

Strategic Human Resource Management Framework for State Universities and Colleges in the Philippines

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Abstract

State Universities and Colleges (SUC) in the Philippines are governed by its own Board of Regents while being mandated to comply with the guidelines set by Civil Service Commission (CSC). Despite CSC's efforts to implement varied HR programs, SUCs still face major challenges in recruitment, selection and placement and performance management. Being exploratory in nature utilizing Grounded Theory methodology, in-depth interviews with ten human resource management officers were conducted. Results from the qualitative data showed that an HRMO's role in addressing any strategic challenges was not optimized due to strategic, leadership, management, organizational value, and culture constraints. This paper concludes that HRMOs are compliance-oriented and that an HRMO's initiative is an important enabling competency. Furthermore, this paper concludes a Strategic Human Resource Management Framework for SUC that will enable HRMO to create better HR services for its stakeholders.

Keywords: *Strategic Human Resource Management, Grounded Theory, State Universities and College*

Introduction

The State Universities and Colleges (SUC) in the Philippines are state-owned educational institutions. These are governed by their own set of Board of Regents (BoR) that is responsible for the development and approval of all policies affecting the entire University/College but within the state established guiding principles. As a government institution, however, the SUC also operates under the umbrella of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) which largely determines the human resource management policies and programs that should be implemented by government agencies including SUCs. Being primarily governed by the CSC, the Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) in SUCs are mandated to observe the statutory and minimum requirements set, in consideration with the other requirements mandated by other agencies such as the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED). With this set-up, where HR policies and programs are mandated by the CSC, the SUC BoR may not be totally aligned or engaged with what the CSC aims to achieve in introducing HR management programs for implementation. As such, the BoR leaves it up to

the Human Resource Management Officer (HRMO) to propose the implementation plan as required by CSC for its approval without much discussion on the details of the implementation and assessment of potential management implications. With a mindset of 'compliance only' to the CSC's generic guidelines, the BoR assumes no accountability for the results of the mandated programs implemented even if these do not address the needs of the organization. This behavior could be a result of the way these programs are introduced by CSC which are mostly as independent programs with no involvement from stakeholders when in fact the programs are supposedly aimed to develop and improve the human resources in support to the achievement of the institution's vision and mission.

The Philippine government through its Civil Service Commission had started to shift its paradigm to Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM). It had begun to raise awareness of all public HR practitioners about the advantages of business-like practices in the private sectors (French & Goodman, 2012). In its aim to embrace strategic human resource management, the CSC's first approach was to implement the Strategic Performance

Management System (SPMS) where incentives are given to employees who have delivered results based on an agency's goals and objectives. This program was introduced in 2013, a year after the Executive Order No. 80 (EO No. 80) was released and implemented mandating all government agencies to implement a Performance Based Incentive System (PBIS), that grants all qualified civil servants a Performance Based Bonus (PBB) and Productivity Enhancement Incentive (PEI) (Opiniano, 2019). Through an Administrative Order No. 25, an Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) was created to carry out relevant tasks for its implementation. Reading through the program profiles, the SPMS, PBB and PEI have basically the same objective which is to link incentive to performance but implemented independently by different agencies. The implementation created major concerns especially that the respective implementing guidelines are not clear about how targets are to be set, how the corresponding deliverables required from employees are determined and the difference between the requirements of the PBIS and the SPMS. The documentary and reportorial requirements needed to be submitted to avail of the incentive also vary for each program, yet the goal is supposed to be the same for the three incentive programs. As a result, the targets set, and outcomes expected may differ for the same job holder and these caused confusion to superiors and employees alike. So instead of motivating employees, the programs have created animosity among superiors and subordinates and the HRMO.

Because of these issues, there is a need to examine closely into how these programs could be properly implemented and integrated into the overall HRMO programs and practices and how these programs could be aligned to the strategic direction of the SUCs. There was obviously a gap in how the HRMO functions in SUCs, how it is structured, how the roles and functions are defined in relation to the HRMO being a strategic partner of management. This observation was supported by the study about state universities and colleges' efficiency and productivity stating that SUCs need to improve on how it measures performances because performance indicators in these sectors were inadequate and inefficient in measuring efficiency and productivity (Castano & Cabanda, 2011). In another similar study of Cuenca (2011), it asserted that one of the critical issues that the higher education faces is the lack of vision,

framework and plan that resulted to lower quality of graduates. Deteriorating faculty credentials were also noted as one of the causes for the declining performance of passers in the licensure exams (Cuenca, 2011). These findings implied that there was a gap on how SUCs were recruiting, selecting, managing, and measuring the performances of their human resource. Apart from other institutional practices and public policies affecting HRMO, the current competencies of the employees tasked to handle HRM related matters, especially the Human Resource Management Officers (HRMO), also posed an important concern for the study as this impact the development and implementation of HR strategies most especially in the aspects of talent acquisition, retention, training, and development. These concerns provided insights on the things that needed thorough and in-depth qualitative analysis of the application of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) for SUCs.

There are studies suggesting how government agencies can shift to strategic human resource management, however, these are generic processes anchored on the main concepts of SHRM. According to Tompkins (2002), the central guide of all HRMO practitioners in implementing SHRM is the alignment of its practices and programs to the entire strategic direction of the government unit. The operational processes include (1) identification of the overall direction (2) analyzing the workforce requirements (3) developing action plans so that HR can help achieve the overall goals of the government unit (Jacobson et al., 2014). Compounding to the tremendous importance of exploring new theories in SHRM, Brewer & Brewer (2010) had emphasized the integral role of HRM in knowledge management in higher education. In the same study, it revealed that human resource managers should possess meta-cognitive knowledge so it can take advantage in the creation of strategies to address organizational gaps (Brewer & Brewer, 2010).

It was in this context that this study was being done to examine specifically how the HRMOs function in the government, specifically in state universities and colleges and to attempt to close the gap to allow the SUCs to fully adapt the SHRM. This paper aimed to analyze the HRMO implemented human resource management programs, the core processes employed, and

challenges faced by existing HRMO that will lead to the development of a strategic human resource management framework that will guide the HRMO of SUCs in becoming a more value adding function in the higher education landscape.

Methodology

To realize the objective of the paper, an exploratory research design, with a researcher-insider stance, was employed to gather qualitative information from various sources and perspectives. An exploratory research design utilizing qualitative data best suited in answering the research problems because it aimed to explore within the context of SHRM, especially in SUCs which is supported by the study of (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Research with an insider stance can prove to be beneficial because the researcher is able to ask questions that are relevant to the participants, including current issues that provide a richer and deeper contextual knowledge to the research (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017). Furthermore, a grounded theory approach was utilized in processing the data, converting it to codes into themes that led to the development of the theory. The themes that were derived from the data were then compiled and analyzed according to the objectives of the paper.

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. The researcher adapted a multi-method qualitative approach in its data collection. Multi-method approach is when the researcher uses more than one data collection technique and this can be applied both in quantitative and qualitative studies (Saunders et al., n.d.). Since interviews are the widely used data gathering technique for qualitative research (Saunders et al., n.d.), the primary data gathered through interviews with the aid of a semi-structured interview guide. Ten HRMO from different SUCs were the main informants of the study. Documentary secondary data were also gathered. Relevant articles, government guidelines such as those from CSC and DBM, strategic plans of one SUC were gathered so that the researcher can triangulate and supplement the information gathered from interviews.

It should be emphasized that the results of the study were based on the rich experiences of the participant, and it does not primarily aim to provide generalization. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted using a virtual

platform, thus, there might be significant non-verbal gestures and cues that the researcher were not able to note because of the virtual limitation and connectivity issues. The documents being examined pertaining to the strategic plans of a university and the OPCR document were extracted from a single university.

Result and Discussion

HR Programs and Practices

Data revealed that common to all participating SUCs was the centralized recruitment structure. The main campuses house the central HRMO where appointment is processed. The issues on having political recommendation, nepotism and other conflicting issues concerning selection between the HRMO and campus heads were also noted. The Individual Performance Commitment Review (IPCR) and Office Performance Commitment Review (OPCR) are tools to measure and evaluate the performances of employees. Since CSC prescribed these tools, this has been also adopted by most SUCs. These programs are under the performance management function of an HRMO. However, based on the interviews, two HRMO, admitted that performance management is one of their weakest in terms of its efficacy and implementation. All programs and practices mentioned can be grouped into two emerged themes; CSC Mandated and Institutional HR Programs and Practices.

Supporting and Intervening Factors

Results from data analysis further showed supporting and intervening factors. Some of these factors have direct influence on HR while some may have only indirect control. There are also factors that are considered beyond the control of HR. These manifestations are due to the interdependent nature of the function of HR as its effectiveness and efficiencies are also affected by other offices within the university.

Data revealed three factors that enable HRMOs to successfully implement HR programs. These are support from the admin, CSC and President. Having competent HR Staff that can deliver with minimal supervision is also one of the supporting factors. These supports are especially beneficial for HRMO when presenting HR proposal to be approved and implemented.

The intervening factors or constraints as revealed in the interviews were the challenges and

difficulties met while performing their duties or when an HRMO implements HR programs. Qualitative data from the interviews of HRMOs revealed that the intervening factors or constraints could be categorized into three, namely, strategic, management and organizational culture-related constraints. It is important to note that the results and findings were not distinct with other constraints, rather, they manifested interdependencies.

Strategic Constraints

In the context of this study, strategic constraints of the HRMO referred to those that hinder the HRMO to address the needs of the university. These were the challenges encountered by the HRMO while doing the job and delivering services to the university. Strategic constraints in recruitment, selection and placement were frequently cited by HRMOs. Specifically, having no applicants or having underqualified applicants for teaching positions that require field specializations and having too many applicants for entry non-teaching positions such as Administrative Aides were the cited reasons why HRMOs cannot meet the manpower demands of every college. Addressing this type of manpower needs are critical for SUCs in producing quality graduates.

The lack of sufficient plantilla items for the needed highly technical non-teaching positions also emerged as one of the strategic constraints that were beyond the control of HRMOs. To attract qualified applicants for this position, security of tenure and an attractive compensation package should be offered. The issuances of new plantilla item positions can only be given through DBM's approval, which is beyond the control of the HRMO. The government's administrative system is also vital to this constraint because this determines the overall management effectiveness of an agency (Donahue et al., 2000). SUCs follow a prescribed organizational structure and proposing additional plantilla items should be within DBM guidelines. If the proposed plantilla position is not included in the existing structure prescribed by DBM, SUCs cannot be granted with new plantilla item positions despite evident need. This centralized approach in addressing manpower needs in SUCs being under DBM's mandate is a form of internal control as its rigid guidelines will prevent red tape in the government. However, in this set-up certain

disadvantages can also be viewed because this hinders SUCs through its HRMO, to directly address manpower problems as stated previously. Accordingly, Meyer and Hammerschmid (2010) asserted that having a decentralized approach, rather than a centralized scheme, is often associated with improved performance.

As per document analysis result analysis on the OPCR of HRMO in one SUC, it can be drawn that the office deliverables being measured in the tool comprised only of CSC requirements and transactional functions such as monitoring of DTRs, clearances and SALN and other HR related documents that were required by CSC or DBM, payroll preparation, updating of PSIPOP. This can be interpreted that the HRMOs focus is only on complying what is minimally required by CSC and in performing transactional and "assistorial" function. The OPCR tool does not imply any trace that the HRMO is a focal person in addressing manpower issues. HRMOs in SUCs view their role to be just "assistorial", meaning just plainly "to assist" or to facilitate. This is evident when one HRMOs revealed that in performance management their role is on the monitoring, recording and consolidating of IPCR and OPCR. HRMO 3 disclosed "that the role of HR in terms of that faculty development plan is more of consolidation".

The view of the role of HRMO in performance management poses a lot of implications why an HRMO views the IPCR and OPCR as not really measuring up employee's work performances. The perceptions that the IPCR are just a "piece of paper" that they need to comply can also be linked under this analogy. HRMOs do not hold themselves accountable for its failure to really measure employee performances because in the first place, they were not part of the target setting. Their role is on the recording part and consolidating part, thus, they view themselves as being outside of the problem rather than thinking they can do something to correct it.

HRMOs in SUC view their role not as a focal point where they can provide strategic solutions to their manpower needs and demands. Instead, their role is just to facilitate. It is the perception of an HRMO that the strategic decisions should be initiated by the top management, and to a HRMOs perspective, they are not part of top management. This view can also be triangulated from the

organizational structure of a SUC where the HRMO is just one of the offices under the administration along with supply office and general services offices.

Certain gaps can be drawn from the analysis of DBM PBB related documentary requirements, IPCR and OPCR of an SUC, Strategic Plans of the same SUC and the SPMS and RBPMS frameworks where the DBMs PBB was anchored on. The SPMS adopted a balanced scorecard approach integrating four perspectives, namely: Financial, Internal, Citizen or Client satisfaction and Leadership Perspectives. The latest DBM Memorandum Circular 2021-1 revised the coverage of dimensions of accountability as basis for the PBB grants. These dimensions included Performance Results, Process Results, Financial Results and Citizen/Client Satisfaction Results. It should be noted that the Good Governance Criteria (GGC) was excluded from the dimensions. In the previous criteria GGC was part of the dimensions of accountability.

Upon examining the documents on IPCR, OPCR and Strategic Plans of an SUC, it was observed that there were no indicators on IPCR or OPCR pertaining to how an office or agency is being led or managed. The strategic plan of the SUC did not also explicitly include managerial and leadership development programs aimed to enhance the managerial and leadership competencies of all heads of offices in the universities. Despite the presence of the GGC dimension in PBB criteria, these gaps still existed in one SUC. With the present exclusion of the GGC, such gap on the issues pertaining to lack of managerial and leadership indicators and related capacity building programs for heads of agencies will continue to persist.

Leadership and Management Constraints

In the context of this study, leadership and management constraints refer to those that are not of direct influence of the HRMO but rather a direct control of the supervisors, the heads of every office, the deans of different colleges, and the Presidents. This includes top management's level of awareness on the role and function of HRMOs in the organization and the leadership and management skills or the lack thereof, of every supervisor, dean and other head of offices in the university. A study of Jiang and Messersmith (2018) also emphasized the importance of

having a resilient and competent workforce, especially the decision makers, because this also determines the effectiveness of HRM practices.

The previous findings that the IPCR ratings do not reflect the actual employee performance can be traced to this contention of HRMO 8 that the supervisors and deans who are rating their staff and faculty, respectively, are not "meticulous" in rating their employees. The word meticulous here can be associated to not being objective in giving ratings, the reason why in the IPCR, it will give the impression that the employee being rated is very satisfactory or outstanding in his/her performance when in fact he/she does not really meet such indicators.

Other constraint revealed from the interview data was the top management's organizational planning initiatives or the lack thereof in the context of implementing IPCR and OPCR in the university. According to HRMO 2, "the objectives of SPMS through its IPCR and OPCR are "effective in principle". Its main constraint, however, is the ability of the top management (the President and Vice Presidents) to conduct an organizational strategic planning for the entire university". He pointed out that if the first step is not followed strictly, problems are expected to arise up to the 4th cycle. So the first step is very critical to align all departments to the overall organizational plan so that department heads develop their goals according to the organization's direction. With this, problems during performance rating may be minimized. In these statements of HRMO 2, she emphasized that it is the main responsibility of the President and the Vice Presidents to set plans and targets for the entire university because the middle management, meaning the heads of offices and the deans, will just comply whatever is given to them. She also emphasized the importance of management and leadership skills that the top management should demonstrate. It also implied that HRMOs have limited "power and authority", that no matter how you work beyond what is expected, a HRMO's effectiveness will always depend on the leadership and management capabilities of those at the top.

The level of awareness of the top management on the strategic nature of HR is also a constraint for the HRMO. It has been the practice of a university to post vacancies using the same generic minimum qualification the CSC had set be it in a

teaching or non-teaching position, without careful consideration of the actual job to be performed. Baruch (2014) in his study about Careers in the Academe advised that educational institutions need to align their strategic management to how they recruit and retain their best talent. Changing the job specification and qualification posted based on what the SUC needed in its vacancy, although still complying with the minimum mandates of CSC, triggered questions from the top management of one SUC. This revealed that the members of the top management themselves were not aware of the strategic role of an HRMO.

Another management related constraint as disclosed by the interview data was the heavy workload of a HRMO and the lack of manpower in the office. This is related to the strategic constraint because the office lacks the direct control to hire permanent staff because of limited plantilla items for non-teaching or admin positions. Strategies used were the hiring of contractual service and job order personnel. This workload concerns of HRMO became one of the reasons disclosed why important HR related functions are not performed such as the review of the duties and responsibilities of both teaching and non-teaching positions.

Values and Organizational Culture Constraints

In the context of this study, the values and organizational culture constraints referred to the differences in values of the people in the university that the HRMO must deal with. These differences in values often led to a conflict of interest and trust issues that affect the working relationships of people in the organization. This also included the red tape practices in recruitment, selection and placement of employees such as nepotism and the accommodation of political appointees in the university. These constraints were difficult to address since the key players in the organization with a direct or indirect influence on the decision may not be objective enough in assessing the HR related concerns not because of the HR issue per se but because of the differences in the underlying values or the kind of working relationship the key players have with the HRMO. This result supported the contention of Selmer (2001) when it asserted that human resource management practices in the Philippines is greatly shaped by three overarching factors as such as the substantial cultural influences, specific economic and political issues.

As revealed by HRMO 2 in the interview data, she emphasized “one should be aware that as an HRMO you have to stand no matter what. Make sure that before you affix your signature, you are sure that no violation is made on the rules of appointments and whatsoever. After all, in all circumstances, the HRMO and president or head of agency are responsible. Therefore it is very important that you all understand each other.”

The above statements of HRMO 2 disclosed the trust issues between the HRMO and other key players in the university. Trust issues are difficult to mend and address. When an HRMO has trust issues against certain people in the organization or vice versa, this hinders an objective assessment of any HR issues that need to be decided upon. HR proposals or any ideas proposed by the HRMO to the top management through admin and academic council meetings might be put to a subjective scrutiny not because of its substance but because of the perceived personal motive of the HRMO or just simply because the HRMO does not have a good working relationship with other council members. On the other hand, when decisions are made by top-management regarding HR related matters, especially if that decision is not favorable to the HRMO, it may be taken negatively by the HRMO and implementation maybe affected.

Another interview transcript data revealed about nepotism and having political interventions as the constraints in hiring procedures. HRMO 3 emphasized the problems on human interventions on appointments just to accommodate political endorsements including endorsements of relatives that may fall under nepotism. Conflicts at work usually occur when the appointing authority tends to influence the selection process, especially, when their “bet candidate” fails to be within the top 5 rank. The task of an HRMO becomes daunting when heads of agencies and appointing authorities tend to ask favors to give preferences to some candidates. Generally, people do not want to strain relationships, especially with their immediate heads. The values held by the HRMO and the entire selection board now become an influencing factor.

Another interview data disclosed that a HRMO was forced to make strategies to accommodate preferred candidates of the appointing authorities. These strategies most often involves taking

actions to avoid legal consequences, going around what is prohibited by law. These actions may still be considered legally acceptable; however, these prevents the achievement of the goal of HR to select the most qualified applicant for the position. If the statement of HRMO 5 is to be regarded, he said that “when you take in applicants with ‘godfathers’, he or she may become a future liability to the organization, rather than an asset.”

Common recruitment, selection and placement constraints that emerged were issues about political appointees and nepotism although not all HRMO focused on these issues. It was observed, however, that for HRMOs with more than 20 years of tenure and just about to retire soon, their answers to the interview questions always included themes relating to values and organizational culture, especially on those coded with workplace politics and relationship issues. Their answers mostly revealed trust relationship issues and not much on the specific HR process.

Analyzing the entire interview transcripts of all participants, it can be inferred that those HRMO whose coded transcripts were about values and organizational culture constraints have lesser coded transcripts in HR programs and practices, best practices, and HR initiatives. Whether they had initiated programs or not, it appeared that the personal issues and conflicts with the top management emerged along with codes describing HR tasks and activities. Unlike the previous strategic and management related constraints that can be easily addressed with objective assessments and effective implementation of programs, the values and organizational culture related constraints are difficult to address. Exploration concerning this topic is a good point of study for other HR researchers.

SUCs have unique structures and specific core mandates that it should deliver. Considering the above-mentioned strategic, leadership, management, values, and culture related constraints, it can be concluded that there are situations beyond the control of an HRMO. Despite this, there are also situations where HRMO can help mitigate and facilitate for the resolution of certain challenges in the university. By applying all learnings in doing his/her function and being more accountable and more proactive, while grounding themselves to principles of integrity, fairness, service, learning and growth,

an HRMO can still become a strategic partner despite all the odds.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that HRMOs in SUCs are compliance-oriented. Compliance theory of Etienne (2011) has manifested in this paper. It stated that every agency is mandated to function based on what the “law-drafting authority” has required. Their actions are primarily determined whether they have complied with the requirements, procedures and guidelines set by the external regulating agency rather than being focused on whether they have addressed the manpower needs and other human resource management related challenges of their organization. This theory explains that the more procedures and guidelines there are to be followed, the greater the tendency for an HRMO to make compliance a priority.

Being compliance-oriented has implications on their ability and willingness to initiate programs because the requirements, guidelines and procedures of the regulating agency become the only option for HRMO on how and what to implement. HRMOs in SUCs tend to rely solely on the explicit mandates which often lead to not addressing the pressing demands of the organization. The guidelines of different regulating agencies, especially the CSC, is generic, thus, relying only on those mandates will fail to consider the unique needs, culture, and practices of the university. Another implication of being compliance-oriented is lesser accountability for HRMOs. With compliance as the primary reference for all HR programs and practices, they believe they cannot be held accountable if they fail to address HRM related problems.

On the other hand, it can also be concluded that an HRMO’s initiative among other enabling competencies is also a strong driving force so that he/she can become a strategic partner in the organization. Compliance to the mandates of CSC and an HRMO’s initiative to propose programs and strategies that provide solutions to the manpower needs and challenges of an SUC will pave the way of delivering better HR services to its stakeholders.

This paper further concludes that HRMO in SUC will be able to perform its strategic role if it adopts the *Strategic Human Resource*

Management Framework for SUCs. Maximizing the positive benefits of compliance-oriented theory for HRMOs in SUC while minimizing its negative implications, this framework integrates all significant results discussed especially the noted supporting and intervening factors, including related existing relevant literatures previously discussed. A Strategic Human Resource Management Framework for SUCs is hereby presented with the proposed HR programs and practices also presented below in details.



Strategic Human Resource Management Framework for SUC

The framework is interpreted from the bottom up. All HR initiative are based on the strategic plan of an SUC. According to Armstrong (2013), the concept of strategic HRM is derived from the concepts of HRM that are integrated vertically with the business strategy and are ideally an integral part of that strategy, contributing to the business planning process as it happens. The next phase of the framework is the identification of strategic issues as basis for HRMO strategic plans. An organization that can assess its internal resources, that is, its managerial and organizational processes in consideration with its external environment and then use this knowledge so it can form new sets of competencies is a determining factor of an organization's efficiency and effectiveness (Teece, 2016).

Moving upwards in the framework, certain HR programs and strategies are prioritized. SUCs are given the autonomy to develop own HR programs, such as in merit system, provided they observe the

minimum standards set by CSC (Dioses et al., 2019). The HR programs and strategies are categorized according to levels aligned to CSCs PRIME HRM program in accrediting HR of SUCs and are further classified anchored on the same CSC program with the addition of programs that capacitates HR personnel and HR strategies on records management.

After all HR programs and strategies are crafted, implementing these programs can be done. It is also emphasized in the framework the importance of integrating automation, digitization, and the use of information technology in all the processes that needs to be performed in adopting this framework. The evolution of technology from pre-digital to digital to post-digital era, all organizations have been affected directly as the needs and expectations of its stakeholders are changed (Goodwin, 2018). The topmost part of the framework refers to both outcomes of the HRMO and of the university. Including the outcomes in the HR framework was also suggested by Beer, et.al (1984). All HR strategies should ensure coherence and alignment to all HR functions. Consequently, it should also support the desired outcomes of the entire university. In this manner, HR becomes a strategic partner in the entire organization. The framework concludes a proposed means of measuring its effectiveness after its implementation. It is proposed that the effectiveness of all implemented programs be evaluated 3 years after its implementation, as aligned with the evaluation period of CSC's PRIME-HRM.

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