

## Emotional Self-Awareness- a Critical Competency for Managing Excellence: A Human Factor

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**ABSTRACT:** Managers in today's organizations are required to get people moving, to take action, and to energize the workforce in an ever changing and dynamic environment. In this evolving business landscape, organizations are finding that the ways in which they previously managed business are not sufficient in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment. Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals are being challenged to provide the right leadership development strategies and programs to ensure managers are engaging and empowering their workforce with the overarching goal of delivering results that drive organizational performance. Organizations generally recognize the role leadership and emotions play in employee and organization performance. Organizations, seek to validate interventions that are effective in the development of leaders and their emotional awareness. Self-awareness involves having a realistic assessment of one's abilities. People who have this strength are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, open to candid feedback from others, and willing to learn from past experiences. This courage comes from certainty, through self-awareness, about our capabilities, values and goals. Self-aware people have the ability to accurately perceive own emotions and stay aware of them as they happen. Self-awareness has become increasingly popular as a measure for identifying potentially effective leaders, and as a tool for developing effective leadership skills. This study examines in details self- awareness as a critical competency for managerial excellence.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotional Self- Awareness, Competency, Managerial Excellence

### I. INTRODUCTION

Self-awareness is a crucial competency associated with work place emotional intelligence. According to Yeung (2009) the first step to becoming emotionally intelligent is to become as self-aware as possible. Emotional intelligence is a recent construct and was made popular and brought to the domain of business by Goleman (1998), who argues that it could be more effective for the management of business affairs than our cognitive ideas. Ever since Goleman made his celebrated publications, many researchers have emerged in the field. For instance, Freedman and Everret (2004) have observed that emotional intelligence is emerging as a critical factor for sustaining high performance.

Self-awareness consists of emotional abilities that enable us to be more effective and form outstanding relationships in the work place. Self -awareness is the ability for one to recognize his or her emotions and their effects. Studies suggest that people who are aware of their emotions are more effective in their jobs. They recognize and understand their moods, emotions and needs and can perceive and anticipate how their actions affect others. People with great certainty about their feelings manage their lives well and are able to direct their positive feelings towards accomplishing tasks. Self -awareness competencies include emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence. Emotional self-awareness is the first component of self-awareness. This reflects the importance of recognizing one's own feelings and how they affect one's performance. Accurate self-Assessment involves knowing one's inner resources, abilities and limits. People with this competency are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, reflective, learning from experience, open to candid feedback, new perspectives, continuous learning and self-development. Self-confidence involves a strong sense of one's worth and capabilities. According to Goleman, (1998), people with this competence present themselves with self-assurance, have presence, can voice views that are unpopular and go out on a limb for what is right, are decisive, able to make sound decisions under pressures. People with self-confidence typically see themselves as efficacious, able to take on challenges and to master new jobs or skills. They believe themselves to be catalysts, movers and initiators, and feel that their abilities stack up favourably in comparison to others.

The impact of globalization has increased the competition in the business environment. The organizations require a team of managers to run the day to day operations. Identifying the team's abilities and capacity, build them into synergy, and become the consistently high-performing team is the need of today's business world. Today, in 21st century, the business organizations have been transformed into a complex structure with vigorous and increasingly erratic employees and customers. This has forced managers to think seriously of handling and dealing with such organisms and to convert the conventional structure with lively, mutually supporting, interactive and creative environment. To gain and maintain the competitive advantage in the market and industry, organizations need to prepare their employees to adapt and adjust in the changing environments, both externally and internally (Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter, & Buckley, 2003). To achieve this organizations require managers and employees who show competency in self-awareness skills. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to examine the self-awareness as a critical competency for managerial excellence.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Underpinning

#### Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Intelligence Theory

Emotional intelligence is a set of competencies, which direct and control one's feelings towards work and performance at work. These set of competencies are the ability of the individual to control and manage his or her moods and impulses on the job. Knowing one's emotions and feelings as they occur, and tuning one's self to the changed situation, requires the emotional competency, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity that are demanded on the job. In a work situation, performance of the employees depends on working with group of people with different ideas, suggestions, and opinions.

Effective use of emotional intelligence gives better team harmony. (Ashforth et al, 1995) Leaders, in particular, need high emotional intelligence, because they represent the organization to the customers, they interact with the highest number of people within and outside the organization and they set the tone for employee morale. Leaders with high emotional intelligence are able to understand their employee's needs and provide them with constructive feedback. Success in sales requires emotional intelligence ability to understand the customer and provide service to customers. (Murray, 1998). Emotional intelligence in the organization supports in identification of employees emotional intelligence level and its impact on employee performance on the job. This would act as an indicator for promotion of employees in the organization.

Howard Gardner is known for his theory of multiple intelligences in which he proposed that people possess intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence among other types of intelligences. Gardner described intrapersonal intelligence as the ability to access and understand feelings and emotions and use this knowledge to guide and understand behavior (Gardner, 1998). He described interpersonal intelligence as the ability to read and understand other people's moods, temperament, and motives. Using this knowledge to guide communication and decisions is also part of interpersonal intelligence (Hetherington & Parke, 2003).

#### Self-Awareness

Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) mentioned that Self-awareness is knowing one's internal state, preference, resources and intuition. It is not automatic to have the ability to recognize our personal moods and reactions when in the spot light, privately and still be able to remain conscious afterward whether in teams or individually (Goleman et al, 2002). Self-awareness also involves having a realistic assessment of one's abilities. People who have this strength are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, open to candid feedback from others, and willing to learn from past experiences. This courage comes from certainty, through self-awareness, about our capabilities, values and goals as cited by (Fatt, 2002). Self-aware people have the "ability to accurately perceive own emotions and stay aware of them as they happen. This includes keeping on top of how one tends to respond to specific situations and people" as quoted in Cheek and O'Higgins (2011:152).

Self-awareness is way beyond simply having adequate knowledge about ourselves but rather extends to being in position to interpret this knowledge for the purpose of learning more about ourselves (Drette, 2010). Drette (2010) posits that self-awareness is broken down into four levels of Arousal and attention, Sensory and motor, Cognitive and lastly Psychosocial. To them at the arousal and attention, attention to ideas developed or any arousal is either very slow or poor due to our inability to pay attention or respond with close concentration as a result of distractions surrounding us. The sensory and motor stage is where we are able to explain our sense of feeling such as movement, fatigue, satisfaction and even more advanced skills of processing our perceptions due to our developed competence to pay attention, comprehend and memorize. The cognitive stage requires attention, comprehension and memory are key for people in this stage to function and abstract reasoning, conceptualization and problem solving are necessary to comprehend the more abstract nature of these abilities. At this level, the information provided at the lower levels is integrated to form a model that integrates knowledge with skills. Lastly, the psychosocial stage of self-awareness involves constantly recognize the world as it is in relation to our abilities and is the stage where we are able to observe and rate our performances against

other work colleagues. “Self-awareness is enhanced through a good therapeutic alliance, brain education and participation in familiar occupations, with process-focused feedback and compensatory strategy training” (Dirette, 2010: 311).

### III. DIMENSIONS OF SELF- AWARENESS

#### *Emotional Self-Awareness*

McPheat (2010:21) defined emotional self-awareness as the “innate potential to feel, use, communicate, recognize, remember, describe, identify, learn from, manage, understand and explain emotions”. Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) mentioned that to be emotionally self-aware, we ought to recognize our emotions and their effects. Ingram (2013) stated that emotional self-awareness is concerned with the identification and response to the feelings that the presenting issues give rise to. The responsibility to reclaim the role of emotions in social work cannot rest solely at an individual level. It has been noted employees may not feel that there are explicit permissions to explore the emotional content of their practice or exercise the degree of autonomy that is implicit within the construct of emotional intelligence. To make genuine strides forward in this area, the messages and organizational processes communicated from a national level need to allow the aspiration for a more autonomous and emotionally aware workforce to be facilitated. The pressure of workloads and lack of leadership, coupled with an alarming and potentially dangerous practice context, would require the workers to manage and respond to a range of internal and external emotional issues (Ingram, 2013).

The process of analyzing what you are doing, why and how is a good process for knowing self (Burgher and Snyder, 2014). The threats we receive from associating with others, unsettlement over others inappropriate behavior, rating ourselves against colleagues are all to aid our opinion about our emotional awareness (Parrot, 2001). Parrot (2001) further suggests that we look at the feelings we develop in times of public exposure of our flaws, guilt as a result of causing trouble, contradiction of our social identities and so many more.

#### *Accurate Self-Assessment*

Victoroff and Boyatzis (2012) states that, it is very important for us to discover and recognize our strengths and weaknesses if we are to improve our self-awareness. We have to accurately evaluate the impact of our emotions on the people we work with, families, society and even our performance, behavior and general relationships. We ought to do this because in the current world, we are bound to work in teams, relate to people, and live in societies thus the more we know about the impact of our emotions the better for our output and relationships and even of more significant use to team/organization leaders (McPheat, 2010). According to Pickerden (2014), he suggested a constant evaluation of self for strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) which constantly improves our behaviour and makes us better people by the day. He further argued that, for effective self-assessment, there is need for honesty in the process of acknowledging and identifying ones emotional strength and weaknesses. Once emotional weaknesses are identified, they can be turned into opportunities for learning new experiences hence self-improvement and development but this is only possible when one is open to hear feedback from others and even seek more information about themselves so that they can further improve themselves. McPheat (2010) further suggests that, you can use many tools for self-assessment such as seeking feedbacks from your trusted friends, colleagues and family members of what they think about you, answer questionnaires etc. for feedbacks. To be effective, you need to have an open mind and listen more to what others have to say about you in order for you to identify your strengths and weaknesses.

The pursuit for improved self-awareness brings to your notice the way you react to different situations and this can be both in a good and bad way. Therefore when approaching similar situations in the future you do so with a prior knowledge and this then enables us to have even a deeper understanding of ourselves (McPheat, 2010).

#### *Self Confidence*

Most times we are forced to push away our feelings instead of acknowledging and recognizing them and how much they influence us and in what direction because we lack the confidence to do so. Once we develop confidence to constantly evaluate our feelings and their impacts, we are in better position to understand that our weaknesses and strengths do not mean our worth and values (McPheat, 2010) hence, the feeling of being able to accomplish so many things due to the skills, competence and knowledge at our disposal (Thompson, 2014). Improving confidence means developing one's self-esteem and self-belief/Self efficacy hence the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of actions required to manage prospective situations.

What matters in building our self-confidence are mindsets that are open to changes and attitudes that welcome change and versatility are a must to avoid pessimism and rather grow your abilities and welcome feedback as an opportunity to develop instead of as criticism. Perceived capabilities minus our perceived task requirements is what sums confidence as quoted by (Thompson, 2014). Confidence breeds confidence and for this to prosper,

we need to give our confidence a constant attention and action, positivism, constant reaffirmation, I can do it attitude and approach many factors that affect self-confidence very carefully less they affect your confidence negatively (Thompson, 2014). (Thompson, 2014) further states that lack of preparation, fear to take risks, negative thoughts and doubt of personal abilities, feeling of not being good enough, lack of focus on Job at hand and either lack of a game plan or having it and not implementing it are some of the signs of lack of self-confidence while self-confident personalities welcome the opportunity to learn new things, rise up to very challenging tasks, try new things, learn from their own mistakes and seek help whenever they are not sure about things.

Thompson (2014) further mentions that in order to develop your confidence, you ought to explore the different roles in your life such as family roles, work roles and other roles outside family and work and rate them so that you can paint a picture of your self-confidence and point out which areas need immediate attention and which areas are excellent. He further stated that self-evaluation brings to light what could have possibly been suppressed by our constant view of our poor sides which could result from strong criticism from trusted and admired persons, confidence breaking messages heard as children and these help as reframe the negative messages in our lives and focus our concentration on the positives to build our confidence to achieve our desires and goals. Thompson (2014) cited in Hollenbeck and Hall (2004) that confident people use their conceptual skills effectively for finding solutions, aim higher by setting bigger but achievable goals make unique choices in daily activities.

Managers at work place recognize the existence of excessive fear for failure hence avoid taking challenging tasks to protect their weak self-image, perfectionism which takes lots of time to produce a product due to the struggle to be perfect and avoid failure, lack of assertiveness as a result of fear of rejections and denying achievements to avoid recognition are some of the major signs of poor self-image that needs to be abolished or reframed less the organization faces a detrimental blow in its performance (Thompson, 2014). Chefalo (2013) suggests that always maintain a positive mindset by choosing the appropriate channel for getting information, mediating or praying, spending time out with nature, listen to music, seek positive people in your life, ask for help and enjoy every moment of your life and your self-confidence will always be on the positives. Garner (2012) states that today's businesses requires lots of co-operation, equality and respect for diversity and this is only possible if self-esteem is fully developed and so does many aspects of our work.

### ***Emotional Self-Awareness and Managerial Excellence***

It has been argued that understanding one's emotions is the most essential of the emotional intelligence dimensions. Having high self-awareness allows people to know their strengths and weaknesses, values, and motives. People with high self-awareness can accurately measure their own moods, feelings and understand how their moods affect others; are open to feedback from others on how to continuously improve; and are able to make sound decisions despite uncertainties and pressures. They are able to show a sense of humor. According to Goleman (1998), a manager with good self-awareness would recognize factors such as whether he or she was liked, or was exerting the right amount of pressure on organizational members.

According to Yeung, (2009), once we become aware of our emotions, strengths and weaknesses, we can begin to think about how to manage and apply them to help us achieve our goals. Goleman (1998) has argued that self-awareness serves as an inner barometer, gauging whether what we are doing (or about to do) is indeed, worthwhile. Feelings give the essential reading. If there is a discrepancy between action and value, the result will be uneasiness in the form of guilt or shame; deep doubts or nagging second thoughts, queasiness or remorse, and the like, such uneasiness acts as an emotional drag, stirring feelings that can hinder or sabotage our effort. Indeed, Yeung (2009) argued that if emotional intelligence were a journey, then self-awareness would be the skill of map reading. It tells you where you are at the moment, the current mood or emotion you may be experiencing. And it shows you where you want to get to a goal, or perhaps an emotion or mood that may help you to achieve your goal.

Yeung (2009) further argued that successful people are usually no cleverer than we are. What they are better at is self-motivation when they feel despondent. They feel worried and afraid but decide to do it anyway. When they lack confidence, they find ways to summon up courage, they get embarrassed and angry too, but they hide it and get on with the task at hand. The awareness of how our emotions affect what we are doing is the fundamental emotional competence. Emotional awareness starts with the realization of our feelings which is present in all of us and with recognition of how these emotions shape what we see, think and do, and how the awareness will affect those we are dealing with. A person excelling in this competence is aware of his emotion at any given movement – often recognizing how those emotions feel physically. He can articulate those feelings, as well as demonstrate social appropriateness in expressing them. People who are unable to know their feelings are at a tremendous disadvantage. In a sense they are emotionally illiterates, obviously to a realm of reality that is crucial for success in life as a whole, let alone work. (Goleman, 1998).



In a comparison of executives who derailed and those who did well, finding suggests that both groups had weaknesses; the critical difference was that those who did not succeed failed to learn from their mistakes and shortcomings. The unsuccessful executives were far less open to acknowledge their own faults, often rebuffing people who tried to point them out. This resistance meant they could do nothing to change them. In another study of hundreds of managers, from twelve different organizations, accuracy, in self-assessment was a hallmark of superior performance, something poorer performers lacked. It is not that star performers have no limits on their abilities, but that they are aware of their limits, and so they know where they need to improve or they know how to work with someone else who has the strength they lacked (Goleman 1998).

Goleman (1998) described those who lack accurate self-awareness as being blind. Whenever somebody consistently mishandles a given situation, that is a sure sign of a blind spot. In a lower reaches of an organization, such problem can easily be dismissed as “quarks”. But at higher levels these problems are magnified in consequence and visibility, the adverse effects matter not just to the person who has them, but to the group as a whole. In a study of forty two otherwise highly successful executives by Kaplan cited in (Goleman 1998:77), those studied ranged from department heads to CEOs. Finding suggests that those with “blind spots” or those who lacked accurate self-awareness have the under listed characteristics:

- i. **Blind ambition:** Has to win or appear “right” at all costs; competes instead of cooperates; exaggerates his or her own value and contribution; is boastful and arrogant; sees people in black-and-white terms as allies or enemies.
- ii. **Unrealistic goals:** Sets overly ambitions, unattainable goals for the group or organization; is unrealistic about what it takes to get jobs done.
- iii. **Relentless striving:** Compulsively hardworking at the expense of all else in life; runs on empty; is vulnerable to burnout.
- iv. **Drives others:** Pushes other people too hard, burning them out, micromanages and takes over instead of delegating; comes across as abrasive or ruthless and insensitive to the emotional harm to others.
- v. **Power hungry:** Seeks power for his or her own interests, rather than the organization’s, pushes a personal agenda regardless of other perspectives; is exploitative.
- vi. **Insatiable need for recognition:** Addicted to glory; takes credit for others’ efforts and puts blame on them for mistakes; sacrifices follow-through in pursuits of the next victory.
- vii. **Preoccupation with appearances:** Needs to look good at all costs; is overly concerned with public images; craves the material trappings of prestige.
- viii. **Need to seem perfect:** Enraged by or rejects criticism, even if realistic; blames others for his or her failures; cannot admit mistakes or personal weaknesses.

As Goleman (1998), puts it self-confidence is the sine qua non of superior performance – without it, people lack the conviction that is essential for taking on tough challenges. Self-confidence gives us the requisite self-assurance for plunging ahead or stepping in as a leader. For those who lack self-confidence every failure confirms a sense of incompetence. The absence of self-confidence can manifest itself in feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and crippling self-doubt. Extreme self-confidence on the other hand, can look like arrogance, especially if the person lacks social skills. Self-confidence should not be confused with brashness, to have a positive impact, self-confidence must be aligned with reality. For this reason a lack of self-awareness is an obstacle to realistic self-confidence.

In another study, cited by Goleman (1998), it was finding suggests that among supervisors, managers, and executives, high levels of self-confidence set apart the best performers from average ones. Highly self-confident persons seem to exude charisma, inspiring confidence in those around him. Self-confidence gives the strength to make a tough decision or follow a course of action one believes in despite opposition, disagreement, or even explicit disapproval from those in authority. People with self-confidence are decisive without being arrogant or defensive, and they stand by their decisions. In a study by Shipper (2003), the finding suggests that self-awareness of interactive skills may be a critical component to managers’ effectiveness in U.S. and U.K cultures. Self-awareness has been found to be the key to realizing one’s own strengths and weaknesses. According to Boyatzis, (1982), among several hundred managers from twelve different organizations, accurate self-assessment was the hall mark of superior performance. Individuals with the accurate self-awareness competences are aware of their abilities and limitations, seek out feedback and learn from the mistakes, and known where they need to improve and when to work with others who have complementary strengths. Accurate self-assessment was the competence found in virtually every “star performance” in a study of several hundred knowledge workers – computer scientists, auditors and the like, at companies such as AT&T and 3m, on a 360-degree competence assessment, average performers typically over estimate their strengths, whereas star performers rarely do, the stars tended to underestimate their abilities, an indicator of high internal standards, (Goleman, 1998).

The positive impact of the self-confidence competence on performance has been shown in a variety of studies. For example, greater levels of self-confidence lead to higher productivity, (Bandura 1997). Among supervisors, managers, and executives, a high degree of self-confidence distinguishes the best from the average performance (Boyatzis 1982). Among 112 entry-level accountants, those with the highest sense of self efficacy, a form of self-confidence, were rated by their supervisors ten months later as having superior job performance. The level of self-confidence was in fact a stronger predictor of performance than the level of skill or previous training (Saks 1995). In a sixty-year study of more than one thousand high IQ men and women tracked from early childhood to retirement, those who possessed self-confidence during their early years were more successful in their careers (Holahan & Sears, 1995).

Goleman (1998) asserts that leaders who possess a high degree of emotional intelligence tend to be more effective than those who lack them. Their self-awareness elicits the trust and confidence of subordinates. People respect leaders who, because they are self-aware recognize their own limitations and because they are self-regulating consider decisions carefully. Self-aware individuals tend to be more self-confident and to cope with ambiguity and are more open, to change. McClelland (1998) argues that “stars” are talented in competencies across the board.

In a study by Spencer (1997), of more than 300 top-level executives from fifteen global companies, finding suggests that self-confidence, an aspect of self-awareness was among the six emotional competencies that distinguished stars from the average. The Harvard Business Review recently reminded leaders that their excellence begins and ends with their inner resources. Executives who fail to develop self-awareness risk falling into an emotional deadening routine that threatens their true selves. Indeed a reluctance to explore your inner landscapes not only weakens your own motivation but can corrode your ability to inspire others, (Goleman 2001). Several studies have proved that self-awareness a component of emotional intelligence affects an individual’s success in an organization and the overall organizational success. Evidence suggests that emotionally intelligent leadership is a key to creating a working climate that nurtures employees and encourages them to give their best. That enthusiasm, in turn, pays off in improved business performance. This trickle-down effect emerged, for example, in a study of CEOs in U.S.A. Insurance Companies, finding suggests that given comparable size, companies whose CEOs exhibited more EI competencies showed better financial results as measured by both profit and growth (Williams 1994).

Schoo *et al* (2013) further mentioned that continuous improvement of performance and development of one’s ability and competencies is dependent on the previous results of our actions and therefore knowledge of our previous estimations, decisions and interpretations is what helps us take better and improved actions to arrive at even a much better desired result. They further stated that to build and improve our performance, we ought to gain better self-awareness and rate it with colleagues who have stayed longer than us in their jobs, older than us, more experienced than us and learn from their past mistakes. Silvia and Philips (2004) states that the desire to improve and achieve greater desired outputs as a result of self-focused acts enables them to put more efforts in trying until they become perfect in their jobs. It is important to note that as we seek for feedback to enhance our self-awareness, we need to also prepare on how the feedback will impact us and how we will respond to it, especially for supervisors they need to know how to deliver the feedback and consider the age factor in delivering their feedback and so do fellow colleagues (Wang, Burlacu, Truxillo, James and Tayo, 2015).

A study by Atwater and Yammarino (1992) examined whether self-awareness of leaders (using difference scores) would moderate the validities of selection devices to predict leadership performance in a military setting. Their findings indicated that the magnitudes of correlations between predictors and leader Behaviour, as well as between Leader Behaviour and performance, varied as a function of self-awareness. Research which further supports the relationship between self-awareness and leadership, Sosik and Megerian (1999) examined relationships between the variables of self-awareness, transformational leadership, and managerial performance. Self-awareness was measured as part of the construct of EI, using difference scores. The study also extended the research to a non-military population sample, and demonstrated further support for a proposed relationship between self-awareness and leadership effectiveness. The aforementioned research by Atwater and Yammarino (1992) categorized leaders in terms of overestimation and underestimation of their leadership ability, finding that leaders who overestimated their abilities were negatively related to leadership performance.

Building upon the work of Atwater and Yammarino (1992), research by Church (1997) investigated between high-performing and average –performing managers using difference scores and found that high-performing managers were more managerially self-aware compared with average-performing managers. Regardless of the performance criteria, they consistently found that high-performing managers were more accurate in assessing

their workplace behaviours. This study is useful as it demonstrates a strong association between self-awareness and leadership in a manager sample.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Self-awareness entails being in touch with our own emotions and knowing their impacts on our decision making, actions and behaviors and being able to be in charge of them while constantly analyzing how we have been acting so as to maintain our confidence levels at a high level (Baloch *et al* (2014). The more self-aware managers are the more it will impact on their managerial excellence. Managers possessing self-awareness competencies are likely to manage employees better and impact on their performance.

#### Recommendations

- i. Organizations need to invest in training their managers to inculcate in them the skills on how to improve on their self-confidence as this will positively impact on their managerial efficiency.
- ii. Organizations need also to inculcate in managers the competency of emotional awareness. This is because when managers are conscious of their emotions, they will be more efficient in handling employees and clients/ customers' of the organization.
- iii. Organizations should engage experts to coach their managers on imbining competencies of self - awareness. A good perception of awareness of oneself is an key to developing positive self-efficacy crucial for managerial performance.

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