

COPING WITH JOB STRESS: A CONCEPTUAL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR COPING MEASURES OF STRESS

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ABSTRACT

Stress is an integral part of all aspects of an individual's life. In the workplace, as in other areas, stress can play a positive role by increasing alertness among staff and mobilizing their adaptive capabilities. To some extent, therefore, a certain level of stress has the potential to actually contribute to organizational effectiveness. However, stress can become unproductive once excessive levels of unresolved issues begin to affect the health and productivity of the workforce. Employers, therefore, have both commercial and moral reasons for being sensitive to the incidence of stress and developing management approaches for controlling it. This paper explores a range of sources of workplace stress and an intervention strategy for managing them. Stress management (SM) is a widely used term with a seemingly obvious meaning. The available literature contains many studies evaluating its effectiveness, but so far it is not clear how many different forms of SM exist and how efficacious they are for which target problem. In general, stress is a daily reality. Some events, such as an important competition or a deadline for a paper, can cause stress that helps motivate us to perform at our best. Unfortunately, stress often becomes a negative presence in our lives. Stress throws us off balance and can have serious health consequences, if left unchecked. Stress management learning will make to handle more challenging situations and significant events in your life. Reports, articles and news stories bombard us about the increased stress in our daily life and warn us of the dangers of long-term stress. Very few may actually know what stress actually is. Stress is our physical, mental, and emotional response to the various demands, changes, and events in our life. In an ideal world, we would have just enough stress to keep us working to our full potential, but not enough to cause overwhelm or excessive anxiety. Too much or too little stress is where we run into problems. It may seem that there's nothing you can do about your stress level. For instance, the bills aren't going to stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day for all your errands, and your career or family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have a lot more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you're in control of your life is the foundation of stress management. This paper discusses various sources of stress, strengths and weaknesses of stresses, and stress management strategy (in terms of prevention, coping up and reduction of work stress).

KEYWORDS: Stress, Increasing Alertness, Adaptive Capabilities

INTRODUCTION

Stress, what is it

During the course of our life, we encounter stress, some in high levels, and some in low. But what exactly is stress? It is the result of placing undue expectations or desire on ourselves, creating images of our self and trying to live up to the image that has been created by others. When we compare the image of ourselves to the reality of ourselves, opposing forces are created, and our mind tries to match the created image with the current situation. Stress can be made worse by other people's expectations, and being human, we always care what others think of us - even though we tell ourselves that we do not. We try to change ourselves so that we can be accepted by other people, regardless of whether or not they care. Negative thoughts about our self image also add to the stress. We remember everything that we have done in life, but more so the negative ones. We re-live those negative moments over and over again in our minds, lowering our self esteem.

Stress is our physical, mental, and emotional response to the various demands, changes, and events in our life. In some cases, stress motivates and encourages us to complete a task we find difficult so that we can take pride in ourselves and what we achieve.

What Happens When you are Stressed

Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make you breathe faster, and give you a burst of energy. This is called the fight-or-flight stress response. But if stress happens too often or lasts too long, it can have bad effects. It can be linked to headaches, an upset stomach, back pain, and trouble sleeping. It can weaken your immune system, making it harder to fight off disease. If you already have a health problem, stress may make it worse. It can make you moody, tense, or depressed. Your relationships may suffer, and you may not do well at work. There may be cultural or social pressure to 'be strong'. Perhaps the employment culture is such that to acknowledge that you are under stress is interpreted as a sign of weakness and could be damaging to your career prospects. Most people experience a significant period of stress or depression during their lives. To feel stressed at various times is to be normal. If you think the stress may be excessive and you need help, and then consult a suitably qualified professional (such as your doctor or a counselor).

The Impact of Excessive Stress on Teamwork is also Harmful, and it can Damage

- Individual work performance
- Team performance
- Working relationships
- Cooperation between team members
- Team spirit



Figure 1

The more effort team members have to expend in managing their own stress, the less they have to contribute to teamwork and mutual support.

How can you Avoid Stress

Although we may not be able to get rid of stress, but you can look for ways to lower it

- **Learn Better Ways to Manage your Time:** You may get more done with less stress if you make a schedule. Think about which things are most important, and do those first.
- **Find Better Ways to Cope:** Be honest about what works and what does not. Think about other things that might work better.
- **Take Good Care of Yourself:** Get plenty of rest. Eat well. Don't smoke. Limit how much alcohol you drink.
- **Try out New Ways of Thinking:** When you find yourself starting to worry, try to stop the thoughts. Work on letting go of things you cannot change. Learn to say "no."
- **Speak Up:** Not being able to talk about your needs and concerns creates stress and can make negative feelings worse. Assertive communication can help you express how you feel in a thoughtful, tactful way.
- **Ask for Help:** People who have a strong network of family and friends manage stress better. Sometimes stress is just too much to handle alone. Talking to a friend or family member may help, but you may also want to see a counsellor

Stress Management - Causes of Stress

Personal Problems that can cause stress include:

- **Your Health,** Stress has been the reason for 50-80% of diseases especially if you have a chronic illness such as heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis, **Insomnia** - The inability to fall asleep, **Hypertension** - High blood pressure, which can lead to lethal complications, **Aging** - Research has proven that people age faster when they experience more stress.
- **Emotional Problems,** such as anger you can't express, depression, grief, guilt, or low self-esteem.
- **Your Relationships,** such as having problems with your relationships or feeling a lack of friendships or support in your life.
- **Major Life Changes,** such as dealing with the death of a parent or spouse, losing your job, getting married,

or moving to a new city.

- **Stress in your Family**, such as having a child, teen, or other family member who is under stress, or being a caregiver to a family member who is elderly or who has health problems. For more information, see the topic Quick Tips: Reducing the Stress of Care giving.
- **Conflicts with your Beliefs and Values.** For example, you may value family life, but you may not be able to spend as much time with your family as you want.
- **Social and Job Issues** that can cause stress include:
- **Your Surroundings.** Living in an area where overcrowding, crime, pollution, or noise is a problem can create chronic stress.
- **Your Job.** Being unhappy with your work or finding your job too demanding can lead to chronic stress.
- **Your Social Situation.** Being poor, feeling lonely, or facing discrimination based on your race, gender, age, or sexual orientation can add stress to your life.

Post-Traumatic Stress

You may be needing help dealing with stress if you have faced a life-threatening or traumatic event such as rape, a natural disaster, or war. These events can cause acute stress disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Symptoms of Stress

Stress is anything that places demands on the body physically, mentally or emotionally. A little bit of stress is normal and it keeps people motivated in their daily lives. However, too much stress can have a negative effect on the body and in personal relationships both at home and in the workplace.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Physical</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleeping problems • Change in appetite • Upset stomach • Headaches • Tension in neck • Trembling/shaking • Rapid heartbeat • Sweaty hands • Craving sweet &/or fatty foods 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Behavioral</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent crying • Increased smoking, alcohol, &/or drug use • Aggressiveness towards others (“snapping”) 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Thoughts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant worry • Negativity • Anticipatory anxiety • Frustration • Self-criticism • Confusion • Visualizing failure • Low self-esteem
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Feelings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear • Sadness • Moodiness 	

Figure 2

Over Time, Stress can Affect your

- **Immune System.** Constant stress can make you more likely to get sick more often. And if you have a chronic illness such as AIDS, stress can make your symptoms worse.
- **Heart.** Stress is linked to high blood pressure, abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia), blood clots, and hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis). It's also linked to coronary artery disease, heart attack, and heart failure.

- **Muscles.** Constant tension from stress can lead to neck, shoulder, and low back pain. Stress may make rheumatoid arthritis worse.
- **Stomach.** If you have stomach problems, such as gastro oesophageal reflux disease (GERD), peptic ulcer disease, irritable bowel syndrome, or ulcerative colitis, stress can make your symptoms worse.
- **Reproductive Organs.** Stress is linked to low fertility, erection problems, and problems during pregnancy, and painful menstrual periods.
- **Lungs.** Stress can make symptoms of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) worse.
- **Skin.** Skin problems such as acne and psoriasis are made worse by stress.

How Stress Affects your Thoughts and Emotions

You May

- Feel cranky and unable to deal with even small problems.
- Feel frustrated, lose your temper more often, and yell at others for no reason.
- increased use of alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes or other drugs (which may suppress feelings of stress)
- Feel jumpy or tired all the time.
- Find it hard to focus on tasks.
- Worry too much about small things.
- Feel that you are missing out on things because you can't act quickly.
- Imagine that bad things are happening or about to happen.

How Stress affects you Depends on Many Things, such as

- Your personality
- What you have learned from your family about responding to stress
- How you think about and handle stress. See:
- Your coping strategies
- Your social support

The Type of Stress Matters

Stress can affect you both instantly (acute stress) and over time (chronic stress)

Acute (Short-Term) Stress is the body's instant response to any situation that seems demanding or dangerous. Your stress level depends on how intense the stress is, how long it lasts, and how you cope with the situation. Most of the time, your body recovers quickly from acute stress for instance job interview, take a test, or run a race

Chronic (Long-Term) Stress is caused by stressful situations or events that last over a long period of time. This

could include having a difficult job or dealing with a chronic disease.

Unhealthy Ways of Coping with Stress

These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

Table 1

Smoking	Using pills or drugs to relax
Drinking too much	Sleeping too much
Overeating or under eating	Procrastinating
Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer	Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities	Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

Healthier Ways to Manage Stress

- If your methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it's helpful to think of the four As:
- Avoiding Stress
- Altering Stress
- Accepting Stress
- Adapting to Stress

Dealing with Stressful Situations: The Four A's

Table 2

Change the Situation	Change your Reaction
Avoid the stressor.	Adapt to the stressor.
Alter the stressor.	Accept the stressor.

AVOID UNNECESSARY STRESS

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- **Learn How to Say "No"** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you're close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a sure-fire recipe for stress.
- **Avoid People who Stress you Out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can't turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.
- **Take Control of your Environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic's got you tense, take a longer but less-travelled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery

shopping online.

- **Avoid Hot-Button Topics** – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion.
- **Pare Down Your To-Do List** – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the "should" and the "musts." Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

ALTER THE SITUATION

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- **Express your Feelings Instead of Bottling Them Up.** If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way.
- **Be Willing to Compromise.** When you ask someone to change their behaviour, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- **Be More Assertive.** Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.
- **Manage your Time Better.** Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you're under.

ADAPT TO THE STRESSOR

If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

- **Reframe Problems.** Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favourite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- **Look at the Big Picture.** Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- **Adjust your Standards.** Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with "good enough."
- **Focus on the Positive.** When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate

in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

Adjusting Your Attitude

How you think can have a profound effect on your emotional and physical well-being. Each time you think a negative thought about yourself, your body reacts as if it were in the throes of a tension-filled situation. If you see good things about yourself, you are more likely to feel good; the reverse is also true. Eliminate words such as "always," "never," "should," and "must." These are telltale marks of self-defeating thoughts.

ACCEPT THE THINGS YOU CAN'T CHANGE

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- **Don't Try to Control the Uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- **Look for the Upside.** As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- **Share your Feelings.** Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- **Learn to Forgive.** Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

MAKE TIME FOR FUN AND RELAXATION

Beyond a take-charge approach and a positive attitude, you can reduce stress in your life by nurturing yourself. If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation, you'll be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

Healthy Ways to Relax and Recharge

Table 3

Go for a walk	Savour a warm cup of coffee or tea
Spend time in nature	Play with a pet
Call a good friend	Work in your garden
Sweat out tension with a good workout	Get a massage
Write in your journal	Curl up with a good book
Take a long bath	Listen to music
Light scented candles	Watch a comedy

Don't get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that you forget to take care of your own needs. Nurturing yourself is a necessity, not a luxury.

- **Set aside Relaxation Time.** Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Connect with Others.** Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.
- **Do Something you Enjoy Every Day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- **Keep your Sense of Humour.** This includes the ability to laugh at you. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

ADOPT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

You can increase your resistance to stress by strengthening your physical health.

- **Exercise Regularly.** Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- **Eat a Healthy Diet.** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- **Reduce Caffeine and Sugar.** The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- **Avoid Alcohol, Cigarettes, and Drugs.** Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- **Get Enough Sleep.** Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

Tips and Techniques on How Employees can Lessen and Relieve Stress in their Busy Lives

With boss to care for, work to grade, and deadlines to meet, employee live very stressful lives. Too much stress and a hectic, busy lifestyle can lead to "burn out." "Burn out" varies from person to person, but the feeling of stress, and life, overcoming you is a major symptom. Employees cannot perform their duties if they are stressed, and "burnt" out. The key to avoid "burn out" is to manage your stress daily so it will not overcome you.

Take a Little Time for Yourself

Don't work through your lunch break, you can simply sit and quietly enjoy your meal, go for a pleasant walk, read a book, or spend a little bit of time on one of your favorite hobbies.

Do Little Meditation

Helps to relieve daily stress. You don't need to go through some elaborate, spiritual ritual, even a few minutes of just sitting peacefully at your desk with your eyes closed is enough meditation to calm your nerves, and help you get through the day. Don't think about work, home, traffic, or anything else that might stress you. Some people find picturing themselves on vacation or a favourite childhood spot a great stress reliever.

Exercise

Another great stress reliever is exercise. As little as ten minutes a day helps your body to relieve stress, calming your mind. Headphones with some calming music really helps to relax you while you walk, jog, or spin on a stationary bicycle. A quick bit of exercise can be squeezed into your day easily. You could park a little further from work and walk the rest of the way.

Writing

Many people also find writing a good stress reliever. You could write aimlessly, creatively, or in anyway you want. Keeping a note pad and pen always around means that you can always be ready to relieve some stress. Reading some of your writing can also calm your nerves, and give you a chance to regroup.

Individual Coping Strategies

Individual coping strategies tend to be more reactive in nature. That is, they tend to be ways of coping with stress that has already occurred. Some individual strategies, such as physical exercises, can be both reactive and proactive, but most are geared towards helping the person who is already suffering from stress. Following are the major individual coping strategies.

Physical Exercise

Physical exercises of different types such as, walking, jogging, swimming, playing etc, are good methods of overcoming stress. Physical exercise helps people to better cope with stress generally as a side effect, such as relaxation, enhanced self-esteem, and simply getting one's mind off work for a while.

Job Enrichment

Through more rational designing of jobs, jobs can be enriched. Improving content factors such as responsibility, recognition, opportunity for achievement and advancement, or improving core job characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback may lead to motivation, feeling sense of responsibility, and utilizing maximum capability at the work. Such a phenomenon helps in reducing stress.

Organizational Role Clarity

People experience stress when they are not clear about what they are expected to do in the organization. This may happen because either there is ambiguity in the role or there is role conflict. Such a situation can be overcome by defining role more clearly. Role analysis technique helps both managers and employees to analyze what the job entails and what the expectations are.

Career Planning and Counseling

Career planning and counseling helps the employees to obtain professional advice regarding career paths that would help them to achieve personal goals. It also makes them aware of what additional qualifications, training, and skills they should acquire for career advancement. A variety of career counseling programmes can be adopted:

- Devices designed to aid the individuals in self-assessment and increased self-Understanding;
- Devices designed to communicate opportunities available to individuals;
- Career counseling through interviews by managers, counseling professionals and Personnel and educational specialists;
- Workshops and educational activities designed to assist the individuals in goal setting and establishing action plan for change;
- Educational and experimental programmes to prepare individual with skills and knowledge for new activities and new career;
- Programmes for enhancing the individuals' opportunities to make job and career changes. Various career planning and counseling programmes for individuals go a long way in providing them satisfaction and reducing the stress.

Stress Control Workshops and Employee Assistance Programmes:

The organization can hold periodical workshops for control and reduction of stress. Such workshops may help individuals to learn the dynamics of stress and methods of overcoming their ill effects. Similarly, the organization can make arrangement for assisting individuals in overcoming their personal and family problems. This arrangement may include managing personal finance, dealing with family problems, dealing with health problems, and dealing with other kind of personal and family stresses.

Stress Management is an important part of daily living for everyone. We all need stress in order to survive. Teams need it to perform well, and in the right doses, it can be very healthy, or even enjoyable.

However, when stress becomes excessive it can be very damaging. It can harm:

- Health
- Happiness
- Work Performance
- Team Spirit and co-operation
- Relationships
- Personal development

Stress Management Involves, at the Simplest Level

- Recognising the symptoms of stress

- Identifying the causes
- Taking action to address the causes and thereby reduce the symptoms
- Where necessary, taking interim steps to relieve the symptoms until the underlying causes have been addressed.

With the pressure of modern life, it is easy to fall into the trap of neglecting steps 2 and 3. That is, only relieving the symptoms. It is important to recognise and address the underlying causes of stress, or else the experience of stress will never go away.

For example, suppose 'overwork' is causing stress, which is resulting in headaches. If you only address the symptoms (eg: by taking pain killers to reduce the headaches), the stress remains, and the headaches will return. However, if you can restructure your work demands so that you are not overworked, the headaches will then disappear without the need for pain killers.

POSITIVE STRESS

Though the word abounds in negative connotations, stress need not always be harmful. Like if you were to win a crore on the popular game show Kaun Banega Crorepati, your epinephrine levels may shoot through the studio roof. But this stress response would purely be one of joy. And prior to winning the jackpot, you might have subjected your body and brain to massive stress by burning the midnight oil cramming knowledge at short notice. But this stress would be extremely motivational in character. Some stress is normal and even useful. Stress can help if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, it can help you win a race or finish an important job on time. Says D.D. Rajdev of Fibcom India: "One has to take stress in a positive way. There has to be some stress in life to motivate you so that you put your best foot forward. But I'm not talking about the kind of stress that breaks one down. There is something like positive stress." "Some amount of stress is good as it drives you. But if it can't be handled beyond a point, it's negative. I personally need some amount of stress. I need the challenge. In lay terms, it means (i) resistance to infectious diseases is not always reduced by stress and in some cases is actually and in some cases (ii) stress can augment a number of immune responses. Possibly, this change may be a natural physiological response that maintains homeostasis and resistance to disease during long-term, adverse situations.

CONCLUSIONS

It may seem that there's nothing you can do about your stress level. The bills aren't going to stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day for all your errands, and your career or family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have a lot more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you're in control of your life is the foundation of stress management. Managing stress is all about taking charge: taking charge of your thoughts, your emotions, your schedule, your environment, and the way you deal with problems. The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with time for work, relationships, relaxation, and fun – plus the resilience to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on.

Key Points

- Most people are motivated to meet realistic deadlines. Activities without deadlines tend to be pushed to the back of the line.

- People will generally do what they can to meet known expectations. By letting your team know what you expect, you greatly improve the odds of getting it.
- When you inspect the work of your team, you build in learning opportunities and demonstrate what is truly important.
- Be careful not to put too much stress on your team. While the right amount of pressure will motivate people, too much often has the opposite effect.
- People strive to make their metrics look good. If you measure the wrong results or put too much emphasis on the numbers, your team will find ways to make the numbers look favourable regardless of actual results.

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