

## Evaluation of recreation departments in theory and practice

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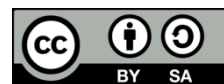
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### ABSTRACT

It is our source and it is irreversible. With industrialization, the time people spend at work has decreased, and their free time has increased. This has led people to look for new ways to spend their free time productively. At this point, graduates of the recreation department will have the opportunity to show the methods that will be useful for people to spend their free time efficiently in line with the education they receive. Since graduates are thought to be employed in organizations that provide leisure time services, the qualifications of graduates are important in this regard. In this study, the expectations of the employers from the graduates and the required qualifications of the graduates were investigated. One issue drawn from the results is that although each branch has specific expectations, all graduates must have certain qualifications, such as communication and constructive language skills.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of time indicates an uninterrupted process. Time is an important resource we need. limited by excellence. With the development of the industry, it is seen that people need useful activities to improve their physiological-psychological and emotional performances and contribute to their peaceful lives [1]–[3]. First of all, it would be helpful to give a brief definition of free time. According to German labor law, free time means when individuals can (freely) decide what to do outside of their working hours. The Rest Period in Section 5 of the Working Hours Act (Arbeitszeitgesetz) states that employees must have at least eleven hours of uninterrupted rest after their daily working hours [4]. In this respect, free time should also be understood as a rest period in which the employee needs to renew himself [5].

People like to tread a fine line between their working hours and free time through sports, traveling, or individual leisure activities. They are open to everything the market has to offer, from hotels in a resort area to moderate boat tours during a city break to a Zumba class around the corner. However, to attract an audience and interested parties, businesses that offer leisure services must develop products or services that engage the customer, communicate them clearly and purposefully, and meet emerging expectations [6].

Graduates from recreation departments are taught how to manage these activities successfully. In addition, recreation students develop an understanding of how to prepare for economic and socio-cultural changes in leisure, sports, tourism, and business. For this purpose, students are taught technical, methodical, social, and intercultural skills and current concepts related to leisure time management. Thus, the opportunities for graduates of the recreation department to find jobs in different sectors are increased [7]. The participation of university students in recreational activities, which is of great importance in raising healthy generations, includes a very important socially important approach.

Recreation and leisure departments were first opened in the United States of America in the mid-1920s [8]. In Turkey, the first recreation department was opened in Muğla within the body of the school of physical education and sports (BESYO) and followed by other universities later [9]. Along with developing tourism education in Turkey, recreation and recreation management departments have started to offer education under tourism faculties. There are departments related to recreation under two different faculties in Turkey. One of them is the department of recreation, a 4-year undergraduate program within the faculty of sports sciences. The other is a 4-year undergraduate program within the faculty of tourism called recreation management [10].

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

Is the recreation program curriculum up-to-date and meets the expectations of the recreation facility owners and at the community level?; in qualitative social research, expert interviews are classified as “semi-structured interviews, quite independently of their position in the research process as exploratory, systematizing, or theory-generating interviews” [11]. Expert interviews enable the researchers to obtain qualitative information about a specific subject [12], [13]. Researchers can save long research processes by using expert interviews [14], [15] if the right experts can be reached for the investigation, “in addition, they promise a kind of guarantee of success” [11]. Furthermore, the experts are not only interviewed “because they have certain knowledge” but rather because this knowledge is particularly effective in practice and thus provides orientation and guidance for other actors [11].

In this study, the guideline-based expert interview was used as a research method to question the actors in the area of leisure or related disciplines as shown in Figure 1. The focal point of the interest in knowledge was the acquisition of information regarding the topicality of the curriculum and the collection of the necessary data or background knowledge for the content modification of the future curriculum of the recreation department (explorative knowledge objective). The focus was on analyzing the important subject areas relating to recreation department, reasons for selecting the topics/areas, and future expectations of graduates of the subject area of recreation department. The more individual questions were answered, the more well-founded the scientific knowledge derived from them [16]. According to Meuser and Nagel, the information obtained from the interviews were evaluated using qualitative content analysis [17].

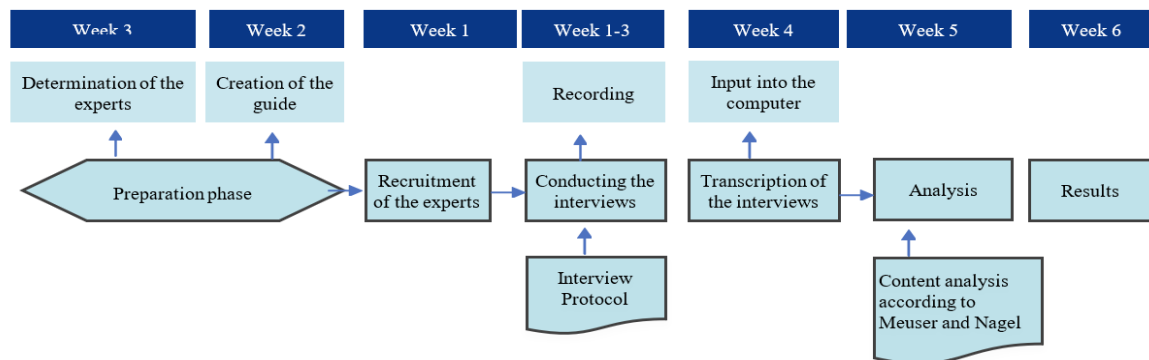


Figure 1. Procedure for the guideline-based expert interview

### 2.1. The term expert and the selection of experts

There are different opinions in the scientific literature on defining the term ‘expert’. In this work, the definitions of terms by Meuser and Nagel [18] and Gläser and Laudel [13] are used, which make the expert status dependent on the research interest. According to this definition, an expert is a person who bears “in some way a responsibility for the design, implementation or control of a problem solution [19], who has privileged access to information about groups of people [19], and has special knowledge of the facts under investigation, which are particularly effective in practice” [18], [20], [21]. Thus, the expert status fundamentally depends on the respective research interest and an attribution [11], [18], [20]. In order to answer the research questions of the present work as a whole, the industries associated with the research object were analyzed [13], [20]. Within the context of this study, the following people can be considered experts: Selected managers and employees of public, private-non-profit, and private-commercial leisure facilities (fitness studios, sports centers) from Yalova.

Actors who, because of their position in a leisure facility or an institution, are involved in decision-making processes about implementing leisure activities. These experts were mainly contacted through personal networks. These experts were first contacted by telephone. First, the research project was briefly explained, and appointments were made for interviews with the experts. Table 1 shows the functions, areas of responsibility, and professional experience of the experts interviewed.

Table 1. Function and task area of experts

Function	Task area	Experience period (Years)	Interview duration (Minutes)	Code
Owner	Management and organization	30	26	E1
Director	Children's homes coordination center administration	20	30	E2
Owner	Management and organization	5	25	E3
Yalova Municipality, Directorate of Women and Family	Giving branch lessons	14	35	E4
Owner	Management and giving dance lessons	5	27	E5
Director	Gazemfer Bilge Children's Homes Administration	7	30	E6
Director	T.C. Yalova Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation Administration	3	25	E7
Owner	Administration and training	7	26	E8
Sports training specialist	Yalova Municipality Sports Units Supervisor	14	30	E9
Owner	Administration and training	15	30	E10
Ministry of Youth and Sports Provincial Sports Officer	Management and organization of sports activities at the provincial level	3	65	E11

## 2.2. Structure and content of the guide

A guide was developed for collecting the necessary data and conducting the interviews based on the work's objective. The guidelines also make it easier to compare the data obtained [11]. The guide was divided into several modules. This guide design allows, on the one hand, for the comparability between the interviews; on the other hand, for a time-saving and goal-oriented implementation [11], [22]. The guidelines used for this study consisted of the following four modules: i) Module 1: Questions about the current curriculum; ii) Module 2: Questions about the expectations of recreation department graduates; iii) Module 3: Questions about the internship; and iv) Module 4: Questions about proposals for future curriculum or additions to the current curriculum.

## 2.3. Conducting the interviews

### 2.3.1. Pre-test

The guidelines for checking interview suitability and comprehensibility were tested in advance [11], [22], [23]. The interview conducted as part of the pre-test was only used to optimize the guidelines and to record the time required for the interviews and was not included in the evaluation [24]. This pre-test was carried out with an expert in the field of fitness.

### 2.3.2. Interviews

At the beginning of the interviews, the relevant personal and organizational data of the experts, such as name, age, duration of current occupation, location, time, and duration of the interview were collected (Annex I). The collection of personal data enabled the researcher to legitimize the expert status and, thus, the selection in addition to the description of the expert selection. Then, there was a short presentation explaining the meaning and purpose of the interviews. Before the interviews, all experts were assured of anonymity and that the data collected would be treated confidentially. Then the permission of the experts was obtained to record the interviews. All experts gave a verbal commitment for the recording of the interviews.

A total of twelve experts were interviewed, with one interview being used for the pre-test, and the results of this interview were not included in the evaluation. There were three female and nine male experts, between 29 and 54 years of age, with 3 to 30 years of experience in their current positions. The interviews took place over a period of one month and in the experts' respective facilities and lasted between 20 and 70 minutes, including the pre-interview phase.

## **2.4. Data acquisition and evaluation, according to Meuser and Nagel**

In order to check the quality criteria of reliability and validity of the data, all interviews were analyzed by another scientist. The results of the reduction steps carried out were checked. This process is necessary for valid knowledge acquisition [17].

### **2.4.1. Transcription of interviews**

All expert interviews, which were tape-recorded with the permission of the experts, were then transcribed [25]. A literal transcription was carried out because the content of the interview is central to the qualitative content analysis, according to Meuser and Nagel [17], [18]. In order to evaluate the interviews anonymously, each expert was assigned a number. 'E1' in this context meant 'Expert 1'. The researcher avoided revealing the name of the institutions since mentioning the name of the company endangers the anonymity of the expert.

### **2.4.2. Evaluation according to Meuser and Nagel**

Since this work is primarily about obtaining information, the transcribed interviews were evaluated using qualitative content analysis, according to Meuser and Nagel [17]. For a detailed description and justification for selecting this method, reference is made to the source "expert interviews and qualitative content analysis" [20]. The purpose of using content analysis is "to work out what is common beyond the individual, to make statements about representative things, about shared knowledge, structures of relevance, constructions of reality, interpretations and patterns of interpretation, and to obtain a complete picture of the object of investigation" [11], [18], [23]. Theoretically, generalization is the goal if expert interviews are used to determine company knowledge. If it is a question of capturing contextual knowledge or if the cognitive interest lies in contextual knowledge, the evaluation can be ended at the level of (sociological) conceptualization [21]. For the specific evaluation, Meuser and Nagel [17] propose the following sequential evaluation steps [18]; paraphrasing, thematic ordering, thematic comparison, conceptualization, and theoretical generalization.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the results of the guideline-based expert interviews, which were carried out with several experts. The assignment of the answers to the questions, presented in the order specified by the guide, takes place in the guide-based interviews with experts according to the topic complexes. This ensures that the thematic assignment and readability are optimal.

### **3.1. Category I: Opinions about the bachelor's degree in recreation program**

The questions of this module or this category were asked to all experts since all future employers of recreation department represent graduates. The mapping of the category system of the opinions on the current curriculum represents differentiated expectations of different industries in terms of curriculum as shown in Figure 2. The knowledge gained from this process is used for the future modification of the curriculum of undergraduate-level recreation department studies.

Under the awareness of the course subcategory, several experts (5 mentions) stated that they had only heard of the term but did not know what it meant. In addition, two experts identified the term/word (3 mentions) and stated that they have heard of it. Furthermore, three experts knew what the term meant because they are descendants of sports science graduates. Furthermore, the experts identified important areas of human anatomy (4 mentions) under the subcategory mentioned. Furthermore, in this area, the most frequently mentioned were physiology (3), foreign languages (3), behavioral sciences (3), wellness and life coaches (2), the elderly and sports (2), swimming, and gymnastics (1). Finally, under the compulsory lectures subcategory, the experts also pointed out that certain lectures offered as electives should be compulsory. Water sports (2), children's gymnastics (2), archery (1), golf (1), animation (1), time management (1), and badminton were named in this area.

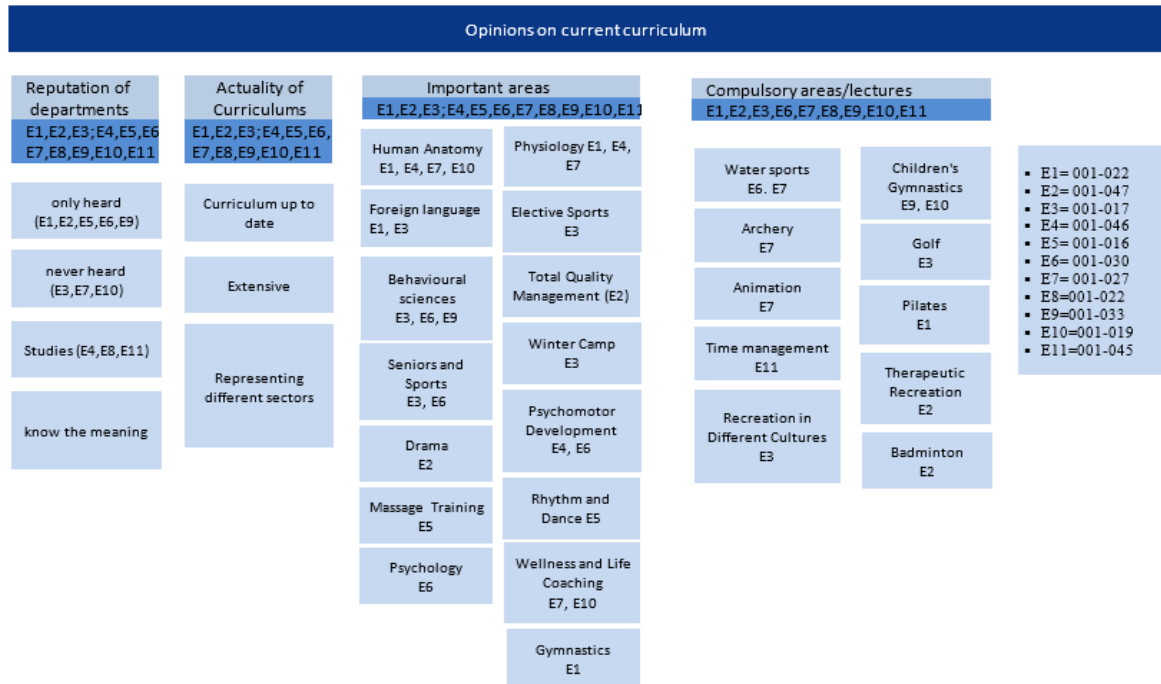


Figure 2. Category system of opinions about the current curriculum

**3.2. Category II: Expectations of leisure management graduates**

In this question, the experts were given the opportunity to identify their opinions about the current curriculum. The category system is illustrated in Figure 3. Under the expectations of future employers' subcategory, the experts identified the following skills and qualifications that recreation department graduates should possess. The following were most frequently mentioned in this area: foreign languages (3 mentions), additional qualifications (3), new ideas (2), communication skills (2), knowledge of nutrition (1), good behavior (1), and punctuality.

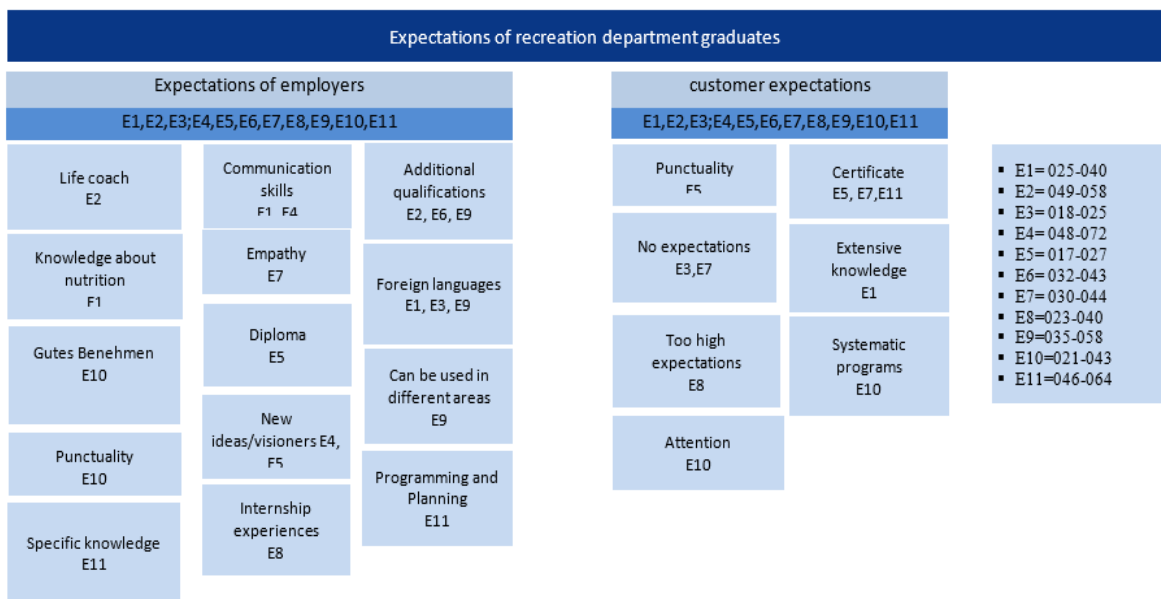


Figure 3. Category system of expectations of recreation department graduates

In addition, according to experts, the graduates should have specific knowledge (1) and diplomas (1) and be employable in different fields (1). From the point of view of the experts, the expectations of the customers that influence the quality of the teaching units are the certificate/diploma (3), punctuality (1), and extensive knowledge (1). In addition, the experts identified other expectations of the need for systematic planning of teaching units and attention (1).

**3.3. Category III: Attitude toward internship**

The category system of attitudes toward the internship during the course of the study is shown in Figure 4. From the point of view of the experts, the most important reasons for the internship during the course of study are because it is the first practical experience (2 mentions), and it helps them make conscious choices about their employers (1 mention). The experts saw the importance of voluntariness as a further reason for the internship (1 mention). Furthermore, the experts saw the internship as a way for students to develop problem-solving skills (1 mention) or to find opportunities for practical implementation in nutrition (1 mention). From the viewpoint of some experts, the internship should not only take place on paper (3 mentions).

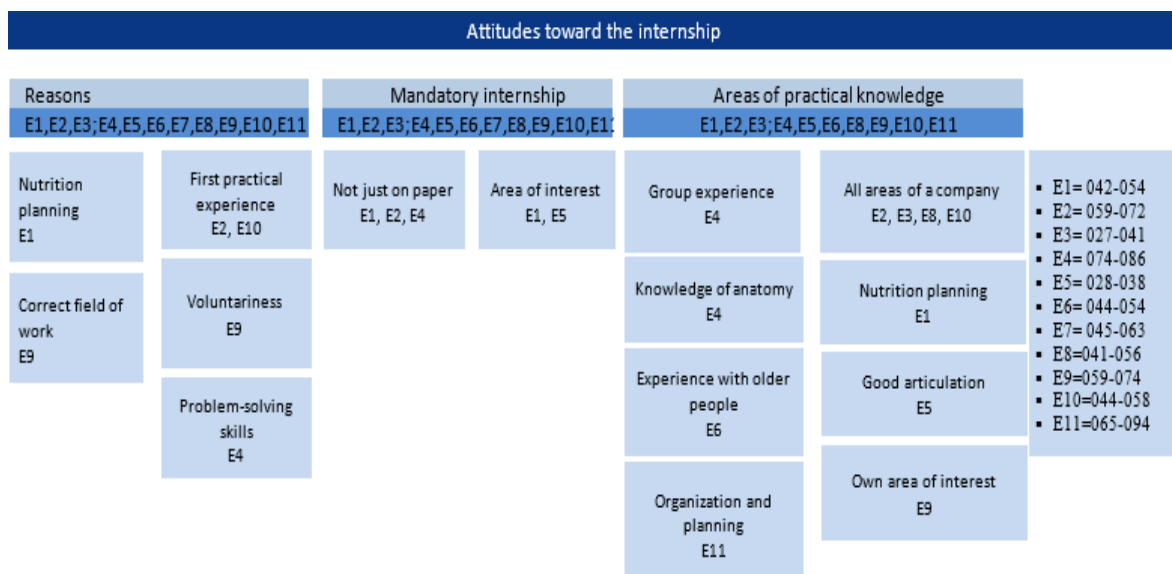


Figure 4. Category system of attitudes toward the internship

Furthermore, the experts identified areas of practical experience/knowledge that students and graduates should possess. In this area, the most frequently mentioned skills were knowledge of all areas of the company (4 mentions), practical knowledge of anatomy (1 mention), group training experience (1 mention), good articulation/interpersonal communication (1), nutritional planning (1), organization and planning (1). Three experts emphasized that the internship should take place under the direction and supervision of teachers.

**3.4. Category IV: Suggestions for future curricula**

In this module, the experts were allowed to express their suggestions for future curricula. The category system of suggestions for future curricula is illustrated in Figure 5. The knowledge acquired from these flows into the modification of the curriculum. Under the important areas' subcategory, the experts identified different foreign languages (2 mentions). In addition, lifesaver training (2), children's gymnastics (1), health tourism (1), different foreign languages (1), and knowledge of different areas of the company (1) were most frequently mentioned in this area. The most frequently mentioned topics by the experts in the sector-specific expectations subcategory were different foreign languages (2), Pilates (1), practical experiences (1), working with the elderly (1), hiking (1), and water sports (1).



Figure 5. Category system of suggestions for the future curricula

This study asked the opinions of the business partners about the current curriculum of the recreation department, which courses are important for them, the internship requirement, the expectations of the business partners from the graduates, and the courses/fields that they can suggest for future curriculum planning and their specific expectations were examined. During the interviews with 11 experts/employers in this study, 16 questions were asked under four themes; the answers were recorded, analyzed, and interpreted.

The current recreation department curriculum was asked to be examined in the interviews. As a result, many partners agree that most of the courses are up to date. Apart from this, it was revealed that the interviewees had specific expectations as they represented different sectors. When these needs/deficiencies are eliminated, or the requested courses are added to the current curriculum, the employment areas of the recreation department graduates will expand. Specific expectations are that they should have practical proficiency and foreign language skills.

For example, some results showed that etiquette education, communication, and rhetoric classes should be compulsory and that yoga, Zumba, and pilates, which are among the current sports branches, should be among the compulsory courses. In addition, child psychology and courses for children are among the other suggestions. Another issue is that every sports science graduate should have basic anatomy knowledge, which is among the subjects that the study partners agreed on. One of the most important issues was that the students were obliged to do internships during the education period and that this internship application was to be followed up efficiently. Another issue is that the graduates, if possible, get more specialized in a specific sports branch, enabling them to take on different tasks where they will work later and make them stand out among other job applicants. Foreign language is also one of the other subjects on which all stakeholders agreed [26].

Results revealed that many employers/business partners are unaware of 'recreation' and, thus, the recreation department. Only graduates of the faculty of sports sciences recognize this department. Another issue is that different sectors have specific expectations. In their research on job postings, Çevik *et al.* investigated what conditions employers seek from recreation department graduates. However, there was no direct contact with employers [26]. Şimşek *et al.* conducted a similar study in another city with nine participants. The participants selected were determined about the recreation in which they worked. Similar results were obtained in this study, revealing that employers and educational institutions should work together [27]. In this study, the qualifications sought from the recreation specialist from the point of view of the employers suggested by Çevik *et al.* [27] were researched within the scope of Yalova province with the qualitative study method. Tsitskari *et al.* [28] documented similar results in their research. The results of the survey from Tsitskari *et al.* show that sports employers demand their employees to act professionally and increase their level of knowledge. This means that they wish their (future) employees to be willing to learn more, strive for a higher level of performance, and aim to produce better results. Also, the sports employers in this survey expected their employees to demonstrate personal and interpersonal skills. The employers in our survey also highly evaluated organization & time management [29]. Using time logically is a sign of wisdom. Achieving this level occurs as a result of a planned training process [29].





Future studies should investigate how to increase the public recognition of the recreation department. In future studies, especially the sectors should be followed closely, and the curriculum of the recreation department should be updated when necessary, considering the ever-changing demands. Thus, the employment opportunities for the graduates of the recreation department will be increased. In addition, conducting further research on different recreation departments in different cities can reveal whether the curricula of the departments are up-to-date and the general profile and working efficiency of the departments.

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