

Broken Minds, Broken Profits: The Impact of Workplace Stress on Employee Productivity and Mental Health in Indian Industries.

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Abstract

The issue of workplace stress has become a serious concern within Indian industries, negatively impacting employee wellbeing, retention and overall productivity of the organisation. Despite the increased awareness, the mental health support available in workplace environments continues to be superficial or inconsistent. This paper highlights the systemic, psychological and cultural factors that sustain chronic stress and burnout in corporate and IT workspaces in India. Using recent survey data, empirical research and evidence from organisational psychological frameworks like Karasek's Job-Demand Control Model and Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory, the paper shows how long hours, unrealistic deadlines and poor management practice undermine motivation, absenteeism and attrition. Subsequent data from national and organisational reports showed that over 60% of employees in India experience significant levels of stress, which creates a multi-million dollar hit to company financial and human capital. The research makes the case for urgently needed systemic interventions relating to autonomy, work-life balance and digital wellness programs to create psychologically safe and resilient workplaces. To be clear, the case for addressing workplace stress is not only a moral obligation, but it is also a key strategy for building sustainability in profitability and human capital retention.

Keywords: Workplace Stress, Employee Productivity, Mental Health, Indian Industries.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress has emerged as an increasing concern in Indian industries, affecting employee well-being and productivity in the workplace. Although there is an increasing awareness of workplace mental health, many companies are still unable to address mental health challenges effectively. A high-pressure work culture, dynamic job roles, and performance expectations often normalise stress as opposed to mitigating it.

India's Workforce is Paying the Price for Relentless Hustle:

Workplace stress, or work-related stress, is a negative state that applies when an individual feels that the demands of their job exceed their coping abilities, often driven by pressures and/or requirements that are non-reflective of their skills or abilities, thereby resulting in negative physical and emotional responses. Workplace stress has become a silent illness in India. Research indicates that 89% of the Indian workforce feels stressed at work, which is among the highest rates in the world (Cigna 360° Well-Being Survey,

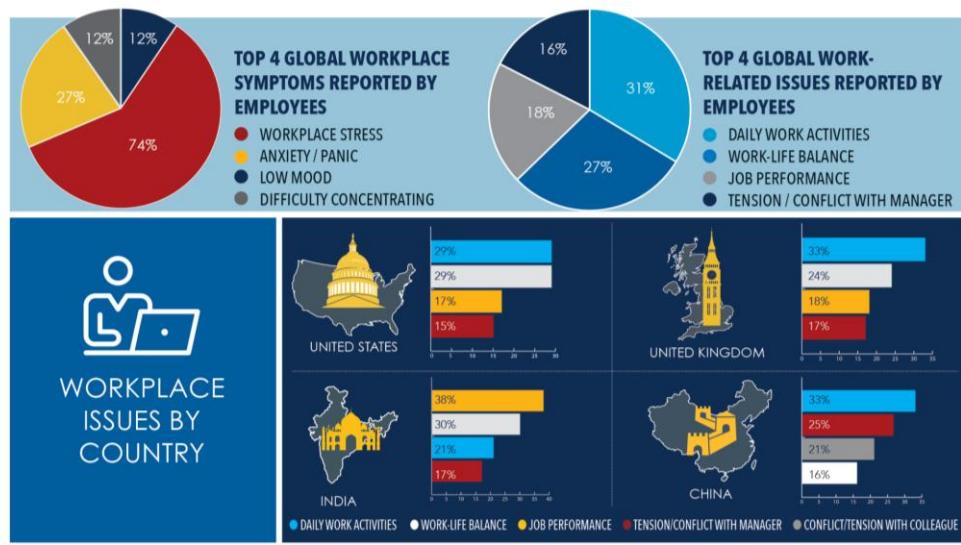
2019). Stress is not only a mental factor, but impacts physical well-being, leading to increased heart disease, diabetes and chronic fatigue. In IT and corporate environments, burnout is leading to a 40% increase in attrition (Neha Jain, 2023), creating a cost of millions for the organisation to rehire, reskill and replace the lost productivity.

Literature review:

Long working hours also play a major role, with 51% of employees working over 49 hours per week (Singh, 2024). The 2023 McKinsey Health Institute survey on workplace burnout revealed that India had the highest rate of burnout symptoms at 59%, significantly higher than the global average of 20%. Indian employees also reported the highest level of workplace exhaustion, at 62%. The survey, consisting of 30,000 employees in 30 countries, indicated that younger employees (18-24) and those in smaller companies were disproportionately affected by burnout. Studies also reveal that work stress leads to a 21% increase in absenteeism and a 35% drop in productivity (Deloitte, 2022). Companies that invest in employee mental health see a 4x return on investment through increased productivity and reduced absenteeism (Ciavaldini, 2025).

Chronic stress increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and weakened immunity (Alotiby, 2024). Work-related stress is linked to significant health risks. High job strain increases the risk of stroke by about 33% (Niedhammer et al., 2020). A study by Rodrigo et al. (2024) found that high occupational stress among hospital workers was linked to increases in body mass index (BMI) and fat mass over a one-year period, suggesting a clear association between work-related stress and obesity risk.

Image 1: Workplace Stress Index



Source: Based on participant data in WPO's Global Workplace Wellbeing study. December 2021.

Are Employees Thriving or Just Surviving? See What Indians are Saying

While companies focus on productivity and efficiency, the real question is, how do employees feel about their work lives? To assess real-time data, the researchers conducted a survey among corporate employees to analyse their concerns regarding their well-being at work. To explore employee sentiments about their work lives, a survey was created, which was designed as a tool to obtain information that relates to workplace wellbeing, engagement, and concerns.

The survey questions were developed in-house, based on preliminary research and thematic areas of

interest, ensuring relevance to current corporate work contexts. After completion, the survey was disseminated through multiple social media channels to reach a population of corporate employees across diverse industries and job levels. This allowed for the collection of real-time self-reported data on employee perceptions and feelings regarding the workplace environment in a nonintrusive and reachable manner.

During the survey time period, 100 responses spread out across four questions were collected and compiled in order to trend, pattern, and identify emerging concerns regarding employee wellbeing, work-life balance, and overall job satisfaction, which provided evidence-based insight as to what is happening in the work environment; areas to support employees beyond productivity that exist.

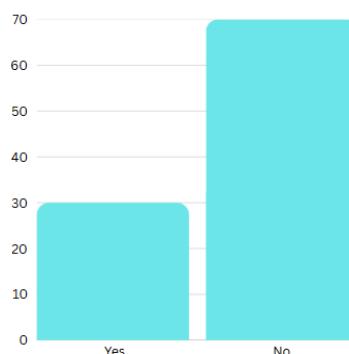
Results and Discussion

Stress at Work Is More Dangerous Than You Think

Figure 1 shows the prevalence of workplace stress in Indian companies and the extent to which organisations prioritise mental well-being. A total of 102 people responded to this question across various social media platforms. The findings reveal significant concerns about how stress is managed in the workplace.

When asked whether workplace stress is taken seriously, a significant majority of respondents (approximately 70%) felt that it continues to be overlooked, with employers failing to implement adequate support systems or preventive measures. Only about 30% believed that companies are actively making efforts to address the issue, such as introducing mental health programs, flexible work policies, or stress management initiatives.

Figure 1: Assessing the Recognition of Workplace Stress in Indian Organisations.



This highlights a growing concern that mental well-being is not yet a priority in many companies. between awareness and action, highlighting the need for strong policies to prioritise mental well-being in workplaces.

The Biggest Job Stressors Nobody Talks About

Figure 2 shows the responses to the question, What affects mental health at work the most? A total of 97 people responded to this question across various social media platforms.

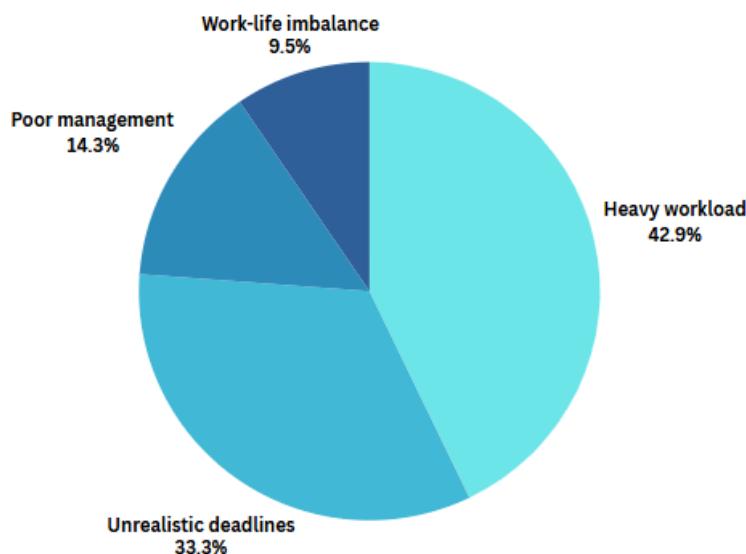
Looking at the data, it is seen that heavy workload is by far the biggest stress factor, affecting about 45% of employees. Many people feel pressured to be available 24/7, especially in industries like IT and finance. Companies that don't address this risk are losing their best employees to burnout.

Next, there are unrealistic deadlines, which affect 35% of employees. This is a huge problem because a

bad manager can make or break a job. Employees who feel unsupported, micromanaged, or unclear about expectations often feel demotivated. Now, looking at poor management, about 15% of employees find this a major stressor. This happens when companies expect too much in too little time, without proper planning. A 2022 Asana report found that 42% of Indian employees work overtime due to unrealistic deadlines, which isn't sustainable.

Finally, there is a work-life imbalance in about 10% of employees. Some companies operate with fewer employees than they actually need, expecting people to take on extra work. This leads to exhaustion and dissatisfaction.

Figure 2: Top Stress Factors at Work



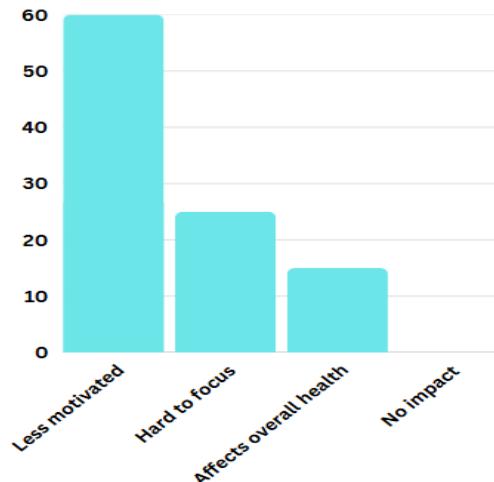
The biggest takeaway here is that work-life imbalance and poor management are the top stress factors, affecting nearly 85% of employees. Ignoring these problems will only lead to more burnout and higher attrition rates.

How Stress Destroys Productivity

Figure 3 shows the responses to the question, How does workplace stress impact productivity? A total of 70 people responded to this question across various social media platforms.

The data clearly shows that workplace stress is not just a personal issue. It directly affects productivity and efficiency. Nearly 60% of employees reported reduced motivation, meaning they struggle to stay engaged, put in extra effort, or feel enthusiastic about their work. This lack of motivation can lead to lower-quality output, increased absenteeism, and ultimately, a decline in overall company performance. Additionally, around 25% of employees reported difficulty focusing, which is a major concern. When employees can't concentrate, they make more mistakes, take longer to complete tasks, and may even feel overwhelmed by their workload.

Beyond productivity, a significant portion of employees reported that their overall health had been affected, both mentally and physically. Most strikingly, almost no one reported being unaffected by workplace stress, which highlights just how widespread the issue is. This means that companies cannot afford to overlook stress management.

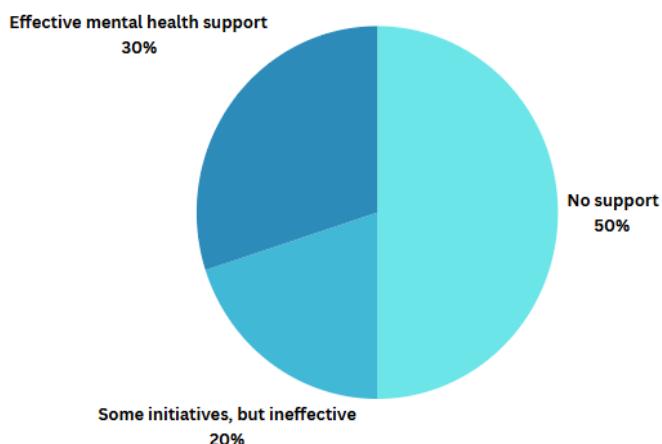
Figure 3: Impact of Stress on Productivity

Mental Health at Work: Are You Protected or Neglected?

Figure 4 shows responses to the question: "Has your company taken steps to support mental health?" A total of 66 people responded to this question across various social media platforms.

Around 50% reported that their workplace had done nothing at all. This indicates a significant gap between awareness and action. Many organisations recognise mental health as important, but fail to implement meaningful policies. Among those whose companies had introduced initiatives, only a small percentage found them genuinely helpful. This suggests that while there are some efforts, such as wellness programs, mental health days, or Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), once again, these efforts are not executed well, not readily accessible, or not sustained over time.

Furthermore, many employees reported that companies took some initiative, but it did not really address any real concerns for employees. This could be due to poor implementation, lack of leadership support, stigma around mental health discussions, or initiatives that feel performative rather than truly supportive.

Figure 4: Employer Support for Mental Health

These insights indicate a pressing need for companies to implement meaningful mental health initiatives, prioritise work-life balance, and foster a healthier, more supportive work environment.

Why Your Best IT Employees Are the First to Burn Out

Stress, productivity, and mental health are closely interconnected. While moderate stress can sometimes fuel motivation and efficiency, chronic or excessive stress often results in burnout, anxiety, and reduced performance. Research recently published indicates that workplace stress is particularly concerning in India, such that it has been determined that nearly 62% of employees demonstrate high levels of stress, and more than 29% demonstrate moderate to severe levels of depression (Sarkar et al., 2024). The case to promote mental health in the workplace is evident, as the repercussions of ignoring stress not only affect an individual's mental health but can also affect overall workplace productivity.

Padma et al. (2015) noted that prolonged exposure to stressful situations can significantly affect employees' autonomic nervous system and performance. The study also highlights that training programs within the IT sector are not necessarily employee-oriented and fail to help employees manage stress effectively.

One psychological concept that explains optimal workplace performance is Flow Theory, introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow occurs when individuals are fully immersed in a task, experiencing deep concentration, motivation, and even enjoyment. This state leads to heightened productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction and an overall better outcome for the organisation. The way organisations can help employees reach flow state is through matching the level of challenge closely with the level of skill of the individual.

When the challenge is more than the skill of the individual, individuals will experience anxiety, stress and an eventual burnout. Whereas when the challenge is lesser than the skill level of the individual, it is still a problem as they would feel apathetic, disengaged and lacking in the motivation to grow.

Absence of flow state on an organisational level is what leads to attrition, absenteeism and low productivity. When the number of employees hired are more than what the work demands, such as in a large consulting company then the challenge for each individual will be lesser than their skill level and that will result in apathy, boredom eventually causing low productivity and poor outcomes within the organisation ultimately resulting in attrition of the highest performers who may seek roles with greater challenge and growth. When the workload is too high for the number of employees, such as a startup, there will be high stress resulting in an eventual burnout, which will again trigger an attrition of the low performers or the people who are unable to cope with the pressure.

In industries like IT, where often the level of challenge might be higher than the level of skill due to several factors, such as the quick pace of development of new technologies, employees often struggle to achieve this flow state. Additionally, competing workloads, unrealistic deadlines, and continued interruptions of emails, phone calls, and meetings can all prevent individuals and even the organisation from reaching a flow state.

The goal is to create a working environment where employees are challenged yet supported, providing engagement and high performance, which is a difficult balance for the leaders to create at an organisational level. Skill assessment, quicker feedback loops, and psychometric assessment will help the leaders make more informed decisions about what kind of work and how much work they can assign to an employee.

The Pareto Principle (80/20 rule)

The Pareto Principle (80/20 rule) states that in most organisations, there will naturally be some productivity imbalance where 80% of the work is often accomplished by just 20% of employees. These are obviously the best employees, but with a cost, i.e. burnout (Laoyan, 2025). To make more employees

be similarly productive often requires dedicated effort in understanding the competencies and the mindset of the individual, where often a “one size fits all” approach is found to be ineffective.

That said, there are certain values that work on a group level too. Studies suggest that values such as mastery, purpose, and autonomy do ensure employees are able to fulfil their highest potential by achieving a flow state. If employees are motivated to reach their personal best, it often leads to a culture of excellence within the organisation as well, where each employee is self-motivated to perfect their work on their own, even in the absence of strict scrutiny by the leadership. While this can seem like a lofty goal, mastery can be emphasised in a work culture by reiterating directly and indirectly the company's larger mission and goal from time to time, rewarding the best performers not just monetarily but also with greater autonomy (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2017).

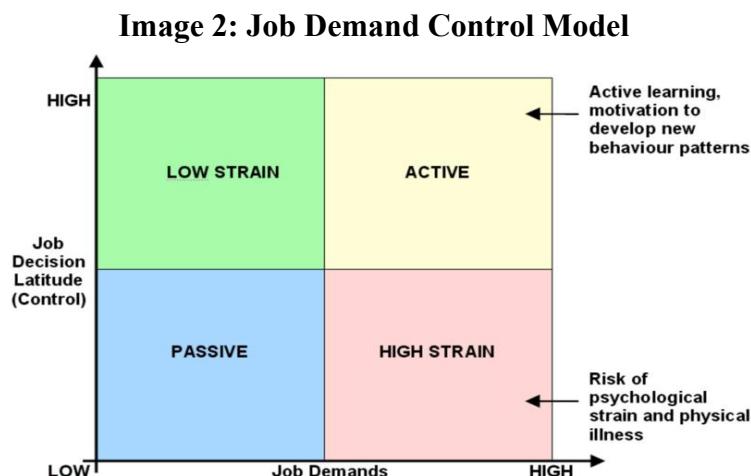
Purpose as a value is strongly derived from the leadership- if the leaders are fully aligned with their purpose, they are able to successfully transmit that to their entire team through reiteration of the company's mission, communication of the larger picture that goes beyond the individual tasks that employees understand, as well as validating the individuals on their strengths when they see them (Pulido-Martos et al., 2011).

Autonomy as a value often seems contentious in systems that thrive on a strict hierarchy. But what is often missed is that autonomy is earned through mastery and purpose. The best thing organisations can do for naturally driven, high-performing employees who are seeking mastery and purpose is to get out of their way. This is, of course, subject to certain practical considerations and certain rules because often all checks and balances are necessary for everyone, including the high performers. That said, autonomy can often be of greater value than even monetary rewards for those who thrive in an environment of mastery and purpose (Vansteenkiste et al., 2010).

High Workload and Technostress:

A high workload is recognised as one of the most significant causes of stress among IT employees. Research by Marchiori et al. (2019) identified technostress as a prevalent issue within the sector. They conducted a study on 927 employees across 14 IT sectors in Brazil revealed that older employees particularly struggle with technostress due to challenges in adapting to rapidly evolving technologies. As technology continues to evolve, employees often struggle to keep pace, leading to difficulties in adapting and workplace stress.

Karasek's Job-Demand Control Model (1979) further explains that workplace stress intensifies when employees face high job demands but have little control over their tasks. In high-pressure environments like IT and finance, employees frequently encounter long hours, tight deadlines, and the expectation to continuously upskill, often without sufficient autonomy. Studies indicate that when employees have greater autonomy and decision-making power, they experience lower stress and higher job satisfaction (Kain & Jex, 2010).



Source: Job Demand Control Model (Adapted from Karasek 1979)

Implications

Mental Health Needs to Be More than Recognition:

Despite awareness, many employees report inadequate support for stress and mental health. Organisations should implement broad-based policies, create effective corporate wellness programs, and have easily accessible resources to help support mental health issues and avoid burnout and attrition.

Stress Affects Productivity:

Heavy workloads, unrealistic deadlines, and ineffective management impact an individual's motivation, focus, and overall work performance. If the organisation does not address the stress concerns, the work output, quality and efficiency will inevitably decline.

Flow State Alignment Increases Engagement:

When an employee's skills match the challenge of the job's demands, they are in the optimal engagement performance state, also known as the flow state. If the work is too challenging or too easy, the individual will experience burnout, disengagement, and diminished creativity. Hence, it is vital for organisations to carefully consider task assignments and provide feedback to assist individuals in finding their optimal engagement.

High Performers are Regularly Overworked:

The highest performing employees are tasked with a larger percentage of work responsibility than non-performers. The highest employees need specific support to avoid burnout and quitting. High-performing employees' efficiency and output will affect the efficiency and culture of the entire organisation.

Culture, Mastery, and Autonomy Drive Retention:

Aspects of purpose, mastery and autonomy increase employee engagement and happiness. Organisations need leadership that emphasises purposefulness, provides autonomy, and supports employee personal growth and skill mastery to have engaged, happy, and high-performing employees.

Game-Changing Wellness Strategies for a Happier Workforce:

A happy, healthy team is the heart of any great workplace. Simple changes can make a big difference. When employees feel less stressed and more valued, they bring their best selves to work every day. A few ideas that could be really helpful are:

1. "Mindful Mondays" – A Fresh Start to the Week:

Begin every week with a 15-minute guided mindfulness or gratitude session. Employees can join virtually

or in person, helping them reset, reduce stress, and boost focus for the week ahead. Small rewards for participation (like a free coffee or an extra break) can keep engagement high. Starting the work week with a short mindfulness activity can provide a reset for workers, relieve stress, and increase concentration, paving the way for a productive week (Craig, 2019).

2. Wellness Treasure Hunt:

Turn wellness into an interactive challenge where employees earn points for healthy habits like walking meetings, hydration goals, or short meditation breaks. Points can be redeemed for perks like flexible work hours, wellness goodies, or meal vouchers, making health fun and rewarding. Gamifying health and wellness can create excitement and promote participation, while also enhancing healthy lifestyle habits. (Aldana, 2020).

3. Anonymous Vent n Vibe Sessions:

Create a digital or physical space where employees can anonymously share their stressors, workplace struggles, or mental health concerns. HR can use these insights to offer targeted solutions, whether through counselling, improved work conditions, or team bonding activities. Giving employees a safe space to express what is concerning them, with the option to remain anonymous, may provide a better understanding of workplace issues and create better courses of action. (Thompson, 2024).

4. Reverse Workouts:

Instead of traditional workouts, introduce fun 5-minute movement breaks tailored to desk jobs like stretching, chair yoga, or laughter therapy. Set up surprise “Reverse Workout” moments where a bell rings, and teams take a short, energising break together. Incorporating short, fun movement breaks into the workday can reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall productivity (Lepak, 2025).

5. The 3-Day Digital Detox Challenge:

Encourage employees to take a break from social media and unnecessary screen time for three days. Provide alternatives like book exchanges, mindful walks, or hobby-sharing sessions at work. Create a fun leaderboard where employees share their experiences and feel motivated to disconnect and recharge. Encouraging some time away from screens can reduce the risk of burnout, improve concentration and enhance mental clarity (Digital Detox Initiatives in the Workplace, n.d.).

6. Implement Workplace Flexibility:

Flexible work arrangements enhance well-being and efficiency. Options like adjustable shift timings, shorter workweeks, hybrid or remote work, and job-sharing reduce commute stress and improve work-life balance. Incorporating flexibility to one’s work schedule will enhance work-life balance, reduce stress, and enhance job satisfaction (Carter, 2024).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has provided important insights, but it also has some limitations. The sample of the study was small and drawn from social media surveys, which limits representation. Respondents were primarily individuals with internet access, and perspectives of people from the economically weaker classes who might experience even greater job-related stress were not present.

Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples, preferably through direct partnerships with organisational entities. Overall, it is recommended to use a sample that includes employees who may work in different industries or income levels, and using mixed methods, such as surveys and interviews, would provide a more complete and inclusive picture of workplace stress.

Conclusion

Workplace stress is a growing concern, significantly affecting employees' mental and physical health. Chronic stress leads to burnout, reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, and long-term psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. A systemic approach is essential that integrates mental health awareness, supportive policies, and proactive wellness programs to create a healthier and more sustainable work environment.

By embracing digital solutions, organisations can proactively address workplace stress, improve employee satisfaction, and boost overall productivity.

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