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Trust antecedents: emotional intelligence and perceptions of others

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine if teachers' trust in others is predicted by their perceptions of others and their emotional intelligence. Employees need to trust others to achieve outcomes, and a lack of trust can have a negative impact on workplace performance.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper surveys a sample of 84 employed teachers.

Findings – Our findings show that perceptions of others' ability, benevolence and integrity are strongly and positively associated with trust. The emotional intelligence ability to perceive emotions is also related to trust. Regression analysis showed that perceptions of others (ability and integrity) and an individual's emotional intelligence (perceiving) combined to predict a large portion of the variance in trust.

Research limitations/implications – This study was limited by a small sample size and the use of a cross-sectional design. These issues were addressed in our analysis.

Originality/value – The majority of trust research examines employee-to-manager trust. Our study is one of the few to examine trust among co-workers. This study also contributes to research on the emotional intelligence and trust relationship by showing that the ability to perceive one's own and others emotions significantly predicts increases in trust. It also reaffirms that perceptions of others' integrity and ability are strongly linked to trust, but that further investigation of the benevolence construct is required.

Keywords Integrity, Trust, Emotional intelligence, Benevolence, Ability

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Trust is essential in organizations in which employees are required to develop cooperative social relationships to achieve outcomes (Chan, 1997). Although trust between co-workers is an important issue, it has not been researched extensively in the context of peer-to-peer relationships. Instead, research on trust in organizations has typically focused on the relationship between trust and important organizational outcomes such as turnover intent and commitment (Connell *et al.*, 2003), risk-taking and job performance (Colquitt *et al.*, 2007), communication (Wells and Kipnis, 2001) and team performance (Dirks, 2000). In terms of antecedents to trust, perceived organizational support has been studied at the organizational level (Paillé *et al.*, 2010). At the interpersonal level, antecedents of trust previously examined include attitudes and moods/emotions (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005; Jones and George, 1998), personality (Schlenker *et al.*, 1973), motivational intention (Sherwood and DePaolo, 2005) and situational factors such as power (Bachmann, 2003) and incentives (James, 2001). In this paper, we outline a study that examines the extent to which an individual's ability to

perceive and manage emotions, as well as the perceptions they hold of others in their workplace, impacts on their level of trust in co-workers.

Our study adds to the currently small body of research on co-worker (peer) trust (Ferres *et al.*, 2004; Knoll and Gill, 2011). While there is significant research on trust in teams (e.g. Jones and George, 1998), this has generally been studied at the team level of analysis (e.g. Barczak *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, there is little research about the impact of a trustor's perceptions of others on their ability to trust co-workers. In our study, we examine the impact of an individual's emotional intelligence abilities on their trust in co-workers. Previous research indicates feelings about others might have an impact on trust decisions (McAllister, 1995). Our study extends this research to investigate the effect of an employee's perceptions of another (cognitive component) as well as an employee's own emotional intelligence abilities (emotional component) on their level of trust in co-workers. Thus, our study builds on recent work by Downey *et al.* (2011) who have looked at the impact of emotional intelligence culture (i.e. influenced by organizational culture) on subordinate's perceptions of the trustworthiness of their team leader. In our study, we examine emotional intelligence as an individual difference variable that may be an antecedent of trust between individual workers and their co-workers.

Trust

Trust is a dyadic construct in which the behavior of one party influences the perceptions and actions of the other party (Yakovleva *et al.*, 2010). Trust is also viewed as the propensity of an individual to be able to rely on another person to complete a task without monitoring the other party (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). A trustor develops these expectations of future behavior based on cognitive and affective information, thus trust has both cognitive and affective bases (McAllister, 1995).

The cognitive aspects of trust are related to our assessment of the reliability and consistency of the actions and behaviors of others, whereas the affective foundations of trust are based on emotional bonds between individuals which support emotional investment and goal congruency (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). Similarly, Becker (1996) differentiates between cognitive (thoughts) and non-cognitive trust (feelings) by showing cognitive trust is associated with expectations (developed through cognitive processes) about the trustworthiness of others. The antecedents of non-cognitive trust include affect, emotions and motivational structures. Becker (1996) contends that even when we have limited trust of individuals on cognitive grounds we may still trust them on non-cognitive grounds. In this regard, we argue that emotional intelligence is an important factor in processing the decision to trust.

Perceptions of others (ability, benevolence and integrity)

In our research, we also examine how an individual's perceptions of another's ability, integrity and benevolence impacts on their trust beliefs about that person. Perceptions regarding the *abilities* of the trustee are based on judgments of whether the person they are to trust has the required level of skill and competency for a specific task or exchange (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). This enables the trustor to weigh the benefits and costs of trusting in specific circumstances. The perception of the trustee's *integrity* is a judgment of whether the trustee will adhere to standards or principles that are important to the trustor. This may include work standards, moral standards or standards of fairness

(Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Finally, *benevolence* indicates that there is a positive orientation by the trustee to the trustor, that is, the trustee will act without expecting to profit from the exchange (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Previous research suggests that each of these factors contributes to a trust decision (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2004; Moye and Henkin, 2006; Simons, 2002). In a meta-analysis of the relationship between the perceptions of another's ability and trust, Colquitt *et al.* (2007) suggest that the relationship between perceptions of others and trust may be confounded and raise questions over the unique variance that the benevolence factor contributes to predicting trust.

There are few studies involving perceptions of others and trust in co-workers within organizations. Furthermore, there are conflicting findings from those that have been conducted (Tan and Lim, 2009; Wasti *et al.*, 2011). For instance, Tan and Lim (2009) found that benevolence and integrity (not ability) predicted trust among co-workers. Conducting a cross-cultural study, Wasti *et al.* (2011) found links between perceptions of others (ability, benevolence and integrity) and trust in a Chinese sample, but found that only benevolence was related to trust in a Turkish sample. In other research, Gill *et al.* (2005) found that a trustor's perceptions of others' abilities, benevolence and integrity are more important in unfamiliar, complex or unclear circumstances. Serva and Fuller (2004) also found that when the goal is task-focused, perceptions of others' abilities are important. However, when the goal is relationship-focused, the trustee's integrity is more important. Although there are mixed findings in this research, there is sufficient evidence to hypothesize that:

H1. Perceptions of others' ability, benevolence and integrity will be positively related to an individual's trust in co-workers.

Emotional abilities

In addition to evaluating individual differences in the trustee, a trustor needs to be able to process (both cognitively and emotionally) information regarding themselves and the co-worker in whom their trust is required. Both facial appearance (Stirrat and Perrett, 2010) and emotional expressions (Winston *et al.*, 2002) are indicators of trustworthiness. Being able to appraise the facial appearance of others is one method of evaluating the personality of others for the purpose of making trust decisions. Emotional intelligence, recently promulgated to link emotion and cognition, encompasses both of these skill sets (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Emotional intelligence is a construct that links cognitive and emotional mechanisms (Cherniss, 2010) that may be used to process the emotional information required to subsequently determine a trust decision. Mayer and Salovey (1997) conceptualized emotional intelligence as a four-branch model that comprised the following set of abilities:

(1) perceiving emotion;

(2) using emotions to facilitate thought;

(3) understanding emotion; and

(4) managing emotions in a way that enhances personal growth and social relations.

As described by Mayer and Salovey (1997), *perceiving emotion* is about the ability to identify, discriminate between, and accurately express emotion in oneself and others.

Using emotions to facilitate thought relates to the ability to use emotions to prioritize thinking, aid judgment and memory, to consider the influence of moods on one's point of view, and to encourage specific problem-solving approaches appropriate to one's emotional state. *Understanding emotion* relates to understanding and analyzing emotions, including the meanings they convey and employing this emotional knowledge to understand complex feelings. *Managing emotions* describes the ability to stay open to both positive and negative emotions, engage or detach from emotion based on its utility, monitor the reasonableness of emotions in oneself and others and moderate emotion in oneself and others without altering the information those emotions seek to convey.

Overall, the construct of emotional intelligence has been investigated in three streams of research differentiated by the type of measures used to assess it (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2005). The streams are:

(1) Stream 1, the abilities model assessed using tests of emotional abilities.

(2) Stream 2, the abilities model assessed using self-report measures.

(3) Stream 3, the mixed model which includes traits and is based predominantly on self-report.

Cherniss (2010) redefines the distinction between abilities models and mixed models calling the former "emotional intelligence" and the latter "emotional and social competence" and highlights the fact that these latter competencies are not forms of intelligence. In a meta-analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance, O'Boyle *et al.* (2010) tested the utility of these three streams of emotional intelligence and found that they all displayed incremental validity and predicted job performance at similar levels. Distinctions were found, however, in the relationships between the three streams and individual difference variables such as general intelligence and the five factor model (FFM) of personality. Stream 1 measures are more closely associated with cognitive ability than with the FFM. The Stream 2 measures (the type used in this study) are distinct from Stream 3 measures, which are more often defined in terms of traits or competencies and have higher correlations with the FFM. O'Boyle *et al.* (2010) also showed that Stream 2 self-report measures can feasibly be used without compromising incremental validity.

George (2000) was one of the first to propose a relationship between emotional intelligence and trust. However, while the relationship between emotional intelligence and trust has been identified theoretically (Prati *et al.*, 2003) and confirmed empirically at the team level (Barczak *et al.*, 2010; Downey *et al.*, 2011), research is required at the individual level. We earlier noted, in particular, that the study completed by Downey *et al.* (2011) examined the impact of an emotional intelligence culture on the perceptions by a subordinate of the trustworthiness of a leader. In an experimental design, Boden and Berenbaum (2007) examined the moderation effect of gender on the relationship between emotional awareness and suspicion (the antithesis of trust). They found that lower levels of emotional awareness were associated with higher levels of suspicion and that women have higher levels of emotional awareness than men. A complementary argument is that higher levels of emotional awareness are associated with increased trust. In a similar vein, in a study of teachers' recollections of positive and negative interactions with each other, Hargreaves (2002) found that no reference was made to

trust in connection with positive emotions but that negative emotions were associated with betrayal which prompted respondents to use emotional regulation strategies such as conflict avoidance to deal with this betrayal. Again betrayal involves a loss of trust and, based on this, we argue that emotional regulation is associated with expectations regarding trust and betrayal.

Previous studies have shown that individuals differentiate more among persons who evoke negative affect than those who evoke positive affect (Irwin *et al.*, 1967). This differentiation is based on measures of cognitive complexity in which individuals indicate their perceptions of others on the basis of construct dimensions such as responsible versus irresponsible, considerate versus inconsiderate, decisive versus indecisive, etc. This suggests that individuals are more vigilant when there is a concern about the reliability of the behavior of another. Although individuals with high emotional intelligence are more aware in making a trust decision about the other person, we contend they should also be able to control their emotions and trust. Based on the arguments above it is hypothesized that:

H2. emotional intelligence will be positively related to an individual's trust in co-workers.

The context: trust in teaching

This study examines emotional intelligence and perceptions of others, and the links of these constructs to the trust that develops between co-workers within a teaching context. Jordan *et al.* (2010) argue that testing the impact of emotional intelligence across different contexts is important. Stress in teaching environments has increased as a result of intensification of work and the erosion of social relationships resulting in changing trust relations (Troman, 2000). Teachers are required to balance their large degree of classroom control with their ability to work with others in school-wide matters and cooperate with teaching partners. Indeed, trust is the framework for high levels of collaboration in schools and generates the required levels of social capital necessary in continually changing teaching environments (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). If teachers are to adapt to these changes in the workplace, greater attention should be given to the issue of trust in the workplace. This includes examining how individuals evaluate who they will trust and the abilities the trustor needs to perceive and manage emotions associated with the decision to trust. We acknowledge that trust is both cognitively based and affectively based (McAllister, 1995) and investigate the combined connection between perceptions of others, factors of emotional intelligence and trust in co-workers.

Method
Participants
A total of 350 Australian school teachers were contacted for this research. In total, 87 surveys were completed, resulting in 84 useable responses (24 per cent response rate). Participation was voluntary and confidentiality for participants was assured. Participants were currently employed as school teachers either full time, part time or casually. The sample comprised 61 females (72.6 per cent) and 23 males (27.4 per cent). The minimum age was 20 and the maximum was 70 with a mean of 40.61 and a standard deviation of 12.64 years.

Procedure

Data were collected both as an online data collection and a paper-based survey. Participants were recruited for this survey by approaching the Dean of a teachers' training college and requesting that an invitation to complete the survey be emailed to alumni who had graduated in the past five years. The link to the survey was emailed to approximately 250 alumni. Additional surveys were collected using a snowballing methodology (Neuman, 2003), with a small number of paper-based surveys being distributed to four schools. A reply-paid envelope was issued with each paper-based survey, so that responses could be mailed directly to the researchers. All data were collected in accordance with an approved university ethics protocol.

Measures

Perceptions of others. Perceptions of others was measured using an established measure that captured the trustor's perceptions of the trustee's ability, benevolence and integrity (Mayer and Davis, 1999). Participants were asked to think of their fellow workers or the team they currently work with when answering questions referring to their team. A sample item in the *ability scale* is "I feel very confident about my team members' skills". Items in the *benevolence scale* include "My team members will go out of their way to help me". The integrity scale includes items such as "My team members have a strong sense of justice". All three scales are measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). The Cronbach's alpha reliabilities reported by Mayer and Davis (1999) were 0.88 for the ability scale, 0.89 for the benevolence scale and 0.88 for the integrity scales.

Emotional intelligence. The measure of emotional intelligence used in this research (Brackett *et al.*, 2006) is based on the four-branch model. This measure fits within Stream 2 research, as described in the literature review. The Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale is a 19-item scale which contains the five sub-scales of Perceiving Emotion, Use of Emotion, Understanding Emotion, Managing Emotion (self) and Social Management (Brackett *et al.*, 2006), which map onto the emotional abilities outlined by Mayer and Salovey (1997). The 19 statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*). Sample items in the perceiving emotion sub-scale include "I am aware of the nonverbal messages other people send", in the use of emotion sub-scale "When making a decision, I listen to my feelings to see if the decision feels right", in the understanding emotion sub-scale "I have a rich vocabulary to describe my emotions", in the managing emotion (self) sub-scale "I am able to handle most upsetting problems" and in the social management sub-scale "I know the strategies to make or improve other people's moods". The Cronbach's alpha for the 19-item scale has been reported in scale development as 0.84 and in subsequent use as 0.77 (Brackett *et al.*, 2006).

Trust. The Trust Inventory (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005) was used as an attitudinal trust measure that examines trust in specific others (in our case, in co-workers). The scale is a shorter version of a larger scale developed by Johnson-George and Swap (1982). It is a self-report scale comprising ten items. The measure utilizes a 7-point Likert rating scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*very likely*). The instructions and items were adapted in this research to refer to the participant's co-workers with items such as "If my team members were late to a meeting, I would guess there was a good reason for the

delay". The reliability of the scale has previously been reported as having a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 (Dunn and Schweitzer, 2005).

Results

Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations correlations and Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for all variables are provided in Table I.

Bivariate correlations

The first hypothesized relationship was between the trustor's perceptions of others and their trust of co-workers. As hypothesized, there were significant correlations between their trust in co-workers and their perceptions of others' ability $r = 0.68$, ($p < 0.01$), benevolence $r = 0.56$ ($p < 0.01$) and integrity $r = 0.69$ ($p < 0.01$). That is, teachers with higher scores on perceptions of others' ability, benevolence and integrity were significantly more likely to report higher trust in others. While these results appear to support Colquitt *et al.*'s (2007) concerns about the relationship between these variables, collinearity diagnostics were conducted in statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS), and the degree of collinearity evident in the data was not considered detrimental (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The largest variance inflation factor (VIF) was not greater than ten and the tolerance statistics were well above 0.2, indicating that there was not a strong linear relationship between the variables and, consequently, no cause for concern (Field, 2009). On this basis, *H1* is supported.

The second hypothesized relationship in the model was between emotional intelligence and trust in co-workers. As Table I indicates, there is no significant relationship between the total emotional intelligence scale and trust in co-workers. Nor are there correlations between the understanding, use of emotion or the management of emotion subscales of emotional intelligence and trust. There is, however, a significant relationship between trust in co-workers and the perceiving subscale $r = 0.31$ ($p < 0.01$). Teachers rating themselves higher on their ability to perceive the emotions of others were more likely to have higher trust in their co-workers, providing partial support for *H2*.

Regression analyses

Building on the significant bivariate relationships shown in Table I, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the combined effect of the significant univariate predictors on the outcome variable trust (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Multiple regression analysis also controls for the inter-correlations found between the predictors in Table I (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The adjusted R square values have been used when reporting the regression analyses, given the small sample size (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

According to the hypothesized relationships, emotional intelligence and perceptions of others should both predict the level of trust an individual has in their co-workers. Perceiving emotion and perceptions of others' ability, integrity and benevolence were entered into a regression equation as independent variables. Trust was included as the dependent variable. Table II shows that the combined relationship between perceiving emotion and perceptions of others' ability, benevolence and integrity on trust was statistically significant $F(4, 79) = 26.66$, $p < 0.001$ and contributed 57.4 per cent of the variance in trust with an Adj $R^2 = 0.55$. The Beta weight for benevolence was not statistically significant ($r = 0.11$, *ns*), indicating that only perceiving emotion ($r = 0.16$,

Table I.
Means, standard deviations and correlations of emotional intelligence, ability, benevolence, integrity and trust variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Age	40.61	12.64												
Gender	1.73	0.45	−0.20											
Trust	3.90	0.55	0.17	−0.12	(0.84)									
EI perceiving	3.74	0.60	−0.15	0.07	0.31**	(0.70)								
EI use of emotion	3.49	0.87	−0.07	0.21	−0.08	0.05	(0.83)							
EI understanding	3.46	0.70	0.03	−0.03	0.16	0.31**	0.15	(0.82)						
EI managing emotion (self)	3.40	0.81	−0.10	−0.19	−0.01	0.15	−0.41	0.13	(0.72)					
EI social management	3.57	0.68	−0.17	0.23*	0.15	0.46**	0.11	0.42**	0.28**	(0.63)				
EI total	3.55	0.42	−0.14	0.12	0.19	0.68**	0.40**	0.74**	0.28*	0.75**	(0.77)			
Ability	3.96	0.67	0.02	0.05	0.68**	0.16	−0.04	0.12	−0.01	0.10	0.12	(0.90)		
Benevolence	3.53	0.79	−0.08	0.22*	0.56**	0.11	−0.10	−0.18	−0.04	0.18	−0.03	0.56**	(0.90)	
Integrity	3.78	0.68	0.06	0.10	0.69**	0.24*	−0.07	0.01	−0.11	0.10	0.07	0.70**	0.76**	(0.84)

Notes: Cronbach's alphas in parentheses; $n = 84$; ** = ($p < 0.01$); * = ($p < 0.05$)

$p < 0.05$) and perceptions of others' ability ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$) and integrity ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$) contributed to the variance in trust.

Discussion

The hypotheses were developed to show that trust in co-workers is partly influenced by two main processes. The first process involves a cognitive process of being able to perceive the ability, benevolence and integrity of others and correctly appraise the level of trust the individual is prepared to assign to a specific co-worker. The second involves an emotional process or perceiving the state of the relationship between the individual and their co-worker through the use of affective information where the focus is on the emotional intelligence abilities of the trustor. In our research, emotional intelligence was examined at the factor level to give clearer insights into the specific abilities that are associated with an increased trust in co-workers.

H1 examined the relationship between perceptions of others and trust in co-workers and the results showed that they were correlated. While this relationship has already been demonstrated empirically by Mayer and Davis (1999) in relation to propensity to trust, we note that our results demonstrate that the mixed findings identified previously may have been specific to a particular industry or situation. Within the teaching profession, however, we found that ability, benevolence and integrity are all correlated with a teacher's trust in co-workers. Further analysis using regressions revealed that benevolence did not contribute any unique variance to the prediction of trust in our teacher sample. This finding also provides further evidence to support the assertion by Colquitt *et al.* (2007) that the benevolence factor may require further scrutiny.

H2 suggested there is a direct link between emotional intelligence and trust in co-workers. Overall, the results support the findings of McAllister (1995) who identified cognitive and affective bases to trust. As perceiving was the only emotional intelligence ability associated with trust in co-workers in this research, it may indicate that reading the emotions of others is important in determining the level of trust given to co-workers. Decisions to trust co-workers are influenced by the specific work contexts in which they occur. For example, individuals may trust co-workers when there is little pressure, but be less willing to trust co-workers in pressure situations. The absence of relationships between the other factors of emotional intelligence and trust in co-workers indicates the importance of examining emotional intelligence at the branch level, a conclusion reached by other researchers in this field (e.g. Christie *et al.*, 2007; Lindebaum and Jordan, 2011). These authors argue that doing so gives more explanatory value to the research findings. In our research, it may be that co-worker relationships in the teaching

Variable	B	$SE\ B$	β	
EI_Perceiving	0.15	0.07	0.16	*
Ability	0.32	0.09	0.39	***
Benevolence	0.07	0.08	0.11	
Integrity	0.24	0.11	0.29	*
$n = 84$; $F = 26.66$***				
$R^2 = 0.57$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.55$				

Notes: * $= p < 0.05$; ** $= p < 0.01$; *** $= p < 0.001$

Table II.
Regression analysis of emotional intelligence (EI) perceiving, ability, benevolence and integrity on trust

profession require individuals to be aware of others around them but do not require them to specifically engage in terms of managing their own or others emotions to achieve their goals.

The implications of our research for practice in the teaching profession are that both cognitive and non-cognitive perceptions of others have been found to influence trust in co-workers. Increasing teachers' non-cognitive expectations of their co-workers through the ability to perceive emotions is associated with their emotional investment in the trust decision (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). Teachers should seek cognitive information (Becker, 1996) on the ability and integrity of their co-workers to aid in making decisions about their trustworthiness and, subsequently, their trust in co-workers.

Limitations and future directions
This research was limited by having a small sample size and by using a cross-sectional design with a single administration. Despite considerable effort to increase the sample size, only 84 respondents completed the data collection. To compensate for the low sample size, the adjusted R square values were used when reporting the regression analyses, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007). Power analysis revealed that the sample size was sufficient to support the analysis we used. We also acknowledge that the survey was conducted within a single administration and has the potential limitation of common method bias. Unfortunately, the operational requirements of an organization mean that in this applied setting we could only get a single survey completed.

Our research adds to the literature on the relationship between emotional intelligence and trust by identifying that the ability to perceive the emotions of oneself and others is significantly related to increases in trust in co-workers. It also reaffirmed that perceptions of others' benevolence, integrity and ability are strongly linked to trust in co-workers. Future research should examine trust in specific others in clearly specified contexts. Since Hargreaves (2002) found a relationship between negative emotion and betrayal in a teaching context and we have found a relationship between emotional intelligence and trust, there is reason to believe that further research is required on emotional intelligence and betrayal in teaching contexts. Of specific interest would be the relationship of the emotion management branches of emotional intelligence and betrayal. Our results have shown that context plays an important role in the study of trust. Further research should be conducted on trust in short-term situations rather than the more generalized trust examined in this teaching context. Mood should also be examined in terms of how it impacts on perceptions of others and the decision to trust. Finally, we believe future research should be undertaken that includes a training intervention to increase emotional intelligence to determine the full extent of its impact on trust across all its components.

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