



Beyond Internal Corporate Social Responsibility Communication (ICSRC): Creating a Purposeful Organization

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is broadly defined as businesses meeting their social responsibilities toward diverse stakeholders. From a functionalist perspective, it is critical to communicate an organization's socially, environmentally, legally, ethically, and economically responsible policies and actions to stakeholders to garner desirable organizational outcomes while from a constitutive, constructivist perspective, it is critical to engage in CSR communication to co-create meanings and understandings of CSR among organizations and their stakeholders (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Schoeneborn et al., 2020). Even though employees have been highlighted as a critical stakeholder in CSR communication,

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research on internal stakeholders lags behind that on external stakeholders and scholars continue to call for more research on internal CSR communication (ICSRC) from constitutive and functionalist perspectives to reflexively interrogate and co-create meanings of CSR, and generate significant returns such as ethical employer brand identity, employer attractiveness, employee engagement, and employee identification, ultimately leading to employees becoming CSR advocates and ambassadors (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Edinger-Schons et al., 2019; Jiang & Luo, 2020; Schaefer et al., 2019, 2020; Verčič & Čorić, 2018; Wang & Pala, 2020).

In addition to engendering these outcomes, ICSRC has been called upon to inspire employees to contribute to building a purpose-driven organization. Although organizational purpose has become a buzzword in practice, and practitioners across management, marketing, and communication have begun to link the concepts of CSR and purpose, there is hardly any academic literature that theorizes connections between ICSRC and purpose. Accordingly, this chapter reviews the literature on ICSRC; defines organizational purpose, connects it to extant understandings of CSR; and offers a theoretical framework that leverages ICSRC to engage employees in building a purposeful organization.

INTERNAL CSR COMMUNICATION (ICSRC)

Definitions

Prior to defining ICSRC, it is important to define related concepts such as CSR, internal CSR, internal communication, and integrated CSR communication.

CSR and Internal CSR

According to one of the most widely cited definitions, CSR refers to “the simultaneous fulfillment of the firm’s economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities” (Carroll, 1991, p. 42). Most discussions of internal CSR mirror these dimensions. For instance, to Maignan et al. (1999) internal CSR includes monitoring employee productivity, honoring employees’ contractual obligations, encouraging workforce diversity, and policies that support work-life balance. In addition, to Weder et al. (2019) internal CSR includes employee volunteering programs. This chapter adopts the view that while the concept of internal

CSR provides a tidy label to CSR activities that are related to employees, this conceptualization is problematic because as organizational members, employees have a ringside view of their organization's CSR efforts related to multiple stakeholders. They are also exposed to external CSR communication and articulations of corporate ethical identities, which can contribute to a holistic assessment of their organization's CSR philosophies and activities, and not just one based on internal aspects (Carlini et al., 2019).

Internal Communication

Internal communication includes intra-organizational communication that encompasses informal watercooler chats as well as formal, managed communication (Vercic et al., 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007). According to Welch and Jackson (2007) formal, internal communication management is “the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organisations” (p. 183). Internal communication has four dimensions of which internal corporate communication, mostly based on one-way communication between managers and employees, is employed to communicate organization-wide goals, objectives, and achievements, making it an ideal vehicle to communicate CSR (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018). However, since social media platforms have amplified employee word-of-mouth communication, particularly with regard to CSR, in addition to strategically managing formal internal corporate communication, organizations will need to consider employees' informal word-of-mouth CSR communication as well (Lee & Tao, 2020).

Integrated CSR Communication

Scholars have challenged the siloed notion of internal communication directed at one set of stakeholders with the concept of auto-communication, which argues that as organizational boundaries blur, communication directed externally could influence internal stakeholders too, and have supported the notion of integrated communication (Cornelissen, 2020). Building on the theory of auto-communication and organizational identification, Morsing (2006) proposed that CSR communication is a vital process of auto-communication for member identification. Arguing that the trends of mediatization, digitalization, media convergence, and demographic developments behooves breaking down silos among public relations, advertising, branding etc., Diehl et al. (2017) defined integrated CSR communication as “the harmonization

of all CSR-related communication strategies and activities, whereby CSR is understood as the company's attitudes and behaviors with regard to its perceived obligations and responsibility toward its stakeholders and society" (p. v).

Internal CSR Communication (ICSRC)

Since employees are exposed to diverse aspects of CSR, internal, external, and auto CSR communication, articulations of their employer's ethical organizational and corporate identities, and because they engage in informal word-of-mouth CSR communication, employees become producers and consumers of CSR communication. Hence, this chapter defines internal CSR communication (ICSRC) as *holistic intra-organizational and auto-communication related to diverse dimensions of CSR, disseminated by organizations and constructively constituted by employees*.

While CSR communication faces issues such as audience skepticism, ICSRC faces specific obstacles due to the relatively intimate nature of employer–employee relationships. Employees have an insider view of the organization; they receive internal and external CSR communication; they have deep knowledge of the company's CSR practices; can better assess CSR action-communication gaps; and as a result, could fall on a continuum that ranges from being highly skeptical to being advocates and ambassadors of CSR (Carlini et al., 2019; Edinger-Schons et al., 2019). The following section will review theoretical frameworks of ICSRC created to address some of these issues.

Theoretical Frameworks to Examine ICSRC

A thorough review of literature on ICSRC across public relations, marketing, advertising, management, accounting, and organizational communication revealed only a handful of theoretical frameworks for ICSRC. These include Maignan and Ferrell (2001) who considered CSR as an internal marketing strategy; Carlini et al. (2019) who offered a theoretical model for the CSR employer brand process; and Du et al. (2010), Crane and Glozer (2016), and Morsing and Schultz (2006) who offered CSR communication frameworks and strategies that are relevant for internal and external stakeholders.

According to Maignan and Ferrell's (2001) conceptualization of corporate citizenship as internal marketing, three aspects of internal and

external corporate citizenship communication (intensity, accuracy, and value congruence) influence (a) the relationship between corporate citizenship practices and employee evaluations of corporate citizenship, and (b) the relationship between employee evaluation of corporate citizenship and outcomes such as organizational commitment and *esprit de corps*. Further, individual characteristics such as personal values, stage of cognitive moral development, and socio-demographics can also moderate these relationships.

More recently, Carlini et al. (2019) synthesized literatures from CSR and employer branding to create a conceptual model that addressed the CSR employer branding process from the perspectives of potential and existing employees. According to the model based on signaling theory, external CSR signals (CSR conduct, which in turns affects uncontrolled communication) are antecedents for potential employees' CSR journey, while CSR employer brand identity is an antecedent for the CSR journey of potential and current employees. For potential employees, external CSR signals can affect the perceived sincerity of CSR signaling, which can moderate the relationship between CSR employer brand identity and potential employee perception, which can influence intention to apply. For current employees, CSR employer brand identity can affect employee perception of CSR experience (such as CSR socialization, workplace benefits, corporate ethical empowerment, and equitable human resource practices, considered as internal CSR signals), which can lead to positive and negative employee outcomes. Further, the relationship between employee perception of CSR experience and outcomes will be moderated by the perceived gap between employees' CSR expectations and experiences. The authors proposed that firms need to achieve CSR consistency in terms of embeddedness of CSR values (embedded vs peripheral), and levels of internal CSR (high vs. low) and offered a typology of organizations that includes CSR employer brand, Underperformers, Internal focused, and Greenwashers that can enable managers to create a CSR employer brand identity, which can create a high-quality talent pool, and generate positive affective, cognitive and behavioral employee outcomes.

However, one of the greatest obstacles of CSR communication has been stakeholder skepticism, to address which Du et al. (2010) proposed a framework that dealt with the influence of message content (issue importance; commitment, impact, motives and fit of the CSR initiatives), and message channel (corporate, independent) on internal outcomes (awareness, attributions, attitudes, identification, and trust) and external

outcomes from the perspective of customers (purchase, loyalty, and advocacy), employees (productivity, loyalty, citizenship behavior, advocacy) and investors (amount of invested capital, loyalty). This relationship can be moderated by stakeholder characteristics (stakeholder types, issue support, social value orientation) and company characteristics (reputation, industry, marketing strategies).

More recently, Crane and Glozer (2016) conducted a review of CSR communication literature, proposed a framework that distinguished research across two dimensions—internal/external stakeholders, and functionalist/constitutive paradigms, and identified four sets of CSR communication research. These included research on employees within the functionalist paradigm called CSR Integration, while research within the constitutive paradigm was called CSR Interpretation. After noting the limited research on CSR Integration, the authors suggested that functionalist research could adopt theoretical perspectives such as social identity theory and organizational justice to connect diverse disciplinary perspectives. Scholarship on CSR Interpretation could examine the role of CSR communication in new forms of organization such as social enterprises, and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Rupturing silos of work on ICSRC, the authors suggested research that spans internal and external stakeholders. For instance, research on externally focused CSR identity can be extended to internal audiences; or theories of sensemaking used to explore internal CSR meaning-making can be extended to understand how internal meaning-making can influence external sense-giving.

Finally, Morsing and Schultz (2006) offered three CSR communication strategies to engage with stakeholders—the stakeholder information strategy built on the public information model; the stakeholder response strategy based on the two-way asymmetrical communication model; and the stakeholder involvement strategy built on the two-way symmetrical model of communication. Although companies could adopt all three models for CSR communication, it is important to develop CSR communication strategies based on two-way symmetrical communication processes.

To summarize, while Maignan and Ferrell's (2001) early model conceptualized ICSRC only as a moderator between CSR practices and employee CSR evaluations; and between employee CSR evaluations and outcomes, later models (Carlini et al., 2019; Du et al., 2010) considered the effects of ICSRC on diverse employee outcomes. Overall, theoretical frameworks have offered various antecedents such as

CSR conduct/practices, moderators such as stakeholder and company characteristics, CSR expectation–experience gap; perceived sincerity of CSR signaling; and outcomes such as intention to apply, organizational commitment, esprit de corps, loyalty, citizenship behavior, and advocacy. Finally, Crane and Glozer’s (2016) work acknowledged typologies of research on ICSRC across stakeholder types and research paradigms, while Morsing and Schultz (2006) offered a typology of CSR communication strategies that can be applied to both internal and external stakeholders.

Empirical Research on ICSRC

Scholars have conducted more work within the functionalist than the constitutive perspective. Functionalist scholarship includes examining antecedents of ICSRC such as CSR communication strategies (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Jiang & Luo, 2020), message valence of employee word-of-mouth related to CSR (Lee & Tao, 2020), and potential employees’ perceptions of CSR and employer brand (Verčič & Ćorić, 2018).

Limited research has identified moderators such as frequency and transparency of CSR communication over social media (Wang & Pala, 2020), and employee involvement in CSR (Schaefer et al., 2019) and mediators such as the evaluation of perceived organizational CSR engagement (Schaefer et al., 2020), CSR social media and job engagement, and employee perceptions of CSR motives (Jiang & Luo, 2020), and authenticity (Lee & Tao, 2020).

Finally, scholarship has examined multiple outcomes such as job satisfaction due to CSR, organizational pride, and word-of-mouth about CSR (Schaefer et al., 2020), consumers’ corporate attitudes and purchase intentions (Lee & Tao, 2020), employee engagement (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Jiang & Luo, 2020), employee identification (Wang & Pala, 2020), perceived authenticity of CSR engagement (Schaefer et al., 2019) and corporate reputation from the perspective of potential employees (Verčič & Ćorić, 2018).

In addition, a handful of studies has examined ICSRC from a constitutive perspective. For instance, Girschik (2020) examined how CSR managers fulfil an internal activist role by framing CSR activities to influence understandings of CSR, while Wagner (2019) demonstrated how employees might withdraw from CSR processes when organizations follow strong sense-giving, informational, and persuasive approaches.

To summarize, empirical research on ICSRC within the functionalist paradigm has been scattered, examining a multitude of antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcomes, indicative of an emergent and productive area of research, while research within the constitutive paradigm is limited. While research on these streams needs to be strengthened, a new direction of research across functionalist and constitutive approaches is to examine articulations of interconnections between ICSRC and organizational purpose.

ICSRC TO BUILD A PURPOSEFUL ORGANIZATION

Defining Purpose and Connecting It to CSR

Kantar Consulting (2018) defined purpose as “why you exist: and the positive impact in people’s lives and the world they live in” (p. 12) in their report, *Purpose 2020*. The report distinguishes purpose from vision, mission, and CSR. While *purpose* refers to the organization’s positive impact in the world; *vision* refers to where the organization is headed; *mission* refers to how the organization is going to get there; and CSR refers to what the organization does to help protect the world. Most business/trade journals also distinguish between *cause* and *purpose*. While cause refers to an issue a company might address, purpose lies at the heart of the business model and is the reason for being. Vila and Bharadwaj (2017) argued that some brands, whom they called *social purpose natives*, have built social purpose into their business models, such as TOMS and Patagonia. The societal benefits they offer are so deeply intertwined with their products and services that one cannot separate the two. However, for those they called *social purpose immigrants*, established brands that are committed to social and environmental causes, but may not have a consciously articulated social purpose, they proposed exploring social purpose through the brand’s heritage, customer tensions, and product externalities. Exploring a brand’s heritage and the core reason for its existence can offer clues to the social needs the brand is positioned to address. Similarly, examining issues that are pertinent to the organization’s customers, especially those related to the brand’s heritage, and identifying externalities caused by the brand or the industry can also help to identify social purpose.

Academic scholarship on purpose also seems to concur with these ideas. Basu (1999) argued that corporate purpose represents the ultimate priority of the organization. The needs of the organization's key stakeholders, the macro environment of the organization, and the cultural beliefs and values of the organization influence corporate purpose. White et al. (2017), reporting an interview with Antony Jenkins, ex-CEO/chairman at Barclays, wrote that a number of CEOs use the word *purpose* to refer to the "underlying issues and practices of rethinking how corporations work, and also rethinking the basic relationship between corporations and society" (p. 101).

To Hollensbe et al. (2014), purpose refers to the reason for which business is created or exists, its meaning and direction. They argued that a focus on organizational purpose highlights the interdependence of business and society, a notion that is also reflected in the literature on CSR. They proposed that the values of dignity (that considers the whole person), solidarity (recognizing that other people matter), plurality (valuing diversity), subsidiarity (promoting accountability at all levels by proper delegation of decision-making), reciprocity (building mutual trust and trusted relationships), and sustainability (being stewards of people, values, and resources) are potential mechanisms to help organizations build trust and better businesses.

Similarly, Karns (2011) argued that the purpose of business is to contribute to *human flourishing*, which is about individual and communal well-being with economic, psycho-social, spiritual, and physical dimensions as reflected in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Karns (2011) suggested the stewardship model where the purpose of business is to serve society by contributing to the flourishing of humankind. Indeed, Cone/Porter Novelli's Purpose study (2018) found that to 89% of Americans, implementing CSR programs was one of the major ways companies could demonstrate their purpose.

The discussions reviewed above establish *purpose as the reason for existence of organizations, and meeting organizations' social and environmental responsibilities (CSR) as a way of delivering purpose, thus making a clear connection between organizational purpose and responsibilities.*

Organizations have been paying attention to the conceptualization, enactment, and communication of their purpose and responsibilities for multiple reasons such as the generation of relational, reputational, and legitimacy capitals and because people increasingly want to work for companies that create positive value. According to Cone/Porter Novelli's

Purpose study (2018), 68% said they would work for a company leading with purpose. Despite these encouraging statistics, research findings on whether stakeholders, particularly current and prospective employees, care about organizational purpose and CSR have been mixed. Consequently, scholars have highlighted the need to acknowledge the role of employee characteristics in the conceptualization and enactment of CSR communication, particularly the emergence of a socially and environmentally conscious generation of employees (Dhanesh, 2020; Diehl et al., 2017; Weder et al., 2019).

Changes in Employee Characteristics and Organizational Responses

Scholars have examined the CSR attitude–behavior gap or the claim by stakeholders that they harbor positive attitudes toward socially responsible companies, but do not translate those positive attitudes to behavior (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). However, scholars have also found that stakeholders care for socially responsible companies, especially millennials, who represent the largest generation in the labour force since 2016 (White et al., 2017). Beyond this demographic categorization of stakeholders who care about organizational purpose and CSR, Dhanesh (2020) proposed that the concept of hypermodernity might offer a new segmentation of publics that care for purpose and CSR.

Adapting Lipovetsky's (2005) ideas of hypermodernity, Dhanesh (2020) argued that characteristics of hyper-individualism such as (a) a paradoxical focus on self and others, (b) the need to actively construct exemplary individual identities (c) a penchant for emotional and experiential consumption (d) a love of hyperspectacles and (e) a paradoxical obsession with enjoying the present while being racked with anxiety about the future, might drive hypermodern individuals' deep interest in engaging with purpose-led, socially and environmentally responsible companies.

Hypermodern organizations, or organizations based on excessive levels of speed, characterized by hyper-flexibility to meet market conditions; and focus on the short term exert undue pressures on employees, and create a climate of risk and uncertainty. Further, widespread adoption of communication technologies has ensured constant connectivity between employees and their organizations, placing excessive stress and an expectation of never being completely disconnected from work (Roberts & Armitage, 2006).

Dhanesh (2020) suggested that to address such issues and to adapt purpose and CSR for hypermodern employees, organizations should create employee well-being programs that rearticulate core work hours and increase organizational awareness of the negative consequences of an always-on mentality. Organizations can also create emotive, experiential CSR programs aligned with organizational purpose that hypermodern employees can engage with as volunteers. Finally, organizations can create visual hyperspectacles that can help to create ethical corporate identities built on the enactment of purpose-aligned CSR programs. Dhanesh (2020) argued that engaging in experiential CSR programs could help hypermodern employees to connect multiple dots—their longing for rich, qualitative experiences; desire to contribute to a humane world; and need to belong to a community which could help them craft unique personal identities. Establishing these connections could meet higher-order needs of employees and enable employee identification.

This approach of creating purpose-aligned CSR initiatives for employees that could improve employee outcomes augments Karns' (2011) idea of purpose as contributing to the flourishing of humankind through individual and communal well-being. Offering initial empirical support for the interconnections of purpose and CSR from an employee perspective, Bhattacharya et al. (2019) found that employee awareness of their company's higher purpose could positively impact reduction in justification strategies of their lack of ownership of CSR, which could, in turn, lead to sustainable behaviors in the workplace. However, scholarship is yet to deal with the role of ICSRC in engaging employees to build a purposeful organization, which the next section addresses with a proposed theoretical framework.

Framework for Purpose-Aligned ICSRC

This chapter builds on the literature reviewed and proposes a framework for purpose-aligned ICSRC (see Fig. 8.1). According to this framework, organizations need to employ communication strategies of engagement and involvement to create conversations among employees on purpose-aligned CSR, straddling topics such as issues and causes to focus on, probable motives and objectives, company-purpose-cause fit, extent and duration of input, and intended impact. This meaning-making process could not only help to collaboratively construct meanings of purpose-led social responsibilities within the organization but could also inform the

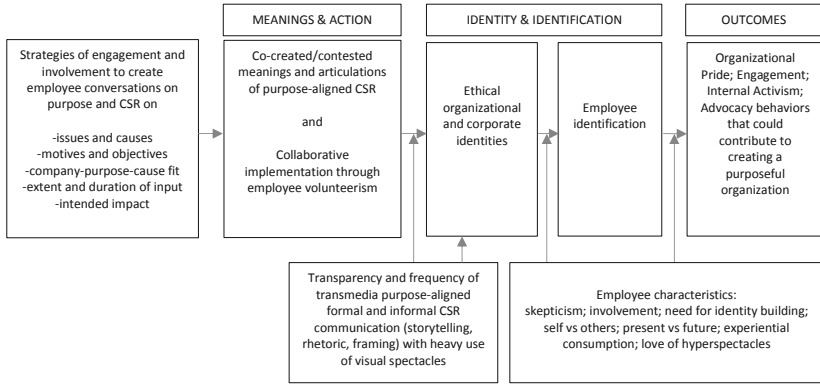


Fig. 8.1 Framework for purpose-aligned ICSRC

crafting of ethical organizational and corporate identities. Given trends such as media convergence, and employees enthused by hyperspectacles, the move from shared articulations and collaborative implementation to creating ethical organizational and corporate identities could be moderated by the extent of transmedia rhetoric, framing, and storytelling employing spectacular visuals. These ethical organizational and corporate identities could meet hypermodern employee needs for identity building, which could be moderated by employee characteristics such as skepticism, or the paradoxical hypermodern feature of being both self- and other-focused simultaneously. Employee identification could generate outcomes such as organizational pride, engagement, advocacy behavior, or internal activism, all of which can contribute to creating a reflexive, responsible, purposeful organization.

Future research can examine each of these variables using both functionalist and constitutive approaches to ICSRC. While organizations tend to adopt top-down, one-way models of communication, research can examine how communication strategies of engagement and involvement can foster both co-created and contested meanings of CSR, and how the two can coexist as organizational members continue to dynamically debate and discuss evolving meanings and articulations of what it means to be a purpose-led, responsible organization. Research can also examine various forms of transmedia storytelling related to purpose and CSR that

encompasses both formal internal and external corporate communication, and informal word-of-mouth employee communication and how processes of auto-communication can moderate the association between CSR practices and creation of ethical identities. Much more research needs to be done on examining the processes through which organizational and corporate ethical identities can meet employee identity needs and achieve identification. Most importantly, how do changing employee characteristics such as those of hypermodern employees affect this process of employee identification, and finally how do these characteristics influence the generation of outcomes from employee identification.

**INTERVIEW WITH ALEX MALOUF,
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS
DIRECTOR MEA, SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC**

How would you define organizational purpose? Is it a fad or a meaningful trend? And why?

For me, organizational purpose should be about what people are there to do in their organizations. Is it making great food? Is it solving problems using technology? Is it connecting people? It's the goal that everyone at that organization is working towards. And it's always been a part of every company and it's the reason companies exist (tell me of a single company that started out with the aim of paying shareholders). What's happened is that this concept has morphed into "positive purpose". Let me give you an example—a fast food company's purpose may have gone from selling great burgers to selling nutritious meals. Pepsi's atrocious Black Lives Matter ad is a great example of this—the company sells tasty drinks and snacks. But they wanted to be seen in the light of a social movement. And this doesn't always work, because that isn't true organizational purpose.

What are your thoughts on the relationship between CSR and organizational purpose?

CSR isn't often long-term—strategies get changed year-in, year-out. And ideas shift. Without long-term planning and execution, CSR isn't as effective as it could be. If CSR is to be truly sustainable, it has to be linked to organizational purpose. Employees need to feel that CSR is part of the company, management even more so if we expect them to support CSR long-term. And stakeholders should see an alignment between CSR and

organizational purpose. The two notions feed off and amplify one another. They help people to see the other much more clearly.

How can internal CSR communication help to engage employees in building a purposeful organization? Could you share an example?

We had one wonderful group in a previous company (Procter & Gamble). They were from the same function, the same team, and they set up a social group. Part of their activities included one CSR activity every quarter. They'd discuss within themselves their big ideas which were linked to what the company did. They'd talk with the communications team about these ideas, to see if they were feasible and if the comms team could craft stories around the activities. Because these were their ideas, they were always engaged, committed, and would do whatever they needed to do to make the activity happen (be it with funding or getting products). I didn't see this level of energy or enthusiasm when ideas were imposed from the top. And the team was the closest, the friendliest in the organization.

What are some of the factors that help and/or hinder the use of internal CSR communication to engage employees in contributing to building a purposeful organization?

Internal CSR can't be top-down. There must be some employee engagement—employees need to feel they have something to give and do in the process of coming up with ideas and execution, otherwise it can just feel like work. Ask your employees, seek out their opinion, preferably in small groups (up to 20 people). Anything larger and it'll often be the management who will seek to lead (at least in patriarchal, top-down societies). Bring in external voices, such as customers and community members, who can speak about societal issues and help educate your internal audience. Use visuals and video, and ask the beneficiaries to tell their own story, especially after the event, so you can emphasize the impact of the good work being done.

Alex Malouf, a marketing communications executive who has spent the last 17 years in the Middle East has lived across the region, working for the public and private sectors in a variety of communications roles. He is the Corporate Communications Director for the Middle East and Africa at Schneider Electric.

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