Article

Cross-Cultural Leadership: Expectations on Gendered Leaders' Behavior

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Abstract

Ongoing low participation of women in global leadership calls for more research in this field. In this article, we set out to include gendered expectations toward leader behavior as part of cross-cultural leadership theory. Building on an existing body of research, we focus on propositions about the effects of gendered expectations on the leader, from the followers' standpoint. The consideration of gendered effects from the follower standpoint is an under-researched area in leadership literature, and it is even more rarely to be found in empirical data. In every culture, there are certain expectations toward leaders of the two genders that influence their behavior. In this article, we will attempt to answer the following question: How does perceived leader behavior and gendered behavior relate to national culture and actual leader behavior? We present a conceptual model that seeks to incorporate gendered expectations into cross-cultural leadership as an answer. Moreover, we provide a conceptual guideline toward operationalization of the model. The model includes the potential of dissonance between male expectations as a dominating leadership role and female leadership. This might serve as an explanation as to why in some cases women are not seen as successful as men when they adopt a masculine leadership style. The article seeks to advance cross-cultural leadership theory by focusing on expected gendered leadership behavior. Our ideas and model could eventually contribute to the advancement of leadership theory, as well as contributing to gender studies, cross-cultural leadership, and business communication.

Keywords

gender, leadership, cross-cultural theory, conceptual framework

Introduction

Leadership in the 21st century is influenced by a few mega-processes, namely, globalization, political change in the world order, and innovation/technology (Padilla, 2012). These processes have influenced thinking in regard to more appropriate organizational models for today's organizations (e.g., Brown & Duguid, 2000; Kanter, 2001). They have also shifted the concept of leadership, emphasizing distributed leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), resulting in a less individualistic and a more relational focus (Fletcher, 2004). These recent models of leadership are regarded as post-heroic. The way that leadership is described in these models has a stronger resemblance to "feminine" leadership, with higher emphasis on transformational aspects, such as communication and distribution.

The concepts of leadership and culture are probably the most debated subjects in management literature (Schein, 2004). Gender, particularly stereotyping, is also an extensively researched field in management (e.g., Book, 2000; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Helgesen,

1990; Powell, 1990), with the exception of gendered expectations, based on implicit beliefs. However, earlier research indicates that these concepts have often been treated separately by researchers (Brooks, 1996; Lee & Liu, 2012; Snaebjornsson & Edvardsson, 2013). To treat the concepts separately increases the risk of having an incomplete picture of leadership, which fails to answer essential questions such as that of leadership effectiveness (Kellerman, 2012; Spicker, 2012). In addition, to date, we still know very little about the way national culture influences leadership styles. There is also a need for more research on gender and leadership in a national context (Snaebjornsson & Edvardsson, 2013). Furthermore, the fast-growing global leadership processes

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and its importance (Adler & Osland, in press) calls for research that would help acknowledge women's leadership and accelerate participation in senior management positions.

In this article, we will focus on leader behavior because leader style/behavior theory is one of the main theories in leadership, and continues to be widely addressed in cross-cultural research. Research on leadership style of top management—men and women—is desperately needed (Adler & Osland, in press). We define leader behavior or style approach as "exclusively on what leaders do and how they act" (Northouse, 2013, p. 75).

In this article, we stress that more research is needed on cross-cultural studies where the focus is on gender and leadership and the purpose of it is to attempt to fill this gap in the literature, and try to combine gender studies with cross-cultural theory. First, we review the literature on cross-cultural leadership and gender. Second, we intend to make a synthesis of past research and draft up a conceptual model on gender, leadership, and national culture. In particular, we point out that leaders in most cultures tend to shape their behavior on genderless leadership expectations that are actually male dominated. In such situations, a perceptual dissonance can occur among followers when female leaders do not follow such expectations, which can result in a less favorable perception of female leaders. The synthesis and our conceptual model are our contribution to advance the field of gender, leadership, and cultural studies.

Culture and Leadership

Culture and Cultural Dimensions

Culture is defined as "the learned beliefs, values, rules, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people" (Northouse, 2013, p. 384). Implicit to all perspectives of cultural studies is that culture shapes the values and attitudes that affect people's perceptions, including human phenomena such as leadership (Ayman, Mead, Bassari, & Huang, 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liu, Ayman, & Ayman-Nolley, 2012).

Culture has been researched through various paradigms and a number of preferences (Earley, 2006; Steers, Sanchez-Runde, & Noardon, 2010). However, during the past 30 years, the tradition of a cultural dimension approach has been firmly established within the field. We share this gestalt view, illustrating culture as a pattern (Benedict, 1934). The cultural dimension approach, which focuses on grouping societal values and beliefs (Dickson, Castano, Magomaeva, & Den Hartog, 2012), is a valuable tool to analyze cultures and categorize them by similarity in certain aspects (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2002). Schein (2004) argues that "culture at the national level is more important than ever" (p. xi). We take notice of his advice and focus on national culture throughout the article.

Culture and Leadership

Most of the leadership research in the past 50 years has come from the United States, Canada, and Western Europe and is strongly based on North American leadership paradigms. In recent years, more research on other parts of the world has emerged. This, however, often comprises of small numbers of groups and is commonly not of a comparative nature (Den Hartog & Dickson, 2012). Comparative and extensive (cross-) cultural leadership research is rare. However, a few groundbreaking research initiatives have emerged during recent decades and have become a basis for analyzing how leadership is shaped by national culture. In our analysis, we will focus on gender aspects in relation to cultural leadership.

The groundbreaking work of Hofstede (1998, 2001) marks a new era in investigating culture's effect on the work environment, particularly values. Hofstede (2001) identified four dimensions for the purpose of researching work-related values, namely, *power distance* (PDI), *individualism versus collectivism* (IDV), *uncertainty avoidance* (UAI), and *masculinity versus femininity* (MAS). The last one refers to society's preference of feminine characteristics versus masculine. Later, he added *long-term orientation* (LTO) and *indulgence versus restraint* (IVR).

The MAS-dimension is quite important for our inquiry as this dimension measures society's preferences for masculine characteristics (e.g., achievement, heroism, and assertiveness) over feminine (e.g., cooperation, modesty, and caring for the weak). Hofstede (1998) states that "MAS-FEM is an analysis at the country level, not an individual"—it explains differences between countries, not individuals (p. 19). The most important aspect is that MAS does not allow us to see the differences in preferences between men and women within a particular culture. Moreover, Hofstede's research focused on values in organizations but does not deal with leadership per se. Therefore, we suggest that even though Hofstede's work is invaluable for cultural studies, it is insufficient in investigating gendered patterns in cultural leadership.

Survey of Values (SVS) is another large-scale cross-cultural research approach focusing on values in relation to a variety of contexts (Schwartz, 2012). Struch, Schwartz, and van der Kloot (2002) searched for gender differences/similarities in meanings of basic values and found that across cultures men and women interpret basic values in a similar way (Struch et al., 2002). However, the researchers did not specify whether these similarly constructed values among men and women are manifested in similar behavior for both genders, thus affecting gender roles in the process.

The World Values Survey (Inglehart, Basanez, Diez-Medrano, Halman, & Luijkx, 2004) analyzed people's values and beliefs, how these values and beliefs changed over time, and their social and political impact. One important conclusion of the study was that significant differences were found between women and men within society (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Moreover, it is suggested that the shift in gender roles could be "the single most central component of value change

in postindustrial societies" (Inglehart & Norris, 2003, p. 159). In other words, the research findings highlight the importance of changes in gender roles and, most importantly, they confirm that women and men in the same society can eventually have different values.

The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Project (GLOBE; House et al., 2004) is of particular interest for this article, as it focuses on the relationship between cultural dimensions and the behavior of leaders. This is the only up-to-date research of this size with a primary focus on (cross-) cultural leadership.

The GLOBE research project identified nine global leadership dimensions (global culturally endorsed implicit leadership theories [CLT]). These are performance orientation, assertiveness, future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, power distance, and gender egalitarianism (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian, & House, 2012). These dimensions represent the ways in which effective and ineffective leadership worldwide is distinguished. The GLOBE study found 10 cultural clusters in their analysis, based on similarities in responses. Such clusterization of cultures is common in cultural studies (see Gupta & Hanges, 2004; Hofstede, 2001). However, the value of such clusterization in predicting leadership behavior can be misleading, as the GLOBE research showed that similar cultures could hold strong differences in leadership dimensions (Dorfman, Hanges, & Brodbeck, 2004). Hence, cultures from the same cultural cluster could present a different image of a desired leader.

The dimension *gender egalitarianism* in the GLOBE study is defined as "the degree to which an organization or society minimizes gender role differences while promoting gender equality" (House et al., 2004, p. 12). Just like Hofstede's (1998) MAS, gender egalitarianism is meant to compare societies, not individuals. However, some relevant results are worth mentioning. First, there are significant interactions between gender and societal culture for five out of the nine CLT dimensions (House et al., 2004). Second, there was a significant difference in how women and men rated four out of nine CLT leadership dimensions. Lastly, the GLOBE research defined leadership as culturally dependent as the "views of the importance and value of leadership vary across cultures" (House et al., 2004, p. 5). These studies emphasize that gender is an important variable in leadership analyses. From this, we derive the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Leadership is culturally dependent and it varies among women and men.

We believe that the third phase of the GLOBE research (Dorfman et al., 2012) makes a significant contribution to the study of leadership and gender. First, it is to be mentioned that one of the basic findings of the study was that national culture does *not* predict leadership style. This is in congruence with the findings of Smith, Andersen, Ekelund, Graversen, and Ropo (2003). Another interesting finding is that "CEOs tend to behave in accordance to societies' expectations of their leaders" (Dorfman et al., 2012, p. 511). This is further stressed by House, Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, and Sully de Luque (2013) where they state,

> [. . .] leaders behave in accordance with their societies' leadership expectations. [. . .] societal expectations of leadership are driven by cultural values [. . .] leaders behave in a particular way not because of cultural values but because of what they believe will be effective in their society. [. . .] leaders believe to be effective in their society is driven by the society's cultural values and aspirations. (p. 324)

The GLOBE studies have pointed out the following causal relationship between culture and leader behavior: Cultural (societal) values → leadership expectations (CLTs) → leader behavior. From this, we put forward the following proposition:

Proposition 2: Expectations of leader behavior, deriving from national culture, predict actual leader behavior.

So far we have seen how cultural studies have identified the way leadership is shaped by cultural values, and there appear to be gender differences in that respect. In the next section, an attempt is made to combine gender, leadership, and cultural research.

Gender in Leadership and Culture Research

Sociological research generally agrees (with a wide spectrum of views) that men and women do have some biologically determined differences (Rudman & Glick, 2010), but genders are socially constructed (Fletcher, 2004) and culturally embedded, or perceived differently in different cultures (Collard & Reynolds, 2005).

To investigate gender is "intriguing, complex, and strange" (Rudman & Glick, 2010, p. ix). Hence, we feel the need for a more comprehensive analysis (not a simple different–not different choice) in search of *how* and *why*, which we intend to answer in the second part of this article. At this point, we should present existing evidence about gender in leadership research, which is based on various theories (e.g., role theory, stereotype paradigm, power theory, gender essentialist etc.) and which most often falls in one of three streams of research:

- The differences and/or similarities of men and women as leaders (e.g., Eagly et al., 2003; Elsaid & Elsaid, 2012; Powell, 1990),
- Leadership effectiveness by gender (e.g., Book, 2000; Rosener, 1995),

- The glass ceiling/barriers to women ascending toward leadership positions (e.g., Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2011).

Empirical evidence of gender differences in leadership behavior/style is divided into two camps. Some studies present no difference in leadership styles, and there we find research by Dobbins and Platz (1986), Bass (1990), Powell (1990), and Andersen and Hansson (2011) to mention a few. However, research by, for example, Henning and Jardin (1977), Rosener (1990), Helgesen (1990), Eagly et al. (2003), does stress there are some gender differences in leadership styles. We suggest that answering the question (Do men and women lead differently?) does not contribute to the advancement of leadership, nor is it a solution to more sensitive fields in modern society such as gender inequality, stereotyping, and so forth.

Interpretation of gender differences in leadership styles is more comprehensive in relation to the evaluation of success and (perceived) effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness is usually difficult to measure and that is one reason for the criticism of leadership studies in general (Spicker, 2012). The review by Snaebjornsson and Edvardsson (2013) suggests that independent of countries, there is no gender difference on perceived efficiency of leadership (Shadare, 2011). This is consistent with Powell (1990) and van Engen, Leeden, and Willemsen (2001), who argue for little to no difference in effectiveness between men and women as leaders. However, the body of research indicates that gender differences do exist. A few authors (e.g., Book, 2000; Rosener, 1995) suggest that women's leadership is an advantage when performed in contemporary society. Moreover, Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) show that women and men are more effective in roles and leadership styles congruent with their gender, for example, women showed higher effectiveness in education, government, and social service organizations, while a masculine leadership style worked better in the military field. Women and men are both perceived as more effective in leadership positions in stereotypical roles, and both are found ineffective in non-traditional roles (Levy, 2010). Moreover, it is noted that the impact of national culture is evident in the perception of a successful leader, although gender differences exist in successful leader perception regardless of national culture (Snaebjornsson & Edvardsson, 2013).

The existence of the glass ceiling and other barriers to women advancing in leadership positions is evident and has been extensively researched. Regardless of the country of origin, women face similar obstacles in leadership such as typecast perceptions and prejudice (Jain & Mukherji, 2010; Wood & Davidson, 2011), cultural conflicts (Yeganeh & May, 2011), the existence of stereotypes (Booysen & Nkomo, 2010; Paris & Decker, 2012), and discrimination (Fernandes & Cabral-Cardoso, 2003; LaPierre & Zimmerman, 2012). The review of this topic is beyond the scope of this article; hence, we will not deal with it further.

Within managerial studies, three paradigms have been developed to analyze gender and leadership. These paradigms are socialization and role development (Eagly &Karau, 2002), gender-related social status and power (Ridgeway & Balkwell, 1997), and cognitive processes and social categorization (Lord & Maher, 1991). Lord, Foti, and De Vader (1984) made an extensive three-phase study, testing a categorization-based model of leadership perceptions. The results of the study showed leadership rating to be strongly affected by the prototypicality manipulation and behavioral expectations. Even though Lord et al. (1984) provide valuable evidence for categorization theory, the need to consolidate the evidence from their research is felt, particularly on conceptual level in relation to gender and cultural aspects.

Analyses of gender usually start by focusing on biological differences and anthropological/evolutionary discourse. From there, the disagreements in theories start, especially, regarding gender role formation. Some gender theories stress that women and men acquire a sense of themselves as female or male through socialization that deeply influences many aspects of life, including cognition of oneself and others. Some of the theories (e.g., social cognition) suggest that during our socialization, our minds form some sort of map, where each category of things/objects is represented in schemata or nodes (Fletcher, 2001). These schemata/nodes are interconnected, depending on their likelihood of appearing together and are formed on the basis of past experiences. For example, if we are typically used to seeing women ironing and men cutting wood, our man schema will be more strongly connected with a wood cutting schema than with ironing.

Studies suggest existing evidence of stereotypes and gendered expectations toward women and men, based on our socialization process and the construction of societies. In leadership, however, there is a tendency to note gender-free perceptions of leadership.

We mentioned earlier that the GLOBE research group identified a set of CLTs for each country that was genderless in nature (see Paris, Howell, Dorfman, & Hanges, 2009). Furthermore, the GLOBE-group provided evidence that leaders (presumably men and women) tend to behave according to society's expectations of leader behavior. From this we draw our third proposition.

Proposition 3: Men and women in every culture model their leader behavior in accordance with the genderless expectation of leader behavior.

Nearly all research on gender and leadership focuses on a single nation or culture. Very few comparative studies have been identified (Snaebjornsson & Edvardsson, 2013). A small number of studies identify the impact of gender and culture on leadership style differences (e.g., Metwally, 2012), but they do not conceptualize the interrelationship of these variables. It is, therefore, evident that more research is needed on cross-national studies where the focus is on gender and leadership.

Looking for the Answer

One particular theory in cognitive science was developed as an attempt to answer the question "Why discrimination is still a reality even though it is opposed by the majority?" The main reasons were identified in our *unconscious* (implicit, hidden) *bias* (Sabin, Nosek, Greenwald, & Rivara, 2009; Whelan, 2013). Unconscious bias explains the reasons why our conscious beliefs can contradict our subconscious (prejudice) behavior. Many recent studies have repeatedly shown in-group preferences or out-group bias. For example, Green et al. (2007) provide evidence that doctors are less likely to prescribe lifesaving care to Black Americans. These results were produced when implicit bias was measured; however, self-reports of physicians showed no explicit preferences for White versus Black patients (Green et al., 2007). One of the main tools in measuring implicit bias—Implicit Association Test (IAT; see Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998)—and other tests provide evidence for behavior prediction. They show statistically significant behaviors between implicit bias scores and people's daily behavior.

The relatively long history of human kind shows how "leader" and "a man" became close terms. "Woman" and "leader" is a development of roughly the past 100 years. As a leader was so closely associated with a "man," a woman would be advised to be "one of the boys," to assimilate as closely to men's leadership style as possible. To a large extent, women have accepted the rules of the game and were sometimes even called "the best man in Great Britain" (like "The iron lady" Margaret Thatcher), and today, the situation is not very different:

> The traits most frequently used to describe leadership potential, such as strong, decisive and ambitious, are traits more readily ascribed to men than women. This means men are often seen as a better fit for leadership roles, not because of their skills and abilities, but because of their assumed personal qualities. (Whelan, 2013, p. 60)

Women still believe that exhibiting "feminine" features does not help to overcome the barriers toward leadership positions. Moreover, research has shown that during the past few decades, women's leadership style has changed while men have changed very little in that respect (Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb, & Corrigall, 2000; Twenge, 2001).

The words "leader" and "leadership" are generally understood as masculine and described in words that are ascribed to men (Fletcher, 2004; Scott & Brown, 2006). To become a leader, according to cognition theory, one believes he or she is expected to behave like one (exhibit behavior generally ascribed to men).

However, in a real-life setting, those formally in leadership positions are primarily expected to "influence a group of individuals to achieve common goals" (Northouse, 2013, p. 5). Based on this, and that "female or male is the first distinction we make after meeting human beings" (Freud, 1933, p. 133), we argue, that implicitly, women are expected to display more feminine behavior, when initiating goal achievement or leadership. We derive this notion from Scott and Brown's (2006) research, where they intended to answer whether the observer first perceives a leader's gender and then the position (leader). They concluded that when encoding leader behavior, a leader's gender might be the first encoding factor, followed by actual leader behavior.

Women and men follow these genderless expectations of leader behavior, assuming more effective leadership as a result. However, research suggests that women and men are more successful when they exhibit leadership behavior congruent with their gender role (Eagly et al., 1995). Moreover, evidence indicates that a woman applying a masculine leadership style might be evaluated very differently from a male leader applying the same leadership style (Bartol & Butterfield, 1976).

In the case of a female leader adopting the masculine attributes of leadership behavior, a follower might experience cognitive dissonance (see Festinger, 1957). This is a state of discomfort experienced when simultaneously holding two or more conflicting ideas or beliefs. The pressure of "acting gender" (see Fletcher, 2004), deeply embedded stereotypes, and other factors have formed strong associations of man—masculine and woman—feminine. Accordingly, when a woman is acting in a masculine manner, we argue that a follower experiences cognitive dissonance. During the experience of cognitive dissonance, a human being engages in "dissonance reduction" (see Carlson, Miller, Heth, Donahoe, & Martin, 2009) techniques to reduce the level of discomfort. Subsequently, we argue that as a result of such dissonance reduction, women exhibiting a masculine style of leadership are perceived less favorably. Moreover, this provides a possible explanation as to why women are more positively evaluated in certain contexts/industries that are, in general, described as more "feminine" (e.g., education; Northouse, 2013). From this, we put forward our final proposition:

> **Proposition 4:** Actual leader behavior, modeled by a genderless culture's expectations of leader behavior, can create dissonance in perception.

A Conceptual Model

Based on the literature review and the propositions, we recommend a conceptual model that includes gender in cultural leadership (see Figure 1). In the previous sections, we have shown different gendered perceptions regarding values and beliefs. However, in every culture, leaders tend to model their conduct in accordance with those perceptions, toward (genderless) leader behavior that the national culture ascribes.

We suggest that leader behavior (constructed on genderless leader expectations) can potentially create dissonance or match in perception, depending on which gender has the leading role. In a real-life setting, when leadership is enacted, the first categorization made by the perceiver when meeting
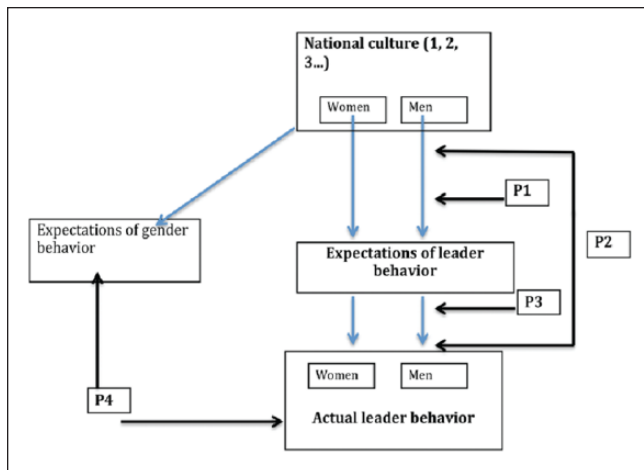
Figure 1. A proposed conceptual model on gender, leadership, and national culture.

Note. P1 = the culture's expectations of leadership behavior vary among women and men; P2 = expectations of leader behavior, deriving from national culture, predict actual leader behavior; P3 = men and women in every culture model their leader behavior in accordance with the genderless expectation of leader behavior; P4 = actual leader conduct, modeled by genderless culture's expectations of leader behavior (not including expectations on gender behavior), can create dissonance in perception.

a leader is "man" or "woman." Just after this categorization, connections with other schemas/nodes are made. However, as the nodes "leader" and "man" are closer schemas than "woman" and "leader," we argue that, implicitly, the perceiver expects different behavior from a male leader than from a female.

Conclusion

In this article, we set out to insert gendered expectations toward leader behavior as a missing link into a cross-cultural leadership construct, emphasizing a follower-centric standpoint and implicit processes. Previous research has confirmed the impact of culture on work environment, leadership perception, leadership style formation, and performance (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). A recent study (Dorfman et al., 2012) suggests that a culture's expectations of leader behavior are the most accurate predictors of leadership style as they have a direct influence on leader conduct. However, women and men in every culture are expected to behave in congruity with their gender role. Hence, leadership studies should take both gender and culture into account. Consistent with this, our findings confirm the need to include both gender and culture into leadership style research, focusing on gendered expectations and implicit processes. We believe that empirical testing of the above outlined propositions would provide much needed data for the business world.

We propose that in every culture there are certain expectations toward male and female leaders. These expectations are

different (we presume the difference level depends on certain values of a particular culture). This finding might provide an explanation of why, in some cases, women are not as successful as men, for example, when they adopt a masculine leadership style.

In our proposed model, we connect the dots in cultural leadership and establish a very important link. We include gendered expectations toward leader behavior in already existing solid knowledge on culture and leadership.

Our ideas and the model proposed in this article might provide a functional basis for advancement in leadership, as well as contributing to gender studies, cross-cultural leadership, and business communication. We have demonstrated the complexity of leadership phenomena and, at the same time, provided some tangible mechanisms to help understand it and enhance leadership practice. Our hypothetical model should be tested empirically in several different countries, to confirm our suggestions. We also feel that the advancement of the model might be connected with leadership effectiveness. This would help to provide answers to the main criticism of leadership studies. This article also highlights the importance of a longitudinal approach in leadership studies. As cultures change, the perception of gender roles and leadership changes as well.

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