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E X C H A N G E

MUCH ADO ABOUT THE LACK OF POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN SCHOLARLY JOURNALS?

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In response to Aguinis et al.'s (2022) thought-provoking article on the lack of policy implications in organizational behavior and human resource management research, we provide an alternative perspective focusing on four main questions. These questions are: (1) is our scholarship sufficiently focused on important policy-relevant issues? (2) if authors include policy recommendations, will nonacademics use the information? (3) would policy implications in research articles translate into actual policy change? and (4) what other strategies can be used to increase the uptake of research to shape policy? In so doing, we offer specific suggestions and potential remedies to address the research-policy gap.

Aguinis, Jensen, and Kraus (2022) highlighted an important topic of inquiry—to what extent does our science inform policy recommendations? In so doing, they raised the alarm about the potential for our science to become irrelevant. The consequences of policy irrelevancy are far-reaching—affecting both funding for our science through federal grants as well as missed opportunities to improve organizations and help ameliorate pressing social issues. Scholars have lamented a related concern for decades—the science–*practice* gap. The science–practice gap centers on the fact that management research does not sufficiently focus on practical implications and that we fail to translate our science to nonacademic audiences (e.g., Banks, Pollack, Rochantin, Kirkman, Whelpley, & O'Boyle, 2016; Bartunek & Rynes, 2010; Rogelberg, King, & Alonso, 2022). In other words, some have argued that our scholarship is both "lost before translation" (unimportant and not practically relevant) and "lost in translation" (difficult for managers to find and understand) (Shapiro, Kirkman, & Courtney, 2007: 250).

WHAT IS POLICY?

Consistent with Aguinis and colleagues (2022: 4) we define policy as "governance principles that guide courses of action and behavior in organizations and societies." We focus on policy that is relevant to work or employment and guides employee behavior, leadership decision-making, and organizational interventions, structures, or processes. The groups ultimately affected by policy include all employees (e.g., organizational anti-nepotism policies that apply to all employees, regardless of rank or job type) or employees that share certain characteristics (e.g., remote work policies apply only to employees that telecommute). We include policies applicable to specific departments or units within a particular organization, single organizations, and corporations with multiple locations or franchises. Legislative policy developed by governments or international organizations that apply to all entities under a broader jurisdiction (e.g., Brazilian consolidated labor laws, or Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho; European Union Council Directive 2000/78/EC on equal treatment in employment) is also included in our definition of policy. Although organizational and legislative policy differ in important ways (e.g., policy adoption process, sanctions for noncompliance, oversight for policy adherence, scope of influence), both provide governance principles for behavior or action in organizational settings. The discussion that follows considers both organizational and legislative policy.

In terms of scope, we follow Aguinis et al. (2022) by primarily focusing on the science–policy gap in organizational behavior and human resource management (OBHRM) research. However, we recognize that there may be differences in the science–policy divide between organizational behavior (OB) and human resource management (HRM) research, respectively (a point we come back to later). We also acknowledge that our observations and recommended strategies likely apply to other areas of business scholarship (e.g., strategic management, operations, entrepreneurship).

THE SCIENCE–POLICY PROBLEM

We agree with several key points made by Aguinis et al. (2022). First, we agree that scholarly research in OBHRM can and should guide policy. In fact, a policy perspective seems particularly relevant for HRM research given its focus on the development and evaluation of HR practices. Second, we do not doubt that many OBHRM articles lack specific reference to policy recommendations, and that "research-informed" (Aguinis et al., 2022: 14) policy is an important goal for our field. Third, it is true that many OBHRM theories do not include policy-relevant factors or consider policy implications. Fourth, many graduate programs in OBHRM and related fields (e.g., industrial-organizational psychology) do not include formal coursework on organizational or public policy (Tett, Walser, Brown, Simonet, & Tonidandel, 2013). Finally, we concur that there is currently a policy "zeitgeist" (Aguinis et al., 2022: 5) in OBHRM. In fact, the movement to increase the relevance of academic research extends well beyond OBHRM. Many professional associations mention the importance of practically valuable research that can "drive legislation, policies and programs for individuals, organizations and communities" (Canadian Psychological Association), increase "the impact of management and organizational science on business and society worldwide" (Academy of Management [https://aom.org/about-aom]), and "influence policy-making in academia and practice" (European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology [http://www.eawop.org/strategy-and-aims]). Extramural funding agencies, such as the Government of Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Council, evaluate research proposals in terms of both outcomes (e.g., policies developed, new capacities created, business strategies formulated) and impacts (e.g., policy relevance, public service effectiveness, quality of life). Similarly, the National Science Foundation (https://new.nsf.gov/funding/learn/broader-impacts) in the United States uses broader impacts (defined as potential to benefit society and contribution to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes) as a scoring criteria for grant applications across its seven scientific directorates.

Notwithstanding our agreement with several points made by Aguinis et al. (2022), in the sections that follow we pose four questions that provide alternative perspectives regarding the science–policy divide. These questions derive from Aguinis et al.'s (2022: 18) arguments that "the current rate of 1.5% of articles including policy implications could and should be improved – especially if OBHRM researchers have the goal of having broader social impact" and that when policy implications are included in scholarly articles "they are readily implementable across different types of organizations and industries" (Aguinis et al., 2022: 6).

QUESTION 1. IS OUR SCHOLARSHIP SUFFICIENTLY FOCUSED ON IMPORTANT POLICY-RELEVANT ISSUES?

Before discussing whether policy recommendations in OBHRM scholarship are poised to have impact, it is worth considering whether we are currently asking the right questions. Alvesson, Gabriel, and Paulsen (2017) provided a provocative argument that our current academic approach and publishing process has failed us in this regard. Alvesson and colleagues (2017) discussed a system of problems plaguing academic research that has collectively reduced the meaning and meaningfulness of that research. Contributing factors include overproduction of research, tremendous pressure to publish in *A*-list journals (transforming science to a "game" that is disconnected from teaching and practice), privileging methodological rigor over originality, and academic incentive systems that devalue meaningful scientific inquiry. Collectively, this has created a "noisy, cluttered environment which makes *meaningful research* difficult to identify and develop as well as rare" (Alvesson et al., 2017: 4; emphasis added). In effect, these authors argued that we have created a system that focuses too much on quantity, incremental knowledge gain, and formulaic approaches—at the expense of addressing important societal issues.

Other scholars have raised similar concerns. Hambrick (2007: 1346) discussed how management's "theory fetish" has thwarted the study of socially relevant topics for which theory does not yet exist. Kaufman (2020, 2022) criticized the dominant hypothetico-deductive method (a scientific process that involves formulating hypotheses based on theory and conducting empirical tests that either confirm or refute *a priori* predictions), arguing that it not only alienates practitioners and business professionals but also it creates knowledge that has limited practical value. Another concern is that OBHRM research is static (i.e., collected at a particular point in time in the past) and often highly contextualized (i.e., based on a particular sample, occupation, or industry). However, organizations operate in dynamic environments, meaning that our current methodological approaches may not adequately capture the unique features and constraints facing an organization at a given point in time (Christensen, Andrews, Bower, Hamenesh, & Porter, 1982; Weible, Heikkila, deLeon, & Sabatier, 2012).[1] Collectively, these concerns raise questions regarding whether our scholarship is asking questions that could actually inform policy.

There is also the perspective that management research has ignored (at best) or perpetuated (at worst) some of the world's most pressing environmental and social problems (see also Ghoshal, 2005). Nyberg and Wright (2020) provided an illustration regarding climate change. Organizations contribute significantly to climate change (e.g., carbon emissions, deforestation, fossil fuel consumption), yet management research has been almost completely silent on the topic. Nyberg and Wright (2020) argued that, even worse, management research and education have perpetuated the problem by emphasizing industrial growth and profit-making, both of which directly contribute to climate change. Other global problems identified by the European Commission, United Nations, and Pew Research Center are also largely outside the purview of mainstream OBHRM research, including social problems related to poverty, economic inequality, access to healthcare, aging, drug addiction, and immigration. However, both OB and HRM research are potentially poised to offer evidence-based policy recommendations in all of these areas. For example, OB research on gender-based economic inequality and work–family conflict could inform legislative policies related to subsidized childcare and extended paid family leave. Similarly, HRM research on recruitment, training, and career pathing could inform organizational policies aimed at improving the skill level of healthcare workers, particularly in long-term care facilities given our rapidly aging population.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned concerns, movements are underway to promote more meaningful and practically useful academic scholarship. Responsible Research in Business in Management (RRBM) is a virtual global organization of management scholars that advocates for, rewards, and supports research aimed at addressing problems facing society. RRBM acknowledges the important role that our scholarship can play in addressing the world's most pressing challenges, and encourages management scholars to produce credible knowledge with policy implications. The RRBM organization (https://www.rrbm.network/) promotes journal special issues, holds an annual responsible research academic summit, provides awards for responsible research, and supports other activities to promote societally meaningful research. Another example is the Research Excellence Framework (REF; https://www.ref.ac.uk/), which assesses the public impact of research conducted in British higher education institutions. REF was implemented to increase accountability for public investment in the U.K. higher education system and uses a standardized system to document the impact of academic research on society, public policy or services, culture, the economy, health, the environment, and quality of life outside academia.

QUESTION 2. IF AUTHORS INCLUDE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN SCHOLARLY JOURNALS, WILL NONACADEMICS USE THE INFORMATION?

Obviously, OBHRM scholarship must be asking the right questions to inform policy. Assuming this is the case, we see no harm in discussing policy implications in scholarly articles. In fact, doing so may engender more of a policy mindset among OBHRM researchers and facilitate professional norms that value the practical impact of our scholarship. However, we fear that including policy implications in scholarly articles may infrequently translate into useful policy recommendations for nonacademics.

Scholarly research in OBHRM suffers from several accessibility problems. Most research has been written by academics who often lack the training, experience, or confidence to draw practical conclusions from their research findings (Rogelberg et al., 2022)—let alone derive policy recommendations. Even where authors have successfully derived policy implications from research findings, academics receive little, if any, training on how to communicate scientific findings for lay audiences, including organizational decision-makers and legislative policymakers. Scholarly journals also expect scientific writing, which is obscure, jargon-packed, and unappealing to lay audiences—echoing previously discussed concerns regarding the meaningfulness of our scholarship

[1] Aguinis et al. (2022) discussed this issue briefly, noting that cultural differences may be important to consider when making policy recommendations and that there may be different behavioral manifestations of the policy target that need to be considered.

(Alvesson et al., 2017; Hambrick, 2007). Bartunek and Rynes's (2010) analysis of the discussion sections of five high-impact management journals reinforces these concerns. The authors found that most implications for practice lack the specificity needed to offer actionable guidance for managers or policy-makers. The most commonly identified recommendations for practice identified by Bartunek and Rynes's (2010) were general, such as "becoming more aware," "conduct training," "learning," and "(re)design or (re)structure."

Physical access to our scholarship is another roadblock for nonacademics. One problem here is that it policy-makers (e.g., high-level managers, elected officials) are unlikely to be familiar with scholarly journals. Another problem is that if policy-makers somehow found our scholarship, they could not easily access it due to journal paywalls and steep subscription fees (Alvesson et al., 2017; Rogelberg et al., 2022). Collectively, these challenges—skill or confidence deficits in identifying policy implications, difficulty communicating ideas to lay audiences, journal norms regarding the presentation of scholarly ideas, and limited access to our scholarship by nonacademics—mean that even if policy implications were included in research articles, it is questionable as to whether these would inform organizational or legislative policy.

Finally, Aguinis et al. (2022) made an important point by recognizing that policy implications are more likely to be appropriate and successful when they are derived from evidence across individual studies. Indeed, replication of scientific findings is an important part of the research lifecycle (Grand et al., 2018). Likewise, both quantitative (meta-analyses) and qualitative (narrative reviews) syntheses of the literature are critical for advancing science and informing evidence-based practice. However, if most OBHRM articles do not include policy implications (Aguinis et al., 2022), it may be challenging to discern patterns of results from prior results that are relevant for policy development.

QUESTION 3. WOULD POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM SCHOLARLY RESEARCH TRANSLATE INTO THE DEVELOPMENT, ADOPTION, IMPLEMENTATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY?

We are also concerned that most policy implications discussed in OBHRM articles are likely to be far removed from the factors that guide policy "in the wild." Specifically, policy recommendations in scholarly articles are not likely to consider barriers to the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of policy, or the arguably different challenges associated with organizational versus legislative policy. There are many conceptual frameworks for policy development (e.g., Birkland, 2019), adoption (e.g., Berry & Berry, 2007), and implementation (e.g., deLeon & deLeon, 2002), all of which explicate myriad factors that affect each stage of the policy process. As an example, Weible et al. (2012) summarized the many factors that drive initial policy decisions. These factors exist at multiple levels of analysis, including individual and collective characteristics of policy-makers (e.g., goals, beliefs, heuristics, emotions), existing programs and structures within organizations (e.g., how the policy fits with other initiatives or practices), subsystems in which organizations are embedded (e.g., industry requirements, regulatory guidelines) and the broader cultural, legal, and economic context.

In addition, middle managers and employees are typically not the ones creating policy, although these individuals are ultimately the *implementers* of policy. This creates additional barriers to the implementation and sustainability of innovations (such as policy)—practices or ideas that are new to an individual or other units of adoption (Rogers, 2002). Considerable research has found that the implementation of innovations in organizations is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon (Eby & Laschober, 2013; Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005), and that there are varying degrees of policy implementation, including policies that are voluntarily adopted and legally mandated. In other words, there is no guarantee that policies will be implemented as intended due to factors such as an unfavorable climate for implementation, disincentives for change, lack of support by managers or employees, skill deficits, values misfit, and incompatibility with existing policies and practices, among other things (Christensen et al., 1982; Eby & Laschober, 2014; Klein, Conn, & Sorra, 2001; Klein & Sorra, 1996). These aforementioned concerns reinforce our argument that simply increasing the discussion of policy implications in scholarly articles may not be sufficient to affect the development, adoption, implementation, and sustainability of organizational or legislative policy.

QUESTION 4. WHAT OTHER STRATEGIES CAN BE USED TO INCREASE THE UPTAKE OF RESEARCH AND THUS SHAPE POLICY?

To be clear, we agree with Aguinis et al. (2022) that encouraging authors to consider policy at all stages of the research process—from idea generation to publication—is important to ensure that OBHRM research is relevant and meaningful. However, there may be approaches that yield broader and swifter adoption of OBHRM research for policy than the discussion of policy implications in scholarly articles. Below, we discuss several alternatives to help narrow the science–policy divide.

Professional Associations

Professional associations can and should be involved in helping to bridge the science–policy divide. Current efforts spearheaded by professional societies could become blueprints for creating and disseminating relevant policy-related OBHRM research. In terms of informing organizational policy, The Academy of Management (AOM, http://aom.org) publishes *Insights*, an online magazine that distills academic research into easy-to-read summaries, videos, and infographics for business leaders and managers. The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP, https://www.siop.org) also has two different White Paper Series (one of which is in collaboration with the practice-based Society for Human Resource Management), both of which integrate and summarize empirical research on topics of interest for business and HR professionals. Policy-relevant topics include effective performance-management systems; telecommuting; artificial intelligence in assessment and selection; cybersecurity training; skill-based pay; automation; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. The good news is that professional membership in AOM and SIOP is not required to access these resources. However, it is uncertain whether business leaders and policy-makers are familiar with our professional associations and, if so, know where to find policy resources.

Regarding legislative policy in particular, there are also several existing models. SIOP created a Government Relations and Advocacy Team (GREAT) to raise awareness outside the academy regarding of the importance of industrial and organizational psychology research in creating sound public policy. Working closely with Lewis-Burke Associates LLC, a federal governmental relations firm in Washington, DC, GREAT has created working groups that deal with policy-making related to defense and national security, education, development and training of the workforce, policing, and veterans' transition to civilian work. In addition to producing evidence-based white papers to share with governmental policy-makers, GREAT has an advocacy registry to identify SIOP members with expertise for congressional testimony, expert witness testimony, consultation on policy development, and advocacy for science on Capitol Hill.

Professional associations in allied fields have initiatives that could help make OBHRM research more policy-relevant, particularly with respect to informing legislative policy. The Canadian Psychological Association has brief policy and position statements on a wide range of societally relevant topics, such as access to high-quality childcare, prejudicial discrimination, and inappropriate test use. These policy statements are based on psychological knowledge and designed to inform public policy debate. The American Psychological Association (APA; http://www.apa.org) dedicates resources to advocating for a wide range of health and human rights issues (e.g., access to affordable healthcare, criminal justice and policing), education and training (e.g., higher education, workforce development), and applied psychology (e.g., substance-use disorders, climate change, future of work). Efforts by APA include congressional briefings, webinars on critical policy developments for members, Senate testimonies, advocacy summits around policy issues, and fellowship programs focused on gaining experience in legislative issues (e.g., APA Congressional Fellowship Program).

Publishers, Journal Editors, and Reviewers

We also see an important role for publishers, journal editors, and reviewers. Publishers and editors can initiate special issues or devote issue sections to research that advances our understanding of the organizational policy process (e.g., theoretical or empirical articles aimed at understanding policy development, adoption, implementation, and discontinuation by considering individual, group, organizational, industry, and cultural perspectives). Another approach involves calls for papers on research with high policy relevance (e.g., technology and automation, reducing structural inequalities, ethical organizational behavior, pro-environment organizational behavior), along with a requirement to incorporate a policy perspective. Publishers and editors can also encourage exploratory approaches to pressing social problems for which no theory currently exists. More generally, editors can signal to reviewers and authors the importance of greater balance between theory and applied knowledge through the revision of journal mission statements and review criteria, as well as through discussion on editorial panels. We also believe that reviewers play a particularly important role here by pushing authors to go beyond nonspecific boilerplate recommendations to more thoughtful and contextualized policy recommendations.

Journal editors might also consider allocating resources for the preparation of brief science-translational summaries written for lay audiences. Summaries can be sent to authors, who can be encouraged to share them on social media and with university media offices for wider distribution. Science translation summaries can also be posted on practitioner-oriented websites for consumption by business leaders and managers. One such success story is the partnership between the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and IO At Work (https://www.ioatwork.com). In just over two years, 79 brief science translation summaries have been written. The summaries emphasize the practical and real-world implications of research findings, avoid scientific jargon, and are written for nonacademic audiences. The summaries have had over 20,500 views (M = 259 views each) on the IO At Work website, mostly from business leaders, practitioners, and policy-makers.

Regarding the role of publishers, editors, and reviewers, we see great promise for change in both HRM and OB journals, but for different reasons. Due to their more practical focus, we expect that HRM journals are already more likely to include policy-relevant implications compared to OB journals. We also anticipate that it may also be easier to get buy-in from publishers, editors, reviewers, and authors regarding the importance of more in-depth and contextualized practical and policy implications in HRM journals. By contrast, OB research often appears in journals with strong traditions regarding theoretical contribution (e.g., *Academy of Management Journal, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*) and less emphasis on practical implications. However, many topical areas in OB address important social and organizational problems (e.g., discriminatory treatment, counterproductive work behavior, job insecurity, and abusive or unethical leadership). As such, there is great opportunity for OB research to make important contributions to organizational and legislative policy if professional norms were to shift. We agree with Alvesson and colleagues (2017) that, over time and with collective effort, journal practices and the peer review process can encourage more meaningful and socially useful science.

Universities and Graduate Programs

Graduate training programs can also play a role in reducing the science–policy gap by providing opportunities for students to view research through a policy-oriented lens. This could involve reading policy articles in graduate seminars, incorporating organizational and legislative policy discussions in course assignments, and training students to translate scientific articles for nonacademic audiences. Graduate students could also be encouraged to take courses in public administration and policy studies if such courses count as electives in students' programs of study. Other policy-oriented experiences for students (and faculty) include interdisciplinary guest lectures from scholars who specialize in policy advocacy for the social sciences, or inviting editors of policy-related journals (e.g., *Journal of Public Policy, Public Policy and Administration*, and *Policy Studies Journal*) as colloquia speakers. Such efforts would help orient graduate students and faculty toward effectively using scientific findings to inform policy and consideration of how interdisciplinary policy-related theories could inform their own research questions. Over time, these activities are likely to instill greater appreciation of the meaning and social value of research (Alvesson et al., 2017). Finally, universities could offer graduate student and faculty funding to attend policy-related conferences, increase awareness of funding and awards for research that informs policy or addresses large-scale social problems, recognize individuals for participation in policy-related activities, encourage individuals to apply for science advocacy or policy-related fellowships, and offer release time for faculty to engage in policy-related professional opportunities.

Individuals and Teams of Scholars

As scientists and subject matter experts, we encourage academics to do their part. Although writing for lay audiences and scientific leadership activities such as congressional testimonies, and serving on national working groups and panels, is rarely rewarded or incentivized by universities (Rogelberg et al., 2022), these activities are important in efforts to reduce the science–policy gap. For example, one of the authors of this article (Eby) has been involved in the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine's efforts to issue policy recommendations regarding mentoring in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) and diversifying the scientific workforce. Eby has also attended science advocacy events on Capitol Hill through both the Consortia of Social Science Associations (www.cossa.org) and the APA. An important feature of these advocacy events is teaching academics how to communicate the importance of our science for policy-making to legislators. Another example involves research commissioned by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine to examine the gendered division of labor among academic women during the COVID-19 pandemic. This collaborative effort yielded both high-impact scholarship (Kossek, Dumas, Piszczek, & Allen, 2021) and important policy recommendations. We view these examples as models for how scholars can be more engaged in policy development by leveraging their unique evidence-based expertise for the greater good.

Finally, various professional associations offer resources for individuals who want to be more involved in using science to advocate for policy change. For example, the APA has an e-alert system for individuals to stay updated on legislative issues related to our science. Other professional organizations are also actively engaged in science advocacy. Another recent example is the Association for Psychological Science (https://www.psychologicalscience.org/) Global Collaboration on COVID-19, which brought together groups of scientists to provide policy-makers, the public, and the science community informed solutions to a wide range of COVID-19 challenges, including mental health, education and learning, misinformation and disinformation, and changes in the nature of work.

We also encourage academics to "get out of the ivory tower and into the field" (Kaufman, 2020: 65)—in other words, become more intentionally involved in their business community. This might involve spending time observing behavior in organizations, serving on advisory boards, and offering *pro bono* seminars, talks, and conversation hours for the business community. Activities such as these not only increase academics' potential policy reach to decision-makers but also allow academics to better understand the issues facing organizations and encourage learning from practitioners, managers, and employees (Kaufman, 2020, 2022). Working more closely with alumni (e.g., MBAs and PhDs working in applied settings) also offers opportunities to both communicate our science to policy-makers and develop academic–practitioner partnerships (Lapierre, Matthews, Eby, Truxillo, Johnson, & Major, 2018) to tackle policy-related issues. Finally, we are not the first to recommend greater cross-talk and collaboration between micro, meso, and macro researchers (Wilkinson, Barry, & Morrison, 2020). Without considering how individual behavior is constrained and shaped by the larger social, cultural, and regulatory environment, any practical or policy-related guidance we provide in OBHRM scholarly articles may be incomplete at best, and not actionable at worst.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In closing, we thank Aguinis et al. (2022) for starting an important discussion regarding the science–policy divide in OBHRM research. We agree that our science is particularly well-suited to inform policy by focusing on real-world problems facing individuals, managers, and organizations, and doing so with an inherently practical focus. Because of this, OBHRM academics *can and should* do more to help ensure that our scholarship contributes to the greater public good through organizational and legislative policy. Although a lofty goal, we can accomplish it through the collective efforts of our scholarly community (Ghoshal, 2005). Reaching this goal is likely to require going beyond highlighting policy implications in our published scholarship. As a community of scholars, we need to (a) engage in critical self-reflection regarding the questions we are asking in our own research, (b) be actively involved in advocating for science-informed policy, (c) infuse a policy perspective into graduate student training, and (d) urge our universities to support and recognize policy-related professional activities for both faculty and students.

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