

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Changed Leadership -From Wise to Compromise: The Decline of Leadership Wisdom in Modern Organizations

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Abstract

This paper explores leadership challenges and problems as stemming from what is called “changed leadership” in describing the major difference existing between leadership of past and present societies. Leadership in modern society is seen as engendering more of compromise rather than wisdom, and this fundamentally constitutes a leadership challenge and can theoretically and hypothetically explain leadership problems across the board. The author believes that while leaders must lead in ways conducive to follower well-being and success, the leader’s position and roles are archetypically determined according to ideas of leadership and those who become leaders having, possessing, or acquiring more than ordinary significance through their impact and influence on others. The major differences between leadership of the past and present are explored from the perspective of leadership competences centered on responses to leadership situations and followers and the leader’s role relative to definition of what is called “wise leadership” or leadership based on the leader’s knowledge and understanding of right and wrong rather than on followers’ demands and expectations relative to fear of losing popularity (compromise leadership), or an interchanged idea of leader-follower and follower-leader roles bound in one individual as typical of leadership that demands leaders’ authentic power and knowledge relative to followers’ dictates. Citing examples of modern leaders considered to be “wise” in their positions as leaders, the author makes a philosophical comparison to the patristic conceptualization of leadership to demonstrate that wisdom in leadership is valued and constitutes the difference between leadership that transcends and leadership that only seeks to satisfy.

Keywords: *Changed leadership, Compromise, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Social imperative, Leadership, Wisdom.*

Introduction

Leadership as a Social Imperative

Leadership is universal, and the fact that it is not unique to the human species, proves that it is both necessary and even indispensable not only to social and collective order, but to individual growth and transformation. Leadership displays itself as a natural social phenomenon into which we are born and a process into which we grow. We seem to all strive to become leaders of something, and it is difficult to separate our personal growth and aspirations completely from leadership. We all eventually lead in some capacity or another, whether on a personal or professional level. Thus, leadership is a human imperative that is found not only in the experiences we gain and the knowledge we acquire, but in the understanding and wisdom of what we do, why we do it, and the ways in which we apply our skills and abilities to make effective decisions for the best outcomes for ourselves and others (various publics or constituencies) in meeting our missions and visions.

Leadership as a process is as old as creation, and human societies across the ages have valued and

recognized the importance of leadership to both individual and collective progress, well-being, and survival. Thus, leadership holds an almost divine and sacred place in our hearts and minds as we look toward leadership and leaders to guide us and find the path whereon we should and must travel best as individuals and groups to realize our greatest potential and even our destiny; what we perceive to be a common destiny that is itself, a purposeful rationale for leaders and leadership. Because we see ourselves as superiorly intelligent and rationale individuals, we fashion our attitudes, values, behaviors and actions according to certain norms, expectations and standards that lead to the creation of individual and group responsibility and accountability. Leadership reflects the ultimate of the responsibilities and accountability that bind us individually and collectively to certain duties and obligations of care in securing our well-beings and survival. Thus, it is more than a process and relationship; leadership is to us what the Psalmist describes as “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path.” Without wise and effective leadership our social

institutions and societies would crumble and our individual lives and roles would become less meaningful.

The major driver in leadership transformation and development is change. Change as both a planned and unplanned phenomenon affects us at every level of our being and affects every aspect of life and our environment. According to McFarlane [1] change leadership has become a new approach to dealing with contextual inconsistency. As such, we constantly develop new systems and theories, ideas and guidelines to deal with change on personal and impersonal levels. While innovation and emerging ideas and strategies are excellent ways of dealing with change, we must also recognize that the “extraordinarily old” values and virtues described by Theobald [2] are essential in understanding and dealing with change at its source: our values and attitudes. Change leadership has called for “changed” leadership in order to address the new problems and challenges that are emerging each and every day. At the same time, we must look back to the past and depend on the authentic wisdom of unique leaders to guide us along.

Defining Changed Leadership and Wisdom

The changes in cultural milieu are a major factor driving the change leadership concept and resulting in changed leadership for the 21st society. Furthermore, the degree to which cultures facilitate change based on orientations toward ideals of collectivism and individualism also affect leadership practices and how leaders are valued and defined [3]. Changed leadership as used here is different from what Kotter [4] calls change leadership. While change leadership refers to leadership that fosters and effectively manage and coordinate change, while overcoming resistance to change and developing in organizational members and followers, positive attitudes and behaviors to accept and become motivated by positive change, “changed leadership” describes leadership as it has changed from one state or ideological form or approach to another. Changed leadership seeks to describe the difference or differences between leadership practices and approaches, ideas and values of yesterday and today. Leadership has no doubt changed over the past several decades, and not to mention over the past several centuries. Leadership today is strikingly different from the leadership of yesterday in its philosophical understanding and conceptual nature and meaning. The traits of leaders and definitions of leadership effectiveness have changed with our changing cultures and values. What was effective

and wise in leadership yesterday is no longer valued in many societies today, and the values and virtues, traits and characteristics which were ascribed to leaders designated as “wise” or “great” have changed and are no longer the defining attributes of leadership as it is practiced and theorized upon.

Changed leadership inherently engenders both a natural transformative-transcended, as well as a forced-change perspective of leadership regarding ideas of what it is and ought to be. With a natural transformative-transcended perspective of leadership, change comes naturally with the passing of time, changed values, culture and attitudes, technological and economic changes, among other factors. Forced-change involves change in leadership views or perspectives where individuals are compelled to choose the ideology of thought they embrace either through direct or indirect threat to well-being, political freedom, or survival – this usually lends itself to leadership perspectives engendering political ideologies such as democracy, communism, dictatorship or the like, and where majority consensus imposes strong restrictions on what one thinks or believes. Thus, changed leadership is leadership that has emerged from its various and past many vestiges and ideas to become what could be called a “universal” or “worldview” leadership perspective today where concepts of followers’ absolute freedom and leaders’ absolute respect for and belief in that freedom dominate.

While “changed leadership” focuses on collective characterization of leadership as a singular and common process, change leadership entails adaptation and planning that deliberately brings individuals into a leadership fold. Spector [5] has developed five core tasks of change leadership. These five core tasks of change leadership are: (i) develop and articulate clear and consistent sense of purpose and direction for the organization; (ii) establish demanding performance expectations; (iii) enable upward communication; (iv) develop and forge an emotional bond between employees and the organization; and (v) develop future change leaders. While the efforts to make leadership more effective underlie the rationale for change leadership, changed leadership simply happens or is made to happen because we must change our views and progress with the flow of time, culture and society to live. As leadership changes in terms of values and attributes, definitions of effectiveness and what constitutes “wise leadership” from “compromise” leadership, we come to view the importance and balancing

relationships of leaders and followers relative to our own ideals and goals.

Changes in our institutions and environments are leading to changing views of what leaders should be and should represent. Both planned and unplanned changes affect how we perceive leaders in terms of their roles, responsibilities and effectiveness. While the majority of changes in organizations are planned changes, unplanned change is powerful in shaping the contexts in which we lead and follow [6]. We must not only learn to lead in turbulent times, but must learn to lead in a borderless world where diversity is a major factor leading to a new era in cross-cultural leadership [7].

Definition of Leadership Wisdom

We often hear followers or individuals in general lament on how wise leaders of yesteryears were; how today's leaders lack the wisdom that their predecessors possessed. This is a legitimate complaint when we consider the numerous leadership-related failures, challenges and problems we face as a society today. However, an important question emerging from this is "What is wise leadership or who is a wise leader?" In order to attempt to understand this question we must first arrive at some acceptable definition and understanding of "wisdom" especially as it relates to the subject of leadership. The word wisdom is philosophically difficult to define. A basic definition of wisdom would be "having the quality of being wise" but this would be a mere restatement of the question, "who can be considered a wise person?" Philosophically, wisdom is approached from several perspectives: (i) Socratic Humility Theory (ii) Epistemic Accuracy, and (iii) Wisdom as Knowledge: Wisdom as Extensive Factual Knowledge (WFK) and Wisdom as Knowing How to Live (KLW); and (iv) Wisdom as Knowledge and Action [8]. Attempting to fully cover the philosophical basis and conceptualization of wisdom here is not our job here and would be impossible as even contemporary philosophy falls short on this matter as Ryan [8] indicates: "the topic of wisdom has not received much treatment in the contemporary philosophical literature" (p. 1). Thus, we will only briefly delve into definitions of wisdom reflecting aspects and attributes of these four conceptions.

From Dictionary.com [9] we are provided with two definitions of "Wisdom": (i) The quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment; the quality of being wise; and (ii) The soundness of an

action or decision with regard to the application of such experience, knowledge, and good judgment (p.1). Both of these are excellent definitions and in the strictest case of application in this essay, the second definition (Definition ii) reflects exactly what most people might mean when they speak of wisdom with regard to leadership and leaders; they essentially are talking about making effective decisions and taking actions that are efficient and which result in optimum satisfaction and value for all parties involved. Essentially, this seems to border on ideas of utilitarianism and other ethics-values theories where decisions and actions by the leader and stemming from leadership leave everybody better off and no "single" individual worse off. However, one may ask: "Is such a thing possible?" We learn about opportunity costs, benefits and losses, advantages and disadvantages, and rarely do decisions on a wide scale leave everyone better off and no one worse off. Thus, situations will produce different results, especially as our society and its many challenges become more complex with additional layers of diverse constituents or followers and their ideological differences.

The World English Dictionary [10] provides us with a very interesting definition of wisdom: "the ability or result of an ability to think and act utilizing knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight" (p. 1). This ability it implies, results from accumulated knowledge, erudition, and/or enlightenment. This makes sense since those usually regarded as having wisdom or being wise usually have far more accumulated knowledge than majority or than the above average person and also the ability to project and apply this knowledge in explaining, understanding and placing things, peoples, and events into their perceived proper contexts and domains. Results are very important in defining wise leadership or leadership that exhibits wisdom as an attribute or characteristic. In this way, the word wisdom applied to leadership is closely related to effectiveness and success in leading individuals, groups, and organizations or institutions. Thus, the implication is that the wise leader or leadership that is wise, or defined by wisdom, always yields effectiveness and success in any situation because followers are able to depend on the ability of a knowledgeable, enlightened or erudite person to make the appropriate decisions after weighing all factors, and thus, brings outcomes or outcome desired by and desirable to followers. However, wisdom as applied to leadership means far more than this. It also means that regardless of outcomes: good or bad,

the wise leader's decisions and actions were the right thing; the good thing, or correct choices given circumstances. Thus, another philosophical intimation is made: morality of leadership decision as a basis for judging leaders and leadership as wise or containing wisdom.

An endearing and enduring value or attribute of leadership regarded as wise or containing wisdom is that of trust with regard to the attitudes of followers. Followers' trust is a main factor which constitutes and contributes to the definition or perception of wise leadership or wisdom in leadership. The degree to which the followers trust their leader will determine how much they perceive him or her as being wise or having wisdom in making leadership decisions and taking actions on their behalf, especially those decisions and actions with significant and wide-scale impact and effects. Thus, the argument could be stated somewhat like this: "Wise leaders are wise because followers trust them and believe in their abilities and their ability to make the correct decisions and take the right actions given circumstances." Regardless of the seemingly follower-oriented perspective of leadership wisdom, a leader-oriented perspective entails conscientiousness and confidence, and a case in which the leader builds his or her leader-persona or character on ideals of "wise leaders" that are a part of followers' schema. The leader is wise not simply because psychometric instruments can independently and objectively verify his or her wisdom, but because followers think, believe, and perceive that he or she is wise. Thus, the wise leader or leadership with wisdom universally encompasses all the traits and characteristics of effective, exemplary, and successful leadership from both past and present examples.

Wisdom, however defined, is a philosophically-engaged and authentic concept designating the ability of leaders to meet what could be termed "extraordinary" demands and expectations of followers, especially as related to their perceptions of what is wise and what is not, what is wrong and what is not, and most definitely, what should be rather than what is. Thus, these leaders live up to the highest moral expectations of their followers and how they go about meeting these expectations and overwhelming followers' ideas of wise and effective leaders and leadership define whether they are wise or possess wisdom as leaders. Wise leadership is needed to effectively roll back and hold in check the "rapids of change" as we are living and experiencing some of humanity's most turbulent years [2]. Therefore, leaders who strive for those values and virtues that have been tested through centuries and

many cultures and deemed as wise are the types of leaders we demand in the 21st century. One of the important challenges we face as a society is trying to find balance, and Theobald [2] believes that the balance can be found in both extraordinarily old and endless new values and virtues. The extraordinarily good old values are what separate wise leaders from their counterparts.

Wisdom in Leadership

It is extremely difficult to associate modern 21st century leadership with the idea of wisdom, not only because of the difficulty of defining wisdom, but because the requirements of leadership and effective leadership have changed so dramatically compared to the past, that we are to a great degree uncertain how to characterize modern leaders. Modern leaders have significantly different ideas of their roles and responsibilities and followers' demands and expectations of leaders have changed as well. Moreover, western democratic societies tend to dominate when it comes to fostering a universal or global perspective or effective leadership practices or guidelines defining leaders who are considered effective. Thus, a transformation even takes place in the way we describe leaders; leaders of the past were in and by majority seen relative to the old patristic ideal of the wise father or wise righteous man, whereas leaders in our modern global era are seen relative to organizational and managerial conceptions of effectiveness and achieving results based on ideas of efficiency.

There are some modern leaders who because of their tremendous success and leadership have been labeled as "gurus" of leadership or called wise because they apply certain principles and practices which have been tested universally as appropriate and effective practices, and from which many organizations and other leaders have gained in their applications to institutions and industries. For example, Stephen Covey, Jack Welch, among several others, have achieved considerable degrees of recognition for their practical wisdom in leading in their various industries. The practical principles they have applied in their positions as leaders have transformed their organizations to become some of the most successful in our century. Perhaps what they possess regarding leadership can be called wisdom. However, not all of their principles and practices are universal and can yield the degrees of success they obtain with their own companies in other organizations. Moreover, many of their principles and practices are based on the ideals of capitalism and cultural

individualism rather than the time-valued principles associated with many customary, ritualistic and collectivist-driven cultures that still believe in and are motivated by leadership ideals based in wisdom and the wise as archetypical elements and reflections of the past, and naturally tied to spiritual and religious faith, belief, and ideas.

Compromise in Leadership

In the 21st century leadership is an interpersonal matter rather than a personal matter because it refers to an interacting dialogical relationship between leaders and followers with implied equality in importance, responsibility, and a definition of leader-role and status dependent on the degree to which he or she yields to follower demands and expectations regardless of what those demands and expectations may be, and this, simply because the leader exists solely to serve followers. This view of leadership and leaders subordinates leader wisdom to follower demands and expectations and differs from ideas of leaders being wise and transcendent in their abilities and views to recognize beyond what followers are able to see and perceive in both short-term and long-term. In other words, modern leadership that requires “compromise” on the part of leaders seems to rob leaders of authentic authority to exercise wisdom which necessarily provides justifications for their positions as leaders. Effective leaders are considered those who make concessions to please their followers or other stakeholders they are dealing with. While concessions are good in many cases, concessions can sometimes weaken leadership authority and deprive leaders of the special role they play and the special place they hold in our minds and hearts as “chosen” individuals; whether by our collective wisdom or a peculiar sway of nature or God.

To compromise means to make a deal where one person gives up part of his or her demand and can refer to settlement of differences in which each side makes concessions. The “compromise” here does not denote anything unethical, but rather communicates the lack of, or more appropriately, the fluid authority and authenticity with which many modern leaders are forced to operate. They must yield to followers’ demands and expectations as these become necessary requirements and characteristics of good or effective leadership regardless of the fact that the majority of followers are not always correct, and that the demands of the majority are sometimes not the “highest good” since as we can see, sometimes the majority of followers are misinformed or harbor prejudices or lack collective wisdom to adequately

determine what is right or wrong. A great example of this is the period in history during which the German people as followers of Adolf Hitler supported, condoned, demanded and encouraged discrimination, murder and other atrocities against minority groups. While it could be argued by many that they had a bad leader, the consensus of followers of such vast majority is the enabler for leaders to perform and enact what their followers desire and express or expect. Thus, wise leaders know when to differ from their followers and know when resolve represents wisdom over compromise. In the same manner of arguing, true followers trust the wisdom and authentic abilities of their leaders who are wise, morally and ethically educated to model the way, challenge whatever process needs challenging, inspire a shared vision that places the leaders and followers on the same authentic wavelength, and encourage the heart and enable followers to act in rational and reasonable ways. These qualities in leaders are not only exemplary, but reflect best practices that lead to wise decisions and significant levels of agreement on follower expectations [11].

The problem with compromise as an approach to leadership is where the line of authentic leadership is blurred because there is an overemphasis on the need to please followers as individuals and groups rather than followers as a “single entity” being led, and this, insofar that leaders in our modern times regularly get caught up in inappropriate relationships and activities such as bribery. Some followers are powerful in influencing leaders because of their economic wealth, political positions, familial and social status, and this sometimes results in leaders lacking wisdom that they yield to the demands of such followers. This is where compromise leadership is a weak kind of approach because it literally demands the leader giving up power and authenticity in situations where followers become overbearing or exert so much force that leaders are sometimes faced with the possibility of altering or reversing their wholesome or correct decisions or even “compromise” their standards to meet those followers’ demands and expectations. Often, compromise is encouraged as a negotiation strategy. Compromise is only advantageous and ethical when situations and circumstances demand it without negative impact being imparted to other parties or without favors accorded to others that lead to disadvantages or unequal treatments.

The Differences between Wisdom and Compromise in Leadership

Leadership in the 21st century is a strikingly different phenomenon compared to leadership in previous centuries, which was mainly transactional and leader-centered. While leadership of the past is regarded today as cold and lacking enough humanistic consideration for follower input and well-being, we can argue that leadership in the past was a more personal than interpersonal matter where leaders were not necessarily only agents of those who followed and depended on them for guidance and direction, but an agent of higher calling, whether that calling stems from ideals of possessing extraordinary intelligence, insights and virtues, or simply based on ideals of divine prominence tied to religious and other spiritual beliefs. The ideas of wisdom and leadership in the past were inseparable and complementary because leaders were predominantly adjudged to be successful, effective, powerful and good based on how followers' perceived them regarding the wisdom they possessed. Today, the idea of wisdom and leadership are further apart with an unbelievable gap observed when we consider many individuals in important leadership positions across the globe today.

Wise leaders assert themselves in what they know and do and are not driven by fear-like compromise leaders who are fearful of follower dissension and fall-out. Thus, compromise leaders are highly motivated by fear, while wise leaders recognize that leadership is not conflict-free because human interactions and decisions are always likely to create constructive disagreements. Compromise leaders fear conflict because they see it as negative and conflict with followers is seen as affecting leader popularity and reign. However, wise leaders are not preoccupied with perpetuation of their position as leaders, but focus on doing the right thing given current and foreseeable knowledge and understanding of contexts and circumstances and the impact on each and every stakeholder. Wise leaders are emotionally intelligent because they exercise wisdom or ability across a range of functions and personal best practices [11,12]. While Goleman [12] views emotional intelligence as an important characteristic of wise leaders, Crowne [13] describes cultural intelligence as "the ability to interact effectively in multiple cultures" and this is something wise leaders need, and Cohen [7] will definitely agree on this as we apply leadership principles and practices to survive the "rapids of change".

Wise leaders possess extraordinary values that are both authentic and historical, and these values have served humanity and people across all walks of life for millennia. These values reflect

the best of who and what we are and are morally unobjectionable across all cultures and societies. These leaders care much for posterity unlike compromise leaders whose major focus is surviving the here and now and with the mantra that "tomorrow provides for itself" and a pessimistic view that the power leaders hold to makes transcendent impact. The problem with compromise leaders is mainly one of politics; because they play the political game all the way; they must engage in "politricks" in order to retain their leadership influence and positions. When the political process ceases to work such leaders find themselves cornered because they do not know how to genuinely and authentically respond to followers. Table 1 below outlines seven major differences between wise leaders(ship) and compromise leaders(ship). The major issues on which they differ center mainly on: ideas about authority and its origin and function; their decision making approaches and rationales; the degree of self-confidence they project; how they view and apply knowledge and facts versus opinions in decision making; the degree of authenticity with which they act in carrying out their roles; how they react to fear and conflict and the attitude they have regarding these; and finally, how they treat follower expectations and how they facilitate transcendence.

Conclusion and Implications

Leadership is one of the most important among social processes in which humans engage to manage life's myriad changes, experiences, and challenges. Leadership provides us with the comfort and satisfaction that someone cares and is in place to be accountable and responsible, and someone to have a voice where ours fail to reach. Leadership is natural and human society could not have survived up to this point as no system in chaos remains so perpetually, but like a star going supernova, must come to its ultimate demise. However, leaders are in our lives and societies to ensure survival, progress, and continuance. Those leaders who apply authentic wisdom through understandings gained about human needs and relationships are the most successful because they understand that leadership uncovers the very essence of hope and dreams idealized in one person or persons we designate as leader or leaders.

There has never been such a great need before in human history and society for wise leaders who can understand our past and its implications for the contemporary as well as for the future. Today's leaders seem to lack the authentic vision and insight into people's very nature and soul, and as a result, they are unable to uncover what

Table 1: The Differences between wise leadership and compromise leadership

Wise leadership	Compromise leadership
<p><i>Authority</i> Leader role is treated as absolute because leadership is the leader's domain; he/she best knows how to be a leader and followership is best exemplified by following the leader's decisions</p>	<p><i>Authority</i> Leader-follower roles are seen and treated as interchangeable since the leader must reflect and exercise capacity and ability to follow as well.</p>
<p><i>Decision Making</i> Ultimate decision is with the leader because he/she knows best and has the capacity to best be responsible and accountable because of being absolutely dependable, honest, and ethical.</p>	<p><i>Decision Making</i> Ultimate decision comes from follower suggestions and demands since the leader is just a figurehead and representative and followers' know best as far as their needs are concerned, and the leader is no wiser than followers.</p>
<p><i>Leadership Confidence</i> Leaders exude an unmatched degree of confidence in their decisions regardless of follower disagreements on certain matters and the threats from dissenting followers.</p>	<p><i>Leadership Confidence</i> Leaders gauge their decisions according to followers' demands and expectations are decisions are not based on what is best according to situation, but what is best according to fear of reprimand and follower reactions; pleasing followers is the major factor whether the outcome followers' demand is right or unethical.</p>
<p><i>Facts and Knowledge Vs. Opinions</i> Wise leadership depend on solid fact and their deep knowledge of trends and understanding of situations to make informed decisions regardless of conflicts with followers' views or opinions because they see leadership and knowledge as complementary.</p>	<p><i>Facts and Knowledge Vs. Opinions</i> Compromise leadership values followers' feelings, passions and opinions above solid facts because reality is what the followers' perspectives and views constitute regardless of foreseeable errors as the leader's effectiveness is found in "majority" rule.</p>
<p><i>Authenticity</i> Wise leadership is based on establishing authenticity through practices and values that are universally accepted as wise and grounded in firm culturally and historically proven ideas that exemplify the leader's ability as the major source of follower inspiration.</p>	<p><i>Authenticity</i> Compromise leadership bases "authenticity" on maintaining follower support through and any means necessary, even when followers' demands and expectations are unreasonable or otherwise because authenticity and "pleasing" are political in defining effective leadership.</p>
<p><i>Fear and Conflict</i> Wise leaders are not driven by fear and they see conflict as functional and constructive. They do not fear dissension because of disagreements with followers because they are sure they are doing the right thing.</p>	<p><i>Fear and Conflict</i> Compromise leaders fear conflict because they see it as negative and are afraid of dissension and fallout from followers; they fear losing popularity and perpetuation of their offices and positions.</p>
<p><i>Follower Expectations and Transcendence</i> Wise leaders transcend follower expectations and achieve extraordinary results because they are not only knowledgeable about human affairs, but spiritual individuals who seek higher consciousness.</p>	<p><i>Follower Expectation and Transcendence</i> Compromise leaders struggle to meet and exceed follower expectations and in fact, often only gauge their efforts at minimally satisfying followers.</p>

people really seek, and also do not know how to transcend human limitations by becoming exemplary wise leaders. Instead of striving for pure levels of authenticity, leaders of today settle for that which perpetuates their positions and roles as leaders rather than for those things that bring them and their leadership and followers to

the next conscious spiritual level. We need wise leadership because our global society is in a dire situation such that the lines from song, "Let's recall some great men" by Winston Rodney aka Burning Spear, Jamaican roots reggae singer and musician, seems to be the most urgent mantra of expression for wise leadership in the minds and hearts of people in every nation today.

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