for idealized influence to predict it more strongly than individualized consideration. A plausible answer is that in a hierarchical, safety-critical and economically constrained sector, employees have limited opportunity to benefit from individualized developmental attention, while a leader's credibility carries disproportionate weight because it is the available signal about how discretionary decisions will be made. This remains a possible explanation rather than an established finding, as the study design does not allow it to be directly tested.

Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology is about the ways in which knowledge can be produced and justified (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2023). Omomehin (2025) proceeds post-positivistically, through hypothesis testing, quantitative measurement, statistical analysis and the search for relationships between leadership variables and employee outcomes, assuming that facts about leadership effectiveness can be established by systematic measurement and inference.

This study assumes that facts about the effectiveness of leadership can be achieved through a systematic measurement and statistical evaluation. The use of regression analysis shows that an attempt was made to find out if changes in perceptions of transformational leadership account for changes in employee

satisfaction. The approach yields knowledge that individual experience cannot. The estimate that transformational leadership accounts for 23.6% of variance in satisfaction is a claim no single account of working life could produce. The same design restricts what may be concluded. A statistical relationship records association without explanation: the study shows that perceptions of transformational leadership move with satisfaction, but not why particular employees read particular behaviors as they do. The 76.4% of variance the model does not explain is the more interesting figure, and it is the space in which reward systems, justice perceptions, career structure and labor-market constraint operate.

Furthermore, the study also measures satisfaction rather than retention. Employee satisfaction is often conflated with employee retention measures, but it is not the same as employee retention. Employees who do not like the job may stay due to the economic climate, lack of other work opportunities, family obligations, or industry specific factors (Silva et al., 2025). The epistemological choice therefore determines the conclusions that are available, and any inference from this study to retention is an inference the design does not license.

Interviews or organizational ethnography as an interpretivist method could give insight into the processes of employees' experience of leadership behaviour and how this relates to their decisions to stay or leave organizations. Pragmatism offers a third route, subordinating the paradigm question to the research question (Morgan, 2007). It is not adopted here, because the objection to treating leadership as an objective variable is ontological rather than practical, and pragmatism sets that objection aside rather than answering it. These are different kinds of knowledge rather than better and worse kinds and choosing between them is a choice about what one is entitled to claim.

4.3 Axiology and Researcher Positionality

Axiology concerns the role of values in research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2023). Omomehin's (2025) quantitative design proceeds on an assumption of researcher neutrality and of measurement independent of the researcher's commitments. The study is making the assumption that the organization would benefit from improving the performance of the leadership and the satisfaction of employees. This is a reasonable assumption as employee satisfaction is often known to have a strong correlation with organizational outcomes. However, what really needs to be looked at is who has their interests being served when leadership research is done.

Organizations can benefit from increased satisfaction and retention, as it can reduce workforce disruption and retention of knowledge within the organization. However, determining the ethical worth of leadership also involves examining the influence it has on creating a better workplace for staff in terms of well-being, fairness, autonomy, and professional growth. Retention is not evidence of a sound employment relationship:

employees may remain because little else is available, or because they depend on the organization for status or housing. An account of leadership effectiveness counting only retention rates a leader who deepens dependence identically to one who builds commitment.

The same scrutiny must be turned on this review. The author is a HR practitioner with prior employment in the Nigerian oil and gas sector, researching the practice of their profession. That position is an asset and a liability in equal measure. It supplies access, sector knowledge and the ability to recognize when a published account of a reward process does not resemble how such processes are administered. It also predisposes the author to treat human resource interventions as consequential, to find the alignment argument persuasive because it is professionally congenial, and to frame retention as a legitimate objective rather than interrogating it. Reflexivity therefore requires these potential influences to be continually recognized and examined throughout the research process rather than simply acknowledged at the outset (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018).

Three commitments follow for the doctoral work. Retention will be treated as a contested good, and the analysis will ask on what terms' employees remain, not only whether they remain. Employee accounts will be sought independently of management accounts, since a study of alignment sampling only those who administer the reward system can establish only that they believe it coherent. The author's professional judgements will be labelled as such and held separate from the evidence, on the principle that a stated value commitment can be examined by a reader whereas a concealed one cannot (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

4.4 Methodological Quality: Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness

Omomehin's (2025) study draws strength from established instruments. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is used widely in transformational leadership research, and Spector's Job Satisfaction Survey is a validated instrument for measuring employees' satisfaction (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Spector, 1985). Their use supports measurement reliability and permits comparison with prior work. Several methodological limitations nonetheless bear on the conclusion.

Firstly, the design is cross-sectional. Data collected at a single point can establish association but cannot establish temporal order, so it cannot be determined whether leadership behavior produces satisfaction, whether satisfied employees evaluate their leaders more generously, or whether a third factor produces both. Longitudinal measurement would be required to separate these.

Secondly, the research is perception-based, meaning that it relies on employee perceptions. Employees rated leadership and satisfaction on the same instrument at the same time, which is the classic condition for common method variance, whereby a portion of the observed relationship is attributable to shared measurement rather than to any relationship between the constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Still, if they

are also responding to the same measures of satisfaction and leadership, they may be introducing common-method bias. People who are generally satisfied with their organization will rate it higher on the leadership and satisfaction questions.

The most serious threat, which the study does not address, concerns construct validity. Both instruments were developed and validated in Western organizational samples and appear to have been administered in Nigeria without adaptation or invariance testing. Measurement invariance cannot be assumed across cultural and linguistic settings, and where it does not hold, observed differences may reflect differences in how items are understood rather than in the constructs themselves (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Deference norms, the meaning attached to a supervisor's personal attention, and the acceptability of criticizing a manager in writing all plausibly differ between the populations on which these scales were validated and a Niger Delta gas workforce. Until invariance is established, it is not certain that the study measured transformational leadership as the instrument's authors defined it. No sample reliability coefficients are reported.

Third, this employee sample of 94 is adequate to provide valid sector-specific evidence, but not adequate to provide generalizing evidence beyond the sector. More importantly, a sample drawn from the Niger Delta cannot support inference to the Nigerian oil and gas workforce as a whole, which spans differing ownership structures, occupational groups, contractual arrangements and locations. The estimate travels to the population sampled, and no further.

Finally, the study does not report on actual retention, but rather on satisfaction. While said employees may be a key psychological process that impacts retention, it may not necessarily be a measure of retention. The absence of any equivalent framework across much of the sector literature itself is worth noting: methodological quality is assessed almost entirely through psychometric criteria, which suits the paradigm and obscures what it cannot see.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

In organizational research, ethical issues are of special concern as employees will have different levels of power within their environment. Research respondents might be reluctant to provide negative feedback on managers or working practices when they think their responses may affect their job situation. Although Omomehin (2025) provides evidence of a structured research design, it is worth noting that there are limitations to consider when conducting research within an organization.

Informed consent is the first and the least straightforward. Consent must be informed, specific and freely given, yet voluntariness is compromised where an employer has sanctioned the study and a supervisor distributes the invitation. Employees may reasonably infer that participation is expected, and refusal may

feel visible. Consent processes must therefore be administered through a channel independent of line management, must state explicitly that participation is unconnected to appraisal or reward, and must make the right to withdraw effective in practice by allowing withdrawal after submission up to a stated date.

Gatekeeper bias follows directly. Where an organization selects participants, the sample is not the workforce but the portion of its management is willing to expose to a researcher, and those most disaffected are the least likely to appear in it. In a study of leadership, this is not a peripheral sampling concern but a threat to the substance of the finding. Sampling arrangements should be documented in enough detail for a reader to judge who could not have been selected.

Power asymmetry shapes what participants say as well as who is asked. Employees rating their own manager have a material interest in the answer, and socially desirable responding is a predictable consequence rather than an anomaly. Anonymity mitigates this only if participants believe in it. The risk is acute in specialized populations: where a department numbers a dozen people, role, tenure and location together can identify an individual even where no name is recorded. Reporting should aggregate demographic detail, and any quotation should be checked for re-identification before use.

Data protection is a legal obligation here, not only an ethical preference. The Nigeria Data Protection Act, 2023 establishes the Nigeria Data Protection Commission and imposes duties of lawful basis, purpose limitation, data minimization, security and accountability on anyone processing the personal data of individuals in Nigeria. Research on employees processes personal data, and where responses concern health, working conditions or grievances it may process sensitive data. Compliance requires a stated lawful basis, retention periods fixed in advance, encryption in transit and at rest, and care with cross-border transfer where analysis is conducted outside Nigeria, as it will be for myself a doctoral candidate studying in the United Kingdom. Institutional approval is necessary but not sufficient, since a United Kingdom ethics committee does not discharge obligations arising under Nigerian law.

Beyond procedure lies the axiological question raised: whose interests the research serves. Retention research is commissioned and read by organizations, and its recommendations are addressed to them. Findings that would improve retention by increasing employees' cost of leaving are, on a purely organizational criterion, successful findings. A researcher who accepts that criterion without examination adopts one party's interests as the standard of value. The position taken here is that retention research must report the terms on which employees remain as well as the rate at which they do and must decline to recommend measures that raise retention by narrowing employees' options.

Two further commitments govern the doctoral work. Participants will receive a summary of findings in a usable form, since research conducted on employees for the benefit of employers without return to

participants is extractive whatever its procedural compliance. The terms of access will be agreed in writing before the research begins to protect the researcher's independence and reduce the risk of sponsors influencing how findings are reported.

4.6 Critical Appraisal and Alternative Philosophical Approaches

Omomehin (2025) establishes a moderate association between perceived transformational leadership and employee satisfaction in the Nigerian natural gas industry, with the strengths of sector relevance, transparent and established instruments, and appropriate statistical analysis. The evidence is not strong in the sense of being causal or generalizable, and the language used to describe it should not exceed what a single cross-sectional sample can bear.

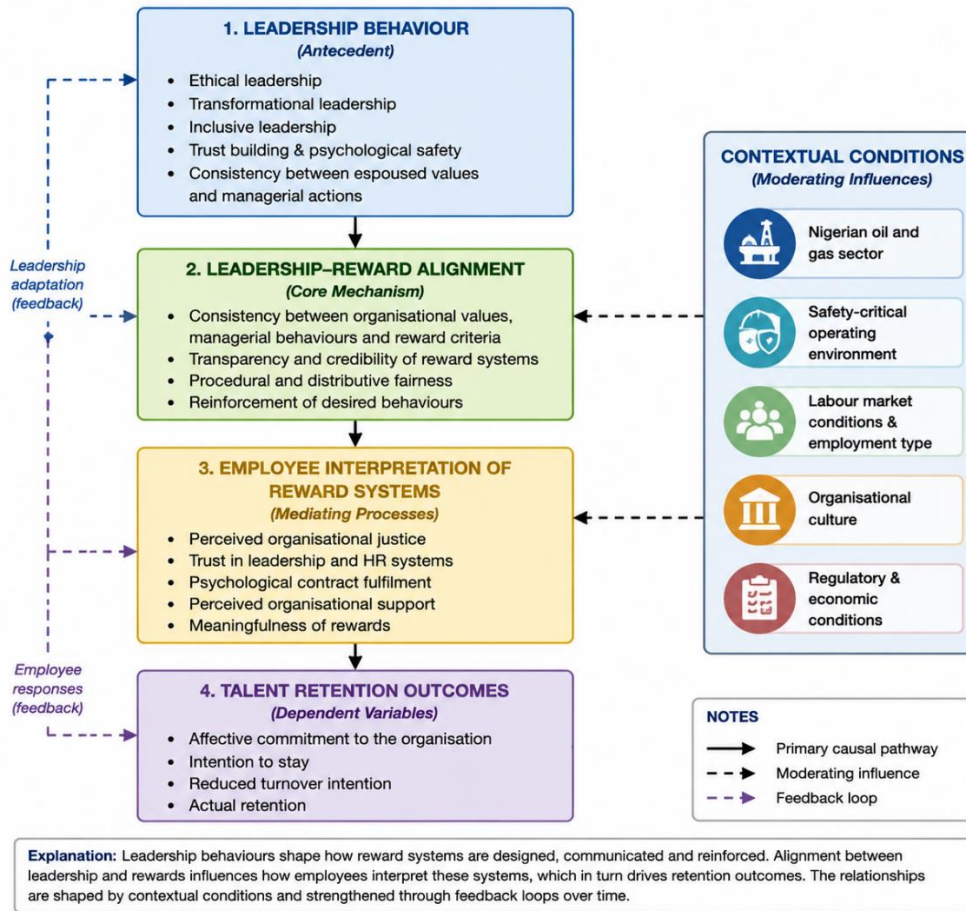
The conclusions available are limited by the study's philosophical position. A post-positivist design demonstrates relationships between measurable constructs but cannot account for how employees interpret leadership behavior in a specific context. An interpretivist alternative would recover employees' experience and its bearing on trust, recognition, fairness and intention to stay, at the cost of generalization. A critical realist design would combine them for a reason other than convenience: quantitative estimation to establish that a pattern obtains, and qualitative work to identify the mechanisms and conditions producing it, on the understanding that the second is not illustration of the first but the explanation the first cannot supply.

While the study by Omomehin (2025) provides insightful insights into how leadership and employee attitudes interact, a more extensive study could analyse leadership behaviour in relation to the alignment of reward systems, organizational justice, and employees' interpretations of organizational commitment.

5. Discussion and Contribution

Leadership behaviours (Li, Ling, and Zhu, 2025; Chaiyasat et al., 2025) and performance-based reward systems (Gerhart, Kim, and He, 2026; Mohapi, Nzimakwe, and Utete, 2025) were found to be important but insufficient explanations of talent retention. The contribution of this review is to relocate the explanation at the point where the two meet, in the correspondence between what leaders reinforce and what the formal system rewards (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024). Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, this paper proposes a leadership–reward alignment framework explaining how leadership behaviour influences employees' interpretation of performance-based reward systems and, consequently, talent retention outcomes.

Figure 2: Proposed Leadership–Reward Alignment Framework for Talent Retention



5.1 Theoretical contribution

The theories drawn on here are not alternatives but stages in a single causal account and setting them out as a sequence is what converts the alignment principle into a framework. Leadership behavior is the signal: what a leader recognizes, praises and sanctions tells employees what the organization values. Social exchange is the response that follows, in reciprocated commitment or withdrawal (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Organizational Justice Theory indicates that when there is a mismatch between the outcomes of rewards, procedural justice can reduce dissatisfaction (Colquitt et al., 2001; Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024). In addition, Psychological Contract theory suggests that if an organization has misrepresented its expectations or promises, or if management has failed to deliver on them, the contract has been violated, and this violation impacts retention (Rousseau, 1995; Manchia, Bal, and Khapova, 2026). The use of these mechanisms shows that employees' perceptions of fairness, trust, and commitment result from the combination of leadership and rewards.

Three propositions follow, stated so that each could be tested and each could fail.

- P1. Perceived leadership-reward alignment predicts retention behavior independently of reward level, and the association survives statistical control for perceived availability of alternative employment.
- P2. Alignment operates through justice perception and psychological contract fulfilment rather than directly, so that controlling for both substantially attenuates the association.
- P3. The effect of misalignment is asymmetric: a credible reward system administered by a leader whose conduct contradicts it damages retention more than an ungenerous system administered consistently, because the first communicates that stated commitments are unreliable.

The third proposition is the one most likely to fail, and it is included for that reason. It predicts that consistency matters more than generosity, which runs against the assumption embedded in most compensation practices.

5.2 Methodological contribution

Previous research has largely used cross-sectional surveys to measure job satisfaction and intention to leave, rather than actual retention (Silva et al., 2025). Testing the propositions above would require three elements the current evidence base lacks: a longitudinal element, so that reported perceptions precede observed departures; organizational turnover records, so that the outcome is behavior rather than intention; and qualitative work with employees at differing levels, so that the mechanism is identified rather than inferred. A sequential mixed design under a critical realist logic would satisfy these, the qualitative phase serving to explain the quantitative pattern rather than illustrate it

5.3 Practical implications for management

Organizations need to refrain from using compensation as a standalone retention measure (Somtochukwu & Farhat, 2024; Sarkar, 2025). Leaders are the interpreters of reward systems and require preparation for that role in transparent assessment, criteria-based feedback and consistency of application. In safety-critical settings the reward system must reinforce the behaviors the organization claims to value, or it will produce the behaviors it actually pays for (Antonsen, 2009).

Three measures follow that an operating company could implement without redesigning its reward structure. A briefing pack for line managers should state each reward criterion in observable terms, give worked examples of what does and does not meet it, and supply wording for explaining an outcome to an employee who disagrees, since inconsistency between managers is usually a failure of shared definition rather than of intent. Alignment should then be measured before it costs the organization people, by asking employees which behaviors they believe are rewarded and comparing their answers with the documented criteria and with what managers report reinforcing; divergence between the three is a leading indicator, and

it appears well before turnover does. Where safety and production incentives conflict, the conflict should be resolved in the incentive design rather than in exhortation. These recommendations reflect the author's professional judgement applied to the reviewed evidence and are offered as such.

5.4 Implications for DBA research

Research design follows from philosophical commitment rather than from convenience. The question for the doctoral study is whether, and through what mechanisms, alignment between leadership behavior and performance-based reward systems affects the retention of technical and supervisory staff in Nigerian oil and gas organizations. The ontological commitment is critical realist: leadership practice and reward systems are real structures with causal powers whose exercise is conditional. The epistemological commitment follows: statistical association establishes that a pattern obtains, and only employees' accounts can establish why, so neither method is subordinate to the other.

The design is therefore sequential and mixed. A survey across multiple operating companies would measure perceived alignment using the distinctiveness, consistency and consensus criteria, together with justice perceptions, psychological contract fulfilment and perceived alternatives, matched where access permits to turnover records collected twelve months later so that the outcome is behavior. Interviews with employees differing in seniority and contractual status would then be used retroductively, with cases selected for divergence from the quantitative model rather than conformity to it, since the cases the model fails to predict reveal the conditions it has not captured (Easton, 2010).

6. Conclusion

The issue of talent retention is complex, and two key factors are leadership and compensation, neither of which can fully address the issue (Li, Ling, and Zhu, 2025; Gerhart, Kim, and He, 2026). This review has argued that the more defensible explanation lies in the correspondence between them. Where the behaviors leaders reinforce match what the formal system rewards, the system is read as credible and fair; where they diverge, employees experience the divergence as a breach of what was promised, and the generosity of the reward does not repair it (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Rousseau, 1995; Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024).

The evidence base is not currently adequate to test that claim. It is dominated by cross-sectional, post-positivist designs measuring turnover intention rather than retention behavior, and Nigerian research, though useful, has not examined whether leadership conditions employees' responses to reward systems (Odigie, 2025; Omomehin, 2025; Aliyu & Adefioye, 2025). What remains uncertain is whether alignment

exerts an effect once labor-market constraint is taken into account, and that uncertainty is the principal reason the doctoral design measures perceived alternatives rather than assuming them away.

Critical realism has been adopted here not as a compromise between positivism and interpretivism but because it accounts for what the evidence base actually looks like: real mechanisms operating in open systems, producing associations that vary because the conditions vary (Bhaskar, 2014; Sayer, 2000). The practical implication for organizations in this sector is that credibility, rather than generosity, is the scarce resource, and that retention strategy is better understood as the management of a coherent employment system than as a schedule of individual inducements.

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