Research Article

How to Adjust to Organizational Culture in Virtual Structures: The Example of Turkish Organizations

Marcin FLIEGER[1], Michał FLIEGER[2] and Ilhan TARIMER[3]

[1]Department of Management, General Tadeusz Kościuszko Military University of Land Forces, Poland

[2]Department of Law and Administration, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

[3]Department of Technology, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey

Correspondence should be addressed to: Marcin Flieger; marcin.flieger@awl.edu.pl

Abstract

The main scientific purpose of the article is to present a pattern for creating mechanisms that allow members of virtual structures to adjust to the organizational-culture-conditioned ways other partners operate. Conceptual development and positioning of the research aim at providing a generalizable contribution to management science, at the same time being accessible to practitioners. The authors focused on depicting a concise theoretical construct which allowed the integration of a consistency concept and organizational culture in network collaboration. This new approach led to the conceptualization of a pattern of working out consistency mechanisms which serve as a template for practical use by managers who exploit network relations and virtual structures. The practical aspect of the study was presented within multiple case studies, on the example of Turkish organizations.

Keywords: organizational culture, virtual structures, collaboration mechanisms, consistency concept

Introduction

In the last two decades, organizational environment has undergone substantial transformation and the key role is played by multi-directional co-dependence of business partners (Mayne et al., 2003; Sakai and Kang, 2000). It results in taking a network collaboration approach (Kickert et al., 1997). The theory of network abandoned an atomic approach to explain reality in favour of a holistic perspective.

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Thus, a network may be perceived as a collection of long-term, formal and informal, direct or indirect relations between two or more units (Håkansson and Snehota, 1989; Newman et al., 2004; Camagni, 1995; Kilduff and Tsai, 2003; Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007).

The network itself becomes a fundament for the development of virtual organizations. Nowadays, cross-border virtual teams are perceived as a valuable source for knowledge creation (Toivanen, 2017). However, the integrator of a virtual organization faces the problem of harmonizing collaboration between partners (Flieger, 2017). Undisputedly, one of the crucial factors influencing effective relations between firms which often operate in different parts of the world is an organizational culture (Wu and Ma, 2018; Peretz et al., 2017). The integrator needs to be aware of cultural differences and similarities, and must know how to adjust to them in order to ensure long-term, effective network collaboration (Stocker et al., 2017). Essential becomes the ability to create such a process of cooperation and communication that will be understood by all concerned (Vetrakova and Smerek, 2016). Such knowledge is needed also for workers at lower levels of an organizational hierarchy, since they are the ones who have a direct contact with other knot groups (e.g.; suppliers or internal clients).

According to the consistency concept, an organization needs to harmonize three basic levels of management – strategic, tactic and operational. They create a natural hierarchy in which lower levels are conditioned by higher ones. Understanding of these relations and conditions becomes especially important in case of inter-organizational networks. Such virtual structures consist of organizations operating in different parts of the globe, which results in different approaches to the implementation of mechanisms that are aimed to ensure optimal efficiency. In this context, one of the basic issues are cultural differences.

The analysis presented in the paper provides both theoretical and practical contribution. The authors concentrated on depicting a concise theoretical construct which allowed the integration of a consistency concept and organizational culture in network collaboration. It is a new perspective which led to the conceptualization of a pattern of working out consistency mechanisms. This theoretical background serves as a template for practical use by managers. It shows what mechanisms and in what way should be implemented in order to allow members of virtual structures to adjust to the organizational-culture-conditioned ways other partners operate.

Thus, the authors made an attempt to answer the research question: what is the pattern of adjusting to organizational culture in virtual structures in order to ensure consistent collaboration? Identifying this pattern and consistency mechanisms constitutes the main objective of the paper. Understanding of this phenomenon serves as an extremely important contribution to the knowledge concerning proper development of relations between partners in virtual structures and, consequently, an increase in efficiency of the process of creating common value.

Consistency Concept

The theoretical contribution of the study refers to conceptualizing a construct which allows the integration of a consistency concept and organizational culture in network collaboration. Consistency concept has its roots in the theory of systems (Churchman, 1971; Bertalanffy, 1969). It has a crucial importance when it comes to organizational harmonization and optimization, which is the essence of consistency. Optimizing an organization by implementing changes requires treating it as one system and looking in different directions, which means detecting possible effects of the changes in various areas and dimensions of an organization. Possible effects may appear also in the areas which are very distant from one another (Haken, 1983; Miller and Page, 2007).

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In order to make the concept useful for managers, we need to identify key areas that may undergo changes and explain interactions between them. In this way, it will be possible to identify how some changes implemented in one area influence other areas. Further, that leads to the identification of the process of harmonizing, adjusting and consistency building among different organizational areas. As a consequence, it becomes possible to implement the consistency concept in practice and increase organizational effectiveness.

Consistency Platforms

Theory of systems allows looking at an organization from the perspective of systems, subsystems and metasystems. Thus, systems consist of subsystems, but at the same time systems are the parts of metasystems (Parsons, 1951; Luhmann, 2013). This idea lays at the heart of the consistency concept. It refers to three consistency platforms. Each of them ought to create a consistent system and when this requirement is met, all the elements of each platform are harmonized and consistent (Table 1).

Table 1: General approach for organizations' consistency analysis

Consistency perspective 1	Consistency platform 1	Subsystem 1
		Subsystem n
	Consistency platform n	Subsystem 1
		Subsystem n
Consistency perspective 2	Consistency platform 1	Subsystem 1
		Subsystem n
	Consistency platform n	Subsystem 1
		Subsystem n

Source: own study

The first platform refers to the concepts and methods of management. In both theory and practice of management these two elements logically complement each other. The implementation of one concept triggers off the need to introduce other concepts, so that the first one is complementarily supported. Furthermore, the implementation of management concepts creates the need to implement management methods which stem from the concepts in question. Accordingly, platform two consists of two key elements – organizational structure and appropriate style and mechanisms of management – and the third platform refers to human resource management.

Research Approach and Methods

Taking into consideration the objective of the paper and the character of analysed phenomena, the authors adopted a methodology of an inter-subjective paradigm, within which they used an idiographic approach which allowed analysing a concrete phenomenon in its context. The research was carried out using the method of a multiple case study (Yin, 2014), following its methodological rigor (Eisenhardt, 1991). The choice of the method is a result of set research objectives and the stage of knowledge development in the investigated research area. Operating of virtual structures still is a relatively new phenomenon. It develops in a very dynamic way and is conditioned by numerous variables. There is a need for a thorough examination which would allow formulating propositions of patterns and development of the phenomenon in question. Therefore, the presented research is interpretative (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) and it leads to in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in some particular context.

During the research, the authors worked out a pattern for creating consistency mechanisms. Firstly, they identified the

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organizational culture of Turkish organizations: the levels of language, behavior and infrastructure artefacts, norms, values and cultural traits were examined and their characteristics identified. Such an approach to the research allowed providing results which can become a significant help for organizations which plan to cooperate with foreign partners to adjust to the organizational culture. To make this adjustment effective, the authors worked out the examples of consistency mechanisms, which are presented further in the paper. The mechanisms are based on the organizational culture characteristics collected during the research.

Scrutiny within multiple case studies was carried out in two stages: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. Following the replication logic, case studies constituted a series of independent research which provided data corresponding with the research questions. The outcome of each individual case study was a base for cross-case comparisons with results of other cases. It allowed theoretical generalizations concerning the pattern of identifying collaboration mechanisms.

The paper presents results of 22 case studies. The key criterion of choice was the variety of cases (Flyvbjerg, 2012) – the organizations were chosen in the way which made the research group differential. It included different public organizations, but also private firms from a production and service sector. The companies belonged to different trades and they were of a different size. Such a variety of the research group allowed giving a very realistic perspective on the characteristics of Turkish organizational culture. The access to crucial data constituted additional criterion. It referred to the possibility of carrying out in-depth interviews with managers and regular workers. Moreover, it ought to be emphasized that it was a very deliberate decision to use a territorial limitation (in this case to the city and province of Muğla). It allowed very precise identification of organizational culture which developed in a particular region. Such an approach corresponds with the

needs of organizations which develop collaboration with foreign partners – very often they expect to identify cultural conditions not so much of some country, but rather of a specific region (or regions) in which they operate. It constitutes another strong reason for using a case study method rather than quantitative ones.

Eight of the research cases were public organizations and fourteen represented a private sector. Public institutions consisted of university units and health institutions in the city of Muğla. As for the private sector, they were small and medium size entrepreneurships operating in the city of Muğla. Eight of the companies were from a service sector and the rest of them were production companies. The in-depth interview was conducted among the total of 78 workers from different levels of organizations' structures, but most of them were lower-level (production) workers. 26 respondents were managers of different levels.

At this point, it is crucial to emphasize that the authors did not aim at statistical generalization, but rather understanding, depicting and synthesizing. They made an attempt to understand the reasons and ways of creating strategy and organizational (virtual) structure (Remenyi et al., 2005). They focused not only on repetitive, but also contextual relations between elements of the environment. Such an approach allowed capturing experiences of the research group and their interpretation, and complex understanding of the analysed phenomena.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in November and December 2019, supported by a questionnaire which included mostly open questions. The data were coded according to adopted conceptual frames (*a priori* codes) (Miles and Huberman, 2000). Collected answers were grouped, so that it was possible to establish how often a given characteristic was mentioned by the respondents. Then, the crucial artefacts in each group were identified using statistical calculation. For each group, the authors calculated the third quartile (Q3). The

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artefacts which were included in the third quartile constituted the base for working out the consistency mechanisms.

Results and Discussion

Elements of Organizational Culture
The first stage of the research aimed at identifying all elements of organizational culture of Turkish organizations. Each kind of artefacts (language, behavioral, material, norms, values, standards and cultural traits) was analyzed separately and presented in tables 2-6. Each table shows

assessment made by members of both public and private organizations.

As presented in table 2, views regarding crucial language artefacts appeared to be very similar. Both groups of respondents stressed the importance of verbal communication and face to face contacts. Moreover, there is a clear expectation and openness to exploit new communication technologies. Both kinds of organizations prefer using Turkish language, but public organizations also exploit English. In private organizations, it is common to use technical language.

Table 2: Language artefacts

Artefacts	Members of public organizations	Members of private organizations
Verbal communication	**32**	**39**
E-mail, Whatsapp and other communicators used	25	18
Traditional phones communication	25	22
Written communication (letters)	17	8
Face to face contacts	**26**	**24**
Body language	9	12
Support and assistance while communicating	9	6
Openness to use/learn new technologies in communication process	**39**	**26**
Confidentiality of communication	13	20
Official way of communicating	20	3
Semi-official and friendly communication	15	18
Meeting presentations	5	2
Bureaucracy in communication process	18	2
Preferring using Turkish language	**31**	**24**
English use	**33**	5
Turkish dialects/slang use	13	14
Office-based, specific language	2	16
Technical language	17	**34**

Source: own study

As for other artefacts, the answers differ substantially. In case of behavioural artefacts, in public organizations dominate official behaviour, bureaucracy and objectives-oriented attitude, whereas

private organizations stressed rather less official behaviour, team work and task responsibility (table 3). Regarding material artefacts (table 4), representatives of public institutions emphasized the

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importance of rather official dressing and proper interior design. The latter feature was also highlighted by private firms, but it was accompanied by efficient use of technological devices and exploitation of internal communication systems.

Table 3: Behavioural artefacts

Artefacts	Members of public organizations	Members of private organizations
Official behaviour	**28**	17
Semi-official behaviour	10	**39**
Respectful, professional behaviour	17	13
Official manager-employee relations	18	9
Non-official attitude to colleagues	15	**25**
Tolerance to different behaviours	9	8
Strict rules in behaviours	15	18
Helpful behaviours	18	14
Behaviours regulated in organizations	21	13
Bureaucratic	**26**	8
Disciplined	13	18
Positive attitude	**22**	8
Humble and honest attitude	12	6
Behaviours based on task responsibility	16	**25**
Objectives orientation	**27**	19
Team work importance	16	**25**

Source: own study

Table 4: Material artefacts

Artefacts	Members of public organizations	Members of private organizations
Internal communication systems	12	**26**
Grouped and easily reached technical equipment	12	20
Efficient use of technological devices	14	**32**
Semi-official dressing	**22**	24
Official dressing	**38**	2
Dress code implemented	16	22
Work comfort dominates dressing style	17	19
Importance/originality of institutional interior design	**18**	**28**
Care of infrastructure	14	22

Source: own study

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Concerning dominating norms, standards and values, in both kinds of scrutinized organizations, serious attitude to work and expectation of continuity of relations were picked (table 5). However, in public units also honour and sense of stability is important, whereas private firms underlined some aspects of time management. Finally, in case of cultural traits, public organizations emphasized hard work, respect, tolerance, information sharing and loyalty to work-place. The latter one was also highlighted by private companies, but it was accompanied by IT orientation, expectation of job satisfaction and financial benefits (table 6).

Table 5: Norms, standards and values

Artefacts	Members of public organizations	Members of private organizations
Pragmatism	9	12
Time/deadlines respected	13	**26**
In daily routines 'just in time' attitude	12	**25**
Serious attitude to work	**19**	**23**
Importance of ethics	18	20
Team-spirit	16	21
Respect to mission and vision of institution	14	11
Work highly valued by employees	15	18
Love and sincerity	17	10
Hospitality	17	14
Honour	**25**	16
Stability	**19**	14
Continuity of contacts and relations	**26**	**23**

Source: own study

Table 6: Cultural traits

Artefacts	Members of public organizations	Members of private organizations
Hardworking	**26**	19
Efficiency at work	22	18
Information sharing	**24**	14
IT orientation	13	**23**
Collaboration/ team work	19	14
Job satisfaction	9	**22**
The will to get rich	3	**37**
Loyalty to work-place	**24**	**22**
Loyalty to other employees	11	18
Collaboration in harmony and order	16	13
Respectful and tolerant attitude	**26**	7
Helpful to other workers/partners	16	19
Openness for collaboration with foreigners	15	18

Source: own study

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Collaboration Mechanisms for Consistency

Having established the characteristics of organizational culture for Turkish public and private entities, it was possible to work out the mechanisms for consistent cooperation. Below, we present the main characteristics divided according to the organizational culture levels. The analysis was done separately for public and private organizations. Each characteristic corresponds with dedicated mechanisms. What is crucial, the mechanisms created by the authors are just examples - they are supposed to help and encourage managers create their own collaboration mechanisms according to the situation they are in.

Language Consistency

As we can notice in table 7, Turkish public and private organizations are quite similar as for language artefacts and so they require implementing similar consistency mechanisms. It is important to put an emphasis on personal contacts and direct, verbal communication. İt is crucial when starting collaboration with Turkish organizations, but also when the relations develop. Face to face communication is important, so it is necessary to pay regular visits to Turkish partners. İf it is not possible (for instance because of a geographical distance), the Internet tools should be used, so that Turkish partners could see the face of the person they speak to. This way personal, friendly relations develop and the trust between partners is built. Moreover, when employees speak English, they perceive it as an opportunity to practice and develop language skills. Therefore, this aspect of cooperation also should be taken into consideration.

Table 7: Language artefacts characteristic for Turkish public and private organizations and dedicated cooperation mechanisms

Language artefact for public organizations	Cooperation mechanisms
Verbal communication	Using phones and other IT communicators allowing direct contacts with Turkish partners; direct negotiating of crucial cooperation terms; verbal confirmation of cooperation terms before formal documents are prepared
Face to face contacts	Personal visits in Turkish companies when starting cooperation and then in ongoing contacts; using modern Internet tools allowing face to face conversations; using face to face contacts to strengthen verbal communication; working out friendly relationships based on personal contacts
Openness to use/learn new technologies in communication process	Introducing new Internet tools for mutual communication; personal training for Turkish employees concerning the use of new communication tools
Preferring using Turkish language	Verbal communication with native translators; written communication in Turkish language;
English use	If possible, using English in verbal and written communication (when Turkish employees speak English)
Language artefacts for private organizations	**Cooperation mechanisms**
All the above – see public sector section	As in public sector section
Technical language	When the trade requires using Turkish and English technical vocabulary

Source: Own study

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Behaviour Consistency

As shown in table 8, regarding behavioural artefacts the mechanisms of cooperation with Turkish public and private organizations are different. Public organizations are more formal; there is a need to follow strict rules and codes, and there is a very little space for informal relations. In a private sector, the situation is less formal; it is possible to organize informal meetings outside the company and it is important to pay attention to the integration of cooperating partners. İn this case, friendly atmosphere helps reaching business objectives.

Table 8: Behaviour artefacts characteristic for Turkish public and private organizations and dedicated cooperation mechanisms

Behaviour artefact for public organizations	Cooperation mechanisms
Official behaviour	Organizational code necessary to be followed; formal meetings with managers and workers; formal body language
Bureaucratic	Recognizing formal requirements and rules; following formal procedures; making sure all formal requirements are met; preparing to take time when cooperating
Positive attitude	Following rules and meeting formal requirements with enthusiasm and patience; being nice and helpful to Turkish workers when following procedures
Objectives orientation	Concentrating on meeting requirements and following rules and regulations when cooperating
Behaviour artefacts for private organizations	**Cooperation mechanisms**
Semi-official behaviour	Private meetings outside company; company integration meetings; codes less important to follow
Non-official attitude to colleagues	Making friends with Turkish partners allowing informal contacts; creating informal atmosphere in mutual relations; close relations with cooperating workers from different countries
Behaviours based on task responsibility	Focusing on objectives to be met; discussing business matters first; paying attention to organizational profits; possible to rely on Turkish partners when reaching objectives
Team work importance	Creating teams when cooperating; integrating cooperating workers and companies; various forms of formal and informal integration

Source: Own study

Infrastructure Consistency

The research results from table 9 show that there are some substantial differences when we take into consideration material artefacts' importance for public and private organizations. In a public sector, it is important to be dressed rather formally, according to a dress code. However, in a private sector, material artefacts are mostly connected with the IT systems and devices the companies implement and use on daily basis. Thus, foreign partners need to adjust to the systems, so that the communication process is effective. İn both cases (public and private), the design of office space is important and often reflects Turkish culture. Thus, other members of an inter-organizational network ought to acknowledge and respect this aspect of relations.

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Table 9: Material artefacts characteristic for Turkish public and private organizations and dedicated cooperation mechanisms

Material artefacts for public organizations	Cooperation mechanisms
Semi-official dressing	Dressing less officially in routine contacts; less formal way of dressing when meeting the same level co-workers
Official dressing	Dressing in an official way when relations are initiated and when official meetings are held; dressing officially when meeting higher level managers
Importance/originality of institutional interior design	Respecting originality of interior corresponding with Turkish culture
Material artefacts for private organizations	**Cooperation mechanisms**
Internal communication systems	Effective use of internal communication with the use of IT tools; using electronic documents and signatures; necessity to get familiar with IT applications in communication systems
Efficient use of technological devices	Necessary to get familiar with technological devices and adjust to the technological requirements; using new technological solutions during cooperation
Importance/originality of institutional interior design	As in public organizations section

Source: Own study

Norms and Values Consistency

With regard to norms and values, first of all it is necessary to respect workers and the rules they follow in everyday routine. Partners ought to respect Turkish customs and culture, and avoid open criticism. İt is also very important to focus on long-term relations by setting common strategic goals. Generally, it is useful to show that we want to get engaged in the cooperation process seriously and for a long period of time. All the actions which express such intentions may be implemented, which gives foreign managers a possibility to be creative in this process.

Table 10: Norms and values characteristic for Turkish public and private organizations and dedicated cooperation mechanisms

Dominating norms and values in public sector	Cooperation mechanisms
Serious attitude to work	Following formal procedures; showing respect and understanding towards procedures and local customs; helping in fulfilling legal requirements; showing respect to the cooperating organizations; avoiding open criticism
Honour	Creating win-win solutions; open communication and cooperation process; showing respect to organization, workers and culture; respecting family bonds and

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	relations
Stability	Creating clear rules of cooperation; putting emphasis on long term relations; creating friendly atmosphere; giving support to problem solving
Continuity of contacts and relations	Long-term orientation of cooperation; creating long-term plans and objectives; mutual exchange of workers; planning and working process in mixed teams
Dominating norms and values in private sector	**Cooperation mechanisms**
Time/deadlines respected	Treating deadlines seriously; trying to do things on time or even before deadline; setting realistic deadlines and avoiding crossing them
In daily routines 'just in time' attitude	Patience with waiting for output; helping in production process and just-in-time practices; avoiding stressful situations when deadlines have not been crossed yet
Serious attitude to work	As in the above section
Continuity of contacts and relations	As in the above section

Source: Own study

Cultural Consistency

While cooperating with Turkish partners, it is necessary to pay attention to effective communication systems which will support information transfer between partners. Other findings show that Turkish workers are very loyal to their work places, so it is necessary to show respect to the organizations they work for and to avoid open criticism. Also, Turkish workers are very tolerant, so there is no need for foreign partners to adjust strictly to cultural norms and habits.

İt is also interesting that Turkish organizations are open to the latest technology. Thus, delivering new IT solutions may strengthen cooperation and help build long-term relations. Finally, it is very important to make sure that Turkish partners are financially satisfied. Therefore, business partners should consider implementing different financial bonuses.

Table 11: Cultural traits characteristic for Turkish public and private organizations and dedicated cooperation mechanisms

Dominating cultural traits in public organizations	Cooperation mechanisms
Hardworking	Respecting workers' duties; offering help with common ventures; being ready for long working hours; spending much time in office with Turkish partners
Information sharing	Efficient listening process in contacts with Turkish partners; communicating clear terms, objectives and expectations; sharing information from outside the business world; taking an interest and being involved in the process of mutual communication
Loyalty to work-place	Respecting the name, nature, tradition and principles of Turkish company; avoiding criticism in an open form; avoiding complaining about one's own company, rules, managers, procedures; being loyal to Turkish partners, which helps to build up long-term and trustful relations
Respectful and tolerant	Being yourself, not trying to copy local behaviour and

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attitude	believes; keeping one's own originality in look, behaviour and believes; being open in explaining failures and mistakes
Dominating cultural traits in private organizations	**Cooperation mechanisms**
IT orientation	Using various IT tools in cooperation and communication process; offering new tools to be implemented; helping with the development of new IT solutions within company
Job satisfaction	Taking actions which lead to making Turkish people more satisfied with their job; making friends and creating wide net of relations giving the feeling of family atmosphere; improving local working conditions; financial aspect of satisfaction (important bonuses); rewards system
The will to get rich	Putting an emphasis on the financial aspect of cooperation; rewards, bonuses; life-standard-improving bonuses such as corporate cars, telephones, computers
Loyalty to work-place	As in the above section

Source: Own study

Conclusion

The presented analysis allowed more thorough understanding of relational characteristics of virtual structures, which constitute crucial value for the development of network science (Watts, 2004; Hudson, 2004; Moller and Wilson, 1995). The authors made a theoretical contribution of conceptualizing a pattern of adjusting to organizational culture in virtual structures. Furthermore, in order to strengthen the practical contribution of the study, the authors presented a possible use of the template on the example of Turkish organizations. The results show that in Turkey the characteristics of organizational culture differ substantially between private and public units, and organizations which collaborate in virtual structures ought to acknowledge this by implementing different mechanisms for each kind of organization.

Finally, the authors would like to stress that the conceptualized pattern and the process of working out mechanisms ought to serve for integrators in virtual organizations as a general template which shows in what way to increase efficiency of relations in a cultural dimension. Although the analysis was done using the method of a multiple case study, the process is universal and it may be implemented by every unit which develops collaboration within virtual structures.

Acknowledgement

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