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A Comparative Study of HRM Practices in Multinational Firms Through a Configurational Model of Best Practices for Talent Retention

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Abstract

In the context of management practices in human resource management (HRM), employee retention is a critical issue among multinational corporations (MNCs). The turnover rates are high, which is why alternative and integrative methods should be utilized despite significant investments in the advanced HRM practices. The current studies have either mainly considered the universalistic or contingency perspective to the HRM practices or have focused less on the configurational (the bundle-based) perspective to the HRM practices. This research seeks to fill this gap by comparing HRM practice configurations in MNCs and the identification of the best bundles that can improve talent retention. The study has a comparative, mainly quantitative design, buttressed by few qualitative insights. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on 186 employees working in four MNCs, and analyzed data using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and configurational techniques. The results indicate that the highest retention levels (mean ≈ 4.02) are achieved with the balanced HRM bundles incorporating training, employee engagement, performance management, and compensation practices (mean ≈ 3.55 and mean ≈ 3.21, respectively). The research will add to the theoretical development of the configurational HRM in the sense of the importance of internal fit and synergy among practices. In practice, it emphasizes the importance of HR managers in MNCs implementing integrated and context-sensitive HR practices to improve employee retention and the overall organizational performance.

Keywords: Talent Retention, HRM Practices, Multinational Corporations (MNCs), Configurational Model, Strategic HRM, High-Performance Work Systems.

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Introduction

Globalization has had a significant impact on employment and led to increased mobility of human resources and human capital integration across national boundaries. Multinational corporations (MNCs) are working in a dynamic environment, where human resources are a critical competitive resource. With the internationalization of firms, required to manage their employees across different cultural, institutional, and economic settings, making human resource management (HRM) an important issue. Recent studies demonstrate that the systems of multinational HRM are shaped by global and local factors, and firms must seek synchronization and adaptation in their HRM (Mayrhofer et al., 2024; Wood et al., 2024).

In this context, labor turnover is a significant issue for multinational firms. While firms may have advanced HR practices (such as competitive remuneration, development, and employee engagement) in place, some still experience high levels of turnover. This could suggest that adopting individual HR practices may not necessarily retain employees. Instead, the effectiveness of HRM may be a function of interactions and integration. Evidence from research shows that institutional differences and cross-country variations also contribute to the challenges in HRM, particularly in countries such as India that have multi-level institutional and cultural differences (Khassawneh et al., 2025). Also, variations in HRM measurement and practices across countries suggest the challenges in "copying" HRM practices across subsidiaries (Darwish et al., 2024).

The majority of the research literature has so far focused on either a universalistic or contingency approach of HRM, which either highlights best practices across organizations or country-specific adaptation of HRM. However, a recent stream of literature emphasizes a configurational view of HRM, which promotes the importance of internally coherent bundles of HR practices. This is premised on the notion that the combined and complementary HRM practices are more important for organizational performance and retention than individual practices (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2025). Previous studies have also shown that HRM practices are influenced by institutional factors and other influences, thus highlighting the need for a more holistic approach (Lee, 2024; Abid, 2025).

But further research is needed on comparative and configurational studies of HRM practices in Multinational Corporations (MNCs). While previous studies have examined HRM systems in a single country or in a particular industry, there has been limited research on the role of different bundles of HRM practices in multiple contexts. In addition, there is little empirical evidence on configurational models in multiple countries. The latest research on bundles of talent management and polycontexturality perspectives reveals that different bundles of practices may have different impacts in different contexts (in terms of size, structure, and firm environment) (Tasoulis et al., 2025; Demirbag et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to add to the body of literature by adopting a configurational perspective to examine HRM practices of MNCs. The purpose of this study is three-fold: (i) to compare the usage of HRM practices among firms, (ii) to investigate the optimal configurations of HRM practices, and (iii) to understand their effects on talent retention. In this sense, the current study seeks to address the following questions: What are the key HRM practices in influencing talent retention in MNCs? What are the differences across firms in the configuration of HRM practices? Which combination of practices is most effective for talent retention?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, give an overview of the research literature on strategic HRM, configuration theory, and multinational HRM. Section 3 reviews the research method. The findings and their analysis are presented in Section 4 and discussed in Section 5. Section 6 concludes, discusses the implications, and offers recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

Talent retention is a key issue in the area of strategic human resource management (SHRM), particularly in terms of international competition for talent. Retention is the ability of an organization to retain its employees, and turnover is the voluntary or involuntary loss of employees. Employee retention and turnover are related to the costs of replacement, loss of knowledge, and loss of productivity. Consequently, organizations allocate resources to HR policies and practices to boost retention.

Strategic HRM involves the development of HR strategies in line with organizational goals to improve performance. Research suggests that a range of HR practices, such as training and development, performance appraisal, and reward management, have a significant impact on employee attitudes and behaviors. For instance, lifecycle-focused HR practices have been shown to have different effects on organizational performance (Pathomphatthaphan et al., 2025), implying that some HR practices have a greater impact on retention than others. In addition, talent management

practices that encourage engagement and the opportunities for development are most helpful in enhancing employee retention over time (Latukha et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of these practices may be moderated by other factors, including culture and institutional factors (Tyskbo & Firtin, 2025).

The configurational approach to HRM is a systems approach that focuses on the fit between HR practices. The configurational approach, in contrast to the universalistic approach, which advocates a best-practice approach, and the contingency approach, which emphasizes an external fit, underscores the importance of the integration of a set of multiple HR practices. Such bundles or High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) are designed to have a positive impact on organizational performance.

Indeed, studies point out that configurational approaches contribute to a more nuanced view of HRM effectiveness by taking into account interactions of practices (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2025). For example, the combination of performance-based pay, training, and participative management practices may result in higher retention rates than any of the practices individually. Further, research on talent management bundles shows that the antecedents of these bundles are influenced by the internal and external factors, highlighting the importance of the internal fit approach (Tasoulis et al., 2025).

The concept of synergy is at the core of the configurational approach, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts in relation to HR practices. This echoes the resource-based view, which proposes that resource configurations in organizations can play a key role in achieving competitive advantage. Also know that configurations in firms in a given environment tend to be similar, implying a convergence of the environment in the HR systems (Mayrhofer et al., 2024).

Multinational corporations (MNCs) have complex HRM systems because of a challenge of managing different workforces in different institutional and cultural contexts. For MNCs, the balance between standardization and localization is an issue. Standardization helps with efficiency and coordination of global operations, while localization helps in tailoring HR practices to local needs.

Research shows that institutional complexity has a major impact on the transnational HRM systems, particularly in emerging markets (Khassawneh et al., 2025). For example, variations in labor laws, culture, and economy call for context-specific modifications of HR policies. In addition, cross-country studies reveal that differences in HRM measures can affect the comparability and effectiveness of HR systems in subsidiaries (Darwish et al., 2024). This suggests the importance of responsive and flexible HRM in MNCs.

Global responsiveness and integration in talent management of MNCs Previous studies have illustrated how organizations use institutional networks and connections to enhance talent development and retention in challenging environments (Demirbag et al., 2025). Similarly, institutional logics in talent management practices imply the effects of macroeconomic factors on HRM (Lee, 2024). The trend towards polycontextual perspectives also suggests that HRM should be examined in relation to the multiple context factors, such as industry, geographical, and organizational characteristics (Wood et al., 2024).

Research Gap

Although extensive research has been done on HRM and talent retention, there are still some research gaps. Most research tends to focus on universalistic or contingency approaches, rather than configurational approaches, particularly in a cross-national context. Although previous studies have recognized the advantages of HRM bundles, there are few empirical studies that compare such talent configurations across Multinational Corporations (MNCs). Further, existing studies mostly examine a single country or industry, and the findings may not be generalized and tend to overlook cultural factors that influence the effectiveness of HRM. While recent studies place a focus on institutional and contextual aspects that shape HRM, empirical evidence on holistic configurational approaches that incorporate these is lacking.

Therefore, this study offers contributions to overcoming these limitations by adopting a comparative configurational approach to the study of HRM in multinational firms in order to gain insight into the best bundles of HRM practices that boost talent retention and that contribute to the theory and practice of strategic HRM.

Methodology

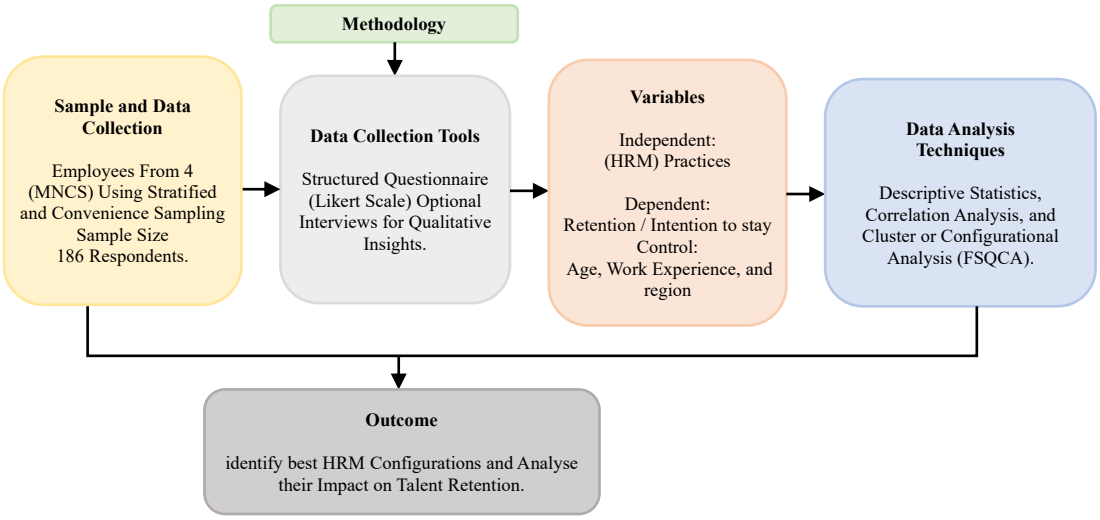


Fig. 1: Methodology Framework for the Comparative Analysis of HRM Practices and Talent Retention

The research design for this study is presented in fig. 1, and it shows a process from design to outcome. It begins with a comparative research design with a quantitative research strategy and a small amount of qualitative data. This progresses to sample/data collection of employees of 3-5 multinational enterprises (convenience and stratified sampling). Next, it highlights the data collection through the use of questionnaires and (optionally) interviews. It then specifies key variables of interest as HRM practices (independent variables) and talent retention (dependent variable) and control variables. The final part of the framework is the data analysis techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlation, and configurational analysis (e.g., FSQCA). This approach, as shown in fig. 1, is used to identify effective HRM practices that influence talent retention.

Sample and Data Collection

The target population of the study is the employees of 4 multinational organizations from different industries to ensure diversity in firms' practices and cultural environment. A combination of stratified and convenience sampling is used to identify the respondents. Stratified sampling ensures representation of various types of employees (e.g., junior, middle, and senior managers), and convenience sampling gives access to employees in the firms of interest. The sample is likely to be 186, which is a good sample size for statistical techniques such as configurational modeling. Data were collected through both online and offline channels to increase response rates and to reach all employees. Participants' anonymity is guaranteed and their responses are voluntary to avoid biased and dishonest answers.

Data Collection Tools

The primary data collection instrument is a questionnaire developed using a Likert scale (mostly 5-point or 7-point) in which the respondents indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding HRM practices or retention factors. The questionnaire covers demographics, assessment of HRM practices, and retention factors. Using standard scales enhances reliability and validity, and the questionnaire is pilot tested to improve it. Interviews with a small number of respondents or HR managers (if agree to take part) include semi-structured questions about practices and contextual factors. These provide some information about the practices and consequences of the interactions and other contextual factors.

Variables

The study employs three kinds of variables to reveal the HRM-retention relationship. The predictor variables are HRM practices like training and development, rewards and compensation, performance management, employee engagement, and career advancement. The dependent variable is talent retention measured through employee retention intentions, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Other control variables such as employee age, experience, level of job, and region are included to account for any demographic and environmental factors that might influence retention. This variable framework allows for a detailed study of HRM configurations and interactions between HRM and employee characteristics on talent retention.

Data Analysis Techniques

Statistical analysis uses statistical and configurational techniques. Descriptive statistics are used to assess the demographic characteristics of the sample and to provide a description of HRM in organizations. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships and identify initial patterns. To look at the impact of HRM on talent retention and to test the associations. To comply with the configurational approach, cluster analysis or more sophisticated approaches such as fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) can be applied to assess the presence of the different HRM bundles and their association with retention. These enable the research to move beyond linear relationships and understand the non-linear relationships between HRM practices and better understand the "best fit" for talent retention.

Results and Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive findings provide insight into the characteristics of the sample and their general opinion about HRM practices in the multinational companies. The sample (n = 186) was of the right size. 58% of the sample were male and 42% female, which could be considered to be fairly gender balanced. In terms of age, 46% were between the ages of 25 and 34, and 30% were 35-44 years old, suggesting a sample with early- to mid-career professionals.

In terms of experience, 38% of the sample had 3-7 years of experience, and 27% had 8 or more years of experience, suggesting a sample with average experience. The sample came from different functional areas (HR, operations, IT, and finance) and was thus cross-functional. The sample was also from different regional offices of multinational firms, thus offering a cultural perspective to HRM practices.

The initial responses to HRM practices showed that training and development and compensation were high across firms, but career development and engagement were more diverse. The mean retention intention score was 3.68 (out of 5), which reveals a relatively high level of retention intention, but not necessarily high in all firms.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative study reveals variations in HRM practices and retention among the multinational corporations (Firm A, Firm B, Firm C, and Firm D). Firm A has a high score in training and development and employee engagement, which resulted in a high average retention score (mean = 4.02). Conversely, Firm B has high scores in compensation and rewards but low scores in career development and thus has a moderate level of retention (mean = 3.55).

Firm C had a well-rounded HRM system, with all the HR practices scoring highly, which translated into a high retention score (mean = 4.10). This suggests that a high-performance HR system with several HR practices has a beneficial effect on retention. Firm D had lower scores in engagement and performance management practices, and this resulted in the lowest retention level of all the firms (mean = 3.21).

This indicates that although other good HR practices were in place in the firms, without them, these practices were not as effective. Firms with more integrated HRM systems are better at retaining employees. The comparative findings highlight the need for a configurational approach, rather than a simple "HR interventions" approach.

Table 1: Comparative Mean Scores of HRM Practices and Retention Across Firms

HRM Practices	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D
Training & Development	4.2	3.8	4.1	3.5
Compensation & Rewards	3.9	4.3	4.0	3.6
Employee Engagement	4.1	3.4	4.2	3.2
Career Development	3.8	3.2	4.0	3.1
Performance Management	4.0	3.5	4.1	3.3
Retention (Mean)	4.02	3.55	4.10	3.21

The relative scores of the key HRM practices and retention level of the four multinational corporations are presented in table 1. The table shows that Firm C scores highly across all HRM practices, has high retention, and can be classified as a balanced HR system. Firm A, too, has high scores in training, engagement, and performance management practices, which leads to high retention. Although Firm B has a high compensation score, its retention score is medium due to its medium scores in employee engagement and career development. Firm D has low scores in most of the HRM practices and low retention. The table indicates that firms that have more comprehensive HRM practices retain more employees.

Configurational Findings

The configurational analysis seeks patterns (bundles) of HRM practices related to retention. Using cluster analysis, identified the following three HRM bundles:

Configuration 1: High-Commitment Bundle

This is a bundle of high training and development, employee engagement, and performance management. Organizations with this bundle (e.g., Firm A) have low turnover. The provision of training and development, and engagement, appears to build commitment.

Configuration 2: Reward-Centric Bundle

This system has high compensation and rewards, but medium levels in other practices. This is predominantly found in firm B. Compensation helps attract, but doesn't retain in the long term due to a lack of career and engagement.

Configuration 3: Balanced HRM Bundle

This model has high scores across the board in HR practices; it is a holistic HR system. This is observed in Firm C and has the best retention measures. The synergy of practices leads to increased job and organizational satisfaction.

Configuration 4: Weak/Fragmented Bundle

Firms with weak or low HR practices (e.g., Firm D) are added. The misfit of HR practices results in low retention, indicating the ineffectiveness of individual HR practices.

The Balanced HRM Bundle was the highest, followed by the High-Commitment Bundle. This supports the configurational perspective that internally coherent configurations of HR practices that fit together are more important than individual HR practices.

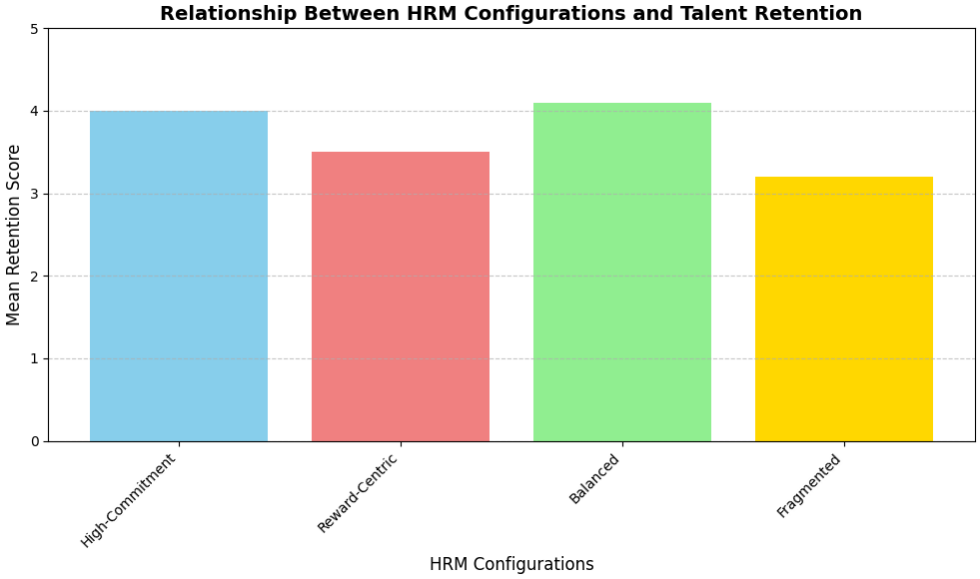


Fig. 2: Relationship Between HRM Configurations and Talent Retention

Fig. 2 illustrates the link between HRM bundles and retention. This figure shows that the Balanced HRM Bundle has the highest retention score, signaling that a range of HR practices is important. The High-Commitment Bundle also scores high, revealing the need for engagement- and development-focused HR practices. Moreover, the reward-centric and fragmented bundles have the lowest scores, indicating that HRM bundles centred on rewards or fragmented HR practices are insufficient to retain employees. Overall, this score confirms the study's claim that high-performing HRM configurations are key to talent retention in multinational corporations (MNCs).

Discussion

These findings verify the need for a configurational view of HRM to understand talent retention in multinational corporations (MNCs). Firms with a well-balanced HRM configuration, in which multiple and complementary HR practices are consistently applied, have the highest retention rate. This suggests that the success of HRM does not

depend on the use of individual HR practices but on the presence and complementarity of multiple practices. On the other hand, firms with a practice-focused HRM (such as compensation-only) have only moderate retention rates, and those with an unbalanced HR system have the worst retention rates.

This study is consistent with the emerging body of research on configurational HRM and High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS), which highlights the importance of fit and complementarity of HR practices (Opara & Waheduzzaman, 2025; Tasoulis et al., 2025). Earlier studies have demonstrated that HR practices across the employment relationship have differential impacts on performance and are more effective when bundled (Pathomphatthaphan et al., 2025). This research builds on this evidence by providing empirical support, in a cross-national context, that HRM bundles are more effective at retaining talent than standalone programs.

The success of balanced, high-commitment HR bundles can be explained by meeting both intrinsic and extrinsic employee needs. Training and development enhance skill and career development, and engagement initiatives enhance identification and feelings of attachment. Performance evaluation systems provide feedback and evaluation, and fair pay provides financial rewards. These offer a comprehensive, positive job environment, contributing to organisational loyalty and reducing turnover. The results support the resource-based view (RBV), which holds that some bundles of resources can confer competitive advantage.

The results also indicate the effects of contextual and institutional factors on HRM. Variations between firms are due to differences in firm strategy, leadership, and environment. This is consistent with research studies that HRM systems are influenced by contextual and institutional similarities and pressures, leading to similar HRM configurations in similar environments (Mayrhofer et al., 2024). In addition, differences in HRM practices and measurement across countries pose challenges to "exporting HR strategies" (Darwish et al., 2024).

A cross-cultural perspective, the study highlights that while the principles of effective HRM configurations are the same across countries, need to be contextualized. Institutional factors, particularly in emerging markets, demand that HR practices be more contingent on cultural, regulatory, and employee needs (Khassawneh et al., 2025). For example, some employees may be more interested in working for a firm with a training and development culture and job security than in one with high financial compensation. In addition, institutional logics and the socio-economic context play a crucial role in shaping talent management strategies and the design and assessment of HR practices (Lee, 2024; Abid, 2025).

In brief, this research demonstrates that the HRM strategy of multinational firms is about striking a balance between global and local responsiveness. By adopting fit and responsive HRM configurations, firms can enhance talent retention and build and sustain a competitive edge in a constantly changing global environment (Wood et al., 2024).

Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the progress of strategic HRM studies by examining the configurational perspective of HRM. Findings demonstrate the benefits of HR practices are significantly enhanced when used as internally aligned configurations rather than as individual practices. This reinforces the opinion that the fit and interrelationships between HR practices are crucial to achieving positive outcomes, such as staff retention. The research also indicates that a comparative multinational "bundle of HRM practices" approach with a configurational perspective considers the impact of the contextual environment and institutional factors on HRM systems and thus integrates the resource-based view and institutional theories.

Practical Implications

This study has practical implications for managers, emphasising a set of HRM practices rather than individual practices by HR managers in multinational corporations. Bundling training with employee engagement, performance, and compensation is more likely to lead to higher retention. In addition, managers and policymakers should build and develop agile HR systems that are globally consistent and responsive to local needs. MNCs need to continually monitor their HR systems to ensure consistency and responsiveness to employees' needs despite cultural and institutional differences.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. While the sample of 186 respondents provides sufficient power for the current analysis, future research should expand, it is small and may not capture the entire population of multinational firms, across industries and geographical locations. Second, the study is limited to a few companies, which might affect the

generalisability of the findings. The findings may also be limited in their applicability due to industry and geographic differences, as HRM strategies and employee needs may vary across industries and cultures.

Third, the cross-sectional nature of the study prevents examination the development of HRM configurations and retention. Future research with longitudinal designs would enable researchers to study the evolution of HRM systems and retention. Finally, multinational studies with a broader sample of multinational corporations could help to investigate the influence of institutional and cultural differences. Also, other advanced configural techniques, such as the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (FSQCA), may be used to understand configurations of causes of HRM practices.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of configurations of HRM practices on talent retention in multinational corporations. Findings reveal that HRM systems' effectiveness is enhanced when HR practices are applied in complementary bundles. Results show that the balanced HRM bundle, with high levels of training, employee engagement, performance management, and compensation, has the highest retention (mean ≈ 4.02), along with high-commitment HRM bundles. On the other hand, reward- and "best-practice"-oriented HRM practices had a negative impact on retention, therefore revealing the importance of the internal fit of HR policies. These results highlight that retention is not driven solely by individual HR policies or practices, but also by the interplay and coherence of multiple practices that address employees' intrinsic and extrinsic needs. This research contributes to the field of strategic HRM by providing empirical confirmation of the configurational approach to HRM and extending this to an international context. The findings are relevant for HR managers, as indicate that need to go beyond a practice-by-practice approach and develop integrated, relevant HR systems. This research may be further extended through longitudinal and cross-country studies to better understand the dynamics and contextual factors of HRM configurations.

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