



KEN RESEARCH · METHODOLOGY

Do sales reps get promoted faster by changing companies?

The data, the methods, every number and every limitation behind the study.

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ABOUT THE DATA

This study uses Ken internal data: the company, people and web records Ken uses for sales and outreach, reused by Cristian Frunze for this study.

Aggregates only. Any group smaller than 50 people is suppressed, and no individual is named.

Figures 1 to 4 are the study page's charts, drawn from the same numbers. The methodology after them keeps the full tables.

SUMMARY

Do sales reps get promoted faster by changing companies?

No. AEs who reached manager after changing company took a median 46 months, against 31 for AEs promoted where they started. Yet 72.5% of AE-to-manager promotions involved a switch.

46 vs 31

median months from a first AE job to manager or higher: AEs who changed company on the way, against AEs promoted where they started.

72.5%

of AE-to-manager promotions involved a change of company. Switching is the more common route up, even though it is the slower one.

17.0% vs 6.1%

of AEs had been promoted to manager after changing company ten years after their first AE job, against 6.1% promoted where they started.

26 vs 14

median months from a first SDR job to AE for SDRs who changed company, against SDRs promoted in-house. The gap holds one rung lower.

Data and method

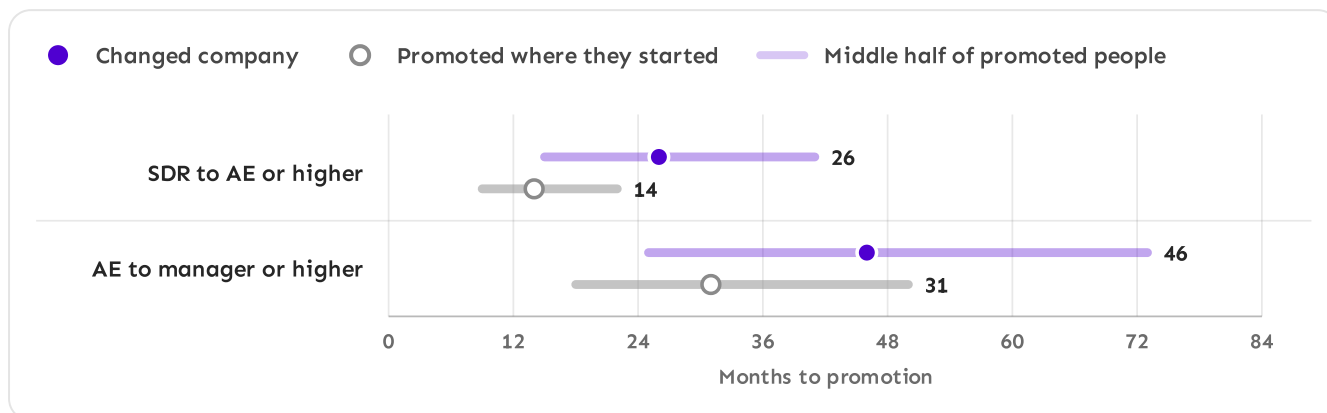
Data	Ken internal data: the public work histories and company records Ken uses for sales and outreach, reused by Cristian Frunze for this study. Six countries: the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland and New Zealand.
Sample	1,108,867 people followed from their first AE job and 256,008 from their first SDR job; 215,328 AEs and 96,766 SDRs were promoted.
Date range	First SDR or AE jobs started January 2008 to December 2023, followed to profiles refreshed by April 2026.
Method	Pre-registered comparison of median months to promotion with bootstrap 95% intervals, competing-risks incidence curves, and Cox models controlling for start year, company size, industry, country and, on a sample, education. Headline numbers recomputed by a separate analysis.
Excluded	• Role records with no start date, an end before the start, or longer than 20 years • People who already held the target rung or higher before entering the role • Founder and intern roles, which are not rungs on the ladder
Privacy	Aggregates only. Any group smaller than 50 people is suppressed, and no individual is named.

FIGURES

The study's charts

FIGURE 1

Reps who changed company took longer to reach the next rung

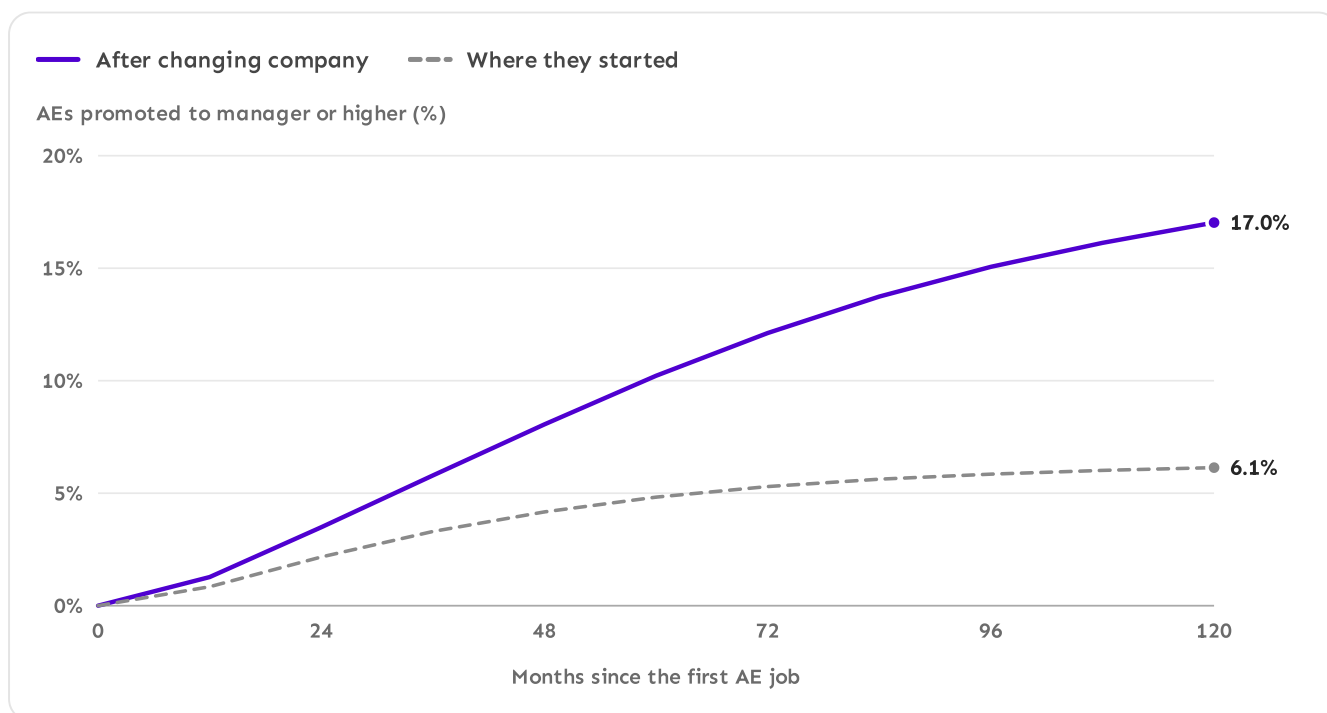


Months from entering the role to the first job one rung up, among people who were promoted. Dots are medians; lines span the middle half of promoted people (25th to 75th percentile).

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FIGURE 2

But changing company produced almost three times as many AE-to-manager promotions

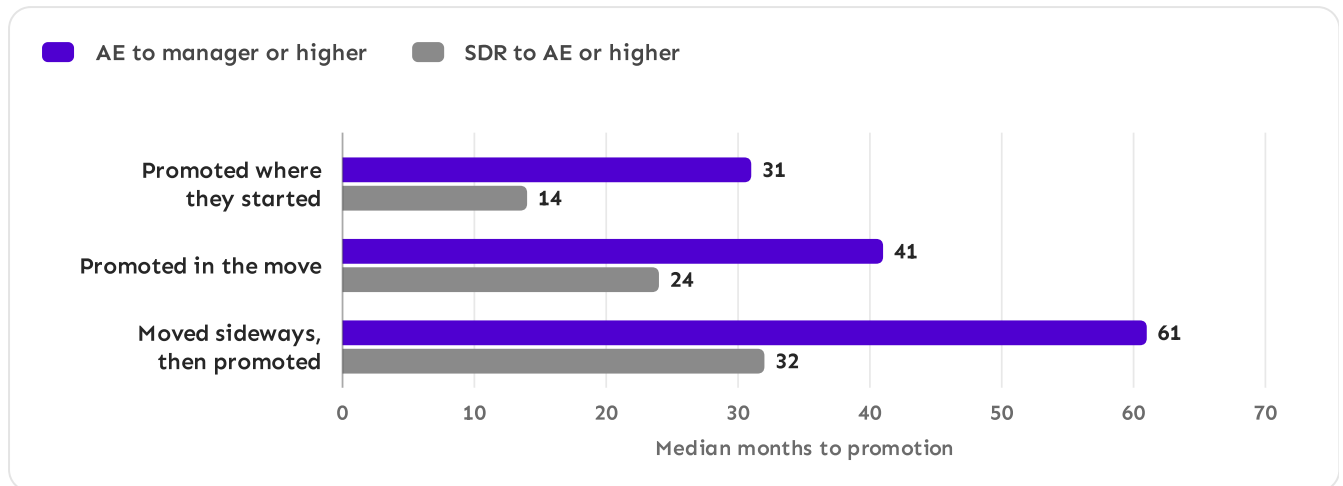


Share of all 1,108,867 AEs promoted to manager or higher by each route, by months since their first AE job. Leaving sales counts as a competing outcome, so people who leave are never counted as promoted.

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FIGURE 3

Moving sideways first is the slowest way up

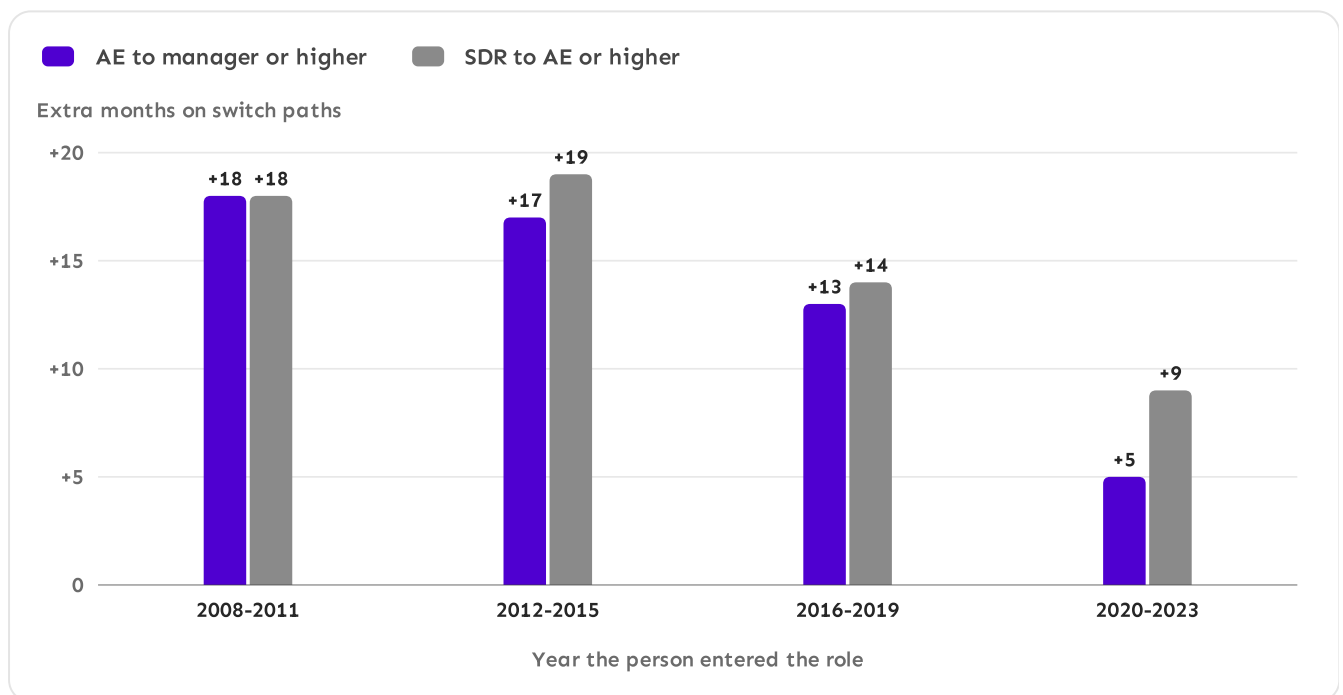


Median months to promotion by route. Promoted in the move means the higher title came with the new job. Sideways means the person moved at the same rung, then was promoted at the new company.

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

FIGURE 4

Switch paths were slower in every start-year group



Extra months to promotion on switch paths against in-house paths (difference in medians), by the year the person entered the role. Recent starters have had less time, so only their fast promotions show up so far.

Source: Ken internal data (company and career records Ken uses for sales and outreach), analysed by Cristian Frunze.

The data, the methods and every number

Do sales reps who switch companies reach the next rung sooner than reps promoted internally?

The hypothesis and plan were pre-registered on 2026-10-16, before any data was pulled.

1. Data

Ken internal data. Ken's dataset of public professional profiles, work histories and company records. The people data covers people whose current country is the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Ireland or New Zealand. Each profile lists past and current roles with title, company, and start and end month. Profiles were last refreshed between 2025-11 and 2026-04.

Sales careers extract. We reused Ken Research's shared sales careers extract, built for the Ken Research study *Who are GTM engineers, and where do they come from?* on 2026-10-15: every person with at least one sales or marketing title, and all of that person's roles, with each title tagged with a function and a level by an ordered set of title rules. It holds 23,543,766 people and 136,156,211 roles. We changed nothing in it.

Company records. Employee count, size band and industry for the companies in the sample. 82,899 company ids were covered by records that Ken's earlier study of sales tenure had already pulled; we pulled records for the other 590,059 ids. In total 493,604 of the 672,958 company ids on sample sales roles matched a record, and 477,828 had an employee count.

Education. Highest degree for a random 200,000 people in the sample, used only as a control.

2. Sample

- **Ladder.** From the extract's labels: SDR = sales development function at individual-contributor level; AE = account executive function at individual-contributor level; manager, director and VP or C-level = those levels in any sales function (sales development, account executive, general sales, account management, partnerships and business development, customer success, enablement, revenue operations, sales engineering). Founder and intern roles are not rungs.
- **Two cohorts.** The SDR cohort starts at a person's first SDR role and looks for the first later role at AE or higher. The AE cohort starts at a person's first AE role (former SDRs included) and looks for the first later role at manager or higher.
- **Entry window.** The first role must start between 2008-01 and 2023-12. If a person's first SDR or AE role started outside that window they are out; a later role is not used instead.
- **Exclusions.** Roles with no start date, an end before the start, or longer than 20 years were dropped: 5,619,916 of the 136,156,211 roles. Of the 2,302,084 people with an SDR or AE role, people whose first role at the cohort's rung started outside the window (SDR 99,060; AE 693,207), who already held a role at the target rung or higher on or before entry (SDR 52,521; AE 210,049), or whose entry company was unknown (SDR 82; AE 330) were dropped, as were the few (under 50 per cohort) whose promotion company was unknown. Intern roles (intern level or student and intern titles) are skipped on the walk.
- **Final sample.** 256,008 SDR entrants and 1,108,867 AE entrants.
- **Group size.** Every published group counts at least 50 people.

3. Methods

Same company or not. A company is identified by its company id, or when that is missing, by its name lower-cased with punctuation removed.

Walking each career. From the entry role we read every later role in start order:

1. A role at the target rung or higher is the promotion. The path is **internal** if every sales role up to and including it was at the entry company, and a **switch** path otherwise. Switch paths are split into **promoted at the move** (the higher role is at a different company from the previous sales role) and **sideways, then promoted** (the person first moved at the same or a lower rung, then was promoted at the new company).
2. A non-sales or founder role counts as **leaving sales** only if it starts after every sales role seen so far has ended. One that overlaps a sales role is treated as a side role and ignored. Intern roles are ignored. Within a month, sales roles are read before non-sales roles, and a sales role at another company that starts in the promotion month makes the path a switch.
3. Otherwise the person is **censored**: at the end of their last sales role, or at their profile's last update if a sales role is current (capped at 2026-04).

Time is counted in whole months from the entry role's start month to the promotion role's start month.

Company size at the time of a role. Ken internal data has no dated company size. For each company we rebuilt a yearly trend from the extract: $H(\text{year}) = \text{the number of extract people with a role there covering 1 July}$. Size at the time = today's employee count $\times H(\text{year of the role}) / H(2025)$. When $H(2025)$ is under 5, today's count is used unchanged. Size bands: 1-10, 11-50, 51-200, 201-500, 501-1,000, 1,001-5,000, 5,001+, and unknown.

Title inflation. Pre-registered rule: at companies with 1-50 employees at the time, a director title counts as manager and VP or C-level as director; at 51-200, VP or C-level counts as director. This rule cannot change who counts as manager or higher, so it leaves both headline steps unchanged; we found this after the first run. We therefore added two checks, labelled exploratory because they were not pre-registered: (1) a stricter rule under which manager, director and VP titles at companies of 1-10 employees do not count as a promotion; (2) the comparison restricted to promotions where the destination company is in the same size band as the entry company or larger.

Estimates.

- Median and 25th and 75th percentiles of months to promotion among the promoted, internal vs switch. Intervals: 1,000 bootstrap resamples of people (seed 51). Months are whole numbers, so at these sample sizes an interval can be a single value.
- Cumulative incidence (Aalen-Johansen) of internal promotion, switch promotion and leaving sales, as competing risks, by month up to 120.
- Cox model for promotion with a time-varying covariate "now works at a different company than at entry", controlling for entry period, entry company size band at the time, industry (top 12 and other) and country. It runs on a random 300,000 people per cohort (all 256,008 for SDRs), and again on the education sample with highest degree added. A promotion that is itself the move has the switch and the promotion in the same month, so we fit it two ways: "move first" (the switch starts half a month before) and "move with promotion" (the covariate is 0 at that event). The first inflates the ratio mechanically; we treat the second as the conservative estimate.
- Linear regression of $\log(\text{months} + 1)$ on switch path and the same controls, among the promoted: $\exp(\text{coefficient})$ is the ratio of times.

4. Results

Outcomes. AE cohort: 215,328 promoted, 448,190 left sales, 445,349 censored. SDR cohort: 96,766 promoted, 87,199 left sales, 72,043 censored.

Routes.

Step	Internal	Promoted at the move	Sideways, then promoted	Switch total
SDR to AE or higher	48,717 (50.3%)	36,433 (37.7%)	11,616 (12.0%)	49.7%
AE to manager or higher	59,171 (27.5%)	121,351 (56.4%)	34,806 (16.2%)	72.5%

Months to promotion among the promoted (size-normalized and raw are identical).

Step	Internal p25 / median / p75	Switch p25 / median / p75	Gap in medians (95% interval)
SDR to AE or higher	9 / 14 / 22	15 / 26 / 41	+12 (12 to 12)
AE to manager or higher	18 / 31 / 50	25 / 46 / 73	+15 (15 to 16)

By switch type: promoted at the move, medians of 24 (SDR) and 41 (AE) months, gaps of +10 and +10; sideways then promoted, 32 and 61 months, gaps of +18 and +30 (intervals 17 to 18 and 29 to 31).

Cumulative incidence.

Step	Month	Internal	Switch	Left sales
SDR to AE or higher	12	8.3%	3.6%	7.9%
	36	18.1%	13.8%	25.9%
	60	19.7%	19.0%	34.5%
	120	20.7%	23.5%	42.0%
AE to manager or higher	12	0.8%	1.3%	5.6%
	36	3.3%	5.8%	22.7%
	60	4.8%	10.2%	34.4%
	120	6.1%	17.0%	46.9%

Destination size. Share of promotions to a company in a smaller size band than the entry company: AE step 48.1% of switch vs 2.5% of internal; SDR step 42.1% vs 3.0%.

Title-inflation checks (exploratory). Destination the same size band or larger: AE step 31 vs 49 months, gap +18 (17 to 18), switch share 48.9%; SDR step 14 vs 26, gap +12 (11 to 12). Strict rule: AE step 31 vs 47 months, gap +16 (15 to 17), switch share 72.2%.

Breakdowns. Gap in medians, AE step, by entry period: 2008-2011 +18, 2012-2015 +17, 2016-2019 +13, 2020-2023 +5; SDR step: +18, +19, +14, +9. By entry company size band: AE +14 to +17, SDR +11 to +14. By country: AE +13 to +16, SDR +10 to +12.

Adjusted models.

Step	Sample	Hazard ratio, move with promotion (conservative)	Hazard ratio, move first	Time ratio, switch vs internal
SDR to AE or higher	256,008 people	1.026 (1.010 to 1.043)	4.215	1.675 (1.660 to 1.689)
SDR to AE or higher	education sample, 38,782	1.020 (0.979 to 1.063)	4.114	1.676 (1.639 to 1.714)

Step	Sample	Hazard ratio, move with promotion (conservative)	Hazard ratio, move first	Time ratio, switch vs internal
AE to manager or higher	300,000 people	1.456 (1.430 to 1.482)	8.350	1.340 (1.322 to 1.358)
AE to manager or higher	education sample, 166,952	1.434 (1.400 to 1.469)	8.415	1.351 (1.326 to 1.375)

5. Pre-registered hypotheses

1. AE to manager: switch paths 4 to 12 months faster. **Rejected.** Switch paths are 15 months slower.
2. SDR to AE: gap between -2 and +6 months. **Rejected.** The gap is +12.
3. A switch is in more than half of AE-to-manager promotions and less than half of SDR-to-AE promotions. **Supported** (72.5% and 49.7%; the SDR share is just under half).
4. Switch promotions land at smaller companies more often, and normalizing shrinks the switcher advantage by at least a third. **First part supported, second rejected:** there is no switcher advantage to shrink, and the pre-registered rule does not touch the manager step.
5. Adjusted hazard ratio for switch paths above 1 with an interval excluding 1. **Supported for AE to manager** (1.456, conservative coding). For SDR to AE it is 1.026 on the full cohort and its interval includes 1 on the education sample.

6. Verification

An independent re-analysis, written from the study plan alone without seeing our code, recomputed the headline numbers. Its first pass matched every median and gap but differed by 0.1 to 0.3 points on route shares and leaving-sales incidence. The causes were three rules in our code: same-month order of sales and non-sales roles, a same-month sales role at another company, and student and intern titles counted as leaving sales. We changed our code to the re-analysis's reading, which follows the plan more closely. After the fix every headline number matches to the precision reported here.

7. Limitations

- **Selection, not cause.** People choose to stay or leave. Strong reps get poached; reps passed over for promotion leave. We cannot separate these, so we say "linked with", never "causes".
- **Conditioning on promotion.** The medians compare only people who were promoted. Recent starters have had less time, so only fast promotions show up for them; that is why the gap is smaller for 2020-2023 starters. The cumulative incidence curves use everyone.
- **Self-reported profiles.** People leave short jobs off, add jobs late, and delete profiles. Only people currently in six English-speaking countries are covered. Earlier years undercount.
- **Titles.** Levels come from free-text titles via fixed rules. English titles are classified best. A level is a title, not proof of managing people.
- **Company size** is rebuilt from today's employee count and each company's trend in the extract, not recorded at the time. Size is unknown for 27% of needed company ids with no matching record and for companies known only by name.
- **Company identity.** Where the company id is missing we match by name, so two companies with the same name merge and a renamed company splits.

- **Side roles.** Overlapping roles at other companies (for example advisory roles in a sales function) can mark a path as a switch when the person never left.
- **Month precision.** A move and a promotion in the same month cannot be ordered, which is why the Cox model is fitted two ways.
- **The pre-registered title-inflation rule** does not affect the manager threshold. The checks that do are exploratory.
- **Missing short jobs** were not estimated in this study.

8. Sources

- Ken internal data: Ken's dataset of public professional profiles, work histories and company records, accessed 2026-10-16.
- Ken Research shared sales careers extract, built for the GTM engineer study, 2026-10-15.
- Company records pulled by the earlier tenure study, reused.
- Bidwell, M. (2011). Paying more to get less: The effects of external hiring versus internal mobility. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 56(3), 369-407.
- Bidwell, M. and Mollick, E. (2015). Shifts and ladders: Comparing the role of internal and external mobility in managerial careers. *Organization Science* 26(6), 1629-1645.

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