A Conceptual Model of Hotel Managers’ Turnover Intentions: The Moderating Effect of Job-Hopping Attitudes and Turnover Culture

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ABSTRACT

High employee turnover within the hotel industry, especially amongst managers, has become one of the major concerns to researchers and practitioners. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to present a proposed model of turnover intentions by viewing job satisfaction as having a direct effect on turnover intentions as well as an indirect effect via organizational commitment. Job-hopping attitude and turnover culture have been proposed as moderators in the relationship between the mediating variable and the criterion variables. A review of the literature to support the proposed model is presented.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Job Hopping, Turnover Culture, Turnover Intentions.

INTRODUCTION

The service sector contributed about 57 percent towards the nation’s real GDP in 2002 (Malaysian Ministry of Finance, 2002). Within the service sector, tourism has been identified as an important income earner to Malaysia. For instance, in 1998, total receipts from tourism activities, which amounted to RM 8.5 billion has risen to RM 26.2 billion in 2002 (Malaysian Ministry of Finance, 2002). This is due to the increase in the number of incoming tourists to Malaysia from 5.5 million in 1998 to 13.3 million in 2002. The tremendous increase of tourist arrivals over the years has resulted in the rapid development and construction of hotels in Malaysia. In 1991, there were only about 49,874 hotel rooms in Malaysia, but this number has increased to almost three folds to 120,000 rooms by the year 2000 (MTPB, 2002), employing a total of 79,780 people.

The hotel industry, however, is faced with the challenge of personnel shortage. Globally, the turnover rate in the hotel industry is estimated to range from 60 percent to 300 percent annually, which is far higher than the 34.7 percent annual turnover rate reported in the manufacturing industry (Foley, 1996). Similarly, in Malaysia, the average operational staff turnover rate in hotels was reported at 65.7 percent for the year 1998/1999 (Malaysian Association of Hotels, 2000). Nevertheless, this high turnover rate is not only confined to the operational employees alone. It has been discovered that a high turnover rate also existed among managerial employees within the hotel industry compared to other industries. For instance, Ghiselli (2000) reported that the managerial turnover rate in the hotel industry in the United States ranges between 35 percent to 47 percent as compared to about 8 to 15 percent in the non-service industries. Additionally, Ingram and Brown (2000) in their study on turnover discovered that the turnover rate among middle-managers in the United Kingdom was significantly higher in the hotel industry as opposed to other service-oriented industries. Past studies regarding hotel managers’ turnover rates in various countries have been reported. For instance, 29.5 percent in the USA (Iverson & Deery, 1997), 86 percent in Hong Kong (Lam et al., 2001), 57.6 percent in Japan, Korea, and Singapore in 1997 (Khatri et al., 2001). Since Woods (1997) argued that turnover seems to be an inalienable feature of the hotel industry worldwide, this phenomenon is expected to exist within the Malaysian hotel industry.

Most of the literatures on employee turnover argued that excessive turnover rate is detrimental to the organization. In the hotel industry, scholars estimated that the turnover costs to be between USD 50.00 for a kitchen helper to USD 10,000.00 for a manager, which include separation, replacement, and training costs (Woods & Macauly, 1989). The intangible costs of
turnover are associated with the decline in employee morale, employee productivity, reputation, and goodwill of an organization (Hogan, 1992). These unfavourable repercussions may subsequently result in the loss of customers, as well as the quality of product and services (Johnson, 1981). Management turnover can adversely affect a company more than operational employee turnover. Replacing departing managers is an expensive and time-consuming process, and considered dysfunctional to the organization (Dalton et al., 1982). Furthermore, losing key managerial personnel suggests that firms not only lose their intellectual capital and relational capital of the departing managers, but also dangerous since competitors are potentially gaining these assets which can be used against the former organization (Stovel & Bontis, 2002).

In recent years, numerous studies have been conducted on the predictors of turnover within the hotel industry in various countries particularly the United States (for instance, MacHatton et al., 1997; Boles et al., 1995; LaLopa 1997; Kaak et al., 1997; You, 1998; Deery & Shaw, 1999; Lam et al., 2001; Pizam & Thornburg, 2000; Khatri et al., 2001). Nevertheless, these researches were relatively fragmented in terms of the variables being investigated. Very limited information is available on managerial turnover intentions in Malaysia (for instance, Nathan, 1998; Toong, 1999). Moreover, these past studies were mainly focused on operational level employees. The choice of choosing managers as the subjects of investigation is motivated by two reasons. First, organizations have considerable investment in their managers in that they are more highly and longer trained. Consequently, the cost of finding and replacing a manager becomes high (Hinkin & Tracey, 2000). Second, managers are actively involved in the strategic decisions and goal-setting process of an organization. Hence, a better understanding of the processes and causes managers to quit the organization becomes increasingly relevant (Subramaniam et al., 2002). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to propose a linkage between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions among hotel managers. Job-hopping attitude and turnover culture have been identified as the potential moderators in the relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### Intention to Turnover

Intention to turnover refers to an individual’s perceived probability of staying or leaving an employing organization (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). Tett and Meyer (1993), on the other hand, referred to turnover intentions as a conscious and deliberate wilfulness to leave the organization. Studies on turnover have shown that intention to turnover is the best immediate predictor of voluntary turnover (Price, 2001; Lambert et al., 2001; Griffeth et al. 2000). This relationship is supported by the attitude-behaviour theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), which holds that one’s intention to perform a specific behaviour is the immediate determinant of that behaviour. Since significant positive relationships have been found between turnover intentions and actual turnover (Steel & Ovalle, 1984; Price, 2001; Hellman, 1997; Mowday et al., 1982), turnover intentions have been recommended as a proxy in measuring actual turnover (Price,2001; Price & Mueller,1981). This is because actual behaviour is more difficult to predict as there are many factors such as employment alternatives that affect turnover behaviour. Thus, it is possible that, despite high turnover intention, actual turnover is low because of high unemployment in an industry. In this case, the low actual turnover may mask poor management practices.

### Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention

Job satisfaction is one of the most widely studied and measured constructs in the organizational behaviour and management literature. Interest in job satisfaction proceeds from its relationships to other substantial organizational outcomes including absenteeism, performance, organizational commitment, and turnover. Moreover, the highly uncertain business
environment of today necessitates the need for organizations to understand how to keep employees satisfied, productive and committed at work (Smith, 1992).

Job satisfaction has been defined in many ways. Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as a pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experience. Similarly, Mottaz (1988) regarded job satisfaction as an affective response resulting from an evaluation of the work situation. According to Robbins and Coulter (1996), job satisfaction is an employee’s general attitude towards his or her job. In sum, job satisfaction is defined as an affective response by an employee concerning his or her particular job and results from the employee’s comparison of actual outcomes with those that are expected, needed, wanted, or perceived to be fair or just (Spector, 1996). According to William and Hazer (1986), job satisfaction is an individual’s affective response to specific aspects of one’s job.

Job satisfaction is the most frequently examined psychological variable in the satisfaction and turnover relationship. Job satisfaction has been repeatedly identified as the single most important reason why employees leave their jobs (Mobley et al., 1979). Cotton and Tuttle (1986) argued that overall job satisfaction was negatively associated with turnover. Recent studies have found that withdrawal intentions can be predicted from job satisfaction (Price, 2001; Lambert et al., 2001), and that job dissatisfaction is related to intention to leave (Hellman, 1997). Another recent study by DeConinck and Stilwell (2002) showed that job dissatisfaction leads to work-related outcomes such as low performance, absenteeism, and turnover. Hence,

**Proposition 1:** Job satisfaction will have a direct and negative effect on turnover intentions

**Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment**

Prior studies have discovered that job satisfaction and organizational commitment is positively correlated with one another (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). William and Hazer (1986) found a direct link between job satisfaction and organizational commitment whereby job satisfaction is an antecedent of organizational commitment. This line of thought assumes that an employee’s orientation toward a specific job precede his or her orientation toward the entire organization. According to Mowday et al. (1979), one’s attitude toward the specific task environment (job satisfaction) is expected to develop more quickly than one’s relationship with the organization. A person’s attachment to the employing organization (commitment) appears to develop slowly but consistently over time and is less affected by day-to-day events in the workplace (Mowday et al., 1979). In a similar note, Stevens et al. (1978) using the exchange process theory argued that when an individual’s needs and desires are satisfied, this resulting affective state becomes associated with the organization, leading to organizational commitment. Saks et al. (1996) supported the finding that job satisfaction resulted from rewards led to increased organizational commitment. Thus,

**Proposition 2:** Job satisfaction will have a direct and positive effect on organizational commitment

**Organizational Commitment and Turnover Intention**

Most definitions of organizational commitment describe the construct in terms of the extent to which an employee identifies with and is involved with an organization (Curry et al., 1986). For example, Steers (1977) defined organizational commitment as the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization. According to William and Hazer (1986), organizational commitment refers to an individual’s affective response to the whole organization. Mowday et al. (1979) have classified approaches to the study of organizational commitment in terms of two perspectives: attitudinal and behavioural.
Attitudinal perspective defines organizational commitment in terms of cognitive and affective responses and attachment to an organization. On the other hand, a behavioural perspective focuses on the behaviours that bind an individual to an organization. Porter et al. (1974) identified three related factors of organizational commitment: (1) a strong belief in an organization’s goals and values, (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort for the organization, and (3) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization.

Mathieu and Zajac (1990) in their meta-analysis distinguished between attitudinal commitment and calculative commitment. The latter is derived from attainment of tangible rewards. Stevens et al., (1978) suggested that any factor that accrues positive economic side-bets increases commitment, unless outweighed by concomitant negative factors (such as a lack of promotion or authority). Previous study by Gruny (1966) indicated that a person’s commitment to an organization is related to the rewards he or she has received from the organization and the experiences needed in order to obtain these rewards. The greater the obstacles the person has overcome, the greater the organizational commitment.

Although there is a growing consensus that organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct, various approaches have been taken to identify its dimensions. For example, DeCotiis and Summers (1987) reported that organizational commitment is a two-dimensional construct. The first dimension centres on organizational goal and value internalisation, and the second dimension centres on role involvement in terms of these goal and values. Thus, organizational commitment can be defined as “the extent to which an individual accepts and internalises the goals and values of an organization and views his or her organizational role in terms of its contribution to those goals and values” (DeCotiis & Summers, 1987). Meyer and Allen (1991), on the other hand, developed a multidimensional model of organizational commitment based on three distinct themes. Meyer and Allen (1991) argued that the psychological states reflected in these different definitions of organizational commitment are not mutually exclusive. They referred to these states as components of organizational commitment. These include affective commitment (emotional attachment), continuance commitment (cost-based), and normative commitment (obligation). The affective commitment component is in tandem with the conceptualisation put forth by previous scholars (Mowday et al., 1979; Porter et al., 1974). On the other hand, continuance commitment relates to Becker’s (1960) recognition of the costs associated with leaving the organization. In contrast, normative commitment (obligation) is associated with a person’s moral obligation to remain with the organization (Weiner, 1982).

Organizational commitment has been investigated as a predictor of an individual’s work outcomes, including intention to turnover and turnover. Studies found that organizational commitment is negatively related to turnover intention or actual turnover (Gaetner, 1999; Vandenberghe et al., 2003; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Organizational commitment was heavily researched in work behaviours and work-related outcomes. Prior research in organizational commitment identifies organizational commitment as an important factor for lowering turnover and improving job performance (Allen et al., 2003; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), positive interaction with customers (LaLopa, 1997), and higher job involvement (Parsons, 1995). Griffeth et al. (2000) argue that understanding the process related to organizational commitment has implications for both the employees and the organization. From an individual’s viewpoint, his or her commitment to an organization may make the individual more eligible to receive both extrinsic rewards such as bonuses and awards, and intrinsic rewards such as job satisfaction and positive relationship with colleagues. From an organization’s perspective, employees’ commitment to the organization is important since it is negatively associated with employees’ lateness to work, absenteeism and turnover, which in turn, have implications for overall organizational performance (Allen et al., 2003). Therefore,
Proposition 3: Organizational commitment will have a direct and negative effect on turnover intentions

Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, and Intention to Turnover

Over the last 20 years, considerable research has been devoted to developing predictive models of voluntary turnover, with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intent to quit among the most commonly proposed antecedents. For instance, satisfaction and commitment have been found to be negatively related to intent to leave and turnover (Vandenbergh et al., 2003; DeConinck, 2002). Similarly, these two variables were discovered to be positively correlated with one another (Price, 2001; Hellman, 1997). Equally consistent is the finding that turnover intention is the strongest precursor of turnover (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Currivan, 1999). Important discrepancies exist, however, concerning the relative contributions of job satisfaction and organizational commitment to the withdrawal process. Three main theoretical perspectives in this area have been identified, each having distinct conceptual and research implications.

One view is that commitment to the organization develops from job satisfaction such that commitment mediates the effect of satisfaction on withdrawal variables. This satisfaction-to-commitment mediation model reflects Porter et al.’s (1974) claim that commitment takes longer to develop and is more stable than satisfaction. This line of argument has received considerable empirical support (Griffeth et al., 2000; Price & Mueller, 1986). Other studies using a variety of employees provided support for the role of organizational commitment as a mediator in the relationship between job satisfaction and withdrawal cognition (Brown & Peterson, 1993; Good et al., 1996; Mathieu, 1991; Price & Mueller, 1986; Sager et al., 1998). A consistent negative correlation has been reported between organizational commitment and both turnover intentions and actual turnover (Meyer & Allen, 1997). This model seems to suggest that job satisfaction has an indirect effect on one’s intention to quit.

The second view holds that the direction of influence between satisfaction and commitment is the reversed. The commitment-to-satisfaction mediation model suggests that commitment to the organization engenders a positive attitude toward the job, possibly through a rationalization process (Bem, 1967; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Earlier scholars (for instance, O’Reilly & Caldwell, 1981; Porter et al., 1976) argued that commitment to the organization may develop prior to entry or at least may be evident at early stages of employment. This model promotes the view that changes in commitment can be expected to have an indirect effect on turnover via satisfaction. The findings with regards to this relationship have been inconclusive. Although several studies (for example, Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Dossett & Suszko, 1989) have provided empirical evidence for the hypothesized relationships, others (such as those by Curry et al. 1986; Meyer & Allen, 1988) failed to do so.

The third perspective holds that both satisfaction and commitment contribute uniquely to the turnover process. This independent-effects model follows Porter et al.’s (1974) suggestion that job satisfaction and organizational commitment, though related, are distinct constructs (Dougherty et al., 1985), and contribute uniquely to the prediction of intention (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Although no particular causality between the two attitudes has been suggested, the possibility of reciprocal influences cannot be ruled out (Farkas & Tetrick, 1989). Some research has reported that job satisfaction is a direct predictor of withdrawal cognitions (Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Tett & Meyer, 1993). For example, in their meta-analysis of the relationship between job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions and turnover, Tett & Meyer (1993) discovered that job satisfaction has a slightly strong correlation with turnover intentions than did commitment. Tett and Meyer (1993) concluded that organizational commitment does not completely mediate the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions. This perspective calls for further studies into how attitudes toward the job and organization interact to influence a person’s intention to quit.
The three perspectives noted above are distinguished by the relative contributions of job satisfaction and organizational commitment to the turnover process. The traditional view is that satisfaction is a determinant of organizational commitment, and its effect on turnover intentions is indirect via organizational commitment. Price and Mueller (1986) supported the relationship in that commitment mediates the influence of satisfaction on turnover intentions, which places satisfaction prior to commitment. Other scholars (for example, William & Hazer, 1986; Beck & Wilson, 2001) also concluded that commitment has a more salient influence on an individual’s intention to quit than does satisfaction, and that job satisfaction is an antecedent of organizational commitment. Hence,

**Proposition 4:** Job satisfaction has an indirect and negative effect on turnover intentions via organizational commitment

**Job-Hopping Attitude**

Voluntary turnover is a widespread phenomenon within the hotel industry. Some practitioners have accepted the high turnover among hotel employees as a norm. According to Wood (1997), many hotel employees voluntarily leave their working organizations even if they are satisfied, which could explain the excessive turnover rate in the hotel industry. The notion that employees particularly managers leaving their workplace is somewhat disturbing. Ghiselli (1974) termed the tendency of workers to engage in job-hopping as a “hobo syndrome”, that is, the periodic itch to move from a job in one place to some other job in some other place. Khatri et al. (2001) defined job-hopping as an attitude or behaviour where employees migrate from one job to another irrespective of better alternatives or other apparently rational motives. It may originate from either characteristic of individuals (such as itch of impulsiveness) or social influences (such as turnover culture). Similarly, Veiga (1981) found that some managers changed jobs a great deal in their careers, but these changes apparently were not due to desires for higher compensation or job dissatisfaction.

Prior scholars have put forth the notion of turnover culture to explain job-hopping tendency. For instance, Iverson and Deery (1997) defined turnover culture as a normative belief held by employees that turnover behaviour is quite appropriate, and the acceptance of turnover as part of the work group norm. If an employee has not changed his or her job for a long time, he or she feels increasingly pressured to do so because of social influences. This phenomenon can be observed from the findings made by Pizam and Thornburg (2000) who reported that 69.5 percent of middle-managers in the Central Florida hotels quit their organization during their first year of employment.

Job-hopping attitudes have been used to explain employees’ turnover behaviours. Simons (1995) in a study among hotel employees found that the high turnover rate among younger workers is manifested through their job-hopping behaviours. According to Simons (1995), most hospitality workers in their early portion of their career expect to move from job to job, which could explain the low desirability placed on commitment. Riley (1980) argued that labor mobility is an important factor in the development of skills among managers and that turnover is encouraged. Harbourne (1995) suggested that it is unrealistic to expect a talented employee to stay too long in any one organization, even if he or she is satisfied with his or her current job and institution. An ambitious manager needs to move on to gain experience and make progress in his or her career. Chew (1996) in his study of job-hopping occurrences within selected Asian countries postulated that in the past, employees are more likely to look for alternative jobs before resigning the current one. However, employees of today resign from their jobs even before securing another one. In addition, Khatri et al. (2001) in their study within the Singaporean context provided empirical evidence on the role of job-hopping attitude as an antecedent of turnover intentions. According to Khatri et al. (2001), the job-hopping attitudes among managers were found to be highly significant in the hotel and retail businesses
as compared to the marine and manufacturing sectors. Khatri et al. (2001) concluded that migrating from one job to the other may provide some sort of ego satisfaction to job-hoppers. These literatures on job-hopping attitude seem to imply that this variable has a critical impact on turnover intentions. Given the fact that Singaporean ethnic composition and culture are quite similar with that of Malaysia (Fontaine & Richardson, 2003; Abdullah, 1992), the findings made by Khatri et al. (2001) may be applicable to the Malaysian scenario. Therefore,

Proposition 5: The negative relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions is stronger for individuals who have weak job-hopping attitudes

Turnover Culture in Hotel Industry

It is generally agreed that organizational cultural is a nebulous concept to define (Schein, 1985) and consequently, to identify a specific type of organizational culture is even more challenging. What is agreed on, however, is the impact that a culture, particularly a strong culture (Kilman et al., 1986) has on the beliefs, values and assumptions of the organization concerning how the organization operates. A particular type of culture may be encouraged to develop if it is perceived as either useful to the organization, or at least, not to present a threat to the effectiveness of the organization. Since, excessive turnover on operational and managerial level employees in the hotel industry is well documented (Wood & Macauly, 1989), and seen as an unavoidable and sometimes even necessary and desirable features of the industry (Wood, 1992), thus it is important to explore the concept of a turnover culture and its effect upon turnover behaviours of managers in the hotel industry.

Abelson (1993) defines turnover culture as “the systematic patterns of shared cognitions by organizational or subunit members that influence decisions regarding job movement” (p.361). The concept of a turnover culture derives from the organizational culture literature. Culture, in its simplest terms, has been defined as a set of cognitions shared by members of a social unit (Rousseau, 1990). The various elements of organizational culture range from myths and stories (Peters & Waterman, 1982) to rites and rituals (Pettigrew, 1979), to behavioural norms (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988).

Of the previous research into culture, it is the investigation of Schein (1985, 1990) and the research into absence culture by Nicholson and Johns (1985) along with the findings from the OCP (O’Reilly et al., 1991), which provide the basis for the current study. Schein’s research focuses on the levels of culture and is seen as a function of group activity (Schein, 1990). In line with his earlier research findings (Schein, 1985), culture is argued to be a pattern of basic assumptions that is invented, discovered, or developed by a given group. Thus, in examining the existence of a turnover culture, it is also important to determine the impact of peer group pressure on the behaviour of employees.

The second major resource for the current study is the findings from research into absence culture, with absenteeism having been found to be a precursor to employee turnover. Absenteeism has also been linked to job search, the immediate determinant to turnover intentions (Price & Mueller, 1981, 1986). By adapting a definition of absence culture as expressed by Johns and Nicholson (1985), it is possible to define a turnover culture. In defining an absence culture, the authors argue that it is “the set of shared understanding about absence legitimacy … and the established ‘custom and practice’ of employee absence behaviour and its control” (p.136). A turnover culture, therefore, can be understood to be a set of shared understandings about the legitimacy of leaving an organization; a definition which confirms Abelson’s (1993) turnover culture definition. Within this contention, the use of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) theory of reason action is particularly important in understanding
the basis of employee behaviour. According to this theory, a person’s intention is a function of two basic determinants; one personal, the other reflecting social pressure.

The third major research influence for the current study on turnover culture in the hotel industry is that of the Organizational Cultural Profile (OCP) devised by O’Reilly et al. (1991). The aim of this instrument is to relate work outcomes to the person-organization fit. Findings from the research by O’Reilly et al. (1991) suggest that employees who do not fit the organization’s task or cultural requirements will have reduce satisfaction and commitment and be more likely to leave the organization. Previous research argues that organizational commitment (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth & Hom, 1995) and job satisfaction (Price & Mueller, 1981, 1986; Griffeth and Hom, 1995) relate directly to an employee’s intention to leave an organization.

Research by Deery and Iverson (1996) has found the presence of a “turnover culture” to contribute directly to employees’ intentions to leave. Subsequent study by Deery and Shaw (1997) on turnover culture in the hotel industry in Australia provides evidences of the existence of such a phenomenon. The study produces two measures of a turnover culture, a positive (functional) and a negative (dysfunctional) turnover culture. They further concluded that there is clearly a positive attitude to leaving the organization, and that work should only be viewed as a small element of life, and changing jobs, especially in the hotel industry, can be seen as a norm. The authors further argued that in hotel industry, there is more to be gained by moving to another organization, than by remaining in the current position. Hence,

Proposition 5: The negative relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions is stronger for individuals who have weak perception of turnover culture

Based on the above-mentioned arguments, the proposed conceptual model for this study is as depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: The Proposed Conceptual Model for the Study of Hotel Managers’ Turnover Intentions**

**CONCLUSION**

Since the hotel industry is labour intensive, the phenomenon of high turnover is rather daunting. This is particularly so among managers who are responsible in implementing the strategic goals of the organization through the work of their subordinates. Hotels need to be able to retain good, motivated, and committed managers as suggested by Simons and Enzs (1992). Given that one’s intention to leave is the immediate precursor of actual turnover, it becomes imperative for researchers to examine factors that are likely to influence employees’ intention to quit. From a review of past literatures, a conceptual model on the antecedents of
hotel managers’ turnover intentions has been proposed. Job satisfaction has been postulated as having both a direct and an indirect relationship with turnover intentions via organizational commitment. Job-hopping attitudes and turnover culture have been proposed as moderating the relationship between the mediating variable and the dependent variable.

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