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"Navigating New Norms: An In-Depth Look at How Working From Home Affects
Employee Engagement and Productivity After COVID-19"

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Introduction

Background to the Research

One of the major shifts in the global labor market over the last decade has been the development of remote work, and that has been highly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It led to a rethinking of traditional styles of work and ways of doing business that are seeking more flexibility, digital collaboration, and valuing work-life balance. The question then becomes: As the environment becomes more common for both workers and companies, does working from home change output and engagement? This paper tries to find out how motivation for, performance of, and general job satisfaction by workers are affected by having to work from home with increasing technological advancement, which makes the practice much easier, or because of health concerns. In general, to understand the main current drivers or eroding factors to develop or engage production in a remote work environment, the main aim will be to explore. All these could help build a body of knowledge in a world after the pandemic (Jones and Frith, 2022).

Research Rationale: Importance of studying remote work's impact post-COVID pandemic

The COVID-19 virus has brought great changes that are more associated with working from home, therefore proving the importance of looking at all the effects this has brought. Such an area should be further investigated because it stands to reason that those effects are, indeed, different not only for productivity but also for gender roles, employees, well-being, and trust within the people, productivity, and planet notion (McPhail et al., 2023). This, therefore, is a step towards trying to understand theories better and also help organizations come up with better plans and policies that will be better fit to work in a post-pandemic world. It, therefore, focuses on these key areas with the purpose of assisting the process of making fair, productive, and long-lasting working conditions within the increasingly changing world's global labor market. COVID-19 made people work from a home office all over the world. That is to say, this underscored how important IT-enabled projects are for keeping businesses afloat even during disasters (Neeley, 2021). This study based on how different companies reacted to the pandemic highlights how important the research on the effects of online work is. In light of these, the study

will seek to explore how the methods of remote work could be used to increase digital readiness and resilience in such a way that could let them remain open after a pandemic. It is, therefore, clear that it brings out the urgency to conduct comprehensive investigations in relation to the long-term effects of working from home post-COVID (Benitez et al., 2023).

Definition of Key Terms (Remote Work, Employee Engagement, Productivity)

Remote work represents working outside a traditional office environment, aided by a computer and digital communication and collaboration tools (Bailey and Kurland, 2002). Employee involvement captures both the emotional commitment and attachment that the worker shows toward his or her job and towards the company, and how these influence the desire of the employees to help the company reach its goals (Macey and Schneider, 2008). Productivity is a way to figure out how well services or things are made compared to the time and resources that go into making them. As more people work from home, standard measures of involvement and productivity are put to the test. As a result, companies need to rethink how they support and improve worker performance and happiness in flexible work arrangements (Drucker, 2016).

Literature Review

History of Remote Work

The rise of remote work in Estonia, which was sped up by the COVID-19 pandemic, is a reflection of a worldwide trend towards more open and independent work. Before the pandemic, more and more people were working from home. This was due to better technology and a cultural shift towards "new work," which was first introduced by Frithjof Bergmann and emphasises liberty, freedom, and important tasks. Betahaus was, in fact, the first coworking place established in Estonia, set up in 2009 (Akhavan and Mariotti, 2023). As it is normally said, a beginning to a story does really mean a turning point from which many other coworking places started to appear, offering people a lot more. The pandemic had spurred the tendency for home-based and shared-space working. Digital infrastructures in Estonia were very good and thus really facilitated the transition of work from the office to online (Sharma, 2023). But, json has its clouds. This time threw into sharp relief the positive aspects of home office and those of better work-life balance and less travel, but also those of good digital support. In reality, coworking spaces are far more than a mere space; they are social hubs of people working independently but together in the same space. The reaction Estonia gives to the future of work query is an example of high adaptivity that a country can have, and it can be replicated well for the rest of the world to enforce such more free, autonomous, and useful work practices.

The Evolution of Remote Work due to the COVID Pandemic

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has completely turned around the way work is done, taking advantage of the increasing use of IT-enabled online work programs in many sectors. Initial steps from the government that declared the lockdowns and social distances had to be done but only later when it became compulsory. It has now developed into the move of a strategy to remain on edge and sure organisations would be able to handle problems never seen before. One of the studies from Spanish firms categorizes their remote work strategies into three groups: leaders, who are very digitized in their remote work before the pandemic; agile firms, quick to learn how to do remote work as the pandemic spread; and survival firms, making their own remote work programs whenever the lockdowns happen. The development has shown how it

turns out to be critical to be digital-ready and flexible at crisis times. Those companies that accepted online work gained a competitive advantage. The pandemic hurried up the transition to digital workplaces and unmasked the need for rapid IT investment in the development of organizational flexibility and resilience (Snow, 2022). That is great news in the history of remote work. The COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, made online work change quickly from an optional, flexible choice around the world to a compulsory standard. This somehow highlighted the great role that digital infrastructure had to take. It has also revolutionized how organizations operate to allow virtual teams, demonstrating what organizational changes need to be made in order for the employees to work from home but still be healthy (Neeley, 2021b).

Key Literature on Employee Engagement and Productivity in Remote Work Settings

The huge changes in the setting for working online are some of the results of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research found that there was a decline in well-being, perceived output, and interest of the remote workers during the pandemic. Self-efficacy and social support from coworkers both seemed to be above other personal and organizational resources in the continuum from keeping the employees involved to keeping the employees healthy, in that order (Straus et al., 2022). Access to the materials you need and a well-equipped office place are some of the outside factors that may have a positive effect on how productive one thinks they are. It insists on the possibility of the creation of a helpful workplace even by the people working from home. There are also specific HRM strategies focused on either increased engagement or productivity, such as self-efficacy and workspace design, respectively (Albrecht, 2010). Investing in such resources as technical tools and self-managing skills during the pandemic is not only a step keeping work results from falling down too much but also making the workforce stronger and more flexible. "Among these factors—communication tools, leadership style, and work-life balance—some may decide how much a worker would be engaged and productive while working from home. The clarifications of goals, level of trust, and adequate support systems would be an important base in the setting of working from home (Fisher and Fisher, 2000).

Theoretical Frameworks

"The Impact of Remote Work on Employee Engagement and Productivity" needs to be looked at from the point of view of organisational behaviour, psychology, and technology acceptance. As a basic idea, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model says that job resources like authority, which is a big part of working from home, can lower job demands, which can make people more engaged and productive. The approach remains equilibrating the demands produced at work with the resources employees are available to reach, suggesting that with the equilibration of remote work, better results are bound to be achieved.

It is at this point that Self-Determination Theory (SDT) chips in very well to further deepen this study in an attempt to see how working from home fits into the psychological needs of a person. SDT states that meeting the need for liberty, competence, and relatedness is very important for there to be some intrinsic incentive to work. Remote working, in turn, directly satisfies these psychological needs: freedom (autonomy), opportunity to become proficient with tasks (competence), and new means for effectively getting along with co-workers (relatedness). This could develop more drive and lead to better performance (Jeno et al., 2019).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an extension that adds yet another psychological and organizational perspective to the assessment of the relevance of digital tools in the context of virtual work. Essentially, it states that how employees regard the perceived ease of usefulness of the technology becomes important for acceptance and effective use of the same. When it comes to working from home, this means that incorporating technology is not only a practical matter, but also a major factor affecting how engaged and productive employees are. So, for remote work methods to work, they need to take into account how job design, psychological needs, and technology acceptance all affect each other. This shows how complicated but necessary it is to create a good remote work setting (Wallace, 2004).

Research Aims, Objectives, and Questions

Statement of the Research Problem

The main question for study is how different types of online work affect employee involvement and output, especially now that the COVID pandemic is over. Since working from home became the norm all of a sudden, companies and workers have had to deal with changes in the workplace that have never been seen before (Kniffin and Antonakis, 2021). The goal of this study is to break down how these changes have affected workers' levels of engagement and productivity, taking into account that different areas have reported different results. Some studies show that work-life balance and higher output are good things, while others show that it can be hard to keep people engaged and working together. This research is very important for coming up with future work rules that take advantage of the good things about working from home while minimising the bad things (Sutherland, K Janene-Nelson and Jurgen Appelo, 2020).

Research Aims and Objectives

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of people had to leave their busy offices and sit down at their kitchen tables for a big experiment. This study looks at how this shift towards working from home will affect people in the long term. The study looks at more than just numbers. It also looks at how the change to WFH has affected the very human aspects of work, such as how motivated we are, how much we get done, and our general sense of success, both as individuals and as a team (Enaifoghe and Zenzile, 2023). Reliable technology, especially computers and internet that don't fizzle out mid-flow, becomes crucial for keeping remote workers engaged and invested in their work. In an interesting twist, the study also shows how important strong legal structures are for creating a good WFH setting, especially in South Africa. Research shows relevance. The independence WFH originally offered was to a great extent an attractive add-on; however, according to the study, it implies serious obstacles. The above will, to a great extent, call upon the HR role and that of the policymakers in the "new normal" to provide support and resources necessary for them to succeed in the remote work setting. Imagine, skills, and coaching without being asked to do so, to make a success of an anywhere environment (Larson, Vroman, and Makarius, 2020)

Research Questions

This study goes further and asks important questions to find out how WFH really affects workers' motivation and ability to get things done:

How does remote work affect employee engagement within different organizational cultures and industries?

What role does technology play in maintaining or enhancing productivity and engagement among remote employees?

What differences in attitudes toward working remotely exist between management and employees, and what might that imply in terms of policy?

What strategies can organizations put in place so they are able to grapple with these downsides of this mode of work and optimize the benefits?

How exactly does the nature of remote working relationships impact employees' work-life balance and what outcomes derive for an employee's composite job satisfaction and productivity?

What longer-term consequences might telework arrangements be expected to have on career development opportunities for employees, and what degree might these consequences differentially affect employees at differing job levels and functions?

Methodology

Chosen Paradigm: Qualitative Research Justification

Establishing how working from home affects the motivation and productivity of the employees, it was, therefore, deemed that a qualitative research model should be put in place. This is because the qualitative research design might not fully capture the complex and subjective experiences that people are going through (Bryman, 2016). Through qualitative research, the investigator will have an in-depth understanding of the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of the workers towards telework. Such is the kind of results reporting so much to us on how telecommuting influences the level of engagement and effectiveness at the job (Bharti, 2024). This way has worked very well with such complex parts of teleworking as how the communication works, the functioning of the team, and maintaining balance between work and personal life. These things are important to know in order to fully understand how working from home affects people in general. Qualitative methods, like focus groups and interviews, will help you get specific stories and experiences (Thiel et al., 2022). It would, therefore, make it easier for the way to be studied in detail about the various factors that affect the involvement of employees and their efficiency in the far-off regions. This would aim to better the view on human and organizational factors on the way people are feeling in relation to working from home. The above goal designed the method (Kozinets, 2015).

Research Design and Rationale

This study will take a qualitative research approach in relation to how working from home influences employee engagement and productivity. The objective is to get a full picture of how the workers feel and what they think (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). This design was used because it will really allow one to demonstrate how working from home has a very direct effect on motivation and productivity in ways that a quantitative methodology might never be able to do. This will be a qualitative study to access the personal stories, feelings, and thoughts of the participants who are involved in home-working. It will do so by the use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, with the theme analysis method, in order to come up with rich, detailed insights (McGregor and Doshi, 2020).

It is meant, therefore, for the complex explorations of dynamics that occur in a remote work setting, such as how people communicate, how teams interact with each other, how to merge work with personal life, and how organizational culture affects an employee (Maxwell, 2013). In so doing, the main drivers of themes that will establish how involved and productive the employee will be working from home will have been established. This implies that company information will be exposed to these companies, and it could help in improving how they do remote work (Delbosc and Kent, 2023).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative approach in this study has clear merits and demerits toward achieving the objective on home working and its effect on employee motivation and productivity.

Advantages:

This gives the researchers further insight into the emotional experiences, attitudes, and views of workers regarding remote work and thus is able to have full knowledge of how all this affects the involvement and productivity. This applies much deeper when looking into conversation, work-life balance, and company culture in places where people are not under the same roof (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Flexibility: He may change his methodology as the study is conducted if, in case, throughout the process, new information unfolds. That is something that would be quite helpful when looking into a new, one-complicated area. Online work would be something to help out, encouraging the learner as the study goes on (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.3).

Rich Data: Qualitative research supplies a rich kind of detailed data that gives a full picture of the thing being studied. For example, with the use of interviews and focus group discussions, there is an opportunity to find stories and experiences that raw data alone would be unable to present (Sagepub, 2012).

Disadvantages:

Subjectivity: Being interpretative, qualitative research may easily bring subjectivity in the study, hence compromising the objectivity and likelihood of biasing the understanding of data. In this regard, researchers have an imperative to remain objective and use organized methods of analysis (Keen, Lomeli-Rodriguez and Joffe, 2022).

Generalisability: Qualitative research, in its very essence, focuses on special circumstances and uses small sample numbers that often do not lend themselves to larger groups of people. Because of this, the result should, therefore, be considered inapplicable to larger groups of people other than the ones studied (Bryman, 2012).

Time and Resource Consuming: Qualitative data collection and its analysis is a process that needs a lot of time and resources, for transcribing, coding, and analyzing the data requires labor-intensive work (Saldana, 2021).

Data Collection Methods

Overview of Qualitative Data Collection Methods:

Inasmuch as such quantitative data—that is, numbers and charts—help, we have to reach a little further if we are to understand the human side of remote work. In that connection, qualitative approaches work almost akin to a magnifying glass, enabling one to pay close attention to the experiences and perspectives of the employees. In-depth interviews let the employees tell their stories. And there are commutes and feelings of isolation; these are vivid stories that show how remote workers' engagement and productivity get affected (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

The last form allows for participation and power sharing. Imagine a virtual round table where the employees of these diverse departments and different backgrounds bring out their experiences in remote work. Collaborative efforts will more often than not bring out new ideas and a deeper knowledge of the shared experience. One group may be putting more emphasis on effective managerial communication as a top priority, while another may be putting strong emphasis on strong collaborative tools (Palmarozzo and Toffel, 2023).

They are instructive, though rare from concern to privacy. A clue as to how to deal with distractions or organize a place of work in one's house may be taken from the observation of a day-to-day routine of a remote worker. Subject to permission, anonymized observations can give real-time statistics for remote work made at employees' homes. These are basically qualitative methodologies that give us the entire view on how remote work is affecting productivity and employee engagement (Salmons, 2021).

Selection of Specific Methods for This Study

Most of the data that will be collected are from the use of in-depth interviews and focus groups, which aim to identify the information required for this study on how efficiency and involvement of employees in organizations are likely to be affected by remote working. People may share their personal narratives and reflections on how the experience of working from home has impacted their motivational levels and levels of work output as part of an in-depth interview, which provides researchers with a much fuller picture of each individual's experiences..

Researchers can use this way to look into complicated topics like work-life balance, communication problems, and how people get used to working from home on a personal level (Morgan, 1997).

Focus groups, on the other hand, help people come up with ideas by pushing them to talk and connect with each other. This way works really well for finding topics and different points of view on things like working from home, using technology, and getting help from the company. Focus groups are a great way to get rich, comparing information about the things that affect employee involvement and productivity in remote settings because they are always changing (Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, 2009).

Evaluation of Data Collection Methods

The study emphasizes the need to evaluate qualitative data collection methods like in-depth interviews and focus groups for researching the effects of remote work on engagement and productivity. In-depth interviews offer detailed insights into individual experiences and the specific ways remote work affects productivity, but they are time-intensive and may not capture broader, communal perspectives (Seers, 2012). Focus groups, in contrast, use discussion among participants for the elaboration, clarification, and sometimes reduction of others' experiences to capture more fully the common themes and diversity of opinion relating to remote working. On the other hand, the effectiveness of a focus group rests largely on the moderator's capability to shape discussions and make sure that all parties to the discussion are given an opportunity to air their views.

Analysis Plan

Qualitative Data Analysis Techniques

This is a good way to investigate how working at home affects the involvement of workers and their productivity. Generally, this would be important in revealing very essential trends that bring out shared experiences and views about working from home with the help of a large number of data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). Its knowledge makes it easy for it to find the complex factors that affect engagement and output. Content analysis, on the other hand, organises written material into categories in a planned way, which makes it possible to measure qualitative results. By combining the range of content analysis with the complexity of theme results, this two-step process makes sure that a full understanding of the effects of remote work is gained (Krippendorff, 1980).

Expected Challenges in Data Analysis

Some of the problems that come up with qualitative data analysis in the field of research are handling a huge amount of data, figuring out how to explain complicated human experiences, and keeping dependability and validity while also dealing with subjective bias (Hoon, 2013). To properly handle data, you need to take a strict and orderly approach. This includes coding and organising the data, making themes based on groups, and using software to help you. It is also important to think about how the study affected the methods of collecting and analysing the data. These issues show how important it is to follow a set of steps when doing qualitative research to make sure the results are valid and based on the data the researchers collected (Patton, 2014).

Software Tools to be Used (e.g., NVivo)

Using software tools may enhance research qualitatively. These software tools would streamline many aspects of qualitative research. From data collection to analysis and reporting, this helps the researcher operate efficiently. To gather data, the smartphone or tablet takes notes, photos, audio or video recordings of observations, or chats. With this transcription software, audio-to-text conversion is easy and fast. Some software identifies your voice. CAQDAS technologies like NVivo, MAXQDA, and ATLAS.ti help researchers arrange, code, and analyse

textual material during analysis (Nobile, 2016). These powerful tools may create charts and other graphics from analysis to help you comprehend research results. Finally, tools like Scrivener can help researchers write more creative reports by arranging and structuring their data. These software solutions help researchers centralise their data. This streamlines qualitative research and improves findings (Jackson, Bazeley and Publications, 2019).

Significance and Implications of the Study

Contribution to Knowledge

This is useful for evaluating the new work conditions created after the COVID-19 epidemic. Remote employment was studied for productivity and employee engagement. This study will go beyond dry numbers to show how remote working arrangements affect morale, motivation, and performance. This innovation has increased our understanding of the long-term effects of widespread remote work (Gephart, 2002).

The study gives insights and practical applications. The insights can be used to create successful remote work policies. If they understand how working remotely affects people, companies may create regulations that promote productivity and well-being. In this new labour age, companies and employees win (Felstead and Golo Henseke, 2017).

Practical Implications for Organizations and Remote Workers

With the right parameters, this working-from-home research may benefit businesses and workers. Businesses might then utilise data to determine what made one productive and interested in working at home, exactly as one would from their thinking rather than research. These help the organisation in creating policies that guarantee flexible hours, provide communication devices, and establish clear communication channels. Companies optimise the ideal environment for online workers (Mohd Tariq Jamal, Anwar, and Singh 2023).

In addition to enterprises, the report encourages home-based workers. To develop a solid organisational culture, especially in remote teams, one must understand how working from home affects work-life balance. It advises many telecommuters on setting limitations and using technology to communicate promptly. Start by following these tips to stay productive and interested when away from the workplace.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Approval Process

Ethical review is very important in a study seeking to investigate how working from home influences involvement and productivity among employees, to ensure that the participants' privacy and data to be collected are protected. Researchers will need to present their research proposals to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or to an ethics group that serves similar functions. The proposal will need to stipulate how to get informed consent, how to keep the people's identities secret, and how to protect any kind of private data. This guarantees that the ethics standards of the set study will be followed, and it is guaranteed that the subject will not be overexposed to harm (Holland, 2015).

Consent and Anonymity

The major ethical issues would be informed consent and protection of participant privacy in the course of the research on the impacts of working from home on employee involvement and productivity. Therefore, all the possible ways, methods, and risks, including benefits to the participants, are required to explain to them with regard to the goal of the study before starting it. It is also important that they understand their choice to participate and their right to quit. Anonymity protects people's names, which is important for being honest about experiences, especially in work settings where people might be worried about privacy and consequences (Quadrelli, 2018).

Data Protection and Confidentiality

When studying how working from home affects employee involvement and productivity, data security and privacy are very important to keep participant information safe. Researchers need to use safe ways to store data, limit who can see private data, and make data anonymous so that people can't be identified. These steps keep personal information safe from being shared without permission and stop unauthorised data breaches. They also keep the trust between academics and users (Corti, Bishop and Woollard, 2014).

Limitations and Delimitations

Advantages and disadvantages

This is useful and important, so the study on how working from home influences motivation and productivity is full of built-in limitations affecting what it can find and how that can be used.

Limitations indicate the problems and restrictions a researcher comes across in the course of research and may have an impact on the truth or applicability of the study. The single major problem is that the information is derived from interviews and polls, which can easily be subjective or wrong in that people narrate what is in their real life and thoughts. A further concern is that the online work conditions vary considerably among sectors and job profiles, making drawing broad-based conclusions from the results quite challenging. The results of the study could easily become outdated very soon with the coming of new technologies and trends, given how very fast the nature of online work has been changing, more so since the outbreak of COVID-19.

One can refer to these as the delimitations: deciding about what the study deals with and how far it goes. In this qualitative research, methods are limited to the range of the study, in which levels of efficiency and involvement cannot be measured quantitatively. This does allow for a more in-depth look at the experience of each person, though. The authors note another limitation: "It is likely that this study focused on specific businesses or types of jobs that were fit to be completed from home. This means that the results may not be useful in other areas (Turner, 2019).

Resource Implications

Estimated Costs

This study looks into how working from home affects employee involvement and productivity. It does this by using online platforms and tools to access many open-access journals and databases. We will only think about subscribing to specialised study sites if we need to get more detailed or up-to-date information that isn't available elsewhere. A flexible and effective mixed-method approach is used for the study, which includes both in-person and online conversations with participants, based on their location and availability. The main financial worry is the cost of travel for in-person talks, especially with experts or key leaders who live far away. Careful budget management will make sure that these costs don't go over the project's budget. Travel plans will depend on how important it is to collect data in person and how useful it is for the study. Over the course of three months, the project aims to do as much research as possible while keeping costs as low as possible. Most of the research will be done using digital tools. The goal of this strategic resource management is to get the most out of time and money, making sure that the study is fully covered and finished quickly (Morse, 2015).

Time Resources

The research on how working from home affects employee engagement and efficiency takes a lot of time at many steps, from planning the study to collecting data to analysing results and sharing them. Collecting data, especially through focus groups and conversations, can take a lot of time because you have to plan the events, run them, and write down what people say. Coding and developing themes are two steps in the qualitative data analysis process that take a lot of time to fully look over and understand the data. The time frame is also longer when writing and revising for publishing or show (Yin, 2018).

Conclusion

Summary of Key Points

This extensive study delves deeply into the impact of remote work on employee motivation and productivity, offering key insights into the evolving dynamics of work in the post-pandemic era. Utilizing qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, the research examines the emotional and experiential aspects of remote working. Findings indicate that while remote work is flexible and supports work-life balance, it also presents significant challenges related to maintaining organizational culture, effective communication, and integrated team objectives.

The research employs theoretical frameworks like the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to analyze how digital tools, psychological support, and organizational backing shape the remote work experience. These frameworks underscore the importance of proper systems and support for successful remote work arrangements.

The study's findings extend beyond theoretical insights to practical applications, suggesting robust organizational policies for remote work that prioritize employee health, engagement, and productivity. Recommendations include investing in technology, fostering a trust-based and autonomous culture, and providing resources to ensure a balanced work-life environment. The research offers strategies to enhance self-efficacy, address home-based work challenges, and improve job satisfaction.

Despite its contributions, the study recognizes limitations such as the potential biases of self-reported data and challenges in generalizing findings due to the dynamic nature of remote work practices. These issues highlight the need for ongoing research to keep pace with the changing work environment.

Overall, this research enriches the literature on remote work, serving as a reference for future studies and offering practical guidance for organizations and workers navigating the complexities of remote work. Understanding and addressing the implications of remote working is crucial for

creating a sustainable, productive, and engaging global work environment in the post-pandemic world. This study not only maps the terrain of remote work but also charts a course for adapting to its newfound effectiveness in the changing landscape of work.

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