

Examining the Relationship among SHRM Roles, Human Resource Professional and Performance of Private Hospital in Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among strategic human resource management (SHRM) roles (strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent) and organizational performance through HR professional. The model was tested by using data collected from 140 private hospitals and a mail survey questionnaire as an instrument. The results of OLS regression analysis showed that SHRM roles had a significant impact on organizational performance via HR professional. In addition, administrative expert has a direct effect on organizational performance. The study contributed to managers by exploring how organizational performance could be improved by SHRM roles and HR professional. Theoretical and managerial contributions, conclusion and future research were also provided.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Management, Human Resource Professional, Organizational Performance

Introduction

In order to survive, it is important that organizations understand the need for change in today's dynamic business. Modern firms are engaged with new technologies, organizational structures, work systems, and improvements of working processes. Major changes relating to human resources are required to fulfill the changing world of business. The success of organization depends greatly on "human", by using the employees' knowledge, skills and capabilities in an efficient and effective way which will meaningfully contribute to achievement of the firm. Strategic human resource management (SHRM) can be seen as an essential role within the HR operation. In prior studies, strategic human resources practices create a connection between business needs and organizational activity consistent with business strategies (Walsh, Sturman & Longstreet, 2010). Crucial changes in strategic planning, reorganization and system performing are among the principal roles to be enacted by HR professionals. Moreover, SHRM roles and HR professionals tend to create values and build human capital that increases organizational competitiveness. (Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009).

From an organizational point of view, academics have observed that SHRM can directly affect organizational performance (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009; Richard & Johnson, 2001). HR professionals, by quality of their knowledge of human performance, are placed to implement strategic leadership and contribute significantly to a firm's competitive advantage. This paradigm shift concerning the value of human resources will create opportunities for the

HR function to develop a more strategic role in a firm's operation (Long & Ismail, 2008). HR roles have now emerged as strategic paradigm which has a major influence between HR function and strategy. However, few studies have assessed the implications of SHRM via HR roles. Thus, this research aimed to gain a better understanding of how SHRM roles such as strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent affected HR professionals and organizational performance in the context of medical business. Specifically, the study of Kabene et al., (2006) found that the relationship between human resources management and health care system is multifaceted and it revealed SHRM as something essential for health care system. Based on the discussion above, private hospitals of Thailand were chosen for this study because service strategy which generated by employees, play critical role for private hospital business success. In addition, private hospital uses SHRM roles as an excellent performance which generates superior financial returns through their medical services business (Thailand Productivity Institute, 2014).

The primary basis of the research was to investigate the relationships among strategic human resource management roles in four dimensions on organizational performance through HR professionals. The sequence of the research is: literature survey, details of research methods including data collection, measurement, and statistics. Subsequently, the results are unveiled and examined. Accordingly, contribution, constraints, future trends, and conclusion are provided.

Conceptual Development

A number of studies suggest that SHRM can be considered as a key approach within an active situation which leads to increase both financial and operational performance (e.g. Ngo, Lau & Foley, 2008; Nigam, et al., 2011). In order to clearly investigate the relationships among SHRM roles, HR professionals, and organizational performance, SHRM roles as independent variable are described in four dimensions of Ulrich model (strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent). Firstly, HR works as a partner of the firm in helping with strategy. Secondly, HR should contribute expertise in the efficient and effective performance. Thirdly, HR should work with employees to increase and ensure their ability to contribute to the organization via their competence and commitment. Finally, HR should contribute to the process of change in organization. In playing these roles, HR needs to play an active and guiding role in an organization as professional in order to add value to firm performance. In addition, there is a positive relationship between HR roles and organizational performance made by HR professionals as mediating variable (Pietersen & Englbrecht, 2005). The study of Bhatnagar & Sharma (2005) found that strategic HR roles have positive relationship with organizational learning capability that is the predictor to firm performance. By fulfilling this role, SHRM roles are very important factors related that enable HR professionals to contribute to organizational success (Long et al., 2008). Accordingly, the tool of Ulrich HRM four roles model is used as independent variable to assess HR professional as mediating variable and organizational performance as dependent variable. The conceptual framework of this research is shown in Figure 1.

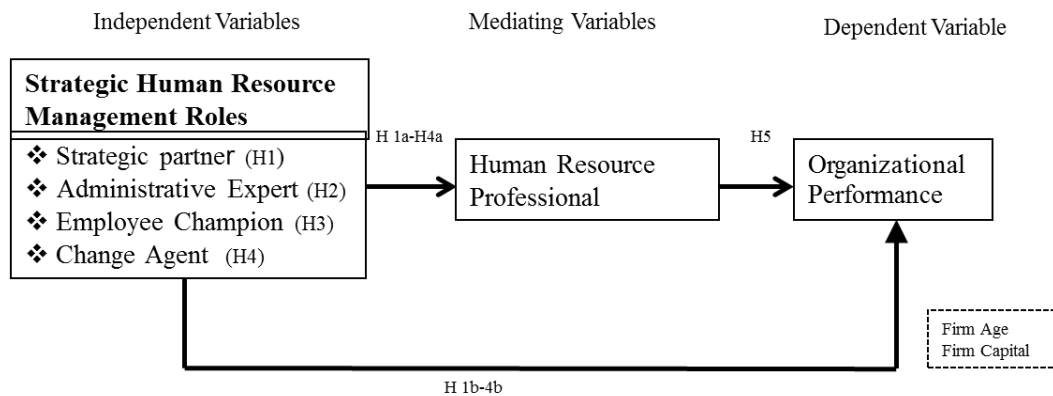


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of SHRM Roles and the Outcomes

Strategic Human Resource Management Roles

Several researchers have defined SHRM as something having various meanings and dimensions. Huselid, Jackson & Schuler (1997) proposed that SHRM should be viewed as a critical element to foster operational efficiency and firm performance. Wright & Snell (1998) stated that SHRM is “a pattern of human resource deployments and activities intended to enable the firm to achieve goals”. SHRM, as focused upon here, refers to a set of processes and activities which link people with the firm to empower the organization to achieve its goals based on the belief that organizations are man-made. In order to establish and achieve their goals, they need to depend on human expertise. In exploring the different aspects of SHRM, this research will emphasize only four SHRM roles which are based on Ulrich (1997), namely: strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champion, and change agent. These four practices were chosen because they represent some aspects of SHRM together with limited empirical studies available from a Thai perspective. With regard to the relationship between SHRM roles and organizational performance, a number of studies reveal that SHRM roles have a constructive influence on the effectiveness of an organization (Ngo, Lau & Foley, 2008; Long & Ismail, 2010; Besma, 2014). The present study investigated the possibility for SHRM roles (strategic partner, employee champion, administrative expert, and change agent) in enhancing HR professionals and organizational performance. To analyze the relationships among SHRM roles, HR professionals, and organizational performance, this research described SHRM roles in four aspects as follows:

Strategic partner refers to the participation of HR practitioners in the task of relating HR practices to business strategies that are effective in building new organizational capabilities (Ulrich, 1997). As a strategic partner, a HR manager must possess the ability to identify and implement practices that will expedite strategic business success. Strategic partnership influences HR services in a number of areas; work depiction, hiring, rewards, strategic pay, performance development, career succession planning, and development of the employees (Sharma, 2012). The study of Ulrich (1997) pointed out that the role of strategic HR is to enables the transition from business strategy to HR practice. In order to create a strategic partnership, the HR manager must focus on the work of HRM as well as business strategy in order to meet organizational goals. Panayotopoulou & Papalexandris (2004) suggest that a partner needs professional competencies to become a strategic partner in developing an

effective organization. Likewise, the study of Ahmad et al., (2014) suggests that the competencies of the HR strategic partner increase the HR professionals' effectiveness. Moreover, Padmaja & Sandhya (2015) state that the strategic partner has a positive impact on HR performance. In addition, Long & Ismail (2010) show that the strategic partner role is significantly related to firm performance. Consequently, these ideas lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Strategic partner is positively associated with (a) HR professionals and (b) organizational performance.

Administrative expert refers to the capability of the HR manager to improve and apply business processes to HR functions with efficiency and effectiveness for performance goals (Darvish et al., 2012). Several researches suggest that HR experts may achieve greater performance results, due to staff performing collectively, by applying management of administrative efficiency to the business (Ulrich, 1997). In addition, Padmaja & Sandhya (2015) point out that expert HR creates infrastructure by continuously examining, evaluating, and improving the HR processes of the overall management of employees flowing throughout the organization, thus, in turn adds values to the business. Moreover, Saidi et al., (2014) pointed out that there is a positive relationship between the administrative expert role and effective work learning. In addition, Long & Ismail (2010) showed that the administrative expert role is significantly related to firm performance. Thus, these ideas lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Administrative expert is positively associated with (a) HR professional and (b) organizational performance.

Employee champion can be defined as the ability of the HR manager to perceive the employees requirements and strive to comply with them so as to advance every chance of increasing employee dedication (Ulrich, 1997). Conner & Ulrich (1996) suggest that the role of the employee champion is to motivate, empower through greater responsibility and develop employee ownership of the business. Furthermore, Ulrich & Brockbank (2005) stated that the employee champion role uses knowledge and expertise in establishing the organizational atmosphere to improve competency and commitment. Likewise, Raub et al., (2006) pointed out that employee champion is one of the key roles of an HR managers competencies. Accordingly, Darvish et al., (2012) proposed that the employee champion has a relationship with HR competencies by listening and responding to employees and finding the balance between demands and resources available to the employee. Similarly, the study of Long et al., (2010) showed that the employee champion has a positive effect on the performance of the firm. Therefore, these ideas lead to the following hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Employee champion is positively associated with (a) the HR professional and (b) organizational performance.

Change agent is defined as the capability to help the organization's employees build a capability for change that leverages firm values (Conner & Ulrich, 1996). Some researchers found that the position of the HR change agent is important (Long et al., 2008). Chanin (2014) proposes that when an organization grows, its needs a change to improve organizational creativity capability. Therefore, the HR manager must learn to understand the organizational changes and how HR can be changed to meet strategic goals. The HR manager can serve as a change agent by involving employees in the creative process for new product proposals, a

process which will also result in positive financial results (Friedman, 2009). Also, Ahmad et al., (2014) revealed that the HR practitioner needs to possess certain competencies in order to play the vital role as HR professional by learning to be a change agent in the organization. The study of Choi & Khairuzzman (2008) and Long et al., (2010) found that the HR, as a change agent, is significantly related to firm performance. Accordingly, these ideas lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Change agent is positively associated with (a) the HR professional and (b) organizational performance.

HR professional refers to a specialized expert who possesses the theoretical and technical knowledge of HR issues: both practical experience and the skills for managing human resources. The HR professional is a strategic asset in a vigorous and competitive environment, providing and developing a continuous competitive advantage for the firm with its ability to mesh with the constantly changing strategic requirement for human resources (Wright & Snell, 1998). Likewise, Ulrich (1998) suggest that precise competencies may be demonstrated by HR professionals to affect its performance and add value to the business. In addition, Sharma (2012) and Ahmad et al., (2014) stated that an HR professional creates a competitive advantage and improves the organization to fit in with the changing business environment. Consequently, the following hypothesis is stated:

Hypothesis 5: HR professional is positively associated with organizational performance.

Data and Methodology

1. Sample Selection and Data Collection Procedure

For this research, the population and sample of the research were 340 Thai private hospitals. The database of this research was chosen from the website of the (Department of Business Development, Ministry of Commerce, Thailand <http://knowledgebase.dbd.go.th/DBD/Main/login.aspx>, 5 March 2015). The crucial contributors are the HR directors or managers representing each private hospital. Questionnaires were sent to 340 private hospitals by mail. While 142 mail surveys were received, only 140 were able to be used. The response rate of 41.18%; which Aaker, Kumar & Day (2007) suggested that a mail survey response rate of 20%, without follow up, would be an acceptable figure for analyzing and testing hypotheses.

Non-response bias was tested for two independent samples. A comparison of early and late response data is recommended by (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). T-tests comparing the first 70 surveys received with the last 70 responses with four company characteristics (i.e. number of employees, number of years in business, amount of capital invested, and annual sales revenue), did not expose any outstanding differences between the two groups. Therefore, there is no apparent non-response bias posing a relevant problem within this research.

2. Variables

For the conceptual model, all of the variables, except control variables, were measured on a five point Likert scale, ranging from '1 = strongly disagree' to '5 = strongly agree'. The dependent, independent, and control variables were described below:

Organizational performance is the dependent variable in this research. It is measured by obtaining sales growth, increased profitability, market share, having outstanding service beyond a competitor, having a reputation and customer acceptance. This construct is adapted from Gilley et al., (2004). *Strategic partner* is measured by the process of linking HR practices to business strategies that are effective in building new organizational capabilities, adapted from Ulrich (1997). *Administrative expert* is measured by the capability to improve and apply business processes to HR results of efficiency and effectiveness, adapted from Darvish et al., (2012). *Employee champion* is measured by the ability of HR to understand the needs of the employees and attempt to meet those needs. It provides every opportunity to increase employee commitment, developed from Long et al., (2010). *Change agent* is measured by the ability of HR to help the organization build a capacity for change that leverages firm values, adapted from Conner and Ulrich (1996). *HR professional* is a specialized expert who possesses the theoretical knowledge, skills and practical experience in the management of HR within the organization, developed from Ahmad, Sharif & Kausar (2014). In this study, the age of a firm may impact on its ability to implement business strategies that will lead to the achievement of superior performance (Ussahawanitchakit, 2007). In addition, some literatures indicate that firm capital may affect strategic decision and firm competitiveness (Thipsri & Ussahawanitchakit, 2009). Thus, firm capital and firm age are also used as control variables.

3. Validity and Reliability

Confirmatory factor analysis has a great potential to inflate the component loadings. According to the rule-of-thumb of (Nunnally & Berstein, 1994), all factor loadings that are greater than the 0.40 cut-off are statistically significant. Furthermore, regarding scale reliability, the cronbach alpha coefficients are greater than 0.80, as recommended by (Hair et al., 2010). The scales for all measurements represent internally consistent results; therefore, they are considered acceptable for analysis due to indicating an accepted validity and reliability. Table 1 indicates the results for both factor loadings, being between 0.734-0.936 thus indicating that there is construct validity. As reliability testing, Cronbach alpha coefficients for all variables between 0.761-0.905 are considered acceptable.

Table 1: Results of Measure Validation

Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items
Organizational performance (PER)	0.816-0.936	0.905	4
Strategic Partner (STA)	0.759-0.841	0.863	5
Administrative Expert (ADM)	0.803-0.888	0.877	4
Employee Champion (EMP)	0.734-0.813	0.761	4
Chang Agent (CHA)	0.838-0.865	0.865	5
HR Professional (HRP)	0.822-0.863	0.870	4

4. Statistic Test

Ordinary Least Square (OLS) is employed as the measurement of all hypotheses in this research. This is possible due to both dependent and independent variables being neither nominal data nor categorical data; therefore OLS is a fitting method of examining the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2010). Conclusively, relationships mentioned above are shown in the model shown below.

$$\text{Equation 1: } HRP = \beta_{01} + \beta_1FC + \beta_2FA + \beta_3STA + \beta_4ADM + \beta_5EMP + \beta_6CHA + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Equation 2: } PER = \beta_{02} + \beta_7FC + \beta_8FA + \beta_9STA + \beta_{10}ADM + \beta_{11}EMP + \beta_{12}CHA + \varepsilon$$

$$\text{Equation 3: } PER = \beta_{03} + \beta_{13}FC + \beta_{14}FA + \beta_{15}HRP + \varepsilon$$

Empirical Findings

1. Result of Descriptive Statistics

In this research, private hospital businesses were the unit of analysis and the key informants were executive director, HR director or HR manager of each firm. Business types in the study are limited companies (81.43 percent). Registered capital is more than 100,000,000 Baht (35.00 percent). Most of the hospital in the study, employees are more than 250 persons (57.86 percent). Most of the hospital sizes in the study are 101-200 beds (42.14 percent). The average sales revenues per year are more than 200,000,000 Baht (55.00 percent). The period of time in operation, are mostly more than 20 years (70.00 percent).

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of the variables. By employing Pearson's correlation coefficient, it can calculate the level of linear association between all pairs of variables as shown in Table 2. Regarding potential problems of multicollinearity, all the correlation coefficients of independent variables are measured at less than 0.8, therefore there is no significant problem of multicollinearity of the independent variables in this model (Hair et al., 2010). Moreover, within the value of 10 as recommended by Hair et al. (2010), the VIF result was 1.056 – 3.194, indicating no correlation of the independent variables with each other. Finally, this means that there are no substantial multicollinearity problems indicated within this study.

Table 2: The correlation matrix of all variables in the regression analysis.

Variables	STA	ADM	EMP	CHA	HRP	PER
MEAN	4.320	4.110	4.241	4.137	3.832	3.733
S.D	0.524	0.622	0.550	0.537	0.587	0.553
STA						
ADM	.554**					
EMP	.711**	.511**				
CHA	.576**	.733*	.700**			
HRP	.413**	.531**	.570**	.571**		
PER	.392**	.463**	.438**	.466**	.645**	

** . p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

2. Effect of SHRM Roles and the Outcomes

Table 3 exhibits the OLS regression analysis of SHRM roles (strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent) on HR professional and organizational performance. The finding shows that strategic partner has no significant effects on HR professional ($b_3 = 0.134, p > 0.05$) and organizational performance ($b_9 = -0.080, p > 0.05$). The unaccepted result of strategic partner on consequence linkages can be explained by the research of Gilley et al., (2004) which states that effectiveness of strategic partner may be achieved in a long run. In addition, this finding may be described by the study of Long et al., (2008) which states that HR strategic partner does not impact HR professional in manufacturing company in Malaysia due to the two barriers pertaining to having no time to address strategic issues and lack of knowledge in strategy and specific competencies. Moreover, Lemmargard (2009) found that HR strategic partner does not increase productivity because it is not a main business focus which only brings little impact on organizational performance. Thus, ***Hypotheses 1a and 1b are not supported.***

Secondly, the results in Table 3 indicate that administrative expert has significant positive effects on HR professional ($b_4 = 0.273, p < 0.01$). In this sense, prior research suggests that administrative expert plays the most vital role in HR function because most of HR functions are done by administrative experts (Saidi et al., 2014). To complete strategic management, the administrative work must be done by HR professional. To sum up, HR in the role of administrative expert is positively related with HR professional (Long & Ismail, 2010). Thus, ***Hypothesis 2a is supported.*** Furthermore, the findings reveal that administrative expert has significant positive effects on organization performance ($b_{10} = 0.280, p < 0.05$) consistent with Long & Ismail (2010) who find that administrative expert role is significantly related to firm performance. Thus, ***Hypothesis 2b is supported.***

Thirdly, the results in Table 3 show that employee champion has significant positive effects on HR professional ($b_5 = 0.400, p < 0.01$). This result is consistent with prior study asserting that increased employee contributions are the product of HR professional (Ulrich, 1998). In addition, HR manager tends to focus on the needs of employees, attempt to meet these needs, and provide every opportunity to increase employee commitment by spending time with employee as important assets. Thus, ***Hypothesis 3a is supported.*** However, the results show that employee champion has no effect on organizational performance ($b_{11} = 0.185, p > 0.05$). Conversely, the unexpected finding is similar to Long et al., (2012) who reveals that employee champion has no direct effect on organizational performance. Likewise, prior literature suggests that HR needs certain competencies such as business skills to execute strategy by spending more work time for effective management of employee (Inyang et al., 2014). Most structures of private hospitals in Thailand are based on moving HRM to SHRM so it may take some more time to gain efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, ***Hypothesis 3b is not supported.***

Fourthly, the findings reveal that change agent has significant positive effects on HR professional ($b_6 = 0.194, p < 0.05$) which is similar to Darvish et al., (2012) who claims that change agent has a relationship with HR professional. Thus, ***Hypothesis 4a is supported.*** However, the results found no associations between change agent and organizational performance ($b_{12} = 0.143, p > 0.05$). According to the results of previous literature of Namasivayam & Denizci (2006), service industry should recognize that employees have a key impact on added value and service quality instead of being simply deliverers of the product so change process in service is more complex than in product. From the results, it implies that

change agent has an indirect effect on organizational performance via HR professional. Thus, **Hypotheses 4b is not supported.**

More importantly, the results in Table 3 assert that HR professional has significant positive effect on organizational performance ($b_{15} = 0.614, p < 0.01$). The results of the research support previous works suggesting that HR professional has an impact on organizational performance (Inyang & Akaegbu, 2014). **Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is strongly supported.**

For two control variables, firm capital and firm age has no statistically significant effects on HR professional ($b_1 = 0.094, p > 0.05, b_2 = 0.039, p > 0.05$) whereas firm capital has significant positive effects on organizational performance ($b_7 = 0.503, p < 0.05$). As a result, this means that the firm capital has an impact on the relationship between SHRM and HR professional. Additionally, this research find that firm capital has significant positive effect on relationship between HR professional and organizational performance ($b_{13} = 0.478, p < 0.01$) as well.

In this research, it has been implication that HR professional in private hospital in Thailand seem still weak in their roles as strategic partner but quite strong in administrative expert and employee champion. To overcome this problem, company should allow them play a more strategic role in organization and give an opportunity to become involved in the process of setting corporate goals and policy planning. This can allow HR to play more strategic roles by linking HR policies to business strategy. In addition, the company should upgrade HR competencies in area of business such as marketing skills and operation management knowledge. Moreover, the HR professionals need to proactive and should not think that they play only a supportive role but also their responsibility can improve firm performance.

Table 3: The Results of Regression Analysis for Effects of SHRM Dimensions on Its Consequences Constructs^a

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable		
	1 HRP	2 PER	3 PER
H1 : Strategic Partner (STR)	-0.134 (.105)	-0.080 (.112)	
H2 : Administrative Expert (ADM)	0.273** (.102)	0.280* (.109)	
H3 : Employee Champion (EMP)	0.400** (.110)	0.185 (.118)	
H4 : Change Agent (CHA)	0.194* (.113)	0.143 (0.126)	
H5 : HR Professional			0.614** (0.063)
FA	.094 (.074)	0.041 (.081)	0.015 (0.070)
FC	.039 (.145)	0.503** (0.156)	0.478** (0.127)
F	11.146	9.974	40.798
Adjusted R ²	0.398	0.305	0.462
VIF	3.151	3.194	1.056

^aBeta coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis, ** p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Summary

With respect to the main research question, the empirical results indicated that SHRM roles (strategic partner, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent) had a positive impact on HR professional and organizational performance both direct and indirect linkage. Administrative expert directly impacted the organizational performance of private hospital in Thailand whereas strategic partner had no effect on the relationships. On the other hand, employee champion, and change agent had an indirect effect on organizational performance through HR professional. Furthermore, it found that employee champion was considered the most important dimensions which can explain the effect of HR professional. Based on these results, it follows that the optimal procedure for medical service companies of Thailand was to focus on the three components of SHRM roles in order to increase organizational performance. In addition, CEOs should give HR personnel an opportunity to become involved in the process of setting corporate goals and policy. In addition, CEOs should get HR personnel involved in the operation meetings in order to understand more fully the operation needs in the company. Likewise, HR professional must start learning to work effectively with other department managers in order to achieve organizational goal. HR professionals need to proactive and should not think that they play only a supportive role but also their responsibility can improve firm performance. The results of the study support the notion that firms which actively cultivate and increase their SHRM are likely to obtain HR professional and organizational performance. Our findings suggest important implications for firms to describe SHRM as the major driver of corporate performance. To explain widely, a further study may consider comparative studying SHRM roles between public and private hospital. In summary, this research contributes significantly that administrative expert of SHRM is directly linked to organizational performance, thus, the executives should clearly improve human resource roles such as administrative expert for gaining superior performance.

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