

# Workplace Safety-Gaps and Productivity among Nigerian Employees (A Psychosocial Issue)

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## Abstract

This research paper investigated on workplace safety-gaps as it affects productivity among Nigerian employees and how safety-gaps have become psychosocial issues in industrial economy. Given this disturbing trend, the research objective explored on why the workplace safety in many Nigerian industries/factories has been treated as an afterthought. The afterthought scenario creates employee psychosocial emotional disorder and as a result an employee may not be aligned with organizational goals. Research findings shown that “afterthought” scenario is endangering the lives of employees and the rate of productivity is adversely affected. Conclusion is that workplace safety, safety gaps and analysis improve productivity and organization’s growth. This paper employed qualitative research techniques of data collection such as words using literature reviews, observation and interaction with industrial employees. This paper copiously benefited from library sources. Industrial labour relations management safety strategies were stated as the way forward.

**Keywords:** Workplace; Safety-gaps; Productivity; Employees; Psychosocial issues.

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## **1. Introduction**

### ***1.1 Background of the Study***

For decades workplace safety in various Nigeria industries have been treated as an afterthought. It is addressed only when an industrial accident occurs and compensation becomes inevitable. From construction sites and production factories, to mining industries and agriculture-processing facilities, lapses in safety have often been excused in the name of productivity. One major reason for the establishment of organizations is production aimed at maximizing profit. The most common productivity factors entail measures of labour productivity are anchored on workplace safety [1].

Workplace safety gaps have tendencies to affect psychosocial issues which entail mental, social, emotional and spiritual domains of an employee's life and how they collectively or individually affect his well-being and productivity. At the heart of this shift is a renewed resolve to enforce occupational safety laws and hold employers accountable for practice that endanger employees' lives. For labour productivity to be achieved, there must be a safety workplace for individual or collectivities workforce, and safety gaps must be prioritized in an industry.

### ***1.2 Statement of the Problem***

In most Nigerian industrial workplace, defiant employers apply negligence that leads to employee injury or death. These kinds of employers consider workplace safety, safety gaps as afterthought and lack effective safety prevention measures ensuring that organization's employees do not have to be injured or killed before corrective measures are taken. There is poor understanding on imbibing healthy safety practices and safety gap analysis in most Nigerian workplaces. Poor workplace safety and negligence to safety gap are strong factors that adversely affecting Nigerian employees as psychosocial issues.

### ***1.3 Research Objective***

The paper generally discussed the level of workplace safety in some industrial organizations in Nigeria. However, the paper specifically -

- Analyzed the impact of workplace safety on the employees' psychosocial in an industry.
- Ascertained the relationship between effective safety measures and productivity in an industry.
- Examined why workplace safety, safety gaps and its analysis are not being prioritized and seen as afterthought by some employers in industrial economy in Nigeria.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The paper employed qualitative research techniques of data collection using literature review, observation and interaction with industrial/factory employees.

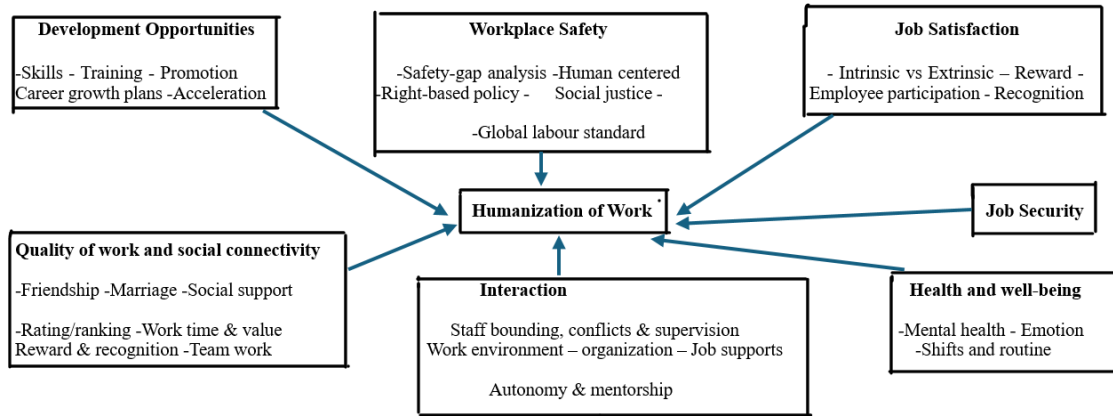
### **3. Humanization of Work and Workplace Safety gaps**

For effective productivity to be achieved, human factors must be given the proper consideration in the workplace environment. Humanization of work refers to the quality or standard of relationship between the employees and the total work environment; its main concern and focus is the overall climate of work and the impact on work and people as well as on organization's effectiveness and goals sustainability [2]. To promote the humanization of work, it is the responsibility of the employer to provide workplace safety [1].

From a bureaucratic orientation, the concept of 'work' is defined as a service to an organization, in letting for incremental and secure wages, that embodies a relationship of trust between the employer and employee [4]. This 'relationship of trust' must start with employer's provision level of workplace safety for the employee to confidently operate to achieve employer's desired goals. For employees to carry out work responsibilities, there must be employee's supply of physical, mental and emotional efforts to produce goods and services for utilization by others or own utilization. Work in this sense is seen as productive work that includes economic activity or paid employment. Employees see work as means to living, the need to acquire income from an organization, and for an organization to achieve its desired goals through employees' productivity [4], hence safety workplace must be fixed.

From this perspective, a workplace is a specific area where the work is being carried out. An industrial work location suitable or safe area for individuals to work in. In humanization of work, the application of safety is most important measure. In this sense, safety talks about been protected from danger or exposure to any form of harm. A workplace where employees are well protected and not exposed to danger or harmful occurrence when doing the work. By implication, an employer that understands the humanization of work should make a workplace safety a top priority and a secure work environment. It is only a defiant employer that can create 'gap' in safety. This implies where a proactive safety measure is lacking that could have reduced or avoided exposure to dangerous conditions or harmful occurrences on employees at workplace.

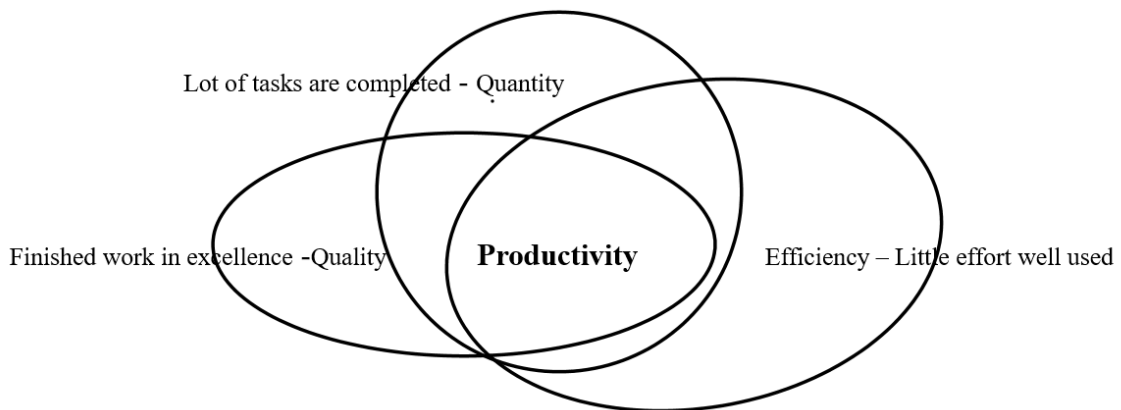
It is against the universal labour ethics to create a workplace safety-gaps [6], that will create workers injury or killed before corrective measures are taken. In humanization of work, workplace safety should be a well-coordinated human-centered and right based policy to address the profound transformation reshaping our workplace. A good workplace safety entails conscious effort for improving workplace environment conditions, work contents and its safety measures, security, wage and benefits. There are factors that individually or collectively determine the humanization of workplace they include workplace safety, safety-gap analysis, job satisfaction, job security, health and well-being social interaction or connectivity and developmental opportunities among others (see diagram below).



**Figure1:** Components of Humanization of work

### 3.1 Workplace Safety and Productivity among Nigerian Employees

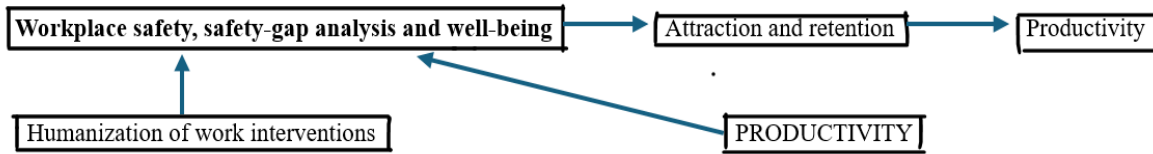
Workplace safety is an efficient workplace, and a protected employee is a productive and emotional stable employee [7]. Moving away from reactive compensation to proactive prevention is a major boost for productivity in an organization. While compensation remains an organization’s statutory responsibility, preventing industrial accidents saves human lives, reduces economic losses and preserves workforce morale to enhance productivity. Training, access to information and sustained safety awareness are central to embedding safety into organization’s culture. Organizations imbibing proactive safety practices in their workplace is a strong motivational factor to improve productivity. Productivity includes quantity, quality and efficiency, thus:



**Figure2**

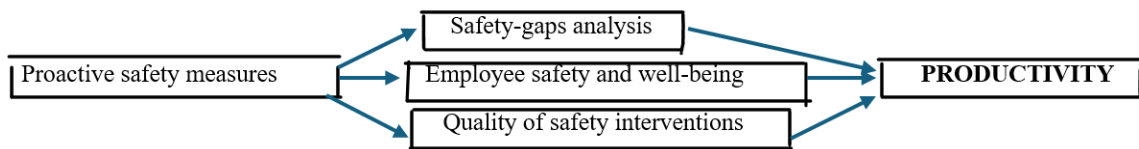
One major reason for the establishment of organizations is production aimed at maximizing profit. ‘Productivity is a ratio of outputs to inputs’ [8]. It implies the volume of output per human hour worked or by machine hour. Output are the goods and services produced by an organization. Inputs include labour, capital, materials and supplies all organized by human energy injected into the organization over a period. The most common productivity indicator entails measures of labour productivity [4]. Employers often prefer to think about

productivity in terms of quantifiable, valid or reliable measures of employees’ commitment and organizational performance, just like workplace safety measures on humanization of work. Indeed, there are often many different challenges in measuring organizational output and input, see diagram below.



**Figure 3:** Determinants of Employees Productivity

Any intervention measures that include employees’ safety satisfaction may provide adequate workplace environment for employees and lead to good productivity.



**Figure 4:** An adopted interaction between Quality of safety interventions and Productivity

With effective quality of safety interventions (improved communication, motivation and capabilities), proactive safety measures and safety-gaps analysis, there is always improved productivity. There are several means that quality of safety interventions can have a positive effect on productivity. But productivity improvement is highly dependent on the degree to which the safety interventions and safety-gaps analysis increase employees’ satisfaction, communication, motivation and performance capability. For productivity to enhance there must be improvement in workplace safety, safety-gaps analysis, secure work environment and employees’ psychosocial satisfaction.

### 3.2 Safety gaps in Productivity

Workplace safety has been rated high in employees’ productivity, and this unfortunately the unmet dream of most Nigerian employees. Do safety gaps generate improvement in productivity? Rigid safety gaps schedule is not good for intellectual employees. In all, every employee wants to balance his life at workplace with his personal safety measures. Safety gaps refer to the difference between the safety standards an organization should meet and the safety standards it follows in practices [10]. Safety gaps harm productivity and discourage employees’ morale, create legal and financial liabilities [10]. Safety gaps have become a mismatch between expected safety performance and actual safety performance. It emphasizes areas where risks are not adequately controlled, safety

policies are neglected and safety resources are lacking.

What generates safety gaps in most organizations in Nigeria include the followings:

- The use of obsolete policies that do not reflect current hazards management in the workplaces
- There is always lack of employee training
- Most organizations maintain poor communication between management and employees
- Many organizations do not have sufficient safety equipment to handle safety gaps
- In the name of corruption, many organizational management personnel apply complacency or shortcuts in daily safety operations
- Many organizations in Nigeria prefer using safety gaps in supervision or enforcement rather than adopting safety measures to reduce or avoid compensations because of employee injury or death.

Furthermore, instances of safety gaps include emergency response plans, but drills are never conducted to achieve safety. No doubt, safety inspections are required on monthly basis but only done occasionally. In many organizations, work machines required took out/ tag-out, but no one is readily trained to perform it. Some organizations have protective participatory employee polices, but employees do not always were in protective participatory practices. Why do safety gaps matter? 'Safety gaps matter in organization's operations because it increases accident and injury risks. It harms productivity and employee morale. It creates legal and financial abilities [7].

### ***3.3 Safety Gaps Analysis to Improve Productivity***

In Nigeria, there is always need for safety gaps analysis to enhance productivity in many organizations. Safety gaps analysis is a system applied to assess the effectiveness of an organization's safety programe by comparing its latest safety practices to required standards such as occupational safety and health analysis (OSHA) regulations Reference [10]. When safety gap analysis is proactively employed, it will go a long way to help identify differences between what is documented in safety policies and what is implemented in practice. The aim is to identify the areas where safety processes may be collapsing allowing organizations in Nigeria to apply proactive measures to improve safety and compliance.

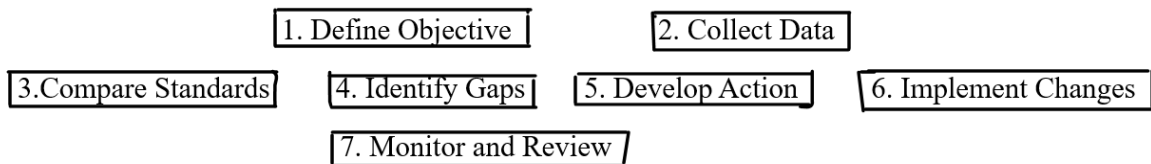
Being proactive on safe gaps analysis promotes workplace productivity. Workplace productivity is the value each team brings to the success of the total business. It measures the output of individuals or teams to better understand how an organization can optimize its workflows [14]. Workplace safety that is improved with safety gaps in an organization, makes productivity important. This will boost employees' productivity that drives business results, which is an essential part of business success; and it also has a positive impact on employees. For business productivity growth shows the health and growth of the organization, a productive business can expand by offering new services and potentially being cost effective. For employees, in the way of knowledge work, productivity is important because it keeps individual progress towards their full potential. Being productive allows an employee to manage his/her work, home lives, hobbies, and family commitments with ease and peace of mind.

A workplace safety and safe gaps analysis ensures employee productivity is important because at work it

contributes to business productivity. It promotes how well employees generate revenue from input, labour and materials. Business productivity usually refers to productivity as revenue allowed by works done.

Assessing the benefits of conducting a safety gap analysis cannot be over emphasized. Most organizations operating in Nigeria need to embrace the culture of safety gap analysis to:

- Identify weakness – This enables to provide help to identify area where safety processes are going down, this includes employees’ training deficiencies or inadequate hazard controls.
- Ensure compliances- Constant GAP analysis can offer help to organizations to enable them to avoid occupational safety and health analysis (OSHA) violations and make sure that adherence to safety regulations is maintained.
- Improve safety culture – By addressing identifiable gaps, organizations can foster a stronger safety culture, leading to better employee engagement and compliance.
- Enhance risk management – Safety gap analysis helps organizations to proactively manage risk by finding out potential hazards before they lead to injury and death incidents.



**Figure 5:** An Adopted Steps to Conduct Safety Gap Analysis

Carrying out safety gap analysis is an important procedure for organizations aiming to improve their safety programs. By systematically identifying and addressing gaps, organizations can enhance compliance, reduce risks and achieve or embrace a safer workplace for all employees. Constant assessments and updates to safety practices are necessary for maintaining a proactive methodology for workplace safety.

### **3.4 Employee Workplace Safety: A Psychosocial Issue**

In Nigeria, an employee is an individual employed by an employer under a contract of employment, whether written or verbal. These are individuals working in different sectors, such as public sectors, private sectors and informal economy. Nigerian employees have rights and obligations, including the rights to a safe working place, protection against discrimination and rights to fair wages etc. On employer and employee relationship, in Nigeria it is an obligatory for an employer as a duty to provide a safe workplace for the employees and treat their employees with respect and dignity. According to [15], the laws regulating the relationship between the employees and employers in Nigeria, include:

- The Labour Act, 1974
- The Employee’s Compensation Act, 2010 s
- Trade Union Act
- National Industrial Court Act, 2006

- National Industrial Court Rules, 2009
- International Labour Organization Conventions

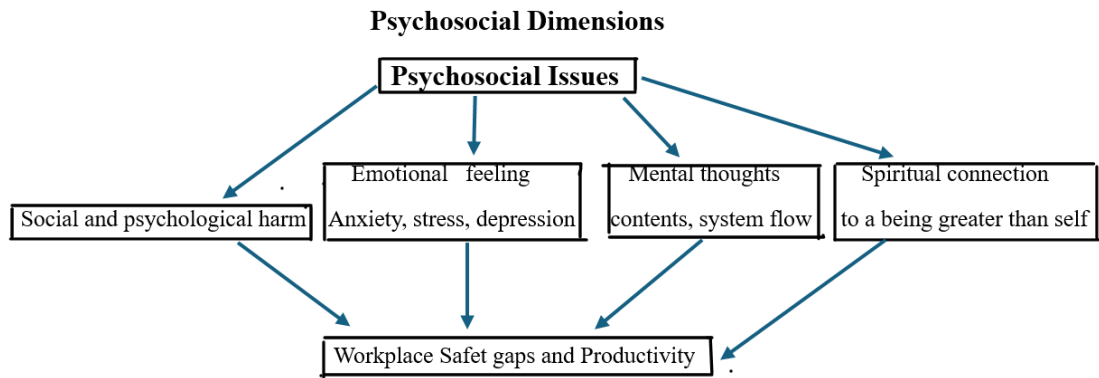
The above laws provide legal rights for an employee in the workplace which involve:

- A safety working place (environment) and access to protective gears in the course of employment
- Right to dignity of an employee at a workplace
- Right to be treated fairly and with respect
- Right to seek redress where the employer violates the right of the employee, etc

Workplace safety is not optional but a legal obligation [7]. Despite its legal obligation, in Nigeria many employers of labour ignore or rather take it for granted safety standards for the protection of employees' lives. High risk sectors such as mining, construction, manufacturing and agricultural-processing industries where unsafe practices have often led to serious injuries and fatalities. These sectors, safety must be treated as a responsibility rather than a choice. However, there is employee's Compensation Act of 2010 as a strong framework for supporting injured employees, compensation alone cannot be enough, prevention ensuring that employees do not have to be injured or killed before corrective measures are taken.

Workplace safety relates to an external social factor that affects the individual employee psychosocial and may deteriorate to psychosocial issues. In this sense, psychosocial refers to as the combined influence that psychological factors and the surrounding social environment have on an individual's physical and mental wellness and their ability to function [17]. A safety workplace environment improves employee productivity, performance and wellbeing [17]. Lack of adequate safety at workplace and negligence of safety gap analysis can adversely influence employee psychosocial and become a psychosocial issue. Psychosocial issues refer to the challenges employees as individuals face their psychological and social wellbeing [19]. These challenges can come from many factors including poor workplace safety, uncoordinated safe gaps and analysis, mental health disorders, family issues, financial challenges etc. Psychosocial issues focus on the internal cognitive aspects of an employees' lives and how they interact with working conditions. It entails mental, social, emotional and spiritual domains of an employee's life and how they collectively or individually affect his wellbeing and productivity Reference [20]. By implication, psychosocial issues focus on integrating and interrelated social, mental, physical and emotional factors that individually and or collectively influence an employee's total wellbeing.

A clear comprehension of employee workplace safety as a psychosocial issue in an organization plays a double role. First, it helps the organization's management to identify the psychosocial risk in the workplace which refers to factors that can lead to psychological or physical harm. Second, it offers the opportunity to identify psychosocial hazards created in the management of work that increase risks of psychological or physical harm. Prolonged exposure to psychosocial hazards can result in serious health issues, including anxiety, depression and other stress related conditions.



**Figure 6:** Four Psychosocial Dimensions

The relationship between the variables of workplace safety, safety gaps and psychosocial concerns is monotonic. A scenario in which the degree of safety and safety gaps analysis have strong influence on the mental and physical well-being of employees toward productivity. When safety measures are increasing and improving, and safety gaps analysis is highly considered, the psychosocial issues become well managed. Workplace safety and safety gaps should be a coordinated, human centered and right based policy to address the profound transformation reshaping our workplace.

### 3.5 Discussion on Previous Studies

Discussion on previous study empirical review examined some verifiable studies as an insight into the research theme. These empirical studies reviewed have some common futures and principles of verifiable research investigations that held some levels of significance to the study being explored. The principle of empirical review is rooted in perceived, careful and controlled amazing experiences. Discuss of previous studies in the domain of this literature theme shows that workplace safety and safety gaps analysis are life saving measures that enhance productivity and promote psychosocial being of the employees.

Kayode, Adeyinka and Abiodun [21], did a study on ‘Employee’s Performance and Productivity in Nigeria Breweries Plc’. Sampling size:668; Sampling technique: stratified random sampling; Data analysis technique: Prescriptive and statistical analysis. On research findings, they identified the strong need for workplace safety and safety gaps analysis as measures that should be given priority. The research identified that workplace safety and safety gaps analysis involved fundamentally live saving ventures, touches psychosocial being, promote industrial relations harmony, enhanced employees’ performance and productivity, organizational growth, job security etc. The research study recommended that application of effective workplace safety measures and safety gaps analysis will encourage employees’ performance and promote productivity.

In another study, Okeke, Nwele and Achilike [22] examined on ‘Impact of effective workplace safety on productivity: Adapalm Oil Mill Plc. in Imo State, Nigeria’, Research sample size:478. Sampling technique; Stratified random sampling technique. Data analysis technique: Descriptive and statistical analysis. The research study asserted that in every organization (be it in private or public sector) workplace safety and handling safety gaps are important and sensitive issues to both management and employees. The research study emphasized that

workplace safety and safety gaps is primary responsibility of the organization's management to improve productivity and place regards to the psychosocial being of the employees. The study recommends that organizations should take the issue of workplace safety and safety gap with more vigor by being proactive in humanization management in industrial relations.

However, the outcome of research discussion illustrated that employers of labour in Nigeria should proactively employ workplace safety and safety gaps analysis as relevant responsibilities to always embark on to improve productivity. When the psychosocial issues of the employees are not well considered, the resultant effect may lead to unproductivity and employee apathy to duty roles. Effective safety measures at workplace give an employee the confidence to be committed to job roles.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Uncertainty is redefining the world of work. Effective workplace safety and safety gaps analysis could be a powerful driver of productivity and organizational growth, but only if accompanied by investment in effective social dialogue to ensure that employees and employers alike can adapt to healthy safety measures in their workplace. High safety standards and business profitability are not mutually exclusive. Adequate safety responsibilities are a form of industrial growth and economic progress cannot come at the expense of human lives. With tougher safety laws and stricter enforcement, employers are now being put on notice. Employers of labour in Nigeria should comply with global safety standards on protecting their employees or face the consequences.

#### **5.Strategic Remedies**

In today's world of work, workplace safety transformation should not be episodic but linear, marking measurable and sustained improvement [20]. Safety Workplace Intervention Projects (SWIP) should be a flagship social intervention initiative that has to be revived in our industrial sector economy. For instance, 'SWIP' should be a programme designed to promote and reward excellence in occupational safety culture across workplaces in Nigeria.

Both workplace safety and safety gaps analysis should be conceived as a fulcrum for continuous growth of occupational safety and health analysis (OSHA), with expanded social protection driving increased participation in the employee's compensation scheme (ECS).

At workplace, employers should adopt a framework to proactive prevention model, recognizing that accident prevention is the first and most critical step in employee compensation. In essence, the scheme prioritizes safety first and compensation only when the inevitable occurs.

Adopting proactive safety measures provides a structured interface between employers and employees and regulates rewarding outstanding safety consciousness through rigorous workplace audits. It measures occupational safety performance, identifies infrastructural gaps, and advocates improvements in safety infrastructure.

Workplace safety should not be optional but strictly considered as a legal obligation in Nigeria's world of work, this legal obligation should be supported with distinct progress across industrial economy to save employees from industrial hazards.

## **6.Conflict of Interest**

There is no financial conflict of interest in any such or with the content of the manuscript used in the research presented.

## **7.Funding Statement**

Non-public funding used in this research presented in the submission.

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