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EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ERROR CULTURE

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to present the results of a study of error culture in companies.
Design/methodology/approach: The methodology included a survey method and literature analysis.
Findings: The results of the survey analysis are presented in the form of graphs, together with comments.
Practical implications: The article has presented the results of research that can be applied to improving motivation systems in occupational safety management.
Originality/value: The article is a valuable material both for theoreticians in the field of research into the company's error culture, as well as for practitioners who prepare motivation systems in the organization.
Keywords: motivation, error, organizational culture.
Category of the paper: research paper**.**

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation at work

'Motive' and 'need' co-develop theories of motivation. P.G. Zimbardo and R.J. Gerrig (2022) define motive as 'a state, usually of a social or psychological nature, that serves to direct an individual's behaviour towards a specific goal'. Motive for action is assumed to be correlated with the feeling of need. 'Need' can be understood as an internal state in which a person feels a lack of something, which, like 'motive', conditions his or her behaviour (Potocki, 2005).

An interesting approach to the hierarchy of needs in management terms is C. Conley's (2007) pyramid based on the idea (model) of A. Maslow (Maslow, 2023) depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Pyramid of needs.

Source: Conley (2007).

The need to survive in a company allows for the construction of motivational tools based on coercion and reward, but the need to succeed already allows for the use of non-financial tools that are highly motivating for specific behaviour. C. Conley (2007) bases his pyramids on the observation of stakeholder behaviour in his company (Joie de Vivre Hotels). C. Conley defined three basic groups that can influence the success of a company (Conley, Friedenwald-Fishman, 2006):

- employees,
- customers,
- investors.

Employees are a key factor in the area of incentive systems for safe work. Based on the new pyramid of employee needs according to Conley, besides the typical ones like remuneration or attachment to the company, a sense of purpose is important (Figure 2). So motivation for safe work should be based on demonstrating the purpose of appropriate behaviours that are meaningful to employees.

Figure 2. C. Conley`s hierarchy of workers needs.

Source: Conley (2007).

Therefore, based on his own observations, C. Conley outlined that a company that is to be successful in the long term should start by properly building a motivation system.

Historically, three approaches to employee motivation can be identified:

- traditional,
- cooperative theories,
- human resource management.

The traditional approach treats work as an unpleasant activity in which the employee is not interested. He or she is only interested in remuneration. The authors of this approach did not pay attention to other factors modelling people's behaviour at work. Very specialised, work had to be supervised and controlled.

Collaborative theories focus on cooperation between employees and social relations in the workplace (Gyekye, Salminen, 2007). They pay attention to employees' social needs in terms of work motivation (Griffin, 2024; Gyekye, Haybatollahi, 2014).

According to the third approach, human resource management focuses on the involvement of employees in the problem-solving and decision-making process. For the organisation, employee qualifications and competencies are important. For the employer, the employee's high emotional intelligence and teamwork skills are important.

In defining the concept of employee motivation, one can therefore use the definition created by D.P. Schultz and S.E. Schultz, who define motivation as ‘factors related to the work environment and individual characteristics that explain why people behave the way they do at work’ (Schultz, Schultz, 2011).

A. Pocztowski distinguishes between two basic concepts of work motivation (Pocztowski, 2018):

- attributive - the internal state and force that influences people's behaviour at work (intrinsic motivation) (Weiner, 2010),
- functional - external factors that trigger people's behaviour in the organisation (extrinsic motivation).

Taking both approaches into account, it can be concluded that employee motivation is a set of internal and external factors that determine employee behaviour and actions.

The motivation system being built in the company includes, first and foremost, work efficiency and safety. One of the areas of OSH management is the impact on accident reduction. If we look at accidents ‘as a consequence of mistakes made due to lack of motivation, knowledge and experience’ (Studenski, 1996) of employees, we can see that the sphere of management, motivation, proper training, evaluation and control of OHS prevention activities must be part of the human resources management system (Flin et al., 2000).

Experience shows that the effectiveness of motivation programmes is a combination of developed procedures, educational, technical and psychological measures that stimulate the intrinsic motivation of workers to work safely (Caruth et al., 2009).

Employer pressure on workers to comply with health and safety regulations is not sufficient to ensure safety in companies. Workers rarely follow the employer's or supervisor's instructions loyally or with sufficient commitment if the intrinsic motivation is not also working. The employee must believe in doing the right thing (Cooper, Philips, 2003).

Emergent independent incentives influence people's behaviour. The right motivation tools build a safety culture (DeJoy et al., 2010; Clark, 2010). Therefore, a well-designed motivational system within health and safety management must influence the intrinsic motivation of the workforce by inducing the right behaviours (Harter et al., 2002). Importantly, this does not have to involve an increase in financial outlay. It can be limited to an appropriate selection of a set of organisational measures in line with crew expectations. It should be noted here that identifying crew expectations is the most difficult task. The simplest and at the same time most effective tool may be an anonymous staff survey. The danger is to fill in the answers untruthfully and wishfully. Based on the results of the survey, you can build a system of consequences that employees develop themselves. In this way, the motivation of employees as co-authors of existing rules can be increased.

A system of incentives to motivate workers to comply with OSH regulations uses both financial and non-financial incentives. The choice of motivational tools depends on factors in the external environment (Ford, Tetrick, 2008).

Unfortunately, various mistakes are often made when building incentive systems in the area of health and safety (Studenski, 1996):

- collective responsibility - can, in extreme cases, lead to the concealment of occupational accidents in work teams in order to avoid losing bonuses or allowances for accident-free work of all employees,
- operating under the principle of ‘yesterday's results are today's plan’ - the initial commitment of employees decreases for fear that the employer's expectations will further increase,
- prioritising production targets over job safety,
- supervisor's inappropriate approach to compliance with health and safety regulations,
- inconsistency in giving instructions to workers,
- inadequate system of inspection and enforcement of safe work rules (irregularity, ambiguity of consequences, lack of transparency of results),
- failure to hear workers' constructive voice on OSH prevention,
- lack of rapid response to risks,
- failure to link career paths to compliance with OSH regulations

use of negative motivation - punishing negative OSH behaviour without rewarding positive actions.

1.2. Error in occupational safety management

The concepts of error, accident and motivation are thus inextricably linked. The first checks on the quality of food, clothing and shelter were made by 'trial and error', allowing experience and knowledge to be gained in the selection of goods with which Homo sapiens slowly surrounded himself. The term 'error' can be variously defined as, for example, 'a departure from correctness'. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2024), it is 'something done or written by accident that is incorrect, imprecise or does not produce the correct result'. In addition to mistakes made by accident, a distinction can be made between mistakes that people make on purpose. Often defending himself against the consequences of other acts.

T. Kotarbinski, in his work entitled Efficiency and Error, draws attention to errorlessness. He treats errorlessness 'as the absence of misrepresentations as well as omissions' (Kotarbinski, 1960). He goes on to point out that in practice, erroneous behaviour can be divided into nine groups:

- substitutes for action,
- automatisms of implementation,
- losing,
- forgetting to do something,
- being late in doing something,
- unsuccessful search,
- neglecting to intervene,
- impulsive, hectic reactions,
- practical errors based on logical fallacies.

The adopted 'Swiss cheese' model (Larouzee, Le Coze, 2020) (fig. 3) shows well how responding appropriately to errors can reduce their negative effects.

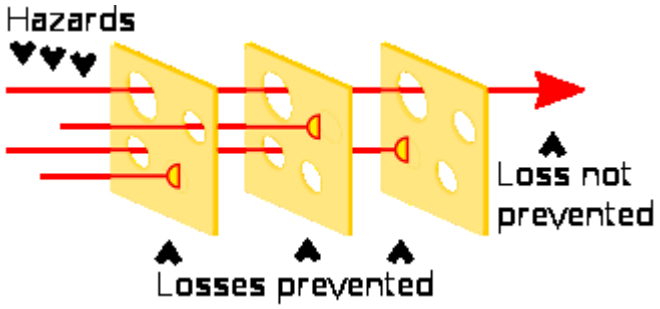

Figure 3. The Swiss cheese model.

Source: Shabani et al., 2024.

The model was developed by the British scientist J. Reason, a professor of psychology and renowned air crash researcher. J. Reason (1998) recognised that unsafe behaviour is primarily due to system failures. The question should always be asked: why did the system fail, not - who contributed to it?

In doing so, J. Reason proposed the following classification of errors (Olson, Raz, 2021):

- human error - despite a planned sequence of actions, the intended effect is not achieved,
- latent error - inappropriate decisions by senior management,
- active error - actions of those directly involved in the process,
- violation - error resulting from deliberate failure to follow established rules and procedures.

Using this model, a distinction can be made between intentional errors (fully conscious, deliberate and with a specific purpose) and unintentional errors (performed unintentionally, reflexively, under the influence of the moment).

Within the group of unintentional actions, two subgroups can be distinguished: mistakes and factual errors. Mistakes are errors that do not result from a lack of knowledge or experience, but from the fallibility of human memory, stress resistance or fatigue. Factual errors are the result of a misunderstanding of facts or situations and are also due to a lack of knowledge (Kuchta et al., 2017).

F. Arnstein also distinguishes latent errors (Arezes, de Carvalho, 2016). These are unidentified system flaws that only become apparent under certain circumstances. They are failures due to lack of work ergonomics, lack of training, lack of qualifications, lack of knowledge, incorrect rules adopted in the organisation, imperfect records, lack of sufficient assistance or supervision, haste, social and cultural factors. Hidden errors can be expressed by the so-called iceberg (fig. 4). They are generally not identified, with the result that they contribute to the greatest costs.

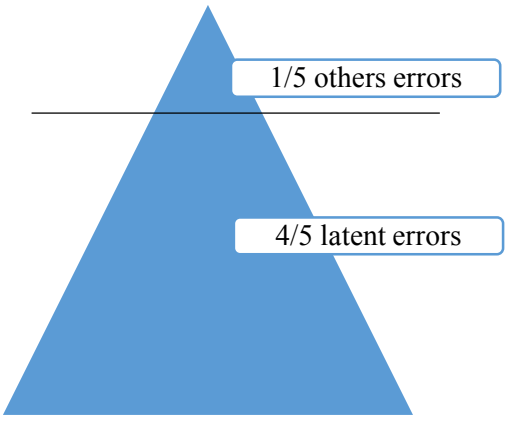

Figure 4. Error iceberg.

Source: Tobór-Osadnik, Bluszcz, 2023.

The approach to making mistakes in an organisation is primarily driven by the leadership style of the employees. A mistake is feedback to management that there is an area for improvement. Such a mistake should be a stimulus for development. Making a mistake itself is not a problem, but what is important is the number of mistakes and the lack of learning from them. Lack of space for error leads to strong frustration and high stress levels among the workforce, and this always results in a threat to the safety status of the company.

In engineering analysis, human error is defined as the resultant effect of technical, organisational and psychological factors on humans (Reason, 2017). Originally, special attention was paid to the technical aspect. Over time, attention has turned to the importance of the human factor (Korban, 2024). Building an organisation's specific approach to making mistakes and learning from near misses can improve the company's safety performance.

2. Methods and results of the surveys

The research questionnaire contained 21 questions about the culture of errors and the characteristics of the respondents, and five of these were used in this publication. In the first phase of the research, the questionnaire was sent out to 190 people employed in various companies in the Silesian Voivodeship. 30% of the questionnaires (57 respondents) were correctly completed. The metric included: gender, education, job position, size of the company divided into micro, small, medium and large. These results were treated as preliminary for further, in-depth research into error culture according to various criteria. This publication presents a summary of the results regarding respondents' opinions on the error reduction motivation tools used in enterprises.

The research hypothesis set is: *H_1 appropriate motivation influences the perception of the role of error in occupational safety management*.

Figures 5-9 present a summary of the results.

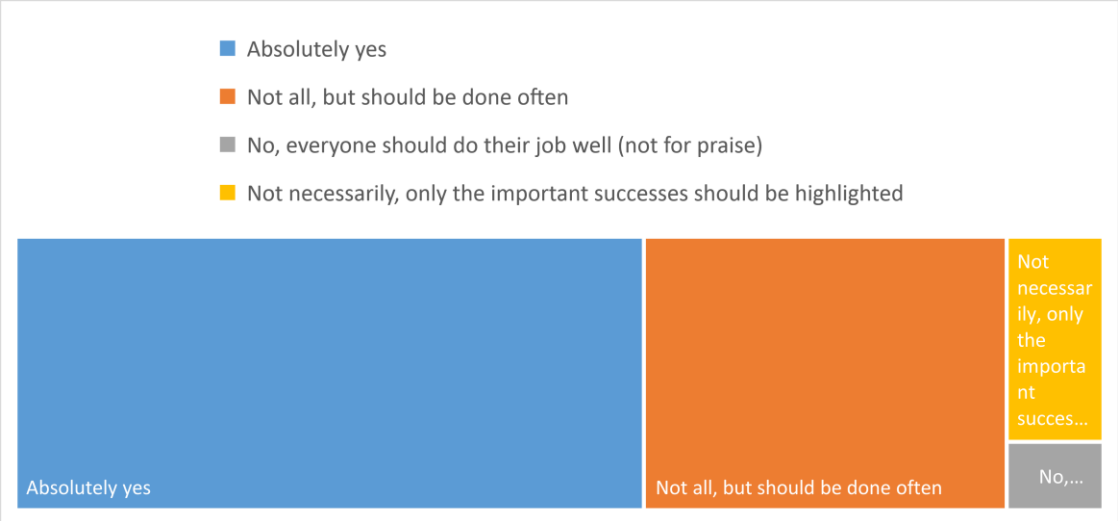

Figure 5. Is it necessary to notice and appreciate every success and effort you put into your work?
Source: own study.

Employees expect non-financial reinforcement. Confirmation of good behaviour and praise are important to them.

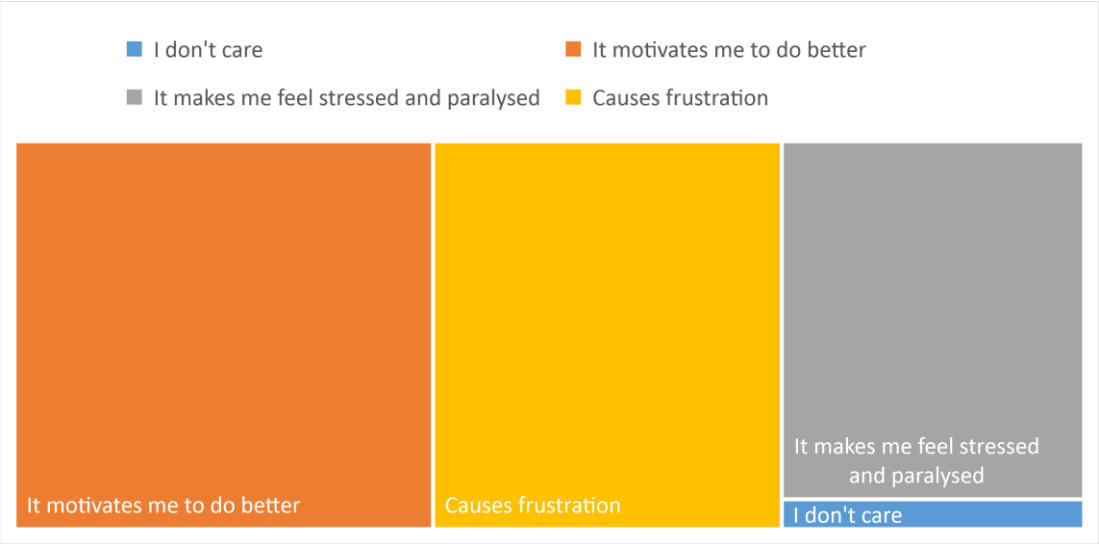

Figure 6. What feelings do you get from pointing out mistakes in your work?

Source: Own study.

The answers to the question What feelings do you get from pointing out mistakes in your work are interesting? Seemingly, the majority confirm that it motivates them to do a better job. However, when you combine the answers that it causes frustration and strongly frustrates, most people react badly to pointing out mistakes directly. So should it not be done? Of course not, but the right motivational methods should be chosen to ensure that the effect of such conversations produces positive results.

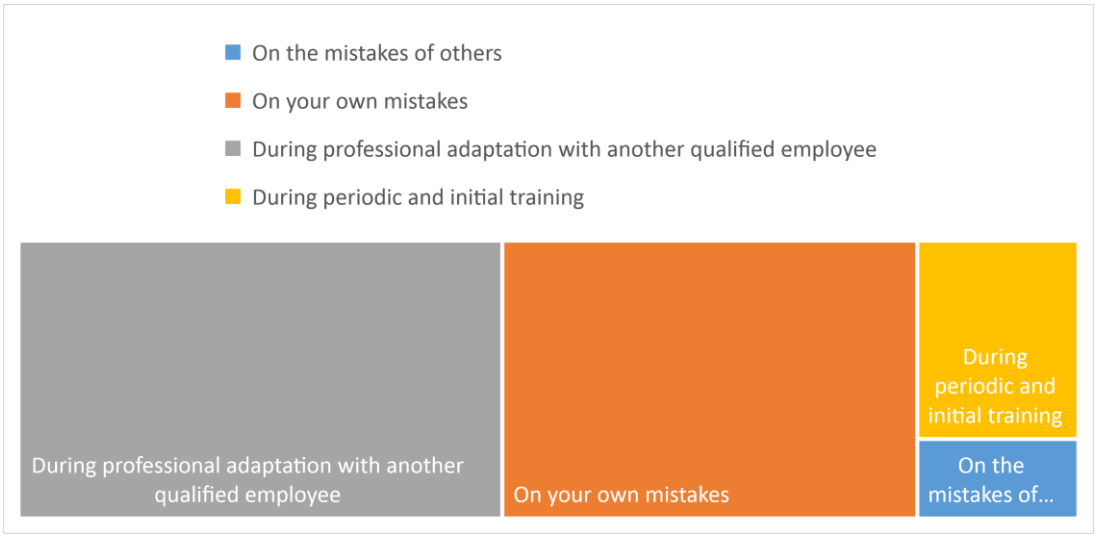

Figure 7. When is the best time to learn so-called safe behaviour at work?

Source: own study.

Well-conducted professional adaptation and so-called ‘learning from one's mistakes’ are highly valued. The question is whether it is always ‘learning from mistakes’ that is acceptable from the point of view of safety in the company. At the same time, by allowing mistakes to be made, are we not giving permission to make more? These doubts should form the basis for building effective motivation.

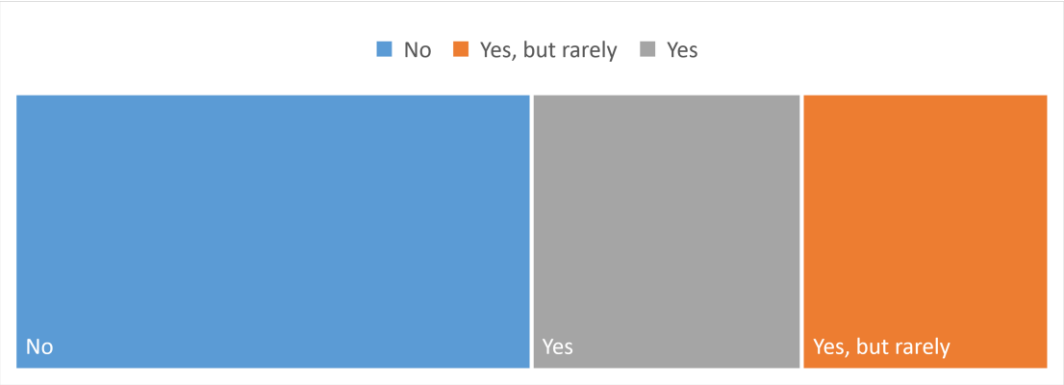

Figure 8. Does your workplace happen to stigmatize people into some negative category?

Source: Own study.

Examples were shown to respondents as stigmatisation: someone is incompetent, this one is dangerous to work with, this one is disliked. Respondents mostly confirm that stigmatisation situations at work do not occur or are rare. This organisational climate is conducive to the use of tools based on dialogue and interpersonal relationships. However, almost 50% of respondents condemned that such situations occur. This is a very high rate. In companies where such situations occur, the employer should react quickly. Especially as this is also the creation of a hostile working environment, which is prohibited by law. The problem arises when the author of such behaviour is a superior.

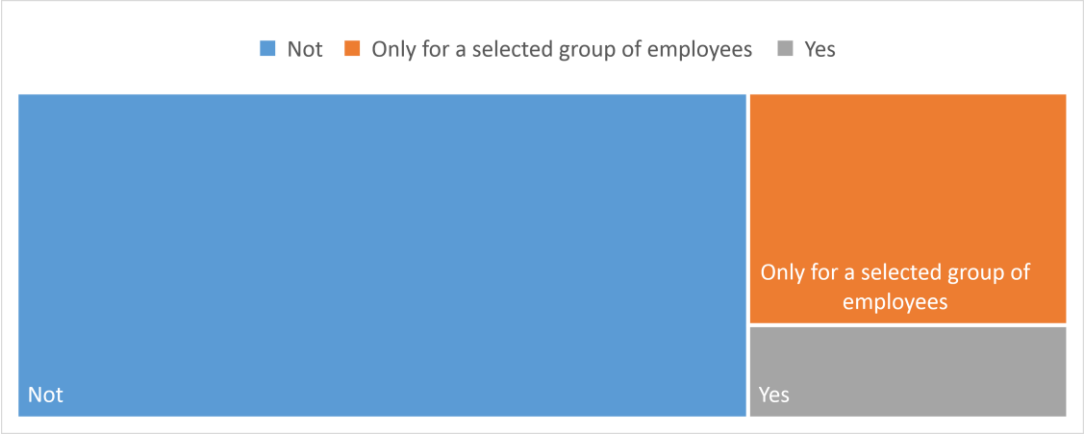

Figure 9. In your work, does your management use a management method based on guilt input and non-conformity with requirements?

Source: Own study.

For the most part, the answer to the question (Fig. 9) is ‘No’. However, the significant number of respondents who indicated the use of such methods in selected groups of employees is of concern. These responses confirm the results of the question shown in Figure 8.

3. Conclusions

Analysing the results of the survey, several conclusions can be formulated:

- pointing out mistakes at work motivates, but at the same time most respondents react badly to direct pointing out of mistakes,
- the so-called 'learning from mistakes' is highly valued by the respondents, but it is difficult to determine the limit of acceptable mistakes,
- financial motivation is lower valued than the use of non-financial tools,
- emphasising tools based on dialogue and interpersonal relations,
- as a problem they signal the creation of divisions of employees into groups that are not protected from stigmatisation.

In conclusion, respondents consider good staff adaptation or learning from their mistakes to be effective methods of eliminating errors. For the organisation, it is important to maintain continuity in the transfer of knowledge and skills from experienced colleagues. This eliminates the creation of a generation gap and a break in the continuity of learning in the organisation. At the same time, interviewees point out the emergence of negative stigmatisation of employees and driving employees into a sense of guilt. Such negative motivation always produces bad results. Employees start to avoid all activity and do not focus on working safely. One of the principles of the learning process is also the law of effect (Horn, 2007). The law of effect states that our behaviour is a consequence of our experiences. Thus, if there is a state of pleasure between the situation and the response to it, the strength of the connection increases. Therefore, positive reinforcement through praise and an appropriate selection of motivational tools is well received by the interviewees. The results of the initial research confirm that it is feasible to continue and seek more precise directions for improving employee motivation together with building an appropriate error culture in the organisation's safety culture.

4. Discussion

Most of the literature treats error in occupational safety management as a source of accidents. It has a pejorative character. The authors propose to look at the issue from a different angle. In particular, the reporting of near misses (Wozniak, Hoła, 2024) and the internal audit method (Tobór-Osadnik, Wyganowska, 2016; Wyganowska, Tobór-Osadnik, 2018; Przybylska, Kańduła, 2019) should be used. As is well known, an individual's behaviour and attitudes result from a continuous learning process involving a relatively constant change in behaviour arising from a set of experiences. In this situation, resulting from 'learning from mistakes'. The learning process can thus be seen as a component of the process of remembering

and continuously modifying behaviour based on a set of experiences (Tobór-Osadnik, 2016). Various learning techniques adapted to the individual's abilities and character can be used to enhance the learning effect. However, regardless of the techniques used, continuous repetition and training of acquired skills has a positive effect. It is therefore important to design employee management in such a way that it is proactive and does not repeat the same mistakes. Based on learning techniques, it is possible to influence employee behaviour by reducing the number of mistakes made.

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