The New HR Imperative
A STUDY LED BY BRAND LEARNING

Leading for Growth
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INTRODUCTION

In a world of seismic change fuelled by technological opportunity, people and the role that they play in business has never needed greater focus. Through passion, creativity and ingenuity, it is people that create the exceptional customer experiences that drive growth. Yet in many businesses the customer and people agendas are not connected.

So with people at the core of business success, there’s never been a better time for HR - the People function - to connect more fully to the growth agenda. Yet in many businesses, HR remains in a supporting role, sitting off stage while the main action takes place in the centre.

To explore this, we spoke to inspirational HR and People leaders across businesses in Europe, US, Asia and Latam. We surveyed people from all functions on their perceptions and needs of HR and we have supplemented these findings with quantitative results from recent Brand Learning studies, including “Growth Drivers” and “Join-up to Stand Apart”.

Our research shows a new imperative for HR: to come out of the shadows and create greater impact. We’ve heard that business is crying out for HR to play more of a driving role in shaping the future and put people at the heart of the strategic discussion.

We’ve also heard that it’s capabilities that are holding HR back. In particular, many HR leaders lack the commercial capabilities traditionally seen in that other function that obsesses about people - Marketing!

To explore this further, our research looked at what’s needed from HR going forward and how HR can learn from Marketing to drive a closer relationship between people and the business.

Qualitative interviews

Quantitative research from Brand Learning

Growth Drivers study, 2015

Join Up to Stand Apart study, 2016

Brand Learning HR online survey, 2017
THE UNCHANGING IMPERATIVE FOR GROWTH

In an ever changing world, fuelled by technological disruption, some things don’t change. One of these is the need for continued growth – whether this be at an individual level or at an organisation level.

Individual growth drives energy and wellbeing, helping us feel worthwhile and valuable, creating energy at work and at home.

Organisational growth not only brings financial reward but also business momentum and motivation – there’s nothing more motivating than working in a growth environment. So growth is needed now more than ever. But what drives growth?

Growth is the oil in the engine, it’s the singular thing that allows you to create an environment in which people can flourish. Without growth, investment dries up, without growth, opportunities for people growth dry-up.

Syl Saller
Chief Marketing Officer, Diageo

1. Growth Drivers Study - Brand Learning, 2015
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE SITS AT THE HEART OF BUSINESS GROWTH

We know that business growth is powered by the delivery of exceptional customer experiences. Those businesses that are delivering a strong customer experience are more likely to be growing than those who are not.²

In the Brand Learning Growth Drivers study 72% of those businesses growing consistently are joining up their strategy around the customer experience. This was supported by a recent Forrester study, showing that Customer Experience Leaders collectively had a 14 percentage point growth advantage over Customer Experience Laggards.²

Our research also showed what’s important for companies to grow:

- Prioritising the happiness of customers. Growth organisations orient their business around customers, striving not just to meet but to exceed customer needs and use this to build competitive differential. They have a customer obsession – and ensure that this obsession is put into practice across the business.
- The talent and effectiveness of people. Whilst brands, innovative products, the impact of R&D or digital integration all have a part to play in growth, our survey showed that a more important attribute is a focus on people.

So people and the role they play in prioritising happiness are central to the customer experience and to business performance: People who are inventive in differentiating the customer experience; people who integrate working practices around the needs of customers and people who use their ingenuity to deliver innovative customer experience solutions.³


Leena Nair
Chief HR Officer, Unilever

It means that in every aspect of everything you do every day, you think about the implication for the customer.

Roger Connor
President, Global Manufacturing & Supply, GSK

2. Customer Experience Drives Revenue Growth - Forrester June, 2016
3. Join-Up to Stand Apart study - Brand Learning, 2016
And what was so fascinating to hear in our research was how it’s hard to do one without the other. This means that if your people experience is lacking, it is harder to deliver a great customer experience. For example, we learnt that 43% of people don’t believe their employee experience matches the brand promise, making it harder to view the business coherently.

So to meet the growth imperative, businesses need to develop exceptional customer experiences, delivered by people who themselves enjoy a positive working experience.

Great people experience drives a great customer experience which in turn drives business results. The experience of people and the experience of customers are two halves of the same coin.

Vivien Leinster
UK People Director, Bupa

We are all obsessed with our customers. Are we that obsessive about the people who work for us?

Doug Baillie
Former Chief HR Officer, Unilever

[The customer experience and people agenda] I think they’re hugely interlinked and particularly in the service industry where a big part of the product is essentially how your people interact with customers.

Peter Duffy
Chief Commercial Officer, easyJet

Customers at Starbucks will potentially trust us because of the way they perceive we treat our partners (employees).

Carol Muldoon
VP Partner Resources, EMEA, Starbucks Coffee Company

This places a dual passion at the heart of growth businesses - an obsession with customers and an obsession with our people.
Yet people in the workplace are changing. In a gig economy where 4 in 10 people are expected to be self employed by 2020⁴, no longer can it be assumed that new recruits are joining for the long term. Furthermore, as Millennials move into management positions, becoming the largest generation in the workplace⁵, the well documented differences between the generations is becoming more pronounced, with the clamour for change getting louder.

Younger employees, who outside of work are uncompromising consumers of the likes of Apple, Uber, Amazon and Zappos, are bringing these high expectations to work. They expect the same levels of responsiveness, instant gratification, consistency of service and accessibility of technology that they get from their favourite brands, demanding that this be integrated coherently into their everyday working lives. And they expect that experience to be connected with a fulfilling business purpose, which resonates with what they care about personally.

In the words of Goffee and Jones: “Organisations no longer hold all the cards”⁶

“Millennials are driving for Purpose, Autonomy & Mastery.”
Leena Nair
Chief HR Officer, Unilever

“We need to look carefully at changes in society and new generations to understand what constitutes hearts and minds for them. Sometimes we feel that Millennials want the impossible. But we need to hear them and we can do a lot to respond if we are open to change.”
Francisco Fortes
Executive VP, People, Organisation Development & IT, Gerdau

⁴ Open Economy report - Samsung, 2017
⁵ Goldman Sachs, 2017; Bersin by Deloitte, 2017
⁶ Why should anyone work here? - Goffee & Jones, 2015
...PEOPLE WANT TO FEEL INVOLVED

“Involvement” people participate passionately in something that holds personal motivation and emotional meaning. Their obvious contribution helps them feel energised and inspired. Involved people then share their passion with others, being more likely to recommend their business: both its brands and as a place of work.

In our recent survey, for example, we saw that people who would recommend their business to others are more than twice as likely to feel involved in the strategy of the business than those who wouldn’t recommend.

With the emergence of the gig economy, involvement of people has a long term impact. With a mobile workforce we need to be tuned into involving people at the outset and ensuring they leave on a positive note. We shouldn’t see them as employees but as partners in the business.

Nimai Swaroop
Global Director Talent Engagement & Resourcing, Diageo

Employees are our main and most important assets. They need to have a purpose, be motivated, engaged and feel good at work.

Francisco Fortes
Executive VP, People, Organisation Development & IT, Gerdau

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Fig. 3: Brand Learning HR Online Survey, 2017
We believe that being involved means having:

1. PURPOSE:
   Personally connecting with the purpose of the business
   “If an employee is heavily invested in and believes in the mission, understands its purpose and has a connection with that, it’s the sort of thing that fits with his own personal values, that person will stay longer, drive performance harder than any other person. So there is a direct connection between the belief of the employee and the mission.”
   Mark McRae, Former Global VP of HR, Ideal Standard

2. EMPOWERMENT:
   Having freedom to contribute to and shape the agenda
   “We decentralised power, we changed the corporate organisation structure, we eliminated some roles and empowered the ‘end points’, we opened up and gave more freedom to people.”
   Francisco Fortes, Executive VP, People, Organisation Development & IT, Gerdau

3. GROWTH:
   Having the opportunity to grow and feel challenge
   “Plunge into the world of digital and technology; really understand the business model so you can help reinvent it; genuinely understand what it is to drive culture.”
   Leena Nair, CHRO, Unilever

4. SUPPORT:
   Feeling connected and supported by colleagues, managers and the team.
   In our recent study, when asked what was most important at work: “friendships” was the most highly rated variable, scoring an average of 6.8 out of 10 whilst “belonging” was also rated highly, scoring an average of 5.4
   “Millennials aren’t accepting this pyramid hierarchy. They want relationships, shared power and freedom to contribute - not to follow orders from the top.”
   Rosie Brown, MD, Cook

7. Inspired by the work of Daniel Pink ‘Drive’, 2009
BUT BUSINESSES ARE NOT DOING ENOUGH TO INVOLVE PEOPLE

People need a working environment and a day to day employee experience where they feel involved in order to successfully deliver customer experiences for growth.

Sadly many businesses are not doing enough to live up to these higher expectations of people, with a Gallup study showing that only 13% of employees feel involved in their businesses worldwide. This was borne out by Brand Learning research which showed that only 35% of people had either a leading role or felt involved in creating the company strategy, whilst only 49% had a leading role or felt involved in the creation of their department strategy.

Which of these best describes how you feel about the strategy for your COMPANY:

- I’m informed: 33.5%
- I’m engaged: 19.7%
- I’m involved: 30%
- I’m leading: 5.2%
- Other (please specify): 11.6%

Figs. 4: Brand Learning HR online survey, 2017

Which of these best describes how you feel about the strategy for your DEPARTMENT:

- I’m informed: 26.6%
- I’m engaged: 17.2%
- I’m involved: 25.3%
- I’m leading: 23.6%
- Other (please specify): 7.3%

THE HR IMPERATIVE: PUTTING PEOPLE AT THE HEART

If people are not feeling sufficiently involved and are not fully contributing to creating growth, could HR do more to put people at the forefront of the business agenda and play a more central, influential role in the business to directly impact performance?

With people central to the delivery of exceptional customer experiences, HR has a stronger connection with the growth agenda than ever before. Never has there been a more exciting time for HR to play a central, influential role in the business, directly impacting strategy and performance.

Yet, our research indicates that this is not yet happening in many businesses, with less than 30% of businesses involving HR in the development of the customer experience strategy.

The imperative now is for HR to step out of the shadows. HR needs to reframe its role – playing a more influential role in driving the strategic agenda.

“Every time we talk about the customer, we need to imagine the employee sitting with them in an equal position.”

Doug Baillie
Former Chief HR Officer, Unilever

“HR is typically not involved in the creation of the customer experience. HR usually comes in later when something is not working.”

Mark McRae
Former Global VP HR, Ideal Standard

“I’m as much on the pitch as the Operations Team. Does HR want to separate itself or be an equal contributor? I believe they need to be on the pitch together.”

Rosie Brown
Managing Director, Cook

9. Join Up to Stand Apart study - Brand Learning, 2016
THE NEW ROLE FOR HR

In our research there was great energy, passion - even excitement - around the imperative for HR to reframe its role in the business.

HR’s role needs to be centred around the business agenda, seeing people as key to the delivery of competitive edge and business performance. HR needs to connect fully with how the business operates, where value is derived and what’s important to commercial leaders.

HR should involve people in the future direction of the business, shaping the business strategy into something simple and definite. They need to put in place a compelling people experience that enables energised people to focus on what’s important for customers, with capabilities and working practices that make it easy to work in a uniquely customer focused way.

In short, HR needs to reframe its role and its impact - truly becoming The People Function.

“HR needs to lay the road in front, not follow, filling in the cracks in the road.”
Doug Baillie
Former Chief HR Officer, Unilever

“The future of work has to be much more human. HR has lacked humanity.”
Jane Storm
Former Group HR Director, Tesco

“When you come into the field of HR and you want to practice this, you have to learn the business. You have to be able not only to speak the language but understand the intricacies about it – the drivers.”
Kristina Karcic-Ehret
Director of People, Lifion by ADP

“HR must have a deep understanding of the customer experience to enable people to deliver it.”
Mark McRae
Former Global VP HR, Ideal Standard
WE HEARD ABOUT 4 SPECIFIC AREAS WHERE HR CAN DRIVE GREATER VALUE, CREATING A WINNING PEOPLE EXPERIENCE TO DRIVE COMPETITIVE EDGE
HR needs to start with UNDERSTANDING. For HR to influence action and drive impact, rooting strategic and operational guidance in insight is critical. Here, the parallel with Marketing becomes evident: only with data and insight are Marketing able to influence the strategic agenda of the business. The same may well be true of HR.

Whilst internal intelligence and ever more sophisticated analytics are key in HR, equally important is the need to blend this with external perspectives. External perspectives on how communities of talent are changing, where new skills are emerging and how competitors are valued are fundamental in understanding sources of competitive edge in the market for talent.

In the last couple of decades, HR have lost the ability to be very data oriented. Now it’s about how we partner with leaders through understanding what all our employee data is telling us and what’s happening externally so that we bring that to bear on the overall productivity and efficiency of the organisation.

Natalie Woodford
SVP Talent, Leadership & OD Centre of Excellence, GSK

HR needs to be more attuned to the world around us. We need to know what’s happening in the external economic environment and the implications on the industry we operate in, the trade and the consumer/customer - and the discontinuity brought in by rapid changes in technology.

Debashish Roy
VP HR, Africa, Eurasia & Middle East, Colgate
Brands with simple propositions tend to be more successful. Similarly, where business is getting more complex for people, HR can deliver value by helping to SIMPLIFY the business.

Our research has shown that people want a clear sense of what the business distinctly stands for - the purpose - so that they can make sense of the organisation and where they fit in.

They then need this clarity delivered through a coherent experience - from the way they’re treated by line managers, through people policies, processes, structure and the culture they feel. We’ve heard strong views around HR playing a greater role in driving this simplicity, in purpose, strategy and experience.

HR has an opportunity to then drive this coherence in practice - streamlining the employee experience and cutting back process where needed to create clarity for the people who work there.

“...
There is a real art in keeping things simple. We’ve tried to avoid unnecessary process. We’ve kept the stuff that’s important and got rid of the rest.

Rosie Brown
Managing Director, Cook
HR can add value by unlocking/releasing the ENERGY and talents of people, enabling them to flourish and helping them to maximise their contribution.

HR can play a unique role, working across the business to shape a culture that is aligned to the purpose and inspires everyone to maximise their contribution. HR should set the conditions for individuals to participate in the agenda, deepening their connection with the business and with each other. This is the foundation for releasing energy.

We want to get people really excited about their work and having them believe it’s the best thing ever to work here, believing in management.

Chief HR Officer
Service Business

A major part of the HR role is culture and the way that this touches the whole organisation. It’s not what we are delivering as a business but how we are delivering it. Culture releases discretionary effort.

Chief HR Officer
Service Business

The HR Director is disproportionately accountable for shaping culture. It’s about pushing boundaries on how we need to lead differently, how we motivate and engage employees and create an environment that inspires performance and growth. This is a critical role in light of the constantly changing external context.

Mairead Nayager
Global HR Director, Diageo
When people in the workplace may be with you for a short time only, helping people to believe in the business and act as ambassadors for the business as proponents of your brand is a must.

In order to be a strong leader you really have to empower your associates to be open and transparent. Once people leave, they take us with them, it’s all about networking - you get a reputation. It’s important to keep people engaged with positive conversation and open dialogue.

Kristina Karcic-Ehret  
Director of People, Lifion by ADP

“...

We want to create 800 brand champions.

Rosie Brown  
Managing Director, Cook
BUT OUR RESEARCH INDICATED THAT HR ARE HELD BACK FROM DELIVERING VALUE IN THESE AREAS

Despite the enthusiasm for HR change, the reality of this change is less evident. HR don’t appear to be increasing their impact quickly or indeed sufficiently. Specifically, in our most recent survey, just over 50% of respondents said that HR in their business is not changing to keep up with the needs of the business.

We heard many reasons for this. Lack of HR confidence clearly plays a part. Equally the role that the CEO and the rest of the Board play in understanding the true value that HR can bring can limit impact.

However, more than any other single reason, we heard how HR are held back by their capabilities. Many HR teams lack the capabilities to deliver against the new imperative. Moreover, they are insufficiently investing in building new ones at pace.

“A lot of HR people have been trained into ‘I’m in the service of the business, what can I do to make your life better’, not ‘you know what, here are the 5 levers you can pull in the business to make a difference.’

Leena Nair
Chief HR Officer, Unilever

“HR has a great opportunity to strengthen its capabilities for the future - enabling it to operate in a more creative way to put people at the heart of the business.”

Jon Harding,
Global Learning & Innovation Director,
LVMH

How good are HR at helping your business? (on a scale 1 (very weak) to 5 (excellent))

How would you rate the skills and capabilities of your HR team and their impact on the business?

Fig. 5: Brand Learning HR Online Survey, 2017
Fig. 6: Brand Learning HR Online Survey, 2017
Given the growing parallels between the role of the customer and the employee, it is not surprising that HR have a greater need than ever for capabilities that draw from Marketing for their inspiration.

Marketing puts customer understanding at the heart of their profession. Understanding is then used to create simple, powerful experiences which create engagement and ultimately brand advocacy. HR must do the same for people.

Our belief is that working together, HR and Marketing should not just borrow from yesterday’s marketing. Rather they should work together to build capabilities that are needed for growth in the technology age.

Through developing these capabilities, HR can build exceptional people experiences that will drive competitive edge, enabling the attraction and recruitment of the right people and involving them in the business agenda.

“...The age of the consumer and the employee synergising is upon us.

Leena Nair
Chief HR Officer, Unilever
BUILDING GROWTH CAPABILITIES

ANALYTICS, SEGMENTATION & INSIGHT

Undoubtedly, HR is underpinned by analytics, however we heard great examples of businesses that were creatively combining analytics with external trends, foresight and judgement to produce true insight.

Building insight skills is essential for HR to provide value adding advice in making strategic and operational decisions. Indeed, in our recent survey, when asked in which areas HR most need to improve, employee insight scored highly at 41%.

Understanding is then enhanced by segmentation. As with Marketing, segmentation is not a job to be done once, rather segmentation needs to be approached creatively to suit different purposes. For example, whilst segmentation by life stage might be useful in tailoring employee benefits, segmenting by attitude might be more useful in tailoring EVP messaging. Great HR teams segment multiple times over to enhance their understanding of employees over time.

For example, Pymetrics works with businesses and academic institutions to help them make better hiring decisions using analytics. Neuroscience games provide data around cognitive and emotional strengths of individuals and results are used to match candidates to roles, with personalised feedback provided giving guidance on next steps. The use of data in this way has been shown to be significantly more predictive and less biased than conventional CV analysis alone, whilst also decreasing attrition levels of new recruits by 20-50% and increasing gender and ethnic diversity by up to 100%.
LEADERSHIP & COACHING

Finally, HR can work with leaders at all levels of the business to help them create the freedom for people to deliver against the purpose and inspire, empower and support them to become brand and business ambassadors.

At Gerdau, the leadership team, supported by HR, decentralised and changed the corporate organisation structure, eliminating some roles and empowering the ‘end points’, creating more freedom for people.

ENGAGEMENT & DIGITAL

Like Marketing, HR need to build engagement capabilities that connect people with the brand, using emerging digital platforms and more traditional channels alike. Through continual conversations with people, HR can fuel conversations and understanding, helping the brand resonate personally and emotionally.

At Affinity, HR have led the way in the building of digital capabilities, within the function and across the business. Digital skills have been put into practice to bring to life employer branding online and connect with new sources of talent.

In which of these areas does HR most need to improve?

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Employer branding</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data analytics</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influencing others</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>Digital</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic planning</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employee involvement (high engagement)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>Employee insight</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<td>Employee experience</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<td>Employee communication</td>
<td>59%</td>
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Fig. 7: Brand Learning HR Online Survey, 2017

PURPOSE & BRANDING

HR needs to use enhanced understanding to create meaning for people that is simple and distinct.

Meaning comes from clarity of purpose and its connection with the brand. HR needs branding capabilities to align employees with the customer brand, working relentlessly to deliver the brand in practice.

For example, at Unilever, people are given the opportunity to truly connect their own personal purpose with a clear and inspiring business purpose: "to make sustainable living commonplace". The employer brand closely relates to the business purpose so that new recruits connect. In addition, internal programmes are used to help current employees reflect what the purpose means to them in their everyday life.

We need to engage our partners around our purpose so they can share the story with customers.

Carol Muldoon
VP Partner Resources, EMEA, Starbucks Coffee Company

Ultimately we need to recognise the commonality between the Employer Brand, both internal and external, and the convergence between the external promise and internal lived experience.

Nimai Swaroop
Global Director Talent Engagement & Resourcing, Diageo
AND CHANGE CAN'T WAIT

What's clear is that HR have a significant and powerful agenda which needs immediate focus. To help with prioritisation, ensuring HR has impact and adds value, we recommend asking 4 simple questions:

01. Do we have a winning people experience that is good enough to support our growth agenda?

02. Given the Purpose and Strategy of the business, what role must HR play uniquely in our business going forward?

03. To play this role, in what areas must HR excel and therefore what is the capability set required to deliver this role?

04. What priority capabilities do we need to build now and in what sequence?

Technological change is transforming our organisations apace while delivering competitive edge through people is catching up only slowly. Meanwhile, employees are voting with their feet, moving to organisations that truly put the people agenda at the centre. In parallel, the strategic agenda moves forward, with HR playing only a supporting role in so many companies.

HR has a unique opportunity to change, connecting with the growth agenda like never before and partnering across the organisation to build new capabilities. Being ready and able is the next step.

“HR is uniquely positioned to see across the enterprise. Is HR capable and ready? No!”

Leena Nair
Chief HR Officer, Unilever
I believe that the most important role on the Board will be the HR role.

Doug Baillie
Former Chief HR Officer, Unilever
ABOUT BRAND LEARNING

BRAND LEARNING is a global consultancy whose mission is to help create growth-capable organisations. We work in partnership with the world’s leading organisations to inspire and build their capabilities to deliver customer-centred growth. We work with Marketing, Sales, HR, Leadership and Digital teams to lift their performance and ability to create exceptional customer experiences.

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With sincere thanks and great appreciation to all our interviewees, respondents, and to the broader team at BRAND LEARNING who helped shape this study and its recommendations.

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<th>Name</th>
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<td>Doug Baillie</td>
<td>Former Chief HR Officer, Unilever</td>
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<td>Samantha Bowerman</td>
<td>HR Director - Functions, RBS</td>
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<td>Melissa Gee-Kee</td>
<td>Strategy Director to Chief HR Officer &amp; Global HR4HR Director, Unilever</td>
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<td>Kenneth Soh Yew Chin</td>
<td>Chief HR Officer, MediaCorp Pte Ltd</td>
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<td>Jane Storm</td>
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