

# Job satisfaction and the quality of working life: the Polish experience

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## **The sociological approach to job satisfaction**

The numerous surveys on job satisfaction recently undertaken in Polish industry have been based on various methodological assumptions, but most of them have shared certain common premises about the place of the human being in a work situation. To put it briefly, they see work as an integral part of the broader business of living in society; people work not only to support themselves and their families but also to contribute to the welfare of society as a whole. Work, it is believed, satisfies at least some of the important human needs created by the social environment, for example the need to compete, to attain proficiency, to participate in a wider community, to develop one's personality, and so on. In this view of things job satisfaction may be considered an end in itself and not just a means of increasing productivity or indeed of serving any other purpose at all.

Job satisfaction is a complex concept. According to J. Reykowski, the psychosociologist, it can take nine different forms:

(1) Satisfaction due to various material benefits. A worker is satisfied because his job provides him with certain financial and other tangible benefits that are important to him; in this case satisfaction does not depend upon the type of work he does.

(2) Satisfaction due to the social prestige attached to the job.

(3) Satisfaction due to an equitable relation between effort and reward. This may equally well occur where the enterprise makes low demands and the worker receives low remuneration as where high demands are matched by high remuneration.

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(4) Satisfaction due to the suitability and interest of the work. A worker may derive satisfaction from performing tasks which correspond to his skills, experience and personal interests.

(5) Satisfaction due to pride in the product. The worker is pleased when the work is well organised and produces visible results.

(6) Satisfaction due to promising career prospects.

(7) Satisfaction due to pleasant human relations at the workplace.

(8) Satisfaction due to the worker's ability to control the flow and pace of work.

(9) Satisfaction due to congenial working conditions.<sup>1</sup>

This list may not cover all the possible sources of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction<sup>2</sup>, but it gives some idea of the area covered by the Polish surveys in this field.

Job satisfaction is considered an important part of the quality of life as a whole. Both official programmes<sup>3</sup> and expert working papers<sup>4</sup> lay much stress on the connection between the quality of work and the quality of life. It is generally held that no improvement in the well-being of the general population is possible without constant amelioration of the quality of work. "Quality of work" is, of course, a very broad concept which embraces such matters as product quality, job satisfaction and work organisation, this last being understood as an operation directed not only towards economic efficiency but also towards the humanisation of work.

Such an approach is possible in centrally planned economies because enterprises are not obliged to seek maximum profits. Every socialised enterprise is expected to achieve certain planned targets, but these relate both to production and to non-production matters. Among the targets in the latter category might be, for example, increased job satisfaction or improvement of the quality of working life.

These are, of course, very difficult tasks which cannot be accomplished overnight. Measures to increase job satisfaction should therefore be based on a proper sociological diagnosis of the problem. Since 1971 the earlier dominance of economic thinking in the process of planning has given way to a broader, socio-economic emphasis. Hence the growing demand for social diagnosis (and sociological surveys) that has been observed in Poland in recent years. This

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<sup>1</sup> J. Reykowski: "Zadowolenie i niezadowolenie a wyniki pracy", in A. Sarapata (ed.): *Problematyka i metody badań nad zadowoleniem z pracy* (Wrocław, Ossolineum, 1973), pp. 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> See for example E. Mumford: *Job satisfaction* (London, Longman, 1972), pp. 4-13.

<sup>3</sup> *O dalszy dynamiczny rozwój budownictwa socjalistycznego—o wyższą jakość pracy i warunków życia narodu*, Uchwała VII Zjazdu Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej (Warsaw, Książka i Wiedza, 1975), pp. 30-41.

<sup>4</sup> See for example K. Secomski and J. Szczepański: "Model spożycia w społeczeństwie socjalistycznym", in *Polityka Społeczna* (Warsaw, Institute of Labour and Social Affairs), 1976, No. 1, pp. 4-9.

sociological approach takes into account problems of job satisfaction, attitudes to work, job motivation and the like.

### **The principal findings of the Polish surveys**

In 1974 there were some 11,970,000 employees in the socialised sector of the Polish economy.<sup>1</sup> The indications are that most of them were satisfied with their work, but some were not. It is always difficult to estimate the total number of dissatisfied workers, but one fairly safe criterion for at least part of this group is the level of labour turnover. According to the statistics, rather more than 1,100,000 employees changed their jobs in 1974.<sup>2</sup> This is the total number, and it does not of course indicate precisely how many were really dissatisfied with their work, since some dissatisfied people stay put while some of those who change do so owing to circumstances unconnected with their employment. A national survey conducted by A. Sarapata found that only 41 per cent of employees who would like to change their place of work consider themselves dissatisfied.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the precise number the problem is a real one, inasmuch as repeated surveys have shown that it concerns almost 10 per cent of the labour force.

Most sociological studies have shown that there are two main factors having a close bearing on the level of job satisfaction, no matter which of its particular aspects is considered, namely the worker's educational attainments and his age (or more precisely the length of time he has been in the labour force). Usually, the higher the level of education the greater the tendency to dissatisfaction, while the longer a person has worked the more likely he is to be satisfied. This relation is clearly shown in a survey carried out in 1973 among the workers of six big industrial enterprises (see table 1). The sample included 2,059 workers under the age of 30 and 1,091 aged 45 or over.

This tendency may be explained in sociological terms. On the one hand, the higher the level of education the more dimensions of job satisfaction are taken into account, and on the other, the longer a worker has been in the labour force the better his adaptation to existing conditions and the less the influence of pre-work expectations, which usually overestimate the real possibilities of the labour market. Hence the highest percentage of those with a low degree of job satisfaction is found among young workers with a higher technical education and the lowest among older workers with a secondary vocational or primary education.

In order to understand the real meaning of job satisfaction in Polish society, a few words may be needed about the place of work in the Polish

<sup>1</sup> *Rocznik Statystyczny 1975* (Warsaw, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1975), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Zatrudnienie w gospodarce narodowej* (Warsaw, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1975), p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> A. Sarapata: "Płynność w przedsiębiorstwie przemysłowym", in G. W. Osipow and J. Szczepański (eds.): *Spoleczne problemy pracy i produkcji* (Warsaw, Książka i Wiedza, 1970), p. 299.

**Table 1. Degree of job satisfaction by level of education and age (%)**

Education	Young workers				Older workers			
	Total	High	Middle	Low	Total	High	Middle	Low
Primary	100.0	63.4	30.5	6.1	100.0	73.2	22.6	4.2
Secondary vocational	100.0	60.3	30.2	9.5	100.0	79.1	17.2	3.7
College (technical or commercial)	100.0	46.0	39.3	14.7	100.0	70.1	23.1	6.8
Higher (technical)	100.0	30.5	51.8	17.7	100.0	51.7	35.6	12.7
<b>All levels of education</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>70.7</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>6.4</b>

Source: W. Adamski: "Postawy społeczno-zawodowe młodzieży pracującej", in *Studia Socjologiczne* (Wrocław), 1974, No. 2, table 3.

worker's scale of values. A number of surveys have shown that it rates very high. In one inquiry undertaken at the end of the 1960s among urban manual workers<sup>1</sup> the respondents were asked what they considered to be particularly important in life. The highest proportion of answers concerned welfare. In second place came health, in third job interest and satisfaction, in fourth a happy family life, in fifth pleasant human relations. Other values came further down the scale.

However, in the above-mentioned survey undertaken by Adamski in 1973 the distribution of answers to a similar question was slightly different. As shown in table 2, both young and older workers put family life in first place and work a close second.

Although the population samples investigated are not strictly comparable, some general inferences may be drawn. Over the past decade the importance of purely economic goals appears to have decreased slightly, while that of social goals seems to have increased. However, the place accorded to work in a value system differs according to the nature of the individual's occupation. As D. Dobrowolska has pointed out<sup>2</sup>, many employees with a high level of education are work-oriented. Among manual workers this type of orientation is not so common, although with the spread of vocational skills work-oriented attitudes are becoming more frequent.

The place occupied by work in an employee's scale of values is an important variable which helps to explain his aspirations with regard to job satisfaction. Where a worker considers a job exclusively as a way of acquiring material benefits the type of satisfaction he expects will, for instance, be different from that of another worker who sees it as a means to self-

<sup>1</sup> G. Pomian and M. Strzeszewski: *Postawy wobec pracy i zakładu pracy* (Warsaw, Ośrodek Badań Opinii Publicznej i Studiów Programowych, 1969), pp. 70-76.

<sup>2</sup> D. Dobrowolska: *Studia nad znaczeniem pracy dla człowieka* (Wrocław, Ossolineum, 1974), pp. 101-102.

**Table 2. Social values among young and older workers**

Social value (or aspiration)	% of replies specifying indicated value	
	Young workers (N = 2,059)	Older workers (N = 1,091)
A happy family life	69.8	66.5
Proficiency at one's job	66.9	65.4
Opportunity for continuous improvement of knowledge and skills	32.5	15.1
To enjoy respect	29.1	34.1
Welfare	27.4	31.8
To be useful to others	23.9	25.6
A quiet life	22.0	42.4
Possession of a university degree	16.3	4.9
A life full of adventure	5.1	1.2
To be a civic leader	4.3	6.9

Source: Adamski, *op. cit.*, table 6.

development. The results of the Polish surveys show that, as a general rule, the higher an employee rates work in his scale of values the more diversified are his sources of job satisfaction, and the more important the content and character of the job.

However, there is probably a close connection between the place accorded to work in a person's value system and his actual conditions of work. Dobrowolska has emphasised<sup>1</sup> that among work-oriented employees the satisfaction derived from the suitability and interest of the work, pride in the product and good career prospects usually strengthens this type of orientation. Conversely, when a job offers little satisfaction of this sort but does confer material benefits or social prestige, this attitude is likely to give way to one in which the work itself is regarded as less important than its personal by-products.

The possible sources of job satisfaction, therefore, vary according to attitudes to work. Usually, the higher a person's rank in an enterprise, then the better his education, the higher his skill level and—up to a point—the greater his length of service. As many surveys have shown, however, higher rank at work is associated with a relatively lower frequency of strictly financial job motivations and a relatively higher frequency of social ones (i.e. satisfaction in the work itself, good human relations and individual career prospects). This tendency was observed, for example, in a survey carried out by X. Gliszczyńska in three industrial enterprises during the period 1966-68. Table 3 illustrates the importance attached to financial rewards by the respondents according to their position in the occupational hierarchy.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

**Table 3. Personnel naming money as first or second most important job motivation according to rank**  
(% of replies in each group)

Enterprise	Production workers	Supervisors	Management staff
Enterprise 1 (majority of semi-skilled women)	37	13	6
Enterprise 2 (majority of highly skilled workers)	67	29	20
Enterprise 3 (majority of workers also running a small family farm)	61	49	22

Source: X. Gliszczyńska: *Psychologiczne badania motywacji w środowisku pracy* (Warsaw, Książka i Wiedza, 1971), p. 172.

Apart from indicating a declining frequency of financial job motivations with increasing rank, the data appear to confirm the traditionally lower interest in financial rewards among women. It will be seen that in enterprise 3—where most of the production workers contrive, with the help of their families, to run a small farm as well—financial motivations among the supervisors are far more important than in the two other enterprises. This is probably due to the fact that supervising such workers, who generally have a high rate of turnover, a poor absenteeism record (particularly at harvest times) and low productivity, is a thankless task. So for supervisors in this enterprise all other types of job motivation become relatively less important.

Further evidence on the place of financial rewards in workers' scale of values emerged from an inquiry conducted by K. Pawlikowska at the end of 1975 in five Warsaw factories. This was an investigation into the problem of labour turnover and covered 191 workers who changed jobs during the period immediately preceding the survey. The majority were under 30 and had received at least a primary education. Their reasons for changing jobs are shown in table 4.

The importance of earnings as a job motivation was also confirmed in a survey conducted by V. Biederman.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, other inquiries have shown that public opinion is convinced of the direct relation between productive effort and the well-being of the whole population. From a study carried out in 1975 by the Institute for the Study of Basic Problems of Marxism-Leninism, using a random sample of 4,904 persons, it emerged that 54 per cent of those questioned considered that hard, productive work by everyone was a major condition for the country's further progress. Some 25 per cent mentioned technical progress in industry as an important factor, 24 per cent good political leadership, 22 per cent a readiness among people to co-operate, 17 per cent the growth of individual incomes, and 15 per cent an

<sup>1</sup> V. Biederman: *Kształtowanie postaw pracowników wobec pracy poprzez właściwe metody (style) kierowania* (Warsaw, Instytut Organizacji Przemysłu Maszynowego, 1975), p. 49.

Table 4. Reasons for changing jobs

Primary reason given	%
Wanted better earnings	47.4
Wanted better type of job	29.4
Wanted better human relations	9.2
Wanted better general conditions of work	3.7
Other, or unclear	10.3
Total	100.0

Source: K. Pawlikowska: *Przyczyny porzucania pracy przez robotników* (Warsaw, Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, 1976).

increase in the production of commodities. In the same survey people were asked what factors they considered most frequently diminished the quality of working life. The answers included alcoholism, waste, insufficiently productive work, faulty organisation of work, excessive routine, and lack of technical progress.<sup>1</sup> These results show that public opinion is very much alive to the darker side of industrial life and that such factors as those mentioned may be a very significant source of job dissatisfaction.

#### Attempts to improve the quality of working life in Poland

While measures to improve the quality of working life in Polish industry go back many years, they have recently become increasingly pragmatic and comprehensive. The following aims may be distinguished: (1) to enhance job satisfaction deriving from the suitability, interest and social prestige of the work, and from the pride taken in it; and (2) so far as possible, to satisfy expectations regarding material benefits, especially earnings, and also regarding the relation between effort and reward, human relations, congenial working conditions and—last but not least—ability to control the flow and pace of work. These goals are reflected in the country's general social policy—which since 1971 has benefited, as we have seen, from a reorientation of social and economic development priorities—and are given practical expression in various specific programmes or experiments carried out in industry.

The latter include, first of all, the so-called "social development plans" and work humanisation programmes that have been drawn up in many industrial enterprises. J. Kulpińska has distinguished the following types of programme:

— instrumental: aimed at increasing workers' identification with production tasks and at raising productivity;

<sup>1</sup> Z. Sufin: "Długofalowe cele i bieżące potrzeby", in *Nowe Drogi* (Warsaw), No. 4/323, p. 119.

- managerial: mainly directed towards improving the effectiveness of management;
- humanistic: concerned with increasing job satisfaction and meeting other work-related needs of employees;
- social: related to the role of the enterprise in the implementation of state social policy;
- ideological: concerned with the achievement of political goals, particularly those related to the organisation of the working community and the shaping of socialistic human relations.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to estimate what proportion of enterprises have actually introduced comprehensive humanisation of work programmes since no exhaustive research has been done on the subject. Another problem is that some of these programmes are in fact no more than simple registers of everyday concerns, a mere compilation of general goals which are not translated into action. This is probably due to the fact that the majority of programmes have been worked out only in the past few years and the general methodology still needs further development.

Nevertheless, some information about the content of such programmes does exist. Kulpińska <sup>2</sup> has analysed the content of 52 of them, mainly in heavy industry, light industry and machine manufacture. Among the fields covered by the programmes are personnel management, physical conditions of work, leisure occupations (participation in cultural activities, further education, holidays), welfare facilities, style of management, democratisation of industrial relations, job design and organisation of work, external relations (for example, collaboration with local authorities) and technology.

The data are certainly incomplete but they do give some idea about the most usual contents of the programmes. Very recently, in collaboration with the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, Wages and Social Affairs has begun developing a general methodology for the preparation of social development plans and humanisation of work programmes at the enterprise level. The methodology is adapted to the above-mentioned goals of this type of activity.

It is difficult to synthesise the whole range of existing work humanisation programmes, inasmuch as each is strictly tailored to the conditions of a given enterprise. It will perhaps be more illustrative to give a short description of a programme which was put into operation in a Polish shipyard during the period 1971-74. The "humanistic" approach was adopted; in other words it was mainly directed towards increasing job satisfaction among employees.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Kulpińska: "Społeczne funkcje przedsiębiorstwa przemysłowego a praktyka badawcza", in W. Jędrzycki (ed.): *Planowanie społeczne w zakładzie pracy* (Warsaw, Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ, 1974), pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> J. Kulpińska: "Analiza zakładowych programów humanizacji pracy", in S. Wróblewski (ed.): *Programy humanizacji pracy w przedsiębiorstwach* (Warsaw, Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, 1975), p. 47.

Much attention was therefore paid to various material benefits, the relation between individual effort and reward, and congenial working conditions.

During the four-year period there was a marked rise in wages. New facilities such as washrooms and cafeterias were provided. In 1972 all employees who needed it were granted access to the enterprise's own sanatorium in one of the mountain resorts and to its rest house for family vacations, and the next year a big medical centre was opened.<sup>1</sup>

It is not possible to evaluate all the social and economic effects of the programme because the available information is rather fragmentary. Nevertheless, the turnover rate (i.e. the number of employees leaving the shipyard as a percentage of the total number of employees at the end of the year) moved in the direction anticipated by the authors of the programme, declining from 25.3 per cent in 1970 to 17.3 per cent in 1971, 17.0 per cent in 1972 and 16.7 per cent in 1973.<sup>2</sup>

It must be emphasised again that job satisfaction, particularly in a centrally planned economy, is not only a function of the conditions existing in a particular enterprise, but also depends heavily on the social and economic priorities laid down by the State. Since about 1970 improving the quality of working life has been such a priority, but this does not of course mean that no efforts were made in this field until then.

The mid-1950s, for example, saw the beginnings of workers' self-management schemes, and by the end of 1957 these were in operation in over 50 per cent of all industrial establishments. Since 1958 all such establishments throughout the country have been required by law<sup>3</sup> to constitute "workers self-management conferences". The functions of these bodies are very broad but relate mainly to an enterprise's economic activities. The workers' self-management conferences are empowered, *inter alia*:

- to deliver an opinion on the targets proposed for the enterprise's annual and long-term plans;
- to participate in decisions regarding the modification of annual or long-term plans;
- to adopt the enterprise's operating (i.e. monthly or quarterly) plans;
- to examine the enterprise's annual balance sheet;
- to carry out a periodic evaluation of various social, economic and organisational activities of the enterprise on the basis of reports submitted by the management.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Z. Szczypiński: "Zakładowy program humanizacji pracy—uwarunkowania na etapie jego tworzenia i realizacji na przykładzie stoczni produkcyjnej", in Wróblewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> ILO: *Legislative Series*, 1958—Pol. 4.

<sup>4</sup> S. Czajka: *Spoleczno-wychowawcze problemy socjalistycznego zakładu pracy* (Warsaw, Wiedza Powszechna, 1974), pp. 326-327.

Workers' self-management has undoubtedly contributed to the democratisation of industrial relations in Poland. At the same time, however, participation in a workers' self-management conference enhances job satisfaction derived from pride in the product (which is planned in conjunction with the workers' representatives) and from exercising control over the work process (since the conference approves the rate at which production tasks are to be carried out).

A quite different initiative has been the launching of the "rationalisers' and inventors' movement". Briefly, the point of the movement is to encourage every worker to submit inventions or proposals to facilitate or rationalise his own work or that of his "brigade" or of the enterprise as a whole. The regular legal procedures regarding authors' rights are applied where true inventions are concerned, but in the case of small improvements there are rather simpler procedures. The majority of inventors are, of course, engineers, but many of them do not have a formal higher technical education. Table 5 shows how the movement has grown over the past 15 years.

To consider only the social aspects of this movement, it may be said that there are several consequences having a direct bearing on the problem of job satisfaction. The main incentive for the submission of inventions is the receipt of a financial reward, but participation in this movement undoubtedly has beneficial side effects, among which Czajka<sup>1</sup> has identified the following:

- enhanced interest in the job and occupation;
- improvement of skills;
- direct increase in job satisfaction;
- fuller identification with the enterprise.

Finally, it will be interesting to note the results of experiments with flexible working hours. In Poland the first initiatives in this field date from 1972. So far, according to the records of the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, at least 50 enterprises have introduced the system, and the Institute has carried out surveys in two of them. These showed that 97.1 per cent of the employees were satisfied with the new arrangement. The widespread acceptance of flexible working hours was found to be mainly due to the opportunity they provided for adjusting working time to the individual's psychological and physiological characteristics (63.8 per cent of those questioned), for reconciling domestic duties with the demands of the job (57.5 per cent) and for conducting personal business with administrative or other public services during normal working hours (55.0 per cent).<sup>2</sup>

Flexible working hours may therefore be considered a new source of job satisfaction, providing a possibility of controlling the flow and pace of work,

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 129-130.

<sup>2</sup> L. Machol and W. Swierczewski: *Ruchomy czas pracy—doświadczenia krajowe i zagraniczne* (Warsaw, Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, 1975), p. 23.

Table 5. Workers' inventiveness, 1960-74

Year	Number of inventions (thousands)		
	Found receivable	Approved	Applied
1960	102.9	53.3	42.7
1965	160.8	90.2	74.3
1970	258.0	138.4	120.8
1971	276.8	145.5	131.4
1972	296.8	155.1	142.1
1973	335.4	174.6	157.1
1974	393.1	211.0	182.5

Source: *Rocznik Statystyczny 1975*, op. cit., table 26, p. 656.

and of adjusting the rhythm of work to the individual's life style or, more generally, to the life of the whole local community.<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusions

This article has tried to present a synthesis of the principal findings of various Polish surveys on job satisfaction, and also to describe some of the measures that have been taken in practice to increase this satisfaction and to improve the quality of working life. A number of conclusions may be drawn from what has been said above.

Poland is currently undergoing a major economic transformation coinciding with a process of controlled social change known technically as the transition to a developed socialist society. There has accordingly been a significant reorientation of socio-economic planning priorities. Purely economic development goals have been balanced by social and cultural ones such as higher family living standards, better social services, broader access to the educational system (including special secondary schools for workers with only a primary education and compulsory secondary education for the young), growing participation in cultural activities, better leisure facilities for workers, free access to public health services for private sector farmers, and so on. At the same time, it is continuously emphasised that better-quality work is a *sine qua non* for the achievement of these goals: the transition to a developed industrial society calls for a greater effort by everyone. The social impact of this new policy is already making itself felt. Many surveys have shown that there has been a significant change in workers' social aspirations and scale of values and in the most frequent sources of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

<sup>1</sup> E. Wnuk-Lipiński: *Czas wolny—współczesność i perspektywy* (Warsaw, Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ, 1975), pp. 51-52.

The sources of job satisfaction are now more diversified than ever before. The formerly predominant type of job satisfaction deriving from the enjoyment of material benefits is being increasingly displaced by satisfaction deriving from the suitability, interest and social prestige of the work, the pride taken in it and the ability to control its flow and pace. However, the growing social importance of these particular sources of job satisfaction also implies that a working life which fails to meet the workers' expectations in this field may be a cause of dissatisfaction. The percentage of persons dissatisfied with their work has remained approximately constant, but their reasons have probably changed somewhat. At the same time, one may observe a significant increase in workers' awareness of factors that diminish the quality of working life.

It is difficult to assess the practical effects of the measures taken to improve the quality of working life because many of them have been applied for only a short time. Nevertheless, institutions such as workers' self-management or the rationalisers' and inventors' movement are already permanent features of working life, and over the past few years have taken on increasing social and economic significance. □

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