

Self-Determination and Quality of Work Life for Employee Motivation

Autodeterminação e Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho para motivação de funcionários

Autodeterminación y Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo para motivación de empleados

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ABSTRACT

Objective of the Study: This study aims to analyze, at a conceptual level, the relationships between Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Quality of Work Life (QWL) model proposed by Walton, discussing how the articulation between these approaches contributes to the understanding of work motivation. **Methodology/Approach:** This is a theoretical essay grounded in a literature review, through which national and international studies addressing SDT, especially the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and Walton's QWL model were analyzed, considering related contextual dimensions such as working conditions, compensation, safety, social integration, and work-life balance. **Originality/Relevance:** The study is distinguished by proposing a theoretical articulation between two models that are widely used independently, whose integration remains underexplored in the academic literature. This approach expands the conceptual understanding of work motivation and provides relevant theoretical support for future research and analyses in the field of people management. **Main Results:** The theoretical analysis reveals relevant conceptual convergences between the basic psychological needs of SDT and the dimensions of Walton's QWL model, indicating that certain contextual characteristics of work may foster the satisfaction of these needs, with direct implications for levels of self-determined motivation in organizational settings. **Theoretical/Methodological Contributions:** The study contributes theoretically by highlighting the conceptual complementarity between SDT and Walton's QWL model, offering an integrated analytical framework for understanding work motivation, supported by literature review. **Social Contributions/Management Implications:** By articulating psychological and contextual aspects of work, the study provides conceptual insights for analyses and people management practices aimed at fostering work environments that consider well-being, meaningful work, and workers' motivation. By articulating psychological and contextual aspects of work, the study provides conceptual insights for analyses and people management practices aimed at fostering work environments that consider well-being, meaningful work, and workers' motivation.

Keywords: Motivation. Self-Determination Theory. Quality of Work Life.

RESUMO

Objetivo do Estudo: Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar, em nível conceitual, as relações entre a Teoria da Autodeterminação (TAD) e o modelo de Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho (QVT) proposto por Walton, discutindo como a articulação entre essas abordagens contribui para a compreensão da motivação no trabalho. **Metodologia/Abordagem:** Trata-se de um ensaio teórico fundamentado em uma revisão da literatura, por meio da qual foram analisados estudos nacionais e internacionais que abordam a TAD, especialmente as necessidades psicológicas básicas de autonomia, competência e relacionamento, e o modelo de QVT de Walton, considerando dimensões contextuais relacionadas, como condições de trabalho, compensação, segurança, integração social e equilíbrio entre trabalho e vida pessoal. **Originalidade/Relevância:** O estudo diferencia-se ao propor uma articulação teórica entre dois modelos amplamente utilizados de forma independente, cuja integração ainda se mostra pouco explorada na literatura acadêmica. Essa abordagem amplia a compreensão conceitual da motivação no trabalho e oferece subsídios teóricos relevantes para pesquisas futuras e para análises no campo da gestão de pessoas. **Principais Resultados:** A análise teórica evidencia convergências conceituais relevantes entre as necessidades psicológicas básicas da TAD e as dimensões da QVT de Walton, indicando que determinadas características contextuais do trabalho podem favorecer ou a satisfação dessas necessidades, com implicações diretas para os níveis de motivação autodeterminada no ambiente organizacional. **Contribuições Teóricas/Metodológicas:** O estudo contribui teoricamente ao evidenciar a complementaridade conceitual entre a TAD e o modelo de QVT de Walton, oferecendo uma proposta integrada de análise da motivação no trabalho, sustentada por revisão da literatura. **Contribuições Sociais/Contribuição para a Gestão:** Ao articular aspectos psicológicos e contextuais do trabalho, o estudo oferece subsídios conceituais para análises e práticas de gestão de pessoas, voltadas à criação de ambientes laborais que considerem o bem-estar, o significado do trabalho e a motivação dos trabalhadores.

Palavras-chave: Motivação. Teoria da Autodeterminação. Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho.

RESUMEN

Objetivo del Estudio: Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar, a nivel conceptual, las relaciones entre la Teoría de la Autodeterminación (TAD) y el modelo de Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo (CVT) propuesto por Walton, discutiendo cómo la articulación entre estos enfoques contribuye a la comprensión de la motivación en el trabajo. **Metodología/Enfoque:** Se trata de un ensayo teórico fundamentado en una revisión de la literatura, mediante la cual se analizaron estudios nacionales e internacionales que abordan la TAD, especialmente las necesidades psicológicas básicas de autonomía, competencia y relación, y el modelo de CVT de Walton, considerando dimensiones contextuales relacionadas, como las condiciones de trabajo, la compensación, la seguridad, la integración social y el equilibrio entre el trabajo y la vida personal. **Originalidad/Relevancia:** El estudio se distingue por proponer una articulación teórica entre dos modelos ampliamente utilizados de forma independiente, cuya integración aún se muestra poco explorada en la literatura académica. Este enfoque amplía la comprensión conceptual de la motivación en el trabajo y ofrece aportes teóricos relevantes para futuras investigaciones y análisis en el campo de la gestión de personas. **Principales Resultados:** El análisis teórico evidencia convergencias conceptuales relevantes entre las necesidades psicológicas básicas de la TAD y las dimensiones del modelo de CVT de Walton, indicando que determinadas características contextuales del trabajo pueden favorecer la satisfacción de dichas necesidades, con implicaciones directas para los niveles de motivación autodeterminada en el entorno organizacional. **Contribuciones Teóricas/Metodológicas:** El estudio contribuye teóricamente al evidenciar la complementariedad conceptual entre la TAD y el modelo de CVT de Walton, ofreciendo una propuesta integrada de análisis de la motivación en el trabajo, sustentada en una revisión sistemática de la literatura. **Contribuciones Sociales/Contribuciones para la Gestión:** Al articular aspectos psicológicos y contextuales del trabajo, el estudio ofrece aportes conceptuales para análisis y prácticas de gestión de personas, orientadas a la construcción de entornos laborales que consideren el bienestar, el significado del trabajo y la motivación de los trabajadores.

Palabras clave: Motivación. Teoría de la Autodeterminación. Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo.

■ INTRODUCTION

The contemporary work environment is increasingly oriented toward understanding employees' needs, aiming to promote well-being, satisfaction, and positive experiences (Harlianto & Rudi, 2023; Pereira & Trevelin, 2020). Modern managers recognize the importance of people as fundamental elements for organizational performance and sustainability (Kovačević, Blagojević, & Kuzmanović, 2020; Lorincová, Štarchoň, Weberová, Hitka, & Lipoldová, 2019; Mamaghaniyeh, Sadeghi, & Amani, 2019; Ramírez Molina, Sukier, Monsalve Castro, & Lay Raby, 2022; Susanto, Syailendra, & Suryawan, 2023; Toscano-del Cairo, Vesga-Rodríguez, & Avendaño-Prieto, 2020). In this context, individual motivation is positively correlated with job satisfaction and productivity, as demonstrated by several studies (Carvalho & Silva, 2019; Chen, Zhang, & Gilal, 2019; Fernandez-Aviles & Forte, 2020; Forner, Jones, Berry, & Eidenfalk, 2020; Kalogiannidis, 2021; Molines, Mifsud, El Akremi, & Perrier, 2022; Peters, Calvo, & Ryan, 2018; Prysmakova & Vandenabeele, 2020). Motivated individuals tend to be more engaged, resulting in improved performance and facilitating the achievement of organizational goals (Kotera et al., 2022; Rahaman, Ali, Wafikk, Mamoon, & Islam, 2020; Zonatto, Silva, & Gonçalves, 2018).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), stands out as one of the most influential approaches in explaining human motivation (Kaabomeir, Mazhari, Arshadi, & Karami, 2023; Kotera et al., 2022), as it emphasizes the role of individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Alsuwailem, 2023; Jungert, Van den Broeck, Schreurs, & Osterman, 2021). In parallel, Walton's Quality of Work Life (QWL) model (Walton, 1973) encompasses eight dimensions that address different aspects of working conditions, such as compensation, social integration, and capacity development, and is directly linked to motivation and the promotion of satisfaction and well-being within organizations (Endayani, Musadieg, & Afrianty, 2018; Mesquita, Ávila, Matos, & Mesquita Júnior, 2018; Sabonete, Lopes, Rosado, & Reis, 2021). Although distinct, SDT and QWL converge in their aim to improve the work experience, suggesting that the dimensions of Walton's model can be understood as contextual factors capable of supporting the basic psychological needs proposed by SDT, indicating a relationship of theoretical complementarity.

In light of this scenario, this study seeks to answer the following research question: how do the basic psychological needs of SDT conceptually relate to the dimensions of QWL proposed by Walton in understanding work motivation? Accordingly, the objective of this article is to analyze, at a conceptual level, the articulation between these approaches, aiming to understand how this integration may enhance the explanation of motivational phenomena in the organizational context. The synthesis of these concepts enriches the theoretical field and provides a basis for the implementation of guidelines for organizations seeking to improve working conditions for employees. Thus, a careful analysis of motivational elements supports more

assertive management practices (Susanto et al., 2023), positioning organizations in a more dynamic, productive, and satisfying environment (Fatai, 2018).

In the workplace, the implementation of effective motivational practices (Kovačević et al., 2020; Uka & Prendi, 2021) enables resource optimization and priority setting (Santos et al., 2020). However, despite the growing emphasis on employee motivation, its practical application remains limited (Forner et al., 2020; Kalogiannidis, 2021; Papadopoulou & Dimitriadis, 2019; Slemp, Lee, & Mossman, 2021). In many cases, motivation continues to be underutilized by managers (Carvalho & Silva, 2019; Silva & Rossini, 2021), reinforcing the need to understand motivational factors as strategic elements within organizations (Riyanto, Endri, & Herlisha, 2021; Toscano-del Cairo et al., 2020). Furthermore, although SDT and Walton's QWL model are widely recognized and applied independently, the literature still lacks studies that investigate, in an integrated manner, the conceptual relationships between these approaches, revealing a relevant gap and reinforcing the theoretical and scientific relevance of the present study.

Methodologically, this article is characterized as a theoretical essay, grounded in a literature review, whose purpose is not to empirically test relationships, but to critically analyze and integrate established concepts. The paper begins by presenting the theoretical foundations of Self-Determination Theory and Walton's Quality of Work Life model, followed by a description of the methodological procedures adopted, and then discusses the conceptual convergences between the models. Finally, the study presents its contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is grounded in the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Alsuwailem, 2023). Intrinsic motivation arises internally, driven by a genuine interest in performing an activity and by the pleasure derived from the task itself (Jungert et al., 2018; Zheng, Janiszewski, & Schreier, 2022). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors, such as rewards or punishments (Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020). SDT also introduces the concept of the control-autonomy continuum, categorizing motivation according to the level of autonomy perceived by the individual. Thus, starting from a state of amotivation (Kaabomeir et al., 2023; Kotera et al., 2022), there are four types of extrinsic motivation that gradually approach intrinsic or autonomous motivation as perceived external control decreases (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Duarte, 2022; Xu, 2022). The main types of motivation described by SDT are presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Types of motivation according to Self-Determination Theory.*

Type of motivation	Meaning
Amotivation	Absence of intention to act
External regulation	Seeking rewards or avoiding threats/punishment
Introjected regulation	Avoidance of guilt/anxiety or related to ego and self-esteem (self-reward or self-punishment)
Identification or Identified regulation	Conscious valuing of something or someone
Integration or Integrated regulation	Self-determined behavior, though not necessarily associated with full enjoyment. External motives are endorsed and integrated into one's sense of self
Intrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation

Source: adapted by the authors, based on Deci & Ryan (2000), Duarte (2022), Jungert et al. (2018), Kaabomeir et al. (2023) and Xu (2022).

SDT is also based on three fundamental psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Jungert et al., 2018; Slemp et al., 2021). Competence refers to the perception of effectiveness in interacting with the social environment; autonomy is related to the desire for self-determination and control over one's actions; and relatedness involves the need to establish connections with others (Liu, He, & Cao, 2023; Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020). These needs are considered innate and universal, although their expression may vary depending on the social and organizational context (Papadopoulou & Dimitriadis, 2019), reinforcing the importance of work environments that support them. According to the theory, satisfying these needs drives individuals along the control–autonomy continuum toward autonomous motivation in relation to a given activity, leading to experiences of growth, integrity, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Duarte, 2022; Xu, 2022).

Forner et al. (2020) analyzed the experiences of 51 leaders who applied SDT principles in their daily management practices and demonstrated how this theory can effectively motivate employees. Kaabomeir et al. (2023) evaluated the impact of training supervisors to support employees' basic psychological needs, observing positive outcomes, including reduced demotivation among participants. The study by St-Onge and Beauchamp Legault (2022) examined the perspectives of experienced professionals in the financial sector regarding management practices based on SDT, emphasizing the importance of motivation and identifying actions that either supported or frustrated basic psychological needs. Among these practices, initiatives related to social integration, compensation, and recognition were highlighted. Papadopoulou et al. (2019) conducted an empirical test and confirmed a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and the performance of public employees.

Based on SDT, autonomous motivation provides long-term benefits for organizations (Alsuwailem, 2023), as employees perform better when their basic psychological needs are satisfied (Jungert et al., 2018). Unlike extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation tends to sustain positive behaviors over time, reducing dependence on external control mechanisms. This is particularly relevant in organizational contexts that seek to promote long-term employee engagement (Kaabomeir et al., 2023; Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020). The

growing emphasis on employee well-being and performance highlights the importance of continued research in this area. In this regard, SDT offers a relevant conceptual framework for understanding how different organizational conditions can support or hinder the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, directly influencing levels of work motivation and employee engagement.

Quality of Work Life according to Walton

Quality of Work Life (QWL) refers to a set of organizational conditions directly related to employee satisfaction (Abebe & Assemie, 2023), encompassing improvements in working conditions and the promotion of well-being (Jayakumar & Kalaiselvi, 2012; Siqueira et al., 2021). In this sense, QWL involves factors aimed at enhancing the interaction between employees and the organization (Abdullah, Zakaria, & Zahoor, 2021; Aminudin Hadi, Wibowo, Edy Wibowo, Jalil, & Waskito Adi, 2022), in order to create a healthy and rewarding work environment (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2023). Among the various approaches, this study adopts the framework proposed by Richard Walton (Walton, 1973), one of the pioneers in QWL research and a key reference for understanding and improving working conditions and employee well-being (Siqueira et al., 2021).

Walton's model includes eight dimensions: fair and adequate compensation, safe and healthy working conditions, use and development of capacities, opportunities for continued growth and security, social integration in the organization, constitutionalism, work and total life space, and social relevance of work life (Mamaghaniyeh et al., 2019; Sabonete et al., 2021; Sousa Santos et al., 2021; Timossi, Pedroso, Pilatti, & De Francisco, 2009). These dimensions, summarized in Table 2, encompass physical, social, and psychological aspects, aiming to improve employees' overall work experience. In this context, QWL should be incorporated into organizational strategies and processes to ensure positive employee perceptions of work (Aminudin Hadi et al., 2022) and to foster an environment in which individuals feel valued and motivated. Thus, Walton's model provides a set of analytical dimensions that enable a comprehensive understanding of how different organizational conditions influence perceptions of well-being and job satisfaction.

Table 2*Factors of Walton's Quality of Work Life (QWL) model.*

Factor	Description
Fair and adequate compensation	Perception of remuneration consistent with responsibilities and comparable to that of other workers
Safe and healthy working conditions	Physical and environmental aspects that ensure safety and well-being at work
Use and development of capabilities	Opportunity to apply skills and develop competencies at work
Opportunities for continuous growth and security	Prospects for professional development and job stability
Social integration within the organization	Existence of relationships based on respect, inclusion, and cooperation among organizational members
Constitutionalism	Assurance of rights, organizational justice, and respect for institutional rules
Work-life balance	Compatibility between professional demands and personal life
Social relevance of work	Perception that the work performed has utility and a positive impact on society

Source: adapted by the authors, based on (Walton, 1973).

According to Silva Neto, Pedroso, and Freitas Júnior (2023), Walton's model is a widely used approach for promoting QWL in organizational settings due to its comprehensive criteria, which include aspects such as fair compensation, benefits proportional to responsibilities, and job security. Continuous skill development and career advancement, as well as the balance between professional and personal life, are also emphasized. At the same time, a risk-free environment that promotes physical well-being, positive interpersonal relationships, and employee involvement in decision-making and organizational management are considered essential for strategic development (Jayakumar & Kalaiselvi, 2012; Sabonete et al., 2021; Siqueira et al., 2021; Timossi et al., 2009). In this sense, Walton's model expands the understanding of Quality of Work Life by integrating structural, social, and psychological dimensions of the organizational environment, enabling more comprehensive analyses of the conditions that influence employee satisfaction and well-being. This multidimensional perspective contributes to understanding how different organizational practices and conditions can foster more satisfying and sustainable work experiences.

Abebe and Assemie (2023) conducted a study with university professors in Ethiopia and found that QWL has a significant and positive association with organizational commitment. Wardani and Anwar (2019), in a study with employees of multinational companies in Indonesia, concluded that QWL acts as a mediator in individuals' psychological capital, with both direct and indirect effects on work engagement. Aminudin Hadi et al. (2022) also identified, through questionnaires, observations, and literature review, that QWL has an impact on individuals' motivation and performance. In this sense, QWL and work motivation are closely interconnected (Bogossian, 2022; Sousa Santos, Valdivino Rocha Lima, & Carvalho da Silva, 2021), and a healthy and satisfying work environment can be a strong driver of motivation. Mamaghaniyeh et al. (2019) highlight the importance of preserving human resources and suggest that improving QWL is a viable strategy to achieve this objective.

Integration Between SDT and Walton's QWL

Although no studies were identified in the literature that directly articulate Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Walton's Quality of Work Life (QWL) model, both approaches present relevant conceptual convergences regarding the relationship between working conditions, the satisfaction of human needs, and motivation. SDT posits that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs is essential for intrinsic motivation, suggesting that when these needs are fulfilled, individuals tend to feel more engaged at work. This, in turn, may contribute to more positive perceptions of Quality of Work Life. Conversely, when QWL-related factors are prioritized by organizations, employees may feel more motivated. Thus, the integration between SDT and QWL suggests a potentially bidirectional relationship that reinforces individuals' intrinsic motivation, creating a positive cycle of well-being and productivity.

The relationship between SDT and Walton's QWL can be supported by studies addressing motivation and satisfaction in organizational contexts. Aparecida and Ferreira (2016) investigated employees' perceptions in a psychiatric institution in Brazil and found that most participants considered motivation to be essential. Their findings indicated that the application of appropriate motivational theories can reduce turnover and absenteeism, as well as improve service quality. Complementing this perspective, Gonçalves (2023) explored the relationship between organizational motivation and reward systems, demonstrating that employee recognition is a crucial element for job satisfaction and performance. The study suggested the implementation of non-financial rewards and more effective evaluation systems as solutions to dissatisfaction, reinforcing the importance of addressing employees' needs to foster a more motivating work environment.

Within the broader field of motivational theories, Silva and Rossini (2021) highlighted that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory are highly influential in Quality of Work Life. Although their study did not specifically address SDT, it demonstrated that motivational factors can be related to the promotion of employees' self-determination. In this sense, SDT emphasizes that intrinsic motivation is fundamental for well-being and performance. By promoting QWL, organizations can create environments that support the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby enhancing self-determination, motivation, and productivity. Additionally, Pereira, da Silva, and Durão (2024) examined motivation and satisfaction within organizational contexts using multiple motivational theories, emphasizing that both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects are essential. Their findings suggest that organizations should promote practices such as personal development programs, feedback, recognition, and encouragement of autonomy.

Based on these contributions, it can be observed that different organizational factors related to Quality of Work Life can conceptually align with the basic psychological needs proposed by Self-Determination Theory. In this regard, dimensions of Walton's model—such as use and development of capacities and opportunities for continued growth—may be associated with individuals' perception of competence; aspects related to participation in decision-making and autonomy at work may support the need for autonomy; while factors such as social integration within the organization contribute to strengthening the need for relatedness. Thus, although the literature does not

yet provide consolidated studies directly integrating these two theoretical models, it is possible to identify conceptual proximities that support the relevance of integrated analyses between SDT and Walton's QWL, particularly in understanding contextual factors that foster work motivation.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study was conducted through a literature review focused on the intersection between Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Quality of Work Life (QWL). The aim was to identify and analyze theoretical and empirical contributions that address possible relationships between these constructs within organizational contexts. The bibliographic search process followed the steps described below:

- a) **Problem formulation:** The study was guided by the objective of examining how the literature has addressed possible relationships between Self-Determination Theory and Quality of Work Life in organizational settings. This guiding question directed the search and selection of the studies analyzed.
- b) **Literature search:** The review was conducted using the CAPES Periodicals Portal and Google Scholar, without time restrictions, and included publications in Portuguese and English. The search terms included the following keywords: "Self-Determination Theory," "Quality of Work Life," "Walton's Quality of Work Life," "motivation," "job satisfaction," and "organizational performance." These terms were selected based on a preliminary analysis of the literature, indicating that they capture the main dimensions of interest in this study. The searches also included combinations of descriptors using the Boolean operator AND to broaden the results. The combinations included: "Self-Determination Theory AND Quality of Work Life," "Self-Determination Theory AND Walton's Quality of Work Life," "work motivation AND Quality of Work Life," and "work motivation AND Self-Determination Theory." This strategy enabled the identification of studies that directly or indirectly addressed the relationships between the constructs analyzed.
- c) **Article screening:** Initially, titles and abstracts of the identified studies were analyzed to verify their relevance to the research topic. Subsequently, potentially relevant articles were subjected to full-text reading to assess their contribution to the analysis of the relationships between Self-Determination Theory and Quality of Work Life. Only studies with full access and available in Portuguese, English, or Spanish were included. The final selection considered studies that presented theoretical discussions or empirical evidence related to work motivation, SDT's basic psychological needs, or QWL factors.
- d) **Reading and analysis of texts:** A full reading of the selected articles was conducted, focusing on identifying key concepts related to work motivation, SDT's basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and factors associated with Quality of Work Life. During the reading process, excerpts and theoretical arguments were highlighted to support the identification of possible conceptual connections between the constructs analyzed.

- e) **Data interpretation:** After reviewing the selected studies, an interpretative analysis of the literature was carried out to identify conceptual convergences between QWL factors—especially those proposed by Walton—and the basic psychological needs of Self-Determination Theory. This analysis aimed to understand how elements of the organizational context described in the literature could be associated with the promotion of intrinsic motivation.
- f) **Discussion of results:** Based on the analysis conducted, a synthesis of the literature was developed, highlighting the main theoretical contributions identified and the possible relationships between the constructs analyzed. This synthesis supported the discussion of the conceptual implications of the integration between Self-Determination Theory and Quality of Work Life, as well as the identification of directions for future research.

Thus, the literature review sought to systematize theoretical contributions available in the literature, enabling the identification of possible conceptual connections between Self-Determination Theory and Walton's Quality of Work Life model. Based on this review and the interpretative analysis of the selected studies, it was possible to develop an integrative theoretical proposition between the constructs, which is presented and discussed in the following sections of the article.

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Alignment Between SDT And Walton's QWL

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) identifies three essential needs for intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When these needs are satisfied, they promote a state of psychological well-being that is crucial for engagement and performance at work (Kaabomeir et al., 2023; Papadopoulou & Dimitriadis, 2019; Slep et al., 2021). From a complementary perspective, Walton's model proposes specific dimensions of Quality of Work Life (QWL) (Walton, 1973) that directly impact employee satisfaction (Sabonete et al., 2021; Siqueira et al., 2021). A joint analysis of these frameworks suggests that both address the work experience from distinct yet complementary analytical levels. While SDT emphasizes the psychological processes associated with the internalization of motivation and the satisfaction of basic human needs (Gagné & Deci, 2005; St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022), Walton's QWL focuses on external and structural factors that may influence these motivations (Timossi et al., 2009). In this sense, bringing these perspectives together allows motivation at work to be understood as the result of the interaction between individual psychological needs and the structural characteristics of the organizational environment, indicating that practices associated with quality of work life may function as contextual elements that support the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs proposed by SDT.

Both SDT and QWL recognize the role of employees as crucial to organizational success (Forner et al., 2020b; Mamaghaniyeh et al., 2019; Papadopoulou & Dimitriadis, 2019; Pereira & Trevelin, 2020; St-Onge & Beauchamp

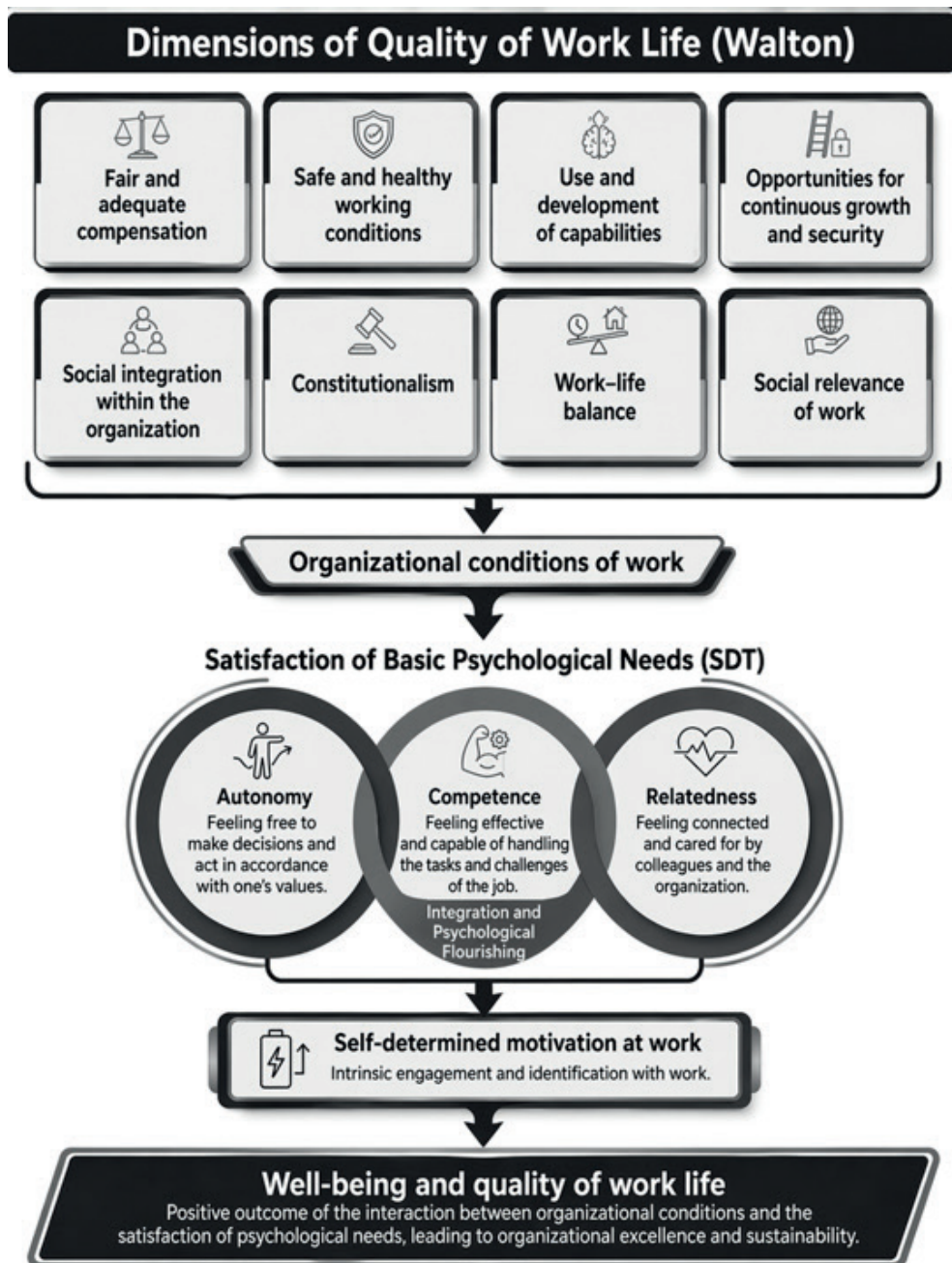
Legault, 2022; Toscano-del Cairo et al., 2020; Xu, 2022). While SDT emphasizes growth, integrity, and well-being as means to maximize individuals' contributions (Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020), Walton's model aims to create working conditions that meet individuals' needs and promote greater satisfaction (Jayakumar & Kalaiselvi, 2012). Thus, both approaches converge in recognizing that the work environment plays a significant role in employee effectiveness (Freitas & de Souza, 2009; Kotera et al., 2022; Papachristopoulos et al., 2023; Sousa Santos et al., 2021). However, they differ in their analytical focus: SDT prioritizes internal motivational processes, whereas QWL emphasizes contextual elements of work, such as working conditions, safety, and organizational support. The integration of these perspectives broadens the theoretical understanding of motivation at work by highlighting that psychological and structural factors are mutually interdependent in shaping the work experience.

Relationships Between Basic Psychological Needs and QWL Dimensions

This section presents a conceptual analysis of the relationships between Self-Determination Theory and Walton's Quality of Work Life model. Based on the articulation between these frameworks, the analysis explores how QWL dimensions can be interpreted as contextual elements that support the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. To synthesize this conceptual articulation, Figure 1 presents an integrative model that schematically illustrates the relationships between Walton's QWL dimensions and the basic psychological needs proposed by SDT. Based on this model, the following subsections discuss the theoretical connections between each QWL dimension and the three basic psychological needs. It is important to note that different QWL dimensions may simultaneously contribute to the satisfaction of more than one psychological need, highlighting the interdependent nature of organizational conditions and motivational processes.

Figure 1

Theoretical integration between SDT needs and Walton's QWL dimensions.



Source: prepared by the authors.

Competence

The need for competence reflects the individual's perception of effectively dealing with tasks and environmental demands, mastering challenges, and achieving goals (Good, Hughes, & Wang, 2022; St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022). It involves seeing oneself as capable and effective (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Peters et al., 2018). When experiencing a sense of competence, individuals

feel skilled and confident to explore and face new possibilities, strengthening self-image, determination, and resilience (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Fair and adequate compensation. For many individuals, the perception of competence is associated with the financial recognition of their work (Adamska, 2019; Fernandes, Santinha, & Forte, 2022). Compensation perceived as fair and adequate not only reflects the time and effort invested but also acknowledges employees' skills (Hainš & Bockaj, 2018). In a context that supports self-determination, a compensation system that conveys positive information about individuals' competence can enhance intrinsic motivation (Cabanas, Proença, & Carozzo-Todaro, 2020). Furthermore, the perception of internal equity is essential for promoting a harmonious work environment (Pinho, Baidya, Dalbem, & Salvino, 2018; Roussillon Soyer, Balkin, & Fall, 2022).

Safe and healthy working conditions. Working conditions must be at least safe and healthy so that employees can focus on their tasks (Fernandes et al., 2022; Omofowa, Akhidue-Ogogo, Nwachukwu, & Lam, 2021) without concerns about physical integrity or well-being. Safety and health are fundamental aspects for individuals (Sholihah, 2017; Walton, 1973). Thus, adequate facilities, schedules, and working conditions that consider the specific characteristics of employees contribute to optimal performance (Hainš & Bockaj, 2018; Mesquita et al., 2018). As a result, achieving established goals fosters a sense of competence, both individually and collectively (Liu et al., 2023).

Use and development of capacities. Competence is inherently related to the development and application of skills at work (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Providing opportunities for employees to expand, refine, and meaningfully apply their knowledge promotes competence and intrinsic motivation (Koziol & Koziol, 2020; Rahaman et al., 2020). Understanding individuals' growth aspirations and capability levels enables organizations to support learning and build diverse motivational resources (Forner et al., 2020). Development programs that enhance interpersonal skills are also effective strategies for promoting personal efficacy (St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022).

Opportunities for continued growth and security. When clear opportunities for development and progression exist alongside a stable and secure work environment (Koziol & Koziol, 2020; Rahaman et al., 2020), employees feel more confident and motivated to pursue new challenges (Nikolova, Caniëls, & Sverke, 2023). Motivation is a key factor for engagement, innovation, and success at work (Susanto et al., 2023). As employees perceive their professional growth, they feel more competent and prepared to advance in organizational activities (Kaabomeir et al., 2023; Lartey, 2021).

Social integration in the organization. An organizational culture that promotes social integration, collaboration, and knowledge sharing fosters competence (St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022) and influences how employees interact with colleagues and supervisors. Facilitating positive social interactions and the formation of support networks (Hainš & Bockaj, 2018; Lorincová et al., 2019) enables employees to learn from one another and develop their skills in a constructive manner (Ellardus Van Zyl et al., 2020).

Constitutionalism. The promotion of a democratic organizational climate (Roussillon Soyer et al., 2022), grounded in constitutionalism, contributes to employees' integration with the work environment (Fernandes et al., 2022). Organizational democracy refers to continuous, broad, and institutionalized employee participation (Svendsen & Jönsson, 2022). In this context, when norms, rights, and duties are clearly established (Sabonete et al., 2021), employees feel more secure to develop projects and achieve goals, resulting in a stronger sense of competence.

Work and total life space. The experience within the organization may positively or negatively influence employees' personal and social lives (Sabonete et al., 2021). Work activities should be aligned with other life domains (Mamaghaniyeh et al., 2019). The balance between professional and personal life is often considered a foundation for well-being (Gagnano, Simbula, & Miglioretti, 2020). This balance enables better management of responsibilities and promotes the development of competence (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2023).

Social relevance of work life. Contributing meaningfully to society through work is a strong element of intrinsic motivation (Good et al., 2022; Martela et al., 2021). Employees who understand the purpose of their work tend to develop a deeper sense of competence (Papachristopoulos et al., 2023). Furthermore, promoting social relevance by providing opportunities to engage in socially impactful projects can enhance both performance and the perceived meaningfulness of work (Liao, Su, Ptashnik, & Nielsen, 2022).

Autonomy

Autonomy is associated with control over behavior and the freedom to act according to one's own convictions (St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022), being defined as the perception that an individual's actions originate from their own interests and values (Pincus, 2023). In the workplace, individuals who have the opportunity to exercise autonomy in their tasks tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and quality of work life (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kortsch, Rehwaltdt, Schwake, & Licari, 2022). Autonomy is considered one of the most significant factors for work motivation (Papadopoulou & Dimitriadis, 2019; Vo, Tuliao, & Chen, 2022).

Fair and adequate compensation. Compensation is generally viewed as a factor that stimulates commitment and motivation (Adamska, 2019; Hainš & Bockaj, 2018; Kovačević et al., 2020). Adequate compensation can provide a sense of financial security, allowing greater freedom in work-related decision-making (St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022). However, managers must be attentive to the use of external rewards, since, according to SDT, when they become the sole source of motivation, they may be perceived as a form of control, potentially reducing intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kuvaas, Buch, & Dysvik, 2020; Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020). Nevertheless, when properly applied, compensation may have positive strategic effects on motivation (Cabanais et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2022).

Safe and healthy working conditions. Investing in safety measures, ergonomics, and occupational health protects employees and enables them to feel comfortable and confident in exercising autonomy in their daily tasks (Nikolova et al., 2023). When individuals are assured that they are in a stable and safe work environment, they are more willing to introduce innovations and act in a self-determined manner to achieve increasingly challenging goals (Omofowa et al., 2021; Walton, 1973).

Use and development of capabilities. Prioritizing professional development fosters autonomy (Forner et al., 2020; Papachristopoulos et al., 2023). Employees who feel capable of performing their tasks are more likely to make decisions independently and effectively, reducing reliance on colleagues or supervisors. The full use of acquired knowledge strengthens the sense of meaning in work. Providing opportunities for the development and autonomous application of skills can significantly enhance motivation and job satisfaction (Fortes et al., 2020; Jungert et al., 2021).

Opportunities for continuous growth and security. Feelings of security and stability at work are fundamental for the exercise of autonomy (Omofowa et al., 2021), as they encourage proactive behaviors and greater dedication to professional development (Chang & Wu, 2021). Additionally, providing clear opportunities for career advancement allows employees to plan their development and perform activities more autonomously (Forner et al., 2020). With a well-structured career plan, individuals can identify their knowledge, skills, and aspirations and follow the necessary steps to achieve desired positions (Lartey, 2021).

Social integration within the organization. Promoting an inclusive and collaborative organizational culture is essential for employees to feel integrated into the team and the organization (Lorincová et al., 2019; Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020). Open communication, teamwork, and participation in interest groups create an environment in which individual autonomy is valued and respected, and organizational changes are more readily accepted (Jungert et al., 2021). Social interaction, in terms of the need for communication and collaboration, enhances job satisfaction (Hainš & Bockaj, 2018) and encourages participation in decision-making processes, increasing individuals' sense of autonomy.

Constitutionalism. By involving employees in decisions that affect their work, organizations promote a sense of belonging and motivation. In this context, adopting participatory management practices and continuous improvement groups enables employees to actively contribute to decision-making and feel more autonomous and creative in their work (Forner et al., 2020; Papachristopoulos et al., 2023; Svendsen & Jønsson, 2022). Clearly defined norms, rights, and duties allow individuals to feel secure in exercising a certain degree of autonomy in their activities. Respect for privacy also influences autonomy by protecting individual integrity and providing space and freedom for decision-making.

Work and total life space. Policies that promote work–life balance, including flexible work arrangements, enable employees to manage their responsibilities autonomously (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2023). Offering flexible arrangements demonstrates recognition of the importance of autonomy in managing time and personal priorities. This flexibility encourages individuals to maintain interest in their activities over time (St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022), as it fosters a sense of control without compromising work performance.

Social relevance of work life. Providing employees with opportunities to contribute to meaningful goals aligned with their personal values enhances their sense of purpose and intrinsic motivation (Liao et al., 2022; Papachristopoulos et al., 2023). Engagement in socially impactful projects and participation in corporate social responsibility initiatives strengthen autonomy by connecting work activities to causes that employees consider important (Good et al., 2022). Meaningful work is essential for satisfaction, well-being, engagement, and commitment at work, and understanding the factors that generate this experience is fundamental for promoting motivation (Martela et al., 2021; Oliveira & Estivaleta, 2019).

Relatedness

The need for relatedness refers to the innate human desire to establish and maintain meaningful connections with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Duarte, 2022). It involves the need to belong, as well as to experience mutual care, support, and understanding in interpersonal relationships (St-Onge & Beauchamp Legault, 2022). Within SDT, this dimension highlights the importance of social bonds for both personal and professional development (Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020). Healthy interpersonal relationships are associated with lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, in addition to promoting feelings of security and belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Peters et al., 2018).

Fair and adequate compensation. Satisfaction with compensation may indirectly foster interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Cabanas et al., 2020). Perceptions of internal equity influence the development of positive relationships among employees (Pinho et al., 2018; Roussillon Soyer et al., 2022). When individuals feel valued through fair compensation, a culture of respect and cooperation is strengthened. However, studies suggest that, compared to monetary rewards, managers may achieve more sustainable results by adopting interpersonal approaches and fostering a positive team climate to promote motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Fernandes et al., 2022; Forner et al., 2020). Nevertheless, when strategically applied, financial reward systems may generate synergistic effects.

Safe and healthy working conditions. Working conditions are core motivational factors (Fernandes et al., 2022; Hainš & Bockaj, 2018). By ensuring employees' health and safety, organizations create an environment in which individuals feel more comfortable engaging in collaborative relationships, including emotional support, teamwork, and open communication (Omofowa et al., 2021). Relationships with management may be negatively affected

when individuals perceive insecurity in the workplace. Conversely, when the relationship with the organization is positive, employees tend to reciprocate with constructive work behaviors (Nikolova et al., 2023).

Use and development of capabilities. Working collaboratively on challenging and stimulating projects enables employees to engage with one another, learn collectively, and build relationships based on trust and mutual respect (George & K.A., 2018). Developing skills within a socially enriched environment contributes not only to competence but also to stronger interpersonal bonds (Jungert et al., 2018; Lorincová et al., 2019). The sharing of experiences and mutual collaboration foster both learning and personal growth, while satisfying the need for relatedness through meaningful interpersonal connections (Villalobos-Zúñiga & Cherubini, 2020).

Opportunities for continuous growth and security. Job satisfaction is positively associated with professional development (Hainš & Bockaj, 2018), whereas delays in career progression may act as significant demotivators (Fernandes et al., 2022). A supportive environment that encourages employees to pursue new responsibilities and career advancement fosters trust and a sense of security about the future (George & K.A., 2018). Providing opportunities for growth may also strengthen workplace relationships, contributing to the development of a collaborative organizational climate.

Social integration within the organization. An inclusive and welcoming environment, in which employees feel accepted and connected to others, contributes to a sense of belonging, organizational identity, and positive emotional experiences (Ellardus Van Zyl et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2018). Promoting social integration is essential for building strong relationships that support both individual and organizational goal achievement (Fortes et al., 2020). Communication and collaboration skills are closely linked to individuals' ability to support one another's needs (Forner et al., 2020). Conversely, a lack of communication among colleagues may create an undesirable work environment and negatively affect motivation (Fernandes et al., 2022).

Constitutionalism. A democratic and participatory organizational culture, in which employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions and contributing to decision-making, fosters a sense of belonging to organizational goals (Svendsen & Jönsson, 2022). By involving employees and valuing their contributions, organizations demonstrate respect and promote collaboration and engagement (Papachristopoulos et al., 2023). Organizational support and perceived justice are key factors that strengthen interpersonal relationships (Piotrowski et al., 2021).

Work and total life space. Promoting work-life balance strengthens interpersonal relationships by enabling positive emotions and well-being at work (Kortsch et al., 2022). By acknowledging and supporting employees' responsibilities and interests outside the workplace, organizations demonstrate concern for overall well-being, which contributes to more positive relationships between managers and employees. Additionally, factors such as separation from family and social life may generate psychological and social costs

(Fortes et al., 2020; Gragnano et al., 2020; Walton, 1973). The balance between organizational demands and personal needs is closely linked to the quality of relationships within and beyond the workplace (Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2023).

Social relevance of work life. Creating an environment in which employees perceive their work as meaningful and contributing to a broader purpose strengthens interpersonal connections (Papachristopoulos et al., 2023). Individuals who share common goals and values tend to develop a sense of community and collaboration within the organization. Moreover, social responsibility can drive identification with others' needs, generating outcomes such as organizational identification, engagement, performance, and knowledge sharing (Fernandes et al., 2022; Oliveira & Estivaleta, 2019). People tend to identify with groups that contribute positively to their self-esteem (Svendsen & Jönsson, 2022) and to the experience of meaningful work (Martela et al., 2021).

Theoretical Implications and Research Agenda

This study was developed with the objective of exploring, at a conceptual level, possible connections between SDT and QWL model according to Walton. Based on the literature review and interpretative analysis, this research assumes the nature of a theoretical essay by proposing an integrative analytical model that relates SDT's basic psychological needs to organizational context dimensions described in the QWL framework. The conceptual integration proposed in this study presents a theoretical model in which QWL dimensions function as organizational conditions capable of fostering the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs described by SDT. In this context, the articulation between these organizational dimensions and basic psychological needs may contribute to processes of psychological integration and flourishing at work, aligning structural conditions of the organizational environment with the development of intrinsic motivation and individual well-being.

The main theoretical contribution of this study, therefore, lies in bringing together two frameworks that are widely discussed in the literature but still rarely integrated, offering a comprehensive perspective for understanding the relationships between working conditions, motivation, and quality of work life. From this integration, a research agenda emerges that can be explored through different methodological approaches. Quantitative empirical studies may investigate the relationships between QWL dimensions and the satisfaction of SDT's basic psychological needs, testing explanatory models that link working conditions, motivation, and indicators of well-being or organizational performance. In turn, qualitative research may deepen the understanding of workers' subjective experiences by analyzing how different organizational characteristics influence perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Additionally, comparative studies across sectors, institutional contexts, or organizational cultures may contribute to understanding how these relationships manifest in different work environments.

From a practical perspective, the theoretical integration proposed in this study provides support for the development of organizational practices aimed at promoting quality of work life and strengthening more autonomous forms of motivation. By simultaneously considering working conditions and

individuals' basic psychological needs, organizations and managers may develop more integrated strategies to foster work environments that enhance engagement, well-being, and performance.

Finally, it is important to highlight that this study presents limitations inherent to its theoretical nature and to the use of literature review as its primary analytical strategy. Therefore, the propositions presented here should be understood as a starting point for future investigations, which may empirically test the proposed relationships and further deepen the understanding of the interactions between QWL and motivation from the perspective of SDT.

■ CONCLUSION

The articulation between SDT and Walton's QWL model allows for an expanded understanding of the organizational factors that influence motivation and well-being at work. By integrating these two theoretical frameworks, this study sought to demonstrate that the dimensions of Quality of Work Life may be understood as contextual conditions capable of fostering the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as proposed by SDT. In this sense, the theoretical essay developed contributes to the literature by proposing an integrative perspective between two fields that are widely discussed in human resource management and organizational behavior. From this conceptual approach, it is argued that organizational practices associated with Walton's model may function as mechanisms that facilitate the internalization of motivation and the strengthening of work engagement. The integrative theoretical model presented in this study contributes to the systematization of these relationships, indicating that QWL dimensions operate as structural elements of the organizational environment that support the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and, consequently, promote more self-determined forms of motivation.

As a research agenda, future studies are encouraged to empirically test the relationships proposed in this theoretical essay, investigating how different dimensions of Quality of Work Life influence the satisfaction of basic psychological needs across diverse organizational contexts. In addition, research may explore different methodological approaches, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, in order to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms that connect organizational practices, motivation, and well-being at work.

From a practical perspective, the integration between these theoretical frameworks reinforces the importance of organizations developing management strategies that consider not only structural aspects of working conditions but also the motivational processes that sustain employee engagement and well-being. In this regard, organizational policies and practices focused on Quality of Work Life may act as contextual mechanisms that foster the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs proposed by SDT. Thus, the articulation between QWL and SDT contributes to the development of healthier, more motivating, and sustainable organizational environments, in which institutional conditions and psychological processes operate in a complementary manner.



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