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Engaging Employees during COVID-19 Lockdown

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ABSTRACT

Today, the organizational work culture is changing with the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19. HR managers are continuously evolving innovative, creative, inventive and effective ways to engage the employees more healthily during this difficult time. The paper is to determine the engagement of employees by various organisation during COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations nowadays are constantly developing innovative and effective means to engage the employees during this tough time. This paper is a conceptual paper that is based on various research papers, articles, blogs, online newspapers, and reports of World Health Organization. During this pandemic situation, many organisations are now implementing employee engagement practices such as virtual team meetings, virtual learning and development, weekly alignment, online sessions, webinars with industry experts, webinars for anxiety and stress, online team building activities, online family engagement practices, brainstorming, apology, and online appreciation sessions, and shared content such as online books, online courses, live sessions for new-skill training, online communication exercise, online sharing best practices for maintaining health and hygiene, digital classrooms training modules, e-learning modules, online guidance for exercise and meditation, online recognition and acknowledgment of employees, online employee feedback, short online game session, virtual office and many more. These kinds of engagement practices boost the employees' morale, and employees feel motivated and committed towards the organization in this COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Keywords: *Engagement, Organisation, COVID-19 pandemic, Employees, World Health Organisation*

T oday, the organizational work culture is changing with the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19. HR managers are continuously evolving innovative, creative, inventive and effective ways to engage the workforce more healthily during this difficult time. Engagement of employees is a workplace behavior that ensures all supports from the organization to give their excellence every day, committed to their organizational goals and values. Organizations always remember that employees who are well engaged in will enhance productivity and growth. This leads to the higher customer satisfaction and, absolutely, developments in businesses of the organization.

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The major challenge in theoretical literature is when we discuss the term "engagement" because there is a lack of a general definition of employee engagement. (Kahn, 1990) explained in his study that employee engagement shows the physical and physiological presence of executing an organizational role. There are three constructs of psychological conditions are meaningfulness, safety, and availability that help employee engagement to develop in an organization. Further study suggests that engaged employees can contribute and encourage them physically, mentally, and emotionally in their work performances. The cognitive component is linked to management, employee, and working environment. Employees' favorable or negative attitudes towards the management are referred to as the emotional component. The physical force devoted to accomplishing an organisational role is referred to as a physical facet. May et al. (2004) further examined Kahn's model and found that the three construct of psychological conditions, that is, meaningfulness, safety, and availability are all positively related with involvement and organizational commitment. The phrase "work engagement" was coined by Schaufeli et al., (2002), who defined it as a positive and job-related state of mind. Potential, spirit, strength, and determination are all taken into account as a elements to get engaged. Employee engagement was defined in this study as an individual's involvement, contentment, enthusiasm, confidence, and commitment to work (Harter et al., 2002). Employee engagement is linked to job involvement, dedication, well-being, and emotions, according to this study (May et al., 2004). Employee engagement is made up of two components: work engagement and organisational engagement (Saks, 2006). An engaged employee always does care about their skills, potential, effort, work, and performance could make a difference. Engagement is usually said to be an internal peace of mind, that is, mentally, physically, and emotionally that binds together with the dedication, commitment, satisfaction, work spirit and potential of an employee.

Employees who are engaged can help and support their organization to achieve its goals, mission, execute its strategy, and enhance productivity. Employee engagement can be improved by different human resource practices comprising rewards, recognition, job design, promotion, recruitment, selection, compensation, training & development, and career development (Vance, 2006). Organizations that help in engagement intelligently can manage talent and communicate with employees honestly, accurately, and at the right time will do manpower forecasting effectively (Robison, 2009). Management and employees are both dependent on each other to fulfill their targets, goals, and objectives. Management should think and implement a strategy to retain their quality employee for the long term. Career development and career growth opportunities prospects, encouragement, communication, recognition, the flexibility of employee's hours, fair pay structure, effective communication, and comfortable work environment, and worker's participation in management are the factors contributing to increasing employee engagement in the organization (Patro, 2013).

To enhance effective employee engagement in the organisation, 6 C's parameters are essential: clarity, confidence, convey, connect, credibility, and career.

Figure : 1

An engaged employee is concerned for their work, productivity and development of the organization. They always think that their dedication, efforts and determination could remark in the form of success. Engaged employees dedicate to increasing the organization's productivity, which generates more customer loyalty, satisfaction, and increase in the productivity. Faith, loyalty, confidence and transparency in the communication among both management and employees are also important. This type of cooperation between employee and management is beneficial for both (Sarangi & Nayak, 2016). Employees' engagement is built on values, belief, reliability, commitment, communication, and the relationship between management and employee. Organizations can increase engagement by enhancing workers participation in management (WPM) in decision making process and transparency in communication with management. Employee engagement is the level of spirit and dedication of the employees towards their work. (Chandani et al., 2016).

COVID-19 lockdown
The severe respiratory disease recently arises in Wuhan (Hubei province), China. Epidemiological examinations have suggested that the epidemic was related to a seafood market in Wuhan, China (Fan et al., 2020). COVID-19 is a pandemic that has already reached 185,853,772 confirmed cases globally, with at least 4,017,816 deaths as reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) as on 30th June, 2021. World Health Organization (WHO), assessment report states that COVID-19 is very high risk at the global level (World Health Organization, 2020a). Those people who are living with NCDs (Non-Communicable Diseases) are more susceptible to becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19 (WHO, 2020b).

World Health Organisation (WHO) gives some suggestions and advice for the people. According to WHO, most of the person experiencing mild to moderate respiratory illness due to the COVID -19 virus can recover without requiring any extra treatment. Aged people and those who are having health problems like heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory and lung diseases are more likely to develop symptom of COVID-19 viruses. According to World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, people must protect themselves from COVID-19 pandemic virus infection by washing their hands regularly or using an alcohol-based sanitizer or rub frequently and at regular intervals. According to the report of WHO (World Health Organization, 2020c), the COVID-19 pandemic virus spreads primarily through discharge from the nose or when an infected person coughs or sneezes. In this situation, most countries go for nationwide lockdown, so that spread of the COVID-19 virus will break soon. Several countries have also closed borders to avoid international travelers from spreading the COVID-19 virus (Ghosh et al., 2020).

Most of the nation worldwide is applying various forms of restrictions to the people like social distancing, lockdown and wearing mask on the face when going outside. The need of the situation, work from home and working online policy has been started by most organizations. Most of the employees feel it difficult to work from home. They do not get the organizational culture and climate at home; they also feel a lack of concentration due to frequent interference of family members; work-life conflict arises due to this situation. Employees do not have the proper utensils, equipment, resources, and tools with a convenient and quiet place to work. Most of the employees feel depressed and stressed due to increasing cases of the COVID-19 virus very rapidly in the world. Employees are more concerned about their salary and job security. Due to lack of these resources, they could not concentrate on their work, so there is a requirement for employee's engagement. Management should take care of their welfare and engage them correctly according to the scenario. Management should also provide some motivational talk lectures, online counseling, and meditation sessions, increase their morale, and provide safety & security and a comfortable, communicative environment so that employees can share their problems. Transparency in the organizational policies and recommendations is essential to make the employee feel comfortable communicating freely with their management.

The main aim of the study is to determine the employee engagement practices during COVID-19 lockdown.

Rationale of the study
The COVID-19 pandemic has put the majority of countries on lockdown. In this difficult position, most organization has started a work-from-home policy. However, in this tough situation, work-from-home policy is difficult for both employee and management. As a result of this issue, management must implement employee engagement strategies to engage them in effective manner. This study aims to identify various innovative and effective techniques of engagement so that employees can do work-from-home and remain motivated and satisfied in this time of pandemic.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Robison, (2009) suggested on dealing with adversity and keeping employees focused and engaged. Telling employees what the management expects from them, ensuring staff have the necessary resources and equipment, allowing employees to do what they do best, remembering to praise, and showing your employees that the organisation cares about them, and always encouraging their growth and development are some of the suggestions made by the researcher. Employee engagement can be used as a mediator to help employees establish positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviors that lead to better work performance (Andrew & Sofian, 2012; Saks, 2006). According to (Andrew & Saudah, 2012), engagement of employees can be used as a mediator to improve employees' behaviour, intention, and attitudes toward better work performance. According to Basquille (2013), management should aid employees with development, career support, and recognition. These elements have a significant impact on employee engagement. According to Patro (2013), organisations must provide their employees freedom by creating comfortable working environment to make their job enjoyable. According to more research, engagement of employees should be a continual process of learning, progress, and action. Therefore, organizations in this pandemic situation should actively look forward to fulfilling expectations of their employees and make them feel comfortable, which directly increase the individual as well as organizational productivity.

According to the model given by (Bedarkar and Pandita 2014), engagement of employees is driven by leadership, communication, and work-life balance Groups, presence perceived, simplicity of use and reputation of Facebook features are the four elements that greatly influence towards employee engagement (Abd et al., 2014) whereas according to (Jalal, 2016), employee engagement gives positive effect on its determinant organizational commitment. The findings of the study suggest that, if more engaged employees are at work, the greater their commitment to the organisation. According to the findings of the (Lee et al. 2016), it is difficult for HR professionals to retain newly recruited employees motivated in their professions. Workers were found to be moderately engaged, implying that some may be dissatisfied with their present job or frightened of losing them. Work engagement is largely influenced by job satisfaction. The findings of (Garg et al. 2017) demonstrated a link between engagement and satisfaction.

According to further research, job satisfaction of employee leads to engagement. Employee involvement in economic performance, which includes financial growth, profit surplus, shareholder income, and operating profit, is nearly three times higher than in disengaged firms. It goes on to say that higher levels of employee involvement lead to fewer absenteeism, job stress, and improved well-being and health. Engagement has a significant positive impact on the organizational bottom line and is strongly tied to organisational performance (Saks, 2017). Engagement results in organisational surplus profits like cost and time savings if an organisation provides a positive working culture in which employees feel valued and supported by the organization. Management trusts in employees and leaders acting as role models which also increase engagement (Sievert & Scholz, 2017).

Further research reveals that internal communication and satisfaction plays a vital impact in strong engagement (Vercic & Vokic, 2017). Employees that are emotionally attached with their work and their company are more productive and effective. Employees that are engaged have complete faith in the organization's leaders. As a result, engaged employees are more concern to their jobs and the company as a whole (Vercic & Vokic, 2017).

Employee engagement is improved by functional, economic, and psychological benefits, according to (Tiwari & Lenka, 2019). This paper found that if organisations invested in their man power for building complete human resource management (HRM) system in their organization, it produces engaged employees; in return, organisations improve their performance (Tensay & Singh, 2020). Committed and engaged employees are always confident, keep good interpersonal behavior and nature with each other, and show a high level of performance (Jena, Pradhan, & Panigrahy, 2018). Employees who experience pleasant happiness at a higher level always practice higher levels of employee engagement (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020). Employee engagement is crucial for an organisation to retain its valued employees. An organization needs to be utilizing their man power effectively. Without engagement and commitment, an organization cannot survive for a longer period (Barreiro & Treglown, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is based on secondary data collected from various studies.Previous articles bring together a variety of different streams of information to create a unique perspective (Chermack & Passmore, 2005). The information gathered came from secondary research conducted by a variety of researchers and organisations. The majority of the material found in research articles, books, online reports, blogs, and online newspapers during the analysis provided insight into the principles and practices of employee involvement in relation to

COVID-19 and difficult times. The information was taken from World Health Organization reports. A systematic and comprehensive study of the literature on employee engagement was conducted. An integrative literature review is a type of research that generates new knowledge and insight about the subject under consideration (Torraco, 2005). The goal of a literature review is to summarise the current level of knowledge about a given phenomenon (Chermack & Passmore, 2005). During this COVID-19 pandemic, employee participation is essential for all organisation. Employee engagement techniques keep employees motivated, dedicated, fulfilled, and contented during a lockdown.

Employee engagement is essential during challenging times

According to the American Management Association (AMA), organisations may boost employee engagement even during difficult times if they take care and implement the correct decisions at the right time. Organizations should prioritize employee involvement in both good and bad times (Vickers, 2019). According to report of the Guardian, engagement helps workers in keeping strong and positive views toward their work and organisation during challenging times. Employee engagement is influenced by a number of elements, including organisational commitment, work satisfaction, and organisational citizenship behavior. In order to enhance engagement during tough times, organisations should do extra attempts to make employees feel like their organisation cares about them (Robertson, 2012). Similarly, according to Groove Management Blog (Formato, 2014), during difficult times, leadership must be more effective than at any other moment. If companies want their employees to be engaged, they must assume responsibility for their future potential and inspire them to reach it. In difficult times, an effective communication plan motivates people to engage in their work and achieve their goals. Employee involvement is vital in difficult times, according to the blog, and only leadership can achieve this through an effective communication plan. According to Deal et al., (2010), additional benefit packages and fair and comparable compensation structures should be given to employees during difficult times to keep them engaged and motivated. Organizations also give employees all of the tools, equipment and resources they need to do their jobs well. Managers should provide useful feedback and instruction to their subordinates on a regular basis to keep employee engagement strong. According to Masson (2009), management should effectively communicate with employees about their career advancement in order for them to trust that development methods are fair and equitable. Managers should be transparent, loyal and honest with their staff, assisting them in identifying their developmental requirements as well as enhancing their skills during difficult moments. An article published by DVV media HR group limited (2018) reveals several concrete recommendations for during difficult times. The most crucial is to increase employee engagement. Other suggestions include: management must be role models in difficult times, include employee feedback into company culture, communicate clearly and consistently, support your supervisors, and keep motivation strong through awards and recognition. Jones and Kober (2019) discussed some techniques for improving employee engagement and delivering better organisational success in challenging times.

These are the strategies:

1. Focus on your core principles to keep employees engaged during challenging times.
2. Explicitly encourage and support your employees in order for keep them stay motivated in difficult situations.
3. Solicit employee feedback—invite employees to freely share knowledge, complaints, and suggestions for improvements in an effective manner.
4. Communicate openly and honestly with employee- In order to perform more efficiently, management should communicate freely and honestly with them.

5. Commit to your employee growth and opportunities—so employees should be committed and engaged.

Matkin (2016) stated that in order to receive direction during difficult times, the vision and mission must be clear and precise, and it should be appropriately communicated to the employees. There should be open-door policies in an organisation; this type of platform allows employees a transparent communicative environment.Five ideas for supporting employees who work from home were published in Nature (Fan et al., 2020) regarding engagement and employee performance.

These are the following:

1. Create a healthy and positive work environment—encourage employees to set up a healthy and positive work atmosphere at home.
2. Stick to a routine—encourage staff to stick to a schedule and set clear boundaries between work and personal time.
3. Don't forget to interact with your coworkers—communicate regularly to as a stress reliever. As a result, organisation should schedule a time for pleasurable activities that would normally take place in the office.
4. Promote well-being practices—organizations should be concerned about their employees' well-being because it can minimize absenteeism and improve engagement and performance.
5. Invest in technology—communication tools such as instant messaging, video conferencing, and audio calling platforms can help to keep teams connected with each other.

In addition, it is important to invest in a recognition platform that allows employees to send and receive recognition, appreciation and feedback.

Engaging employees during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown

There are several ways to engage the employees by work-from-home policy as organisation establish various engagement techniques to implement full-time and regular remote work policy.

According to (Sarkar, 2020), a new component in engagement of employees is also family involvement. During COVID-19 lockdown, it keeps employee kids engaged in their studies for a few hours while their parents work from home. Genpact, Accenture, Deloitte, AMD, and Hinduja Global Solutions are among the companies that practice these methods. According to Talukar's essay from 2020, there are five recommendations for practicing involvement of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Build a far more comprehensive communication policy with the remote teams, remember to cheer them up with instant praise, loosen up and ensure flexibility, develop a virtual circle with all of the employees, and hold online team-building activities, among other things. The essay by (Goswami, 2020) is about utilizing tough times of employees during the lockdown period. The tough times are being prioritized by manufacturing organizations such as CEAT, SAR, and Aditya Birla.

Organisations keep their employees motivated during a lockdown by providing opportunities for learning and development. Some organisations provide their employees talks and webinars with industry experts, books, online-learning, and self-developed content. During pandemics, several organisations try to motivate their employees by assuaging their worries and encouraging them to be cheerful. Through podcasts and live conversations, CEAT employed fitness experts to keep downtime employees and their families engaged.

Dutta, (2020) discusses in his article that how digital learning tools can help personnel enhance their abilities during a lockout. Organizations can equip digital staff ready for the future by generating learning opportunities, giving numerous tools for continuing professional advancement, and keeping employees motivated and engaged during these tough times. During the COVID-19 outbreak, Singh (2020a) stated that organisations must focus on engagement of employees. Employees feel inspired and dedicated to their organisation when they have meaningful work and firms continue to provide growth possibilities. Engaging remote employees generate a culture of openness in which employees can get new ideas. Engagement programs raise employee curiosity and help in bringing out the innovative and creative side of the workforce. So, it becomes necessary for organisations to take effective employee engagement measures during tough times.

Various approaches to boost employee involvement during the lockdown were offered and explained by (Goyal et al., 2020). Conduct weekly alignment sessions, team meet-ups, entire team gathers over video conference for lunch, short online game session, virtual challenges, and competitions, 5 minutes of informal talk, shared content such as TED Talks, books, and online courses, brainstorming focus, apology and appreciation session, communication exercise, ditch a task, map of alignment. Singh (2020b) talked about the different challenges that employees are dealing with during this difficult time. This article recommended that firms should be aware of their employees' stress levels during this trying period, and that there should be an open environment and clear communication channels so employees can open up about their problems. The majority of companies hold contests, challenges, and engagement strategic events for their employees. Organisations are frequently assessing employee well-being and providing solutions that promote a good work-life balance. During this time, management should concentrate on their employees learning and growth. Most companies are incorporating webinars and live sessions into their online therapy sessions to assist employees stay safe and healthy at home. According to (Anand ,2020), lockdown has created massive global disruption, as billions of individuals are self-isolating in their homes. During the lockdown, this article offered four suggestions for improving workers participation. Construct reliable communication channels, such as chat platforms, video conferencing, and email. During this difficult time, employees need to be appreciated, recognized, and acknowledged. Keep things flexible since employees will need time off to prepare meals, play with their children, and do domestic tasks. Organisations should plan meetings in the virtual mode with their employees.

During this challenging time, Capgemini undertakes various employee engagement activities, according to Nair (2020). Capgemini introduces structured employee engagement programmes such as continuous communication with employees via video messages from organisational leadership, creating and maintaining social networks in virtual communities, creating a sense of belonging, arranged counselling service for employees, conducting webinars dealing with anxiety and stress, and sharing best practises for maintaining health. Bhardwaj (2020) talked on the initiatives Cars24 took to increase employee engagement and a sense of belonging to the company. Cars24 hosts a variety of activities, such as challenges such as sharing a photo with your pet, a family snap, fun awards, and "Know Your Leaders," in which employees are quizzed on their general knowledge of the leaders, mental fitness, and meditations online classes, a hidden talent show, virtual karaoke challenge, a virtual campfire challenge, fostering team spirit, video calls, and more.

Brunswick Group (Metts, 2020) mentioned that companies need to develop employee engagement and communication plans to keep morale high and help their people stay

connected. Communications to employees should be regular and frequent, allow weekly all-employee video conferences or conference calls, remind colleagues to take extra precautions on potential data breaches and other cyber-security issues, and encourage employees to share work-from-home experience and tips—what do they find challenging and how to stay focused and productive. Fallon (2020) elaborates on the team engagement during the coronavirus pandemic. The article explains some ways to keep employees engaged, like keep people updated through transparent communication, prepare powerful presentations, and get everyone on video. Leaders lead by example with an excellent remote work setup, avoid micromanaging, maintain friendly social interactions in the virtual office, and get employee feedback on how they feel. Hasan (2020) explained the various ways companies are serving employees in response to COVID-19. Amway is ongoing with increments, promotions, and recognition as per previous plans. The company has planned virtual engagement programs like external webinars to learn new skills and announced employee medical claim plans covering treatment costs for COVID-19. Hindustan Coca Cola Beverages has launched a virtual employee engagement program that seeks to involve employee colleagues and their family members online for their physical and mental wellness. McDonald's India has adopted many of its classroom training modules digitally and introduced e-learning modules, quizzes, master classes by managers, and many more creative learning sessions. Employees can access their phones while in quarantine at home. ITC Hotels has rolled many e-learning courses targeted at specific roles and levels through primary channels of E-learning to provide an opportunity for self-learning, which can be accentuated through anytime app-based hosting. Clix Capital is also hosting live e-sessions on its learning platform.

Various companies are doing employee engagement practices innovatively and creatively to keep their employees satisfied and committed to the organization. It is essential to do employee engagement practices during this challenging time of the pandemic.

According to Brunswick Group (Metts, 2020), organisations must build employee engagement and communication plans to keep morale up and help their employee feel engaged. Allow weekly video conferences or conference calls, remind colleagues to take extra precautions on potential data breaches and other cyber-security issues, and encourage employees to share their work-from-home experience and tips, such as what they find challenging and how to stay focused and productive with their employees. Fallon (2020) elaborates on the coronavirus pandemic's team engagement. The article discusses how to keep staff engaged, including keeping them informed through open communication, preparing compelling presentations, and having everyone on camera. Leaders set a good example by having a great remote work setting, maintaining cordial and social interactions in the virtual office, and soliciting employee feedback. Hasan (2020) discussed how corporations are responding to COVID-19 by providing various services to employees. Amway continues to offer raises, promotions, and recognition in accordance with earlier plans. Employee medical claim plans for COVID-19 treatment have been announced, as well as virtual engagement activities such as external webinars to learn new skills. Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages has established a virtual employee engagement initiative aimed at including employees' coworkers and family members in their physical and mental well-being online. Many of McDonald's India's classroom training modules have been converted to digital format, and the company has incorporated e-learning modules, quizzes, management master classes, and a variety of other innovative learning opportunities. Employees can use their phones while at home under quarantine. ITC Hotels has brought out a number of e-learning courses targeted at various jobs and levels through key E-learning

channels, allowing for self-learning that can be augmented by anytime app-based hosting. Clix Capital's learning platform also hosts live e-sessions.

Various organisations are using unique and innovative employee engagement techniques to keep their employees satisfied and dedicated to the company. During this difficult period of the epidemic, it is essential to implement employee engagement practices on priority basis.

CONCLUSION

Employee engagement has become critical in the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. In this current lockdown situation, assuming the top position without the support of your colleagues would be a dream comes true. Organizations understand that engaged employees are key to their success in this difficult time. That is why, in the event of a pandemic, management must plan on keeping their employees satisfied and engaged through better engagement policies. Establishing employee engagement measures with the help of technology is critical for the growth of firms in the current circumstances. Many organisations are now implementing employee engagement practices such as virtual team meetings, virtual learning and development, weekly alignment, online sessions, webinars with industry experts, webinars for anxiety and stress, online team building activities, online family engagement practices, brainstorming, apology, and online appreciation sessions, and shared content such as online books, online courses, live sessions for new-skill training, online communication exercise, online sharing best practices for maintaining health and hygiene, digital classrooms training modules, e-learning modules, online guidance for exercise and meditation, online recognition and acknowledgment of employees, online employee feedback, short online game session, virtual office and many more. These kinds of engagement practices boost the employees' morale, and employees feel motivated and committed towards the organization in this COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Implications of the study

During this difficult period, all firms should develop unique and creative engagement. In this difficult time, COVID19 will keep employees motivated, stimulated, devoted, fulfilled, and joyous. Working from home has become quite popular in recent years, and it would be impossible to succeed without the use of internet methods. Organizations should use an online practice strategy to stay competitive during this difficult period. Companies should prioritize virtual relationships in order to increase employee engagement. Employees that are engaged constantly attain their goals with ease. Management also considers how to engage people in order to foster a positive corporate culture. Organizations also need to recognize the various facets that motivate and derive employee engagement in organizations.

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Conflict of Interest

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