The Self-Worth of Records and Archives Management Students at the National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the self-worth of Records and Archives Management students at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The study applied a qualitative methodology in which a case study research design and a questionnaire were used to gather data from a population of first, second and fourth year students in the Department of Records and Archives Management. The findings of the study show that the majority of students in the Records and Archives Management Degree programme were not confident of their degree programme. These students felt that they made a wrong decision by enrolling into the Records and Archives Management Degree programme. This was because the majority of the students had been admitted into the Records and Archives Management Degree programme because they had failed to meet the requirements and cut-off points of their preferred degree programmes. The paper therefore, recommends a rigorous marketing of the records and archives management programme, career guidance for students, and the resuscitation of the records and archives management professional association to develop the records and archives management profession in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Records management, Archives profession, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Archives, archivists and archiving are terms not understood in many communities, as Mason (2011) highlights that many people think of archives as buildings that store old documents. The subject of records and archives management (RAM) is slowly diffusing across Africa (Nengomasha, 2007). Tsuura and Mutsagondo (2015) highlight that the records management programme faced prejudice, labelling and stigma even in the post-professionalisation era, and has been looked down upon in social circles. Such prejudices and stigma can potentially deter prospective students from enrolling and studying for degrees in RAM. Moreover, such stigma can dent the self-worth and confidence of students enrolled in the RAM degree programme.

The Department of RAM at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) Zimbabwe was established in the year 2004, and it enrolled its first cohort the same year (National University of Science and Technology (NUST), 2014). At its inception, the RAM degree programme borrowed a number of courses and lecturers from the Department of Library and Information Science. This however, changed as the Department of RAM grew and started hiring RAM lecturers, and in 2011, it conducted a curriculum review exercise which replaced some LIS courses with RAM ones. The Department of RAM at NUST is in the Faculty of Communication and Information Science (CIS),

together with three other departments namely: Publishing Studies (IPU), Journalism and Media Studies (IJM) and Library and Information Science (LIS). Students in the Faculty usually battle for supremacy, constantly seeking to find which programme is better than the others. In Zimbabwe, NUST and the Zimbabwe Open University have been the two universities offering degree programmes in RAM, with polytechnics, and other colleges offering records and information management diplomas.

As a relatively new and budding programme, the RAM degree has been viewed differently by students and the community at large. The establishment of this degree programme can, however, be commended as a very positive move towards the growth and visibility of the RAM profession in the country. Positive signs towards the growth of the RAM profession in Zimbabwe are: RAM undergraduate programmes, Master of Philosophy graduates and the Doctor of Philosophy students specialising in RAM.

Growth is a process; and if the RAM profession in Zimbabwe has to grow, there is a need for consistency in the production of graduates, who go on to practise and further their studies in the field. Without the production of graduates, the future of the records and archives profession in Zimbabwe is bleak. In 2011, the Department of RAM at NUST reviewed its curriculum, taking into consideration developments and trends in the records and archives management profession. From its inception up to date, the Department of Records and Archives Management has had eleven cohorts enrolled in the programme. At the time of conducting this study, seven cohorts had graduated from this programme. With this development, there is a need to evaluate the self-worth of RAM students at NUST, Zimbabwe.

Literature Review

The education and the training of records and archives personnel improve the management of records and archives (Ngulube, 2001). Education and training in records and archives management enables personnel to acquire new skills, knowledge and to gain confidence in their work (Wamukoya, 2000; Ngoepe, 2011). Katuu (2009) also notes the impossibility of building real skills without building

the basis of thinking being grounded in education. Furthermore, Ngulube (2001) encourages the development of guidelines and standards that suit the indigenous environment and the use of standards to enable learners to be competitive in the global economy. To Dickinson (2010), training must be properly timed and meet the real needs of the society at a particular time. Students have to be relevant and also instrumental in stirring development in communities. Kallberg (2012a) notes that the relationship between research, practice and higher education is important for archivists. According to Kallberg (2012b), higher education has an important role in supporting the practice with research that strengthens the archivist's profession in deûning problems and developing new working methods.

The status of professionals in any given field can at most influence how students view the profession. For most people, a job is the most important social and economic role held by most adults outside their immediate family or household (Hauser and Warren, 1997:179). The Social Identity Theory proposes that individuals think categorically about themselves and others, such that members of a high-status group assume themselves to be superior because of this group identiûcation, while members of low-status group may have an equal and opposite reaction (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Nengomasha (2009) identifies low salaries as one of the reasons for the poor status of records management in the public service in Namibia. Moreover, the International Records Management Trust (IRMT) (2004) highlights that in post-colonial Africa, poor remuneration lowered the prestige and status of records managers. Low salaries for records managers are likely to discourage prospective students from enrolling in the RAM degree programmes.

Professional identity is also important if the records and archives profession is to grow in Zimbabwe. Kallberg (2012) highlights that professional identity can be understood as a sense of shared experiences, understandings and skills, common ways of perceiving problems and their possible solutions. Kallberg (2012) also notes that the identity is produced and reproduced through a shared and common educational background and professional training, work practice, and memberships in professional associations. In

academic circles, RAM and librarianship have been considered as straightforward professions which need no specialised degree programme dedicated to them. The relevance of theory and academia in library and archives professions has been questioned by some scholars who have propagated the misconception that the work of these professions is general and straightforward and does not need any formal university degree program (Vollmer and Mills, nd: Roberts, 1987). Such thinking and arguments may dent the confidence of students studying towards degrees in these fields as they may feel inferior to students pursuing seemingly complex and sophisticated degree programmes.

Today's records managers and archivists have to manage digital documents which raise issues of privacy, security, preservation, intellectual property, surveillance, and access (Myburgh, 2005). Cox (2006) notes that graduate archival educators need to bring creativity and greater dedication to building a solid foundation for such professional education in universities. Turner (2003) posits that the purpose of education and training in electronic records management serves to provide knowledge and skills towards job performance and can be used to develop competency. Ngulube (2007) also points out that the education system should be sensitive to the challenges ushered in by e-government and comes up with strategies to equip students with skills required in the e-government environment. Mutiti (2001) points out that despite advances in the use of ICTs in many organisations, archival institutions have, in most cases, lamentably remained behind. Wamukoya and Mutula (2005) also raise concerns over the fact that among records and information managers and national archivists, there is insufficient capacity and training to articulate e-records issues and to provide guidance and input to policy makers and planners. Atkinson (2002) observes that archivists, in managing electronic records, also often lack the necessary skills to deal with electronic records because archival education remains relatively under-developed. Tibbo (2006) posits that archivists in North America have described, discussed, and debated the necessary and optimal content, configuration, and venue for archival education for close to a century but have given little consideration to integrating technology in their archival curricula. The failure to address e-records management in records management training produces half-baked records and archives management professionals who do not have the confidence to actively participate in e-records management environments.

The manner in which students are trained and oriented in the profession plays a pivotal role in shaping and boosting their confidence in their professions. Ljuca, Lozo and Vladimir (2008) reported that the student is the central figure in the process of education, and modern international institutions use "student centred approach" as their main philosophy in the process of curriculum development. Redmond (2008) insists that institutions should study the needs of the students and all the other feasibilities before selecting courses and drafting curricula. Little (2010) also highlights that there is a need for trainees to have a positive attitude towards work, fully commit, engage and be prepared to take learning back into the workplace. Powers and Rossman (1985) note that graduate students' satisfaction is related to faculty-student interaction, peer interaction, and a feeling of intellectual stimulation. Covington (1989) reported that as the level of self-esteem increased, so the level of academic achievement scored but as the level of self-esteem decreased, achievement declined. Self-worth and self-esteem, are therefore, critical factors if RAM students are to excel and contribute towards the development of the profession.

Okello (2009) avers that records and archives curriculum is poor in Uganda, and it runs para-professional with courses such as Library and Information Science (LIS). He further elucidates that education in RAM in Uganda can be described as inadequate but strongly growing. Kemoni (2011) conducted research on the RAM curriculum at Moi University, Kenya, and his findings revealed that some courses needed revisions to meet the market demands. Scheurkogel (2006) also notes that RAM students that go through LIS courses usually have few courses of archival science in their curricula, and poor delivery in archival institutions can be considered as a cause of concern. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the self-worth of RAM students at NUST with a view to determining how this affects enrolments into the degree programme and the growth of the records management profession in Zimbabwe as compared to other counties as reported in the literature.

Statement of the Problem

The low prestige and status of the RAM profession seemingly affected students in the RAM Department at NUST, as they felt inferior to students in other degree programmes. Furthermore, such a scenario may have led to low enrolments in the RAM degree programme, dropouts and may discourage students from pursuing higher degrees in RAM. This was witnessed by dwindling numbers of students who were enrolled in the programme between the years 2011 and 2015. Low self-esteem and the lack of self-worth could negatively impact the growth of the records and archives management profession in Zimbabwe. The aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions and self-worthiness of the students of the Bachelor of Science Honours degree in RAM at NUST, Zimbabwe.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives to:

i.   determine the reasons why the students enrolled for the RAM degree programme.

ii.   determine students' perceptions of the RAM degree programme;

iii.   establish the level of confidence that the RAM students had in their degree programme; and

iv.   establish possible future professional and academic plans of the RAM students at NUST

Research Methodology

The population of the study comprised students in the RAM Department in the 2014-2015 academic year, that is, the first, second and fourth-year students in the Department. Third-year students who were on industrial attachment were left out of this study as it would have been a challenge to contact them since they were located in different parts of Zimbabwe.

Purposive sampling technique was applied in this study as only students in the Department of RAM were chosen. Only registered students were included as the sample frame. The focus group discussion was the instrument used for conducting the study for each cohort or stream; hence three focus group discussions were conducted. In this study, 19 first-year, 16 second-year and 16 fourth-year students were studied and a response rate of 100% was achieved as all students were part of the focus group discussions. A standard interview guide was used in all the three groups. The interview guide had open-ended questions and the data analysis followed a thematic fashion. The study was carried out in March 2015. The students who were interviewed in this study were aged between nineteen and twenty-four years. All the students who participated in this study were not employed in RAM prior to enrolling for the programme. Only fourth-year students had gone through industrial attachment in their third year which had exposed them to records management practices.

Findings

Data were presented thematically and the themes were derived from the objectives of the study.

Factors Influencing Enrolment in the RAM Degree Programme

The reasons behind the students' enrolment in whatever degree programme differ as there are a number of factors which lead to students' degree choices. These factors include: advice from relatives and friends, the subject combination they would have read for at high schools and failure to satisfy minimum requirements in other degree programmes inter alia. Upon applying for enrolment at NUST, students are given the freedom to choose between three degree programmes in order of preference. These students were thus asked to highlight the choices they made when applying for a place to study at NUST, and their responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Degree Choices Made by Students upon Application for Admission Stage

	RAM as First Choice	RAM as Second Choice	RAM as Third Choice	Did Not Choose RAM
First Year Students	6(32%)	4(21%)	3(16%)	6(32%)
Second Year Students	5(31%)	6(38%)	2(13%)	3(19%)
Fourth Year Students	4(25%)	5(31%)	4(25%)	3(19%)

Some students who had RAM as their first choice stated that their friends and relatives who were RAM graduates had encouraged them to enrol in the programme. Some students also stated that their parents advised them to choose RAM as it was new and not flooded like many traditional programmes such as LIS, marketing, accounting and journalism inter alia. Students in this category also stated that they chose RAM because they knew RAM graduates who were excelling in life and this was encouraging. One student stated that she enrolled in RAM out of curiosity, just to find out what the programme was all about and she had eventually "fallen in love with it". One-fourth year student, however, highlighted that " lack of career guidance at high school led me to enroll in RAM and should I have known better, I would have not enrolled in this programme." The students were further asked if they were regretting their decisions to enrol in the RAM degree programme, and their responses are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Students Regretting/Happy about Enrolling in RAM

Cohort	Number of Students Regretting Enrolling in RAM	Number of Students Happy About Enrolling in RAM
First Year	6 (32%)	13 (68%)
Second Year	1 (6%)	15 (94%)
Third Year	5 (31%)	11(69%)

The students who did not regret being in the programme highlighted that they were slowly beginning to appreciate the programme, but hoped that the curriculum will be improved with time. These students also stated that the issue of unemployment was not facing RAM graduates only and this, to them, showed that the unemployment challenge was as a result of the country's economic meltdown and not the weakness of their degree programme. These students reported that South African RAM graduates were being employed and doing well and that, to them, meant that under a stable economic climate, they could be employed and become prosperous. These students also indicated that they were going to use their RAM degrees as stepping stones to achieve greater things in life. The students who were regretting enrolling in the RAM Degree highlighted that there was a number of RAM graduates who were unemployed and this made them feel insecure about their future, and they had no passion for the programme as they had enrolled thinking that it would be easy to change to other programmes.

Perceptions of the Students of the RAM Degree Programme

Students' perceptions and appreciation of a degree programme are critical as they show their interests and can inspire creativity and innovation therein. The following table highlights the students' appreciation of the RAM degree programme at NUST:

Table 3: Appreciation of the RAM Degree Programme by Students

Cohort	Students Appreciating the RAM degree Programme	Students not Appreciating the RAM degree Programme
First Year	14 (74%)	5 (26%)
Second Year	16 (100%)	0 (0%)
Fourth Year	11 (69%)	5 (31%)

First-year students who professed to appreciate the RAM degree programme indicated that the profession had not yet reached a stage where there were a lot of graduates competing for jobs, and this gave them hope that they could be employed after graduating. This group also cited that nearly all organisations and companies have records that have to be managed and this, to them, meant that nearly all organisations were potential employers for them. Second-year students who highlighted their appreciation for the RAM degree programme cited reasons raised by first-year students and also added that only a few universities in Zimbabwe were offering degree in RAM. One of these students stated that "it is only NUST and Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in Zimbabwe which offered this degree programme, and upon graduating, we will not be facing too much competition such as other students in traditional and over-subscribed degree programmes." Fourth-year students who appreciated the RAM degree cited reasons such as its uniqueness compared to other degree programmes. To these students, their degree programme was unique as they were having practicals unlike most degree programmes. These students also raised the fact that the degree programme was slowly being appreciated by employers as evidenced by the increase in the number of companies requesting for RAM students for Industrial attachment.

First-year students who did not appreciate the RAM degree programme cited the following reasons: "the shallowness of the RAM degree at NUST does not adequately prepare us to manage e-records management." These students also highlighted that they were being looked down upon by students from other faculties. One of these students lamented this in the following words:

> "*We cannot confidently tell anyone that we are studying RAM because people despise our degree programme and we always have to explain to people what RAM is. Most people do not know about RAM and they seem not to believe that someone can enroll in a degree only to study how to manage records*"

The Empowerment of RAM Students

Students have to acquire knowledge and skills that will empower them to contribute to the development of their communities and countries. If a degree programme cannot empower students, its existence becomes questionable. Respondents were asked if the RAM degree programme had empowered them. Their responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Students Who Felt Empowered by the RAM Degree Programme

Cohort	Students Who Felt Empowered by the RAM Degree	Students Who Did Not Feel Empowered by the RAM Degree Programme
First Year	14 (74%)	5 (26%)
Second Year	4 (25%)	12 (75%)
Fourth Year	12 (75%)	4 (25%)

Students in all the three cohorts who felt that the RAM Degree programme had empowered them opined that they now understood the importance of archives, records and freedom of information towards the democratisation, development and good governance of a nation. These students also felt that they were now prepared to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country and Africa at large. Practicals which were part of the course work were mentioned as another way through which the students felt empowered.

Second-year students who felt that the RAM degree programme had empowered them indicated that they could now design websites among other things. Some fourth-year students also highlighted that courses such as infopreneurship and information economics had unveiled the business side of records and information management. Some reasons raised by the students across all the three cohorts included better communication and writing skills which they had acquired. Students who felt that the degree programme had not empowered them at all indicated that there was no need to study managing records at a degree level. These students believed that on-the-job training could suffice as there was not much to learn over four years. However, first - and fourth-year students felt more empowered by the RAM degree programme than second-year students. Fourth-year students' industrial attachment experiences had empowered them with practical skills. Twelve out of sixteen second year students (75%) were of the opinion that they were not empowered by the degree programme because they thought that the degree programme offered them very basic skills which did not empower them to work in international organisations such as the United Nations which required prospective employees to be conversant with e-records management and archiving software. These students felt that there was no practical e-records management and they had never come across any e-records management software or applications.

RAM Degree Programme Areas Which Need Improvements

The students were asked whether they thought that the RAM Degree programme could be improved for the development of the RAM profession. All the students in the three cohorts perceived that the RAM degree programme could do with some improvements. Some of the areas which the students thought needed to be improved on included practicals, especially in e-records management as most of the courses were just theoretical. The students also opined that the RAM Department was supposed to increase the number of e-records management courses as these were few. The students also were of the opinion that the RAM degree programme was designed with the public sector in mind and did not pay attention to records management in the private sector. The fourth-year students further highlighted that there was a lot of repetition and overlap between some courses that had been administered at lower levels. These students also noted that some courses were having the same course content. The fourth-year students also stated that they needed to have core courses and electives to avoid being treated as a homogenous group and not being able to choose courses they had interest in. These fourth-year students also highlighted that they needed lecturers who have a practical experience of what they were teaching rather than just theorising and searching for notes on the Internet.

The Contribution of the Industrial Attachment Experience to the Students

NUST students usually go for industrial attachment during their third year of studies. At the time of conducting this study, only fourth-year students had gone through industrial attachment. Industrial attachment provides students with the opportunity to experience RAM processes in any given organisation. Fourth-year students were asked to share their experiences during industrial attachment. These students indicated that they were required to either go to the National Archives of Zimbabwe or any other company that had a functioning records management system for their industrial attachment as this would enhance the value of this exercise. These students noted that some industrial attachment hosting institutions did not have records management systems and, therefore, students could not achieve any records management value and even learn. Some of these students noted that in some organisations there were neither records management systems nor qualified records managers who could train them.

Confidence in the RAM Degree Programme

The students were further asked if they had confidence in the RAM Degree programme and the

Table 5 shows students' responses to this question.

Career Plans for RAM Students

Table 5: Confidence in the RAM Degree Programme

Cohort	Confidence in the RAM Degree Programme	Lack of Confidence about the RAM Degree Programme
First Year	2 (11%)	17 (89%)
Second Year	9 (56%)	7 (44%)
Fourth Year	0 (0%)	16 (100%)

All the sixteen fourth-year students stated that their lack of confidence in the RAM degree programme was because the felt underrated and undermined in organisations they were conducting their industrial attachment in. These students indicated that they felt like their roles as records management attachés were insignificant and not part of organisations' strategic areas. Across all the three cohorts, the students reported that when asked about the degree programme they were enrolled in, they preferred not to tell the truth and but were telling people that they were enrolled in other degree programmes such as marketing and media and journalism and not RAM. Most of these students stated that they could not stand being associated with RAM as it was one of the degree programmes which most fellow students at NUST felt was insignificant. One final year student also stated that "we are just overqualified secretaries or clerks."

These students also stated, that in most organisations, RAM is always associated with filing, and employers would rather hire a secretary than a RAM graduate to do filing. The students further stated that they had no confidence in the RAM programme since NUST (the university that offers the programme) did not have a university archive and records centre. This study established that the students had failed to meet requirements of their preferred degree programmes, and thus they were offered the RAM degree programme which was not their preference.

Preferred Degrees within the Faculty of Communication and Information Science

Respondents were then asked to highlight their preferred Faculty of Communication and Information Science degree programmes which included RAM, IJM, LIS and IPU. Their responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Preferred Degree Choices

	RAM	IJM	LIS	IPU
First Year Students' Preferred Degree Programme Choice	13 (68%)	4 (22%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Second Year Students' Preferred Degree Programme Choice	13 (81%)	2 (13%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)
Fourth Year Students' Preferred Degree Programme Choice	5 (31%)	9 (56%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)

Some career paths chosen by students included infopreneurs, that is, start businesses in line with information and records management, information brokerage, consultancy, commercial records centres and archives. These students also highlighted that they would also venture into research, become records managers, archivists and RAM lecturers. The above-mentioned students who considered careers in records management had an interest in audio visual archives management, e-records management, archives management, health information, informatics, database management, virtual archives and records management and data archives management. Five (26%) first-year students, twelve (75%) second year students and four (25%) fourth-year students indicated that they were not going to practice in the area of RAM as they had no passion for the degree programme. These students were not even sure of what they would do with their RAM degrees after graduating. These students stated that they found themselves enrolled in RAM just because they failed to satisfy the minimum requirements in other degree programmes. One final year student said that "I did not want to do RAM. When I came for registration there was a lady/receptionist who said that RAM was going to change to BSc Hons Information and Communication Technology, and it was this assurance that made me choose RAM. I regret ever meeting that lady who did not tell me the truth."

Continuing Education in RAM

The students were further asked if they were going to enrol in RAM higher degrees after graduating, and their responses were as follows.
not all students had lost confidence in the degree programme as some of them were foreseeing a bright

Table 7: Willingness to Pursue RAM Higher Degrees

Cohort	Students Willing to Pursue RAM Higher Degrees	Students not Willing to Pursue RAM Higher Degrees
First Year	16 (84%)	3 (16%)
Second Year	8 (50%)	8 (50%)
Fourth Year	3 (23%)	13 (77%)

The respondents who chose to pursue higher degrees in RAM after graduating highlighted that they did not want to start pursuing new areas outside the scope of records and archives management. These students also stated that they wanted to develop and become experts in RAM. Some of these students further highlighted that RAM would develop to grow like every other professions, and having higher degrees in the field would position them to become academics or lecturers when more universities and colleges start offering RAM degrees and diplomas. However, some of these students highlighted that they were not going to pursue their higher degrees at NUST as doing so would be mere repetition of what they studied during their undergraduate years. These students highlighted that they would rather study for RAM higher degrees in South African and overseas universities. Students who were not willing to pursue RAM higher degrees highlighted that they had already enough of the RAM programme. One fourth-year student expressed that "I will just use this programme as a stepping stone, I want to enrol for a first degree in Law."

Conclusion

Findings of this study showed that some RAM students at NUST felt the degree programme being offered by the university was lacking, especially in e-records management which happens to be the most sought-after skill in RAM. The study also concluded that most students had not intended to study for a degree in RAM, but due to their failure to meet the requirements in other degree programmes, they found themselves enrolled in RAM. The study also showed that some students' perspectives and views were shaped by their negative experiences during industrial attachment. These researchers also concluded that

future in RAM. This study also concluded that most students did not know about RAM prior to enrolling in the programme and they did not plan on making a career out of records management.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the RAM Department needs to do career guidance and conduct other educational programmes to help their students understand what it really means to be an archivist or records manager. RAM professionals, successful NUST RAM students' alumni and motivational speakers can be called upon to motivate students and give them hope. The study recommends the proposal of Ceja and Inefuku's (2009) for the need to support networking, mentoring, and career and leadership development as an element that would support the retention of minority students in the archives profession. The paper also recommends a comprehensive recruitment programme incorporating tuition stipends in support of graduate archives education, paid internships, and financial support for students to attend RAM conferences and workshops (Inefuku, 2014). Furthermore, the Department has to do a lot of marketing in order to be visible and establish contacts which can translate to employment opportunities for its graduates. These researchers also recommend that the RAM Department at NUST visits schools and conduct career guidance; set up records and archives clubs and conduct some archives competitions and other initiatives which may attract students who will be passionate about RAM from a tender age.

The RAM Department at NUST has to see to it that it reviews its curriculum in order to strengthen the e-records management and technology bit. Ataman (2009) highlights the need for new roles and new skills for archivists, records managers and librarians, and recommends increased technology content in education (Ataman, 2009). Kallberg (2012b) also notes the need of changing skills and knowledge in archival education and a need for increased technology. Furthermore, there is a need for practicals in e-records management and other technologies in records management as bombarding students with theory void of practice will not at all prepare them for the workplace. It is recommended that the students are to be made aware of the need

for tertiary education in RAM. Kallberg (2012a) suggests that archivists need education in order to obtain the additional skills needed for pro-active and strategic work.

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