



Journal of International Economics and Management

Journal homepage: <http://jiem.ftu.edu.vn>

The impact of manager training on employee turnover intentions: the serial mediation roles of employee satisfaction and employee's perception of management style

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Received: 14 April 2023; **Revised:** 13 June 2024; **Accepted:** 01 November 2024

<https://doi.org/10.38203/jiem.024.3.0099>

Abstract

The turnover intention of employees has always been one of the most notable issues within any business environment. While several studies in recent decades have investigated the impact of training in general on employee turnover intention, limited attention has been given to management-level training. Therefore, this research aims to examine how management-level training directly impacts employee turnover intentions through the double mediation effects of employee's perception of management style and employee satisfaction. The quantitative method was applied with a sample of 245 employees working at small- and medium-sized enterprises in Vietnam. This paper finds the crossover influence of manager training on employee turnover intention in various enterprises in a large business community, i.e., Keieijuku, where chief executive officers take a training course for Vietnamese small- and medium-sized enterprises' managers. Additionally, employees' perception of management style and employee satisfaction serially mediate the inverse relationship between management training and employee turnover intentions. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of factors influencing employee turnover intentions. Moreover, it offers valuable practical recommendations for small- and medium-sized enterprises in terms of training investment and training assessment.

Keywords: Manager training, Employee turnover intention, Employee's perception of management style, Employee satisfaction, Small- and medium-sized enterprises

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1. Introduction

The employee turnover rate is considered one of the most persistent issues any organization has to handle regarding human resource management. The existing literature widely demonstrates the negative impact of employee turnover on firm performance. These consequences may include decreased sales growth, downgraded service quality, and diminished organization profitability (Kumar, 2011). According to Anphabe, the turnover rate in Vietnam increased continuously from 2017 to 2019, reaching 24%. Although this figure reduced to 11.8% for local enterprises and a lower rate of 8% for multinational corporations, this indicated that Vietnam is still experiencing “the great resignation” in recent years (Talentnet, 2023). Vietnamese small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the main ones impacted by this phenomenon, which makes them spend more time and resources on resolving this issue.

As Wesley and Skip (1999) pointed out, training activities have been linked to positive organizational outcomes such as improving self-esteem, reducing turnover intention, greater job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (cited in Chiang *et al.*, 2005). Newman *et al.* (2011) have found that with the availability of training, there was an increase in employee affective commitment and a decrease in organizational turnover rates. Previous studies on turnover intention have demonstrated a close connection between employee training and turnover. However, a few scholars examined the relationship between manager training and employee intention to leave (Malek *et al.*, 2018). Another research approach by Green *et al.* (1996) believed that the staff turnover rate positively connects to the scale of investment in training because the trained employees with a higher value can leave the organization for better-paid jobs offered by the rival organizations where they can use their acquired skills.

Following research by Choi and Dickson (2010), which qualitatively examined the effect of hotel management training on employee turnover rates, Malek *et al.* (2018) designed empirical quantitative research to check the crossover effect of manager training on the turnover intention of employees. These two studies were conducted on a small scale of several companies in the hotel industry, which creates a gap for further research to find the crossover influence of manager training on employee turnover intention in other fields.

This study aims to investigate the impact of manager training on employee turnover intentions, which has rarely been paid attention to in prior research. We intend to verify the effect of manager training of managers who participated in a business training course named Keiejuku on the turnover intention of their employees. This is the Japanese philosophy training course for managers of Vietnamese SMEs organized by the Vietnam-Japan Human Resource Development Institute (VJCC). The serial mediation effect of perceived management style and employee satisfaction was also included to assess the relationship between manager training, employee turnover intention, perceived management style, and employee satisfaction. This is one of the first studies about the relationship between these variables, conducted on a large business scale rather than one industry, as designed by previous researchers.

The remainder of this paper is organized into five parts. Section 2 reviews the literature to develop theoretical frameworks and hypotheses. Subsequently, section 3 describes the measurement method and research design. Based on the discussion of research results in section 4, managerial implications for Vietnamese SMEs in training strategy are drawn in section 5. Finally, section 6 concludes the study.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Employee turnover intentions and antecedents of employee turnover intentions

Employee turnover is defined as the situation when employees voluntarily leave the organization or profession (Jha, 2009). Research on turnover behaviors proposed that employees would finish their employee-organization relationship only when they have the desirability and a perceived possibility to leave (March and Simon, 1958, cited in Jha, 2009). Turnover intentions, which indicate the perceived desirability of termination of employee-employer relation, may be understood as the individual's intention to quit the organization or profession voluntarily. According to Mobley (1982), before conducting the turnover behavior, employees experienced the process of thinking of quitting, intentions to search, and intention to leave. Thus, management needs to be aware of turnover intention to prevent the consequences of turnover behavior.

Research on the antecedents of employee turnover intentions highlighted the importance of the following variables: perceived organizational support (POS), perceived supervisor support, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational climate and justice, and training (Alkahtani, 2015). Among that, the role of managers in influencing employee relationships with their managers, management style and priorities, management quality, and the concern of managers for their employees, which have an impact on these above factors, is proved to be crucial (Malek *et al.*, 2018).

Perceived organizational support (POS) was defined by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) as the extent to which employees feel that their organization values their contributions and always cares about their well-being and was demonstrated to have a positive relationship with employee's intention to stay with an organization in a recent meta-analysis (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017). When an organization supports an employee, employees have a goodwill feeling towards the organization. This will strengthen the employee-employer relationship, and employees will think they must pay back the organization through reciprocity actions (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990; Alkahtani, 2015). As a result, POS is negatively linked to employee turnover intentions. Besides POS, perceived supervisor support (PSS) received increasing attention in academics and has been pointed out to be significantly related to the turnover intention of employees (Maertz *et al.*, 2007). POS is discovered to be a full mediator in the relationship between PSS and employee turnover intentions (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Rhoades *et al.*, 2001). Thus, organizations should strengthen the link between employer and employee to reduce voluntary turnover intentions.

Organizational commitment was defined by Mowday *et al.* (1979) as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in an organization. Employees who have high levels of organizational commitment will devote considerable effort to and exert a strong desire to build organizational membership. Uncommitted employees are likely to leave the organization and do not think they need to go beyond normal job requirements. Several studies have reported a strong correlation between organizational commitment and turnover intention, as employees with high levels of commitment are less likely to leave the organization (Alkahtani, 2015; Falkenburg and Schyns, 2007; Harris and Cameron, 2005; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Another important precursor factor of turnover intention is job satisfaction, which academics have demonstrated to have a strong negative relationship with voluntary intention to leave (Kim *et al.*, 2009; Davis, 2006; Currall *et al.*, 2005). Dissatisfied employees will sooner or later quit their jobs, negatively impacting the organization's daily operations (Alkahtani, 2015).

POS, PSS, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction are demonstrated in the research area to be the predictors of employee turnover intentions, and all of these constructs underscore the important role of managers. Supervisors have been found to influence an employee's POS and PSS significantly (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017). POS can be increased by various activities such as participation in decision-making, opportunities for growth, flexible scheduling, and human resource practices (Allen *et al.*, 2003), which a manager can influence directly or indirectly (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Alexandrov *et al.* (2007) highlighted the importance of some management-influence factors to organizational commitment. Some factors such as behavior, employee concern and caring, management style, and supporting a work/family balance, which are directly linked to the manager's attitude and practices, have all been proven to be important influencers of job satisfaction (Malek *et al.*, 2018).

2.2 Employee perception of management style

According to Chang *et al.* (2009), employee behaviors are demonstrated to be influenced by two main factors: human resource management practices and their perceptions of these practices. The influence of the manager plays a crucial part in shaping an employee's perceptions of the organization and its leaders. Employee perceptions of management style are personal views that an individual has based on their experiences of a particular situation related to the leadership style of their managers (Tornow and Wiley, 1991). Whereas this specific fact does not have a clear and widely accepted definition, the concept of employee perception by Robbins *et al.* (2012), which defined this as individuals forming an understanding of their surroundings and interactions with their managers, can be applied in this situation. Many other researchers recognized the important role of employee perceptions in positively influencing organizational people's attitudes and behavior (Macey and Schneider, 2008) and transforming human resource activities into expected outcomes (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

2.3 Manager training impact on employee turnover intentions

Training is considered one of the most privileged solutions for managers to handle potential challenges, as this practice helps them to gain the proper skills and knowledge (Malek *et al.*, 2018). In measuring the effectiveness of management training courses, researchers designed important criteria, some of which are management quality outcomes (Ekaterini and Constantinou-Vasilios, 2009; Hoang *et al.*, 2022). These outcomes include improvement in leadership skills, communication, and employee-supportive behaviors, which can result in a new working environment and employee-employer relationship. According to Malek *et al.* (2018) and Choi and Dickson (2010), there is a relationship between overall training for managers and lower turnover intentions. Therefore, the first research hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: Manager training has a significant negative influence on employee turnover intentions.

The important reason explaining employee turnover intention, as Woods (2002) pointed out, was the employees' view of the quality of supervision. When employees perceive the management style of their managers as caring and supporting their well-being and effective leadership skills, they will experience high levels of job fulfillment and increase their dedication to the organization (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Thus, well-training for managers positively impacts employee perception of management style. Malek *et al.* (2018) indicated that management training would shape management style and reduce employee turnover rate. Therefore, the second hypothesis is stated as follows:

H2: Employee perception of management style mediates the negative relationship between manager training and employee turnover intentions.

Training for managers exerts a significant influence on increasing the quality of management, which shapes positive employee perception of management style. Well-trained managers could also care for employees' demands and create favorable working conditions, making them feel satisfied with the organization. Koster *et al.* (2011) and Cheng and Waldenberger (2013) also implied job satisfaction as a mediator of the relationship between training and employee turnover intention. Training for managers, similar to training for employees, can satisfy employees. Based on the social exchange relationship theory, they will consider that the benefit outweighs the cost and do not want to terminate the relationship, which is the turnover intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Employee satisfaction mediates the negative relationship between manager training and employee turnover intentions.

Furthermore, previous literature also mentioned employee satisfaction as one of the positive impacts on employees if they perceive the management style of the leaders qualify, resulting in some organizational performance such as employee intention to leave. As Mount *et al.* (2006) and Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) reported, attitudinal factors, including job satisfaction, significantly mediated the impact of psychological climate or work environments on turnover rates. Nakata and Saylor (1994) pointed out that employee perceptions of management style

are positively linked to job satisfaction, and a high level of employee satisfaction might lower turnover intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Employee perception of management style and employee satisfaction serially mediate the influence of manager training on employee turnover intentions.

3. Research methods

3.1 Measurement

This study used two surveys: one for managers to examine manager training results and one for employees to discover their perception of management style, job satisfaction, and turnover intention after the training period. The manager training variable is extracted from the manager surveys with four questions cited from the previous research of Malek *et al.* (2018) and two questions developed by the author. The employee survey has six questions to measure employee perceived management style, four for employee turnover intention (Malek *et al.*, 2018), and four for employee satisfaction (Camara *et al.*, 2015; Antoncic and Antoncic, 2011). All questions were assessed using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 - strongly agree to 5 - strongly disagree).

3.2 Research design

This study analyzed reports from survey responses of line-level employees and their managers who participated in the Keiejuku training program. This program was organized by VJCC, an Institution of Foreign Trade University, in 2009 to develop a group of entrepreneurs to master Vietnamese industries. It gives trainees a global mindset, modern business tools, and Japanese business philosophy. The Keiejuku community – a group of Keiejuku participants – now comprises approximately 800 members from many industries. Although Keiejuku is a training course for top and middle managers, the small and medium size of their enterprises allows them to have close relationships with employees, immediately influencing employees' attitudes and perceptions when they apply training skills and knowledge.

Two self-report surveys were distributed to both employees and managers in the sample companies. We conducted random sampling to facilitate the data collection process. The questionnaires were sent directly to 50 participants who are members of the Keiejuku program to get data about manager training. We also conducted direct interviews and online surveys using Google Forms to gather information from the employees of these managers. The data were collected from October 2022 to December 2022. These two data sources were then matched between the managers' and employees' responses. The sample size was calculated based on the number of employees.

The sample size was decided based on the recommendation of Hair *et al.* (2006). For exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the sample size must be at least five times greater than the number of scale indicators. In the survey questionnaire, 20 observed variables were used for factor analysis, so a minimum sample size of 100 must be applied. After collecting,

reviewing, and filtering unqualified responses, the remaining number of responses included in the analysis was 245, which fully met the above requirements.

Table 1. Demographic information of the research sample

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	135	55.1
	Female	110	44.9
Education level	Postgraduate	18	7.3
	University/College	131	53.5
	High school	96	39.2
Job title	Low-level manager	37	15.1
	Employee	208	84.9
Company location	Hanoi	127	51.8
	Ho Chi Minh City	68	27.8
	Others	50	20.4

Source: Author's research sample

The percentage of male employees was 55.1%, followed by 44.9% of female respondents. Among 245 participants, the proportion of postgraduates (7.3%) was much lower than that of respondents who completed college or hold a bachelor's degree (53.5%). Over one-third (39.2%) of the respondents had high school level since they were factory workers. The target respondents were categorized into two job positions: employee and low-level manager. The number of respondents working as low-level managers was 37, constituting 15.1% of the population, whereas 208 respondents (84.9%) were normal employees taking part in the survey. As a significant number of participants in this course were from Hanoi, the percentage of those from Ho Chi Minh City and other provinces was relatively small, accounting for 27.8% and 20.4%, respectively.

3.3 Data analysis

Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used to analyze the data. Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.7 and above were applied to ensure scale reliability. EFA was conducted to extract factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and extraction loadings of at least 0.5 (Costello and Osborne, 2005). CFA was used to examine the construct validity of the variables.

4. Results and discussions

The results show that Cronbach's Alpha of the factors ranged from 0.919 to 0.960, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency of these measures. Because the survey items were developed from previous research with some revisions, CFA was used to assess the survey items and determine in which way the items were loaded into factors. Items with a factor loading of 0.5 and above were loaded on that factor. Since the questions were built on knowing about

the management behaviors with employees, this factor was named “employee perception of management style”. The factor analysis on these items is based on Bartlett’s test of sphericity, and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy is indicated to be appropriate (KMO is 0.907; p-value is less than 0.001). All components together explained 73.166% of the variance. The factor loading of all items ranged from 0.619 to 0.951.

Table 2. Cronbach’s Alpha results

Code	Items measurement	Factor loading				Cronbach’s Alpha
		1	2	3	4	
<i>Manager training (MT)</i>						
MT1	Amount of the training course.			0.954		0.920
MT2	Perceived quality of the training course.			0.921		
MT3	The training course provided me with the information necessary to do the job.			0.711		
MT4	The training course prepared me to complete my job responsibilities.			0.814		
MT5	The training course provided me with useful leadership skills.			0.831		
MT6	The training course provided me with practical knowledge for managing my company.			0.810		
<i>Employee’s perception of management style (EPMS)</i>						
EPMS1	My manager stays informed about how I feel and think about my job.	0.822				0.932
EPMS2	My manager has informed me sufficiently and on time.	0.658				
EPMS3	My manager can handle the administrative tasks smoothly.	0.619				
EPMS4	I can speak up when I disagree with a decision.	0.817				
EPMS5	My manager maintains high standards of productivity and performance.	0.874				
EPMS6	I am encouraged to partake in the decision-making process of my company.	0.783				
<i>Employee satisfaction (ES)</i>						
ES1	Generally, I am very satisfied with my job.		0.913			0.919
ES2	I am proud to tell others that I am part of my company.		0.782			
ES3	I feel very happy and content with my job since my manager enthusiastically supports me.		0.782			
ES4	I feel excited every morning before going to work.		0.918			
<i>Employee turnover intention (ETI)</i>						

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha results (*continued*)

Code	Items measurement	Factor loading				Cronbach's Alpha
		1	2	3	4	
ETI1	I have sought an alternative job.				0.818	0.960
ETI2	I intend to quit this job within the following year.				0.951	
ETI3	I will not need to take much time to leave this company.				0.950	
ETI4	I may look for a new job soon.				0.889	

Source: Author's calculation

The research results show that the data fit the measurement model since the model has a Chi-square/df ratio of 2.421 (less than 5, which is acceptable), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) of 0.960, comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.966, relative fit index (RFI) of 0.933, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.075. Table 2 presents the variables with good Cronbach's Alpha and KMO (Cronbach's Alpha is above 0.9; KMO is greater than 0.5). Table 3 shows that this measurement has good composite reliability (CR is less than 0.7) and acceptable discriminant validity (average variance extracted is above 0.7) for all latent variables.

Table 3. Reliability, validity, and latent correlations among variables

	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. MT	3.970	0.79	0.920	0.659	1			
2. EPMS	4.110	0.70	0.945	0.744	0.738**	1		
3. ES	3.980	0.74	0.924	0.755	0.737**	0.938**	1	
4. ETI	2.018	0.81	0.963	0.867	-0.705**	-0.863**	-0.887**	0.931

Source: Author's calculation

Table 4 reveals the results of the mediation effect analyses for hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 (Hayes, 2013). The inner structural model was performed using 5,000 bootstrapping samples and bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap at 95 percent confidence intervals. The direct effect (95% confidence interval [-0.124, -0.025]) was insignificant, while the indirect effect (95% confidence interval [-0.814, -0.454]) was significant. The direct effect of management training on employee turnover intention was initially significant before considering potential indirect or mediating effects; however, consistent with full mediation, the direct effect of training on turnover intention was no longer significant after accounting for the presence of two mediators. Accordingly, H4 was supported, which predicted that EPMS and ES totally double-mediated the influential relationship between MT and ETI. EPMS partially mediated the negative relationship between MT and ETI as the indirect effect (95% confidence interval [-0.510, -0.223]) was significant; therefore, H2 was supported. Meanwhile, ES did not

impact this relationship as the indirect effect (95% confidence interval [-0.071, 0.028]) was insignificant; therefore, H3 was rejected.

Table 4. Mediation analysis summary

Effect	Unstd. coefficient	P-value	SE	BC 95% CI		Conclusion
				LLCI	ULCI	
<i>Indirect effect</i>						
MT→ EPMS→ ETI	-0.365		0.073	-0.510	-0.223	H2: Supported
MT→ ES→ ETI	-0.013		0.025	-0.071	0.028	H3: Rejected
MT→ EPMS→ ES→ ETI	-0.273		0.053	-0.352	-0.166	H4: Supported
<i>Direct effect</i>						
MT→ ETI	-0.054	0.182	0.040	-0.124	-0.025	
<i>Total effect</i>						
MT→ ETI	-0.705	0.000	0.048	-0.800	-0.611	H1: Supported
<i>R-squared</i>						
EPMS		53.01%				
ES		83.49%				
ETI		82.14%				

Source: Author's calculation

Manager training is shown to have a negative impact on employee turnover intentions with a standardized β coefficient of -0.705, p-value less than 0.000, adjusted R-squared of 82.14% (H1 is supported). This result is consistent with prior research conducted by Malek *et al.* (2018), which confirms the relationship between higher manager training and decreased turnover intentions (β value of -0.60). However, the direct connection between manager training and turnover intentions is not significantly linked (p-value of 0.182), even if the total effect is still statistically demonstrated. That means more manager training did not directly decrease employees' intention to leave. Still, this training must influence other mediators, i.e., employees' perception of management style and employee satisfaction, to reduce turnover intentions. This full mediation of employees' perception of management style and employee satisfaction, which is tested in H4, shows a difference between this research and some previous literature (Malek *et al.*, 2018; Choi and Dickson, 2010) since they all confirmed the direct impact of manager training on employee's intention to leave. This difference is because previous studies were conducted for manager training courses focusing on a specific industry, so the knowledge learned is industry-specific and easy to apply after graduation. The Keiejuku senior manager training program is designed for managers from many industries, providing general, oriented knowledge; therefore, it might not bring business outcomes immediately. The effectiveness perceived by managers, which is measured in the questionnaire, is just the first two levels of manager training evaluation criteria proposed by Hoang *et al.* (2022),

which include reaction after the course, knowledge, social and job behaviors, and results for organizations and society.

There is a significant positive interrelation between manager training and employees' perceptions of their manager. The multiple regression results show that manager training only impacts employees' perception of management style (β value of 0.67, p-value of 0.000). Manager training accounts for 53.01% of the variance in an employee's perception of management style. The accepted H2, which demonstrates the mediator role of employees' perception of management style in the relationship between management training and turnover intention, consists of the research of Malek *et al.* (2018) and can be explained by the training evaluation level proposed by Hoang *et al.* (2022).

However, the regression result indicates no direct relationship between manager training and employee satisfaction since the p-value is 0.407 and greater than 0.01, which makes H3 rejected. Previous studies have confirmed the mediator role of employee satisfaction, but it mediates the relationship between employee training and turnover intention. In this case, employees are experienced in training support, resulting in positive feelings. When manager training is more invested, employee satisfaction will increase, but through the mediation effect of employee perception of management style. In other words, an employee's perception of management style totally mediates the relationship between manager training and employee satisfaction. The result of the serial mediator model also shows the significantly negative impact of employee perception of management style and employee satisfaction on employee turnover intention. As the employee's perception of his manager and satisfaction increases, subsequent turnover intentions decrease.

5. Managerial implications

There are some relevant implications for the management team when investing and conducting training activities for managers. The study conducted with various Keiejuku participants indicates that employee turnover will decrease if the company invests more in management training. However, it does not mean that the more training a manager has, the lower the employee turnover intentions. The manager training activities impact employees' intention to leave when there are positive changes in management style that employees perceive. These changes can include effective communication with employees, improving administrative task skills, and effective employee empowerment. This study suggests that when management training is transferred into practical implementation by participants, employees tend to view their supervisors more positively, experience greater job satisfaction, and have less of a desire to leave the company. These findings support the research in a previous study conducted by Malek *et al.* (2018), Mathieu *et al.* (2016), and Kang *et al.* (2015) about the importance of manager training, supervisor behavior, manager skills, and their impact on job satisfaction and turnover intentions of employees.

This study also indicates that the Keiejuku training course is effective for managers in Vietnamese SMEs since it helps improve managers' management skills. These skills

are crucial in changing employee perceptions of management style, increasing employee satisfaction, and reducing turnover intention in these organizations. This study also suggests using turnover intention as an indicator to measure the effectiveness of manager training courses.

6. Conclusions

This paper investigates the effect of manager training on employees' perception of management and employee satisfaction and how this impacts employees' intentions to leave. There exists a gap in the existing literature concerning the analysis of serial mediation in the context of management training and its effects on employee turnover intention. Consequently, the analysis contributes to understanding how managerial training influences employees' intentions to leave their jobs. The research results show the serial mediator roles of employees' perception of management and employee satisfaction in the negative relationship between the overall training the manager received and the turnover intention of employees. The findings suggest that after attending this course, the managers were seen as more knowledgeable and management skillful as the outcomes of the manager's training. When effective manager training improves an employee's perception of the management style, it could result in positive employee work experience and employee satisfaction. In turn, these two variables continue to reduce the intention of employees to leave the organization.

This research fills the gap created by previous research to find the crossover influence of manager training and employee turnover intention in various enterprises since the research scale was in a large business community rather than one industry. The result contributes theoretically by explaining the mechanism of the impact of manager training on the intention to leave an employee. Future research can explore additional serial double mediation effects that influence the interconnection between manager training and employee turnover intention.

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