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## **ASSESSING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF A CONSULTING ORGANIZATION**

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**Abstract:** The paper provides a detailed review of some of the most challenging aspects of consultancy organisation competitiveness analysis. The paper examines conceptual aspects that identify consultancy as an independent field in the service industry and provides an analytic grid and a matrix for assessing the competitiveness of a consulting organisation. The paper also includes a formula that defines the criteria for such assessment. Consultancy is a practice of giving expert advice on a wide range of topics, including finance, commerce, legal operations, technology, etc. to curators and managers. It aims to aid the management system in achieving the stated goals.

**Keywords:** consultancy, competitiveness, organisation, business

### **INTRODUCTION**

Consultancy, in its essence, aims is to strengthen the subject of enterprise management by employing external experts and resources and, as such, achieve a rational balance between linear (operational) and administrative (research-oriented and transformational) management functions (1). Any enterprise can be viewed as a business process and a system of relations about it. At the same time, the essence of a business process is determined by the technology implemented, i.e., the mean of converting resources into a product, as well as the medium of that technology. A defining characteristic of any enterprise in the service industry is that the people themselves are the main object of technological transformations. The people also act as media of technology. This contrasts with the manufacturing industry, where technology is mainly determined by fixed assets, and material resources are the main object of transformation. The aforementioned basic feature of a service determines the specific

features of consultancy, which focuses primarily on full-cycle consultancy services; as well as services that reduce the subjective nature of technology in the service sector, creating 'quasi-fixed assets'; an example of this development is the creation of standards for enterprises in the service sector, standards for its business processes, etc (12). It should be noted that, generally, service enterprises are in greater need of consultancy services, when compared to enterprises operating in other fields.

According to E. Murueva, in economic context, consultancy is a managerial activity directed at a certain enterprise. Regardless of the field of application, consultancy identifies key issues that an enterprise may be facing, analyses them and issues recommendations on how to choose the most effective solution. Consultancy services can also be provided by regional centres for the development of innovative activities, technology transfer centres, coaching centres, business incubators, technological clusters (4). Within the framework of a professional approach, consultancy is seen as a professional service. This approach is shared by L. Greiner and R. Metzger, who see managerial consultancy as a contractual advisory service that provides services to organisations by employing qualified specialists, who help the client organisation identify key managerial problems, analyze them, give recommendations for solving them and, if necessary, facilitate the implementation of these solutions (8).

To facilitate competitiveness of the services, a consultancy organisation is tasked with the following: 1. A client-organisation industry analysis. In the context of import substitution industrialization, there is a growing need for alternative suppliers, revision of the commodity group portfolio, strategic plan updates, and staff training; 2. To conduct an analysis of the existing consultancy methodology and tools, as well as to devise one's own; A characteristic feature of working in the consultancy field is subjugation to constant mental labour. A careful selection of publicly available methods with further comparison and adaptation to specific goals is needed to automate this process; 3. Promoting the final product utility for the consumer, rather than the company itself. When in search for a consultancy company, or a private consultant, managers expect to receive comprehensive solutions to the problems posed. A simple review of international consultancy companies' websites shows the differentiation of the customer-organisation industry, and the specific results of their cooperation.

According to K. Ohmae, a Japanese guru of strategy, there are four routes that a company should follow to achieve strategic advantage over its competitors (6). 1. Key Factors for Success. The company rationally segments its market, clearly positioning the product for its customers, converts its resources to boost the activities that guarantee sustainable success. As a result, it increases its market share and profitability. 2. Relative Superiority. If a company does not have any explicit competitive advantages, and is comparatively like its rivals, it may make use of any other mean of differentiation (e.g.: adding new features to the product or service, post-warranty support, research results employment, shape and packaging). 3. Aggressive Initiative. If a company holds firm grounds in a mature, slowly growing industry, then its aggressive initiatives should lead to qualitative, sometimes very dramatic changes in the market, which will give the company a competitive edge. 4. Strategic Degree of Freedom. For a company, this often means designing a new product, actively entering a new market, rapid development within the areas of economic activity not occupied by competitors. The essence of the Ohmae's 3C model is the management of corporate goals by the means of ensuring a harmonious balance (without excesses or shortages) between three types of resources:

human, technological and material. A strategist should focus on three key success factors: corporations, customers, and competitors (6).

## METHODOLOGY

Competitiveness is the ability to compete successfully with rivals. Russian term for competitiveness, *конкуренция*, derives from Latin *con corso*, i.e., 'common course', 'joint search in the given direction'. The origin of this very word implies joint activities that may imply rivalry, to achieve maximum economic results (3). The most widely used methods to evaluate the strategic position of a consulting organisation are as following (9): 1. The Boston Consulting group product portfolio matrix. The method is based on the analysis of the company's ability to compete, regarding the service's life cycle. The aim of such assessment is to analyze the matrix based on a coordinate system: on the horizontal axis is the growth/decline rate shown as several sales on a linear scale; on the vertical axis is the relative share of goods/services on the market. Companies with the strongest strategic position hold a significant share in the fast-growing market. 2. The method based on the evaluation of company's product/service. This method is based on the assumption that the competitiveness of a service provider corresponds with the competitiveness of its services. As an indicator evaluating the competitiveness of a product/service, a price-to-quality ratio is used. The most competitive service, having the optimal ratio of these characteristics, serves as an indicator of the quality of the service per unit of price. 3. The method based on the theory of effective competition. According to this theory, the companies where the work of all departments and services is organized in the best possible way are the most competitive. The effectiveness of each service is influenced by many factors, i.e., the company's resources. Evaluation of the effectiveness of each of the units involves evaluating the efficiency of its employment of these resources.

The method is based on the assessment of the four following indicators, or competitiveness criteria (10): The first group includes general management indicators: levels of production costs, operations involving fixed assets, technological advancements, organisation of labour in the company. The second group includes floating assets management indicators: the company's independence from external sources of financing, the company's ability to pay its debts, and the prospect for sustainable development. The third group includes indicators of the system of sales and promotion of goods/services on the market by means of advertising and stimulation. The fourth group includes indicators of the product's competitiveness: the quality of the product and its price, where the quality of the product is calculated based on the life cycle and the relative market share of the product (as in the matrix method) (11). This assessment of competitiveness includes all important assessments of the company's economic activity and allows to quickly and objectively determine its position in the industry.

## RESULTS

To determine the competitors of Audeks LLC in the Russian consulting services market, we should turn to information by the RAEX agency, which annually publishes the rating of large companies in various industries. Audeks LLC regularly volunteers to be included into these annually organized ratings, which indicates the company's interest in developing and managing its strategy. Since this paper analyses the market of

consulting services, it is necessary to present a table with the ranking of consulting organisations in 2018.

**Table 1.** Consulting Organisations Ranking, 2018

Ranking	Company	Net Sales of Consultancy Services (1.000 roubles)	Avg. Number of Experts Employes	Annual Change (ppl.)
1	LANIT	21 5 49 567	2 2 49	310
2	EY	10 3 35 980	3 4 12	183
3	PWC	10 1 73 235	3 2 18	N/A
4	KPMG	8 4 08 616	1 2 81	187
5	KP OK	6 936 8 67	1 525	-1 5
95	Tekart	68 0 90	39	-1
9 6	TFH Russia	65 6 01	7	-0
97	Legion	64 4 34	23	6
9 8	1A Konsaltingovaya Gruppa	6 4 390	3 5	1
99	Audeks	62 6 46	16	-4
1 00	Gestion-Konsalt	62 4 76	33	-0

As we can see, the company was ranked 99th, past many Russian consulting companies and the Big Four. This situation confirms the findings on the ambiguity of the development of the consulting services market in Russia and the development of competition. However, it should be noted that, with respect to the number of consultants, labour productivity at Audeks is on decent level, which indicates proper development of the corporate culture and staff efficiency. Audeks LLC offers tax solutions based on the extensive knowledge and experience of consultants. With new markets emerging, it is proposed to introduce a service on transfer pricing consultancy. This will include general consultancy about transfer pricing, revealing a list of interdependent persons and controlled transactions, and reports on interdependent persons. The SWOT analysis is an assessment of Audeks LLC internal environment (its strengths and weaknesses), as well as external capabilities and threats.

**Table 2.** Audeks LLC Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to maintain the appropriate prices in comparison with primary rivals.</li> <li>- Employment of qualified personnel capable of securing, if sufficiently funded, a significant increase in the competitiveness of the services provided.</li> <li>- The restriction of the entry of foreign companies into the Russian market of services makes it possible to develop regional companies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inability to work with several clients due to prices for services (“different clients, different opportunities”).</li> <li>- Entry barriers the global market due to competition and political sanctions.</li> </ul>

**Table 3.** Audeks LLC Opportunities and Threats

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacities for effective horizontal and vertical integration, as well as an increase in the scale of services provided.</li> <li>- Systematization of works to improve the quality of services provided.</li> <li>- Increased infrastructure costs can boost demand for consulting services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decreasing legislative control over the activities of the consulting business may provoke the emergence of new competitors.</li> <li>- Inevitable aggravation of competition in the domestic market.</li> <li>- Stagnation of the economy will hinder business growth.</li> </ul>

Comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of an enterprise along with the opportunities and threats of the market allows to answer the following questions regarding the further development of the Audeks LLC company: How will the company use its strengths to take advantage of the opportunities that open up? What weaknesses of the enterprise hinder its development? Which strengths can neutralize existing threats? What threats, exacerbated by the weaknesses of the enterprise, should it be most aware of? Using strengths, enterprises can: expand the distribution of its services into new markets; improve the quality of services; introduce a new type of service to the market. Activities aimed at neutralizing threats due to the strengths of the enterprise: informing the consumers on the high quality of new services; promoting the public image of Audeks LLC; increasing its competitiveness; measuring to stimulate the development of information support. Audeks LLC needs to be most aware of: competitors offering similar services at a lower price; bankruptcy; lack of investments into development projects. Since a consulting organisation is an enterprise whose main resource is HR, the result of the activities of such firms is always a service, the level of which denotes its indicator of competitiveness.

Formula 3.3.1 is proposed, which is essential for solving the issue of determining the competitiveness of consulting organisations:

$$K_{Cp \setminus \kappa} = \left( \frac{Y_{\Pi Cp}}{Y_{\Pi C\kappa}} \right)^{\alpha} * \left( \frac{\Pi_p}{\Pi_{\kappa}} \right)^{\beta} * \left( \frac{Y_{Op}}{Y_{O\kappa}} \right)^{\gamma}, \quad (1)$$

where:

- 1)  $\alpha + \beta + \gamma = 1$ ;
- 2)  $K_{Cp \setminus \kappa}$  – an indicator of the competitiveness of the service in relation to the competitor's service;
- 3)  $Y_{\Pi Cp}$ ,  $Y_{\Pi C\kappa}$  – a point-based assessment of the consumer properties of the service in-question and the competitor's service;
- 4)  $\Pi_p$ ,  $\Pi_{\kappa}$  – price of the service and the competitor's service;
- 5)  $Y_{Op}$ ,  $Y_{O\kappa}$  – a point-based assessment of the levels of services;
- 6)  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$  – relative significance coefficients for variables no. 3, 4, and 5.  
 $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$  coefficients are to be determined by marketing experts.

In accordance with the analysis methodology, after the experts have distributed their points, it is necessary to conduct a study of competitiveness for each service provided, and to examine their interdependence. A point-based assessment of consumer properties of the services for the maintenance and organisation of accounting provided by Audeks LLC and competitor's services, on a scale of one to ten, is presented in Table 3.3.1. Market research shows that Audeks's main competitors are consulting firms offering their services in this market. Table 4 presents an expert assessment of the levels of consumer properties of a service for accounting organisation and maintenance, as well as an average assessment of the properties of a competitor service (on a scale of one to ten) provided by experts.



**Table 4.** Assessment of Consumer Properties for the Accounting Organisation And Maintenance Service

No.	Service's Property	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
1	Accessibility	10	9,1	0,157
2	Informational Value	9,5	7,3	0,148
3	Corporate Image	8,7	8,6	0,165
4	Reliability	8,6	9,0	0,147
5	Safety	8,8	7,6	0,115
6	Tangibility	9,1	8,4	0,124
7	Level of Expertise	8,5	8,5	0,143
				1,000

The values of the coefficients of relative significance were also established. For this assessment, six experts of the Audeks LLC consulting company were involved, along with 12 employees of other consulting companies. Based on the information in Table 3.3.1, the levels of consumer properties of the services for the organisation and maintenance of accounting are calculated:

- for Audeks LLC the  $YII C_p$  value is 9 (2)

$$YII C_p = 10^{0,157} * 9,5^{0,148} * 8,7^{0,165} * 8,6^{0,147} * 8,8^{0,115} * 9,1^{0,124} * 8,5^{0,143} = 1,44 * 1,39 * 1,43 * 1,37 * 1,28 * 1,31 * 1,36 = 9,0$$

(2)

- for the competitor's service the  $YII C_k$  value is 8,2 (3)

$$YII C_k = 9,1^{0,157} * 7,3^{0,148} * 8,6^{0,165} * 9,0^{0,147} * 7,6^{0,115} * 8,4^{0,124} * 8,5^{0,143} = 1,41 * 1,34 * 1,42 * 1,38 * 1,26 * 1,30 * 1,35 = 8,2$$

(3)

The price of the Audeks LLC service is 80 990 rubles, the price of the competitor's service is 92 900 rubles. It should be noted that these figures are relative and depend on several factors, such as financial indicators, the scale of activity, the scale of workflow, the consultant providing the service, etc. An expert assessment of the service levels of the considered services and evaluation of the same indicators of competitor's services are given in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Level of Services Assessment

Nº п/п	Level of Services Indicators	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
1	Employee Competency	7,9	6,25	0,12
2	Communication Level	8,85	7,25	0,8
3	Employee Affability	8,92	7,50	0,08
				1,00

Based on the information presented in Table 3.3.2, the  $YO_p$  and  $YO_k$  coefficients were calculated for Audeks LLC (4) and competitor's service (5) respectively.

$$Y_{Op} = 7,9^{0,12} * 8,85^{0,8} * 8,92^{0,08} = 1,28 * 5,72 * 1,19 = 8,71 \quad (4)$$

$$Y_{Ok} = 6,25^{0,12} * 7,25^{0,8} * 7,5^{0,08} = 1,24 * 4,88 * 1,17 = 7,08 \quad (5)$$

Based on Formula 1, we can determine the level of competitiveness for the Audeks LLC service of consultations on tax legislation in relation to a competitor's service. The values were established for the coefficients of the relative significance of the individual components of the competitiveness of services:  $\alpha = 0,28$ ;  $\beta = 0,31$ ;  $\gamma = 0,41$

As such, Formula 1 equation is solved as such:

$$K_{Cp/K} = \left(\frac{9,0}{8,2}\right)^{0,28} * \left(\frac{80990}{92900}\right)^{0,31} * \left(\frac{8,71}{7,08}\right)^{0,41} = 1,1^{0,28} * 0,87^{0,31} * 1,23^{0,31} = 1,03 * 0,96 * 1,09 = 1,07$$

This competitiveness indicator demonstrates that relative consumer preference for Audex LLC is higher, compared to the competitor's service, which is ensured by lower prices, higher consumer properties, and better customer service. Similarly, we may calculate the competitiveness indicator for four other services provided by Audeks LLC and Auditorское Partnerstvo NIKA LLC. For tax and legal consulting, the characteristics of the applied factors remain the same, because of the type of service provided, and the nature of interaction with the clients, which makes these types of services like accounting. The results of the market research on the assessment of consumer properties and the level of services, as well as significance coefficients for two of the services are presented and summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Consumer Properties Assessment for Tax Consulting, and Legal Consulting Services

Type Of Service	Service's Properties	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
Tax Consulting	Accessibility	9,4	8,3	0,157
	Informational Value	9,2	8,7	0,148
	Corporate Image	9,8	7,1	0,165
	Reliability	9,3	8,3	0,147
	Safety	8,5	7,2	0,115
	Tangibility	9,3	8,2	0,124
	Level of Expertise	10	8,8	0,143
Total				1
Legal Consulting	Accessibility	10	9,1	0,157
	Informational Value	9,5	7,3	0,148
	Corporate Image	8,8	8,2	0,165
	Reliability	8,7	9	0,147
	Safety	7,6	7,6	0,115
	Tangibility	9,9	8,4	0,124
	Level of Expertise	9,8	8,1	0,143
Total				1

Based on these figures, we can calculate the YIC coefficient for both companies. YICp, and YICk coefficients for tax consulting services provided by Audeks LLC and Auditorskoe Partnerstvo NIKA equal 9,6 and 9,4 respectively. Same coefficients for legal consulting services provided by these companies equal 9,7 and 9,4 respectively. This insignificant difference in results is due to the service of Auditorskoe Partnerstvo NIKA lacking in informational value, safety, and expertise. This is because this company has shorter experience of operating the industry, compared to Audeks LLC. Next, we shall assess the level of services for the services in question. To explicitly show the interrelations of the factors, we present and summarize the data in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Level of Services Assessment for Tax Consulting, and Legal Consulting Services

Type of Service	Level of Services Indicators	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
Tax Consulting	Employee Competency	9,1	9,2	0,12
	Communication Level	9,8	8,5	0,8
	Employee Affability	8,8	8,1	0,08
Total				1
Legal Consulting	Employee Competency	9,6	8,6	0,12
	Communication Level	10	9	0,8
	Employee Affability	9,6	7,9	0,08
Total				1

The YO summarizing indicator is 8,7 and 8,0 for Audeks LLC and its rival respectively. As for legal consulting, the indicator's values are 8,8 and 8,3. As the study suggests, Moscow-based firms are inferior in terms of staff affability due to the specific nature of the flow of customers, perhaps because of the employees' time schedule and the work speed at the enterprise. For further analysis we shall determine these coefficient's values for the financial valuation and training seminars services. The data on the level of consumer properties, as well as the level of services is presented in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Financial Valuation Service Customer Properties and Level of Services

Type of Service	Service's Properties	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
Financial Valuation	Accessibility	9,1	9,6	0,123
	Informational Value	9,2	9,3	0,127
	Corporate Image	8,5	8,6	0,112
	Reliability	8,3	8,3	0,134
	Safety	7,1	7,6	0,015



	Tangibility	9	9,2	0,104
	Objectivity	9,1	9,8	0,141
	Relevancy	9,3	9,5	0,132
	Level Of Expertise	8,7	9,5	0,112
Total				1
Type of Service	Level of Services Indicator	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
Financial Valuation	Employee Competency	8,4	9,2	0,12
	Communication Level	8,1	8,5	0,8
	Employee Affability	8,9	8,1	0,08
Total				1

As noted before, for a more detailed analysis of the financial valuation service factors, it is necessary to introduce two additional factors, such as Objectivity and Uniqueness. It is these two factors that fully determine the significance of residential, commercial real estate valuation services, and any valuation activity in the market. Adding these factors will allow us to more widely explore this service and examine their impact on general performance. It will also allow us to evaluate these development strategies and the vector for management development. From the results obtained for this type of service, the  $Y\Pi C_p/\kappa$  values were determined at 11.5 for Audeks LLC, and 11.6 for Auditorskoe Partnerstvo NIKA LLC. Also, regarding the level of customer service,  $YOp$  value is 7,8 and  $YO\kappa$  values is 8,0. Auditorskoe Partnerstvo NIKA LLC has wider experience in working with clients, as it has a more extensive system of sales and accreditations in various banks regarding residential real estate and mortgage lending. It should be noted that, in terms of objectivity and competence, it exceeds Audeks LLC. This is because the former, in view of its territorial location, has great competition in the market and can objectively approach the tasks posed, as well as improve the skills of its employees.

Regarding the service of conducting training seminars, we present our summary in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Training Seminars Organisation Service Customer Properties and Level of Services

Customer Properties				
Type of Service	Service's Properties	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
Training Seminars	Accessibility	9	9,5	0,123
	Informational Value	9,5	9,7	0,127
	Corporate Image	8,7	8,7	0,112
	Reliability	7,9	8,3	0,134
	Safety	7,7	7,6	0,015
	Tangibility	9,4	9,4	0,104

Total	Uniqueness	9,9	9,5	0,132
				0,747
Level of Services				
Type of Service	Level of Services Indicator	Audeks LLC	Competitor's Service	Relative Significance Coefficient
Training Seminars	Employee Competency	8,8	9,7	0,12
	Communication Level	8,2	8,9	0,8
	Employee Affability	8,9	9	0,08
Total				1

According to these results, for this type of service the  $Y_{IC}$   $p/\kappa$  values were determined as 8,9 for Audeks LLC and Audit Partnership NIKA LLC, respectively. Also, according to the level of services,  $Y_{Op}$  was set at 7,9 and  $Y_{Ok}$  was set at 8,3. This discrepancy in the level of services occurred because of the experts' high assessment of the staff competency at Audit Partnership NIKA LLC. This is because the company has greater options in hiring qualified lecturers for training courses. We shall use these values in the formula presented above and analyze the competitiveness of each service based on the necessary indicators. All the necessary final indicators for a visual and detailed analysis of each generalizing indicator are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10. Results**

Service	Customer Properties ( $Y_{IC}$ $p/\kappa$ )	Price (roubles, $p/\kappa$ )	Level of Services ( $Y_{Op}$ $p/\kappa$ )	Competitiveness Indicator ( $RC$ $p/\kappa$ )
Accounting Organisation and Maintenance	1,03	0,96	1,09	1,07
Tax consulting	1,01	0,97	1,03	1,01
Legal Consulting	1,01	0,97	1,02	1,00
Financial Valuation	1,00	0,81	0,99	0,80
Training Seminars	1,00	0,81	0,98	0,79

According to our findings, obtained by applying the weighted average to the formula, it is necessary to conclude that, despite its higher costs of services, Audeks LLC has greater competitive potential than Auditorskoe Partnerstvo NIKA LLC. However, it should be noted that, in relation to services such as accounting organisation and maintenance, and tax and legal consulting, the most significant of the factors determining the overall competitiveness indicator is the level of service, which indicates highly qualified employees, clear standards for working with customers and an effective corporate culture within the enterprise. Because Auditorskoe Partnerstvo NIKA LLC has greater human resources when it comes to the provision of training services, the company is able to make a more effective use of its competitive advantages, in contrast to Audeks LLC. Also, external factors such as accreditation with a larger number of banks implies more customers. The ability to increase the cost of services, the presence of

great competition in the market is always determined by the level of objectivity.

## SUMMARY

As part of the analysis of the external and competitive environment, in order to increase its competitiveness, Audeks LLC needs to make a more efficient use of its competitive advantages, introduce control over the fulfillment of tasks, and conduct interim assessments of results on the implementation of competitive-increasing policies.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis and its results allowed to identify the features of competitiveness in the consultancy services market and recommendations for strategic management of the competitiveness of consulting firms. A comprehensive theoretical analysis of consultancy as a concept defines it as a multifaceted category within the market economy, the main specific task of which is the process of creating and selling consultancy services. Factors of competitiveness of consulting firms are formed by the knowledge capital of the company. This is because the final product of such companies is created with human resources. Therefore, consulting firms must compete by developing its knowledge capitals. This implies a continuous increase in the skills and professionalism of the company's employees, which ultimately translates into higher-quality services for customers. A specially devised formula was applied to identify the competitiveness of the Audeks LLC consulting organisation. The results of its practical application prove that such a technique can make explicit the advantages and disadvantages of the company's work in the consulting services market, since the competitiveness of a company in this industry is defined by its services and may affect various technological, organisational and, economic aspects of the organization's development.

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