

Aligning Performance

Improving People, Systems, and Organizations

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Chapter 10: Achieving Performance Alignment in Business

The previous nine chapters provided a performance-based view of work—the Language of Work model. In bringing closure to the book, we will tie together this view of performance with its application to the performance levels of business (business unit, core processes, individual jobs, and work groups) and the layers of performance (human consonance, support, standards, and behavior) to achieve a fundamental goal that can assure efficiency and effectiveness of work-performance alignment.

Everyone and everything in business should be working in alignment. If work groups do not support one another, inefficiency and ineffectiveness prevail and improvements are not consistently achieved. If individuals are out of sync with core processes, the processes are not achieving what they are intended to achieve. If careful planning at the business unit is not operationalized in core processes and executed by individuals and work groups, performance alignment is out of whack! Today's businesses can ill afford this situation. They must stay abreast or ahead of others in the global economy. All work in a business is interrelated and must be seen in relation to dependent variables. Work is most likely to be successful if the levels and layers of performance are truly aligned. The ultimate operational goal of business, beyond profit or the welfare of society, is performance alignment. As a performance consultant it is paramount that you have a full and coherent view of performance alignment and how you can help facilitate it in business.

It Takes Time and Commitment

Understanding what performance alignment is can be relatively easy. To actually achieve performance alignment in a practical way in business can be an amazing feat. It requires discipline, attention to detail, a workable approach, and a commitment of time. Alignment will not happen on its own, and it takes longer to achieve through a fire-fighting mentality. Performance alignment demands a systematic methodology understood and applied by an informed management, through a disciplined workforce, consistently applied throughout the major performance levels of business, and aided through the facilitation of performance consultant experts.

Because it is a systematic methodology based on a thorough understanding of performance, the Language of Work model helps make the daunting task easier. It helps operationalize alignment in a practical way, as described in the preceding chapters. The explanation of performance alignment that follows is predicated on an understanding of the 6:4:4 (proforma: performance levels: layers of work) Language of Work model.

Each chapter in this book has been a building block for achieving performance alignment. In this chapter, we will integrate the various blocks to illustrate how alignment can be realized. If the concept is not totally clear at first, remember that learning the Language of Work is much like learning a foreign language; achieving performance alignment will take time, practice, correction, and more practice.

We will begin with a simple simulation game that we, as external performance consultants, usually play with our clients to illustrate two of the three dimensions of alignment; the third dimension will be covered through description and example.

As a word of caution, because this chapter presents the ideal in achieving performance alignment, the task may seem a bit daunting. It requires time and effort to reach true performance alignment. It is important to know that one can begin at any level of business, at any time. The description that follows covers every aspect of alignment as if we were starting from scratch to form and operate or completely reorganize and reengineer a business. In actual practice, we would have the goal of achieving as much alignment as possible. Whichever goal we choose, having a systematic methodology and commitment will help us to achieve it.

Performance (Work) Alignment Defined

Technically, performance alignment, as shown by the Language of Work model, is the relationship of work within and between performance levels of business, combined with the synergistic relationship between work behavior, work standards, work support, and human consonance. It is the harmony of work in all its dimensions within a business.

Performance alignment is difficult because it is a complex, behaviorally based view of work throughout a business. When we as managers and workers operate in only one part of the business, it is difficult for us to see how we could influence and achieve the ultimate goal of performance alignment and still do our work. That is why it is important that organizations have performance consultants to help them achieve the alignment.

Performance alignment is not only multilevel (as in the four levels of the Business Sphere), but also requires a three-dimensional view as four layers of performance (work behavior, standards, support, and human consonance) cut across the levels. To align even a small organization requires great perspicacity, knowledge at several levels, and a paradigm or system that addresses performance in an equal and translatable way. When an organization is large and complex, with many customers and suppliers, alignment may seem to be "an impossible dream." However, any business can achieve alignment. As a performance consultant, you can facilitate executives and managers to achieve the goal through their efforts and the direct involvement of the workforce. As a result, not only will performance alignment be achieved, but everyone involved will gain a far greater understanding of the business and will commit to achieve its success.

Performance alignment is all work-related considerations working together. The fundamental goals are (1) a common good of clients being served and (2) the survival and prosperity of the business and its workforce. At the more functional level, performance alignment is the harmony of all the work elements that must exist for a business to be successful. It is much more than people "working together." Certainly, alignment involves people (individuals and work groups), but it also involves systems (core processes) and the organization (business unit).

Technically, alignment is most often explained as the vertical and horizontal work relationships within a business. This means some kind of interrelated relationship of "work" (however "work" is defined in each business), up and down (vertical) and across (horizontal) the organization. In the case of the Language of Work model, it means the interaction between work elements as defined by proformas at multiple performance levels and work layers. This will be explained and illustrated shortly in greater detail. But first, let's look at another critical dimension beyond vertical and horizontal.

Although we are usually constrained to a concept in a two-dimensional plane (vertical

and horizontal) in the Language of Work model, we need to plan and think of alignment as three-dimensional. Vertical and horizontal alignment deal with levels and layers of performance. The third dimension deals with connections between layers. This, too, will be illustrated shortly.

Although it may seem complicated and difficult at first to align performance on so many levels and layers, not to do so is to fail to align much of the business that needs it. For example, goals may be aligned with operational tasks, but not translated to how each individual and work group would operationalize the goal and tasks, what standards would be met, what support would be provided, and how the human consonance would be assured. Multiply this out throughout the business and there are numerous needs in performance alignment.

Tenets of Performance Alignment

We should be able to align performance company-wide. This is best achieved with a planned, long-term effort in which the business evolves toward a healthy state as each successive level of performance is aligned. It might take only a couple of years or perhaps ten years to achieve alignment initially, then continuous attention to maintain. We have been working with one client for six years to achieve alignment and the business is very close to its goal. Imagine the process that was undertaken to align the organization horizontally and vertically, to install or improve the host of interventions found in the work support matrix (Chapter 8), as well as to define and align its work behavior and standards, plus achieve consonance of human relations. Alignment takes planning, skill, patience, endurance, commitment to the long haul, and continuous attention to maintain and improve the business. It begins, however, with any attention to any alignment relationship need.

The components of the 6:4:4 Language of Work model are shown in Figure 10.1. They are described in detail in the remainder of the chapter as they relate to achieving performance alignment.

The Tenets of Performance Alignment

1. Achieve horizontal alignment by assuring that the proforma for all the four levels within a layer (as applicable) of performance is complete, accurate, and achievable.
2. Achieve vertical alignment by assuring that each of the like elements at the four levels within a layer (as applicable) of performance is aligned with each other.
3. Achieve synergistic alignment between the layers of work by linking the work behavior, as the foundation, to the defined work standards, building a healthy organization through work support, and assuring human consonance to minimize work noise.

We will now see how performance alignment can be established, nurtured, and continued in a business by following the three tenets of performance alignment.

The Work Simulation Game

The first and second tenets above can be best illustrated through a work alignment simulation game. These tenets are related to horizontal and vertical alignment. We often use the game with clients both to introduce the proforma and to build an introductory understanding of alignment. Although the simulation is best played with others to take advantage of group interaction, you can play the game as a reader by taking the time to fill in the information as you go along.

The simulation matrix in Figure 10.2 has twenty-four squares representing the four performance levels of a hypothetical business, the business unit, core processes, individuals, and work groups. The simulated business is a division of a large corporation that provides communications services to both its internal clients and external companies. Thus, the business unit in question has been partially outsourced by its parent company. It is a communication division (business unit) that is to achieve self-sufficiency as a profit center, while still meeting the internal needs of its parent company. The fictitious business unit is called Corporate Communications, Inc. (CCI).

In explaining the "simulation," the president of CCI would say something like:

As your executive officer, I want you to help me make our division more efficient and effective. We need to get our work in order-aligned-to better serve our internal and external customers. If we cannot do this, we will continue to be inefficient, we won't grow, or we may even go out of business. To use specific terms from the Language of Work model we have been learning through our company performance consultant, it means that

- The proforma for each of the four performance levels of our business must be aligned horizontally.
- The six elements of each proforma from one performance level to the next must be aligned vertically.

After the simulation, we will consider the work standards, support, and human consonance of work and how these can be aligned in the attainment of our work behavior at the four performance levels. For now, we will be concerned only with aligning our work behavior.

With the executive officer's goal in mind, let's see how alignment is illustrated in a simplified way in the simulation. By looking at how work behavior is analyzed, we can understand a similar cause-and-effect relationship for work standards, support, and human consonance. First, let's see how the company achieved horizontal and vertical alignment. The executive officer continues his instructions to his workforce. See Figure 10.2 for the company's outputs

I have already defined our major outputs, which are various company communication documents. I have shown the outputs for the business unit on a matrix, along with associated work elements at the business unit level. You can see that I have yet to define the inputs, conditions, process elements, consequences, and feedback for some levels of the the business. Of course, our business unit has other outputs, but to keep it simple for now, I've listed only some outputs and will shortly define associated work elements.

In the matrix I've entered one output at each of the core process, individual, and work group levels. Note that each of these is aligned to the output at the business unit level. Thus, we achieve 'company communication documents' at the business unit level by producing a 'printed document' (as one of the communication documents) at the core process level. Then, at the individual level we complete 'word processed document' and at the work group level 'various completed documents.' Again, to keep things simple, I've included only one process, one job, and one work group.

Now notice that there are several blank boxes. I am going to ask you to fill in each box to demonstrate your understanding of what it takes to achieve performance alignment in our

company.

The following is a list of work elements that I want you to place into the matrix. Based on the meaning of each phrase or statement, you are to put each in its appropriate place as a work element of input, conditions, process element, consequences, or feedback for the performance levels of core process, individual, and work group. These statements must align with their appropriate output (horizontally) already shown for the remaining three performance levels, as well as with one another (that is, input to input) as appropriate vertically. Write the number of the work element in Figure 10.2 in the proper box in the matrix. One word of advice: Start at the business unit level, which I've already filled in, and work your way down through core process, individual, and work group. When you have entered each work element in the simulation matrix, perhaps with the help of some other colleagues, return and we will compare your answers with a completed matrix.

Work Elements for Business Simulation Game

1. Error-Free Document
2. Client Requests for Various Communications
3. Reproduction Equipment Specifications
4. Document Review by Client
5. Group Satisfaction with Work Produced
6. Printing
7. Document Quality Assurance Report
8. Business Resource Methods: Receive, Log, Assign, Complete, Ship
9. Attractive, Accurately Typed Document
10. Job Assignment to Process a Document
11. Request for Printing
12. Word Processing: Schedule, Type, Print, Proof, Print, Return to Client
13. Division Performance Report
14. Word Processing Standards
15. Copy Editing Standards for Various Communications

Figure 10.3 is a completed copy of the work behavior alignment matrix for Corporate Communications, Inc. The names of the elements are placed in their proper positions and their corresponding numbers are shown. Did you place and align your work elements correctly? If there are differences, some may be due to how you interpreted the words or their context. Some may be because of the need to further clarify what performance alignment is.

To understand the meaning of alignment, let's use Figure 10.3 as a reference point.

Horizontal Alignment

Tenet 1:

1. Achieve horizontal alignment by assuring that the proforma for all the four levels within a layer (as applicable) of performance is complete, accurate, and achievable.

On the horizontal axis of the simulation matrix, viewing work at each of the four performance levels of the Business Sphere, we must make sure that each proforma is complete, accurate, and achievable. We often know this kind alignment is missing when we hear comments such as

- "Nobody pays attention to the rules and regulations of our business."
- "Nobody seems to care what the results of our work are supposed to be."

- "There just isn't enough communication on what goes right and what needs fixing."
- "You know if you tell the print shop something, they don't follow through."
- "I do work the way I think it needs to be done."

One example of horizontal alignment in the case of Corporate Communications, Inc., is shown in Figure 10.4. We see that, at the business unit level, the output of "company communication documents" is aligned to the work that is needed to achieve the output. It is aligned to the other five elements of its proforma as follows:

- Input : Stated Company Image
- Condition : Business Communication Needs
- Process Element : Documentation Production Methods
- Consequence : Company Image Maintained
- Feedback : Client Satisfaction Survey

In horizontal alignment the proforma must meet three criteria: completeness, accuracy, and capable of being achieved. We see in the example that the performance is complete in that each of the six elements of the proforma are defined. It is accurate through verifying that the performance reflects the desired behavior. And, it is achievable through actual use. If the horizontal alignment does not meet any of these three criteria, then the performance is not horizontally aligned. The three criteria can be defined as follows:

1. Complete means that each of the six elements of work must be present and accounted for.
2. Accurate means that each element reflects a verified definition of the performance.
3. Achievable means that the work can be performed by those who do the work.

Let's look at a few other examples from the simulation.

In the simulation, if we don't plan for the input of a clear job assignment at the individual level, it is unlikely that the output of a word processed document will be fully achieved. At the business unit level, if we don't properly identify client needs, the business unit will not be aligned to achieve the outputs and consequences. The same would be true if the conditions, process element, and feedback at the business unit level were not accounted for. This is true of any level of performance. If we don't adequately plan to achieve the individual level consequence of attractive, accurately typed documents, they are not likely to occur. Just ask yourself this basic horizontal alignment question (for any level of performance): "If I failed to adequately provide for any one of the work elements in the proforma, what effect would it have on achieving the work behavior the company desires?" The answer may be major or minor. The effect would be failure to achieve horizontal performance alignment.

Now, just as work behavior must be aligned horizontally, a similar horizontal alignment must be achieved for work standards, work support, and work consonance. Horizontal alignment in all these dimensions is illustrated in Figure 10.5a, b. The nature and scope of these kinds of horizontal alignment are discussed next.

As an example of aligning standards, suppose at the work group level the company establishes a quality standard (a condition) that certain documents will always be in three colors. However, the consequences standard for these documents says they will not exceed a certain price. This creates misalignment whenever the three-color copy standard keeps the company from meeting the price for clients who want fewer than one hundred

copies. They cannot bid on certain customer requests. Standards for conditions and consequence are thus not in alignment. Either the price will have to be raised or the three-color condition applied to certain circumstances, or both, to bring them into alignment.

The horizontal misalignment of work support is fairly easy to see. For example, if we define a certain workload (as a condition) that the printing business can handle, yet we don't support this by allowing every piece of business (an input) that comes in the door to be accepted with any deadline, there is not an alignment of work support between the condition and the input.

Horizontal alignment of human consonance might be best illustrated by looking at the behavior of a manager regarding expectations about the design and production of a given document. Let's say that the manager has plenty of praise for those who design the document (after all, he used to be a designer), but yells at the printing staff because they are late in producing the document. The fact that the designers usually get the document to printing at the last minute is overlooked. This is a problem in horizontal human consonance alignment.

Now let's move to vertical performance alignment.

Tenet 2: Vertical Alignment

2. Achieve vertical alignment by assuring that each of the like elements at the four levels within a layer of performance is aligned with the others.

Just as there is a horizontal relationship in achieving alignment of work behavior, standards, support, and human consonance, performance must also be vertically aligned between each level at each layer. In fact, this is the more traditional view of alignment, although sometimes not well understood. Campaigns to improve the "line of sight" goals, for example, from the business unit to the individual are reflections of this need.

Why is it that vertical relationships often don't exist when they should? The answer is fairly simple. Businesses start with a few individuals and functions, and then add other individuals and functions. A new product here, some new staff there, and some new technology over there. Growth is followed with rearrangement of work and reorganization of work groups. So, too, are standards and support added on an as-needed basis, without necessary attention to alignment need. And on and on. There is, after all, the work to get done! Occasionally, we need to step back and say, "Hey, let's make sure all of this work stuff we are doing is aligned to achieve what we really need to do to meet our clients' needs!" The fact that this doesn't occur is not because of a lack of noticing or caring (there are plenty of comments that something needs to be done). It is more likely not taking the time or not knowing exactly what work is and how to define and align it. The failure to achieve vertical alignment is largely due to the lack of using a work paradigm by which the various levels of a business may be defined in a common way and thus aligned. Without a common proforma, alignment cannot be conceived, achieved, or tested.

The lack of vertical alignment of performance is commonly expressed in such comments as:

- "Management doesn't know what we do down here."
- "If the print department would just have some appreciation for our needs."
- "If only Mary would contribute to our group."
- "Process, process! I barely know what my job is in relation to my work group."

- "The consequences our business wants and those of my job certainly don't match up!"
- "The executives may think they are communicating (giving feedback), but it doesn't match up with what my manager says."

As represented in Figure 10.6, vertical alignment is the view up and down the levels of each layer in the Business Sphere. This is not the same as the view up and down the organization. That is another issue, and certainly one to be attended to. But here we are addressing the relationship of work behavior (and other layers) as it cascades from work element to work element from the business unit to the core processes to individuals to work groups and back up again.

Note in vertical alignment of performance that there is a direct relationship between each common work element (output to output, input to input, and so on) and within each performance level; that the sequence of this relationship for alignment (and definition) is always from business unit down through core processes, individuals, and ending with work groups; and that the relationship from bottom up is the implementation and achievement of work.

As described in Chapter 6, work groups become the process element of the business unit, closing the loop of work definition and alignment between the four performance levels of the Business Sphere.

Figure 10.7 is a vertical slice of the simulation case for Corporate Communications, Inc., in which we see that the outputs at each level are related to one another. The behavior alignment relationship cascades from the business unit down through the core processes, to individuals, and work groups; during implementation the relationship is from bottom to top.

In the simulation, the same vertical alignment of each level also exists for inputs, conditions, process elements, consequences, and feedback. These relationships must exist in order for performance to be efficient, effective, and congruent within a level of business. If not, things that should happen do not, those things that do happen are less efficient than they should be, or the wrong things happen altogether.

A good example of the lack of vertical alignment occurred at a high-tech company in which we were to improve individual level consequences in collecting data on the repair of equipment. In that instance, the executives of a high-tech company at the business unit level valued different consequences from what the repair people valued at the individual level. The executives wanted certain information, which the repair people did not collect because they didn't see the company's consequences as important. They considered themselves to be repair people for whom the customer's repair was most important. They didn't collect and report the repair data in a form that was useful so that hardware developers could design for fewer repairs and customer complaints. Thus, there was a lack of alignment between consequences at the business unit and the individual levels. Indeed, most of the misalignment in the vertical is in feedback, consequences, and conditions-which is not to say that the remaining three work elements don't have their share of misalignments.

In the simulation we can illustrate, for instance, that the outputs listed at the four performance levels are aligned to one another. We know this because the foundation output at the business unit, "company communication documents," is:

- Manifested at the core process level by "printed document" (as one of the

- company communication documents);
- Aligned to the "various completed documents" at the work group level.

Of course, specifying alignment and achieving it are two different matters. Alignment must be validated during actual implementation. A similar review of the simulation for Corporate Communications, Inc., will show the vertical alignment of inputs, conditions, process element, consequence, and feedback.

In the same way that work standards, support, and human consonance must be aligned in the horizontal relationships of performance, so too must they be aligned in the vertical relationships. This is represented in Figure 10.8a, b. Once we establish a standard at the business unit level for any work element, we know that it needs to cascade its way down through related core processes, jobs, and work groups. For example, if a certain standard in communication for the business is set at the business unit level, this standard must be aligned with the standard to be achieved at the core processes, individual, and work group levels. The same applies to vertical alignment of work support and attainment of work consonance.

Tenet 3: Synergistic Alignment

3. Achieve synergistic alignment between the layers of work by linking the work behavior, as the foundation, to the defined work standards, building a healthy organization through work support, and assuring human consonance to minimize work noise.

As depicted in Figure 10.9, perhaps the least attended to aspect of performance alignment is that which needs to exist between the four layers of work: behavior, standards, support, and human consonance. Vertical and horizontal alignment occur within each level and its layer of performance. Synergistic alignment occurs between the layers. Both vertical and horizontal alignment were relatively easy to see on paper, whereas synergistic alignment is a bit more complex because it involves several layers of work.

Managers and supervisors typically worry about and are suppose to achieve horizontal alignment. They are to define and get the work done. By contrast, executives are suppose to achieve and worry about vertical alignment: What will the business be, how will work be done, by whom, and how organized. But who attends to the synergistic alignment in the company? It certainly should be to some degree a responsibility of executives and it should be a responsibility of managers and supervisors. Probably what is really needed is an individual to make sure synergy is being attended to. This is a perfect role for a performance consultant who is charged with looking across, up, and down, and from one layer to the next of business. Perhaps a new role could be created: the "chief performance officer" of a business. The need for continuous attention to alignment in the business and who will facilitate it is not to be answered here, but raises an important issue for the executive management of any business.

The need for synergistic alignment is often found when comments such as the following are heard:

- "They say mission and vision are important, but you wouldn't know it around here! I can't see it at our level!"
- "It may be a self-directed work team approach we have around here, but the vice president of operations keeps changing the decisions we make as a team!"
- "He may be a great vice president for meeting the profit target in our group, but he is sure a pain to the rest of us who have to work with him, let alone the problems he causes for other divisions."

- "We'd be able to get our process done more efficiently if we just had some computers with the latest software."
- "Standards to that group's work? You've got to be kidding!"

Synergistic alignment calls for a concerted effort to define performance in the proper order, as it has been presented in this book—from work behavior to work standards to work support and establishing human consonance. Furthermore, it requires that the vertical and horizontal alignment of work behavior be established first, and then serve as the anchors for layering in horizontal and vertical alignment within work standards, support, and consonance.

Achieving synergistic alignment further requires that the aforementioned steps be done by using a common model of performance, such as the proforma of the Language of Work model. Without a common performance view, there is no way performance can be equated or aligned within levels and from one layer to another. By analogy, building an organization without attention to alignment is similar to purchasing different computer platforms that cannot exchange data and work together for the common good of the business. To achieve synergistic alignment there has to be a way to connect the layers of performance systematically. The Language of Work proforma is one such way.

As an example of synergistic alignment, when we examined the drawing behavior of the business case engineering example, we saw how the appropriate standards in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost were layered to the core process of engineering designs. Then, the appropriate support was identified so that the drawings and their standards had the greatest likelihood of being achieved. To further ensure this, the human element was carefully looked at to make sure that positive executive, manager, and worker relations existed to complete the designs to reach the desired consequences. This is synergistic alignment of the core process layer, and the same type of alignment would have to be done for the other three performance layers of a business.

The Difficulty of Achieving Performance Alignment

On the one hand, performance is a rather simple thing to define. On the other hand, not everyone has the same perspective of what work is. There is no common work language—and to complicate matters, there is often much emotion involved in just talking about work, before even attempting to reach a basic shared understanding and to resolve the needs of business. One answer involves how we prepare managers and workers to achieve alignment and performance improvement.

In business, we typically devote a great deal of energy to seeing that managers receive the kind of training they need to understand and manage their businesses. However, little of this training teaches how to define, measure, implement, and improve performance itself. Training and education deal with financing, planning, presenting, managing, and communicating. Organizations might well consider putting managers and employees together in training to define, measure, improve, and understand their own performance, with their own work groups. When trained separately, each can blame the other for what they believe the problems are. Training managers with their intact work groups allows them to work through the issues of performance to common understanding for their own well-being in the business and with other groups. With a common model of work and a common work language, this understanding of performance can be achieved quickly.

If managers and workers had a solid foundation in performance improvement, the business would then do well to have a performance consultant who could facilitate and work with executives, managers, and the workforce to achieve optimal performance. He or she could serve as a teacher of performance for intact work groups, a facilitator of

work definition and solutions, and a coach and counselor when needed. Such a person could work across the entire business, seeking performance alignment for the entire business.

Perhaps the most optimistic aspect of alignment is that it can begin today in any business. It does not initially require analyzing, defining, and implementing every work map or job model and installing or implementing every intervention suggested in this book. Each person can start by defining their own job first and making sure you understand your relationship (alignment) to other individuals, your own work group, your customers, and your suppliers. Similarly, managers can see that their groups are aligned in a common work and team effort; managers can use facilitation to lead the work group effort. Executives can see that the "business drivers" are aligned and have in their organization a performance consultant who will help address work behavior, standards, support, and human consonance. Executives also can initiate efforts at alignment by conducting an organizational scan of work support and developing strategic efforts to further develop the support needs of a healthy organization. The interventions (Langdon, Whiteside, & McKenna, 1999) embodied in work support and needed for work improvement can be attended to on a continuous basis, and with the increasing effectiveness that would result, it could reassure employees that their company wants to be the very best.

Finally, if performance improvement and alignment are to be achieved, a common way of perceiving, defining, developing, measuring, and improving work must be understood and used. This is particularly crucial for the understanding of performance, not only within the workforce, but between the workforce and the performance consultant. Otherwise performance alignment is a nice concept but will never become a reality. Now you can use the Language of Work model to help businesses achieve understanding of and alignment of their performance.

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