

Encouraging Positive & Deterring Negative Employee Attitudes: Test of a Latent Variable Model

Soumendu Biswas & Subrata Chattopadhyay

This study examines employees' organizational trust and their procedural justice perceptions as key antecedents of their levels of affective commitment and organizational cynicism when mediated by their relational contract with their organization. Through relevant literature review, the study hypotheses are postulated and linked by a conceptual latent variable model (LVM) which is tested using data collected from 451 managerial executives working in India and Indians by origin. They were then subjected to various statistical techniques per structural equation modeling procedures. All the study hypotheses were found acceptable as was one of the LVMs labeled, LVM5. Subsequently, the theoretical and practical implications of the findings were discussed.

Soumendu Biswas is Assistant Professor – HR Area, Management Development Institute, Mehrauli Road, Sukhrali, Gurgaon 122001. E-mail : sbiswas@mdi.ac.in.
Subrata Chattopadhyay is Professor – Marketing Area, University of Engineering and Management, Kolkata 700 156. E-Mail: subrata.chattopadhyay@uem.edu.in

Introduction

A recurring challenge faced by contemporary managers is to elicit effective employee attitudes that shall serve as intrinsic motivators for superior performance. While job security, career advancement, and systematic pay increments can serve as decisive signals to attract talented human resources, it may not be enough to instill in them a sense of obligation, attachment, and an inherent drive to make regular contributions to organizational values and productivity (Fadli & Hongbing, 2020). Accordingly, the objective of the present study was to confirm whether employees' organizational trust (OT) along with their procedural justice perceptions (PJPs) can serve as explanatory constructs to enhance their affective commitment (AC) and reduce organizational cynicism (OCy) when mediated by their relational contract (RC) with the organization.

OT, PJPs, & RC

As per extant literature, OT may be conceptualized as a bilateral bond between co-professionals who are mutually reliant and who act for the other's welfare (Le & Lei, 2018). During this period, both parties are relatively vulnerable because both believe that the other shall fulfill their relational expectations and are satisfied when their honest mistakes are forgiven (Surya et al., 2021). From a credibility perspective, when employees detect honest attempts of their organization concerning openness in communication, explanations about decisions taken, and timely and accurate work inputs, their levels of OT are instantly augmented (Ambrose et al., 2007). Furthermore, OT is an important component of human resource (HR) management especially when managers intend to achieve organization-wide implementation of policies and initiatives (Matthysen & Harris, 2018). Besides, OT fosters a positive psychological climate for employees and this, in turn, evokes from them affirmative attitudes in terms of high levels of commitment, engagement, and involvement and low levels of cynicism, doubt, and deviance (Nguyen & Ermasova, 2018).

From an organization-employee exchange perspective, the extent to which the organization is trustworthy depends on the employees' perceptions of the organization's actions and their concomitant degree of justice and fair play (Amin, et al., 2020). Thus, along with OT, perceptions about organizational justice in general and procedural justice in particular, are central concepts that employees

may consider while evaluating their socio-economic contractual relationship with their organization (Vantilborgh et al., 2014). Employees appraise their relationship with their organization not only on whether the latter fulfills obligations towards any one individual but also on whether these obligations are met regularly and consistently for all (Epitropaki, 2013; Rodwell & Gulyas, 2015).

Perceptions about organizational justice in general and procedural justice in particular, are central concepts that employees may consider while evaluating their socio-economic contractual relationship.

Based on the review of the literature above, the following study hypotheses may be posited.

- H1. Employees' organizational trust will be significantly and positively linked to their relational contract with their organization.
- H2. Employees' procedural justice perceptions shall be significantly and positively connected to their relational contract with their organization.

An additional hypothesis that emerges from the above discussion is as follows:

- H3. Employees' organizational trust and their procedural justice perceptions will interact significantly and be positively related to their relational contract with their organization.

RC, AC & OCy: In organizations, work has to be systematized as per organizational objectives as well as employees' capabilities and inclinations (Cassimir et al., 2014; Salehzadeh et al., 2014). However, a well-designed work structure keeping person-job and person-ability fit in mind may not be enough to obtain the desired levels of employee effectiveness if they do not sense a strong relational bond with their organization to be affectively committed to and lack any intention of divergence from their organization's goals and objectives (Sinha & Israel, 2018).

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following hypotheses are posulated:

H4. Employees' relational contracts will have a significantly positive correspondence with their organizationally-directed affective commitment.

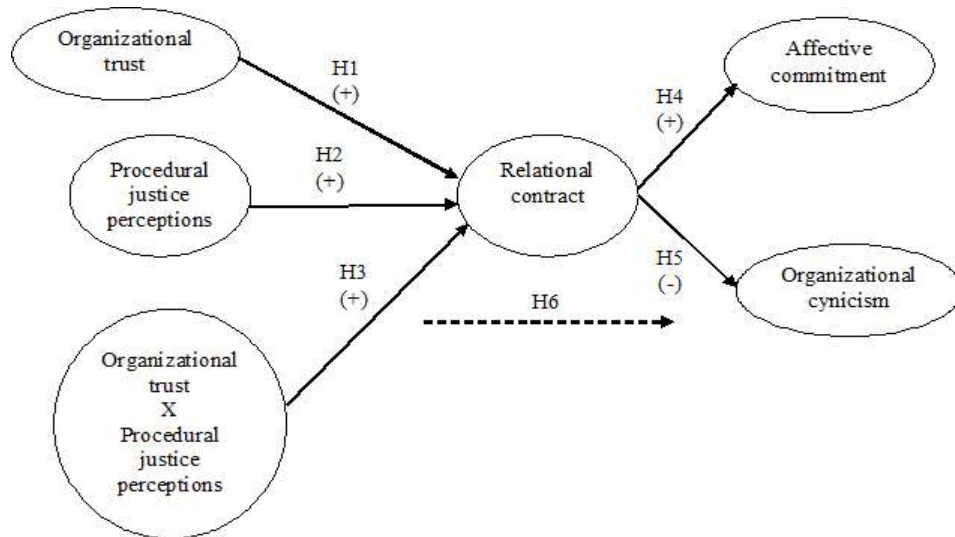
H5. Employees' relational contracts will have a significantly negative association with their levels of organizational cynicism.

Furthermore, all the study hypotheses submitted for investigation so far indicate the scope for examining relational contract as a mediator variable. Thus, an additional study hypothesis is presented as follows:

H6. Employees' relational contract with their organization will significantly mediate the relationship between their organizational trust, procedural justice perceptions, and their interaction as the primary antecedents of affective commitment and organizational cynicism as the final consequences.

Overall, all the study hypotheses are put together as a conceptual LVM in Fig. I below.

Fig. I The Proposed Latent Variable Model (LVM) and the Hypothesized Links Between the Study Constructs



Method Sample & Procedures

Data for the present study were collected in successive phases. First, the National Business Directory was used to randomly select 40 organizations all over India. Thereafter, the HR departments of these organizations were contacted to gain permission for data collection. 12 out of the 40 organizations allowed their employees to participate in the survey process. Of these 12 organizations, seven were from the manufacturing sector and were involved in business activities connected to mining, heavy engineering, cement production, laboratory equipment manufacturing, soft drink bottling, brewery, and tin plating. The remaining five organizations belonged to the services sector and were involved in banking, general insurance, marketing consultancy, information technology-enabled services, and hotels and hospitality services. Subsequently, a list of participants who voluntarily agreed to respond to the study survey was prepared for each organization. Based on this list, about 800 questionnaires were circulated. 451 completed and usable questionnaires could be finally collected which were then put through the data analyses procedures as detailed below. Thus, the response rate for this study was 56.38 percent. In this connection, 46 percent of the respondents belonged to the manufacturing and the remaining 54 percent belonged to the services sector organizations.

For the present sample, the average age of the respondents was about 38 years and their average work experience

was about 13 years. All respondents were full-time, tenured, and permanent employees of their respective organizations. Also, 67 percent of the respondents were males while the remaining 33 percent were females. Based on their designation and job position, respondents were categorized as senior, middle, and junior managers with 19 percent belonging to the senior, 57 percent to the middle, and 24 percent to the junior level, respectively.

Measures

All the five study variables have been measured on a five-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Also, the reliability indices as expressed by the Cronbach's alpha for all the measures were above the acceptable value ranging from .76 to .90 and are reported in Table I.

OT was measured by the seven-item scale developed and reported by Robinson (1996). A sample item of this scale was 'In general, I believe my management's motives and intentions are good'. Three out of the seven items had to be reverse scored. An example of such an item was 'I am not sure I fully trust my management'.

PJPs of employees concerning their current employing organization was measured by the scale of the formal procedure developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993) consisting of six items. Example items of the measure were 'My manager makes sure that all employee concerns are heard before job decisions are made'.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics, Inter-correlations, and Alpha Reliability Indices

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
1. OT	3.16	.69	(.81)				
2. PJPs	3.07	.72	.62**	(.83)			
3. RC	3.78	.82	.12**	.10**	(.90)		
4. AC	3.52	.62	.60**	.77*	.82**	(.76)	
5. OCy	3.14	.77	-.78**	-.73**	-.72**	-.87**	(.89)

Note. $n = 451$; SD, Standard Deviation. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$. Alpha reliabilities are reported in parentheses on the diagonal; short-forms are as mentioned in the text.

RC. Nine items of the psychological contract scale developed and reported by Raja et al. (2004) were used to measure the relational aspect of the psychological contract. An example of the items of this measure was 'To me, working for this organization is like being a member of a family'.

AC. To measure affective commitment, the eight-item scale developed and reported by Meyer and Allen (1997) was utilized. A sample item was 'I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization'. Four out of the eight items were reverse scored. An example of such an item was 'I do not feel a strong sense of belongingness to my organization'.

OCy. Five items of the organizational cynicism scale developed and reported by Dean et al. (1998) were used to measure organizational cynicism. An example of the items used was 'This organization expects one thing of its employees but rewards another'. Two items were reverse-scored and one of them was 'When my organization says it's going to do something, I know that it will really happen'.

Control Variables. In all analyses that follow, respondents' age, work experience, sex, managerial position, and the sector to which their organization belonged were treated as control variables. While the respondents' sex (1 = male, 2 = female) and sector to which their organization belonged (1 = manufacturing, 2 = services) were categorized as dichotomous variables, their managerial position had three categories (1 = senior, 2 = middle, and 3 = junior). Age and work experience of the respondents were treated as ratio variables and were calculated by rounding them off to the nearest year.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A single-latent factor approach was also considered to inspect the presence of latent variable common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For this study, a common latent variable model (CLVM) associated with the manifest variables of the five study constructs namely, OT, PJPs, RC, AC, and OCy was tested against the conceptual LVM proposed earlier (Fig. 1) to check for the differences in model fit. The comparative-fit-index (CFI) and the incremental-fit-

index (IFI) of the proposed model were .97 and .97, respectively whereas, the same indices were .73 and .73, respectively for the CLVM. As such, the CLVM could not be accepted and this eliminated the risk of CMB in the proposed LVM.

Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations & Internal Reliabilities

Table I presents the mean, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and internal reliability indices of the key study variables. Expectedly, OT and PJPs correlated positively and significantly with RC ($r = .12, p \leq .01$; $r = .10, p \leq .01$, respectively). Further, RC correlated significantly and positively with AC ($r = .82, p \leq .01$) and negatively with OCy ($r = -.72, p \leq .01$). Further, the internal reliability indices for the measures of all the study variables as expressed by Cronbach's alpha estimates were between .76 and .90.

OT, PJPs, RC & Moderator Analysis

In this section, the main and interaction effects of OT and PJPs on RC have been examined. For this purpose, three competing LVMS were cross-examined with the data being subjected to structural equation modeling (SEM) procedures with maximum likelihood estimates using AMOS 18.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). To meet the objectives of this study, three absolute fit indices and four comparative fit indices were examined. The absolute fit indices comprised the

normed χ^2 , the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and the root-mean-square-error-of-approximation (RMSEA). The comparative fit consisted of the comparative-fit-index (CFI), the incremental-fit-index (IFI), the normed-fit-index (NFI), and the relative-fit-index (RFI). As per literature, the suggested cutoffs for RMSEA d" .06, $1.00 \leq \text{normed } \chi^2 \leq 3.00$, and for all the fit indices that is, GFI, CFI, IFI, NFI, and RFI $\geq .90$ (Byrne, 2009). Following these suggested cutoff points a model could be accepted for further analyses only when it met these minimum acceptable threshold values.

As described, three competing models were tested, and these were labeled as LVM1, LVM2, and LVM3. LVM2 and LVM3 incorporated one distinct latent exogenous variable labeled as 'Trust_Just' representing the interaction between OT and PJPs. The indicators of 'Trust_Just' were the products of the indicators of OT and PJPs which were first centred by subtracting the value of each indicator from the overall mean of the respective latent variable. Of these three models, LVM3 represented quasi-moderation between OT and PJPs in their association with RC. All LVMS were analyzed through path analysis and SEM procedures and so, both interval estimates in terms of standardized regression estimates, as well as point estimates in terms of the absolute and comparative fit indices, were studied in choosing the most empirically robust model to carry out further analyses.

For both LVM1 as well as LVM3, RC regressed positively and significantly on OT (standardized $\beta = .39, p \leq .01$,

LVM1; standardized $\beta = .08$, $p \leq .01$, LVM3) and PJPs (standardized $\beta = .28$, $p \leq .01$, LVM1; standardized $\beta = .08$, $p \leq .05$, LVM3). As a result, the first two study hypotheses namely, H1 and H2 were accepted. When RC was regressed on 'Trust_Just' that is, the interaction between OT and PJPs, the standardized estimates were not significant (standardized $\beta = .13$, *NS*) for LVM2 but significant for LVM3 (standardized $\beta = .38$, $p \leq .01$). This led to the acceptance of H3 exclusively for LVM3.

When looking into the absolute and comparative fit indices of the three LVMs, only those related to LVM3 were found to not only be above the recommended

threshold levels but also had the best fit. For LVM3, the absolute fit indices that are, the normed χ^2 was 2.16, GFI was .97, RMSEA was .04, and the comparative fit indices that are, CFI and IFI were both .98, NFI was .96, and RFI was .95. Since, LVM3 represented quasi-moderation between OT and PJPs in their linkage with RC, H3 of the present study was also accepted. Consequently, LVM3 was chosen over LVM1 and LVM2 as the model that could be carried forward for further analyses. The standardized regression estimates of the accepted model that is, LVM3 are presented in Table 2 and the fit measures comparing the three LVMs are presented in Table 3.

Table 2 Regression Analyses Results of LVM3

Values (→)	Unstandardized coefficients			C.R. [†]	Remarks
Paths(↓)	b	Standard error	Standardized estimates		
OT → RC	.10	.04	.08	2.82	H1 accepted
PJPs → RC	.17	.07	.08	2.14	H2 accepted
Trust_Just → RC	.59	.07	.38	9.82	H3 accepted

Note. $n = 451$; [†]C.R. is 'Critical Ratios', a recommended basis for testing the statistical significance of SEM components. C.R. $\geq \pm 1.96$ indicates significance at the 95% level and C.R. $\geq \pm 2.58$ indicates significance at the 99% level; short-forms are as mentioned in the text..

Table 3 Analysis of Moderator

Values (→)	Fit indices						
Models(↓)	Absolute fit indices			Comparative fit indices			
	Normed χ^2	GFI	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	NFI	RFI
LVM1 (<i>no</i> moderation)	4.15	.89	.06	.86	.86	.86	.82
LVM2 (<i>full</i> moderation)	4.23	.87	.06	.83	.83	.84	.82
LVM3 (<i>quasi</i> -moderation)	2.16	.97	.04	.98	.98	.96	.95

Note. Minimum acceptable values are as mentioned in the text.

RC, AC, OCy & Mediator Analysis

LVM3 from the previous analyses was further extended for analyses to three

new LVMs namely, LVM4, LVM5, and LVM6 which were competing LVMs and represented path models with the absence of mediation, with full mediation, and with

quasi-mediation respectively by RC between OT, PJPs, and 'Trust_Just' as the primary exogenous and AC and OCy as the final endogenous latent variables.

For LVM5 and LVM6 which considered mediation by RC, AC (standardized $\beta = .12, p \leq .01$, LVM5; standardized $\beta = .05, p \leq .01$, LVM6) regressed positively and OCy (standardized $\beta = -.24, p \leq .01$, LVM5; standardized $\beta = -.04, p \leq .05$, LVM6) regressed negatively and significantly on RC. As such, H4 and H5 of the present study were accepted.

When examining the absolute and comparative fit indices of the three

LVMs, those related to LVM5 were found to not only be above the recommended threshold levels but also had the best fit. For LVM5, the absolute fit indices specifically, the normed χ^2 was 2.88, GFI was .97, RMSEA was .03, and the comparative fit indices namely, CFI and IFI were both .97, NFI was .95, and RFI was .96.

The standardized regression estimates of the accepted model that is, LVM5 is presented in Table 4 and the fit measures comparing the three LVMs in this section namely, LVM4, LVM5, and LVM6 are presented in Table 5.

Table 4 Regression Analyses Results of LVM5

Values (→)	Unstandardized coefficients			C.R. [†]	Remarks
Paths(↓)	b	Standard error	Standardized estimates		
RC → AC	.14	.04	.12	2.69	H4 accepted
RC → OCy	-.27	.02	-.24	-2.81	H5 accepted

Note. $n = 451$; [†]C.R. is 'Critical Ratios', a recommended basis for testing the statistical significance of SEM components. C.R. $\leq \pm 1.96$ indicates significance at the 95% level and C.R. $\geq \pm 2.58$ indicates significance at the 99% level; short-forms are as mentioned in the text.

Table 5 Analysis of Mediation

Values (→)	Fit indices						
Models(↓)	Absolute fit indices			Comparative fit indices			
	Normed χ^2	GFI	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	NFI	RFI
LVM4 (<i>no</i> mediation)	8.6	.77	.09	.76	.76	.77	.73
LVM5 (<i>full</i> mediation)	2.88	.97	.03	.97	.97	.95	.96
LVM6 (<i>quasi</i> -mediation)	3.37	.91	.06	.92	.92	.93	.90

Note. Minimum acceptable values are as mentioned in the text.

Additional mediation analyses as per the procedures suggested by MacKinnon et al. (1995) were also conducted. With RC as a mediator, two conditions were checked which were (i) whether the di-

rect path from the primary antecedents to the final consequent variables was greater than the indirect path through the designated mediator variable and (ii) whether the direct path remained signifi-

cant under conditions of mediation. Out of these two, only the second condition was fulfilled and as such, RC was considered as a full-mediator in the proposed LVM, and H6 of the present study was accepted.

Finally, although the application of SEM procedures established RC as a full-mediator and precluded problems of correlated measurement errors, it was decided

to conduct the Sobel's (1982), the Aorian's (1944), and the Goodman's (1960) tests as per the z-prime method (MacKinnon et al., 2002) to discount the possibilities of Type-I error while exploring the strength of mediation. Additionally, the ratios of the indirect effects on the total effects of all the mediated paths were computed and expressed as percentages and labeled as 'percentage of mediation'. These results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Additional Analysis of Mediation

Values (→) Paths (↓)	Path analyses		Additional mediation tests			Percentage of mediation	Results of the additional mediation analyses
	Whether regression estimate of (direct path) $e\hat{S}$ (path undermediated condition)?	Whether regression estimate of (path under mediated condition) is significant?	Sobel's test	Aorian's test	Goodman's test		
OT→RC→AC	NO	YES	1.92**	1.86**	1.99**	7.93	Relational contract is a <i>full</i> -mediator
OT→RC→OCy			-2.46**	-2.45**	-2.47**	2.15	
PJPs→RC→AC			1.89**	1.83**	1.95**	6.95	
PJPs→RC→OCy			-2.39**	-2.38**	-2.40**	8.38	
Trust_Just→RC→AC			2.82*	2.84*	2.80*	12.57	
Trust_Just→RC→OCy			-7.15**	-7.14**	-7.16**	39.44	

Note. $n = 451$; * $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .05$; short-forms are as mentioned in text.

Theoretical Implications

The present study posited OT as a key antecedent of employees' attitudinal reactions in terms of their levels of AC and OCy. From a theoretical perspective, this expressed a social exchange process whereby, organizations through their policies and practices were able to complement employees' levels of OT through a commensurate enhancement

of their AC and diminution of their organizationally directed pessimism and cynicism. This implies social exchange and affective events theory as precursors and eventuality, respectively. Moreover, the role of PJPs as a quasi-moderator in the relationship between employees' OT and RC denotes a theoretical interaction between the social exchange, fairness heuristics, and the relative deprivation theories. Employees' OT is a reciprocation

of their long-term opinion about their organization's trustworthiness. For this, they may utilize fairness heuristics such as equity of organizational practices and/or uniformity of applications of organizational policies. This would be more so when, as suggested by the affect infusion model, such organizational actions are personally relevant. From a relative deprivation theory perspective, employees' OT is augmented and their RC becomes more firm when they observe procedural isonomy.

The acceptance of LVM5 with RC as a full-mediator denotes the theoretical role played by it as a transmitter of the social exchange mechanisms and reciprocity norms therein between an organization and its employees. In this connection, employees deploy their relational contract as an instrument of judging the intentions of their organization and if found favorable, they demonstrate high levels of AC and low levels of OCy.

Practical Implications

The results of this study have some practical implications for corporate managers. First, managers need to involve employees not only in executing but also in planning organizational policies and strategies. This can be achieved through the promulgation of an open culture marked by clear, consistent, and trans-

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parent communication system. Such a system can be established through practices such as sharing information on an organization-wide basis via face-to-face, target-specific interactions. When employees realize their involvement in organizational processes especially, at the decision-making junctures, they shall be more engaged not only with their job but also with the organization they serve. This, in turn, shall amplify their OT perceptions and PJPs, strengthening their RC, and as exhibited in LVM5, finally culminating in heightened AC and weakened OCy, if any. While overall, this is a very practical and doable proposition for small and medium-sized organizations, the practices suggested above can be carried out departmentally or unit-wise in larger organizations.

Another practical implication of this study may be that managers should be consistent for their own attitudes and behaviors habitually adhering to organizational policies, rules, standards, norms, and customs. Furthermore, they should be empathic towards employees' job-resource concerns and should make timely provisions for wherewithal that may be lacking. Apart from clarifying the objectives and deliverables of employees' jobs, managers should display apposite prosocial behavior in explaining to his/her employees the process of achieving the desired outcome. This may include technical and vocational guidance regarding job execution, how to perform a job to secure positive appraisals, illustrating the importance of an individual's job in connection with the overall departmental and organizational purpose and objectives,

and the most economical, time-saving, and efficient ways of performing the job-at-hand. In turn, the remaining path as envisaged in LVM5 can be realized.

Limitations & Future Research

The results and findings of this study need to be evaluated within the ambits of some limitations which also give rise to certain opportunities for future research. First, this study was carried out among executives in managerial positions working in India and of Indian origin. As such, it rules out cross-cultural and cross-national comparisons of the hypothesized links or the accepted LVM that is, LVM5. Additionally, being cross-sectional in design, the study findings may not be temporally relevant. Further, the local culture that influences individual perceptions and organizational culture that contribute to organizational policies and practices have not been included as a part of this study. However, the study limitations cited here hold scope for future research. The LVM5 that has been considered here as the most suitable model insofar as addressing the present research objectives and concerns can be extended to cross-national, cross-cultural, and/or cross-temporal examinations. The variance-invariance techniques may be applied to comprehend its cogency in a multigroup SEM context. It would also be interesting to note the observations of future researchers if this study is placed in the context of a specific sector and/or socio-economic employee cohorts such as telecommuters, contract workers, or those who work-from-home and are virtually connected.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study probed into the shared influence of employees' trust and PJPs on their AC and cynicism levels when mediated by their RC with their employing organization. For this purpose, an LVM was conceptualized and data was collected to test it by applying different statistical techniques. Based on the outcomes, a particular LVM namely, LVM5 was considered the most empirically valid model which fulfilled the study hypotheses and objective. Consequently, the theoretical and practical implications of the study results and findings were specified. Despite some limitations, the study concludes by suggesting certain calls for future research.

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