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The Business of Infotech

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CYBER MEDIA



Q&A: Ron Hovsepian
president & CEO,
Novell /14

TALENT GROWING THE PIE

IT companies, so far focused on hiring, training, and retaining people, are now forced to work on expanding the talent pool—rather than just going for a larger slice of the pie /32A



The US Presidential Race

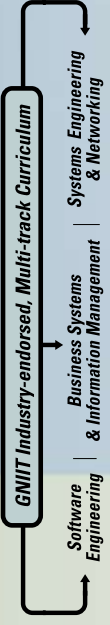
Global enterprises face new legal and regulatory frameworks, depending on whether Hillary, Obama, or McCain wins the US presidential election in November /58

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THEY CHASE. YOU CHOOSE.



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Traditionally, most people selection in India (be it civil services or admission to premier engineering colleges like IITs) has been based on the method of elimination. The underlying principle being, when you eliminate the rest, those who remain are the best. There is nothing wrong with that proposition except that it assumes that supply will always be more than demand.

Most IT companies also started that way but soon hit a ceiling. The few selected campuses that they were going to could not give them the number of engineers they needed. Being a globally competitive business, lowering the standard was out of question.

That is when a few pioneering companies as well as industry body Nasscom, started looking at how they could tackle this challenge effectively. The first step was to go to the next level of colleges and if they found some candidates who were good but lacking in a few skill areas, provide them training to bridge that gap. This, while still practiced by many, could still not meet the rising demand. After all, the IT industry, all the concerns around its linear model notwithstanding, will continue to grow by absorbing more and more people for the foreseeable future.

HR departments in large companies, so far focused on hiring, training and retaining people were mandated to find out what they could do to expand the pool of talent: growing the pie rather than just take a bigger slice of the existing pie. Many new ideas emerged: going to newer campuses was of course obvious; reaching out to newer sections such as women who have taken a break from work, differently-abled people was another; training science graduates to make them ready for IT work was yet another. The latest seems to be helping the institutes to train their students according to industry needs, through faculty management programs.



“We started hiring BScs in the last two years, and had tremendous success. We have a target of 3,000 such people for 2008”

—Nandita Gurjar, group head, HR, Infosys Technologies

“Much work is necessary in the less tangible areas of soft-skills such as management, communication and language—important elements of what comprises an ‘industry-ready’ or ‘employable’ resource”



Some of them have worked; some have not been successful. But one thing is for sure—this work, which started as a new, peripheral initiative to supplement the core HR function has become a core function itself. Seeing the early results, tier-2 companies have also joined the bandwagon.

Today, the HR strategy of India IT Inc is as much about expanding the pool as it is about regular HR functions.

How Big is the Pie?

India has a billion people. Yet, nowhere is the proverbial war for talent as intense as it is in India. India's top major competitive advantage continues to remain talented workforce, but as companies grow and expand their operations both within India and overseas, getting the right talent is becoming increasingly difficult for companies. This is true of both campus hires as well as lateral hiring. For lateral hires, the easier way some companies (particularly new entrants to the market) have adopted is “poaching” which has created some bad blood between competing com-

panies. For fresh hires, the situation has improved in terms of employability, but it remains far from satisfactory. The reasons for this are manifold. Outdated curriculum, lack of any planned training on developing skill-sets beyond the core engineering domain, mainly soft skills, resulting in a large chunk of graduate engineers being rendered unemployable.

According to AICTE, the total annual intake of students in 1,346 degree engineering colleges is about 439,689. Large companies are putting serious effort to expand that pool—in the short run by training science graduates to take up work hitherto performed by engineers; in the medium run by academic partnerships; and in the long run by encouraging mathematics and science education in schools. There are companies like Wipro, Infosys and others who have taken up the initiative to train faculty members in select engineering colleges so that they are in a better position to train their students, and make them more employable. A beginning has been made but real success will take some time. Effort is on

to grow the pie, rather than just grow the slice. Some indications of shortage have started to emerge. A study done by IDC shows that there will be a shortage of 1 lakh networking professionals alone in the next 3 to 5 years. According to Piyush Dutt, associate VP, Human Resources, HCL Comnet, "In an industry which is hit by talent crunch, it is a strategic imperative for organizations to create focused programs for accelerated development of people."

One curious thing has also happened. There has been a flight of a good chunk of engineering talent to BPO companies where the minimum qualification is as low as intermediate, and, in some cases, even class 10. BEs from reputed engineering colleges are providing technical support jobs which were traditionally done by non-engineering graduates. Finding the reason for this is not so difficult. BEs simply could not get into software/IT services jobs due to their

We don't have any trouble attracting the high quality talent. We spend close to \$780 mn a year on training. We find the raw talent and then we, as a company, have the obligation to invest in them as they invest in us. We use tools and techniques, and have the know-how to train them. The important proposition is not only to attract people but also train them to do what we do."

—William D Green, chairman & CEO, Accenture, which employs 37,000 people in India, in response to a question by Dataquest on their talent acquisition strategy



failure to pass the recruitment test—thereby bringing in the employability factor.

Hiring numbers are also impressive, and an indicator of the shape of things to come. TCS inducted, trained, integrated and absorbed over 35,000 people during 2007-2008 while making 22,451 campus offers for 2008-09 including over 4,000 science graduates. Accenture announced plans to hire 13,000 people in 2008 while Infosys plans to hire 25,000.

Employability is Key

Though the employability percentage has somewhat improved from what it was four years ago, it is not sufficient to sustain the amount of growth the Indian IT industry is witnessing. According to Rajasekharan SG, senior VP, Keane India, "Employability has tremendously improved in the last four years. But we have found that 40% of students get rejected on analytical skills, 20-30% on soft skills, and another 10% on technical skills."

An innovative program initiated by Wipro, aimed at faculty development is Mission 10X (see box). The idea behind this initiative, according to Selvan D, senior VP, Talent Transformation at Wipro, was to work at the faculty level in terms of capability building which will work in ground up mode and will go a long way in increasing employability. He also laments the fact that there is no structured faculty enablement program across the country. There is another program from Infosys with similar objectives, called Campus Connect (see box).

Talking about the project, Nandita Gurjar, group head, HR, Infosys Technologies says, "There was not much success and response to the program in the first year, 2004, and, in fact, we got into a situation where we were told by some universities that they were not interested, and that we should take care of these students once we recruit them. But in 2005, we started seeing some progress, and by 2006 there was acceleration of the programs and more and more colleges came into its fold."



"Today, the concern is not of freshers but of managing the middle level, as we are growing them too fast. We have got into a panic mode because of the boom and are promoting them left, right, and center indiscriminately"

—Resita Rabindra, executive VP, HR, NIIT Tech

"The idea behind Wipro's Mission 10X was to work at the faculty level in terms of capability building, which will work in ground up mode and will go a long way in increasing employability"

—Selvan D, senior VP, Talent Transformation, Wipro Technologies



On Employability

Taking cognizance of the fact that talent is a critical differentiator for sustaining India's competitiveness in the global sourcing landscape, NASSCOM, in association with its member companies from the industries, has taken several initiatives and programs aimed at both creating suitable talent for the industry and also transforming the "trainable" workforce into an "employable" workforce.

NASSCOM has taken the employment pyramid approach to better understand the industry's skills requirement and create specific education and development initiatives. The base of the pyramid represents simple technical skills (including entry level jobs in the BPO industry and vocational jobs like networking, hardware maintenance, etc). The middle stands for skills which are mainstream and account for the majority of the existing shortage in the industry, while the top of the pyramid, represents high-end technology skills (in areas such as bio-informatics, embedded software, product architecture, DSP, VLSI, program management and multimedia convergence), which are niche today, but will become mainstream in the near future.

For the top of the pyramid, programs like setting up 20 new IITs are in the pipeline; for middle of the pyramid, NAC Tech and setting up of IT/Engineering Finishing Schools and the IT workforce development initiative; for the bottom of the pyramid we are working with initiatives like NAC.

At the top end of the skill stack, which is where high-end jobs including R&D feature, NASSCOM has been working with multiple government agencies to facilitate interventions with an objective of expanding the pool of specialized professionals.

Some of the significant interventions include working with Ministry of HRD to establish 20 new IITs across the country. Each of these IITs will be an autonomous institution and will set up through a Public-Private partnership between the MHRD, State Government and IT industry firms. Additionally, in order to promote the academia-industry research linkages, the Government of Delhi has decided to establish a Science & Technology Park and has asked NASSCOM to prepare the Detailed Project Report. NASSCOM, in collaboration with the DST is also looking at capacity building for post graduates and PhDs in IT technologies.

To bring in a higher degree of focus, NASSCOM is institutionalizing these efforts under its Education Initiatives, which are designed to nurture better industry-academia interface and ensure better synchronization between the education system output and industry requirements. The initiative includes workshops and conferences, faculty sabbaticals, training programs, mentorship initiatives, and encouragement of research and survey-oriented projects. NASSCOM has also been working closely with bodies such as MHRD, AICTE, and UGC to standardize the curriculum and pedagogy.

We are confident that with the support of all stakeholders and active partnerships with the government, we will be able to ensure a continuous supply of talent for the industry



—Som Mittal
president,
Nasscom

The interesting aspect was that the campus connect trainees were free to apply for any company, not only for Infosys. Same with Wipro. Companies are doing their bit but it would be more productive for similar minded companies to come together and use their energies in a united manner. Nasscom is another forum which has been at the forefront of trying to address the issue but clear-cut data points on how far it has managed to succeed are unavailable. According to Gurjar, "Infosys would be keen on such joint initiatives."

According to Jaswinder Ahuja, corporate VP & MD, Cadence Design Systems, "Employability of India's engineering graduates is a key concern across the industry ecosystem, as companies spend up to a year training new recruits."

Finishing Schools Not Enough

The gaps in the skill-sets required for entry into a company, have resulted in the emergence of finishing schools, with some companies specially targeting this lot. Even a group of IIM alumni have got together and floated a company called Elements Akademia aimed at creating an innovative national chain of vocational schools. Elements Akademia aims to bridge that gap by offering a 6-month part-time vocational course designed with the help of their corporate partners. This will prepare graduates in tier-2 cities for entry level jobs in IT services apart from other sectors. The company's vision is to annually make 10,000+ Indians employable. 24x7 Learning is another company trying to cash in on the employability factor by offering solutions. According to the company's website, "For every 5 hires, there are 250 near hires. All that is required to convert the 'near-hire' into a hire is relevant IT and behavioral training." It sells employability enhancement programs.

One of the finishing schools' catch-

line aptly describes the importance of finishing schools: "People and Diamonds have real market value once polished."

The eligibility criterion at NIT, Trichy gives an indication of the efforts made to find a way out of the current employability mess. It invites applications from "only engineering graduates of any disciplines from recognized Institutes/Colleges from Tamil Nadu, who have completed their course in 2007 or 2008 and haven't got any jobs, are eligible to apply for the program. Such candidates have to declare that they have not obtained a fulltime job while applying for this special program."

So who needs finishing schools? According to Rajasekharan SG, senior VP, Keane India, "If a candidate has obtained 60% marks in class 10, intermediate, followed by engineering, chances are that he or she should easily be able to get a job. The people who go to finishing schools are the people who have not done their academics well. When companies are short of people and the demand supply situation becomes bad, then companies would surely consider going to finishing schools and take students from there as a last resort." On what needs to be done, Ajay K Sharma, president and CEO, New Horizons says, "Much work is necessary in the more intangible area of soft-skills such as management, communication and language—important elements of what comprises an 'industry-ready' or 'employable' resource." RiiT and PurpleLeap (Karnataka) and Globsyn (West Bengal) are some of the prominent finishing school initiatives towards addressing the employability issue.

Where's the Faculty?

According to the National Knowledge Commission, India will need 1,500 more universities by 2015 to keep up with the development and fill up the gap in manpower requirement. One good news that came

Faculty Development Programs

Wipro: Mission10X is a Quantum Innovation project partnering with the academia from across the country. This project aims at introducing a new learning model that would help enhance the learning of students on the subject while developing key employability skills. This project is an outcome of intense research done by Wipro across the academic community, student community, and the industry. Wipro plans to train over 10,000 of the faculty over the next three years covering all the 1,300+ engineering colleges in the country.

This will be done in a phased manner where in Year 1, 1,000 of the faculty would be trained and in Year 2, 3,000; in Year 3 another 6,000 would be trained. This would be a one week long training program where faculty would be certified on the Wipro Learning Model, which provides innovative teaching techniques.

Wipro has created a strong team across the country to reach out to the academia and conduct these sessions at the campuses. The Mission 10X portal enables collaboration across the faculty in the country to leverage on best practices in teaching and learning. As part of Mission 10X, Wipro released the first faculty guide complying with the Wipro Learning Model. This was launched by the Vice Chancellors of four Universities.

Mission 10x was launched on September 5, 2007. This initiative is seen as a key differentiator for the country to address the challenge of the demand supply gap in human capital. This is a not-for-profit trust.

Infosys: Campus Connect

Launched by Infosys in May 2004, CC is a unique academia-industry initiative to "architect the education experience". Our goal is to build a sustainable partnership with engineering education institutions in India and abroad for mutual benefit; producing "industry ready" recruits.

Our objective in launching this program is to enhance the quality and quantity of the IT talent-pool; sustain the growth of the IT industry itself. We don't want to increase the number of engineering colleges or the number of graduates. We intend to increase the employability of students. We want to have a consistent output, irrespective of all variables involved. It doesn't matter where the college is located (big city or remote town), the kind of faculty or students. Whatever the conditions may be, with the help of our partners, we want to achieve a high-quality, constant product.

It has a program for tier-2 and tier-3 towns, and has worked with government and academia, over the last four years, in engineering and graduate colleges. The idea was not just improving the employability of the students but in sharpening the technical skills of the teachers. The program now runs in 1,040 colleges.

TCS AIP

TCS has been supporting the academic community across the globe, from the time the company was inception. This was further strengthened in 2002, when the company put in place a comprehensive AIP (Academic Interface Program) Process framework and infrastructure. The TCS AIP facilitates a robust high-quality, long-term relationship between TCS and academia, leading to a win-win situation for both. The TCS AIP support has three focal points—institutes, faculty, and students.

sometime back, which will undoubtedly give a boost to creating the pool, was the government's decision to increase the number of IITs to sixteen, with eight new ones coming up in Rajasthan, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal, Gujarat, Orissa, MP and Punjab while the institute at BHU will be converted into an IIT as well. The crucial question everybody is asking—Where is the faculty? Putting the appropriate faculty in place won't

be an easy task. It should be recalled that 3.22 lakh students appeared for 4193 seats this year. Becoming teachers is not something which is seen as glamorous enough. Getting students won't be much of a challenge but the problem would be getting faculty.

Optimizing Women Talent

Women employees form a substantial chunk of the IT workforce, and in some companies their presence is as

high as 30%. Losing these employees who leave permanently or temporarily due to some special need arising out of maternity or child care, also puts extra pressure on companies. Some companies have good plans in place wherein they offer flexible work hours to those who are really in need of them. Working from home is also encouraged in some companies. NIIT Technologies has something called "half day, half pay policy", apart from flexibility to work from home on projects which do not require a presence in the office. There are companies which have set up crèches within their campuses. But there is a mixed response to this. NIIT Technologies used to have this facility, but found that employees are more comfortable keeping their babies at home or at a crèche located near their homes.



“Employability of India’s engineering graduates is a key concern across the industry ecosystem, as companies spend up to a year training recruits”

—**Jaswinder Ahuja**, corporate vice president & managing director, Cadence Design Systems

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—**Rajasekharan SG**, senior VP, Keane India



Tapping Non-engineering Graduates

There are around 85% of institutions which churn out non-engineering graduates, and which are not on the radar of any IT company as everybody is eyeing the creamy layer of leading engineering colleges with the exception of some. Sharing her experience of graduates, Gurjar of Infosys Technologies says “We started hiring BScs in the last two years, and had tremendous success. We have a separate program which lasts for three months. We have a target of 3,000 such people for 2008.” Do all IT jobs require a BE? If no, then why is so much energy spent in hiring and training them. According to Subash AK Rao, director, Human Resources, Cisco India, (The company intends to grow to a manpower strength of about 10-12,000 from the current 4,000 in three years time), “A lot of jobs do not require a four year engineering degree.” He suggests that it is absolutely the right thing to do to approach candidates who have the right abilities, certain analytical skills, and arithmetic ability, and then train

them up for any specific skills that are required for the job. According to him, “The use of computer science graduates to do some basic programming is not the best use of talent and, in fact, will lead to frustration.”

Developing Tomorrow’s Managers

In the fast paced industry, companies are finding it difficult to keep in step due to the inadequate number of middle level managers. The challenges are many. According to Rosita Rab-

indra, executive VP, HR, NIIT Technologies, “We have a bigger challenge at middle level for the simple reason that IT workers, after three-four years begin to handle teams. This does not happen in any other kind of industry. So, for a technical person, managerial skills do not come naturally. Hence, there are programs these people are put through.” NIIT has a SEED program to let employee transition from worker to manager apart from the program run in collaboration with ISB. According to Nandita Gurjar of Infosys Technologies, “Today, the concern is not of freshers, but of managing the middle level as we are growing them too fast, and we have got into a panic mode because of the boom and promoting them left, right, and center. This can do more harm than good.” She adds that sometimes what is needed is just experience and also senior managers to work with junior managers as mentors. HCL’s Eagle’s Nest Program is aimed at identifying and grooming high performance managers. The idea has been drawn from the qualities of an Eagle, and the

NIIT’s Chindwara Model

In August 2007, NIIT inaugurated the Model District Learning Center at Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh. The District Learning Center is aimed at tapping the talent in the area, and making them employable.

The center has state-of-the-art facility, and will have fully-networked classrooms, machine rooms, labs, library, VSAT connectivity, high-bandwidth internet, amongst other learning resources. The center will train over 200 students every year.



“A lot of jobs do not require a 4 year engineering degree. Approach candidates who have the right abilities, analytical skills and arithmetic ability, and then train them up for specific skills that are required for the job”

—Subash AK Rao, director, HR, Cisco India

“With the BPO industry growing at a rapid pace and the absence of homegrown middle managers, it posed a challenge to companies that had to balance people growth to meet revenue growth”

—Shanmugam Nagarajan, co-founder and chief people officer, 24/7 Customer



“In an industry which is hit by talent crunch, it is a strategic imperative for organizations to create focused programs for accelerated development of people”

—Piyush Dutt, associate VP, HR, HCL Comnet

program looks at identifying managers who display a keen eye for excellence, vision, fearlessness, tenacity, vitality, a nurturing and co-operative attitude and an ability to soar high.

The middle level crisis has become crucial for the BPO industry. According to Shanmugam Nagarajan co-founder and chief people officer of 24/7 Customer, “The BPO industry is amongst the very few industries in India where the demand and the role of the middle manager has emerged and evolved very rapidly in the last few years. With the industry growing at a rapid pace and the absence of homegrown middle managers, it posed a challenge to companies that had to balance people growth to meet revenue growth.” Some global players have also made their entry into India eyeing the managerial training segment. Disney Institute, one of the leading players in experiential training, leadership development, benchmarking and cultural change for business professionals across the globe

entered into a tie-up with Saviance Technologies to bring professional development programs.

Tapping the Physically Challenged

According to statistics, there are around 6 mn physically challenged people in the country, out of which a large chunk are well qualified and can be employed in the IT/BPO in-

dustry if adequate measures are put in place. But there are very few instances of tapping into this pool of talent. Gurjar of Infosys, which incidentally is one of the largest employers of challenged people, says, “We have clearly identified processes and the type of people who would be able to do that job. We are very clear that we don’t do this as a charity. They go through the training like anybody else and we take all the steps to make sure that these people are successful.” MphasiS, also through its program Project Communicate, has made a beginning to tap the talent from this category.

Vital Stats

During FY08, the total expected graduate outturn is estimated at over **3.2 mn**, an **increase** of about **5%** over the previous year. Technical graduate and post graduate outturn, comprising engineering degree (4 year programs) and diploma, MCA students (3 year programs) and masters in engineering is expected to **cross 454,000**; while graduate and post graduate outturn across other non-technical streams including the sciences, commerce and arts is expected to **cross 2.7 mn**.

The Outlook

There has to be a concerted effort on the part of all HR heads, Nasscom, central, and state governments to address the issue of harnessing the talent in India. Gurjar says, “The HR heads should concentrate on creating talent rather than poaching them. We need to own the responsi-

AICTE Approved Engineering Colleges Intake Data

Region	State/Union Territory	ENGINEERING		Region	State/Union Territory	ENGINEERING	
		No of Institutes	Intake			No of Institutes	Intake
Central	1. Madhya Pradesh	61	20,210	North-West	1. Chandigarh	5	800
	2. Chhattisgarh	14	4,020		2. Haryana	38	12,785
	3. Gujarat	37	12,965		3. Himachal Pradesh	5	1,260
	Total	112	37,195		4. Jammu& Kashmir	5	1,545
Eastern	1. Mizoram	1	120		5. New Delhi	14	4,330
	2. Sikkim	1	525		6. Punjab	45	14,880
	3. West Bengal	54	15,477		7. Rajasthan	41	15,045
	4. Tripura	1	180	Total	153	50,645	
	5. Meghalaya	1	240	South	1. Andhra Pradesh	236	82,970
	6. Arunachal Pradesh	1	210		2. Pondicherry	6	2,370
	7. Andaman&Nicobar	-	-		3. Tamil Nadu	254	80,417
	8. Assam	3	750	Total	496	165,757	
	9. Manipur	1	115	South-West	1. Karnataka	118	46,375
	10. Nagaland	-	-		2. Kerala	89	24,413
	11. Orissa	41	13,014		Total	207	70,788
	12. Jharkhand	10	3,385	West	1. Maharashtra	155	48,250
Total	114	34,016	2. Goa		3	740	
North	1. Bihar	8	1,905		3. Daman & Di. Dadar, NH	-	-
	2. Uttar Pradesh	89	28,953	Total	158	48,990	
	3. Uttaranchal	9	1,440	Grand Total	1,346	439,689	
Total	106	32,298					

Recent Developments

- Mphasis Launched "College Connect" for Engineering Colleges Partnership with Academia to help build industry ready talent
- IBM announced collaborative SSME curriculum initiatives with leading business and tech schools in India. IBM, earlier this year, had signed a MoU with the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad and is working closely with the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, IITs and Indian Institute of Science to advance SSME research in the region.
- Accenture and the Indian School of Business have launched the Accenture Management Development Academy in India, an online, classroom and on-the-job training program designed to develop and nurture leaders from Accenture's mid-level management in India.
- Microsoft and HCL Infosystems will train and certify 50,000 students on Microsoft technologies, in three years, across 100 training centers—the HCL Career Development Centers—set up by HCL. The curriculum used will be the Microsoft Official Curriculum, the most comprehensive and structured learning methodology designed and developed by Microsoft.
- Institute for Electronic Governance (IEG), an initiative of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, today signed an MoU with Oracle India and the Oracle Academy to introduce the Oracle's business and technology curriculum to students in Andhra Pradesh. The IEG, which leads the state's Jawahar Knowledge Center initiative, will work with Oracle to roll out the Oracle Academy program to 342 engineering colleges that are part of the initiative. Under the MoU, the Oracle Academy program will be offered to more than 50,000 students over a two-year period.
- Cisco announced a series of country-specific initiatives aimed at expanding India's capacity to train, employ and retain highly qualified networking and systems engineers. By establishing partnerships and opening testing facilities, Cisco aims to expand India's networking workforce capacity to 360,000 engineers in the next five years, a six fold increase over present employment levels.

bility rather than pretending." Rosita Rabindra says, "People with good skills are still in short supply and all the companies are trying to get the best talent. The cycle time to find people is very high as the total base of people in that specific domain is very small." So, what is the solution? According to Ajay K Sharma, president and CEO, New Horizons, "India does not lack in 'bodies'. And my belief is that as a people we do not lack in talent either. Both from the desire to learn/upgrade and also in terms of grasping ability." So what is causing this gap? He says, "Clearly it is our inability to train this willing and vast resource pool effectively. What is needed is a concerted effort by all stakeholders—industry, government and educationists—to identify skill gaps and put in place measures to reduce them.

—Sudesh Prasad
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