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Strategic Leadership and Performance of Kenya Airways Limited in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

In Kenya Airways Limited, there have been issues of poor performance in terms of decreased profits, reduced number of passengers, reduced market share, increased operating costs and reduced craft movements has been an issue. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of strategic leadership on performance of Kenya Airways Limited in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was supported by resource-based view theory and employed a descriptive research design. The targeted population was 388 managerial staff drawn from departments at Kenya Airways Limited. The sample size of 143 participants were chosen by use of stratified random sampling technique. Analysis of qualitative data was though thematic analysis. Quantitative data analysis was through the use of descriptives and inferential statistics. The study established that strategic leadership had a strong effect on the organizational performance of Kenya Airways Limited (β=0.609; p=0.000). The study concluded that strategic leadership has a significant effect on the performance of Kenya Airways Limited, Kenya. The study recommends that the management at Kenya Airways Limited needs to implement and strengthen leadership development programs to enhance the strategic leadership skills of current and potential leaders. There is also a need for KQ management to organize and offer training sessions, workshops, and mentorship programs for employees and junior management staff in an attempt to cultivate a leadership pipeline within Kenya Airways Limited.

Keywords: *Strategic Leadership, Performance, Kenya Airways Limited*

1.0 Introduction

In the dynamic and highly competitive corporate environment of the 21st century, organizations are constantly seeking ways to achieve organizational performance by gaining a competitive edge, sustaining growth, and attaining their strategic goals (Kant, 2021). Organizational performance could be described as the capacity of an establishment to realize its goals by utilizing its resources efficiently and effectively (Elena-Iuliana & Maria, 2016). It is a measure of how effectively and efficiently an organization operates and can encompass various aspects, including financial, operational, strategic, and human resource performance. Evaluating and improving organizational performance is essential for the longstanding success and sustainability of any entity (Ngutu & Kavindah, 2019). Organizational performance is a crucial factor in strategic management and is typically evaluated by comparing an organization's results across three dimensions, including financial returns, growth, and performance in stock markets (Hamann, Schiemann, Bellora & Guenther, 2013). To achieve

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organizational performance, organizations have been forced to adopt different practices in strategic management including strategic leadership (Fuertes, Alfaro, Vargas, Gutierrez, Ternero & Sabattin, 2020).

Strategic management practices have been established to be among key elements of an organization's decision-making and play a pivotal role in shaping its success (Acciarini, Brunetta & Boccardelli, 2021). According to Ali and Anwar (2021), strategic management enables the assessment of a company's competitive edge and outlines objectives and strategies to meet the challenges posed by current and prospective competitors. Deeboonmee and Ariratana (2014) noted that effective strategic leadership requires an understanding of how to navigate and control both the internal and external facets of the business landscape, alongside the ability to adeptly handle intricate information processing.

From a global perspective, companies and organizations have made efforts to achieve performance among them being adopting various strategic management practices. In USA, organizations like Amazon have continued to enhance organizational performance by adopting strategic leadership that includes continuous expansion of its product and service offerings, as well as optimization of the supply chain to deliver goods quickly and efficiently (Dash, McMurtrey, Rebman & Kar, 2019). In Canada, companies are achieving organizational performance by aligning strategic management practices with the global economic trends and trade policies that affect their operations. Canada Goose has been enhancing its performance by strategically differentiating itself by producing high-quality, premium outdoor apparel which helps in maintaining strong profitability (Brydges & Hracs, 2018). Further, Rojas Rincón, Riveros-Tarazona, Mejía Martínez and Acosta-Prado (2022) established that Bancolombia, a leading financial institution in Columbia, has improved its organizational performance by strategically expanding its services, leveraging technology, and pursuing efficient cost management.

Regionally, African continent has experienced remarkable economic growth, urbanization, and technological advancements, leading to a burgeoning corporate landscape (Daraojimba, Kolade, Nwankwo & Odochi, 2023). This remarkable transformation has prompted a growing focus on evaluating and understanding the performance of companies operating within Africa. The performance of these companies serves as a critical barometer not only for the continent's economic health but also for its social and political stability (Signé & Heitzig, 2022). In Nigeria, the organizational performance of companies like Nestlé has been improved by strategically managing its relationships with various stakeholders, including local communities and regulatory bodies (Khojastehpour & Shams, 2020). In Ethiopia, Molla (2022) established that the organizational performance of Dashen Brewery has been significantly enhanced through adoption of various strategic management practices to differentiate its product line by introducing new flavors and packaging. In South Africa, Chamberlain (2019) noted that South African Breweries (SAB) increased its market share and profitability by expanding product range and recognizing the demand for non-alcoholic beverages in rural areas.

Locally in Kenya, different organizations and companies play a substantial role in enhancing economic groups through the creation of employment and revenue generation (Shuriye & Wambua, 2020). However, there are challenges facing Kenyan entities including fierce competition arising from the numerous businesses operating in the market (Muchiri, 2018). To improve organizational performance, companies have adopted strategic management practices. In Kenya, where resource constraints can be an issue, this efficient allocation can lead to improved performance. Strategic management practices help organizations set clear objectives, identify opportunities, and allocate resources efficiently. According to Paelo (2019), performance of Safaricom, Kenya's leading telecom company, has been enhanced by consistently making strategic decisions, such as investing heavily in mobile money service M-Pesa. Mwazo (2020) noted that the strategic expansion of Bidco Africa into various consumer goods markets, including edible oils and personal care products, has contributed to its strong financial performance and market leadership. Further, Kirimi (2019) argued that the performance of KCB Bank was enhanced by embracing technology and strategic innovation to offer services such as mobile banking and payment platforms. Additionally, Wambugu (2016) established that Nation Media Group has tailored its strategic practices to attain the unique needs of Kenyan consumers, resulting in enhanced organizational performance in terms of strong brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

1.1 Problem Statement

In the rapidly evolving business landscape, organizations are struggling to achieve and sustain high levels of performance despite adopting various strategic management practices (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Though strategic management practices play a pivotal role in restructuring a company’s capability to adapt, innovate, and thrive in this ever-evolving landscape, it is still unclear to what extent it affects organizational performance. In Kenya, the airline industry is characterized by heightened competition linked to changes in market shares and globalization. Further, Airlines in Kenya face high operational costs, including fuel, maintenance, and labor costs making it challenging for them to remain competitive and profitable (Dobby, 2021). In addition, the inadequate infrastructure in the country's airports has made it challenging for airline companies to keep up with the growing demand for air travel. Further, enhancing organizational performance in Kenyan airline industry has been hindered by labor disputes, strikes, and high labor costs which continuously disrupt airline operations and increase operational costs (Odongo, Mugambi & Abayo, 2019).

In Kenya Airways Limited, there have been issues of poor performance in terms of decreased profits, reduced number of passengers, reduced market share, increased operating costs and reduced craft movements has been an issue. According to KQ annual report (2022), On-Time Performance (OTP) dropped by 11% points to 73% in 2022 from 84% OTP achieved in 2021. This situation may be due to notable infrastructure difficulties at The Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) hub, including a lack of sufficient parking positions for aircraft with access to air bridges, an insufficient baggage sorting facility, prolonged closure of apron spaces for aircraft movement, and ongoing Covid checks on arrivals, all of which negatively impact the guest experience and OTP (KQ annual report, 2022). In addition, Kenya Airways Limited increased its loss from Sh15.87 billion in 2021 to Sh38.26 billion in 2022 (KQ annual reports, 2022). In addition, the total direct operating costs increased from KShs 41,155 million in 2021 to KShs 79,763 in 2022. In addition, Kenyan Airways Limited has been facing significant strategic management challenges that have further been exacerbated by other factors, including organizational restructuring and the formation of alliances and partnerships. In addition, despite adopting different strategic management practices including strategic leadership, it is yet established how these have affected the performance of Kenya Airways Limited. This study sought to determine the effect of strategic leadership on the performance of Kenya Airways Limited, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The proponent of Resource-Based Theory was Birger Wernerfelt (1984). The theory puts emphasis on the importance of a firm's internal assets and abilities in contributing to its exceptional performance and competitive edge. This theory asserts that a company’s success is majorly established by the distinct resources and proficiencies it possesses, rather than external factors such as market conditions or industry structure. According to the theory, organization can develop a distinctive competitive edge by leveraging its resources and capabilities, and when it effectively harnesses these assets, it can enhance its long-term performance (Srivastava, Fahey & Christensen, 2001). Wernerfelt (1984) defines a company's resources as anything it owns or controls that it can use to develop and implement its strategies. Barney (1991) expanded on this concept by asserting that to serve as a foundation for lasting competitive advantage, resources must possess qualities of value, rarity, uniqueness, and non-replaceability (VRIN).

Resource-based theory is a useful theoretical framework for this study because it sheds light on how an organization's internal resources and capabilities can be utilized to sustain a competitive advantage and improve performance (Kim, Song, & Triche, 2015). Thus, the theory could be used in this study to explain how strategic management practices like leadership give Kenya Airways unique resources and capabilities that improve its performance and competitive edge. The theory presupposes that the Airline’s assets and abilities are the wellsprings of its upper hand and unrivaled execution. As a result, this theory remains appropriate for the study as it identifies Kenya Airways Limited's resources and capabilities that can assist it gain a competitive edge and perform better. In addition, the theory can help provide insight into Kenya Airways Ltd's capacity to sustain a competitive advantage by utilizing its resources and capabilities. For instance, the theory suggests that the organization needs to create and maintain resources and capabilities that are valuable, uncommon, unique, and cannot be replaced (Collis, 1994). As a result, resource-based theory can be used to evaluate the effect of strategic leadership on performance of Kenya Airways Limited.

2.2 Empirical Review

A study by Rahman, Othman, and Ibrahim (2018) focused on how strategic leadership impacts the performance of Perusahaan Otomobil in Malaysia. The research adopted a desk review methodology. The study found that senior leaders possess the capacity to align human resources with the company's business strategy effectively. It also revealed a strong and advantageous connection between strategic leadership and overall organizational performance. Consequently, Proton's executives and business leaders exhibit effective strategic leadership that is in sync with the company's strategic direction and operational prowess. The study recommended that fostering strategic competitiveness could offer businesses a competitive edge in navigating undefined and turbulent times by effectively crafting and implementing their strategies. However, the study was based in Malaysia and not in Kenya. Further, the study employed a desk review methodology which could not be applicable in the current study that used primary data.

Jaleha and Machuki (2018) critically reviewed literature on strategic leadership and performance of organizations. The study adopted desk review in which 13 empirical studies were examined. The study established that effective strategic leadership is essential for addressing the challenges posed by environmental instability and the ongoing necessity for suitable organizational adjustments to attain performance objectives. The research deduced that strategic leadership indirectly affected the performance because the external environment can either moderate or mediate the association amongst strategic leadership and performance. However, the research did not focus on a specific organization and hence could not be applicable in case of Kenya Airways Limited. In addition, the study used desk review methodology and not primary data.

Another study by Ogechi (2016) examined how strategic leadership affected performance of Kenyan SMEs. The study utilized descriptive survey designs. The targeted population was 3,001 SMEs in Kenya. The sample of 301 SME owners was chosen through stratified sampling techniques. The data was obtained using structured surveys. The research utilized descriptive and inferential statistics for analysis. The conclusion was that strategic leadership had a substantial and positive impact on the performance of Kenyan SMEs. It is recommended that the successful implementation of well-balanced organizational controls is crucial for attaining positive performance results. However, the study focused only on SMEs and could not be applicable to case of Kenya Airways Limited.

A study by Abdi (2018) examined how strategic leadership affected performance of tea estate industries in Nandi, Kenya. Descriptive research designs were utilized and population consisted of 114 management staff at tea industries. Surveys were used for obtaining primary data. The research established that visionary leadership and transformative leadership had substantial effects on the performance of tea estate industries. The research deduced that strategic leadership significantly affects the performance of the Tea industry. Though, the study was done in a different context as it focused on Tea estate companies and could not be used to establish the situation at Kenya Airways Limited. In addition, the study only targeted management staff for collecting data while the current study focused on staff engaged in strategic management.

Further, Mailu and Kariuki (2022) studied how strategic leadership influenced performance in non-governmental organizations in Nairobi. The research used explanatory research designs. The populations were 636 employees in various NGOs based in Nairobi County. The study sampled 234 participants chosen through stratified random sampling. Primary used was collected by use of a questionnaire. Inferential and descriptive statistics were utilized for the analysis of quantitative data while content analysis was utilized for the analysis of qualitative data. The research found that strategic thinking greatly improves NGOs' performance. Additionally, it uncovered that effective change management also has a substantial and positive effect on the performance of these organizations in the same region. The research deduced that strategic leadership has a substantial impact on the performance of NGOs. It was recommended that NGOs should embrace change management strategies to help leaders and managers effectively allocate responsibilities to workgroups, departments, and staff. However, the study was in a different context as it was on NGOs, unlike this research that focused on Kenya Airways Limited. In addition, the study adopted explanatory research that is not applicable to this research.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed descriptive research designs. The targeted population was 388 managerial staff drawn from departments at Kenya Airways Limited. The sample size of 143 participants was chosen by use of a stratified random sampling technique. The researcher utilized a combination of surveys and structured interviews for collecting the primary data. The questionnaires were administered either online or in person. Analysis of qualitative data was through thematic analysis. Quantitative data analysis was through the use of descriptives and inferential statistics. The presentation of findings was in figures and tables.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Strategic Leadership

The participants were requested to specify their agreement or disagreement with statements about strategic leadership at Kenya Airways Limited based on a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 is strongly disagree strongly, 2 is disagree, 3 is neutral, 4 is agree and 5 is agrees strongly. The results are represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Agreement or Disagreement with Statements on Strategic Leadership

	Mean	Std. Dev.
The leadership of Kenya Airways has the skills and experience necessary to implement the company's strategic plan	4.103	0.582
Kenya Airways Limited's senior leadership team demonstrates a clear comprehension of the company's strategic goals and objectives	3.925	0.723
The management establishes corporate strategic direction for KQ in pursuit of its long-term objectives	3.879	0.710
The leadership at Kenya Airways Limited effectively communicates the company's strategic direction to employees at all levels	2.336	0.764
There are collaborations between leaders and employees for effective management of change at Kenya Airways Limited.	2.224	0.691
Leadership at KQ ensures organizational resources are allocated properly to meet the strategic needs	4.122	0.761
Leaders at Kenya Airways Limited promote a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in the organization	3.888	0.769
The leadership of Kenya Airways Limited motivates and inspires employees towards achieving the company's strategic goals.	4.159	0.601
Aggregate Mean	**3.580**	

As per the outcomes in Table 1, the participants agreed that the leadership of Kenya Airways Limited motivates and inspires employees towards achieving the company's strategic goals as represented by an average of 4.159, and that leadership at KQ ensures organizational resources are allocated properly to meet the strategic needs as illustrated by an average of 4.122. Further, the participants agreed that the leadership of Kenya Airways has the skills and experience necessary to implement the company's strategic plan as illustrated by an average of 4.103, and that Kenya Airways Limited's senior leadership team demonstrates a clear comprehension of the company's strategic goals and objectives as illustrated by a mean of 3.925. The findings correlate with Jaleha and Machuki (2018) who established that effective strategic leadership is essential for addressing the challenges posed by environmental instability and the ongoing necessity for suitable organizational adjustments to attain performance objectives.

Further, the participants agreed that leaders at Kenya Airways Limited promote a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in the organization as illustrated by a mean of 3.888, and that the management establishes corporate strategic direction for KQ in pursuit of its long-term objectives as illustrated by an average of 3.879. However, the participants disagreed that the leadership at Kenya Airways Limited effectively communicates the company's strategic direction to employees at all levels as illustrated by a mean of 2.336, and that there are collaborations between leaders and employees for effective management of change at Kenya

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Airways Limited as illustrated by a mean of 2.224. The findings correlate with Abdi (2018) who argued that visionary leadership and transformative leadership had substantial effects on the performance of tea estate industries. The research deduced that strategic leadership significantly affects the performance of the Tea industry. Deeboonmee and Ariratana (2014) noted that effective strategic leadership requires an understanding of how to navigate and control both the internal and external facets of the business landscape, alongside the ability to adeptly handle intricate information processing.

Further, the interviewees were asked to elaborate ways in which strategic leadership affects the performance of Kenya Airways Limited. The interviewees said that strategic leadership plays a vital role in fostering a culture of innovation involving adopting new technologies and processes to enhance operational efficiency, customer experience, and organizational performance. Further, the interviewees said that strategic leadership ensures the financial health of Kenya Airways by optimizing routes, managing operating costs, and exploring new revenue streams to enhance organizational performance. In support, one of the interviewees said;

> *"Strategic leadership has allowed KQ to establish partnerships and alliances with other airlines, service providers, and industry stakeholders to enhance its network, reduce costs, and provide access to new markets. In addition, strategic leadership aims at enhancing customer satisfaction which leads to increased loyalty and positive brand perception".*

4.1.2 Organizational Performance

The participants were also requested to specify their agreement or disagreement levels with statements about the performance of Kenya Airways Limited based on 5-point Likert scales in which 1 is strongly disagree strongly, 2 is disagree, 3 is neutral, 4 is agree and 5 is agree strongly. The results are represented in Table 2.

Table 2: Agreement or Disagreement Levels on Organizational Performance

	Mean	**Std. Dev.**
There has been an increase in KQ's market share in the global airline industry	4.131	0.478
The current market share of Kenya Airways is significant and competitive	3.094	0.505
The passenger load factor (occupancy rate) at KQ flights is consistently high.	2.122	0.761
There has been an increase in percentage of KQ flights departing and arriving at different destinations	3.925	0.773
Kenya Airways Limited consistently meets and exceeds its on-time performance targets.	2.112	0.718
Kenya Airways Limited continuously seeks opportunities to enhance the passenger load factor.	4.224	0.634
There has been an increase in the use of loyalty program benefits by customers	3.907	0.694
Kenya Airways Limited actively responds to customer concerns to improve satisfaction	2.178	0.711
Aggregate Mean	**3.212**	

As per the study outcomes in Table 2, the participants agreed that Kenya Airways Limited continuously seeks opportunities to enhance passenger load factor as shown by a mean of 4.224, and that there has been an increase in KQ's market share in the global airline industry as represented by an average of 4.131. The participants also agreed that there has been an increase in the percentage of KQ flights departing and arriving at different destinations as shown by a mean of 3.925 and that there has been an increase in the use of loyalty program benefits by customers as shown by a mean of 3.907. Ngambi and Nkemkiafu (2015) argued that organizational performance means the attainment of a company's aims and objectives, and it should be assessed using a comprehensive set of criteria, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Ngutu and Kavindah (2019) noted that organizational performance is a crucial factor in strategic management and is typically evaluated by comparing an organization's results across three dimensions, including financial returns, growth, and performance in stock markets

Further, the participants were neutral that the current market share of Kenya airways is significant and competitive as shown by an average of 3.094. However, the participants disagreed that Kenya Airways Limited actively responds to customer concerns to improve satisfaction as shown by a mean of 2.178, and that the passenger load factor (occupancy rate) at KQ flights is consistently high as shown by a mean of 2.122. In addition, the participants disagreed that Kenya Airways Limited consistently meets and exceeds its on-time performance targets as shown by a mean of 2.112. Chadwick and Dabu (2009) perceived organizational performance as a multifaceted concept, encompassing a harmonious blend of effectiveness, significance, efficiency, and the financial sustainability of the organization. To understand organizational performance, it is indispensable to deliberate on the organization's drive, capabilities, and external surroundings.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis is a statistical technique employed to assess the magnitude and orientation of the linear connection between two numerical variables. The Pearson correlation analysis was used to establish the association amongst the organizational performance and strategic leadership. The study outcomes are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlations Analysis

		Organizational Performance
Strategic Leadership	Pearson-Correlation	.798**
	Sig.	0.00
	N	107

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study found that there is a strong and substantial association between the strategic leadership and organizational performance of Kenya Airways Limited (r=0.798; p=0.000). The results concur with Rahman, Othman, and Ibrahim (2018) who found that there is a strong and significant connection between strategic leadership and overall organizational performance. Ogechi (2016) found that strategic leadership had a substantial and positive impact on the performance of Kenyan SMEs. In addition, Abdi (2018) established that visionary leadership and transformative leadership had significant effects on the performance of tea estate industries.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Linear regression analysis was utilized to examine the association between the dependent variable (organizational performance of Kenya Airways Limited) and the independent variables (strategic leadership).

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Table 3: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.793	.158		5.006	.000
	Strategic Leadership	.609	.045	.798	13.589	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

The study established that strategic leadership has a strong effect on the organizational performance of Kenya Airways Limited (β=0.609; p=0.000). This implies strategic leadership at KQ fosters a culture of innovation and creativity leading to the development of new products and services that give the organization a competitive edge. Strategic leadership could be used to improve organizational performance by ensuring that the actions and decisions of the organization are aligned with its overall goals and objectives (Deeboonmee & Ariratana, 2014). These findings are relevant to the aviation sector as it may help firm managers to adopt strategic leadership in an effort to enhance organizational performance. The results concur with Rahman, Othman and Ibrahim (2018) who found that strategic leadership has a significant effect on overall organizational performance. Jaleha and Machuki (2018) established that effective strategic leadership is essential for addressing the challenges posed by environmental instability and the ongoing necessity for suitable organizational adjustments to attain performance objectives.

4.4 Summary of Findings

The study sought to establish the effect of strategic leadership on the performance of Kenya Airways Limited, Kenya. The study found that there is a strong and substantial relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance of Kenya Airways Limited (r=0.798; p=0.000). Further, the research established that strategic leadership has a strong effect on the organizational performance of Kenya Airways Limited (β=0.609; p=0.000). The study found the leadership of Kenya Airways Limited motivates and inspires employees towards achieving the company's strategic goals and that leadership at KQ ensures organizational resources are allocated properly to meet the strategic needs. Further, it was established that the leadership of KQ has the skills and experience necessary to implement the company's strategic plan.

Further, the study found that Kenya Airways Limited's senior leadership team demonstrates a clear comprehension of the company's strategic goals and objectives. The study established that leaders at Kenya Airways Limited promote a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in the organization and that the management establishes corporate strategic direction for KQ in pursuit of its long-term objectives. The study revealed that the leadership at Kenya Airways Limited does not effectively communicate the company's strategic direction to employees at all levels and that there are no collaborations between leaders and employees for effective management of change at Kenya Airways Limited. The research found that strategic leaders play vital roles in fostering a culture of innovation involving adopting new technologies and processes to enhance operational efficiency, customer experience, and organizational performance.

5.0 Conclusion

The study also concluded that strategic leaderships have a significant effect on the performance of Kenya Airways Limited, Kenya. This is linked to the fact that strategic leaderships play a vital role in fostering a culture of innovation involving adopting new technologies and processes to enhance operational efficiency, customer experience, and organizational performance. It was clear that the strategic leadership of Kenya Airways Limited motivates and inspires employees towards achieving the company's strategic goals and also ensures that organizational resources are allocated properly to meet the strategic needs. Strategic leadership at Kenya Airways Limited promotes a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in the organization.

6.0 Recommendations

The study further recommends that leaders at KQ need to implement and strengthen leadership development programs to enhance the strategic leadership skills of current and potential leaders. There is a need for KQ management to organize and offer training sessions, workshops, and mentorship programs for employees and junior management staff in an attempt to cultivate a leadership pipeline within Kenya Airways Limited.

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