THE HYBRID WORKPLACE

The Return to Work Report

INFOGRID

Contents

Methodology

Infogrid commissioned OnePoll to carry out a survey of 2,000 employed adults during November 2021. This sample excludes those who ordinarily work from home or are self-employed.

About Infogrid

Founded in 2018, Infogrid is an AI-powered smart building platform that automates and optimises facilities and building management. It provides building owners, facility and workplace managers with a holistic and real-time view of building data that can help them meet sustainability targets, reduce costs and improve employee productivity and well-being.

Introduction

**William Cowell de Gruchy,
Founder & CEO, Infogrid**

54% of employees say the health of their workplace—including factors like fresh air and viral risk—still impacts their mental and physical wellbeing.

As humans we spend 90 percent of our time indoors.

Two years into the pandemic, employees are more aware than ever of the impact of the physical workplace on their personal wellbeing.

In last year's Creating a Healthy Workplace report, we revealed how the pandemic had fostered a desire among employees for a safer, happier, and more productive workplace. As businesses prepared for the return to the office last spring, employees told us how a healthy workplace was a priority for their mental and physical wellbeing.

A year on, amid continued political uncertainty and calls for a permanent shift to a more flexible, hybrid mode of working, employees are even more concerned about the health of their workplace.

Indeed, our research shows that over a third of UK employees today are more concerned about returning to the physical workplace than they were six months ago.

As we all manage a new phase of the pandemic, we wanted to catch up with employees about how they feel about the return to work. That is why we commissioned research with OnePoll, to understand what employees want to feel happier, more productive, and safer in the workplace

Two major themes emerge from the research. Firstly, most employees (55 percent) say the health of their workplace—including factors like fresh air and viral risk—still impacts their mental and physical wellbeing.

Secondly, employees are more concerned about the flu season, which reaches its annual UK peak between December and March. Over half of British employees are worried about falling ill at the workplace when returning to work.

For employers, though, there is good news. The overwhelming majority of employees (84 percent) feel that their employers care about creating a healthy working environment. However, there is also a challenge: how can employers reassure their staff that they are doing enough?

Employees want visibility on the health of their environments. You can provide it.

Returning to Work: Update

63 percent say that they are more concerned about the healthiness of their workplace today than they were before the pandemic

% of how the healthiness of the workplace impacts employee concerns
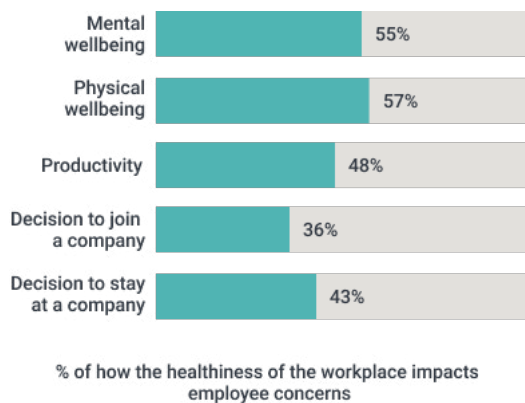
With the emergence of the omicron variant in late 2021, return to work strategies have been thrown into uncertainty. While many restaurants, retail outlets, warehouses, and factories continue under exceptional circumstances, other UK employees work from home with many not clear on when they will return.

In a changing context, employee concerns are shifting too. When we interviewed employees last year before the return to work in spring, half (50 percent) reported that they were concerned about returning to the office. Now, over a third (34 percent) are more concerned than they were six months ago

Employees are more concerned than ever

From our research, we believe that change is largely driven by worries about the winter flu season and concerns about being in contact with unvaccinated people.

58 percent of UK employees are worried about falling ill with flu over the winter, while 57 percent say they are concerned about encountering people who have not had a jab against COVID-19.

More generally, 63 percent say that they are more concerned about the healthiness of their workplace today than they were before the pandemic.

Employees now say the healthiness of the working environment impacts their mental wellbeing (55 percent), their physical wellbeing (57 percent), their productivity (48 percent), and their decision to join and to stay at a company (36 percent and 43 percent respectively).

With increasing awareness among staff of the importance of workplace health, employers need to ensure that a concern for their welfare is a top priority. But what do employees need to feel safe and comfortable in the workplace?

44 percent of employees would go into their physical workplace more often if their employer made changes to make the environment more pleasant.

26 percent said that receiving a booster vaccine against COVID-19 would make them more willing to return to the office.

Efficient and regular cleaning services	52%
Controls on the number of people in the workplace	49%
Better ventilation in the workplace	39%
Information on air quality, including on virus risk	39%
More plants to improve air quality in the workplace	25%
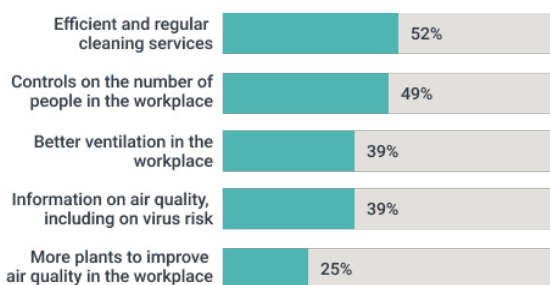
% of specific interventions that would make employees feel safer about going into the physical workplace alongside unvaccinated people during the flu season

Employees want to balance the culture of the office with viral protections in the workplace

After two years of following public health advice, UK employees are aware of what they need to feel safe and reassured at work. Most significantly, this awareness impacts where employees want to work.

A quarter (25 percent) still wants to work from home at all times, while 25 percent prefer to always work in the office.

38 percent say a hybrid environment would be their preferred structure, where they work partly in the office and partly at home. Yet this is not purely out of concern for the safety of the workplace.

84 percent of British staff already think that employers care about their wellbeing. Meanwhile, more than two fifths (44 percent) would go into their physical workplace more often if their employer made changes to make the environment more pleasant.

Indeed, employees mention some precise circumstances that would make them happier to return to the office full-time. For example, being around more people in the office is appealing for over a quarter of employees (26 percent), while a livelier atmosphere with different surroundings to their home attracts a further 26 percent.

However, over a quarter (26 percent) said that receiving a booster vaccine against COVID-19 would make them more willing to return to the office.

Similarly, employees support the introduction of some specific interventions that would make them feel safer about going into the physical workplace alongside unvaccinated people during the flu season:

- Efficient and regular cleaning services (52 percent of respondents said this, making it the most popular strategy)
- Controls on the number of people in the workplace (49 percent)
- Better ventilation in the workplace (39 percent)
- Information on air quality, including on virus risk (39 percent)
- More plants to improve air quality in the workplace (25 percent).

58 percent of employees reported feeling more comfortable if their employers used data to improve the healthiness of their buildings.

60 percent of employees say they want to see data on cleaning information.

Employees want to see data on building health

A fascinating finding is that employees desire to access information about the healthiness of their workplace.

58 percent of UK employees agree that they would feel more comfortable returning to the workplace if their employer used data to improve their workplace, including data on air quality and building occupancy.

These numbers remain steady from the previous study, where the same proportion (58 percent) reported feeling more comfortable if their employers used data to improve the healthiness of their buildings.

But what is remarkable is that respondents say they want greater visibility over the data themselves. Employees say that, if it were available, they would like to see data on:

- Cleaning information (60 percent)
- Air quality (56 percent)
- Virus risk (51 percent)
- How busy the building is (50 percent)
- Light levels (33 percent)

The data suggests that while employers are trusted to want to build a healthier working environment, taking active steps to do that is not always enough. Instead, employees who are increasingly concerned about their health are curious about the environment where they are spending their time.

Moving into 2022

Almost 50 percent of UK employees said being in the physical workplace increases their productivity.

41 percent of UK employees say they are more likely to stay at a company that proposes a net-zero strategy.

What do employees report about their working preferences moving into 2022? Believe it or not, it's not all about the pandemic.

We asked UK employees about their attitudes to the workplace in general—across themes including mental health, climate change, and personal productivity.

In response, almost half of UK employees said being in the physical workplace increases their productivity, while 41 percent say they are more likely to stay at a company that proposes a net-zero strategy.
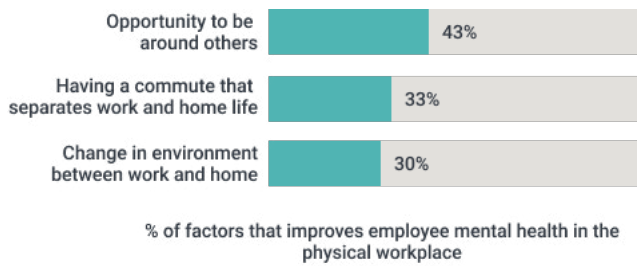
Overall, in a world in which concerns about health and the planet are on the rise, employees are asking more from their employers than ever. For businesses, doing the right thing can have a big impact on employee attraction and retention.

So, what do employees find attractive about returning to the office in January 2022?

- A better social environment than at home (35 percent)
- The opportunity to get outside more (26 percent)
- Better controlled temperature (25 percent)
- A barrier between home and life (23 percent)

Alongside these, we asked employees what their employers could do to make the return to work even more appealing. 38 percent said that efficient and regular cleaning would make a difference. 31 percent cited controls on the number of people in the workplace. 30 percent also said better facilities to reduce virus risk would make the workplace more appealing.

Mental health is a key concern for employees

Factor	%
Opportunity to be around others	43%
Having a commute that separates work and home life	33%
Change in environment between work and home	30%

% of factors that improves employee mental health in the physical workplace

28 percent said that their mental health is best when working from home.

Throughout the pandemic, the issue of mental health has become more critical than ever across all parts of society. Unfortunately, data has shown that since early 2020, mental health has declined—and has not yet shown signs of improvement.

The world of work is an essential factor in mental health. If employers want healthy, happy, and productive employees, they need to provide an environment that works for everyone.

In this context, we asked UK employees when their mental health is best at work. 28 percent said that it is best when working from home. 23 percent said it was better in the office. Only 22 percent said their mental health was best in a hybrid of home and office work. This was surprising, given that hybrid work was cited as the preferred mode of work overall.

From the research, we believe that this coincides with the fluctuating pandemic landscape and the varying standards of working models that employers currently offer.
Flexibility will be a critical factor to improve employees' mental health.

What emerged from the research is that employees are very conscious of the factors that affect their mental health, for better and for worse.

For example, when asked what improves their mental health in the physical workplace, nearly half of employees (48 percent) cited the opportunity to be around others. A third (33 percent) said that having a commute that separates work and home life is important, while the change in environment between work and home made a positive difference for another 30 percent.

43 percent of employees say attending the physical workplace increases their productivity.

Yet it is not all positive. There are essential elements that hold back mental wellbeing in the workplace, employees say:

- The lack of fresh air in the building (cited by 64 percent)
- A lack of natural light (59 percent)
- Feeling uncomfortable because of the temperature (62 percent)
- The social atmosphere: too much noise and distraction, with too many people in the building (57 percent)
- The social atmosphere: too little distraction and noise, with too few people in the building (24 percent).

Different parts of the workforce have different priorities and preferences. So the challenge for employers is not just to improve light levels, fresh air, and comfortable temperatures.

Instead, they also need to provide the flexibility to suit all employees' needs and ensure every employee's wellbeing.

Employee productivity improves in the workplace

Over a third of UK employees say hybrid working is their preferred work mode. Yet our research shows that, overall, productivity improves when employees are working from the office.

43 percent of employees say attending the physical workplace increases their productivity, while only 15 percent say that their productivity falls when in the office. Significantly, 42 percent say there is no impact at all.

Important factors that increase their productivity in the workplace stood out for employees. Nearly half (47 percent) say that the separation between work and life had a positive impact. 45 percent cite a better quality of light, while 44 percent say that a busy workplace with people in the building improves their productivity.

Nearly a third (31 percent) say an optimal temperature is an important factor. Employers should look to create a healthy and safe workplace to encourage productivity.

40 percent of UK employees say they would be more likely to apply to work at a company that proposed or adopted a net-zero strategy.

Environmental issues affect employee retention and attraction

The working environment has an impact on employee productivity. Nevertheless, businesses can become more attractive to employees by reducing the impact of the workplace on the environment at large.

40 percent of UK employees say they would be more likely to apply to work at a company that proposed or adopted a net-zero strategy. Meanwhile, 41 percent said they would be more likely to stay at a company that proposed the same thing.

Our research confirms findings from other studies. One 2021 survey by IBM, which took the opinions of 14,000 consumers across nine countries, found that 71 percent of employees and those seeking employment believe environmentally friendly companies to be more attractive employers.

Meanwhile, younger generations appear to be more likely to choose their workplace based on their values. According to the 2021 Deloitte Millennial Survey, nearly half of employees under the age of 40 are more likely to work for companies that align with their personal ethics, including environmental issues.
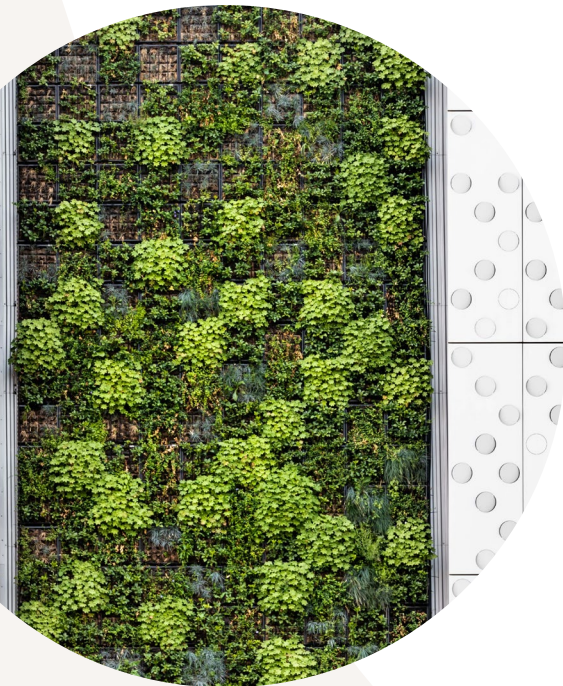
Infogrid: Hybrid Workplace Platform

A fluctuating landscape needs a flexible platform. Infogrid gives you the confidence to get your employees back to work safely and when the time is right.

What do we help you do?

Monitor your estate remotely if you can't go in
Monitor your building from the safety of your home. Be alerted to issues as and when they happen so you don't need to put yourself at risk unnecessarily.

Keep your employees safe when they do
We provide real-time data on air quality, building occupancy and usage so if you do have to come in, we've got you protected.

Plan for a hybrid future through a consultative process with our sales team
Staff will return to the office, let's be prepared for it. We help you to proactively plan your building management strategy to ensure you're ready for employees to return to work safely, and when the time is right.
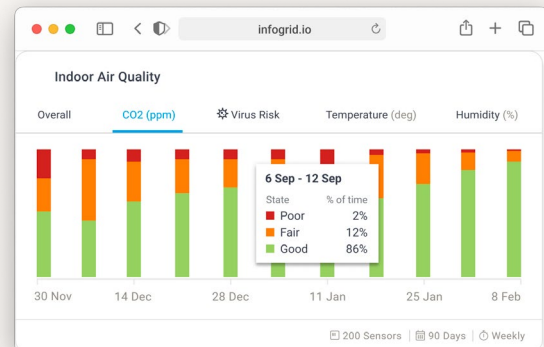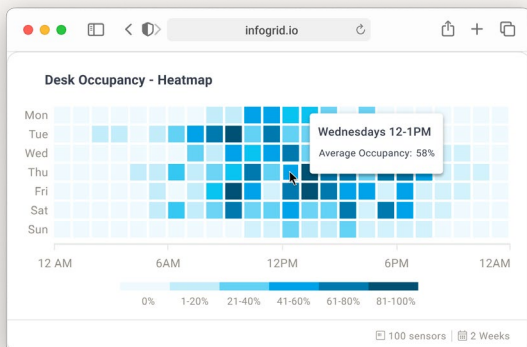
Air quality

Monitor CO2, VOCs, radon, humidity, light levels, ventilation, virus risk factor, air pressure, and a range of pollutants including particulate matter (1, 2.5, and indicative for 10).

Smart cleaning

Tailor cleaning based on usage to reduce costs and improve customer satisfaction. In addition, sensors can be used to validate when and where cleaning has taken place.

Occupancy

Track the movement of people to monitor space usage, control social distancing and limit access at the busiest times. Understand which rooms, desks and facilities are being used, when and for how long, to better utilise facilities and guide users to free space.

Water safety

Automatically monitor water movement and temperature to help reduce the need for labor-intensive processes and to determine if pipes require flushing to reduce the risk of diseases such as legionella. The system can also detect leaks and prevent mold.

Occupant satisfaction

The Healthy Buildings System integrates feedback from employees and occupants to help organizations quantify the impact they are having on their welfare and for the first time get true ROI measurement on employee satisfaction.

Build occupant confidence by demonstrating your healthy building measures

Increase productivity and wellbeing through safer, cleaner and healthier environments

Improve occupant satisfaction by providing more enjoyable spaces to work in

Building Health Longevity

The Infogrid Healthy Building System can also integrate additional use cases including fire safety (e.g., keeping fire doors closed, fire walk-around compliance), unauthorised access, and a host of other healthy building measures.
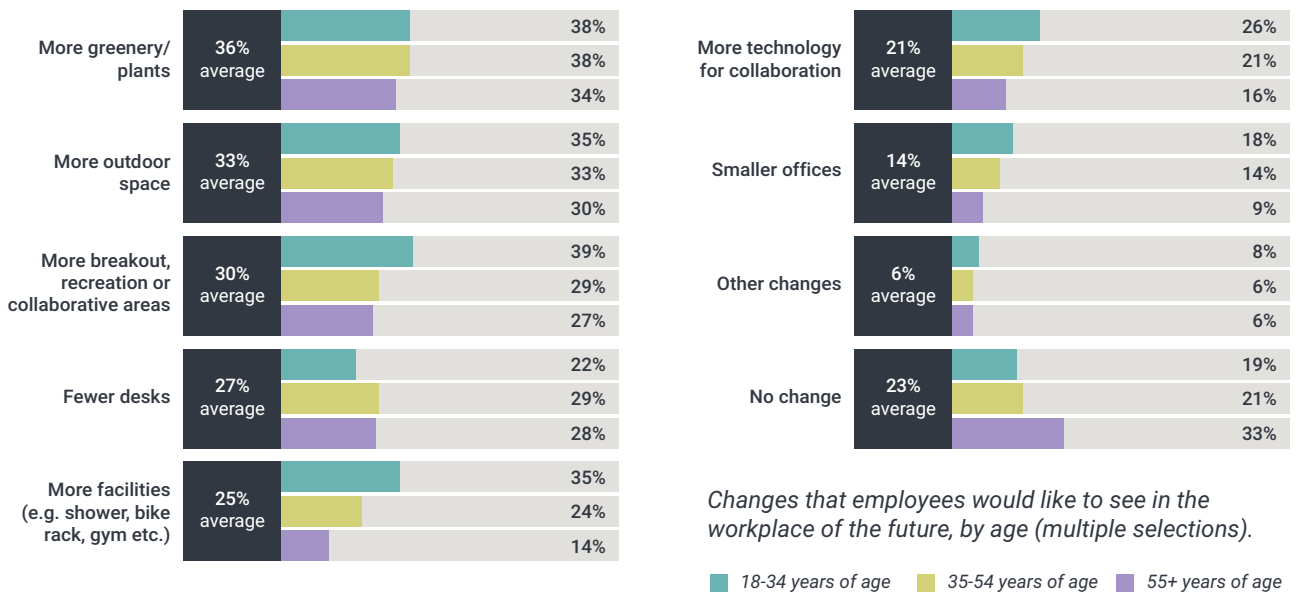
The Infogrid Healthy Buildings System integrates the data from each of these sensors securely in the platform, providing organizations with a holistic view of their estate. Infogrid's AI correlates the raw data generated by the sensors, unlocking the power of combining different use cases, and deriving insight that makes it easy for companies to identify issues and take timely action.

It also provides companies with a score of where they stand in their healthy building journey, in comparison to their peers. This gives them a benchmark to make improvements against and - for the first time - the ability to quantify the impact of measures such as regular cleaning and air quality in the office, to reassure employees that it is a safe environment for them to return to.

More importantly, with the new ability to have holistic oversight of their estate, companies can make long-term positive decisions that improve working conditions for their employees. It will help organizations demonstrate regulatory compliance, meet their ESG goals, and improve the sustainability of their buildings as well.

Real time SMS/Email alerting lets you know immediately when problems occur

Benchmark the healthiness of your buildings with a single score

Take action with AI-powered recommendations to improve the healthiness of your buildings

Use floor plans to visualise data and highlight where action is needed

REQUEST A DEMO

The workplace of the future

	18-34	35-54	55+
More greenery/ plants — 36% average	38%	38%	34%
More outdoor space — 33% average	35%	33%	30%
More breakout, recreation or collaborative areas — 30% average	39%	29%	27%
Fewer desks — 27% average	22%	29%	28%
More facilities (e.g. shower, bike rack, gym etc.) — 25% average	35%	24%	14%

	18-34	35-54	55+
More technology for collaboration — 21% average	26%	21%	16%
Smaller offices — 14% average	18%	14%	9%
Other changes — 6% average	8%	6%	6%
No change — 23% average	19%	21%	33%

Changes that employees would like to see in the workplace of the future, by age (multiple selections).

■ *18-34 years of age*   ■ *35-54 years of age*   ■ *55+ years of age*

Employees are demanding more of their workplaces. They are aware of the impact of the workplace on their happiness and wellbeing and will no longer tolerate an unhealthy working environment. But what do they want from their workplace in the future?

The research uncovered a clear desire to move away from the "traditional" office and work environment in the future.

Employees want more greenery (36%), more outdoor space (33%), more recreation areas (30%) and fewer desks (27%).

Once again, younger workers (aged 18-34) signalled that they want more change from the workplace, suggesting organizations are increasingly going to have to work to keep their staff.

In order to keep their workforce productive, engaged, and happy, businesses will need to rethink what their workplaces look like.

Data will play a critical role in helping to inform these changes to the working environment, helping to measure what works, feed decision making, and ultimately shape what the workplace of the future looks like.

Get started

The Infogrid System has been designed to ensure both installation and use are simple - making it scaleable to deploy across your estate. A suite of best-in-class wireless IoT sensors can be fitted to any building in just a few steps, removing the barriers and expense of traditional smart building technology.

Book a meeting with the team to get a demo and find out how to begin your healthy building pilot.

BOOK A MEETING   **GET PRODUCT OVERVIEW**
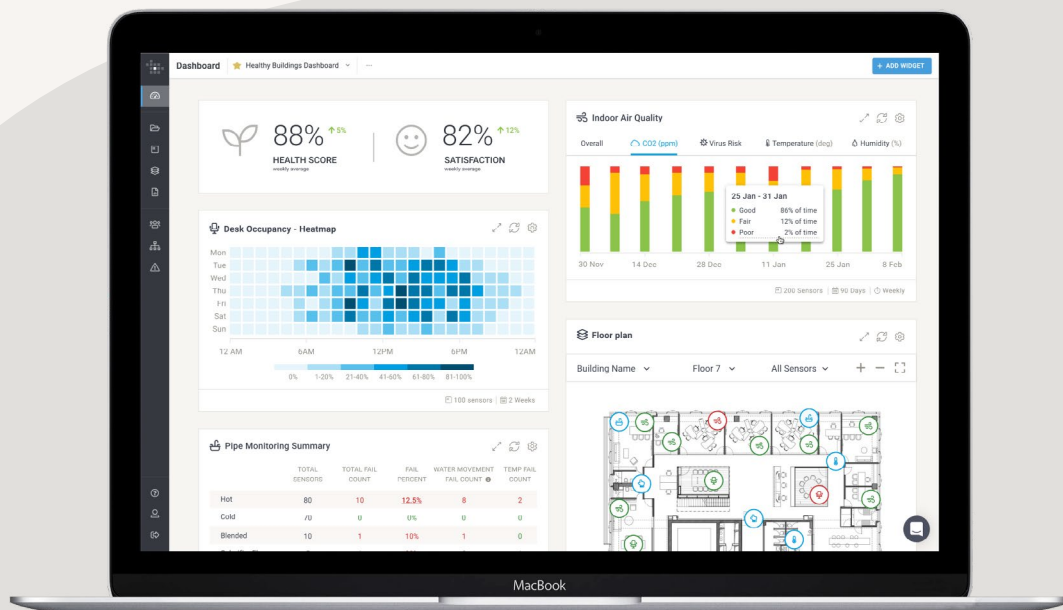
About Infogrid

Founded in 2018, Infogrid's smart building platform combines the world's smartest IoT sensors with powerful AI to automate and optimize facilities and building management. Easily deployed, Infogrid's end-to-end system enables Facilities Managers and estate owners to create efficient, healthy, and sustainable buildings, whilst strengthening compliance and reducing costs.

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