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Places to Work in Poland: Are They Great?

About the Employee Attitude Research Project

A Polish nationwide research project was conducted among employees of various organizations at the turn of December 2008 and January 2009, as a part of the 3rd **Employee Attitudes** Research Project organized by **Nowoczesna Firma** [Modern Firm] in collaboration with **Fundacja Obserwatorium Zarządzania** [The Management Observatory Foundation] and the **Great Place to Work® Institute Polska**.

The study encompassed people working in companies throughout Poland. It consisted of completing an online questionnaire. The purpose of the research was to determine whether employees at Polish workplaces **trust the people they work for, are proud of what they do, and are fond of people they work with**. This issue is of greater importance, as it is the relations between an employee and his or her superiors and colleagues that make the workplace great.

Trust Is the Basis for Good Relations at a Workplace

For over twenty years, a model for shaping organizational culture that focused on the employee and reflected the importance of **Trust** in creating relations at the workplace has been used by Robert Levering – co-founder of the **Great Place to Work® Institute** established in 1991. Trust is demonstrated in each of the following three intertwined relations at a Great Place to Work:

- Relation between employees and the managerial staff,
- Relation between employees and their work/company, and
- Relation among the employees themselves.

The way people are treated is immensely important at a Great Place to Work.

People cooperate and act jointly in an environment filled with trust. This contributes to building positive interactions. Managers believe that employees want to be efficient and encourage them to take active part in the company's affairs. When employees are enthusiastic, they approach their work and the mission adopted by their company with passion. This results in growth in their efficiency and the generating of higher profits by the company.

Building trust in relations between employees and managerial staff is a source of permanent profits for the organization. These profits include:

- Increased prestige for the organization and a perfect reputation,
- More job applications fostering possibilities of attracting talent,
- Greater ability to introduce innovations,
- Higher sales,
- Higher productivity,
- Lower employee rotation, and
- Lower absenteeism.

Trust as a Foundation for Above-Average Financial Results

Furthermore, the Best Places to Work are better at dealing with crises. During the crisis in 2002, the companies that won that title noted a lesser decrease in the value of shares and faster growth after its end (source: results of research carried out on the basis of the Fifty Best in Great Britain).

Annual research on the United States Stock Exchange carried out by Russell Investments, Inc. proves the exceptional effectiveness of investments in the shares of companies considered great by the Great Place to Work® Institute. Over the years 1998–2008, an investment listed each year among 100 workplaces of the *Fortune* magazine brought a return of 206%, while an investment in the S&P 500 brought a 78% return. This proves the high profitability of actions related to raising trust at the best places to work.

What Builds Trust at a Workplace?

The Model® of the Great Place to Work® Institute assumes that Trust comprises three dimensions: **Credibility**, **Respect**, and **Fairness**. The first, Credibility, is determined by open communications, access to information, expertise in coordinating human and material resources, as well as solidity in the consistent accomplishment of the mission.

The second, Respect, is determined by supporting professional development, showing gratitude, cooperating with employees in making important decisions, and caring

about employees. A managerial staff that perceives employees as people, not just employees, wins the employees' trust and the conviction that their Fairness can also be trusted in other situations. The feeling of being surrounded by caring persons builds loyalty at a workplace. The element of Fairness, for its part, is determined by decent treatment of all employees in terms of awards, impartiality in hiring and promotions, as well as justice guaranteed by the absence of discrimination and a possibility of appeal. Managers who avoid politicking and backstabbing as ways to get things done actively encourage employees to practice teamwork and collaboration. At the same time, they win their trust.

The Model[®] of the Great Place to Work[®] is an empirically proven model, characterized by reliability and high validity, including cross-cultural validity.

Engagement

Employee engagement remains one of the central issues tackled by people dealing with the question of human resource management at organizations. Employee engagement is interpreted as a voluntary effort made with the purpose of performing a task. It is related to the will to perform a given task in the best possible way, without additional motivation on the part of managers.

As the studies of the Towers Perrin research company, published in 2008 in a book entitled *Unlocking Employee Potential by "Closing the Engagement Gap" Is Now More Critical than Ever*, show, managers should know their employees, care about their development, inspire them, allow them to work freely, and reward them—know them, grow them, inspire them, involve them, and reward them—in order to give them the possibility to do their best. Such an approach to the issue confirms that the existence of good interpersonal relations at a workplace is of fundamental significance. Only in an atmosphere of mutual trust is there a chance to create high employee engagement.

Basic Information on the Research

The research was carried out with the collaboration of **Nowoczesna Firma** [Modern Firm], **Fundacja Obserwatorium Zarządzania** [The Management Observatory Foundation], and the **Great Place to Work[®] Institute Polska**. The form of the research was that of a Polish nationwide questionnaire. The survey was carried out with 1,222 respondents. Adult, working Poles were invited to take part. The survey used a measurement tool of the **Great Place to Work[®]** called the **Trust Index[®]**. Respondents were asked to assess the organizations they were employed at in terms of sixty-two survey items. The survey was carried out online, from December 16, 2008 to January 20, 2009.

Indicators and Types of Data Analyses Performed

As was mentioned above, research employed the Trust Index[®] tool. Its standard version, used worldwide, includes fifty–seven survey items. In research carried out in a number of European countries, including Poland, the survey includes an additional item related to equal treatment of the disabled. The Polish edition of the study was further extended by two more items involving the issue of employee care: “Comfortable conditions are created here for people with parent or caretaking responsibilities” and “Management recognizes the need for limiting stress at work.”

The discussed Polish nationwide survey further comprised some additional questions: whether the company under assessment monitors the level of employee satisfaction and engagement and whether studies of employee satisfaction and engagement result in changes in the actions of the managerial staff.

The people who were surveyed assessed individual aspects of the company’s functioning on five–point scales—from “Almost always untrue” to “Almost always true.” The scales have a central point: “Sometimes untrue, sometimes true.” As research results showed, such a description of a scale is perceived better than a description including a statement “I agree” / “I disagree,” as it does not force thinking on an abstract level. It allows the respondent to easily assess the degree to which certain events occur at his or her workplace. Furthermore, the people subjected to the survey were allowed to skip some survey items if they were difficult to assess. Missing data resulting from this were infrequent.

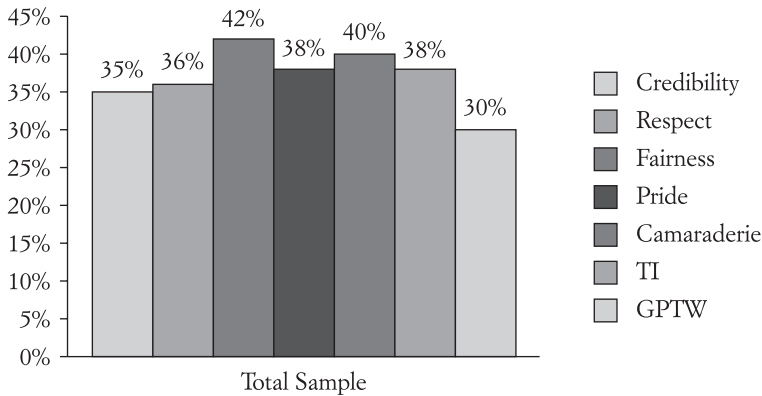
Research Results

The rating of Polish workplaces turned out to be low in comparison with the ratings obtained by companies included on the Lists of the Best Places to Work published annually by the Great Place to Work[®] Institute, which encompasses forty countries throughout the world. In order for a company to be ranked in the List, its Trust Index (TI) needed to exceed 60%. On the basis of the data presented in Chart No. 1, it may be stated that the organizations assessed by respondents are far from achieving that threshold.¹

There were only 30% positive marks in the final survey item “Taking everything into account, I would say this is a great place to work” (GPTW)—a little less than the total TI value (38%). The same pattern of results—higher TI and lower GPTW indices—was

1 It needs to be noted that respondents included employees of various organizations, thus the ratings presented do not refer to any one particular enterprise.

Chart No. 1. Assessment of Polish Workplaces: Total Sample



Source: Own study.

also observed in intergroup demographical comparisons, which are presented later in the report.

More than a half (65%) of the respondents stated that the disabled were treated equally with other employees. *Nota bene*, the relatively high result of the Fairness index (42%) is, to a large extent, a direct outcome of positive marks related to the lack of possible signs of discrimination at a workplace—e.g. connected with the employee’s age or gender.

Table No. 1. Percentage of Positive RATINGS in Additional Survey Statements

Comfortable conditions are created here for people with parent or caretaking responsibilities	38%
Management recognizes the need for limiting stress at work	24%
People here are treated fairly regardless of disability	65%
By conducting studies, the company monitors the level of employee satisfaction and engagement	20%
The studies on the level of employee satisfaction and engagement result in changes in the actions of the managerial staff	13%

Source: Own study.

Only 24% of respondents think that managers understand the need to limit stress at work. This may lead to the conclusion that many work under considerable pressure. The data presented in Table No. 1. also show that people employed at Polish workplaces seldom observe the purposefulness of conducting studies on satisfaction and engagement (lack of implementation).

Table No. 2. Relative Strengths of Polish Workplaces

Credibility	Competence	People here are given a lot of responsibility	59%
Respect	Support	I am given the resources and equipment to do my job	54%
	Caring	This is a physically safe place to work	60%
		I am able to take time off from work when I think it is necessary	68%
Fairness	Justice	People here are treated fairly regardless of their age	55%
		People here are treated fairly regardless of their race or ethnicity	77%
		People here are treated fairly regardless of their sex	57%
		People here are treated fairly regardless of their sexual orientation	68%
		People here are treated fairly regardless of disability	65%
Pride	Personal Job	My work has special meaning: This is not “just a job”	47%
Camaraderie	Hospitality	This is a friendly place to work	45%
		When you join the company, you are made to feel welcome	50%
	Community	You can count on people to cooperate	49%

Sorce: Own study.

Among strengths are elements related to the organization of a workplace, necessary tools, and lack of discrimination. As regards Credibility, employees may count on a wide scope of duties, while as part of Camaraderie, new employees may be sure that they will be warmly welcomed.

It turns out that assigning tasks as part of Credibility has a weaknesses that is related to the skilful coordination of tasks. Employees evaluate keeping promises by superiors and acting according to declarations—the foundation of skilful leadership—poorly. The issues of ensuring mental and emotional comfort and limiting stress at work are also given low marks. As regards Fairness, non–transparency of promotion rules, or lack of a sense of justice in this field, as well as a frequent feeling that employees are not awarded decent remuneration for their work deserve attention. What is interesting is that lack of discrimination is a strength, while favoring some people is a weakness.

Selected Demographic Intergroup Comparisons

The personal profile section included in the survey consisted of twelve variables. The next part of the report includes a presentation of intergroup differences that took ten variables into account. The report does not provide results on intergroup differences

Table No. 3. Relative Weaknesses of Polish Workplaces

Credibility	Competence	Management does a good job of assigning and coordinating people	25%
	Integrity	Management delivers on its promises	27%
		Management’s actions match its words	28%
Respect	Support	I am offered training or development to further myself professionally	26%
		Management shows appreciation for good work and extra effort	27%
	Collaboration	Management involves people in decisions that affect their jobs or work environment	25%
	Caring	This is a psychologically and emotionally healthy place to work	23%
		People are encouraged to balance their work life and their personal life	26%
		Management recognizes the need of limiting stress at work	24%
		We have special and unique benefits here	21%
Fairness	Equity	People here are paid fairly for the work they do	27%
		Everyone has an opportunity to get special recognition	28%
	Impartiality	Promotions go to those who best deserve them	27%
		Managers avoid playing favorites	23%
	Justice	If I am unfairly treated, I believe I will be given a fair shake if I appeal	28%

Source: Own study

resulting from industry or place of residence (voivodeship), although there were many significant differences, particularly in the case of inter-industry comparisons.

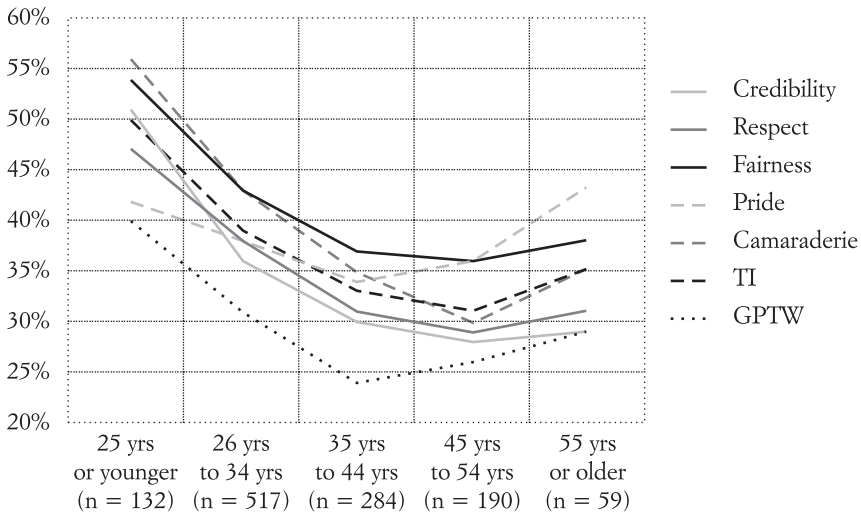
Charts and tables that are formulated as legibly as possible, without extensive commentaries, are presented below. The authors hope that reading the report will prove enjoyable.

Differences in Ratings in Terms of Age

It is clearly visible that young people perceive their working environment in the most positive way, whereas employees aged 35–44 are the most critical. Younger employees tend to see their work in a better light.

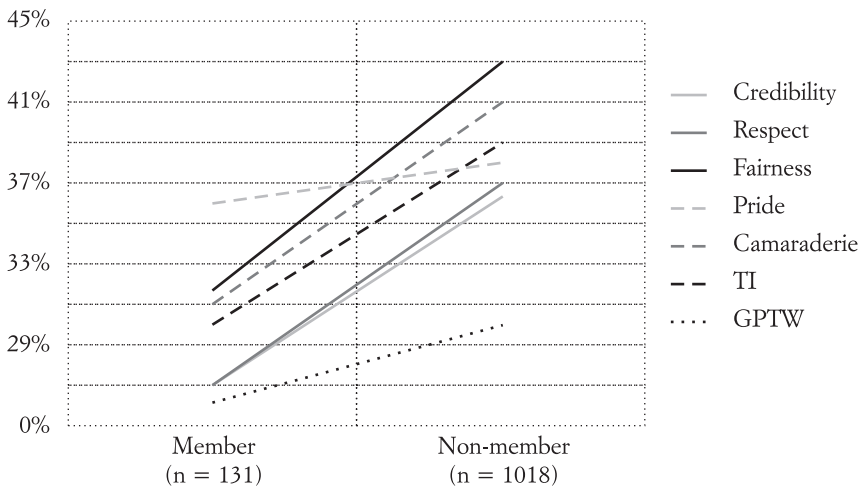
As the research shows, trade union members assess their workplaces lower than persons unaffiliated with trade unions. However, it should be noted that surveyed trade

Chart No. 2. Differences in Marks: Age



Source: Own study.

Chart No. 3. Differences in Marks: Trade Union Membership

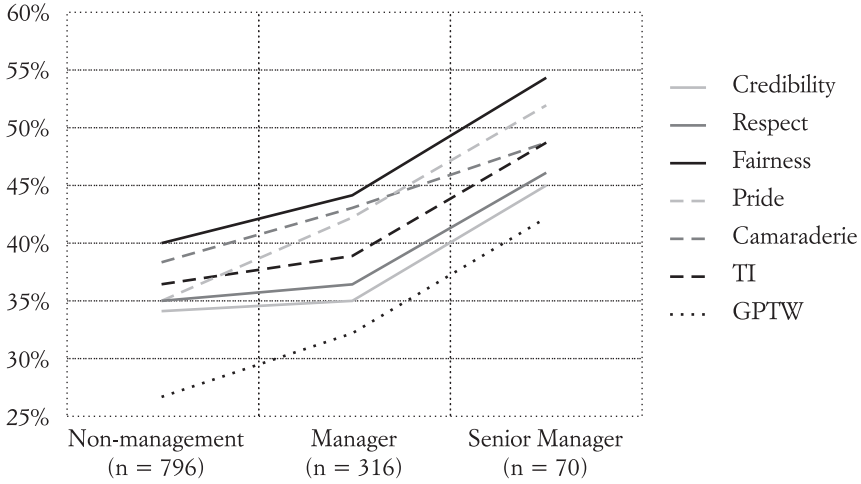


Source: Own study.

union members often work in larger companies with a stake held by the State Treasury, and most of them are elderly people, with longer work experience.

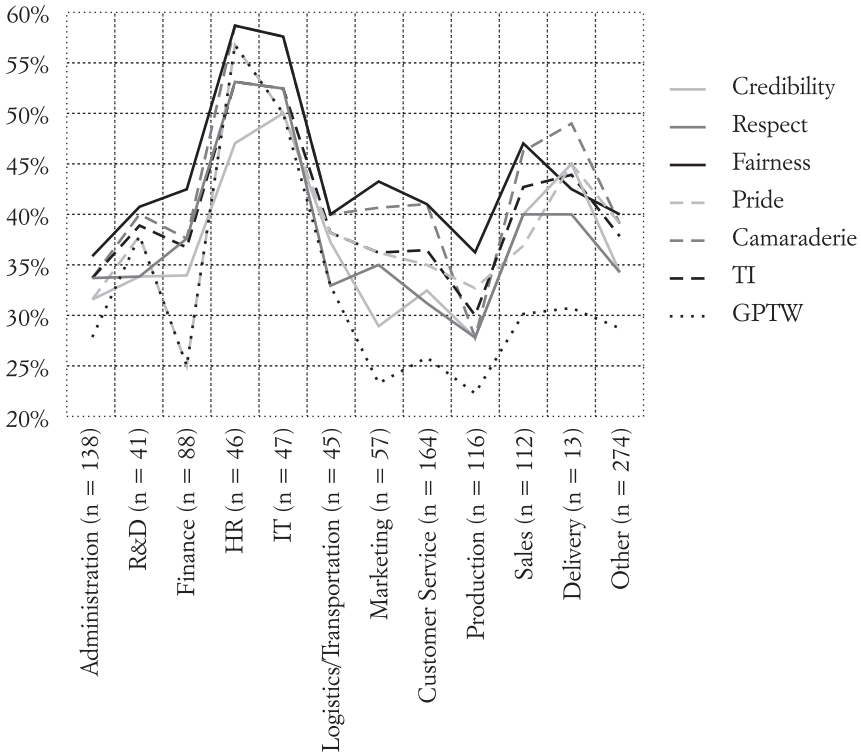
If one takes positions occupied into consideration, significant differences are found in the following indices: Fairness, Pride, and GPTW. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the higher the position, the higher the assessment of the workplace.

Chart No. 4. Differences in Marks: Position Occupied



Source: Own study.

Chart No. 5. Differences in Marks: Department

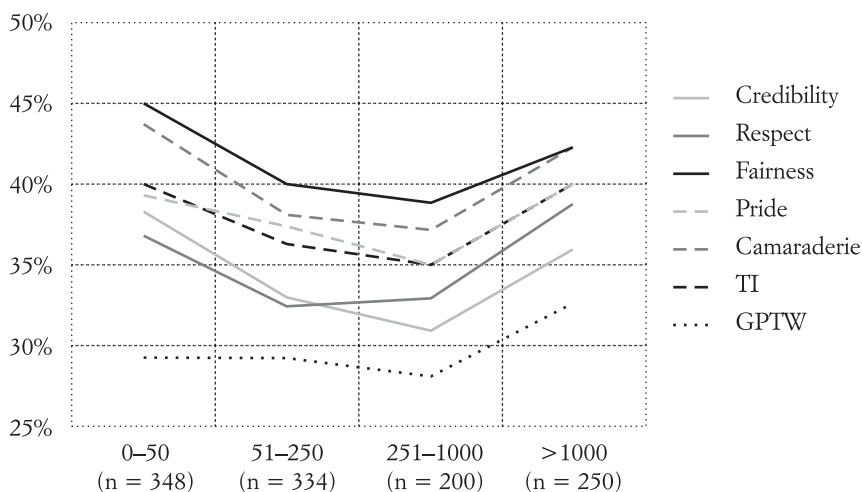


Source: Own study.

HR and IT departments have very positive opinions in all fields, whereas in the case of production departments the opposite is true. It is important to take particular care of communications in production departments, which can have completely different requirements than IT departments.

Significant differences were found in terms of Credibility and Respect. Credibility is given the highest marks by persons working in small companies, employing up to fifty people. It is easier to determine the course of actions and ensure the transparency of management in such companies. On the other hand, the assessment of Respect is best in the case of respondents from the largest companies, employing over 1,000 people. This may stem from the fact that such companies have the greatest number of various procedures related to employee care.

Chart No. 6. Differences in Marks: Organization Size

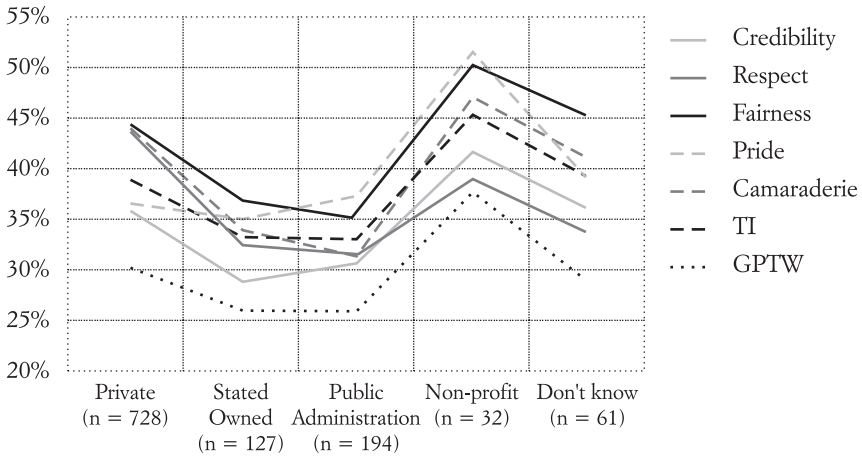


Source: Own study.

Significant differences were found only in the area of Fairness. The best results were achieved by private companies and companies with an undefined ownership structure—better than State administration of companies with shares held by the State Treasury.

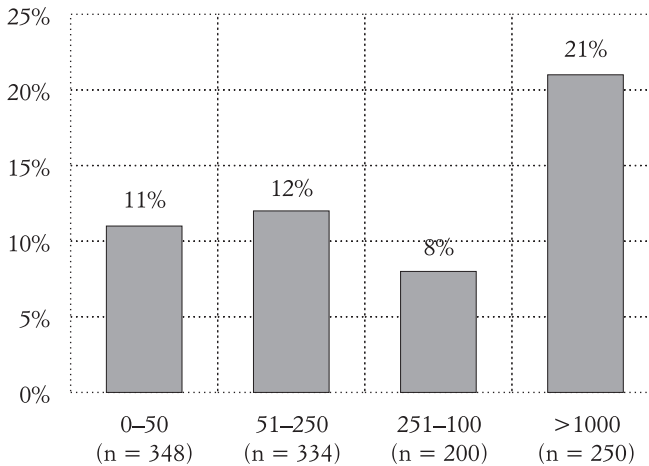
Ratings made by the employees of big enterprises employing over 1,000 people are the best. Statistically, they differ significantly from assessments made by employees from every other category.

Chart No. 7. Differences in Marks: Ownership Structure



Source: Own study.

Chart No. 8. Differences in Marks: Organization's Size



Source: Own study.

Conclusion

Employees are poor at noticing employers' particular solutions resulting from organizational studies. A question may be asked: Should the organizational culture be studied in terms of satisfaction, engagement, or trust? Probably, one of the answers is that the managerial staff needs knowledge about its organization in order to react to obstacles in strategy implementation. Moreover, well-conducted studies provide an

undeniable possibility for motivating employees, and they are an opportunity to build the Employer's Brand.

In order to take full advantage of the potential of research on organizational climate and culture, such studies must be closely related to the company's personnel and business strategy. Moreover, their results should be precisely communicated through implemented projects aimed at organization improvement. Every employee should have a sense that by completing a culture assessment questionnaire, he or she considerably contributes to building its value.

Maria Zakrzewski – Head of the Quantitative Research Team of the Great Place to Work® Institute Polska. Doctor of Social Sciences, University of Warsaw, fifteen years experience on the personal advisory counseling market, completed certified training in the application of the ROI Methodology as managed by the ROI Institute and the Coaching Academy accredited with the International Coaching Federation. Specializes in organizational audits, creating human resource management tools, research into the worker attitudes and motivation, and managerial audits. Acted as project head and implementer for many projects related to these matters for key Polish companies and institutions.

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