

**PART ONE**

# Explore

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# Why personalization matters

Work is broken. If our work was an item of clothing, for most of us it would be a straitjacket. Or at best an ill-fitting suit. Modern working practices are failing us – constraining rather than amplifying our diverse skills, strengths, passions and interests. No wonder globally over 86 per cent<sup>1,2</sup> of us aren't fully engaged, excited and energized about our jobs.

As a society and in business, people embrace opportunities for the personalization of products and services. We enjoy and value having our own individual style, beliefs and passions reflected in what we do and how we do it. What if we encouraged people to customize their work the way a tailor would the final fit of a semi-tailored suit? What if we started to shape work around people rather than expecting people to constantly contort themselves around their jobs? What if we took a more personalized approach? What would an exceptional personalized people experience look and feel like? These are the questions that we will be exploring in this book.

So how can we bring a personal touch to our work? The answer lies in job crafting. Job crafting enables and encourages people to bring their diverse, whole and best selves to work each day in ways that foster engagement, job satisfaction, resilience and thriving. Job crafting is a research-informed and evidence-based approach to personalizing work and the research into this practice is compelling – it boosts innovation, nurtures health and wellbeing and amplifies meaning, purpose and productivity. This book focuses on what job crafting is, the positive impact it can have on individuals, teams and organizations, and how to practically encourage and embed a personalized people experience. But before diving into job crafting research, evidence and case studies, it's useful to explore the concept of personalization itself, why it matters and why it is missing from most organizations. This will be the focus for the first two chapters of this book.

In this first chapter, we will consider what personalization means, how different industries and sectors are evolving to enable and encourage greater customization, and why the ability to customize and shape objects and experiences makes us feel good and perform well. By exploring examples of how personalization is being used to create exceptional customer experiences we'll see what's possible with technology and creativity. By contrast, these illustrations will start to demonstrate how starkly an employee-centred and, arguably, human-centred mindset, is missing from the people experience in most workplaces.

### The personalization revolution – a (very) brief history

Personalization is the action of designing or producing something to meet someone's individual requirements. Today, it permeates almost all aspects of our everyday lives, with the exception of most workplaces. We can now personalize our cars, our clothes and our holidays. This was not always the case. In the past, customization was the Rolls Royce or Saville Row of services, with the price tag to match. With new technology, production and information systems, costs are reducing and the benefits of personalization are more affordable and widely available. Reduction in costs combined with developments in digital technology has led to more enabled and interested consumers becoming more engaged in informing and creating the products they purchase and the services they buy.

Consumers increasingly want products and services personalized and customized to meet and amplify their preferences, personalities and lifestyles. 'Off the shelf' is beginning to sound like an outdated and substandard term. As a society and in business, people enjoy and value of having their own individual style, beliefs and passions reflected in what they do and how they do it.

Personalization is now all around us, but it is hard to pinpoint exactly when the concept moved from something that was a specialist luxury offering, to something more mainstream. One way to spot trends is to look at the use of a word or phrase in our modern language. Between 1950 and 2009, there was a 16-fold increase in the incidence of the terms 'personalisation' (the common British spelling) and 'personalization' (the Oxford English and American spelling) within the millions of books and articles that are scanned as part of the Google Books project.<sup>3</sup> Whilst the available data currently stops in 2009, as we will explore further in this chapter, there is nothing to

indicate that the use of these words would have slowed down. In fact, there is everything to suggest that their use would have exploded further as opportunities to personalize our goods, services and lives in general have become both more accessible and affordable.

### *One-size doesn't fit all – insights from car manufacturing*

In the past, car manufacturers and designers approached heterogeneity and diversity amongst their customers as a problem or business challenge to overcome. Over time this mindset has shifted and manufacturers are increasingly recognizing that responding to and tapping into individual preferences is a source of competitive advantage.

One of the most famous quotes made by Henry Ford, the founder of the Ford Motor company is; 'Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black'.<sup>4</sup> Henry Ford made this comment in relation to the Model T car in 1909. Despite lobbying from his sales and design team, Ford was adamant that his company should save costs and leverage efficiencies by only offering one type of chassis and one colour of car. And that colour was black. In his autobiography,<sup>5</sup> Ford stated that his rationale was that 95 per cent of potential car purchasers were not interested in the colour of their car and that they should be focusing on these consumers rather than the 5 per cent – labelled by Ford as the 'special customers' – who were potentially interested in a more distinctive look. There is no denying that Henry Ford's approach was successful; when the final Model T ran off the production line on 25 May 1927, over 15 million cars had been produced.

Whilst it is difficult to challenge the success of Henry Ford's original thinking, it's certainly fair to say that the one-size-fits-all approach is not shared by modern car manufacturers and does not remain at Ford today. Today, all car buyers appear to want to be part of the 'special' 5 per cent that Henry Ford referred to and want to be able to customize and choose the specifications of their vehicles. As John Cooper, Vice President Customer Service Division at Ford Asia Pacific, said: 'Customers today view vehicles as an extension of their own personalities and are keen to customize their cars to stand out from the clutter.'<sup>6</sup> Modern car consumers are now able to personalize their vehicles with specifications way beyond the colour and the engine.

People who want a wider range of purchasing and personalization options are no longer thought of as demanding. To encourage and enable people to choose the options for their cars, Ford, along with other manufacturers, now

have vehicle personalization centres across the world. These showrooms are set up to create a customized car-buying and driving experience. As well as being able to see and drive test and show cars, some showrooms now offer people the opportunity to use immersive technology to configure their cars. Having put on a virtual reality (VR) headset, customers of Volkswagen, Audi and Toyota are now able to see, feel and hear what their final car will look like.<sup>7</sup> Using augmented reality (AR) it's now possible for customers to use their smartphone or tablet to project what their car will look like sitting on the driveway of their house.

### *From mass production to mass customization*

In the same way that mass production and standardized production are key legacies of the first Industrial Revolution, mass customization and personalization can be indelibly linked to the current technological revolution fuelled by digital advancements in artificial intelligence, machine learning and robotics that we are undergoing today. From a production perspective, mass customization enables products to be manufactured at scale that can be individually customized and tailored to the specifications of the purchaser. The primary distinctive aspect of mass customization is that the customer is a critical and integral part of the design process and is in effect a co-designer of the final product. Whilst modern technology is now enabling mass customization at scale, it is not an entirely new idea. The first modern description of mass customization can be traced<sup>8</sup> to the American futurist and writer Alvin Toffler and his 1971 book *Future Shock*,<sup>9</sup> which described a new paradigm in manufacturing where personalized products and services could be provided to consumers with efficiency and at scale.

Digital development and the internet revolution have enabled organizations to connect the manufacturing or service technologies with the consumer in a cost-effective, high-quality way. The internet provided a platform for organizations to launch online configurators, which enabled customers to customize elements of the products they were purchasing. One of the earliest and best-known companies to do this was Nike, with NikeiD (now known as Nike by You), which allowed customers to personalize elements of their footwear such as colours and include personal messages and motifs to be stitched on. Today, rather than only being able to personalize an existing product, 3D printing and other manufacturing technologies allow consumers to easily upload and print one-of-kind designs and products. Websites such as Ponoko and Zazzle, for example, allow customers to create personalized gifts and items using 3D printing technology.

## Positive disruption through personalization

The movement towards personalization, choice and customization is disrupting how industries and sectors are operating. As Professor Frank Piller, co-founder of the MIT Smart Customization Group, states on his website:<sup>10</sup>

Mass customization means to profit from the fact that all people are different. Many managers regard heterogeneity of demand as a threat, as a challenge to overcome. I see it, however, as an extraordinary profit opportunity. If you set up the right processes and product architectures, you can serve your customers individually and efficiently at the same time. Exactly this is the essence of mass customization.

Through his research, Professor Piller, together with his colleagues and collaborators, argues that mass customization has the potential to benefit both the business and the customers.<sup>11</sup> Consumers are able to purchase personalized goods and services that meet with, and match their needs and preferences at a price point they are willing to pay, and businesses are able to profit from this service. As we will explore in later chapters, there is a similar benefit for organizations and employees in the creation of a personalized workplace; people get to work in ways that best fit their personal styles and strengths and organizations benefit from the additional performance, engagement and discretionary effort that this way of working provides.

### *Some examples of personalization in practice*

To get a sense of just how much personalization is now a part of everyday lives, it is useful to explore some examples of how the ability to shape our products around us as individuals is fundamentally shaking up the way we shop for and consume our clothes, cars, food and medicines.

#### CARS

In 2018, Mini launched the Mini Yours customized range. Described on the website portal as 'the next stage of personalization', Mini now offers customers the opportunity to be the designer of their own, 'one of a kind' Mini, which enables drivers to literally put their signature on their car. Through an online portal, and using 3D print and laser-cutting technology, consumers are able to produce personalized items such as dashboards with individualized pictures or names. Using special lights hidden underneath the car's wing

mirrors, the car is able to project a special message onto the pavement when you unlock the car or open the car door. These displays give you a custom image or message when you enter and exit the car.

#### MEDICINE

Our health is shaped by our genetic makeup combined with environmental and lifestyle factors. Through the combination of analysis of information about our genomes with clinical and diagnostic data it is now possible to identify our risk of susceptibility to ailments and disease and to develop potential treatments to stop them. In the past, the so-called ‘blockbuster’<sup>12</sup> medicines have been developed to treat as broad a range of people as possible. Using the traditional treatment approach, almost all patients with the same condition would receive the same drug, even though if in reality it may only be 30–60 per cent effective across the population. To get a medical licence, pharmaceutical companies would need to prove that it was safe to use amongst the whole population. This took time and was tremendously costly.

Personalized medicines revolutionize the treatment process. Building on insights gained from genomic and diagnostic analysis, different subtypes of individuals who suffer with the same condition can be identified and treatment can be developed and ultimately tailored to target the underlying cause.

The treatment of cancers is one area where this approach is increasingly commonplace in, for example the NHS in the UK. As all cancers have a genetic basis, it is possible to develop a genetic or molecular diagnosis which can be used to identify the most effective treatment. This approach has been found to significantly improve the chance of survival, compared with traditional ‘broad’ diagnosis and treatment.<sup>19</sup>

#### PERSONALIZED FOOD AND NUTRITION

DNA testing is not only being used to provide personalized healthcare. Personalized nutrition services have been around since 2016, led by Habit in the United States. Nestlé launched a similar service in 2018, which it is piloting in Japan.<sup>13</sup> These services typically send new customers a testing kit consisting of a swab to collect your saliva and a fingerprick test to collect a small sample of blood. This enables your DNA profile to be analysed. Depending on the service you are using, your genetic profile can be developed for up to 60 different biomarkers, identifying deficiencies in



key minerals, vitamins and hormones and tolerance levels and sensitivities. In response to this analysis, customers are sent a customized dietary and nutrition report outlining how their body reacts to different food groups. In order to work with, rather than against their biological profile and lifestyle goals, customers are able to buy personalized recipes, meal kits or ready-made meals.

#### PERSONALIZED CLOTHING

Most clothes purchases could be described as ‘off the peg’ – customers select from pre-made items in store, or online, which best fit their personal size and sense of style. For many of us, working with a stylist or getting tailor-fitted clothing is a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence saved for weddings or significant life events when we want to look and feel our best. Increasingly, though, clothing manufacturers and retailers are looking to find ways to disrupt and challenge the existing way we buy clothes and create more opportunities to have clothes made or sourced based on individual specifications.

Zozo and Stichfix are two examples of companies that have put personalization and personal style into the heart of clothes buying. Stichfix, founded by Katrina Lake in 2011, has the mission to ‘change the way people find clothes by combining technology with the personal touch of experienced style experts’.<sup>14</sup> For a small fee Stichfix asks people to complete a style survey online and then through a combination of algorithms and human stylists the company curates a selection of items which it sends to customers. Delivery and returns are free. The company went public in the United States in 2017 with a valuation of \$1.4 billion.<sup>15</sup> An arguably more ambitious, but certainly less successful clothing business is Zozo. The Japanese company’s ambition was to produce bespoke clothing on a mass scale. In order to collect measurements, Zozo sent a skintight ‘Zozosuit’ to people’s homes. Each suit had more than 350 white dots which were scanned using a special smartphone app. Once a customer’s unique measurements had been collected they were able to order bespoke clothing including t-shirts, blouses, trousers and dresses. This idea appears to have been ahead of its time and in April 2019, Zozo discontinued services outside of Japan.<sup>16</sup> There are, however, a number of organizations betting on a personalized revolution in clothing and, perhaps most notably, Amazon currently holds a patent for an ‘on demand’ customized clothing manufacturing system.<sup>17</sup>

## Why personalization matters

Why do we value personalization and why is it important? These are two questions that we will explore in this next section, with help and insights from TV shows on Netflix and the experience of building flat-pack furniture from IKEA.

### *Personalization sparks joy*

Intuitively, many of us understand that we tend to value and appreciate the things we build and create. To get a sense of this you only need to watch an episode of *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* on Netflix. Marie is an organizing consultant and author. In her hit tv show she works with people to declutter and organize their lives by focusing on the items that they store, use and display in their homes. To practise the Kondo method, people are instructed to sort through the items in their house one by one, keeping those that ‘spark joy’ and discarding those that don’t.

On the show, when people sort through their household objects, the items that people cling on to tend to be things people have created, customized or have a personal story attached to them. The ‘keep items’ that spark joy tend to be personally constructed or built furniture, jewellery, clothing, photos or correspondence which have sentiment and personal resonance. To the viewer it is sometimes surprising to see what people want to hold onto – some of the ‘keep’ items do not look especially beautiful or aesthetically pleasing – but it is clear that to the participants these items are precious. If there is a theme it is that they tend to reflect something personal about that participant, trigger a memory or story, or represent a chapter in that person’s life.

### *The IKEA effect*

Through a series of ingenious experiments, scientists have been able to explore why, when it comes to personalization, beauty really is in the eye of the beholder. Or to put it another way, why we value the things we build.

Researchers Michael Norton at the Harvard Business School, Daniel Mochon from the University of California and San Diego, and Dan Ariely at Duke University were curious about whether physically constructing an item influenced peoples’ perceptions of its value. In their initial study they randomly assigned participants as ‘builders’ or ‘inspectors’. Builders were asked to assemble a plain black cardboard box from IKEA using standard instructions. Inspectors were given a ready-made box and had the opportunity to examine it.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of the study, participants were in possession of identical boxes, the only difference being that half the group had played a part in putting the box together. Before the study finished, participants were asked to place a bid on the box. They were also asked to rate how much they liked the box. Builders bid significantly (over 1.5 times) more than inspectors and their ratings of how much they liked the box were higher too. The researchers coined the term the ‘Ikea effect’ to refer to the phenomenon of people placing additional value on items that they have played a part in constructing compared with ready-built goods and services.

Although the Norton *et al* study was relatively modest in size, the IKEA effect has been found to be present in a number of subsequent and preceding studies involving items such as origami, LEGO<sup>19</sup> and even lottery tickets.<sup>20</sup> In the case of the origami experiment, participants were willing to pay almost the same for their poorly constructed beginner’s effort (in this case a frog) compared with the same aesthetically perfect animal constructed by an origami expert.

Consistently, people attach greater value to the things that they build than if someone else built the very same product. Intuitively, the IKEA effect makes sense. We may all have experienced an attachment to, or affection for, a self-assembled item of furniture. This is often even more surprising because – and particularly in my case – they tend to be poorly constructed. A personal example of this is the filing cabinets in my office which I restored and painted. When I moved offices, I was able to make use of some old cabinets that a business in Durham was getting rid of. I had to take the cabinets apart and put them back together again. I sanded them down and repainted them. The time it took to do this cost much more than it would have been to buy cabinets from new. And if I’m honest I did a pretty terrible job. But I now love these cabinets, even though they stick and you need to be careful not to rub the paint off when you walk past. The reason I have an affection for the cabinets is that in a small way they are part of me – they reflect my personal taste in the colour they are painted, my belief in hard work in having to put them together, and my commitment to recycling and limiting waste.

#### KEY PERSONALIZATION PRINCIPLES

When working with businesses to explore their work design and people experience, I suggest that leaders consider three principles when it comes to the personalization in the workplace:

**Principle 1:** People (may) like what you give to them.

**Principle 2:** If you want people to value something let them build it.

**Principle 3:** If you want people to love something then let them create and shape it.

## Enhancing performance through personalization

As well as influencing the extent to which we like and value an object, personalization can provide us with a performance advantage. This is particularly the case with objects that allow people to self-express through the customization process. In a study published in the American Marketing Academy's *Journal of Marketing*, Ulrike Kaiser and Martin Schreier from Vienna University of Economics and Business, and Chris Janiszewski of the University of Miami Research, investigated the link between personalization and performance.<sup>21</sup>

In the first stage of the experiment participants were asked to either select or design a pen which they were told would be used to advertise the university where the study was being carried out. Two weeks later the participants returned to collect their pen and whilst they were there were asked to complete some additional tasks. This including a challenge to generate as many two- to eight-letter words from the letters D, S, E, T, N, R, I. The length of time people spent on the exercise (their motivation) was recorded, together with the number of correct words produced (performance). Participants who completed the task using a pen they had designed themselves spent over 23 per cent longer on the task compared with those using a standard 'off the shelf' pen they had previously selected. And those using a self-designed pen were more accurate too. They were nearly 18 per cent more accurate. The research team went on to find similar results with exercises using personalized versus standardized beer mats (the exercise involved flipping) and dart flights (the task involved hitting targets with a dart).

### *Why personalization influences performance*

Researchers provide a number of potential reasons why personalization appears to increase motivation and by extension performance. First, the customization process transfers the individual's identity to the end product. When I spoke to Ulrike Kaiser, she explained that customization extends a

part of the self into the product and, in effect, makes the product an extension of the self. Consequently, a person has stronger attachment to the product, and is more committed, willing and motivated to use the product to achieve the goals or tasks that are pursuing. An interesting conclusion from this research is that there appears to be an advantage in allowing self-expression in the tasks that we do. The golden shoes worn by Usain Bolt at the 2016 Olympics look like a shrewd investment (and a nice marketing ploy too I'm sure) and may explain the trend for football stars to personalize their boots.

## The psychology of personalization

Whilst the pull towards personalization may feel natural, researchers from the fields of psychology, marketing and economics continue to explore the reasons that we are drawn to objects, products and services that have been shaped and built by us. Broadly four factors either explain or directly influence why we value personalization:

- preference fit;
- accomplishment;
- investment of effort;
- origination.

### *Preference fit*

Preference fit refers to the match between a person's preferences and a specific product or service. You can think about this as whether or not an item reflects our personal taste and style. Not surprisingly, when people state that they have a strong match between their personal style – what researchers would refer to as a high preference fit match – and an item then they typically strongly value the product.

Understanding people's preference fit matters because if someone ultimately doesn't like the style or make-up of a final product they are going to value it less than someone who feels that it has a strong match. Most of us can relate to this, when we have had to fake a smile or a thank you for a present we have been given that we know we will never use it because it does not match our personal tastes. At work, the equivalent is being given a task or asked to be involved in a project that either we don't enjoy (there is not

a good match to our skills and strengths) or we don't see or value its purpose (there is not a good fit between our values and beliefs).

Preference fit can also explain why we do sometimes value the things we have played no part in designing. Most of the objects or experiences we buy are not customized or personalized. This does not mean we won't enjoy them, but it is contingent on our tastes and preferences. Similarly, at work, being told a decision doesn't mean we won't value or respect it, but if we have no part in contributing to it, then the extent to which we may be motivated by it will be contingent on whether or not it matches our personal beliefs and values.

### *Accomplishment*

Fundamentally, as humans, we value opportunities to demonstrate to ourselves and others that we can successfully achieve and accomplish things. We tend to get satisfaction from doing and creating things. You can see it in the eyes of children when they have finished their latest LEGO project and why a beer or glass of wine in the evening tastes so good after having spent the day gardening or working through thorny life administration tasks. Psychologists argue that accomplishment feeds our need to show competency and efficacy, which is deeply embedded in our human nature.<sup>22</sup> By building something, people are able to control and shape elements of their environment and in doing so are also able to demonstrate competence to themselves and others in terms of what they have created. Building our own stuff ultimately amplifies our feelings of passion, pride and competence.

If you inhibit or take away people's sense of accomplishment from an item they have constructed then you can also impact on people's affinity and value. Researchers ingeniously tested this through a LEGO building task.<sup>23</sup> Participants were split into two groups and both were asked to build identical models. At the end of the experiment, one group were asked to dismantle the models, whilst the other group kept the model intact. Both groups were then asked to value the models. The dismantlers valued the model significantly less than those whose models remained intact; effectively, the researchers had taken away the former group's feelings of accomplishment.

### *Effort*

Economists have known for some time that the more effort and energy people put into the pursuit of something, the more they tend to value it. So a partial explanation of the power of personalization is that the effort

invested in the customization or personalization process transfers, or rubs off, to the product and leads to an overall greater attachment. This might explain why home-grown fruit and vegetables are often thought to taste better because they are fresh and have been lovingly grown, but the secret might be largely explained by the effort effect. The fact that we have put effort in the growing process means that we are ultimately going to value the end product more than something we bought off the shelf at the local supermarket. The effort effect exists in other animals too. Research with other animals including rats<sup>24</sup> and pigeons<sup>25</sup> have shown a preference for sources of food that have required an effort to obtain.

### *Origination*

People tend to value items where they feel they have been the creator or originator. By shaping, crafting or creating an object, people's personal fingerprints are figuratively and sometimes literally on the final product or outcome. In laboratory experiments, marketing researchers Nikolaus Franke, Martin Schreier and Ulrike Kaiser found that people valued self-designed artefacts simply because they felt that they were the originators of the object. They referred to this as the 'I designed it myself' effect. Through a series of studies involving items such as scarfs, wristwatches, t-shirts and skis they consistently found that participants gave a higher valuation to items which they had been able to create or design themselves compared with objects that were similar, but not identical, in style that had no, or limited, options to customize.<sup>26</sup> The study found that the effect is even stronger when the customization factor is rated as enjoyable and when the customer or participant feels that they have contributed most to the final outcome.

Origination of a product also enables people to reflect their personal identity. In an interview in the *New Scientist*,<sup>27</sup> Kelly Herd, a marketing researcher from Indiana University, highlighted that personalizing a product provided an opportunity to show a person's true self. She argued that this tapped into a fundamental human need and explains why people will pay more for items that they have personalized or customized themselves. As she puts it, 'People create pretty objectively unattractive stuff but they love it.'

### *Interaction of personalization factors*

Whilst each of these pillars of personalization impacts on people's feelings of value, it is important to recognize that they can each interact with and

influence each other. For example, through statistical analysis, Schreier's research team have demonstrated that whilst the effort and energy involved in the personalization process are linked to augmented levels of value, this is only the case when people value the final product (eg there is a strong preference fit). If the end product is not valued – it has a low subjective preference fit – then the effort and energy involved in the creation are seen as a cost rather than an investment and this ultimately has a negative impact on the value of the product. At the extreme level, this could be illustrated by an artist destroying the canvas of an artwork that they have been toiling, on or a child, in a fit of rage and frustration, pulling apart a LEGO model they have been building if it doesn't look like they had imagined it would.

## Conclusion

There are clear reasons which explain why customer-focused organizations are increasingly creating opportunities for consumers to customize and individualize the products, services and experiences they are buying and investing in. A sense that we have co-actively contributed to the creation of an item makes us feel a greater affinity and attachment to that product. We value it more than something we have simply been given. Personalized goods not only feel better; in the right circumstances they let us perform better too.

The ability to personalize the products and services around us extends to almost all aspects of our lives. But there is one significant area of our lives where a tailored and human-centred approach is often missing: the workplace. Despite the potential benefits in terms of profits and performance, few organizations are embracing a personalized approach to work. From a technological perspective we are now in what many are calling the fourth Industrial Revolution, but our leadership styles and management practices still seem tethered to management ideas that are over 120 years ago. The reason for, and the cost of, the stubborn persistence of traditional 'top down', 'control heavy' and 'mass production' working practices and leadership styles will be the focus of the next chapter.



### KEY POINTS

- We are going through a personalization revolution in all aspects of our lives – with the exception of the way we work.
- People tend to value the things they build compared with the things they are given and love the things that they create and personalize.
- Personalization can give us a performance advantage as it fuels motivation and lets us express ourselves positively.
- The power of personalization can be explained by four factors: preference fit, accomplishment, investment of effort, and origination.

### KEY QUESTIONS

- What do you see as the key benefits of personalization?
- What opportunities are there for people to personalize their jobs and work in your organization?
- To what extent do you encourage people to be part of decision and change processes within your organization?

### Notes

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