

Graduates' Performance of Business Administration Program at the National University of Laos

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Abstract: *The main purpose of this case study was to investigate the performance of graduates earning a BBA based on human capital principles. The informants of the study were graduates of the BBA program at the National University of Laos from 2007 to 2014. They were from three groups, which were the self-employed, management and operation groups. Twenty-eight informants from organizations, public companies and the private sectors were selected. The data were collected with in-depth and semi-structure interviews, and analyzed based on manual coding.*

The findings:

Three groups of BBA graduates have reported on performance that they still kept learning after gaining direct knowledge from the BBA program as applied to work. They gave priority to product quality and honesty to customers. All groups valued and recognized the importance of internal unity, teamwork, English and focusing on IT, specifically the use of social networks.

Each group differed in several aspects. The self-employed group ran businesses using a family management style but discipline was the core of work. After graduating, they developed new management systems and the knowledge most required was human resource management, marketing, and ethics. The management group was working in higher positions and proud of their achievements. The performances required were leadership and human resource management. The operation group gained experience and chances to meet many people from work, which made them patient. They learned to work under pressure and handle heavy workloads. The problems at work were English and IT skills.

Keywords: Graduates' Performance of Business Administration Program, National University of Laos, Human Capital, Human Resource Development, Attitude, Achievement.

Introduction

All countries normally compete in human resource development and Management. Human capital is the most important resource providing maximum outcome for the advancement of a country. Development of the economy, society and environment always depend on human resource to create human capital.

From the environment, Social-Economic quickly changed, and the world advanced management services that emphasized knowledge; so persons are the main factors pushing the organization to reach the goals. If the organization aims to encourage each person to use skills, knowledge and ability for high advantage, the organization should understand that the

behavior of human resources has differences with other resources. Persons are properties that cannot be touched or absorbed as property. Persons are “Human Capital” which can make “value added” and the Human Capital means Knowledge, Skills, and Ability (KSAs) including the experiences of each person, combined with those to improve the efficiency of the organization or to be the main resources. In addition, more values will make the organization have more ability and advantages than their competitors will.

The National University of Laos (NUOL) is the main Institute to respond to human resources development for society and for country. Therefore, the NUOL development should guarantee two types: the forward of academics type and the qualification type. NUOL development should have forward of academics, firstly, the largely developed syllabus of teaching and learning, and focusing on quantity and quality. The quality of NUOL students, who graduated, should have the special academic knowledge of a foreign language that responds to the need of social economic development. For this successful work, the committees should inspect and reform the process of learning and teaching, because this process is the principal of educational quality. Therefore, enlargement and development on the process of learning and teaching should be the educational quality that could merge regional education and international for the AEC in the end of 2016 (Viphavanth, 2015, p.1).

The main human resource development (HRD) activities are training and education provisions. Higher education institutes play an important role in achieving this goal. Since education is one of the major activities of personal development (Joungtrakul, 2010), the development of higher education institutes and universities affects immensely on national development, because its product is individual development that responds to the labor market and national economic growth. This also is consistent with the philosophy of HRD, as the primary purpose of HRD is the development of the individual, and the primary outcome of HRD is learning and development (Swanson & Holton III, 2009).

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the performance of the graduates earning a Bachelor of Business Administration from the National University of Laos from 2007 to 2014 based on the human capital principles.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study is ***“Which jobs lead to successful careers for graduates of the Business Administration Program at the National University of Laos?”***

However, the researcher has set four specific questions as follows:

1. What was the performance of BBA graduates who were self-employed?
2. What was the performance of BBA graduates who were in management?
3. What was the performance of BBA graduates who were working in operations?
4. What was the perspective of BBA graduates toward the Faculty of Economics and Business Management, National University of Laos?

Literature Review

The researcher has provided some of literature reviews to support the study framework as follows.

Performance Management Concept

Management applies to small and large organizations, profit and not-for-profit enterprises, and manufacturing as well as service industries. However, a given situation may differ considerably among various levels in an organization or various types of enterprises. Performance management maintains, develops and motivates the people at work to give better results. Performance management can focus on performance of the organization, a department, processes to build a product or service, employees, etc. Aguinis (2009, p. 2) defined "performance management" as a continuous process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning their performance with the strategic goals of the organization. Performance management is a useful tool for increasing labor yield, individual performance and reducing general administration costs. According to Armstrong (2006a), performance management can be defined as a systematic process for improving organizational performance by developing the performance of individual and teams. Overall, performance management aims to: (1) Empower, motivate and reward employees to do their best, (2) Focus employees' tasks on the right things and doing them right; align everyone's individual goals to the goals of the organization, (3) Proactively manage and resource performance against agreed accountabilities and objectives, (4) Align individual objectives with team, department and corporate plan, (5) Make individuals clear about what they need to achieve and the expected standards, and how that contributes to overall success of the organization, (6) Provide regular, fair, accurate feedback and coaching to stretch and motivate employees to achieve their best, (7) Maximize the potential of individuals and teams to benefit themselves and organizations. Protopopescu (2013) mentioned that performance based management can be regarded as a proactive system of managing employee performance for driving the individuals and the organizations towards the desired performance and results. It could be concluded that the important components of performance management are attitude, motivation, job satisfaction, and training and development activities.

Human Capital Concept

Dess, Lumpkin & Eisner (2010b, p. 122) human capital is the "individual capabilities, knowledge, skills, and experience of the company's employees and managers". This knowledge is relevant to the task at hand, as well as the capacity to add to this reservoir of knowledge, skills, and experience through learning. Cannon-Cannon-Bowers & Salas, (2014). Knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) are critical to successful job performance. Knowledge refers to the necessary understanding of facts, concepts, relations and underlining foundation of information a trainee needs to perform a task. Skills are those behavioral and cognitive sequences and procedures necessary for task performance and Attitude refers to the necessary affective components of the task. Armstrong, M. (2005, P7) it also means engaging in talent management-the process of acquiring and nurturing talent, wherever it is and wherever it is needed, by using a number of interdependent HRM policies and practices in the fields of resourcing, learning and development, performance management and succession planning. Kwon, Dae-Bong. (2009, p. 4) considering that experience can be included as a category of knowledge, the human capital is a synonym of knowledge embedded in individuals.

Human Capital: The Foundation of intellectual Capital.

Dess, Lumpkin, Eisner. (2010b, p. 123) organizations must recruit talented people-employees at all levels with the proper sets of skills and capabilities coupled with the right values and attitudes. Such skills and attitudes must be continually developed, strengthened, and reinforced, and each employee must be motivated and her efforts focused on the organization's goals and objectives.

The rise to prominence of knowledge workers as a vital source of competitive advantage is changing the balance of power in today's organization. Knowledge workers place professional development and personal enrichment (financial and otherwise) above company loyalty. Attracting, recruiting, and hiring the "best and the brightest," is a critical first step in the process of building intellectual capital.

Hiring is only the first of three processes in which all successful organizations must engage to build and leverage their human capital. Firms must also *develop* employees to fulfill their full potential to maximize their joint contributions. Finally, the first two processes are for naught if firms can't provide the working environment and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to *retain* their best and brightest.

The Concept of Human Capital

Human capital can be considered at two levels. At the macro level it is regarded as "a key factor of production in the economy wide production function" (Son, 2010, p. 2). At the micro level it is considered "the component of education that contributes to an individual's productivity and earnings while being an important component of firm production" (Son, 2010, p. 2). Thus human capital can be referred to "the ability and efficiency of people to transform raw materials and capital into goods and services, and the consensus is that these skills can be learned through the education system (Son, 2010, p. 2). According to Davenport (1999) it comprises: (1) ability which include knowledge, skills and talent; (2) behavior which is observable ways of acting that contribute to the accomplishment of work; (3) effort which is the conscious application of mental and physical resources toward a particular end; and (4) time which is referred to the chronological element of human capital investment. It can be seen as other perspectives of human resource development that focus on the measurement of the investment in human resource development.

Research Design

The research design for this study is a qualitative study using a case study as research strategy. The researcher conducted the qualitative method research based on the results of the prior pilot study.

Data Collection

The researcher has collected the data by using in-depth and semi-structured interview, interviewing 28 participants who were former graduates from the BBA program (Bachelor of Business Administration) at the National University of Laos.

Table 4.1 Demographics of the Participants

No.	Gender	Age	Education Degree	Marital Status	Job Position	Experience (Years)
1	Male	51	Bachelor	Married	President	32
2	Male	40	Master	Married	Deputy Director	24
3	Female	26	Bachelor	Married	Accounting	6
4	Male	27	Bachelor	Single	Cashier	4
5	Male	26	Bachelor	Single	HR Officer	5
6	Female	26	Bachelor	Single	Sales Representative	4
7	Male	25	Bachelor	Married	Director	3
8	Female	45	Master	Married	Director	23
9	Female	27	Bachelor	Single	Credit Control	4
10	Male	26	Bachelor	Single	Cashier	5
11	Male	53	Bachelor	Married	Manager	25
12	Male	29	Bachelor	Married	Deputy Director	6
13	Male	49	Master	Married	Deputy Chief	23
14	Male	30	Bachelor	Married	Jewelry Shop Owner	17
15	Female	26	Bachelor	Single	Purchasing	2
16	Female	39	Bachelor	Married	Manager	16
17	Female	26	Bachelor	Married	Finance	4
18	Female	35	Bachelor	Married	Secretary	8
19	Male	34	Bachelor	Single	Debt Claim	12
20	Female	42	Bachelor	Married	Head of Unit	19
21	Male	28	Bachelor	Single	Head of Department	4
22	Male	48	Bachelor	Married	Manager	48
23	Male	27	Bachelor	Single	Floating Restaurant Owner	4
24	Male	42	Bachelor	Married	Director	18
25	Male	41	Bachelor	Married	Deputy Chief	20
26	Male	48	Master	Married	Deputy of Department	26
27	Male	36	Bachelor	Married	Head of Unit	11
28	Male	27	Bachelor	Married	Deputy Director	4

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis employed in this study started with the coding the coding was done manually since the data were a small scale according to Saldana (2009) The coding was done in three cycle, first cycle coding, second cycle coding and third cycle coding. The first cycle coding method was used to extract the data from the interview transcripts, the coding and formatting made it more convenient and easier to revise. A number was assigned for each line to allow a preliminary analysis of the data. The researcher used a pencil portrait of Initial Coding, devised by Charmaz (2006), then the researcher has read and re-read the raw

data. Next, the researcher began to categorize in the second cycle coding analysis, which are now presented in more detail. For the second cycle coding method the researcher began with manual coding line by line. Then, classified and grouped the open codes. In order to clarify the second round coding correctly the researcher consulted a qualitative research expert on this matter. The third cycle coding method helped categorizing categories, and then the researcher displayed and made reduction again. Finally, after withdrawing and making a conclusion as Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested there were only eight main categories as: (1) Prosperity in life after Graduating with a BBA, (2) BBA as a Foundation Work in Progress, (3) Working Process Development, (4) Attitude Development, (5) Motivation, (6) Human Capital in the BBA field, (7) Looking back at the Business Administration Program and (8) Preparation for AEC.

Trustworthiness

In order to establish academic rigor, the reliability of the data (Dependability), the interview guide was first reviewed by my advisor and co advisor to verify the accuracy of the desired objectives. Second, it was validated and reviewed by examination committee. In addition, a pilot study was conducted to determine whether the questions were valid, understandable and answerable. All suggested alterations and changes were made, and the final guide was used in all the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the interviews, a formal application was submitted, and approved by ethic research committee, for maintaining privacy and the protection of research data. This study was based on voluntary participation among the target population, but they were encouraged to take part in the study by explaining to them the benefits of the study.

Discussion

Response to research question one

1. What was the performance of BBA graduates who were self-employed?

In responding to this research question, the performance of the graduates was integrated to answer the question. The findings for the self-employed participants in Laos are as below:

Self-employment is most frequently identified with someone running a business. The respondents represented mainly such sectors as agriculture, microfinance, international school, import-export, jewelry, restaurant, labor supply and construction. Most of the former students who were self-employed persons had similar comments on several topics. The respondents claimed that they entered into cooperation with a particular enterprise because of business ideas and visions including business expansions and business developments from the BBA program. They applied and integrated their knowledge from theories and practical experiences. Overall their businesses grew very well. The important and necessary knowledge that they usually used was Human Resource Management, Marketing, Business Ethics, Psychology, English speaking skills, Accounting and Finance. Moreover, human relationships and work discipline are major topics that needed for work. This is because most of entrepreneurs have the concept that "Discipline is the Core of Work". Team work is supposed to encourage a friendly atmosphere where members are motivated to make an extra effort and support each other which leads to happiness, capacity building, internal

unity and helping each other when someone has a problem or is sick. Some participants were also influenced by demotivating factors, which reduced their relative participation and commitment. In the long-term, this situation may affect work motivation, satisfaction and lead to decreased personal work performance. When many people work together, the output is team perfection, which increases the potentiality and productivity of the organization (Limkriengkrai, 2011).

Most of them have pride in their business achievements. The self-employed most often emphasized the internal unity of the organization that creates a good working atmosphere and environment for employees that is like family. Most were family businesses. Furthermore, entrepreneurs gave precedence to customers, for example "The customer is God." The self-employed respondents were predominantly of the opinion that service must be honest, fair, and trustworthy to customers and society.

Two of them had struggled with their businesses before be successful. After graduation, they expanded and developed new management systems. The other four participants built up new businesses after they graduated with a BBA. They were confident in their ability plus their capital funding. The other two participants had had sales experience since they were young and were studying. These participants are important for society and the nation. They are part of the national economic development and build the reputation of the country.

This is also confirmed by the study of Chlosta, S. et al. (2012). Growing up in an entrepreneurial family offers the opportunity to learn from the self-employed parent serving as a role model and getting a realistic job preview of self-employment. Their research shows not only that the presence of a parental role model increases the likelihood that individuals become self-employed but that the influence of role models also depends on the individual's openness. Moreover, many researchers have found that early exposure to parental role models in the family business will affect the children's attitude towards becoming self-employed themselves (Carr and Sequeira 2007) and that growing up in a family with self-employed family members may lead to a general business attitude of the children (Dunn and Holtz-Eakin 2000). Finally, graduates who came from entrepreneurial families can benefit in accessing the family business.

These self-employed Lao BBA graduates have similar guidelines to Ukrainians. In the Ukraine, the government supports youth enterprises in order to encourage students to accumulate and leverage entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to increase self-employment and new venture creations (Solesvik, et al, 2012). Many young people face the following barriers to self-employment and business creation: poor self-confidence, experience and knowledge deficiencies relating to entrepreneurial behavior, and finance shortages. Laos' robust economic growth is a result of its exposure to global markets, AEC members and increased foreign investments. Since the major economic reforms, the economy of Lao PDR has expanded remarkably. The wealthiest provinces of Vientiane and Vientiane province are larger than the poorest provinces of Huanphanh, Luangnamtha, and Phongsaly in the northern region. Laos' government supports graduates to be business owners but this policy still in a tiny group.

Response to research question two

2. What was the performance of BBA graduates who were in management?

The findings for the management group in organizations and companies in Vientiane from the participants are as below:

The most positive opinions regard their current and past situations. Eight participants of this group were promoted to higher positions and were trusted by government and executives of organizations. They used the knowledge from the BBA program to integrate their responsibilities and duties. The important and necessary knowledge used regularly was leadership, human resource management, financial analysis, marketing, accounting, management information system and English, respectively. Most were positioned in direct businesses and responded according to their abilities and skills. These emphasized management systems with transparency, justice and dedication to work. Further, management has to learn constantly. The importance was to learn and deeply understand government political policy to bring organizations and all staff to meet the policies. The very important issue that management has to focus on is internal unity, such as taking care of each other when sick or special needs in either their line or their families that will make a warm working atmosphere. Most of them take pride in their assignments. This resulted in caring about customers, honest customer service, justice and paying attention to customers like God. The majority of the respondents wanted to continue functioning within the framework of their employment and keep developing their organizations. The reason is that management is a significant person of the company, organization, or investor that directly controls the company. Another role is the company or organization representative for the highest benefits.

Previous research has confirmed that authentic leadership is related to follower performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic leadership relates to group performance and group organizational citizenship behavior through the mechanisms of group trust, group positive psychological capital and teamwork (Hannah, Walumbwa and Fry, 2011).

Human Capital factors are another interesting topic for management. The study showed that the caring of management to their staff is one reason for a good workplace environment. Grdinovac and Yancey (2012) proposed that employees of organizations that used more caring adaptations and fewer uncaring adaptations will have greater affective and normative organizational commitment than the employees of organizations that use fewer caring adaptations and more uncaring adaptations. The result revealed that all groups of participants were full of leadership in their duty. This result relates to the study of Bhatti, et al (2012, p.192). Bhatti mentioned that leadership is a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organization goals. This is a process whereby one person exerts social influence over other members of the group, a process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group of individuals in an effort towards goal achievement in given situations, and a relational concept involving both the influencing agent and the person being influenced. This finding correspondent to Crook TR. et. al (2011). They noted that the management's job is viewed as guiding workers to choose the best paths to reach their goals, as well as the organizational goals. The theory argues that leaders will have to engage in different types of leadership behavior depending on the nature and the demands of a particular situation. It is the leader's job to assist followers in attaining goals and to provide the direction and support needed to ensure that their goals are compatible with the organization's goals

This result also revealed that management who pay close attention to their staff, give advice and return feedback to their staff have better organization management. Sommer and Kulkarni (2012) suggested that employees whose supervisors used constructive feedback had greater job satisfaction. Research also suggests that managers can also improve employee satisfaction by providing a good learning environment for employees (Alonderiene, 2010).

The previous studies have shown that job performance was influenced significantly by job satisfaction. A number of studies found that job satisfaction also had a significant impact on organizational commitment (Qureshi et al. 2011; Malik et al. 2010).

Response to research question three

3. What was the performance of BBA graduates who were working in operations?

The findings for the operation group in organizations and companies in Vientiane from the participants are as below:

These participants did not have much work experience or work related training. Seven of them worked in the direct business line after they graduated. They used most of the BBA knowledge for their work responsibilities, such as human resource management, psychology, English, information technology, financial, accounting, organizational behavior, and banking. In answering the question about the respondent's plans – whether he/she will continue the current employment – most of them liked their jobs. Some of them were rotated for several duties in their organization. However, some of them were looking for new jobs because of work pressure, and related work. They continuously learned more knowledge, were dedicated to work and willingly serviced customers. The work atmospheres were good with unity. However, sometimes they had unpleasant atmospheres such as hard work, work overload and limited chances for discussions. They needed talking skills and good personalities that respected other people, etc. These participants were in the operation group but they were people who inherited businesses or future management. Most operational participants agreed that they needed to be good at English, IT, finance and accounting to be confident looking for jobs and useful at work. They all understood their abilities and interests in order to find an appropriate way to build on their strengths and develop areas of weakness. They seemed to be highly motivated and their aim for learning English was for a better future, a better job and a higher salary. These participants found that work was different from the learning they did during university. Further, when faced with a stressful novel task, participants tended to engage in the more effective task-focused coping.

All the participants showed a good family organization style and caring workplace environments. This result is similar to Fu and Deshpande (2014) that a caring climate had a significant direct impact on job satisfaction, organizational command, and job performance. This is consistent with the findings of Meeusen et al. (2011) and Jamal. (2011). They found that work climate characteristics had statistically significant correlations to job satisfaction, such as making employees feel an important part of the organization's mission statement and providing sufficient opportunities to learn and to grow. Jamal. (2011) reported that organizational commitment has a significant impact on performance and it moderates the relationship between overall job stress and job performance in Malaysia and Pakistan.

Response to research question four

4. What were the perspectives of the BBA graduates toward the Faculty of Business Management, National University of Laos?

The findings for the former BBA students' perspectives towards the performance of the graduates who were working at organizations and companies in Vientiane Capital from the three groups of participants are as below:

All the former BBA students had similar agreements on several topics. They agreed that the BBA was a good program at an international standard, accepted by society and popular for both children and their parents. The BBA program contained many subjects with good details but mostly in theory not many practices. For the BBA program lecturers,

the participants agreed that they were good at devoting themselves to work even though they could not avoid some lecturers that missed classes or did not prepare lectures good enough and no cooperation between external organizations for internship students. They also commented about the BBA Program that should add English and IT knowledge since the current situation is online social life and the AEC era needs strong English as addition skills from academic ability. About student behavior, they found some students did not concentrate on studying, missed classes or were late. Another comment about the BBA program was the library. The library had good service but the textbooks were not up-to-date and there was not much variety. The internet system was a very important tool too. Another perspective is the FBM should focus and develop a better BBA program including support for advantage activities and collaborate with external organizations for internships. If we can develop good people then they will affect society and contribute to sustainable development.

It is clear that HRM plays a significant part in organizational performance. The effectiveness of HRM depends on more than the presence of good HRM practices: the manner and context in which these practices are applied play a vital role (Wright & Nishii, 2006).

Knowledge Attributes and Transformations

Knowledge is the primary strategic resource for organizations in a knowledge-based economy. To create value for oneself and an organization, knowledge must flow through and be embedded in the organization. Knowledge transformation held by individuals into intellectual capital for achieving a competitive advantage. Some of participants in operation group are task readiness, because of little knowledge or un-relevance knowledge to their works and need additional knowledge. After graduating from the BBA program, the participants received a profession and went to work. If they needed, for some reason, more knowledge in some areas, they may continue training or further study. Consequently, these participants, especially the operational group, were more likely to apply more effort, and motivate themselves to obtain the knowledge and experience that was necessary to belong to the organization. This result corresponds to the study of Tho & Trang (2015). They proposed that BBA knowledge and motivation are the factors that affect the transfer of knowledge from business schools to business organizations through in-service training students. However, none of the above-mentioned factors is sufficient for knowledge transfer. Instead, combinations of these factors are performance, leadership, teamwork, equity and work environment, customer service, human resource management, and human capital as Figure 1

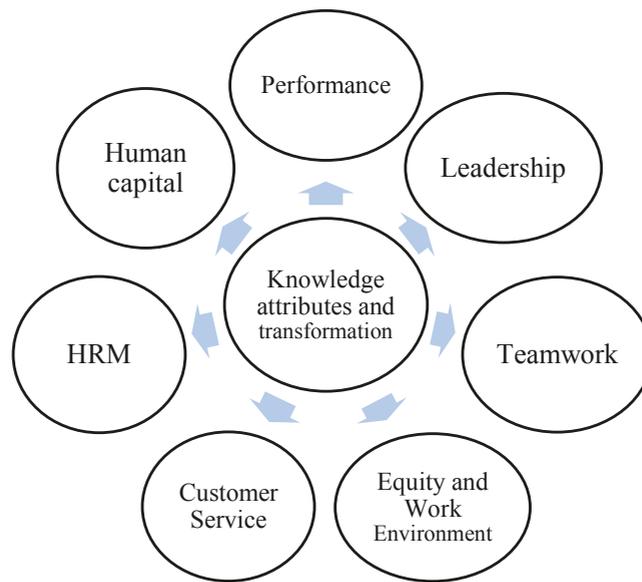


Figure 1 Knowledge Attributes and Transformations
Source Developed by Researcher, 2016

Recommendations

Research Applications

This research could be used as information for the BBA Program to improve and develop program content to meet the requirements of business in current situations to prompt students for innovative business and overseas business investments. The study also recommends that the BBA program should focus on preparing students to solve a range of unforeseen or unknown problems by reinforcing new ways of thinking and acquiring new kinds of knowledge. This study results provide additional information that the program should add more English or set up an international BBA program to develop international standard courses. The other point to review is the instruction methodology of individual instructors. They need to use current information and more technology for classes. If the program could provide computers and other educational aids for students, that would benefit different students from different economic backgrounds. This will assist them to pay more attention to courses and achieve their goals.

Future Research

In carrying out this study, some limitations have been confronted that the participants were restricted to employees and self-employed in small to medium-sized service organizations. With a small sample of BBA graduates from NUOL, this study cannot discuss the overall performance and only two sample respondent was in the government section. Future investigations should be conducted using a quantitative research method to assess the generalizability of these findings by drawing samples from large organization and more samples. For example, a limited sample size did not allow the researcher to collect the data

and compare between small, medium and large business organizations, and the access to particular companies was unequal depending on organizations and participants cooperation.

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