

Effective Leadership: Panacea to Africa's Economic Growth and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This paper looks at the possibilities that effective leadership in Nigeria and the whole of Africa can bring about sustainable growth and development to the continent. The Africa continent is faced with developmental and leadership problems that retards economic growth and development. The economic growth and development in the country has over the years been given less attention by political leaders in Nigeria. Albeit, several governments have embarked on various policies toward redressing these acute problems; there seems to be no clear direction and strategic focus in dealing with the root causes, which in some cases are being occasioned by political, tribal and religious differences. We have been daunted with issues—ranging from ineffective leadership, poor economic policies, religious bigotry, poor infrastructures and maintenance, poverty, illiteracy, high mortality rate, low standard of living, insecurity, decaying health sector, mismanagement of the nation's natural resources, internal conflicts, terrorism, poor funding of educational sector, etc. In analysing the economic growth and sustainable development of the country, the author notes that economic, infrastructure mismanagement, and political instability are major features/problems confronting many African societies today. This paper, however offers a balanced approach to the role of the leaders in building and improving Nigeria's economy, which of course, is a major player in Africa continent. The author concludes that these fundamental but serious economic and developmental issues would be averted and/ or curtail if proactive and transformational leadership styles be implemented by our leaders in this 21st century.

Keywords: Effective Leadership: Panacea to Africa's economic Growth, and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

To fully comprehend the rationale behind this paper, there is need for one to be acquainted with the concepts and processes of effective leadership. And, in this paradigm therefore, there is also the need to understand that the Africa continent—a multi-cultural society is faced with developmental and leadership problems that retards economic growth and sustainable development. Leadership, which is a central feature of organisational and or institutions performances have not been given its rightful positions in the helm of affairs in our society, thus, the present economic and developmental quagmires consciously witnessed in Africa. We need to understand the culture of effective leadership since research and study conducted over the years clearly points to the direct link between critical growth and sustainable development of the continent and leadership itself. Effective leadership is about building trust amongst followers, building and nurturing credibility, integrity, sustainability and posterity. A leader also must understand the truism of

leadership influence and factors which determine relationships with other people, and the effectiveness of the leadership relationship.

All through ages, Africa continent have been in the news regarding its growth and development. Growth, according to Webster Dictionary means the act of growing, getting bigger or higher, while development is really much more than simply economic growth; it goes far beyond the objective of increased average income to include factors like education or elimination of poverty, insecurity, inequality and unemployment within the context of growing economy. Development has been conceived as a multi-dimensional process involving economic as well as social and environmental changes. Modern concept of development sees it as a substantial improvement in people's quality of life; access to education and health care, employment opportunities, availability of clean air and safe drinking water, security, etc. In the main, many authors, politicians, policy makers, authorities, writers, scholars, organisations, etc. have discussed about this issue, but much still needs to be done to seeing that Africa can, in this century and beyond achieve better result in our dealings with, and or amongst the committee of friends.

Leadership Defined

The 21st century leaders; presidents, managers, administrators, and the rest of top-echelon management share the responsibility of championing the growth, and development of their countries (political and economic). Amongst the skills needed to achieve success and be in business and or compete favourably in this competitive business community is the ability to make efficient and effective use of managerial economic tools to business decisions, economic/political decision, and exercise effective leadership qualities. Any nation, or organisation, whose leadership or administrators cannot think strategically in this regard is therefore, doomed to fail. Study showed that organisations or institutions with weak leadership can wreck the sounded strategy, but forceful execution of even a poor plan can often bring victory.

The study of leadership is the study of outstanding men and women in action that could be viewed from many angles; such men and women could be in government, politics, military, religion, family, university, business or organisations, etc. Leadership is a moral intellectual ability to visualise and work for what is best for the organisation and its employees. This definition indicated some desirable qualities of leaders; these are compassion, clear thinking, a general understanding of technological operations without obsession with details, integrity, ability to retain the confidence, and ability to communicate and with enthusiasm.

Leadership is an art or skill that you acquire for the purpose of leading others to achieve set goals. It is something more than just an aspect of personality, tradition, opportunism, or appointment. It is connected with actual behaviour and attributes towards one and others in any social interactions. Good leaders are made, and at the same time born. Scholars in the field of leadership argued strongly that situations, invariably creates a leader. In fact,

Africa nations for years have been saddled with leaders who out of power and positions have decided to lead their people negatively, thus, causing mayhem or their subjects to revolts in the society, and killing themselves.

Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training and experience (Jago, 1982). To inspire your workers or subjects into higher levels of teamwork, there are certain things you must know, be and do. These do not come naturally but are gained through knowledge acquisition and experiences (Nwafor, S.E. 2014).

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. This definition is similar to Northouse's (2007, p3) definition; Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership knowledge and skills. This is called 'Process Leadership' (Jago, 1982).

However, note that students of leadership stress that we have traits that can influence our actions. This is called 'Trait Leadership' in that it was once common to believe that leaders were born rather than made. While leadership is learned, the skills and knowledge possess by a leader can be influence by his or her attributes or traits; such as beliefs, values, ethics, and character. Knowledge and skills contribute directly to the process of leadership, while the other attributes give the leader certain characteristics that make him or her unique.

Leadership, which is an integral and important function of a manager, is the interpersonal aspect of managing human behaviour for positive thinking geared towards achieving organisational goals and objectives, and today, leadership provides the greatest human challenges.

Leadership, according to Dan Agbese (1988) is a glory, and it is a burden, whichever is greater only those who led knows'. Effective leadership is the ability to successfully integrate and maximise available resources within the internal and external environment for the attainment of organisational, and or societal goals." To Alan Keith, "Leadership is all about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen". This definition brings to mind the three qualities of a man;

- i. those who make things happen,
- ii. those who ask why things happen, and
- iii. those who watch things happen.

In this context however, leaders belong to those who makes extra-ordinary things happens. Remember that in any functional organisation, managers create task, assigns it to employees, motivates and coordinates the workers to align their personal objectives with the overall company's objectives to achieve designated objectives. Thus, we can say that the ability to successfully administer this to employees depends on his ability to determine whether his leadership style(s) is effective or ineffective on the long-run. It is a process by which a superior tries to influence a task- related activity on subordinates". In fact,

leadership has to do with influencing people towards the achievement of result, and without influence one would not be able to lead others.

Therefore, the author summarise from the above definitions of leadership that it is an act of influencing the behaviour and attitude of others without resulting to the use of force to achieve a predetermined goal. Renowned Social Scientists, such as Harold Koonzt, 'O' Donnel et al (1984) defined leadership as 'a process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of group goals'. This definition can be enlarged to imply that not only must the followers be willing to work, but also be willing to work with zeal and confidence. A good example is that of the orchestra leader whose function it is to produce coordinated sound and correct tempo through the integrated efforts of the instrumentalists, and depending upon the quality of the director's leadership skill and ability, the orchestra will respond effectively and efficiently with enthusiasm.

To achieve this effectively, a lot more have to be put in; not only the routine administrative procedures which guides and direct employees which is not only the normal expectancy of performance expected of them, but also a good leadership style which should yield positive result. Senator (Dr.) Dalhatu Tafida, former Nigeria High Commissioner to Britain (NTA's interview in May, 2017), asserts that leadership is not only when you are a president, governor, minister, manager, etc., but one assigned with responsibility and authority to perform a given task in an organisation or institution. He stated further that such a person must lead by example.

Aderounmu W. O. & Ehimetalor (1981), defined leadership as 'the ability to initiate, to motivate and direct others toward the fulfilment of a goal'. And Peter Drucker asserts that the only definition of a leader is someone who has followers." To gain followers requires influence, but doesn't exclude the lack of integrity in achieving this. Indeed, it can be argued that several of the world's greatest leaders have integrity and have adopted values that would not be shared by many people today.

In the "21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership", John Maxwell sums up his definition, thus; "leadership is influence; nothing more, nothing less". Let it be said that leadership has different meanings to various writers but all the definitions tend towards a general acceptance that leadership is an influence. This moves beyond the position of defining the leader, to looking at the ability of the leader to influence others-both those who would consider themselves followers, and those outside that circle. Indirectly, it also builds on leadership character since without maintaining integrity and trustworthiness, the capability to influence will disappear. Warren Bennis' definition of leadership is focused much more on the individual's capability of the leader: "Leadership is a function of knowing yourself, having a vision that is well communicated; building trust among colleagues, and taking effective action to realise your own leadership potentials".

Importance of Effective leadership to Africa continent

African continent at this period of history needs effective leadership 'cause we have been daunted with issues—ranging from ineffective/poor leadership, ethnic wars, poor economic policies, religious bigotry, poor infrastructures and maintenance, poverty, illiteracy, internal crises, high mortality rate, low standard of living, insecurity, decaying health sector, internal conflicts, poor funding of our educational sector, and of course, terrorism, etc. and as such proactive measures should be put in place by us to foster peace and justice in our land.

Leadership, they say is related to motivation, interpersonal behaviour and the process of communication. As noted by Sir Simon Nwafor (2017) in Sir Paul Judge: over thirty years ago, it was very much about what you know; the technicalities of things. Managers now are leaders of their groups, their departments, their section, etc. Albeit, they may well need some specialist knowledge, the human relations' part of the management's job is more important than ever. People have more flexibility and more choices in their careers, which are in themselves more fluid, so keeping people motivating is very important. Leadership is also important in attempting to reduce people's/employee dissatisfaction. Good leadership involves the effective process of delegation and empowerment.

Obviously, leadership is a dynamic process. The leader-follower relationship is reciprocal and effective leadership is a two-way process which influences both individual and organisational performance. Lord Sieff notes that leadership is usually important at all levels within an organisation: from main board to the shop floor. It is the moral and intellectual ability to visualise and work for what is best for the organisation and its employees.....the most vital thing the leader does is to create team-spirit around him and hear him, not in a scholarly sense alone, but in realistic terms. It is a matter of mature adults....and to be effective, leadership has to be seen, and it is best seen in action. Good and effective leadership helps to develop teamwork and the integration of individual and group goals. It aids intrinsic motivation by emphasising the importance of the work that people do.

Every good leader is aware of the value of a well- defined business strategy. Few, however, give thought to the leadership that will be required to implement strategies that calls for changes in the direction or capabilities of the organisation. Without effective leadership, even the best and boldest strategies die on the vine, and their potentials never realised.

African leaders have over the last forty years being engrossed with the philosophy of planning effectively, but at the same time executing and implementing sound plans poorly, thus, the present economic and political quagmires witnessed in the continent today. The author will use the situation in South Africa and Nigeria as an example, where human lives no longer mean anything to their rulers.

Effective change leadership is the key to shifting people's perceptions from seeing change as a threat to seeing it as an exciting challenge. African continent needs effective leadership now. We have become a laughing stock amongst the committee of friends with our retrogressive policies, utterances concerning our citizens, corruption, terrorisms, banditry,

and religious beliefs that has nothing to do with our economic growth and sustainable development, winners gets it all syndrome, etc.

In this paradigm therefore, Fullan sees leadership in a culture of change and points out that leadership is keyed to large-scale improvement. It is essential for leaders to understand the change process, and moral purpose without which change will lead to moral martyrdom. As Africans, are we really improving in effective and good governance? No. Leaders should at this juncture be able to operate under complex and uncertain circumstances. Buttressing this further, the Taylorist model had a simple view of management, which was responsible for the implementation of the work system.

The idea that management involves understanding how to lead the workforce, who in turn required differentiating types of leadership (autocratic, participative from directive, etc.), was an important innovation in effective leadership and human relations thinking. It has stimulated a series of researches identifying the distinction between managers (concerned with maintaining and administering the existing system) and leaders (concerned to create new goals and directions for the organisation).

Leadership Development

Going beyond the individual, the demand for leadership training is significant. The supply of leadership training is vast. Access to scholarly books, journals, and website information is easy, if not overwhelming, yet the demand for leadership training and capacity building continues. Most leadership programmes focuses on the broad range of identified leadership competencies. Leadership is a key factor in good governance and the successful implementation of public sector mandates.

Public sector leaders work in uniquely complex environments with multiple stakeholders and demands. In addition, some public sector leaders are working in environments with the further challenges of major conflict (dealing with various political parties and affiliations), significant poverty and/or limited development. In recent years, accountability has been at the heart of sound leadership practices. Leadership competencies have been identified and corresponding training developed and delivered worldwide. What is less common in leadership development focused on the environmental or institutional challenges of public sector leadership. These challenges are linked to the unique and special environments within which public sector leaders are working – the term and life cycle of government, the specific role of the leaders, and the historical or cultural pattern of leadership within a given government. Leadership development needs to focus on political visions, specific strategies and timetables as well as individual management and technical roles in order to carry weight and sustain impact. McGregor concludes that leadership is not a property of the individual, but a complex relationship among these variables¹.

According to Kouzes and Posner, credibility is the foundation of leadership. From extensive research in many countries and response to the question of what people look for and admire in a leader, in a person whose direction they would willingly follow, people have consistently

replied that they want leaders who exemplify four qualities: they want them to be honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent. In this research however, the respondents strongly agreed that they want leaders with integrity and trustworthiness, with vision and a sense of direction, with enthusiasm and passion, and with expertise and a track record for getting things done.

Qualities of leadership needed in Africa

We are meant to understand from the foregoing that leadership is the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of group's goals. Effective leaders do not stand behind a group to push and prod; they place themselves before the group as they facilitate progress and inspire the group to accomplish organisational goals. This, however, portrays some distinct roles and qualities perform by leadership in furthering human knowledge and understanding about the chemistry of effective leadership.

Leaders play crucial roles during change management and implementation-the period from the announcement of change through the installation of the change programmes. During this middle period, the organisation is made unstable, characterised by confusion, fear, loss of direction, reduced productivity and a lack of clarity about direction and mandate. It can be a period of emotionalism, with employees or citizens grieving for what is lost, and initially unable to look to the future. In addition to forecast and amiability, the characteristics that a leader must have are ability to recognise employees' talents, the know-how to make teams work and open mind. Leadership does very well to some extent as per the positions, that is, it may be slight different for managers and different for a union leader but the basic qualities of leadership does not change.

- **Good communication skills:** Communication is the key to a great leadership. The reason for this is simple. If he possesses the other seven leadership qualities but fails to communicate well, he will never be a great leader, rather a ruler. What he can do is communicate with others in the organisation about what human resources department, for instance can do to move the company forward.

- **Honesty:** The most valuable quality of a leader is honesty. He must be honest with both his features and his integrity. Once a leader compromises his integrity, he is lost. That is, perhaps the reason integrity is considered the most admirable trait. The leaders, therefore, must keep it "above all else". Most African leaders lack this quality possibly because of political affiliations, winner gets it all syndrome, greed, ineptitude, poor vision, religion, incompetence, corruption, etc.

- **Visionary outlook:** Leadership qualities are different for different positions. For a Chief Executive Officer/ and or a president in Africa, for example, he must be thinking of stabilising the current business, or condition of the economy and always looking for future scope of expansions. He has to be able to look beyond where we are now, know where the business/economy is going, and be able to use that vision to move the country forward.

Being able to do this is a rare skill, indeed. In fact, the post covid-19 saga, corruption, and terrorism are major challenges facing the African continent today.

- **Selecting a good team:** A good Chief Executive Officer, although possesses sound technical skills, should ensure that the team he selects is efficient enough to back up any skill he lacks. Choosing the best people for such team is a skill. A Chief Executive Officer is a human being and does not have answers for everything, but by working together, he creates an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect; the team will always find the best solutions. Today, most African leaders choose their teams not because of their competencies, or skills but because of party, tribal, and religious affiliations.

- **Action speaks louder than words:** Leaders must be able to put aside their concerns to listen to those around them. With that, they should be able to know what is going on in the organisation. Foremost African leaders like Dr. Nelson Mandela, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. etc., demonstrated much of these qualities while pressing for independence of their countries and people. They have the knack of appearing to know what people need even if those needs are not expressed directly. Knowing what is going on, and identifying the need of those around them however, is not sufficient. A responsible and responsive manager/leader also acts upon that knowledge, attempting to help fulfill the needs of employees, superiors, citizens, etc. Responsive leaders wield influence to solve problems for those around them, often before even being asked.

- **Ability to motivate people around:** A good leader must always keep motivating his team mates for good work and should maintain healthy work environment. He must give first priority to safety of workers/citizens and, that they are not exploited by superiors. He must ensure that all compensation and rewards due are paid to those whose performances are encouraging according to the policies and or the constitution of the country.

- **Consistency:** Leadership effectiveness is impossible without consistency. Every leader has an approach that is unique to them. Don't change your personal style radically after all; it got you in a leadership position. Modify the rough spots but take care not to confound your staff or citizens by displaying inconsistency. Your expectations, though subject to modification based on ever-changing business needs should remain as constant as possible. The business world is confusing enough without you adding unwelcome surprises into the mix. Keep things simple and consistent always. In this context, most African leaders have been engrossed by this style of leadership and this is why we, at any given period, keep changing policies and programmes, thus, discontinuing the programmes of the previous governments.

- **Ability to stand against critics:** As the success rate increases, your critics multiply and become louder. Come to peace with the fact that will always have a camp of people who criticise every decision you make. They are generally the ones who are excellent problem identifiers rather than problem-solvers. As leaders, you need to develop your skills of repelling such critics so that they do not diminish your confidence or enthusiasm. In the

main, Nigerians have learnt their bitter lessons. Today, many ethnic groups are clamouring for secession; this is because of the poor leadership qualities exhibited by the leaders. In the same vein, millions of people are fleeing from their villages for fear of being killed by boko haram terrorists, herdsmen, raiders, kidnappers, and also thousands of companies and other small businesses have closed down or producing at very low ebb, thus, creating rooms for job losses in the economy.

How do we grow and develop here? We, as African need to change our orientations. It takes focus and confidence not to be adversely affected by criticism. Strong leaders learn the art of listening to critics but ultimately making decisions for the good of the institutions not to simply please the critics. The following quote sums it up nicely: "some of the most talented people are terrible leaders because they have a crippling need to be by everyone" as rightly started by James Schorr.

Attaining economic growth and sustainable development through effective and transformational leadership

The word "leadership" is today gaining recognition amongst Nigerians and Africans, and of course, they cry out for better and more proactive and effective leadership and management of our continent's natural resources, which ranges from the activities of those in business, government, religious institutions, traditional institutions, etc.

Transformational leadership, however, focuses on the big picture; needing to be surrounded by people who take care of the details. In the same token, scholars see transformational leadership as the same thing as charismatic, visionary or inspirational leadership. It is a known fact that within our context, transformational leaders build a strategy, culture, direction and outcomes for an organisation or nation as the case may be. The other view is that the leader is constrained by such powerful internal and external variables that influence performance and directions. In other words, that the impact of the leader is actually been affected by and contingent upon these factors rather than his or her genius.

Modern scholars agree that leadership, while being admittedly indescribable concept, is indeed central to the mission, purpose, progress, and success of businesses, organisations, and nations. As noted by General Murtala Mohammed-former military Head of State in Nigeria, "God Almighty has endowed Nigeria with the human and natural resources to make it a wealthy nation. It is we, the people, who have to make this country great by the way we conduct our private and public affairs". Also, another former President, Dr. Jonathan Goodluck buttressed more on the truism of the transformational leadership in his inaugural address to the nation, "The leadership and the followership must strive to convert our vast human and natural resources into the fore that leads to a greater Nigeria." But Prof. Chinua Achebe "the inimitable storyteller, summarised Nigeria problem as failure of leadership".

Transformational leadership exerts a positive influence over the behaviour, and attitude of others without the use of coercion'. It instills respect and trust, develops a challenging and attractive vision, and purposive direction towards achieving organisational goals and objectives. Transformational leadership develops constituents to take care of leaders themselves and others and that with good and reputable leadership at government, non-government and business levels, coupled with lofty plans, policies and implementation, stakeholders can be productive rather than provocative.

According to Nwafor, S. E (2014), transformational leadership is akin to moral leadership; both followers and leaders progress to higher levels of moral and or mental development as a result of such leadership. It is also argued that transformational leadership is rooted in strong ethical values, showing that the concerns of the followers are considered, hence making them happy and integrated. Transformational leadership is guided by morally altruistic principles that reflect a helping apathy for others even at considerable personal sacrifice or inconvenience.

Africans needs positive goals and value system-cum development; being people and community oriented, re-engineering our economic growth and development, social transformation, investment in production, security, education and provision of social amenities, training and development of citizens, human capital development, employment, encourage locally made goods, removing multiple taxation, tax free for some key sectors of the economy, equipping our hospitals, holistic funding of our educational sector, ensuring accountability and sustainability, drastic fight on corruption, upholding our judicial system, etc. The government and the security agencies should, as a matter of urgency buff up their expertise and end this deadly scourge called terrorism in our land, etc.

Summary and Conclusion

As noted earlier, while a leader may have power; influence depends more on persuasion rather than on coercion, and the style of leadership in present day knowledge driven economies that are based on different assumptions and theories. The style (s) that individuals used will be base on a combination of their beliefs, norms, values and preferences, as well as the organisational culture and norms which will encourage some styles and discourage others. And from Mahatma Gandhi to Winston Churchill to Martin Luther King Jr to Julius Kambarage Nyerere to Dr. Nelson Mandela to Dr. Yakubu Gowon to Chief (Dr). Olusegun Obasanjo, etc. there are as many leadership styles as there are leaders.

Effective leadership is not simply based on a set of attributes, behaviours, or influence; you must have a wide range of abilities, charisma, skills, aptitudes, competencies, etc. and leaders that you can draw upon. Good leaders often switch instinctively between styles according to the situation, people they lead, and the work that needs to be done.

Effective leadership is essentially the "secret" to successfully fulfilling demanding roles in today's competitive societies, and encompasses a consistent combination of individual

behaviours and attitudes toward group members in order to achieve organisational goals and objectives. We need to look into the dynamic nature of the relationship between a leader and followers. And in these unique social dynamics, all the parties involved attempts to influence each other in the pursuit of group goals. In order to accomplish these goals, the leader then must exercise his or her power to influence people. That power is exercised in earlier stages by motivating followers to get the job done and in later stages by rewarding or punishing those who do or do not perform to the level of expectations. Remember that leadership is a continuous process, and with the accomplishment of one goal becoming the beginning of a new goal. The proper reward by the leader, however, is of utmost importance in order to continually motivate followers in the process.

The author concludes that effective leadership in any organisation or a nation depends to a large extent on the quality of top management personnel. It is also observed that the high growth rate of an organisation, and or a nation is a clear testimony of good leadership styles being implored since most of the departmental staff or administrators, and even the corporate management use democratic style in handling the affairs of the organisation/nation.

In conclusion, the author would want to end this by quoting the speeches of two American ex-presidents (Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln) who tested leadership positions and retired honourably. First, Thomas Jefferson's letter to his old friend, French Economist Pierre Du Pont De Nemours: excerpt: "Never did a prisoner, released from his chains, feel such relief as I shall on shaking off the shackles of power. Nature intended me for the tranquil pursuits of science, by rendering them my supreme delight but the enormities of the times in which I have lived, have forced me to commit myself on the boisterous ocean of political passions, I thank God for the opportunity of retiring from them without censure and carrying with me the most consoling proofs of public approbation".

Secondly, by Abraham Lincoln: On February 11, 1861, he states "Today, I leave you; I go to assume a task more difficult than that which devolved upon General George Washington. Unless the great God, who assisted him, shall be with and aid me, I must fail. But if the same omniscient mind, and Almighty Arm that directed and protected him, shall guide and support me, I shall not fail; I shall succeed. Let us all pray that the God of our fathers may not forsake us now."

The question we must consciously ask ourselves and which every African leader must note is; how many African leaders of this century are happy to leave office? How many are genuinely ready to hand over power to another person? Ask Dr. Robert Mugabe, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, Samuel Doe, Joseph Kabila, Mobutu Seseseko of DRC, Emperor Bukasa of Central Africa Republic, [Yahya Jammeh](#) of Gambia, etc. These and many others are the lessons we must live by as we go through our various schools of leadership.

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