

**ROLE OF THE TRAINING IN CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATION
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENTS-SPECIFICS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA¹**

Jasminka Jakimovska

Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia
jjakimovska@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The rapid technological development, greater scope of operations and law application on one hand and the need for quick response in providing services to the business community, on the other, aimed at achieving the fiscal element of the flow of goods for both import or for export, but also due to the greater need for realization of various procedures, primarily for the purpose of observing the Customs Administration's protective function, has imposed the need for careful selection and effective development of the human resources. Hence, the Customs Administration defines continuous learning as key factor for improvement of the effectiveness of the customs service to achieve the set goals. With continuous and well-thought-out education, the customs officers can develop their skills and knowledge, which will contribute to increasing their personal competencies that will enhance the quality of their performance, regardless of the level of career development they are in. This way, their motivation for further development and improvement will grow, ensuring achievement of results at work on daily basis, as well as personal satisfaction in general. The author of this paper will make an analysis showing that the success of training in the professional development of the employees of the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia depends on how the training needs of the employees were identified, the type of training attended by the employees and, who delivers them.

KEY WORDS: customs, training, continuous learning, skills and knowledge

¹Review article

INTRODUCTION

Despite all the technological advancements in the 21st century, the knowledge that people possess, their individuality, habits and behavior, as well as their motivation and satisfaction, are the focus of human resources management worldwide. Given the current trends, especially the global interrelations in the exchange of goods and information, arising from the very nature of the work performed by the Customs Administration, the management of the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia (hereinafter: the Customs Administration) has adopted the concept of knowledge management as a way of enabling better and more effective professional performance and providing genuine professional development of the personnel it possesses.

Our everyday experience shows that an organization is as worth as much as its employees are because their knowledge represents the IQ of that organization. This is why organizations increasingly tend to pay great attention on their personnel's training. However, it does not suffice for people with a university degree to be hired and for only one training course to be held for the employees. Given that the economy requires flexibility and readiness for constant changes, this also entails constant investment in the organization in terms of training its employees in order to develop their professional skills².

It is for these reasons that the Customs Administration is now building a system to define the need for training courses, starting with the training of the newly-employed officers, increasing the knowledge of the existing employees, all the way to providing them with skills, knowledge and competencies for future jobs, as well as enabling the professional advancement of the employees in order to provide them with the opportunity to acquire wider knowledge in different areas within the organizational unit in which they work so as to be motivated to improve their performance and increase their promotion prospects, thereby creating loyalty toward the organization.

²(Boljanovic-Dzordzevic, J., 2013, 142)

The employees' training is of special importance in terms of human resources management and it is a factor that contributes to the professional development of the employees at the Customs Administration. The success of the training depends on the way in which the employees' training needs are identified, the types of the training courses that the personnel attend and the realization of the same.

Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia -- Structure and Hierarchy

The Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia is an independent state authority that acts in the capacity of a legal entity under the Customs Administration Law adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia. There are currently 1,110 employees at the Customs Administration, working in nine sectors, four independent departments and five regional customs offices: Customs Office Skopje, Customs Office Kumanovo, Customs Office Shtip, Customs Office Bitola and Customs Office Gevgelija. Within the customs offices, there are 18 border and 25 internal customs checkpoints and five services that supervise certificate holders. They all differ in size and scope of work.

As for the educational background of the employees, in the Customs Administration there are two employees who hold a PhD degree, 41 employees with an MA degree, 637 employees with higher education, 17 with a college degree, 393 with a high-school degree and 24 with a different kind of education. This means that, according to the data of the Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2017, 61% of the customs officers are with higher education. According to the demographic features there are 331, or 29.82%, female customs officers and 779, or 70.18%, male customs officers.³

In compliance with its jurisdiction, the Customs Administration primarily safeguards the financial interests of the country and the people's health and life, but it also sees to the enactment of the economic policies of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia by retaining and promoting a specific economic

³Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2017/ www.customs.gov.mk accessed on 18.04.2018

atmosphere and constantly implementing and proposing measures to facilitate trade and transport.

The Customs Administration works incessantly on improving and promoting its organizational structure and way of work in all areas of customs work for the purpose of improving its efficiency and effectiveness. Therefore, the Customs Administration carries out a number of activities to advance the human resources management system, improve its administrative capacity and increase transparency in its work.⁴

Ever since the establishment of the independent Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia on 14 April 1992, a number of internal Rulebooks have been adopted that stipulate the hierarchy in the administration and improve the functionality of the organization, while heeding the professional development of the customs officers in terms of the current trends for the purpose of improving their professional accomplishments in compliance with the obligations arising from the reforms that the country is implementing as an EU candidate state. The strategic plans of the Customs Administration clearly point to the objective of using a good training program to provide professional, educated and efficient personnel who will obtain broad knowledge and skills related to their professional duties, given that the Customs Administration works on a number of activities.

In terms of this strategic hierarchy of the Customs Administration, the Training Department became an integral part of the newly-formed Human Resources Sector in March 2004. This department is aimed at defining the needs for training, as well as planning, organizing, registering and evaluating the training courses. It also hires trainers, both foreign and national trainers, that is, customs officers who provide professional training courses on customs work during the basic training of the newly-employed customs officers, as well as purposeful/specialized training courses to upgrade and advance the customs officers' general knowledge.

⁴(Sekulovski... and others. 2012 .3)

Strategy, Planning and Implementation of Training Courses at the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia

The projections regarding the training for the newly-employed customs officers and the training courses aimed at upgrading the customs officers' knowledge have always been made at the Customs Administration, that is, at the Human Resources Sector. However, the Training Program of the Customs Administration that incorporates the subject matters of the training, the types of training courses and trainers and defines the target groups was first made in 2009.

The first Strategy on Training and Professional Upgrade of Customs Officers 2011-2013 was made in January 2011, while the next Strategy on Training and Professional Upgrade of Customs Officers 2013-2015 was adopted in February 2013. The Strategy on Training and Professional Upgrade of Customs Officers 2014-2016 was adopted in 2014, the Strategy on Training and Professional Upgrade of Customs Officers 2016-2018 was prepared in March 2016, while the Strategy on Training and Professional Upgrade of Customs Officers 2018-2020 was prepared in October 2017.

On the basis of the training strategies, plans and programs, Annual Reports are prepared at the end of every year and they summarize the activities carried out by the Customs Administration. These reports contain the number of training courses held, the type of training courses, their purpose and the number of trainees. The reports also note that the achieved results in the various areas of customs work are regarded as an outcome of the conducted training.

Determining Need for Training at the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia

If we regard training as the basic instrument required to improve individual performance and the performance of the organization in general, training planning has been deepened and improved with the "Guidelines on Specifying Training" adopted by the Customs Administration director in December 2012, the Guidelines on Planning, Organizing, Conducting and Evaluating Training of the Customs Administration director in July 2013 and the Guidelines on Planning, Organizing, Conducting and Evaluating Training of the Customs Administration director in February 2016. The purpose of these guidelines is to

determine on time the need for training in compliance with the Customs Administration authorities and work processes and in order to help the managers define what kind of training the employees in their organizational units need to improve their performance.

The managers of the organizational units determine the need for training with a detailed analysis, during which they are able to use three types of intertwined analyses, such as:

1. Organizational analysis
2. Job duties analysis
3. Analysis of customs officers' performance

The organizational analysis is used to determine the need for training on the basis of the already defined strategic goals and priorities in the Annual Plans of the Customs Administration (for example, new organizational structure, personnel shifts, introduction of new IT systems, amendment of the execution standards and the like).

The job duties analysis implies gathering data on a certain job or a group of jobs. This analysis should determine the knowledge, skills and positions required to successfully perform the relevant job duties. In compliance with the relevant guidelines, it is the manager who should determine the job duties, the way in which they should be performed and the skills that the employees should have to perform the respective job duties successfully. During the job duties analysis for the purpose of defining the training, the managers can use the job descriptions in the job systematization of the Customs Administration, make a job risk assessment, review the obligations arising from the internal instructions and procedures, interview the employees who are working at a particular position to specify what kind of training they need and the like.

The analysis of the customs officers' performance is aimed at assessing their performance compared to the way in which their duties should be fulfilled. For this analysis, the managers could compare the ways in which all the employees perform their duties, thereby detecting the weaknesses that could be improved through training. Furthermore, this analysis can be made by monitoring and controlling the work of the employees at one position or a group of positions, as

well as test the knowledge and skills required to fulfill the job duties in a certain position.

On the basis of these analyses, the managers can make a realistic evaluation of the required training and define the priorities in organizing and conducting a training at the Customs Administration. During the evaluation, the managers should also take into account the following indicators:

- Legal amendments;
- New work procedure;
- New work practices;
- New strategic goals and activities of the organization;
- Reassignment of employees to another job with a different job description than the previous one;
- New rules and responsibilities of the existing job;
- Conclusions reached in the evaluation report;
- Public complaints and requests from the business community;
- Frequent mistakes in performing certain job duties, and so forth.

The methods and techniques used to collect data to define the actual need of training are:

- Interviews
- Questionnaires or polls
- Group discussions
- Job descriptions
- Analysis of previous performance
- Written records
- Monitoring
- Consultations
- Tests
- Registers and reports

Once the analysis is made, the organizational units managers have to fill in a form for the required training, which they should then submit to the Training Department of the Human Resources Sector. The Training Department will afterwards draft the training program on the basis of the submitted forms.

Types of Training at the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia

According to the Catalogue of Training for Professional Advancement of the Customs Officers, the training courses can be classified in the following way:

1. **Training on basic customs authorities**, which is aimed at familiarizing the newly-employed customs officers and the customs officers who have acquired a higher position with customs work, so as to be able to perform their duties independently, acquire an acceptable degree of knowledge, skills and conduct at work and to prepare for the professional certification test.
2. **Training on specialized authorities**, which is intended for all the customs officers and is aimed at enabling them to keep track of the regulations so that they could apply them properly and uniformly, the continuous upgrading of the customs officers' knowledge and skills and primarily strengthening the customs officers' integrity.
3. **Training on special powers**, which is intended for the customs officers that occupy positions with special powers aimed at providing the required knowledge, skills and conduct of the customs officers for the purpose of performing their job duties properly given their special authorities.

The job descriptions in the Training Catalogue⁵ greatly help the managers define the training needs. According to the needs expressed by all the organizational units with the Customs Administration, a plan is prepared and it is regularly updated by the Training Department, which is in charge of organizing and delivering the planned training.

⁵ *Catalogue of Training for Professional Advancement of the Customs Officers, Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, December 2016*

Conducted Training Courses at Customs Administration in 2009-2013 and 2014-2017

Ever since the Republic of Macedonia became independent, the Customs Administration has held regular training courses, but apart from the 2014 master's thesis on the topic of "Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia", there have been no other relevant studies to date that would point to the effectiveness and efficiency of the conducted training courses.

According to the available data on the training courses held in 2009-2013 and in 2014-2017, here is the number of the conducted training courses:

Table 1 Training courses in 2009-2013⁶

Year	Number of training courses	Hours per participant	Hours per employee
2009	253	90	24
2010	174	198	28
2011	256	118	31
2012	290	84	20
2013	358	23,67	7,3

Table 2 Training courses in 2014-2017⁷

⁶ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje, 2014, p36

⁷ *Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2014; Annual Report on Performance of Customs Administration in 2015; Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2016 and Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2017*

Year	Number of training courses	Hours per participant	Hours per employee
2014	302	7	18.8
2015	286	7.4	23.5
2016	233	8.56	15.8
2017	188	10.28	12

The aforementioned results, presented as the total number of training courses, incorporate all kinds of activities, such as training courses, seminars, workshops and presentations. Apart from the training held by the trainers employed at the Customs Administration on different fields of customs work, every year foreign customs officers and organizations hold part of the training courses, especially those on special powers. The key partners of the Macedonian Customs Administration are: the US Government, the Tax and Customs Administration of the Kingdom of Netherlands, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, the UK Embassy and the French Embassy. Furthermore, training courses, workshops and seminars on topical customs issues have been organized under the European Commission program dubbed "Customs 2013" and "Customs 2014"⁸⁹. Also, foreign experts working in different customs fields have held the training courses envisioned under the IPA projects and different programs.¹⁰

The results of the master's thesis of author Jasminka Jakimovska¹¹, which covered the period from 2009 until 2013, are still applicable today, because there are no other studies in this field, apart from the registered training courses included in the Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration and the training evaluation forms. The author's purpose was to examine whether

⁸ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje, 2014

⁹ *Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2014; Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2015; Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2016 and Annual Report on the activities of the Customs Administration in 2017*

¹⁰ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje, 2014, pp 37-52

¹¹ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia*, Skopje, 2014

the training courses held at the Customs Administration are properly identified, whether the types of training courses help the professional development of the customs officers and whether the choice of the trainers plays a part in the training, that is, in the transfer of knowledge to the trainees.

Contribution of Training to Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of Republic of Macedonia Depends on Way in Which Training Needs Are Identified

The results obtained from the aforementioned research by answering question 5-13 of the questionnaire¹² suggest that most of the employees at the Customs Administration are familiar with the plan for their professional development in different programs, annual plans and training strategies, which means that the customs officers are primarily informed and then interested in the manner in which their professional development is planned. Namely, the statistical data indicates that a significant part of the employees agree that the Customs Administration has identified successfully the needs for the employees' training. ($\chi^2(df=4)=103.313$, $p < 0.001$).

The results, in which the positive view prevails (80.9%, $N=106$), indicate that the customs officers believe that their immediate superiors know what kind of training they need to upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to fulfill successfully their job duties at their current positions ($\chi^2(df=4) = 91.634$, $p = 0.000$). This result has been verified by the answers of the participants in this research who said that their immediate superiors had chosen the right customs officers for the appropriate training courses ($\chi^2(df=2)=54.702$, $p=0.000$). On the other hand, 75.6%, or 99 employees, said that their immediate superiors did not know what kind of training they needed to develop their knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, these results show that a significantly larger portion of the employees have been selected for a training course that is related to their current job duties (86,3%, $N=113$), while most of the employees have been selected to attend a training that did not refer to their current jobs, but that could apply to another position (69,5%, $N=91$).

¹²Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2014*, p 107

The concerning thing here is that the customs officers have failed to raise an initiative on their own to take part in training courses because the majority of the respondents in this research have showed no interest in being chosen to attend a training course (56,5%, N=74).

On the basis of the aforestated, we could conclude that the contribution of the customs officers' training is bigger if it is related to their current job rather than if the training is intended for another/future job and the job duties that it implies.

Contribution of Training to Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of Republic of Macedonia Depends on Type of Attended Training Courses

The results that have been obtained from the answers to the questions 14-19 of the questionnaire¹³ refer to the hypothesis (2) that the contribution of the training to the professional development of the employees at the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia depends on the type of the attended training courses.

The obtained results suggest that most of the customs officers took the customs certification test. They have a positive view of the training for newly-employed customs officers because it helps them accumulate knowledge of customs issues. Statistically speaking, a significant part of them agree that the program for basic training on customs authorities contributes to developing knowledge of customs-related issues that they need to perform their job duties successfully ($\chi^2(df=4)=100.031$, p 0.000).

As for the claim that the training courses on specialized authorities in the customs area upgrade the customs officers' knowledge required to fulfill their job duties (in terms of origin of goods, tariff issues, value, simplified procedures, advanced use of the MAKCIS system reports and the like), most of the employees (85.5%, or 112 employees) have a positive view on this, too. They believe that the training on specialized authorities provides knowledge

¹³J.Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2014*, p 107

of customs-related issues that is necessary to perform their job successfully and professionally ($\chi^2(df=4)=70.252, p=0.000$).

Regarding the claim that the training on special powers in the customs field contributes to upgrading the knowledge required for the customs officers' work, most of them have answered in the affirmative (80.9%, N=106). The customs officers believe that the training on special authorities helps develop the knowledge of the special powers that customs officers hold (passenger examination techniques, drug detection, use of the electronic procurement system, use of firearms, targeting consignments via risk assessment and so forth) which is required for their successful performance ($\chi^2(df=4) = 119.88, p=0.000$). These training courses upgrade the knowledge of the customs officers who have special powers and work in the control, audit and court testimony organizational units of the Customs Administration.

The Customs Administration employees believe that the best results in terms of expanding their knowledge, skills and conduct can be achieved through interactive training (59.5%, N=78) and workshops, while theoretical training courses, which they regard as being merely formal, are least effective. This is the conclusion reached on the basis of the respondents' comments at the end of the questionnaire. Most of them wrote down that the customs officers preferred interactive training and that this was the best way to upgrade knowledge, develop skills and change habits, which is the purpose of every training.¹⁴

All of the aforementioned statements confirm the postulate that the professional advancement of the employees at the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia depends on the type of the attended training courses, too.¹⁵

Contribution of Training to Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of Republic of Macedonia Depends on Trainers

The results regarding the hypothesis (3) that the contribution of the training to the professional development of the employees at the Customs Administration of

¹⁴ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2014, pp 99-100*

¹⁵ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2014, p 103*

the Republic of Macedonia depends on the trainers indicate that the choice of trainers does matter. Of the respondents, 51.2% (N=84, or 64.1% of the total number of answers) approved of the claim that the training held by trainers employed at the Customs Administration helped them acquire new knowledge, skills and ways of behavior. The result of the answers to the claim that the training held by external trainers/customs experts helps most of the customs officers acquire greater knowledge, skills and ways of conduct is almost identical (57.6%, N=91, or 71.7% of the total number of answers). A smaller number of the employees answered that the training of external trainers/experts had helped them find a solution to the everyday problems they encounter at work, while only a small number of the employees said that the training courses had not helped them learn anything.

Hence, we may conclude that, when it comes to the professional development of the Customs Administration employees, the trainer is vital. Namely, it is important how the trainer presents the required knowledge, makes the material comprehensible and available and enables discussion on the relevant subject matter, regardless of whether the trainer is a customs employee or comes from another institution or another country.

This means that the aforementioned conclusions confirm the postulate that the contribution of the training to professional development also depends on the trainers.¹⁶

Bearing in mind that the conducted research verified the three separate hypotheses that were tested statistically and for which qualitative answers were given, we can conclude that the basic hypothesis that the training of the employees at the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia is a significant factor for their professional development¹⁷ has been confirmed.

¹⁶ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2014, p 102*

¹⁷ Jakimovska, J., *Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2014, p 102*

CONCLUSION

According to the aforementioned, we may conclude that, since the country gained independence, the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia has carried out a number of changes in terms of its structural order for the purpose of upgrading its organizational structure in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness in the following ways:

- The Human Resources Sector has established the Training Department (2004) whose key task is to define the need for training and to conduct training;
- Strategic plans on the training and professional advancement of the employees, rulebooks, instructions and guidelines have been prepared to determine the need for training, to plan the training and to carry it out;
- Training programs have been made in compliance with the strategic plans with clearly defined topics, types of training, types of trainers and target groups in order to establish a training system that will create trained and professional cadre;
- Practices have been introduced to encourage the customs officers to raise self-initiatives regarding the need for training under the Training Catalogue, which contains a list of training courses that can be delivered.

In this analysis, a summary has been made of the conducted training and professional courses at the Customs Administration starting from 2009 until 2013 inclusive¹⁸, as well as in the period of 2014-2017.

The overview of the conducted training indicates that all the training courses were purposeful and in compliance with the actual needs, that is, according to the changes in the organizational structure of the Customs Administration and the new customs trends, all for the purpose of improving the employees'

¹⁸ *Jakimovska, J., Training - Factor for Professional Development of Employees at Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 2014*

knowledge concerning their work positions at the specific organizational units at the Customs Administration and their professional advancement.

This analysis has focused on measuring the contribution of training to the professional development of the Customs Administration employees, that is, determining whether the need for training is identified properly, analyzing the impact of the different kinds of training courses on professional advancement and evaluating the influence of the trainers in the process of knowledge transfer.

The obtained results have confirmed the following:

- The basic training is important and indispensable as an introduction to the job duties of every customs officer;
- Most of the employees believe that the training on special powers provides greater knowledge on the issues that are required to perform successfully the duties at the control sectors or the other sectors that hold special powers (arrest, use of special investigative measures and the like);
- The training on increasing professional knowledge in terms of the specialized customs authorities are crucial in terms of accumulating knowledge to perform the job duties more efficiently. Most of the customs officers believe that the knowledge of the goods, their origin, their customs value and the customs procedures change as the global economy changes and as the national policies are updated, so they need to be trained constantly regarding this matter.

The customs officers prefer interactive training courses on issues that are related to their everyday work even to training related to obtaining knowledge about other positions. Because the customs officers have a positive view on the types of training held at the Customs Administration, it is recommended that this course should be preserved and that both the global trends and the special needs of the organization should be followed when working on increasing their knowledge.

Their interest in training courses related to their current jobs point to the existence of insecurity and the lack of knowledge about the customs issues that are relevant for their current positions. This is why the Human Resources Sector

should make a comprehensive analysis of the current situation in order to be able to stimulate in an appropriate manner the employees' interest in training, as well as support the employees' initiatives on this matter. Furthermore, the obtained results are of special importance because they clearly indicate that the customs officers want interactive training courses at which they can hold a debate and exchange experiences, thereby solving problems and improving their knowledge of any given area.

One of the objectives of this analysis has been to determine whether the contribution of the training to the employees' professional development depends on the trainers. The results have shown the following:

- The trained trainers who are Customs Administration employees have helped the trainees acquire new knowledge and skills, as well as to solve everyday problems much more than the external trainers/customs experts. According to these results, the trainers employed at the Customs Administration are excellent in knowledge transfer, which means that the Customs Administration possesses excellent and highly educated personnel that contributes to the trainees' professional advancement.

The Customs Administration is an institution that is genuinely interested in increasing the knowledge of its cadre because its key role, apart from the fiscal, is the protective one, while training is a factor that contributes to the employees' professional development. Namely, the Customs Administration should continue developing the efficiency of its training system by properly analyzing the needs and offers for training and professional advancement, while remaining consistent when defining the training needs and holding the training courses according to modules that will suit the subject matters, the targeted groups of employees and the like.

We can conclude from this analysis that training is a factor that contributes to the professional development of the customs officers at the Customs Administration of the Republic of Macedonia and that only with a timely and appropriate professional advancement of its employees can the Customs Administration deal with the challenges prompted by the changes dictated by the contemporary economic trends.

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