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Managerial Cognitive Capability, Emotional Intelligence, Cognitive Bias Awareness, Analytical Reasoning Competence, and Experience Depth as Predictors of Strategic Decision-Making Effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service.

Abstract

Strategic decision-making in the Ghana Education Service requires more than formal authority. It depends on how leaders interpret evidence, regulate emotion, recognise bias, reason analytically, and draw on experience in complex school and administrative settings. This article presents a structured conceptual review of recent peer-reviewed and policy literature published between 2021 and 2026 to examine how managerial cognitive capability, emotional intelligence, cognitive bias awareness, analytical reasoning competence, and experience depth shape strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service. The review shows that stronger decisions emerge when leaders combine evidence processing with emotional regulation, reflective judgement, and context-sensitive reasoning. It also shows that leadership quality weakens when cognitive overload, unexamined bias, weak data use, and routine-based experience replace disciplined judgement. The article argues that these five capabilities are complementary rather than interchangeable and proposes a Ghana Education Service capability model that links them to decision quality, implementation credibility, and institutional trust. The paper concludes that promotion systems, leadership preparation, and continuing professional development in the Ghana Education Service should move beyond procedural compliance and deliberately cultivate decision capability.

Keywords: managerial cognitive capability, emotional intelligence, cognitive bias awareness, analytical reasoning competence, strategic decision-making effectiveness, Ghana Education Service

1. Introduction

Educational leadership in Ghana increasingly takes place under conditions of pressure, uneven resourcing, public accountability, and considerable variation across districts and schools. In such an environment, decision quality matters as much as decision speed. Recent scholarship shows that effective school and system leadership is strengthened when decisions are informed, participatory, evidence-aware, and relationally competent rather than driven by hierarchy alone (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Dare et al., 2025; Yahuza et al., 2025). In the Ghana Education Service, these issues are especially important because leaders are expected to make decisions on staffing, deployment, supervision, school improvement, and teacher support in settings that are often resource-constrained and administratively demanding.

This article addresses a straightforward but important question: how do managerial cognitive capability, emotional intelligence, cognitive bias awareness, analytical reasoning competence, and experience depth interact to shape strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service? This question matters because educational decisions are rarely made in neutral conditions. They are made in social, organisational, and emotionally charged contexts in which leaders must process information, interpret competing interests, communicate difficult choices, and sustain trust while acting under uncertainty. Recent research suggests that the most effective leadership in such settings is best understood not as a single trait, but as a combination of interrelated capabilities that influence how leaders interpret evidence, regulate emotion, recognise bias, and respond to complexity (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Fasolo et al., 2025; Hansen, 2025).

The central argument of this article is that strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service is best explained through an integrated capability perspective. Managerial cognitive capability helps leaders process complexity and prioritise action. Emotional intelligence improves conflict management, relationship quality, and decision

acceptance. Cognitive bias awareness reduces preventable errors in judgement. Analytical reasoning competence strengthens evidence use and data interpretation. Experience depth contributes contextual judgement, but only when it is reflective rather than habitual. These capabilities are therefore treated in this paper as complementary and mutually reinforcing contributors to better strategic judgement.

The article makes three contributions. First, it reorganises a scattered body of literature into a coherent capability-based explanation of decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service. Second, it moves beyond descriptive discussion by synthesising how the five focal capabilities interact rather than treating them as isolated attributes. Third, it proposes a Ghana Education Service-focused capability model that links leadership capability to decision quality, implementation credibility, and system trust. The rest of the paper proceeds in six sections. Section 2 explains the Ghana Education Service decision context. Section 3 reviews the literature and analytical frame. Section 4 outlines the review methodology. Section 5 presents the synthesised findings. Section 6 discusses the implications of the synthesis and develops the integrated model. Section 7 concludes the article.

2. Background: The Ghana Education Service Decision Context

The Ghana Education Service is mandated to implement pre-tertiary education policy, manage staffing and posting, uphold professionalism, and improve service delivery across the school system. The 2025 Right to Information Manual also indicates continuing efforts to clarify institutional functions and improve internal administrative coherence within the Service. These features make leadership judgement especially important because policy execution in the Ghana Education Service depends not only on formal directives but also on how leaders interpret, prioritise, and implement those directives across different institutional levels (Ghana Education Service, 2025). Recent government reforms also signal a shift towards more standardised personnel processes. For example, the 2022 Budget Statement reported the introduction of aptitude testing in promotion processes, with

46,273 candidates sitting the test and 29,465 passing, indicating growing reliance on structured screening in leadership advancement (Ministry of Finance, Ghana, 2022). Even so, the quality of decisions in the Ghana Education Service cannot be understood through formal procedures alone. Ghana-based research shows that school and district leaders continue to work under conditions marked by scarce resources, stakeholder pressures, implementation gaps, and uneven access to professional development. Studies of headteacher leadership in Ghana show that decision-making at school level is deeply shaped by communication demands, community expectations, administrative constraints, and the need to balance accountability with practical judgement (Dare et al., 2025; Yahuza et al., 2025). UNESCO's Ghana spotlight brief similarly emphasises the importance of leadership development, local accountability, coordination, and the communication of clear performance expectations as key levers for improving educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2023).

These realities make the Ghana Education Service an appropriate context for a capability-based discussion of strategic decision-making. Formal authority remains necessary, but it is not sufficient. Leaders must also be able to interpret policy in context, manage relationships, evaluate evidence, check bias, and adapt past experience to new circumstances. The need is therefore not only for more procedures, but for better judgement within procedure. This is the gap the present review addresses.

3. Literature Review and Analytical Frame

3.1 Analytical frame

This article adopts an integrated capability perspective. The core idea is that decision-making effectiveness in complex public organisations is not produced by one attribute alone, but by the interaction of several capabilities that together shape judgement quality. Recent guidance on conceptual and review articles stresses that literature reviews should do more than summarise prior studies. They should explain relationships among concepts, show where the literature converges or diverges, and build a more coherent explanatory

frame from dispersed evidence (Schreiber & Cramer, 2024; Snyder, 2024). In this article, the integrated capability perspective serves that purpose.

The five focal capabilities were selected because recent literature repeatedly connects them to decision quality in educational, organisational, and public leadership settings.

Managerial cognitive capability concerns information processing, complexity handling, and judgement under uncertainty. Emotional intelligence concerns emotional regulation, empathy, and the relational conditions that influence decision acceptance. Cognitive bias awareness concerns the recognition and mitigation of systematic judgement errors.

Analytical reasoning competence concerns evidence use, data interpretation, and structured reasoning. Experience depth concerns the contextual learning that develops over time through reflective leadership practice. The argument of this article is that these five capabilities should be treated as mutually reinforcing rather than as separate explanatory variables.

3.2 Managerial cognitive capability

Managerial cognitive capability refers to a leader's capacity to interpret complex information, weigh competing priorities, and select a defensible course of action under uncertainty. In school and system leadership, this capability matters because leaders routinely confront multi-variable problems involving staffing, student performance, school improvement, stakeholder pressure, and policy implementation. Recent work on principals' data literacy shows that educational decision-making increasingly depends on leaders' ability to interpret evidence and translate that evidence into coherent action (Lee et al., 2024). Related work on data systems for teacher data use similarly indicates that leaders require stronger cognitive and interpretive competence if data are to inform practice rather than remain procedural (Alonzo et al., 2024).

This capability is particularly relevant to the Ghana Education Service because leaders operate across interconnected administrative and school-level demands. Recent Ghanaian leadership research suggests that headteachers often work in contexts where organisational expectations are high but support systems are uneven, making cognitive

clarity and judgement especially important (Dare et al., 2025; Yahuza et al., 2025). Managerial cognitive capability therefore forms the anchor of the present framework. Without it, leaders may struggle to integrate information, prioritise action, or make consistent decisions across complex settings.

3.3 Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognise, regulate, and use emotions effectively in oneself and in others. In leadership settings, this capability matters because difficult decisions are not implemented in emotionally neutral environments. Decisions affect morale, trust, conflict, and perceptions of fairness. A recent hybrid review of emotional intelligence, leadership, and work teams concluded that emotional intelligence contributes to stronger leadership effectiveness, teamwork, and organisational outcomes, especially in contexts where leaders must manage people as well as tasks (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). Ghana-based evidence also suggests that relational leadership and wellbeing are significantly connected to teacher professional commitment, which reinforces the importance of emotionally intelligent leadership behaviour in educational settings (Hansen, 2025).

For the Ghana Education Service, emotional intelligence matters because strategic decisions often require leaders to communicate difficult choices, manage resistance, and maintain commitment in constrained environments. Emotional intelligence does not replace analysis. Rather, it improves the social quality and practical acceptability of decisions. Leaders who can regulate their own responses, read stakeholder emotions, and sustain constructive relationships are better positioned to implement decisions effectively and maintain institutional trust.

3.4 Cognitive bias awareness

Cognitive bias awareness refers to the capacity to recognise and reduce systematic judgement errors such as overconfidence, confirmation bias, anchoring, and habitual inference. This capability is increasingly important in leadership research because complex decisions are often distorted not only by lack of information, but by flawed interpretation of

available information. Recent work shows that cognitive biases interrupt evidence-based decision-making and can redirect judgement away from balanced evaluation towards shortcuts and unexamined assumptions (Eldredge & Hill, 2025). Recent integrative review work in management also argues that bias mitigation should be treated as a central organisational issue because bias affects both decision quality and institutional performance (Fasolo et al., 2025).

This issue is especially relevant in the Ghana Education Service where promotion, deployment, supervision, and disciplinary decisions may be influenced by familiarity, routine expectation, or incomplete evidence. Cognitive bias awareness is therefore not an optional leadership extra. It is part of disciplined judgement. Leaders who can question first impressions, test assumptions, and resist automatic interpretations are more likely to produce fairer and more defensible decisions.

3.5 Analytical reasoning competence

Analytical reasoning competence refers to the ability to interpret evidence, compare alternatives, evaluate probable consequences, and use data in a structured way.

Educational leadership literature increasingly identifies this competence as fundamental rather than technical. A systematic review of principals' data literacy shows that leaders need stronger capacities in data interpretation, evidence use, and reasoning if school decisions are to become genuinely data informed (Lee et al., 2024). Recent evidence also shows that data-informed decision-making by school leaders is shaped by both school context and the quality of leaders' evidence use, suggesting that data competence matters for school improvement and not only for compliance (Lee et al., 2025). Work on ICT-based data systems further shows that data use is strengthened when leaders can interpret information in ways that are pedagogically meaningful rather than mechanically procedural (Alonzo et al., 2024).

For the Ghana Education Service, analytical reasoning competence is increasingly relevant because administrative reform is moving towards more formalised and evidence-based procedures. If leaders lack the ability to interpret staffing data, performance indicators, or

school-level evidence, formal administrative reforms may not translate into better judgement. Analytical reasoning therefore strengthens decision quality by helping leaders move beyond impressionistic decision-making towards more transparent and defensible choices.

3.6 Experience depth

Experience depth refers to the practical wisdom that emerges from accumulated exposure to complex situations, provided that such experience is reflective rather than merely repetitive. Experience matters because it helps leaders recognise patterns, anticipate implementation barriers, and adapt to context. Yet recent literature suggests that experience is not automatically beneficial. It contributes positively when leaders learn from prior situations and remain open to adjustment rather than relying on habit alone (Dare et al., 2025; Hansen, 2025). Ghanaian work on headteacher leadership challenges further shows that effective leadership in context depends on how leaders interpret and respond to recurring but changing constraints rather than simply on years served in position (Yahuza et al., 2025).

In the Ghana Education Service, experience depth is valuable because leaders often face recurring challenges in resourcing, stakeholder coordination, staffing, and implementation. However, experience becomes truly useful only when joined to reflection, openness, and willingness to revise practice. Experience without reflection can stabilise routine.

Experience with reflection can improve judgement.

3.7 Synthesis and review gap

Taken together, the literature suggests that strategic decision-making effectiveness in educational leadership is shaped by a capability bundle rather than a single competency. The strongest decisions emerge when leaders can process complexity, regulate emotion, detect bias, interpret evidence, and learn from experience in an integrated manner. Yet the literature also remains fragmented. Emotional intelligence studies often emphasise relational quality but pay less attention to evidence use. Data literacy studies often stress evidence use but give less attention to emotional regulation and bias. Ghana-specific

studies provide valuable contextual insight, but they do not yet bring these capabilities together into a single explanation of decision quality in the Ghana Education Service (Dare et al., 2025; Yahuza et al., 2025).

This gap justifies the present review. The article therefore synthesises the five capabilities into a single decision-quality framework for the Ghana Education Service. The aim is not merely to describe each construct, but to show how they intersect in real leadership situations and why they should be developed together.

4. Methodology

This article uses a structured conceptual review design. The purpose is not to present primary field data from the Ghana Education Service, but to synthesise recent peer-reviewed and policy literature into a coherent explanation of strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service. Review-based studies are especially valuable when the literature is dispersed across different fields and when a stronger conceptual integration is needed to clarify how key constructs relate to one another (Schreiber & Cramer, 2024; Snyder, 2024). That is the situation in the present study, where relevant evidence is spread across educational leadership, organisational behaviour, decision science, and Ghana-specific policy and school leadership literature.

The review focused primarily on literature published between 2021 and 2026. Searches were conducted across Google Scholar, ERIC, and Web of Science using combinations of the following terms: educational leadership decision-making, school leadership emotional intelligence, cognitive bias in management, principals' data literacy, evidence-based school leadership, Ghana Education Service leadership, headteacher leadership Ghana, and participatory school decision-making Ghana. Official Ghana Education Service, Ministry of Finance, and UNESCO documents were included only where they were necessary to establish the institutional and reform context of the Ghana Education Service. Peer-reviewed studies were prioritised for the substantive analysis.

Sources were retained using four criteria. First, the source had to address at least one of

the five focal capabilities or a closely related decision-quality construct. Second, it had to contribute conceptually, empirically, or contextually to understanding leadership judgement in education or public administration. Third, Ghana-specific studies were prioritised where available in order to ground the argument in the national context. Fourth, the final source set had to support synthesis across the five focal capabilities rather than only isolated description of a single variable. The analysis proceeded through thematic synthesis. The selected studies were read comparatively and organised around the five capabilities, the institutional context of Ghana Education Service decision-making, and the interaction effects among capabilities. This method made it possible to move beyond a descriptive review towards an integrated explanatory model of decision-making effectiveness.

5. Synthesised Findings

5.1 Managerial cognitive capability is the anchor capability

Across the reviewed literature, managerial cognitive capability appears as the anchor capability because it supports the interpretation of multiple variables, prioritisation under pressure, and coherent action in uncertain settings. Leaders who cannot process competing demands effectively are less likely to make defensible decisions on staffing, school improvement, monitoring, or policy implementation. Evidence from data literacy and school leadership studies shows that stronger educational decisions depend on leaders' capacity to interpret evidence, connect it to operational priorities, and respond coherently rather than reactively (Lee et al., 2024; Alonzo et al., 2024). In the Ghana Education Service, where leaders routinely work across administrative and school-level pressures, this capability underpins judgement quality.

5.2 Emotional intelligence improves the social quality of decisions

The reviewed literature does not suggest that emotion replaces analysis. Rather, it shows that emotional intelligence improves how decisions are communicated, received, and sustained. Leaders with stronger emotional intelligence are better able to regulate stress, manage conflict, read stakeholder reactions, and maintain commitment when difficult

choices have to be implemented. This matters because the quality of a decision is not determined only at the moment of selection. It is also shaped by whether the decision can be communicated credibly and enacted without avoidable breakdown in trust. Emotional intelligence therefore improves the social quality and practical workability of strategic decisions (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Hansen, 2025).

5.3 Cognitive bias awareness reduces preventable judgement error

A strong theme in the reviewed literature is that leaders frequently misread evidence when they rely too heavily on shortcuts, assumptions, or familiar routines. Bias awareness therefore functions as a corrective capability. It encourages leaders to question assumptions, revisit first impressions, and test whether the evidence truly supports the preferred course of action. In settings such as the Ghana Education Service, this matters for promotion, deployment, supervision, and performance review, where decisions may be shaped by familiarity, routine expectation, or incomplete information. The evidence suggests that bias awareness should be developed as part of leadership preparation rather than treated as a secondary ethical concern (Eldredge & Hill, 2025; Fasolo et al., 2025).

5.4 Analytical reasoning competence turns information into judgement

Another major finding is that analytical reasoning competence is no longer a technical extra. It is becoming a basic leadership requirement in evidence-aware education systems. Leaders are now increasingly expected to interpret performance trends, staffing patterns, school-level indicators, and administrative data. Where leaders lack this competence, formal moves towards evidence-based administration may remain superficial. Recent work on school leaders' data-informed decision-making shows that evidence use is most effective when leaders can interpret data in context rather than simply comply with reporting demands (Lee et al., 2025). In the Ghana Education Service, this capability is especially relevant because standardised processes such as aptitude-based promotion and administrative streamlining imply a stronger evidence culture, but such a culture will only improve judgement if leaders can reason analytically with the information available.

5.5 Experience depth matters when it is reflective

The literature consistently treats experience as important, but not automatically beneficial. Experience contributes to decision quality when it deepens contextual understanding, helps leaders anticipate implementation barriers, and sharpens practical judgement. However, experience can also reinforce routine if it is not reflective. The most useful experience is therefore reflective experience. This matters in the Ghana Education Service because many leadership problems are recurrent but not identical. Leaders must draw on prior knowledge while remaining open to changing conditions, new evidence, and stakeholder feedback. The reviewed literature suggests that experienced leaders are most effective when they combine practical familiarity with openness, cooperation, and continued learning (Dare et al., 2025; Hansen, 2025; Yahuza et al., 2025).

5.6 Integrated pattern across the five capabilities

The synthesis shows that the five capabilities do not work as substitutes. They work as complements. A leader may be experienced but analytically weak, emotionally warm but cognitively disorganised, or evidence-oriented but blind to bias. Strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service is therefore best understood as the result of capability interaction. Managerial cognitive capability provides structure to judgement. Emotional intelligence improves relational acceptance. Cognitive bias awareness protects against avoidable error. Analytical reasoning converts information into defensible choice. Experience depth adds contextual wisdom when it is reflective. This integrated pattern is the key finding of the review.

6. Discussion and Integrated Model

The central implication of the review is that strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service should not be treated as a personality trait or a simple administrative competence. It is better understood as a system of interacting leadership capabilities. This interpretation matters because many reform discussions in education still focus on rules, structures, and promotion procedures while paying less attention to the capability profile required for good judgement after leaders are appointed. The evidence

reviewed here suggests that appointment, promotion, and leadership support systems in the Ghana Education Service need to move from a procedural view of leadership readiness to a capability view of leadership readiness.

The review also suggests that managerial cognitive capability and analytical reasoning competence should be treated as foundational for judgement quality, while emotional intelligence, bias awareness, and reflective experience improve the legitimacy, fairness, and practical success of decisions. This does not imply a rigid hierarchy among the five capabilities. Rather, it indicates that strong decisions usually require both cognitive rigour and relational discipline. Leaders who interpret evidence well but mismanage people may weaken implementation. Leaders who communicate warmly but reason weakly may produce decisions that are accepted in the short term but ineffective in substance. The most useful leadership profile in the Ghana Education Service is therefore a balanced one. Figure 1 presents the integrated capability model proposed in this article. The model positions strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service as the outcome of interaction among managerial cognitive capability, emotional intelligence, cognitive bias awareness, analytical reasoning competence, and reflective experience, all operating within institutional and stakeholder pressures.

Figure 1. Integrated capability model of strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service.

The model is cyclical rather than linear. Decision quality is shaped by how leaders process complexity, regulate emotion, test assumptions, interpret evidence, and learn from prior action. Experience therefore appears in the model not merely as an input, but also as a feedback mechanism that influences future judgement. This cyclical structure is especially relevant to the Ghana Education Service because leaders repeatedly confront related problems in changing local circumstances, making reflective learning a central part of strategic capability.

The review also has a practical implication for policy. The Ghana Education Service has

already signalled movement towards more standardised personnel processes, including aptitude testing and clearer administrative structures. These are important steps, but the review suggests that they will yield stronger results only when combined with leadership development that builds judgement quality after promotion as well as screening before promotion. In other words, the system should not only select for advancement. It should also build the decision capabilities that advancement requires. That means leadership development should include evidence interpretation, bias checking, emotionally intelligent communication, and structured reflective practice.

A second practical implication concerns school-level leadership. Ghanaian studies show that headteachers work within complex stakeholder environments in which communication, participation, and contextual responsiveness remain central to effective leadership (Dare et al., 2025; Yahuza et al., 2025). This suggests that centralised authority in the Ghana Education Service should be balanced with stronger support for district and school-level judgement. Decision quality improves when leaders are equipped not only to comply with policy but also to interpret policy intelligently in local conditions.

Figure 2 translates the review synthesis into a practical decision process model for educational leaders in the Ghana Education Service. It shows how cognitive processing, emotional regulation, bias checking, analytical reasoning, and reflective experience interact across the stages of strategic judgement, implementation, and feedback.

Figure 2. Integrated decision process model for educational leaders in the Ghana Education Service.

A concise Ghana Education Service decision-quality profile: The synthesis suggests that managerial cognitive capability is moderately visible in the Ghana Education Service through formal administrative procedures and increasingly standardised promotion processes. However, emotional intelligence, bias awareness, and analytical reasoning competence appear more uneven and require stronger intentional development. The system is also likely to contain substantial experience depth, but experience is not always

translated into reflective leadership. The most urgent priority is therefore not simply to recruit more experienced leaders, but to develop leaders who can think clearly, regulate emotion, question assumptions, use evidence responsibly, and adapt judgement to changing institutional conditions (UNESCO, 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Hansen, 2025).

7. Implications for Policy and Practice

The review has clear implications for policy and practice in the Ghana Education Service.

The Service has already signalled movement towards more standardised personnel processes, including aptitude testing and clearer administrative structures. These are important steps, but the review suggests that they will yield stronger results only when combined with leadership development that builds judgement quality after promotion as well as screening before promotion. In other words, the system should not only select for advancement. It should also build the decision capabilities that advancement requires.

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The synthesis also points to a practical Ghana Education Service decision-quality profile. Managerial cognitive capability is moderately visible in the system through formal administrative procedures and increasingly standardised promotion processes. However, emotional intelligence, bias awareness, and analytical reasoning competence appear more uneven and require stronger intentional development. The system is also likely to contain substantial experience depth, but experience is not always translated into reflective

leadership. The most urgent priority is therefore not simply to recruit more experienced leaders, but to develop leaders who can think clearly, regulate emotion, question assumptions, use evidence responsibly, and adapt judgement to changing institutional conditions.

8. Conclusion

This article has argued that strategic decision-making effectiveness in the Ghana Education Service is best understood as the product of five overlapping and mutually reinforcing capabilities: managerial cognitive capability, emotional intelligence, cognitive bias awareness, analytical reasoning competence, and experience depth. The review shows that strong decisions do not emerge from authority alone. They emerge when leaders can process complexity, regulate emotion, challenge assumptions, interpret evidence, and learn reflectively from experience.

The article's main contribution is the development of an integrated capability perspective for understanding decision quality in the Ghana Education Service. Rather than treating leadership effectiveness as a single trait or a purely procedural matter, the review shows that judgement quality is shaped by a capability bundle that affects both the quality of decisions and the credibility of their implementation. This perspective helps explain why standardised administrative reforms may still produce uneven outcomes if leaders are not supported to think, interpret, and act well in context.

The policy implication is clear. The Ghana Education Service should strengthen leadership selection, preparation, and professional development around decision capability rather than procedural compliance alone. Promotion systems remain important, but they should be complemented by deliberate support for evidence use, emotional regulation, bias awareness, reflective practice, and stakeholder-sensitive judgement. Future research can test the integrated capability model empirically across district, circuit, and school leadership levels in Ghana.

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