

Implementation of Educational Innovation in Private Greek Primary Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perceptions of teachers, regarding the "benefits" of changes/innovations to students and teachers, resulting in better quality learning and more efficient schools. Its individual objectives are to highlight the obstacles faced by teachers, the reasons for resistance, the position of parents and the wider social environment, the multifaceted role of the school leader as well as the school leadership model he should implement. The methodology used a Structured Electronic Questionnaire of closed type questions and a high degree of reliability. A study of 128 teachers in private primary schools in Attica revealed that innovations benefit students by providing information about health, environmental, cultural, security, and civil protection issues, developing communication skills, and promoting mental health. Teachers benefit from new teaching methods and professional development, while teachers face challenges like increased workload and lack of proper training. School leadership plays a crucial role in encouraging initiative, creativity, and collective work. The most agreed-upon leadership models were educational or didactic and transformational, with positive leadership being the most desired. 83.59% of respondents considered their school a "perpetual learning organization."

Keywords: Innovation, Education, Benefits, Obstacles

1. Introduction

The modern era, the era of the global market, artificial intelligence, socio-economic crises, the digital and internationalized economy bring about the need for changes/innovations in the field of education as well. Education systems are directly affected by these rapid developments and are trying to respond to these conditions [1]. In this context, the introduction of innovations by enhancing skills, are a priority of every modern education policy [2-5].

The main purpose of this paper is to present the results of the empirical research on the views of private primary school teachers in Prefecture of Attica (A, B, C, D, East Attica) and to highlight the importance of implementing innovations in the improvement and

change of the school unit. Also, its aim is to promote the "benefits" of innovations to students (if they develop communication skills, if they promote their mental health, if they entertain them, etc.) and teachers (if they help in their professional development, new teaching methods, etc.), as well as the obstacles that teachers encounter and are inhibiting factors for their non-participation. Also, whether parents support innovative actions in school and whether the local government has an active role in it.

In addition, to emphasize the multidimensional role of the school leader/principal, as well as the model of school leadership that the school leader should follow, in order to better contribute to the implementation of changes/innovations in his school unit.

The results of the research can help in the formulation of modern educational policies, as and Kokkonos et al., mention, promoting innovation in schools should be a creative act for students and teachers [6,7].

1.1. Importance of Research

The continuous socio-economic and technological developments of the 21st century create new conditions, which make changes necessary in educational organizations as well. In this paper we will explain that for the successful introduction and implementation of innovations in schools, the involvement of teachers and the school leader/principal play a very important role, because the principal is the one who will attract the teachers. to activate them to participate and act. It also depends on the school leadership model, the positive climate of cooperation and the appropriate organizational culture that the headmaster will form.

1.2. Literature Review

The school should function as an open social system and interact with the internal (students, teachers, administrative and auxiliary staff, etc.) but also with its external environment (parents, local government, European programs) [8,9]. Due to the changing needs of society, the school implements innovations in order to cope. In the last 15 years, there has been a dynamic introduction and implementation of innovative programs in primary education, which are adapted for each age [3,7,10].

Innovative actions are an important part of the curriculum in primary education and their implementation is considered a key feature for the improvement and change of the school unit [11]. For an innovative program in education to be successful, a prerequisite is the training of human resources. The management of human resources, the provision of incentives, the positive climate and the stable organizational culture that will be created by the school leader, is the key to the success of school a unit [8,12,13].

In the centralized and hierarchically structured educational system, the role of the school leader/director is very important, as is the model of school leadership that will follow [14]. In a school unit, effective administration depends to a large extent on how effective the school leader/principal is [15]. But the school leader should always work with his team, his supporters, structures, institutions, and the social and economic context. This the leader should take seriously for the success of the outcome and effectiveness. To implement a change requires the cooperation of all actors in the school community [16].

Reppa argues that "leadership is a team function, it is the interaction of many people" [8]. Besides, when all members of the school community follow the principal's learning process by implementing innovations, then a positive environment can be created and students respond pleasantly. This certainly contributes to their mental health and well-being [17]. Through innovative actions, students develop empathy, critical thinking, communication skills, and are entertained [18,19]. On the other hand, teachers' involvement in innovative programs contributes

to the development of initiatives, they are informed about new teaching methods (through technology) and learning, teaching tools, as well as their training. Even though changes/innovations bring positive results, they create resistance among teachers, such as fear of the unknown that change will bring, uncertainty, extra work, proper preparation, work stress [13]. At the same time, team collaboration with parents is developing, but also with the wider social environment [19,20].

1.3. The Concepts of Educational Change and Educational Innovation

The literature contains a plethora of definitions of the concepts of "change" and "innovation" in education. According to Fullan, change is defined as any practice, which is seen as something new for the individual, who is trying to cope with an educational problem [21]. Everard, Morris, and Wilson describes the concept of change as a process of interaction, dialogue, feedback, goal modification and reformulation of plans [22].

Morrison considers change as a dynamic and continuous process of development and reorganization [23]. It is a process of transformation, a transition from one situation to another, where individuals, groups, organizations are involved and are introduced by internal or external pressures. Also, change is an educational transformation that is sometimes institutionalized through laws, presidential decrees, ministerial decisions, etc. and other times it simply occurs without necessarily having been institutionalized [8].

Regarding the definition of innovation, Robbins, Zafeiropoulou and Staikos point out that it is a new idea that finds application in the introduction or improvement of a process or service [19,24,25]. Educational innovation is focused on the school, its operation and its progress [25]. It is a decision-making process, in which the executives of an organization decide to adopt a process, a program that is new to that organization [26].

Based on the above definitions regarding the concepts of "change" and "innovation", change is a general term and includes a range of concepts, one of which is innovation. Innovation, on the other hand, is a form of change, it is an idea, a new practice, by an individual or by a group or by an organization, which is applied to the introduction or improvement of a process or a service, in a specific context (spatially and temporally) with specific purposes and objectives) [9].

1.4. Necessity and Benefits of Changes/Innovations in Modern Schools

The implementation of innovative programs in school units brings positive results to students, teachers, and the school unit as a whole. As far as students are concerned, innovation has a positive effect on the development of students' creativity and their active participation. Students gain greater responsibility, self-confidence, develop positive attitudes and behaviors, better manage success or failure, and are entertained [19]. In addition, they develop their communication and social skills, strengthen their basic skills (such

as empathy, critical thinking, love of reading, etc.), improve their performance and have better learning outcomes, cooperate with their classmates, but also with their teachers, are trained in new technologies, enhance their knowledge and gain new experiences. Furthermore, through innovative programs, students are informed about health, environmental, cultural, security, civil protection and career issues [18,19,27].

Teachers, on the other hand, through innovation, acquire a critical attitude, improve teaching and learning methods (through technology), develop initiatives, actively participate in decision-making, reflect and are constantly trained. A climate of cooperation is cultivated and according to Vasiou, Iordanidis, and Nestora, teachers who cooperate with each other, implement innovations, participate in decision-making, have good relationships with their students and high levels of mental resilience to be able to manage various difficult situations [28].

Significant benefits also arise from the school unit, since innovation promotes new values and behaviors, new teaching approaches and means of teaching and learning, and the improvement of relationships between teachers, parents and students is cultivated. The school leader/principal is the one who will contribute to the formation of good relations between school and parents, so that parents support and enhance innovations. Parents, when they do not agree with innovation, discourage their children from actively participating and come into conflict with teachers, making change difficult [19]. Every major innovation that will take place changes the culture of the school, especially when distinctions are made. For example, teacher-teacher relationships with principals tend to change. This change has an impact not only on the school's principal and teachers, but also on students and administrative staff. Therefore, due to change, the relationships between members in the various forms of power, communication, the groups that will be formed, and even the friendship between individuals are necessarily affected [13].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to demonstrate whether the implementation of innovations in schools contributes to higher quality learning and more effective schools. It also aims to investigate the perceptions of private primary education teachers in all Attica Prefecture Directorates, in relation to the "benefits" (to students and teachers) resulting from the implementation of changes/innovations, the difficulties faced by teachers, as well as the reasons for resistance, which constitute inhibiting factors for their non-participation in innovative programs. Additionally, sub-objectives are the views of teachers regarding the position of parents and the wider social environment on innovations in education, the role of school leadership regarding change management, as well as the school leadership model that the school leader should follow in order to better contribute to the implementation of changes/innovations in his school unit.

2.2. Research Questions

In this paper, the main research questions that arise and attempt to be answered are:

- I. How do private teachers perceive the terms educational "change" and educational "innovation"?
- II. What are the difficulties faced by teachers in private schools?
- III. What is the position of parents and the wider social environment regarding innovations in education?
- IV. What is the role of school leadership in change?
- V. Which model of school leadership dominates in private schools?
- VI. Does the private school operate as a "learning organization", which constantly learns and develops through innovative actions?

2.3. Sample Description

A total of 128 private school teachers participated in the survey. Of these, 60.9% are women and 39.1% are men. The age group with the highest incidence rate was observed between 51 and 60 years old, which was equal to 40.6%. Subsequently, 23.4% reported ages between 41 and 50 years old, 15.6% between 31 and 40 years old, 10.9% over 61 years old and 9.4% up to 30 years old. Finally, 28.9% reported a teacher specialty, 14.8% kindergarten teachers and a little more than half or 56.3% another specialty. The highest percentage of choices was observed in the postgraduate program. This percentage was equal to 66.4% and was followed by the certification of proficiency in a foreign language with a percentage equal to 60.9%, annual training with a percentage of 44.5%, ICT knowledge at Level 1 with a percentage of 34.4% and training for the implementation of innovative actions with a percentage of 29.7%. Regarding their experience in private education, 33.59% responded that they had experience between 21 and 30 years. Then 26.56% responded between 11 and 20 years, 22.66% less than 10 years and 17.19% more than 31 years. Finally, it was found that 42.19% belongs to the Athens Primary Education Directorate 4 and then 24.22 to the Eastern Attica Primary Education Directorate. In the remaining cases (Directorate A of Athens, Directorate B of Athens, Directorate C of Athens) the percentages were close to 10%.

2.4. Research Tool

The data collection tool was a questionnaire in electronic format. This consisted of 3 main sections. The first contains 14 main closed-ended questions (5-point Likert [1 = Strongly Agree ... 5 = Strongly Disagree], dichotomous and single-choice scales) and examined the necessity of educational changes and innovations. The second contains 9 main closed-ended questions (5-point Likert [1 = Strongly Agree ... 5 = Strongly Disagree] and dichotomous scales) that examined the role of educational leadership in educational changes. The third section recorded the demographic characteristics of the research participants, such as gender, age and professional experience with the help of 6 questions (single-choice and multiple-choice scales).

The purpose of the questionnaire was to interpret the attitude, perceptions and interaction of teachers regarding innovations in

private primary education. According to the results of the survey, it is expected that it will help to provide appropriate feedback on the actions of all factors and agencies involved in the educational process. This questionnaire was constructed based on previous similar studies and relied heavily on the work of Stamatis [29]. The reliability of the tool was examined using Cronbach's alpha, where values greater than 0.7 indicate a reliable questionnaire. The results of the examination showed that the questionnaire is a reliable research tool in total ($\alpha = 0.965$). Both sub-sections, Necessity of innovation ($\alpha = 0.920$) and School leadership ($\alpha = 0.930$) also showed high alpha values.

2.5. Data Collection

The research was conducted in private schools in the Prefecture of Attica of the Primary Education Directorates (A, B, C, D and East Attica). Approval was given for the research to be conducted by the Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of the Prefecture of Attica. The sample of the research consisted of 128 teachers of private primary education. In compliance with ethics on research the questionnaire was accompanied by an introductory note, which stated the title of the work, the method that would be followed, the purpose of the research, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants for reasons of personal data protection (GDPR), the time period of the research (17/4/2024 - 30/04/2024).

2.6. Data Analysis

Using the statistical program SPSS V29, we processed the results of the survey, and the corresponding conclusions. The findings from the survey were classified in accordance with research questions. A description was made and then the correlations or effects between the variables, which were measured with the questionnaire, were calculated.

3. Results

Based on the results of this survey, it was found that 82.81% of private teachers participate in innovative programs (Health Education, Environmental Education, Cultural Issues, Career Education, Panhellenic Student Artistic Games, European Educational Programs (eTwinning, Erasmus+, etc.). Also, during the current school year, 69.53% of private teachers stated that they participate in such an innovative program. Then, when asked if they have ever broken with their colleagues, in their attempt to convince them not to participate in any change or innovation, 21.09% answered positively. Regarding the reaction of their colleagues to this rupture, according to the results, the most frequent reaction was Argumentation and Democratic debate, less often colleagues reacted with Silence and even less often with Irony, Intense Argument, Disdain and Insult. In addition, with regard to the position of the Director in the implementation of changes and specifically in the question on the one the decision to participate and implement innovative processes was collective, 71.1% answered positively and 86.7% agreed that the Director urges them to take initiatives for such changes/innovations and 73.4% disagreed with the fact that the Director has pressured them

to implement changes and innovations. Also, in cases where they were pressured by their director, this was mainly by imposing change or innovation in 26.2% and then by abuse of power in 19%, by coercion in 18.3% and by offensive behavior in 10.3% of cases.

3.1. Perception of Change

The results of the survey showed that the participants in the survey perceive innovations as an overall action, activity or even integrated program, based on innovative and consequently original ideas, to improve and change in the school reality and then reported the use of new teaching and learning tools.

Change is understood more as a dynamic and continuous process of development and reorganization, which changes the culture of the school, while their next perception was a concept associated with the introduction of new elements (innovations) in education. Teachers then agreed more that innovations promote new methods of teaching and learning (through technology) and agreed to a lesser extent that they help their professional development.

3.2. Difficulties

The main difficulties mentioned are the increase in the workload in the already burdened program, that they require proper preparation and that there is no proper training from the Central Educational Leadership. It was then mentioned that great preparation is needed, that teachers are not provided with incentives, that they reduce free personal time, that there is no training in modern teaching methods and finally work stress. unknown about what the change will bring, the insecurity, the habit one feels about the situation, the incomplete logistical infrastructure, and the lack of resources, were closer to the neutral point of view, showing that they are inhibitory factors, but to a much lower – neutral degree.

Almost all research based on theory has shown that the process of change encounters obstacles and these can be addressed through teacher training, information, encouragement, motivation, participation and support and the school leader himself, who will help them understand the change and the benefits of innovation.

3.3. Stance of Parents

According to the results of the survey, 9 out of 10 participants answered that parents support the implementation of innovative programs. Then 1 in 2 reported that there is cooperation in private schools with parents in the implementation of innovative programs, which means that it is not so certain that there is cooperation and about 9 out of 10 disagreed, that parents discourage their children from participating in innovative school activities due to workload.

Finally, only one third (1/3) agreed that the wider social environment (Local Government) has an active action and contributes to the success of the school's innovative actions.

3.4. Role of School Leadership

According to the results of the survey, there was a greater degree of agreement that leadership encourages and encourages teachers

to take initiatives, that it explains the necessity of implementing changes, and that it creates a climate of creativity and an appropriate positive climate of collective work. He then mentioned that he informs about the existence of changes, that he cultivates interpersonal relationships and cooperation and finally that he understands the interests of teachers and utilizes their abilities.

According to the results, technical and social skills, the promotion of dialogue so that it receives and evaluates negative feedback through a fruitful feedback, the formation of a culture of quality and continuous improvement, the acquisition of active listening skills so that communication becomes productive, administrative and organizational skills, the ability to utilize teaching staff, depending on the skills and interests of each one, the perception and understanding of teachers' needs, combined with the cultivation of empathy as a necessary prerequisite for emotional intelligence, that it constantly helps teachers in their work, that it ensures teachers' commitment to a common vision, but also the insight and flexibility to deal with problems, showed the highest degree of agreement in their average scores.

Similar average scores were found in the statements, Transparency, meritocracy and honesty, organizes in-school training, always supports the work of teachers and Undertakes initiatives and innovations, which he himself leads in their implementation.

3.5. School Leadership Model

The results showed that teachers who participated in the survey agree that their dominant model in their school is educational or instructional leadership and then transformational leadership, followed by administrative leadership, positive leadership and distributed leadership.

In addition, the participating teachers in the survey desire greater implementation of positive leadership with a high degree of agreement and follow by far transformational leadership and distributed leadership. They also call for a lower degree of implementation of educational or teaching leadership and administrative leadership, to better contribute to the implementation and implementation of changes and innovations.

	Current		Desired		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p
-The model of instructional leadership (emphasis is placed on the cognitive/learning orientation of the school)	2,20	0,804	2,42	0,955	0.036
-The model of managerial leadership (identifies the concepts of Leadership and Administration and overemphasizes the structure and bureaucratic character of the school unit)	2,80	0,991	3,21	1,021	<0.001
-The model of transformational leadership (places greater emphasis on the transformation of the whole team so that the school meets the needs of modern society. All parties work together for the common goal, there is interaction between leader and subordinates, faith in a vision prevails)	2,31	1,033	2,01	0,980	0.003
-The distributive leadership model (gives the opportunity to undertake administrative initiatives, existing members who have the ability, skills, knowledge to respond at the level of cooperation)	3,00	0,996	2,08	0,910	<0.001
-The model of positive leadership (focusing on the human being and the refined characteristics of his nature, it is a guiding action that evokes in the followers a psychological reserve of positive emotions, among which perseverance and hope stand out)	2,88	1,077	1,62	0,940	<0.001

Table 1: Current and Desired School Leadership Models

In addition, the leadership model influences the implementation of innovations. More specifically, and according to the results, the model of educational or teaching leadership is correlated with benefits and barriers as well as disagreements. The administrative leadership model has shown that it reduces the number of disagreements but does not affect the benefits or barriers, while

the transformative leadership model has shown that it increases the number of disagreements. Finally, the models of desirable distributed leadership and positive leadership have been shown to increase both the benefits and the barriers to the implementation of innovations.

	Benefits		Obstacles		Disputes	
	Current	Desired	Current	Desired	Current	Desired
-The model of instructional leadership	,361**	,290**	,354**	0,172	0,129	,307**
-The model of managerial leadership	-0,149	-0,067	0,044	-0,024	-,280**	0,061
-The model of transformational leadership	,345**	,344**	0,071	0,140	,339**	0,151
-The distributive leadership model	0,031	,270**	0,026	,257**	-0,066	0,112
-The model of positive leadership	0,033	,296**	0,073	,233**	0,092	,178*

Table 2: Leadership Impact on Benefits, Obstacles and Disputes

According to the results of the survey, the model of leadership that prevails in the schools examined is educational or instructional leadership and then transformational leadership. However, the teachers participating in the survey want greater implementation of positive leadership with a high degree of agreement and follow by far transformative leadership and distributed leadership. the way in which the school leader explains the necessity of a change/innovation to them. They want a leader who cares about the well-being of teachers, based on theory and that is why they chose positive leadership.

3.6. Perpetual Learning

The results of the survey showed that 83.59%, i.e. just over 8 out of 10 respondents, agree that the school in which they work is a "learning organization". Indeed, the private schools of the surveyed teachers are "learning organizations", which are constantly learning and developing through innovative actions.

4. Discussion

The implementation of innovations in school units is a necessity for schools to be able to meet the demands of the modern era [30,31]. The introduction of change/innovation in a school unit runs into obstacles and based on research, teachers, even in private schools, react due to an increase in the workload in the already burdened schedule they have and that innovative programs require proper preparation. Teachers must be given incentives, such as (to supplement their teaching hours with innovative programs, in order to get involved, because they participate voluntarily, resulting in their non-participation.

Nevertheless, private schools, based on the results of research, function as "learning organizations". "Learning organizations" based on the theoretical framework, improving learning outcomes and the quality of educational work. Schools should be learning organizations, where they constantly learn and create, innovate. This, however, requires the cooperation and support of all members of the school community (students, teachers, principals, administrative staff, parents, local community). Creativity and innovations are considered necessary to be part of the curriculum. Teachers must be creative and innovative, for the benefit not only of themselves, but also of their students and the school unit. It is necessary, however, to be encouraged and motivated by school leadership [13,32,33].

In addition, the school leader/principal, as confirmed by the research, in order to achieve a change/innovation, must possess knowledge, communication, technical and social skills, have a vision, encourage innovation, promote dialogue, manage time properly (program development), convey values, ethics and high expectations to its members [13,34]. Furthermore, its role is decisive, because it is the one that will implement the appropriate school leadership model, which, as the research found, the leadership model that prevails in private primary schools, is the model of educational or teaching leadership and transformational leadership, while the desired model of school leadership, according to the participants in the survey, It is the model of positive leadership and they follow the models of transformative and distributed leadership Reppa and Reppa argue that positive leadership focuses on the human being and the refined characteristics of his nature [34]. Positivity dominates this model (joy, pleasure, peace, gratitude, love, self-esteem, determination, prudence, altruism, kindness, responsibility, etc.). A positive school leader has active listening, hope, patience, is enjoyable, inspires, rewards, shapes a positive school climate and culture, creates positive relationships with its members, and promotes creativity and innovation. Mental empowerment in the workplace is the key to success. According to, the positive leader is interested in teachers' well-being (valuing their work, facilitating their professional development, etc.), which affects students' well-being and performance [35].

Therefore, those responsible for making modern educational policy, based on the theoretical framework, should take seriously the well-being of teachers, which derives only through a positive environment, which ultimately has an impact on the psyche and learning outcomes of the students and consequently on the school unit, as and Staikos emphasize [19]. In addition, we should leverage the data of the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, with the aim of promoting mental health, well-being and building mental resilience of school community members (implementation of mental health improvement programs).

When you have happy teachers, then this also has an impact on the mental well-being of students, because a positive environment is created, in which according to Ariyani, Suyatno*, and Muhammad, students respond pleasantly, and this certainly contributes to their mental health and entertainment and better communication [17]. In fact, when teachers implement innovations, they collaborate with

their colleagues [36]. If they participate in decision-making and have good relationships with their students, then they also have higher levels of mental resilience, i.e. they can cope with difficult situations and manage a change better. It seems that a good school climate cultivates positive relationships, collaborations, participation and innovation strengthens teachers mentally [35,36].

In conclusion, the positive leadership model, according to research studies, contributes better to the implementation and implementation of changes/innovations in school units, because to transform a school unit, you must first convince your members of the necessity of change/innovation. And only a positive school leader can do this [34]. However, the school is an open social system, so the introduction of changes/innovations is inevitable and a key role for its implementation is played by the school leadership, always in cooperation with the teachers [8,31,36-38]. The school leader/principal should also act as a "counseling implementer" to its members, but also to manage changes and conflicts [39].

5. Conclusions

Innovations in school units are crucial for meeting the demands of the modern era. However, the introduction of change often faces obstacles, as teachers may react to increased workloads and lack proper preparation for innovative programs. To overcome these challenges, schools should function as "learning organizations" that constantly learn and innovate. Creativity and innovation are essential for the benefit of students and the school unit. School leadership plays a crucial role in implementing the appropriate school leadership model, which can be positive or transformative.

Positive leadership focuses on the human being and their refined characteristics, with positivity dominating this model. A positive school leader has active listening, hope, patience, inspires, rewards, shapes a positive school climate and culture, creates positive relationships with members, and promotes creativity and innovation. Mental empowerment in the workplace is key to success, and those responsible for making modern educational policy should take the well-being of teachers seriously.

A positive school climate also impacts the mental well-being of students, as happy teachers contribute to better communication and mental health. Teachers who implement innovations collaborate with colleagues and have good relationships with their students, leading to higher levels of mental resilience. A good school climate cultivates positive relationships, collaborations, participation, and innovation, strengthening teachers mentally.

In conclusion, the positive leadership model contributes better to the implementation of changes/innovations in school units. To transform a school unit, a positive school leader is necessary, and the school leader/principal should act as a counselor implementer to its members while managing changes and conflicts.

5.1. Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research and Study

The most important limitation of the research was the sampling methods. As is known, convenience sampling is prone to several forms of biases. This fact does not allow the safe generalization of study results. Therefore, a more detailed sampling method should be used in future study.

The research would be useful to continue in the private Secondary Education schools of Attica Prefecture in all Directorates, but also Pan-Hellenic and Pancyprian (for Primary and Secondary Education), in order to have a larger sample of schools and participants and to form a more complete picture of the changes/innovations in the field of private education. It would also be important to continue the research in private schools in the Prefecture of Attica by distributing questionnaires to students to see how the students themselves perceive the innovations, whether they operate creatively and constructively, and whether they burden their mental health with workload.

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