

“An Assessment of the Effect of Employee Pay and Workload on Project Performance among Grade B Construction Contractors in Zambia”

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Abstract

Project management is today one of the rapid growing facets of industry. This is so because almost all companies are performing projects of some sort. The only predicament is that most of the projects undertaken do not result into success. Failure in most instances comes from costing over budget, taking longer time than planned and compromised product quality.

Many aspects of project management have been studied by various researchers to counter this effect but employee motivational has been given less attention. This study therefore undertook to consider the motivation aspect through employee pay and workload and how these two factors affected project performance. Project performance was measured through completion time and quality.

The research concentrated on building contractors in grade B according to the listings and registration under the National Council for Construction in Zambia. A population of 1118 potential respondents was determined from which a sample of 294 respondents was drawn. The research obtained a response rate of 50% and a participation rate of 13% from the total population using random sampling.

The results obtained indicated that workload from low to high affected project performance in terms of time but not quality. Additionally, employee pay also affected completion time significantly. The research therefore recommended better pay for improved time performance.

Key Words: Assessment, Effect, Project Performance, Workload, Quality, Time

1. Introduction

According to Armstrong (2010), motivation is a force that energizes, directs and sustains behaviour. Nhat and Dung (2013) defined it as a set of indefinite factors that cause a person to perform his or her duties in a special way. They further observed that Cole (2009) defined it as the drive that a person has to work in a particular way and with a given amount of effort. In addition to the above definitions given by the cited scholars, Shahzadi *et al.* (2014) defined it is a force that enables an individual to act in the direction of a particular objective. Regardless of the differences in definitions, it can be observed they all maintain that for people to perform in a particular way, something (a force) has to entice them to do that.

Motivation can be a complex issue to deal with because it can either be intrinsic or extrinsic driven. Intrinsic motivation is one that is highly dependent on ones perception of their job or work while extrinsic is induced by the use of external factors to entice people. Shahzadi *et al.*

(2014), observed that intrinsic motivation is internal to the individual and in many ways less tangible. They pointed out that it could be from taking pride and feeling.

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In spite of the complex nature of employee motivation, organizations still need to keep their employees motivated because it may have an effect on organizational performance. Zameer *et al.* (2014) pointed out that employee motivation plays an important role in both public and private organizations. They argued that without motivation, organizations can hardly achieve their goals. Bhadoriya and Chauhan (2013) argued that in order to be competitive, organizations need to manage their resources effectively and that the human resource is no exception in the matter. Onyango (2014) argued that motivation controls the behaviour and patterns of work thus making it a major driving force towards organizational development. In the same vein, Zameer *et al.* (2014) and Shahzadi *et al.* (2014) added that customer perception about a company lies in the hands of the employees who have direct contact with the customers or customers' products. Hence, their motivation could be necessary.

1.1 Analysis of the Prevailing situation in the Construction Sector in Zambia

The Zambian Construction Industry (ZCI) has been observed to treat the workforce as a disposable commodity rather than as essential players of on-going enterprises, they have been provided with poor working conditions. This has led to more cases of employee frustration and unscheduled turnover of artisans in many organizations (ILO, 2015; Kaoma and Muya 2016). In addition to the issue of employee frustration in ZCI, it has also been observed that there is poor performance in the delivery of projects by many contractors with less than 40% of contractors being able to meet or exceed clients' expectations in terms of quality and productivity (Zulu and Chileshe 2009; ILO 2015).

On the other hand, though a general consensus may exist that lack of motivation from factors such as salary levels, job satisfaction, job security and career progression negatively affect performance on projects, most practitioners (contractors) do not see it that way and as a result leave their workforces to frustration. To this effect, this study aims to assess the extent to which motivational factors affect project performance.

The study was important to the management of construction projects in Zambia as it sought to point construction managers to the relevance of employee motivation through pay and work load in the construction industry. The study undertook to show how the different factors under working conditions and pay interacted with project performance. Therefore, it was

envisaged that the research would add to the existing knowledge on how to motivate a construction worker in Zambia

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Employee Motivation in Construction

Construction companies are typical project organizations that use temporary setups to undertake their projects which are temporary in nature. Turner *et al.* (2008), pointed out that the temporary nature of projects creates dynamic environments that are not so easy to handle when it comes to employee motivation. Schmid and Adams (2008); Stulgienne and Ciutiene (2012) observed that the ever changing scopes, deadlines and number of projects in project environments which are also highly competitive create a lot of stress for the project worker. They argued that such environments are usually coupled with multi role demands which lead to stress for employees who fail to achieve a work-life balance. They also pointed out that companies find it hard to grasp the work and emotional state of their employees. Wandera (2011) further observed that the nature of temporally engagements also leads to divided allegiance on the part of the temporal workers. This indicates that issues of employee motivation in construction and any other project based industries may be more delicate than in other industries.

According to Osabiya (2015), in such a dynamic environment it is important that the workers are kept motivated to keep the organization active. He pointed out that employees are more likely to use their full talents if they are motivated arguing that people always have their own individual needs to be met before they can fully contribute to organizational growth and development. Barge *et al.* (2014) observed that managers need to understand the ever changing environment and change their approach on how to motivate a construction worker if motivation is to be achieved. However, Schmid and Adams (2008) pointed out that though projects are by nature unique endeavours with limited time making the environment dynamic, they all follow similar structures in the achievement of their goals. They argued that being aware of the recurring motivational factors in project settings can help project managers avoid demotivation on their teams. Osabiya (2015) added that if motivation is achieved, the ability to retain talented employees which is a key feature for a successful business is also enhanced

On the contrary, motivation of employees in construction is often neglected. Barge *et al.* (2014) observed that there is little motivation of employees in the construction industry. They further pointed out that there is also little comprehensive study on employee motivation for the construction worker. According to Turner *et al.* (2008), though factors pertaining to the wellbeing of employees in construction are important, they may be overlooked. Overlooking of employee motivation in the industry may not be good for the individual employees and the organizations at large. Barge *et al.* (2014) argued that productivity in construction has not improved as compared with the other sectors due to poor motivation. Burma (2014) argued that where there is no motivation employees feel neglected and get to withdraw either through increased absenteeism or decreased commitment. According to Manavand *et al.* (2013) and Shumba (2016), lack of employee motivation brings in the aspect of burnout, a state of emotional exhaustion which negatively affects employees mentally, physically and spiritually. They argued that burnout leads to demotivated teams and Howard (2015) warned that employee burnout should be avoided because it can be very difficult to reverse.

2.2 Employee Motivation in the Zambian Construction Industry

Like any other country affected by the lack of wellbeing of project personnel, the Zambian scenario is not in any way different, construction companies are still struggling to keep their employees motivated. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2015) observed that semi-skilled and skilled personnel are often challenged with poor working conditions where they are often taken as disposable commodities rather than investing in them as contributors to growing businesses. Kaoma and Muya (2016), noted that due to frustration, qualified artisans in the construction industry prefer self-employment to regular monthly employment in the organizations. They observed that unattractive conditions of service were one of the major contributors of skills shortage in the industry.

The information highlighted above implies that lack of employee motivation in the Zambian construction industry has negatively affected many of the companies' ability to retain their competent personnel. As a result, it is expected that there is an effect on the performance of these companies. Zulu and Chileshe (2008) as cited by Enshassi *et al.* (2009) argued that the performance of construction companies in Zambia was below expectation. In addition, a study by Zulu and Chileshe (2009), showed that only 30% of the studied contractors were able to meet or exceed clients' expectation in the delivery of projects. ILO (2015), noted that the performance of construction companies in Zambia has been negatively affected by poor employee productivity. A study by Aigbavboa *et al.* (2014) looked at the contributors of poor performance in the delivery of construction projects in Lusaka. It looked at the causes of poor project performance from the clients' side, consultancy side and contractors' side, it was established that among the labour issues that contributed to the delays, low productivity of employees was the major contributor. In addition, Kaoma and Muya (2016) argued that the poor workmanship in construction projects was due to skills shortages

2.3 Effects of Motivation on Performance

Achim *et al.* (2013) defined motivation as the art of getting people to do what you want because they want to do it. Shahzadi *et al.* (2014) considered it as a force that drives the employees towards attaining specific goals and objectives of the organization.

Performance is simply output, rate of output and quality of output. Mehta (2014) defined employee performance as the quantity and quality of work expected from an employee. Shahzadi *et al.* (2014) added that employee performance includes timeliness of the output and Ackah (2014) points out that it is highly affected by ones effort, skills and role perceptions the factors that Porter and Lawler added to Vroom's expectancy model.

The question is whether performance can be affected by motivation. Some scholars believe that there is a strong link between motivation and performance. Thwala and Monese (2012) and Olubusayo *et al.* (2014) argued that a company's productivity can be attributed to hardworking and happy employees. Mehta (2014) argued that employee performance is directly influenced by the quality of rewards provided by the organization. Nani and Apraku (2016) also claimed that the problem of how to obtain optimum performance from employees can only be overcome if an individual or group is highly recognized and rewarded for performance. On the other hand, Zameer *et al.* (2014) pointed out that without employee motivation, organizations cannot achieve their goals and cannot even run. Pratheepkanth (2011) adds that without motivation even the most talented people will not deliver to their

potential, but with motivation others will perform way above the level expected of their intelligence and academic ability.

Olubusayo (2014) observed that productivity will only be enhanced if the employees are well motivated through adequate incentive packages that are proportional to their performance. Achim *et al.* (2013) argued that if employees are happy, they will take care of the customers' interests without much supervision. Mehta (2014), noted that it is because motivation will increase employees' satisfaction which in effect will lessen cases of absenteeism. If organizational performance is a factor of employee performance which according to Achim *et al.* (2013) and Olubusayo (2014) is also a factor of employee motivation, then it can be said that motivation has an effect on organizational performance. Therefore, according to Mehta (2014), for an organization to achieve a competitive edge, it has to flourish its human assets.

2.4 Monetary against Non-monetary reward Systems

Both the financial and non-financial incentives are meant to keep employees happy and avoid frustration in their work life. Onyango (2014) argued that whether financial or not, rewards control employees' level of motivation and significantly affect organizational performance. According to Olubusayo (2014), when employees are motivated, absenteeism, wastage and accidents are reduced thereby creating a productive work culture. In addition, Muogbo (2013) pointed out that when these rewards are not given, workers tend to express their displeasure through poor performance and non-commitment to their jobs.

However, Nani and Apraku (2016) argued that though the difference in the effects between financial and non-financial rewards is minimal, financial reward systems have higher effect than non-financial reward systems. On the contrary Njanja *et al.* (2013), argued that cash bonuses only seem to make employees happy and stop them from being dissatisfied, but do not seem to have an impact on employees' performance. In addition, Masaiti and Naluyele (2011) claimed that financial incentives in the public sector were failing to achieve the desired results. Debates about what methods are better in employee motivations are more likely to be always there, what is important is to understand the industry and the actual environment as pointed out by Safiullah (2015).

On the other hand, Nani and Apraku (2016) observed that although the construction industry recognizes the significant role financial and non-financial rewards play in the organizations, not much is done for the operatives. Based on this observation, if nothing much is done for the operatives in the construction industry in terms of motivation, could it be that the importance of employee motivation is only theoretical or contractors are just negligent. Such are some of the questions among many that the study will clarify.

3.0 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Many theories can be used to explain this study such as the 'needs' theory, 'expectancy' theory and many others. Luneburg (2011) observed that according to Vroom (1964), the expectancy theory is based on four assumptions. The first assumption is that people join organizations with expectations about their needs, motivations, and past experiences. The second assumption is that people's behaviour is a result of conscious choice based on their own expectancy calculations. The third is that people will want different things from an organization in terms of good salary, job security, advancement, challenge, etc. The last assumption is that people will choose among alternatives so as to optimize outcomes for them

personally. Lunenburg (2011), Saif *et al.*, (2012), Ghoddousi *et al.*, (2014) and Parijat and Bagga (2014) pointed out that based on the four assumptions the expectancy theory has three key elements which are expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. As a result, Lunenburg (2011) argued that according to Vroom (1964), a person is motivated to the degree that he or she believes that;

- Effort will lead to acceptable performance (expectancy)
- Performance will be rewarded (instrumentality) and that
- The value of the rewards is highly positive (valence).

According to the model, employee behaviour towards work is affected by how they value the rewards to be received which are as a result of their efforts. Therefore, according to this model, motivation can be expressed as a product of expectancy, instrumentality and valence. Saif *et al.*, (2012), also pointed out that for rewards to be able to positively influence performance, they must be of value to the recipients. The model below represents the perspective of this theory:

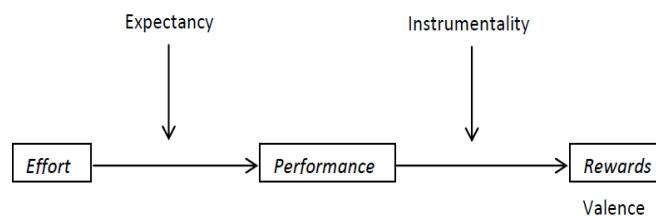


Figure 1: Relations between effort and performance and performance and rewards
Source: Lunenburg 2011

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Another theory that was found to be useful to the current study was the equity theory. Equity theory originated from the work of Stacy Adams in her 1963 paper. This theory suggests that employees weigh their input and outcome in relation to the input and outcome of their fellow employees who could be from the same organization or a different organization. According to the theory, rewards will only increase motivation if they are valued and perceived as fair by the employees (Saif *et al.*, 2012).

Further, some scholars feel that the presentation of Maslow's theory through a pyramid (triangle) is not very representative about the real nature of the characteristics of these needs. According to Seedna and Nor (2010), there are much more significant characteristics about needs and how the needs work that the pyramid concept cannot capture. They further pointed out that there is no evidence that the pyramid or triangle concept came from Maslow. As a result, they came up with other graphical presentations shown below.

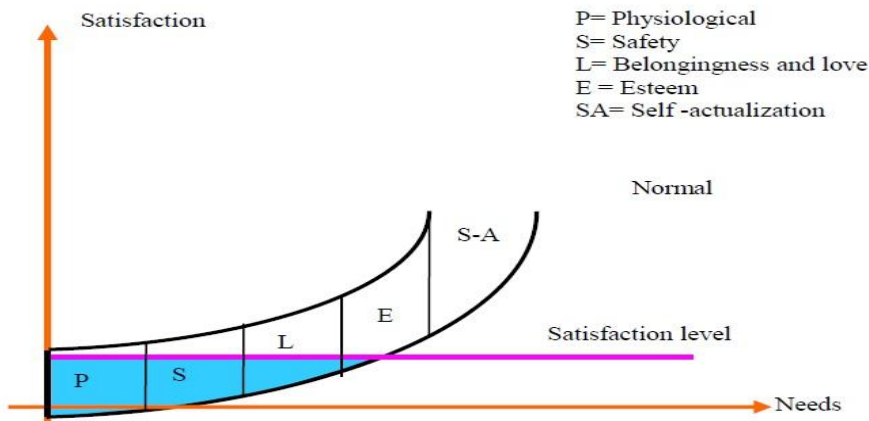


Figure 2: Rebranded hierarchy of needs model
Source: Seedna and Nor 2010.

Additionally, they argued that a lower level need must not be entirely satisfied before the following higher need arises. Their argument was that there is an overlap between the complete satisfaction of a lower need and the arising of the next need; it does not necessarily need a 100% satisfaction of a lower need before an individual begins to feel that they lack in something from the next level need. Seedna and Nor (2010) pointed out that all the five needs can exist at the same time but with differing degrees of importance where the lower needs will be needed more than the higher needs and ended up redesigning the triangle as shown in figure 2 below:

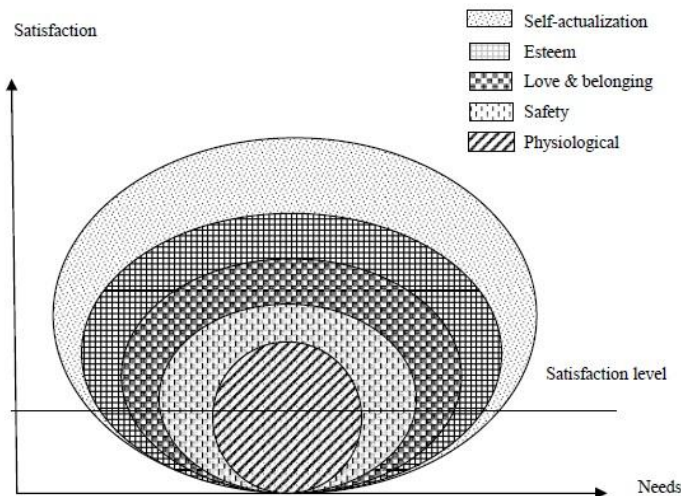


Figure 3: Seedna and Nor's design of the needs theory
Source: Seedna and Nor 2010.

3.1 Conceptualised Research model

The designed model represents the motivational factors (pay and workload) with reference to their effect on project performance. Project performance was measured using completion time and quality.

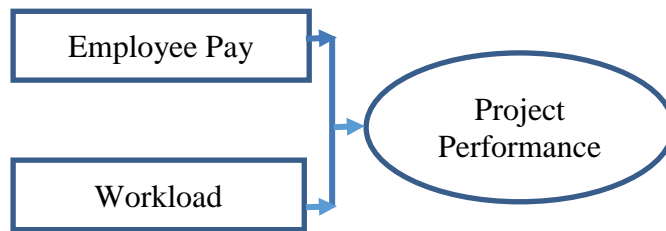


Figure 4: Conceptualised research model

The model represents good project performance arising from good pay and manageable workload without which performance would be adversely affected.

4. Methodology

The study followed a descriptive type of research design which looks at how things come together and interact (Kowalczyk, 2015). Nachmias and Nachmias (1993) define research design as the programme that guides the investigator in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting observations. In other words, Yin (2003) considers it an action plan for getting from one point to another (from here to there where here is the question to be answered and there is the conclusion to be drawn).

Data collection was done using random sampling from construction contractors who were based in Lusaka because that is where most of the registered contractors based the head offices. Kaoma and Muya (2016) observed that 45% of the contractors registered with the National Council of Construction (NCC) were based in Lusaka, 28% on the Copperbelt province and the rest were distributed across the country. However, 45% made a large population in all the grades ranging from grades 1 to 6. The researcher therefore narrowed down to B for building contractors.

The researcher engaged the target construction companies in order to determine the total number of employees which stood at 1,118 in total for the grade B construction companies. Therefore, the researcher sampled the respondents using Yamane’s formula given by:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \dots\dots\dots \text{equation 1}$$

Where n = sample size
 N = population
 e = margin of error set at 5%

The sample was derived as follows:

$$n = 1118 / (1 + 1118(0.05)^2) = 294$$

Since the sample size of 294 was obtained, 294 questionnaires were produced and distributed to the targeted respondents. The data collected was subjected to descriptive statistics and ordered regression. Most questions on the questionnaire followed a five point Likert scale.

5. Results and Discussion

The research obtained 50% response rate (146 responded), 85% were male while 15% were female. The Likert scale was scaled from 1-Always, 2-often, 3-sometimes, 4-rare and 5-never. Respondents rated the extent to which the level of pay affected their commitment towards work at about **2** which is equivalent to “**often**” on the Likert-scale. This also applied to the extent to which both the project completion time and quality were affected by the level of pay. The mean for the workload rating was 2.55 can be rounded of to **3** representing “**sometimes**” on the Likert scale which is “**manageable**” as represented by a value close to **2** on manageability. With regard to the effect of this workload on performance, 3 was obtained representing “**sometimes**” affects the time on a project but “**often**” (2) affects the quality.

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis
Behavioural characteristics					
Absenteeism	146	3.89	.990	-.252	-1.193
Presenteeism	146	4.27	1.111	-1.326	.207
Employee Pay					
Effect of level of pay on commitment	146	1.93	1.219	1.153	.469
<i>Effect of level of pay on time</i>	146	1.79	.878	1.096	.667
<i>Effect of level of pay on quality</i>	146	1.72	.974	1.091	-.050
Work load rating	146	2.55	.954	-.110	-.899
Manageability of work load	146	2.10	.811	.909	.758
<i>Effect of workload on time</i>	146	2.71	1.350	.330	-.781
<i>Effect of workload on quality</i>	146	2.16	1.306	.814	-.479

Workers were asked how often they miss work and the mean obtained was 3.89 indicating sometimes but very close to rare. Additionally, they were asked to rate themselves on the aspect of presenteeism a condition in which one is present but not committed to work and the mean obtained was 4.2 indicating rare. The kurtosis and skew for both aspects do not show much deviation from normality hence there is an indication that employees often report for work and were busy with work.

Further, employees considered that the level of pay often affected their commitment to work (mean=1.9), time spent at work (mean=1.79) and quality of their work (mean=1.72). They rated workload as often to sometimes high (mean=2.55), often manageable (mean=2.1), often to sometimes affect completion time (mean=2.71) and often affect quality (mean=2.16)

Ordered Logistic Regression Tests

The ordered logistic regression test was used due to the fact that the outcome and/or dependant variables are categorical and naturally ordered progressively from higher to lower thresholds (i.e. always to never on the Likert scales). In addition, there is a total number of four groups being investigated. In an event that there were two groups being investigated, the t test would have worked better especially where the comparison of means of two specific groups is of interest.

Effect of the Level of Pay on Completion Time

Ordered logistic regression of level of pay on time					
Variables	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Influence of level of pay on completion time					
Often	0.046	0.041	0.001	0.008	0.264
Sometimes	2.787	2.024	0.158	0.672	11.567
Never	1.49E+21	2.00E+27	1	0	.
Gender					
Female	0.892	0.699	0.884	0.192	4.142
Age group					
26 to 30years	0.392	0.242	0.129	0.117	1.315
31 to 35 years	0.208	0.176	0.064	0.039	1.094
36 to 40 years	0.561	0.402	0.419	0.138	2.284
Over 40 years	0.124	0.090	0.004	0.030	0.513

In the table above the significant variables were “often” “over 40 years” as highlighted in the table. The p-values of these parameters were less than 0.05 or very close to 0.05.

The first item on the Likert scale (ALWAYS) was used as a reference parameter in the analysis, so, compared to those who said that the level of pay ALWAYS affects their commitment towards work, those that indicated OFTEN are less likely to ALWAYS complete work on time/work faster, all other factors being kept constant because the value of the odds ratio was 0.046 which was less than 1. This was also almost true for those in the 31 to 35 years and over 40 years age groups at 5% significance level. This analysis can further be illustrated using the regression table as shown below:

Variables	Performance in terms of time and quality	
	time	quality
Level of pay and effect on performance		
Often	0.045813*** (0.041)	3.569 (3.079)
Sometimes	2.787 (2.024)	3.052805* (1.823)
Never	1.49E+21 (2.00E+27)	1.50E+21 (2.01E+27)
Workload and effect on performance		
High	0.0000235*** (5.92E-05)	1.96E-17 (4.83E-14)
Medium	0.0000000202*** (7.21E-08)	8.96E-42 (4.89E-38)
Low	0.00000000959*** (3.57E-08)	1.06E-51 (8.92E-48)

With regard to the level of pay, those who stated that the level of pay often has an effect on their commitment towards work (compared with those who said always- of the reference category) are less likely to always have their working speed affected given the odds ratio at 5% significance level is less than 1. In contrast, the quality of work is always affected for respondents that said often. However, the odds ratio of the level of pay always affecting the quality of work is not statistically significant. Nevertheless, for those that said sometimes with regard to the level of pay affecting their commitment towards work, the odds that the quality of work will always be affected is greater by 3 times at 10% significance level. In a similar fashion for any level of work load from high, medium or low, the odds of always having completion time of projects affected are less likely. Surprisingly, the results show that the workload had no significant effect on the quality of work. For those that have flexible working times and those that never have flexible working times, the odds that it affects their working speed and quality of works produced are greater and statistically significant under 5% significance level. This is also true for the effect of social interactions were they are neutral relative to healthy social interaction. The associated odds ratio is greater than 1 and statistically significant.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It was therefore concluded that the level of pay and workload were statistically significant to affect time performance on the project but not quality.

It was recommended that construction contractors increase employee pay in order to stimulate speed from workers and begin to complete projects on time

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