

## EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LOCUS OF CONTROL IN THE LAND ADMINISTRATION DELIVERY SERVICE

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### Article history

**Received date** : 21-9-2023  
**Revised date** : 22-9-2023  
**Accepted date** : 9-11-2023  
**Published date** : 15-12-2023

### To cite this document:

Mohammad Anuar, F. N., Ishak, N. A., & Mat Ali, N. A. (2023). Exploring the role of locus of control in the land administration delivery service. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 8 (59), 46 – 56.

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**Abstract:** *Throughout the years, Malaysian land administration has been associated with a negative image for being slow and underperforming. To satisfy consumer demands, the land administration determined to improve the quality of land services. This article seeks to explore the role of locus of control in the land administration departments in Kedah. The methodology employed in this study is a combination of in-depth interviews and an online survey; or mixed methods. This study comprised 248 participants from the land administration departments in Kedah. In summary, the quantitative findings indicate that the majority of public servants have an external locus of control. The qualitative findings highlight five themes: (1) Decision-making, (2) Colleague Influence, (3) Training and Course, (4) Workload Issues, and (5) Reward and Promotion. In a nutshell, the role of locus of control among government employees in land administration departments is of the utmost importance to offer appropriate guidance for the implementation of courses or training designed to expand locus of control.*

**Keywords:** *Locus of Control, Land Administration, Delivery Service*

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### Introduction

Land administration departments are one of the most important government sectors in Malaysia, which contributed significantly to economic growth. Land administration involves many different processes and procedures, such as ensuring security of tenure, managing and administering State Land, regulating land use and development through planning schemes, developing land policy through legislative instruments, and providing public access to land administration information (Ismail, 2023). In today's society, the government sectors place a high priority on customer satisfaction. As indicated by Zulkeflee, Nawanir and Abdul Ghani (2023), the government sectors need to evaluate service quality in order to meet customer satisfaction. According to a study by Zulkeflee, Nawanir, and Abdul Ghani (2023), providing effective public services depends in large part on customer satisfaction. Likewise, land administration departments are also under pressure to improve the quality of land services in order to meet consumer needs and satisfaction. At this point, it is the duty of public employees working in the land administration departments to further improve the standard of service. This study illustrates how psychological theories such as locus of control affects public employee's

locus of control whilst delivering services to the public. The district land offices are deemed to be the most appropriate venue for the study in order to better understand the land administration delivery system and to investigate the role of locus of control in land administration departments. The structure of land administration in Malaysia is defined in Article 91 of the Federal Constitution and is further explained in the 9th Schedule of the Federal Constitution. The Ministry of Water, Land, and Natural Resources (KATS) has highest authority over the land management system at the federal level, though district land offices exercise the lowest authority (MTCP, 2018). According Singaravelloo (2023), the district office is the level of government closest to society, and the staff have more direct experiences engaging with the public. Sustainable advancement in the provision of land administration services is necessary to maintain the public's confidence in government services. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the role of LOC in the district land offices, especially in terms of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of land service delivery.

### Literature Review

To begin with, according to Khan et al. (2023), locus of control (LOC) significantly affects organizational success especially the internal LOC. Based on this assertion, the author believes that the study of LOC is crucial to the success of an organization. The term LOC, is defined as a person's "internal or external source of drive and motivation, recognized as an influential element on people" (Sasongko, Widami, & Bawono, 2020). The LOC concept was first proposed by Jullian B. Rotter in 1954, and the definition classifies LOC into internal and external categories. Employees are affected differently by internal and external LOC. Employees that possess an internal LOC for example, believe that hard work can lead to achievement in their work and accept greater responsibility for their success or failure (Zain, Murwani & Churiyah, 2023). Besides, employees with internal LOC are more assured in their abilities to complete tasks and assume responsibility for their achievement in life. They also believe that they have complete control over their lives and everything that happens to them. Employees with an external LOC, on the other hand, demonstrated improper behavior and perform their work inefficiently (Supriadi, 2023). The ability of the land administrators to make a decision became the most important indicator that determined locus of control. Since land services must adhere to the standards of procedure as stipulated in the National Land Code (NCLL) 1965, almost all of land services required careful decision-making on the procedure and processes. Ironically, there was often intervention from other parties for the land administrators to carry out their tasks autonomously, notably from political parties. According to Satar (2020), the author of the article entitled "*Make civil service great again,*" political involvement in the duties of government employees have contributed to a dramatic fall in the reputation and efficiency of the civil service. Political group involvement consequently demonstrated to have an impact on service quality and highlighted concerns about LOC's vulnerability to external pressure on decision-making. After all, employees with internal locus of control are preferred in government sectors. LOC is also regarded as a personality attribute that represents everyone's confidence in their capacity to determine their own path in life (Sasongko, Widami, & Bawono, 2020). Employees should have greater internal LOC for success at work. Internal employees have a greater sense of self and stop blaming their "fortune" or other people for their career decisions.

Aside from that, as Kholik (2018) pointed out, the LOC can be changed. Employees who currently have an external LOC, for example, can change to an internal LOC. The LOC is determined by the approach employed by the leaders of the organization or departmental heads. For all the public servants affiliating with land administration departments, it is the head

department's obligation to organize and carry out all indoor and outdoor training and course. In accordance with the research done by Sasongko, Widami, and Bawono (2020), workplace training is beneficial for employees with high internals. Internal employees are more likely than external employees to use the training they get at work. The study performed by Sasongko, Widami, and Bawono (2020) suggested that employees undergo organizational training to ensure high-quality service. Furthermore, employees within the organization may acquire training course materials that are going to help them in advancing their careers. Public employees are regularly enrolled in courses at *Institut Tanah dan Ukur Negara* (INSTUN), located in Behrang, Perak, that are relevant to the discipline of work (INSTUN, 2021). INSTUN offers a variety of courses, and staff members can select courses that are relevant to their professional duties.

With regard to the land administrators authorized by Section 12 (NLCC), it is important to acknowledge that LOC is being researched to provide them with adequate training. The author accepts the necessity of land topic training for public employees' gazettes under Section 12 NLC 1965 in order to improve knowledge of the subject and reduce the likelihood of negligence. In Malaysia, public employees are currently categorized into three major groups: the Premier Group, the Professional and Managerial Group, and the Support Staff (1 & 2) (Haque, Wong, and Ko, 2023). More specifically, in addition to the vast majority of the lowest-ranking public employees, there is a support group that assists the other two groups with administrative duties, clerical, and technical duties (Haque, Wong, and Ko, 2023). The support group is the most significant group for research in land administration departments since public employees belong to this group and are the closest to the customer because they are on the front line. The support group represents the 'image' of land offices and is involved in practically all land services. In fact, the manner in which they engage with consumers; their facial expressions, as well as the manner in which they talk and deliver services, become controversial topics among customers who deal with land offices. As a result, this study focused more on the requirement of this group to assure the effectiveness and efficiency of land service delivery.

In the meantime, another significant employees' group in the land administration department is the land administrators who carried out their assigned duties under Section 12 (NLC). Land administrators are often from the Professional and Managerial group. Under Section 12 (2) of the NLC 1965 (Laws of Malaysia, 2020), land administrators have been designated by the State Authority to carry out the functions and satisfy the requirements imposed by this Act. As a result, in order to carry out their obligations under the code, land officers and assistant land officers must have a thorough comprehension of the NLC 1965. The State Authority appoints all land officers and assistant land officers in accordance with Section 12 of the NLC 1965. In a similar clause, Section 2 (5) of the NLC 1965, the code declared that.

*(5) Subject to the provisions of sub-section (3), in every district in which there may be one or more Assistant Land officers in addition to a Land officer, every Assistant Land officer shall exercise the powers and perform the duties conferred or imposed upon him by or under this Act in conformity with the directions of the Land officer.*

Following that, each district has one or more Assistant Land Administrators to assist the Land Administrator. Both the land administrator and their assistants have equal degrees of power and accountability. Land administrators must therefore fully grasp each section of the NLC before making any decisions under this provision. According to the provision, it is the primary responsibility of the state government to ensure that the employees working in the land

administration department are completely educated of all applicable rules and regulations in order to avoid making thoughtless decisions. Due to the numerous cases of incompetence by land administrators, the government was forced to spend an enormous amount of money in the legal process. Consequently, the training and courses related to land matters not only assist to the improvement of land administrators and support staff members, but also to expand the LOC among the public employees affiliated to the land administration departments.

Based on prior research, the LOC is one of numerous characteristics that influence employee performance (Nasution, Sembiring, & Harahap, 2021). To be more specific, the LOC appears to have an impact on how well employees perform. As shown in a study by (Sari & Krisna, 2021), when employees have self-control, their performance improves when they expand their LOC. The findings suggested that one of the critical aspects that contributed to a significant improvement in employee performance is locus of control. Both an internal and external LOC may have an impact on performance at work. Employees with high external LOC are more likely to feel stressed out at work and to anticipate quitting; as well, the stressful work environment lowers their productivity and achievements (Supriadi, 2023). Employees with high internals, on the other hand, may be able to manage difficult circumstances more successfully and accomplish outstanding achievement and work performance. Dealing with the public is undeniably a difficult scenario for public employees. In many cases, the public holds the front-line officers accountable.

Additionally, LOC have a major impact on organizational commitment, work happiness, job performance, turnover intention, and dysfunctional audit behavior (Achyar & Musnadi, 2020). Simultaneously, in the research of (Achyar & Musnadi, 2020), there are five (5) LOC variables which are *success is the result of hard work, opportunity to improve self-quality, find solutions to every problem, think efficiently and also, think that success is worth the effort*. All of these variables described LOC are essential for this study, especially while collecting and analyzing data, because they give the researcher with guidance on the qualities or attributes required for an employee to internalize the LOC. In addition, the indicators for evaluation framework to determine the effectiveness of land administration system in general are produced by Doing Business from World Bank (2016).

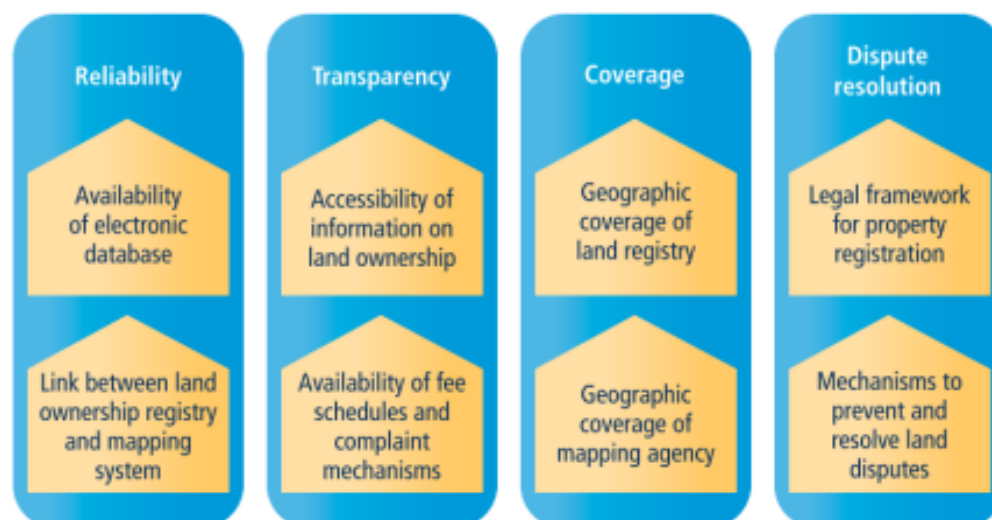


Figure 1: Doing Business assessment framework, adapted from World Bank (2016)

According to the Figure 1, "dispute resolution" is one of the metrics used to gauge the effectiveness of the land administration system. In terms of the LOC study, the indicator of conflict resolution is comparable to the two LOC variables, which are, think quickly and find answers to all problems (Achyar & Musnadi, 2020). These two factors are crucial for land administrators to have internal LOC and provide effective service in accordance with the global standards of the World Bank. Additionally, each of these World Bank measures is linked to the land administrators' ability to provide services and to uphold the public's confidence in the government employees. To ensure the effectiveness of the land administration system, all land administrators should adopt these positive traits in their work.

Customer satisfaction is one of the critical success factors in service delivery performance (Zulkeflee, Nawadir, and Abdul Ghani (2023). Customer satisfaction is crucial to an organization's or firm's ongoing performance, according to Zainali et al. (2023), particularly when it comes to resolve consumer complaints at the SP Municipal Council in Malaysia. In a similar vein, consumer complaints concerning the caliber of land services were also received by the land administration departments. Customers have expectations of the services provided by public employees in terms of delivery service because public sectors provide services rather than goods. Therefore, the length of time required by public employees to complete each land application is considered in the context of land administration departments as a gauge of job performance and the quality of service delivered. The dealing with land is going to begin immediately whenever the processing of the land application takes a short time; either through a land transaction or development processes. Instead of having to wait for years, the customer is able to enjoy their property and land rights. One of the performance indicators for every government employee (land administrators and support staff) assigned to land administration departments is the ability of customers to exercise their land rights. In light of this, it is advisable to employ internal public employees to ensure that customers have access to effective land services. Internal employees will certainly exert more effort to carry out assigned duties compared to external employees.

## **Methodology**

The objective of this article is to examine the locus of control's role in the delivery system for land administration. To investigate the impact of an individual's locus of control on public servants who serve in the land administration, a qualitative study approach was employed. This article focuses on the Kedah state government's service system for land administration departments. The online survey was completed by a total of 248 participants who worked at different Kedah district land offices. This approach was adopted to make it easier for participants to respond at any time or location. The survey questionnaires are meant to assess employees' present locus of control using a 5-likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree to 5-Strongly Agree) (Creswell, 2014). The survey findings were entered into the SPSS program for further analysis. For the qualitative method, this study included 15 respondents from the total number of participants (N:248) who took part in the in-depth interview session. Prior to the interviews, the questionnaires were examined by eight (8) experts from various Malaysian institutions to ensure the data's reliability. The qualitative data collected was then analyzed using the NVIVO 12 program to identify repeating codes and themes (Brooks & King, 2012).

## **Location of Research**

This article focusses on land administration delivery system particularly in Kedah state government. The selection is due to the impressive achievement of land administrators as well as

public servants attached in land administration departments to attract investors, not only domestic investors but also international investors. For example, the collaboration between Widad Business Group Sdn Bhd (WBG) and Bin Zayed International LLC (BZI) to jointly undertake an RM40bil mixed development on 2,000 acres known as Widad@Langkasuka in Langkawi (The Star, 2021). Acknowledging this impressive achievement, the authors attempt to investigate the role of LOC within the working group of public servants in the Kedah land district offices. The research of LOC is necessary to determine the best intervention or mechanism to improve the quality of land services.

## Result

### Quantitative Data Findings

The Demographic Profile (N: 248) of participants in land administration departments is depicted in Table 1 based on survey data analysis. The Demographic Profile encompasses all of the information on the participants, notably "Gender", "Age", "Education", and "Duration of Service".

**Table 1: Demographic Profile (N: 348)**

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Female	154	62.1%
Male	94	37.9%
<b>Age</b>		
20-30 years old	57	23.0%
31-40 years old	114	46.0%
41-50 years old	52	21.0%
51- 60 years old	25	10.0%
<b>Education</b>		
PMR	17	6.9%
SPM	47	19.0%
Diploma	84	33.9%
Degree	72	29.0%
Postgraduate	27	10.9%
Doctoral Postgraduate	1	0.4%
<b>Duration of Service</b>		
Less than a year	15	6.0%
1-3 years	45	18.1%
3-5 years	30	12.1%
More than 5 years	158	63.7%

The analysis of the Demographic Profile of the participants from the land administration departments is presented in Table 1. The data indicated Frequency (N) and Percentage (%). First and foremost, the analysis of participant gender. In total, there were (N:154) female participants (62.1%) and (N:94) male participants (37.9%). Employee women make up the majority of participants as a result. The age of the participants in this study is the subject of the second analysis. There were (N: 57) participants aged 20-30 years (23.0%), (N:114) participants aged 31-40 years (46%), (N:52) participants aged 41-50 years, and (N:25) participants aged 51-60 years (10.0%). This clearly reveals that a majority of participants (N:114) were between the ages of 31 and 40, with (46%) comprising over half of the total participants. With (N:25) participation the participants aged 51-60 years old constitute the lowest age group (10.0%). The following demographic profile analysis focuses on the educational background of participants. In total, there were 17 PMR (Penilaian Menengah

Rendah) qualified participants (6.9%), (N:47) SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) qualified participants (19.0%), (N: 84) Diploma qualified participants (33.9%), (N:72) Degree qualified participants (29.0%), (N: 27) Postgraduate qualified participants (10.9%), and 1 Doctoral Postgraduate qualified participant (0.4%). With 84 participants (29.0%), this number shows that the majority of participants from land administration departments hold a diploma, whereas there was only (N:1) participant with a doctoral postgraduate degree (0.4%). The final study emphasized on the participants' duration of service. There were (N:15) participants who worked for less than a year (6.0%), (N: 45) for 1-3 years (12.1%), (N:30) for 3-5 years (12.1%), and (N:158) for more than 5 years (63.7%). The greatest proportion of participants worked for more than 5 years, with (N:158) participants (63.7%); and the lowest proportion reported, with just 15 participants (6.0%), worked for less than a year.

As a result of the survey, Table 2 below shows the descriptive statistics for the locus control level among participants in the land administration departments.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Locus of Control' Level**

Level	Frequency (N)	Per Cent (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall participants	External	193	77.8%	4.06
	Internal	55	22.2%	

The level of locus of control among employees in land administration departments is shown in Table 2. The frequency (N), percentage (%), mean, and standard deviation are all shown in the table. The level was divided into two categories: low (scores 1.00 to 3.50) and high (scores 3.51 to 6.00). In accordance to the overall descriptive analysis, the majority of participants showed external locus of control because they were most frequently classified as "External" (N = 193, 77.8%) individuals and because their overall mean was 4.06 (Range = 3.51 to 6.00). In an effort to improve the service quality, the author consequently concentrated more on approaches to internalize the LOC based on the analysis of the findings.

### Qualitative Data Findings

The analysis of interview data was presented in this paragraph, and various themes emerged. Referring to the overall findings in the quantitative data, the qualitative data additionally reveals that most participants generate assertions that are more directed at external LOC. The themes that were brought up most frequently by the participants during the session are illustrated in the paragraphs that follow. These themes are "*Decision-making*," "*Colleague Influence*," "*Training and Courses*," "*Workload Issue*," and "*Reward and Promotion*."

#### i. Decision-making

This theme alludes to the external control pressure experienced while making decisions. The challenges faced by participants are depicted below;

*“Conducting an enforcement at the unlawful quarry site is a difficult task for me. I may receive a phone call or letter from someone in authority asking me to stop or postpone enforcement. ...”*

*“As the assistant of land administrator, we are required to conduct enforcement under the National Land Code 1965's Sections 425 (Unlawful occupation, etc., of State Land, Reserved Land, or Mining Land) and 426 (Unlawful extraction or removal of Rock Material) under the NLC 1965 (Laws of Malaysia, 2020). Most of the time, we must endure political intervention...”*

## **ii. Colleague Influence**

This theme alludes to the influence of colleagues in the workplace. The social support of a colleague encourages career development and personality enrichment to work hard in completing the assigned responsibilities. The influence of colleague is depicted below;

*“I knew nothing about land law or procedures when I first arrived at the land offices. However, my colleagues are very accommodating...”*

*“My colleague who sits next to me has been with this organization for nearly 20 years. He constantly walks me through the procedures. I believe that with the guidance of a senior colleague, a person can be successful in their professional development and delivering services...”*

## **iii. Training and Course**

This theme relates to the requirement for trainings and courses in ways that internalize LOC. The career training is proven to be essential for transforming external employees to internal employees. But few respondents actually take the initiative to go to training. The following statements are made:

*“The course frequently needed me to stay at INSTUN for a minimum of three days and up to one week. No one can look after my children...”*

*“I won't be able to attend the course because we don't have enough employees to entertain customers at the counter. ...”*

*“I don't have time to attend the course because I have a lot of paperwork (land application) to finish...”*

## **iv. Workload Issue**

This theme pertains to the issue of workload encountered by some of the interview participants. The participants were overburdened with work. The challenges faced by participants are depicted below

*“I have a lot of files to complete and must also cover the counter at the same time. I don't have time...”*

*“Sometimes I have to come in the weekend to finish the work that I can't handle during business hours....”*



*“The most stressful situation for me is when I have to accomplish a task on short notice, and I can't say no to my superior...”*

**v. “Reward and Promotion”**

This theme is about reward and promotion in land administration departments. The responses are as follows:

*“My boss or superior never sees me. So, it's pointless for me to put forth effort or even work hard. ...”*

*“I only have a diploma. The majority of my colleagues have advanced degrees. Promotion is out of the question for me...”*

*“I am not confident enough to attend the interview for grade promotion. Many people told me that the questions were challenging...”*

Based on the assertions above, the majority of participants are externals, with only a few of them having an internal LOC. A few participants, for example, indicate internal LOC with the establishment of the "Colleague Influence" theme. However, most respondents exhibit external LOC from the themes emerging such as; 'Decision-making', 'Workload Issue', 'Training and Course' and 'Reward and Promotion'.

### **Discussion**

In summary, the survey outcomes suggest that the majority of participants portray external LOC. Meanwhile, data from in depth interview suggest similar outcome with the emergence of themes related “decision-making”, “colleague influence”, “workload issue”, “training and course” and “reward and promotion”. Nonetheless, based on an extensive review of previous studies on LOC, external employees can be transformed into internal employees (Kholik, 2018). As one of the most important government sectors, land administration departments needed employees with internal LOC that would offer them greater initiative and desire for success at work. According to the research's findings conducted through interviews, only a small percentage of participants exhibit internal LOC with the establishment of "Colleague Influence." Colleagues impact them positively at work in terms of career accomplishment and knowledge exchange in the delivery of land services. In the study conducted by Khan et al. (2023), internal employees are more ambitious and put in more effort than external employees. At this point, the involvement of colleagues, particularly those who are willing to help the newcomer by imparting information and offering appropriate guidance about land matters, may enable them to expand the LOC.

The aggregate data, on the other hand, show that the majority of the participants have external LOC. The National Land Code 1965 governs land services, with each part and provision presenting details on land policy and procedures. Ironically, one of the major challenges faced by land administrators was their inability to make autonomous decisions, particularly when it came to enforcing Sections 425 and 426 (NLC 1965) (Laws of Malaysia, 2020). According to Akca, Ulutas, and Yabancı (2018), externals are driven by "What do others say?" in this case, land administrators face an impediment of carrying out their assigned tasks in accordance with land legislation due to the intervention or involvement of third parties. Giving public employees the freedom to work autonomously will increase public trust in them and will help them preserve land rights in particular. Then, participants mentioned the "Workload Issue," in which

they expressed feeling overwhelmed by their workload and desire to surrender. Kholik (2018) lists 'easy surrender' as one of the external LOC characteristics. Not only that, yet when questioned about 'Training and Course,' participants exhibit a lack of initiative. Public employees now have access to a wide range of online courses and in-house training which they may attend anytime they want. Therefore, they appeared to have no justification for disregarding the training relevant to their job scope. Last but not least, "Reward and Promotion" emerged as the final theme during the interview method. Some of the participants put in less effort to achieve work success because they do not believe they are responsible for their own achievement and have no control over their lives. The truth is that people that work hard and put up a lot of effort are the ones who succeed in work. The mixed method techniques, after all, offer rich details, whereas quantitative data typically show a trend or a percentage of LOC. While delivering the services, the viewpoints of participants or actual feelings are revealed through the qualitative data.

### Conclusion

Public servants' career growth may benefit greatly from the study of locus of control in land administration departments. Literature provides evidence that internal employees have more initiative and effort to succeed in their careers than external employees. Most significantly, the information gathered during the study offers the government and the head department in the land offices new insights for mapping out appropriate trainings and courses that may enhance the expertise of public servants in the land administration departments. As previously stated, an individual's LOC can be altered through appropriate courses and training. Attending a counselling session or consultation may also assist employees to expand their LOC. For future research, the role of locus of control should be investigated in relation to other psychological theories imbedded in the workplace setting, and public servants from several different government sectors could potentially be included

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