

# Complaint Management in Public Institutions in Tanzania: A Systematic Review of Literature 2008 – 2023

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## Abstract

*Complaining against dissatisfaction with service failure has received considerable attention in the literature. This attention focuses on improving service provision to meet the satisfaction of service users. To manage complaints, governments around the globe have established the requirements that guide the management of complaints in public institutions. This study reviews and analyses the contents of previous research to examine the implementation of complaint management in Tanzania and suggests workable strategies. The main question that guided the review was, "What are the key findings from empirical research on complaint management? Google Scholar was used as the main online search engine. Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT) were used to narrow down and ease the online search. "Complaints Management", "Tanzania", "Compliance", and "Complaints Standards" were used as the keywords. Both grey- and peer-reviewed studies were reviewed. Content analysis was performed to reveal key findings. The results revealed that the management of complaints is ineffective. A lack of confidentiality, unresponsiveness, inattentiveness, poor communication, untimely feedback, and negligence have been cited as causes of ineffectiveness. Public institutions should customise complaint management practices to suit working environments and services. Further studies can be conducted to examine why public institutions in Tanzania do not adhere to the established complaint management requirements.*

**Keywords:** Complaints; Complaints Management; Complaints Management requirements; Public Institutions; Tanzania

## 1.0 Introduction

Complaint management in public institutions has become important in modern service provision (ISO, 2018). The assumption behind this importance is that complaint management has been reported to increase service users' satisfaction, loyalty, and positive branding of an institution (United Republic of Tanzania, 2012, 2011; Ngetich 2019; Mantaring et al. 2019). Complaints can be managed internally or externally. External complaints can be managed through mechanisms such as the court system or independent institutions (Bassett et al., 2012). Internally, complaints as argued by Bassett, et al. (Ibid) can be managed using amicable methods established by either the government or regulatory bodies. Some of the amicable ways are reinforcing senior leaders' commitment to enforce compliance (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014), establishing active complaint units/offices, appointing/recruiting competent Complaint Management Officers who are committed to adhering to the established complaint management mechanism (Stauss & Seidel, 2019), and establishing active institutional websites or hotlines (Bassett et al., 2012).

This study reviews the implementation of complaint management in Tanzania, focusing on public institutions. The study mainly focuses on the implementation of the complaint management requirements stipulated in the guidelines and suggests workable strategies. The remainder of this paper is organised into four sections. The first section briefly reviews the history of complaint management in Tanzania, the second section presents theories guiding the review. The third section describes the methodology, and the fourth section analyses empirical literature and discusses the results. Finally, the fifth section presents conclusion and recommendations.

### 1.1 Complaints Management in Tanzania: Historical Outlook

Phase two of the Public Service Reforms (2008 – 2012) brought about three avenues for enhancing public accountability in Tanzania. The first was enhancing accountability across the government, the second was enhancing accountability within institutions, and the third was enhancing accountability among citizens (Mpwapwa DC); Rugumyamheto, 2004; Issa, 2010). Accountability among citizens aims to improve service delivery through complaint management systems (Issa 2010). According to Issa (Ibid), complaint management systems were operationalised in seven ministries, independent departments, and agencies.

Since the 2000s, the Government of Tanzania has been using prepared guidelines for preparing and implementing client service charters for public services in 2006 and the Management Standards Checklist in 2011. These guidelines prioritise complaint management. Specifically, the government prepared complaint-management guidelines in 2012. In 2014, the government provided guidelines for monitoring ethics compliance. These guidelines compelled all public institutions<sup>1</sup> in Tanzania to comply with stipulated complaint management standards. To make complaint management effective, the guidelines require public institutions in Tanzania to institutionalise a physical Complaint Management Office and an electronic complaint management system known as e-Mrejesho and provide all the needed resources (United Republic of Tanzania, 2012; 2014; 2023). The following subsection conceptualises key terminologies including, compliance, complaints, complaint management, and complaint management standards.

Compliance entails acting as deemed by a government or top-level managing body (International Compliance Association, 2022). Compliance with complaints management standards in public institutions in Tanzania is the accomplishment of what has been provided by the guidelines mentioned cited earlier. A complaint is a negative expression of service failure. A service may fail if it does not meet the expectations of its users or the government (URT, 2012; Ombudsman, 2017; URT, 2018; Stauss & Seidel, 2019; Queensland Ombudsman, 2021). Complaint management is an effort made by an organisation to recover a failed service. It is an effort to minimise or eliminate factors that trigger dissatisfaction among service users and establish satisfactory service provisions (Kandampully, 2012; Stauss & Seidel, 2019; URT, 2014, 2023). Complaint management standards are guiding principles to adhere to when handling complaints (URT, 2011, 2014, 2012, 2018; ISO, 2018).

<sup>1</sup> Public institutions must be understood as those covered by the Public Service (Revised Edition) Act (URT, 2019). Section 9, subsection 3 (a) to (f) of this Act covers the civil service, the local government services, and the operational services. The subsection also covers teachers' and health services, executive agencies, and public institutions' services. Meanwhile, section 8A, subsection 2 (a) to (g) of the Act excludes the Immigration Services, the Police Force, and the Prison Services. It also excludes the Tanzania Intelligence and Security Service, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Tanzania People's Defense Force, and the Judiciary and National Assembly Services.

Generally, complaint management standards require an officer to act responsively, with high commitment and confidentiality, and adopt a customer-focused approach. Guiding principles include using complaint information competently and professionally regarding the required skills and knowledge, accountability, and integrity. Other principles are availability, affordability, and accessibility of complaints management mechanisms and acting timely and free of charge (URT, 2018; 2012; 2011; 2006; 2005).

Even though context matters in processing a lodged complaint (URT, 2012), in Tanzania, for instance, complaint management has to follow a process whereby for example, a lodged complaint must be received, acknowledged, and acted upon initially. If not acted on by the Complaint Management Officer, it should be forwarded to the respective departments, followed up on, and final decisions communicated to the complainant and closes the matter (URT, 2012, 2014).

## **2.0 Theoretical Foundation on Compliance**

Compliance theory and bureaucratic theory of management guide this review. Compliance theory assumes that compliance with rules, regulations, and standards depends on the relationship between two levels in an organisation: high-level and low-level participants (Dodge, 2016; Lunenburg, 2012). High-level participants were power holders and low-level participants were subjects of that power (Ibid). Three aspects explain compliance in power relationships: coercive, remuneration, and normative power (Dodge, 2016). In coercive power, high-level participants use force-like sanctions to archive compliance from low-level participants; in remunerative power, high-level participants use extrinsic rewards such as job security, salaries, and commissions (Ibid) to archive low-level compliance; while in normative power, high-level participants use intrinsic rewards such as creating conducive working conditions and giving low-level participants chances to learn new skills in a particular area (Manzoor et al., 2021). In this review, compliance theory was applied to review and analyse institutional compliance with complaint management standards in public institutions in Tanzania based on the third aspect (normative power). Normative power was chosen based on the provisions of the guidelines. The guidelines oblige leaders of public institutions to create conducive working environments such as good offices with an Internet connection, complaints registers, and forms and appoints and trains Complaint Management Officers (United Republic of Tanzania, 2012 & 2023). Contextually, the power holders (high-level participants) in the case of complaint management in Tanzania are the President's Office, Public Service Management and Good Governance (PO-PSMGG), and the senior leaders in an institution. The subjects (low-level participants) of that power are public institutions and employees, specifically Complaint Management Officers.

Bureaucratic management theory describes an organisation's formal processes. Bureaucratic management theory assumes that formalised organisational processes oblige subordinates to adhere to the established formal procedures. For example, Weber (1905) assumed that formalised rules and regulations, observance of legitimate order, hierarchy, regular wages, division of labour, and specialisation could influence subordinates' desired performance (Septra & Ferreira, 2019; Oyedele, 2015). Therefore, bureaucratic principles of formal rules and regulations, division of labour, hierarchy, and observance of legitimate order were applicable in reviewing and analysing complaint management. In Tanzania, the PO-PSMGG is the higher-level Participants responsible for formulating formal guidelines

and standards, and disseminating them to public institutions for implementation. Either way, the top management body within an institution is at a high level because it is responsible for customising government guidelines to suit their working situation (URT, 2012). On the other hand, public institutions are lower levels and (according to the assumptions of bureaucratic management theory) have to observe and implement legitimate orders from PO-PSMGG.

### 3.0 Methodology

This article reviews previous studies to determine the extent to which complaint management requirements are implemented in Tanzania. The review was limited to the period 2008–2023. The dates were selected for two reasons: first, the 2008 - 2012 period was the time for Phase Two of the Public Service Reform Program (PSRP). This phase focuses on improving service delivery by enhancing accountability. Complaint management is an aspect of accountability for citizens. Second, from 2012 onwards, specific complaint management guidelines were established. These include the Complaints Management Guidelines 2012, Ethics Compliance Monitoring Guideline 2014, and revised Complaints Management Guideline of 2023.

In addition, the available literature (grey and peer-reviewed) on complaint management in public institutions in Tanzania is dated between 2013 and 2023. The selection criteria were (i) the study was about complaint management in public institutions, within an institution, not about outside projects or about private institutions; (ii) the study was on amicable complaint management systems provided by the Complaint Management Guidelines of 2012 and the revised guidelines of 2023, and 2014 not complaint management based on legal proceedings.

Apart from printed copies (theses and dissertations) accessed from the University of Dar es Salaam library, Google Scholar was used as the leading search engine. Springer, Emerald, Scopus, JSTOR, and Wiley were other search engines which were recognised and accessed. Research repositories from the University of Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Mzumbe, and the Institute of Accountancy – Arusha Branch were accessed. Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT) were used to narrow down and ease the online search. “Complaints Management”, “Tanzania”, “Compliance”, and “Complaints Standards” were used as keywords. Site restrictions/limits were also used to narrow the online search.

The review was biased on grey and peer-reviewed literature on complaint management in public institutions (business-oriented public institutions were not selected). Only municipalities, towns, and district councils were selected. The councils were chosen because they are guided by similar principles and motivations. The abstracts were first read to screen the relevant literature, which was then selected for content analysis. The search results included two reports, three master dissertations, and two journal articles (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Selected Literature and Government Guidelines on Complaints Management**

S/N	Author(s) & year	Title	Type
1.	Sikika (2013)	Availability of effective complaint mechanisms in public health facilities	Report
2.	Amos (2016)	An assessment of the effectiveness of complaints desk in the public sector: A case of selected institutions in Dar es Salaam.	MA Dissertation
3.	Mgalula (2027)	The effectiveness of complaints mechanism in empowering patients in Tanzania: A case study of three selected district hospitals in the Coast Region	MA Dissertation
4.	Lubuva et al. (2018)	Assessment on the implementation of the public complaints desk towards the improvement of public service delivery among local government authorities in Tanzania	Journal article
5.	USAID (2018)	Public Sector Systems Strengthening (PS3) in Tanzania:	Report
6.	Sengat (2019)	The Effectiveness of the Complain Desk in the Public Sector: A Reflection of Selected Institutions in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania	Journal Article
7.	Maduhu (2023)	Effectiveness of complaints resolution approaches on Customer satisfaction in local government authorities: A case of Arusha City Council	MA Dissertation
8.	URT (2012)	Complaints management guideline (Kiswahili version)	Government guideline
9.	URT (2023)	A guideline for citizens feedback on government services (Kiswahili version)	Government guideline
10.	URT (2014)	Ethics compliance monitoring guideline (Kiswahili version)	Government guideline

**Source:** Different search engines, 2021 - 2023

The following questions guided this review. (1) What are the complaints management requirements from the complaints management guidelines of 2012 and 2023 and ethics compliance monitoring of 2014? (2) What are the key findings from empirical research on complaint management? (3) What is the way forward? This study collected qualitative and quantitative data by reviewing documents and analysing the contents. This study reviewed three government guidelines and journal articles, two reports, and four master's dissertations.

## 4.0 Findings

### 4.1 Content Analysis of the Complaints Management Guideline (2012)

Chapter Three of the guidelines pertains to the process for managing complaints. These guidelines oblige public institutions to customise complaint management procedures based on the service rendered, the places where a service is delivered, and the size of an institution. The following are the complaint requirements from the guidelines: leaders of public institutions must induce complaint awareness to employees, and employees are required to grasp the institutional core functions. Moreover, leaders are required to appoint and empower experienced Complaint Management Officers who have proven to have good manners. Empowerment basics are training on complaints management-related skills and knowledge, providing a room (an office) with an Internet connection, a computer, registers, a telephone, and other stationeries.

The guidelines require Complaint Management Officers to (i) receive and record complaints and (ii) sort and initially solve them. If not solved at the front office, Complaint Management Officers must (iii) communicate and send complaints to the respective units/departments and (iv) use electronic devices to store complaint information. Others include (v) Make follow-ups to respective units/departments; (vi) advise customers on complaint management issues; (vii) prepare and present complaint reports; and (viii) create complaint management awareness for customers.

If the institution cannot resolve the reported complaints, it is required to forward such complaints to the respective external institution and inform the complainant about the decision. These guidelines require public institutions to manage complaints in an amicable way with high responsiveness, commitment, confidentiality, transparency, competencies, customer focus, and integrity of information, accountability, objectivity, and timeliness.

### 4.2 Content Analysis of a Guideline for Citizens' Feedback on Government Services (2023)

This was a revised edition of the 2012 Complaint Management Guidelines. The 2012 guidelines were challenged by focusing primarily on complaint management. Some public employers and employees had negative attitudes towards complaint management and accurate data on complaints were missing. Other challenges include the neglected use of suggestion boxes, increased customer service centres, and delayed feedback to complainants.

Feedback on government services includes (i) complaints, (ii) compliments, (iii) suggestions, and (iv) enquiries about government services. The 2023 guidelines do not differ much from the 2012 guidelines, expect for the scope of the 2023 guidelines, which is broader. For example, reporting mechanisms are more comprehensive and include telephone, written, and face-to-face communication. Others include suggestion boxes, note boards, and electronics. The electronic mechanisms include e-Mrejesho, email, and websites. The e-Mrejesho is widened and includes mobile Apps, SMS/USSD code (\*152\*00# Ok), and government call centres. The 2023 guidelines authorise newspapers, pamphlets, flyers, radio, TV, public meetings, and social media as feedback mechanisms to the public.

Chapter Four of the guidelines pertains to complaint management processes. These guidelines require public institutions to use different means to inform the public about the existence of feedback reception mechanisms. Moreover, these institutions must encourage citizens to provide feedback regarding government services.

The appointed coordinator at the desk is required to (i) register the feedback (complaints, compliments, suggestions, and feedback), (ii) sort and determine the feedback frequency, (iii) note the dates and determine the time frame for the resolution, and (iv) inform the citizen. After that, the Coordinator has to (v) forward the matter to the respective department and (vi) follow up with the departments and give feedback to a particular citizen. For issues needing the resolution of other institutions, the Coordinator has to (vii) forward the issue to the respective institution. The guidelines also require the presentation of accurate reports to institutional management teams and the management teams to integrate the reports into institutional improvement plans.

### **4.3 Content Analysis of the Ethics Compliance Monitoring Guideline (2014)**

This is the general ethics compliance monitoring guideline for public services in Tanzania. Complaint management is a package of public accountability (ethics Principle 6). The guideline obliges public institutions to have a functioning complaint office equipped with the necessary tools to ensure compliance with complaint management standards. The office needs to make sure that the tools are effectively used, complaints are resolved on time, and complaint statistics are in place.

### **4.4 Content Analysis of Grey and Peer-Reviewed Literature on Complaints Management**

The analysis was based on key findings from the literature. The reviewed literature include Sikika (2013), Amos (2016), Mgalula (2017), Lubuva Ngoyo and Sulley (2018), USAID (2018), Sengat (2019), and Maduhu (2023). Sikika (2013) conducted a cross-sectional survey in six districts to explore the effectiveness of available complaints management mechanisms. Twenty-eight health facilities in six districts were studied. These were five health facilities in Ilala, five in Kinondoni, and five in Temeke Municipal Councils in the Dar es Salaam region. There were four health facilities in Kibaha Rural Coastal Region, five in Kondoa, and four in Mpwawa in Dodoma region.

Sikika's findings revealed the availability of five complaint management mechanisms: community meetings, health committees, complaint offices, and suggestion boxes. Regarding the effectiveness of the available complaint mechanisms, Sikika (Ibid) found that only health facilities in Kinondoni were rated as effective. Ilala, Temeke, Kibaha rural health facilities, Kondoa, and Mpwawa were rated ineffective. As observed by Sikika (Ibid), *"... respondents in Ilala District said that their complaint mechanism means were ineffective... majority of the respondents in Mpwawa, Kibaha, and Kondoa said their strategies were ineffective... (Sikika, 2013, p. 8)."*

Sikika (Ibid) argued that citizens in rural districts were afraid of using the existing mechanisms, particularly the suggestion box, which is the most available mechanism. The main factor for the fear was the lack of confidentiality. The findings in a study by Sikika

(Ibid) maintain, “...suggestion boxes were positioned in open areas... they feared negative consequences in terms of health services.... as respondents claimed that healthcare providers might punish them (Sikika, 2013, p. 9).” The second reason for the reported fear was how the suggestion box was managed. According to Sikika (Ibid), “... the suggestion box is managed; handled and supervised by health facility in question...; the complaints may not reach the intended organs responsible for handling complaints... The third factor for fear was the long time spent in resolving a lodged complaint; Sikika (Ibid) observes, “...users were not comfortable with the use of suggestion boxes as it takes a long time from the date of reporting their complaints to the time the complaint reaches members of the Health Committee... (Sikika, 2013, p.9).”

A study by Amos (2016) assessed the effectiveness of complaint management desks in the public sector and found that the implementation of the established complaint management procedures were ineffective in Ilala, Temeke, and Kinondoni Municipal Councils. Amos (Ibid) explored the level of public awareness of the complaint management desk, examining its effectiveness, and identifying the challenges impinging the implementation of complaint management practices. The findings in a study by Amos (Ibid) revealed that citizens were unaware of the procedures, while others did not see the complaint desks. Amos (Ibid) revealed that 59 per cent of respondents were not aware of the prevalence of the complaint desk; and 53 per cent of the respondents did not see complaint desks in public offices (Amos, 2016).

In another study, Mgalula (2017) focused on comparing patients who had experienced unethical practices in Bagamoyo, Rufiji, and Mkuranga District Hospitals. Mgalula (Ibid) focused on ethical values to examine whether the available complaint mechanisms were visible to patients and if health workers were responsive, impartial, and maintained confidentiality. A study by Mgalula (Ibid) revealed unethical practices for managing patient information in selected district hospitals. Mgalula (Ibid) reported a lack of confidentiality among health service providers in all three district hospitals.

Lubuwa, Ngoyo and Sulley (2018) assessed the implementation of a public complaints management desk to improve service delivery in Mpwapwa and Kondoa District Councils. Lubuwa, Ngoyo and Sulley (Ibid) wanted to determine the views of heads of departments and complaint management staff on the implementation process, the contribution of the complaint management desk in improving service delivery, and the challenges and opportunities emerging from the implementation process. Lubuwa, Ngoyo and Sulley (ibid) found that the complaint management processes was ineffectiveness, and that there was a communication gap between the Complaint Management Office and departments within the two Local Government Authorities. For example, Lubuwa Ngoyo and Sulley (2018) reported cases of disorganised complaint management mechanisms in Mpwapwa. They therefore insisted that “...complaint handling mechanism practice in Mpwapwa seems to take away the role of PCD (public complaint desk) unit of analysing and recording complaints most of which are taken directly to higher authority like departments (Lubuwa, Ngoyo & Sulley (2018, p.68).”

A survey by USAID (2018) on strengthening public sector systems (PS3) in Kishapu and Bahi District Councils and the Ujiji and Mikindani Municipal Councils revealed effective complaint management mechanisms and practices. Part 4 of the USAID report (governance

and citizen engagement) subpart 4.2 (strengthening citizen feedback and complaint management) reports that complaint management has been improved in these councils because complaint-management procedures are made publicly. There were complaint registers, offices, officers, and guidelines. On these councils, USAID (Ibid) reported the presence of active complaint management offices and officers and up-to-date complaint registers and reports.

Sengat (2019) conducted a study on the effectiveness of complaint desks in public institutions in Dar es Salaam. The study intended to determine whether the complaints desk was available, accessible, simple, and fast. Other aspects included whether the process was fair, confidential, courteous, open, and transparent, and whether complaint management outcomes were integrated into policies and made practical. It also examined the challenges facing complaint management practices. The findings (from citizens) indicate a negative response as the respondents agreed with only one element: “complaints desk was an easy platform to lodge complaints.” the respondents disagreed with one element, and were neutral on other four elements. Findings from public officials indicate improved confidentiality and impartiality, openness, courtesy, transparency, fairness, and the reformation of complaints. On the contrary, the results indicate a neutral response to fairness, independent complaint management, and the integration of complaints into policy and practice. The challenges facing the complaints desk are illiteracy and fear among the public for using the complaints desk, and the negligence of public institutions.

Maduhu (2023) studied the effectiveness of complaints resolution approaches on customer satisfaction in Arusha City Council. The study revealed a moderate use of resolution approaches. Customer satisfaction was observed to have been influenced by commitment to and dedication to resolving complaints. Some challenges which were reported include, poor communication, slower feedback, inattentiveness, unresponsiveness, and the ability to own the system.

**Table 2: Summary of Key Findings**

S/N	Author(s)	Key findings	Associated reasons
1.	Sikika (2013)	Mechanisms available but ineffective	Lack of confidentiality: Citizens fear being known and mistreated
2.	Amos (2016)	Ineffective	Complaint mechanisms are not visible, and there was low awareness of complaints management.
3.	Mgalula (2017)	Unethical practice	Lack of confidentiality
4.	Lubuva et al. (2018)	Ineffective	Communication gap and diverted complaints management practices
5.	USAID (2018)	Effective	Availability of complaints offices, officers, registers, reports

S/N	Author(s)	Key findings	Associated reasons
6.	Sengat (2019)	Ineffective (citizen)	Challenged by fear of using existing mechanisms and illiteracy
		Moderate improvement (public officials)	Challenged by negligence
7.	Maduhu (2023)	- Moderate use of complaint resolution approaches	Poor communication, slower feedback, inattentiveness and unresponsiveness and lack of ownership
		- Satisfied customers	Commitment and dedication to complaints resolution

## 5.0 Discussion

In respect with the foregoing guidelines, public institutions are given options to customise complaint management standards based on the services provided, location of the service, and the size of the institution. The reported ineffectiveness of complaint management mechanisms could be attributed to minimal customisation of the general guidelines and neglect of power relations and levels of structures within public institutions. If complaint management was customised, and if formal rules and structures were observed, why was there no confidentiality? Why were the mechanisms not visible and why did poor communication and slower feedback occur? Why was the public unaware of complaint management practices? The reported negligence could be the result of neglecting the normative power relationship, formal structure, and rules.

Negligence is revealed by the tendency to ignore the established complaint-reporting process. Higher offices could have maintained the division of labour and directed people to report complaints to their respective offices. A higher level could also ensure that subordinates provide feedback timely.

Apart from the established complaint management standards, the Code of Ethics and Conduct for the Public Service in Tanzania in 2005 reflects compliance theory and bureaucratic theory of management. The Code of Ethics and Conduct requires all public servants to provide timely services with high security and confidentiality. The Code of Ethics and Conduct (Ibid) stresses that: *"...finish assigned duties within required time and standards...; ...give instructions which are clear and undistorted ... ensuring that subordinates clearly understand the scope of their work ... (URT, 2005, pp.7-8)."* Established complaint management practices could have been enforced by the top management by compelling subordinates and complainants to obey the established complaint management practices.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the literature reviewed, complaint management practices have been reported as ineffective. Of the seven reviewed studies, one was reported to be fully effective and two were to have made moderate improvements. The remaining four studies reported

ineffectiveness in complaint management practices. Indicators of ineffectiveness were lack of confidentiality, unresponsiveness and inattentiveness, invisibility of complaint boxes, and a low level of awareness of complaint management practices. Slower feedback, poor communication, and negligence, illiteracy and fear for using the established complaint mechanism are other indicators of ineffectiveness. Also, there seem to be a neglect of the established complaint management guidelines. Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that The President's Office, Public Service Management and Good Governance could ensure that public institutions customise complaint management practices to suit working environments and services. From the review results, it appears that the established complaint requirements are violated. Further studies need to be conducted to examine why public institutions do not adhere to the established complaint management requirements.

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