

INFLUENCE OF GROUP COMMUNICATION SKILL AND OFFICE MANAGERS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between group communication skills and office managers' job performance in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. The objective of the study was to examine how group communication skills interact with measures of office managers' job performance such as early task completion, creativity, and actionable decision making. The cross-sectional explanatory survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of this study consisted of two hundred and sixty (260) office managers in six (6) public tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The sample size of the study was one hundred and sixty-five (165) respondents obtained using the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination of 1970. The collection of primary data was done using a questionnaire designed by the researcher. Structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection after face-validation. Cronbach alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument. Out of 165 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total of 140 were retrieved. The test of hypotheses (bivariate analysis) was done using Spearman Rank Order Correction. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between group communication skills and measures of office managers' performance such as early task completion, creativity, and actionable decision making. The study concluded that group communication skills are instrumental to improved performance of office managers in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. The study therefore, recommended that office managers across tertiary institutions should imbibe the culture of persuasion and emotional intelligence in order to get along with their colleagues and achieve targets smoothly.

Key Words: Group Communication Skills, Office Managers' Job Performance.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Across organizations, managers have been put in administrative positions to oversee activities and as well give appropriate reports duly. In tertiary institutions, we have office managers being the Deans of faculties, Heads of Departments, and Directors of Academic Units (such as Director of ICT, Director of Student Affairs, etc.) that are administratively in charge of these faculties departments, and units. In clear terms, office manager operationally refers to middle level administrative heads saddled with the responsibility of manning the affairs of a Department or Unit of an organization. Within the structure of tertiary institutions, administrative heads within this category include Heads of Departments (HODs), Deans, and Directors of Academic Units (Odu, 2019; Otamiri, et al., 2020). They have the responsibility of organizing the administrative activities of the unit under their auspices; they ensure that management decisions and other administrative information are properly communicated; and they are also expected to manage the administrative records of the unit under them. Conversely, the inability of middle level administrative heads to effectively and efficiently man the administrative affairs of such units under them is one of the problems facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

There is delay in completion of tasks characterized by delay in target attainment, task performance and goal attainment. There is also the issue of lack of creativity among the office managers occasioned by dearth of critical thinking, open innovation, and as well as creative problem solving.

Poor performance on their part has also permeated into indecisiveness and as well as incessant lack of implementation whenever a decision is reluctantly made. The issue of low performance of administrative heads has provoked several theoretical and empirical investigations and despite the plethora of research findings and recommendations made by scholars over the years, the average office manager is still underperforming in their line of duties (Olayanju & Asogwa, 2010; Yusuf & Lawal, 2012; Osakede et al., 2017; Odu, 2019). In his study, Frank (2017) found that Nigerian Office Managers reported lower levels of efficiency and effectiveness as compared to Office Managers in South Africa. Yazon et al. (2019: 54) lamented that “only few administrative heads in Nigerian tertiary institutions are performing satisfactorily in their core duties”. This suggests that there is a problem of having office managers who are performing in our tertiary institutions. Explicitly, this has given rise to delay in task performance, lack of creativity, and non-implementation of decisions.

Participant observation of the researcher has proved that office managers across tertiary institutions in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular are generally dull in getting tasks, goals and targets established on time, in spite of the level of exposure some of them have in administrative communication, which would have enhanced co-operation in their units. In tandem with this, Odu (2019) had lamented the poor performance of administrative heads in terms of their failure to professionally handle and preserve administrative records in their units on time, unnecessary delay in the dissemination of administrative information as well as poor feedback in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. Failure to provide colleagues and students with necessary information update on time, late calling of departmental and faculty meetings, lackadaisical behaviours towards administrative functions, and reluctance in coordination of departmental activities in the administrative system of Nigerian tertiary institutions point to the fact that most office managers are underperforming.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMWORK

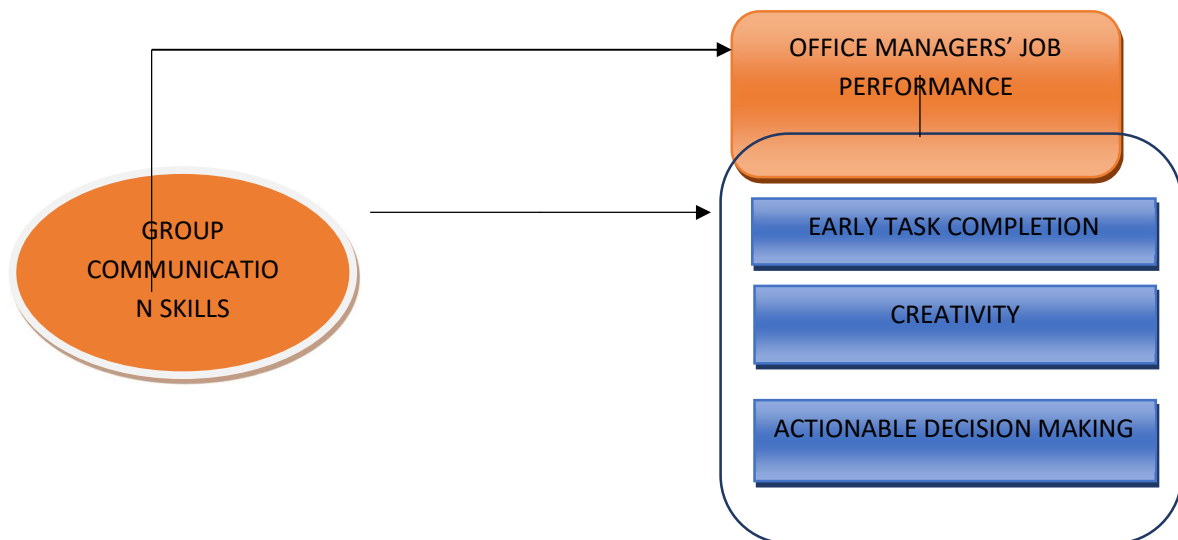


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework Showing Relationship between group Communication skills and Office Managers' job Performance.

Source: (Nazari et al., 2017; Nebo et al., 2015; Syahrudin, 2018; Kasande et al., 2016; Al & Hassan, 2016)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to empirically examine the influence of group communication skills on office managers' job performance in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. The specific objectives of this study included the following:

1. To determine how group communication skills influence early task completion in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.
2. To examine the influence of group communication skills on creativity in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.
3. To ascertain the influence of group communication skills on actionable decision making in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.

HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Ho₁: Group communication skills do not have any significant influence on early task completion in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.
- Ho₂: Group communication skills do not have any significant influence on creativity in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.
- Ho₃: Group communication skills do not have any significant influence on actionable decision making in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This work is anchored on the Person-Environment Fit Theory of Lewin and Edwards, popularized in 1962 (Osita, 2018). Person-Environment Fit Theory of psychology describes the interaction between the person and environment ($P \times E$) as the key to comprehending people's cognitive and behavioural reactions such as performance and productivity. The theory posits that a mismatch between a person and his work environment will lead to tension and uneasiness capable of hampering his level of performance. The second tenet of this theory is that worker's capabilities (skill sets) will determine the level of work pressure and how environmental stress affects their output. The theorist explained that the level of match between job demands and workers' capabilities (skills) to meet those demands is referred to as demands-ability fit (Cummings & Worley, 2008).

Socio-Technical Theory

The socio-technical theory is attributable to Eric Trist, Ken Bamforth and Fred Emery, during the World War II era, based on their work with workers in English coal mines at the Tavistock Institute in London in 1951. The theory is made up of two main constructs joined together – socio and technical. Socio has to do with people and society while 'technical' has to do with machines and technology. Socio-technical refers to the interrelatedness of social and technical aspects of an organization. This theory holds that business organizations are made up of human beings working together in social groups using equipment, tools, methodologies and knowledge to achieve desirable changes in the system and to bring about the achievement of corporate goals as well as outperforming competitors (Walker et al., 2016). This theory holds that changes in organizations and the capacity of organizations to compete favorably in the market are influenced by demands from the external environment which impacts information systems changes in an organization.

Concept of Group Communication Skills

In a business environment, it is common for employees to work together in small groups, teams and departments to accomplish specific business tasks. To work effectively with one another, it is important for each individual to have strong group communication skills. If they do not, the employees may cause misunderstandings, start unnecessary conflicts and slow down the efficiency of the organization. Learning how to facilitate effective group communication can help employees

work better together. There are many different groups in the workplace. This can include a sales team that works to accomplish the functional task of selling products. It can also include a social club committee made up of those who volunteer their time to plan fun events for the staff. Typically, groups are defined as having between five and twenty people, though the size can vary based on the organization. The defining factor of a group at work is that they need to collaborate to accomplish a specific objective together. Communication is the act of sending and receiving messages. In an individual setting, there is one sender of the message and one receiver of the message. In a group dynamic, however, this changes – which can lead to complications and misunderstandings. There can be several senders of the message and several receivers of the message, and this can all happen simultaneously. If all individuals in the group do not understand the message as intended, it can lead to issues in the workplace. The purpose of group communication is to exchange information in order to make decisions, resolve confusion, build rapport and get closer to attaining the business goal (Ahmed, 2019). However, group communication also has an effect on how the individuals in the group treat each other and feel about each other. This informs whether they are motivated to meet the goals of their group. There is therefore need to be skillful in communicating within a group setting, as this will strengthen effective team collaboration leading to organization growth and performance. Examples of group communication skills include technical skill, persuasive skill, and leadership skill.

Concept of Office Managers' Job Performance

The office manager is described by The Online Business Dictionary (2016) as an employee of a business or organization whose duties typically include allocating physical resources such as office space and supplies, scheduling internal events, overseeing operational staff such as accountants, technicians, and administrative personnel, and other details necessary to run an office in any industry or field. Office managers, also called administrative service managers, are business professionals who are responsible for a diverse set of administrative tasks. Whether calculating payroll or hiring new employees, office managers must perform their duties with decisiveness and accuracy for a business to perform well. Chigamik Community Health Centre (2013:3) describes the office manager as "an employee responsible for organizing and coordinating office operations and procedures in order to ensure organizational effectiveness and efficiency." The Office Manager reports to the Executive Director and has strong people skills, manages a wide variety of administrative and clerical tasks, and proficient with computers and the use of Microsoft Office software, including Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Publisher. Office Manager as conceptualized in this study is quite different from the conventional one where the secretary is presumed to be the Office Manager. Here, by the concept "Office Manager" we meant the middle level managers who intermediate between the top and first level management in an organization. Thus, in this regards, the Office Manager (middle management) is the intermediate management of a hierarchical organization that is subordinate to the executive management and responsible for at least two lower levels of junior staff (Peter, 2016). Unlike the line management, Office Manager (middle management) is considered to be a senior (or semi-executive) management position, with respective salary and a package of benefits (Dance, 2011). The Office Managers' job is to implement company strategy in the most efficient way. Their duties include creating an effective working environment, administrating the work process, making sure it is compliant with organization's requirements, leading people and reporting to the highest level of management (Zhang, 2008).

According to Roth (2016), in every hierarchical organization, the Office Manager (middle management) acts as important link and interface between the top management and the operating core, but also as central contact point for supporting service departments. This unit, metaphorical speaking, is horizontally and vertically placed in the heart of an organization. The Office Manager's job is tied among others to interpret and later transmit the defined strategies into management decisions and corporate action is only one of the main tasks. Office Managers at this level of

organization (middle management) comprises of managers who head specific departments (such as accounting, marketing, production) or business units, or who serve as project managers in flat organizations. The Office Managers are responsible for implementing the top management's policies and plans and typically have two management levels below them. Usually among the first to be slashed in the 'resizing' of a firm, Office Manager constitutes the thickest layer of managers in a traditional (tall pyramid shaped) organization (Das, 2011).

Measures of Office Managers' Job Performance

Early Tasks Completion: One of the signs of a performing office manager is his ability to create an environment that enables employees to accomplish routine tasks in time. Early task completion is some strategic contribution to the higher objectives of an organization (especially in tertiary institutions, as lots of administrative job requirements are involved alongside academic tasks) that could take the form of revenues generated, costs avoided, revenues recovered and percent improvement in some process, smooth operation etc., something above and beyond the normal day-to-day duties and responsibilities. Now, those daily duties and responsibilities may be tactics that support the strategic contribution (Mattessich, 2015). By this, then it is been done in an early manner. Also, the Freedictionary.com defines early completion as completion of the work, done or designated portion thereof on or before the date required.

Jeff (2017) stressed that task completion is one of the fundamental usability metrics. It is the most common way to quantify the effectiveness of an interface. If users cannot do what they intend to accomplish, not much else matters. While that may seem like a straightforward concept, actually determining whether users are completing a task often is not as easy. The ways to determine task completion will vary based on the mode of evaluation and whether the data is collected from actual use (things users have done or self-reported) or simulated use (typically a usability test).

To this end, early task completion portends timely completion of the work, duty, task, responsibility or assignment as a designated portion by an individual on or before the time or date required. It is the attainment of a task or duty by an individual on or before the designated time required for such to be completed. In line with the above conceptual definition, timely task completion as a measure of job performance of an Office Manager means when an Information Manager attains a designated tasks or duties on or before the stipulated time. An Office Manager in a tertiary institution such as the Dean, Head of Department (HOD), or academic unit Director is expected to issue out memos, call for meetings, give reports, etc. on time, as this will permeate into their performance, thereby enhancing his performance as an office manager.

Creativity: Creativity can be explained as production of new ideas; a creative employee is one who can come up with new suggestions/ideas for the services to be constructed, the flood of the communication and understanding it in the same way which would affect the work done by the employee during his working hour (Amabile, 2017). Creativity is explained as a design in which the employee make such innovative construction in which the work related problems are resolved in rightful manner with step by step process, some explain it as the ability of the individuals how they can develop useful solution to meet the challenges and overcome the problem them self individually (Amabile, 2017; Young, 2016).

Creativity has been defined differently by different researchers. Some defined it as personal characteristics and others as a process (Amabile, 2017). Researchers in the past have revealed that a creative response can be a product, idea or procedure that fulfills two conditions: (1) they must be novel or original, and (2) they should be potentially relevant for, or useful to an organization (Barron & Harrington, 2018). Literature has revealed that at first, researchers have focused on determining a set of personal characteristics that are associated with creative achievements (Davis, 2015; Martindale, 2019). They addressed the role of personal attributes and cognitive styles as the key determinants of employee creativity rather than job specific contextual factors that also play an important role in determining employee creativity.

Actionable Decision Making: The word “decision-making” conjures up the image of choice among alternative courses of action in a way appropriate to the demand of the situation. The ability of the decision maker to choose the best option that is capable of achieving the set objective or solving the problem demands structured decision guidelines (James & Edwin, 2017). To be actionable, organizations must, through their managers and employees, be able to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Among the influences perpetuating this environment of widespread and rapid changes are significant developments in technology and research, demographic and socio-political shifts and the trend towards globalization. Moreover, these developments have brought the global economy to a cross roads between the industrial age and the postindustrial age (Yasodara et al., 2016). Decision making can be regarded as an outcome of mental processes (cognitive processes: memory, thinking, evaluation) leading to the selection of a course of action among several alternatives. Actionable decision making is very paramount to the progress of every organization and institution as it leads or shows the next line of action. When office managers match their words with actions, then confusion is cleared and work can progress. Employees such as lecturers and non-academic staff under their leadership will know what to do and how to do as management decision will be communicated to them. A decision can only be said to be actionable when it shows the next line of action.

What might be the reason behind a successful decision could be the expected outcome or the process taken to get there. If you chase the result, then you cannot be sure if the result was delivered by sheer luck or that the success can be repeated again. Some say actionable decisions require an actionable decision-making process. However, without instilling checks and balances, mere method alone cannot provide a good foundation for business decisions. The biggest conflicts in business decisions come from a poor understanding of the needs driven by misguided data and unintentional biases. Having a decision-making process alone does not kick our clarity of choices, opportunities, and risks. There needs to be a quality check in the process to ensure decision-makers bring their highest quality intentions and clear minds. Decisions taken across organizations are often regarded as rational, often relying on data and facts for clear choices. Yet, there is not enough facts and data in the world to predict a 100% outcome. The best decisions navigate the “heart vs. head” conflict, continually questioning facts, as well as your assumptions. Is your business built on passion or information? A great decision is created from passion (heart) and challenged with information (head). When it comes to actionable decision making with guided intuition, our cognitive process for making judgment calls and decisions shifts from intuitive to rational driven by five factors (Leading Lotus, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional explanatory survey research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consisted of two hundred and sixty (260) office managers in six (6) Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. Sampling in this study was in two stages. First, the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970 was adopted. Using the Krejcie and Morgan Sample Size Determination Table of 1970, the sample size of this study is one hundred and fifty-five (155) respondents. Cronbach alpha via SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The data presentation and analysis of this work was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0. Spearman’s (rho) correlation was used to analyze the relationship between independent and dependent variables at $p < 0.5$ (two tailed test).

RESULTS

- Ho₁: Group communication skills do not have any significant influence on early task completion in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.
- Ho₂: Group communication skills do not have any significant influence on creativity in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.

H₀₃: Group communication skills do not have any significant influence on actionable decision making in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.

Table 1: Correlations between Group Communication Skills and Office Managers' Performance

		Group Communication Skills	Early Task Completion	Creativity	Actionable Decision Making
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.855**	.923**	.811**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	147	147	147	147
	Correlation Coefficient	.855**	1.000	.759**	.509**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	N	147	147	147	147
	Correlation Coefficient	.923**	.759**	1.000	.887**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	147	147	147	147
	Correlation Coefficient	.811**	.509**	.887**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	147	147	147	147

**Correlation is Significant at the 1.000 level (2-tailed)

Source: SPSS Output

Column two of table 1 above shows r value of 0.855 at a significant level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to group communication skills and early task completion. Since the significant level is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) which states that group communication skills do not have any influence on early task completion in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a1}) was accepted. This implies that there is a very strong positive relationship between group communication skills and early task completion in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.

Column three of table 1 above shows r value of 0.923 at a significant level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to group communication skills and creativity. Since the significant level is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) which states that group communication skills do not have any influence on creativity in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a2}) was accepted. This implies that there is a very strong positive relationship between group communication skills and creativity in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State.

Column four of table 1 above shows r value of 0.811 at a significant level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to group communication skills and actionable decision making. Since the significant level is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) which states that group communication skills do not have any influence on actionable decision making in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a3}) was accepted. This implies that there is a very strong positive relationship between group communication skills and actionable decision making in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. These results showed that an improvement in the group communication skills of office managers in Public Tertiary Institutions will bring about a very significant improvement in their performance in terms of early task completion, creativity, and actionable decision making, amongst others.

Discussion of Findings

The tests of hypotheses one, two and three revealed that there is a very strong positive relationship between group communication skills and office managers' performance in public tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The role of technical skill, leadership skill, and persuasive skill cannot be overemphasized. HODs, Deans and Directors are all leaders in their positions. As such, they dearly need these skills that constitute group communication skills. No wonder, Stowell (2018) asserted that the ability of a manager to add persuasion to his leadership skill is a plus to their ability to lead with result-driven orientations. In line with this Ahmed (2019) found that academic instructors with the right communication skills bear the ability to persuade students to perform competitively well. The purpose of group communication is to exchange information in order to make decisions, resolve confusion, build rapport and get closer to attaining the business goal (Ahmed, 2019). However, group communication also has an effect on how the individuals in the group treat each other and feel about each other. This informs whether they are motivated to meet the goals of their group. There is therefore need to be skillful in communicating within a group setting, as this will strengthen effective team collaboration leading to organization growth and performance.

Effective communication within a group as led by an office manager helps to build a common purpose among its members that will allow them to reach their goals, hence a plus to the performance of the leader, the group and the entire institution. To make this hold enough water, Stowell (2018) opined that frequent friendly communication can help group members develop a sense of belonging and strengthen relationships. When an office manager leading a group of lecturers or students is open to them and communicates effectively, it becomes very easy to have them working together with him. Group members yield to leadership where communication is appropriately done in a way that gives them a sense of belonging and respect. With this, they just

yield to leadership, thereby enhancing the performance of the leader and the entire group. Effective group leaders know that group communication drives organizational efficiency. As employees understand the standards for their work, they will be more willing to reach out for help when they need it and the group will become more capable. Strong group communication will create understanding and that understanding will create powerful relationships within a team.

It becomes very difficult to collaborate with all group members and have them reach a common agreement where there is dearth of communication skills within a group, especially by its leader. Many at times, group leaders face the challenge of not knowing how to pass a message from management to the members of the group. It takes group communication skills to have everyone pay keen attention and come to terms with the leaders. Hence, it becomes pertinent for group members and leaders especially, to get equipped with group communication skills so as to be able to effectively collaborate with group members and possibly the entire workforce of an organization. Truly, good communication skills are integral to any group's success and the overall success of the organization. Liang and Martin (2018) stated that group communication promotes positive work relationship, reduces and diffuses conflict, creates a culture of celebration, inspires clear and reachable goals, and ensures greater efficiency.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analyses and discussion of findings, the study concluded that group communication skills enhance the job performance of office managers in Public Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. Public Tertiary Institutions that understand this and take advantage of it by making conscious effort in improving the communication competences of their office managers will enjoy the improvement that will emanate from the office managers in terms of early task completion, creativity, and actionable decision. Lack of group communication skills make it difficult for office managers to effectively perform their job.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The management Public Tertiary Institutions should organize seminars and workshops where office managers will be properly trained on writing skills, interpersonal skill, and group communication skills, as this will help optimize their performance significantly.
2. Office managers should as well sponsor themselves in attending both offline and online seminars and workshops that will add to their writing skills, interpersonal skill, and group communication skills, amongst others. Over time, this will build very strong confidence in their communication competences, hence, a big plus to their performance.
3. Public tertiary institutions should adopt technological policies, operational policies, and Human Resource Development policies that will create avenues for communication competences to thrive amongst their office managers, thereby improving their performance.

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