

Well-being at Work and Employee Performance: Towards Managerial Practice Reframing in the Digitalization Process - Moroccan Context.

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Abstract

With an increasingly competitive and dynamic economic environment, employees' well-being at work is increasingly regarded as a strategic catalyst for Human Resources Managers (HRMs) to enhance employees' commitment and company performance. The current research discusses the interplay between employee well-being and performance with the goal of establishing a managerial model tailored to the specific needs of companies in Morocco. Despite a multitude of theoretical frameworks of motivation and job satisfaction as described in contemporary literature, few studies adopt a contextual and qualitative approach to analyze this connection in emerging economies where organizational processes and cultural traditions affect the association. Based on qualitative research using semi-structured interviews of HRMs in Moroccan SMEs, the study elicits some common themes. They are the concept of well-being as a source of performance, motivational drivers like autonomy and appreciation, and monitoring devices of well-being (e.g., social barometers, informal feedback). The study suggests that where well-being is embedded in company culture, there is a more engaged, productive, and resilient workforce.

The proposed managerial model incites concrete and context-related actions: creating a healthy work climate, promoting autonomy and appreciation, ensuring flexibility, and implementing repeated well-being reviews. This is an attempt to reconcile the workers' expectations with the organizational necessities of performance and competitiveness. The integration of well-being into strategic management enables SMEs not only to improve worker satisfaction but also to ensure long-term organizational resilience.

Keywords: Workplace well-being, Organizational Performance, Moroccan SMEs, Human Resource Management, Employee Motivation, Digitalization

Introduction

The world of labor is undergoing profound transformations under the double influence of globalization and digitalization. The changes are recasting not just organizational models, but also the expectations of workers regarding their place of work. In this new context, the well-being at work has emerged as a strategic issue, intertwined with employees' performance and firm success. Companies must redefine management practices to be able to counterbalance productivity needs with the rising need for quality of life at work.

The acceleration of digital technologies — i.e., remote labor, collaborative spaces, and artificial intelligence — creates opportunities and threats for workers' well-being. Digitalization can offer more flexibility, freedom, and access to assets but can also generate risks such as hyperconnectivity, professional isolation, or workload increase. Well-being management should thus be re-shaped, incorporating these new characteristics into a redesigned managerial vision.

Though work well-being has been studied thoroughly across the world in recent decades (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Seligman, 2000; Ryff, 1989), its intersection with employee performance, particularly within the digital transformation scenario, remains under-researched. Little research has also been done on how these interactions unfold in specific cultural and economic contexts, such as Morocco, where rapid digital adoption is paired with traditional organizational frameworks.

In response to this gap, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- *How does workplace well-being influence employee performance in the digital era?*
- *How should managerial practices be redefined to promote both well-being and performance within Moroccan organizations undergoing digitalization?*

Drawing on a qualitative study with Human Resources Managers from various sectors in Morocco, this research aims to contribute further theoretical and applied understanding on workplace well-being, highlighting new managerial practices adapted to the Moroccan digital challenges.

The article structure is as follows: the next section briefly addresses the main theoretical contributions to workplace well-being, employee performance, and digitalization impacts. The methodology section describes the qualitative research approach. The results and discussion sections address and present the main findings. Finally, the conclusion refers to the theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and future research directions.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Well-being at Work: Concepts and Evolution

The concept of work well-being has evolved considerably over the past decades. Drawing on philosophical ideas of the Ancient Greeks about happiness and human flourishing, it emerged as a key concept in organizational studies during the 20th century. Initially associated with physical working conditions (Mayo, 1932), it developed to include psychological, emotional, and social dimensions (Maslow, 1954; Herzberg, 1959; McGregor, 1960). Two dominant theoretical approaches have shaped the study of well-being:

- **The Hedonic Approach**, focusing on the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, emphasizing positive emotions and life satisfaction (Kahneman et al., 1999).
- **The Eudaimonic Approach**, highlighting personal development, self-actualization, and meaningful engagement (Waterman, 1993; Ryff, 1989).

Most recently, positive psychology, in particular Seligman's PERMA model (2012), has provided a multidimensional perspective of well-being that includes Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

Within the work environment, conceptual models such as Karasek and Theorell's Demand-Control-Support model (1990) have related well-being to work demands, autonomy, and social support in a manner that provides an explanatory model for stress and satisfaction in organizational settings.

1.2. Well-being and Employee Performance: A Strategic Link

Work well-being is also being established as one of the key drivers of employee performance. Several researchers (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Vanhal & Tuomi, 2006) have demonstrated that the psychological well-being of employees is positively correlated with their productivity, creativity, organizational commitment, and even levels of retention. Organizations that foster well-being often experience:

- Higher levels of employee engagement and motivation.
- Lower absenteeism and turnover.
- Enhanced employer branding and attractiveness in the labor market.

Conversely, ignoring the well-being of employees can come with a hefty price tag of disengagement, burnout, and turnover.

In Morocco, where companies are increasingly exposed to international competition and seek to improve their competitiveness, the introduction of well-being into performance strategies remains a major challenge. Nevertheless, managerial literature on the topic remains relatively

new and scattered (Allali, 2008; Bakadir & Cherkaoui, 2012), which confirms the ongoing evolution of HR practices in the Moroccan context.

1.3. Digitalization and the Redefinition of Managerial Practices

Digitalization has profoundly reshaped the world of work, impacting not only operational processes but also interpersonal relationships and management practices. New technologies make it possible: Greater flexibility through remote work and hybrid models.

- Increased autonomy with decentralized decision-making tools.
- New forms of collaboration via digital platforms.

However, digitalization also brings risks that can affect well-being, such as:

- Hyperconnectivity and blurred boundaries between professional and personal life.
- Social isolation and reduced informal interactions.
- Cognitive overload due to the constant influx of information.

Thus, the digital era calls for a **redefinition of managerial practices**, emphasizing:

- A culture of trust and autonomy rather than control.
- Active support for employees' mental health and digital well-being.
- Personalized and flexible management approaches.

In Morocco, digitalization is accelerating across sectors, typically without an adequate development of managerial frameworks (Battal et al., 2015; Orabi & Bentaleb, 2020). Not only do organizations need to adopt technological platforms, but they must also revisit their leadership and HRM policies in order to preserve employees' well-being while enhancing performance.

1.4. Theoretical Foundations

This study is based on an **integrative theoretical framework** combining three major models of workplace well-being and performance:

- **Karasek and Theorell's Demand-Control-Support Model (1990):**
This model posits that well-being at work is influenced by the interaction between job demands, the employee's level of control (autonomy), and the social support they receive. High demands combined with low control and weak support generate stress, whereas balanced conditions promote well-being and higher performance.
- **Ryff's Psychological Well-being Model (1989):**
Ryff identifies six key dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. This multidimensional approach broadens the understanding of

well-being beyond the absence of stress or dissatisfaction.

• **Seligman's PERMA Model (2012):**

As part of Positive Psychology, Seligman's model emphasizes five pillars of flourishing: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Each pillar contributes to sustainable well-being and by extension, impacts individual and organizational performance.

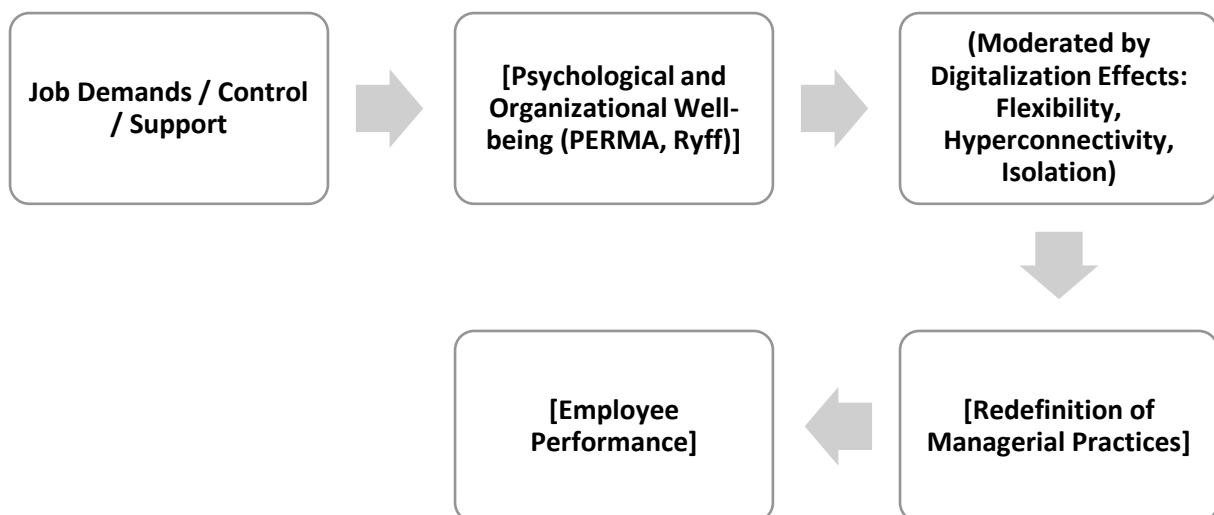
These models are particularly pertinent in the digitalization setting, as they demonstrate how new forms of work arrangements (e.g., higher autonomy, teleworking, information technologies) impact staff performance and satisfaction.

1.5. Proposed Research Model

Based on the theoretical foundations and the challenges raised by digital transformation, the research model integrates the following assumptions:

- **Well-being at work positively influences employee performance.**
- **Digitalization acts as a moderating variable**, modifying the relationship between well-being and performance.
- **Managerial practices** mediate the relationship by adapting strategies to maintain and enhance well-being under new digital conditions.

Fig. 1: Proposed Research Model



Source: Authors

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Approach

Because our research questions were in-depth exploratory in nature and we had to understand the complex meanings of managerial practices in today's digital world, we undertook a qualitative and interpretative research design.

Qualitative methods allow for in-depth, qualitative examination of complex phenomena such as well-being, performance, and digitalization, especially where theoretical foundations are rudimentary (Miles & Huberman, 2003).

Our goal is to capture Human Resources Managers' (HRMs) insights into:

- The relationship between employee well-being and performance.
- The transformations of managerial practices induced by digitalization.
- The specific challenges and opportunities present in the Moroccan context.

2.2. Data Collection Method

We used semi-structured interviews, which are flexible and consistent. With this method, interview respondents can express their opinion freely, and the main areas of research coverage (Romelaer, 2005).

These were conducted using a guide to interview that was constructed around five dominant themes:

- General information about the respondent and the company.
- Perceptions of workplace well-being and its components.
- Factors linking well-being and employee performance.
- Perceived impact of digitalization on managerial practices.
- Strategies and initiatives for promoting well-being and performance in a digital environment.

All interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, face-to-face, by telephone, or through the use of video conferencing facilities. Interviews, with the consent of the participants, were recorded, fully transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis.

2.3. Sample Description

The population included 10 Human Resources Managers from companies of varying sizes and sectors in Morocco to ensure a variety of opinions.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling of staff with operational or strategic duties in human resources.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample

RESPOND ENT	POSITION	YEARS OF EXPERI ENCE	COMPANY SIZE	INDUSTRY SECTOR
P1	HUMAN RESOURCES DIRECTOR	18 YEARS	300 EMPLOYEES	AUTOMOTIV E INDUSTRY
P2	HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER	15 YEARS	GROUP (1000+ EMPLOYEES)	HOSPITALIT Y SECTOR
P3	HR DEPARTMENT HEAD	8 YEARS	900 EMPLOYEES	OFFSHORIN G
P4	HR MANAGER	6 YEARS	100 EMPLOYEES	SERVICES
P5	HR DEVELOPMENT MANAGER	5 YEARS	250 EMPLOYEES	TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS
P6	HR MANAGER	4 YEARS	100 EMPLOYEES	HEALTHCAR E
P7	HR MANAGER	5 YEARS	350 EMPLOYEES	TELECOM / SANITATION
P8	HR DEVELOPMENT MANAGER	4 YEARS	200 EMPLOYEES	AEROSPACE INDUSTRY
P9	HR OFFICER	3 YEARS	150 EMPLOYEES	CONSTRUCT ION
P10	HR COORDINATOR	2 YEARS	89 EMPLOYEES	SERVICES

Source: Authors

2.4. Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using **thematic content analysis**, following these stages:

1. **Familiarization with the data** through repeated reading of interview transcripts.
2. **Coding** the data according to predefined themes, with openness to emergent sub-themes.
3. **Cross-analysis** to identify convergences and divergences among respondents.
4. **Interpretation** of results about existing theoretical models (Karasek and Theorell, Ryff, Seligman) and the Moroccan digitalization context.

To ensure rigor, data triangulation was applied, comparing multiple sources and interpretations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Definition of Workplace Well-being by Human Resources Managers

Interview findings among Human Resources Managers (HRMs) indicate that workplace well-being is typically synonymous with good working conditions, satisfaction in work, and long-term motivation. The HRMs establish the definition of well-being in work as the state where staff feels at ease, appreciated, and a part of the team, which is linked to raised participation and work rate.

However, it was observed that the terminology employed to define well-being remains a bit ambiguous among practitioners. The terms "happiness," "motivation," and "employee satisfaction" are often used interchangeably with "well-being," reflecting a conceptual imprecision. This finding is consistent with Richard's (2012) observation that workplace well-being is a complex and multifaceted concept without a shared definition.

Moreover, although HRMs acknowledge the importance of psychological and emotional aspects of well-being, their understanding tends to be geared towards tangible aspects like work conditions and interpersonal relations. This is partially in line with Karasek and Theorell's (1990) model, where social support and autonomy are regarded as inherent components of occupational well-being. Yet, deeper psychological aspects identified by Ryff (1989), such as purpose in life and self-acceptance, are less salient in the language of the managers.

Overall, the findings highlight that while workplace well-being is increasingly a strategic issue for Moroccan organizations, its design remains operational and pragmatic, rather than holistic.

3.2. Key Factors Influencing Workplace Well-being

Several significant workplace well-being determinants were continually mentioned by the interviewed HRMs. The first was the recognition of employees' work as the primary driver of satisfaction and motivation. Recognition efforts that reward individual and group performances

significantly contribute to the development of a healthy organizational climate.

Second, career development opportunities and continuous professional growth were discussed most frequently. HRMs emphasized that providing employees with a clear path for development and training programs for skill improvement makes them more engaged as well as psychologically healthier. This is also consistent with Ryff's (1989) personal growth dimension because the central component of psychological well-being is present here.

Third, work-life balance initiatives, including flexible work arrangements and telecommuting options, were deemed increasingly important in the digital era. Flexibility not only improves employees' well-being but also increases their loyalty and productivity.

Furthermore, a positive social environment, characterized by collegiality, trust, and open communication, was recognized as a critical component of workplace well-being. This factor is consistent with the social support dimension of Karasek and Theorell's (1990) Demand-Control-Support model and with the Relationships pillar of Seligman's (2012) PERMA model. Yet organizational cultural variations within Moroccan firms, such as hierarchical structures and relatively large power distances, were also identified as causal factors. Those cultural traits are sometimes liable for limiting employees' experiences of autonomy and empowerment and making trouble for workplace well-being efforts. Overall, these findings confirm that both organizational practices and socio-cultural factors jointly shape employees' experiences of well-being at work.

3.3. Initiatives Implemented and Challenges Faced

According to the study, Moroccan firms have begun to embrace different initiatives for promoting workplace well-being. The most common practices are work-life balance programs, i.e., flexible work arrangements and support for teleworking; mental health-promoting programs, i.e., stress management workshops; and social benefit enhancements, i.e., medical coverage and wellness activities.

As favorable as these trends were, HRMs noted several critical challenges to implementing and sustaining these programs. The most widely referenced challenge was economic constraint, particularly for SMEs with modest budgets. Resistance to change in the organization, specifically among higher-level managers accustomed to traditional management strategies, was another standard complaint.

Furthermore, inadequate managerial buy-in and a lack of awareness of the strategic importance of well-being hinder the success of initiatives. HRMs also pointed to the difficulty in quantifying the direct impact of well-being programs on organizational performance, which

makes it difficult to make a business case for investment in well-being to senior management. These impediments suggest that although there is growing awareness of the relevance of workplace well-being, its overall incorporation into strategic human resource management practices is limited by structural, cultural, and economic factors.

3.4. Monitoring and Evaluation Practices

Monitoring workplace well-being is relatively traditional in Moroccan companies. HRMs reported that measurement involved employing yardsticks such as rates of employees' absenteeism, rates of employee turnover, and random employee satisfaction questionnaires to judge well-being levels. Firms have introduced some more vibrant measures, such as occasional social barometers and relaxed feedback sessions, to listen to employees' feelings.

Nevertheless, these tools are not typically effective in fully representing the complex, multifaceted nature of well-being as theorized by models like Ryff (1989) and Seligman (2012). Simple quantitative measures can cover up underlying psychological and emotional issues that affect employee satisfaction and performance.

A few of the HRMs spoke of growing interest in creating more sophisticated and real-time monitoring systems, particularly with the assistance of digital media that present continuous feedback and finer analysis. The application of such systems is scant so far, and they face budget, technical infrastructure, and data management capacity limitations.

So, although watching practices adapt, there is still a good deal of opportunity for innovation and complexity in ascertaining workplace well-being.

3.5. Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the strategic importance of workplace well-being in enhancing employee engagement, organizational commitment, and overall organizational performance. The findings are consistent with the literature, which emphasizes the positive impact of well-being on productivity, creativity, and employee retention (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Vanhala & Tuomi, 2006).

Theoretically, the study validates the relevance of Karasek and Theorell's (1990) Demand-Control-Support model to the Moroccan context. The priority accorded by HR managers to employees' autonomy, respect, and social support closely echoes the model's hypotheses that the negative consequences of job demands are mitigated by high control and good support. Similarly, the dimensions of Ryff's (1989) model of Psychological Well-Being — more specifically autonomy, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others — are reflected in the themes that have been drawn out from HR managers as being integral to

workplace well-being.

Secondly, the PERMA model proposed by Seligman (2012) provides a useful framework to interpret the findings. Positive emotions (e.g., satisfaction and motivation), engagement (e.g., through meaningful work), and positive relationships (e.g., support from colleagues) were frequently mentioned by the participants. However, dimensions such as Meaning and Accomplishment were less systematically addressed, suggesting partial operationalization of the full PERMA framework in Moroccan organizations.

To fill this gap, Moroccan companies could take the initiative to incorporate the more often overlooked facets of workplace wellbeing, such as purpose-driven work and goal-tracking systems, at the human resources level. Purposeful work entails assisting employees with connecting their functions and activities to an organizational vision or societal impact. Employees are more likely to fully engage, become more resilient, and motivated when they see their efforts, no matter how small, aid in achieving a certain meaningful goal. Such alignment enables the employee to not only aid to the “Meaning” component of the PERMA model but also supports long-term fulfillment and loyalty to the organization.

Similarly, supported “Accomplishment” systems like OKR (Objectives and Key Results) or even comprehensive performance dashboards promote advanced feedback mechanisms and appreciation systems. In terms of Morocco, where some form of role delineation and performance markers are non-existent, formalization of those systems could improve not only the employees’ perception of achievement but strategic alignment as well.

In addition, while modernizing the monitoring procedure for well-being, Moroccan firms ought to embrace technology and digitalization through tools such as pulse surveys or HR dashboards. One of the major contributions of this study is the revelation of contextual moderators specific to the Moroccan socio-cultural environment. Hierarchical organizational structures, classical leadership styles, and a relatively high power distance culture (Allali, 2008) appear to limit the extent of autonomy and participation granted to employees. These cultural features partly explain the spotty implementation of well-being practices and the dominance of traditional management styles despite awareness of global trends.

The findings also demonstrate the paradoxical function of digitalization. On the one hand, digital tools and remote work possibilities introduce new opportunities for flexibility, autonomy, and self-management, which align with contemporary theories of positive organizational behavior. On the other hand, they introduce new psychosocial risks, including hyperconnectivity, professional isolation, and cognitive overload (Battal et al., 2015; Orabi &

Bentaleb, 2020). HR managers recognize the need for a balanced strategy, utilizing digital innovations for well-being and developing buffers for their potential adverse effects, e.g., promoting "right to disconnect" policies or enhancing virtual team building rituals.

Finally, the study confirms that while there is greater rhetorical emphasis on workplace well-being among Moroccan HR professionals, actual practice remains hampered by financial, structural, and cultural barriers. The gap between intention and practice reaffirms the need for a greater strategic and systemic integration of well-being into organizational policies, supported by leadership commitment, adequate resourcing, and practices that are culturally attuned to local contexts.

In general, the findings suggest that fostering workplace well-being in Morocco is a dual undertaking: internal transformation, via crafting HR strategies and management styles, and external fit, through international best practices' contextualization to fit the local organizational culture. Future efforts should not only pursue individual well-being outcomes but also design organizational settings supportive of sustainable engagement, resilience, and thriving in the digital era.

4. Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

4.1. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the strategic value of workplace well-being as a source of employee engagement, organizational commitment, and long-term performance, in the case of Moroccan organizations undergoing digital transformation. By combining such theoretical frameworks as Karasek and Theorell's Demand-Control-Support model (1990), Ryff's Psychological Well-Being model (1989), and Seligman's PERMA model (2012), the study provides a comprehensive framework to understand the intricate nature of well-being at work.

The findings report that although there is increasing awareness among HR managers of the importance of promoting well-being, actual practice remains patchy and context-dependent. Cultural factors, organizational routines, and budget constraints continue to shape and at times limit the application of well-being indicators. Moreover, digitalization is both an enabler and a challenge as HRM practices have to transform adaptively to new risks and opportunities.

Lastly, leading sustainable well-being in the workplace needs a systemic, holistic approach that not only attains individual needs but also creates sustainable organizational contexts to sustain them. Aligning organizational performance with worker satisfaction will be a key driver for competitiveness and resilience in an increasingly digitalized, turbulent economic environment.

4.2. Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations:

- **Sample Size and Scope:** The research is based on a small, purposively selected sample of ten HR managers from diverse sectors, which limits the generalizability of the findings across all Moroccan organizations. Future studies could benefit from a larger and more diversified sample, including operational employees and middle managers.
- **Qualitative Nature:** While qualitative methods allow for rich and in-depth insights, they may also introduce subjectivity in data interpretation. Triangulation with quantitative measures (e.g., well-being surveys, performance metrics) would strengthen the robustness of future findings.
- **Cultural Specificity:** The study focuses exclusively on Moroccan organizations, characterized by specific socio-cultural dynamics. While this focus enriches the understanding of local practices, it may limit the applicability of results to other emerging economies or more globalized contexts.
- **Rapid Evolution of Work:** The effects of ongoing digitalization, hybrid work models, and post-pandemic organizational transformations are still evolving. Therefore, some

findings may need to be revisited as the nature of work continues to change.

4.3. Future Research Directions

Building on these limitations, future research could explore several avenues:

- **Comparative Studies:** Cross-cultural comparisons between Moroccan organizations and companies in other emerging or developed economies would provide deeper insights into how cultural factors influence workplace well-being strategies.
- **Longitudinal Research:** Conducting longitudinal studies could capture the dynamic evolution of workplace well-being practices over time, particularly in the context of accelerated digital transformation.
- **Employee-Centered Perspectives:** Expanding the research to include employees' voices — especially those from different hierarchical levels — would offer a more holistic and balanced view of well-being perceptions and needs.
- **Quantitative Validation:** Developing and testing empirical models through quantitative methodologies (e.g., structural equation modeling) would enable the validation of relationships between well-being, digitalization, and performance.
- **Exploration of Digital Well-being:** Future studies could focus specifically on the emerging concept of "digital well-being," examining how organizations can optimize digital tool usage to support — rather than undermine — employee mental health and satisfaction.

By addressing these research opportunities, scholars and practitioners can contribute to building more resilient, human-centered organizations capable of thriving in the future of work.

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