

# The Influence of Career Commitment on Motivation to Learn and Motivation to Transfer

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**ABSTRACT**—*The training transfer literature provides a variety of recommendations to enhance training transfer. However, the influence of career commitment on motivation to learn and motivation to transfer has not yet been adequately studied. This study attempted to identify the influence of career commitment on motivation to learn and motivation to transfer as well as the relationship between motivation to learn and motivation to transfer, using a sample of 180 managers in MBA programs. Data was collected using a self administered questionnaire validated through a pilot study. The results indicate that career commitment is neither a strong predictor of motivation to learn nor a predictor of motivation to transfer. However, motivation to learn is a significant predictor of motivation to transfer. The implications of the results are discussed, and limitations of the study are also noted, along with the suggestions.*

**Keywords**— career commitment, motivation to learn, motivation to transfer

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's turbulent environmental conditions resulting from globalization and technological advancement, organizations are pressured to place much weight on enhancing employees' competencies for competitive advantage (Ballout, 2009; Grossman and Salas, 2011). This is due to their being aware that, without a competent, flexible, committed and motivated workforce, they are unable to reach their mission. Thus, they invest a significant amount of money on employee training and development. For example, U.S employers have invested around 2.2 percent of payroll in training (Donovan and Darcy, 2011). Although a large amount of investment is incurred on training in general, in most situations no adequate learning has been transferred to the trainees' work places (Clarke, 2002; Kontoghiorghes, 2002; Pham et al, 2010). Therefore, transfer of training is an important issue addressed by many HRD scholars and professionals in the past and today. Thus, they attempt to understand the training transfer process, the factors that hinder it or facilitate it, and strategies to enhance the transfer of training from the point of view of trainees, trainers and managers. Transfer of training is described in literature as the degree to which trainees apply the competencies gained in training to their work places (Bruke and Hutchins, 2007; Noe 2008). Among the factors discussed in the literature on training transfer, career commitment is a less studied area (Kontoghiorghes, 2002). Career commitment refers to a composite of individual attitudes towards career, and it is reflected from his/her career decisions and behaviors such as career identification, career planning etc (Shim and Rohrbaugh, 2011). The concept of career has been growing and changing with the new trends in the business world such as mergers, acquisitions, de-layering, layoffs, technological advancements, and the characteristics of employees such as changing loyalties and level of education etc. (Carson and Bedian, 1994; Marchant, 1999). Today's careers are explained as protean or boundary-less careers (Noe, 2008); and, with the new career concept, the psychological contract between employers and employees has also changed. For example, with regard to boundary-less or protean careers, employees are ultimately responsible for pursuing and managing their own careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Noe, 2008). They are in fact expected to demonstrate employability and to be of value to the organizational success (Merchant, 1999). Thus, it would be expected that employees would put in much effort to find new career strategies and behaviors to manage their career in the new scenario. Furthermore, employees may exert much effort by themselves to acquire new competencies and to utilize them in their job as a survival strategy in the new career world (Cheng and Ho, 2001). Thus, it is expected that individuals would have high career commitment and would exert higher levels of motivation to learn and transfer their learning to their work places. However, to date there are no adequate studies conducted, either globally or locally, that have examined the impact of career commitment on motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. On this ferment this article seeks to investigate the research gap in the training transfer literature, by examining the level of career commitment of the managers who are involved in Master of Business Administration (MBA) programs, and the influence of career commitment on motivation to learn and motivation to transfer in the Sri Lankan context. The reason for choosing MBA degree programs is that scholars have mentioned this as the optimal setting for studying the transfer of training, due to its nature (Pham et.al, 2010).

Among the transferable skills, managerial skills are more applicable to different settings rather than technical skills. In addition, managers are the key players of any organization. Thus, organizations in Sri Lanka also spend considerable amounts on management development. In general, management development programs could be formal or informal. An instance for formal management development programs is an educational program such as MBA or short academic courses. In Sri Lanka, MBA degree is highly popular among private and public sector managers/ executives. As a result, most of the state sector universities and institutes in Sri Lanka offer MBA degree programs. Generally, managers in the Sri Lankan context perceive that earning a MBA degree is one of the best ways to be equipped in the new career world. Therefore, the objectives of this study were formulated to examine (a) level of career commitment of Sri Lankan managers who are in MBA programs, (b) the influence of the level of career commitment on acquiring new competencies from MBA programs and (c) the influence of career commitment on the motivation to transfer what they have acquired from MBA programs to their job.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Career Commitment**

Career commitment can be explained as “employee’s attitude towards his or her vocation, including a profession” (Balu, 1985) or as “employee’s motivation to work in a chosen vocation” (Hall, 1971). In general, career commitment involves development of career goals and willingness to put effort, energy and time to pursuing career goals (Colarelli and Bishop, 1990). Even though Balu has not mentioned career planning in his definition, Colarelli and Bishop (1990) and Carson and Bedeian (1994) have mentioned career planning as a major component of career commitment. Career commitment is difficult to operationalize because of its vague boundaries (Carson and Bedeian, 1994). Based on the research findings of London (1983), Carson and Bedeian (1994) identified three dimensions of career commitment, namely, career identity, career planning and career resilience. Career identity is the emotional association with one’s career, career resilience is the ability of employee to face the problems that affect his or her work, and career planning is involved with developmental needs and career goals. Srikanth and Israel (2012) citing Meyer et al (1993) conceptualized career commitment in three approaches: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment refers to an individual’s strong desire to remain in the same profession; normative commitment refers to a sense of obligation to remain in the chosen career; and continuous commitment, to remaining in the chosen career due to the high cost of leaving it. Balu (1985) citing London (1983) mentioned individual and situational variables as important predictors of career commitment.

Employees who have career strategies are more willing to learn and apply new competencies because of their awareness of the relationship between behavior improvement and career mobility. Colarelli and Bishop (1990) indicated that employees with high career commitment would be able to pursue their career goals even when faced with obstacles. Aryee and Tan (1992) confirmed this argument through their findings, and mentioned that employees with high career commitment may make a significant investment in their careers (e.g. acquire required competencies by participating in training, seminars, workshops etc.). Marchant (1999) mentioned that the psychological contract between managers and their employers has changed, and the nature of managers’ career mobility has also changed. As a result, managers should demonstrate a higher degree of ‘employability’. In order to ensure their employability, they need more commitment towards their careers.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the hypothesis ‘Managers will be highly committed to their careers’ (H1), is formulated

### **2.2 Motivation to Learn and Career Commitment**

Motivation to learn has been defined by different scholars in different ways. For example, Noe and Schmitt (1986) described motivation to learn as the specific desire of a trainee to learn the content of a training program. Bruke and Hutchins (2007) define it as the direction intensity and persistence towards learning. However, Colquitt et al (2000) refer to it as the intensity and persistence of efforts that trainees apply in learning-oriented improvement activities before, during and after training. A close examination of these definitions reveals that motivation to learn involves desire, intention and involvement with learning or training. Prior researches have unveiled different antecedents of motivation to learn, such as training self efficacy, goal orientation, supervisory support, peer support, career commitment etc. (Awoniyi et al., 2002; Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Clarke, 2002; Gumuseli and Ergin, 2002; Klink et al., 2001). In general, motivation to learn has been found to be influenced by personal characteristics, training program design factors and work environmental factors (Mathieu, et al 1993; Seylar et al, 1998). Among such personal characteristics are self efficacy, locus of control, need for achievement, extraversion, career commitment, performance goal orientation etc (Tziner et.al, 2007). Chang and Ho (2001) indicated that trainees with high career commitment were likely to exercise greater effort towards learning the program with the intention of improving their job performance. They have thus revealed that career commitment is positively related to learning motivation. Marchant (1999) argues that, with organizational turbulence, job security cannot be guaranteed if managers are not employable. Therefore, employees need to maintain and improve the competencies through commitment to their career. Though the empirical evidence between

motivation to learn and career commitment are minimal, based on the foregoing discussion it can be hypothesized that 'career commitment is a significant determiner of motivation to learn' (H2).

### 2.3 Motivation to Transfer and Career Commitment

Motivation to transfer is dynamic and essential for transfer of training. Without motivation, trainees will not apply newly acquired competencies in their jobs. Motivation to transfer is defined as the trainees' desire to use competencies gained in training on their jobs (Holton et al, 2000; Noe and Schmitt, 1986). Seylar et al. (1998) examined the relationship between motivation to transfer and five groups of variables, namely, individual or general attitudes, situational specific attitudes, reaction, learning and work environmental factors. They found that individual attitudes and work environmental factors explained most of the variance involved.

Scholars have mentioned that attitudes are the immediate antecedents of intention to perform a certain behavior (Bandura, 1986). Work related attitudes, such as career commitment, organizational commitment and job involvement, affect the extent to which a trainee is motivated to learn and motivated to transfer. Organizational commitment has received a great deal of interest among others (Ahmad and Bakar, 2003), while career commitment has been studied less frequently (Cheng and Hampson, 2008; Kontoghiorghe, 2002). There have been several studies examining the relationship between work related attitudes, pre-training motivation and motivation to transfer, but their findings have been mixed (Mathieu et al, 1993; Noe and Schmitt, 1986). For example, Mathieu et al. (1993) did not find a significant relationship between job involvement and motivation to transfer. However, the work of Noe and Schmitt (1986) and Clark et al (1993) demonstrate that job involvement and career attitudes are antecedents of learning and behavior change. Cheng and Ho (2001) found a statistically significant relationship between career commitment and motivation to transfer. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that career commitment will be a significant determiner of motivation to transfer (H3).

### 2.4 Motivation to Learn and Motivation to Transfer

Gegenfurtner et al (2009), doing a comprehensive literature review on motivation to transfer, concluded that pre training motivation to learn predicts post training motivation to transfer. In the same vein, Kontoghiorghe (2002) examined the predictors of motivation to learn and motivation to transfer in a service organization in the health care industry and found that motivation to learn was one of the most important predictors of motivation to transfer. Chiaburu and Marinova (2005) found that pre training motivation was related to skill transfer in their survey on individual dimensions and contextual factors on a total of 186 trainees. Based on the above empirical findings, it can be hypothesized that 'Motivation to learn will be positively related with motivation to transfer' (H4).

The proposed model of this study can be presented as follows.

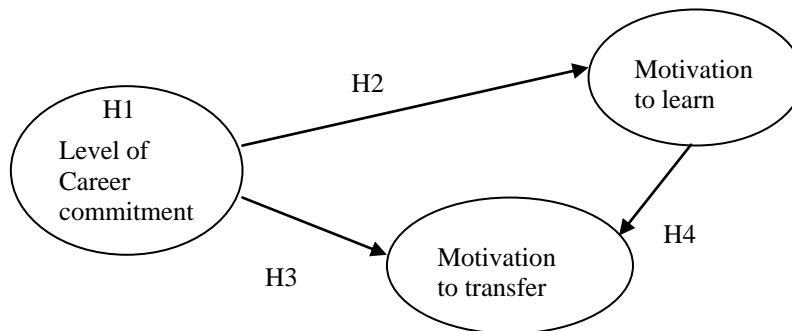


Figure 1: Proposed Model for the Study

## 3. RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND SAMPLE

The sample for this study was drawn from the students in three MBA programs offered by three leading state sector universities in Sri Lanka. When the sample was drawn, the students were in the second semester of their second year, and had completed more than 90% of the course work. Therefore, it is assumed that their perception on motivation to learn had not been distorted. There was no significant difference among these universities in terms of courses, duration of the programs, teaching staff, fees and administration of the program. Thus, respondents were treated as one sample. 200 identical questionnaires were distributed among the MBA students. 182 questionnaires were received, out of which 180 were usable.

With respect to the demographic profile, 61 per cent of the respondents were male (n= 109). 60.5 per cent of them were married. The mean age of the participants was 35 yrs. 63 percent of the sample funded themselves for the program while 12 per cent were partly sponsored by their organization. The rest of them (25 percent) were completely sponsored by their respective organizations. 56 per cent were employed in the private sector, and the average tenure of the participants in the current position ranged from two to five years.

### 3.1 Measures

#### 3.1.1 Career Commitment

Four items were used to measure the degree of career commitment. Items were developed based on Balu's (1985) instrument of career commitment and the work of Carson and Bedeian (1994). For example, one of the sample items was "If I could get another job that is different from this one but paying the same amount, I would probably take it".

#### 3.1.2 Motivation to Learn

To measure this construct, the researcher used three items. The items developed by Ai –Eisa et al. (2008) were slightly modified for this study. An example item is "I am motivated to learn the materials that are emphasized in this MBA program".

#### 3.1.3 Motivation to Transfer

This construct was measured using four items. An example item is "I will set specific goals for maintaining the knowledge and skills that I have learned from this MBA program".

All the items were assessed using a five point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree).

### 3.2 Validation of Measurement Properties

A pilot study was carried out to validate the measurement properties of the instrument. Measurement properties such as reliability, convergent and discriminant validity were tested. The results of the respective tests are given in Table 1.

#### 3.2.1 Reliability

Reliability of the instrument was examined through evaluating the internal consistency among the indicators. The data in Table 1 clearly show that two of the three constructs exceed the standard value ( $\alpha = 0.7$ ) and that the remaining construct is very close to the standard, thus ensuring the internal consistency.

#### 3.2.2 Convergent Validity

Factor analysis was performed to examine whether the items converged on the respective constructs. The selected indices of factor analysis are given in Table 1. Originally, ten items were developed for capturing the construct of career commitment, four for motivation to learn, and five for motivation to transfer. However, eight items that were poorly loaded were deleted based on the results of the factor analysis.

Kaiser-Meyer- Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used to examine the appropriateness of the factor analysis. KMO index compares the magnitude of the observed correlation coefficient to the magnitude of the partial correlation coefficient (Malhotra, 1993). All the KMO values were found to be over 0.5, proving the sampling adequacy (Malhotra, 1993). Bartlett's test of sphericity was performed to examine whether the indicators are correlated in the population (Hair et al, 1998). All the Chi square values of the Bartlett's test are significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level, suggesting that each indicator is highly correlated with the other indicators (Malhotra, 1993). In addition, the average variance was extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability for each construct was examined. All AVE values exceed the standard value of 0.5, while all composite reliability values exceed the standard value of 0.7. The results of these tests ensure the convergent validity (Malhotra, 1993).

**Table 1:** Cronbach's alpha, AVE and Composite Reliability Values on each Variable

Construct	KMO	Bartlett's	Cronbach's	AVE	Composite
Career Commitment	0.737	121.39	0.7	0.53	0.822
Motivation to Learn	0.627	84.86	0.67	0.603	0.82
Motivation to Transfer	0.738	217.85	0.75	0.5	0.897

#### 3.2.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was established through comparing the paired correlation coefficients for each and every construct with the respective AVE of each construct. All the AVE values exceed the correlation coefficients, thus proving the discriminant validity.

### 3.2.4 Goodness of Fit Indices

Measurement model of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was tested by using AMOS 18 version to examine the goodness of fit of the model. The results are recorded in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Goodness of Fit Indices for Individual Variables in the Model

Variable	CMIN/df	AGFI	RMSEA	NFI	CFI
Career commitment	2.355	0.990	0.055	0.994	0.901
Motivation to transfer	1.971	0.835	0.051	0.934	0.943
Motivation to learn	2.437	0.912	0.580	0.926	0.935
Acceptable limits	Ratio of 3 to 1	0.90 or greater	0.05 or less	0.90 or greater	0.90 or greater

Goodness of fit indices in Table 2 reveal that all indices are within acceptable limits, suggesting a satisfactory overall fit of the measurement model. Diagnosis indicators for evaluating components of the measurement model, such as standard residuals and modification indices, the direction, magnitude and statistical significance of the parameter estimates between indicator and latent variables, etc, were also examined. All the diagnosis indicators satisfied the standard.

## 4. ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Degree of Career Commitment

To test the first hypothesis, the degree of career commitment was estimated by summing the responses given to each of the indicators of the career commitment construct. Subsequently, the mean values were calculated and categorized into three levels, viz high, neutral and low, by using the following criteria: if the mean values are between 1 to 2.59, the degree of career commitment is considered low; if they are between 2.6 to 3.59, the degree of career commitment is neutral; and if they are greater than 3.6, the degree of career commitment is high. The resulting frequencies are given in Table 3. According to Table 3, the degree of career commitment of more than 50% of the managers is either neutral or low. Moreover, 48 percent of the managers perceived their career commitment level as high.

**Table 3:** Decision Criteria and Frequencies of Career Commitment

Range of mean values	Level	Frequencies	%	Cumulative %
1.0 – 2.59	Low	28	15.6	15.6
2.6 – 3.59	Neutral	66	36.7	52.2
3.6 - 5.00	High	86	47.8	100

To examine whether the observations in Table 3 are statistically significant, One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test was performed. The results which are given in Table 4 disclose that KS z value (4.042) is significant at  $p = 0.000$  level, claiming that the differences among the observations are statistically significant. That is, more than 52% of the managers' career commitment level is neutral or low. Therefore, the first hypothesis cannot be accepted.

**Table 4:** Results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		A
N		180
Normal Parameters <sup>a</sup>	Mean	2.32
	Std. Deviation	.730
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.301
	Positive	.193
	Negative	-.301
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		4.042
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

a. Test distribution is normal

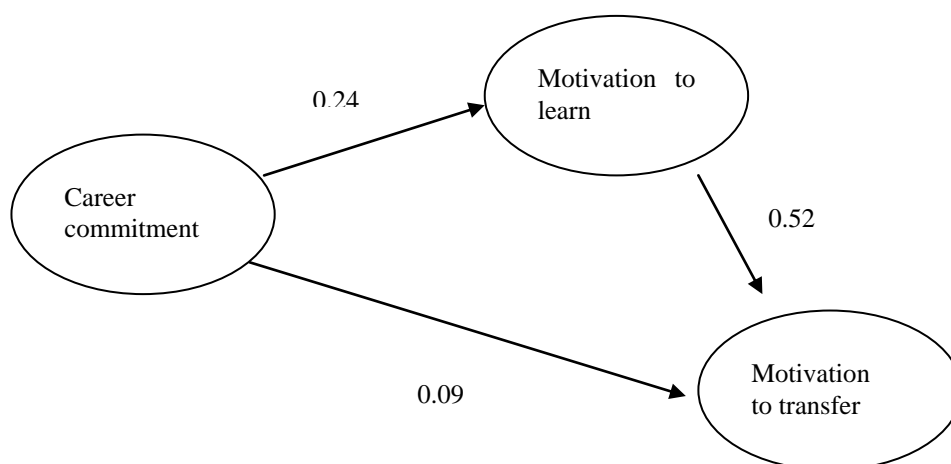
#### 4.2 Testing the Relationships among the Variables

Structural model of the SEM, which is the procedure for empirical estimation of the strength of relationship between each variable, was estimated for H2, H3, and H4. The results of the model were recorded in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Results of the Structural Model

			Standardized	S.E.	C.R.	P
ML	<---	CC	.242	.056	2.183	.029
MT	<---	CC	.099	.044	1.016	.310
MT	<---	ML	.524	.113	4.117	***

The results indicated that career commitment positively influences motivation to learn ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), leading to accept H2. However, the strength of the said relationship was weak. Career commitment was not a significant influence on motivation to transfer ( $r = .10$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), thereby the H3 is not supported. However, motivation to learn was positively and significantly related with motivation to transfer ( $r = 0.52$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), thus supporting the H4. The following figure indicates the path coefficients of the model.



**Figure 2 :** Path Coefficients of the Hypothesized Structured Model

## 5. DISCUSSION

Under the newly defined career concept and the resulting psychological contract between employer and employee, employees are likely to exert a high degree of effort and commitment towards their careers to increase their employability. However, the result of the first hypothesis test of the study is inconsistent with the above argument. Thus,



to further understand this claim, separate chi square tests were performed to examine whether the degree of career commitment varied in terms of the demographic characteristics of the sample. The results of these tests reveal that no statistically significant difference exists among the degrees of career commitment of the employees in different sectors or among the employees from different educational levels. However, the degree of career commitment does vary in terms of gender. That is, male managers reflect a higher degree of career commitment than female managers in MBA programs. London (1983) has mentioned that both individual characteristics (eg. personality, development orientation) and situational variables (eg. supervisory support) are important predictors of individual career behavior. However, the scope of this research is not to examine the predictors of career commitment: it is limited to determining the existing level of career commitment. Thus, future studies can be conducted to examine the predictors of career commitment and their influence on the existing level of career commitment. The lower degree of career commitment of managers may be due to the feeling of greater job security of the managers in MBA program in the Sri Lankan context. Difference in HRM policies, practices and cultural differences may be other contributors to this condition. Thus, future studies can explore the antecedents of career commitment since this knowledge is important in developing effective career strategies.

Second and third findings of this study support the previous scholars' claims regarding career commitment's influence on motivation to learn (Cheng and Ho, 2001) and motivation to learn being a strong predictor of motivation to transfer (Kontoghiorghes, 2002; Tannenbaum et al, 1991). In short, if MBA students are not motivated to learn the program, transfer of training will not occur adequately even where the factors relating to the MBA programs' design and work environment are favorable. Thus, this finding suggests that MBA degree programs' administrators, employers and students themselves should address the factors affecting the motivation to learn, in an attempt to enhance the degree of motivation to transfer.

However, the next finding of the study, that career commitment does not have a statistically significant influence on motivation to transfer, is contradictory to the findings of Cheng and Ho (2001). This contradiction might be due to poor HRM practices, such as low attention paid by organizations and individuals for personal and career development plans, employees' perceptions of a mismatch between promotion and performance, and ineffective performance appraisal systems. In brief, motivation to transfer does not occur due to career commitment, but due to favorable factors in the work environment.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS**

Both the organizations and the individual managers need to look for strategies to enhance career commitment, such as career counseling, lateral transfers, special assignments, job enrichment, multiple career paths etc., because a higher degree of career commitment benefits both parties. Individual managers also need to get the maximum benefit from the facilities provided by organizations and to take initiatives to enhance their career.

As the study reveals that a positive weak correlation exists between career commitment and motivation to learn, HRD managers should examine why and how this relationship can be improved and what factors (other than career commitment) have an influence upon the motivation to learn. In the same vein, examining why career commitment does not influence the motivation to transfer, and taking necessary strategies accordingly, is needed to obtain an adequate return on the investment done on management development.

## **7. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Several limitations of this study should be noted. Firstly, all three variables were measured by self reported data and data were collected through a cross sectional design. Some scholars have mentioned that gathering data from multiple sources may be more accurate and that measuring attitudes through a longitudinal design might be more appropriate (Cromwell and Kolb, 2004). Secondly, the study enumerated only a sample of 180 elements. However, as far as the generalizability is concerned, using a more diverse and larger sample could enable extending the results more confidently. Thirdly, the theoretical and empirical effort of this study is limited to examining only the influence of career commitment on motivation to learn and motivation to transfer. Antecedents of career commitment and moderating variables are ignored when examining the proposed model. Future research should be conducted to address this research gap, taking into account the limitations mentioned herein.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

This study examined the level of career commitment of managers in MBA programs, the influence of their career commitment on their motivation to learn the program and motivation to transfer, and the effect of motivation to learn on their motivation to transfer. The results indicated that the career commitment of a majority of the sample is not high, and that career commitment influences the motivation to learn in low profile, though without any influence on motivation to transfer. Further, it was found that motivation to learn significantly predicted the motivation to transfer. This reflects that managers in MBA programs have the motivation to transfer the learning of the programs, not primarily because of their career commitment, but because of other factors, such as personality, program design and work environmental factors.

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