

MANAGEMENT STYLES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN MALAYSIA: A RECENT SURVEY

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Abstract

Management styles have received much attention as a field of study as well as practice. However, as an area of research, the literature review reveals that limited studies have attempted to investigate the management styles embraced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in the Malaysian context. This study attempted to address this research issue. Data for the study was collected from 186 SMEs operating in the manufacturing sector by using structured questionnaires. The analyzed data gathered from the SMEs suggest that these firms adopted five styles of management. Among the management styles identified in the study includes; autocratic, participative, nurturance task, paternalistic and laissez-faire.

Keywords: Management styles, SMEs, Malaysia.

Abstrak

Gaya pengurusan telah menerima banyak perhatian sebagai satu bidang kajian dan amalan. Walau bagaimanapun, sebagai suatu bidang penyelidikan, kajian literatur mendedahkan bahawa kajian tentang gaya pengurusan industri kecil dan sederhana (IKS), terutamanya dalam konteks Malaysia adalah amat terhad. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani isu tersebut. Data untuk kajian telah dikumpulkan daripada 186 IKS yang beroperasi dalam sektor pembuatan dengan menggunakan soal selidik berstruktur. Data yang dianalisis mencadangkan bahawa firma-firma ini menerima pakai lima gaya pengurusan. Antara gaya pengurusan yang dikenal pasti dalam kajian ini termasuk; autokratik, partisipatif, tugas pemupukan, 'paternalistic' dan 'laissez-faire.'

Kata kunci: *Gaya pengurusan, IKS, Malaysia.*

Introduction

The performance of organizations depends very much on how well they are being managed. With regard to the performance of organizations, some continue to sustain their success while others appear to be less successful. Most often, the successful organizations are able to perform and sustain their operations due to effective management styles. With regard to the unsuccessful organizations, in many cases, they fail because of mismanagement.

Management style as an area of research and practice has long attracted the attention of practitioners, consultants and scholars. In addition, the review of the literature indicates that the research emphasis on management styles continue to grow over the years. The theoretical as well as research contributions on management styles resulted from the notion that the styles of management can influence the effectiveness, efficiency and productivity of organizations.

Over the years, various management styles have been introduced, presented as well as promoted in the literature. At the same time, numerous studies have also attempted to investigate the management styles that can help companies to improve their performance and help to sustain their competitive advantage. Previous studies have primarily concentrated on examining the management styles used by successful as well as excellent companies. These studies have attempted to not only scrutinize the way these companies are being managed but also strived to identify as well as learn the styles of management that make them successful (Meggeneder, 2007; Ogbeide & Harrington, 2011; Uche & Timinepere, 2012).

Findings of past studies reveal several specific styles of management adopted by different organizations. Apart from being able to identify several types of management styles, these studies have also promoted the styles that are able to influence the performance of successful companies. Interestingly, each of these studies further claims to have found a specific management style

that can contribute to the growth as well as continued success of companies (Cassell, Nadin, Gray, & Clegg, 2002; Champoux & Brun, 2003; Dimmock, 1999; Harney & Dundon, 2006, 2007; Harvey & Turnbull, 2006; Matlay, 1999, 2002a, 2002b; Rainnie, 1989).

Notwithstanding the enormous amount of literature and increasing research attention on management style in recent years, empirical studies in this area seemed to be not only limited but also neglected in the Malaysian context. One particular important area of research would be to investigate the management styles adopted by small and SMEs in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to examine the management styles adopted by SMEs. By doing so, the study attempts to not only identify the different styles of management adopted by these firms but also to provide some insights into the scope and focus of each style of management.

Literature Review

Earlier studies that examined management styles began in the 1960's and 1970's. However, past studies on management styles mainly investigated the styles of management in unionized organizations. These studies found that management of these organizations emphasized on consultation and negotiation styles when dealing with their employees and unions. However, following the decline of the number of the unions in the 1980's, organizations began to search for new forms of management styles to help them maintain the relationships between employees and employers (Bacon, 2008; Dundon & Rollinson, 2011).

With regard to the definition of management style, findings of prior studies indicate that various definitions have been used in previous research. Different authors have defined management styles in many different ways. For instance, in a more recent study, Dundon and Rollinson (2011) referred to management styles as not only a manager's preferred approach to handling matters concerning employees and employment relations but also the styles reflect the way that the manager exercises his or her authority as well as makes decisions.

In an earlier study conducted in the 1980's, Poole (1986) specifically defined management style as “a coherent approach to the problem of motivating and controlling employees, of handling grievance and conducting relationships with organized labour.” Following this definition, another study by Purcell, (1987) regarded management style as “a distinctive set of guiding principles, written or otherwise, which set parameters to and signpost for management action in the way employees are treated and particular events handled.”

In the 1990's, the study by Syed Abdullah(1991; 6) viewed management styles as specific patterns of managerial practices that involved management's philosophy, core values and the way things are done in organizations. In the same period, Blyton and Turnbull (1994) described management style as “the general control and direction of labour exercised by management on a day to day basis.” However, the subsequent study by Khandwalla (1995; 18), considered management styles as the distinctive manner in which various business functions such as goal setting, strategy formulation and implementation, organizing, staffing, control, coordination, leadership and image building are being performed in organizations.

Various factors influence management styles. The factors that shaped management styles in organizations involve not only external factors such as the government, labour market, economics and competition but also internal factors that include; core values, purpose, management philosophies of the owners and founders, managers and business strategies of the organizations. Management styles are considered important because they play a key role in determining how organizations are managed and controlled (Bray, Waring & Cooper, 2011).

In an earlier study, Dimmock (1999) pointed out that organizations need to adopt effective management style to help them direct their businesses effectively. The management style practiced by owners-managers influenced the direction of their organizations through various organizational competencies. In addition, according to Baptiste (2008), management style that provided strong support, developed trust, promoted employee well-being at the workplace are known to increase organizational performance as well.

The more recent study by Trask, Rice, Anchors and Lilieholm (2009), further indicated that information and knowledge concerning management style used by owner-managers in SMEs are also useful in understanding how decisions are made in their organizations. According to the study, the decisions made in SMEs are influenced by the management style adopted by their managers and that the decisions have implications on the success as well as failure of these firms.

Over the years, in realizing the importance of management styles to organizations, numerous attempts have been made to investigate the types of management styles adopted by organizations. The review of the findings of past studies indicate that organizations not only adopt different types of management styles but also the styles of management vary between different organizations due to various external environmental factors as well as internal organizational factors (Dimmock, 1999).

Likert (1967) developed and proposed the Likert's System 4 as one of the earliest work on management style. The Likert's System 4 developed by the author consisted of four specific types of management styles. The four specific management styles include; System 1 (exploitative authoritative style), System 2 (benevolent authoritative style), System 3 (consultative style) and System 4 (participative style).

In another study, Poole (1986) identified another four types of management styles based on the unitary and pluralist perspectives. The four types of management styles introduced in the study include; authoritarian, paternal, constitutional and participative management styles. According to the study, the unitary framework is represented by the authoritarian and paternal management styles. On the hand, the constitutional and participative management styles are closely associated to the pluralist framework.

Purcell (1987) was able to single out the following two additional management styles; individualism and collectivism management styles. The individualism style focused on the extent to which personnel policies emphasized on the rights and capabilities of individual employees. While, the collectivism style underscored the extent to which management policies

are directed toward inhibiting or encouraging the development of collective representation by employees as well as allowing employees to participate in management decision making.

Dundon and Rollinson (2011) claimed that the earlier works on management styles can be traced to the Fox's scheme which emphasized on the unitary and pluralism management styles. With regard to the unitary and pluralism management styles, the study by Syed Abdullah (1991) indicated that the unitary management style postulated one source of authority and stressed on employees' loyalty. In contrast, the pluralism management style considered many separate and competitive interests of stakeholders in the organizations and also featured on the role of management in ensuring harmony at the workplace.

In an analysis of previous studies on employment relations, Blyton and Turnbull (1994) were able to identify five types management styles adopted by organizations. Among the five management styles identified in the study involved; the traditional style, the sophisticated paternalists/human relation style, the consultative (sophisticated modern) style, the constitutional (sophisticated modern) style and the standard modern style.

Khandwalla (1995) proposed two main groups of management styles, namely the best and worst management styles. The author indicated that the best management style group consists of the following four styles; participative style, altruistic style, professional style and organic style. Meanwhile, the worst management style group includes; the defective intuitive style, the defective conservative style, the defective authoritarian and the defective professional style. In the study, the author further highlighted two fundamental reasons why styles of management vary from one organization to the other. First, each organization differs in term of their characteristics such as types of organization, purpose, size, environment and history. Second, there are many different ways to manage the various managerial functions in organizations. In addition, as a result of their different characteristics and the availability of various ways to manage, organizations have to make a choice in establishing their goals as well as developing their strategies. With regard to this, each organization needs to adopt a distinctive management style that specifically suits its business requirements and environment.

The study by Menkhoff and Kay (2000), attempted to investigate the management styles adopted by small firms in the Southeast Asia region. According to the findings of the study, the small firms in the Southeast Asia countries, especially among the Chinese owned small firms, tend to exercise the benevolent autocratic management style, emphasized on paternalism to ensure employees loyalty and at the same time stressed on centralized decision making.

At the same time, Matlay (2002a) investigated the management styles among SMEs in Britain. Findings of the study indicated that the SMEs in Britain adopted five types of management styles. Among the five types of management styles include; the formal style, the informal style, the mixed formal and informal style, the professional style and the external or agency. According to the study, the SMEs used these five styles to manage as well as control the employees in their organizations.

The subsequent study by Deery and Jago (2001) examined management styles adopted in medium-sized hotels. In the study, the authors focused on four types of management styles. Evidence from the study suggests that the management of the medium-sized hotels used the following management styles; autocratic style, decisive style, consultative style and the democratic management style.

According to Scase (2003), the two common management styles found in small organizations involved the egalitarian style and the autocratic management style. Owners and managers of small firms that followed the egalitarian style or also known as participative management style (Kennedy, 2002), tend to work alongside their employees. This style established the duties and responsibilities of employees based on mutual adjustment, emphasis on commitment, teamwork and profit sharing. On the other hand, the autocratic management style has an inclination to exploit their employees, particularly in SMEs where their employees are unskilled and have no union to represent them. Employers that used this style are more likely to offer low rates of pay, poor working environment and unfavourable terms and conditions of employment.

The study by Ansari, Ahmad and Aafaqi (2004) suggested a new management style as a future runner for participative management style. The new management style is known as nurturant-task (NT) management style. The emphasis of this style is on the balance between work as well as the relationships between employees and their superiors. This management style was first introduced in the context of organizations in India. According to Jayasingam and Cheng (2009) and Ansari et al. (2004), this management style is also relevant and applicable to firms in Malaysia due to certain similarities in the working environment of organizations in both countries.

In another study, Ahmad (2005) examined the management styles among SMEs in Malaysia. Findings of the study suggest that not only majority of the Malay employees perceived paternalistic management style as important to them but also reveals that the Chinese and Indian employees viewed paternalistic management style as crucial, particularly in terms of fulfilling their needs and protecting their rights.

The subsequent study on SMEs conducted by Edwards, Ram, Gupta and Tsai (2006) used two types of management styles that include the authoritarian and participative management styles. At the same, however, the study by Edwards et al. (2006) indicated that SMEs may not necessary adopt the two management styles but use other styles. According to the study, the paternalistic style of management may also be useful to manage employees in SMEs.

Interestingly, the study by Mikhailitchenko and Lundstrom (2006) made an attempt to survey the management styles followed by SMEs in the United States of America, China and Russia. According to the evidence from the study, the SMEs in the three countries adopted four types of management styles. The four types of management styles identified the three countries include; the supervision style, the decision making style, the information sharing style and finally, the paternalistic orientation style. Trask et al. (2009) found almost similar types of management styles adopted by small firms. The study discovered that the firms adopted management styles that consist of the autocratic style, the authoritarian style, the bureaucratic style, the democratic style and the participative style. Following this,

Jain and Premkumar (2010) in their study uncovered the following four types of management styles; the participative style, the altruistic style, the professional style and the organic style.

Using the four management styles identified earlier by Likert (1967), the study by Nassar, Abdou and Mohmoud (2011) attempted to determine the relationships between the four management styles and retention among nurses in a private hospital in Egypt. Findings of the study show that the four management styles that include; the consultative style, the exploitative/authoritative style, the benevolent/authoritative style and the participative management style are related to the retention of the nurses at the private hospital.

In a more recent study, Uche and Timinepere (2012) examined the management styles of organizations in the private sector in Nigeria. This study adopted six management styles in their study that consist of participative, paternalistic, authoritarian, entrepreneurial, conservative and bureaucratic management styles. At the same time, findings of the study by Mansor, Wai, Mohamed and Shah (2012) found that the management in the Malaysian International Bank practiced found four specific management styles that involve; the autocratic style, the democratic style, the paternalistic style and the laissez-faire management style.

Research Methodology

Sampling Frame and Procedure

This study was based on data collected from SMEs that operated in the manufacturing sector in Malaysia. The SMEs in the study was defined as those firms that employed 10 to 300 employees. Using this definition, the study identified and selected 1, 867 firms from the 2014 Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FFM) Directory of Malaysian Manufacturers. The primary data for the study was collected by using structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaires were posted to the senior managers of the 1, 867 selected SMEs. Of the total of 1, 867 questionnaires mailed, 186 usable questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 9.96 per cent.

Questionnaire

The structured questionnaire used in the study was divided into three sections. The first and second sections of the questionnaire contain 34 items that were used to gather the general information concerning the background of the respondents (12 items) and the characteristics of the SMEs (22 items). The 30 items in the third section were adapted from past research to measure the five management styles (autocratic, participative, nurturant task, paternalistic and laissez-faire) adopted by the SMEs. The respondents were asked to rate the management styles by using a five-point scale that ranged from Least like you (1) to Most like you (5). The questionnaire was tested prior to posting to the respondents. The coefficient alpha scores of the five management styles range from 0.79 to 0.88.

The Results

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 exhibits the profile of the respondents that were involved in this study. Of the 186 respondents, 94 respondents (50.5 per cent) were managers, 60 respondents (32.3 per cent) were owners cum managers, 18 respondents (9.7 per cent) were owners as well as Chief Executive Officers, six (3.2 per cent) were owners and the remaining eight respondents (4.3 per cent) were executives.

In terms of race, the Chinese constituted 77.4 per cent of the respondents, followed by the Malays (15.1 per cent), the Indians (3.8 per cent) and other races such as Eurasian and Japanese (3.8 per cent). Most of the respondents were male and married. The age of the respondents ranged from 26 years old to more than 40 years old.

With regard to their education, 155 (83.3 per cent) of the respondents had a bachelor degree, five (2.7 per cent) had a master's degree, one (5 per cent) had a PhD degree, 18 (9.7 per cent) had a diploma, and seven (3.8 per cent) had only a secondary school certificate. Most of the respondents had been with their companies for more than a year. As for prior work experience, majority of the respondents (87.1 per cent) have less than ten years of experience.

Table 1 The profile of the respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Position		
Owner and CEO (Managing Director)	18	9.7
Owner and a manager	60	32.3
Manager, but not an owner	94	50.5
Owner, but not a manager	6	3.2
Others	8	4.3
Ethnic		
Malay	28	15.1
Chinese	144	77.4
Indian	7	3.8
Other	7	3.8
Gender		
Male	153	82.3
Female	32	17.7
Marital Status		
Married	122	65.6
Remarried	5	2.7
Never married or single	51	27.4
Divorced or separated	5	2.7
Widowed	3	1.6
Level of Education		
School certificate	7	3.8
Diploma	18	9.7
Bachelor's Degree	155	83.3
Master's Degree	5	2.7
PhD Degree	1	0.5
Year of Experience		
1 – 5years	84	45.2
6 – 10 years	78	41.9
11 – 15 years	12	6.5
16 – 20 years	9	4.8
More than 30 years	3	1.6

Characteristics of the Sample Firms

Table 2 displays the characteristics of the sample firms that participated in the study. Out of the total number of 186 companies, 46 were private limited companies, 67 companies were partnerships and the remaining 73 companies were sole proprietors. In terms of employment, 73 companies (39.0 per cent) employed between 10 to 50 employees, 57 companies (30.5 per cent) employed between 51 to 100 employees, 25 companies (13.4 per cent) employed between 151 to 200 employees, 10 companies employed (5.3 per cent) and the remaining 4 companies (2.1 per cent) employed between 251 to 300 employees.

The 186 companies in the study operated in various different industries. Of the total 186 companies, 30 companies (16.1 per cent) were involved in metal products industry, 22 companies (11.8 per cent) operated in the plastic product industries, 19 companies (10.2 per cent) represented the food and beverage industry, 19 companies (10.2 per cent) were involved in motor vehicles industries, 16 companies (8.6 per cent) operated in the chemical industry, 15 companies involved in electrical industries and the remaining 65 companies represented the other industries such as ceramic, concrete, customer products, fertilizer, furniture and fixtures, hardware and machinery, textile, motor vehicles, non-metal products, paper products, printing, pharmaceuticals, wood, vegetable and animal oils and fat products, and rubber products. Most of the companies had been in operations for more than ten years. Of the 186 companies, 88 companies (47.1 per cent) had been in business for more than 20 years.

Table 2 The characteristics of the sample firm

	Frequency	Percentage
Legal Form of Business		
Sole proprietorship	73	39.2
Partnership	67	36.0
Private limited company	46	24.7
Number of Employees		
10 to 50 employees	73	39.0
51 to 100 employees	57	30.5
101 to 150 employees	25	13.4
151 to 200 employees	18	9.6
201 to 250 employees	10	5.3
251 to 300 employees	4	2.1
Industry		
Ceramic	2	1.1
Chemicals	16	8.6
Concrete	1	.5
Customer Product	1	.5
Electrical	15	8.1
Fertilizer	2	1.1
Food and Beverage	19	10.2
Furniture	4	2.2
Machinery	10	5.4
Pharmaceuticals	5	2.7
Metal Product	30	16.1
Motor Vehicles	19	10.2
Non-Metal Products	6	3.2
Paper Products	5	2.7
Plastic Products	22	11.8
Printing	11	5.9
Rubber	7	3.8
Textile	2	1.1
Communication Product	3	1.6
Vegetable and Animal Oil and Fats	4	2.2
Wood	2	1.1
Age of Firms		
3 to 5 years	2	1.1
6 to 10 years	5	2.7
11 to 15 years	41	21.9
16 to 20 years	51	27.3
More than 20 years	88	47.1

Management Styles Adopted by SMEs

As far as the management styles of the SMEs are concerned, the information obtained from the responding firms in general suggest that these firms emphasized on five management styles as documented in the literature. The five management styles include autocratic style, participative, nurturance task, paternalistic and laissez-faire.

The means and standard deviation scores of the 30 items that were used to measure the five types of management styles investigated in the study are summarized in the following Table 3 through Table 7. The results presented in Table 3 through Table 7 indicate that the five management styles adopted by the responding firms.

Autocratic Management Style

As shown in Table 3, the mean scores for the five items used to measure autocratic style of management ranged from 3.62 to 3.81. The highest mean (3.81) in this autocratic management style is the task to force the employees to increase their current performance. The high mean values suggest that the SMEs in the study adopted autocratic management style as presented in the literature.

Table 3 Mean and standard deviation scores of autocratic management style

Dimensions of Autocratic Management Style	Mean	Std. Deviation
Often makes a decision without consulting others	3.6183	.85708
Gives direction about how to do things	3.6237	.81093
Talk to other into doing thing based on manager's preference	3.6935	.74809
Needs to push the employees to work harder	3.7742	.85903
Forces the employees to increase their current performance	3.8118	.78642

Participative Management Style

Following Table 3, Table 4 presents the means and standard deviation scores of the seven items that were used in the study to measure participative management style. According to the figures shown in Table 4, the mean

values of participative management style ranged from 3.68 to 3.87. The highest mean (3.87) in this participative management style is the task to treat all group members as equal.

Table 4 Mean and standard deviation scores of participative management style

Dimensions of Participative Management Style	Mean	Std. Deviation
Treats all group members as equal	3.8710	.82168
Grants full freedom to the employees, so that they can work best	3.6774	.87810
Grants autonomy to the employees, so that they can work best	3.7903	.90888
Provides all information to the employees	3.7849	.85550
Lets the employees jointly find the solution to a problem	3.8118	.82663
Decisions made by the manager are always by a voting system	3.8226	.75389
Allow employees to share their ideas and strategies because they are welcome to do so	3.8441	.87758

Nurturance Task Management Style

The means and standard deviation scores of the six items used to measure nurturance task management style are summarized in Table 5. As shown in Table 5, the figures show that the means scores of employee participation ranged from 3.76 to 3.83. The highest mean (3.83) in this nurturance task management style is the task to give specific directions to the employees when necessary.

Table 5 Mean and standard deviation scores of nurturance task management style

Dimensions of Nurturant Task Management Style	Mean	Std. Deviation
Take special care that work gets top priority	3.7688	.78863
Expects the employees to increase their knowledge related to their job	3.7581	.82565
Always keeps track of the progress of work	3.7796	.80526
Believes that one can really grow up by learning to do a job well	3.8011	.73389
As and when necessary, gives specific directions to the employees	3.8333	.79128
Sees that employees work to their capacity	3.8118	.86498

Paternalistic Management Style

The means and standard deviation scores of the six items used to measure paternalistic management style are displayed in Table 6. The figures in Table 7 indicates that the means scores of paternalistic management style ranged from 3.43 to 3.84. The highest mean (3.83) in this paternalistic management style is the task to generously give advice and support when the employees seek for the opinion.

Table 6 Mean and standard deviation scores of paternalistic management style

Dimensions of Paternalistic Management Style	Mean	Std. Deviation
Generously gives advice and support when the employees seek for the opinion	3.8387	.83557
Consults the employees when making decisions, but for final decision, the manager tends to remain with his/her original idea anyway	3.4355	.96905
Feels responsible in looking after their employees	3.5699	.86865
Often involved in family matters of employees	3.6828	.83273
Often helps employees with non-related matters	3.7688	.82874
The atmosphere in this company is family-like	3.8280	.75156

Laissez-Faire Management Style

Table 7 provides the means and standard deviation scores of the six items that were used in the study to laissez-faire management style. The figures in Table 8 shows that the mean values of laissez-faire management style ranged from 3.71 to 3.87. The highest mean (3.86) in this laissez-faire management style is the task to frequently allow the employees to decide on how to do their tasks.

Table 7 Mean and standard deviation scores of laissez faire management style

Dimensions of Laissez-Faire Management Style	Mean	Std. Deviation
Believes that employees in this organization will come up with the best working methods when given minimal instruction	3.7097	.76520
Often consult with employees	3.8118	.80005
Often let the employees to make their decision, but the manager is responsible for the decision they make	3.8548	.86080
Often let the employee to analyze the situation	3.8226	.80251
Often allow the employees to determine what needs to be done	3.8011	.81087
Often allow the employees to decide on how to do their tasks	3.8656	.84354

Discussion and Conclusion

A research attempt has been made in this study to investigate the styles of management adopted by SMEs in the manufacturing sector in Malaysia. The results of the study shows that in general the 186 SMEs adopted five management styles that have been emphasized in the literature as well as past studies.

More specifically, the empirical evidence obtained from the study indicates that the SMEs involved in this study appeared to adopt five styles of management that include; autocratic, participative, nurturance task, paternalistic and laissez-faire. In addition, of these five management styles, the results seem to suggest that participative management style is most dominant among the SMEs.

As a whole, the results of the study seem to show that in general the SMEs in the study emphasized different styles of management. More importantly, the relatively high mean scores of the management styles suggest that these firms may not necessarily adopt the same style of management. These findings appear to support previous studies that have also suggested the relevance and applicability of management style to SMEs (Alkahtani, Abu-Jarad, Sulaiman, & Nikbin, 2011; Awan & Mahmood, 2010; Jain & Premkumar, 2010; Ogbeide & Harrington, 2011).

As mentioned previously, despite the importance of management styles to organizations, research in this area remains limited, particularly in the local context. This suggests opportunities for researchers interested to further explore the management styles of SMEs. Although the results of this study suggest that SMEs adopt five types of management styles, this conclusion should be regarded as only suggestive since it is based on one study. Therefore, more empirical research is needed and will be particularly useful in providing more empirical evidence to support the findings of this study as well as to identify other management style that is not included in this study which may also be useful to the SMEs.

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