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## THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE ON CULTURE AND IDENTITIES: CASE STUDY OF A HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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# THE EFFECTS OF CHANGE ON CULTURE AND IDENTITIES: CASE STUDY OF A HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

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## Abstract

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The primary aim of the research was to identify drivers of change and mergers in higher education. It was then reflected on how changes and mergers impact on cultures and professional academic identities. The case study is based on review of government policies and institutional strategy documents looking towards the future and determining how they are affecting the current situation in the Institution. This was conducted via analysis of interviews and observations at meetings and classes, and via use of discourse analysis of some policy and strategy documents. The interviewees were asked about their views on which factors bring about strategic change from both external and internal drivers and how these drivers impact on their own culture and professional academic identities. They also discussed possible future mergers in higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education Change, Culture, Identities, Case Study, Policy Documents, Narratives

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The principle aim of this research is to understand the effects of higher educational change and mergers on academic and pedagogic cultures and subsequent impacts on professional academic identities. It is not proposed that this case is the 'ideal' example but it is one example of Irish higher education in transition to be more student-focused and flexible for future demands, while in tandem moving to one main campus located at the heart of Dublin.

## 2 HIGHER EDUCATION AND CHANGE

Chandler [1] and Barber, et al., [2] suggest that higher education is no exception to change as traditional boundaries move and education requires adapting to modern technologies, changing demographics and academic interests. However, Chandler [1: 244] purports that higher education change can be slow and is referred to as a 'dinosaur out of touch' with its environs.

Mergers represent one of the most difficult processes of both planned and unplanned change occurring in higher education institutions today, as the HEA has continuously encouraged collaborations and alliances, which have resulted in a number of proposed mergers to form the new Technological Universities (TU). The following sections outline the rationale and relevance of the study reviewing the higher education sector and providing a research question to direct the research.

The higher education system in Ireland is broad in scope and encompasses the university sector, the technological sector, the colleges of education and private, independent colleges. Ireland is a society undergoing major change economically, but also demographically through recent migration and mobility of workers from all over Europe and beyond, especially since accession states joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004. In an economy as open as Ireland's, it is vital that higher education operate to a maximum effectiveness responding to changing societal needs.

The Higher Education Authority (HEA) has recommended that Institutions need to compete globally and changes are being implemented to effect these recommendations as Europe is no longer setting the pace in the global race for knowledge and talent, while emerging economies are rapidly increasing their investment in higher education [3]. Funding has been cut for higher education in Europe, there has been no real improvement in global rankings for European HEI's since the crisis hit in 2008, and there is a threat to its sustainability [4]. In contrast growth in investment in higher education in other countries such as China, South Africa, South Korea, Israel and Finland [5], reflecting a desire by these nations to become important educational hubs and knowledge economies, challenging USA and Europe [6]. It is, therefore, apparent that higher education and the knowledge economy can regenerate struggling nations since the global crises hit.

## 2.1 National Higher Education

Enrolments in higher education in Ireland increased rapidly throughout the whole period 1970-2010 [7] but this was not equalled with increased funding. Therefore the increased financial burden of higher education in Ireland on the exchequer and ultimately the tax payer due to a move from elite to mass education, and subsequently increased access and participation rates on courses across HEI's, has led to increased policies of efficiencies, quality and standards [8]. Institutes of Technology (IoT's) also face the possibility of further downsizing and staff reductions and the inevitable reduction in finances will see cost reduction exercises and the reintroduction of students fees (National Strategy for Higher Education in Ireland to 2030, HEA [9]).

It is apparent from the above that both budgets in higher education and participation rates are conflicting and funding and other supports for increasing student numbers are declining more rapidly than reports suggest. These changes can influence the future socio-cultural environment of higher education. This may suggest that there will be increased competition on a global scale. It is apparent that the reintroduction of fees would change the student profile, the number of students or indeed where students originate (nationally or internationally) in the future. It can be suggested that this may also in turn influence the culture within.

The HEA have set other targets for HEIs including advancing the internationalisation agenda and increasing participation from disadvantaged communities. The target for non-EU fee paying students for 2020 is 15% of the total FTE student population. The current figure in DIT is approximately 3% but would be lower for the DTU alliance. Other measures of internationalisation being used by the HEA are proportion of international staff to domestic staff and the proportion of internationally co-authored research papers. However, despite the increased participation in higher education over recent years there still exists significant inequity of access.

The Institutes of Technology (IoT) Act (1992), followed closely by the Universities Act (1997), led the way towards access and equal opportunities for students by allowing more places on higher education courses and introduction a free fees initiative [10] for higher education students. Following this the Institutes of Technology Act (2006) require institutions to have equality of access policies in place for people from sections of society who are under-represented in higher education. Previous to this the Higher Education Authority Act (1971) required the HEA to promote equality of opportunity in higher education and to review equality policies [10]. The Universities have surpassed the Institutes where access and equal opportunities are concerned. Since 2007, Ireland witnessed a slowdown in the increased participation at higher levels; 2007 saw a 7% increase; 2008 witnessed an 8% increase; but in 2009 this increase was only 1% [11].

In March 2010 the number of CAO applicants of 71,843, indicate a difference of 4,210 or 6.22% increase on 2009. This is also reflected in McGuinness et al.'s [12] report of a 7% increase in 2010/2011 with a further projected year on year increase by 2030. This, together with other government policies, has resulted in what we are witnessing today of the 'massification' of the higher education sector. This would pose the question, is higher education in Ireland at capacity already and can higher education sustain increases in the future?

Countries like Ireland wishing to move towards the knowledge economy are challenged to undertake reforms to raise the quality of education through changes in content and pedagogy. Many forces of change call for a more flexibly managed institution which would involve many change agents within the organisation being management, staff and students alike driving and steering the changes [13]. Some institutions may resist the forces for change although being a learning organisation many of the changes are actually driven from within the institution itself, such as knowledge creation and innovation, pedagogical and staff development.

Clark [14], in his study on entrepreneurial universities described the issue with the neat phrase 'demand overload'. This suggests that the resources and conditions that support HEI's become more and more limited while the services demanded of them and their costs increase [14]. When HEI's do change they change by an institutional version of survival of the fittest or natural selection. Survival is a necessity and all institutions will eventually choose change in order to survive in an economy of growing competitiveness. Kelly [15] purports, however, that the recent 'dumbing down' of education will be detrimental to the survival of the Irish economy in the long run.

## 2.2 Dublin Institute of Technology

Following on from the economic recession, the increased costs of doing business together with the increases in participation year on year, the DIT has witnessed many other changes over the years since its inception in 1992.

Arising from HEA policy documents [9], changes are already transpiring within the DIT as it has already undergone some operational structural changes which have seen the old Faculties merging and creating a four College structure down from seven Colleges. Some of these changes are also as a result of the organizational development of DIT, following on from the DIT Act (1992) [10]. These six colleges were independent of one another pre 1992. Post 1992, and the DIT Act of that year, they became Faculties and Schools under the governing of the Dublin Institute of Technology, with the establishment of a new site central to all colleges, the new seventh College, at Aungier Street.

The current changes within the Institute moving to one main campus within Dublin have also witnessed many hiccups along the way. The Grangegorman Development Act, was established in 2005 [10], but a proposal for a move-in date to the campus in Grangegorman had been postponed under a previous government during the economic recession (c. 2008). However, in July 2010, the same government announced its Government Infrastructure Investment Priorities which outlined that the development of Grangegorman would still go ahead as planned. However, in the budget of 2011/2012 this was put on hold once again. This was re-established at the end of 2012 under a new government and currently there is a staggered move in date, which commenced in September 2014 with the first 1100 students and staff arriving on campus from the School of Art, Design and Printing. This is only one School of the new Colleges and therefore the logistics of multiple sites around the city remain. This calls for further flexibility of delivery to students.

The Grangegorman move has recently started moving in tandem with the Dublin Technological Universities (DTU) initiative (2012 to date) but it has taken many years to strategically plan since its inception in 2005. The Minister for Education and Science signed the order, giving effect to the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 with effect from the 1st September 2007; as a consequence the DIT became a designated institution under the HEA. The reorganisation of DIT was initiated in 2007 as a consultation process on the overall restructuring of DIT. The DTU which has become one of the first alliances arising from the Hunt report [9] is still undergoing negotiations at government and local levels. For a lot of these changes to happen, although there is already an alliance of three institutions, some mergers of Schools, Colleges or indeed Institutes will also have to take place. Under the DTU Act there is mention that this will take place under the brand of DIT to begin with as the move to one campus at Grangegorman goes ahead from September 2014. This has many implications of the influence of change on culture and identities.

## 3 CULTURE AND IDENTITIES

Clark [13] in his analysis of three American colleges referred to cultures as the 'organisational saga' [13] where the beliefs and norms of the organisation are rooted in history, roles and sentiment. Clark [13] had also viewed the culture emanating from colleges as fitting into five main categories. The personnel core, which reflected the employees' subculture, disciplines or identity; the student subculture, the alumni and the campus ideals; the program core, reflecting elements of learning and teaching practices within the institution; the college or educational institution's ideology itself, and the social base, reflecting the society within which the college functioned. Each of Clark's cultures provides elements of excellence, equity and enterprise within the culture or combination of cultures found in higher education. This further supports an earlier Clark-Trow [16] typology of students which provides concepts of student subcultures such as collegial, vocational, academic and non-conformist, some of which have been adopted into institutional cultures themselves, such as collegiate and vocational. Clark [17] further developed a triangle of co-ordination to illustrate how order can emerge from the complexity of higher education systems that encompass many different facets, cultures and forms of authority from the state, market and academia. He referred to these as ideal types [17].

In examining definitions of organizational culture, it is a set of shared values, shared beliefs and customary ways of thinking and doing things, which shape the organisation and its members [18; 13]. Understanding institutional culture leads to a greater awareness of the functioning of an institution, from its mission and vision statements and leadership roles to the subcultures and disciplines, and identities of their staff. Therefore, an examination of the research of an institutions' culture has shown

that culture can help in understanding individual and collective identities and subcultures within the institution.

Academics essentially enter into a cultural institution consisting of the profession as the institution and professional discourse (academic or habitual) within this field. It is constantly changing as the institution travels through time and influenced by what that period brings with it. This then becomes increasingly difficult to sway as policy changes expose higher education to further disruptions and changes to its culture. This also affects the continuity and change of professional academic identities. Fundamentally when attempting to change an institution, the culture of the institution is in flux, the behaviours, beliefs and assumptions of the institution may change, and the personality of the institution will evolve. It is evident from the literature that this is the norm.

It is, therefore, essential to identify and understand the varying, myriad of cultures [19], which may exist within higher education institutions, to develop synergies between them and to avoid conflicts with each varying cultures [20; 21; 22]. It is further evident that culture depends upon shared values, sense of purpose, shared visions and clear mission, which produce norms of behaviour that 'both exemplify and reinforce' those shared values whereby organisations are set apart from others and bind its employee's together within communities of social, professional practice and discipline. However, fragmentation and subcultures exist within the culture of higher education institutions.

As higher education institutions undergo significant changes, academics and their identities drive to adapt and change alongside. Academic professional identities are influenced both prior to entering an institution and what happens during their career, and how they are influenced over time due to student cohorts and institutional cultures [23; 24; 25].

There have been strong pressures placed on academics, communities and institutions not only to change their cultures and structures to enable the changes to occur in relation to policy shifts and the global crisis, but also to review their management of academics duties and roles, and cultures within these institutions. Change inevitably involves loss, anxiety and struggle because it can strike at the core of cultures, professional identities, and disciplines.

The Hunt Report [9] emphasises the need for forward and strategic thinking in relation to the future of higher education in Ireland, and recognised the need for HEI in Ireland to be able to compete on an international scale and also to be able to develop programmes for national innovation. Some of the recommendations arising from the report also indicate structural changes to assist in developing a critical mass in HEI, together with diverse and flexible deliveries for the new learner. There is also a strong emphasis for engagement with society, be it globally or locally, be it the potential student or potential graduate, and the market and industry within which the student will gain employment, to further understand what is required of the new international and national student and graduate [9].

The consequences of the plethora of reports and policies coming from Europe, our national government and also driven within individual institutes, is continuous change in higher education, which some may view as lifelong changes and developments. There is a growing awareness that managing change is of paramount importance and that careful consideration of the cultural landscape in higher education institutions must be measured in order for higher education institutions to survive, grow and develop and be able to compete internationally in education. The changes within the landscape of higher education from global to local level have led to the question directing this research.

#### **4 RESEARCH QUESTION DIRECTING THIS RESEARCH**

The purpose of this section of the chapter is to present the research question and to provide an overview of the main objectives of the study. According to Palmer, Dunford and Akin [26], there are a number of reasons why things change, for example, due to internal environmental issues, fashions and trends, geopolitical issues, market decline pressures, hyper-competition pressures and reputation issues. Palmer et al. [26], suggests that information technology and corporate governance have been the greatest initiators of change since the early 1990's. Furthermore mergers are a more pressing issue for HEI in Ireland since the Hunt report [9]. A merger is seen to mean an amalgamation of two or more separate institutions or units within an institution that 'surrender' their culturally independent identities in favour of a new joint identity under the control of a single governing body [27]. Therefore the main research question directing this study is:

*How is the phenomenon of higher education change in Ireland affecting cultures and professional academic identities in an Institute of Higher Education?*

The Dublin Institute of Technology, the largest Institute of Technology in Ireland, will be used as a case study.

From this a set of research questions emerge:

- 2 What are the drivers of change in the higher education landscape in Ireland?
- 3 What are the drivers for change within the Dublin Institute of Technology?
- 4 What is the culture of the Dublin Institute of Technology, and are the changes outlined influencing this?
- 5 Are the changes also influencing professional academic identities in the Dublin Institute of Technology?

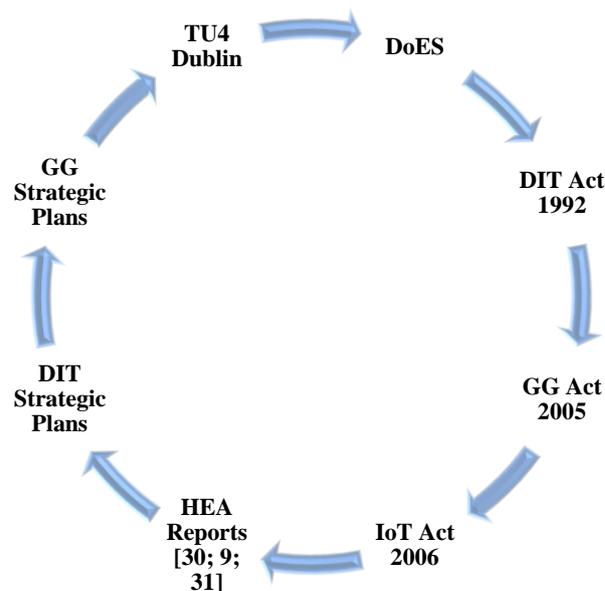
## 5 METHODS

A case study of the DIT as it goes through its transition from traditional multi-site colleges to one main campus in the heart of Dublin's historical inner city is the methodology employed and it is based on interviews, reviewing government policies, institutional strategy documents looking towards the future and determining how they are affecting the current situation in the Institution.

Phase 1 inspects the rationale behind the use of participant observations at meetings to obtain information on documents important to the research [28; 29]. This was to provide answers to the research questions regarding what the drivers of change are in the higher education landscape in Ireland, and within the DIT. It was also to infer, through the policy discourse, concerning what the underlying culture might be in the Institute. Phase 2 examined the use of interviews in order to examine the changes influencing the culture of the DIT through the perceptions of those involved. Moreover, how these changes might be influencing the participants' professional academic identities. Each phase indicates the methods of analysis used, such as CDA of documents and thematic narrative analysis of interviews.

## 6 POLICY DOCUMENTS AND ANALYSIS

Policy documents in higher education in Ireland since the 1970's have emphasised issues of social inclusion, increased participation and knowledge creation and innovation as the norm. More recently HEA policy documents [30; 9], have recommended dramatic structural reform and a system-wide change that would see higher education in Ireland become more competitive with HEI's in Europe and internationally [31]. The following figure illustrates the documents analysed as part of this research:



**Figure 1: Policies Analysed**

These policy decisions alone will have major implications on all three IoTs' culture and identity, but as this is still to be passed through government, the mergers and changes underway will be reviewed as part of this research. It does, however, suggest that the influences of change originate at state and HEA level, and disseminated down to Institute level via policy documents. These are then adapted into the Institute's own strategic plans or policies for implementation. Even though there is evidence that many of the drivers of change are coming from the state, more evidence that is recent suggests that the influence coming from the DRHEA forming the proposed TU for Dublin.

**Table 1: Policy & Documents**

<b>Policy/ Document</b>	<b>DIT Act 1992</b>	<b>DIT Strategy</b>	<b>College Plans</b>	<b>GG</b>	<b>TU4Dublin</b>
<b>Discourse</b>	Amalgamation of Colleges Establishment of DIT Hierarchy and organisational restructuring Students Staffing Knowledge economy Globalisation	Pillars: Learning Research Engagement Student Services People Organisational Development	Same pillars as the strategy Creativity, innovation, flexible, unique, etc.	Restructuring Economic & social development Collegiality Leader vision Staff consultation, participation, involvement	Reflects all of the previous plans plus the McCarthy & Hunt reports which suggest: Collaborations, amalgamations & restructuring of the HE sector.
<b>Who's involved</b>	All the Heads of the independent CDVE Colleges merging at the time, together with student representatives & the government minister from the DoES.	All staff and students within DIT	All staff and students within the respective Colleges	Board representatives appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills	The Steering Group represent the 3 IoTs proposing to merge in Dublin

Communication of the changes are generally conducted via the plans or mission statements but are also conducted via formal communication from the President's office. This in turn further emphasises both the cultural influence from the state and from within the Institute via the leader.

## 7 NARRATIVES

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that all participants had witnessed many types of changes throughout their time in the college, even if they had only started their employment with the Institute. The changes have become more evident and prevalent in recent times since the economic down turn and subsequent budget cuts in higher education. Targeting different levels within the schools provided for a much wider range of responses on each of the topics and within the interview protocol. Each interviewee's contribution to this research is an invaluable insight into the effect of the changes on the culture in the College and their identities.

Within each topic discussed, narratives were used to frame the stories within. The narratives provide a structure for the findings under the research questions and objectives outlined earlier in chapter four. The proposed change initiative comprised what is considered to be a micro-merger but driven from government policies, and so questions ranged from what was happening at national level down to what was affecting staff in their work place and how this was affecting their role, discipline and professional identity. The following table illustrates in part the topics, themes and meta-discourse emerging from the interviews. Further narratives and stories emerged from which the research could be framed.

**Table 2: Topics, themes and meta-discourse**

<b>Topics from the literature</b>	<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Themes for discussion</b>	<b>Meta-discourse</b>
<b>Change and Mergers – HE driving forces PEST</b>	What are the drivers of change in the higher education landscape in Ireland	Questions on change in Higher Education	(P) Policies (named); Reports about consolidation; (E) Economy; Efficiencies; Cut backs. (S) Massification; Overcrowding; New types of students; New generations; (T) New expectations of delivery; Drive for more research
<b>Internal Driving Forces – mergers, resisters, leaders, strategies</b>	What are the drivers for change within the Dublin Institute of Technology	Questions on change in DIT	Mergers - New Institute structures; Engagement with industry; Drive for TU requires more research; Competition from other IoTs requiring a critical mass; Resisters - Lack of resources; No time allocation for research; Leaders & strategies - Leader(ship) are important; Change agents are important; Consultation is important
<b>Cultures, Subcultures &amp; communities</b>	In what way, are changes influencing the culture of the Dublin Institute of Technology?	Questions relating to culture and change	Collegial; Community; Bureaucracy; Hierarchy; Cliques; Silos; Satellites; Independent; Resisters; Suspicious; Lifers; Anarchistic; Power struggles
<b>Identity</b>	In what way, are the changes also influencing professional academic identities in the Dublin Institute of Technology	Questions relating to identity and change	Teacher; Lecturer; Academic; Manager; Admin; Consultant; Researcher; Individual; Loss of identity; Withdraw; Distinct life from here; Overloaded with work so confused; Are we an IoT or a University?; Confusion; Frustration; Embarrassed; Disrespected; Powerless; Separate

## **8 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The main findings indicated that the external policy drivers of change came from the DIT Act (1992) and the Grangegorman Development Act (2005), with further amendments in 2006 [10]. Further to these very specific DIT policies were HEA reports referring to structural and sectoral changes such as collaborations, alliances and mergers [9] due to recommendations of economic efficiencies of the time [30]. These have also resulted in redundancies, early retirements and possible redeployment of existing staff [31] with recommendations of TU4Dublin [9].

The influence from these proposals, especially the proposed merger have been felt internal to DIT with inclusion of words of 'critical mass' and 'future campus' at Grangegorman in internal strategic documents, College plans and currently under review at School levels. The influence and vision of the leaders are important [32; 33], and is evident in internal mission statements endorsing government policies of student participation and resulting in increasing numbers. This has also led to

IT solutions of flexible deliveries but also IT skills required by industry, where the importance of engagement with industry sector stakeholders was paramount.

These changes and mergers certainly influenced the culture of DIT, endorsing Whitchurch and Gordon [25], but most interviewees agreed that they could only speculate what it might become once over in Grangegorman campus either under DTU or under DIT. Currently they emphasised the history and culture of DIT, where independent colleges once merged to become DIT, remain mainly independent of DIT, influencing the myriad patchwork [19] of cultures. Interviewees did, however, remain positive in that it was collegial and student centred with a bureaucratic overtone because of its centralised and hierarchical control (see appendix B), which endorses Clark's [13] saga theory and other research into change in education [14; 16; 17]. Interviewees stated there was a culture of conflict and confusion supporting Becher and Trowler, [20], which is indicative of large organisations of having an organised anarchy endorsing Cohen and March [21; 22].

Understanding of culture was the first step in understanding identity and interviewees spoke with multiple narratives and multiple identities. The experience they had prior to becoming part of DIT, their discipline, the people they gravitate towards in communities of practice or social interaction all influenced who they are. Sometimes they were a 'teacher', an 'academic', a 'researcher' or a specific discipline. This research concurs with Henkel [23] and Flores and Day's [24] research.

However, with the influence of the changes outlined earlier, interviewees expressed their sense of insecurity and loss due to work overload and administration. This sometimes meant that they spent less time in front of students [23], or that they might have lost their discipline, their role, or their identity. This led to a feeling of confusion and isolation where identifying with Institute could no longer happen and therefore they became independent to the Institute. It was also apparent that there were individuals who separated themselves from the Institute in terms of identifying who they were at the outset and they indicated that the changes only endorsed this sense of separation.

## **9 CONCLUSION**

The education sector itself being one of innovation drives change. Drivers also come from Government, the HEA and the industry. These drivers are evident in strategic plans with influences from planners and leaders. This in turn influenced the culture within the Institute. The culture of the Institute itself emanated from its history and its leaders down through the years putting their own 'mark' on the Institute.

The higher education institutions own culture of 'innovation', 'entrepreneurship' or even 'resistance' can drive change. The influence of change on any part of the Institute can also influence the culture. Culture emanates from history, leaders influence, the market place, the disciplines, the professional staff and student bodies. Predominantly in higher education, this forms anarchistic, fragmented yet resilient cultures.

Cultures influence identities and can drive change from within via cultures of innovation, or resistance. The topics and discipline taught and the engagement with industry determines the culture, as do the people within its walls. It is the focus on these people, which is the last section of the diagram. People influence the culture, and the culture of the Institute influence the people.

Professional academic identities of 'innovation', 'entrepreneurship', or even 'resistance', could also influence and drive change. However if the academic identity is fragmented or distanced from the Institute then it may not be as affected. The identity of the professional academic is formed through experiences and future aspirations, by their discipline and by the communities they align themselves to, or not. It evolves over time, as does the culture. These identities can be 'teacher', 'academic', 'management', 'administrator' or a plurality of identities, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in harmony, depending on the individual.

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