

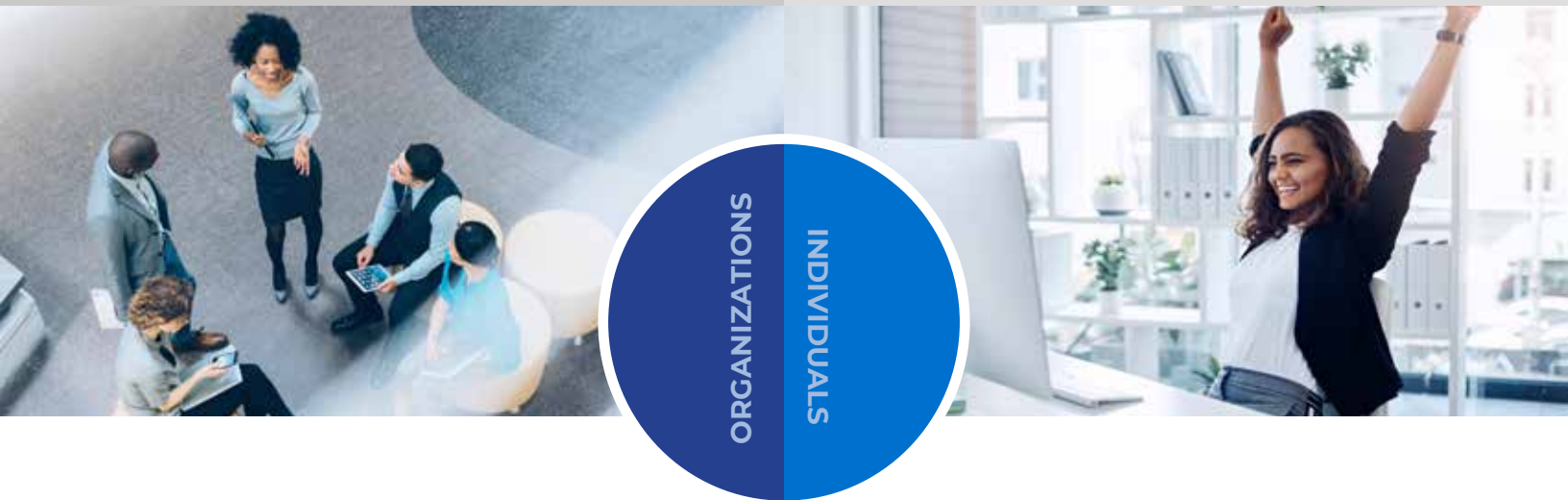
# HOW TO INCREASE PROFESSIONAL WELLBEING:

WHAT LEADERS AND EMPLOYEES CAN DO

MICHAELA L. FISHER, MBA



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Professional wellbeing is a critical piece of the overall wellbeing puzzle. Many factors impact professional wellbeing, though, and this concept might look different for each person. Typically, professional wellbeing comprises various components related to the organization, the job, and the organizational culture, along with an individual's experience in the midst of these factors. Many factors impact an individual's professional wellbeing, including whether they have meaningful and challenging work with opportunities for growth, clarity on expectations, workload/work-life balance, autonomy over their work, training opportunities, and job security; to what extent there are bureaucracy and perceptions of fairness at the organization; and the quality of their relationships with coworkers.

Poor professional wellbeing may bleed into many other areas, such as overall happiness, family satisfaction, and even life satisfaction. In fact, individuals with good professional wellbeing are “more than twice as likely to be thriving in their lives overall” ([Rath & Harter, 2010](#)). There are many interrelated reasons to take professional wellbeing seriously, and it's in every organization's best interest to bolster their employees' professional wellbeing. It's important not only for the health of your employees but also for the healthy functioning of your organization ([Rogers, n.d.](#)).

Improving employees' professional wellbeing is not solely the responsibility of the employer. Whether you are a leader looking to enrich your employees' wellbeing or an individual who wants to better your own professional wellbeing, some helpful tips are provided below.

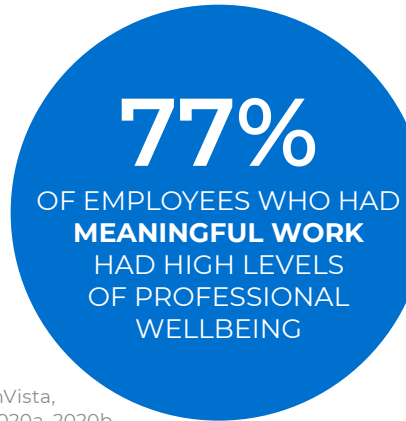
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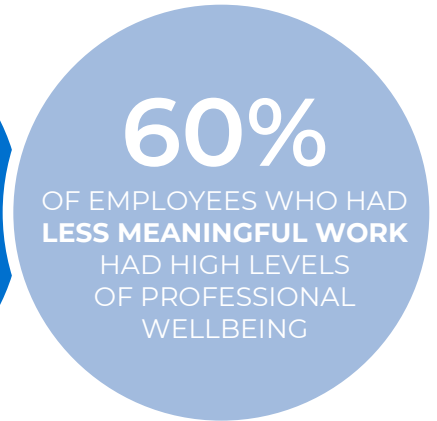
# MEANINGFUL/CHALLENGING WORK

## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

It has long been established that meaningful work increases motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and intentions to stay ([Bravery, 2018](#)). A [Bates-Gallup study](#) found that employees who had a high purpose in work were ten times more likely to experience overall wellbeing. Additionally, recent studies conducted by InVista (2020a, 2020b) found a higher endorsement of meaningful work resulted in much higher levels of professional wellbeing (77% of employees who said they had meaningful work had high levels of professional wellbeing; of employees who said they had less meaningful work, only 60% had high levels of wellbeing). Organizations can increase the meaningfulness of work by illustrating the “why” behind the work and translating its significance to all employees ([Fraser-Thill, 2019](#)). Assembly line workers for an automobile manufacturer each play a small part in the overall process, but their responsibility to correctly install brake pads, for example, is critical to the safety of the vehicles and the reputation of the company. In addition, you can recraft individual jobs to instill them with more purpose and meaning. For your accountants, for example, you could create a division that serves charitable organizations ([Kelly, 2019](#)). Good interpersonal relationships also bring purpose and meaning to the workplace. Consider ways to encourage connection—for example, create opportunities for coworkers to discuss their weekends or opportunities to interact with customers.



InVista,  
2020a, 2020b



## FOR INDIVIDUALS

It's important for individuals to be challenged and fulfilled in their work. If you're not finding purpose in your work, change your thought process by reflecting on the “why” behind the work. Thinking about the greater significance of your work is important, even if you play a small role. ([Fraser-Thill, 2019](#)). Additionally, it's important to focus on your own professional development, seeking out ways to grow and make your work more challenging ([Bowman, 2018](#); [Cast, 2018](#)).

- ✓ **Make yourself an expert in an important area by conducting research, reading and writing on the topic, or speaking at a conference or seminar.**
- ✓ **Ask a senior-level person to mentor you.**
- ✓ **Find ways to expand your responsibility and grow new skills.**
- ✓ **Enroll in an online course or earn a certificate in your field, and then ask your manager if you can incorporate what you've learned into your job responsibilities.**



# CLARITY ON EXPECTATIONS

## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

A big barrier to employee success is unclear expectations. Leaders should set clear goals and performance expectations. When employees know what is expected of them, they are better equipped to accomplish goals, complete projects on time without letting any slip through the cracks, improve teamwork, and spend energy on executing their tasks versus trying to determine where responsibilities lie ([Blazek, 2016](#)). In fact, a recent study conducted by InVista (2020b) found that, on average, employees with high levels of professional wellbeing reported 15% higher ratings of clarity on their priorities. Expectations should stem from the organization's strategic goals and initiatives, with organizational objectives trickling down to department goals, team goals, and individual goals. Allowing employees to help set their own goals is an effective way to get buy-in. Some helpful considerations for employee goal-setting include ([Paychex Worx, 2018](#)):

- ✓ **Set goals that align with the organizations' objectives.**
- ✓ **Let employees participate in the goal-making process.**
- ✓ **Set SMART goals—goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based.**
- ✓ **Set consistent goals for employees with similar responsibilities.**

Another source of stress is undiscussed expectations, such as response time to emails or being available 24/7. It's critical that employees understand your stance on these types of work habits so they know they won't be seen as lazy or unengaged if they set healthy work boundaries. It has been proven that too much engagement can lead to burnout ([Fisher, 2020](#)).







## CLARITY ON EXPECTATIONS

### FOR INDIVIDUALS

If you are unclear on your priorities or what your manager thinks of your performance, it's time to have a conversation. Outline what you believe your expectations are so you can share them with your boss, and prepare to have an open dialogue to confirm or clarify your understanding. Here are a few questions you can ask:

- ✓ Can you help me understand where I should be spending my time?
- ✓ Can you help me understand what percentage of time I should be spending in each area?
- ✓ Can you help me prioritize my list of tasks/responsibilities?

These types of conversations can also open a discussion about workload.

**Allowing employees to help set their own goals is an effective way to get buy-in.**



# WORKLOAD/WORK-LIFE BALANCE

## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

It's important to ensure an appropriate workload for your employees ([Kennell, 2021](#)). Workload is the amount of work required to fulfill job expectations. Work overload is having too many demands and/or having insufficient time to complete work, and work underload is having too few tasks assigned to fulfill a role or completing tasks beneath one's capabilities. Recent client data from InVista (2020a) shows that 65% of employees felt their organization was understaffed, and 33% of employees reported that work-life balance problems negatively impacted their performance.

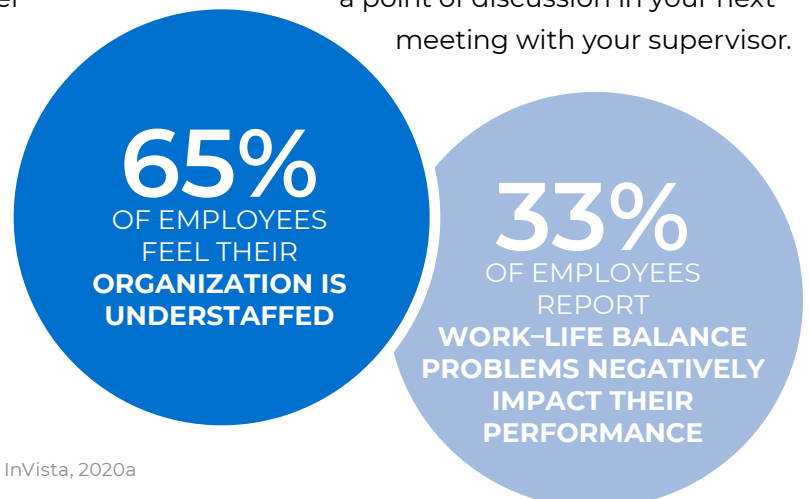
If work overload is an issue, it's important to evaluate staffing levels. When hiring additional employees is not possible, look for opportunities to automate processes or improve work tools. During times of uncertainty, setting stretch goals is not ideal; instead, communicate expectations, set clear priorities around key goals, and help employees prioritize the most critical work. Be sensitive to employee needs; when possible, offer flexibility in work schedules or the opportunity to work remotely. If work underload is the problem, consider redesigning jobs. Examine roles where employees feel underloaded and assign additional, meaningful tasks. Provide opportunities for growth to employees who have expressed interest in expanding their skills, tasks, or responsibilities.

## FOR INDIVIDUALS

If you feel your workload is overwhelming, consider how you can alleviate some of this stress. While it is not always possible for your organization to hire additional staff, there are several solutions that may ease your workload:

- ✓ Consider where you might improve processes.
- ✓ Propose tools or technology that will help you perform your job more efficiently.
- ✓ Ask for guidance on what you might be able to de-prioritize.

A heavy workload can take time away from life and family demands, leading to burnout and low levels of wellbeing ([Fisher, 2020](#)). When workload matches capacity, though, you can effectively complete work while having opportunities for rest, recovery, growth, and development ([Saunders, 2019](#)). If you are struggling to find the right balance, be sure to add work-life balance as a point of discussion in your next meeting with your supervisor.



InVista, 2020a



# FAIRNESS AND RESPECT

## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Perception is reality. If employees perceive unfairness—regardless of whether it exists—they may develop negative work attitudes that lead to decreased employee wellbeing. A recent InVista study (2020b) found that employees with high levels of professional wellbeing perceived that their organization enforced policies consistently 26% more than those with low levels of professional wellbeing.

Perceptions of fairness affect not only individual wellbeing but also outcomes associated with organization success such as turnover and performance. An InVista client survey (2019a) revealed that employees were experiencing poor perceptions of organizational fairness and that this was one of the biggest drivers of turnover intentions. Additionally, employees with low perceptions of fairness had lower performance ratings by their managers.

By being transparent and open about decisions (especially the ones that impact employees) and communicating the reasons behind decisions, organization leaders can often increase positive perceptions of fairness. If you don't have the entire story to share, communicate what you do know, and provide updates as you learn more information. This is especially important when there is an environment of uncertainty over communication. Consider multiple sources of sharing information (e.g., company announcements, team huddles, having supervisors reshare communications). If you think you are overcommunicating, you're probably providing just the right amount of information.

Employees' fairness perceptions can be challenged when organizations implement change. To ease the change process, organization leaders can provide channels in which employees can share suggestions, such as team meetings, individual conversations, or surveys requesting feedback. Giving employees the opportunity to be part of the conversation and have a role in the decision-making process is an extremely helpful way to improve perceptions of fairness.



# 26% more

Employees with high levels of professional wellbeing perceive their organization enforces policies consistently 26% more than those with low levels of professional wellbeing

InVista, 2020a



## FAIRNESS AND RESPECT

### FOR INDIVIDUALS

If you perceive unfairness, realize that you might not know the whole situation, and it may not be appropriate for your manager to disclose another employee's situation with you. However, you can bring this up to your manager so they are aware of the perception.

Here are a few steps you can take to ensure a productive conversation:

- ✓ **Prepare for the conversation by clarifying your goal, identifying your manager's goals and potential roadblocks, and finding common ground.**
- ✓ **Set the conversation up for success by planning its logistics. Schedule it in advance if possible, find a private location, and consider a time of day that works well.**
- ✓ **During the conversation, clarify your intent and focus on shared objectives, and then state your observations and concerns. Ask for your manager's input and listen to it. Finally, address potential concerns, and brainstorm resolutions.**
- ✓ **Don't forget to follow up after the conversation. This helps ensure accountability of the agreement reached and allows you to reassess if the resolution is not working.**

### SEVEN TIPS FOR HAVING DIFFICULT WORKPLACE CONVERSATIONS

1. Clarify your goal
2. Find common ground
3. Set a meeting in private to discuss
4. Clarify your intentions and focus on the shared objectives
5. State your observations and concerns
6. Ask for input and listen
7. Follow up after the conversation





# AUTONOMY

## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Providing employees with a chance to share their perspectives and have a say in how their work is completed is a great way to empower them. After setting clear expectations and realistic goals, give your employees the freedom to achieve them. You will see increases in engagement, performance, motivation, and employee perceptions of feeling valued ([Harriss, 2019](#)).

Some jobs require more autonomy, while others offer less freedom. Hiring employees whose work styles align with the disposition of the role is one way to set your employees up for success.

It's important to find a balance between giving leeway and providing necessary support. Some individuals thrive on independence, while others desire more guidance. Have conversations with your employees about their preferences. Here are some ways you can encourage autonomy, regardless of individual preferences:

- ✓ **Allow employees to adjust their schedules when necessary.**
- ✓ **Give employees an opportunity to participate in setting deadlines.**
- ✓ **Allow flexibility for employees to complete their work in the way that works best for them.**
- ✓ **Let employees design their own processes (individual workflows, prioritization setting, etc.).**
- ✓ **Invite employees to participate in individual and department goal-setting.**

Using personality assessments is another great way to measure fit, which is important for your organization's success as well as the employee's success. Specialized companies like InVista offer services that can help you understand the critical values and personality traits important for success in a job.



**Some individuals thrive  
on independence,  
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## AUTONOMY

### **FOR INDIVIDUALS**

If you desire more flexibility and freedom in how you complete your work, consider the following tips:

- ✓ **Assess your current role and identify additional skills you could learn that would benefit your department or organization.**
- ✓ **Keep your work organized via using systematized files and a calendar or planner. Keeping track of important documents and dates negates the need to rely on coworkers or managers to remind you of important information, enabling you to work more independently.**
- ✓ **Take extra initiative. Set personal work goals independent of those required, attempt to solve problems by yourself, or develop the first draft of a project without direct prompting from your manager. This will help you demonstrate you are invested in your work and able to take on more responsibility.**

## POOR TRAINING LEADS TO TURNOVER

A recent study found that employees who indicated a high risk for turnover also said they didn't have the proper training to do their jobs

InVista, 2020a



## TRAINING

### FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Training is highly linked to performance, but it's also related to employee satisfaction ([Frost, 2019](#)) and subsequently employee turnover. A recent study conducted by InVista (2020b) found that employees who indicated a high risk for turnover also said they didn't have the proper training to do their jobs. To be most successful, employees must feel confident and capable in doing their job. It may be helpful to conduct a training needs analysis—a process that determines the training an employee should complete within a certain period to perform their job effectively as well as progress and grow ([Morrison, 2019](#)). Along with highlighting training you may not have previously considered, this process allows you to identify knowledge and skills gaps on your team before they become a problem.

### FOR INDIVIDUALS

If you desire more guidance or training on how to perform your job more effectively, ask your supervisor for additional resources or tools that will help you. Speak with more experienced coworkers to learn what types of training have worked for them. Consider what elements of your job would most benefit from additional training, and seek external resources if budget allows.

Ask your supervisor the following questions:

- ✓ **What resources does our organization already have?**
- ✓ **Is there a training video I can watch?**
- ✓ **Is there a specific employee I can shadow to learn more?**

# JOB SECURITY



## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Job security has a significant impact on performance ([Wang et al., 2015](#)). It also influences employees' intention to quit. Recent client data from InVista (2019b) show that, as job insecurity increases, so does turnover, while job satisfaction and organizational commitment decrease. On the other hand, as job security increases, job performance improves. To bolster employees' perception of job security, make performance expectations clear. Employees should know what good performance looks like and be able to tell when they're not meeting expectations. Rightfully, many organizations have moved away from the annual review and into ongoing performance coaching. This model better enables employees to know what they are doing well and what should be improved.

Companies may face challenges due to economic hardship, and layoffs, salary cuts, and furloughs are sometimes inevitable. It's important for leaders to provide a justification regarding these decisions. Good-faith explanations will increase the perception of fairness. However, layoffs are painful regardless of how thoughtfully they are implemented. They affect not only the person leaving but also the remaining employees. During these times, it's crucial to be accessible, visible, and transparent.

## FOR INDIVIDUALS

It's important to think through what you can do in your current role to be successful. Having clear lines of communication with your manager will help prevent any small issues from developing into larger issues. Let your manager know you are open to feedback and constructive criticism—accepting these will help you proactively address any concerns. Having frequent performance conversations and working to understand your manager and company goals can help you demonstrate your value and ensure you are meeting expectations. If you feel your skillset could be put to better use in a different role, take an inventory of your skills and accomplishments and determine how these might translate to another role in your organization. Actively practice and use those skills so that others recognize these strengths.





# BUREAUCRACY

## FOR ORGANIZATIONS

It's in an organization's best interest to avoid office politics and unnecessary bureaucracy—it "saps initiative, inhibits risk taking, and crushes creativity. It's a tax on human achievement" ([Hamel & Zanini, 2018](#)). In fact, [Hamel and Zanini \(2017\)](#) report that "bureaucracy costs the U.S. more than \$3 trillion in lost economic output per year."

To reduce overly political behavior, leaders can do several things ([University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2010](#)):

- ✓ Provide equal access to information.
- ✓ Demonstrate collaborative behavior.
- ✓ Show by example that political behavior will not be rewarded or tolerated.
- ✓ Encourage managers to provide high levels of feedback to employees about their performance. High levels of feedback reduce the perception of organizational politics and improve employee morale and work performance ([Rosen et al., 2006](#)).

## FOR INDIVIDUALS

Organizational bureaucracy can be frustrating, but you can help make your workplace more positive by not participating in politics.

- ✓ Build your social network and find ways to connect with other departments. This will minimize the tendency for silos to form across departments.
- ✓ Remain professional at all times. Remember that, when a conflict arises, it's typically possible to find a solution that satisfies everyone.
- ✓ Build your own personal brand. A personal brand is the unique combination of skills and experiences that make you who you are. It is also how you present yourself to others. Effective personal branding will help you build trust and set the tone and expectation of how you interact with others—extremely important when you're navigating a bureaucratic environment.





## COWORKER RELATIONS

### FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Strong employee relations are a vital part of the work experience. In a client engagement survey, InVista (2019a) found that, on average, employees who endorsed higher levels of coworker relations performed slightly better than those with low levels of coworker relations. To promote coworker relations, encourage your employees to take the time for quick check-ins with their peers, including some that are not work-focused. Managers should do the same with each member of their team. Ask employees how things are going. When coworkers are comfortable around each other, they will feel more confident sharing opinions, brainstorming, and being open to new ideas ([Mind Tools, n.d.](#)).

As many organizations have adapted to remote work, it's important to find creative ways to promote social connections among your staff. Team-building activities are extremely important for good morale whether employees work from home or in the office. Create opportunities for "water cooler chat" and allow employees to share funny GIFs, videos of their new workspaces, or pictures of their pets. Creating a channel to celebrate company and employee wins is another great way to encourage and connect your staff. The internet offers hundreds of ideas for virtual team-building activities (e.g., [Collier, 2020](#)).

### FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



Create opportunities for "water cooler chat" and allow employees to share funny GIFs, videos of their new workspaces, or pictures of their pets.



## COWORKER RELATIONS

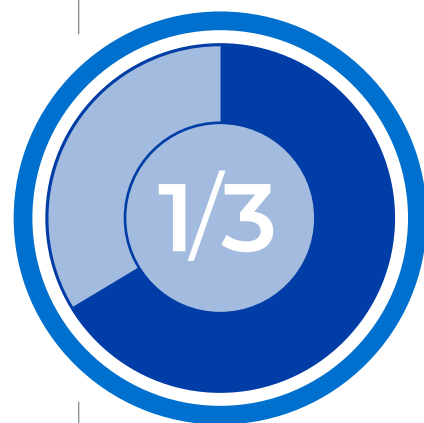
### FOR INDIVIDUALS

If you're in an environment where you work closely with others or depend on others to accomplish your work, it's important to maintain strong relationships. Even if your role is performed entirely independently, you will still benefit from cooperation with others in terms of sharing information and planning for the unexpected.

- ✓ **Be present and available even in short interactions with coworkers. This can help encourage meaningful connections in the workplace. Being engaged and friendly while working on collaborative assignments can help prevent you from being viewed as difficult or aloof.**
- ✓ **Recognize that different backgrounds, attitudes, and approaches can add value to solving problems. Focus on developing positive relationships with individuals on your team. Engage with others when you are unsure how to approach a situation, and always listen with genuine interest.**
- ✓ **Establish a common goal with the members of your team. Keep an open mind when listening to the ideas and perspectives of others, and resist being biased toward your own ideas and methods. Appreciate the differences in ideas and opinions that exist between you and your team members, and use these differences to reach the goal more effectively.**

The average person will spend one third of their life, or 90,000 hours, at work—it's in everyone's best interest to make these hours enjoyable (Vaughn, 2018). The best practice for organizations and individuals is really two sides of the same coin: Organizations, take care of your employees' professional wellbeing; individuals, take control of your professional wellbeing.

**90,000**  
HOURS AT WORK



**OF AN AVERAGE  
PERSON'S  
LIFE SPAN**

The average person will spend one third of their life, or 90,000 hours, at work—it's in everyone's best interest to make these hours enjoyable.

Vaughn, 2018

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