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# Collecting qualitative data via video statements in the digital era

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**ABSTRACT**

Qualitative research methods in organisational research, such as interviews, observation and focus groups, provide detailed insights into business phenomena. In the social sciences, new methods have emerged enabled by the digital era, such as video methods particularly suitable for capturing participant interaction and obtaining non-verbal cues. Slowly, video methods are also gaining recognition in organisational research, opening up innovative possibilities for applying them beyond the traditional focus purely on interaction. This research presents an alternative video method: video statements. This time- and cost-efficient data collection method is characterised by participants who self-record their experiences following a guideline to gather multimodal (visual, audio and textual) data. Hence, video statements can be collected remotely. In our sample study, the approach generates genuine impressions, providing insights into an emerging organisational phenomenon. The output is used as a form of data and a basis for follow-up discussion by participants to add meaning to the video representations. Overall, video statements offer an alternative approach to data collection, supporting researchers in providing richer knowledge for business and management.

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## Introduction

Video methods have quickly become ubiquitous in modern life, from television to online video channels to livestreaming personal channels on social networks. As technology advances, video methods have become indispensable in qualitative research (LeBaron et al. 2018; Tuma and Schnettler 2019; Ristau et al. 2021). The key feature of video methods is obtaining visual and audio data to investigate the behaviour and interactions of persons (Nassauer and Legewie 2021). Specifically, in organisational studies, the reason to collect video data is to capture fine-grained data about what people say and how they engage in work life (Christianson 2018). However, while video technology is becoming increasingly popular, there are certain challenges to consider that visual data brings to organisational research.

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First, qualitative studies, including video methods, are faced with identifying alternative methods. The necessity of adopting an iterative process where the required methods can be refined and improved to facilitate and serve the fulfilment of the study objectives while considering and navigating practical issues and challenges is part and parcel of qualitative research (Saunders et al. 2019). Therefore, a qualitative research design requires adjustments to the circumstances and progress of the research. With high flexibility, video methods can be adapted to various research settings while overcoming methodological challenges, creating the need to further explore this characteristic.

Second, video methods suit various research projects and theoretical approaches from different scientific disciplines (Moritz and Corsten 2018). Whether the research design is set in an experimental framework or a natural environment, the researcher is primarily responsible for recording. Nevertheless, there is scant literature discussing self-recorded videos.

Third, the target group is another consideration in the context of video methods. Issues concerning access to video recording equipment, clarifying whether participants can handle the technology and determining if an internet access point is available must be identified in advance. Furthermore, the tech-savvy generation entering the workplace is said to be more comfortable using technology than previous generations (Barley et al. 2017; Twenge 2017; Klaffke 2022). Consequently, newcomers may prefer a method that allows quick and immediate data collection with convenient tools such as their mobile phones, calling for further investigation.

Finally, due to contact restrictions, the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily impacted participants' access in the last three years. Therefore, a remote participant recruitment and data collection method became necessary in many research projects. Scholars (e.g. Ristau et al. 2021; Roberts et al. 2021) have addressed this challenge, reflecting on applying common qualitative methods (e.g. semi-structured interviews) and their ethical and methodological challenges. However, there is a lack of presentation of alternative video methods that can be conducted remotely by participants, offering time and cost-efficient advantages while providing richer and more complex data (e.g. facial expressions).

To address these challenges, we propose an alternative method: video statements. Thus, we illustrate developing and conducting a video method using examples from our research with young professionals to collect self-recorded video statements about their job expectations of organisations.

## *The origins of the use of video recordings for organisational research*

Since the first commercial mobile videophone was introduced in 1999 (CNN 1999), accessing and using video has become easier for everyone. Moreover, video methods have increased in ethnographic and social field studies (Tuma and Schnettler 2019) to capture natural interactions (Knoblauch and Vollmer 2018).

Primarily, video methods have become a preferred tool for researchers in experimental research areas for sociology, psychology and education (Knoblauch and Schnettler 2012; LeBaron et al. 2018). In contrast, video methods are relatively new in organisational studies (Hindmarsh and Heath 2007; LeBaron et al. 2018). When video methods are used in this context, the research questions gather dynamic data (processes) that can

be heard (audio) and observed (visual). These requirements are met when conversations, meetings, interactions or situations are video recorded in organisational settings (Hindmarsh and Llewellyn 2018). Therefore, videos can be an excellent method to bolster data collection efforts in qualitative research such as case studies (Stake 1995; Yin 2018; Ridder 2021), grounded theory (Charmaz 2017; Bryant and Charmaz 2019) and ethnographic research (Knoblauch and Schnettler 2012; Slutskaya et al. 2018; Tobin 2019; Danielsson and Berge 2020).

Furthermore, in the work world, digital transformation has been strongly driven by the COVID-19 pandemic in the last two years. The disruptive development in the workplace has led to a considerable increase in video as a working tool for videoconferencing, training, advertising, virtual trade fairs and documentation for internal and external consumers (Luff and Heath 2019). Moreover, video methods have been frequently applied in interviews due to pandemic contact restrictions. The videos have substituted for personal contact to replace face-to-face meetings. However, in this execution, videos have often not been exploited (Ristau et al. 2021). Thus, only an audio recording has been transcribed because, according to Luff et al. (2015, 387), transcriptions are 'first and foremost an analytic resource, a way of interrogating and documenting aspects of data, the fragments of recording that form the critical resource for our particular investigations'. Despite this new development of video interviews, data collection via video is primarily used to collect dynamic and visual data. Hence, the data can be analysed to observe changes over time, for example, in video diaries (Zundel et al. 2018), or to capture processes, for example, in conversation analysis (Wang and Lien 2012).

Additionally, alternative methods, such as the experience sampling method, where individuals share experiences of their daily lives through a short self-reported survey, have gained popularity (Larson and Csikszentmihalyi 2014; Shigemoto 2022). This method profits from capturing data close to organisational situations participants find themselves in (e.g. at the workplace or while working from home). Therefore, this approach can be adaptable to surveys and situations where participants capture daily interactions at their workplace via video.

Overall, technological advancements have influenced how people access and interact with data. This poignant consideration affects young people even more who intuitively use their mobile phones to create and share digital video content that feeds into social relationships and organisations (Twenge 2017; Deloitte 2022). As people publicly present their experiences via videos on social media such as YouTube (Del Río Carral et al. 2021), Instagram (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017) and TikTok (McCashin and Murphy 2022), visual data from nonlaboratory research settings and open sources are being increasingly collected (Legewie and Nassauer 2018). Although academics have used these new approaches to collect video data, most researchers have fallen back on tried and tested methods such as interviews and surveys, not least because of ethical hurdles when for example face recognition is used without participants' consent.

Once the data are collected, researchers apply various methodological forms for analysis. Since this research insight focuses on the data collection process, the video analysis will only briefly be outlined. Video analysis methods are predominantly influenced by the sociological theory of communicative genres (Luckmann 1979; Bergmann 1985; Knoblauch et al. 2020). There are different analytic approaches, including interpretative analysis (Knoblauch and Schnettler 2012;

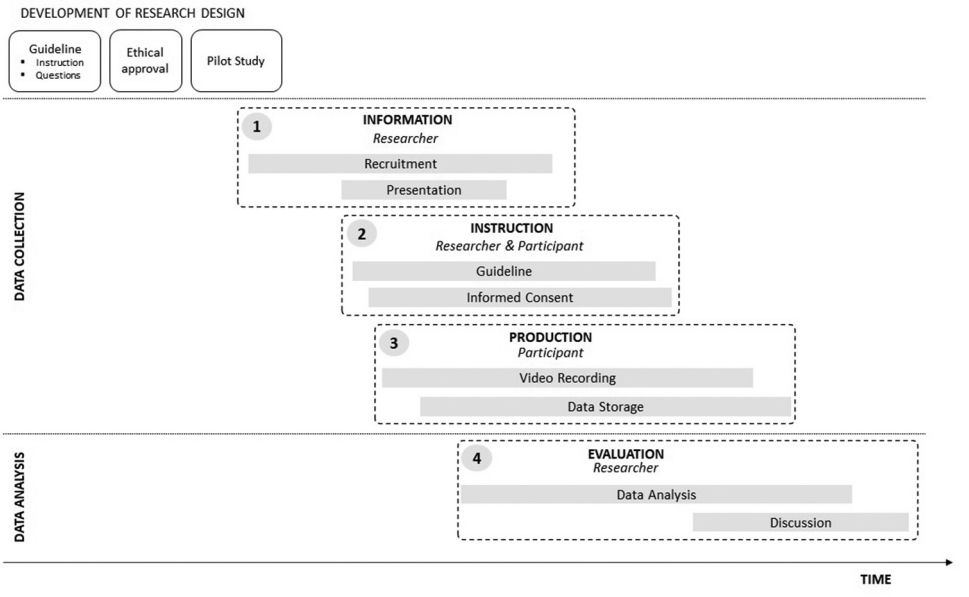


**Figure 1.** Data collection process of video statements. **Source**: Original illustration

Rose 2016; Tuma and Schnettler 2019; Knoblauch et al. 2020), video data analysis for interactional patterns and situational dynamics (Collins 2008; Nassauer and Legewie 2021) and studies applying multimodal interaction analysis (Stivers and Sidnell 2005; Wilmes and Siry 2021). Therefore, as video technologies evolve, researchers must complement and extend existing research methods by discussing additional possibilities and manifestations of the video method to record individual experiences and meanings.

## *Application of video statements*

To illustrate how the developed video method can be applied, we share a short overview of our research project. The study was situated in the field of human resource management and explored the job expectations of young professionals towards their organisations. The target group was work-study students employed part-time at different practice organisations. Thus, the participants were not always available due to their alternating places of work and study. Additionally, the literature review provided only a few quantitative and contradictory findings on the job expectations of young professionals. Therefore, we initially decided to identify key themes on job expectations while, among other methodological reasons, seeking a flexible qualitative data collection method to gain first insights.

Our application of the video statement is presented in Figure 1 and illustrates the research design development, data collection steps and analysis along a timeline.

### *Development of the research design*

Prior to the data collection, we developed the research design with the respective research philosophy: social constructionism to capture participants' interpretations and experiences to understand how young professionals' expectations of their workplaces in Germany are formed and influenced during organisational entry. Based on our conceptual framework, we formulated the research questions to narrow the area thematically, temporally and geographically. Early on, we engaged with the literature on data saturation (Guest et al. 2006; Saunders and Townsend 2016) to estimate how many study participants were needed. Indeed, we advocate that researchers should regularly check whether saturation has been achieved during the analysis, recruiting further participants as necessary.

After determining the research design, we set up the guideline, including the instructions and the video statement open-ended questions. The general information assigned participants to use their own recording device and not re-record themselves to collect instant, real and genuine statements. Participants were advised to avoid naming individuals or organisations for data protection reasons. We suggested five to ten minutes as an approximate time for recording the video. Additionally, the participants received information on how to send or upload their video statement files to the researcher.

For this purpose, we prepared a data storage on Microsoft OneDrive utilising a university server, which ensured data backups and encryption. Moreover, we maintained that the storage remained secure and accessible only to the individual participant and the researchers. As the data were collected in Germany and stored in the UK, this approach complied with the General Data Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act (GDPR 2016; GDPR/UK 2018).

Participants were given a two-week withdrawal period and were assigned participants an identification number and instructed to use it only on the video to maintain anonymity. Besides the instructions, the guideline included the video statement questions in two parts. The first part asked for the identification number and demographic details: in our study, the birth year, study programme and current semester. At this point, we found it helpful to ask participants again for their informed verbal consent to data collection to ascertain their voluntariness. Then, the second part covered four questions derived from our research questions, where participants were asked to read them aloud and then answer them (e.g. 'I expect my employer to … ').

After obtaining ethical approval, we conducted a pilot study with five participants to ensure that the study participants understood our guideline. From the pilot study, we learnt that offering secured data storage (e.g. OneDrive) was possibly the only way for participants to file the videos properly due to the increased data volume when sending videos via email. Therefore, we recommend that in the event of possible technical problems, researchers should provide adequate support so that participants do not lose interest in providing data due to frustration. We also found it beneficial to briefly explain open-ended questions to ensure participants understand the requested statements to achieve research objectives.

## Data collection and analysis

Data collection started with the first step: information. Due to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher was responsible for remotely recruiting participants. Then, to raise awareness of the study, we used the chance to briefly introduce the study to potential participants in an online presentation, thereby explaining the purpose of the study while providing information about participation, such as the right to withdraw and the handling of the data. Moreover, the audience was allowed to ask questions, which supported mutual trust. Finally, to ensure successful recruitment, we asked interested candidates to provide us with their email addresses.

Once we received contact details, the second step started: instruction. We sent the guideline and the consent form by email. With remote data collection, there is a risk that participants may misinterpret the guide sent via email. Therefore, the researcher provided comprehensive and detailed information and interacted with the participants if questions occurred. Although we had many prospective participants at the beginning, we noticed that it was useful to follow up two to three times to remind candidates to participate in the study.

The third step, production, was carried out exclusively by the study participants without the researcher's presence. To record the video statements, most participants used their mobile phones despite the possibility of utilising their laptop cameras and corresponding software such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and apps like Flipgrid. The participants could record at any time or place at their convenience, mostly from home. After completion, the participants uploaded their video data independently.

After data collection was completed, the fourth step of evaluation followed. We first transcribed the data to use the written statements as quotes for publication, apart from the possible audio and visual data analysis. Based on the four questions in the guideline, the video statements provided a relatively short recording, three to ten minutes, with thoughts and experiences of the chosen target group. Compared to open-ended questionnaires, with an average of 184.37 words, we captured more than eight times the word amount with our approach than with open-ended questionnaires (for comparison, see Denscombe 2008; Walsh and Brinker 2016). Sensitive information (e.g. personal data) was anonymised in the transcripts but could not be excluded from the videos. Moreover, we used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to generate themes via reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022), identifying key themes that we applied in a follow-up method, focus groups, to provoke discussions of the identified themes. Therefore, the data generated from the videos provided codes and themes and were further applied as an elicitation tool (Griffin 2019).

In the end, we decided against the analysis of audio and visual data because the videos had no interactions to examine, we did not choose a linguistic focus (e.g. youth language) and, ultimately, our research purpose was fulfiled by the textual evaluation.

However, video data inevitably offered far more possibilities for analysis. Hence, we present a few considerations.

For instance, multimodal interaction analysis can investigate gestures, facial expressions, vocal intonation and language (Wilmes and Siry 2021). Likewise, microanalysis dissects spoken utterances, gestures and gaze shifts at the micro level, showing how

they are interwoven, for example, to identify linguistic patterns (Bezemer et al. 2017; Debski 2019). On the contrary, visual data analysis emphasises interactions and emotions to be analysed in video statements frame by frame (Nassauer and Legewie 2021).

We suggest that the data evaluation is supported by qualitative data analysis software (e.g. NVivo, ATLAS.ti and MAXQDA), offering the possibility of selecting multiple ways of coding and applying visual markers, annotations, sequences and memos along a timeline (Rose 2016; Moritz and Corsten 2018; Nassauer and Legewie 2021). Moreover, we highlight that video analysis differs from the everyday viewing of a film. Therefore, researchers must reflect on their viewing habits and the comprehensibility of the evaluation process that can be achieved using a critically reflective diary (Le Gallais 2008; Ortlipp 2015).

## *Characteristics of video statements*

In general, the significant differences when comparing video data with other methods are the dynamic-static element of the data and its multimodality to capture textual, audio and visual data (LeBaron et al. 2018). Video records of events are thus more accurate and detailed than human observation. Furthermore, rich and complex video data are constantly available; therefore, recordings may be repeatedly replayed until the analysis is completed, enhancing reliability (Rose 2016). Another advantage of video data is their permanence as a record, retrievability and availability to other researchers, experts or even participants to check findings, including the possibility of reinterpretation (Wang and Lien 2012). Since investigator triangulation plays an essential role in verifying the credibility and validity of video data, long-term data storage offers the opportunity for more than one researcher to perform the analysis (Rose 2016). Hence, when investigator triangulation is applied in the data analysis, it increases the credibility and validity of the research findings (Wang and Lien 2012).

Now, to situate the video statements among alternatives, we present the differences in visual, audio and textual data, as shown in Table 1.

**Source**: Original illustration

Unlike the usual use of video methods, the approach of using video statements is remote, which we consider one of the main differences. Furthermore, video statements preserve the separation between the researcher and the participants during the recording. Consequently, the researcher cannot intervene unlike, for example, in interviews or focus groups (Griffin 2019). Hence, video statements are similar to an essay or a qualitative survey where delivery is left to the participants.

As participants record themselves, it is a convenient data collection tool offering a high degree of time flexibility for the researcher and the participant. Similarly to experience survey methods, respondents are likely to provide their data since this approach is an attractive and easy way to contribute to a study (Larson and Csikszentmihalyi 2014). Moreover, resources (e.g. time and travel costs) are saved during data collection, which happens at the expense of the ability to perceive external factors such as environmental influences (e.g. context, smell, temperature), which can only be gathered by applying on-site methods.

The video statements are designed to encourage participants to respond spontaneously and immediately, unlike written diaries, where participants generally think about the phrasing of their responses. However, when applying video statements, there is no guarantee that the messages were not re-recorded several times to provide a better

**Table 1.** Comparison of the essential characteristics of video statements with visual, textual and audio data.

| Characteristics | Video Statements | Visual Data | Textual Data | Audio Data |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Application of method** | Video recordings of statements by individuals | Video recordings of groups or individuals during interviews, experiments | Written text (e.g. essay or diary by individuals) | Voice recordings of individuals during face-to-face or phone interviews |
| **Number of participants** | One | One or more | One | One |
| **Accessibility of hard-to-reach participants (e.g. distance, facilities)** | Easy | Difficult on site | Easy | Medium (face-to-face); Easy (phone) |
| **Tools and storage** | Researcher: Computer Participants: Camera (e.g. mobile phone and computer) | Researcher: Video equipment and computer Participants: None | Researcher: Computer Participant: Computer or pen and paper | Researcher: (Mobile) phone and computer Participant: (Mobile) phone and computer |
| **Convenience of operation for the researcher** | High | Low | High | Medium |
| **Convenience of operation for the participant** | Medium | High | Medium | High |
| **Flexibility** | No appointments, only deadlines | Long-term appointments | No appointments or deadlines | Long-term appointments (face-to-face); Short-term appointments (phone) |
| **Influence by researcher** | Low | Medium | Low | High |
| **Resources** | No travel costs or time | Travel costs and time | No travel costs or time | Travel costs and time (face-to-face); No travel costs but time (phone) |
| **'Output' of data** | Audio and visual data can be transcribed (text) | Audio and visual data can be transcribed (text) | Text | Audio data can be transcribed (text) |

representation from the participants' perspectives. Nevertheless, researchers can assume that video data, such as audio and text, contain experiences and opinions that participants generally want to share. Furthermore, video data benefit by capturing facial expressions and linguistic data, providing additional and nuanced information for a deeper analysis.

Lastly, the guideline for the video statements does not include the challenge of setting a fixed date, as in an interview or on-site observation. Instead, the researcher uses the guideline of the video statements to inform participants about the data collection period, reminding them accordingly before the deadline, if needed.

## *Limitations of video statements*

The presentation of the application and the characteristics of video statements showed that this method offers tremendous potential benefits for the qualitative researcher due to its multimodality. However, video statements involve various challenges and limitations that should be addressed, such as ethical issues, contact restrictions, qualitative data analysis and participant access.

As with all research, ethical considerations exist regarding representation, presentation and ownership (Miller Scarnato 2019). Prior to data collection, conversations with participants about ownership and representation are required to establish clear agreements. In addition, sharing or not sharing video recordings (e.g. with other participants for elicitation) requires ample consideration to preserve the participants' privacy. Not sharing data increases confidentiality, possibly leading to more open and honest participant statements. However, it should be noted that participants can still be selective in what they disclose (Wang and Lien 2012; Saunders et al. 2019; Barlett and Milligan 2020).

As LeBaron et al. (2018) noted, video methods in the business environment often require different forms of data storage demanded by the organisation. Furthermore, due to time-sensitive information (e.g. strategies and ad hoc publications), data analysis may only be possible at a later stage. Hence, a wider context of dependencies and power relations needs to be considered in organisational research endeavours.

Capturing video statements offers a genuine representation without the researcher's interference, whereas other methods, such as essays and diaries, may not capture impulsive reactions (Miller Scarnato 2019). Therefore, Knoblauch and Schnettler (2012) explained that video data require an analysis of the recorded interplay of spoken words and gestures. However, in our example study and during a remotely conducted, later textually analysed interview, the aspects of the visual recording of gestures, facial expressions and posture were lost (Ristau et al. 2021).

During data collection, we reserved the right to adapt the method (e.g. video recording by the researcher on campus). However, it was not feasible due to the exceptionally changing circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the limitations, we could not support the participants with the setup of the video recording, as, for example, Köster et al. (2022) did. Although we reached our study purpose, we recommend this alternative to avoid misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations of the guideline by participants.

Before data collection, we ensured our participants had access to a video recording device. Furthermore, the young target group was familiar with videos in their daily lives (e.g. social media or video calls). Notably, there may be constraints to conducting data from an older target population or participants without access to recording devices or the internet. Nevertheless, while acknowledging that our data collection through video statements has limitations, the introduced method can be adapted in various ways (see the categorisation video on data collection by Griffin 2019).

## *Conclusion and future directions*

The digital age has brought new tools for collaboration in organisations, enabling employees to connect from anywhere in the world. Moreover, the contact restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic have forced researchers to implement new ways of collecting data (Ristau et al. 2021). Set against this background, we propose an evolved video method: video statements characterised by self-recording to obtain multimodal data. Thus, we employ video statements to enrich the future of modified video methods. Moreover, this research insight illustrates that methodological and ethical decisions are required to establish a rigorous research design for video statements. In particular, specifying the target group, developing a comprehensible guideline and legally securing data storage are critical.

Initially, video methods piqued our interest in the context of an emerging visually engaged generation who prefer to quickly exchange information via video, voice and pictures. We anticipated they would see video statements as a fun and contemporary way to participate. Therefore, in the future, feedback from participants on the application of the method is needed to shed light on the attractiveness and convenience of this approach.

To meet our research aim, we decided that the video statements served best as a complementary method to provide initial insights into the phenomenon under study while offering an elicitation tool for further data collection. Since video statements can be adapted to different research designs, we welcome to see the use of video statements as a single method in future research projects.

If the recordings are stored with data protection, the video statements can be collected over a long period to resonate with the past or achieve a historical perspective, as LeBaron et al. (2018) suggested. Hence, video statements may be applied in organisational settings, where participants self-record daily 'go-along' videos (e.g. gathering statements about their well-being while coping with typical workplace situations). Thus, the advantage of video statements is the adaptability of time and location, making the method particularly attractive for global research projects. Nevertheless, ethical considerations of obtaining consent from recorded persons must be clarified in advance.

Furthermore, while illustrating the flexibility that video statements offer, we also highlight the importance of further exploring data analysis techniques to capitalise on the advantage of multimodal data. Moreover, we recommend including participants' reflexivity in the research process to gather a more nuanced and rich understanding of our data (Cassell et al. 2020).

Although video technology continues to influence our daily lives, researchers tend to prevail in traditional patterns and notions of data collection and analysis. However, video recordings offer the possibility of analysing organisational and social phenomena in a more detailed and in-depth way (LeBaron et al. 2018; Miller Scarnato 2019). Particularly for practitioner-orientated researchers who wish to conduct qualitative research in a more transparent and engaging process, video statements can be an exciting method for data collection.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

*Dr Annica Lau* graduated from the Worcester Business School at the University of Worcester. Her research focuses on the job expectations of young professionals, specifically the concept of the psychological contract and Human Resources Management (HRM) in general. Currently Annica works in HRM where she is responsible for talent and succession management, leadership programmes and international business projects. In addition to her work, Annica teaches HRM at the Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft in Berlin and Business Administration and Research Methodology at IU International University of Applied Sciences in Hanover.

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