

Workplace Flexibility and Employee Productivity: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract: *As the recent Covid-19 outbreak shown, businesses in today's highly competitive and dynamic marketplace benefit greatly from flexible work arrangements. Employees have lost their jobs, production has stalled, and businesses have lost money as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown and stay-at-home period. Organizations' stiff and inflexible work arrangements may be to blame for their high staff turnover, poor productivity, and low profitability. According to the findings, workplace flexibility such as telecommuting, flexi-time, and other kinds of remote work have a beneficial impact on productivity. Consequently, management was advised by the research to support teleworking in order to improve productivity and staff retention via the use of technology. Management should encourage telecommuting, which allows workers to work from home, in order to improve work-life balance and increase productivity. Flexi-time, which enables full-time workers to choose their own start and end times, should also be emphasized by management in order to promote a healthy work-life balance and increase productivity.*

Keywords: *Workplace flexibility; teleworking, telecommuting; flexi-time; productivity; crisis situation*

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Introduction

Competitive marketplaces, like as the current Covid-19 stay at home epidemic, need flexibility in the workplace. Human Resources Management (HRM) methods that encourage more flexible work schedules are used by firms in order to better adapt to the unpredictable environment (Stavrou, 2005).

practices that might increase productivity by using flexible work schedules are referred to as flexible working practices (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). Human resources may be more effectively used if the workplace is flexible enough to allow workers and their time to be allocated in accordance with the nature of the task (Berkery, et al., 2017).

Increasingly common in European Union (EU) and OECD member nations, workplace flexibility has lately acquired some traction (Battisti and Vallanti, 2013). Many large-scale surveys, including the European Working Conditions Surveys, the Workplace Employment Relations Series and the Work-Life Balance Study, as well as a recent comparative analysis by Gialis & Taylor (2016), confirm the enormous popularity of flexible working arrangements in both highly developed countries like the United Kingdom, Italy, and the Netherlands as well as less developed EU countries such as Greece. According to other surveys, flexible working arrangements are becoming more common in several nations throughout the globe, including Japan, the United States and Canada (Spreitzer, Cameron, and Garret, 2017).

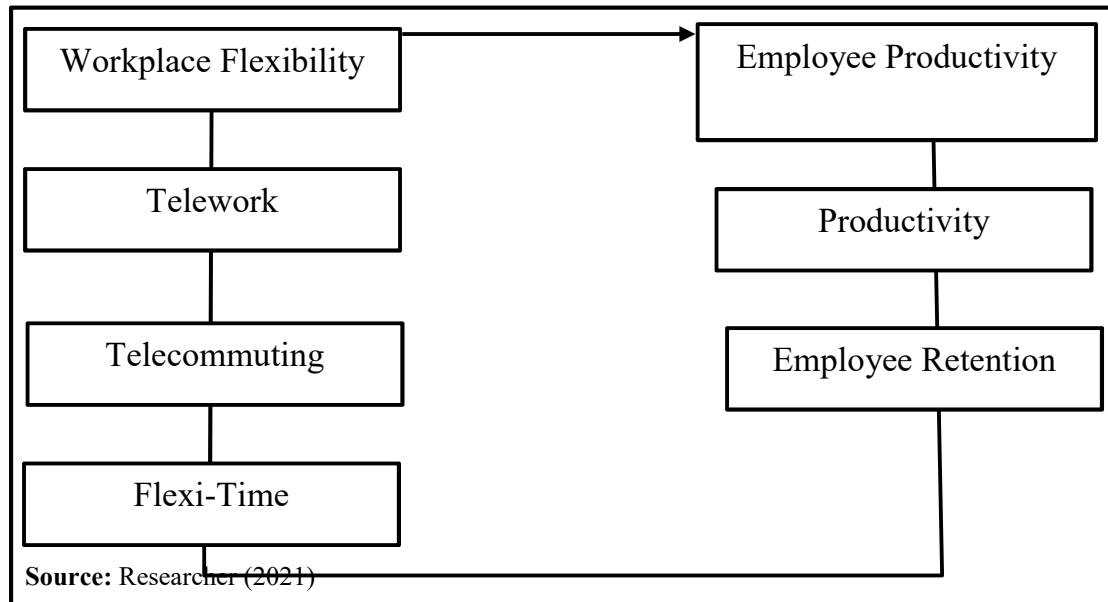
Workplace flexibility was first studied in earnest in the 1970s, with an emphasis on the influence on individual productivity (de Menezes and Kelliher, 2011). In recent years, research on workplace flexibility's influence on productivity has broadened to include work-life difficulties, health outcomes, and job engagement (Rudolph and Baltes, 2017). The influence of specialized workplace flexibility on company productivity, profitability, turnover, absenteeism, and other factors has lately been studied (Berkery et al., 2017). Employer-driven flexible working arrangements aimed at reducing costs are an important aspect of workplace flexibility. Also, flexible working arrangements aimed at lessening the friction between work and personal life are welcome (employee-driven). As the corporate world becomes more global and technological advances become more prevalent, the demand for new working techniques has become more urgent. Since the 1970s, people-oriented techniques have been a part of corporate life as a result of these developments, known as the "flexibility concept". Businesses have devised new ways of working to keep up with the rapid pace of change, while also increasing the output of their employees. Increasingly, companies are required to treat their workers in such a way that they are content with their job and their employer. Businesses want to maintain their best employees while adapting to new business trends. Competitive advantage: Businesses that focus on employee happiness have loyal staff. As a result, workers are more motivated and productive, and firms are able to compete with one another for the best staff (Altindag and Sillor, 2014). Job creation and unemployment management, on the other hand, are critical issues nowadays. It is the primary goal of developing new work models and employment options to create jobs and reduce unemployment. Employees' personal well-being is also becoming more and more of a consideration. Employees who previously had to deal with traffic in their daily commute, particularly in large cities, might benefit from flexible working arrangements. With greater control over their personal lives outside of the workplace, workers are able to increase their level of job satisfaction. Employees who arrive on time, who are not weary, who are focused on their task, and who are devoted to their work all contribute to a company's ability to function efficiently (Altindag & Sillor, 2014). The goal of this research is to fill a need in the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between workplace flexibility and productivity.

Statement of the Problem

In the past, researchers looked at how workplace flexibility affects productivity in the workplace. During a time of crisis and uncertainty, there is little focus placed on production. Employees have lost their jobs, production has stalled, and businesses have lost money as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown and stay-at-home period. Many businesses would be forced to shut down, and the government would suffer financial losses while trying to keep the peace, all of which would exacerbate the already-existing instability in the nation. Organizations' stiff and inflexible

work arrangements may be to blame for their high staff turnover, poor productivity, and low profitability. People can't do their jobs from faraway regions because of a dearth of cutting-edge technologies. Employees are unable to work from home. Employees, on the other hand, aren't entitled to choose their own working hours. In other words, the goal of this research is to see whether flexible work arrangements have an impact on productivity at work.

Conceptual Framework



Conceptual framework showing the relationship between workplace flexibility with its dimensions as telework, telecommuting, and flexi-time, and organization productivity

Aim/Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between workplace flexibility and organizational productivity.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. Ascertain the relationship between telework and organizational productivity
2. Ascertain the relationship between telecommuting and organizational productivity
3. Ascertain the relationship between flexi-time and organizational productivity

Theoretical Background

In the past, researchers looked at how workplace flexibility affects productivity in the workplace. During a time of crisis and uncertainty, there is little focus placed on production. Employees have lost their jobs, production has stalled, and businesses have lost money as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown and stay-at-home period. Many businesses would be forced to shut down, and the government would suffer financial losses while trying to keep the peace, all of which would exacerbate the already-existing instability in the nation. Organizations' stiff and inflexible work arrangements may be to blame for their high staff turnover, poor productivity, and low profitability. People can't do their jobs from faraway regions because of a dearth of cutting-edge

technologies. Employees are unable to work from home. Employees, on the other hand, aren't entitled to choose their own working hours. In other words, the goal of this research is to see whether flexible work arrangements have an impact on productivity at work.

Workplace Flexibility in Theoretical Context

While the idea of workplace flexibility is rooted in larger theoretical frameworks, it is also situated within substantive micro-level theories in this portion of the paper. There are few theories that explicitly address workplace flexibility, despite appeals in the work and family literature for more theoretical frameworks to be explored (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This might be due to a lack of consistency in the development of theories, the complexity of the notion, or a lack of theoretical perspectives used to drive work-life research (Madsen, 2003). Despite these difficulties, a range of theoretical views have been useful in situating workplace flexibility.

Ecological systems theory is perhaps the most often utilized theoretical framework for workplace flexibility. According to ecological systems theory, it is important to understand an individual's features and surroundings in relation to each other (see Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Voydanoff, 2007). Microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem make up the hierarchy of systems that make up the environment. The microsystems of the home, the workplace, and the community are the most critical in work-life studies. Mesosystems are the result of an individual's active participation in each of these three realms. Assuming that the employee is a member of a system, this theory describes inputs, processes, outputs and feedback loops between that system and the employee's surroundings (Voydanoff, 2007).

Flexible workplaces are considered to be an environmental quality that facilitates "proximal processes" (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) that lead to favorable results for employees and their families as well as their employers. For example, workplace flexibility in ecological systems theory is a property of workplaces generated from structural and interactional elements, such as the availability of policies and a company's primary job type (manufacturing or service) (supportive culture and leader-subordinate trust). As a result of this, there is probable diversity in workplace flexibility within the restrictions imposed by structural variables. Thus, ecological systems theory is a helpful theoretical tool because it not only predicts the processes and ideas that are likely to create workplace flexibility, but also defines the mechanisms through which flexibility might influence the outcomes of interest.

Workplace flexibility may be discussed in the context of family life cycle theory, a wide theoretical framework that emphasizes how employment evolves over the course of one's life. There is no longer a split between work and life that has been frozen in time, but rather a more complicated perspective of jobs and lives as they evolve across time (Moen & Sweet, 2004). As a result of this knowledge, it may help explain variances in the association between occupational flexibility and different outcomes by age and life stage (Pitt Catsouphe and Matz-Costa, 2008). (Hill et al., 2008). In addition to age and gender-specific subgroups, it is suggested that the work-family interface is affected by changes in family requirements, resources and vulnerabilities, as well as modifications in family roles, connections, obligations, and situations (Ayree, 1992; Moen & Sweet, 2004).

There are several micro-level theories and models of the work-family interaction that also have consequences for comprehending the theoretical framework of workplace flexibility. These theories tend to concentrate on conflicts in role, fit, and control, although more recent theoretical

advancements have started to focus on ways in which work and family support one other rather than conflict.

Theories about Conflicts in Role

Role conflict theory asserts that role ambiguity or conflict leads to an undesirable condition (Madsen, 2003, p. 41). Work-family conflict refers to the perceived contradiction of role constraints between work and family, making participation in one role more difficult (p. 305). Flexible workplaces may lessen role conflict.

The scarcity paradigm (Ayree, 1992) believes that humans have a limited quantity of energy and that numerous roles deplete them, causing stress or inter-role conflict. The utilization of scarce resources in one area leaves less time for another domain, creating a negative connection or zero-sum game between work and family (Frone, 2003). Using this paradigm, workplace flexibility might help save time and energy (e.g., avoid wasting time in a long commute by telecommuting). Fit-person-environment conflict theories (P-E) Fit theory stresses people's talents and resources to satisfy demands (Edwards, 1996). This shows scheduling flexibility may help employees manage work and family commitments (Voydanoff, 2007). Grzywacz, Carlson, and Shulkin (2008) employ this paradigm to explain workplace flexibility and health.

Work characteristics theory proposes that 'fundamental job features include psychological states that contribute to job productivity and job happiness' (Hackman & Oldman, 1976, p. 498). This theory explains how flexible work arrangements promote attitudes, behaviors, job satisfaction, work productivity, and organizational productivity (Stavrou, 2005).

Facilitation Theories

After two decades of work-family literature dominated by a conflicting viewpoint, pleasant work-family interactions are gaining attention (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz, Carlson, Kacmar, & Wayne, 2007; Hill, 2005). Work-family enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), positive work-family spillover (Crouter, 1984), work-family facilitation (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Grzywacz et al., 2007), work-family enhancement (Voydanoff, 2002), and work-family fit capture the shift from conflict to compatibility (Grzywacz & Bass, 2003; Voydanoff, 2002).

Conceptual Review

The literature on workplace adaptability and efficiency is analyzed for this investigation.

Allows work to be done outside of the traditional parameters of a regular work organization in terms of volume, working time, and location. Flexible, non-standard, or alternative work arrangements (Spreitzer et al., 2017). In addition to flexible hours, part-time work, job-sharing, shift-and-weekend work; overtime; annual hours; flexi-time; subcontracting; teleworking; paid parental leave; flexible shifts and rosters; variable year employment; annual hours contracts; compressed working weeks; working from home; flexible leave arrangements; paid parental leave; (Berkery et al, 2017).

Employee-driven FWAs (e.g., paid parental leave, flexible leave arrangements, employee roster, shift choice, variable year employment) allow workers to better manage their work-life balance, while employer-driven FWAs allow businesses to better align employment costs with production volume or secure a more competitive and motivated workforce. According to Kotey and Sharma (2016), there are two types of FWAs: employee-driven and employer-driven. Employer-driven FWA practices are the focus of this study. overtime is additional working hours above standard workweek hours; shift work allows for continuous production as workers are assigned to work in different periods (shifts) during a single day; an annual hours contract is an agreement between employer and employee regarding working hours; weekend work allows employees to extend

their work hours during the weekend while taking time off during the week (De Cuyper, De Wiite, & Van Emmerik, 2011).

There are three types of employee-driven FWA practices examined in this research: part-time employment where employees agree to work fewer hours per week than the standard workweek; job-sharing where work is split between two employees so that their combined weekly work hours equal the standard week working hours of one employee; and flexi-time, which allows full-time employees to choose when they begin and end their shifts. (Zeynnoglu, Cooke, & Mann, 2009); (Kotey & Sharrna, 2016) Workers in a truncated work week put in more hours each day than those in a standard one (Baltes et al., 1999).

Being adaptable is nothing new. The concept of "flexible working" encompasses both past and contemporary work habits. Flexibility may help a wide range of people and organizations. Flexible working hours are required because of the increasing competition for talent, the growth of technology, and changes in industries, as well as a lack of job opportunities (Celenk and Atmaca, 2011; Lee, 1996)

To be competitive in today's market, businesses must continually reinvent themselves, according to MESS's Flexibility and Flexible Working. It's time for businesses to shift their focus away from standard structures and toward diversity and complexity, simplicity and openness, and the ability to adapt quickly to change instead of being stagnant. This is what is meant by "adaptability" (Trey, 1992; Mess, 1999). Adaptability is the ability of people and businesses to change with the times. An efficient strategy to respond to changes is by working flexible hours. Flexible working is now possible across the world thanks to new company concepts and rules (Sezgin, 2005).

Nature of Workplace Flexibility

(A) Personality. These are personal demographics unrelated to employment (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, education, and income). They're control variables. They may also be independent variables in primary research questions. Pitt-Catsoupes and Matz-Costa (2008) examined the association between organizational flexibility and employee engagement. Hill et al. (2003) discovered that both men and women are interested in job flexibility, but different ways. Gender and age are crucial to investigating concerns concerning flexibility at various life phases (Hill et al., 2008).

(B) Family and home. Marital/partner status, household composition (e.g., dual-earner vs. single-earner), presence, age, responsibility for children, and caregiving arrangements are employed in workplace flexibility research. Hill et al.'s stage studies focus on children's presence and age (2008).

Workplace traits. Workplace variables affect when, where, and how long activities are accomplished. Formal flexible work rules (e.g., flextime, flex place, leaves, and reduced-hours work alternatives) improve workplace flexibility but aren't enough. Because of assumptions that workplace flexibility is connected with negative punishments, the company culture must openly embrace flexible alternatives to achieve workplace flexibility (Voydanoff, 2007). Fostering organizational support requires a culture that values the full individual, not just "the bottom line."

Community traits. Community factors affecting workplace flexibility include infrastructure and social interactions (Klein & Hill, 2007; Voydanoff, 2007). Community infrastructure is its physical environment. Transportation, utilities, buildings, and child care are examples of community infrastructure. This infrastructure's limits or possibilities affect workplace flexibility. A vast body of research has linked commute distance, unpredictability (e.g., traffic delays), and lack of choice (i.e., just one route to work) to greater personal stress and poorer job motivation

(Evens & Wener, 2006). Long commutes are linked to children's internalizing behaviour among welfare-leaving single moms (Dunifon, Kalil, & Bajracharya, 2005). To minimize delays and save time, traffic patterns may impact the choice to adopt flexible work hours. Research shows that flextime reduces driver stress and time urgency (Lucas & Heady, 2002). This lower stress is likely linked to a stronger work-life balance, which affects other outcomes.

Community infrastructure affects work-life balance in numerous ways. Broadband internet connection in a town affects employees' capacity to embrace flextime through using virtual offices (Hill, Hawkins, & Miller, 1996). The number of dwellings in a neighborhood may also affect work-at-home performance (Hill et al., 1998).

Social norms impact flexible employment arrangements. If many people in the community work from home, a person may crave such flexibility. Social assistance may also help people balance jobs and family (Voydanoff, 2007). There is little academic work (and none in this special issue) that acknowledges or investigates the link between community infrastructure and employment flexibility (Voydanoff, 2007). In their conceptual and empirical work on workplace flexibility, experts should include community features.

Work-life balance. Individuals analyze work-family fit by weighing and integrating several components of their work-family approach (Voydanoff, 2002, p. 155). Several studies show a link between job flexibility and work-family balance (Clarke, Koch, & Hill, 2004; Voydanoff, 2007).

Vitality. Our conceptual paradigm links professional flexibility to personal vitality. Health, depression, burnout, life happiness, personal success, and tranquility may be assessed. Flexibility at work was linked to better mental health in a 2002 study (Jacob et al., 2008). Grzywacz et al. (2008) study occupational flexibility and health. Another study links job flexibility to greater physical and mental health (Thomas & Ganster, 1995) and lifestyle choices that boost wellbeing and vitality (Grzywacz, Casey, & Jones, 2007).

(H) Family health. This paper's conceptual model claims that workplace flexibility affects workers' homes and families. Marriage happiness and stability, parenting and child behavior, fertility, and child care and housekeeping time affect home and family vitality. Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2006) discovered that flexible workers had stronger families. This model element includes non-traditional household characteristics. Workplace flexibility may affect workers' capacity to care for seniors, sustain intergenerational and extended family ties, and respond to marital status changes.

Office liveliness. Growing evidence links job flexibility to workplace vibrancy. Stavrou (2005) investigated 2811 firms in 14 of the 15 EU member states and concluded that home-based employment and teleworking increased productivity and decreased turnover. Annual hour contracts, part-time employment, job sharing, flextime, and fixed-term contracts reduce turnover. Glass and Finley (2002) found that flexible work hours improve employee productivity, organizational commitment, retention, morale, and satisfaction. Flexible work schedules reduce absenteeism and turnover. An examination of data across multiple large firms supports the premise that workplace flexibility boosts employee retention, engagement, and satisfaction (Corporate Voices for Working Families and WFD Consulting, 2005). 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce analyses shows the link between workplace flexibility and employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention (Jacob et al., in press). Several articles in this issue address the link between job flexibility and vitality. Richman, Civian, Shannon, and Brennan (2008) measure employee engagement.

(J) Vitality. There is minimal research on employment flexibility and community vitality (and none on this issue). Small but considerable literature has established this relationship. Research shows that occupational flexibility affects volunteerism. Participation in community groups is favorably connected with part-time employment for women (Estes, 2005), schedule flexibility (Wickrama, Lorenz, Conger, Matthews, & Elder, 1997), and self-directedness in work (Wickrama et al., 1997). This voluntary engagement is vital because many groups give services to community members and because social interactions may foster a healthier neighborhood environment. Several international and national studies have indicated that community involvement improves overall health (Putnam, 2001). To truly capture workplace flexibility's entire effects, studies should include community consequences.

Empirical Review

Workplace Flexibility and Organizational Productivity

FWAs may affect organizational and individual (behavioral and work-related) benefits (Kattenbach et al., 2010; de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). FWAs affect employee and organizational productivity. Absenteeism, turnover, and retention are the most researched flexible work variables. Without workplace flexibility, people may reduce their workload or fake illness to enhance their work-life balance (Battisti & Valianti, 2013). Due to its negative consequences, companies are trying to decrease absenteeism (Dalton & Merely, 1990).

FWAs are said to reduce employee absenteeism by reducing stress (Baltes et al, 1999). De Menezes & Kelliher (2011) found that 60% of research link FWAs to decreased absenteeism.

Flexible work-time design reduces absenteeism, say Baltes et al. (1999) and Kauffeld, Jonas, and Frey (2004). Like absenteeism, employer turnover is bad.

Stavrou (2005) and Berkery et al. (2017) say FWAs reduce absenteeism and turnover. Employees consider companies that give FWAs as sensitive to their well-being, which motivates them to be more loyal, which might minimize turnover, absenteeism, and retention (Berkerv et al., 2017).

According to Stavrou (2005) and McNall, Masuda, and Nicklin (2010), FWAs reduce employee turnover. Financial indicators of organizational productivity such as profitability, productivity, profit, return on assets, return on equity, and return on investment are also analyzed in FWAs (Baltes et al. 1999; Stavrou, 2005; de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). HRM practices that enable staff flexibility may improve productivity and innovativeness, leading to greater production and profitability. Most financial research found no link to FWAs. 44% supported a favourable relationship (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011).

Shepard III, Clifton, and Kruse (1996) suggest that FWAs might boost production owing to higher effort, better collaboration, and the capacity to recruit skilled individuals who prefer flexible work hours. However, more schedule adjustments could raise supervisors' toe expenses. Previous studies show that FWAs are positively related to productivity (Baltes et al, 1999, Shepard III et al, 1996), but remote work from home is positively associated with profit and perceptions of organizational productivity (Meyer, Jukerjee & Sestero, 2001; Stavrou, 2005), while flexi-time is positively associated with profitability, employee retention, and negatively to

turnover and absenteeism (Stavrou & Kilanios (Stavrou, 2005). Berkery et al. (2017) found no significant connection between flexible work bundles and organizational profitability.

Employer-driven agreements should boost organizational productivity to justify their existence (increased productivity). Previous research reveals that their impacts on organizational productivity are negative. Weekend, shift, and overtime labor increase turnover, but not organizational productivity (Stavrou, 2005; Stavrou & Kilarsiotis, 2010). Abo, shift work increases absenteeism and turnover of long-term workers (Shers & Dicker, SMffi). Previous results show the necessity for investigation of employee-driven and employer-driven arrangements, as well as their impacts on organizational productivity, to prove that FWA effects differ by main beneficiary.

Summary

The research found that workplace flexibility boosts productivity. Management's capacity to tailor assignments for work-life balance and firm efficiency is workplace flexibility. According to the literature, flexible working arrangements include telework, telecommuting, flexible-time, part-time work, job sharing, shift and weekend employment, overtime, yearly hours, temporary work, and fixed-term contracts. Productivity is a company's ability to maintain and increase its performance. Employee efficiency and production are included.

Conclusion

Based on the literature, the study concluded that among other relevant flexible working arrangements: Teleworking is positively related to firm productivity. Telecommuting is positively related to firm productivity. Flexi-time is positively related to firm productivity.

Recommendations

The study recommended as follows:

1. Management should encourage teleworking as a type of working arrangement where employees perform tasks from remote locations using technology which could improve productivity.
2. Management should promote telecommuting as an arrangement that allows employees to work from home as this will enhance work-life balance and improve productivity.
3. Management should encourage flexi-time which allows employees who work full-time to choose when to start and finish work which could lead to efficiency and increased productivity.

Contribution to knowledge

The study has contributed to knowledge by discovering that flexible working arrangements such as teleworking, telecommuting and flexi-time have greater impact on organizational productivity such as productivity and employee retention.

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