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Reinforcing The Status Quo in Organizations Through Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM)

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Abstract

Background: *The usage of mobile instant messaging (MIM) applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram in an organization has become increasingly popular. Unfortunately, studies on the phenomenon, especially its impact on organizations, such as power distribution, have been scarce. Thus, this study asks, how does MIM technology affect power distribution in an organization? The objectives are twofold. The first is to determine how the MIM technology altered the distribution of power in an organization. The second is to identify why a collaborative tool intended for social use can have a profound impact on power relations in an organization.*

Method: *This case study involved interviews with twenty-one participants through six group interview sessions. The management selected the participants based on the study requirements. The interview participants were selected from different levels of the organization's hierarchy that use MIM actively in managing work.*

Results: *The findings suggest that increased use of MIM for many activities, such as delivering instructions and monitoring work progress, has had a profound effect on power distribution. The findings suggest that the implementation of MIM in managing work reinforces the status quo of top management through the congregation of employees, forced commitment, and the illusion of consensus.*

Conclusions: *MIM can reinforce the power of the top management over the rest by extending its reach to all levels in the organization. Findings from this study add to the existing knowledge on the relationship between power and information systems (IS) and power relations and MIM.*

Keywords: Mobile Instant Messaging, WhatsApp, Power Relations, Managing Work, Status Quo.

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Introduction

The usage of MIM applications as a way to communicate, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, has become popular among many smartphone users (Church & Oliveira, 2013). MIM is a mobile app that provides real-time communications services (Wu et al, 2017). It has also attracted many users due to its simplicity and user-friendly features for communicating with family, friends, and others. It provides users with several attractive features, such as free SMS (Duggan, 2015), photos, videos, locations, and document sharing (Oghuma et al, 2016), as well as free voice and video calling for multiple users simultaneously (“WhatsApp Features,” n.d). According to Clement (2019), Malaysia has the second-highest number of WhatsApp users in terms of market penetration among selected countries with active users, including Saudi Arabia, Germany, Brazil, and Mexico. In 2019, Statista reported that 98% of internet users in Malaysia was using WhatsApp as their communication apps (Müller, 2019).

Slowly, organizations see the potential of MIM as a collaborative technology (Hong et al, 2012). At least in Malaysia, management sees the technology as a way to reduce the communication cost in an organization significantly (Adilah et al, 2019; Ansari, 2016). MIM has been used to connect organizations with internal (Garrett & Danziger, 2007) and external parties (Deng et al, 2010). It has also been used as a channel for sharing and transferring documents, such as meeting invitations, approval documents, and letters of request (So, 2016). Some even employ this application as a medium to conduct meetings and arrive at enforceable decisions. Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence suggests that organizations are increasingly using MIM over emails and telephones with little consideration over its possible negative impact (Mustaffa et al, 2018). While MIM is a simple, cheap and fun technology to use, it lacks many formal features of the other platforms. Moreover, there are possible disadvantages that businesses and organizations may have overlooked. In South Korea, some employees have complained that MIM usage has infringed on employees’ time outside office hours (Haas, 2018). This practice is more pervasive and detrimental in Malaysia to the extent that one trade union proposed that the government develop legislation to ban such practices (Fun, 2018). One study even suggested that interruption from MIM applications affects individual and group quality performance (Gupta et al, 2013).

Unfortunately, studies on the use of MIM in the organizational context, especially its impact, have been scarce. Moreover, the technology’s impact on organizations, such as power relations, has been under-estimated. The current studies on MIM in organizations tend to focus on the effectiveness of the platform for various activities such as discussion (Hou & Wu, 2011), feedback (Soria et al, 2020), and teamwork (Kim et al, 2014; Abiodun et al, 2019). More importantly, there is a large number of studies on the impact of large enterprise systems such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) on power relations in organizations (Jasperson et al, 2002; Esendermili et al, 2015) compared to communication technologies such as MIM. Jasperson et al. (2002) question how IT equalizes the participation of individuals across formal positions in an organization, especially the less powerful, by increasing their visibility and informal bases of power. Eventually, organizations were caught by surprise by the adverse effect of the technology on power relations in their organizations (Shim & Shin, 2016).

Thus, this study’s main research question is, “how does MIM technology affect the power distribution in an organization.” The study has two objectives. The first is to determine how MIM technology has changed the distribution of power in an organization. The second objective is to identify how and why collaborative technology can have a profound impact on power relations in an organization. We took the call from Jasperson et al. (2002), who suggested that “the use of collaborative technologies at the organizational, inter-organizational, or societal levels may discover additional insights regarding power-related issues.” (p. 424). We also posit that studies on power and IS should not be limited to political positioning (Silva, 2007). Instead, we subscribe to Cendon and Jarveenpa (2001) that power does not have to

be a zero-sum game and can be implemented in a non-threatening way. By doing so, the study will enable organizations to reflect on their usage of MIM for managing work. Consequently, they will be able to predict the potential impact of the technology's usage on the power balance in the firm. This prediction will help the firm to manage the portfolio of communication platforms such as emails, telephones, and MIM more effectively.

Literature Review

Mobile Instant Messaging

MIM started with short messaging services (SMS), which allows the exchange of short text messages of up to 160 characters and images among mobile handset users (Church & Oliveira, 2013). In the middle of the 1990s, Instant Messaging (IM) applications such as Yahoo and MSN Messenger were introduced to the public. IM allows users to share more types of documents, such as text, pictures, voice, and graphics. However, IM is still a limited technology, as it is based on a dyadic "call" model. Users do not go into "rooms" to converse with whoever is there; instead, there is a single individual with whom they communicate (Nardi et al, 2000). The application, however, experienced significant changes in the late 2000s. WhatsApp application, arguably the first MIM, allowed users to share text, picture, video, and audio for free. Additionally, users can use the application through smartphones or desktops. Some of the most popular MIM applications are WhatsApp, Telegram, LINE, and WeChat.

Since IM is a predecessor of MIM, a review of relevant literature would be incomplete without the coverage of both IM and MIM related studies. Furthermore, numerous studies have already been conducted on the usage of IM, in particular, its use for work management. Pazos et al (2013), for example, studied how IM functions to support tools in an organization. Similarly, Ou et al (2010) investigated the impact of IM usage on employees in the workplace.

Compared with organizations, more studies were devoted to the social usage of MIM. Earlier studies at the organizational level focused more on overall technology use in the organization. For example, research on a MIM application called Hubbub suggests that the technology removes barriers between different levels in the organization, hence increasing the communication among professional staff (Isaacs et al, 2002). Meanwhile, recent studies have focused on the impact on the organization and its members. One study suggests that IM has no significant effect on employee job satisfaction, work performance, or organizational commitment (Wu et al, 2017). Unfortunately, such studies are scarce. Moreover, there is still a lack of awareness of the potential impact of MIM on an organization's power relations.

Power in Organization

Studies on power in organizations can be divided into three streams: sources of power acquisition, the power distribution process, and power distribution outcomes.

The first stream - sources of power acquisition – describes where the power to affect changes in organizations comes from. One who has more power possesses the ability to affect change in an organization. Our review of the literature revealed two main sources of power acquisition: hierarchical authority and network centrality. Hierarchical authority refers to the power acquired due to the position someone holds in an organization. The employee's position determines the relative control of organizational resources such as funds and subordinate employees (Cendon & Jarvenpaa, 2001). On the other hand, network centrality refers to the position a person or an entity holds in a social network. The more central the person or an entity is, the more power they hold. This situation arises because each important action or decision in the network has to go through them. They can then expand their power by forming allies with other units and organizations (Cendon & Jarvenpaa, 2001; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977).

Power acquisition, meanwhile, does not automatically translate into the ability to affect power distribution in an organization. That ability can be influenced by several factors such as organizational culture modification (Jones et al, 2005), organizational leadership transformation (Hwang et al, 2016), user's knowledge and project control (Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2012), technology management (Markus, 2004), and change agents' intervention (Hyde, 2018). The power dynamics at this stage affects change and its subsequent organizational change (Boonstra & Bennebroek, 1998). In organizational culture modification, norms such as readiness for change can affect employees' confidence and capability to overcome workplace challenges. In turn, confidence and capability can influence employees' resistance, thus affecting the power balance in the organization (Jones et al, 2005). In terms of organizational transformation, leadership skills of managers, such as communication effectiveness and motivational ability, could soften the blow from changes in the status quo, thus maintaining the power balance (Gilley et al, 2009). In other instances, the power balance is maintained by the close relationship between leaders and employees. This kind of relationship increases employees' commitment and job satisfaction in the change process (Hwang et al, 2016).

In terms of user's knowledge and project control, background knowledge of a policy or a decision can empower them to have more control, thus affecting the power distribution in an organization. For example, Bloodgood and Morrow (2003) found that knowledge increases users' ability to understand the planned changes in an organization. Ultimately, the top management must include the users in the planned changes because of their strong influence on the outcome of the initiative. Meanwhile, Pozzebon and Pinsonneault (2012), who researched client and consultant relationships, found that users' know-how encourages their desire and effort to increase their control over a project. Unfortunately, in this instance, it led to political battles and power struggles with consultants. Technology management, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which technology is introduced and managed in an organization. The introduction of a new technology that is incompatible with how users perform their work or mismanagement of its implementation often leads to resistance, thus affecting the organization's power relationship (Markus, 2004). Finally, change agents' intervention refers to the actions taken, often people in the middle or lower rungs of an organization, to affect change and eventually power distribution. Hyde (2018) explained eighteen ways in which low-level employees can become change agents could influence power distribution outcomes.

The power dynamics in an organization can lead to two power distribution outcomes: power shift and power struggle. Power struggle refers to an outcome where conflict occurs between and within teams in their pursuit of organizational resources. As a result, each group will resist a change perceived to be incompatible with its beliefs and struggle (Van Bunderen et al, 2018). On the other hand, the power shift refers to the movement of power either to the top or bottom level of the organization (Clegg, 1989). Table 1 explains the three categories of studies on power in organizations.

Table 1 - The Summary of Studies on Power in Organizations			
Component	Constructs	Explanation	References
Sources of Power Acquisition	Network Centrality	The position of an entity in a social network. The more relations flow out from an entity, the more central it is. The entity at the core of a network often holds more influence than others further from the core.	Cendon & Jarvenpaa (2001); Salancik & Pfeffer (1977), Ibarra (1993).
	Hierarchical Authority	The official position of an entity in an organization. Typically, the higher the position, the more resources, such as finance and human, an entity hold. Consequently, the stronger the entity's authority over the rest.	Cendon & Jarvenpaa (2001),
Power Distribution Process	Users' Knowledge and Project Control	Users know-how encourages their desire and effort to increase their control over a project. Eventually, it may lead to political battles and power struggles with consultants.	Pozzebbon & Pinsonneault (2012), Bloodgood & Morrow (2003)
	Organizational Culture Modification	Certain organizational norms, such as readiness for change, could affect employees' confidence and capability to overcome workplace challenges, hence determining the level of employees' resistance in the process.	Jones et al (2005).
	Organizational Leadership Transformation	The ability of the top management to use the available resources at their disposal to lead their organizations to the desired destinations.	Hwang et al (2016), Jones et al (2005)
	Technology Management	The way technology is introduced and managed in an organization can affect power relations in an organization. Bringing in a technology that is incompatible with the users may lead to their resistance, which can eventually affect organizational performance.	Markus (2004)
	Change Agent Intervention	Power and influence of change agents within the supportive networks can intervene and eventually affect power balance in organizations.	Hyde (2018)
Power Distribution Outcome	Power Struggle	Inter and Intra team conflicts in an organization caused by the competition over organizational resources.	Van Bunderen et al (2018)
	Power Shift	Enacting change can result in more power going to the top management or the middle and lower-level employees.	Clegg (1989)

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted an explorative and interpretive case study research design, which could lead to new findings that are not prejudiced by a priori hypothesis (Hale et al, 2005). Case study research methods help researchers to understand how and why a business situation exists. Moreover, using empirical evidence from “real people in real organizations is an original contribution to the knowledge” (Myers, 2009). For this study, a single case study at a relevant organization was carried out. An organization that uses MIM for managing work, such as in decision making, work instruction, and work monitoring, was chosen as the research site. Additionally, the organization provided access to all levels of the organization, including management, officers, and general staff.

Data Collection

This study was conducted at the procurement department of a utility company in Malaysia. The department was chosen after lengthy discussions between the researchers and the company where we explained our study, especially its aim and objectives. Eventually, the procurement department was chosen because it uses MIM extensively in managing work. As shown in Table 3 (p. 10), the department utilizes MIM for all of its activities. Furthermore, the company’s management also promised us access to all levels of its employees. Although we did initially had doubts about the value of the department in studying power relations, we posit that better access was more vital to the success of the study. Better access enabled the study to develop a closer relationship with the participants, allowing us to perform an in-depth study of the MIM usage in the department. In addition, it is extremely difficult as an external entity to evaluate the suitability of a site for a study. The department contains 127 employees, comprising one general manager, three senior managers, seven managers, 44 executives, and 72 non-executive staff. In this study, the general manager, senior manager, and manager were grouped as management. For this study, we interviewed 21 participants through six group interview sessions lasting between 40-60 minutes.

The group interviews were conducted with participants of the same level or position to ensure that the presence of higher-level employees did not intimidate them. The interviews were conducted in groups to enable us to obtain a richer picture of the MIM usage and to validate the responses given by each participant. The general manager made suggestions as a gatekeeper to ensure that the participants in the interview session actively use the MIM for work purposes. We trusted the gatekeeper’s judgment because he has better knowledge of the workers under his watch. We had personally asked him to select those with experience and will not dominate the discussion. Consequently, the interview participants were selected from different levels of the organization’s hierarchy that use MIM actively in managing work. Table 2 shows the number of participants, their roles in the department and working experience in the organization.

Table 2 - Number and Roles of Participants in the Procurement Shared Services Department				
Position		Unit	Gender	Working experience in the organization
Management	General Manager		Male	23 years
	Senior managers	Contract, Procurement Operation, Shared Service Management,	Male	14 years
			Female	23 years
			Female	18 years
Managers	Contract, Procurement Operation, Shared Service Management,	Male	10 years	
		Female	8 years	
		Female	23 years	
Officers	Executives	Contract,	Female	1 year
		Contract,	Female	2 years
		Procurement Operation,	Male	25 years
		Procurement Operation,	Male	1 year
		Procurement Operation,	Female	17 years
		Procurement Operation,	Female	14 years
Procurement Operation,	Female	3 years		
General Staff	Non-executives	Contract,	Female	10 years
		Contract,	Female	5 years
		Shared Service Management,	Female	6 years
		Shared Service Management,	Female	5 years
		Shared Service Management,	Female	1 year
		Shared Service Management,	Female	4 months
		Shared Service Management,	Male	3 months
Total participants				21

Interviews were conducted at their workplace to offer flexibility and convenience to the participants. The interview session asked general questions about the use of MIM in the department before progressing to more specific questions on the employee's usage of MIM in managing work. The questions revolved around the three components of power relations in an organization: sources of power acquisition, power distribution process, and power distribution outcomes. Some of the questions asked during the interview include:

- How do you communicate with your manager or colleagues in the department?
- What are the topics or issues share/ discuss in the MIM group?
- What were the topics or issues shared/discussed with higher-level employees through MIM?

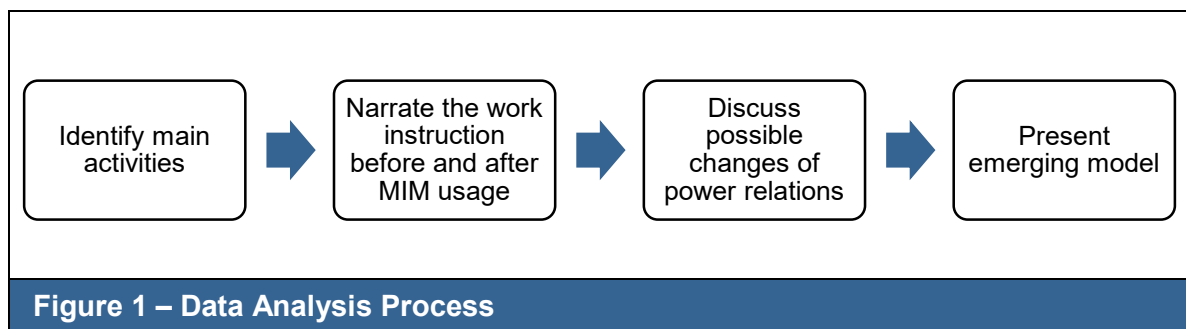
The full interview questions are available in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection to capitalize on the flexibility of the case research methodology. In analyzing data to answer 'how' question, we count on the guideline from Pan and Tan (2011) in analyzing a case study research. All three researchers for this study were actively involved in interpreting the data. This process involves four data analysis activities: identifying key departmental activities that strongly rely on employee communications across all levels; explaining how the work instructions differ before and after the introduction of MIM; discussing the possible impact of these changes on power relations, and finally, a model emerges from the analysis of the technology's impact on organizational power relations. Here we found three main activities where communication among employees across levels is vital: delivering work instruction, decision making, and work monitoring. They are demonstrated as three mini-cases. This practice is similar to creating stories to help users visualize the order of events (Pan & Tan, 2011).

In each mini case, the steps involved in performing the activity were narrated. More importantly, they showed and explained the differences before and after the introduction of MIM. "Before the introduction of MIM" also includes the time before the department's establishment in its current form (Circa, 2016). We were able to compare the differences because before the widespread use of MIM, many participants were already with the organization. After that, the possible impact of those changes to power relations was discussed by first looking for relevant 'verbs' (Avgerou, 2013) such as 'discuss' and 'instruct.' The cases were then compared with the power relation constructs from the literature.

Next, the case analysis presents an emerging model (Pan & Tan, 2011.) In this study, the emerging model is an abstraction of the activities that led to a new power relation in the department. To ensure the emerging model embodied the attributes of simplicity, accuracy and generality, alignment between data, theory and the model was needed (Sutton & Staw, 1995). Pan and Tan (2011) suggest three types of alignments: theory data alignment, data model alignment, and theory model alignment. For the theory data alignment, the aim is to find a 'succinct and elegant theoretical explanation' for the data from the case study (Pan & Tan, 2011, p.171). We compare the interview data with the theory of power relations. The objective of data model alignment is to ensure that the emerging model is an accurate depiction of reality (Pan & Tan, 2011). In this study, we ensure the relevant data included support the model. Finally, the theory model alignment is essential to establish generality for the emerging model (Lee & Baskerville, 2003). Therefore, we ensure that the power relations theory supports the emerging model. Figure 1 shows the data analysis process for this study.



Analysis and Findings

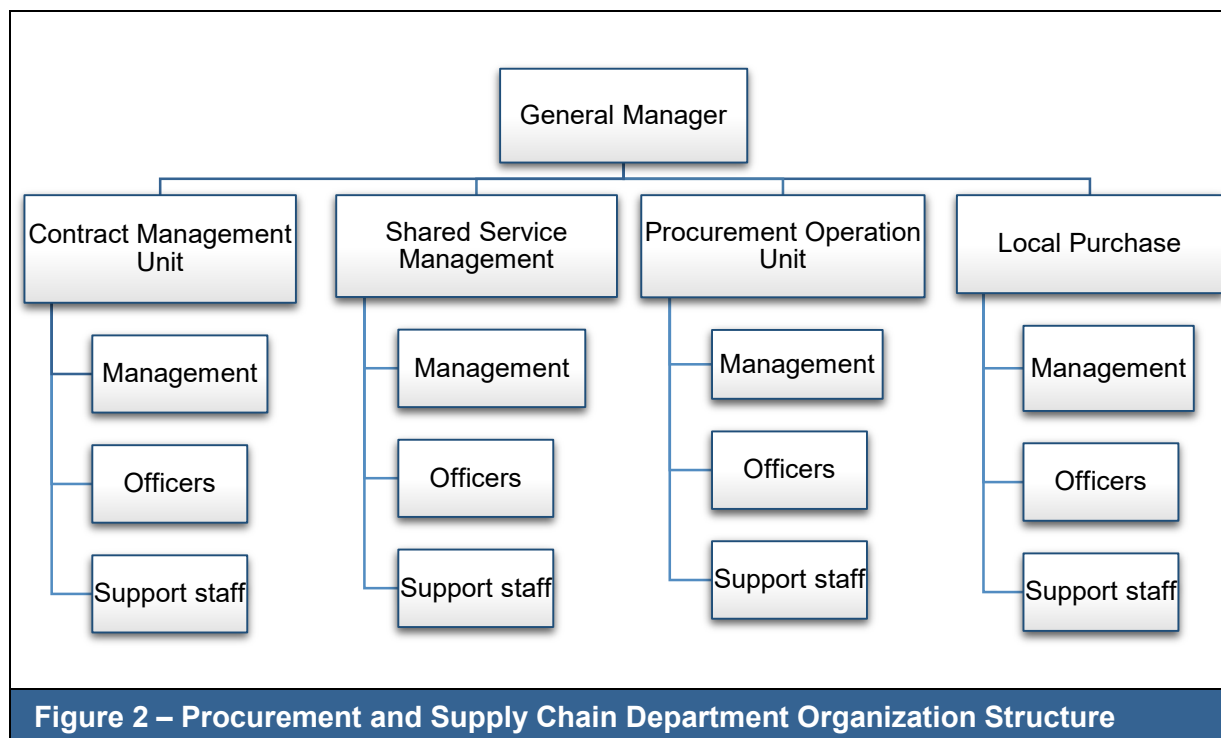
Organizational Background

The organization in this study is a utility company in Malaysia. Its core business involves the generation, grid, and distribution of utilities. The company started its operation in 1949 by providing utility services to commercial, residential, and industrial areas. Currently, the company has 9.2 million customers in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Labuan. It also has more than 100 kiosks in Malaysia providing services such as payment of bills, new account applications, inquiries on billing, advisory services fixtures, wiring and safety, and advice on the effective and safe use of utilities.

The study was conducted at the Procurement Shared Services (PSS) department. However, the department was known as the Procurement and Supply Chain Department before 2016. The function of the Procurement and Supply Chain Department was managing supply chain and procurement activities such as contract management, local purchase, data management and vendor registration. Procurement and Supply Chain Department comprise of four main units which are Contract Management, Shared Service Management, Procurement Operation, and Local Purchase. Figure 2 shows the organizational structure of this department. The

department has two general managers, four senior managers, four managers, 108 executives and 58 non-executives.

In 2016, the top management of the company decided to establish a department that consolidated many business functions into the Procurement Shared Services department. The primary function of this department was managing the company's procurement activities, which include purchase orders, online purchases, invoicing, contract administration, and master data administration. Most of the managers, officers, and general staff are from other departments in the organization. Additionally, the new department has removed the local purchase unit. This department comprises three units: Contract Management, Procurement Operation, and Shared Service Management. The roles of the Contract Management unit are the issuance of contract documents and monitoring contract enforcement. The Procurement Operation Unit plays roles in the processing of purchase orders, system support for vendor registration, providing training for the procurement work process, and managing online systems. The Shared Services unit functions as the master data administrator and manages tender and performance appraisals. There are 127 employees, including one general manager, three senior managers, seven managers, 44 executives, and 72 general staff. Generally, each manager is responsible for four executives and seven general staff. Figure 3 shows the organizational structure for the Procurement Shared Service Department.



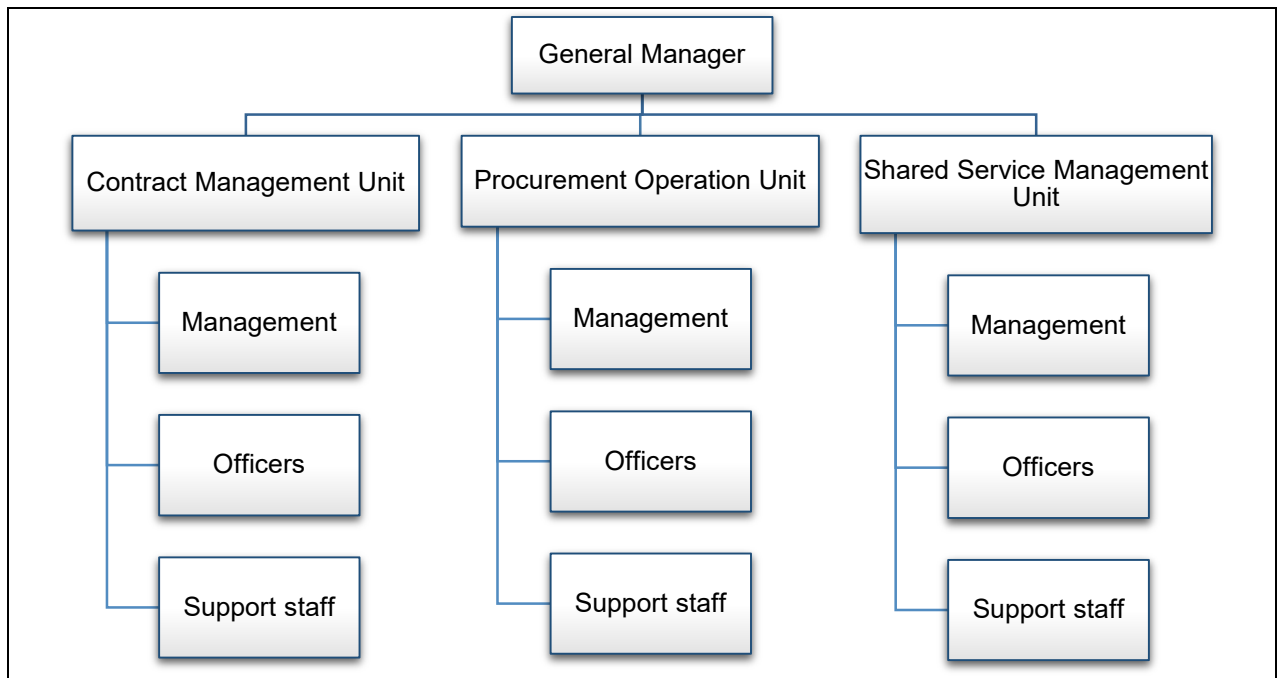


Figure 3 – Procurement Shared Services Department Organization Structure

Although the organization's informal use of MIM began sometime in 2011, the department started using MIM for work purposes since its inception in 2016. The department's general manager initiated it. Previously, the medium of communication used were emails and phone calls. The usage of this technology helps the department in sharing information and immediate action among staff. The main MIM application used throughout the company is WhatsApp. They have several types of WhatsApp groups, such as a PSS department group, a unit group, a team group, and other informal groups among colleagues. The degree of involvement in the WhatsApp group depends on a person's position, unit, and teams of the staff. As mentioned by the managers:

"The WhatsApp group started in around 2016 initiated by the general manager [...]"

"The senior manager will join all the WhatsApp manager groups; a manager will join the lower-level groups [...]"

The usage of WhatsApp in the department in managing work is extensive. Table 3 shows the usage of WhatsApp in this department. On this table, MIM was used extensively for all activities in each unit in this department. For example: sharing information on new policies or procedures among colleagues, updating task progress to managers, giving work instructions to the general staff, sharing work issues with managers and colleagues, and conducting discussions among colleagues. The app is even used for approval of urgent tasks and making decisions. The app is even used for approval of urgent tasks and making decisions. Generally, decisions made in MIM group chats are related to operational tasks such as approval for the issuance of letters of agreement, purchasing of items, and releasing purchase orders. These decisions are required by the executive and general staff to complete their daily task. However, more critical decisions requiring approval from top management will be discussed on a face-to-face basis. According to some of the managers, officers and general staff:

"We use WhatsApp for all activities in this department even among the top management [...]"

"We use WhatsApp for work [...] like decision making in WhatsApp, [...] if there is an urgent task, we do a meeting in WhatsApp first, the documentation comes later [...]"

“WhatsApp is part of our need. We used it for work instruction, even sometimes, we use it for approval. For example, we ask for approval to buy items from senior managers through WhatsApp, and senior managers approve through WhatsApp[...].”

“The senior manager will inform us once the documents are approved so that we can proceed to release the letter of agreement [...].”

Table 3 – The MIM usage in the department		
Unit	Activities	Usage of WhatsApp
Contract Management	Contract Document	/
	Contract Enforcement	/
Procurement Operations	PO Processing	/
	Administration of LAPASAR & Punch card system.	/
	Help Desk	/
Shared Service Management	Tender Administration	/
	Master Data Management	/
	Performance Management	/

Data Analysis

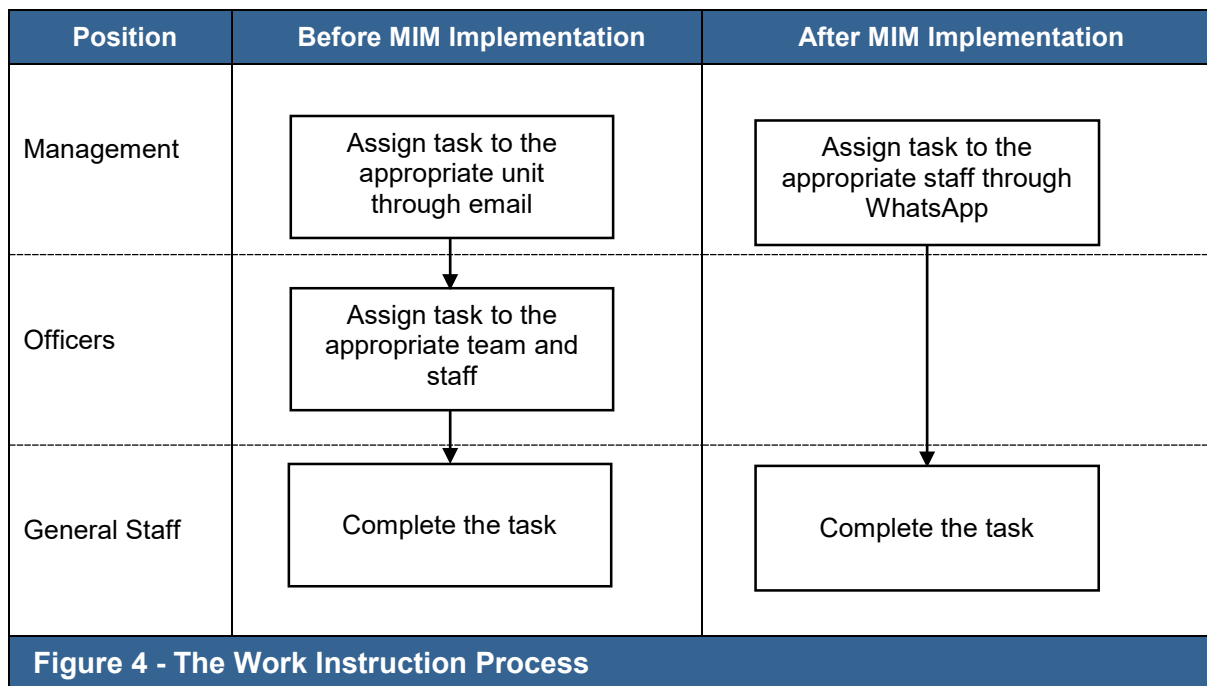
Case 1: Work Instruction

Figure 4 shows the work instruction process in the department. There is very little difference between the steps before the use of MIM and after. Before the use of MIM, the process consisted of three steps. First, management assigns a task to an appropriate officer through email. Next, the respective officer delegates the task to the appropriate team and staff, and the process ends with the general staff completing the task. However, with the introduction of MIM, management became less reliant on officers for the delivery of instructions. Now, management can directly disseminate their instructions through this technology. As a result, the officers have less say over how the instruction will be delivered to the low-level employees. Inadvertently, they lost their bargaining chip with the general staff because they could not explain why the instructions were delivered, nor could they amend them. On the other hand, the management now relies less on the officers to deliver work instructions. Instead, they prefer to go direct because it affords them more control over the proceedings. With WhatsApp, the managers can even deliver the instructions directly to a particular staff in a specific team. According to the managers:

“If manager need it urgently, she will post it in WhatsApp group and ask the particular staff (general staff) to do the task, and the instruction was given directly to the general staff [...].”

“For example, if we have system error [...] I will screenshot the error and share in the WhatsApp group for a solution [...].”

“For example, if I need certain data, I will ask the particular staff (general staff) through the WhatsApp group [...] the communication through WhatsApp is faster compared to email [...].”



Case 2: Decision Making

Figure 5 shows the decision-making process in the department before and after the introduction of MIM. Before the introduction of MIM, the process starts with management identifying the issues for discussion and proceeding with organizing a meeting and inviting the relevant staff. Next, the respective management and officer discuss the issues and arrive at a decision. Lastly, the decision is shared with the team through a face-to-face meeting or email. Since the introduction of MIM, operational decisions have been included on the agenda. As a result, the general staff were involved in the decision-making process. Although theoretically, this decision looks good in encouraging participation from all corners of the department, its implementation has sidelined the officers. An example is in the purchasing of equipment under MYR 10 thousand. Before the introduction of MIM, the general staff will prepare the request for such purchases and deliver it to the management for discussion and decision. In order to make a decision, meetings were frequently called between managers and officers. If approved, the relevant documentation will be prepared by the general staff under the supervision of the officers.

Unfortunately, this clear chain-of-command for the purchasing of equipment under MYR 10 thousand has been interrupted by the MIM technology. Although the members of the department often follow this chain, there are instances when they are over-ruled. Using the technology, sometimes the general staff bypasses the officers and go straight to the management to obtain approval. According to a general staff:

“Decision through WhatsApp for example spot buy under ten thousand ringgit, the general manager reply ‘good’ sign as approve in WhatsApp, then we can release the purchase order [...]”

This action often leaves the officers clueless about the happenings of the organization. Unlike the management, they are the go-to person should the general staff or external parties require consultancy on purchasing matters. As a result, they often feel powerless in the decision-making process in the department. In contrast, the management feels more powerful because they are more in control of the decision.

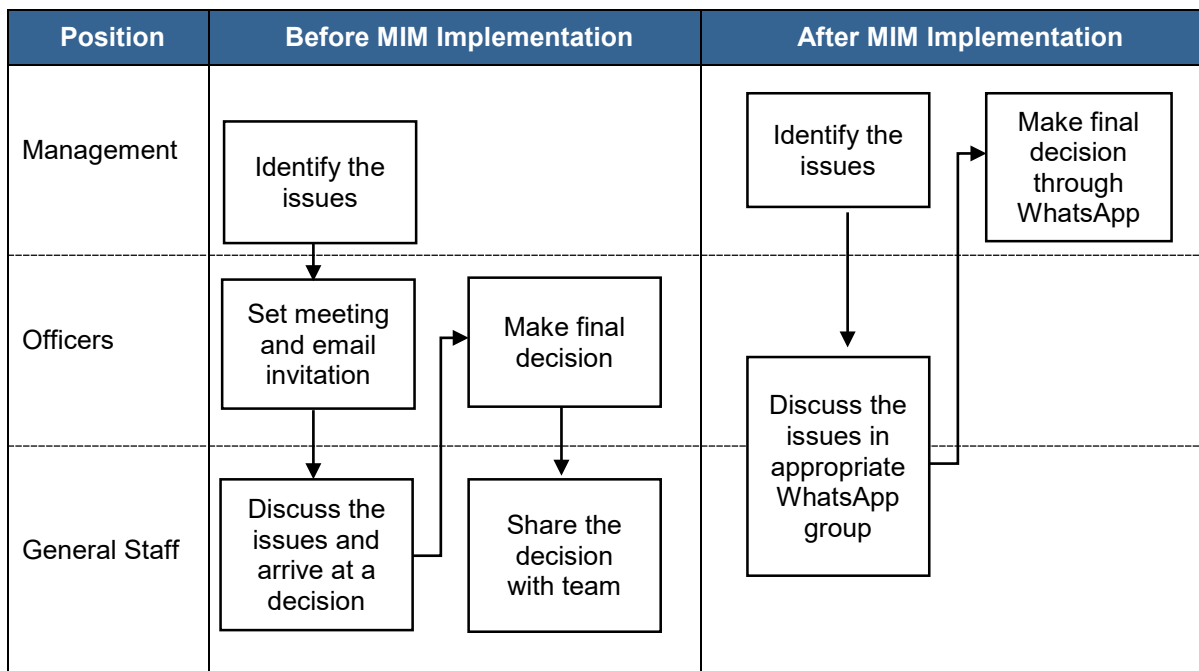


Figure 5 - The Work Instruction Process

Case 3: Work Monitoring

Figure 6 shows the work monitoring process in the department before and after the introduction of MIM. The work monitoring process before the introduction of MIM involved five stages. It started with management acquiring the task progress from the respective officer through email. The officer then asked for an update on the task with the relevant teams. The individual general staff members compiled the necessary information and updated the particular officers regarding progress. In turn, the officers then updated management. The use of MIM technology, however, reduced the steps to three. The reduction occurred because management did not have to go through the officers to receive the progress updates. Instead, management could acquire the task progress by sending a message directly to the appropriate WhatsApp group. As one of the managers mentioned:

“I forward the information on the vendor to the Vendor Registration WhatsApp group [...] I ask the respective staff members to update the status of this vendor registration[...] They immediately update the status in WhatsApp group [...]”

“If I do not respond or were aware of the WhatsApp message, my team will reply and update the status...the team will respond on behalf of you [...]”

While the management welcomes this change, it leaves the officers in a bind. Although they are accountable for the progress of work in the department, their control is lessened because the progress report from the general staff often bypass them. As a result, they are in the dark over the progress of some work in the department. In other words, their power has seen some reduction due to the use of MIM in the organization.

Discussion

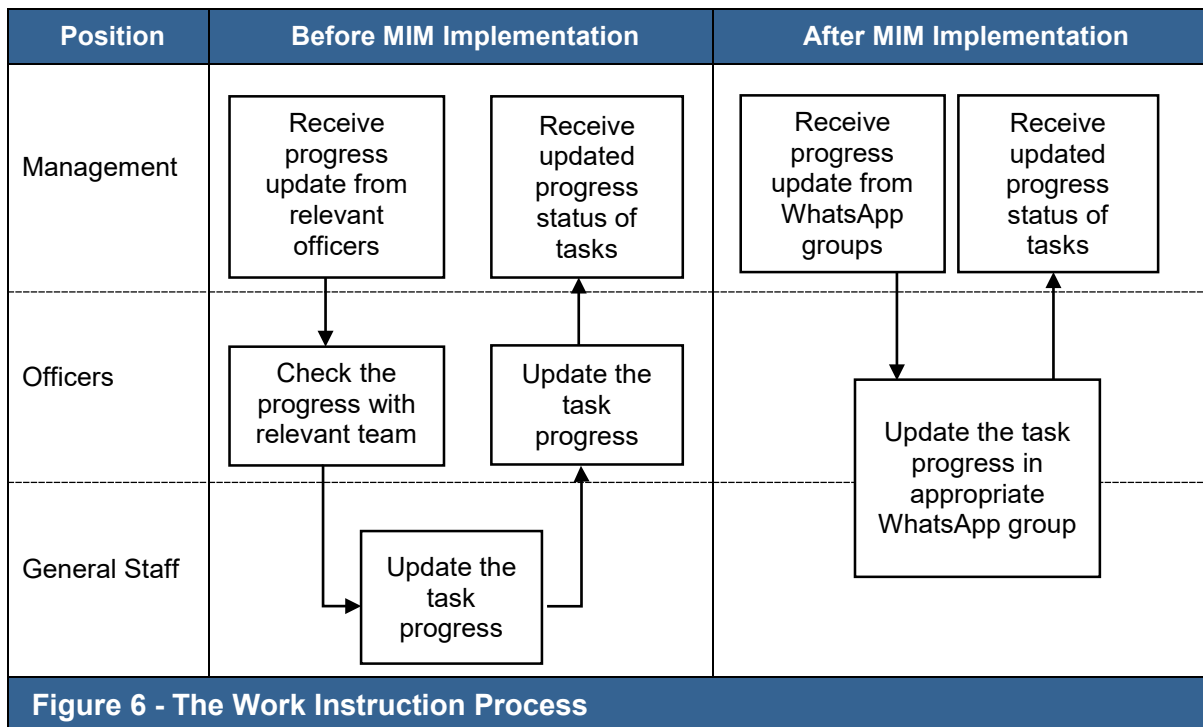


Table 4 shows the finding of power relations from the three cases. The power to introduce MIM into the organization came from the hierarchical authority (Bloom et al., 2014), i.e., it was introduced by the management of the firm. The explicit demarcation of duties remains despite the introduction of MIM into the workplace (Hyde, 2018; Shu & Lewin, 2016). The power in the organization is still dominated by management, who make all the decisions. The technology only replaces the medium in which the discussions of the decisions take place. Meanwhile, the officers still have the responsibility of monitoring progress and ensuring the completion of tasks in the organization. The general staff is still expected to implement the tasks personally. Despite being able to join the discussion of a decision now and provide updates directly to management, staff roles are still limited by where they are in the organization's hierarchy.

As a result, the anticipated power shift (Held, 2000) never took place. Instead, management can strengthen its reach and hold over the lower-level employees. Management is now able to use MIM to bypass officers and issue instructions and monitor the progress of tasks. This technology allows management to hold and control more power over officers and general staff in the department. Unfortunately, officers receive a terrible deal from the use of MIM in managing work. Their significance in the department is lessened to a great extent due to the extended reach of management. The same can be said of the general staff. Due to the technology's ability to directly connect different levels of the organization, they are being monitored directly at once by both management and officers.

Table 4 – Finding of Power Relations	
Sources of Power Acquisition	Hierarchical authority
Power Distribution Process	Technology management
Power Distribution Outcome	Reinforcing the top management's authority

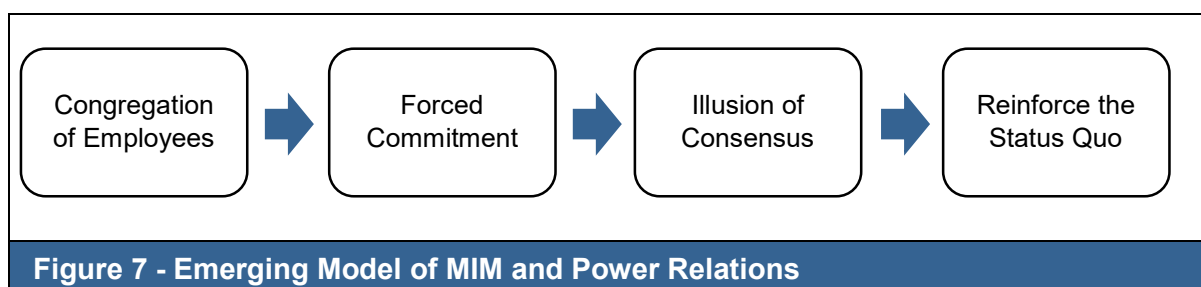
An Emerging Model of MIM Usage for Managing Work and the Reinforcement of Status Quo

The findings suggest that the use of MIM for work management resulted in an unplanned power shift but not a power struggle as experienced by the implementation of enterprise systems (Van Bunderen et al., 2018; Clegg, 1989). Not only has power remained with the top management, but the use of MIM in the workplace also has managed to strengthen the authority of managers over employees. The technology served as a means of bringing all staff in the department and unit together virtually, and this allows managers to have direct contact and control of all staff. The technology makes the demarcation between the three levels in the organization more explicit. The instructions and directions come from the top while the officers and general staff are only expected to implement them. However, these changes did not result in resistance from lower-level employees. The lack of resistance may have been due to the nature of the technology itself, which was mostly used in the employees' social context. They are already very familiar with the technology. Its usage in the workplace is merely an extension to that context which the employees do not mind.

Figure 7 shows the merging model of MIM usage in reinforcing the status quo, i.e., maintaining the power the top management has over the rest of the organization. The reinforcement of the status quo starts with the ability of MIM technology to gather all levels of employees in one platform. The virtual congregation of all employees enables them to chat and share messages, photos, and videos (WhatsApp, 2018). Furthermore, this technology has a feature that allows users to see whether other employees are present in virtual groups and whether they have read messages sent there. This "opportunistic interaction" (Isaacs et al, 2002) forces them to read the messages. Users can no longer deny that they have received a particular message, especially from management.

Indirectly, the technology "forced" the employees to commit to a particular decision. In addition to sharing messages between members, the technology is also able to display details, such as when the message was delivered and whether each member was reading or playing it (Church & Oliveira, 2013). While the original intention of this function was noble, i.e., to alert users to quickly respond to a message (Nardi et al., 2000), it has instead become a mechanism for management to indirectly solicit commitments from group members (Pielot et al., 2014). This is because the technology is more suited for delivering and receiving messages than to function as an avenue for an extensive discussion of work issues. Eventually, the officers and general staff give up any chance for a discussion and accept management's decisions and directions.

Consequently, the technology also gives an illusion of consensus, especially to management. Unable to adequately express opinions for fear of looking foolish in the MIM group, the officers and general staff suppress their concerns. They also feel that their personal opinions are not as convincing as management's (Marks & Miller, 1987). Furthermore, the features, such as "last-seen" in WhatsApp, also "pressures" members to give a quick response (Nardi et al., 2000) because they lack time to think and provide constructive feedback, most resort to simply agreeing to an issue.



Conclusion

The many easy-to-use and useful features of WhatsApp have made it a popular platform for organizational communication. Organizations have increasingly relied on the MIM technology to deliver work instructions, make decisions, and monitor work progress. Unintentionally, this reliance has afforded MIM the ability to affect, among others, power relations, profoundly. Consequently, it can strengthen the power of the top management by extending its reach to all corners of the firm. The top management does not necessarily have to go through the middle-level managers to get things done. Instead, they can go directly to the lower-level employees to either send work instructions or ask for the progress of a project. The “congregation of employees” in the MIM groups indirectly force them to commit on a path given by the top management. This “forced commitment” gives the “illusion of consensus” because the work structure afforded by the technology provides very little room for discussion. Eventually, this practice reinforces the status quo, where the top management prevails over the rest.

This study offers several theoretical contributions. First of all, it adds to the knowledge of IS and power relations in organizations. Prior knowledge of power and IS was based mainly on the enterprise system. At the same time, this study examines the communication system in an organization. Secondly, this research adds to the knowledge of MIM and power relations when it is used for managing work. Here, it is shown that the introduction of MIM can strengthen the reach and domination of the top management over the rest of the employees in an organization. Thirdly, this research will enhance understanding of how simple mobile applications, such as mobile instant messaging, can have a significant impact on the status quo. Therefore, organizations should never underestimate the impact of small and simple technologies on organizations. In addition, this study provides some practical input. It helps enhance management's ability to identify the most effective use of MIM in the organization. More importantly, it helps to develop policies on new technologies, such as MIM usage. As this case has shown, organizations can predict whether new technology could be used to their advantage. The popularity of WhatsApp was able to reinforce the hierarchy – a desirable outcome rather than a negative disruptor.

There are several limitations to the study. It is limited to the organizations that wanted to participate in this study. While the company and the department were all too pleased to participate in this, it may not be the best place to investigate power relations and distribution. To be sure, we have not found any indications of power struggle or of shifting that point to organizational dynamics. Furthermore, the company insisted that the participating department and the participants were to be selected by them. Fortunately, the aim of this research was not severely hindered by these limitations.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

A General question on interviewees

1. Please tell us about your position, working experience and nature of work?
2. How do you communicate with your manager or colleagues in the department?
3. What are the topic or issues that you, colleague and manager discuss?

B General questions on MIM usage in the organization

4. When did you start using MIM?
5. What are the effects of MIM usage to you in managing work? Can you provide an example? How do you actually manage the work before MIM implementation?
6. What were the topics or issues shared/ discussed in the MIM group?
7. Can you communicate with the top manager/lower-level employees directly with MIM? How about before MIM implementation?
8. What were the topics or issues shared/discussed with higher-level employees through MIM? Who posted it first?
9. Did you receive new information related or not related to you in the MIM group?

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