

EFFECTS OF PANDEMIC CRISIS. ESSENTIAL VALUES AND QUALITIES HIGHLIGHTED DURING THE CRISIS

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Abstract: *Throughout history, humanity has gone through all sorts of crises. Every time there were financial losses, there were victims, but, in its entirety, humanity resisted. Crises are the periods when a strong company must take a set of sound principles about protecting its employees. The essence of these principles is related to stability - job stability, financial stability and, in addition, the recognition of the efforts of employees who continue to work in the workplace.*

The pandemic context has tested us in every way.

There are a number of lessons to be learned, both on personally and professionally level - every opportunity is a learning opportunity.

These are many natural questions that arise in this context and for which humanity is looking for answers.

This paper seeks to highlight the effects of the crisis on the labor market and also to distinguish the core values and human qualities that stood out during the crisis.

Keywords: *pandemic crisis, effects of crisis, labour market, essential values and qualities, organizational culture.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humanity has gone through all sorts of crises. Every time there were financial losses, there were victims, but, in its entirety, humanity resisted. But no attack has been as harsh as the coronavirus pandemic, which has spawned a global health crisis, categorized by many psychologists and sociologists as the ultimate test of humanity.

How can a company or organization take such a test?

It does true that a company or organization can face a crisis only if it is united, agile and resilient?

How do we reshape ourselves socially, organizationally and individually, so as to overcome the health, economic, social and emotional shock?

How do we change our priorities so that we keep the principles moral is, but also to take advantage of all the opportunities they bring change?

These are some natural questions that arise in this context and for which humanity is looking for answers.

EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC CRISIS ON THE LABOR AND RECRUITMENT MARKETS

Since the World Health Organization first reported a ‘cluster of pneumonia cases’ in Wuhan, China, in early January 2020 and officially declared the outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a pandemic on 11 March, COVID-19 has devastated lives across the globe (WHO, 2020).

The public health measures adopted to contain the spread of the pandemic have all but halted activities that are reliant on travel and public gatherings in close proximity and have thus particularly impacted on the arts, entertainment, live performance, tourism, transport and hospitality sectors. However, the economic and labor market impacts have gone far beyond this, as working practices have had to be adapted to comply with travel restrictions, social distancing measures and other health and hygiene protocols.

The effects of pandemic crisis on UE labor market are exposed by Eurofound Report - *COVID-19: Implications for employment and working life*¹, as follows:

- in the 12 months leading up to Spring 2020, EU employment declined by 2.4%, the weekly hours of those still in work dropped by nearly one hour and the share of workers employed but not working more than doubled to 17%; the most affected sectors by the crisis are hierarchized in the fig. 1.

¹ Eurofound (2021), COVID-19: Implications for employment and working life, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Sector	Change (Q2 2019–Q2 2020)		Q2 2020
	Employment (%)	Weekly hours worked	Employed but not working (%)
Most affected			
Accommodation	-22.9	-5.4	50.9
Food and beverage service activities	-17.9	-2.9	47.4
Gambling and betting activities	-10.5	-1.3	49.3
Sports activities and amusement and recreation	-5.4	-2.2	42.6
Air transport	-9.3	-6.8	44.8
Travel agency and tour operator activities	-19.9	-7.2	39.5
Other personal service activities	6.6	-1.7	35.3
Manufacture of leather and related products	-9.2	-0.7	31.3
Creative, arts and entertainment activities	-7.0	-3.6	34.4
Manufacture of textiles	-1.3	-2.3	24.8
Least affected			
Telecommunications	20.6	-0.5	4.4
Computer programming, consultancy and related activities	18.5	-0.4	1.1
Insurance, reinsurance and pension funding	17.5	-0.8	2.8
Manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products	15.1	-0.2	2.3
Programming and broadcasting activities	12.5	-1.3	3.7
Information service activities	11.7	0.1	1.1
All sectors	-2.4	-0.9	17.0

Fig. 1. The most and least affected UE sectors by the pandemic crisis
 (Source: Eurofound (2021), COVID-19: Implications for employment and working life, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p. 11)

- by July 2020, nearly 50% of EU workers had moved to exclusive or partial telework, opening up new labor market gulfs as the more highly educated and those in urban areas were better placed to work from home.
- young people experienced the sharpest decline in employment, while prime-aged workers (25–54 years) and older male workers have been most likely to see their working hours cut. The need to avoid another ‘lost generation’ of young people must be a priority for policymakers when designing active labor market policies to mitigate the fallout from the crisis.
- workers with precarious employment conditions have been particularly exposed to job losses because of the pandemic: the number of temporary contracts in the EU27 shrank by 17% between spring 2019 and spring 2020, accounting for well over three-quarters of the decline in aggregate EU employment.

- short-time working or similar schemes to protect employment have buffered the impact of COVID-19 on the labor market, but the scope and level of income protection offered varies significantly between countries.
- the COVID-19 crisis has provided an impetus in most countries to extend income protection to groups not previously protected. However, the level of support granted to the self-employed often falls short of the protection provided to workers as the eligibility criteria introduced included sectorial restrictions, limitations to certain groups of self-employed and requirements to meet income reduction thresholds.

With the negative effects of the pandemic, the labor and recruitment markets have changed significantly. The crisis has made employers more selective and focused on key roles, while candidates have changed their attitudes and priorities and become more flexible and open to change.

In Romania, the companies are looking for **flexible, adaptable, innovative employees** who can deliver results in the shortest possible time.

In the recruitment process, the **motivation of the candidates** to join the company is also very important, and the **relevant references and experience** also play an important role.

Candidates have to go through several stages of interviews and evaluations because employers have become more selective. This means more tests and evaluations with own tools or those of external consultants, technical tests for specialists, tests in evaluation centers for top managers.

The recruitment process takes longer because employers are more selective and looking to hire the best professionals to move easily during the crisis.

On the other hand, employees now want more of a stable company, which has not been affected by the crisis or which has adapted and where there are more chances to keep their job.

Employees refer to an **employer who offers them a flexible schedule, the opportunity to work remotely or safe conditions at work**. The plan offered by the company in **professional development** is also highly appreciated by employees.

There are more candidates would accept lower from the previous role or a lower salary than previously had. This is due to the increasing number of unemployed and job-ups decreasing competition in certain roles is even three times higher.

Demand for recruitment is growing, but the chances of success are on the side of those with extensive experience, good references and proven results.

ESSENTIAL VALUES AND QUALITIES AT THE INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL, WHICH HAVE BEEN HIGHLIGHTED DURING THE PANDEMIC CRISIS

One aspect that was observed in this period of crisis was the emphasis on the need of people to feel, more than ever, that they are part of a community, within which they feel protected and can go through situations that are difficult or impossible to overcome individually.

This idea of uniting, giving rise to something bigger and stronger than us, which can face dangers from outside, has always existed, but I believe that the emergence and development of individualism (which has now begun to be seen in nations) made us forget it.

We stopped rewriting the idea of coexistence, based on returning to the "fortress", as a way of organizing to protect individuals. But, let's not forget that inside the fortress there are rights and freedoms, but also obligations, and their observance, in equal measure, is the only way of functioning of this way of organizing groups of individuals. One solution is, therefore, the reinvention of the "fortress", adapted to the current context, a fortress within which individuals can feel protected, united and valued.

As an organization, which is also a form of community, the key to success in these times is listening to and understanding the experiences of colleagues and using that information to bring about positive change.

When those around us feel supported, heard, understood, they become more confident and motivated to help us in the smooth running of things. That is why now, more than ever, the quality of leaders to understand human nature, to accept and manage people's reactions in times of crisis, so different and unpredictable from ordinary times, has been essential. The ability to understand where these reactions come from, to analyze their background, through the very good knowledge of the people in their team, with their personal situation and their history made the difference between having a united and productive team or a disconnected one, non-functional.

During these times people need to be understood as individuals, with their previous problems and experiences, with their personal worries and priorities. There are people with a lower tolerance for danger and the unforeseen, people whom fear blocks, makes them selfish and sometimes aggressive, people who can no longer support the requirements of their role or teamwork and can become "contagious" and instigators, attracting other teammates in this state.

In these cases, a harsh, formal and authoritarian attitude on the part of leaders, who also face their fears and doubts, does not help, but complicates the

personal situation of more sensitive colleagues and the team in general. Here empathy is essential and is the only solution to restore calm, security and functionality. Empathy is like an ability to understand each case, with its specificity, in the given context, and to presume good faith and good intentions, beyond undesirable behavior.

On a personal level, some of us connected more with ourselves and those close to us, reset our priorities, reviewed our relationship with time, and rearranged our value system. We all needed these things, as a slowdown in the dizzying pace at which our lives unfolded. A return to basic values and simplicity were more than necessary. There are many people around us who talk about the good things that happened to them during this period, beyond all the other less positive things.

Whatever these benefits are, it is important to know how to capitalize on them, not to "lose" this crisis and use it to mark a new stage in our individual and group evolution. In any case, at the end of this crisis we can come out better, more supportive, more connected to the people around us, more able to adapt to an increasingly unpredictable and unstable environment.

In this context, continuous and transparent communication with each of the employees is essential, through specific communication channels: e-mail, intranet, internal television, messages from leaders, in order to raise the morale of colleagues and keep them motivated and involved.

The essential element during this period is communication, with the help of which we manage to maintain a friendly, safe, supportive and encouraging climate.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE PANDEMIC CRISIS ON A PROFESSIONAL AND EMOTIONAL LEVEL

It would say that the evolution of technology, digitization, the emergence of platforms and tools of distance communication which preceded the pandemic crisis, saved us both professionally and personally.

Digitization has proven to be one of the keys to continuing the business. Companies that have already been prepared for telework, for manage equipment and digital processes have been less affected by this crisis, while others have been forced to accelerate their digitization at a forced pace.

In most of the companies from worldwide, the activity continued from the first day almost without interruption, only with small syncope generated by the mechanisms and processes of adaptation, on the go, to a

new way of collaboration and communication. From a technical and procedural point of view, things worked really well.

According to *Eurofound Report - „Living, working and COVID-19”*, the proportion of workers who started teleworking, in the UE, in the first half of 2020, varies by country, as follows (fig. 2):

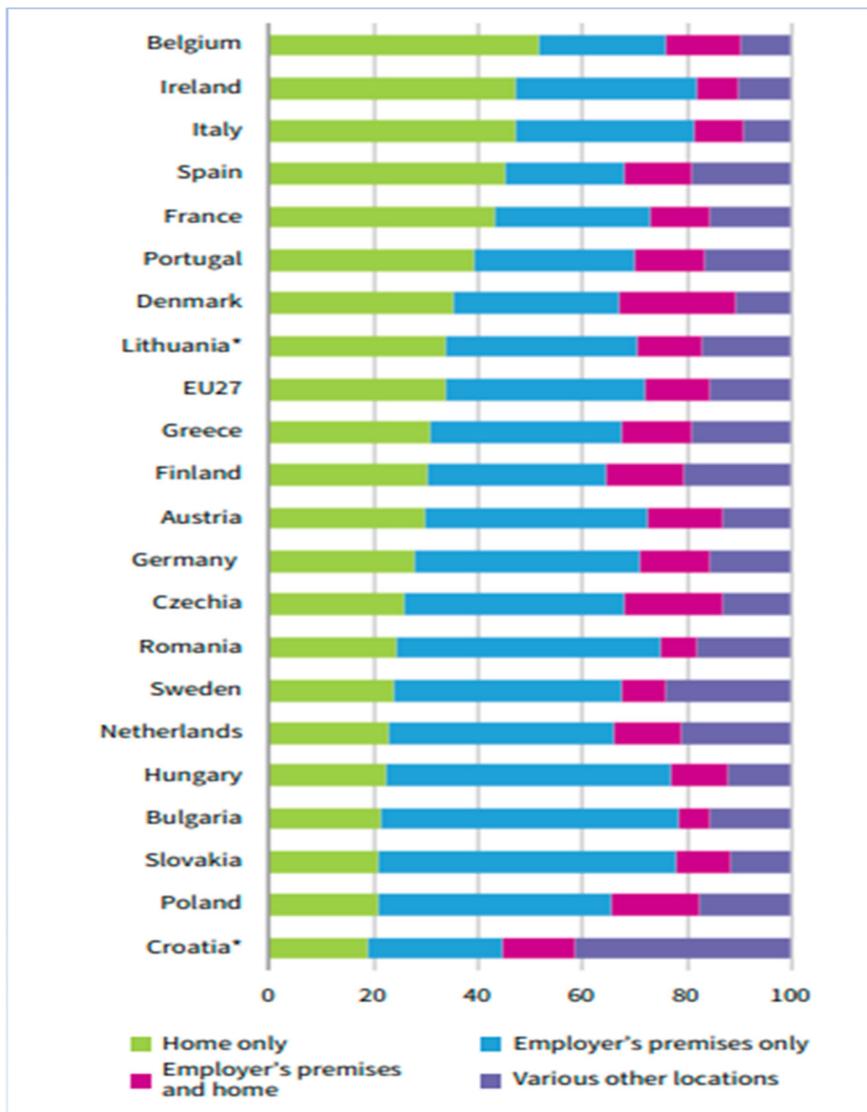


Fig. 2. Proportion of workers who started teleworking, in the UE (%) (Source: Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p. 32)

While you will be hard-pressed to find anyone who can say they enjoy working fully from home or fully from the office, there are positives and negatives to both. These compounding factors require deeper analysis, with input from staff and an openness to new solutions.

The trend pre-pandemic: only 20% of American employees worked from home, according to Pew Research.² By May 2020, that number had shot up to over 60%. A Great Place To Work (GPW) survey of *Fortune* 500 executives in 2020 showed a similar increase, from 16% to 65% of staff working virtually, with most employees working from their dining tables in the professional services (89%), information technology (88%), and financial services and insurance (74%) sectors.³ By industries, the percentages are distributed as follows (see fig. 3):

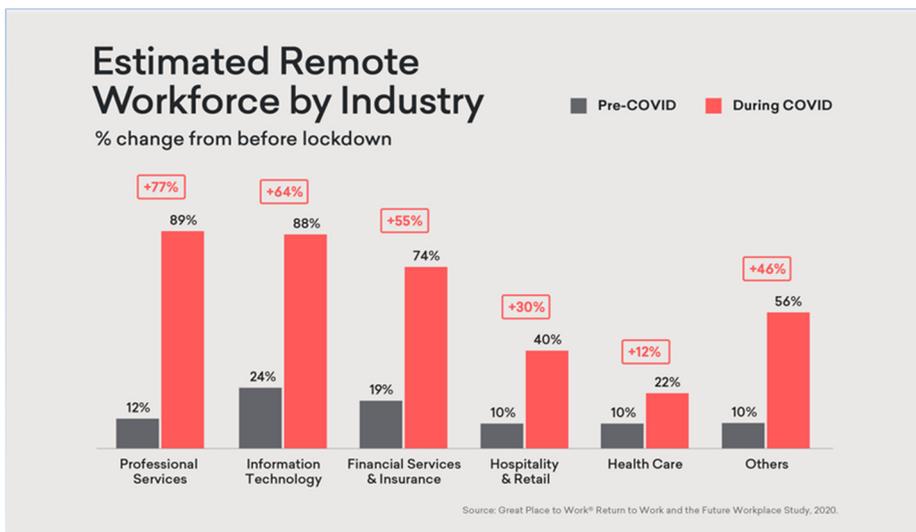


Fig. 3. Estimated remote workforce by industry
 (Source: <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/new-survey-fortune-500>)

Regarding work from home post-covid, obviously every organization’s decisions will depend on its own unique circumstances, but overall, three out of five executives believe up to 25% of their workforce will continue to work remotely full-time, according to the GPW survey results. Technology and financial services organizations anticipate the largest remote workforce after the pandemic, at 40% and 35% of their staff remaining remote, respectively. Remote-first cultures and hybrid models vary by industry (see fig. 4).

2 <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/12/09/>

3 <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/new-survey-fortune-500>

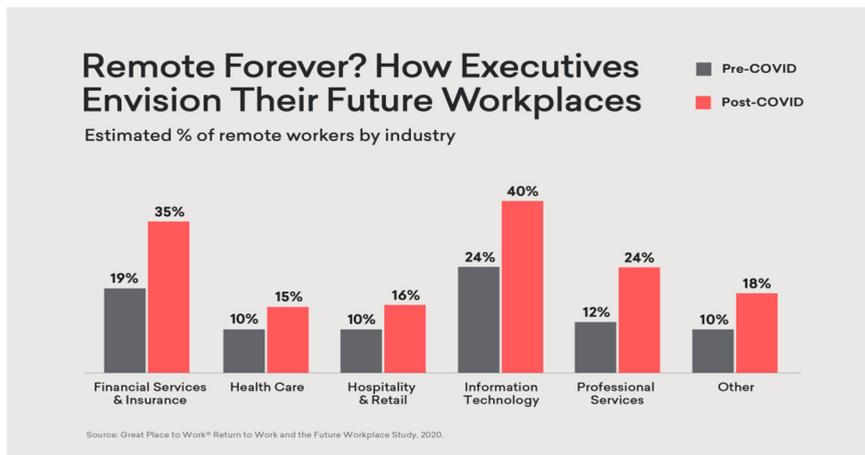


Fig. 4. Estimated remote workforce by industry, pre- and post-covid
 (Source: <https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/new-survey-fortune-500>)

The Pew Research survey found that many workers would like to work remotely after the pandemic is over: transition to work from home has been relatively easy for many (see fig. 5).

According to the same survey, executives disagree on how working from home has affected company culture and productivity: **50%** of executives surveyed believed **productivity was not impacted** by remote work. **30%** of executives believed teams were **more productive** while working from home. But **20%** reported **mixed impacts across teams and business units**, with some improving while others suffering.

Leaders hold diverse views about the anticipated productivity gains when employees return to the office, with just **14%** **expecting better productivity** in the future. 30% of executives believed teams were more productive while working from home.

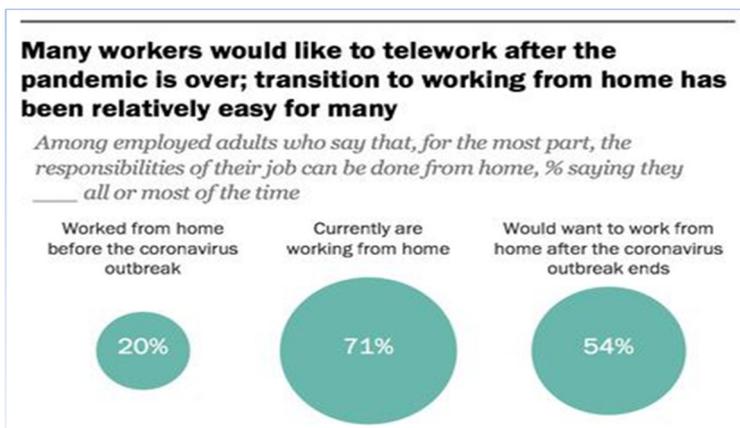


Fig. 5. Transition to work from home.
 (Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/12/09/>)

Hybrid work is being discussed more and more.

As Harrison Kim observed, when the COVID-19 precautions are reduced for employees, future working arrangements are likely to be more flexible. Staff will probably spend something like 3 days in the office and the balance of their time working from home in a hybrid arrangement. Some teams even commute to the office once a week for a team day of meetings and ideas, and they choose where they work for the rest of the week – home or office. This seems to work successfully, but has to be coordinated carefully.⁴

Not all team members can adapt readily to working within a hybrid environment. Individuals who are strong at relationship building have an advantage in hybrid environments. This enables them to ask for, find, and claim resources they need for successful remote working. Employees with good network and political awareness can use their informal connections to keep up to date with their organization's intentions and actions. This helps to reduce the gap between face-to-face and remote working. Best results from hybrid working also go to those who can show they are trustworthy when working largely out of sight.⁵

From the emotional point of view, however, of interpersonal relationships, even if initially, people retreated quickly to new ways of interaction and communication, which seemed really fun at first, over time, we all began to feel alienation, an alienation that deepened as the pandemic progressed.

We are social beings, dependent on interactions that involve certain closeness, including physical, a certain presence, a certain environment delimited in space and time, a certain intimacy.

Professionally, the physical work environment reflects the culture of an organization, the specifics of a community, it is a space where it is easier for you to play your professional roles. The virtual environment cannot offer them completely, in some situations, not at all. Moreover, the mixture to the point of merging the professional environment with the personal one has led to confusion and difficulty in delimiting the roles and responsibilities we have as individuals.

Although the crisis has accelerated the digital transformation, which is undeniably one of the benefits of this period, the human race is not ready to move entirely in a virtual world, is still dependent on interaction based on physical closeness, which allows a handshake, a hug, a hand placed encouragingly on the shoulder. Therefore, the new normal we are talking about

4 Harrison, Kim, (2021). *After lockdown, should your team continue to operate remotely?*, published by Cutting Edge Insights Pty Ltd., 11 mar. 2021.

5 Idem.

must preserve, to a large extent, spaces and contexts in which such an approach can take place.

The pandemic has brought, in addition to countless challenges, the *opportunity to reshape the world of work* and to better align it with the needs and requirements of employees in recent years: transparent communication, digitalization, flexible hours. We must use this opportunity to adapt quickly to the new conditions and to continue to take care of our employees, colleagues and their needs, *needs reshaped by the pandemic context*.

Now, especially in the context of the coronary crisis, where possible, more and more people are working from home and using more and more digital tools. And the emphasis is (or should be) on accountability, care, online communication and moral, technological and informational support. In other words, we see it ourselves how *technology enhances humanity*.

So, it's a good time for managers and the HR department to focus even more on what really matters in an organization: the **HUMAN**. Futurologist Gerd Leonhard says that this could be a kind of **RENAISSANCE**⁶.

What this means for HR departments, among others:

- process improvement will no longer be a priority;
- instead, the main focus will be on people development and team cohesion;
- empathy, kindness, joy are values that will be more and more important for organizations;
- learning programs will be naturally integrated into the way we work;
- HR will take the initiative in proposing and supporting programming to make the organization a better place for people.

CONCLUSIONS

Crises are the periods when a strong company must take a set of sound principles about protecting its employees. The essence of these principles is related to stability - job stability, financial stability and, in addition, the recognition of the efforts of employees who continue to work in the workplace.

There are a number of lessons to be learned, both on personally and professionally level - every opportunity is a learning opportunity.

⁶ Leonhard, Gerd, (2016) Technology vs. Humanity: The coming clash between man and machine, the Futures Agency, Zurich, 2016.

On a personal level, the crisis has once again taught us to test our limits. How to achieve a balance between personal and professional life, in the middle of a real crisis situation, is one of the important lessons.

At the professional level, the crisis is a test of extreme adaptability, rapid reaction to change, permanent adjustments, collaboration and team communication. In addition, we are in an accelerated stage of accepting the diversity we have come even closer to than before the crisis.

The most important thing in this period of the pandemic crisis is to adapt to change, even as we go, to be more open to increasingly different and difficult circumstances.

The pandemic context has tested us in every way, we have discovered how resilient we can be in the direct fight against a crisis, to reconsider what we should do and, especially, how we can make everything work in normal parameters or even better as before.

During the crisis, we operate more on instinct and intuition than on formal learning. Thus, we rediscover another kind of learning, essential, an adaptive learning, we understand, we listen, we process, we have all the senses sharpened to the maximum, we feel, we act, we fall back and we act again. We learn on the go and, more than ever, we learn that we can reinvent ourselves, that we can overcome primary fears, we can connect and work in ways we have so far not accepted as sufficient and satisfying in our traditional connection behavior and work behavior. The most important thing is to remain responsible and balanced, to encourage each other.

Also, the period we are going through for more than a year is an exercise of adaptation as a human species and individually, certainly necessary in our evolution. Only those who will agree to transform and reinvent themselves will emerge victorious. We hear more and more people expressing their desire to return to normality, but normality is exactly what we are experiencing now and what will follow. It is vital to accept and see transformation as something natural, not to forget to look optimistically to the future and to what it will bring us.

Adaptation remains the essential condition for evolution, evolution being the essential condition for survival.

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