

Examining the Application of Talent Management Practices Employed at a Tertiary Institution in South Africa

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To achieve sustained organisational performance, a number of tertiary institutions are putting talent management concept into practice. Using a specific South African institution as a case study, the study investigates how university staff members perceive the application of talent management techniques. The Human Capital Questionnaire was used with a sample of 402 administrative, support, and academic staff. To address the objectives of the study, descriptive statistics and the t-test were employed. The findings of the study show that strategy, the personnel review process, staffing, talent acquisition, engagement, development, and performance management all use talent management techniques ineffectively. In South Africa, it is advised that talent management problems be given top priority.

Keywords: talent management, talent acquisition, staffing, talent engagement, talent development, performance management, talent review

INTRODUCTION

Organisations typically operate in competitive, uncertain, and stormy environments (Binci et al., 2023; Rožman, Tominc, & Štrukelj, 2023). Businesses nowadays, for example, are figuring out how to survive in the contemporary digital era. Without efficient personnel management procedures, no business can thrive in the fiercely competitive global economy of today (Musakuro, 2022). Organisations must implement innovations and modifications due to the environment. Through the use of efficient talent management techniques, organizations including academic institutions are making significant progress in acquiring, developing, and retaining their human resources. More attention is being paid by managers to the career planning and development of their employees.

One of the most important issues managers deal with in the modern company environment is talent management (Silzer and Dowel, 2010). In order to create a high-performing workforce that aligns with the organization's strategic goals and objectives, it refers to a comprehensive human resources approach that includes strategic identification, acquisition, development, and retention of top talent (Karthik, 2023).

According to Marchington et al. (2016), the identification, growth, advancement, compensation, and retention of critical personnel are all aspects of talent management. According to Karthik (2023), talent management encompasses a number of initiatives aimed at creating a long-term talent pipeline for the company, such as succession planning, performance management, talent development, acquisition, and retention. The five main classes of talent management performance, recruiting, performance management, training and development, succession planning, and retention are crucial to the talent management framework, according to Oladapo (2014). Talent management can be divided into nine classes, according to the Human Capital Institute Africa and Hewitt's Human Capital Consulting (2011). These include strategy, staffing, performance management, talent engagement, talent deployment, talent development, talent retention, and the talent review process.

Numerous academics have emphasised the advantages of talent management in businesses. In order to get a competitive edge, Musakuro (2022) proposed that talent management is a strategic approach that integrates business activities. Talent management is a strategy used by organisations to attract and retain employees in order to maintain a competitive edge over time. According to De Boeck, Meyers, and Dries (2018), talent management is a tactic for boosting performance and employee motivation. According to a number of authors, talent management helps organisations succeed since talent is increasingly important to the organization's strategic success (see, for example, Fogarassy, Szabo, and, 2017). Kumar (2022) found that talent retention is positively impacted by talent management. Barkhuizen and Gumede (2021) found that talent management techniques have a positive correlation with work satisfaction and a negative correlation with employees' intents to leave their jobs voluntarily. Talent management, perceived organisational support, work engagement, and the intention to stay are all positively correlated, according to Weng, Shen, and Kan (2023). Barkhuizen and Gumede (2021) emphasised the importance of talent management for an organization's long-term viability and efficiency. According to Silzer and Dowel (2010), the ultimate objective of talent management is to guarantee that the company has employees on hand when needed.

There are certain difficulties in putting talent management techniques into reality, despite the fact that several studies have shown their advantages. Some of the contemporary personnel management difficulties include growing employee burnout and stress, compensation cutbacks and freezes, and hiring freezes (see, for instance, Aguinis and Burgi-Tian, 2021). Globalisation, global employment market dynamics, climate change, and political instability are some of the factors that exacerbate these issues. It's interesting to note that the dynamics of the global labour market are linked to a shifting environment driven by factors like demographic shifts, technological breakthroughs, and economic ups and downs. This leads to increased competition for skilled workers, a rise in the need for specialised skills, and more opportunities for remote work. Because of this, one of the biggest problems of our day is managing talent effectively.

These issues also affect higher education institutions (HEIs). HEIs' talent management systems face a number of difficulties, including increased demand and retention problems (Musakuro and De Klerk, 2021; Theron, Barkhuizen, & Du Plessis, 2014; Higher Education South Africa (HESA), 2011). The "war for talent" is having an impact on them. In particular, HEIs in South Africa are having trouble putting talent management policies and procedures into reality (Mukwawayaya, Proches, and Green, 2022). According to HESA (2014a), the lack of qualified personnel to cover the voids created by the retiring generation is one of the problems facing South African higher education. According to Mukwawayaya et al. (2022) and Musakuro (2022), there is growing worry in the South African setting about the availability and supply of academic professionals in the near future. High employee turnover is a problem for HEIs in South Africa, and they do their hardest to keep their best employees. According to HESA (2011), recruiting and keeping important university employees is a huge challenge for South African tertiary education institutions. Because there are so many HEIs in South Africa, employees have a lot of options, which makes competition and the "war for talent" more fierce. There is equal competition for employees as there is for exceptional kids. Because of their uncompetitive pay and working circumstances, key university personnel are difficult to recruit and retain (Musakuro, 2018; Mokoditoa, 2011; Robyn, 2012). At both the micro and macro levels, using academic staff is quite expensive (see Musakuro and De Klerk, 2021 and references therein). As a

result, Musakuro and De Klerk (2021) suggested that HEIs should manage academic talent more effectively and efficiently since doing so enables academic staff to increase output and job satisfaction.

Using a specific South African university as a case study, this study examines how university staff members see the application of talent management techniques. The Human Capital Questionnaire was used with a sample of 402 administrative, support, and academic staff. To address the study's goal, descriptive statistics and the t-test were employed. The study's findings demonstrate the inadequate application of talent management techniques in strategy, performance management, staffing, talent acquisition, engagement, and development. It is suggested that, in the framework of South African higher education, talent management concerns be given first priority. The talent management of academic, support, and administrative staff at public institutions has received little attention until now, but this study fills that gap.

The study is structured as follows. The literature review is described in Section 2, and the analysis approach is presented in Section 3. Section 4 presents the findings of the investigation. The study is concluded in Section 5, which also outlines the ramifications and potential research fields.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A group of McKinsey consultants invented the term “war for talent” in 1998 and articulated that talent is vital to for the success of the organisation (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001). From this time on, talent management has been seen as a critical ingredient for organisational success and sustainability. Hence, talent management has become a progressively prevalent area of study and has been examined by several scholars (Guerra, Danvila-del-Valle and Méndez-Suárez, 2023). Some scholars regard talent management as a ‘bridge field’ (Sparrow, Scullion and Tarique, 2014). Sparrow and Makram (2015) propounded that talent management borrows some concepts from supply chain management, human resources management, marketing or the theory of resources and skills. Basically, talent management strives to satisfy the needs of employees and improve the performance of the organisation (see Guerra, Danvila-del-Valle and Méndez-Suárez, 2023 and references therein).

Main elements of talent management include talent acquisition, talent development, performance management, succession planning, and talent retention (Karthik, 2023). Talent acquisition involves identifying, attracting and recruiting top talent for the institution, ensuring that they stay longer. Talent development involves offering workers with the knowledge, skills and experience they require to execute their jobs efficiently so that they grow and develop. Performance management involves developing well-defined objectives and expectations, giving feedback to employees and managers, and measuring worker performance to guarantee alignment with the goals of the organisation. Succession planning involves recognising promising future leaders within the organisation and nurturing their development to ensure continuous business operations while preserving the organisation's legacy and their values for future generations to learn from and uphold. Talent retention involves cultivating a work environment that promotes employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational loyalty, ensuring that employees feel valued and motivated rather than obligated. For more information related to these key elements of talent management, the reader is referred to, among other authors, Musakuro and De Klerk (2021). According to Marchington et al. (2016), there are two perspectives on talent management: exclusive and inclusive. While the inclusive view of talent management encompasses talent management for all employees, the exclusive approach focusses on a small number of individuals (often senior management) who have significant influence inside the organisation. Employee needs may be neglected as a result of the exclusive viewpoint.

Nowadays, organisations find it more difficult to retain their key workers (Tafti, Mahmoudsalehi and Amiri, 2017). Rožman, Tominc and Štrukelj (2023) propounded that losing skilled and experienced workers to rivals is a huge waste of human and intellectual capital. It depresses workers who stay with the organisation and it decreases productivity (Latukha et al., 2022). Torrington, Hall and Taylor (2002) indicated that, in the professional services (like higher education sector), turnover rates above 10% can do harm to the business and influence service quality. However, talent management enables organisations to attract, keep and successfully develop workers; thereby augmenting the organisation's competitiveness (Schreuder & Noorman, 2019). Kafetzopoulos and Gotzamani (2022) opined that, to uphold a competitive

edge, organisations should design approaches to keep top-performing workers who are fully acquainted of their value. Rožman, Tominc and Štrukelj (2023) postulated that key workers have particular competences, knowledge and capabilities vital for the organisation's success in the market. According to the literature, there are a number of strategic reasons why talent management is necessary, including the quick turnover of personnel, workplace reform, and the rise in diversity (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Brunila & Baedecke Yllner, 2013).

The landscape of higher education has changed significantly on a global scale, especially after the COVID-19 epidemic. Demand has become too great in the higher education market (O'Donnell, 2018). Demands and pressures from students and customers have become commonplace (see, for example, Arif, Iiya, and Hameed, 2013). Given the reliance of the higher education sector on professional capital, these challenges and demands suggest that an inclusive approach to talent management is necessary. Professional capital encompasses the systematic development and integration of social, human and decisional capital (Stone-Johnson, 2017). Remarkably, the institution's ability to compete depends on its ability to attract and retain professional capital (Marchington et al., 2016).

HEIs comprises of private, public and corporate institutions. HEIs are being affected by technological advances, globalisation and socio-economic factors and demographic changes. Specifically, the advent of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) which is characterised by swift development of technology and digitisation. 4IR leverages automation, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data analytics and cyber-physical systems to design smart, interrelated and highly effective production environments. These issues shape how HEIs operate, forcing them to put much emphasis on identifying, attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining talent. Theron, Barkhuizen and Du Plessis (2014) have indicated that, in HEIs, the demand for academic employees has substantially risen and future demand is expected to increase. Given that more academics are retiring, and universities are increasing their student enrolment, the situation is going to worsen (HESA, 2014a, 2014b, 2011).

The exodus of university employees from their employers has been explained in the literature by a number of factors, chief among them being uncompetitive pay and benefits packages, unjust promotion practices, inadequate state funding, and rising student enrolment that puts more strain on academics (HESA, 2011; HESA, 2014a). The higher education sector is now at risk of losing academics to other industries and other foreign tertiary education institutions that offer competitive salaries, according to Takawira, Coetze, and Schreuder (2014). Furthermore, extant literature has also shown that the lack of recognition for good performance, resignations, and limits related to self-development are some of the causes contributing to the academic staff deficit in South African higher education institutions. Employees get demoralised, disempowered, and stressed as a result of student-customer demands and pressures, extreme time constraints, lengthy workdays, and student satisfaction ratings. This leads to absenteeism and staff turnover. According to research, excessive academic turnover is frequently linked to expenses associated with hiring new faculty, disruptions in lectures, problems with departmental and student planning, and the departure of seasoned mentors and advisors (Theron, Barkhuizen & du Plessis, 2014).

It is crucial to note that universities, for example, can lower turnover costs and guarantee effective service delivery when they implement talent management techniques (Brunila & Baedecke Yllner, 2013; Du Plessis & Grobler, 2015; Odierno, 2015). According to Gerhardt and Karsan (2022), efficient professional capital management can improve knowledge capital in a dynamic and competitive higher education setting by making it easier to hire and retain highly skilled and experienced faculty members. According to human resources specialists, innovative, effective, and efficient human resources strategies are desperately needed.

METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy

Positivist research philosophy is adopted in this study. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) indicated that positivism is the study of 'being' and is focused on the nature of existence and the edifice of reality. Positivism is of the view that the observed reality and the researcher are independent of one another and

the pursuit for knowledge should be value-free and objective (Karupiah, 2022). Basically, positivism is premised on quantitative data.

Research Design

Quantitative research design was adopted in this study. Quantitative research design is premised on numerical data gathering and analysis to achieve the research objective/s (Slater and Hasson, 2024). Objective, methodical and rigorous processes are used to create knowledge and ensure the validity of the study results (Slater and Hasson, 2024; Ochieng, 2009). Generally, quantitative methods are known for their objectivity, accuracy and ability for generalisation. Quantitative research design allows replication of the methodology by other scholars.

Population and Sample

The study population comprises of the university's academic, support and administrative employees. The target population includes 2050 academic, support and administrative employees. The sample of 500 employees was conveniently selected to participate in the study. The respondents are chosen premised on their proximity and accessibility to the researcher. Convenience sampling is efficient, cheap and simple to apply (Jager, Putnick and Bornstein, 2017). The sample was homogeneous since it was extracted from the same university. Jager, Putnick and Bornstein (2017) propounded that homogeneous convenience samples are associated with stronger generalizability as compared to conventional convenience samples.

Research Instrument

The Human Capital Index questionnaire was modified and used to collect quantitative data of relevance (The Human Capital Institute Africa and Hewitt's Human Capital Consulting, 2011). The 45 items on the questionnaire assess the following aspects of talent management: strategy, staffing, performance management, talent engagement, talent deployment, talent development, talent retention, talent acquisition, and talent review process. A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (outstanding), was used to rate each item. According to the literature currently in publication, the HCI is dependable (see, for example, Dzimbiri and Molefi, 2022).

Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire was used in the study to collect the primary data. Three months were allotted to the participants to finish the survey. Five hundred surveys were distributed. 420 of the 500 surveys that were distributed were returned, yielding an 84% response rate. 402 questionnaires were used for data analysis after invalid and incomplete questionnaires were removed, yielding an 80.4% effective response rate.

Procedure

Participants had to work for the university as academic, support and administrative employees to be eligible to take part in this study. Recruitment was conducted via the university's human resources department. The researchers had to speak directly to the participants as part of the recruitment exercise to elucidate the study aim. Those who were eager to partake in the study had to first sign informed consent forms prior to filling out the questionnaire. Respondents were assured that the data collected is anonymous, confidential and is only going to be used for academic purposes. To promote data accuracy and confidentiality, they were told not to indicate their names on the questionnaires. Involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Ethical approval was provided by the Research Ethics Committee of the university under study.

Analysis

The study's goal was accomplished through the use of descriptive statistics. The primary characteristics of the data set were described and summarised using descriptive statistics, providing an accurate data

summary. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 28.0 and Microsoft Excel were used to analyse the data.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

Out of all the employees who participated in this study, 51.2% were academic staff, 37% were administration staff and 11.7% were support staff. This is not surprising since we are dealing with an academic institution. In terms of gender, 38.8% were males and 61.2% were females. This indicates that the university is female dominated. The majority of the participants were from the Black Africans (79.4%). followed by those from Whites, Indians and Coloured constituted 16.4%, 2.2% and 2.0%, respectively. The majority of responders (36.1%) were between the ages of 31 and 40. The percentage of married participants was 50.7% of total participants. An overview of the participants' demographic data is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	156	38.8%
	Female	246	61.2%
Age	30 years and below	49	12.2%
	31-40 years	145	36.1%
	41-50 years	103	25.6%
	51 years and above	105	26.1%
Race	Black African	319	79.4%
	Coloured	8	2.0%
	Indian	9	2.2%
	White	66	16.4%
Marital Status	Divorced	25	6.2%
	Married	204	50.7%
	Re-Married	13	3.2%
	Single	160	39.8%
Work strata	Academic	206	51.2%
	Support	47	11.7%
	Administration	149	37%

Reliability Analysis

To ascertain the reliability of the measurement instrument, a Cronbach's Alpha was performed which shows an overall reliability of 0.971 (Number of items: 45) which means that the reliability of the measurement instrument is high. The HCI of talent management techniques scale is a highly reliable and consistent measure of employee perception on the application of talent management practices within the university context, as evidenced by its Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of 0.971.

To ascertain the implementation of talent management techniques, additional descriptive statistics were calculated following the completion of the reliability test. Staff perceptions of the implementation of talent management techniques at the university under investigation were ascertained using the modified Human Capital Index. The analysis's findings are displayed in straightforward frequencies and proportions in the subsection that follows. A -5-point Likert scale was used for the ratings, and the rankings were as follows: Poor, Fair, Average, Good, and Excellent are the first five categories.

In general, staff members at the university being studied expressed dissatisfaction with the way talent management procedures were implemented at work. Among other things, the Talent Review Process,

Talent Engagement, Talent Development, Performance Management, and Talent Retention are areas that require significant attention. As indicated in Table 2 below, a T test was conducted to ascertain the university's implementation of talent management methods.

TABLE 2
CURRENT APPLICATION AND IMPORTANCE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES
AT THE UNIVERSITY

	Mean			<i>P</i>
	Current	Importance	Gap	
Strategy	3.059	4.262	-1.2030	0.000*
Talent review Process	2.440	3.881	-1.4403	0.000*
Staffing	3.099	3.774	-0.6751	0.000*
Talent Acquisition	2.836	4.088	-1.2522	0.000*
Talent Engagement	2.950	4.402	-1.4517	0.000*
Talent Development	2.341	4.108	-1.7677	0.000*
Performance Management	2.141	3.782	-1.6408	0.000*
Talent Retention	2.333	4.148	-1.2694	0.454

* Differences-p≤0.05

From Table 2 above, university staff believed that the majority of talent management techniques were not being used effectively. Strategy, the talent assessment process, staffing, talent acquisition, talent engagement, talent development, and performance management were the areas where significant shortcomings were noted. Table 2 above, a gap was established in Strategy (-1.2030) with a *p* value of (.000). Another significant gap was seen in Talent review process (-1.4403) with a *p* value of (0.000). Staffing also recorded a significant gap of (-0.6751) with a *p* value of (0.000). Talent acquisition also recorded a significant gap of (-1.2522) with a *p* value of (0.000). Talent Engagement also recorded a significant gap of (-1.4517) with a *p* value of (0.000). Talent Development also recorded a significant gap of (-1.7677) with a *p* value of (0.000). Lastly, Performance Management also recorded a significant gap of (-1.6408) with a *p* value of (0.000). All these results where gaps were identified showed that talent management practices were not effectively applied.

DISCUSSION

The majority of talent management techniques are implemented inadequately, according to the report. Strategy, the talent assessment process, staffing, talent acquisition, talent engagement, talent development, and performance management were the areas where significant shortcomings were noted. The employment of talent management techniques at the university in question is the main topic of the discussion that follows.

Talent Acquisition

According to Warnich et al. (2015), talent attraction or recruiting is the process by which an organization's human resources department entices prospective employees who are suitable and qualified for the role within the business. According to Shikweni and Wyk (2019), attracting qualified workers enables a company to produce outstanding outcomes. While the goal of selection is to find and choose the

best candidates for the positions posted in that specific organisation, recruitment typically encourages potential employees to apply for jobs (Sachane, Bezuidenhout & Botha, 2018). The task to be done and the "employer brand" are known to have a significant impact on how prospective employees react to a company (Mboma, 2012; Saurombe et al., 2017; Onah & Anikwe, 2016; Warnich et al., 2015). The use of talent acquisition in this study was poorly applied.

Talent Engagement

Talent engagement is a self-fulfilling, interrelated mental state that requires vigour, immersion, and resolve, claim Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2008). According to Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2008) and Brown and Hawkins (2013), talent engagement also refers to the process via which employees can dedicate themselves emotionally, intellectually, and physically to their work. According to Towers Perrin (2003), employee engagement is the capacity and willingness of staff members to devote their time, knowledge, and effort to making a substantial contribution to the company's success. It's important to keep in mind that employee engagement goes beyond commitment and contentment. Human resources study indicates that both the employee and the organisation experience personal fulfilment as a result of employee engagement (Brown & Hawkins, 2013; Towers Perrin, 2003).

The degree of control that employees have over their job is another way that talent engagement is viewed (Brown & Hawkins, 2013; Rossier et al., 2012; Mmako & Schultz, 2016). In light of the aforementioned, university administration should use a variety of tactics to encourage staff to put in a lot of effort at work. Offering both monetary and non-monetary prizes is one of the main tactics that may be employed to encourage employees to put in extra effort. The study's findings provide evidence that talent engagement was not implemented well.

Talent Development

According to Charan (2008), one of the riskiest aspects of talent management is talent development. For example, in universities, the capacity to perform activities as a "talented academic" by demonstrating required academic proficiency is frequently linked to the growth and development of academics in particular. Additionally, Charan (2008) hinted that universities are training their staff to not only satisfy their demands but also to provide a solid foundation for efficient instruction and learning (Charan, 2008; Malunda & Atwebembeire, 2019).

Performance Management

The biggest difficulty that is facing today's organisations is to generate sustainable human resources who are competent. According to Imran et al. (2014), most human resource managers take into account the management of employee performance as a crucial issue (Imran et al., 2014; Sachane et al., 2018; Stanton & Nankervis, 2011).

Literature suggests that establishing and efficiently deploying a performance management system is a serious cause for concern for organisation. The necessity of monitoring employee performance within an organisation led to the development of methods that guarantee management can evaluate employee performance (Sachane et al., 2018; Saeed & Shahbaz, 2011). Henry Ford's and Frederick Taylor's efforts, which have their roots in the history of industrialisation, can be connected to performance management. It is important to remember that performance management is applicable to all management specialities and companies worldwide, including universities (Waal, 2002).

A performance management system ought to be created with each organization's needs in mind, making it unique to that company. Even though the goals of performance management are similar across many businesses, the type of organisation determines the type of performance management system that an organisation might use. This suggests that, for instance, a university's performance management system should be different from a private sector company's (Kandula, 2006). In light of the above, performance management was poorly applied in this study.

Talent Retention

According to Cascio (2003), talent retention refers to the strategies or actions implemented by an organization's management to keep its employees from leaving; these strategies include things like effectively rewarding staff members, maintaining relationships, and ensuring a safe workplace for the benefit of all employees. Another definition of talent retention is management's efforts to ensure employees remain with a company and reduce deliberate turnover (Jackson & Schuler, 2000). Pienaar and Bester (2008) provide support for the aforementioned definition by defining employee retention as initiatives aimed at ensuring employees stay with the company and preventing or reducing deliberate turnover. According to Makondo (2014), in order for employees to feel fairly treated in the workplace, activities including job descriptions, job analyses, job grading, and selection are necessary for both attracting and keeping employees (Erasmus et al., 2015; 2008; Makondo, 2014).

"All the strategies, action plans, and methods used to retain talent or valuable employees in the organisation in order to achieve and sustain competitive advantage" is how Ehlers (2011:4) characterised staff retention. Employee retention refers to all of the management's attempts to make the company seem appealing to workers in order to keep them on board during the lengthy transition (Ehlers, 2011; Erasmus et al., 2014). According to Samuel and Chipunza (2009), employee retention is the process by which a company creates an atmosphere that is conducive to retaining its workforce. The objective of employee retention, according to Samuel and Chipunza (2009), is to find different ways to keep talented employees from leaving the company. Retention, according to Ivanovic (2007), is the process of retaining current employees and persuading them to stay with the organisation and avoid leaving (Erasmus et al., 2015; Samuel & Chipunza, 2009; Ivanovic, 2007; Zineldin, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

Examining the talent management strategies used at a South African higher education institution was the goal of the study. The study's findings may have a big impact on the university's ability to recruit and retain important staff members. This study demonstrated how inadequately talent management methods were implemented in the areas of strategy, performance management, staffing, talent acquisition, engagement, and development. because the purpose of the study was to investigate how employees felt about the use of talent management techniques at a South African institution. More broadly, the study showed that the university in question had difficulties implementing talent management strategies. In order to address the numerous issues affecting the university with regard to the implementation of talent management methods at the university in question, the research suggested managerial commitment.

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