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Author : Jihaad Hammami, et al
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Analysis of Supplier Relationship Performance and Supplier Relationship Improvement Using the DMAIC Method at XYZ Company

Jihaad Hammami, Harmein Nasution, Nismah Panjaitan

Master of Management Study Program, Postgraduate School, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, 20155, Indonesia

jihaad.hammami@gmail.com, harmein_nasution@yahoo.com, nismah.panjaitan@usu.ac.id

Abstrak

Kopi merupakan salah satu komoditas ekspor utama Indonesia yang berkontribusi signifikan terhadap devisa negara dan sebagian besar dipasok oleh petani kecil. PT. Ujang Jaya International, sebagai perusahaan eksportir kopi, menghadapi tantangan dalam menjaga stabilitas pasokan akibat hubungan dengan pemasok yang masih bersifat informal dan kurang terstruktur, sehingga berdampak pada fluktuasi pasokan dan daya saing ekspor. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi kinerja hubungan pemasok menggunakan pendekatan Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement (SRPM) yang mencakup enam variabel, yaitu kepercayaan, daya tawar, transparansi, komunikasi, komitmen, dan keberlanjutan. Selain itu, metode DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) digunakan untuk merumuskan strategi perbaikan. Data diperoleh melalui kuesioner yang disebarkan kepada perusahaan dan pemasok serta divalidasi melalui wawancara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kinerja hubungan pemasok berada pada tingkat sedang, dengan kelemahan utama pada aspek komitmen dan daya tawar. Rekomendasi perbaikan meliputi penerapan kontrak formal, peningkatan komunikasi dan transparansi, serta pemberian insentif berbasis kinerja guna menciptakan kemitraan yang lebih berkelanjutan dan kompetitif dalam rantai pasok kopi global.

Kata Kunci: Supplier Relationship Management; Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement; Siklus DMAIC

Abstract

Coffee is one of Indonesia's main export commodities, contributing significantly to national foreign exchange earnings. The majority of coffee supply comes from smallholder farmers across various regions. PT. XYZ, a coffee-exporting company, faces challenges in maintaining supply stability due to informal, unstructured relationships with its suppliers. This condition leads to fluctuating supply and weakens the company's export competitiveness. This study aims to evaluate the supplier relationship using the Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement (SRPM) approach, which includes six key variables: trust, bargaining power, transparency, communication, commitment, and sustainability. Additionally, the study proposes improvement strategies using the DMAIC method (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control). Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to both the company and suppliers, supported by in-depth interviews for validation. The findings indicate that the quality of the relationship is moderate, with significant weaknesses in commitment and bargaining power. Recommended improvements include implementing formal contracts, enhancing communication and transparency, and introducing performance-based incentives. These steps are expected to foster a more sustainable and competitive partnership in the global coffee supply chain.

Keywords: Supplier Relationship Management; Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement; DMAIC Cycle

1. Introduction

The global coffee industry has experienced notable growth in recent years, driven by an increasing global appetite for specialty coffee and heightened awareness around sustainability and ethical sourcing. Consumers today demand not only high-quality beans but also transparency in how those beans are sourced. This shift has placed greater pressure on coffee-exporting countries to strengthen their upstream supply chains. Among these, Indonesia stands out as one of the world's leading coffee producers, consistently ranking among the top five exporters globally (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024). Its favorable agro-climatic conditions and diverse varieties, such as those cultivated in the Gayo and Lintang highlands, have contributed to its competitive position in international markets.

Despite this comparative advantage, many Indonesian exporters continue to face persistent structural challenges, particularly in managing relationships with their upstream suppliers—most of whom are smallholder farmers organized through cooperatives. These supplier relationships tend to be informal and short-term, often lacking formal contracts, performance monitoring, or

structured collaboration mechanisms. As noted by Hasibuan and Kusri (2020), such informal arrangements in agricultural commodity chains often give rise to supply instability, inconsistent product quality, and poor traceability, all of which constrain long-term competitiveness.

One company operating within this context is XYZ, a coffee exporter based in Sumatra that sources Arabica beans primarily from cooperatives in the Gayo and Lintong regions. While XYZ has established a solid foothold in international markets, its supplier engagement practices remain largely ad hoc. The firm operates without formalized contracts or a systematic supplier management framework, making it vulnerable to risks such as price volatility, opportunistic supplier behavior, and misaligned objectives across the value chain (Zamroni *et al.*, 2020). As Munizu (2017) has emphasized, supply chains in the agricultural sector cannot depend solely on operational efficiency; rather, they must be underpinned by trust, mutual commitment, and long-term alignment to ensure sustainability and value creation.

Addressing these challenges requires more than reactive problem-solving; it calls for adopting structured frameworks that can diagnose the quality of supplier relationships and guide systematic improvements. Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) provides such a foundation (Ku *et al.*, 2020). Defined as a strategic approach to optimizing the value derived from supplier partnerships (Emon *et al.*, 2024), SRM focuses on fostering collaboration, enhancing transparency, and encouraging long-term engagement between buyers and suppliers (Monczka *et al.*, 2015). Within the SRM framework, the Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement (SRPM) tool enables organizations to assess the health of their supplier relationships across six key dimensions: trust, bargaining power, transparency, communication, commitment, and sustainability (Hasibuan & Kusuma, 2023).

Each of these dimensions plays a critical role in shaping relational outcomes. Trust is fundamental to fostering openness and reducing opportunistic behavior. Transparency ensures the availability and accuracy of shared information, enabling informed decision-making (Montecchi *et al.*, 2021). Effective communication facilitates coordination and the timely resolution of issues (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021). Commitment reflects both parties' willingness to invest in the relationship's future, while bargaining power shapes the balance of influence and the equitable distribution of benefits (Meena & Tiberwala, 2024). Together, these dimensions not only define the present quality of a supplier relationship but also determine its potential for future growth and resilience (Chang *et al.*, 2022).

However, identifying relational weaknesses through SRPM alone is insufficient. Improvement requires a methodical approach to convert diagnostic insights into tangible actions (Ahistasari *et al.*, 2023). The DMAIC methodology, which originates from the Six Sigma framework, offers a structured process for driving continuous improvement (Damlin *et al.*, 2012). Comprising five interconnected phases—Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control—DMAIC guides organizations through identifying problems, understanding their root causes, designing appropriate interventions, implementing changes, and ensuring sustainability over time (Elkington, 1997).

When integrated, SRPM and DMAIC form a synergistic framework that allows firms to assess and improve their supplier relationships systematically and sustainably. SRPM provides the evaluative criteria, while DMAIC offers the operational roadmap for implementing improvements. This integration is especially relevant in agricultural export contexts, where supply chains are complex, supplier loyalty is fluid, and long-term competitiveness hinges on both relational and operational excellence.

For Indonesian coffee exporters like XYZ, adopting such a dual approach is increasingly necessary. Moving beyond informal, transaction-based relationships toward structured, performance-driven partnerships can mitigate key risks and unlock long-term value across the supply chain. The integration of SRPM and DMAIC, therefore, is not only a best practice—it is a strategic imperative for firms seeking to thrive in the global coffee economy.

Based on the issues described above, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- a. To evaluate the quality of the supplier relationship between XYZ and its key suppliers using the Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement (SRPM) method.
- b. To identify the root causes behind weak supplier relationships, particularly related to commitment and bargaining power.
- c. To design improvement actions and a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) using the DMAIC approach

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship dynamics between the company and its suppliers (Doyle *et al.*, 2009). The approach integrates quantitative data—collected through the Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement (SRPM) using Likert scales—and qualitative insights gathered through interviews and company documentation.

To guide the improvement process, the research adopts the DMAIC framework (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) as a systematic methodology for identifying issues, analyzing root causes, and developing and maintaining corrective actions in supplier relationships.

The research was conducted at PT. XYZ is a coffee export company located in Medan, North Sumatra. This location was selected because it serves as the operational hub for raw material intake, processing, quality control, and export distribution. The

study was conducted over three months, from February to May 2025, covering all phases, from preliminary interviews to recommendation development, using the DMAIC cycle.

2.2. Type and Source of Data

The study used two types of data: primary data, collected through direct observation, interviews, and the distribution of questionnaires to management and suppliers. Secondary data, obtained from company records, journal articles, research reports, and other relevant sources, support the analysis. Data were collected through the following procedures:

- Preliminary interviews with management to explore supplier relationship issues and support the development of the SRPM questionnaire.
- Distribution of SRPM questionnaires to both management and suppliers, measuring relationship performance in terms of trust, bargaining power, transparency, communication, commitment, and sustainability.
- Collection of internal documents, such as supplier performance reports and contractual agreements, to validate primary data.
- Data analysis using the DMAIC method, aimed at formulating improvement strategies and establishing control mechanisms through SOPs.

2.3. SRPM

SRPM is used to evaluate supplier relationship performance through six core variables. Indicators are measured on a Likert scale, yielding quantifiable data that reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the supplier relationship. The definitions and indicators for measurement are as follows:

Table 1. SRPM Variable

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators
Trust	The degree of confidence that both parties will fulfill obligations fairly.	Information transparency, contract compliance, honest communication, loyalty.
Bargaining Power	The strength each party holds in negotiating the terms of the partnership.	Dependency, availability of alternatives, switching cost, negotiation balance.
Transparency	The level of openness in sharing relevant operational information.	Access to operational data, production capacity, decision-making involvement, and formal agreement clarity.
Communication	The frequency and effectiveness of information exchange.	Frequency, two-way flow, clarity, diversity of communication channels.
Commitment	The consistency and willingness to maintain a long-term partnership.	Investment in the relationship, adaptability, long-term orientation, and consistency in fulfilling agreements.
Sustainability	Level of alignment and commitment to implementing principles of the economy, society, and environment	Participation in sustainability training programs, support for environmentally friendly practices, access to market information and certification, and price stability and assurance of purchase volume.

2.4. DMAIC

Improvements to relationship performance are guided by the DMAIC methodology, adapted from Damlin *et al.* (2012), and structured as follows:

- **Define:** Identify relationship performance areas with low scores based on SRPM results.
- **Measure:** Gather historical and interview-based data on the identified underperforming KPIs.
- **Analyze:** Investigate root causes using tools such as cause-and-effect (fishbone) diagrams.
- **Improve:** Develop and implement targeted improvement strategies.
- **Control:** Maintain improvements through the implementation of measurable and observable Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

By combining the SRPM framework, Likert-scale metrics, and the DMAIC cycle, this research aims to develop evidence-based and actionable recommendations to enhance supplier relationship performance and strengthen supply chain management at PT. XYZ.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Company Description

PT. XYZ is a coffee export company based in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Founded in 1998, the company started as a local trader supplying coffee beans to roasters and exporters. Over time, it expanded its operations to directly target international markets, transitioning into a fully integrated exporter. PT. XYZ primarily sources specialty-grade Arabica beans from key producing regions such as Gayo, Lintong, and Mandailing, which are well known for their complex flavor profiles and high export value.

To ensure long-term sustainability in its export operations, PT. XYZ recognizes the critical role of managing supplier relationships beyond mere transactional interactions. As such, it has adopted Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) to foster strategic partnerships. The company operates through a structured organization that integrates certification, procurement, quality control, and export logistics to ensure product consistency, traceability, and timely delivery.

Despite its strong position, PT. XYZ faces several structural issues in its supply chain, including a lack of formal long-term contracts, uneven bargaining power, and inconsistent supplier commitment levels. These challenges hinder the development of strategic partnerships and pose risks to supply continuity and certification compliance (e.g., Fairtrade).

3.2. Result

The performance of PT. XYZ’s supplier relationships were measured using the Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement (SRPM) framework, which includes six key indicators: trust, bargaining power, transparency, communication, commitment, and sustainability. Table 1 presents the average scores and highlights areas for improvement.

Table 2. SRPM Result

Indicator	Score	Sub-Indicators < 4.0
Trust	3.9	Agreement compliance, supplier satisfaction
Bargaining Power	3.5	Supplier dependency, availability of alternatives, switching costs
Transparency	4.0	Information consistency
Communication	4.1	-
Commitment	3.7	Long-term investment, flexibility, consistency
Sustainability	4.4	-

The overall average score was 3.94, categorized as good but not yet reaching the strategic partnership threshold (≥ 4.0) as defined by Monczka *et al* (2015). The lowest scores were observed in bargaining power and commitment, signaling the need for systemic improvements in those dimensions. To improve the weaker aspects identified by SRPM, a DMAIC (Define–Measure–Analyze–Improve–Control) approach was employed. The summary of actions taken in each phase is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. DMAIC Result

Phase	Objective	Actions/Findings
Define	Identify key issues in supplier relationships.	Weaknesses in bargaining power (3.5) and commitment (3.7); lack of formal contracts
Measure	Collect quantitative and qualitative data.	Data from questionnaires and interviews revealed the absence of loyalty incentives and the presence of only a few alternative suppliers.
Analyze	Identify root causes	No long-term contracts, informal agreements, weak supplier engagement mechanisms
Improve	Design solutions	Introduced performance-based contracts, monthly communication forums, and supplier segmentation
Control	Institutionalize improvements	Developed SOPs, biannual SRPM evaluations, loyalty incentive systems, and KPI tracking

3.3. Discussion

The SRPM analysis revealed a relatively high relationship performance with suppliers, particularly in communication (4.1) and transparency (4.0), showing that PT. XYZ has built an effective and open communication system. However, bargaining power (3.5) and commitment (3.7) remain significantly below strategic standards. These findings indicate that, despite good interpersonal relations, structural mechanisms such as loyalty incentives, formal contracts, and participatory planning are lacking.

As noted by Chang *et al* (2022), imbalanced bargaining power can deteriorate long-term collaboration. Similarly, Hasibuan and Kusrini (2020) stress that the absence of commitment mechanisms can undermine supplier loyalty. Munizu (2017) highlights that trust must be reinforced through concrete, consistent actions rather than just verbal agreements.

To address the relationship performance gaps identified through the SRPM analysis, this study adopted the DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, and Control) methodology as a structured problem-solving framework. The application of DMAIC provided a systematic roadmap to enhance supplier relationship quality at PT. XYZ, particularly in the domains of bargaining power and commitment, which were found to be below the strategic threshold.

The Define phase focused on clearly identifying the main problems in PT. XYZ’s supplier relationships. Based on the SRPM results, the indicators of bargaining power (3.5) and commitment (3.7) were notably lower than the others. This indicated that PT. XYZ had limited influence over its suppliers and lacked mechanisms to foster long-term loyalty. Through initial interviews and

observations, the research revealed that the absence of formalized long-term contracts and strategic engagement had resulted in inconsistent cooperation and supplier dissatisfaction. These factors were prioritized as critical areas for improvement.

In the Measure phase, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to deepen the understanding of the identified issues. Additional data were gathered through in-depth interviews with procurement staff, quality control managers, and a sample of key suppliers. The results showed that most supplier relationships were governed by short-term informal agreements without clearly defined performance metrics or shared planning initiatives. Furthermore, PT. XYZ had limited alternative suppliers in certain regions, which weakened its bargaining position and exposed it to supply risks. This phase confirmed that the root of the low bargaining power stemmed not only from external market limitations but also from internal policy gaps.

The Analyze phase aimed to identify the root causes of the low scores. Using cause-and-effect (fishbone) analysis and field observations, several factors were identified: (1) the lack of structured supplier classification, (2) the absence of incentive schemes for long-term cooperation, (3) inconsistent evaluation practices, and (4) limited supplier participation in planning. These root causes aligned with findings from Patrucco *et al* (2022), who emphasize that performance gaps often stem from a lack of formal SRM mechanisms and unequal power dynamics. The analysis provided a basis for designing targeted and sustainable solutions. The cause-and-effect diagram can be seen below:

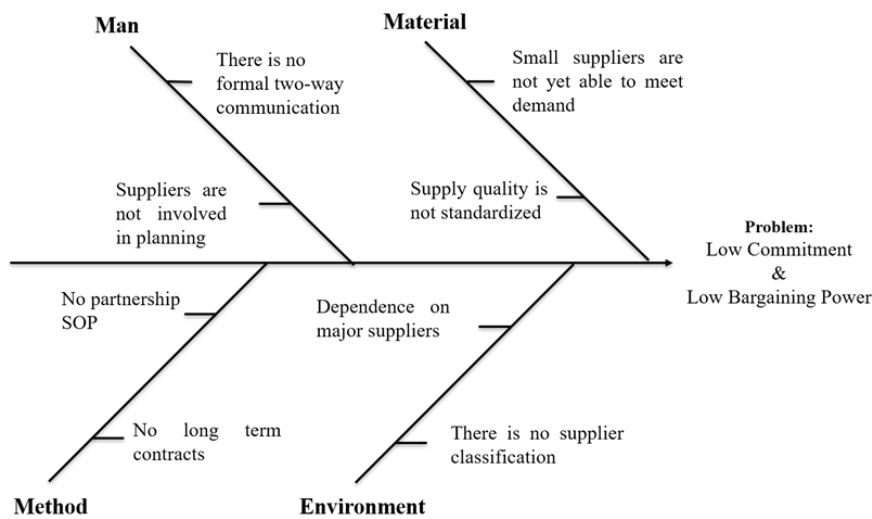


Figure 1. Cause and Effect Diagram

In the Improve phase, PT. XYZ implemented several corrective actions to address the root causes. First, the company introduced performance-based contracts with selected strategic suppliers. These contracts included mutually agreed-upon KPIs related to quality, delivery reliability, and ethical compliance. Second, PT. XYZ launched a supplier segmentation framework to classify suppliers based on historical performance, volume, and reliability. High-performing suppliers were offered preferential terms and considered for long-term partnerships. Third, the company initiated monthly coordination meetings and joint planning sessions with key suppliers to strengthen communication and build commitment. Lastly, an incentive program was piloted, offering financial bonuses or exclusive contracts for consistently high-performing suppliers. These initiatives significantly improved alignment and cooperation between the parties.

The final Control phase aimed to sustain the improvements achieved in the previous stages. PT. XYZ established a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to institutionalize supplier management practices. These SOPs outlined procedures for periodic supplier evaluations using SRPM, structured communication protocols, and contract management standards. The company also developed a biannual performance review system, ensuring that SRPM indicators are regularly measured and used to inform strategic decisions. Furthermore, a dedicated SRM team was assigned to monitor compliance, provide supplier feedback, and update partnership strategies in response to evolving needs. This phase ensured that the improvements were not only implemented but also embedded in the company’s operational culture.

In response to these findings, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was developed as part of the Control phase of DMAIC. This SOP serves as an operational blueprint for institutionalizing supplier relationship management practices and monitoring the six key SRPM indicators: trust, bargaining power, transparency, communication, commitment, and sustainability.

The SOP aims to ensure that supplier assessments, performance evaluations, incentive allocation, and long-term planning are executed systematically, transparently, and sustainably. Table 4 presents the core structure of the SOP.

Table 4. Standard Operating Procedure

No	Procedure	Person in Charge	Frequency	Expected Output
1	Develop and sign medium/long-term performance-based cooperation contracts	President Director, Certification Manager	At the beginning of cooperation	Formal work contract with agreed KPIs, duration, bonuses, and penalties
2	Develop and agree on supplier relationship performance indicators (based on SRPM)	Certification Staff, Administration Staff	At the beginning of the cooperation and annual revision	Relationship KPI document (trust, commitment, communication, transparency, bargaining power, sustainability)
3	Conduct SRPM measurement through questionnaires and supplier interviews	Certification Staff, Head of QC	Every 6 months	SRPM score report and findings on indicators scoring < 4
4	Hold formal communication forums and relationship evaluation meetings with suppliers.	Certification Manager, Head of QC, Daily Coordinator	Every 6 months	Meeting minutes, improvement recommendations from both parties
5	Develop and implement improvement programs based on evaluation results	Head of QC, Warehouse Head, Certification Staff	As needed	Action plan to improve weak SRPM dimensions
6	Classify and assess suppliers based on volume, quality, and loyalty	Certification Manager, Warehouse Head	Annually	Supplier classification matrix: strategic, potential, operational
7	Provide loyalty incentives (training, purchase priority, financing, etc.)	President Director, Head of QC	Annually or as needed	Written incentive program, documentation of assistance, or high-performance incentives
8	Monitor contract implementation, communication forums, and relationship KPI achievement.	Certification Staff, Finance Staff, Head of QC	Quarterly	Relationship performance monitoring report and follow-up actions
9	Grant rewards or penalties based on SRPM evaluation and contract implementation	President Director, Head of QC	Annually	Official letter of reward or penalty for suppliers
10	Update SOPs, contracts, and relationship strategies based on control results and SRPM trends.	Certification Manager, Administration Staff	Annually or after evaluation	Updated SOPs, new contract documents, and the latest long-term relationship strategies

This SOP is not merely a procedural checklist; it represents a structural transformation of the company's approach to relationships with its suppliers. It internalizes the principles of continuous improvement (Eckes, 2001) by enabling regular evaluations and adaptive corrective actions. The SOP provides a formal governance mechanism for previously informal relationship practices. For example, loyalty incentives—which were formerly ad hoc—are now linked to documented performance criteria. This reinforces the commitment dimension, identified as a weak point in the SRPM results (score: 3.7).

Similarly, the SOP addresses bargaining power asymmetry (score: 3.5) by introducing supplier classification and support systems that reduce dependency on dominant suppliers, thereby improving negotiation equity (Chang *et al.*, 2022). Segmenting suppliers and diversifying procurement sources are critical steps toward creating resilient and balanced supply chains (Chopra & Meindl, 2016). The SOP also aligns with Fairtrade International's (2021) principles of equity, transparency, and long-term partnership. By embedding regular evaluations, two-way communication forums, and ethical performance-based incentives, XYZ moves closer to a strategic partnership model—one grounded in mutual growth, shared risks, and sustainable competitiveness (Hasibuan & Kusriani, 2020).

In summary, the SOP is both a managerial instrument and a strategic milestone, enabling the transition from collaborative to strategic supplier relationships. It provides the formal structure, accountability mechanisms, and performance metrics necessary for long-term success in the increasingly competitive and ethically demanding global coffee export market.

4. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that strengthening supplier relationships is essential for enhancing the performance and resilience of supply chains in the coffee export sector. Using the Supplier Relationship Performance Measurement (SRPM) framework and the DMAIC methodology, the research identified critical weaknesses in the relationship between PT. XYZ and its suppliers, particularly regarding bargaining power and commitment. The average SRPM score of 3.94 indicated a generally positive relationship; however, it fell short of the threshold for strategic partnership (≥ 4.0), underscoring the need for systematic improvement.

Through the structured DMAIC process, the root causes of underperformance were traced to the absence of long-term contracts, insufficient supplier segmentation, and the lack of incentive mechanisms to foster loyalty. In response, a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was developed to institutionalize improvements, ensure continuous evaluation, and support the implementation of fair and transparent supplier engagement practices. These changes reflect a shift from ad hoc, transactional management to a

strategic, performance-driven partnership model.

The integration of SRPM and DMAIC in this research offers a replicable and practical framework for other firms in similar Agri-based export industries. It enables organizations to diagnose relationship performance objectively and drive sustainable improvements through structured, evidence-based actions. By aligning supplier management practices with the principles of trust, transparency, commitment, and equitable power dynamics, companies like PT. XYZ can enhance both its operational efficiency and long-term competitiveness.

Future studies may expand this approach by integrating digital supplier analytics, exploring cross-sector comparisons, or assessing the long-term impact of SOP implementation on export performance and certification compliance. (1)

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