The Spiritual Dimension of Individuals in the Context of the Workplace

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> In a holistic view of life we are creatures with a mind, body and a spirit—all interconnected and arranged in a pattern that means that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Albert Einstein)[1].

Abstract

The paper reviews literature on spirituality and identifies numerous ways in which spirituality has been conceptualized, suggesting that when approached in the workplace, certain constraints are inherent. The paper makes a distinction between religion and spirituality and asserts that the spiritual dimension of individuals can be described as, *inter alia*, a search for purpose, meaning, value, integrity, humanity, and service to others. In the context of the workplace, the paper argues that where the spiritual dimension plays an important role there is a shift from earning a living towards living a meaningful life—where meaning has to do with turning one's job into a vocation, thereby achieving a sense of personal wholeness, purpose and direction.

[1] Albert Einstein (1879-1955). Available at: http://careerfocus.bmj.com/cgi/content /full/326/385/S51.

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Introduction

In the context of the workplace 'spirituality' is a fairly new concept. Conversely, in life and in individual human experience, spirituality is as old as civilization itself. As we live in the transition period amid the old meaning of work as survival, and the new meaning of work as livelihood, an enabling environment needs to be created where employees are happy and are able to actualize their full potential, whilst at the same time the organization achieves it own goals.

Over the course of the twentieth century a central development in the workplace was the rejection of the rational and mechanistic view of labour characterized by FW Taylor's 'principles of scientific management' or Taylorism (Hicks:2003:39). This was due to the increasing recognition that workers are motivated by more than rationality or narrowly considered self-interest.

Over the last few decades, the emerging trend in managing people or human resources is evidently towards the adoption of the human resource approach. The thrust of this approach is that it is beneficial both to the organization and to the employee. In this regard, Grobler, Warnich, Carrell et al (2006:5) suggest that rather than addressing organizational goals and employee needs as separate and exclusive, the human resource approach holds that organizational goals and human needs are mutual and compatible: one set need not be gained at the expense of the other.

In referring to employees as a 'human' resource it is important to consider the dimensions that constitute human beings. 'Human' is a holistic concept and includes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimension. Biberman and Whitty (1997:17) emphasize that the spiritual dimension is simply another facet of the human character which warrants consideration when viewing the human—whether employee[2] or employer—as a whole

[2] The term 'employee' for the purpose of this paper shall also include those in managerial positions.

person. Similarly, Kourie (2009:151) suggests that spirituality impacts on the totality of what it means to be human.

This paper shall provide a general overview of spirituality and covers the following aspects, namely, spirituality and religion, status of spirituality in South Africa; spirituality in the workplace; benefits of spirituality in the workplace; and spirituality *versus* ethics in the workplace.

Spirituality and Religion

Initial research in the field of spirituality advocated different religious perspectives on the concept, which with the passage of time subsequently changed (Kale & Shrivastava 2003). Even though the vocabulary of spirituality contains many religious terms, spirituality is viewed by some authors as a much broader and inclusive term than the creed of any single organized religion (De Klerk-Luttig 2008:510). In this regard, she cites Alexander and McLaughin (2003) where they differentiate between religiously 'tethered' and 'untethered' conceptions of spirituality and concur that 'spirituality' cannot be confined to the religious domain (De Klerk-Luttig 2008:51).

According to Kourie (2009:148),

> spirituality is no longer a phenomenon discussed quietly and reservedly in church circles, but has increasingly entered the public arena; it is no longer limited to clergy, religious workers, theologians and theoreticians of religion, but on the contrary is a topic of discussion, *inter alia*, in the health profession, psychology, business and education.

She adds that spirituality has come into its own, and that publications, both popular and scholarly, abound; courses on spirituality and retreats are in high demand; and that centres for the study of spirituality have been instituted to cater for this growing interest (Kourie 2009:149). Moreover, the academic study of spirituality has been introduced in theology faculties and departments of philosophy and religion (Kourie 2009: 149).

The concept *religion* is clarified by Koenig *et al.* (2000 in King and Crowther 2004) as follows:

> Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designed to (a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality) and (b) to foster an understanding of one's relation and responsibility to others in living together in a community. Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community.

Roof (1993) adds that religion may be viewed as 'institutional' and 'manifested in the practice of rituals, adhering to dogmas and attending services'.

The spiritual dimension, according to Smith and Louw (2007 in Albertini and Smith 2009:13) can be defined as a search for purpose, meaning, value, inner wholeness, connectedness, harmony, love, morality, beauty, wisdom, hope, vitality and gratitude. Our spiritual dimension is considered to be our ultimate or core dimension. Verrier (2002:35) adds that spirituality at work involves 'bringing one's whole self to work', including one's spirit. If one views spirituality as a basic human life dimension, then one would have to agree that it is impossible not to takes one's spirit to work. In a similar manner Schneiders (1986:266) asserts that spirituality refers to the deepest dimension of the human person, whether religious or non-religious, and presupposes a life that is not isolationist and self-absorbed, bur rather characterized by 'self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives'. In a parallel view, Kourie (2009:159) affirms that spirituality can denote the actual experience of self-transcendence, whereby life is lived according to the ultimate values and commitments upon which we base our lives. However, Waaiman (2002) in Kourie (2009:151) goes a step further and describes spirituality 'as that which touches the core of human existence, namely our relation to the Absolute'.

Spirituality, according to Cacioppe (2000:49) is not formal, structured or organized whereas organized religion has more of an external

focus. Spirituality involves a person looking inward, and therefore, is accessible to everyone whether religious or not. Also, spirituality is above and beyond any specific religious denomination and seeks to find and experience the common principles and truths that each religion offers (Cacioppe: 2000:49). Similarly, Graber (2001:39) also delineates spirituality and religion and contends that 'spirituality avoids the formal and ceremonial undertones of religion; it is non-denominational; non-hierarchical, and non-ecclesiastical'.

For purpose of this paper it was necessary to delineate 'spirituality' and 'religion' as spirituality in lay circles is oftentimes seen in the same context as institutionalized or organized religion, which embraces particular beliefs, moral values and traditions—often resulting in ambivalent or narrow connotations.

The fundamental nature of spirituality is that it emphasizes the core of human existence—that which connects individuals to one another.

Status of Spirituality in South Africa

Democratic societies are founded on the principle of the dignity and worth of all people and derive from the most basic human values. With the advent of democracy in South Africa, many pieces of legislation and policies were revised and new ones promulgated. Among others are the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996, and the White Paper for Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997.

Although the Constitution, Chapter 2: Bill of Rights does not specifically refer to the dimension of spirituality, it may be argued that under sub-sections 'Equality' and 'Freedom of belief, religion and opinion', it is broadly captured as follows:

Equality

9 (3) the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including *race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture and birth.*

Freedom of religion, belief, and opinion

15 (1) everyone has the right to freedom of *conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.*

As spirituality may be the result of one's *conscience and beliefs*—aspects that are covered in the above Sections in the Bill of Rights, it may be argued that 'spirituality' in any context, including the workplace, is a human right. In this regard the intrinsic-origin view of spirituality argues that spirituality is a concept or a principle that originates from inside of an individual (Krishnakumar & Neck 2002:154). In a parallel view, Guillory (2000:154) also affirms that spirituality may be defined as 'our inner consciousness'. A question that may be posed is 'where do we derive our inner consciousness from', if not from within, namely, our conscience and beliefs?

In essence, spirituality in any given context implies a search for meaning, purpose or fulfilment that may be undertaken by anyone (organizations included) regardless of religious belief or denomination, or someone even with no belief system.

Spirituality in the Workplace

The spiritual dimension of individuals may be defined as a search for purpose, meaning, value, inner wholeness, connectedness, harmony, love, morality, beauty wisdom, hope vitality, and gratitude. Our spiritual dimension is considered to be our ultimate or core dimension (Smith & Louw 2007:19)

As indicated earlier we live in the transition period between the old meaning or definition of work as survival, and the new meaning of work as livelihood. Consequently, management in the survival mode has been based on command and control. In the bureaucratic and scientific management models in the workplace, rationality and legality provided the parameters for workplace behaviour. According to Ashmos and Duchon (2004:3) the spiritual dimension of human beings, namely that dimension concerned with finding and expressing meaning and purpose, and living in relation to others—something bigger than one oneself—was not yet welcome in the workplace. The notion, however that personal issues, *inter alia,* spirituality

should not be brought to work is not pragmatic as employees are holistic beings, and many link their personal self-image with who they are in the world of work.

Visser (2008:56) states that little has been written about the search for meaning in a workplace or business context, although meaning has been a serious topic of research and application for least fifty years, following the seminal work of Viktor Frankl. He adds that 'work is where we spend about a third of our lives—if meaning cannot be found in the workplace—our ability to lead a fulfilling life is seriously impaired' (Visser 2008:56).

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* Viktor Frankl (1946:105) narrates his experiences in a concentration camp during the holocaust. He asserts that 'man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a "secondary rationalization" of instinctual drive'. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own *will* to meaning (Frankl 1946:105). He adds that 'Man, however, is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values' (Frankl 1946:105). It is indeed profound that under such trying conditions, a prisoner would search for meaning in his life. A few decades later, during his treason trial, former President Nelson Mandela also echoed similar sentiments—that he was prepared to die for his ideals and values. Clearly, a purpose and meaning in life is what should motivate human beings—without which life could be sterile.

In the context of the workplace, Visser (2008:56) further suggests that,

> where the spiritual plays an important role there is a shift from earning a living towards living a meaningful life, because spirituality is not primarily about success, but about significance and meaning. Meaning has to do with turning one's job into a vocation, thereby achieving a sense of personal wholeness, purpose and direction.

Whilst management literature emphasizes the need to ensure productivity and performance, employee satisfaction is also important and often coupled with work as meaningful. In this regard, Herman, Gioia and Chalkley (1998:24) argue that today's worker is no longer willing to work in

an authoritarian and dehumanizing environment, and that workers want meaning in their work and balance in their lives.

In a similar perspective, Barrett (2006) contends that research shows that employees are finding it difficult to continue to separate their spiritual lives from their work lives as it is believed that integrating spirituality in the workplace will allow them meaning and purpose in life. It may be assumed that employees not only become personally fulfilled, but the organization reaps the benefits of profits, high morale, and a decrease in absenteeism. Accordingly, Rutte (2005:5) suggests that in the *spiritual workplace,* productivity can be achieved through 'nurturing the expression of the self and the spirit'. He adds that 'leaders should facilitate the discovery of spirit, to esteem it, to celebrate it, and to hold others accountable for their expression of it' (Rutte 2005:5).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory provides a useful framework for the understanding of needs and expectations in an individual and organizational context. The theory identifies human needs as either low-order or high-order needs, and is often cited in leadership literature as important for understanding the motivation of employees and employers alike. Swanepoel *et al.* (2009:325) suggests that the self-actualization model (of which Maslow's hierarchy is the best known example) is based on the work of existential philosophers who postulate that man has the innate drive to achieve his full potential, but that conditions of everyday life that place constraints on this 'instinct of self-actualization' and cause him to perform sub-optimally'. Self-actualization, a high-order need relates to growth and development—and to achieving one's optimal potential.

Hughes *et al.* (1999:395-6) also contend that the literature on spirituality and leadership generally classifies spirituality as a high-order need, most often in relation to *self-actualization*, the top tier of Maslow's pyramid. Visser (2008) adds that,

> writing about high-order needs of his famous motivational hierarchy, Maslow used words like *vocation, calling, mission, duty, beloved job,* even *oblation,* to describe the sense of dedication and devotion to their work experienced by self-actualizing people.

Similarly, Tischler (1999:273) suggests that,

> as the majority of citizens in any society can be freed from Maslow's lower level needs (*food, shelter* and *security*) they can, as a society, shift their concern to higher order needs (*knowledge* and *self-fulfilment*).

Clearly, there is a perceived connection between meaningful work and self-actualization. It may, however, be argued that self-actualization may not be possible in all societies as it would depend on individual's priorities, and vary depending also on the level of development of the country.

Stephen Covey's popular book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* which embodies many of the fundamental principles of human effectiveness encourages an inward and intrapersonal journey. The 'Habits' represent the internalization of correct principles upon which enduring happiness and successes are based (Covey 1992:23). The Seven Habits identified by Covey are: *Be Proactive; Begin with the End in Mind; Put First Things First; Think Win/Win; Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood; Synergize; and Sharpen the Saw*. 'Habit 7' is taking time to sharpen the saw. It surrounds the other habits on the Seven Habits paradigm because it is the habit that makes all others possible (Covey 1992:287). Renewing the spiritual dimension, claims Covey (1992:292) provides leadership to one's life as it is 'your core, your center, your commitment to your value system'. Notably, the 'Habits' are about self-renewal—renewing the four dimensions of one's nature—physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional.

All of the great religious traditions at some level encourage the contemplative life, asserts Ashmos and Duchan (2004: 2) where the search for meaning and purpose is primary and the goal of living in harmony with others is fundamental. Thus, the language of the spirituality movement that is appearing in the workplace, claim Ashmos and Duchan (2004:2) is grounded in the tradition of religious metaphors: *personal transformation; rediscovering self; beginning a personal journey; having utopian visions; and experiencing renewal*. These are familiar descriptions in religious circles, but uncommon in classical organization and management theory such as that articulated by Weber (1947) and Taylor (1947) where managers were viewed as impersonal instruments to material ends, and were expected to control workers (Ashmos & Duchan 2004:3).

The rationale for the above assertion may be attributed to the angle offered by Zohar and Marshall (2001:54),

> from the moment we begin school we are trained to look outward rather than inward to focus on facts and practical problems in the external world; virtually nothing in western education encourages us to reflect on ourselves, on our inner lives and motives.

In their earlier book, the authors rightly emphasized that human beings are essentially 'spiritual creatures' because they are driven by a need to ask 'fundamental' or 'ultimate' questions as to the meaning and purpose of life (Zohar & Marshall 2000). Also, humans have a drive and need to find meaning in everyday life experiences and to be involved in something that is greater than themselves which can help them to experience feelings of worth (Zohar & Marshall 2000). In the context of the workplace, such questions could include: What is the purpose of what I do? Is there meaning in what I do? Do I add value in the workplace? These questions would be motivated by wanting to construct logic of one's purpose in life.

While it may be true that the workplace must essentially be secular, detached and rooted in the real world, it cannot also be totally oblivious to or unconcerned with the spiritual orientation of the individuals who populate it, suggests Titus (2007). He adds that creating environments that respect the spiritual orientation of individuals and encourage their practice requires strong organizational commitment and effort (Titus 2007). Moreover, this is a productive effort for spiritual values such as integrity or honesty, co-existence or respect for diversity, anger management or behavioural decorum, compassion or caring and self improvement or learning are all closely linked to key management principles that organizations themselves are often seeking to espouse (Titus 2007).

In South Africa, even today, the dichotomy of work and *religion* is not a subject that has been vigorously debated, especially during the apartheid regime that claimed to uphold Christian values. Generally, this dichotomy pervaded the work environment—the belief perhaps that if *religion per se* was allowed, it may promote a multitude of religious perspectives—thus threatening the neutrality of the workplace. That being said, even today, a robust discussion on spirituality or the promotion and

benefits thereof in the workplace is a subject that not many people are comfortable with.

Benefits of Spirituality in the Workplace

For many the workplace is the only environment that offers an opportunity to interact and connect with people at a social level. Accordingly, Conger (1994:89) suggests that the workplace is being seen more often as a primary source of community for many people because of the decline of neighbourhoods, churches, civic groups, and extended families as principal places for feeling connected.

For individuals, where the spiritual plays an important role there is a shift from earning a living towards living a meaningful life, because spirituality is not primarily about success, but about significance and meaning. Meaning has to do with turning one's job into a vocation, thereby achieving a sense of personal wholeness, purpose and direction (De Klerk-Luttig 2008:507).

Although many people would find religious expression in the workplace highly inappropriate, spirituality is generally seen as more inclusive. It is viewed as embracing diversity of expression while underlining the interconnectedness of all life. Within that frame of reference are elements such as ethics, vision, values, meaning and mission (Barrett 2006).

Literature and studies show that globally, some workplaces are encouraging the development of spirituality because it is believed that a humanistic work environment creates a harmonious situation for both employees and the organization. According to that view, if members of an organization are happy, it may be assumed that they may be productive, more creative, and more fulfilled[3]. Barrett (2006) adds that that in light of factors

[3] Personal fulfilment and high morale are closely linked to outstanding performance and, therefore, have a direct impact on an organization's success (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_philosophy). A dispirited workplace, however, can manifest itself in low morale, high turnover, burnout, frequent stress-related illness, and rising absenteeism http://www.oppapers.com/ essays/Spirituality-Workplace/138562.

such as costs of employee burnout, turnover and absenteeism; the value of focusing attention on our inner lives should not be dismissed.

Through a rigorous study of the work of eminent researchers in the field of spirituality, Albertini and Smith (2009:11) extrapolated the recurrent benefits of spirituality in the workplace, namely

- a purpose-driven and meaning-based workplace;
- an appreciation based culture;
- management practices and decisions that are consistent with spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, love, hope, kindness, respect, and nurturing;
- management values employees based on who they are not only on what they do;
- management truly listens and builds a safe place where employees can speak the truth without fear of repercussion;
- a move from command-and-control leadership to horizontal servant *(sic)* leadership; more creative and innovative employees;
- increased authenticity and genuineness in communication;
- a greater sense of teamwork based on trust; increased ethical and moral behaviour; increased sense of fulfillment, contentment and belonging; and
- improvement of morale, job satisfaction, loyalty and ultimately productivity.

To understand spirituality in the workplace it is important to recognize that workers are spiritual beings whose souls are either nurtured or disregarded in the work environment. In this regard, Moore and Casper (2006:3) assert that

when an organization develops an environment where employees perceive they are valued and cared for as individuals, the organization is communicating that the job is only part of the whole employee. Employees feel as though the organization values them as a whole being, not just the employment or job aspect of the individual. As a result, employees feel encouraged to bring their 'whole selves to work and not just their work only characteristics' (Moore and Casper: 2006:3).

McGhee and Grant (2008:67) assert that although research on the subject of spirituality does not explicitly connect to the exercise of spiritual virtues, that it does not take much imagination to see the potential linkages. They further assert that spiritual individuals have greater organizational commitment, increased job motivation, increased productivity and greater job satisfaction (McGhee and Grant: 2008:67). Moreover, they suggest that this may be attributed at least partially to them seeing their work as a calling not just a job in which they want to do the best they can with humility while respecting others (McGhee & Grant 2008:67). The idea of 'all work is a vocation' may be an idealism for many sectors and societies. In South Africa some occupations that were traditionally viewed as noble professions or vocations, namely, teaching, nursing and law enforcement have lost its glory. There are perhaps a myriad reasons for this—*inter alia*, poor salaries and working conditions. Moreover, given the high rates of unemployment—individuals who do not necessarily have a passion for a job—accept it as a means for survival.

A question that one is bound to grapple with—are there any specific characteristics or qualities to 'spirituality'? To this end, McGhee & Grant (2008:65) extrapolated a multitude of core values of spirituality identified by different authors on the subject, namely, *equality, honesty, compassion, service, duty, trustworthiness, being a good citizen, empathy, integrity, humanism, responsibility, humility, empathy, service to others, respect, openness, caring and concern, and reflective practice.* Understandably, the above-mentioned values and characteristics are not only confined to personal and individual issues, or for that instance to organizational issues only but pervade matters that concern all of society. In addition, McGhee and Grant (2008:62) suggest that the behavioural characteristics of spiritual individuals include:

i) seeking to transcend their ego (i.e. their own self-interests);

ii) awareness and acceptance of their interconnectedness with others, creation, and their Ultimate Concern;

iii) understanding the higher significance of their actions while seeking to integrate their lives holistically; and

iv) believing in something beyond the material universe which ultimately gives value to all else.

Arguably, the behavioural characteristics of individuals in the workplace are indeed noteworthy, principally in light of the implications and ramifications of their conduct; both positive and negative. For example, the financial crunch that is currently sweeping across the globe, including even super powers is attributed to greed, corruption and unethical behaviour by so-called custodians of financial power and authority. In addition, and closer home, almost daily the media reports cases of fraud, corruption and unethical behaviour of, *inter alia*, political office-bearers and public officials—at all levels and in many forms and shapes. By at least taking cognizance of the consequences of their actions and inactions on the 'ordinary' public—that is, by having a social conscience—would hopefully serve these so-called 'fat cats' well.

Spirituality is not about bringing religion into the workplace or necessitating that employees *meditate, chant hymns* or *mantras* at their workstations. Spirituality in the workplace is an endeavour to create a sense of meaning and purpose at work, and a connection between individual and organizational values and goals. A major challenge of taking spiritual awareness into the workplace, however, is that in the main people are reticent to discuss their spiritual beliefs, let alone practice them within the parameters of a work environment.

Spirituality *versus* Ethics

Spirituality and ethics are dissimilar concepts, although it is easier for a spiritual person to be ethical. Garcia-Zamor (2003:358-359) asserts that

spirituality encompasses the same topic, which is so important in ethics: character, and the giving of oneself for the benefit of others. Ethics or moral philosophy aims to explain the nature of good and evil. It is important because the human world is dominated by ideas about right and wrong and good and bad, and most ordinary conversation consists of value judgments (Garcia-Zamor: 2003:359).

A variety of studies demonstrates a clear link between values and workplace behaviour where employees bring their ethics and value system to the workplace—which motivate their behaviour. In this regard, Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004, suggest that values affect one's perception of a situation, how one relates to others, and act as guides for choices and actions.

It is implicit that each individual should have a basic understanding of what kind of behaviour is morally acceptable (and sometimes obligatory) in the work environment, and what is considered morally unacceptable. However, within this broad framework are a multitude of variables that often are rooted in the individual's own spirituality, adds Garcia-Zamor (2003:359). It is almost with certainty that an individual's spirituality will determine his or her understanding and interpretation of ethical behaviour. However, relying on an individual's interpretation of 'ethics' in the workplace is not adequate. For this reason, a code of ethics is essential as it is a formal way of governing the conduct and performance of employees in the workplace—as part of the conditions of service.

The relationship between work and spiritual life is more complex than just exhibiting excellent ethical behaviour. Organizations need to understand that employees bring to the job, personal and moral core values that may be linked to their cultural backgrounds and spirituality, which they try to relate to their jobs. In this regard, the perception that work is a vocation can bring a sense of individuality to all employees, across the board.

Conclusion

Human beings are holistic beings with multi-dimensional aspects—spirituality being an important dimension. The spiritual dimension can be described as a search for purpose, meaning, morality and connectedness—which many authors consider to be our ultimate or core dimension A growing

awareness and interest in spirituality shows that people have aspirations for greater things that could give meaning and purpose to their lives.

In the work context, numerous social and economic changes and shifts in demographics have also contributed to the growing interest of spirituality in the workplace. Spirituality plays a central role in upholding human values, morality, sense of duty and virtue—in both the individual and the work context. In this regard, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory provides a useful framework for the understanding of needs and expectations in an organizational context—where human needs are classified as either low-order or high-order needs. Self-actualization which includes knowledge and self-fulfilment is, for e.g. high-order need. Consequently, there is a perceived connection between meaningful work and self-actualization. As a corollary, this paper suggests that work environments that respect the spiritual orientation of individuals should be encouraged. Accordingly, if members of an organization are happy, it may be assumed that they shall be productive, more creative, and more fulfilled. When this happens one's job can be experienced as a vocation or calling, and their work as meaningful!

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