

Research Article

People's Assessment of the Leadership Competencies of the Local Chief Executives During the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to assess and analyze the leadership competencies of the local chief executives based on the perception of the people-respondents during the pandemic and arrives at recommendations for improvement. The leadership competencies during the pandemic from 2020 to 2021 were evaluated by the people-respondents using a survey questionnaire and the results were analyzed using statistical treatment. It appears that the local chief executives showed competencies moderately in terms of leadership, clear purpose and vision, responsiveness to community needs, partnership development/ external relationship building, skills and commitment, effective processes and systems, well-managed resources, organizational learning, innovation and change, accountability, and organizational management, integrity, professionalism, and respect for diversity. Furthermore, the data indicated that the local government was inefficient in dealing with the pandemic crisis. The findings recommend the creation of a community-based crisis management council that is independent and empowered for a long-term mission, tasked to mitigate, implement, monitor, and assess crises before, during, and after they happen. Furthermore, they must be autonomous and enjoy fiscal autonomy to prevent the politicization of the council.

Keywords: Leadership, Competencies, Local Executives, Local Government, Pandemic

1. INTRODUCTION

Countries around the world struggled to find solutions to mitigate, if not eliminate, the effects of Covid 19 pandemic. Forster et al. (2021) stressed that leaders of different countries reacted differently during the COVID-19 pandemic as they relied on various scientific evidence before acting, as each has different systems and funding sources.

Bouckaert et al. (2020) showed that countries worldwide observed the same logic, risk management procedures, and increased hospital facilities. However, it cannot be denied that each of these countries followed a Coronationalistic way influenced by the state's cultures and traditions. This Coronationalism dominated the political-administrative management of nations in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. National responses may be suitable but insufficient and need more collaboration from across the border to fight the pandemic effectively. Hence, countries crossed different ways to provide solutions, but as mentioned by Bouckaert, it may not be enough to battle the creepy economic, social, and fiscal effects of the pandemic.

Several literatures stressed that during the pandemic, leaders used different strategies to face this unexpected event. Some of them were not successful, while others, such as New Zealand and South Korea, were able to minimize the effects of COVID-19. Countries have different political systems, and their approaches in dealing with this plague vary from centralized, authoritarian to a more liberal, top bottom. Further, it was stressed in different studies that a result-oriented governance results in the development of trust between the government and the people. Government officials must possess leadership competencies and be wardens of change with the power of foresight and communication skills.

Consequently, success in the war against this pandemic lies in the hands of the front-liners of the government, the mayors who observed and acted differently. There were mayors or local leaders who were dependent on the plans of the national government. In contrast, others had initiatives and made sure that people trusted them to easily implement their plans and projects during and after the pandemic. Their leadership skills as prominent strategists, therefore, will depict the status of the units they handled.

Osborne and Gaebler (1992) suggest values in reinventing the government as follows: catalytic government: steering rather than rowing; community-owned government: empowering rather than serving; competitive government: injecting competition into service delivery; mission-driven government: transforming rule-driven organizations; result-oriented government: funding outcomes, not inputs; customer-driven government: satisfying the needs of the people, not the bureaucracy; enterprising government: earning, instead of spending; anticipatory government: prevention rather than cure; decentralized government: from hierarchy to participation and teamwork; and market-oriented government: leveraging change through the market. As such, these values are suggested as essentials in local and national governance during and after the pandemic to provide solutions to mitigate this crisis's impacts and lead the nation toward recovery. It is paramount for the government to reinvent its governance to meet the demands of the current situation. These include leadership skills not only of the national but also of the local administrators to ensure their constituents will be provided and protected economically and socially.

In the Philippines, local government officials, specifically the mayors, played a critical part during these tough times, from policymaking to implementing the policies needed to battle the impacts of this crisis. The Local Government Code of 1991 empowered local government officials with decentralized or devolved powers. In the exercise of these functions, it is necessary that they, such as the governors, mayors, and barangay chairpersons, possess leadership competencies that will give them the capabilities to face the difficulties and challenges encountered during and after the pandemic. Cities and provinces in the country exerted efforts, as proved by the study conducted by Carpio et al. (2023). It stressed that barangay officials were responsive in the implementation of the protocols, but there were still challenges faced by them.

The local government units comprise 81 provinces, 146 cities, 1,488 municipalities, and 42,046 barangays (www.dilg.com.ph). However, the study focused on municipalities as they are the leading officers in directly battling the effects of Covid 19. These frontlines were the first to act and react to ensure that the people were well provided to reduce the ill effects of the pandemic. Thus, this study intends to assess the leadership competencies of local leaders from the perspective of their constituents.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was primarily conceived to assess the leadership skills of the local chief executives in the Philippines as perceived by the Filipino people during the pandemic. It aimed to know the leadership competencies of the mayors using the following variables: leadership, clear purpose and vision, responsiveness to the needs of the people, partnership development/external relationship building, skilled and committed people, effective process and systems, management of resources, and organizational learning, innovation, and change, accountability and organizational performance management, integrity, professionalism, and respect for diversity (Valerio, 2018).

The research was made to know the people's perceptions of the leadership skills of their respective local leaders during the pandemic. It can be a tool for determining the strategical implementation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the mayors during the pandemic. This can be a tool for the leaders to know how they are perceived by the people and serve as a guide in dealing with another possible unprecedented event like the COVID-19 pandemic in the future.

This study utilized the quantitative approach using simple purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007), which is more reliable in gathering data in comprehending social conditions and events. Simple purposive sampling was used in choosing the respondents using the online means of gathering data as it assists the researchers in looking for respondents to dig deeper into the topic, specifically residents of the research locale of the study. It used percentage frequency distribution and weighted mean because it is practical and valuable in summarizing and analyzing the data gathered through a survey. The study population was the local chief executives, specifically the mayors in some areas in the Philippines and the research used the Likert scale in its verbal interpretation.

The results were presented in tabular and textual format and analyzed using statistical treatment, specifically weighted mean, and supported by previous studies on related literature.

The researchers exploited the leadership competencies mentioned in the study paradigm (Figure 1) as a basis for people's assessment of the leadership competencies of their local chief executive during the pandemic. The researchers handled the inputs using the following leadership competencies such as leadership, clear purpose and vision, responsiveness to community needs, partnership development/ external relationship building, skills and commitment, effective processes and systems, well-managed resources, organizational learning, innovation and change, accountability, and organizational management, integrity, professionalism, and respect for diversity as provided in the survey questionnaire.

Theoretically, James Macgregor Burns (1993) stressed that leaders must have the following qualities: self-confidence, optimism, dogged idealism, risk-takers, inventors, entrepreneurs, visionaries, result-oriented and moral builders who can infuse values and are determined to define, defend, and promote missions and goals. Further, a transforming leader believes in empowering all stakeholders and guiding them in fulfilling their goals (Burns, Peltason, & Cronin, 1993). This kind of leader requires soft skills to understand the needs and wants of his people, especially in turbulent times.

These are the basis of the researcher's hypotheses in assessing the leadership competencies of the local chief executives as front-liners in public service. It is imperative to dig deep into the competencies of the local leaders because, in a complex world of public administration, it is the local leaders who know and feel the problems and issues of the people. Therefore, assessing such

competencies and knowing their implication for good governance is essential.

The systems approach (input-process-output) in studying a political scenario arrived at a proposed plan that can be utilized as an assessment tool in determining the leadership competencies of the local chief executives in turbulent times. In addition, the proposal can serve as a guide for current and aspiring local leaders in facing future crises.

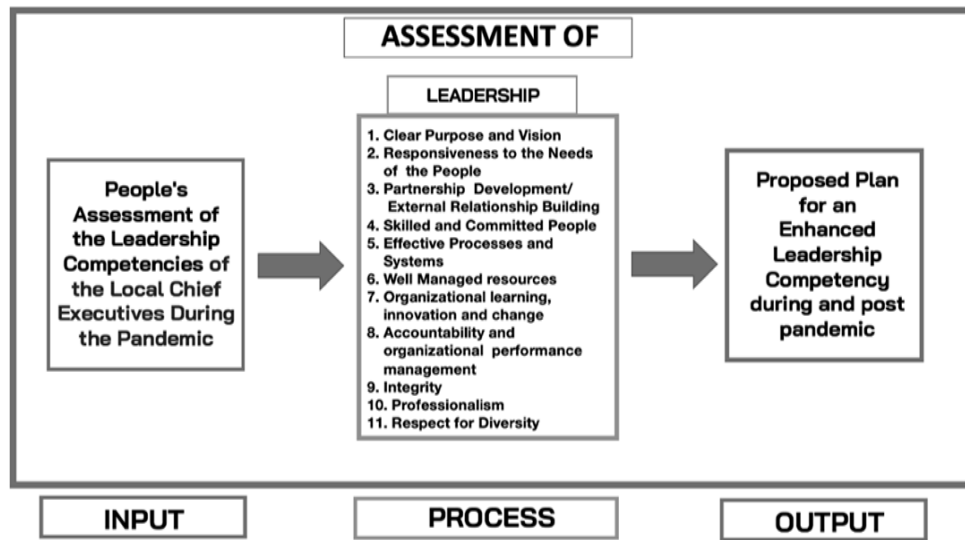


Figure 1. The Paradigm of the Study

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings showed that all of the local government leaders in our respondents' areas managed to demonstrate their leadership competencies as follows moderately:

Table I.
Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
LEADERSHIP		
1. The local government in the past pandemic was active and committed to the constituency.	3.02	Agree
2. The local government in the past pandemic had a strong desire for change.	2.97	Agree
3. The local government in the past pandemic is seen as an inspiration by others.	2.76	Agree
4. Local government in the past pandemic has been respected for being transparent with constituents	2.73	Agree
5. The local government in the past pandemic is trustworthy.	2.82	Agree
6. Local government in the past pandemic has encouraged participation	3.01	Agree
7. The local government in the past pandemic encouraged coordination.	3.10	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.92	Agree

Table I shows that local leaders encouraged coordination and participation of all stakeholders (3.10), as illustrated by their active and committed action in mitigating the effects of the pandemic. However, the people-respondents felt the lack of transparency and thus resulting in doubts as to the trustworthiness of the local leaders, as pointed out in the weighted mean of 2.73. In the study by Burns, Peltason, & Cronin (1993), a good leader must be a morale builder who empowers his people whom they can trust and guide them in fulfilling their goals. Therefore, building people's trust is a vital component of leadership competency, which is an important component to embattle the challenges during and facing the aftermath of the pandemic.

Table II.

Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Clear Purpose and Vision and Responsiveness to the Needs of the People

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
CLEAR PURPOSE AND VISION		
8. The local government, during the last pandemic, had a clear understanding of the needs of the people.	2.95	Agree
9. The local government in the past pandemic is following and has shown strategic planning.	2.90	Agree
10. The local government in the last pandemic has remained the same in achieving and setting goals.	2.86	Agree
11. The local government, during the past pandemic, is acting based on the department's mission and goals.	2.95	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.92	Agree
RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE		
12. Local government, in the past pandemic, has been conducting a continuous assessment of people's needs and satisfaction.	2.89	Agree
13. The local government, during the past pandemic, has implemented continuous programs or services that meet the needs of the people.	2.95	Agree
14. Local government during the pandemic had performance standards based on "best practice" in delivering programs and services.	2.83	Agree
15. The local government, during the past pandemic, has maintained a smooth and regular flow of information to keep the community informed of either progress or failure.	2.92	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.90	Agree

The people-respondents perceived that their local leader manifested a clear purpose and vision and somehow understood the needs of the people in this time of crisis but seemed to lack strategic plans for dealing with and providing solutions to alleviate the suffering of their respective constituents, as shown in Table II. The inconsistency in achieving and setting their goals was also apparent. Local leaders must be vision driven in coordination with the whole system and the local community (Ramalingan et al. (2020).

Further, the people, nevertheless, sensed that their respective leaders responded positively to their needs as the government implemented programs and somehow informed them of their progress, but still thought that it lacked effort in giving the best practice in governance during the pandemic (Table II). A good leader during the pandemic must learn to steer instead of simply rowing the boat, meeting the needs of the people and not the bureaucracy (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

Table IV.

Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Partnership Development/External Relationship Building

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT/EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIP BUILDING		
16. The local government, in the past pandemic, has been collaborating and coordinating with other sectors to achieve a common goal.	2.99	Agree
17. The local government during the past pandemic shows a good and positive image.	2.91	Agree
18. The local government during the last pandemic was active and positively influenced the making of laws.	2.83	Agree
19. Local government in the past pandemic has had a continuous relationship with the public.	2.93	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.92	Agree

The local government may have failed to make laws that could have aided during the pandemic. Nonetheless, the respondents saw that somehow their leaders collaborated with other sectors to provide solutions during the past pandemic and maintained a good relationship with the public (Table IV). The mission of our local leaders is to anticipate challenges and be

prepared to face all the impacts of any fortuitous event. Thus, the foresight of local leaders is an important skill in leadership competencies.

Table V. Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Skilled and Committed People

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
SKILLED AND COMMITTED PEOPLE		
20. The local government, during the last pandemic, had a concrete, realistic, and detailed plan for the constituency.	2.80	Agree
21. The local government, during the past pandemic, has policies and programs that benefit the community.	2.93	Agree
22. The local government during the past pandemic was fair in distributing the benefits to its constituents.	2.68	Agree
23. The local government, in the last pandemic, provides economic training for its constituents.	2.70	Agree
24. The local government in the past pandemic is ensuring the strengthening of the capacity of the department and constituency.	2.83	Agree
25. Local government in the past pandemic has been trustworthy, maintaining an open and honest dialogue inside and outside the workplace.	2.79	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.79	Agree

During the last pandemic, the government had concrete, realistic, and detailed policies and programs that could decrease the effects of Covid 19. However, people perceived that their local leaders needed an open and honest dialogue with their constituents, failing to meet their urgent needs and, most often, just a fair distribution of government support to the public as the perception of the respondents was fairly the lowest. Burns (1993) stressed that a leader must empower their people toward achieving their goals, and Osborne & Gaebler (1992) suggested a community-owned government that empowers the people instead of simply serving them.

Table VI.

Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Effective Processes and Systems

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
EFFECTIVE PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS		
26. The local government, in the last pandemic, has been conducting regular and strategic planning for the constituency	2.85	Agree
27. Local governments in the past pandemic have robust and updated financial plans.	2.79	Agree
28. The local government, in the last pandemic, makes a budget according to the operation of the department.	2.91	Agree
29. The local government, during the past pandemic, has been regularly monitoring budgetary activities.	2.81	Agree
30. The local government in the last pandemic had operational planning connected to strategic planning.	2.85	Agree
31. The local government during the last pandemic was professional, and strong and well designed the processes of each department.	2.82	Agree
32. Local government in the past pandemic had a transparent, formal system for decision-making.	2.88	Agree
33. The local government's decision in the past pandemic is consistently implemented.	2.79	Agree
34. The local government, during the past pandemic, has had constant integration between different programs and organizational units.	2.84	Agree
35. The relationship with local government during the past pandemic was one of necessities (rather than hierarchy and politics).	2.65	Agree
36. The tasks and responsibilities of the local government during the past	2.82	Agree

pandemic are performed.		
37. Local government in the past pandemic had an organization chart and job descriptions that were complete and updated.	2.79	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.82	Agree

In Table IV, the local government officials could meet the standard tasks required by a government which included conducting regular meetings, budgeting, planning, monitoring, and arriving at a formal decision-making system. However, the inconsistencies in its implementation were very evident, and actions done were mostly characterized by politics. Thus, it barely sustained the processes and systems made to lessen the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. On the other hand, in terms of the available resources (Table V), the local leaders hardly managed them. They lacked a vigorous system in budgeting, decision-making, and organizing their goals and failed to wisely utilize the latest technology in improving their services to the public. Although it was evident that their respective leaders sought opportunities for innovations, they tried ways to adapt to the changing environment, and entered into joint ventures with other sectors, but still, a failure to conduct an open and extensive dialogue with their respective constituents to fully understand and provide the much-needed organizational innovation and change during the crisis (Table VII).

Table VII.

Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Well-Managed Resources

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
WELL-MANAGED RESOURCES		
38. The local government in the last pandemic has a robust system in financial management.	2.78	Agree
39. The local government in the last pandemic has a proper and transparent financial plan according to the budget, decision making, and organizing goals.	2.72	Agree
40. The design of the physical infrastructure of the local government in the past pandemic is consistent with the current and future needs.	2.84	Agree
41. The local government, in the past pandemic, has state-of-the-art and latest technology to support and improve the performance of the departments.	2.70	Agree
42. Local governments in the past pandemic have practical user-friendly, and comprehensive systems to create, document, and disseminate knowledge to all	2.80	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.79	Agree

Table VIII.

Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Organizational Learning, Innovation, and Change

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING, INNOVATION, AND CHANGE		
43. The local government, in the past pandemic, has been conducting an open and extensive dialogue with the constituency	2.75	Agree
44. The changes implemented in local government during the last pandemic are in line with the changes in time and the environment	2.85	Agree
45. Local government in the past pandemic has sought opportunities for innovation and success.	2.91	Agree
46. The local government, during the past pandemic, has been conducting joint ventures or partnerships that respond to system expansion and innovation	2.81	Agree
47. The local government in the last pandemic has a robust system in financial management.	2.78	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.79	Agree

Table IX.
Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Accountability and Organizational Performance Management

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
ACCOUNTABILITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT		
48. The local government in the past pandemic had effective day-to-day processes and decision-making that are embedded in comprehensive performance	2.78	Agree
49. The local government in the past pandemic had an efficient, complete, and integrated system that is used for measuring performance and progress on an ongoing basis of the department.	2.79	Agree
50. The local government's responsibility in the past pandemic has a standard that is always communicated to everyone.	2.80	Agree
51. Local government during the past pandemic had a clear delegation and accountability framework.	2.67	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.76	Agree

Table IX stressed that the lack of accountability of frameworks was evident in local governance during the pandemic. The people-respondents felt that the local leaders did not provide a system that monitors and measures whether the leaders' performance was effective and was rooted in public service. On the other hand, the performance of the local leaders was perceived as aligned with the values of each local government unit and doing the right thing for the right reason. Still, then again, the people-respondents lacked neutrality in interpersonal and political matters. Hence, there had been barely to no observance of integrity in the exercise of good governance Table X.

However, despite the observance of professionalism in the performance of their tasks and responsibilities, the results showed that the level of efficiency was low. It is worth mentioning that the leaders of the local government units had a good grasp of respect for diversity, as the people felt that through their policies and acted fairly in terms of racial diversity, as shown in Tables XI, XII.

The possession of leadership competencies of any leader in the government is supported by Burns (1993) and Osborne & Gaebler (1992). They both asserted that leaders must be catalysts for change, risk-takers, result, and market oriented. These are important variables to consider in local governance, especially during turbulent times.

Table X.
Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Integrity

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
INTEGRITY		
52. The actions of the local government during the past pandemic were aligned with the values of the department and appreciated in their daily work.	2.91	Agree
53. The local government in the past pandemic has acted as a role model to others, in work and in daily behavior.	2.81	Agree
54. The local government in the past pandemic protects justice.	2.81	Agree
55. The local government in the recent pandemic determined the cause to avoid conflicts of interest.	2.77	Agree
56. Local government during the past pandemic has maintained neutrality in interpersonal and political matters.	2.63	Agree
57. The local government in the past pandemic has been following the specified ideal.	2.89	Agree
58. Local government in the past pandemic is stable in the face of external challenges.	2.88	Agree
59. Local government in the past pandemic is doing the right thing for the right reason and encouraging others to do the same.	2.88	Agree
60. The local government in the past pandemic shared information openly even the "bad" decisions with the people.	2.76	Agree

Overall Weighted Mean	2.82	Agree
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Table XI.

Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Professionalism

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
PROFESSIONALISM		
61. Local government in the past pandemic has created an organization that performs appropriately, starts and ends meetings on time, meets deadlines, and achieves results.	2.82	Agree
62. The local government has focused on the quality and continuous improvement of the department during the recent pandemic	2.97	Agree
63. The local government during the past pandemic has created a welcoming, positive environment for all	2.84	Agree
64. The local government during the past pandemic is making sure that the resources are used in the best possible way.	2.81	Agree
65. Local government in the past pandemic has led to a level of high efficiency	2.68	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.79	Agree

Table XII.

Leadership Competencies by the People as Assessed by the Respondents in Terms of Respect for Diversity

Items	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
PRESPECT FOR DIVERSITY		
66. The local government during the past pandemic was composed of different types of workers.	2.97	Agree
67. The local government during the last pandemic promoted policies that respect diversity within the organization	2.95	Agree
68. The local government in the recent pandemic is acting on the challenge of losing bias and tolerance in the department.	2.78	Agree
Overall Weighted Mean	2.90	Agree

4. CONCLUSION

A government official must possess the attributes of a good leader, but the complexity of the pandemic challenged the existing leadership structure of the government system. The public servant needs to have an open and honest dialogue, engage different sectors in active collaboration, and build trust with their constituents. They need to encourage participation and be transparent in their plans and programs in battling the impact of the pandemic. In order to successfully combat such challenges and difficulties, local leaders must recognize that the challenges are unexpected, and the situation is uncertain; thus, leaders must act like strategists and visionaries to anticipate future crises.

Each municipality is diverse, and the way to manage a crisis like the pandemic is to involve the people by listening to their needs and creating policies and programs that respond to this. Empowerment requires the removal of institutional barriers and promote dialogue and encounters between sectors.

Leaders during crises must be innovative, creative, risk-takers, and driven. It is necessary for leaders, as public managers, to conduct the rudiments of meetings, budgeting, planning, monitoring, and maximizing available resources and the latest technology for an efficient and effective program toward sustainable development.

In summary, the data indicated that the local government was agreeably efficient in dealing with the pandemic crisis. The local government failed to develop an accountability framework resulting in fairly managing and distributing goods and services efficiently and effectively. Laws and ordinances were not fully adequate and not relative to the needs of the communities. The lack of transparency led to inconsistent implementation of goals and confusion and disorganization in many sectors.

Aside from the leadership competencies mentioned, it is also important that they act based on necessity, not bureaucracy. In times of crisis, communication through an open and honest dialogue between leaders and all stakeholders is the bridge that will

connect misunderstandings leading to the successful implementation of policies.

The Philippines is exposed and vulnerable to many threats; the World Risk Index of 2022 even ranked the country as the first in the world as a disaster risk hotspot based on exposure, vulnerability, susceptibility, lack of coping capacities, and lack of adaptive capacities. The researchers recommend empowering the grassroots to act and make decisions for their communities during a crisis. Upskilling and enhancing their capacities will lower the disaster risks and prevent further losses because the actions are based on local knowledge and experiences. At the same time, reconstruction and recovery will be more thorough and directly benefit the community.

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