Conflict Management Methods of Managers: An Empirical Study of the Turkish Tourism Industry

Muharrem TUNA[1], Fatih TÜRKMEN[2]

*Gazi University Tourism Faculty Gölbaşı Yerleskesi 06830 Gölbaşı / Ankara, TURKEY,
Tel: +903124851460, e-mail: muharrem@gazi.edu.tr*

Abstract: Although considered unwanted by the tourism industry, it has been acknowledged that conflict can foster new ideas which contribute in a positive way by providing an opportunity for self-critique and maintaining internal dynamism through change and innovations. For these reasons how to manage conflict is a crucial skill for managers. This research paper aims to determine the extent to which conflict management methods change according to demographic characteristics or the characteristics of the enterprises. It examines the preferences of managers on integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding methods. Survey research has been conducted on 1098 managers, who work at touristic enterprises located in the seven regions of Turkey. The first part of the survey includes questions on the personal characteristics of managers and the general characteristics of their enterprises. The second part includes 28 statements to explore the conflict management strategies of the managers. Percentage, frequency, t-test for independent samples, one-factor variance analysis (Anova) and Bonferroni test have been used on statistical analysis. The survey analysis establishes a significant relationship between conflict management methods of managers, their demographic characteristics and the characteristics of the enterprises they work at.

Keywords: Conflict; Conflict Management; Conflict Management Methods; Tourism Enterprises Managers

JEL classification: M12

[2] *Karabük University Safranbolu Faculty of Tourism 78600 Safranbolu/Karabük, TURKEY,
Tel: +905322748257, e-mail: fatihturkmen@karabuk.edu.tr*

1. Introduction

Humans, have to be in interaction with the individuals surrounding their social environment, especially with the family members and friends. However, during the process of communication and interaction, they may face with problems, and be unable to communicate their messages and express themselves sufficiently. These and the related problems might be defined as conflict in general terms [Cornille et al., 1999: 69; Çelik, 2011: 2]. In this sense, the conflict, which is a part of the human nature, is highly important for the organizations [Dijkstra et al., 2005: 87-88].

The studies on conflict management methods, which are conducted in order to manage these conflicts, aim to analyze the individual experiences of conflicts and the intentions of the individuals regarding the conflicts [De Dreu et al., 2001: 646]. The ability to manage the conflicts is considered as one of the fundamental factors for managerial success [Everard et al. 2004: 99] and the conflict management is considered as within the domain of the leader's responsibility [Kim et al, 1999: 130].

Conflict is a part of not only the social life, but also the organizational life. Since conflicts are inevitable, the managers are required to benefit from the conflicts in order to realize organizational aims [Mirzeoğlu, 2005: 51]. Hence, although the individuals, who are parts of the conflicts, may find it hard to cooperate, the conflict might contribute to the individuals' personalities and might create the opportunities to increase job satisfaction, if it is at tolerable levels [Schrumpf et al., 2007: 39].

Conflict is not only a subject of management and organizational psychology, but studies from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economy also deal with conflicts [Asunakutlu and Safran, 2004: 27; Üngüren, 2008: 882; Rhenman et al., 1970: 57]. There are various definitions of the term 'conflict' in the literature. These differences are related with the evaluation of the conflict as a process, a type of communication, or an outcome [Alexander, 1995: 33]. In fact, what is meant in the previous sentence is about the disagreements between the conflicting sides regarding the resource usage, expectations, aims, and the conflicting ideas [Wilmot and Hocker, 2001: 41].

Rahim [2002: 206] defines conflict as an interaction, which is revealed in the form of disconformities or disagreement, whereas Sirivun [2001: 7] defines the term as a process, which is a result of the disagreement and disconformities between the social entities and which occurs as a result of the interaction between these entities. On the other hand, Ting-Toomey [1994: 360] defines the conflict as the discord of the values, expectations, perceived processes and the outcomes, which are the results of the material and relational problems between two or more parties.

Conflicts mostly damage the relationship between two parties. Especially the dysfunctional conflicts may have negative consequences for the attitudes and the behaviors related to the organizational aims and may lead to loss of energy related to the focal point [Lydiah, 2009]. However, it has been asserted that the organizations without conflicts are doomed to failure due to the absence of dynamism [Regnet, 1999: 12]. In addition to this, organizational conflicts may not always have devastating results, but may be results of the different individual perceptions [Rees et al., 2012: 20]. Moreover, it should be recalled that the conflicts are the starting points of change, evolution and development [Günbayı and Karahan, 2006: 210], and are inevitable elements of the organizations [Everard et al., 2004: 99; Asunakutlu et al., 2004: 170; Gibson et al., 2000:

225; Hodge and Anthony, 1991: 528; Rahim, 2001: 1]. Since the conflicts may be used for organizational continuity, efficiency, and development and since they may lead to organizational failure, the management of the conflicts is highly important [Özmen, 1997: 12-13; Tjosvold, 1991: 53; Aydın, 1984: 9]. Within this context, Rahim [1992: 6] claims that the conflicts show the extent to which the organizations are healthy, and adds that the organizational theory will have an important deficit without any works to gain insight into organizational conflicts.

Rothwell and Kazanas [2003: 490] argue that disagreements of aims and values among the individuals or the groups, competition over the resources, and the communication problems lie at the sources of organizational conflicts. If the conflicts can be controlled, they may have positive consequences for the modern organizations, such as the increasing cooperation between the members of the organization, and the development of the capacity and the innovative structure of the organization. With the help of the feedback provided by the conflicts, the organization may adopt a critical perspective, intra-organizational relations may deepen, and the organizational problems may be solved. At this point, the conflict management strategies of the managers are crucial for organizational continuity [Chaudhry et al., 2008: 345] and for efficiency of the employees [Brewer et al., 2002: 78]. In fact, Peterson and Behfar [2003: 103] revealed, in their study, that the relationship between the conflict and the organizational performance is highly important for innovation, organizational dynamism, determination of possible conflict levels, coordination and avoidance of previous problems. On the other hand, the study of Kitchin [2010: 107] found that the organizational conflicts may be hidden or salient, and that the determination of organizational conflicts may be a hard task due to the organizational culture. Due to this, since unrevealed conflicts may constitute a potential source of problem for the organizations, the managers have to develop alternative methods to deal with the conflicts [Badaracco, 1997: 169].

In conclusion, conflicts are evident in all organizations and they might have both positive and negative consequences [Gibson et al., 2000: 225]. What is important is the management of the conflicts in order to obtain positive consequences for the organization. As such, the managers may benefit from the conflicts to provide innovation and development to the organizations. In case of the organizations, in which the conflicts are not managed, the conflicts may result with destructive effects such as inefficiency, stress, or job loss. In this context, the management of the conflict may be defined as the management of the disagreement and the discontent into the favor of the organization by controlling the levels of the conflict between the parties [Akkirman, 1998: 3].

2. Conflict Management Methods

The avoidance of conflicts and the maintenance of the organizational success are among the main issues to be dealt with the managers. This is because of the fact that the managers have to define the conflict management strategies for various conflicts. It is claimed that some of the methods provide temporary solutions, whereas the others solve the problems permanently. At this point, the managers have to decide on the proper methods for either temporary or permanent solutions [Şahin et al., 2006: 556]. Consequently, it is not appropriate to remain the organizational problems unresolved.

Conflict management methods, which have been defined by Rahim [2004: 9] as integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating, and avoiding, have been considered as appropriate method of scaling [Şirin and Yetim, 2009: 187]. These five methods, which

may be used to classify the methods of conflict management, are appropriate for the analysis of individual and organizational conflicts [Rahim, 2004: 10].

However, the analysis of three standards is crucial for the determination of the appropriate methods in order to achieve organizational profit. These include, the contributions of the methods to the organizational efficiency, the degree to which the methods can respond to the stakeholders' demands and expectations, and the extent to which the methods can satisfy the participants' ethical demands [Rahim, 2002: 208-209]

The methods used to manage conflicts also reveal the managers' leadership skills. In order to maintain the minimum influence of the conflicts over the organizations, the managers have to determine one or more than one of the conflict management methods and try to decrease the influence of the conflicts over the organizations. During the process of conflict management, the managers have to determine the sources of conflict, decrease the uncertainties related with the conflict, and adopt a cooperative management style based on confidence [Wall and Callister, 1995: 540-541].

3. Method

3.1. Universe and the Sample

The universe of this research comprises of the A group travel agencies and the three, four and five stars hotels, operating in Turkey. Within the scope of this research, A-group travel agencies [6496], three stars hotels [641], four stars hotels [543], and five stars hotels [319] includes the universe for the case for Turkey. The universe of this study has been stratified according to the seven geographic regions of Turkey and the cases have been selected based on the cluster sampling method in order to maintain representativeness. Since the universe includes more than 10.000 enterprises, we used the unlimited universe [N>10.000] and the universe volume calculation formula [$n = \sigma^2 Z_\alpha^2 / H$] developed by Özdamar [2001: 257]. The sample volume of this research has been calculated for each four different types of enterprises. In other words, we intended to sample 245 managers from every different enterprise. Based on these, we reached to 350 managers of A-group travel agencies, 247 three stars hotel managers, 252 four stars hotel managers, and 249 five stars hotel managers, which amount to a number of 1098 participants.

3.2. Scales used in Data Collection

In this study, survey method was used for data collection. The survey comprises two parts. The first part includes data on the demographic characteristics of the participant managers and the enterprises that they work at. In the second part, the scale for conflict management method, which includes 28 items and 5 sub-dimensions, has been used. This scale has been developed by Rahim (1983) and has been labeled as the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II. Five-point Likert scale has been used for the evaluation of each statement in both scales and has been scored as the following: "Strongly Disagree=1", "Disagree=2", "Neither agree nor disagree=3", "Agree=4" and "Strongly Agree=5".

3.3. Aim of the Research and the Hypotheses

This research aims to determine the relationship between the conflict management methods of the managers who work at travel agencies and hotels, their demographic characteristics and the characteristics of the enterprises. With this aim, the following hypotheses have been developed.

H$_1$: There are significant differences between conflict management methods of managers and his/her gender.

H$_2$: There are significant differences between conflict management methods of managers and his/her age.

H$_3$: There are significant differences between conflict management methods of managers and his/her education level.

H$_4$: There are significant differences between conflict management methods of managers and his/her experience.

H$_5$: There are significant differences between conflict management methods of managers and his/her administrative status.

3.4. Analysis of the Data

The data obtained from the survey has been analyzed by using SPSS statistical software. Confirmatory factor analysis of the scale has been conducted and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy test has shown the adequacy of the sample [KMO=0,913], whereas the Bartlett test has shown the applicability of the factor analysis [χ^2=17984, 693; p<0,001]. Five factors [Integrating, obliging, compromising, dominating and avoiding] have been determined. Besides, the alpha reliability co-efficient of the scale has been measured as α=0,922, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability co-efficient of the five factors and their sub-dimensions have been calculated as over α=0, 70. Hence, the scale for the conflict management methods seems reliable. The research has provided the demographic characteristics of the managers, and the characteristics of the enterprises in the form of frequency and percentage distribution. Bonferroni test has been used to compare the participant managers' demographic traits in terms of the dimensions. Besides, t-test for independent samples for the groups with two variables has been used to compare individual or organizational characteristics. Additionally, one-factor variance analysis has been used for groups with more than two variables.

3.5. Findings and Discussion

42.3% of the participant managers are female [f=465], whereas 57.7% are male [f=633]. Regarding the participants' ages, 16.2% are below the age of 25 [f=178], 48.1% are between 26 and 35 [f=528], 29.6% are between 36 and 45 [f=325], and 6.1% are over the age of 46 [f=67]. Besides, the 96% of the participants have the degrees of high school, associate or undergraduate, whereas 2% are primary school graduates and 2% have graduate degrees. Finally, 22% of the participants hold top executive roles [director general or deputy director general], 28.1% hold mid-level positions [department manager or deputy department manager], and 49.9% of the participants hold junior positions [chief and deputy chief].

The analysis of the frequency and the percentage distribution of the enterprises' characteristics [type of enterprise, the geographical location of the enterprise, the status of the enterprise, and the operating period of the enterprise] shows that the A group travel agencies constitute 31.8% of the participants. The remaining managers, who participated in this research, work for five stars [22.7%], four stars [23%], or three stars hotels [22.5%]. 30% of the managers work in hotels located in the Aegean region, whereas 18.9% are located in Mediterranean region, 17.9% in Central Anatolian region, 16.2% in Marmara region, and 11% in Black Sea region. The number of the managers, who work at the Eastern and the Southeastern Anatolia regions amount, is to 5.9%. On the other hand, 58.3% of the managers work at domestic independent firms. Finally, 61.3% of the

participants have been working at touristic enterprises with an operating period of less than ten years.

Table 1: Statistical Analysis on the Comparison of Conflict Management Methods

Conflict Management Methods	$\overline{X}$	d.f.	F	P
Integrating	4,20 a	0,71		
Obliging	3,64 b	0,77		
Dominating	3,63 b	0,83	237,086	0,000[*]
Avoiding	3,53 c	1,02		
Compromising	4,05 d	0,75		

[*]$p<0,001$ [a, b, c, d] *The difference between the groups with different letters under the same column are significant.*

Table 1, which provides the results of the "Bonferroni" test reveals a significant difference between the averages for each conflict management methods [$p<0,001$]. Mean values show that the participant managers mostly used integrating methods [$\overline{X}$=4, 20] and lastly used the avoidance method [$\overline{X}$=3, 53]. The participants are inclined to use the obliging [$\overline{X}$=3, 64] and the dominating methods [$\overline{X}$=3, 63] at equal levels. Finally, the second mostly used conflict management method is found as the compromising method [$\overline{X}$=4, 05].

Table 2: Comparison of the Conflict Management Methods according to Gender

Conflict Management Methods	Gender	$\overline{X}$	d.f.	t	p
Integrating	Male	4,21	0,66	0,698	0,485
	Female	4,18	0,77		
Obliging	Male	3,56	0,76	4,251	0,000[***]
	Female	3,76	0,77		
Dominating	Male	3,56	0,82	3,543	0,000[***]
	Female	3,74	0,86		
Avoiding	Male	3,38	1,02	5,474	0,000[***]
	Female	3,72	1,00		
Compromising	Male	4,02	0,75	1,198	0,231
	Female	4,08	0,76		

[***]$p<0,001$

The results of the t-test for independent samples, which have been revealed in Table 2, show a significant difference between the conflict management methods and the genders of the participants, with the exception of the integrating and the compromising methods. The mean values show that the females are more likely to use the obliging, dominating, and the avoiding methods than the males. These findings might be interpreted, as the females are more likely to use their authority, ignore the problems, and adopt the obliging methods compared to the male managers.

Table 3: Comparison of the Conflict Management Methods according to Age

Conflict Management Methods	Age	$\overline{X}$	s.d.	F	P
Integrating	25 and below	4,04 a	0,70	3,977	0,008[**]
	26-35	4,20 b	0,76		
	36-45	4,26 b	0,66		

	46 and above	4,28 b	0,51		
Obliging	25 and below	3,49 a	0,79	7,090	**0,000*****
	26-35	3,69 b	0,76		
	36-45	3,78 b	0,75		
	46 and above	3,45 a	0,81		
Dominating	25 and below	3,53 a	0,85	2,545	0,055
	26-35	3,64 a	0,82		
	36-45	3,71 a	0,86		
	46 and above	3,49 a	0,82		
Avoiding	25 and below	3,55 a	0,88	1,898	0,128
	26-35	3,54 a	1,01		
	36-45	3,55 a	1,05		
	46 and above	3,24 a	1,26		
Compromising	25 and below	3,92 a	0,73	2,526	0,056
	26-35	4,04 a	0,76		
	36-45	4,11 a	0,77		
	46 and above	4,09 a	0,69		

*** $p<0,001$ ** $p<0,01$ [a, b] *The difference between the groups that involve different letters for each method is significant.*

The results of the one-factor variance analysis (ANOVA) in Table 3 shows a significant difference between the integrating [p=0,008; p<0, 05] and the obliging methods [p=0,000; p<0, 05] and the ages of the participants, but also shows no significant difference between the managers' age and the other conflict management methods [p>0, 05].

Table 4: Comparison of the Conflict Management Methods according to the Education Levels

Conflict Management Methods	Education Level	$\overline{\mathrm{X}}$	d.f.	F	p
Integrating	Primary School	3,99 a	0,71	3,746	**0,005****
	High School	4,09 a	0,69		
	Associate	4,27 b	0,74		
	Undergraduate	4,23 b	0,70		
	Graduate	3,97 a	0,60		
Obliging	Primary School	3,23 a	0,69	6,650	**0,000*****
	High School	3,57 b	0,79		
	Associate	3,79 c	0,78		
	Undergraduate	3,57 b	0,75		
	Graduate	3,52 b	0,54		
Dominating	Primary School	3,35 a	0,73	3,704	**0,005****
	High School	3,63 b c	0,83		
	Associate	3,75 c	0,84		
	Undergraduate	3,55 b	0,84		
	Graduate	3,52 b	0,85		
Avoiding	Primary School	3,04 a	1,10	4,914	**0,000*****
	High School	3,55 b c	1,00		
	Associate	3,67 b	0,99		
	Undergraduate	3,41 c	1,05		

	Graduate	3,27 d	0,86		
	Primary School	3,87 a	0,91		
	High School	4,03 a	0,75		
Compromising	Associate	4,05 a	0,77	1,598	0,173
	Undergraduate	4,08 a	0,73		
	Graduate	3,98 a	0,74		

*** $p<0,001$ ** $p<0, 01$ [a, b, c, d] *The difference between the groups that involve different letters for each method is significant*

The results of one-factor variance analysis (ANOVA) in Table 4 show a significant difference between the conflict management methods and the education level [p<0, 05] with the exception of the compromising method [p=0,173; p>0, 05].

Table 5: Comparison of the Conflict Management Methods according to Administrative Experience

Conflict Management Methods	Administrative experience	$\overline{\mathrm{X}}$	d.f.	F	p
Integrating	Less than 5 years	4,24 a	0,70	3,170	0,024**
	5-9 Years	4,10 b	0,76		
	10-14 Years	4,07 b	0,67		
	15 Years and above	4,25 a	0,49		
Obliging	Less than 5 years	3,74 a	0,77	12,958	0,000***
	5-9 Years	3,45 b	0,76		
	10-14 Years	3,41 b	0,62		
	15 Years and above	3,39 b	0,73		
Dominating	Less than 5 years	3,73 a	0,84	11,098	0,000***
	5-9 Years	3,49 b	0,85		
	10-14 Years	3,40 b	0,76		
	15 Years and above	3,22 c	0,61		
Avoiding	Less than 5 years	3,68 a	0,97	23,141	0,000***
	5-9 Years	3,31 b	1,03		
	10-14 Years	3,18 c	1,09		
	15 Years and above	2,64 d	1,09		
Compromising	Less than 5 years	4,09 a	0,76	3,022	0,029**
	5-9 Years	3,96 b	0,75		
	10-14 Years	3,87 c	0,77		
	15 Years and above	4,09 a	0,58		

*** $p<0,001$ ** $p<0, 01$ [a, b, c, d] *The difference between the groups that involve different letters for each method is significant*

The results of the one-factor variance analysis (ANOVA) in Table 5 demonstrate a significant difference between the conflict management methods and the administrative experience [p<0, 05].

Table 6: Comparison of the Conflict Management Methods according to Administrative Status

Conflict Management Methods	Administrative Status	$\overline{\mathrm{X}}$	d.f.	F	p
Integrating	Director general or deputy director general	4,20 a	0,69	5,473	0,004**
	Department manager or deputy department manager	4,31 b	0,69		
	Chief or deputy chief	4,14 a	0,73		
Obliging	Director general or deputy director general	3,44 a	0,74	16,348	0,000***
	Department manager or deputy department manager	3,81 b	0,75		

	Chief or deputy chief	3,64 c	0,78		
Dominating	Director general or deputy director general	3,56 a	0,82		
	Department manager or deputy department manager	3,73 b	0,85	3,095	**0,046**[*]
	Chief or deputy chief	3,62 a	0,84		
Avoiding	Director general or deputy director general	3,34 a	1,11		
	Department manager or deputy department manager	3,59 b	1,03	5,053	**0,007**[**]
	Chief or deputy chief	3,57 b	0,98		
Compromising	Director general or deputy director general	4,09 a	0,74		
	Department manager or deputy department manager	4,05 a	0,80	0,609	0,544
	Chief or deputy chief	4,02 a	0,73		

[***] p<0,001   [**] p<0, 01   [*] p<0, 05   [a, b, c] *The difference between the groups that involve different letters for each method is significant*

The results of the one-factor variance analysis (ANOVA) in Table 6 show a significant difference between the conflict management methods and the administrative status [p<0, 05], with the exception of the compromising method [p=0,544; p>0, 05].

Conclusion

This research, which evaluates the conflict management methods of the managers employed by the touristic enterprises, has found that the managers likely to opt for the integrating, compromising, obliging, dominating and avoiding methods, respectively. The usage of the integrating method, which is the most effective method of conflict management [Rahim, 2004], indicates the adaptation of a positive approach by the managers during times of conflict. The reluctance of the managers to adopt the avoiding method, which comprises negative behaviors such as retreat, non-involvement, indifference, and which leads to lose the conflicting sides, reflects the consistency and the knowledgeableness of the managers during the management of the conflicts.

This research has also analyzed the influence of the personal characteristics of the managers, and the characteristics of the enterprises over the selection of conflict management methods. The results of the difference analysis, which was conducted to find the relationship between the personal characteristics of the managers [age, gender, and education levels] and the conflict management methods employed by the managers showed significant difference for the obliging, dominating and avoiding methods. The opinions of the female managers regarding the obliging, dominating and the avoiding methods are more positive than the male managers. This finding reveals that the female managers are more likely to use their authorities, to be indifferent to the conflicts, or to becalm or not to upset the conflicting parties. Besides, this research has also found that both the female and the male managers are likely to use the methods of integrating and compromising. This finding is parallel to the studies of Özmen [1997], Sirivun [2001], Niederauer [2006], Şirin [2008], and Kırçan [2009].

The analysis of the difference between the ages of the managers and the conflict management methods shows significant differences for the integrating and the obliging methods. The participants have positive responses for the integrating method as they get

older. This finding shows that the experienced managers are likely to solve the interpersonal problems in a more rational way. Regarding the obliging method, the managers above 46 and below 25 do not make concessions. This finding reveals that the managers at these age groups are more likely to prioritize their interests and to use their administrative authorities over the subordinates.

Significant differences between the managers' education levels and the conflict management methods have been found for the integrating, obliging, dominating and the avoiding methods. These methods have been frequently used by the managers with associate degree, and least used by the primary school graduates. This finding reflects that the primary school graduates do not have sufficient knowledge on the conflict management methods and do not use these methods deliberately. On the other hand, managers with associate degrees use the integrating method in a rational way. However, since these managers have positive evaluations about the obliging, dominating and the avoiding methods, we may argue that they have some improper tendencies for the management of the conflicts.

This research has also dealt with the results of the difference analysis related with the positions of the touristic enterprise managers [experience and administrative status] in the tourism sector. The comparison of the conflict management method according to the managers' experiences show that the integrating and compromising methods are mostly used by the managers with less than five years or more than 15 years of experience. These results indicate that these managers are likely to pay attention to the conflicting sides' opinions and to search for a middle way. Additionally, the managers with more than 15 years of professional experience are reluctant to use avoiding, dominating and obliging methods. This shows that experienced managers are more likely to manage the conflicts in a professional way and are more likely to recognize and solve the problems rather than ignoring them. The employment of the obliging, dominating and the avoiding methods by the managers with less than 5 years of experience may be related with the lack of professional experience, absence of prior experiences with the conflicts, or with these managers' tendencies to rely on temporary solutions such as ignoring, making concessions or suppression. The findings are parallel to the findings of the Niederauer's [2006] study.

This study also dealt with the differences between the administrative positions of the managers and their preferences for the conflict management methods. The analysis shows that the department managers and the deputy department managers opt for the integrating, obliging and the avoiding methods. On the other hand, since the managers holding these positions also prefer the dominating method, it may be concluded that they adopt both the benign and the dominating administrative styles. The reluctance of director generals and the deputy director generals to employ the avoiding and the obliging methods indicates that the top managers deal with the conflicts in a proper way. Finally, the hesitancy of the chiefs and deputy chiefs to use the integrating method shows the professional inexperience and lack of knowledge of the junior managers.

In fact, the finding is verified by the fact that managers have positive evaluations for the compromising method. However, we should recall that the practice of the compromising method may end up with complex problems and may be inadequate to manage the conflicts [Rahim, 2002].

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