The Relationship Between Work-Life Balance, Job Satisfaction, Age, and Gender

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The concept of work-life balance is widely used in the business context and is pervasive in the field of Human Resource Management and Development today (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Several factors contribute to an employee's career growth within an organization. Employees want to feel that an organization provides employees with benefits such as: quality work-life programs and initiatives, the space to thrive at work and perform to their full potential, support from leadership, equal and fair career advancement opportunities, and fair compensation. The discourse surrounding the work-life interface and employee wellbeing is becoming more prevalent in many modern organizational structures as the workforce becomes increasingly more diverse. There are several contexts, such as gender and age, that intersect with this conversation. Although women are fully integrated into today's workforce, men and women still traditionally fulfill different social roles (Pace & Sciotto, 2021). Current research suggests women report lower levels of satisfaction regarding their potential for career advancement and with their work-life balance (Wynen, et al., 2015). Career stages and age also play a significant role in the work-life interface as there are different concerns for employees depending on age and career stage and journey (Darcey, et al., 2012). Literature on work-life balance and employee well-being flourished in recent years, however; there are challenges on the way individuals conceptualize and perceive work-life harmony and how organizations manage work-life initiatives to promote job satisfaction and employee retention (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Eikhof, et al., 2007; McMillan, et al., 2011). Thus, the question remains as to how organizations balance the personal and professional needs of employees with the business needs of the company.

Present Study and Purpose

This paper reviewed the work-life balance (WLB) literature within Human Resource Development and other related fields of study. We conducted an exploratory analysis to investigate the relationship between employee perceptions of work-life balance and factors related to workplace satisfaction, and the role of age and gender as it relates to work-life balance to answer the following research questions:
1. Is there a relationship between employee perception of work-life balance and job satisfaction?
2. Is there a difference in perceptions of work-life balance among age group cohorts?
3. Is there a difference in perceptions of work-life balance among gender groups?

Literature Review

The career landscape is ever-changing. Institutions and companies employ individuals from all races, ethnicities, faiths, genders, abilities, sexual orientations, and generations. Most recently, globalization has also increased communication across countries and cultures and an employer's ability to communicate effectively and competently with individuals from various backgrounds is becoming more commonplace. In addition, there is an increasing number of women that make up today's workforce as well as many age groups working together at various points in their career journey. As organizations change, policies and procedures should reflect the individuals they represent. An active approach to work-life balance practices and initiatives in the workplace includes programs to promote employee productivity and satisfaction. Such

initiatives include mentoring programs, family-friendly programs, alternative work arrangements and revised work schedules, and training and development programs (Bozeman & Feeney, 2009; Chaudhary & Bhaskar, 2016; Lamm, et al, 2015; Morgenroth et al., 2021; Roberson, 2006; Sturman & Walsh, 2014, Yang & Konrad, 2011). The goals of these programs are also very much intertwined with the concept of work-life interface. Thus, organizations would find benefit in creating systems in which these programs are made available to their employees.

Work-life Balance/Harmony

The work-life interface describes the intersection of work and personal life. There are many aspects of one's personal life that can intersect with work, including family, leisure, and health (McMillan, et al., 2011). There have been many constructs for the concept of the work-life interface in the literature such as work-life conflict, work-life enrichment, work-life balance, and its newest model, work-life harmony. Work-life harmony takes into consideration the *integration* of work-life conflict and work-life enrichment constructs and theories; therefore, this is the way in which individuals negotiate roles and responsibilities. An important domain of the work-harmony model is that its properties align and contribute to an integrated narrative of work and life that is productive, satisfying and fulfilling for the employee (McMillan, et al., 2011). Often, many concerns arise once employees feel: (a) they are not being productive, (b) they are unsatisfied with their daily work, (c) they are unsupported by leadership, (d) there is a lack of upward mobility, (e) there is a misalignment of their values with the values of the organization, and (f) they do not have a real sense of belonging to the organization in which they are working. The outcomes of these dilemmas are often work-related stress, absenteeism, and turnover (Porath, et al., 2012; Morgenroth, et al., 2021; Pace & Sciotto, 2021).

The work-life interface intersects in various areas of an individual's personal life and attributes which include age, gender, career trajectories, caregiver status, education, and many other domains in one's life. Emslie & Hunt (2009) conducted a qualitative study exploring gender dynamics in the work-life interface. It is suggested that gender plays a role in how women and men negotiate their home and work life, and that there are differences in the way gender identities are created in an individual's work and home lives. The researchers shared that within the work-life interface women and men view the permeability of boundaries differently. For example, the idea that boundaries vary among women and men, and how they position themselves regarding how they identify with certain gendered identities. There were also differences in how respondents expressed themselves and minimized their feelings toward work-life balance. Other studies examined the relationships between gender and career opportunities, work-life balance, and well-being perception and found that gender differences persist (Morgenroth, et al., 2021; Pace & Sciotto, 2021). Pace and Sciotto (2021) surveyed 499 women and 557 men to examine how gender plays a role in the perceptions of work-life balance and career opportunities. What they found aligns with the recent literature that there are differences in how gender plays a role in work and life and that programs that promote equity among gender groups should therefore be implemented in the workplace.

In a study conducted by Darcey, et al. (2012), work-life balance is a significant concern for employees across different stages of their careers. The researchers investigated this relationship by identifying job satisfaction variables such as job involvement, managerial support, career consequence, and work-life balance across career stages and age groups. Findings indicated significant results suggesting work-life balance is important for organizations to

consider for employees at each career stage. However, each stage presented with different reasons. The study suggests that organizations need to be mindful of the work-life balance needs of employees at each career stage. This research supports the notion that organizations should tailor work-life balance initiative approaches in ways that are appropriate for individuals at each career stage and that investing in a "one-size-fits-all" approach may not be the most effective (Darcey, et al., 2012; Eikhof, et al., 2007).

Thriving at Work

The concept of thriving at work relates to the work-life harmony interface as it provides employers with crucial information about how to tap into their workforce's potential and to support them as they want to develop their careers. This concept relates not only to work-life balance but also to job satisfaction. Sabharwal (2014) expressed that having leadership committed to supporting diversity, both individual and cultural, is essential to creating inclusive work environments. The ability to "thrive" in the workplace relates to this idea of organizations creating an environment where individuals feel that they can succeed. A related concept of worker well-being and job satisfaction is the link between thriving and adaptive behavior, such as career development and job performance, that has been researched and examined in an organizational behavior context. Porath et al. (2012), set out to conceptualize thriving at work by conducting three studies to validate the construct of thriving at work (i.e., career development, job performance) and examine the model of "embeddedness" of thriving across work and different contexts (i.e., work and home). The researchers sampled individuals and employees from diverse industries, levels of expertise, and job titles which enhanced generalizability. Findings indicated that the promotion of thriving at work is valuable for organizations as it relates to lower levels of burnout and higher levels of job performance and positive health. A thriving dynamic embedded in the work context varies over time (Porath, et al., 2012). It is suggested that promoting the ability for an employee to thrive at work can contribute to a reduction of employee stress and absenteeism, both of which are correlated to higher health care costs. Organizations need to take into consideration how they can have an impact on the employees' ability to thrive at work by considering the factors that contribute to employee perceptions of work-life balance.

Methods

Data for this study was obtained using a dataset published on the openICPSR repository from the Workplace Equity Project (Spilka, et al., 2020). Using this dataset, we examined associations between perceptions of work-life balance on the basis of job satisfaction, age, and gender. The Workplace Equity Project is described as a nonprofit organization that seeks to advance equity in the scholarly publishing industry. One of their primary goals is to better understand the effects of organizational-level diversity and equity efforts on the workforce. This dataset provided sufficient information related to work-life balance and job satisfaction, along with demographic variables needed to conduct the exploratory study.

Survey Participants

The Workplace Equity survey was conducted in 2018 by the Workplace Equity Project. The Workplace Equity Project's survey dataset is comprised of 1,182 participants employed in the publishing industry or publishing-related industries and had a mean response rate of 847. This study will focus on a subset (n = 856) of the survey participants who responded to most of the demographic questions. 75.58% (n = 647) of this subset reported they identify as women, 20.79% (n = 178) identify as men, 0.98% (n = 8) identify as non-binary, and 2.69% (n = 23) that selected they preferred not to answer the question. For the demographic question "What is your ethnic group?", 81.09% (n = 686) identified as white, 7.57% (n = 64) identified as Asian, 6.03% (n = 51) identified as mixed ethnicity or belonging to multiple ethic groups, 2.84% (n = 24) identified as other, and 2.48% (n = 21) identified as Black. The age groups represented in this data set are 20-35 years (24.4%, n = 288), 36-50 (31.2%, n = 369), 51-65 (14.6%, n = 172), and 66+ (.8%, n = 10). The education levels represented in the data set consist of High School Level (1%, n = 12), Some University (1.7%, n = 20), Bachelors Level (31.7%, n = 375), Masters Level (28.4%, n = 336), and Doctorate Level (8.8%, n = 104).

Survey Items

Using this dataset, we investigated the relationship between employee perceptions of work-life balance and perception of job satisfaction. Perceptions of work-life balance was determined using the survey item, "How easy is it to balance your work life and personal life where you work?". This item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale consisting of "Not at all easy" to "extremely easy". Job satisfaction was determined using a single-survey item, "I am satisfied with my current position". Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement. This item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree". We investigated if there is a difference between perceptions of work-life balance among gender groups and age groups.

All data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS software. The survey dataset was cleaned, and Likert scale items were computed into ordinal scales. We used chi-square analysis and analysis of variables (ANOVA) to examine the relationship between variables.

Results

Work-life Balance and Job Satisfaction

To explore the relationship between employee perceptions of work-life balance and perception of job satisfaction, we conducted a chi-square analysis. Before we completed the two-way chi-square model, we grouped the survey responses from the job satisfaction survey item into positive and negative sentiment groups. The job satisfaction sentiment groups were based on the Likert scale responses to the statement "I am satisfied with my current position". Those responding with "strongly disagree" and "disagree" were grouped into the negative category, and those responding with "strongly agree" and "agree" were grouped into the positive category. For this analysis, those responding "neither agree nor disagree" were excluded due to the neutral sentiment, and the analysis was based only on positive and negative sentiment surrounding job satisfaction (n=657). We then grouped the work-life balance survey item, "How easy is it to

balance your work life and personal life where you work?". Three work-life balance groups were created by grouping responses to the work-life balance survey item into low, medium, and high work-life balance groups. Those responding "not at all easy" and "not so easy" were grouped into the low work-life balance group, those responding "somewhat easy" were grouped into the medium work-life balance group, and those responding "very easy" and "extremely easy" were grouped into the high work-life balance groups. We then conducted the two-way chi-square model. The results of the Pearson's chi-square analysis revealed a significant relationship between work-life balance and job satisfaction $\chi^2 = 39.10$, $p < .05$. Cramer's V (φ_c) was computed at .224 and revealed a moderate relationship between the variables (See Table 1). These results indicate that negative job satisfaction sentiments are correlated to lower perceptions of work-life balance. Alternatively, more positive sentiments surrounding job satisfaction are correlated with higher perceptions of work-life balance.

Table 1

Chi-Square Results for Work-life Balance (WLB) and Job Satisfaction Sentiment (N = 657)

Job Satisfaction	Low WLB		Mid WLB		High WLB		χ^2	φ_c
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Negative	78	55.7	87	32.8	62	24.6	39.10*	.244
Positive	62	44.3	178	67.2	190	75.4		

*$p < .05$.

Figure 1

Work-Life Balance & Job Satisfaction Sentiment
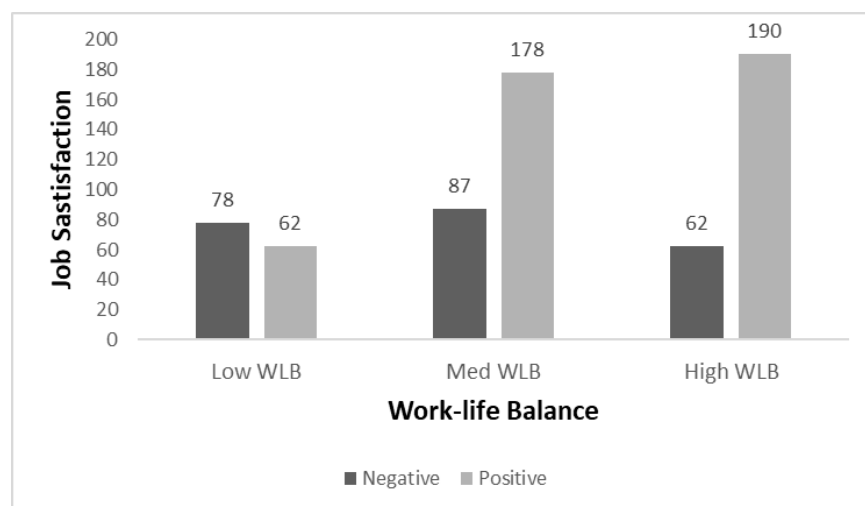
To further examine this relationship, an additional one-way analysis of variance was conducted to investigate levels of job satisfaction among the different work-life balance groups. In this analysis, we considered the neutral response for the work-life balance survey item, "How easy is it to balance your work life and personal life where you work?" which states, "neither

agree nor disagree." The results of the ANOVA, as seen in Table 2, indicated significant differences in job satisfaction between the work-life balance groups ($F(4,850) = 13.632$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$).

Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD revealed three subsets based on responses to the work-life balance survey item (See Table 3). The group that reported achieving work-life balance was "not at all easy" (M = 2.38, SD = 1.102) was significantly different than the subset for the groups that responded "not so easy" (M = 2.98, SD = 1.139) and "somewhat easy" (M = 3.31, SD = 1.104), and the subset for the groups that responded "very easy" (M = 3.93, SD = .991) and "extremely easy" (M = 3.25, SD = 1.225).

Taken together, these differences suggest that job satisfaction is influenced by one's perceived level of work-life balance. It should be noted that no significant differences were observed in job satisfaction between the medium and high work-life balance groups that reported "somewhat easy". Generally, the mean differences in perceptions of job satisfaction tend to rise along with perceptions of ease of work-life balance. This finding aligns with our expectations for this research question.

Table 2

One-Way Analysis of Variance for Work-life Balance and Job Satisfaction (N = 855)

Measure	Not at all easy		Not so easy		Somewhat easy		Very easy		Extremely easy		$F(4,850)$	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Job Satisfaction	2.38	1.01	2.98	1.14	3.31	1.01	3.53	.991	3.45	1.23	13.63*	.06

$p < .001$

Table 3

Tukey's HSD Job Satisfaction Across the Work-Life Balance Groups[a,b,c]

Work-life Balance		Subset		
	N	1	2	3
Not at all easy	40	2.38		
Not so easy	162		2.98	
Somewhat easy	333		3.31	3.31
Very easy	255			3.53
Extremely easy	65			4.45
Sig.		1.000	.247	.643

Means for groups in homogenous subsets are displayed. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 1.184

    a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 93.489

    b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

    c. *a* = .05

Work-life Balance and Age Group

When investigating the work-life balance variable by age group cohorts, we conducted a chi-square and a one-way ANOVA to observe differences in the perceptions of work-life balance between the four age group cohorts: 20-35, 36-50, 51-65, and 66 and over.

The results of the Pearson's chi-square analysis revealed a significant relationship between work-life balance on the basis of age group ($\chi^2 = 25.653$, $p < .05$). Cramer's V (φ_c) was computed at .125 which indicates a weak relationship between the variables (See Table 4). The results of the chi-square can be interpreted as having a slight variation in the perceptions of work-life balance between the various age groups surveyed.

Table 4

Chi-Square Results for Work-life Balance (WLB) and Age Groups (N = 657)

Age Groups	Low WLB		Mid WLB		High WLB		χ^2	φ_c
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
20-35	50	18	93	33.5	135	48.5	25.65*	.125
36-50	94	26	153	42.3	115	31.8		
51-65	46	27.2	68	40.2	55	32.5		
66 and over	4	40	1	10	5	50		

*$p < .05$.

When conducting a one-way ANOVA, there is a slight violation of Levene's statistic indicating unequal variances between age groups ($F(3,835) = 2.702$, $p = .045$). Despite this minor violation, we proceeded with the ANOVA which indicated significant differences between perceptions of work-life balance among the four age groups ($F(3,835) = 5.383$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .019$). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the perception of work-life balance between the different age groups (See Table 5).

Post-hoc analysis of multiple comparisons using Tukey's HSD revealed significant differences between the age groups 20-35, 36-50, and 51-65. The 36-50 and 51-65 age groups were significantly different from the 20-35 age group, but not significantly different from each other, or the 66 and over age group. There were no significant differences between the 66 and over age group and any of the other three age groups (See Table 6). Interestingly, when examining the homogenous subsets based on Tukey's HSD, only one subset emerges. This could indicate that the differences between groups are not large enough to observe in distinguishable groups (See Table 7). Thus, future studies using a larger sample with greater age group inclusion across career stages should further investigate this relationship to determine if significant differences arise. Figure 3 depicts the decline in the perception of work-life balance as reported by the sample population across different age groups.

Table 5

One-Way Analysis of Variance for Work-life Balance and Age Group (N = 839)

Measure	20-35		36-50		51-65		66 and over		$F(3,835)$	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Work-life Balance	3.36	.970	3.08	.933	3.06	1.01	3.10	1.29	5.383*	.019

*p < .05

Table 6

Tukey's HSD Multiple Comparisons for Work-Life Balance Among Age Groups

Age Group		Mean Difference			95% Confidence Interval	
(I)	(J)	(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
20-35	36-50	.27*	.076	.002	.08	.47
	51-65	.30*	.93	.007	.06	.54
	66 and over	.26	.311	.841	-.54	1.06
36-50	20-35	-.27*	.076	.002	-.47	-.08
	51-65	.03	.089	.991	-.20	.26
	66 and over	-.02	.310	1.00	-.81	.78
51-65	20-35	-.30*	.093	.007	-.54	-.06
	36-50	-.03	.089	.991	-.26	.20
	66 and over	-.04	.314	.999	-.85	.77
66 and over	20-35	-.26	.311	.841	-1.06	.54
	36-50	.02	.310	1.00	-.78	.81
	51-65	.04	.314	.999	-.77	.85

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 7

Tukey's HSD Job Satisfaction Across the Work-Life Age Groups[a,b,c]

Age Group		Subset
	N	1
20-35	288	3.36
36-50	369	3.08
51-65	172	3.06
66 and over	10	3.10
Sig.		.556

Means for groups in homogenous subsets are displayed. Based on observed means. The error term is Mean Square(Error) = .933
   a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 35.715
   b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.
   c. $a = .05$

Work-life Balance and Gender

When investigating perceptions of work-life balance between gender groups (N = 833), we used both chi-square and one-way ANOVA to determine if there was a difference in work-life balance between gender groups. When conducting this chi-square, we again grouped work-life balance into high, medium, and low groups based on responses to the question, "How easy is it to balance your work life and personal life where you work?". Results of the chi-square analysis used to investigate work-life balance among gender groups revealed no significant differences ($\chi^2 = 9.317$, $p > .05$).

Table 7

Chi-Square Results for Work-life Balance (WLB) and Gender (N = 833)

Gender	Low WLB		Mid WLB		High WLB		χ^2	φ_c
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Female	149	23	266	41.1	232	35.9	9.317	.075
Male	46	25.8	52	29.2	80	44.9		
Non-binary	1	12.5	4	50	3	37.5		

For this ANOVA, Levene's statistic is not significant indicating no violation to the equality of variance assumption between the groups ($F(2,830) = 2.418$, $p > .05$). However, upon conducting a one-way ANOVA, no significant differences were found between the groups ($F(2,830) = .727$, $p > .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$). For this analysis, we compared gender group categories which included male-identifying (n = 178), female-identifying (n = 647), and non-binary-identifying (n = 8). We excluded those respondents who selected "prefer not to answer" (n = 23).

Table 8

One-Way Analysis of Variance for Work-life Balance and Gender Group (N = 833)

Measure	Female		Male		Non-Binary		$F(2,830)$	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Work-life Balance	3.16	.960	3.22	1.026	3.50	1.069	.727	.002

Discussion

The objectives of this study were to explore the relationship between the perceptions of work-life balance and job satisfaction, the perceptions of work-life balance between age groups, and the perceptions of work-life balance between gender groups. The findings of this study suggest support for most of these relationships. To investigate relationships, statistical analyses were conducted to draw some conclusions related to the Workplace Equity Project's survey. The findings supported the conclusions noted in the original Workplace Equity correlational study conducted by Taylor et al. (2020).

Overall, these results provide support for research question one indicating there is a relationship between perceptions of work-life balance and job satisfaction. Those respondents having low work-life balance are more likely to report having a negative perception of job satisfaction. Alternatively, those respondents having a high work-life balance are more likely to

report having higher job satisfaction. These results also support previous research conducted using this dataset (Taylor et al., 2020). The results suggest that if an employee perceives that they are easily able to achieve work-life balance, they may feel more satisfied with their work. This has implications for the way employers and organizations provide work-life balance initiatives and programs to ensure that their employees are satisfied with their work which in turn reduces many non-productive workplace behaviors, work stress, and turnover – which has been suggested in the literature (Porath, et al., 2012; Morgenroth, et al., 2021; Pace & Sciotto, 2021).

The results did support research question two, that there is a relationship between the perceptions of work-life balance and age. The results illustrate that there are differences in which younger employees, middle-aged employees, and older employees indicate perceived work-life balance. Interestingly, literature concerning age and work-life balance has similar results. Research suggests that employees represented in older age cohorts are more likely to indicate that they are able to achieve a "balance between work and private life" and "the maintenance of WLB (Kaźmierska, & Stankiewicz, 2016)." There may be some important lessons that individuals can learn from older generations and employees regarding work-life balance.

Lastly, the results for research question three did not observe differences in the relationship between the perceptions of work-life balance in gender. Although we did not find a significant finding in this study, it does not suggest that there is not a relationship in the perception of work-life balance among gender groups. Interestingly, the literature does not have a clear or consistent message about the relationship between gender, work-life balance, and job satisfaction. There are studies that have shown differences in how genders negotiate their professional and personal roles, and there are other studies that have not shown significance with regard to gender (Walia, 2015). More research on the factors that may contribute to how gender relates to work-life balance is needed, in addition to including individuals who identify as transgender and non-binary, who may perceive work-life balance differently.

Limitations

This studied relied solely on secondary data collected from the Workplace Equity Project's survey. The participants of this survey were self-selected and included only participants who agreed to participate in the survey. The individuals who participated in the survey work in the publishing industry, and thus it may not be appropriate to make more broad generalizations. The survey participants were primarily white, female, and there were very few respondents from other gender, race, and ethnic groups. Many respondents opted out of responding to the demographic questions and were, henceforth, not included in the analysis. Survey fatigue could have played a role in the lower response rate to questions toward the end of the survey. Another limitation to consider is that the data collected comes from the participants' self-reported scores on Likert scale surveys.

Recommendations for Future Research

To further the depth of knowledge on topics related to work-life balance and job satisfaction outcomes, a qualitative study should be conducted to examine the factors that contribute to work-life balance perceptions. In addition, this survey could be adapted and distributed to organizations in other industries which can further explore the relationships among perceptions on work-life balance and job satisfaction in those fields. Another recommendation

for research would be to also investigate pay and salary schedules, such as whether individuals are hourly-rate or salaried employees, and workplace setting such as on-site, hybrid, or remote. To expand on the results of the study, research can further investigate career level such as leadership or middle management roles, and age cohorts along with their perceptions on work-life balance and job satisfaction and focusing more on the intersection of gender and age.

About the Authors

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