

Exploration of the Gap between Business Management Curriculum and Employability Requirements: A Study of Curriculum Designers and Recruiters' Perceptions

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Abstract – This paper aims to explore the perceptions of curriculum designers and recruiters toward why the gap exists between business management curriculum at a selected university and employability requirements of bank in Cambodia. Qualitative approach with specific design of exploratory case study was employed to investigate the problem. Data was extracted from documents, observations and structure interviews. The interview was conducted with 6 respondents (2 curriculum designers, 4 recruiters). Data were classified into two categories (1) perception of curriculum designers and (2) perception of recruiters. A direct analytical approach was applied followed strategy of Creswell (2007). The results indicated that the gap exists due to four main factors (1) a loose enforcement from the government on nurturing relationship between university and industry in developing curriculum, (2) a misperception between university and industry toward skills development, (3) a scarcity of resources in implementing business management curriculum, and (4) an information gap between university and industry to develop and update business management curriculum. With such obvious evidences, several implications and suggestions have been made to the government, line ministries, universities, industries and students for further study of business management curriculum and its challenges so that they can design compatible curriculum to develop knowledge and skills of students for the national, regional and global skill standards.

Keywords: Gap; Business Management; Curriculum; Employability Requirement; Industry

1. Introduction

Skills development and employability become a recent challenge in higher education curriculum (Atlay, 2006). Current studies have highlighted that this issue has occurred worldwide, for example, in the OCEC countries (McIntosh, 2008), the United States and Europe (Scherer et al. 2005), and East Asian countries (the World Bank, 2012). The World Bank (2012) stressed out that graduates 'employability skills in Vietnam, Thailand, Mongolia, and Philippine, and especially in Cambodia have been comparatively poor. In Cambodia, the World Bank (2012) pointed out that graduates have poor analytical skills. Similarly, CAMBFEB (2008) claimed that only small number of Cambodian graduate employees have "skills or almost skills". In general, business graduates do not obtained sufficient knowledge and skills for work area (Sopahl, 2008).

The common skill shortages of business graduates, especially with the field of business management were work attitude and foreign language, work experience, technical skill, communication skill, decision-making, analytical skill, and specialized skills (D'Amico, 2009; UNDP, 2011). This problem has caused difficulties to

employers in recruiting qualified graduates for the positions of management, marketing, sales and service, human resources, accounting and finance (D'Amico, 2009; UNDP, 2011; CAMFEB, 2008).

Consequently, the skill gap has hindered Cambodian graduates in entering employment market (ILO, 2011). As emphasized by Sopahl (2008), graduates take several months to get a job, and only 50% of them regardless the field of studies have not been employed (Ministry of Vocational Labor and Training, 2011). Annually, 300,000 Cambodian youth enter employment market, and the numbers steadily increase to over 400,000 in the following years (ILO, 2011). Even worse, the numbers of graduates will reach to 220,000 while employment market can provide 86,000 jobs.

With this reference, skill gap has become a barrier to improve socioeconomic and national wealth (Sopahl, 2008; Meng, 2010; Economic Intelligent Unit, 2010). Recently, Cambodia faces a lot of challenges in boosting the growth of economy (Sopahl, 2008). To deal with this problem, it has been suggested reflecting on the application of higher education curriculum, specifically business management. Therefore, this paper intends to explore the perceptions of curriculum designers as well as recruiters toward why the gap exist between business

management curriculum and employability. Especially, the study aims to investigate how the selected university develop and practice business management curriculum, and how the bank create employability requirements.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Business Management Curriculum and Skills Development in Professionalism

Given strong co-operations by European sociologists such as Tocqueville, Max Weber, Durkheim, Tocott Parson, and Robert Merton, business education in professionalism model has become a powerful tool in producing graduates' employability skills for industries (Khurana, 2007) through articulating excellent knowledge and skills with quality business program (AIM, 2006). This model has been applied to promote economic and cultural knowledge to students so that they can secure the highest position for career (Khurana, 2007). Hence, business universities have to transform business curriculum into professionalism called "knowledge-co-production model (AIM, 2006)" or "knowledge economy model (Nordberg, 2008)". The knowledge economic model focuses on developing political and global economy through enhancing four competences (1) analytical skills, (2) business knowledge and skills, (3) technical/ICT skills (technical and innovative knowledge), and (4) communication skills (service sector, business network, and strategic alliance) (Fragidis et al., 2008).

For this reason, business management curriculum has been carried out accordingly to broaden knowledge and skills of students beyond business dimensions. The recent development and practice of business curriculum aims especially to promote pool skills and knowledge for global economy. Therefore, strengthening business education and skills development becomes the fundamental strategy to grow individual, social and national wealth worldwide, especially in the emerging economic countries like Cambodia.

2.2 Business Management Curriculum and Skills Development in Cambodia

After the fall of Khmer Rouge in 1979, all levels of Cambodia's education were restored and developed. Higher education institutions were reemerged to provide educational services to Cambodian youth. Two faculties at Royal University of Phnom Penh were first opened to provide educational services to students (Duggan, 1997). Later, other institutions were operated, for example, Khmer-Soviet Friendship Higher Technical Institute in 1981, the Economics Institute in 1984, and the Agricultural Institute in 1985 (Clayton, 1999). A few year afterward, there were 977 doctors, dentists, or pharmacists, 2,196 senior secondary teachers, 1,481 foreign language specialists, 474 technical engineers, 400 economists, and 184 agricultural engineers (Clayton, 1999). Although educational philosophies and curricula contents were overwhelmed by political ideologies, it was

acknowledged that Cambodia's higher education played important role to enhance knowledge and skills to Cambodian students. Since then, business-related subjects have been offered in some institutions due to growing demand of labor market.

In 1993, new government of Cambodia was established to ensure peace, security, and stability. Along with the light and hope, Cambodia has come to new page of human era called "Globalization". Globalization has pulled Cambodia into the global economy demanding people with professional knowledge and skills for the growth of industry and economy. Therefore, the Government of Cambodian establishes National Development Plans in which is one of the plan is to improve the quality of higher education, human resource, employment and industry. Hence, on the one hand, the government resumes greater efforts to develop human capital through public universities. On the other hand, the government through line ministries has privatized higher education to private sector. Then, the first private university, Norton University, was opened in 1997. As a result, Cambodia's higher education, faculties, curriculums and subject matters have been significantly developed to enhance knowledge and skills of students for labour market (Duggan, 1997). In this regard, Cambodia's higher education institutions have changed educational policies, management structure, academic program and quality standard.

2.2.1 Education Policies

As accorded by the fourth National Assembly in 2008, the Royal Government of Cambodia formulated National Education Policies as one element in a Rectangular Strategy. The policies are (1) to promote accessibility, (2) to strengthen quality and efficiency, and (3) to develop institutional capacity and management in order to develop human resource and capacity-building, and grow private sector and employment market (ESP, 2010). To achieve these policies, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) set up four strategies: (1) developing the existing policies and strategies for HEIs, (2) giving academic freedom and autonomy to HEIs, (3) supporting HEIs to develop study programs and administrations, and (4) strengthening quality and efficiency of HEIs. To this end, the management system has been revised and restructured.

2.2.2 Management Structure

The government creates national and sub-national committees to direct and manage higher education institutions (HEIs). For example, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and Ministry of Labour and Vocation Training (MoLVT) are in charge of monitoring, auditing, and evaluating HEIs. The MoEYS is in charge of academics, while the MoEYS supervises vocational stream. Moreover, the two ministries have to cooperate with the line ministries such as Ministry of Health, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Ministry of Economy and Finance etc. Supported the (MoEYS), agencies were established (1) the Department of Higher Education

(DHE) and (2) the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC). The DHE directly works with the MoEYS while the ACC was established on 31 March, 2003, as an independent agency to ensure the quality standard for higher education. To reach this end, the ACC has to monitor, assess and evaluate 9 minimum standards of HEIs: 1. Mission, 2. Governing Structure, Management and Planning, 3. Academic Program, 4. Academic Staff, 5. Students and Student Services, 6. Learning Services, 7. Physical Plant, 8. Financial Plan and Management, and 9. Information Dissemination (Accreditation Committee of Cambodia, 2009).

Currently, management structure of higher learning institutions has been categorized into three divisions: Royal Academy, University and Specialized School/Institute. Yet, the structures and functions of these institutions are hard to distinguish (Chealy 2009) as they are faced with several constraints, for example, human resources, budget, and management. A part the university is operated its educational provisions under the direction of the MoEYS (DHE) and the ACC. With massive development university has licensed to gain academic freedom and autonomous management. The top management of university is Rectorate Department to delegate tasks to academic affairs, faculty, and institute. Faculty and institute are entitled accordingly to academic discipline, for example, business management, humanities, social science, law, or language. Dean or director has to manage, organize and evaluate academic activities and program in faculty and institute.

2.2.3 Academic Program

Improving the quality of academic program is the 3rd standard of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Accreditation Committee of Cambodia's agenda. The quality of academic program must fine-tune with national development goal and be responsive to demands of labour market and students. Therefore, curriculum must encompass nine indicators:

1. HEI's curriculum must be created through the Curriculum Development Committee and Advisory Board
2. HEI's curricula contents and structure must be designed based on the (Circulation 04/04 ACC/SSR, dated 19 November 2004, on Credit System and Credit Transfer) in line with the mission of HEI that complies with the national development policies and employment market.
3. HEI's curriculum must encompass the system of credit system and credit transfer.
4. HEI's curriculum must comprise of teaching effectiveness.
5. HEI's curriculum must comprise of learning assessment.
6. HEI's curriculum must contain research skill.
7. HEI's curriculum must ensure internal quality assurance consistent to the policies and guideline of MoEYS and ACC.
8. HEI's curriculum must have an efficient filling management and maintaining system.
9. HEI's curriculum must be reviewed, assessed,

evaluated and updated to articulate specialized skills in the needs of participants and employment market.

For curricula content and credits in first academic year (the Foundation Year) of a bachelor' degree must follow the ACC's regulations. Students must pass all subjects and credits; otherwise they are not permitted to study in the following years. The purpose of the foundation year is to provide flexible program for students. The curricula contents and credits for 2nd/3rd/4th years are designed by curriculum development committee and advisory board of each higher learning institutions.

Decades of efforts, higher education as well as industry has been greatly developed to grow Cambodia's economy. Recently, there are 91 higher education institutions including public and private providing educational services to 981 doctoral students, 12, 887 master students, 173, 274 bachelor's degree and 20,719 associate degree. In addition, 29,008 students already graduated. Recently, business-related subjects such as business management, marketing, accounting, finance, banking, entrepreneurship, and security market have become important field to promote knowledge and skills of business for national, regional and global market. Therefore, quality of workforce has been improved for industry, particularly banking and financial sector.

2.3 Banking Industry in Cambodia

According to In (2005), Cambodian financial institutions are divided into four types: (1) commercial banks; (2) specialized banks; (3) licensed micro-finance institutions; and (4) MFI NGOs registered with the National Bank of Cambodia. For this last decade, banking and financial sector has significantly contributed to the growth of national economy of Cambodia. The growth rate of Cambodian economy has been relatively high at 7% in 2011 if compared to previous year (ACLEDA Bank, 2011). The report further stressed out that banking and financial sector has given considerable growth in term of deposit, credit, profit and asset to generate Cambodia economy. Currently, banking sector has absorbed more foreign investments. In 2011, there were 35 commercial and specialized banks in Cambodia that provide more jobs to graduates, especially in the field of business management. With current expansion, banking industry has become the largest employment market for graduates. However, hindrances have remained due to the gap between business management curriculum and employability of industry.

2.4 Employability Requirements

Employability is not just a skill. It comprises of achievements, understandings and attributes developed by good learning under four dimensions: understanding, skillful practice, efficacy belief and meta-cognition (USEM) (Knight & Yorke, 2004). It covers all employment-related descriptors in broader scope and longer-term capacities (Curtis and McKenzie, 2001) to meet the demand of workplaces (Bates and Phelan, 2005)

which encompasses key competencies, for example, technical skills, soft skills, transferable skills, enterprise skills and life skills (DEST, 2011). In short, employability requirements refer to all necessary quality, capacity and competency developed through learning experience to meet the demand of market. Same to elsewhere, Cambodia Education Law (200&) aims to enhance knowledge, skills, morality, innovative and creative ideas and enterprise spirit to students.

2.5 Gap between Higher Education Curriculum and Employability Requirements of Industry

The gap between business management curriculum and skill requirements for industry is still a hot topic for researchers, policy makers and employers. Several studies were conducted to identify real scenarios. An obvious example was a doctoral dissertation of Buttermore (2010) used exploratory case study to investigate why the gap between business education at public university and skill demands by business organizations. The findings revealed that most universities used old paradigm curriculum which was less effectiveness to enhance skills to students. This concern was also examined by Saunder, et al. (2005) that skill gap existed because of misperception among students, lecturers and employers. Relatively, Scherer et al. (2011) asserted that institutional culture, financial issue, poor quality academic program, disparity enrolment and low quality of learning outcomes were also serious challenges to cause skill gap. Similar situation occurred in the United States where fresh graduates were not able to work unless they were additionally trained (Mihm-Herold (2010). Same aspect happened in East Asia countries included Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Philippine, Indonesia, Mongolia and China. The World Bank (2012) revealed that the highest unemployment rate was seen among university graduates in Philippine and Indonesia due to skill deficiencies, while the employment rate among university graduates in Vietnam and Thailand was relatively poor in outskirts areas. Comparing occupational distribution among graduates in the selected countries, graduates in Indonesia, Cambodia and some parts of Philippine were employed in clerical positions, rather than professional and technical posts (the World Bank, 2012).

The World Bank (2012) emphasized that the skill gap between graduates and employment market resulted from a mismatch between academic program and employability of market. This reference was specifically found in Cambodian context. According to UNDP (2011); Ford (2006); Chin & Dy (2009), and Sandra D’Amico (2009), education program of Cambodian universities still encounter several challenges to promote knowledge and skills to students. The skill shortages among Cambodia graduates, according to Sandra D’Amico, addressed in the Cambodia Outlook Conference 2012, were soft skills (communication, critical thinking, problem solving) and technical skills (computer). Consequently, the insufficient skills of graduates remained a barrier for investment slowing down

individual, societal and national economy which needs aggressive remedial approach.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Design

Qualitative approach with a specific design of exploratory case study will be applied in this study. Unlike quantitative, qualitative approach is primarily used to extract descriptive and interpretive data (Gillham, 1999) from various sources (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) such documents, observations, and interview (Yin, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2007) to examine a phenomenon with small sample in single or multiple cases of educational setting (Gerring, 2007). Qualitative case study is generally used to answer questions “How...?” or “Why...?” about real life phenomenon when little evidence was defined (Yin, 2003) within a prominent site and key figures (Creswell, 2007).

Therefore, this study will be carried out with one top university and the largest banking institution in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The site will be selected based on its prominence in terms of economy, education, industry and population. The university has been operated for over 30 years in providing business education to Cambodian students. Every year, university produces thousands of graduates for employment market, especially for banking sector. The same characteristic was considered to select the bank. The bank was opened in 1993 and expanded over 2000 branches in Cambodia and overseas. Data was collected through documents, observations, and interviews with 6 respondents. The 6 respondents were selected among key feature to ensure construct reliability and validity.

Table1. Research Respondents

Organization	Respondents	Position/duties	Number
University	Curriculum Designer	Design curriculum, research on career development, university industry relationship	2
Bank	Human Resource Division	Create job requirement, recruit, train and evaluate fresh graduate employees	4
Total			6

As displayed in the table, the researcher chose 6 respondents (2 curriculum designers from National University of Management, 4 recruiters from human resource division at ACLEDA Bank). The selection of respondents is purposefully made based on belief and judgment that respondents will provide informative and sufficient data to answer research questions. The interview questionnaires are structurally designed with

close and open-ended questions. Each set of interview questions consisted of 25 questions. Data was classified into two categories: (1) the perceptions of curriculum designers and (2) the perceptions of recruiters. Analytical model of Creswell (2007) is applied, and results are present in narrative texts.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Perceptions of Curriculum Designers

Table 2. Summary of Key Findings

Education al Goals	Contents	Practices	Problems
Produce qualified people with knowledge and skills	Core courses, major courses, elective courses	Four-Year Programs Faculty recruit teachers/lecturers	Educational policy (MoEYS & ACC) Lacked experts for new subjects
Take part in government policy to promote economy	40 courses/120 credits Course work/ 108 credits	Teacher/student -centered QA committee (50% of on-going assessment,	Lacked textbooks Lacked frequent dialogues Lacked industrial training
Standardize into regional and global standard	Thesis/ 12 credits Reforms (3/5 years) Market research	50% of final exam)	Distant engagement between learning with work area

As highlighted in Table 2, educational goals/objectives of business management curriculum of the selected university aims to produce qualified graduates for all stakeholders' needs; therefore, the development and practice of curricula contents have to be consistent to national and international standards. In the national level, curricula contents must comprise of three courses (1) Business Core Courses, (2) Business Major Courses, and (3) Elective Courses to ensure the nine minimum quality standard of the accreditation committee of Cambodia (ACC). The business management curriculum is a four-year undergraduate program containing 40 courses accounted for 120 credits (118 of course works, 12 of thesis and defense). Curriculum has been reformed and updated every 3 to 5 year with university board, government actors and industry. University also established quality assurance committee to evaluate curriculum, teachers, teachings, and learning.

However, this study indicated several challenge, for example, an influence of the government policy, scarcity of resources, lacked frequent dialogues with stakeholders, lacked innovative programs and industrial trainings, and loose integration of teaching and learning with work area. These problems have caused the gap between business management curriculum at university and employability requirements of industry.

The findings of this study are consistent to a report of Sophal (2008) which highlighted that the quality of curriculum at some Cambodia universities was relatively poor. This happened due to unclear framework for

curricula practice, mismatch course contents to market demand, lacked information sharing (Sophal 2008), low academic standard (Duggan, 1997), and a distancing collaboration among line ministries and agencies, and an inadequate staff at university and faculty levels (Chet, 2009).

4.2 Perceptions of Recruiters

Table 3. Summary of Key Findings

Creation of Requirements	Recruitment Process	Skills Training	Problems
Follows Collective Labour in Cambodia	Consist of several process	3 weeks (two weeks for training general knowledge, skills, work culture, work system, one week for on-job training)	Difficult to find suitable candidates
Follows the bank policy and demand	Testing, interview, medical checks, training and on-job training	Work ethics and morality	poor work attitude
Consists of four steps: job analysis, drafting, revising and finagling	Work ethics and morality	Training modules designed by bank	work ready, lacked work ethics & low practical knowledge & skills
Focuses on knowledge, skills and work attitude			

Based the results in table 3, the process of creating employability standard at ACLEDA Bank has followed the policy of bank, collective labour, and employment policy of Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MoLVT). Started from the creation of requirements to final the final stage of training, there was absence of university involvement. The problem has been resulted from unclear responsibilities between two line ministries in nurturing relationship between academics and industry although the two ministries have worked together in supporting the government development policies. The poor engagement between university and industry has also seen as severe concern since the selected university and participating bank ground on different orientations—non-profit and profit. As a result, there has been a misperception and distancing cooperation in sharing information about employability issues with academics.

The findings of this study are paralleled to a concern of UNDP (2011) that there was loose linkage between line ministries due to a reason that Cambodian Educational Law (2007) did not state explicit responsibilities. Such problem has created difficulties to coordinate among government agencies with relevant stakeholders in improving quality of education. Chen et al. (2006) also claimed that although banking industry has offered effective skill training to employees, tightening cooperation with higher education such as university was really necessary in developing human resources for business sector.

4.3 Matching Perceptions of Curriculum Designers and Recruiters

Table 4. Matching the Perceptions of Respondents

Themes	Curriculum designers	Recruiters
Expectation	All posts and level (\$200-250), work everywhere with all types, main skills are knowledge and skill, English, computer Demanded by industry Misperception of skills development	Entry-level (\$209), graduates from all fields and universities <i>Work in</i> provincial branches, wanted <i>graduates with</i> work ethics, knowledge and skills, to grow business Misperception of skill demand
Goal	Produces graduates to become entrepreneurs, leaders, manager Take part in government development policy Grow economy Academic domain	Recruit graduates for business Equal job opportunity Generate socioeconomic Business and profits Business oriented & privacy
Content	Follows government policy, core/major/elective courses, External resources Quality & efficiency Influence of government policies	Follows industry standard Writing/English/general knowledge tests & interview No external resources or consultancies Follows collective labour Privacy & profits Business & profits
Practice	textbooks, classroom setting teacher & student centered teaching, 50% of on-going assessment, 50% of final exam), focus on academics, but lacked teaching & learning materials, disengaged between learning & work area	practical experience, teacher centered & case study, Trained by senior staff, assessed by quizzes, tests, training reports focus on work attitude (morality), work culture, work system, Business domain irrelevant courses to training modules, no university involvement

Matching the data patterns of this study signified four major factors causing the gap between business management curriculum and employability requirements. The first factor associates with an ineffective enforcement of government policies on nurturing relationship between university and bank industry. Second factor results in a misperception between university and banking industry toward skills enhancement and skills demand. Third concerns with a scarcity of resources such as specialized lecturers, innovative programs, and facilities at university. The final factor relates to a distancing cooperation between university and bank in sharing feedbacks of academic and employability issue.

The four major factors were similar to previous findings of studies, for example, Chet (2006); UNDP (2011); Walker (2012); UNESCO (2010); and Lall & Sakellariou (2010). They all asserted that the gap between curriculum at Cambodia's university and employment market was the alarming issue since a recent expansion of business management in Cambodia's university could be addressed in term of quantity rather than quality. Every year, Cambodia's universities have oversupplied graduates to the demands of employment

market. This concern has happened in neighboring countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. This problem was precisely highlighted by the World Bank (2012).

The World Bank (2012) conducted a cross-border study of higher education and skills for labor market among low and middle-economic countries in East Asia. According to the study, the World Bank (2012) revealed similar results that insufficient skills of graduates still exists in China, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. The World Bank (2012) further pointed out that the issue occurred due to five factors (1) a loose collaboration of university and employment market; (2) a weak research capacity and technological applications between university and market; (3) a distant engagement between classroom settings to research domain; (4) a disconnection among educational providers themselves; and (5) a misaligned subject areas from the earlier education systems with the higher education system.

Similar hindrances to move upward Chinese business management education were also highlighted by Lu & Alon (2003) and Bai & Enderwick (2005). They presented three factors (1) management education practiced in tradition methods, (2) influence of politics and economic plan on curricula contents and practice, and (3) poor quality of institutional management at business universities.

The findings of this study have also partially related to a discussion of Peredo and Moore (2010) that business management education in Colombia, South African, and Vietnam and so on lacked coherence to social and cultural contexts which has become the most challenging issue. Whereas the OCED countries in Europe face similar problem that universities cannot produce graduates with sufficient skills for labour market due to influence of computer and technology (McIntosh (2008). To deal with such shortcomings, the United States as well as Europe has implanted technological tools into pedagogical implications.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aims at exploring why the gap exists between business management curriculum and employability requirement at banking institution. Based on the perceptions of curriculum designers and recruiters, the gap exists due to four major factors (1) a loose enforce of line ministries on nurturing university and industry, (2) a misperception of university and bank toward skills development and skills demand, (3) a scarcity of resources at university and faculty levels, and (4) an information gap between university and banking industry about academics and employability.

The four factors have given diverse impacts on academics and business environment. In the academic loop, educational providers cannot create compatible curriculum to enhance skills to students who would become expensive assets for industry. Without sufficient skills, graduates could not perform well at workplaces affecting business operations and profits of organizations. In turn, low incomes of industry can impact employees' likelihood and socioeconomic and national wealth.

Consequently, the gap has given several challenges to students, faculty of business management, industry and society. To bridge the gap, participatory actions and intensive interventions must be ensure from government, line ministries, universities and industries. The government should strengthen educational and employment law to tighten strong corporation among university and industry. University should increase frequent dialogues with industry, and industry should open horizontal opportunities for researchers, educators and students to study about employment issues. By doing so, the gap between business management curriculum and employability requirements will be successfully bridged.

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Vitae

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