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GENERATION Z AS A CHALLENGE FOR THE TRADITIONAL CORPORATE CULTURE IN POLAND

Abstract

The objective of the paper is to analyze the skills and attitudes of Generation Z in Poland in order to update and systematize data on features of all generations that are active in the Polish labour market. The issue deserves research due to the specific perception of work and business by young people, which, by affecting their motivation, forces companies to modify their operations. Employee engagement programmes must be adjusted to the skills and preferences of individualists, who are proficient in Internet use, but inconsistent in their decisions or endeavors and not prepared for teamwork. Short attention span and short-lived interests of young staff, which require a kinesthetic, multimodal working environment, may disrupt a traditional company culture. Communication with Generation Z, used to ongoing communication and co-creating, is a serious challenge to managers. Low levels of soft skills and economic literacy may undermine the benefits from excellent adaptability of the young generation. Tabular summaries of generation-based characteristics will be presented. The paper is based on the literature on the older generations as well as reports and statistics on Generation Z.

Keywords: Generation Z, job market, skills, motivation

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to analyze the characteristics and attitudes of Generation Z and compare them to those of the older generations. As a result, features that make them unique in the workplace and require action from employers will be identified. It is an attempt to update the existing compilations and systematize generation-based data on the contemporary workforce. The article will provide tabular summaries of features exhibited by all generations active in the labour market, which can facilitate application of appropriate management tools in the workplace, especially in multigenerational working environments. The paper is based on an extensive study of the existing literature on older generations in the labour market as well as on official statistics and reports concerning Generation Z. The focus of this study is Polish representatives of Generation Z, as their perspective differs from those of their counterparts, e.g. in the United States of America. or in the United Kingdom, where the 2008 crisis, relatively mild in Poland, was a crucial experience for the youngest generation.

1. Literature Review

The contemporary workforce is believed to consist of several generations, understood as groups of people born in a certain period of history and having common characteristics and viewpoints as a result of being affected by the events taking place during their formative years. In particular, Generation Z is defined as persons born between 1995 and 2010, although some sources include people born as early as 1990, 1996, 1997, or even as late as 2000. They are sometimes called Post-Millennials,

¹ S.B. Berkup, Working with Generations X and Y in Generation Z period: Management of Different Generations in Business Life, "Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences" 2014, Vol. 5, No. 19, p. 219.

² ibid; K. Włodarczyk, *Młode pokolenia na rynku pracy [Young Generations in the Labour Market]*, "Marketing i Rynek" 2016, Vol. 3, p. 1044.

³ J. Morbitzer, *Medialność a sprawność edukacyjna ucznia* [*Media Competencies and Educational Skills in Students*], "Edukacja i Dialog" 2012. http://www.ktime.up.krakow.pl/symp2012/referaty_2012_10/morbitz.pdf, accessed 10 November 2018.

⁴ J. Bejtkovski, *Employees of Baby Boomers Generation, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z in Selected Czech Corporations as Conceivers of Development and Competitiveness in their Corporation,* "Journal of Competitiveness" 2016, Vol. 8, Iss. 4, p. 106.

⁵ M. Dimok, *Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Post-Millennials Begin*, Pew Research Center report, Washington, 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/defining-generations-where-millennials-end-and-post-millennials-begin/ (accessed: 14 November 2018).

⁶ K. Zelga, *Managing Generation Y Employees in the Enterprise*, "World Scientific News" 2018, Vol. 104, p. 441.

⁷ M. Dimok, Defining Generations..., op.cit.

Centennials,⁸ Generation C,⁹ or iGeneration.¹⁰ Regardless of the border dates, their specific historical perspective (the 2008 crisis) and the technological acceleration¹¹ they have experienced from an early age needs to be stressed.

The uniqueness of Generation Z is believed to stem from the fact that they were raised in VUCA conditions (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity)¹² of junk contracts and unceasing technological change, and the first generation to take mobile Internet access for granted. According to research performed by software company AVG Technologies,¹³ polling 2,200 mothers with computer access across the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, 58% of children aged from two to five can play computer games, whereas only 52% can ride a bike. Moreover, 69% of children can handle a computer mouse, but only 11% can tie their shoelaces. Internet exposure from such an early age is claimed to have an impact on the brain structure, as the cognitive load exceeds the brain's ability to store and process data, which makes it impossible to retain information or to refer it to items already stored in the long-term memory. The upside is enhanced capacity to process visual clues and locate disparate pieces of information, as well as good hand-eye coordination. The effect was described as 'juggler's brain' by Nicholas Carr.¹⁴

The young people have been widely described as consumers¹⁵ or students,¹⁶ but their professional and business performance has hardly been explored, since they

⁸ *Unlocking Global Youths Insights*, Kantar Futures report, London, http://www.kantarfutures.com/centennials-unlocking-global-youth-insights/ (accessed: 10 July 2018).

⁹ K. Borawska-Kalbarczyk, *Pokolenie C w roli studentów – uczenie się w pułapce klikania [Generation C as Students – Learning in the Clicking Trap]*, 23. Ogólnopolskie Sympozjum Naukowe Człowiek – Media – Edukacja 2013 paper, Kraków, 2013, http://ktime.up.krakow.pl/symp2013/referaty_2013_10/borawska.pdf (accessed: 14 November 2018).

¹⁰ L.D. Rosen, L.M. Carrier, N.A. Cheever: *Rewired, Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2010.

¹¹ B. Tulgan, *Meet Generation Z: The Second Generation within the Giant 'Millennial' Cohort*, Rainmaker Thinking, Whitneyville 2013, rainmakerthinking.com (accessed: 10 July 2018).

¹² Unlocking Global Youths Insights..., op.cit.

¹³ J. Brand, R. Renner, *Research into Growing Up in a Digital Age and What This Means for Today's Parents*, AVG Digital Dairies study, Brno 2011, https://www.avgdigitaldiaries.com/post/6874245208/research-intogrowing-up-in-a-digital-age-and-what (accessed: 18 November 2018), www.avgdigitaldiaries.com/tagged/stage-two, (accessed: 21 November 2018).

¹⁴ N. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, W.W. Norton and Company, London 2010, p. 115.

¹⁵ V. Jain, R. Vatsa, K. Jagan, Exploring Generation Z's Purchase Behavior towards Luxury Apparel: A Conceptual Framework, "Romanian Journal of Marketing" April/June 2014, pp 18–29; G. Aniszewska, Zmiany pokoleniowe a decyzje i wybory konsumenckie [Generation Changes vs. Consumers' Decisions and Choices], "Marketing i Rynek' 2015, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 207.

¹⁶ E. Vecumniece, O. Leontjeva, Generation Z. Business Students as Future Employees of Organisations in Latvia: Empirical Study, 58th International Riga Technical University Scientific Conference on Economics and Entrepreneurship SCEE'17 Proceedings, Riga Technical University, Riga 2017, pp. 131–132;

have just started entering the labour market. Researchers have studied attitudes, expectations and economic literacy of young people.¹⁷

2. Findings

Generation Z will be described in terms of their communication, Internet-related, social and business skills, as these are the feature categories that differentiate them the most from other generations in the workplace and affect their professional performance. Their skills, motivation, entrepreneurial interests and business literacy levels will be contrasted with those of the previous generations.

2.1. Communication skills

Frequent use of the Internet affects communication skills in Generation Z, but it also forces them to develop the ability to multitask (see Table 1).

Table 1. Tabular summary of communication skills in generations active in the labour
market and their impact on working environment preferences

Communication skill/ preference:	Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1980)	Generation Y (1981–1994)	Generation Z (1995–2010)
Preferred means of communication	Printed text	Picture	Video/screen	Interactive screen
Understanding	Deep	Selective	Fragmented	Superficial
Concentration	Focused	Working on one task	Distracted	Multitasking
Working environment preferences	Traditional	Flexible	Casual	Kinesthetic, multimodal, interactive

Source: own elaboration based on N. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, W.W. Norton and Company, London 2010, pp. 90–91; G. Aniszewska G., *Zmiany pokoleniowe a decyzje i wybory konsumenckie [Generation Changes vs. Consumers' Decisions and Choices]*, "Marketing i rynek" 2015, Vol. 1, p. 6.

A young person can combine watching a newsreel with reading a report, talking to colleagues and checking their emails smoothly and effortlessly. However, the

G. Aniszewska-Banaś, Czynniki różnicujące oczekiwania wobec kultury organizacyjnej – wyniki badań sondażowych [Factors Differentiating Expectations Towards Organizational Culture – The Results of Survey Research], "Humanizacja pracy" 2017, Vol. 4(290).

¹⁷ B. Tulgan. *Meet Generation Z* ...,, op.cit.; A. Bencsik, G. Horvath-Csikos, T. Juhasz, *Y and Z Generations at Workplaces*, "Journal of Competitiveness September 2016, Vol. 8, No.3; J. Bejtkovski, *Employees of Baby Boomers...*, op.cit.; M. Ozkan, B. Solmaz, The *Changing Face of the Employees – Generation Z and Their Perceptions of Work (A Study Applied to University Students)*, "Procedia Economics and Finance" 2015. Vol. 26, pp. 476–483.

advantage of divided attention will be offset by their inability to extract relevant information. ¹⁸ Understanding will be superficial and reflectionless.

Short attention span coupled with poor concentration is another weakness resulting from extensive Internet use. To boost performance of young staff, employers might have to create a multi-impulse, kinesthetic and intermodal working environment. ¹⁹ In order to integrate Generation Z employees into their corporate cultures, companies need to ensure an interactive environment. ²⁰

2.2. Internet-related skills and preferences

Internet aptitude and enthusiasm (see Table 2) is a competitive advantage of Generation Z in the labour market. They are sometimes described as Generation C (computerized, connected, always clicking),²¹ or Generation L (leads, links, likes, life-stream, local),²² accustomed to ongoing contacts in social media. Generation Z employees expect immediate reward for their efforts and achievements.²³

Table 2. Tabular summary of Internet skills in generations active in the labour market
and their impact on working environment preferences

Skill/preference	Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1980)	Generation Y (1981–1994)	Generation Z (1995–2010)
Internet and technology	Useful tool	Indispensable tool	Main source of information and entertainment	Main field of activity
Preferred form of communication	Face to face	Face to face	Internet	Social media
Working environment preference	Office-based	Office-based	Remote work	Ongoing communication, instant reward

Source: own elaboration based on B. Tulgan, *Meet Generation Z: The Second Generation within the Giant Millennial' Cohort*, Rainmaker Thinking, Whitneyville 2013, rainmakerthinking.com (accessed: 10 July 2018); A. Bencsik, G. Horvath-Csikos, T. Juhasz, *Y and Z Generations at Workplaces*, "Journal of Competitiveness" 2016, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 94–95.

To take advantage of young people's high Internet literacy, employers need to implement interactive, ongoing communication procedures, both Internet- and office-based. Bruce Tulgan recommends high-intensity relations within small work

¹⁸ N. Carr, The Shallows: What..., op.cit. pp. 141-142.

¹⁹ G. Aniszewska, Zmiany pokoleniowe..., op.cit., p. 4.

²⁰ B. Tulgan, *Meet Generation Z* ..., op.cit.

²¹ J. Morbitzer, Medialność a sprawność..., op.cit.

²² K. Borawska-Kalbarczyk, *Pokolenie C w roli...*, op.cit.

²³ A. Dolot, *Zawodowy Alfabet Pokolenia Z [Professional Alphabet of Generation Z]*, Alterima HR report, 2017, www.aterima.hr/raport-pokolenie-z (accessed: 10 July 2018).

groups with a strong peer leader, supported by teacher-style leadership and customer service-style management. Generation Z seems to be highly responsive to the policy of clearly defined goals followed by discussing performance and rewards on an ongoing basis.²⁴

2.3. Social skills

Low levels of soft competencies are the most commonly quoted weakness of Generation Z. Young Poles are poor listeners, often cannot recognize other people's intentions nor read body language. They tend to understand information literally. Therefore, they are called the 'New Silent Generation,'25 They do not exhibit much empathy nor self-control, as they interact on the Internet rather than face to face. The young people are poor team workers, not eager to exchange opinions nor discuss their ideas. Should any dispute arise, they either provoke a conflict or avoid confronting the issue.²⁶ In spite of this, they prefer to interact with a manager who listens to them rather than just gives them instructions,²⁷ although they expect feedback from their managers. They appreciate the opportunity to contribute with their suggestions. Therefore, a co-creating working environment needs to be developed.

Table 3. Tabular summary of social skills in generations active in the labour 1	narket
and leadership style preferences	

Skill/preferences:	Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1980)	Generation Y (1981–1994)	Generation Z (1995–2010)
Conflict management	Avoiding	Compromising	Competing	Provoking conflicts
Teamwork	Collectivist	Collaborative	Individualist	Poor team skills
Empathy	Empathetic	Acknowledging other opinions	Low empathy levels	Low empathy levels
Preferred leadership style	Instructing	Coordinating	Independent	Co-creating

Source: own elaboration based on: G. Aniszewska, *Zmiany pokoleniowe a decyzje i wybory konsumenckie [Generation Changes vs. Consumers' Decisions and Choices]*, "Marketing i rynek" 2015, Vol. 1, p. 5; A. Bencsik, G. Horvath-Csikos, T. Juhasz, *Y and Z Generations at Workplaces*, "Journal of Competitiveness" 2016, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 94–97; B. Tulgan. and Rainmaker Thinking; Whitneyville, K. Zelga, *Managing Generation Y Employees in the Enterprise*, 'World Scientific News', Złocieniec, 2018, Vol. 104, p. 442.

²⁴ B. Tulgan, Meet Generation Z..., op.cit.

²⁵ J. Bejtkovski, *Employees of Baby Boomers...*, op.cit., p. 109.

²⁶ A. Bencsik, G. Horvath-Csikos, T. Juhasz, Y and Z Generations..., op.cit., p. 97.

²⁷ M. Ozkan, B. Solmaz, *The Changing Face of the Employees – Generation Z and Their Perceptions of Work (A Study Applied to University Students)*, "Procedia Economics and Finance" 2015, Vol. 26, p. 480.

2.4. Business skills

Generation Z is highly competitive in the labour market due to their adaptability, developed in the VUCA reality. Having to respond to thousands of simultaneous impulses in a multimodal, interactive world, young people need to be flexible. They embrace change, ²⁸ picking up and implementing all kinds of novelties and trends, looking for new challenges and impulses. They do not expect stability.

Nevertheless, the above skills cannot be fully appreciated due to poor commitment in Generation Z, which is believed to be inactive, with low ambition or engagement levels, exhibiting an attitude described as 'good enough'. Happy with what they have, living for the present and not eager to struggle,²⁹ young people are used to choosing from a wide range of options, but not willing to make any effort to optimize their choices. They tend to make impulse decisions, influenced by their peers.³⁰ Consequential thinking is not a standard for them. This attitude may hamper their professional and business careers, which require a consistent drive for perfection.

Generation Z is perceived as having little desire to make sense of things, systematize or formalize their knowledge. They are slow at associating distant concepts or drawing conclusions, which impedes both critical thinking and problem-solving (see Table 4).

Table 4. Tabular summary of business skills and attitudes in generations active in the labour market

Skill/attitude:	Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1980)	Generation Y (1981–1994)	Generation Z (1995–2010)
Decision making	Long-term	Long-term	Short-term	Impulse-based
Ambition	Ambitious	Highly career-oriented	Focused on personal development	'Good enough'
Change	Traditionalist	Reluctant to change	Flexible	Open, adaptable
Problem-solving	Analytical, practical	Practical, goal-oriented	Experimenting	Looking for ready solutions or experimenting

Source: own elaboration based on: G. Aniszewska, Zmiany pokoleniowe a decyzje i wybory konsumenckie [Generation Changes vs. Consumers' Decisions and Choices], "Marketing i Rynek" 2015, Vol. 1, pp. 4–6; K. Zelga, Managing Generation Y Employees in the Enterprise, "World Scientific News" 2018, Vol. 104, p. 442.

²⁸ A. Bencsik, G. Horvath-Csikos, T. Juhasz, Y and Z Generations..., op.cit., p. 93.

²⁹ ibid

³⁰ G. Aniszewska, *Zmiany pokoleniowe...*, op.cit., p. 5

2.5. Motivation

Table 5 presents the results of research performed on Szczecin university students in 2015. It indicated that it is responsibility (8.9%), independence (7.7%) and short working hours (7.7%) that students value the most, whereas remuneration is of relatively low importance (4%). The research confirms that young people tend to be independent, expecting empowerment and good working conditions. Strong individualists, they stress the importance of work-life balance (5.1%).

Table 5. Workplace values declared by students

Values	%
Good atmosphere at work	4.0
Work that is rewarding and satisfying	2.4
High remuneration	4.0
Work that makes sense	4.5
Opportunities to be creative	6.0
Work-life balance	5.1
Flexible working time	6.0
A lot of independence at work	7.7
Short working hours	7.0
A lot of responsibility	8.9

Source: based on W. Jarecki, Wartości wyznawane przez osoby wchodzące na rynek pracy [Values Shared by People Entering the Labour Market], "Marketing i Rynek" 2016, Vol. 3(CD), p. 269.

Some studies³¹ stress the importance of working for a cause, which is expressed by young people.

2.6. Entrepreneurial interests

Entrepreneurial interests of Generation Z are a complex issue. As many as 72% of Polish secondary school students declare interest in setting up their own company.³² Nevertheless, according to CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center), courage and entrepreneurial skills were mentioned by only 25% of the participating secondary school students as a determinant of success in the labour market. Although 59%

³¹ S. Pandey, M.S. Khan, *Changing HR Dimensions of Employees Focusing Generation Z in an Era of Globalization*, Udaipur, managejournal.com, 2016, (accessed: 18 July 2018).

³² J. Nieżurawska, A. Dziadkiewicz, Wybrane problemy zarządzania różnorodnością pokoleniową – identyfikacja instrumentów i determinantów motywowania generacji Z w świetle badań empirycznych [Selected Problems of Diversity and Generation Management – Identification of Instruments and Determinants for Motivation as Viewed by Generation Z – empirical study], "Marketing i rynek" 2016, Vol. 3(CD), p. 664.

claimed they would 'generally consider' establishing their own business, only 6% want to launch their own economic activity on graduating from school.³³ This may imply that representatives of Generation Z, understanding the importance of education and experience, postpone their business careers until they are ready. On the other hand, this could mean that they regard their economic literacy levels as too low to run a company, which would require action from educators.

2.7. Business literacy

According to the NBP (National Bank of Poland) Economic Literacy Report of 2015,³⁴ Polish youths underestimate their economic knowledge and competencies. The subjective evaluation of their own skills, expressed during interviews, was much lower than their actual economic literacy test results. As many as 55% of research participants aged 15–24 rated their own economic knowledge and skills as 'low or very low', whereas only 22% of the test results were actually low. The percentage of low scores in young people, however, was the highest of all age groups, which is alarming, given that those persons should have received or be receiving the most up-to-date education. Moreover, students perceive business and economic issues as difficult and their test results confirm their poor understanding of complex financial and macroeconomic issues. According to the NBP report, young people need more knowledge of taxes, insurance, budgeting and saving, which the respondents admit.

3. Discussion

3.1. Impact on the workplace

As indicated above, Generation Z may not meet the expectations of the traditional workplace where discipline, teamwork and ambition are taken for granted. As indicated by M.W. Kopertyńska and K. Kmiotek,³⁵ based on a poll of 382 managers from the Dolnośląskie and Podkarpackie Voivodeships, Polish managers have noticed deficiencies

³³ Młodzież 2016, CBOS report, www.cinn.gov.pl/portal?id=15&res_id=1150305 (accessed: 13 November 2018).

³⁴ Stan wiedzy i świadomości ekonomicznej Polaków 2015 [Economic Literacy of Poles 2015], report by konsorcjum Pracowni Badań i Innowacji Społecznych "Stocznia" i Grupy IQS dla Departamentu Edukacji i Wydawnictw NBP, Warszawa 2015, https://www.nbportal.pl/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/54528/Diagnoza-stanu-wiedzy-i-swiadomosci-ekonomicznej-Polakow-2015.pdf (accessed: 13 November 2018).

³⁵ M.W. Kopertyńska, K. Kmiotek, *Podejście menedżerów do zróżnicowania pokoleniowego pracowników – doświadczenia badawcze [Managers' Approach to Workforce Age Diversity – Research Experience]*, "Problemy zarządzania organizacjami w społeczeństwie informacyjnym" 2014, mfiles, p. 101.

in young employees' soft skills, responsibility, and motivation. They complain of high job rotation, team building problems and conflicts involving the youngest staff. A special difficulty is managing multigenerational teams in a working environment where the division into 'the young' and 'the old' is clearly visible. Behaviours, expectations and communication methods that are natural for 'the young' are unacceptable for 'the old', who appreciate good manners, authority and discipline. As a result, managers have to focus on social issues as well as on the company's core business. Companies need to adjust to the youngest employees and create comprehensive staff engagement programmes in order to incentivize the youths to contribute. The role of flexible working arrangements and empowerment needs to be highlighted. Employers have to provide a kinesthetic, interactive working environment, and implement ongoing communication procedures based on co-creating.

3.2. Social impacts

In spite of their impressive Internet skills, Generation Z is expected to suffer from a more acute skills gap than the older generations. Those with poor communication and critical thinking skills or unacceptable working habits will require remedial action from the government, while the best educated elite will reap the benefits of labour market opportunities.³⁷ Moreover, business literacy levels in young employees, entrepreneurs and consumers must be raised. Educational programmes have to be implemented, targeting both those in education and graduates. According to NBP research,³⁸ the most appreciated forms of acquiring business skills include internships, computer games, Internet portals and workshops. Project learning and mini-companies are popular with older teenagers. Young people who have already started their professional careers could benefit from corporate entrepreneurship and Internet business games.³⁹

3.3. Directions for further research

Professional and business activity of Generation Z requires further study due to the unclear reasons for their postponement of business activity. As indicated above, Polish youths express interest in launching their own economic activity, but

³⁶ K. Włodarczyk, *Młode pokolenia na rynku pracy w Polsce [Young Generations in the Labour market in Poland]*, "Marketing i Rynek 2016, Vol. 3 (CD), p. 1046.

³⁷ B. Tulgan, *Meet Generation Z...*, op.cit.

³⁸ Stan wiedzy i świadomości ekonomicznej Polaków 2015, op.cit.

³⁹ M. Mazurek, New Forms of Business Education as an Attempt to Raise Business Literacy Levels in Polish Generation Z, "Humanizacja Pracy" 2019, pp. 33–35.

do not set up companies, which could imply poor preparation for business activity or low self-confidence.

The tabular summaries presented in the article provide a basis for empirical research. Generation Z has just entered the labour market and the impact of employment on young people's attitudes needs to be assessed. The question to be answered is how they can learn to function in a traditional workplace and how successful they are in doing so. The next question could concern companies and their effectiveness of using young people's potential in the workplace.

Conclusion

Even those complaining about the disturbance caused by the appearance of Generation Z in the workplace admit that generation gap is part of the evolution and diversity is necessary in the workplace. Diverse business units will solve problems faster, make better decisions and serve their customers more efficiently on condition they identify and address the needs of individual employees. Creating multigenerational teams working in the atmosphere of respect for the experienced and the competent on the one hand and empowerment of the creative and the flexible on the other hand will be of utmost importance, as older generations, incapable of multitasking or handling massive amounts of data, will require younger colleagues' assistance.

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⁴⁰ M.W. Kopertyńska, K. Kmiotek, *Podejście menedżerów...*, op.cit. p. 103

⁴¹ A. Jagoda, Zarządzanie różnorodnością pokoleniową a organizacja czasu i miejsca pracy pracowników [Age Diversity Management and Organization of Time and Place of Work], "Marketing i Rynek" 2016, Vol. 3 (CD), pp. 210–213.

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