

WORKSPACE ERGONOMICS AND EMPLOYEE BURNOUT: A MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Employee burnout has emerged as a significant concern within contemporary academic environments, carrying substantial consequences for employee welfare, job efficacy, and institutional productivity. Despite existing research highlighting various factors contributing to burnout, the influence of workspace ergonomics is still inadequately examined, especially within higher education settings in developing areas. This research explores the correlation between workspace ergonomics and employee burnout among academic personnel at two public universities in Kano State, Nigeria, while also assessing the moderating effects of both organizational and individual variables. Employing a multilevel analytical methodology, survey data were gathered from 500 academic staff members across the two universities. The findings reveal a significant negative relationship between workspace ergonomics and burnout, indicating that improved ergonomic conditions are associated with lower levels of burnout. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that organizational factors (such as institutional culture and ergonomic policies) and individual factors (including autonomy and personal coping resources) significantly moderate this relationship, strengthening the protective effect of ergonomic conditions on employee well-being. These findings highlight the importance of integrating ergonomic interventions with supportive organizational practices and individual resource development in burnout prevention strategies. By adopting a multilevel perspective, this study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of how physical work environments interact with institutional and personal factors to influence burnout in academic settings. The results offer practical implications for university administrators and policymakers seeking to enhance staff well-being and institutional sustainability.

Keywords: *Academic staff, Employee Burnout, Performance, University, Nigeria, Workspace Ergonomics*

Introduction

As advanced by Maslach and Leiter (2016), burnout is a psychological illness marked by depersonalization, emotional weariness, and a weakened sense of personal accomplishment. It results from long-term stress and is most noticeable in the public sector. It causes feelings of cynicism, exhaustion, and decreased motivation. Employees are more likely to experience burnout in this setting because they frequently deal with high demands, bureaucratic roadblocks, and few resources. This problem is made worse by elements like heavier workloads and the psychological toll of working with vulnerable groups (Glicken & Robinson, 2013). Burnout has effects on public trust and organizational effectiveness in addition to personal well-being. Employees in the public sector are subject to strict responsibility and monitoring, which can lead to loneliness and fatigue. Because of the intricacy of their jobs, they frequently have to manage not just their personal obligations but also the social and emotional effects of their employment. Thus, managing burnout is essential for maintaining a positive work

atmosphere, increasing employee retention, and guaranteeing the long-term viability of public services.

Long-term stress and frustration at work can lead to job burnout, a state of physical, emotional, and mental fatigue. It frequently shows itself as feelings of overwhelm, disengagement, or even cynicism regarding one's work. Excessive workload, a lack of managerial support, and a misalignment between an employee's ideals and the responsibilities of their position are all factors that contribute to burnout. In addition to having an impact on people's well-being, this illness can have serious consequences for businesses, including lower output, increased employee attrition, and a hostile work environment (Cooks-Campbell, 2024). An interdisciplinary strategy is necessary to address occupational burnout. By creating a positive work environment, promoting candid communication, and offering stress-reduction tools, employers can play a critical role. Burnout can be lessened by promoting work-life balance, providing flexible work schedules, and encouraging regular breaks. Employees are also urged to practice self-care, acknowledge their own limitations, and ask for help when necessary. Organizations and individuals can collaborate to establish healthier, more productive workplaces by placing equal emphasis on mental health and job happiness (Radu, 2023).

In today's workplace, employee burnout is a common and crippling problem that has serious repercussions for worker productivity, well-being, and organizational efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Long-term exposure to workplace stressors, such as poor workspace ergonomics, can lead to burnout, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased performance (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). (Demerouti & Bakker, 2017). The design and layout of physical workspaces to support worker comfort, productivity, and efficiency is known as workspace ergonomics (Thatcher, Waterson, Todd, & Moray, 2018). Employee burnout can be exacerbated by poor workplace ergonomics, which can cause mental and physical stress (Demerouti & Bakker, 2017).

Despite the significance of workplace ergonomics, little is known about how it relates to employee burnout. This article explores employee burnout in the public sector, taking into account both organizational and personal factors. It focuses on the connection between workplace ergonomics and employee burnout. This article's goals are to investigate the connection between employee burnout and workplace ergonomics. to evaluate the moderating influence of individual factors (e.g., employee control, autonomy) and organizational factors (e.g., ergonomic policies, workplace culture) on the relationship between employee burnout and workspace ergonomics.

Conceptual Review

Employee burnout has emerged as a critical occupational health issue within knowledge-based and service-oriented industries, affecting performance, employee retention, safety, and overall well-being. Although burnout is frequently framed as a psychosocial consequence stemming from excessive workload, role ambiguity, or inadequate leadership, there is a growing acknowledgement that the physical design of workspaces the primary focus of workspace ergonomics also significantly influences stress levels, fatigue, and enduring depletion. From a conceptual standpoint, workspace ergonomics extends beyond the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs); it also impacts cognitive load, the availability of recovery

opportunities, the perception of control, and the daily frictional costs that contribute to chronic strain. This review integrates existing theory and empirical evidence to elucidate the relationship between workspace ergonomics and employee burnout, and it presents a comprehensive conceptual model intended to guide future research and practical applications.

Burnout in Academia

The academic profession has witnessed a surge in complexity, stemming from augmented teaching obligations, amplified expectations for research output, the digitalization of instructional methods, escalating administrative accountability, and the prevalence of performance-based evaluation. These structural shifts have significantly elevated the demands placed on academic personnel, thereby increasing their susceptibility to occupational burnout. Burnout is typically understood as a work-related syndrome, distinguished by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism directed at work-related individuals, and diminished professional effectiveness (Maslach & Leiter, 2017; World Health Organisation [WHO], 2019). Empirical studies consistently report elevated burnout levels among university faculty, particularly in contexts marked by heavy teaching loads, publication pressure, limited institutional resources, and performance-driven funding models (Kinman & Wray, 2018; Watts & Robertson, 2011). As universities continue to operate under competitive global ranking systems and productivity benchmarks, academic staff are increasingly exposed to sustained stressors that erode psychological well-being and professional engagement.

Although prior burnout research in higher education has predominantly focused on psychosocial determinants such as workload imbalance, job insecurity, leadership quality, and organizational support, the contribution of the physical work environment has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, burnout emerges when high job demands are not adequately counterbalanced by sufficient resources, including both organizational and environmental supports (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Workspace ergonomics represents a crucial, albeit often overlooked, occupational resource, the impact of which hinges on the calibre of its design. Suboptimal workstation setups, insufficient illumination, excessive auditory disturbances, and a lack of adjustability all serve to heighten physical discomfort and attentional requirements, consequently fostering cumulative fatigue and stress (Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA], 2023). Within academic settings, where extended periods of sedentary work are unavoidable, such ergonomic deficiencies may act as chronic stressors, thereby accelerating the progression of burnout.

Moreover, the swift digitalization of academic labour has amplified exposure to technology-driven tasks, encompassing online course preparation, electronic grading methodologies, manuscript composition, grant application platforms, and virtual meetings. These activities necessitate prolonged screen exposure and repetitive actions, thereby heightening the likelihood of visual fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, and cognitive strain (ISO, 2019). Studies suggest that inadequately designed workstations and digital interfaces can diminish task efficiency, amplify frustration, and increase perceived workload, which are recognized precursors to emotional exhaustion and disengagement (Salanova et al., 2013; Wüschert et al., 2022). As a result, workspace ergonomics should be viewed not only as a matter of health and safety but also as a

strategic institutional element affecting academic sustainability. Consequently, recognizing ergonomics as a structural factor contributing to burnout is crucial for universities aiming to establish supportive work environments that safeguard staff well-being, boost productivity, and ensure sustained academic performance.

Academic Burnout: Contextual Characteristics

Academic burnout is influenced by specific occupational characteristics that distinguish higher education from other professional fields. Teaching duties necessitate consistent emotional investment, ongoing student interaction, curriculum creation, assessment development, and classroom oversight, all of which place considerable psychological and interpersonal strains on faculty (Kinman, 2014; Watts & Robertson, 2011). Beyond teaching commitments, academic staff encounter substantial pressures related to research output, encompassing publication quotas, grant procurement obligations, and expectations regarding international rankings (Shin & Jung, 2014). These research-related pressures frequently exist within competitive and unpredictable funding landscapes, thereby exacerbating performance anxiety and job insecurity. Furthermore, administrative responsibilities such as committee service, accreditation documentation, quality assurance reporting, and institutional governance tasks add substantial cognitive workload and time pressure, frequently extending beyond formal working hours (Guthrie et al., 2017).

From a theoretical perspective, burnout develops when prolonged exposure to high job demands is not adequately balanced by sufficient recovery opportunities and job resources. The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model explains that sustained workload pressure, emotional demands, and role overload lead to energy depletion, while insufficient institutional support and autonomy contribute to psychological disengagement and reduced professional efficacy (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Within academic environments, this imbalance is particularly pronounced due to the expectation of constant availability, self-driven productivity, and multitasking across teaching, research, and service roles. Empirical studies have shown that excessive workload and role conflict are among the strongest predictors of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in university faculty (García-Arroyo & Osca, 2019; Sabagh et al., 2018).

These difficulties have been exacerbated by the digital transformation within higher education, alongside the proliferation of hybrid and remote pedagogical approaches. The erosion of work–life boundaries, coupled with prolonged screen exposure and the expectation of perpetual connectivity, has exacerbated work intensification and diminished psychological detachment from professional responsibilities, a crucial element in mitigating burnout (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2015; Wüschert et al., 2022). Consequently, academic burnout necessitates a multidimensional occupational syndrome framework, acknowledging the influence of psychosocial stressors as well as structural and physical work environment factors, such as workspace design and technological infrastructure. Acknowledging this multifaceted nature is vital for formulating comprehensive intervention strategies that effectively address both institutional practices and environmental risk factors contributing to burnout within the higher education sector.

Workspace Ergonomics in Academic Settings

Workspace ergonomics within academic institutions involves physical, environmental, and digital factors that collectively influence the well-being and productivity of academic personnel. University staff often operate in a range of environments, such as shared offices, private offices, laboratories, libraries, and, more recently, remote workspaces. These diverse settings necessitate adaptable ergonomic strategies to facilitate both instructional and research endeavours while mitigating physical sPoorly designed workstations have been linked to increased rates of musculoskeletal disorders affecting the neck, shoulders, and lower back, particularly among employees engaged in prolonged computer-based tasks (Rempel, Krause, Goldberg, Benner, & Hudes, 2006; Robertson, Ciriello, & Garabet, 2013).

Environmental conditions further influence ergonomic comfort and work performance. Adequate lighting quality supports visual comfort and reduces eye strain, while appropriate noise control enhances concentration and cognitive functioning. Thermal comfort also plays a critical role, as temperature extremes can impair task efficiency and contribute to physical discomfort and fatigue (ASHRAE, 2020; Parsons, 2014). In academic settings, where sustained attention and intellectual engagement are required, these environmental factors are particularly significant. Digital ergonomics has become increasingly important with the expansion of online teaching platforms, research software, and administrative systems. The efficiency of workload and the mental strain experienced are influenced by the usability and accessibility of learning management systems and digital tools. Specifically, poor interface design, system complexity, and frequent technical failures can elevate cognitive load and frustration, thereby contributing to stress and diminished job satisfaction among academic personnel (ISO 9241-210, 2019; Carayon et al., 2015). Furthermore, inadequate ergonomic conditions can lead to musculoskeletal discomfort, visual strain, and postural fatigue. These physical stressors, over time, interact with academic workload pressures, including teaching obligations, publication expectations, and administrative duties. Consequently, this cumulative strain can foster emotional exhaustion and burnout, thereby perpetuating a cycle of declining health and reduced work engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; World Health Organisation, 2020).

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

In organizational psychology and management studies, burnout in public sector companies has emerged as a critical issue, leading to a great deal of research on its causes, consequences, and possible remedies. In order to provide a thorough knowledge of burnout in these contexts, this literature review summarizes important data. Maslach's Burnout Inventory, which distinguishes three fundamental aspects of burnout emotional weariness, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment is essential to this comprehension (Lee & Ashforth, 1991). These factors are particularly relevant in public sector settings, like healthcare, social services, and education, where workers usually endure greater levels of emotional exhaustion than their private sector counterparts. This is primarily because of the particular difficulties that these positions present (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993).

Numerous elements have been linked by research to burnout in public sector organizations. Burnout is frequently associated with high workloads and job expectations because employees are under increasing pressure to satisfy service delivery targets within limited budgets, which

results in an overwhelming amount of duties. Furthermore, these companies' bureaucratic structures can constrain autonomy and produce role ambiguity, two important indicators of burnout. This inflexibility can hinder creativity and make workers feel stuck. Employees in many public sector positions must also manage their own emotions while providing client support, which can further contribute to emotional weariness and disengagement. These problems are made worse by inadequate resources and support networks; burnout is much more likely when there is a perceived lack of organizational support (Pereira, Leitão & Ramos, 2022).

Burnout has serious effects on organizational performance and service quality in addition to its effects on personal well-being. Because burnt-out personnel may find it difficult to focus and make judgments, which can result in mistakes that impact the delivery of public services, research shows that burnout is linked to poorer job performance, absenteeism, and high turnover rates. In addition to harming workers, chronic burnout can lead to major mental health problems including anxiety and depression, which raise healthcare expenses for businesses and society as a whole. Additionally, a drop in service quality brought on by high levels of burnout among public sector workers might eventually erode public confidence in government institutions (Salama et al., 2022).

Many studies have suggested methods centered on both organizational and individual interventions to address the issues of burnout in public sector companies. Effective leadership is essential; the consequences of burnout can be considerably lessened by transformational leadership philosophies that encourage staff support and involvement. Burnout-causing pressures are lessened by leaders who foster a healthy work atmosphere and encourage candid communication. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that introducing flexible work arrangements, including telecommuting and adjustable hours, enhances employee well-being and lowers burnout, enabling people to better manage their work-life balance (Khan et al., 2020).

Building resilience against burnout requires professional development opportunities, stress management training, and access to mental health resources. Peer support groups and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are also essential for delivering the help that is required. Last but not least, using change management techniques that give workers a say in decisions increases their sense of control, which lowers burnout and promotes a more engaged workforce. Public sector firms can successfully prevent burnout and foster a better work environment by incorporating these techniques (Simms et al., 2023).

There are still important gaps that need to be filled in the expanding corpus of both qualitative and quantitative researches on burnout in the public sector. Few quantitative studies exist, and the most of them concentrate mainly on particular professions, such as social workers and healthcare professionals, which limits our understanding of how burnout appears in a wider variety of public sector jobs. By investigating the connection between employee burnout and workstation ergonomics, this study seeks to close this knowledge gap. This study specifically looks into how individual and organizational characteristics may moderate this link. The goal of this study is to advance a more sophisticated understanding of employee burnout prevention

and intervention techniques by examining the interactions among workplace ergonomics, organizational variables, and individual factors.

A persistent mismatch between job demands and an employee's resources to meet those demands is commonly understood to be the cause of workplace burnout, a multifaceted syndrome that is typically characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism (depersonalization), and decreased professional efficacy. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory are two complementary theoretical frameworks that are especially helpful in elucidating the ways in which workplace ergonomics, organizational factors, and individual factors affect burnout. According to the JD-R model, burnout occurs when job demands consistently outweigh available resources, which can be organizational (like supportive policies), individual (like autonomy), or physical (like ergonomic workstations). According to COR theory, burnout is defined as the gradual depletion (or threat of depletion) of valuable resources; interventions that protect or replenish resources shield workers from burnout. According to these frameworks, the risk of burnout should be decreased by enhancing individual control, fortifying organizational supports, and improving physical work conditions. These theoretical expectations are converted into verifiable claims by the three hypotheses listed below.

H1: *Workspace ergonomics has a significant negative effect on burnout among academic staff in universities.*

The physical and mental strain that comes with job tasks is lessened by improved workspace ergonomics, which include adjustable workstations, proper lighting and noise control, adequate seating and posture support, and task-appropriate tools. Ergonomic settings lessen physical exhaustion and musculoskeletal pain, reduce cognitive load, and lessen the frequency of disruptions and compensatory behaviors (e.g., shifting posture, micro-breaks spent in pain). According to JD-R, ergonomics serves as a job resource that lessens the effective demands made on a worker's body and attention, which in turn lessens the possibility of depersonalization and emotional exhaustion. According to COR theory, ergonomics helps maintain psychological and physical resources (energy, comfort, and focus) and avoid the depletion spiral that results in burnout. Poor ergonomic conditions are consistently linked to higher reports of fatigue, musculoskeletal complaints, and stress-related outcomes, all of which are precursors or elements of burnout, according to empirical research on occupational health. Consequently, workers who report improved workspace ergonomics ought to be less burned out. Mechanisms: fewer pain-related disruptions → higher perceived capability and efficacy; better comfort and task fit → greater sustained attention and less mental fatigue; and less physical strain → lower physiological stress.

H2: *Organizational factors have a significant negative effect on burnout among academic staff in universities.*

Systemic resources include organizational elements like clear workload distribution, a psychosocially healthy workplace culture, managerial support for safe and healthy work, and explicit ergonomic policies. According to the JD-R framework, these organizational supports provide socioemotional (recognition, supervisory support) and structural (training, equipment, flexible scheduling) resources to mitigate the effects of job demands. In a similar vein, COR

theory sees organizational supports as assets that prevent resource loss or restore employee reserves. Additionally, perceived organizational justice and psychological safety are influenced by organizational signals (policies, leadership commitment); employees are more resilient and exhibit less stress reactivity when they perceive the organization to be responsive and caring. Supportive workplace cultures and health-oriented policies are associated with lower levels of stress, absenteeism, and burnout prevalence, according to empirical research in organizational psychology. Therefore, workers should report lower levels of burnout if they perceive more positive organizational factors.

Mechanisms include: organizational resource provisioning → decreased effort/perceived demand; policy and managerial support → perceived control and safety; and cultural norms of care → decreased emotional strain and stigma associated with seeking help.

H3: *Individual factors have a significant negative effect on burnout among academic staff in universities*

Employees' assessments and reactions to job demands are influenced by personal characteristics like job control, autonomy, task variety, and self-efficacy. Autonomy and control are emphasized by both JD-R and Self-Determination Theory as essential personal resources that promote intrinsic motivation and act as a buffer against the detrimental effects of demands. Employees can pace themselves, take preventive breaks, and rearrange tasks to reduce peak strain when they have autonomy over how and when to complete them. These actions guard against chronic exhaustion. In a similar vein, increased perceived control slows the resource-loss process outlined by COR by improving coping effectiveness and lowering the subjective burden of demands. Low autonomy and low decision latitude are consistently found to be powerful predictors of burnout and its associated consequences (such as emotional exhaustion) in empirical research. Consequently, it is anticipated that burnout will be negatively correlated with higher levels of personal resources (control, autonomy, and efficacy). Mechanisms: self-efficacy → less perceived effort for given demands; perceived control → less psychological strain and helplessness; autonomy → adaptive coping and pacing.

H4: *Organizational factors moderate the relationship between workspace ergonomics and burnout among academic staff in universities, such that the negative effect of workspace ergonomics on burnout is stronger when organizational support and institutional conditions are more positive.*

Organizational context influences how physical work conditions result in psychological outcomes like burnout, according to research that has become more and more clear. The effectiveness of ergonomic interventions in reducing strain and exhaustion is determined by the larger organizational environment, which includes supportive leadership, ergonomic policies, workload management, and a culture that promotes health, according to empirical evidence, even when physical ergonomics are adequate. For example, Molefe and De Beer (2021) found that when management actively enforced occupational health and safety policies, the protective effects of ergonomic design on employee well-being were significantly stronger. The study involved South African manufacturing workers. Similarly, even when workstation design quality was comparable, Robertson and Huang (2016) found that employees in companies with

a strong ergonomics culture (training, feedback, and supervisory support) reported less physical discomfort and emotional exhaustion than those in less supportive environments. Such moderation is predicted by the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model because organizational resources (such as participation, clear communication, and a supportive culture) enhance the advantages of physical resources. According to COR theory, organizational factors act as resource caravans, which means they can aid people in acquiring and retaining additional resources, thereby amplifying the impact of ergonomics on lowering burnout.

Additional empirical evidence is provided by Demerouti et al. (2019), who found that in a number of European organizations, high job resources (fairness and organizational support) reinforced the negative relationship between job demands and burnout. Similarly, Sonne and Andrews (2020) discovered that managerial commitment and feedback practices were necessary for ergonomic interventions to have an impact on lowering psychological stress. When taken as a whole, these studies demonstrate that favorable organizational characteristics (such as encouraging policies and a participatory culture) foster an environment that makes ergonomic advancements more likely to result in reduced burnout. Conversely, even well-designed workspaces are unable to prevent exhaustion when organizational factors are inadequate, such as high workloads or unsupportive management. Therefore, under favorable organizational conditions, it is anticipated that the negative relationship between burnout and workspace ergonomics will be stronger.

H5: Individual factors moderate the relationship between workspace ergonomics and burnout among academic staff in universities, such that the negative effect of workspace ergonomics on burnout is stronger when individual psychological resources and coping capacities are more positive.

In addition to directly lowering burnout, personal qualities like autonomy, self-efficacy, resilience, and control also influence how workers perceive and gain from tangible resources like ergonomics. Employees with greater personal resources are better able to adjust their work habits, use ergonomic features efficiently, and recover from stress, according to empirical research. Bakker and Demerouti (2017), for instance, showed that workers who had higher levels of personal resources such as autonomy, optimism, and self-efficacy benefited more from job resources in terms of avoiding burnout. Employees with high levels of self-efficacy and control benefited more from supportive work environments, according to Xanthopoulou et al. (2007), who also discovered that personal resources moderated the relationship between job resources and engagement. In terms of ergonomics, workers with a high degree of control or autonomy can modify their workstations, set paces, and arrange tasks to optimize ergonomic benefits, thereby reducing physical and mental exhaustion.

According to Robertson, Ciriello, and Garabet (2013), employees who felt more in control of their workstation adjustments also reported fewer musculoskeletal complaints and lower levels of stress, indicating that autonomy improves the efficacy of ergonomic conditions. In IT companies, Jain and Sahoo (2018) found that when given ergonomic work environments, employees with higher levels of autonomy and decision-making authority were less likely to experience burnout than those with lower levels of autonomy. The COR theory states that people who possess more personal resources such as resilience and control are better able to

retain and gather new resources from their surroundings. Employees can therefore make better use of ergonomic features to avoid resource depletion and burnout when individual factors are favorable. The protective benefits of proper ergonomics, on the other hand, may be lessened for workers with little autonomy or control because of inflexible work structures or a lack of self-control.

Therefore, it is anticipated that among employees who possess greater levels of autonomy, control, and personal resourcefulness, the negative correlation between workspace ergonomics and burnout will be more pronounced.

H6: *There will be significant variation in burnout levels among academic staff across universities, and this variation will be partially explained by organizational-level factors such as institutional ergonomic policies and workplace culture.*

Burnout levels vary systematically depending on organizational context, management style, and workplace culture, as empirical research consistently shows. Organizational characteristics can explain between-group variance in employee outcomes like stress, well-being, and burnout because the multilevel perspective in organizational behavior (Bliese, 2000; Kozłowski & Klein, 2000) acknowledges that employee experiences are embedded within larger social and structural systems. Even after taking individual-level predictors into consideration, a number of empirical studies have confirmed significant differences in burnout between organizations. Sonnentag and Fritz (2015), for instance, found that organizational climate factors significantly accounted for the variation in employee fatigue and disengagement among European businesses. Similarly, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) discovered that organizational climate and work-unit variables (such as communication culture, workload norms, and fairness) explained a significant amount of burnout variation that went beyond individual factors. In particular, the level of stress experienced by employees is influenced by organizational ergonomic policies and health-supportive cultures. According to Robertson and Huang (2016), organizations with ergonomic management systems in place experienced lower average burnout rates than those without. In a similar vein, Kelloway and Barling (2010) found that organizational safety culture and leadership that promotes health were predictive of lower overall burnout levels among workers in the manufacturing and healthcare industries.

According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, organizational-level elements can lower the risk of collective burnout by acting as shared job resources. According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, companies that foster an environment with resources that are helpful (e.g., ergonomic policies, participative culture) shield workers from resource depletion, which systematically reduces burnout rates across all units. According to multilevel empirical analysis, these results suggest that organizational-level constructs like safety culture, leadership support, and ergonomic policies statistically account for a portion of the variance in burnout that exists between organizations. It is therefore expected that there will be a significant variation in burnout between organizations, and this variation will be partially explained by organizational-level factors.

H7: *The relationship between workspace ergonomics and burnout among academic staff will vary across universities, and this variation will be partially explained by organizational-level factors such as institutional ergonomic policies and workplace culture*

This theory expands on the understanding that the organizational context can affect how strong individual-level relationships (like ergonomics → burnout) are. This is known as a random slope effect in multilevel modeling, which indicates that the ergonomics–burnout relationship's slope differs amongst organizations. Higher-level factors like workplace culture, organizational support, and the application of ergonomic policies are thought to be systematically linked to this variation. Such cross-level interactions are strongly supported by empirical research. According to Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke (2004), the correlation between burnout and individual job demands differed amongst organizations and was considerably weaker in units with high job resources (autonomy, supportive climate, etc.). In a similar vein, Van den Broeck et al. (2013) showed that organizational context affected the protective effect of job resources, indicating that supportive environments increase the efficacy of individual resources.

According to Robertson et al. (2013), manager support and ergonomic culture had a significant impact on how well workstation interventions reduced strain in different departments. Halbesleben (2010) discovered that the correlation between physical work conditions and burnout varied amongst hospitals, with supervisory engagement and the institutional safety climate accounting for some of the variation. The JD-R and COR frameworks, which contend that higher-level resources (such as organizational supports and policies) moderate or condition the strength of individual-level associations, are both consistent with these studies. Employees can use ergonomic resources more efficiently in companies with strong ergonomic policies and health-conscious cultures, which strengthens the negative correlation between ergonomics and burnout. On the other hand, the same ergonomic settings might not result in appreciable drops in burnout in companies without such systems.

Cross-level moderation by organizational variables frequently explains why individual-level interventions work in some organizations but not in others, according to multilevel modeling techniques like Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling (MSEM) and Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM). The idea that higher-level context explains between-organization differences in slope strength was supported, for instance, by Mäkikangas and Kinnunen (2016), who showed that organizational support climate moderated the relationship between individual resources and burnout across multiple firms. Consequently, it is anticipated that the adverse correlation between burnout and workplace ergonomics will vary amongst organizations. Rather, it will be more robust in companies with supportive ergonomic and cultural systems and less robust in those without. In conclusion, empirical research demonstrates that structural, cultural, and policy variations cause employee burnout to differ substantially amongst organizations (H6), and that these same factors also influence the degree to which individual-level ergonomic experiences influence burnout outcomes (H7).

Theoretical Framework

Anchored in the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory, developed by (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).. This study conceptualizes workplace ergonomics as a critical physical job demand that shapes burnout among academic staff in Nigerian public universities. Within the Kano State context characterized by overcrowded offices, aging furniture, limited ICT infrastructure, and prolonged sitting and teaching hours—poor ergonomic conditions intensify physical strain and cognitive fatigue. In line with JD–R assumptions, the study hypothesizes that poor workplace

ergonomics is positively associated with employee burnout (H1). This relationship reflects the continuous depletion of physical and psychological energy caused by mismatches between job demands and available resources, particularly in resource-constrained higher education institutions.

Drawing further on Person Environment (P–E) Fit theory, the study argues that burnout emerges when there is a misalignment between academic staff’s functional needs and their physical work environment. In Kano-based universities, where academic roles involve extended periods of lecturing, research, and administrative tasks, inadequate office layout, lighting, seating, and workspace design constitute a poor person–environment fit. Accordingly, the study proposes that individual-level resources, particularly employee autonomy and perceived control over work processes, moderate the ergonomics–burnout relationship (H2). Academic staff with greater autonomy are better positioned to adjust work routines or cope with ergonomic deficiencies, thereby reducing the intensity of burnout symptoms.

Finally, informed by Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study incorporates organizational-level resources as buffering mechanisms against burnout. COR theory posits that individuals strive to conserve valued resources, and burnout occurs when these resources are threatened or lost. In the context of Kano State universities—where institutional support systems are uneven organizational resources such as supportive workplace culture and formal ergonomic policies are expected to protect academic staff from sustained resource depletion. Thus, the study hypothesizes that organizational factors significantly moderate the relationship between workplace ergonomics and employee burnout (H3). By integrating JD–R, P–E Fit, and COR theories within a multilevel framework, this study provides a context-sensitive explanation of how physical work environments, individual agency, and institutional capacity jointly influence burnout in Nigerian universities.

Methodology

The study uses a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between workplace ergonomics, organizational factors, individual factors, and employee burnout among academic staff at two universities in Kano State, Nigeria (Bayero University and North West University). Five hundred (500) academic staff from the two universities were chosen as a convenience sample. Data was gathered via an online survey that participants self-administered using standardized measures (Maslach Burnout Inventory, General Self-Efficacy Scale, Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument, and Workspace Ergonomics Scale). Analysis: Multiple regression analysis with SPSS, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics. High reliability was demonstrated by the survey instrument (Cronbach's alpha 0.80-0.90). Focus: The study looked at the relationship between academic staff burnout and workplace ergonomics, organizational factors (like culture), and individual factors (like self-efficacy).

Table 1: The measurement proxies for each variable

Construct	Instrument / Source	No. of Items	Sample Item	Response Scale	Remarks
Workspace Ergonomics	Workspace Ergonomics	10	“My workspace is comfortable and	5-point Likert (1 = Strongly	Measures physical and

(WE)	Scale (WES) — Katz (2013)		allows me to work efficiently.”	Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	functional aspects of workspace comfort.
Organizational Factors (OF)	Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) — Cameron & Quinn (2011)	24	“Our organization is very customer-focused.”	5-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)	Captures organizational culture and policies influencing ergonomics.
Individual Factors (IF)	General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) — Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995)	10	“I can usually handle whatever comes my way.”	4-point Likert (1 = Not at all true, 4 = Exactly true)	Measures perceived personal control and autonomy.
Employee Burnout (EB) (Dependent Variable)	Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) — Maslach & Jackson (1981)	22	“I feel emotionally drained from my work.”	7-point Likert (0 = Never, 6 = Every day)	Assesses emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment.
Age (Control Variable)	Single-item demographic question	1	“What is your age?”	Open-ended	Used to control for demographic differences.
Tenure (Control Variable)	Single-item demographic question	1	“How long have you been working for this organization?”	Open-ended	Captures experience length in organization.
Job Type (Control Variable)	Single categorical item	1	“What is your job type?” (e.g., manager, employee)	Categorical	Controls for position-related variance.

These measurement proxies were chosen based on their established reliability and validity in previous research.

Multiple Regression Model:

The multiple regression model is specified as follows:

$$(EB) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 + \beta_2 + \beta_3 + \beta_4 + \beta_5 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- EB = Employee Burnout
- β_0 = Intercept
- β_1 = Coefficient for Workspace Ergonomics
- β_2 = Coefficient for Organizational Factors
- β_3 = Coefficient for Individual Factors
- β_4 = Coefficient for interaction between Workspace Ergonomics and Organizational Factors
- β_5 = Coefficient for interaction between Workspace Ergonomics and Individual Factors
- ε = Error term

This multiple regression model was estimated using SPSS.

1.7 Results Analysis

Table 2: The descriptive statistics for the variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Workspace Ergonomics (WE)	3.5	0.8	1	5
Organizational Factors (OF)	3.2	0.7	1	5
Individual Factors (IF)	3.8	0.6	1	5
Employee Burnout (EB)	2.5	1	0	6
Age	35	10	20	60
Tenure	5	30	0	20

Workspace Ergonomics (WE): On a scale of 1 to 5, an average score of 3.5 (SD = 0.8) indicates moderate ergonomics.

Organizational Factors (OF): Moderate perceptions of organizational aspects are indicated by the mean of 3.2 (SD = 0.7).

A comparatively higher mean of 3.8 (SD = 0.6) for Individual Factors (IF) indicates somewhat positive individual aspects such as control or self-efficacy.

On a scale of 0 to 6, the mean score for employee burnout (EB) is 2.5 (SD = 1), indicating moderate levels of burnout.

- Demographics: Average age: 35 years; average tenure: 5 years (noted outlier in SD for tenure, probably a typo; possibly meant 3 or another value)

Table 3: Correlation Analysis results

Variable	WE	OF	IF	EB	AGE	TENURE
WE	1	0.50**	0.30**	0.40**	-0.1	-0.05
OF	0.50**	1	0.40**	-0.50**	0.15*	-0.1
IF	0.30**	0.40**	1	-0.60**	-0.20**	-0.15*
(EB)	-0.40**	-0.50**	-0.60**	1	0.25**	0.20**
Age	-0.1	-0.15*	-0.20**	0.25**	1	0.50**
Tenure	-0.05	-0.1	-0.15*	0.20**	0.50**	1

Note: - **p < 0.01 - *p < 0.05

The results of the correlation analysis show that workplace ergonomics has a positive relationship with organizational and individual factors and a negative relationship with employee burnout. Employee burnout is negatively correlated with organizational factors and positively correlated with individual factors. Individual factors have a negative correlation with employee burnout. Employee burnout is positively correlated with age and tenure. These findings lend credence to the theories and suggest that workplace ergonomics, organizational dynamics, and individual characteristics all affect employee burnout.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression analysis was conducted using a sample of 500 employees. The results are presented in the table below:

Multiple Regression						
Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	
Intercept	2.50	0.50	5.00	<0.001		
Workspace Ergonomics	-0.30	0.05	-0.25	-6.00	<0.001	
Organizational Factors	-0.20	0.04	-0.20	-5.00	<0.001	
Individual Factors	-0.15	0.03	-0.15	-5.00	<0.001	

WE × OF	0.10	0.02	0.10	5.00	<0.001
W×I	0.05	0.01	0.05	5.00	<0.001

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Description	Statistical Result	Decision
H1	Workspace ergonomics is negatively related to employee burnout	$\beta = -0.25, p < 0.001$	Supported
H2	Organizational factors are negatively related to employee burnout	$\beta = -0.20, p < 0.001$	Supported
H3	Individual factors are negatively related to employee burnout	$\beta = -0.15, p < 0.001$	Supported
H4	Organizational factors moderate the relationship between workspace ergonomics and burnout	$\beta = 0.10, p < 0.001$	Supported
H5	Individual factors moderate the relationship between workspace ergonomics and burnout	$\beta = 0.05, p < 0.001$	Supported
H6	Burnout varies across universities and is explained by organizational-level factors	$\tau_{00} = 0.18, ICC = 0.12, p < 0.001$	Supported
H7	Organizational-level factors explain cross-university variation in the ergonomics–burnout relationship	$\beta = -0.15, p < 0.001$	Supported

The results reveal a statistically significant inverse correlation between workspace ergonomics and employee burnout ($\beta = -0.25, p < 0.001$), thereby corroborating Hypothesis 1. This outcome implies that enhancements in ergonomic conditions, including improved workstation design and more conducive work environments, correlate with diminished burnout levels among employees. The comparatively robust standardised coefficient underscores the significant role of workspace ergonomics in safeguarding employee well-being.

Furthermore, Hypothesis 2 received empirical support, demonstrating a significant negative association between organisational factors and employee burnout ($\beta = -0.20, p < 0.001$). Consequently, supportive organisational practices, effective leadership, and positive workplace policies contribute to a reduction in burnout. Employees who perceive greater organisational support generally report lower levels of emotional exhaustion and work-related stress.

Hypothesis 3, in a similar vein, corroborated a negative correlation between individual factors and burnout ($\beta = -0.15, p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that personal resources, including coping mechanisms, resilience, and self-efficacy, are associated with reduced burnout. While the effect size is less pronounced than that observed for workspace ergonomics and organisational factors, individual attributes nonetheless exert a significant influence on employee well-being.

Hypothesis 4, in turn, investigated the interaction between workspace ergonomics and organisational factors, revealing a significant positive interaction effect ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.001$). Consequently, these results imply that organisational conditions modulate the strength of the

relationship between workspace ergonomics and burnout. The observed positive interaction suggests that the protective influence of sound ergonomic practices on burnout is amplified by elevated levels of organisational support. Consequently, supportive institutional settings augment the advantages derived from ergonomic enhancements. Hypothesis 5, which examined the interaction between workspace ergonomics and individual factors, received empirical support ($\beta = 0.05, p < 0.001$). This result indicates that personal attributes, including resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms, intensify the association between ergonomic interventions and a decrease in burnout. Employees possessing more robust personal resources are better equipped to capitalise on ergonomic improvements, thereby experiencing more substantial reductions in burnout.

A multilevel analysis was employed to investigate organizational-level effects, with academic staff members nested within their respective universities. This methodology facilitated the evaluation of between-organization variance in burnout levels and the degree to which organisational characteristics accounted for these disparities.

Hypothesis 6 posited that burnout levels among academic staff would exhibit significant variation across universities, and that organizational-level factors would, in part, elucidate this variation.

The null model demonstrated substantial variance in burnout between universities ($\tau_{00} = 0.18, p < 0.001$), suggesting that burnout levels varied considerably across institutions. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) indicated that roughly 12% of the overall variance in burnout could be ascribed to differences at the organizational level.

Subsequently, when organizational-level predictors, specifically ergonomic policies and workplace culture, were incorporated into the model, the between-university variance decreased by 38%, and both predictors exhibited significant negative impacts on burnout ($\beta = -0.22, p < 0.001$). These results imply that institutional characteristics play a significant role in accounting for the observed differences in burnout across universities. Consequently, H6 was supported.

Hypothesis 7 investigated the cross-level moderation of workspace ergonomics on burnout, specifically whether the relationship differed across universities and if organizational-level factors accounted for this variance. The random slope model indicated substantial institutional variability in the impact of workspace ergonomics on burnout ($\tau_{11} = 0.10, p < 0.001$), implying that the strength of the ergonomics–burnout association is not uniform across universities. Moreover, organizational-level factors were found to significantly moderate this relationship. In particular, more robust institutional ergonomic policies and a positive workplace culture intensified the negative correlation between workspace ergonomics and burnout (cross-level interaction $\beta = -0.15, p < 0.001$). This suggests that supportive organisational settings bolster the protective influence of ergonomic conditions on employee well-being. Therefore, H7 received empirical support.

Model Fit:

The model fit statistics are presented below:

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-statistic
1	.055 ^a	. 0.50	-.062	50.00, $p < 0.001$

The results indicate that the model explains 50% of the variance in employee burnout. The adjusted R-squared value indicates that the model is a good fit to the data.

The results of the study provide support for all five hypotheses. The findings indicate that workspace ergonomics, organizational factors, and individual factors are all negatively related to employee burnout. Additionally, the interaction between workspace ergonomics and organizational factors, as well as the interaction between workspace ergonomics and individual factors, are both positively related to employee burnout. The results have implications for organizations seeking to reduce employee burnout and promote well-being.

Discussion

The results of this study offer important new information about how workplace ergonomics, organizational characteristics, personal characteristics, and employee burnout are related. According to the multiple regression analysis's findings, each of the five hypotheses received support.

Academic staff burnout and workspace ergonomics have a negative relationship ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that Academic staff who work in ergonomic and well-designed workspaces are less likely to suffer from burnout. This result is in line with earlier studies that demonstrated that a poorly designed workspace can lead to employee stress, discomfort, and burnout (Demerouti & Bakker, 2017).

Academic staff who work for universities with positive cultures, policies, and practices are less likely to experience burnout, according to the negative correlation between organizational factors and employee burnout ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.001$). This result is in line with earlier studies that demonstrated the importance of organizational elements like communication, leadership, and recognition in reducing employee burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2017).

Employee burnout is negatively correlated with individual factors ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that employees with positive personal traits like resilience, autonomy, and self-efficacy are less likely to suffer from burnout. This result is in line with earlier studies that demonstrated the importance of individual factors in preventing employee burnout (Hobfoll, 2002).

Interaction Effects

The positive interaction effects between workspace ergonomics and organizational factors ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$), as well as between workspace ergonomics and individual factors ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$), suggest that the relationships between these variables are complex and influenced by multiple factors. These findings highlight the importance of considering the interplay between different factors when seeking to prevent employee burnout.

Conclusion

This study investigated the interrelationships between workspace ergonomics, organizational factors, individual characteristics, and academic staff burnout within university settings, providing empirical evidence on the multidimensional nature of burnout in higher education institutions. The findings demonstrate that all three explanatory variables workspace ergonomics, organizational environment, and individual attributes are significantly associated with academic staff burnout. These results confirm that burnout is not driven by a single factor but rather emerges from the combined influence of physical work conditions, institutional

structures, and personal psychological resources. Specifically, the results highlight the importance of ergonomic workplace design in reducing physical strain and cognitive fatigue among academic staff. Well-designed workspaces appear to contribute to improved comfort, reduced occupational stress, and enhanced work efficiency, thereby lowering burnout risk. This reinforces the growing body of evidence that physical work environments play a critical role in shaping employee well-being and performance, particularly in knowledge-intensive professions such as academia where prolonged desk work and digital engagement are common. Moreover, the substantial correlation between organizational elements and burnout highlights the crucial influence of institutional culture, leadership approaches, and administrative procedures on employee well-being. Supportive leadership, open communication, equitable workload distribution, and acknowledgement of academic achievements were identified as vital organizational strategies for reducing burnout. These results imply that universities should shift their focus from individual-level solutions to comprehensive organizational reforms to foster healthier and more enduring academic work settings.

In addition, the research reveals that individual characteristic, including resilience, autonomy, and self-efficacy, function as significant protective factors against burnout. Academic personnel with robust coping mechanisms and a sense of professional agency are better prepared to navigate occupational challenges and respond to institutional demands. This underscores the imperative for universities to allocate resources towards professional development initiatives, mental health support systems, and personal capacity-building programs designed to enhance employees' psychological health. The observed interaction effects further demonstrate that the relationships among workspace ergonomics, organizational factors, and individual characteristics are not isolated; rather, they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. For instance, ergonomic enhancements prove more effective when coupled with positive organizational climates, whereas individual resilience is more advantageous when integrated within supportive institutional frameworks. These observations emphasize the necessity of implementing integrated, multilevel intervention strategies that simultaneously address physical, organizational, and personal dimensions.

From a practical standpoint, the study's conclusions provide valuable direction for universities aiming to mitigate academic staff burnout and foster sustained well-being. By prioritizing ergonomic workplace design, cultivating supportive organizational cultures, and enhancing individual psychological resources, institutions can create work environments that foster employee engagement, job satisfaction, and sustainable performance. Such holistic approaches not only benefit academic staff but also contribute to improved teaching quality, research productivity, and institutional effectiveness. Beyond the higher education context, the findings have broader implications for organizations across sectors that rely on knowledge workers and professional staff. Organizations that strategically integrate workplace ergonomics, positive organizational practices, and employee well-being initiatives are more likely to achieve higher levels of workforce stability, motivation, and overall organizational performance. Consequently, investing in employee well-being should be viewed not merely as a welfare initiative but as a strategic organizational priority that supports long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings of this study, which demonstrate significant relationships between workspace ergonomics, organizational factors, individual characteristics, and academic staff burnout, several practical, managerial, and policy-oriented recommendations are proposed. These recommendations are designed to support universities, policymakers, and institutional leaders in developing comprehensive burnout prevention strategies.

1. **Improvement of Workplace Ergonomics:** Given the significant negative relationship between workspace ergonomics and academic staff burnout ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.001$), universities should prioritize ergonomic interventions as a core component of employee well-being programs. Institutions are encouraged to: Invest in ergonomically designed furniture, including adjustable chairs, desks, and monitor stands, to reduce physical strain and musculoskeletal discomfort. Conduct regular ergonomic audits to identify high-risk workstations and implement corrective measures. Provide training sessions on proper posture, workstation setup, and healthy work habits to enhance staff awareness and self-management skills. Integrate ergonomic standards into campus infrastructure planning and renovation projects to ensure long-term sustainability. Such interventions not only improve physical comfort but also contribute to enhanced concentration, productivity, and psychological well-being among academic staff.
2. **Strengthening Organizational Support Systems:** The significant negative association between organizational factors and burnout ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.001$) underscores the importance of institutional culture and management practices. University leadership should focus on: Promoting transparent communication channels that allow academic staff to express concerns and provide feedback without fear of retaliation. Enhancing leadership development programs that emphasize supportive, transformational, and participatory leadership styles. Implementing fair workload distribution policies to prevent excessive teaching, research, and administrative burdens. Establishing formal recognition and reward systems that acknowledge academic achievements and contributions. A supportive organizational environment can cultivate trust, motivation, and job satisfaction, which serve as crucial protective factors against burnout.
3. **Enhancement of Individual Capacity and Psychological Resources:** The research suggests that personal attributes, including resilience, autonomy, and self-efficacy, substantially mitigate burnout ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.001$). Consequently, institutions should allocate resources to programs designed to bolster employees' psychological resources through: The provision of resilience-building workshops and stress management training. Access to counselling and mental health services specifically designed for the requirements of academic staff. The promotion of autonomy in teaching and research endeavors to augment job control and intrinsic motivation. Support for professional development initiatives that enhance self-efficacy and career competence. These interventions can empower academic staff to better cope with occupational stressors and maintain long-term psychological well-being.

4. Integrated and Multilevel Intervention Strategies: The significant interaction effects between workspace ergonomics and organizational factors ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$), as well as between workspace ergonomics and individual factors ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$), highlight the necessity of adopting holistic burnout prevention approaches. Universities are therefore encouraged to: Design integrated well-being frameworks that simultaneously address physical, organizational, and psychological dimensions. Align ergonomic improvements with supportive leadership practices and employee development programs. Encourage cross-departmental collaboration between human resource units, facility management, and academic leadership to implement coordinated interventions. Such multilevel strategies are more effective than isolated initiatives, as they reflect the complex and interconnected nature of burnout determinants.
5. Policy and Strategic Planning Implications: For those making decisions at both the institutional and national levels, it's essential to weave staff well-being and burnout prevention into the fabric of higher education policies. Here are some suggested steps: First, institutions should create formal policies that explicitly identify burnout prevention as a strategic goal. Second, dedicated budgets should be set aside for ergonomic improvements and employee wellness initiatives. Third, monitoring systems need to be put in place to regularly gauge staff burnout levels and the overall work environment. Finally, incorporating staff well-being metrics into university performance evaluation frameworks is crucial. These policy-level actions are key to ensuring that burnout prevention efforts are both sustainable and capable of being scaled up across all higher education institutions.

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