

London Work, Travel, Convene Coalition

Health: a Strategic Priority

January 2021

"Witnessing the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on people, businesses and entire countries, it's hard to believe we won't come out the other side looking at the world differently. At its core, COVID-19 is an issue of people, health and risk – and from a business perspective, the impact of health has never been in sharper focus. Through COVID-19, business leaders are seeing first-hand how health impacts work. I expect this will create far greater awareness amongst business leaders to be better prepared and take action on preventable ill-health."

Charles Alberts, Head of Health Management, Aon



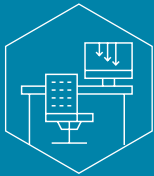
1 in 5

The number of adults suffering from depression has doubled, increasing from **1 in 10** to **1 in 5** since March 2020 (Office of National Statistics)



200%

200% increase in the number of potential suicide risk assessed cases during the lockdown period, according to occupational health data (Duradimond)



40%

40% increase in working days lost (17.9 million) due to work-related stress in 2019/20 (Health & Safety Executive)



111%

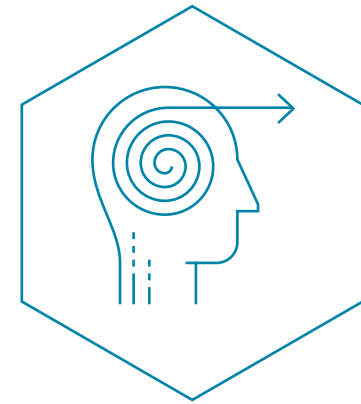
111% increase in mental health spending under PMI in the first six months of lockdown and claims under PMI trend upwards year on year (Aon Portfolio Data - around 250 large corporates)



2030

Even before COVID-19, the WHO predicted that depression would become the leading cause of the global burden of disease by **2030**

Accelerated change



The pandemic has accelerated employers' recognition of the importance of employee health and wellbeing to the success and resilience of their businesses.

In recent years, the concept of employee health and wellbeing seemed to be gaining traction with UK employers who acknowledged a fit and healthy workforce equalled a more profitable organisation. Then came the pandemic which, if anything, accelerated the promotion of employee wellbeing and pushed organisations' strategy and planning to another level. But it also has complicated issues given the need to deliver a 'reshaped' organisation quickly but in an environment that few businesses could have anticipated.

Mental health at work: A challenge for the modern age

The determinants of mental health

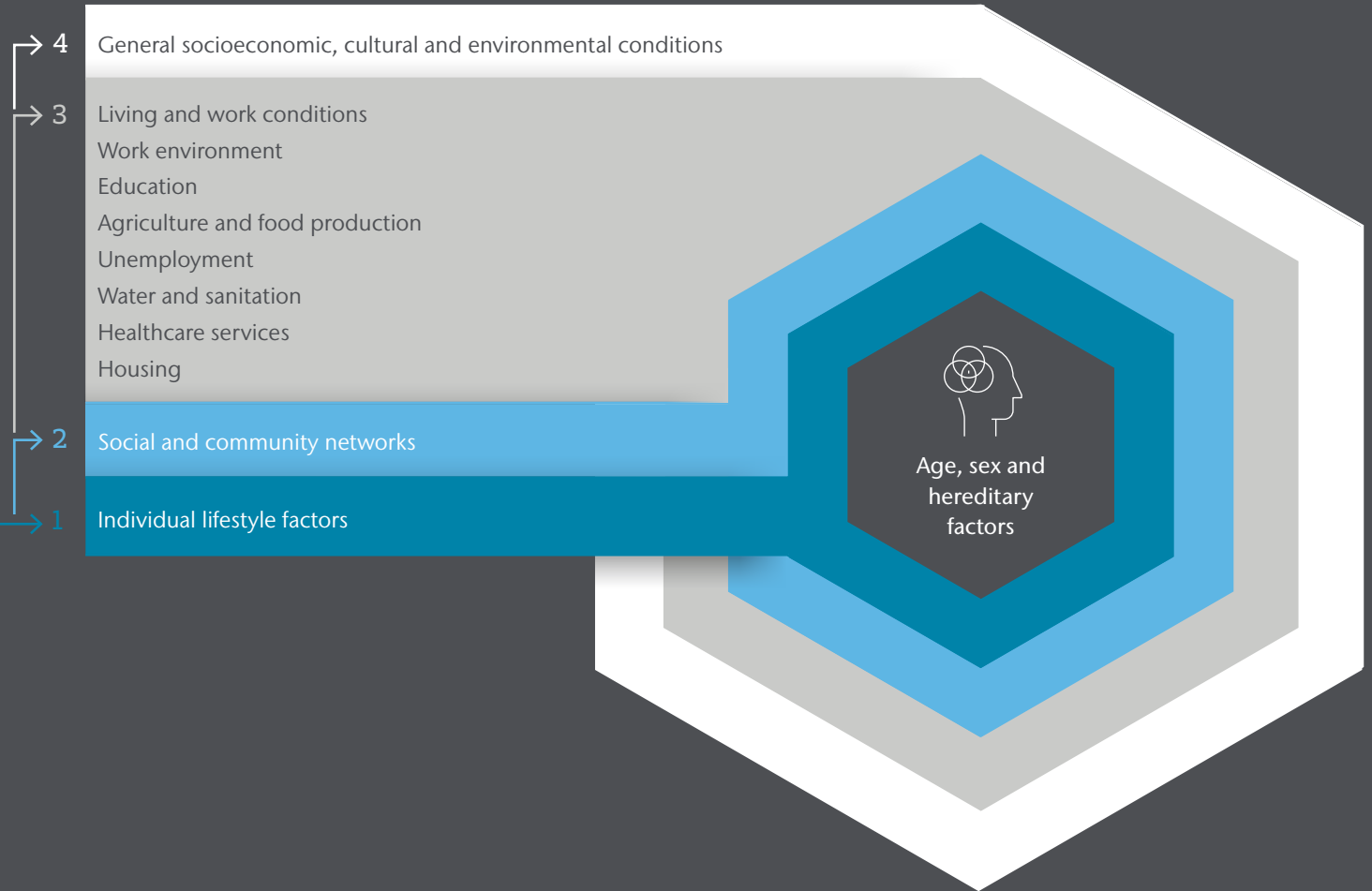


Figure 1. Source: Mental Health Foundation

Moving beyond cost

Pre-pandemic, recent societal changes had facilitated employee health and wellbeing's climb up the corporate agenda to the point where organisations were looking for more than merely a way to control costs. Awareness of issues like mental health and physical inactivity meant that companies started to feel not just an obligation but a desire to do more than the minimum. They were slowly recognising factors that impact their business outside of cost and profitability. Organisations were grasping the intrinsic knowledge: if your people are fitter and healthier, then you will get more engagement, loyalty, and better customer care, which will ultimately deliver increased profitability. There has been a clear move from return on investment to return on value.

"My challenge to leaders in workplaces today is, what are you doing to create an environment where people know they have a chance to have a conversation which might lead to some form of recovery? Or are you leading organisations in a way that is so psychologically unsafe that people can't put their hands up and ask for some help?"

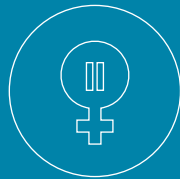
Geoff McDonald,
former Unilever Global VP
of Human Resources



Divorce
& Separation



Domestic
Abuse



The
Menopause



Trauma
& Suicide



Drug
& Alcohol



Loneliness



Gender
Dysphoria



Working
Carers

Contemporary drivers of mental health



Lone
Worker



Addictions



Social
Media



Work



Sleep



Sexuality



Harrasment
& Bullying



Bereavement



Money &
Debt



Race



Home
Working



24/7
Culture

Figure 2. Source: Aon



How can we manage the psychological impact of COVID-19?

Aon engaged Geoff McDonald, former Unilever Global VP of Human Resources and globally recognised mental health campaigner. McDonald says COVID-19 was likely to impact colleagues' mental health in the short term, and leaders should prepare for this.

"COVID-19 has democratised this (mental health) around the world. It has done more to generate this conversation than I have in the past 6 or 7 years." Geoff McDonald

Considering followers' expectations of leadership, a recent Gallup poll found employees want trust, stability, hope and compassion. So what is the leadership play in the short-term? According to McDonald, all leaders, including line managers, need to:

- **Overcommunicate, keep employees up-to-date to minimise uncertainty; reassure employees that everyone has the same access to senior management**
- **Be inclusive, encourage participation and use check-ins to ask how people are feeling and share vulnerability**
- **Think about their questions. Asking employees how they are sleeping, rather than just the standard 'are you okay?', may elicit more meaningful responses from colleagues.**

“The cohort we are most concerned about is junior leaders and the expectations and demands on them as we know that you can’t pour from an empty cup. We are finding ways to support and invest in those leaders so they are then able to help all their teams. It’s challenging to both look after yourself and be able to lead others in a very different dynamic – we need to ensure they have the support.” Darren Cornish, People Services Director, Aviva

A supportive conversation must be genuine; listening should be active, without judgement and reflected back, leaders should be consistent and predictable in their interactions and must resist the urge to cure.

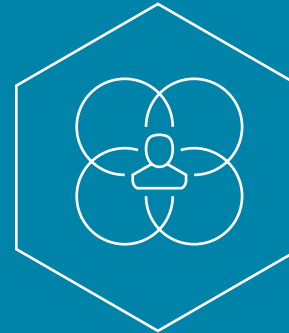
“We can’t always be happy. We can’t always be content. But we can always appreciate someone who listens to us.” Geoff McDonald

Self-care first. McDonald has a clear line on this: leaders must model self-care and give employees permission to self-care. Leaders need to be alert to the symptoms of mental ill-health and emphasise that they have a compassionate and empathetic relationship with mental ill-health.

“If you can’t care for your own health, I promise you that you can’t care for anyone else’s health.” Geoff McDonald



Overcommunicate



Be inclusive



Ask the right questions

C

Connect:

10 mins with friends, family, community or nature

A

Active:

40 mins exercise

N

Nice:

try to be nice to someone

D

Discover:

15 mins learning something new

O

Observe:

take a 5 min break every 2 hours to go outside/be in the present/do nothing

CANDO

anacronym: to
maintain wellbeing

"There was a book recently written called, "The 10 Most Enjoyable Walks in the World". When the researchers asked the ordinary man in the street, what is one of your most enjoyable walks in the world, do you know what the response was? Leaving the office on a Friday afternoon and walking to the car park, home or to the station. Why have we created workplaces where we suck the most important driver of individual and team performance from people, their energy?"

Geoff McDonald

**Performance =
Knowledge + Skill + Behaviour
+ Experience x Health**

Geoff McDonald

Health is a multiplier for performance

When organisations are recruiting, they look for competence, knowledge, and experience, but also attitude, passion and energy, which come from being healthy. However, if health is zero, then performance is zero (and success is zero).

Despite this recognition, wellbeing programmes in many organisations are still not hitting the mark. McDonald argues they tend to focus on one week of the year, with few superficial changes such as fruit bowls in meetings, while continuing in the same vein for the other 51.

He proposes four further reasons:

- **Health & Wellbeing is not a strategic priority in most businesses**
- **There is no organisational accountability to keep people healthy in the same way as there is to keep them safe**
- **There is no individual accountability to maintain health. People understand their responsibility to stay safe**
- **There is no change programme behind it.**

How do you prioritise workforce health?

McDonald's framework (figure 3) illustrates what health as a strategic priority might look like/entail, to enhance organisational accountability and facilitate the question: what have we done to improve people's physical, emotional and mental health? Have we created that sense of purpose at an organisational level?

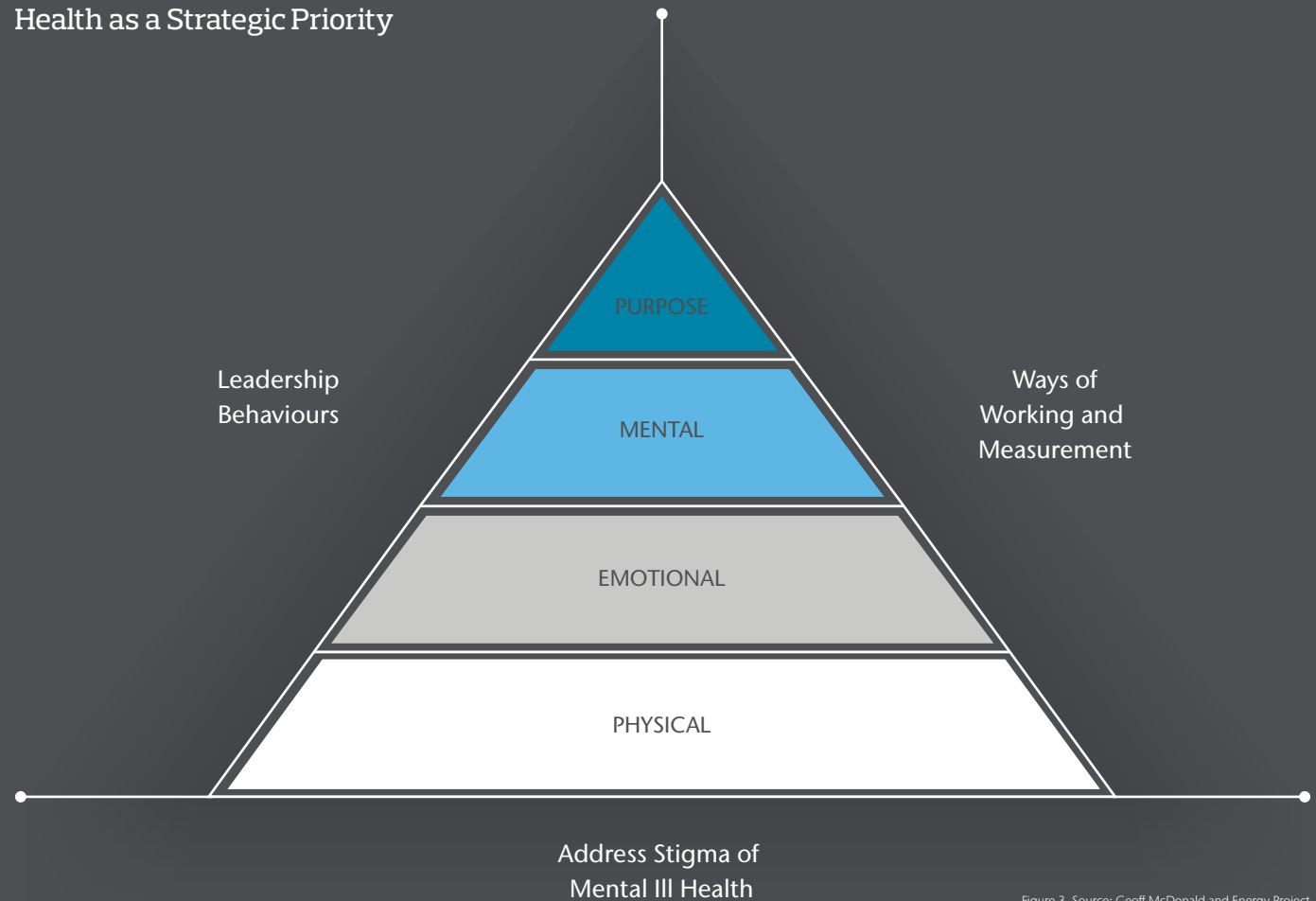


Figure 3. Source: Geoff McDonald and Energy Project

How do you prioritise workforce health?

“If we look to Occupational Safety, where great strides have been made reducing work-related injuries, progress was achieved by more than just training and awareness. Dangerous machinery was guarded to prevent people losing limbs; tasks are designed to prevent people getting hurt; people are given protective equipment. Awareness and training are vitally important in any workplace mental health strategy, but organisations will need to challenge themselves on how work can be designed to reduce the mental ill-health risks.” Chris Dark, QHSE Director EMEA – Growth & Emerging Markets, CBRE



For organisations,
McDonald advises:

- Carrying out audits to discover pain points, which could lead to changes in policies, processes and procedures
- Including a behaviour around self-care or compassion in the leadership competency model
- All organisations have to address the stigma of mental ill-health.



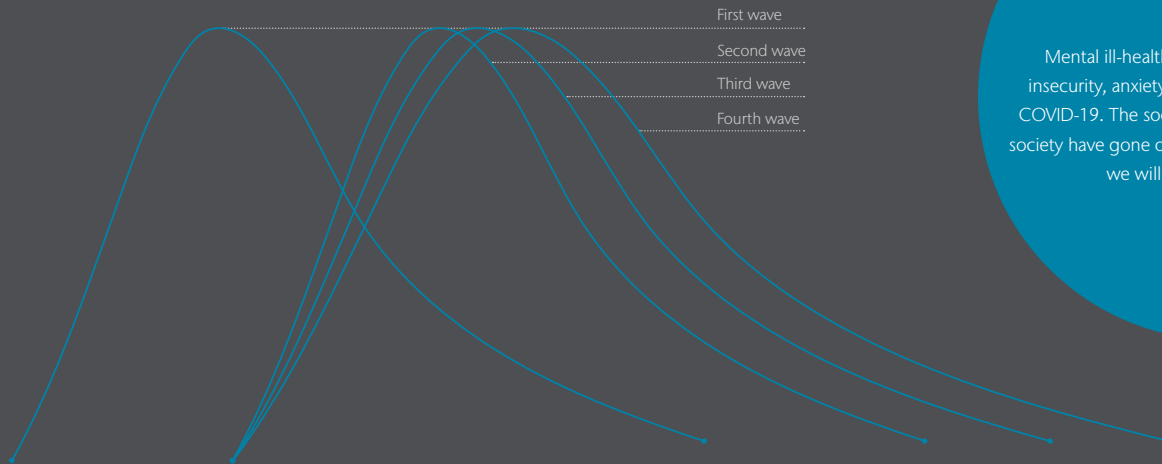
When considering
individual accountability,
McDonald advocates:

- Individual development plans that don't only relate to knowledge, skill, behaviour and experience, but also enhance energy
- Training for employees of all levels, ensuring everyone has a collective understanding of mental health, regardless of role level.



What are the future health challenges relating to COVID-19?

International SOS expects to see additional health challenges in the next two to three years —split into four waves (see Figure 4).



1

FIRST WAVE:

COVID-19 – and the spike for the Christmas season during winter in the northern hemisphere.

2

SECOND WAVE:

Chronic diseases, and the umbrella, non-communicable disease – everything from cancer, diabetes and the risk factors that lead to those. Why is there an anticipated tsunami of these cases in the next couple of years? Firstly, healthcare systems have been put on pause, so individuals have not had regular check-ups. Add working from home to that – and it has completely changed the dynamic of our lives – we're more sedentary and even our relationship with food has changed.

3

THIRD WAVE:

Mental ill-health – this is rising because of job insecurity, anxiety and depression associated with COVID-19. The social norms of how we operate as a society have gone out the window in the last year, and we will see the impact of this.

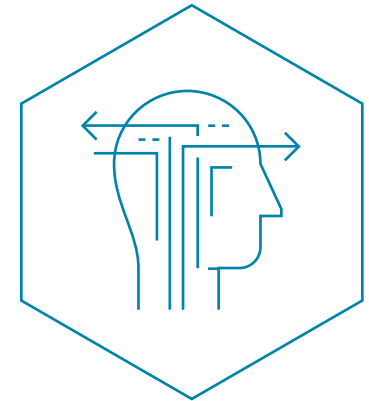
4

FOURTH WAVE:

The consequent socio-economic disparity, which will have lasting implications for mental health. The Institute of Fiscal Studies says the specific nature of the economic shock associated with COVID-19 has interacted with many old and deep inequalities. About 30% of low-income households pre-crisis said that they could not manage a month if they were to lose their main source of household income.

Figure 4. Source International SOS

Taking stock of where we are



Remote working challenges

Many organisations in office-based businesses that complement home working and reduced movement - such as tech and media companies – have survived and even thrived during COVID-19 as demand for their services has grown, but those services are being delivered by employees who are primarily working from home.

Many employees don't want to go back to the office like they used to, but they still want to collaborate and innovate with their teams in a face-to-face environment, which could mean providing access to office space for a day or two per week, which becomes a challenge. What about other issues like the mental health problems of being out of the office, or the potential musculoskeletal risks of working from home at poorly equipped workstations?

Take the talent agenda as another issue – how you hire, train, develop and reward people becomes a greater challenge for a remote workforce. Do you give everyone a homeworking allowance for example? What happens to pay variances across the UK – e.g. London weighting? If you're operating in different countries, do you give the same allowance across different regions?

Know where you stand

Employers like – and need – to have some comfort around benchmarking in these areas. Are they doing the same thing as other businesses? What are others doing to support and develop their employees? It's in areas like these where the London Work, Travel, Convene Coalition can bring valuable insight. It is clear leading employers have plans and actions in place, even while dealing with the shifting dynamic of COVID-19, and sharing and helping others to access those learnings is important.

Supporting employees through this process is critical, although ironically, many organisations may not be aware that their existing health benefits may offer services that can help people get through this change but aren't currently being exploited. Services like digital GP services, employee assistance programmes, access to occupational health, cognitive behavioural therapy, and physiotherapy are often built into traditional benefits programmes. Businesses must make sure they are using what they have got before they go looking anywhere else. And if a business does need to buy something, there might be other areas where it can cut back, or get a better premium; helping to deliver an effective programme in a cost-neutral way.



The power of purpose

COVID-19 presents employers with an opportunity to enhance employees' wellbeing and provide purpose at a time when our lives are in sore need of fulfilment. Whilst the vaccine news provides hope that many await, the return to the workplace as we knew it is many months, if not years away. Organisational investment is shifting and offers an unparalleled opportunity to invest in people.

As businesses strive to align their benefits to the 'new better', communication should be the first port of call in terms of spending. The disconnect shown in figure 5 illustrates that few businesses allocate enough resource

to communicating with their employees when it comes to the health and wellbeing benefits they can access. Still, now, with many operating a disparate workforce, it's essential to ramp up the resources spent on developing an effective communications plan and executing it well.

Most importantly, businesses should have a strategy in place; know the start, middle and endpoints, and have data sets that can be measured to prove its health and wellbeing approach is making a difference as they reshape for a challenging and resilient future.

Crossed wires: there is a communication gap between organisations and employees when it comes to the current availability of health and wellbeing initiatives.

Statement	Employees who agree – UK	Employers who agree – UK
No initiatives focused on healthy living	43%	17%
No initiatives focused on emotional wellbeing	42%	20%
No initiatives focused on flexible work or skill development	39%	13%

Figure 5. Source: Aon Rising Resilient core data set UK, 2020

"Mental health awareness has been accelerated by the pandemic. After negotiating the react, respond, and recover phases of the crisis, businesses will arrive at the reshape phase and want to take advantage of the opportunity to create change that is long-lasting for their employees – a way of working that we describe at Aon as part of creating the 'new better'."

Colin Barnes, Aon

What is the London Work, Travel, Convene Coalition?

The London Work, Travel, Convene Coalition launched in September 2020. It brings together large employers in the City and Canary Wharf to share key learnings and insights related to planning and operations, to assess impact and measurement of efforts and to evaluate the latest technologies. The coalition's aim is to develop a set of guidelines to help navigate the challenges businesses face as society re-opens throughout the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Founding members of the coalition include, Accenture, Ashurst, Aviva, Clyde & Co, JLL, Legal & General and others. Member roles range from Chief Operating Officer, Director of People Services, Director of Employee Experience, and Future Workplace Director.

Other coalitions worldwide include Chicago and New York, Dublin, and Singapore.

If you would like to find out more about the coalition, please contact The London Work, Travel & Convene Coalition Team [LondonWTC@aon.co.uk]

About Aon

Aon plc (NYSE:AON) is a leading global professional services firm providing a broad range of risk, retirement and health solutions. Our 50,000 colleagues in 120 countries empower results for clients by using proprietary data and analytics to deliver insights that reduce volatility and improve performance.

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