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### **The intersection of national human resource development and skills training in the tourism industry: A Jamaican perspective**

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#### **Abstract**

The growing interest in national human resource development (NHRD) is increasingly considering unique cultural and economic context conditions and the influence this may have on a number of employment related indicators. To date, NHRD literature has largely ignored issues related to skills training and workforce development in the tourism industry, despite the expanding nature of this dynamic service sector in many nations. This literature review study of NHRD in Jamaica examined on-going national level HRD initiatives paying close attention to the tourism industry. Conclusions include that in Jamaica the NHRD agenda may be driven by the tourism industry.

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Jamaica is largely known for its sun, sea, and sand. These natural resources blended together attract millions of visitors to the country every year, supporting one of Jamaica's most important industries – tourism. Many Jamaican citizens, as well as visitors, are unaware of the role of human resources in the tourism industry and the potential role of tourism as a factor driving broader economic development for the country. In this paper, we argue that the recruitment, management, and especially the training and development of human resources are vital concerns for the continued successful operation of the tourism industry as well as for the ongoing economic and social development of the nation. Yet, little is known of training and human resource development within the tourism industry and the role this may have for broader issues of skill development and increasing levels of employability across all sectors of the Jamaican economy.

Jamaica is not unique in that it represents a developing economy that is increasingly reliant on the tourism industry. Jamaica is also joining a growing number of countries that are embracing elements of national human resource development (NHRD) as a mechanism to address a broad range of economic, educational, and social development goals for the nation. This provides an opportunity to explore the intersection of tourism, NHRD, and workforce, economic, and social development. Previous literature on NHRD has only alluded to the potential connection between employment and training in the tourism industry and the role this can play in broader NHRD efforts (Bartlett and Rodgers 2004; Scotland 2004). For the most part, the existing body of literature on NHRD has largely ignored the perspective of the tourism industry as a catalyst for national development of human resources through the provision of skill training and enhancing levels of employability. For the purpose of this paper, we explored through an integrative literature review the potential relationship with HRD in tourism to ongoing NHRD efforts in Jamaica. Further, we examined the potential role of tourism as a platform for supporting and advancing workforce development, skill levels, and employability at a national level. While specifically limiting our analysis to a single country, the discussion draws attention to the potential role of training related to tourism industry employment as a mechanism to address skill and workforce employability at a larger national level.

Before describing our method we provide a brief historical background to Jamaica drawing from Bayer (1993). As part of the Greater Antilles, Jamaica is the third largest island in the Caribbean. The Arawak Indians, or as they were commonly called, the Tainos, were the first inhabitants who settled on the island hundreds of years ago. Jamaica originated from the Arawak word Xaymaca meaning, "land of wood and water". The arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1494 ushered in an era of colonialism that led to the extinction of the indigenous people just over a century later. A transfer from Spanish to British colonial control and the development of a slave-based plantation economy established a pattern of economic and social history that lasted until independence on August 5, 1962. It is important to note that although slavery was abolished in 1838 elements of a plantation economy and society persisted and this in some ways explains Jamaica's pattern of development (Beckford 1972). The country currently has an approximate population of 2.76 million (The World Factbook 2007). Based on current estimates, the 0-14 age cohort represents 33.1% of the population, while the 15-64 age group, which is inclusive of most of the workforce, comprises 59.6% of the population. Of the entire population, individuals 65 years and older represents only 7.3%. The available data indicate that the population has slightly more females than males.

Significant structural shifts occurred within the economy after independence (Blank and McArdle 2003; Davies, 1994). Manufacturing and the agricultural sectors, which were the major sources of foreign exchange earnings, were replaced by bauxite mining and later the emergence of tourism with the direct connection of commercial air travel. In a short time the tourism sector emerged to be the dominated sector of the economy (Davies 1994). Today, Jamaica has a mixed free market economy comprising state owned enterprises and privately owned businesses. The three sectors currently generating the largest foreign exchange earnings are, in order, tourism, bauxite mining, and sugar production (The World Factbook 2007). Over a decade ago, it was noted that Jamaica is rapidly shifting from an “economy which is driven by the export of natural resource based goods to one that is increasingly human resource and technology driven” (Planning Institute of Jamaica 1993, 11). However, there is widespread recognition that every sector of the economy suffers a shortage of sufficiently skilled human resources needed to keep the economy growing. As stated in the Jamaica Five-Year Development Plan 1990-1995 (Planning Institute of Jamaica 1993), it is such a contradiction that a shortage of skilled workers coincides with a high unemployment rate. The current unemployment rate for Jamaica is approximately 15% (The World Factbook 2007) with unemployment of women almost twice that of men, and unemployment of youth also high (Blank and McArdle). Levels of unemployment are not uniform across the various regions or parishes (the level of local government administration) of the nation. This is especially the case related to tourism employment where jobs are clustered along the north coast where the major resorts and hotels are located but this is far from the largest population centers. Levels of attainment in the formal education system and the impact this has on the workforce also continues to cause concern. Reports indicated that a high percentage of students leaving primary or elementary level education are in need of remedial training once in the workforce. This is further compounded by complaints from employers that graduates at the secondary level are not equipped for the work world (Planning Institute of Jamaica 1993, 2005).

The World Travel and Tourism Council (2008) projected that the travel and tourism sector will account for a third (30.8%) of Jamaica’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The industry will generate US\$3,415.3 million of economic activity and provide 290,000 jobs (World Travel & Tourism Council 2006). This is a significant percentage (27.1%) of total workforce employment. Tourism primarily provides employment for people in the accommodation (hotel) sector but other prominent tourism related occupations include tour guides, airline personnel, taxi drivers, restaurant and bar workers, art and craft vendors, retail and store personnel, casino workers, hair braiders, security personnel, and public servants employed in the relevant government tourism ministries. Tourism also generates employment for industries that are indirectly related. These sectors include agriculture, manufacturing, banking and finance, construction and engineering, environment and conservation, as well as other services (Hall and Jayawardena 2002; Ramphal 1993). Hall and Jayawardena described Jamaica’s tourism industry as having an important multiplier effect on the economy, and consequently, many Jamaicans are either directly or indirectly dependent on the industry for their livelihood (Charles 1997).

The potential link between NHRD and the tourism industry deserves specific focus and attention as tourism related employment is an increasing important factor in the labor market of many nations. Almost a decade ago, Honey (1999) suggested that tourism is the world’s largest employer. Yet, to date no study has focused on the context, impact, and potential of the tourism

industry, its positive effect on national level education, training, skill development, and workforce development and how this impacts NHRD efforts. This study seeks to provide a preliminary examination of these issues and their possible intersection.

### **Research Question**

The absence of literature on the role and possible impact of the tourism industry on NHRD promoted the following research question:

What role does the tourism industry play in addressing NHRD issues in Jamaica?

### **Method**

The emerging nature of NHRD, and more specifically, the possible connection of NHRD and the potential role of tourism as a driver for skill training and enhancing employability at a national level, lends itself to a literature review from a critical perspective. This study used an integrative literature review method as described by Torraco (2005) framed from a critical viewpoint (Fenwick 2004). The critical perspective seems appropriate given that erroneous data, myths, and misquoted statements characterize much information related to tourism employment.

For this study, we reviewed existing literature on NHRD theory, as well as studies describing HRD at the national level in Jamaica and other tourism dependent island nations. We also reviewed literature on the tourism industry and specifically existing documents that focus on training, HRD, career development, workforce development, skill development, and post-secondary education in Jamaica and the Caribbean Region. Literature included published journal articles, chapters, and books as well as reports, briefing papers, literature reviews, and research studies prepared by the Jamaican government, regional agencies in the Caribbean, and various international agencies. This broad and diverse collection of literature was organized into the following categories:

1. *Literature related to NHRD and national economic development theory.* These articles, case studies, and reports tended to present in-depth overview and analysis of various NHRD initiatives in different countries spanning developing, transitioning, and developed nations.
2. *Literature related to NHRD, workforce development, and skill enhancement activity in Jamaica.* This broad and largest category of literature was dominated by reports published by the Jamaican government and its agencies. Additional sources included reports, reviews, and studies by a wide variety of international funding agencies (such as the World Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank), regional governmental agencies such as the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), and the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).
3. *Literature on Jamaican tourism as well as HRD within the tourism sector.* Given the high profile of the Jamaican tourism industry this category included both scholarly research as well as a variety of government reports. Additionally, statistics and descriptions of best practices were reviewed from the Jamaica Tourist Board, the Caribbean Tourism Organization, and the World Travel and Tourism Council.

Literature in each category was reviewed looking for reference to pre-identified key words (HRD, training, career development, employability, skill enhancement, etc). Once identified, themes suggesting a connection between the development of human resource employed in the tourism industry in Jamaica and the achievement of broader NHRD goals were sought. The findings are presented in the following section.

## **Findings**

The findings from each of the three categories of literature are presented. Major themes along with supporting examples from the analyzed literature are provided.

### ***Literature related to NHRD and national economic development theory.***

The function of HRD is now recognized as not only for the benefit of organizations but also individuals, communities, nations, and the entire world (McLean and McLean 2001). Bates (2002, 5) stressed that “at no time in history has HRD been called upon to play a more fundamental and key role in solving critical economic and social problems faced by communities, organizations, and nations”. The concept of NHRD is one lens through which the development of human resources can be examined at a national level. Even critics of NHRD have noted that “the NHRD literature has attempted to expand the HRD discipline beyond established boundaries into national socio-cultural contexts based on broad issues such as national economic performance and national health issues” (Wang and Swanson 2008, 79).

The increased interest in NHRD reflects the growing acceptance of developing the skill level and furthering the levels of employability of human resources as a significant driving force for national development. In earlier years, what is now referred to as NHRD reflected a broad portfolio of policy and activity in areas including manpower planning, human capital investment, and five-year development planning (McLean 2004). McLean described that these previously used terms are not broad enough to address problems or concerns that go “beyond employment and preparation for employment issues to include health, culture, safety, community, and a host of other considerations” (269). Consequently, a growing body of evidence and case studies seems to suggest that NHRD is increasingly evident in a growing number of countries (Lynham, Paprock, and Cunningham 2006).

Some authors have recently challenged the credibility of NHRD from a theory development perspective (Wang and Swanson 2008). A key aspect of this critique focuses on definitions and foundational economic theories. While a well-agreed upon definition is lacking for NHRD, although some advocate that this is desirable (McLean 2004), a general description of the scope of activity encompassing human resource development at the national level is emerging. However, Wang and Swanson argued that incomplete and overlapping definitions of NHRD and HRD challenge the existence of the NHRD concept. Further, they noted that the subfield of NHRD must have completely different definitions to HRD. The broad level of scope, as well as the unique cultural setting for many emerging NHRD definitions, seems to suggest that perhaps HRD and NHRD can exist with similar definitions. For example, Bartlett and Rodgers (2004) noted that in the Pacific Islands, intergovernmental agencies have simply defined HRD as those processes that equip people with relevant skills to have a healthy and satisfying life. Rodgers (2001) proposed that HRD in the South Pacific be considered as “a holistic

concept, incorporating intrinsically Pacific social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions to build capacity and empower people” (2).

The other chief criticism advanced by Wang and Swanson (2008) is that the existing literature on NHRD has not accounted for the full range of influencing elements or components of a national economic system. This is potentially a valuable observation that a broader view of component factors and influences to national economies would enhance the case by case understanding of HRD at a national level, and consequently, the development of NHRD theory. Wang and Swanson further identified gaps in the “theory development methods between NHRD literature and economic research” (82) in that, current literature on NHRD tends to have “overlooked a significant body of development literature from international and country-specific development agencies and communities” (82). This too is a potential important contribution, in that, a wider lens through which to study NHRD would aid in the development of a broader understanding. To this regard, our paper seeks to examine NHRD in Jamaica by examining the HRD efforts in a single industry (in this case tourism) and explore how skill development in tourism may act as a driver for improving human capital at a national level.

***Literature related to NHRD, workforce development, and skill enhancement activity in Jamaica.***

The Jamaican government appears to have recognized that continued national development will be largely dependent on ensuring that sufficient numbers of talented individuals are in the workforce who can “provide the necessary dynamism to move the economy on the path of progress” (Planning Institute of Jamaica 1993, 1). This recognition of the vital role of human capital and the need for efforts to improve workplace skills as well as the overall employability of the workforce resulted in HRD being the first of four major social and economic imperatives of the government’s Five-Year Development Plan 1990-1995 (Planning Institute of Jamaica 1993). This planning document detailed that both the government and private sectors had a history of involvement in training activities within the different sectors of the economy. However, the benefit of a coordinated or comprehensive approach to the achievement of national level workforce development was lacking. Subsequent planning efforts (Planning Institute of Jamaica 2005, 2008) have identified the need to develop a unified plan for training, addressing the needs of the various economic sectors to ensure the best use of available resources. The aim of more recent planning efforts at the national level have sought additional ways to strengthen partnerships that already exist and to establish new relationships between education and training institutions, employers, and professional bodies, with the government playing the primary role of facilitator.

The increased recognition for a national approach to developing human resources has not yet manifested in the use of the term NHRD. Indeed, we could find no definition or reference to NHRD in Jamaica within the literature we reviewed that was published by the Jamaican government and its agencies. However, our analysis of themes from the reviewed literature indicated that clearly there are aspects of policy and practice that would fit emerging definitions and descriptions of NHRD. By contrast, when reviewing literature taking a regional view, as opposed to a single country, we found more evidence that HRD is important to the economic and social development of the Caribbean. This is especially evident in the work of CARICOM. Formed in 1973 by the Heads of Government within the region this organization has focused on

policymaking in areas such as healthcare, education, and employment (Bayer 1993). In 1989 CARICOM established a regional single market, the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), to further the agenda of development. Currently there are 15 full member states of CARICOM and CSME: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. The purpose of the CSME is to build an integrated development strategy to meet global market challenges.

The analysis of CARICOM produced reports indicated that this organization places special emphasis on HRD as a preferred mechanism to further develop member nations. For example, the communiqué issued at the conclusion of the 18th meeting of the conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM (1997a) included a commitment to the implementation of specific measures related to HRD at a national level. In preparation for this meeting, a number of key reports were requested. In addition to the summary reports on HRD in each of the Member States, CARICOM also commissioned and received submissions from various agencies with broad interests in the development of human resource throughout the region including: the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce (CAIC), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), and the Caribbean Tourism Organization. Using these reports to inform the dialogue, it is clear that HRD is seen as vital for building capacity of human resources and improving the skill level of the current and future workforce. Since 1997, each annual meeting and the resulting communiqué's issued at the conclusion, has continued a trend where HRD is linked to issues of health, housing, and education to advance a broad agenda of both the region and the individual CARICOM Member States.

The role of CARICOM and CSME to advance and promote HRD for the achievement of a wide range of economic and social development aims has drawn specific attention to the role of skill development and increased the importance of employability as a key foundation for economic development. As an example, the influence of CARICOM can be seen in the policies and activities of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). Reports published by the CDB recognize the link between investment in education and HRD with social and economic development (Caribbean Development Bank 2003). A Caribbean Education Strategy was established by the CDB with the aim of building a competitive labor force and developing more effective education systems within the region to meet the challenges of the changing workplace environment. Over the past few years the CDB has provided millions of dollars in funding HRD related projects, such as “institutional strengthening, teacher training, enhancing of the physical learning environment, student loans and research” (Caribbean Development Bank 2003, i). The CDB sees HRD as crucial to human capital formation, and therefore, through its policy seeks to create “an ever expanding pool of productive Caribbean citizens with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to lead purposeful and productive lives in an internationally competitive environment” (Caribbean Development Bank 2003, iii).

The initiatives and plans we analyzed for this study indicated that despite the lack of specific mention of NHRD, the provision of HRD at a national level is clearly recognized as imperative to the growth and development of Jamaica.

### ***Literature on Jamaican tourism as well as HRD in the tourism sector***

The literature reviewed for this study provides clear evidence that both the private and public sectors throughout the Caribbean recognize tourism as occupying a strategic position in the region. In February 1992, the late Prime Minister of Jamaica, Right Honorable Michael Manley, successfully initiated a CARICOM Tourism Summit, concentrating on the interests of regional tourism (Ramphal 1993). Following this meeting, a fund for training and development for Caribbean people was launched at the 18th meeting with CARICOM Heads of Government meeting held July 2, 1997. The purpose of training funds, as outlined during the meeting, was to develop Caribbean people for work with the tourism sector. Cresser (2002) noted that tourism, when combined with education, “plays an even more important role as the dependence on the economic benefits of that sector can only be realized if workers in the sector are properly trained and educated to maintain the total tourism product, and to deliver the quality of service that is demanded worldwide” (102).

HRD within the tourism sector is well established and a range of tourism related education programs are now offered in Jamaica. These programs have been developed to assist the tourism sector access to skilled employees to operate within a dynamic service industry. The public education system through the University of the West Indies (U.W.I.) and the University of Technology Jamaica (UTech), as well as leading provider of non-formal training - Human Employment and Resource Training/National Training Agency (HEART/NTA), along with private corporate universities (e.g., Sandals University) and private tourism organizations are providing tourism education and workforce development.

A major threat to achieving broad skill enhancement and employability goals through HRD in the tourism sector is the limited investment made by most private tourism organizations in providing training and development opportunities for their front-line employees who have to interact with tourists on a daily basis. In many cases, hotel employers send employees to participate in pre-designed training programs outside of the organization. A criticism leveled at these training programs is that they do not focus sufficiently on the skills, knowledge, and ability of front-line staff to respond appropriately to customer preferences in a rapidly changing environment (Crick 2002). This observation appears to continue a trend of earlier reports and studies that identified the need for far greater levels for training and development for front line service workers in the tourism sector in Jamaica. Additionally, research reports have indicated that in other major areas identified as requiring substantial training efforts include, interpersonal communication, marketing, leadership, human resource management, computer literacy, and foreign languages (Quality Consultants 1999).

With NHRD a growing area of interest, the connections to the tourism industry were examined in the literature reviewed for this study. Overall, it appears that skill development in the tourism industry is recognized as a vital component of national human resource development activity. An example of how NHRD can be driven by the tourism sector can be seen in a national tourism HRD project, known as the Tourism Human Resources Management System

Project. This project was launched in 1998 with the objective of developing, educating, and training the workforce to increase the competitiveness of the entire tourism industry within Jamaica (Hall and Young 2002). A number of agencies including the local private sector organization for tourism, the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA), National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET), and the Workforce Development Consortium (WFDC) were involved in the implementation of this project. According to Hall and Young (2002, 87), the goals of the project included:

- Development of modular and customized programs for in-firm and classroom instruction
- Making available a cadre of highly skilled trainers, coaches, and mentors for the industry
- Facilitation and coordination of comprehensive and specialized skill training for industry employees and new entrants to the labor market
- Creation of a credentialing system that would afford a framework for the rationalization of tourism education and training
- Improving the technical and organizational capacity within the JHTA to institute action plans that cater to the industry's peculiar human resource development and management needs
- Ensuring a labor market information system that directly links training and current and emerging labor market needs in the tourism industry.

The project, though specifically tailored to suit the Jamaican context, encountered several barriers to implementation including initial skepticism from representatives within the tourism sector that training of employees was not absolutely necessary. Some managers within the Jamaica tourism industry were reluctant to participate in this training effort fearing the changes that would follow. However, employer support increased over time (Hall and Young 2002).

Maximizing the potential and skill level of employees is reflected in the implementation of these tourism related educational programs offered. It is evident that education and training and development of human resources entering the industry, as well as for employees already in the industry play a critical role in the success of the tourism sector in Jamaica. A skilled workforce will yield optimum returns for the industry and the economy, as well as the social well-being of the nation. Therefore, tourism has the capability of driving NHRD in Jamaica although, to date, the literature review would suggest that this is not occurring to the extent possible.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

A history of struggle and hardship has to a great extent characterized and shaped the Jamaican nation. However, a new approach to HRD at a national level that leverages existing skill training programs is offering a new way forward for workforce training and development in Jamaica, and indeed throughout the Caribbean region. In this paper, we reviewed literature related to three broad areas linked to NHRD theory, NHRD in Jamaica, and HRD within the tourism sector. It is important to note that the literature we reviewed was not specially designed to discuss or address

NHRD issues, rather, we adopted this lens to examine the extent to which these themes were present within the existing literature.

Our review of literature indicated that the emerging construct of NHRD appears to be more developed at a regional level in the Caribbean than in Jamaica. This was clearly evident in the reports and documents published by CARICOM that we reviewed. Perhaps it is not surprising that the work of regional NHRD efforts would trickle down to individual nations. We saw clear evidence that Jamaica is increasingly adopting a philosophy to workforce education and skill development that acknowledges the vital role of human capital development for the achievement of a broad range of social and economic goals. In answering our central research question, the important role of the tourism sector in Jamaica is evident in influencing HRD policies and attitudes towards skills training.

Although some have challenged the negative aspects from tourism development (Sharpley 2002; Singh 2003), it is generally agreed that planned and controlled growth of the tourism sector can lead to improved and desired economic and social outcomes (Clayton 2002). As such, the tourism sector can play a major role in training and education, workforce development, and employability at a national level. Despite the fact that tourism is a major source of employment and income in Jamaica, as well as being the main source of foreign exchange earnings, the existing research on skills training and workforce development in this sector is limited.

Boxill (2002) highlighted the need to develop a body of research on tourism in the Caribbean. Tourism studies in general, and especially those on workforce planning, human resource issues, and NHRD policies conducted in other areas of the world may simply not reflect the somewhat unique context of Jamaica and the Caribbean. More clarification and studies to support the ability of training and development in the tourism sector to assist the overall employability of the workforce is needed. The often reported high turnover of many tourism occupations can alternatively be viewed as tourism providing a portal to the workforce in which skills can be transferred to the benefit of both the individual worker and the economy as a whole. This suggests a range of opportunities for skills training in tourism sector jobs to be linked to formal education. Tourism should be integrated in the curricula for the primary and secondary school system as a way of promoting the industry “as a viable career option for workers and at an early age, help to develop the right skills and attitude in the future labour force” (Hinds, Browne, Henry, Jayawardena and Butcher, 2004, 417). For an industry that serves as the engine of economic development, it is also important that all citizens be educated on the positive effect of the industry on the overall well-being of Jamaica.

There is a pressing need to devote attention towards the continued development of the tourism sector in Jamaica. As is evident in the literature reviewed for this study, tourism is increasingly recognized for its contribution to the economy; the benefits of which extend to personal, social, and broad national level economic development. It has been recognized that a national agenda for sustainable tourism needs to be developed (Clayton 2002; Ramphal 1993). Based on our analysis on existing data, consideration of the potential of HRD in the tourism sector to create benefits in the economy and Jamaican society in general need to perhaps be given greater priority on the emerging NHRD agenda.

The review of literature for this research leads us to suggest that tourism can play a role in driving NHRD. However, there are implications for the HRD profession and policy makers both in Jamaica and beyond. HRD professionals and especially government policy makers in Jamaica need to coordinate their efforts with leaders in the tourism industry. This will help ensure that human resources are developed to effectively and efficiently move the tourism industry over the long term also serving as a the propelling force for overall growth and development of the nation.

In other nations with tourism dependent economies, a similar approach involving HRD professionals could also be used so tourism becomes a driver for NHRD in the achievement of desired social and economic development. The Jamaican experience with tourism and its role in NHRD may be most useful for other small island nations. As Bartlett and Rodgers (2004, 313) noted, “small island nations face many challenges in the development of their human resources, yet they appear to be keenly aware of the consequences of a lack of HRD”. The end result is that Jamaica, long known for its sun, sea, and sand, may soon add another dimension – world leader in integrating tourism development with NHRD efforts.

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