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An Evaluation of The Impact of The Covid-19 Pandemic on the Organizational Structure and the Organizational Coordination of Hotels

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Abstract

The severe negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced hotels to adapt their processes, in accordance with the principles of the "Resource-Based Theory". "Resource-Based Theory" supports that the organizational design of an enterprise facilitates the transformation of resources into "organizational capabilities" that can lead to a competitive advantage. The organizational design of an enterprise is determined by: Organizational Structure and Organizational Coordination.
This research aims using the Delphi method in the light of resource-based theory: a) to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Structure and Organizational Coordination of hotels and b) to propose strategic level policies that will facilitate the development of "organizational capabilities" that will help hotel managers overcome the impact of the pandemic.
It has been found that the Organizational Structure of hotels has become formal, standardized, and specialized. This led to an Organizational Coordination that is characterized by bureaucracy, strict rules, procedures, and formal relationships among employees. To overcome the impact of the pandemic, hotel managers should focus on human resources which through training and appropriate incentives must be empowered and to hotel processes which must be standardized and simplified for the benefit of guests.
On a scientific level this research fills a knowledge gap, while on a practical level, the findings of this research will help hotel managers to move forward and make strategic decisions suitable to overcome the impact of the pandemic

Keywords: *Covid-19, Hotels, Resource-based theory, Organizational Design Organizational Structure, Organizational Coordination.*

JEL Classification: Z3 Tourism Economics, Z31 Industry Studies, L2 Firm Objectives, Organization, and Behavior, L29 Other

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic due to its severe negative impact on the hotel industry (Jones & Comfort, 2020) has forced hotels to adapt their processes For example, the sharp decline in demand for the hotel product due to the spread of Covid-19 (Bartik et al., 2020) has forced hotel companies worldwide to change the standards of the services they offer (Chan et al., 2021) and to develop innovative products that will strengthen the reduced demand (Seetharaman, 2020). Gursoy and Chi (2020) argue that hotels have been forced to integrate into their day-to-day operations: implementation of health protocols, usage of personal protective equipment, social distancing, contactless transactions etc. (Gursoy et al., 2020).

The above reveals that hotels, in accordance with the principles of the resource-based theory (Barney, 2001; Barney et al., 2021) have made major changes in their operation, aiming to syndicate in the best possible way the resources that they hold to develop enterprise capabilities that will enable them to remain competitive in the Covid-19 pandemic era. The purpose of this research is through field research using the Delphi method (McPherson et al., 2018) in the light of the resource-based theory: a) to evaluate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the organizational design of the internal environment of hotels in the areas of organizational

structure and organizational coordination and b) to propose strategic level policies that will facilitate the development of "organizational capabilities" that will overcome the impact of the pandemic.

The above holds elements of originality and scientific and practical contribution, since at a global level the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the operation of hotel enterprises have been recorded (Chan et al., 2021; Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Kakarougkas & Stavrinoudis, 2021), but the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the organizational design of the internal environment of hotels in the areas of organizational structure and organizational coordination has not been investigated. Therefore, this research on a scientific level will fill a knowledge gap (Miles, 2017), while on a practical level will help hotels management to make strategic decisions that will allow them to respond positively to the changes brought about by the pandemic.

2. Literature Review

Resource-Based Theory and Organizational Design of the Internal Environment of Hotels

"Resource-Based Theory" support that enterprises hold "Resources and Capabilities" (Barney, 2001; Barney et al., 2021). The resources that a hotel holds can be distinguished in tangible resources e.g., capital, intangible resources e.g., routines and procedures and human resources e.g., employees (Tritto, 2020). The management of every hotel tries to combine these resources in the best possible way to develop "Ordinary and Dynamic Capabilities" (Pattanasing et al., 2019; Teece, 2019). "Ordinary capabilities" include several basic functions and procedures that are necessary for the operation of a hotel and are usually available to its competitors, in the sense that they can easily acquire or imitate them (Ali, et al., 2020) e.g., booking operation, customer check in, implementation of mandatory health protocols, etc. "Dynamic capabilities" include several functions and processes that a hotel holds but its competitors do not and are difficult to acquire or emulate (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019) e.g., formation of innovative hotel products and services that at a strategic level will meet the requirements of the new reality imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic (Marco-Lajara et al., 2021).

Burton et al., (2020) argue that the organizational design of the internal environment of an enterprise supports the transformation of resources into "organizational capabilities" that can lead to a competitive advantage. Following that the organizational design of an enterprise depends on the control and the combination of various elements such as structures, processes, leadership, human resources, and others (Lemus-Aguilar, et al., 2019). The way these elements will be controlled and combined is determined by two central factors: Organizational Structure and Organizational Coordination (Burton & Obel, 2018). Tajeddini and Ratten (2017), emphasize that the Organizational Coordination of a hotel depends on the arrangements that the management will apply to the Organizational Structure of that hotel. For this reason, in the text that follows, firstly will be analyzed the elements that determine the Organizational Structure of a hotel and then it will be presented the characteristics of the basic types of Organizational Coordination that can be shaped based on the way these elements have been arranged.

The Elements that Determine the Organizational Structure of a Hotel

Organizational Structure according to Burton and Obel (2018) includes the way in which different tasks, roles and resources are delegated to different people or groups of people within an enterprise. Zakaryaei and Noubar (2016) in agreement with the above, suggest that the Organizational Structure of an enterprise is determined by a series of interdependent and interrelated variables. The first variable is related to the degree of "Formalization" of the work performed by employees. The low degree of formalization allows employees to execute their tasks freely and to develop new ideas, while the high degree of formalization respectively provides a small degree of freedom and idea generation to employees, thus it can be an obstacle to the development of innovation (Rhee et al., 2017). The second variable is related to the degree of "Standardization" of an enterprise's processes. The high degree of standardization means that the processes of an enterprise are carried out in the same way every time and is a key goal of most modern hotel companies in their effort to offer high-quality standardized product and services (Özdemir et al., 2019). The third variable is related to the degree of "Specialization" of an enterprise's processes. The low level of specialization of a hotel process means that employees are involved in many different tasks resulting low efficiency due to a high degree of work complexity. On the other hand, a high level of specialization means a low degree of work complexity for employees, that usually leads hotels to a higher rate of efficiency (Zhang, et al., 2020). The fourth variable is

related to the concept of "Hierarchy of authority", which aims to define the way power is distributed within an enterprise. Kang and Busser (2018), argue that the Hierarchy of authority plays a crucial role in the psychology, the performance, and the behavior of all the employees of a hotel. This is because the role of each employee and the perception that each employee will gain about his/her role in a hotel in relation to the roles of other employees, depends on the position of each employee in the hotel hierarchy and the typical rules that governs the employees' roles inside the hotel (Lu et al., 2016). The fifth variable relates to the degree of "Complexity" of the Organizational Structure and is divided into vertical and horizontal. Vertical complexity within an enterprise is characterized by the distribution of different employees' roles at many hierarchical levels - vertical formal organization (Kanter, 2019). While horizontal complexity within an enterprise is characterized by the distribution of different employees' roles at minimal hierarchical levels - flat formal organization (Zhao, 2017). The sixth variable relates to the increased or decreased "Willingness of employees to participate in learning processes" that will allow them to develop new skills and knowledge, in their effort to adjust to the demands of the contemporary competitive organizational environment. Guliyev et al. (2019), argue that the employment of employees that are willing to develop new skills and knowledge is a prerequisite for improving the operations of a hotel. The seventh variable is connected to the degree of "Centralization" of the decision- making powers. Cain et al. (2018) suggest that hotels with a high degree of centralized decision-making powers are usually characterized by a strong vertical formal organization with many hierarchical levels, strict rules, control, and bureaucracy, while hotels with a low degree of centralization of the decision-making powers are characterized by a flat formal organization with few hierarchical levels, loose rules, minimal control, and bureaucracy. The above led to the formulation of the first research question:

Q1: What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Structure of hotels?

The Basic Types of Organizational Coordination of a Hotel

According to Yusupova and Pozdeeva (2018), Organizational Coordination is linked to the way a hotel's different resources (tangible, intangible, and human), are coordinated to develop organizational capabilities that will lead to the provision of high-quality hotel services. Burton and Obel (2018) suggest that the effectiveness and the type of the Organizational Coordination is based on enterprise communication, leadership, routines, and processes and generally the management style that an enterprise follows in relation to the Organizational Structure design. Tajeddini and Ratten (2017) argue that two central types of Organizational Coordination can be formulated based on the arrangements that management will apply to the elements that determine the Organizational Structure of a hotel. The first central type of Organizational Coordination favors the free communication and exchange of ideas between employees by minimising bureaucratic and hierarchical restrictions (Biron et al., 2020). For this reason, Organizational Coordination of this type presupposes an Organizational Structure characterized by low formalization, specialization and centralization, minimal bureaucracy, flat hierarchical organization, and employees with enhanced need of developing new skills and knowledge (Nielsen, et al., 2019). This type of Organizational Coordination seeks to achieve a competitive advantage by developing organizational capabilities focusing mainly on the development of innovating products and services and less on cost savings (Kaliappen & Hilman, 2017).

On the other hand, there are hotel companies whose Organizational Structure is characterized by: high level of specialization, vertical complexity, centralized decision-making powers, extensive bureaucracy, and employees that seek work duties stability at the expense of developing new skills and knowledge (Tajeddini & Ratten, 2017). Enterprises with these characteristics are likely to develop an Organizational Coordination that can be characterized as highly controlled stable and formal with vertical hierarchy of authority (Jogaratnam & Tse, 2006). As a result, hotels with this type of Organizational Coordination seeks to gain a competitive advantage by developing organizational capabilities focused mainly on cost savings procedures and less on innovation development (Kaliappen & Hilman, 2017). The above led to the formulation of the second research question:

Q2: *What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Coordination of hotels?*

3. Methodology

Survey Design and Implementation

McPherson et al. (2018) argue that when a knowledge gap is identified, the Delphi method is the most suitable to investigate it. The Delphi method through a series of research rounds aim to collect from a committee of experts qualitative and quantitative data (Asselin & Harper. 2014). Following that Asselin and Harper (2014) and McPherson et al. (2018), proposed that two minimum conditions must be met: a) The committee of experts must consist of at least fifteen members, with a high degree of expertise and knowledge on the subject to be examined. For this reason, the committee of experts of this research consisted of acclaimed "Academics and Executives of the Hotel Industry", and b) The research process must include at least three research rounds. The communication with the committee of experts in all three research rounds was carried out with the combined use of electronic forms, email, and social networks.

Greece was chosen to be the geographical area of this research since its economy is strongly based on tourism and especially the hotel industry (Magoutas et al., 2016). At the same time, the spread of Covid-19 strongly affected the Greek hotel industry (Kakarougkas & Stavrinoudis, 2021). According to a survey by the Institute for Tourism Research and Forecasting (2020), of the 9,971 hotel units operating in 2019 in Greece, only 60% operated during the 2020 tourist season for a short period of time with a low average monthly occupancy (23,1%).

The first research round started on 27/05/2020 and ended on 22/06/2020 where twenty-four completed questionnaires were collected from a total of fifty-five. In the first research round, the central research goal was explained to the experts and qualitative data were drawn on the characteristics of the organizational design of the internal environment of hotels before the spread of the Covid-19. Because of this the first research round questionnaire consisted of two sections that asked the experts to list five keywords which in their opinion best describe the elements that made up the Organizational Structure, and Organizational Coordination (Burton & Obel, 2018) of hotels before the pandemic. The keywords were grouped based on their semantic relevance and then their recording frequency was measured (McPherson et al., 2018).

In the second research round from 29/06/2020 to 13/07/2020, twenty valid questionnaires were collected from a total of twenty-four questionnaires sent to the experts who completed the first research round. The second research round: a) Presented the central findings of the first research round to the experts. b) Obtained quantitative data on the degree of strengthening or weakening of the elements that shaped the organizational design of the internal environment of Greek hotel companies before the pandemic, through a two-section questionnaire consisted respectively by fourteen and ten items in the form of Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were applied to draw conclusions, according to Hasson et al. (2000).

In the third research round from 24/07/2020 to 13/08/2020, fifteen questionnaires were collected from the total of twenty questionnaires sent to the experts who completed the second research round. The third research round presented the central findings of the second research round and collected quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire of this research round was based on the results of the second cycle of the research and consisted of two sections, each of which included three closed-ended questions in the form of Likert scale and four open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions asked the experts to evaluate whether the findings of the second round of the research were: a very insignificant or a very significant development, a very negative or a very positive development and a big threat or a great opportunity. The first three open-ended questions of each section asked the experts to explain / justify their answers to the closed-ended questions, while the fourth open-ended question asked the experts to explain which strategic decisions can reduce the negative and enhance the positive effects of the Covid-19 on the organizational design of the internal environment of hotels. Content analysis and descriptive statics were used to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data collected (Hasson et al., 2000; McPherson et al., 2018).

4. Results

According to the results of the first research round (Table 1, bellow), the element "Small family-owned hotels" prevailed over the element "Large hotel companies" in the pre-Covid-19 era. But the results of the second research round show that the experts with relevant agreement support that both these items were weakened due to the pandemic, but the element of " Small family-owned hotels" more intensely. This finding combined with the strengthening of the elements: "Central decision making and Minimal involvement in decision making, Intense control and Obedience to rules, Vertical organization and Acceptance of superiors' orders, Intense distribution of roles and tasks and Many quality features", revealed that the pre-Covid-19 dominant model of the Greek hospitality industry which was based on small family-owned hotels with poor

organization has been weakened in the favor of "Large hotel companies" with better organizational design of their internal environment. This conclusion is also supported by the parallel weakening of the elements: "Loose distribution of roles and tasks, Little hierarchy, Few quality features, Intense distribution of roles based on gender, Disobedience to the rules, Poor organization and Great hierarchy".

The results of the third research round revealed that the experts recognize the strong negative impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has on the Greek hotel industry, but at the same time skeptically consider that there can be some positive extensions regarding the Organizational Structure of hotels. More specifically, the positive extensions can be found in the idea that the small and medium sized hotels will have to adapt their Organizational Structure to the requirements of the modern business environment on the one hand by investing in the field of acquiring new resources and modernizing the old ones that the hold and on other by changing their organizational culture including administration. Skepticism stems from the perception that for the above to be implemented the small and medium-sized hotels will have to either partner with larger hotel companies or be absorbed by them, since the large hotel companies due to the exploitation of economies of scale, can adapt more easily to the new conditions created by the pandemic. The participating experts pointed out that this development can highlight the value of hotel executives, especially those belonging in the top management levels. The experts suggested that to strengthen the positive and reduce the negative elements of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Structure of Greek hotels, there should be a change in their management model (especially for the hotels that belong to the small and medium-sized category), which should be: a) developed by specialized hotel executives, b) financed by state financial support in order to acquire new resources and modernize existing ones, c) relied on empowered human resources whose value is recognized and d) leading to the redesign of the offered hotel product.

Table 1.

Summary of quantitative results on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Structure of Greek hotels

	First research round results (Keywords recording)	**Second research round results (1- Intense weakening, 3- Neither weakened /Nor strengthened, 5- Intense strengthening)**	
Variables	**Frequency**	**Mean**	**Median**
Small family-owned hotels-I1.1	13	2.40	2
Central decision making and Minimal involvement in decision making-I1.2	13	3.20	4
Intense control and Obedience to rules-I1.3	11	3.95	4.5
Loose distribution of roles and tasks-I1.4	11	2.40	2.5
Little hierarchy-I1.5	8	2.65	2.5
Vertical organization and Acceptance of superiors' orders-I1.6	7	3.45	4
Few quality features-I1.7	7	2.20	2
Intense distribution of roles based on gender-I1.8	4	2.65	3
Intense distribution of roles and tasks-I1.9	3	3.30	3.5
Disobedience to the rules-I1.10	2	1.85	1,5
Many quality features-I1.11	2	3.45	3.5
Poor organization-I1.12	2	2.15	2
Large hotel companies-I1.13	2	2.85	3
Great hierarchy-I1.14	2	2.90	3
Third research round quantitative results			

Above Evolution: 1- Very Insignificant, 5- Very Significant-I1.15	3.85	4.00
Above Evolution: 1- Very Negative, 5- Very Positive-I1.16	3.69	3.00
Above Evolution: 1- Great Threat, 5- Great Opportunity-I1.17	3.77	4.00

The results of the second research round (Table 2, bellow) revealed that the Organizational Coordination of Greek hotels due to the Covid-19 pandemic turned to the further strengthening of elements that were prevalent before the Covid-19 era (Findings of the first research round). Those elements are: "Compliance to many rules, Extensive bureaucracy and Many procedures and repetitive tasks". In addition, employee relations have become more formal due to the strengthening of the element: "Formal relationships between employees" and the parallel weakening of the element: "Informal relationships between employees, Few rules, Minimal bureaucracy and Poor Organizational Coordination". In conclusion, the results of the first and second research rounds show that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Greek hotels have become highly bureaucratic with many rules, repetitive tasks, and formal relationships between employees. The elements of "Intense and Minimal routine and stability at work" has both been weakened, this is a surprise as someone would expect the element of "Intense
routine and stability at work" to be strengthened and not to be weakened according to the findings of the first and second research rounds.

The participating experts according to the results of the third research round propose that the above developments are significant but negative for the Organizational Coordination of Greek hotels. This is supported by the belief of the experts that the intense bureaucracy can negatively affect the product and competitiveness of hotels and at the same time reduce the creativity of employees, which can lead to minimal innovation. Nevertheless, the experts emphasize that the above development hides two beneficial elements for the Organizational Coordination of the Greek hotels. The first includes the weakening of the element of poor Organizational Coordination and the second the strengthening of the element of health and safety insurance due to the imposed health protocols. The combination of the negative and positive elements leads the experts to consider that the above developments due to the Covid-19 pandemic are neither an opportunity nor a threat to the Greek hotel industry. Finally, the experts believe that to strengthen the positive and weaken the negative elements of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Coordination of Greek hotels, two strategic decisions must be made regarding the resources of hotels. The first is related to the human resources that need to be trained and to be given positive incentives that will strengthen their creativity and encourage them to follow formal rules and at the same time to develop effective informal relationships. The second is related to the procedures of hotels (intangible resources) which need to be standardized and simplified for the benefit of guests.

Table 2.

Summary of the quantitative results regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the "Organizational Coordination" of Greek hotels

	First research round results (Keywords recording)	**Second research round results (1- Intense weakening, 3- Neither weakened /Nor strengthened, 5- Intense strengthening)**	
Variables	**Frequency**	**Mean**	**Median**
Intense routine and stability at work-I2.1	13	2.65	2.5
Compliance to many rules-I2.2	12	4.10	5
Extensive bureaucracy-I2.3	10	3.85	4
Many procedures and repetitive tasks-I2.4	9	4.25	4.5

Minimal routine and change at work-I2.5	6	2.95	3
Informal relationships between employees-I2.6	5	2.50	2.5
Formal relationships between employees-I2.7	4	3.45	4
Few rules-I2.8	3	1.65	1
Minimal bureaucracy-I2.9	3	1.90	1.5
Poor Organizational Coordination-I2.10	3	2.20	2
Third research round quantitative results			
Above Evolution: 1- Very Insignificant, 5- Very Significant-I2.11		4.00	4.00
Above Evolution: 1- Very Negative, 5- Very Positive-I2.12		2.62	2.00
Above Evolution: 1- Great Threat, 5- Great Opportunity-I2.13		3.15	3.00

5. Conclusion

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Structure of hotels

The results of this research revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic has strongly affected the organizational design of hotels internal environment, but "Small family-owned hotels" have been affected more compared to "Large Hotel Companies". This finding reveals that small family-owned hotels, compared to large ones, must overcome more difficulties to adjust the way they combine the resources they hold to develop "Ordinary and Dynamic Capabilities" (Pattanasing et al., 2019; Teece, 2019). Subsequently, the Organizational Structure of hotels due to the Covid-19 has turned to a high degree of formalization (Rhee, Seog, Bozorov & Dedahanov, 2017), standardization (Özdemir, Çolak & Shmilli, 2019) and specialization (Zhang, et al., 2020), which is based on the concentration of power (Cain et al., 2018) and the respect of the roles that the hierarchical structure assigns to employees (Kang & Busser, 2018; Lu et al., 2016). Based on the above results, a parallel increase in the vertical and horizontal complexity of hotel enterprises would be expected (Kanter, 2019), but this does not become apparent since the experts stressed that both types of complexity were weakened (Weakening of Little and Great hierarchy).

The above developments are considered important by the experts and an opportunity for positive renewal and change in the way hotel companies design their Organizational Structure. Prerequisite for this, is the hotel companies, especially those belonging to the category of small and medium size, to change their management model, emphasizing on the quality assurance of their services. To achieve this, hotels enterprises and human resources must be financially supported by the state. Analytically, hotels must be supported to reorganize their Organizational Structure in a way that will help them develop "Dynamic Capabilities" associated with the creation and the offering of an innovative and diversified hotel product. While human resources must be supported to develop professionally with new knowledge and skills which will allow them on the to work effectively in the new reality imposed by the pandemic by supporting the development of "Dynamic Capabilities".

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Organizational Coordination of hotels

The findings of the research show that the Organizational Coordination of a hotel depends on the regulations that the management will apply to the Organizational Structure of this hotel, thus confirming the previous studies of Tajeddini and Ratten (2017) and Burton and Obel (2018). The experts stressed that the management of hotels in their efforts to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic, turned to an Organizational Coordination that relies heavily on bureaucracy, strict rules, procedures, and formal relationships among employees. Surprise caused the fact that the experts argued that the element of "Intense routine and stability at work" was weakened, a view which contradicts on the one hand the study of Tajeddini and Ratten (2017), and on the other hand the rest of the research findings according to which someone would expect the strengthening of this element and not its weakening.

These developments are characterized as particularly important but keep a negative and a positive dimension for the Organizational Coordination of hotels. The negative dimension is located on the view that the strong compliance with a bureaucratic system consisting of many, and strict rules can negatively affect the product and the competitiveness of hotels as well as the creativity of employees. A finding that aligns with Jogaratnam and Tse (2006) and Nielsen, et al., 2019. The positive dimension is located on the view that hotels due to the above will have to transform the Organizational Coordination in such a way that it will make efficient use of available resources (Tritto, 2020) resulting the development of dynamic capabilities in hygiene, which is essential for better customer service, especially in the Covid-19 era (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Gursoy et al., 2020). To weaken the negative dimension that leads to an Organizational Coordination model that does not favor the development of innovation (Kaliappen & Hilman, 2017) and to strengthen the positive one that favors the development of "dynamic organizational capabilities" (Pattanasing, Aujirapongpan & Srimai, 2019), hotel managers should turn in two directions. The first direction is related to human resources which through training and appropriate incentives must be empowered to develop creativity and effective informal relationships within a controlled bureaucratic environment. The second direction is related to enterprise processes which must be standardized and simplified for the benefit of guests.

Scientific and Practical Implications

On a scientific level this research fills a knowledge gap, as globally no resource-based theory approach examination of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the organizational design of hotels has been carried out. On a practical level, the findings of this research will help hotel managers make strategic decisions that will have a positive impact on addressing the challenges they face in managing the organizational structure and organizational coordination of the hotels they work for. Finally, this research leads to a further understanding of the impact that the spread of the Covid-19 has had on hotels and how these changes can be addressed.

Limitations and future research

The Delphi method requires the investigation of the views of a committee of experts who hold an extensive experience and knowledge in the under-investigation subject. This is a limitation for this research, as only the views of "Academics and Executives of the Hotel Industry" were investigated. Future similar research could explore the views of a representative sample of front-line hotel employees so that there is a two-way study and understanding of the phenomenon.

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