

Examining the Long-Term Economic Returns from Investments in Mental Health Interventions Within Corporate and Public Sectors

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ABSTRACT

Mental disorders have persistent effects on productivity, earnings, and social participation, and they impose costs that accumulate across life cycles and generations. Organizations and governments increasingly fund interventions that range from brief psychosocial programs to digitally enabled care pathways deployed at scale. This study synthesizes economic mechanisms and long-horizon valuation methods to examine the long-term returns from investments in mental health interventions spanning corporate and public sectors. The analysis integrates firm-level productivity, labor market dynamics, healthcare utilization, education and justice externalities, and intergenerational transmission channels into a unified perspective on durable value creation. A cross-sector lens clarifies how corporate investments primarily monetize private benefits through absenteeism and presenteeism reductions, retention gains, and occupational safety, while public investments realize broader fiscal and societal payoffs through tax bases, transfer offsets, and avoided downstream costs. To evaluate persistence, we embed transition dynamics of mental health states, depreciation of intervention effects, and capital deepening responses that jointly shape macroeconomic spillovers. We discuss estimation strategies, measurement risks, and heterogeneity by age, job task, and disorder severity, emphasizing generalizability and incentive compatibility. The results provide decision rules for portfolio design under uncertainty, guidance on contracting structures that align private and social returns, and sensitivity to discounting and equity goals. Strategic implications include the use of outcome-linked finance, demand-side reinforcement through procurement, and governance that internalizes spillovers. The paper offers implementable valuation heuristics and modelling templates that enable firms and governments to compare, prioritize, and sequence investments in mental health with transparent, long-run economic criteria.

1 INTRODUCTION

The economics of mental health investment sits at the intersection of human capital theory, organizational production, and public finance [1]. Distress, depression, anxiety, and related conditions influence the allocation of attention, error rates, and decision quality in workplaces, while also affecting labor supply, job match stability, and the trajectory of earnings. Because these effects propagate through time and interact with other forms of capital, any credible assessment of returns must extend far beyond immediate clinical outcomes and short-run utilization offsets. The horizon must encompass learning-by-doing, technological adoption that complements healthier workers, and spillovers across teams and communities. The long-term perspective also recognizes that interventions differ along multiple dimensions: intensity, delivery channel, target population, and durability of effects. A single uniform metric cannot adequately appraise such diversity without a structured framework that

ties micro-behavior to macroeconomic aggregates. [2]

At the firm level, managers confront a set of choices about screening, referral pathways, digital and in-person supports, clinical quality assurance, and reintegration policies after absence or crisis. Each choice interacts with job design and operating practices, which in turn determine how much of any mental health improvement translates into effective output. A factory floor that integrates mistake-proofing will monetize reductions in attentional lapses differently from a creative studio that depends on collaboration and tacit knowledge. In public systems, planners face the complementary challenge of allocating finite resources across prevention, acute care, and recovery services while managing equity and fiscal constraints. The question is not merely whether to invest, but how to sequence and bundle investments across agencies so that outcomes in one domain are not undone by bottlenecks in another.

Evidence synthesis in this domain is complicated by

measurement [3]. Absenteeism is visible in payroll data, but presenteeism is diffuse and requires triangulation from performance metrics, quality incidents, and supervisory assessments. Clinical measures capture symptom changes but do not automatically map to productivity. Meanwhile, there is the important problem of counterfactual dynamics: even without intervention, mental health states fluctuate, and workplaces adapt by reassigning tasks or introducing automation. The valuation task must isolate incremental, durable effects from ambient change.

This paper builds a conceptual and computational foundation for estimating long-term economic returns from mental health interventions in both corporate and public sectors. It articulates mechanisms, develops a tractable lifetime valuation approach that incorporates transitions across health states and labor market positions, and analyzes spillovers that operate through supply chains, public budgets, and communities. It then examines contracting and financing structures that align private and social incentives, with an emphasis on verifiable outcomes and risk sharing. Finally, it addresses heterogeneity and equity, recognizing that mental health burdens and benefits are unevenly distributed and that the fairness of returns is an integral dimension of strategic value.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND ECONOMIC MECHANISMS

The long-horizon economics of mental health investment can be organized around a simple but powerful idea: mental health is an input into the production of effective effort, and effective effort is transformed into organizational and societal value through technologies, teams, and institutions that amplify or dampen individual capability [4]. Let m_{it} denote an index of functioning for individual i at time t that synthesizes cognitive bandwidth, emotional regulation, and social connectedness. Let e_{it} denote discretionary effort, and let k_{it} collect task-relevant skills and firm-specific experience. Effective effort is then $a_{it} = \phi(m_{it})e_{it}$, where $\phi(\cdot)$ is increasing and concave to capture diminishing returns to functioning at high levels. Output on task j is $y_{ijt} = \alpha_j a_{it}^{\gamma_j} k_{it}^{1-\gamma_j} - \pi_j q_{ijt}$, where q_{ijt} is the probability of an error that triggers rework or quality loss costed at π_j . Interventions shift the distribution of m_{it} , but their economic footprint is mediated by γ_j and by the convexity of the error cost function that maps q_{ijt} into realized losses.

A compact representation of error avoidance clarifies why small clinical improvements can compound economically in high-reliability contexts. Suppose incidents on a line follow a Poisson process with intensity $\lambda_{jt}(m_{it})$, where $\partial \lambda_{jt} / \partial m_{it} < 0$. The expected avoided cost per unit time from an intervention-induced increment Δm_{it} is $\pi_j [\lambda_{jt}(m_{it}) - \lambda_{jt}(m_{it} + \Delta m_{it})]$. If incidents trigger cascading delays across tightly coupled steps, the effective cost becomes $\pi_j \mathbb{E}[L(\tau)]$, where τ is the random duration until the system returns to

nominal throughput and $L(\cdot)$ is a convex function capturing queueing penalties. Convexity implies that reducing the tail of the incident distribution carries value that exceeds a linear approximation, a feature that renders brief but well-targeted interventions disproportionately profitable in settings where bottlenecks are costly.

The same logic carries into creative and heuristic tasks, though the mapping from functioning to value differs [5]. When projects require exploration and recombination of ideas, capability improvements increase the set of problems an individual or team can credibly attempt. A convenient formalization uses option value. Let a project of type p have stochastic payoff V_p and success probability $s_p(m_{it})$. The expected marginal value of an intervention that raises m_{it} is $\sum_{p \in \mathcal{P}} \frac{\partial s_p}{\partial m_{it}} \mathbb{E}[V_p \mid \text{attempted}] \Pr(\text{attempt } p)$. If attempted projects are chosen by thresholding expected utility, any shift in m_{it} that moves marginal projects above the threshold adds not only direct success value but also real options value from a richer opportunity set. In aggregate, capability deepening rotates the firm's feasible frontier outward even if measured task productivity shifts modestly on average.

The firm-level production technology mediates the translation from individual capability to output. Consider a team g that produces $Y_{gt} = A_{gt} F(K_{gt}, L_{gt}^*)$, where K_{gt} is physical and intangible capital and $L_{gt}^* = \sum_{i \in g} \eta_{it} \ell_{it}$ is effective labor built from scheduled hours ℓ_{it} scaled by capability multipliers $\eta_{it} = \psi(m_{it}, z_{it})$ with z_{it} capturing job design and environmental factors. Interventions act on m_{it} , but organizations influence $\psi(\cdot)$ through redesign that reduces unnecessary task switching, aligns incentives, and builds slack for recovery. The elasticity $\varepsilon_{Y,\eta} = \partial \ln Y_{gt} / \partial \ln \eta_{it}$ summarizing the output sensitivity to capability is larger in technologies with high error costs or high returns to attention, which underscores that corporate investments in mental health and complementary process innovations are joint levers rather than substitutes.

The extensive margin is as important as the intensive margin [6]. Let h_{it} be labor force participation, which is a binary choice with latent utility $U_{it} = v_i + \chi_t + \zeta(m_{it}) - \kappa_{it}$, where v_i is time-invariant taste for work, χ_t captures macro conditions, and κ_{it} includes fixed and variable costs of participation such as transport, childcare, and stigma. Interventions that raise $\zeta(m_{it})$ or reduce κ_{it} increase participation. This margin is pivotal in public sector analysis because it expands the tax base and strengthens community safety nets when household members can re-enter or remain attached to work. The empirically observed hysteresis in participation after episodes of poor mental health is consistent with dynamic fixed costs of re-entry, which magnify the long-term effects of temporary improvements if transitions across health states are path-dependent.

Dynamic complementarities create another layer of amplification. Consider capital adjustment in response to a shift in workforce capability. Let investment I_t be chosen by solving $\max_{I_t} \mathbb{E} \sum_{s=t}^{\infty} \beta^{s-t} \pi_s(I_t, K_s, L_s^*)$ subject to

$K_{s+1} = (1 - \kappa)K_s + I_s$. When capability improves, expected marginal revenue product of capital rises, triggering crowd-in of I_t . Even if mental health interventions are delivered to only a subset of the workforce, their effect on perceived reliability and throughput can reduce the option value of waiting to invest, shifting firms toward earlier adoption of process innovations [7]. The joint evolution of K_t and L_t^* therefore encodes long-run returns that exceed the partial equilibrium tally of absenteeism and error avoidance alone.

A linear algebraic lens clarifies persistence. Let \mathbf{x}_t be a vector of state occupancies over discrete functioning states such as stable, mild impairment, moderate impairment, and severe impairment. Transitions obey $\mathbf{x}_{t+1} = P\mathbf{x}_t + \mathbf{u}_t$, where P is row-stochastic. Interventions perturb P by shifting probability mass toward healthier states and by reducing relapse probabilities. The net present value of state-dependent benefits \mathbf{r} over an infinite horizon under discount factor β is $V = \mathbf{1}^\top (I - \beta P)^{-1} \mathbf{r}$ when $\rho(\beta P) < 1$. The Fréchet derivative of V with respect to a small change ΔP is $dV = \mathbf{1}^\top (I - \beta P)^{-1} (\beta \Delta P) (I - \beta P)^{-1} \mathbf{r}$, which is positive whenever ΔP shifts mass toward states with larger components of \mathbf{r} . This expression formalizes the intuition that long-run value is governed by the resolvent $(I - \beta P)^{-1}$, whose entries are geometric sums of transition probabilities, so that changes to probabilities in early steps reverberate into the far future.

Corporate mechanisms include turnover dynamics that interact with tacit knowledge accumulation. Let s_{it} be the hazard of separation and J_t be organizational knowledge capital that evolves as $J_{t+1} = (1 - \delta_J)J_t + \sum_i \xi_i(1 - s_{it})$, where ξ_i is the expected contribution to repositories of process know-how and mentoring. Interventions reducing s_{it} by even modest amounts protect J_t , which in turn improves the speed and quality of onboarding for new hires. A compact way to capture this externality is to write expected time-to-proficiency for entrants as $T_{\text{prof}}^{-1} = \bar{\omega}_0 + \bar{\omega}_1 J_t$. Because J_t is a stock with slow depreciation, the shadow value of reductions in s_{it} accumulates across cohorts, and the multi-period ROI becomes dominated by avoided re-learning that would otherwise destroy organizational memory after spikes in turnover.

The public sector faces a broader canvas in which the same functioning improvements propagate through education, justice, and health systems. Let E_t be educational attainment distribution, H_t be physical health risk, and C_t be criminal justice contact rates. The evolution of each can be written as $E_{t+1} = \mathcal{E}(E_t, m_t, \zeta_t)$, $H_{t+1} = \mathcal{H}(H_t, m_t, \omega_t)$, and $C_{t+1} = \mathcal{C}(C_t, m_t, \iota_t)$, where $\zeta_t, \omega_t, \iota_t$ are policy environments. Improvements in m_t shift these dynamics not only through direct pathways like attendance and adherence but also through peer effects and reduced volatility in household environments [8]. In long-run fiscal accounting, these shifts appear as streams of avoided costs and enhanced tax revenues. Because the timing of gains is distant relative to political cycles, budget mechanisms that recognize the

asset-like properties of mental health improvements are required to prevent underinvestment.

The interface between interventions and technology adoption deserves emphasis. Automation and decision support tools impose cognitive and emotional demands during transition. Learning curves amplify errors when attention is fragmented or motivation is low. Let θ_t index the adoption stage of a new process technology with learning curve $g(\theta_t)$ and error rate $q(\theta_t, m_{it})$. Interventions that stabilize m_{it} during this period reduce the area under the error curve, which is the integral $\int_0^\Theta \pi q(\theta, m_{it}) d\theta$ until steady state Θ is reached. If $\partial q / \partial m < 0$ and $\partial^2 q / (\partial \theta \partial m) < 0$, then the interaction is strongly complementary: capability improvements both directly suppress errors and accelerate learning, which further suppresses error exposure [9]. This synergy explains why interventions timed to coincide with major operational changes can report outsized ROI compared with the same programs implemented in steady state.

Network structure within and across firms shapes spillovers. Consider a set of units linked by an adjacency matrix W capturing collaboration and handoff intensity. Output in vector form \mathbf{y} responds to capability shocks $\boldsymbol{\eta}$ according to $\mathbf{y} = (I - \gamma W)^{-1} B \boldsymbol{\eta}$, where B maps unit-level capability into direct output changes and γ scales the strength of inter-unit dependence. When $\rho(\gamma W)$ is near but below 1, multipliers are large, so raising capability in well-connected units produces system-wide gains. Targeting strategies that prioritize hubs or bridges in the network can therefore magnify impact beyond what uniform deployment would achieve [10]. The same framework applies across firm boundaries in supply chains where upstream reliability reduces the need for downstream buffer stocks, freeing working capital and reducing lost sales.

Equilibrium considerations refine the mapping from private to social returns. If interventions expand the effective labor supply in tasks with scarce specialized skills, wages may adjust, reassigning some gains from firms to workers. From a social perspective, this redistribution is not a loss; it reflects who captures the surplus. The critical point is that valuations tied solely to employer cash flows understate public returns when tax bases rise and transfer claims fall. A full accounting recognizes joint surplus and allocates risk and reward through contracts and financing arrangements that reflect contributions and control [11]. Because many mental health benefits materialize as volatility reductions rather than mean shifts—fewer crises, smoother attendance, more stable performance—capital market analogies help. Reducing variance in cash flows lowers the cost of capital through improved debt capacity and better planning. Formally, if Π_t is operating profit with variance σ^2 that declines by $\Delta \sigma^2$ after intervention, a simple mean-variance utility would assign certainty-equivalent gains proportional to $\frac{1}{2} \lambda \Delta \sigma^2$, where λ is the coefficient of absolute risk aversion embedded in financing constraints. Although stylized, this device captures a consistent real-world observation:

decision-makers value predictability, and mental health programs often buy predictability at attractive prices.

Sustained returns depend on how intervention effects decay or stabilize. Let the half-life of improvement in m_{it} absent reinforcement be $h = \ln(2)/\delta$ with decay rate δ . Reinforcement strategies ρ modify δ and potentially reshape $\phi(\cdot)$ by building skills that persist. Writing the treatment effect on functioning as $\Delta m_{it}(\tau) = \Delta m_{it}(0)e^{-\delta(\rho)\tau}$, and the corresponding expected output gain as $G_{it}(\tau) = \Gamma\phi'(m_{it})\Delta m_{it}(\tau)$, one sees that small changes in δ produce large changes in integrated value $\int_0^\infty e^{-r\tau}G_{it}(\tau)d\tau$. This observation justifies pairing initial interventions with low-intensity maintenance supports whose cost is modest relative to the extension of the benefit tail they generate. [12]

Finally, it is helpful to consider a unified operator perspective that embeds multiple channels. Let \mathcal{T} be a linear operator acting on the space of state-dependent benefits such that $\mathcal{T}\mathbf{r} = \beta P\mathbf{r} + \mathbf{b}$, where \mathbf{b} collects contemporaneous gains. The fixed point $\mathbf{r}^* = (I - \beta P)^{-1}\mathbf{b}$ summarizes steady-state value under constant policy. Interventions shift \mathcal{T} through both P and \mathbf{b} , the former capturing persistence and the latter immediate productivity and cost effects. Because the spectrum of βP lies inside the unit circle for stable systems, Neumann series expansions yield $\mathbf{r}^* = \sum_{t=0}^\infty (\beta P)^t \mathbf{b}$, which highlights that early-period improvements in \mathbf{b} get multiplied by powers of P , while improvements that act through P itself multiply every future \mathbf{b} . Programs that enhance persistence therefore create value with a reach that extends even to benefits realized by complementary initiatives introduced later, reinforcing the argument for sequenced, mutually supportive investments across corporate and public domains.

3 DATA LANDSCAPES AND MEASUREMENT CHALLENGES

Credible estimation of long-term returns depends on the integrity, granularity, and linkage of data traversing clinical, workplace, and public administrative systems. Each domain collects signals that are partial and noisy, and economic inference requires harmonizing them into a coherent longitudinal record. The corporate domain typically contains high-frequency information on attendance, scheduling, throughput, rework, defect counts, near-miss incidents, customer service indicators, and human resources flows such as promotions and separations. Clinical information, when collected through employee assistance programs or health plans, includes screening scores, diagnostic codes, medication fills, therapy engagement, and crisis events [13]. Public systems provide education attainment, benefit receipt, justice contact, and healthcare utilization. The fundamental challenge is to connect these streams in ways that preserve privacy, resist selection bias, and permit causal interpretation under plausible assumptions.

The most elementary variables—absenteeism and turnover—important heterogeneity. Absence spells can represent acute

episodes, scheduled therapeutic engagement, caregiving burdens, or opportunistic use of leave, and the economic meaning differs across contexts. Estimating the cost of absence requires a mapping from missing hours to effective output loss that depends on team buffering, cross-coverage, and demand timing [14]. Let scheduled hours lost be H_{it} . Effective output loss is $L_{it} = \kappa_{g(i)t}H_{it}$, where $\kappa_{g(i)t}$ captures coverage elasticity in team $g(i)$ at time t . If queues are long and capacity is tight, $\kappa \approx 1$, but if slack or overtime can be deployed, $\kappa < 1$. A data system that treats all hours equally will misprice absenteeism in both directions. For turnover, headline metrics such as annualized separation rates obscure the composition by voluntary and involuntary exits, tenure, and role criticality. The monetization must integrate replacement recruiting costs, training costs, ramp-up time, and the shadow price of lost organizational memory. Let replacement cost per exit be C^{rep} , ramp-up loss be $C^{\text{ramp}} = \int_0^{T_{\text{prof}}} [y^* - y(\tau)]d\tau$, and knowledge capital loss valued at $C^{\text{know}} = \varpi J_t$ per critical departure. The total cost is heterogeneous and exhibits fat tails when departures cluster in pivotal teams.

Presenteeism, the diffuse reduction in on-the-job performance due to health challenges, demands proxies extracted from process and quality data [15]. Throughput per unit time is a starting point, but the richer signals come from variance and tail behavior. In quality-critical environments, the right tail of the error distribution drives cost through rework and warranty claims; in creative environments, the left tail—periods of very low output—can derail project schedules. Capturing these features requires not merely averages but full distributions conditioned on observable shocks such as seasonality, promotions, or technology rollouts. A state-space model offers a principled approach. Let latent capability m_{it} evolve as $m_{it} = \mu_i + \phi m_{it-1} + \theta \text{Treat}_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$, and let observed performance y_{it} be $y_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta m_{it} + \gamma X_{it} + \eta_{it}$, where X_{it} captures contemporaneous covariates like workload and shift. The Kalman filter yields estimates of m_{it} that combine noisy performance data with intervention timing, delivering a smoothed functioning trajectory that is more robust than raw measures. The economic valuation then applies a calibrated mapping from m_{it} to dollar outcomes as described in the framework section.

Clinical measures introduce their own complexities. Instruments differ in scaling, sensitivity to change, and domain coverage [16]. A data integration layer must translate across scales without introducing bias. A latent trait model provides the machinery for harmonization. Let item responses across instruments load on a common factor f_{it} representing functioning. If group g uses instrument A and group h uses instrument B , measurement invariance implies $\Lambda_A = \Lambda_B$ for the common items or that crosswalk parameters are stable. In practice partial invariance is sufficient: fixed anchors on a subset of items and freely estimated loadings on others produce a bridge that permits comparisons. Estimation can proceed via maximum likelihood or

Bayesian methods, but what matters economically is that a unit increase in f_{it} has the same meaning across contexts, enabling pooled analysis of program effects.

Linking clinical and corporate data raises privacy and governance questions that are not merely ethical constraints but determinants of data quality and thus valuation precision. Differential privacy provides a formalism for releasing aggregate statistics while bounding disclosure risk [17]. If a statistic S is released with noise calibrated to privacy parameter ϵ and failure probability δ , then the trade-off between accuracy and privacy is explicit. Suppose we release average absenteeism reduction \bar{L} with additive noise $N \sim \text{Laplace}(b)$ where $b \propto 1/\epsilon$. The resulting estimator is unbiased but has variance inflated by $2b^2$. In an ROI calculation $R = \bar{G}/\bar{C}$ that uses $\bar{G} = p\bar{L}$ for price p per unit of regained capacity, the added variance propagates to R and widens confidence intervals. Sponsors can then explicitly price the loss in precision as a cost of privacy protection and decide whether to increase sample sizes or prolong measurement windows to compensate. The key is to make these trade-offs visible and integrated into financial decision rules rather than treated as afterthoughts.

Causal attribution is foundational [18]. Interventions are rarely randomized at scale, and selection into programs is governed by need, motivation, managerial referral, and access. Designs like staggered rollouts across units, eligibility thresholds, and propensity scores offer leverage if implemented with transparency and careful diagnostics. A difference-in-differences structure with unit and time fixed effects is a workhorse: $y_{gt} = \alpha_g + \lambda_t + \delta \text{Treat}_{gt} + \mathbf{X}'_{gt}\theta + \varepsilon_{gt}$. Yet mental health outcomes can trigger anticipatory behaviors—self-selection into units, route assignments away from high-stress tasks—that violate parallel trend assumptions. Diagnostics based on pre-trends and placebo tests help but are insufficient if underlying shocks are heterogeneous. Synthetic control constructions that assemble counterfactuals by weighted combinations of untreated units can mitigate these concerns, provided weights are constructed on pre-intervention trajectories of both outcomes and predictors such as workload and staffing. Regardless of method, the economic valuation must propagate uncertainty from identification through to ROI, presenting decision-makers with distributions of outcomes rather than point estimates. [19]

Longitudinal linkage across systems is both essential and delicate. Unique identifiers cannot always be shared; salted hashes and privacy-preserving record linkage become necessary. Probabilistic linkage creates false matches and misses that bias estimates if not modeled. Let M be a binary match status with $\Pr(M = 1 \mid \text{data}) = \pi$. An estimator that treats $\hat{M} = \mathbb{I}(\pi > \tau)$ as truth induces measurement error. A better approach integrates over π in likelihood or estimating equations. If Y is an outcome from corporate data and Z is an exposure from clinical data, then $\mathbb{E}[Y \mid Z]$ should be computed as $\sum_{m \in \{0,1\}} \Pr(M = m \mid \text{data}) \mathbb{E}[Y \mid Z, M = m]$,

explicitly acknowledging match uncertainty. In practice, this adds computational burden but reduces attenuation bias that would otherwise shrink estimated program effects toward zero.

Heterogeneous treatment effects are salient and must be surfaced rather than averaged away [20]. Let H_i index baseline severity, R_i role complexity, and A_i age. A flexible specification for gains G_{it} is $G_{it} = \theta_0 + \theta_H H_i + \theta_R R_i + \theta_A A_i + \theta_{HR} H_i R_i + \theta_{HA} H_i A_i + \theta_{RA} R_i A_i + \varepsilon_{it}$. Empirical Bayes or hierarchical approaches shrink subgroup estimates toward overall means in proportion to information, avoiding overfitting in small cells while preserving genuine variation. From a decision perspective, heterogeneity informs targeting and pricing. If roles with high R_i display 40% larger gains but also face higher risk of burnout, sponsors may allocate more intensive supports there, while offering lighter-touch options in low R_i roles. These tactical choices feed back into valuation by altering the average cost per unit of benefit when delivery intensity is tailored.

Time lags between proximal clinical change and distal economic outcomes complicate attribution [21]. For adolescent programs, fiscal benefits via higher earnings and reduced justice involvement arrive years later. Translational coefficients that map near-term changes into long-term outcomes are needed. These can be derived from linked administrative data tracking cohorts over time, but careful attention to cohort effects and secular trends is necessary. A pragmatic solution is to model the joint evolution of clinical state and earnings with a semi-parametric hazard for labor force entry and wage growth conditional on early-life functioning. Let wage at age a be $w_{ia} = \zeta_a + \sum_{s=0}^a \beta_{a-s} \Delta m_{is} + v_{ia}$, where β coefficients summarize the carryover of functioning improvements into earnings at each lag. Discounted present value of incremental earnings $\sum_a \frac{w_{ia} - w_{ia}^{\text{cf}}}{(1+r)^a}$ becomes the fiscal component of social ROI. Sensitivity analysis explores how varying β within empirically plausible bounds shifts valuation, ensuring that adopters understand that long-run benefits are substantial but not point identified. [22]

Measurement error and missing data are ubiquitous and require explicit modeling. If clinical scores are noisy with classical error, estimated treatment effects are attenuated. If missingness is related to unobserved outcomes, the bias can be severe. Let S_{it} be an indicator that a functioning score is observed. Under missing at random, $\Pr(S_{it} = 1 \mid y_{it}, m_{it}, X_{it}) = \Pr(S_{it} = 1 \mid X_{it})$, imputation using observed covariates suffices. Under missing not at random, selection models or pattern-mixture models are needed. A selection model writes the likelihood of observation as $\Pr(S_{it} = 1 \mid m_{it}, X_{it}) = \text{logit}^{-1}(\pi_0 + \pi_1 m_{it} + \pi_2 X_{it})$. Joint estimation of the outcome and selection processes recovers unbiased effects under correct specification. From a practical standpoint, routine sensitivity analyses that vary π_1 across plausible ranges produce bounds on ROI that communicate robustness without pretending to know the unobservable with certainty. [23]

Translating technical estimands into managerial dashboards requires careful engineering. Decision-makers need stable, interpretable metrics that tie directly to line-of-sight financials. A canonical pipeline ingests raw data, applies role-specific normalizations, runs state-space filters to estimate capability trajectories, estimates causal impacts with design-appropriate models, and monetizes gains through mappings calibrated to each setting. Each stage should emit diagnostics. For normalization, distributions of throughput conditioned on shift and demand should be stationary over time if adjustments are adequate. For filtering, innovations from the Kalman filter should be white noise if the model captures systematic variation [24]. For causal estimation, pre-trend coefficients should center near zero. For monetization, mapping coefficients like $\kappa_{g(i)t}$ should be periodically re-estimated to reflect evolving operational practices. Dashboards that hide these diagnostics invite overconfidence; those that surface them foster mature conversations about uncertainty and risk management.

Public finance evaluation adds layers that are less familiar to corporate analysts but essential for complete accounting. Healthcare utilization must be parsed into discretionary and non-discretionary components, with attention to substitution. A reduction in emergency department visits accompanied by an increase in primary care may be welfare-improving and cost-neutral in the short run but cost-reducing in the long run if it prevents complications. Educational outcomes should be linked to lifetime earnings using contemporaneous wage structures, not historical averages, to reflect the changing returns to skills [25]. Justice system interactions should be valued at marginal, not average, costs when system capacity is not fully utilized. All these adjustments require detailed administrative microdata and careful, transparent assumptions to avoid double-counting or omission.

An underappreciated challenge is sustainability of measurement. Data collection burden can erode engagement, and the very populations most in need may be least able to complete surveys. Passive data from digital interaction logs, wearables, or scheduling systems can supplement active measures but must be interpreted cautiously [26]. Noise and drift are common, and algorithmic updates in background systems can introduce structural breaks. A rigorous practice is to treat passive signals as auxiliary measurements in a multi-indicator latent variable model, with time-varying loadings Λ_t that can adapt when systems change. Regular recalibration windows—say quarterly—can detect and correct drift. The economic payoff of such discipline is the avoidance of spurious conclusions that would misallocate resources.

Equity-sensitive measurement requires stratification and fairness constraints in modeling pipelines. If error rates of outcome prediction models vary across demographic groups, targeting may inadvertently underserve those with historically noisier data or lower engagement [27]. Con-

straining models to satisfy equalized residual variance or bounded calibration error across groups can reduce nominal ROI by a few percentage points, but the long-run value of inclusive benefit distribution and trust gains often overwhelms this apparent cost. A practical device is to embed an equity shadow price λ_{eq} in the objective function so that the selection of participants or intensity solves $\max \sum_i \mathbb{E}[G_i] - \lambda \text{Var}(G_i) - \lambda_{eq} \Psi$, where Ψ measures group disparities. This makes transparent the trade-offs policy-makers are implicitly making and disciplines discussions that might otherwise default to rhetorical flourishes.

Quality assurance and fidelity monitoring are measurement challenges in their own right. The same intervention label can mask large variation in actual delivery. Digital platforms log exposures and engagement, but interpreting clickstreams as meaningful participation is fraught. Session notes, supervision records, and independent audits supply richer fidelity indicators but are costlier [28]. A reasonable middle path quantifies fidelity through a composite $F_{it} = \sum_k \omega_k Z_{kit}$, where Z_{kit} are standardized indicators of completion, timing regularity, and therapist adherence, with weights ω_k learned to maximize predictive validity for short-run symptom change. Incorporating F_{it} into outcome models avoids penalizing programs for poor implementation when the underlying content is sound and shifts managerial focus toward the operational levers actually under their control.

The economics of sample size and measurement horizon deserves explicit treatment. Because many gains materialize through volatility reduction and persistence, short windows understate value. If the true effect is a reduction in variance $\Delta\sigma^2$ and a small increase in mean $\Delta\mu$, the power to detect $\Delta\mu$ over short horizons is low, whereas volatility effects reveal themselves in distribution tails and stability metrics. A mixed objective that values both mean and variance more faithfully represents managerial preferences, and sample size calculations should be anchored on detecting a composite effect. If the decision rule is to adopt when the certainty equivalent gain $CE = \Delta\mu - \frac{1}{2}\lambda\Delta\sigma^2$ exceeds cost, then power analyses should target CE rather than $\Delta\mu$ alone. This shift often shows that seemingly modest programs are decisive when evaluated on the dimension leaders actually prize: predictable performance.

Data stewardship is a productive capital input [29]. Governance frameworks that allow secure, auditable linkage and analysis with clear consent and opt-out protections improve participation and data quality. Versioned data pipelines ensure reproducibility; immutable logs of transformations support audits; access controls and monitoring reduce insider risk. The immediate payoff is credibility with stakeholders who must act on the results. The longer-run payoff is a compounding reduction in uncertainty that lowers the cost of capital for scaling successful programs. Seen through this lens, investments in data infrastructure are not overhead but co-equal complements to program delivery, raising the

ROI of everything built on top. [30]

Finally, the translation from measurement to decisions closes the loop. Decision-makers require threshold rules that are stable across cycles yet flexible to context. A canonical rule is to deploy when risk-adjusted NPV exceeds zero under base-case parameters and remains positive under stress scenarios that degrade key assumptions by, say, 20%. The choice of stress magnitudes should reflect empirical volatility in the underlying business rather than arbitrary round numbers, and stress tests should be embedded in routine reporting, not reserved for special analyses. Crucially, decision rights should be allocated to the actors who can adjust complementary levers. A centralized health benefits team can select vendors, but line managers control scheduling, task design, and recognition practices that convert functioning gains into output [31]. Measurement systems that report at both levels, attributing value accordingly, align incentives and make the economics legible to those responsible for delivery.

The measurement landscape, in sum, is not a passive background but an active determinant of realized value. Accurate, privacy-preserving, causally credible, and equity-aware measurement amplifies the economics of mental health interventions by clarifying where, when, and for whom benefits occur, enabling portfolio design that targets high-return segments while protecting inclusion. By approaching data as a designed system and by integrating statistical rigor with operational pragmatism, organizations and public agencies can move from hopeful anecdotes to durable, compounding returns quantified with the precision and humility that long-horizon investments demand.

4 MODELLING LIFETIME RETURN ON INVESTMENT

A lifetime valuation approach treats mental health as an evolving state that modulates productivity and costs. Let the vector \mathbf{x}_t represent the distribution of a cohort across discrete functioning states at time t , and let $P(\theta)$ denote a transition matrix whose elements depend on intervention intensity and fidelity parameters θ . The cohort evolves as $\mathbf{x}_{t+1} = P(\theta)\mathbf{x}_t + \mathbf{u}_t$, where \mathbf{u}_t captures entry and exit flows due to hiring, separation, and demographic change. With discount factor $\beta = (1+r)^{-1}$, the present value of net benefits is summarized through $\mathbf{V} = (I - \beta P(\theta))^{-1}\mathbf{r}$, where \mathbf{r} is the vector of per-period net benefits associated with each state integrating output, healthcare, and externalities. The expression $(I - \beta P(\theta))^{-1}$ accumulates the persistence of benefits through dynamic stability as long as the spectral radius satisfies $\rho(\beta P(\theta)) < 1$. In practice, this condition codifies the requirement that intervention-modified transitions do not generate explosive state occupancy. [32]

Evaluating an investment at the firm level involves mapping \mathbf{r} to margins such as absenteeism reduction, presenteeism recovery, error avoidance, and turnover mitigation. If y_t denotes observed output and y_t^{cf} the counterfactual with-

out intervention, the gain is $g_t = y_t - y_t^{\text{cf}}$. Let c_t be program cost per eligible worker and h_t the avoided healthcare expenditure that accrues to the sponsor. The net present value is $\text{NPV} = \sum_{t=0}^T \frac{g_t + h_t - c_t}{(1+r)^t}$. When the firm shares benefits with employees via wages or reduced overtime, distributional parameters allocate g_t accordingly; however, from the firm's perspective, what matters is the portion that survives after contractual sharing and competitive pass-through. A comparable social valuation substitutes a broader \mathbf{r} that includes tax revenue, transfer offsets, justice outlays, and quality-adjusted life components, applying a social discount rate that may differ from the private cost of capital.

Durability is encoded in $P(\theta)$. If intervention effects decay at rate δ absent reinforcement, the transition probabilities revert toward baseline with half-life $\ln(2)/\delta$. Booster sessions, maintenance supports, and environmental changes slow reversion by modifying either δ or the off-diagonal probabilities that govern relapse. In corporate settings, pairing interventions with job redesign can shift the reward structure of tasks such that improved functioning is more likely to be sustained; this is captured as a persistent rotation of \mathbf{r} toward higher productivity.

Uncertainty is intrinsic [33]. Suppose θ is random with mean $\bar{\theta}$ and variance Σ reflecting fidelity variation and population heterogeneity. A second-order approximation to expected value yields

$$\mathbb{E}[\mathbf{V}] \approx (I - \beta P(\bar{\theta}))^{-1}\mathbf{r} + \frac{1}{2} \text{vec}^{-1} \left(\left[\frac{\partial \text{vec}(\mathbf{V})}{\partial \theta} \right] \Sigma \left[\frac{\partial \text{vec}(\mathbf{V})}{\partial \theta} \right]^{\top} \right) \quad (1)$$

, showing how parameter dispersion shifts expected returns through curvature. Decision rules should therefore rely on risk-adjusted valuations such as certainty equivalents under mean-variance preferences, or coherent downside measures that cap exposure to adverse realization of θ .

From a portfolio standpoint, sponsors rarely deploy a single program [34]. Consider a set of K interventions indexed by k , each with cost stream $c_t^{(k)}$, effect parameters $\theta^{(k)}$, and interaction terms $\phi^{(k\ell)}$ that encode complementarity or redundancy. If deployments overlap on the same cohort, the effective transition matrix is not simply additive; it is a composition that respects probability constraints and interference. Approximate aggregation can proceed by defining a baseline P_0 and a set of sparse perturbations $\Delta P^{(k)}$ such that $P(\Theta) \approx P_0 + \sum_k \Delta P^{(k)} + \sum_{k < \ell} \phi^{(k\ell)}$. Portfolio optimization then selects weights w_k to maximize $\text{NPV}(\{w_k\})$ subject to budget and capacity constraints, recognizing that $\phi^{(k\ell)}$ may favor sequences rather than simultaneous delivery when learning or absorption limits bind.

5 GENERAL EQUILIBRIUM AND SPILLOVER DYNAMICS

6 FINANCING STRUCTURES AND INCENTIVE COMPATIBILITY

Individual and firm-level gains can scale into macroeconomic effects when labor markets, capital accumulation, and public budgets respond. A tractable representation starts with an aggregate production function $Y_t = A_t F(K_t, L_t^*)$, where effective labor L_t^* equals the measured headcount scaled by an average functioning index that rises with intervention coverage. If $L_t^* = \int \eta_i l_{it} di$, where η_i is a capability multiplier influenced by mental health, then an investment that increases η shifts both current output and the marginal product of capital. In dynamic equilibrium, capital adjusts according to $K_{t+1} = (1 - \kappa)K_t + I_t$, with investment I_t guided by the user's cost of capital and expectations of future demand. Improved workforce capability elevates expected returns on I_t , so crowd-in effects can be material even if the intervention targets only a subset of the labor force.

Public budgets trace a related path. Let τ_t be the effective average tax rate on labor and capital, and let G_t denote government spending that includes health, education, and justice. The fiscal impact of improved mental health appears through higher tax bases and lower outlays in high-cost sectors [35]. A coherent valuation takes the stream of net fiscal surpluses $\Delta S_t = \Delta T_t - \Delta G_t$ and discounts them alongside private gains. The interaction terms matter because reduced volatility in earnings stabilizes consumption and shifts households toward longer financial planning horizons, which in turn affect savings and capital formation.

Team and network effects amplify returns beyond the treated individuals. Consider a network of work units indexed by j , each with output y_j that depends on local capability η_j and on the weighted average of neighbors' capability $\sum_m w_{jm} \eta_m$. If intervention coverage raises η_j in a subset of nodes, the system adjusts via the adjacency matrix $W = [w_{jm}]$. The aggregate change in output can be expressed as $\Delta \mathbf{y} = (I - \gamma W)^{-1} \mathbf{b}$, where γ captures the strength of inter-unit spillovers and \mathbf{b} stacks direct gains. Whenever $\rho(\gamma W) < 1$, these network multipliers converge and can be large when γ approaches the stability boundary. Supply chain links exhibit analogous behavior; improvements in an upstream supplier's reliability reduce buffer inventory needs downstream, freeing working capital and reducing stockout losses.

Labor market equilibrium introduces substitution and selection [36]. If capability rises in jobs that previously had high turnover, employers may refine screening and expand internal labor markets. Wage premia can adjust when compositional shifts alter scarcity, redistributing gains between firms and workers. From a social standpoint, distributional outcomes are not a side issue; they determine political sustainability and adoption speed. When public systems bear costs while private firms capture a large share of gains, co-financing and clawback mechanisms can rebalance incentives without eroding efficiency.

The temporal profile of costs and benefits poses a financing challenge. Many high-value programs require upfront expenditure with benefits that unfold over years [37]. Corporate leaders may face hurdle rates tied to competing capital projects, and public budget cycles may prioritize near-term balance. To reconcile these horizons, contracts can link payment to verified outcomes and stage cash flows as milestones are met. Outcome-based structures can be adapted to both sectors: firms can agree with vendors on payments tied to observed absenteeism reductions or retention improvements beyond baselines, while public agencies can structure agreements around sustained engagement, reduction in crisis episodes, or employment milestones that translate into fiscal value.

To make such contracts credible, measurement must be auditable and robust to gaming. This favors composite indices derived from multiple data sources and resistant to manipulation [38]. When program providers face idiosyncratic risk beyond their control, shared savings corridors and stop-loss provisions maintain investment incentives while protecting sponsors from tail outcomes. Risk pooling across employers or jurisdictions can stabilize payments and accelerate learning about which contexts yield the strongest returns. The emergence of digital delivery also invites modular contracting, in which core components are standardized and wraparound supports are tailored to local needs; value-sharing can then reflect the marginal contribution of each module to the composite outcome.

Capital market participation is feasible when outcomes can be verified at scale. Instruments that tie coupons to outcome indices allow investors to finance expansion while sharing upside with sponsors as performance unfolds. The cost of capital declines when variance in outcomes is reduced through better targeting, reinforcement schedules, and environmental modifications that protect gains [39]. Importantly, financing vehicles must accommodate equity objectives. If the highest ROI segments are not the most disadvantaged, one can blend pricing so that cross-subsidies support inclusion without undermining overall financial viability. Public payers can further stabilize markets by committing to floor prices for verified outcomes, encouraging innovation in delivery without transferring all risk to providers.

7 IMPLEMENTATION RISK, HETEROGENEITY, AND EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

Implementation mediates the translation from modelled returns to realized value. Fidelity to the intervention protocol, training of facilitators, digital platform reliability, and governance of data sharing influence effectiveness as much as the clinical content itself. Variation in these elements generates wide dispersion in outcomes [40]. Sponsors must,

therefore, treat scaling as a distinct investment with its own returns; resources allocated to quality assurance, supervisor support, and user-centered design may yield higher ROI than simply increasing enrollment volume without attention to experience quality.

Heterogeneity manifests along several axes. Baseline severity and comorbidity affect response to care, but so do job characteristics such as autonomy, complexity, and exposure to stressors. A role that requires sustained vigilance under time pressure may convert improvements in attentional control into large error reductions, while a role with cyclical creative bursts may benefit more from mood stabilization that reduces the amplitude of productivity swings. Age is another dimension; early interventions have longer windows to compound benefits but face more uncertainty, whereas mid-career interventions can rapidly translate into productivity but with shorter remaining horizons. Equitable design demands that these differences be acknowledged openly and accommodated through tailored pathways that do not systematically exclude hard-to-serve groups. [41]

Equity also has a dynamic face. When interventions lift participation among marginalized groups, social networks and local labor markets can reorganize in beneficial ways, creating new pathways for mobility and resilience. The economic value of such reorganization is difficult to monetize fully, yet it is real and accumulative. One practical approach is to define shadow values for inclusion goals and embed them in decision rules. Sponsors can allocate a portion of the portfolio to interventions whose primary justification is equity, with explicit thresholds for acceptable financial tradeoffs relative to average ROI [42]. Doing so enhances legitimacy and may unlock complementary benefits such as reduced conflict, improved organizational climate, and reputational gains that feed back into recruitment and retention.

A further equity consideration involves privacy and trust. Programs that depend on sensitive data to tailor care and measure outcomes must operate within governance frameworks that protect confidentiality while enabling insight. When participants trust that their information will not be used punitively, engagement rises and outcome measurement improves. The resulting gains in data quality reduce valuation uncertainty and lower the cost of capital for scaling. Governance, therefore, is not an administrative burden but a productive asset that raises the efficiency of the entire investment system. [43]

8 CONCLUSION

The discourse surrounding mental health has long been framed in terms of social responsibility and compassionate care. While these moral imperatives are undeniably foundational, a more robust and compelling argument is emerging that positions mental health not as a charitable expenditure, but as a strategic investment with significant, long-term economic returns. This paradigm shift requires moving beyond

static cost-benefit analyses to a dynamic valuation framework that accounts for the complex interplay of individual functioning, organizational design, and macroeconomic dynamics. By meticulously modeling the propagation of benefits and adopting innovative financing mechanisms, both corporations and governments can unlock compounding returns that strengthen productivity, fiscal health, and societal well-being for generations to come.

The economic benefits of mental health interventions are generated through a powerful interplay of effects that ripple across different scales. At the individual level, successful interventions enhance cognitive function, emotional regulation, and overall resilience [44]. This is not merely about treating illness but about fostering a state of flourishing. Individuals with robust mental well-being exhibit improved concentration, heightened creativity, and greater problem-solving abilities. They are better equipped to handle stress, adapt to change, and contribute effectively to their teams. This enhanced individual functioning is the fundamental building block for organizational gains. Corporate sponsors see these benefits materialize through tangible improvements in workforce metrics: reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, heightened employee engagement and satisfaction, fewer errors, and stabilized, more collaborative teams. This leads to a virtuous cycle where a healthier workforce is a more productive and innovative one [45]. The benefits then propagate to the macroeconomic level. Public sponsors, such as governments and public health agencies, capture these wider benefits through enhanced labor force participation as more individuals are able to enter and remain in the workforce. This strengthens the tax base, reduces reliance on public assistance, and lowers utilization in costly service systems, including emergency healthcare, social services, and the justice system. The interconnectedness of these gains underscores that the return on investment is not a simple linear sum but a complex, multi-layered outcome.

A coherent and rigorous valuation approach is essential to fully capture these diffuse and dynamic returns [46]. A simple accounting of costs and direct savings fails to appreciate the persistent and compounding nature of the benefits. Instead, a dynamic model must integrate the transition dynamics of mental health states. This can be represented through transition matrices, which map the probability of an individual moving from one state (e.g., “acute distress”) to another (e.g., “stable functioning” or “flourishing”) over time as a result of an intervention. By representing the evolution of state occupancy through these matrices and combining them with discounted accumulators that monetize the value of each state, analysts can generate a more accurate long-term valuation. Furthermore, the model must account for the durability of effects, acknowledging that a single intervention can produce lasting changes in behavior and well-being. This requires considering spillovers that propagate through networks and supply chains [47]. For ex-

ample, a manager with enhanced mental health literacy can create a more supportive environment, leading to a ripple effect of improved well-being among their direct reports and, by extension, across the organization. The concept of network multipliers captures this exponential spread of benefits. When these dynamic elements are combined with an analysis of capital crowd-in, which acknowledges that investments in mental health can attract further human and financial capital, the resulting valuations reveal that returns are not fleeting but persist and compound under plausible stability conditions.

To realize these long-term returns, financing architectures must be designed to align incentives while accommodating the inherent uncertainty of health outcomes. The traditional fee-for-service model, which pays for activities regardless of their effectiveness, is fundamentally flawed in this context. A more effective approach is to implement contracts that pay for outcomes [48]. These agreements tie payments to verifiable composite measures of success, such as a combination of reduced absenteeism, self-reported well-being scores, and objective productivity metrics. This model, often paired with shared savings and risk protection clauses, incentivizes providers to invest in high-quality, scalable interventions that deliver real results. For example, a contract might stipulate that the provider receives a bonus if the organization's productivity increases by a certain percentage, sharing the savings created. Capital market instruments can further accelerate the diffusion of effective interventions, particularly when outcomes are auditable and the long-term returns can be reliably projected. Instruments like social impact bonds or mental health bonds allow private investors to finance interventions upfront, with repayment contingent on the achievement of predefined social outcomes. Moreover, blended pricing can be used to incorporate equity objectives, ensuring that interventions reach underserved populations without eroding financial viability. This multifaceted approach to financing creates a self-sustaining ecosystem where investment is rewarded with measurable impact, and innovation is encouraged.

The strategic implication for corporate leaders is profound and requires a fundamental re-evaluation of human resources. Instead of treating mental health as a fringe benefit or a compliance issue, it should be viewed as a core component of human capital deepening. This perspective recognizes that investing in the mental well-being of employees is as critical as investing in their technical skills or providing them with advanced equipment. A mentally resilient and engaged workforce is a source of option value, offering the flexibility and adaptability to navigate market shifts and seize new opportunities [49]. This is best realized when mental health investments are paired with complementary strategies, such as job redesign to reduce stressors and improve autonomy, and the integration of capability complementing technologies that can automate routine tasks and free up mental energy for more complex, creative work.

For example, a company might offer cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) while also implementing new project management software to reduce organizational friction. These synergistic actions amplify the returns, creating a more sustainable competitive advantage.

For public sector planners, a similar strategic shift is needed. Mental health should be considered a form of infrastructure investment whose returns are not confined to the health sector but are transmitted through education, justice, health, and labor markets. A mentally healthy student population is better equipped to learn, leading to higher educational attainment and a more skilled future workforce [50]. A robust mental healthcare system can reduce the burden on the justice system by diverting individuals with mental illness away from incarceration and toward treatment. This interconnectedness warrants cross-agency coordination and multi-year budgeting to ensure that investments are sustained and benefits are captured across departmental silos. This long-term perspective allows for the kind of foundational investments in community clinics, school-based programs, and crisis response services that create enduring social and economic returns. A strong mental health infrastructure is not just a safety net; it is a catalyst for economic growth and social stability.

Finally, an effective strategy must incorporate an attention to heterogeneity and inclusion. A one-size-fits-all approach to mental health is insufficient [51]. The needs of employees or citizens are diverse, spanning different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic statuses. A portfolio of interventions that offers a range of options, from one-on-one therapy to peer support groups and mindfulness apps, improves not only fairness but also resilience. This diversified portfolio can stabilize performance across various economic cycles and unexpected shocks, such as a recession or a global pandemic, by providing a variety of tools to address different challenges. The focus on measurement quality is pivotal, demanding the use of linked, privacy-preserving data that can connect short-run functional gains to long-run fiscal and productivity outcomes. By adopting rigorous, dynamic valuation methods and incentive-compatible financing, organizations and governments can effectively convert compassion into a source of compound economic returns. These returns persist well beyond the conventional accounting period, creating a stronger, more productive, and more resilient society for all. [52]

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