Soft Skills Training Strategy and Its Effect on Nurse Interns' Civil Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Contents: Soft skills are socio-emotional skills, essential for personal development and workplace success. While civility is defined as having respect for others, and it is necessary to bring attention to the importance of soft skills and civility and discuss its impact on teaching, learning, and patient outcomes.

Aim: This study aimed to assess the effect of soft skills training strategies on nurse interns' civil behavior.

Methods: The study was conducted at Ain-Shams University Hospitals, where nurse interns have their training, namely; Ain-Shams University Hospital, El-Demerdash hospital, Pediatrics Hospital, and Cardiovascular Hospital using quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design. The subjects of this study included all available nurse interns having their training in the settings mentioned above during the data collection period (the academic year 2017-2018). The study sample was 90 nurse interns, 35 males, and 55 females. The data were collected by using two tools, namely soft skills elements questionnaire and workplace civility index.

Results: The study revealed a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' total knowledge in the post and follow up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase. Also, there was a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' soft skills in the post and followed up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase. In addition to a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' civil behavior in the post and follows up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase.

Conclusion: Implementing a soft skills training strategy for nurse interns is effective to improve their civil behavior. Based on the study findings, it was recommended that soft skills training strategy should be applied in all nursing curricula. The faculty of nursing should be supplied with all the learning resources needed in the educational system to support the students' soft skills development, and further studies should be developed to handle the barriers of implementation of soft skills training strategy in nursing education.

Keywords: Soft skills, nurse intern, civil behavior.

1. Introduction

Soft Skills is a trendy term nowadays, used to indicate personal transversal competencies refer to personalities, attributes, qualities, and personal behavior of individuals. Soft skills include specific abilities such as communication, problem-solving, self-motivation, decision-making, and time management skills *(Allbrahin, 2016)*. While civil behavior can be defined as "behaviors that help to preserve the norms for mutual respect in the workplace, civility reflects concern for others" *(Çelik et al., 2018)*.

More than any other profession, nursing has long been concerned with establishing professional values and behaviors within their discipline. Professional nursing practice is a commitment to compassion, caring, and strong ethical values; continuous development of self and others; accountability and responsibility for insightful practice demonstrating a spirit of collaboration and flexibility *(Bednash, 2019)*.

Nursing is a field requiring clinical knowledge and skills to care for the patients and his family as it deals with real-life situations *(Kalaivani, 2014)*. A further component of nursing which is essential to professionalism is quality care. Nurses are expected to give the best possible care to all clients, regardless of the situation or who they are. Professionalism means that all nurses treat everybody equally and do their best to ensure that the highest quality of care is provided. It includes a dedication to principles of justice, honesty, respect, and integrity *(Dubois, & Rothwell, 2017)*.

The main goal of nursing education is to prepare students who communicate effectively, think critically, demonstrate caring behaviors, and perform safe and effective nursing interventions ethically. The expectation for nursing education is to produce graduates who will be competent practitioners after graduation. For this reason, clinical experiences are a significant component of nursing education *(Robinson, 2017)*.

The study of soft skills is essential because every administrative function and activity involves direct or

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indirect communication. Whether planning and organizing or leading and monitoring, school administrators communicate with and through other people. It implies that every person's communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness. It seems reasonable to conclude that one of the most inhibiting forces to organizational effectiveness is a lack of effective communication *(Huston, 2017).*

Liu and Li (2018), studied nursing's soft skills of intern nurse students in the clinical nursing activity. The study reported that more than half of the participants indicated improvement in their soft skill after the first session of training. Also, *Luparell and Conner, (2015)* studied management of student incivility and misconduct in the learning environment and found that majority of the participants' reported significant improvement in civil behaviors compared with their pre-management behavior.

2. Significance of the Study

Most higher education institutions include the development of employability skills within their curricula and place the focus of career development efforts on hard skills, technology skills, knowledge, and other skills that specifically relate to the ability to get work-related tasks done. However, employers continue to report that graduates are not ready for the world of work, and lack some of the essential soft skills needed for successful employment despite the soft skills can be learned and can make or break any organization.

Our social nature also depends on communication. One of the most cherished forms of human communication is a conversation process guided and structured by implicit or explicit civility standards. Employers prefer to hire and promote those who are resourceful, ethical, and self-directed with excellent soft skills. So, many management colleges are supporters who incorporate soft skills training in the curriculum of management courses *(John, 2010).* This study aimed to train the nurse interns on soft skills and assess the effect of this training on their civil behaviors.

3. Aim of the study

This study aimed at assessing the effect of soft skills training strategies on nurse interns' civil behavior.

3.1 Research Hypotheses

- Soft skills training strategy will improve nurse interns' total knowledge related to soft skills and civil behavior.
- Soft skills training strategy will improve nurse interns' soft skills.
- Soft skills training strategy will improve nurse interns' civil behavior.

3.2. Operational definitions

Soft skills are intra- and inter-personal (socio-emotional) skills, essential for personal development, social participation, and workplace success. The components of soft skills for seeking the aim of this study are communication, problem-solving, teamwork,

professionalism, and leadership.

Civility is defined as having respect for differences, discussing them robustly, and treating one another with dignity and honor.

Civil behavior is being cultured or polite, and it is the ability to stop inappropriate discourse and gossip by redirecting the conversation and speaking firmly but calmly for another person.

4. Subjects and Methods

4.1. Research design

A quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design will be used in this study. This design is a unique research methodology because it is characterized by what is lacks, this type of research is often performed in cases where a control group cannot be created, or random selection cannot be performed. It is often the case in particular medical and psychological studies *(Abraham & MacDonald, 2011).*

4.2. Research setting

The study was conducted at Ain-Shams University Hospitals, where nurse interns are having their training, namely; Ain-Shams University Hospital, El-Demerdash Hospital, Pediatrics Hospital, and Cardiovascular Hospital, which include different clinical units.

4.3. Subjects

The study subjects included all available nurse interns with their training in the settings mentioned earlier during the data collection period (the academic year 2017-2018). The study sample was 90 nurse interns, 35 males, and 55 females.

4.4. Tools of the study

Data for this study were collected by using two tools, namely soft skills elements questionnaire and workplace civility index.

4.4.1. Self-administered Questionnaire

This tool consisted of two parts. The first part was concerned with data about the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, residence, birth order, marital status, pre-university education, training setting, and attending a training program for both soft skills and civility.

The second part was developed by the researcher guided by *(Clark, 2013; Lazarus, 2013; Kechagias, 2011)* to assess nurse interns' knowledge regarding soft skills and civil behavior. It included (7) basic dimensions contained 30 multiple choice questions (MCQ) covering different aspects of soft skills and civil behavior. They were soft skills (6 MCQs), communication (4 MCQs), problem-solving (4 MCQs), teambuilding (4 MCQs), professionalism (4 MCQs), leadership (4 MCQs), and civility (4 MCQs).
Scoring system

Each question was assigned a score of "1" if correct answer and "0" if the incorrect answer. The scores of each item were summed up and converted into percent scores for

each area of knowledge. Knowledge was considered satisfactory if the percent score was 60% or more and unsatisfactory if less than 60%.

4.4.2. Soft Skills Elements Questionnaire

This tool was developed by the researcher guided by *(Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2006)*. It was used for assessing the soft skills elements as perceived by nurse interns. It was included (5) basic dimensions contained 43 statements *distributed as following:* Communication (9 statements), Problem-solving (9 statements), teambuilding (9 statements), professionalism (8 statements), and leadership (8 statements).

Scoring system

Responses of participants were measured through a three-point scale, measured through "Always, Sometimes and Never." Item scores were added together to get a dimension score for every participant. These scores were converted into a percent score. The result was considered high if the percent score was 60% or more and low if less than 60%.

4.4.3. Workplace Civility Index

This tool was developed by the researcher based on a literature review *(Clark, 2013)*. It was used for assessing nurse interns' civil behavior. It was included four basic dimensions consisted of 36 statements distributed as following: Interactions with supervisors (10 statements), interactions with health team members (10 statements), interactions with other colleagues (8 statements), interactions with patients/visitors (8 statements).

Scoring system

Responses of participants were measured through a three-point scale, measured through "Always, Sometimes and Never." Items' scores were added together to get a dimension score for every participant. These scores were converted into a percent score. The result was considered civil if the percent score was 80% or more and uncivil if less than 80%.

4.5. Procedures

Tools were presented to a panel of experts for assessing face and content validity and collected their general opinions about the tools for relevance, clarity, applicability, comprehensiveness, and understandability. The jury consisted of five professors of nursing administration from two faculties of nursing. Ain Shams University (three professors) and Cairo University (two professors). The reliability of the tools was examined by assessing internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Soft skills elements questionnaire was 0.969, and workplace civility index was 0.968

Administrative and ethical consideration: Before embarking on the study, official and formal letters were issued from the Dean of Faculty of Nursing, Ain-Shams University to the hospital directors, explaining the aim of the work, and the expected benefits to obtain their cooperation during the study and ethical approval was obtained from

Scientific Research Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Nursing at Ain Shams University. Individual oral consent was also obtained from each participant in the study.

A Pilot study was conducted in December 2017. It was done on nine nurse interns randomly selected, representing approximately 10% of the main study subjects. A pilot study was done for testing the clarity and applicability of tools and their relevance to study. It also helped to estimate the time needed to complete the data collection forms and the feasibility of the research process. Since there was not any change done in the tools, the pilot samples were included in the primary study sample.

The fieldwork lasted seven months, started at the beginning of January 2018, and was completed by the end of July 2018. The study involved four phases (Knowledge assessment, program designing, implementation, and follow up).

Phase 1 (knowledge assessment phase). This phase was conducted at the beginning of January 2018 and was concerned with assessing nurse interns' knowledge about soft skills and civil behavior. Before program planning, the researcher met the nurse interns, oriented them about the study aim and tools, and invited them to participate. After completing the data collection during the assessment phase, the analysis was done to identify all the nurse interns' needs.

Phase 2 (Program designing phase). This phase was conducted at the beginning of February 2018. The researcher constructed the program after reviewing the related literature and based on the needs of the nurse interns. The designed program aimed to teach the nurses intern the essential soft skills needed to improve their civil behaviors. The time spent on conducting the program was 32 hours (16 theoretical and 16 practical). The components of the program include eight theoretical sessions regarding the objectives and content of the program. The educational session included concepts of civility, the importance of soft skills, principles of effective communication, team members' roles, competencies of leadership, qualities of successful decision-makers, and essential keys to being true professionalism.

The practical sessions (8) included small group activities for applying problem-solving techniques, role-playing to apply communication skills, and brainstorming for applying time management tools.

Phase 3 (program implementing phase). The program was implemented at Ain Shams University Hospitals, where nurse interns have their training. The program was implemented throughout two months (March and April 2018), two days weekly. One session was offered daily, two hours for each session.

Phase 4 (follow up phase). Three months after implementing the program at the end of July 2018, the researcher evaluated the effect of the program on nurse interns' civil behavior using the same format of data collection tool (posttest), namely needs assessment tool, soft skills elements questionnaire, and workplace civility index.

4.6. Data analysis

Data entry and statistical analysis were done using (SPSS 20.0) statistical software package. Data were presented using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages for qualitative variables and means and standard deviation and median for quantitative variables. Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated to assess the reliability of the developed tool through its internal consistency. The Chi-Square test was commonly used for testing relationships between categorical variables. Statistical significance was considered at p-value < 0.05.

5. Results

Table 1 shows that more than half of the participants had less than twenty-four years; 61.1 % of them were females, 60% live in an urban area. Nearly two-thirds of them were single, and their order in the family more than second (72.2% and 71.1% respectively). 62.2% of them have general secondary education before faculty enrolment; two-thirds of them were trained at Ain Shams University Hospital and El-Demerdash hospital. The majority of the participants had no previous training on soft skills and civility (70%, 82.2%, respectively).

Table 2 shows a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' total knowledge regarding soft skills and civil behaviors in the post and follows up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase.

Table 3 shows a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' soft skills in the post and follows up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase.

Table 4 shows a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' civil behavior in the post and follows up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase.

Table 5 shows a highly statistically significant relation between nurse interns' pre-intervention soft skills and all civil behaviors p<0.01.

Table 6 shows a highly statistically significant relation between nurse interns' total knowledge and their pre-intervention civility p<0.01, while there was a statistically significant relationship between nurse interns' total knowledge and their pre-intervention soft skills in the pre-intervention p<0.05. In the post-intervention phase, there was a statistically significant relationship between nurse interns' total knowledge and their post-intervention civility and soft skills p<0.05. In the follow-up phase, there was no statistically significant relationship between nurse interns' total knowledge and their civility and soft skills scores at follow-up.

Table (1): Frequency and percentage distribution of sociodemographic characteristics of nurse interns (n=90).

	Frequency	Percent
Age		
<24	48	53.3
24+	42	46.7
Range	22.0-29.0	
Mean±SD	23.51±2	
Median	23.0	
Gender		
Male	35	38.9
Female	55	61.1
Residence		
Urban	54	60.0
Rural	36	40.0
Birth order		
1	26	28.9
2+	64	71.1
Range	1-8	
Mean±SD	2.2±1.3	
Median	2.0	
Marital status		
Single	65	72.2
Married	25	27.8
Pre-university education		
Secondary school	56	62.2
Technical institute	34	37.8
Training setting:		
Ain-Shams University Hospital	30	33.3
Cardiovascular Hospital	15	16.7
El-Demerdash Hospital	30	33.3
Pediatric Hospital	15	16.7
Previous training on soft skills		
No	63	70.0
Yes	27	30.0
Previous training on civility		
No	74	82.2
Yes	16	17.8

Table (2): Comparison of the studied interns' knowledge about soft skills and civil behaviors throughout intervention phases (n=90).

Satisfactory knowledge	Phase						Pre-post		Pre-follow up	
	Pre		Post		Follow Up		x^2	p-value	x^2	p-value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%				
Soft skills	21	23.3	67	74.4	76	84.4	47.05	<0.001	67.63	<0.001
Communication	33	36.7	62	68.9	70	77.8	18.75	<0.001	31.07	<0.001
Leadership	20	22.2	62	68.9	69	76.7	39.51	<0.001	53.36	<0.001
Problem-solving and critical thinking	26	28.9	63	70.0	73	81.1	30.43	<0.001	49.58	<0.001
Teamwork	31	34.4	65	72.2	78	86.7	25.80	<0.001	51.38	<0.001
Professionalism	31	34.4	49	54.4	69	76.7	7.29	<0.007	32.49	<0.001
Civility	24	26.7	53	58.9	72	80.0	19.09	<0.001	51.43	<0.001
Total										
Satisfactory	28	31.1	64	71.1	73	81.1	28.81	<0.001	45.68	<0.001
Unsatisfactory	62	68.9	26	28.9	17	18.9				

Table (3): Comparison of the studied interns' soft skills throughout intervention phases (n=90).

Soft skills	Phase						Pre-post		Pre-follow-up	
	Pre		Post		Follow Up		x^2	p-value	x^2	p-value
	No	%	No	%	No	%				
Communication	53	58.9	83	92.2	76	84.4	27.7	<0.001	14.47	<0.001
Problem-solving and critical thinking	39	43.3	74	82.2	73	81.1	29.12	<0.001	27.32	<0.001
Teamwork	51	56.7	79	87.8	78	86.7	21.71	<0.001	19.95	<0.001
Professionalism	53	58.9	83	92.2	77	85.6	27.07	<0.001	15.95	<0.001
Leadership	50	55.6	75	83.3	76	84.4	16.36	<0.001	17.88	<0.001
Total										
High (≥60%)	47	52.2	80	88.9	80	88.9	29.12	<0.001	29.12	<0.001
Low (<60%)	43	47.8	10	11.1	10	11.1				

Table (4): Comparison of nurse interns' civil behaviors throughout intervention phases (n=90).

Civil behavior	Phase						Pre-post		Pre-follow-up	
	Pre		Post		Follow Up		x^2	p-value	x^2	p-value
	No	%	No	%	No	%				
Interactions with supervisors	54	60.0	81	90.0	77	85.6	21.60	<0.001	14.83	<0.001
Interactions with health team	56	62.2	83	92.2	78	86.7	23.03	<0.001	14.13	<0.001
Interactions with other colleagues	56	62.2	82	91.1	75	83.3	20.99	<0.001	10.12	<0.001
Interactions with patients/ visitors	55	61.1	79	87.8	71	78.9	16.82	<0.001	6.77	0.009
Total										
Civil (≥80%)	52	57.8	82	91.1	81	90.0	26.28	<0.001	24.22	<0.001
Uncivil (<80%)	38	42.2	8	8.9	9	10.0				

Table (5): The relations between nurse interns' pre-intervention soft skills and civil behaviors (n=90).

Civility	Soft skills				x^2 test	p-value
	High (≥60%)		Low (<60%)			
	No.	%	No.	%		
Interactions with supervisors						
Civil	43	79.6	11	20.4		
Uncivil	4	11.1	32	88.9	40.64	<0.001
Interactions with health team						
Civil	45	80.4	11	19.6		
Uncivil	2	5.9	32	94.1	47.03	<0.001
Interactions with other colleagues						
Civil	43	76.8	13	23.2		
Uncivil	4	11.8	30	88.2	35.85	<0.001
Interactions with patients/ visitors						
Civil	44	80.0	11	20.0		
Uncivil	3	8.6	32	91.4	43.74	<0.001
Total						
Civil	43	82.7	9	17.3		
Uncivil	4	10.5	34	89.5	45.83	<0.001

Table (6): The relations between nurse interns' total knowledge and their civility and soft skills throughout intervention (n=90)

Program phases	Knowledge				P-value
	Satisfactory (≥60%)		Unsatisfactory (<60%)		
	No.	%	No.	%	
PRE					
Soft skills					
High	19	40.4	28	59.6	0.046
Low	9	20.9	34	79.1	
Civility					
Civil	23	44.2	29	55.8	0.002
Uncivil	5	13.2	33	86.8	
POST					
Soft skills					
High	60	75.0	20	25.0	0.032
Low	4	40.0	6	60.0	
Civility					
Civil	61	74.4	21	25.6	0.048
Uncivil	3	37.5	5	62.5	
Follow up					
Soft skills					
High	67	83.8	13	16.3	0.094
Low	6	60.0	4	40.0	
Civility					
Civil	68	84.0	13	16.0	0.063
Uncivil	5	55.6	4	44.4	

6. Discussion

Skills can be defined as a non-technical and not reliant on abstract reasoning, involving interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities to facilitate mastered performance in particular social contexts. Soft skills include oral communication, team working, customer handling, and self-presentation. Soft skills are seen to contribute to greater leadership effectiveness in management *(Hurrell, 2016)*. The current study aimed to assess the effect of soft skills training strategies on nurse interns' civil behavior.

Regarding sociodemographic characteristics of nurse interns, the current study revealed that more than half of participants had less than twenty-four years. Near two-thirds of them were females and live in an urban area. Near two-thirds of them have general secondary educations before faculty enrolment. Nearly three-fourths of them were single, and their order in the family more than 2nd, two-thirds of them were trained at Ain Shams University hospital and El-Demerdash hospital. The majority of the participants have not previously trained in soft skills and civility. These sociodemographic characteristics are typically corresponding to the age of most Egyptian interns, who are commonly female predominance, single, graduated from secondary school, and live in urban areas because in the current study Ain Shams University is one of the main University in Cairo, the Capital of Egypt.

The same results were reported by *Ahmed et al. (2018)*, who studied the effect of educational guidelines on nurse interns' decision-making skills and found that majority of the participants had less than twenty-four years and had general

secondary education. More than three-quarters of them were females and lived in an urban area.

Regarding nurse interns' total knowledge, the current study revealed a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' total knowledge in the post and follow up phases as compared to the pre-intervention phase. From the researcher's point of view, this result may be due to using suitable teaching methods and well-prepared educational materials in addition to good skills of the trainers and interesting of nurse interns to learn about this vital topic. All these factors could affect training outcomes positively. This finding is supporting the first research hypothesis.

This result is in agreement with *Chiu et al. (2016)*, who Assess students' knowledge and soft skills competency in the industrial training program and found that majority of the participants' total knowledge was improved.

Regarding nurse interns' soft skills, the current study revealed a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' soft skills in the post and follow up phases as compared to the pre-intervention phase. From the researcher's point of view, this result may be due to the positive effect of the training program on nurse interns' soft skills that could be reflected in their performance. This finding is supporting the second research hypothesis.

This result is in agreement with *Mahesh et al. (2018)*, who studied the introduction of a skill boot camp for final year undergraduate nursing students entering an internship and found that more than half of the participants' soft skills were improved. In the same line, this result is in agreement with *Safan and Ebrahim (2018)*, who studied problems and obstacles facing nursing interns and their relation to their

performance in the clinical setting and found that more than two-thirds of the participants reported improvement in all soft skills' dimensions.

Regarding nurse interns' civil behaviors, the current study revealed a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' civil behavior in the post and follow up phases as compared to the pre-intervention phase. From the researcher's point of view, this result may be due to nurse interns' deep understanding of the importance of civil behavior and using effective teaching methods.

This result is congruent with *Luparell and Conner (2015)*, who studied management of student incivility and misconduct in the learning environment and found that the majority of the participants reported significant improvement in civil behaviors compared with their pre-management behavior. In the same line, this result is in agreement with *Satyanrayana et al. (2017),* who studied the perception of uncivil classroom behavior among the faculty members and the students in an Indian dental institution and reported great improvement in participants' behaviors. These findings are supporting the third research hypothesis.

Regarding the relations between nurse interns' pre-intervention soft skills and civility, the current study revealed a highly statistically significant relation between nurse interns' pre-intervention soft skills and all civility. These findings evidenced the possible effect of soft skill training on improving civil behaviors. This result is incongruent with the study done by *Dunker and Manning (2019)*, who studied civility training for faculty using role-play: Creating a healthy clinical environment and stated a statistically significant relationship between participants' soft skills and their civil behaviors.

Regarding the relation between nurse interns' knowledge and their civility, and soft skills, there was a highly statistically significant relationship between knowledge, soft skills, and civility at pre and post-intervention, while there was no statistically significant relationship between knowledge, soft skills, and civility at the follow-up phase.

From the researcher's point of view, this result may be due to the nature of new skills training that needs more time to be improved and to persuade nurse interns to alter their current behaviors and accept a new one to follow and develop it in the future.

This result is in agreement with the study done by *Stone et al. (2017),* who studied teaching for critical thinking: preparing hospitality and tourism students for careers and indicated a statistically significant correlation between soft skills and knowledge. In contrast, *Dunker and Manning (2019)* studied "Civility training for faculty using role-play: Creating a healthy clinical environment to maximize student learning" and found that there is no statistically significant correlation between participants' level of knowledge and civil behaviors.

7. Conclusion

The study findings concluded that there was a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' total knowledge in the post and follow up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase. Also, there was a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' soft skills in the post and follow up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase. In addition to that, there was a highly statistically significant improvement in nurse interns' civil behavior in the post and follow up phases p<0.01 as compared to the pre-intervention phase. Implementing a soft skills training strategy for nurse interns is effective in improving their civil behavior. This finding confirmed the research hypotheses, which stated that the soft skills training strategy would improve nurse interns' knowledge, soft skills, and civil behavior.

8. Recommendations

Based on the study finding, it was recommended that soft skills training strategy should be applied in all nursing curricula. The faculty of nursing should be supplied with all the learning resources needed in the educational system to support the students' soft skills development. Further studies should be developed to handle the barriers of implementation of soft skills training strategies in nursing education.

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