

Senior Management Leadership in the Irish Civil Service

The 2010 NUI Galway Study



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The Context - Irish Public Service Modernisation

INITIATIVE	KEY FOCUS
SMI 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements in public service quality and delivery
DBG 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational improvements in HRM, financial management and enhanced IS management
Evaluation SMI/DBG 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New HRM agenda needed to cultivate and strengthen managerial & leadership capabilities among senior mgrs
OECD 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong leadership at both political and administrative levels... vision, support and direction in developing the modernisation and change agenda
TPS 2008 – to-date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater efficiency and flexibility, accountability in the PMS, and mobility and redeployment of staff resources in an efficient and effective manner across the service Organisational Review Programmes established

The Role of Leadership

- New public management and public sector reform rely heavily on **effective leadership** (Hartley & Allison, 2000; Van Wart, 2003; McLoughlin & Wallis, 2007)
- General acceptance of the criticality of leadership
 - “leaders make a difference to their subordinates’ satisfaction and performance and in whether their organisation succeeds or fails” (Bass, 1990: 22)
- Limitation with many leadership theories is the limited focus on leadership traits and competencies but less on results and impact (Ulrich et al., 1999; 2008)

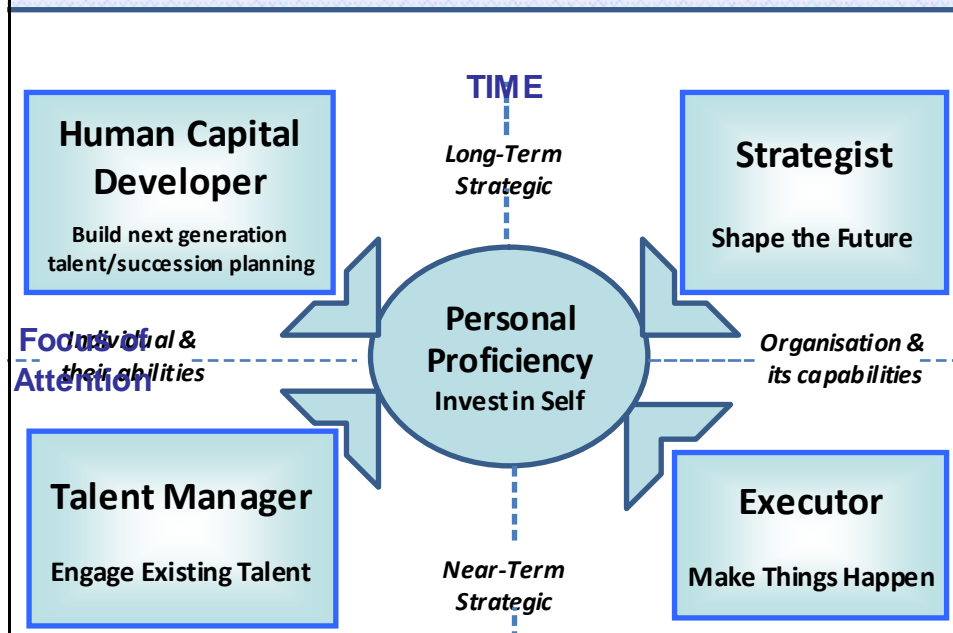


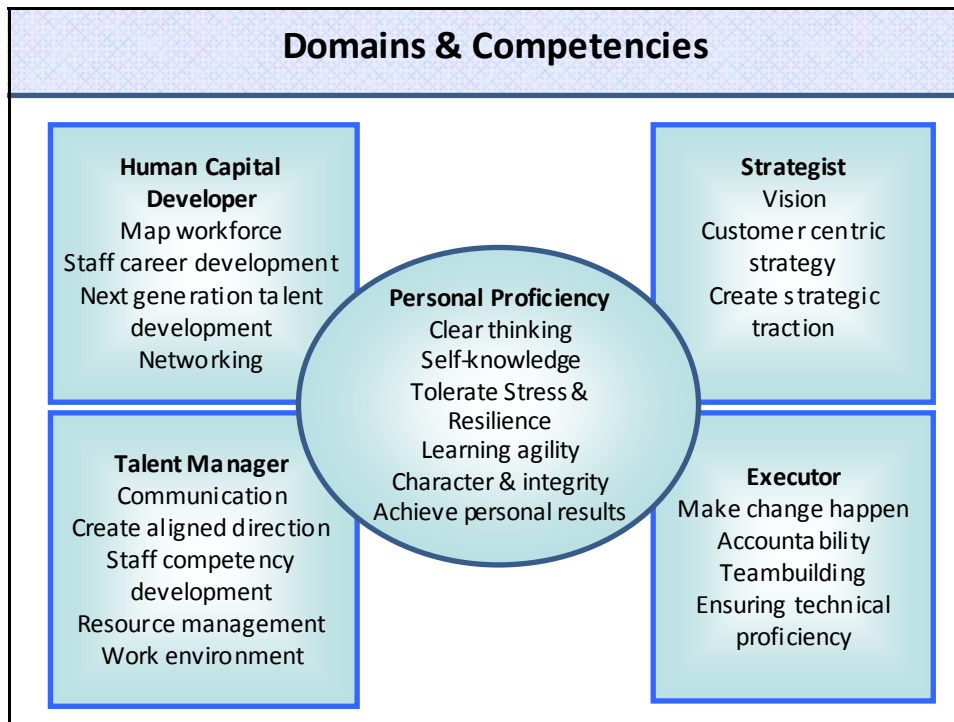
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The Leadership Code

Ulrich, D., Smallwood N., Sweetman, K., 2008





Data Gathering in the Irish Civil Service (a)

- Customisation and review of online instrument
- **13** Departments + Office of the Revenue Commissioners participated
 - Research Team and SG meetings in all Departments
 - 6-16 SG, ASG, PO in each org (depending on size of organisation and no. senior managers)
- April – August 2010
- **146** senior managers in total: **8** SG; **37** ASG; **101** PO

Data Gathering in the Irish Civil Service (b)

- 360-degree review process using online instrument
- **1200** completed questionnaires:
 - **146** managers/self assessments
 - **134** manager assessments
 - **403** peer assessments
 - **517** direct report assessments



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Rating Scale

- Respondents were asked to **assess the focal individual's** competence level for each question using a **five-point scale** as follows:
 - 1 = **Poor**
 - 2 = **Fair**
 - 3 = **Good**
 - 4 = **Very Good**
 - 5 = **Outstanding**



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The Online 360 Questionnaire

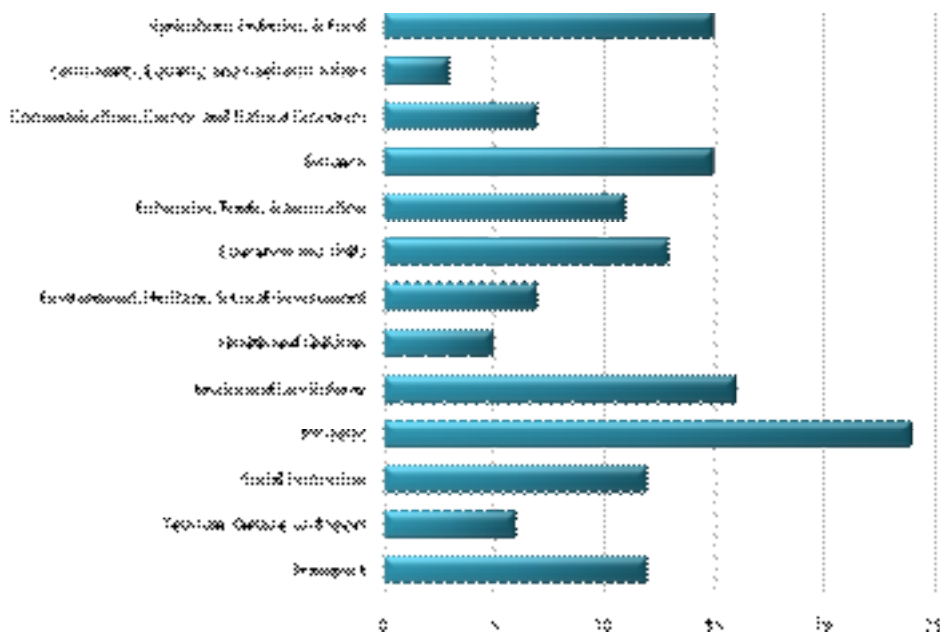
- 9 demographic and human capital questions
- 72 questions assessing 27 leadership competencies across 5 domains – quantitative using 5 point scale
- 3 open-ended qualitative questions for raters:
 - Senior manager's top 3 leadership strengths
 - Senior manager's top 3 leadership development needs
 - Public sector/Civil Service context factors affecting leadership capability



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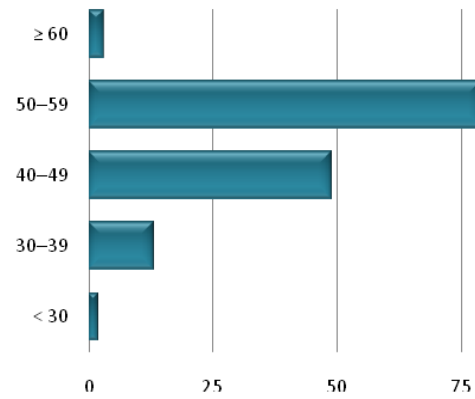
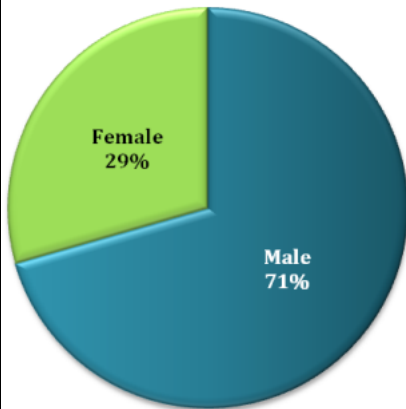
Departments & No. of Participating Managers



Demographics (a)

Gender: male (71% male, 29% female)

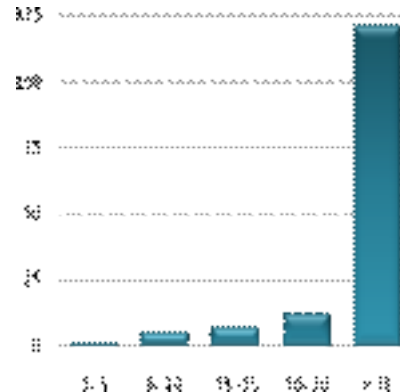
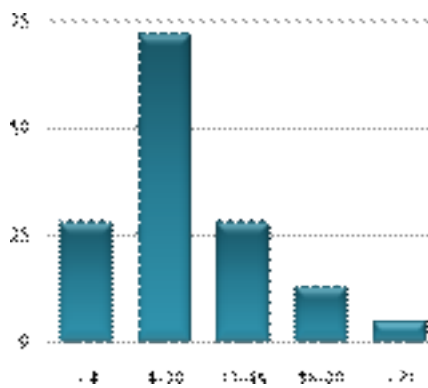
Age: the majority (79%) were between 50 and 60 years

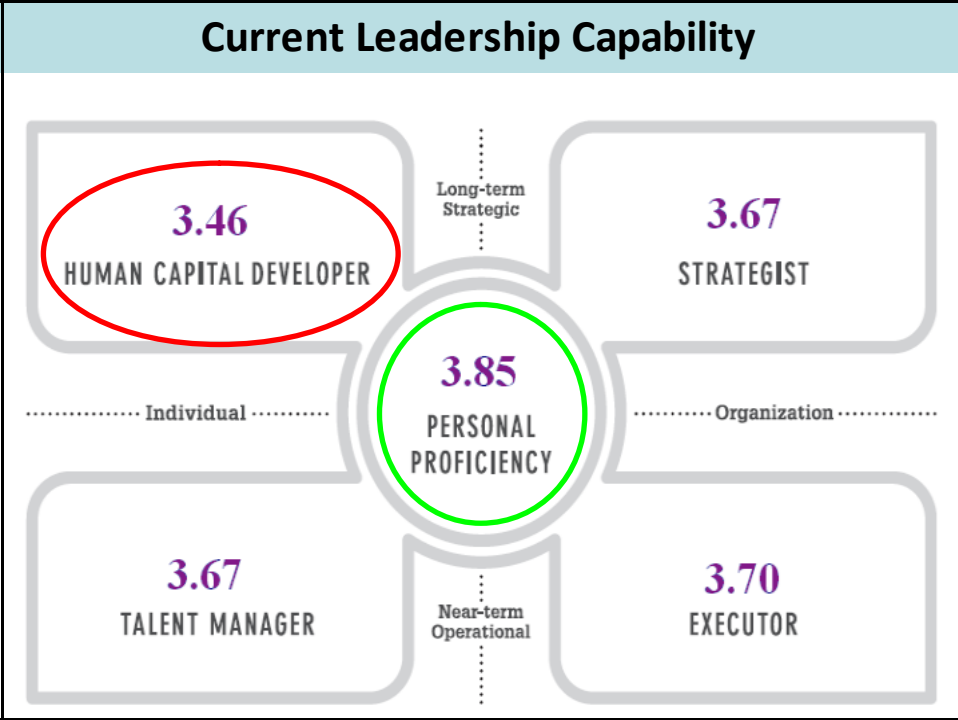


Demographics (b)

PS Tenure: 80% working for 20 or more years in the public service

Job Tender: 4 to 10 years in a senior management position

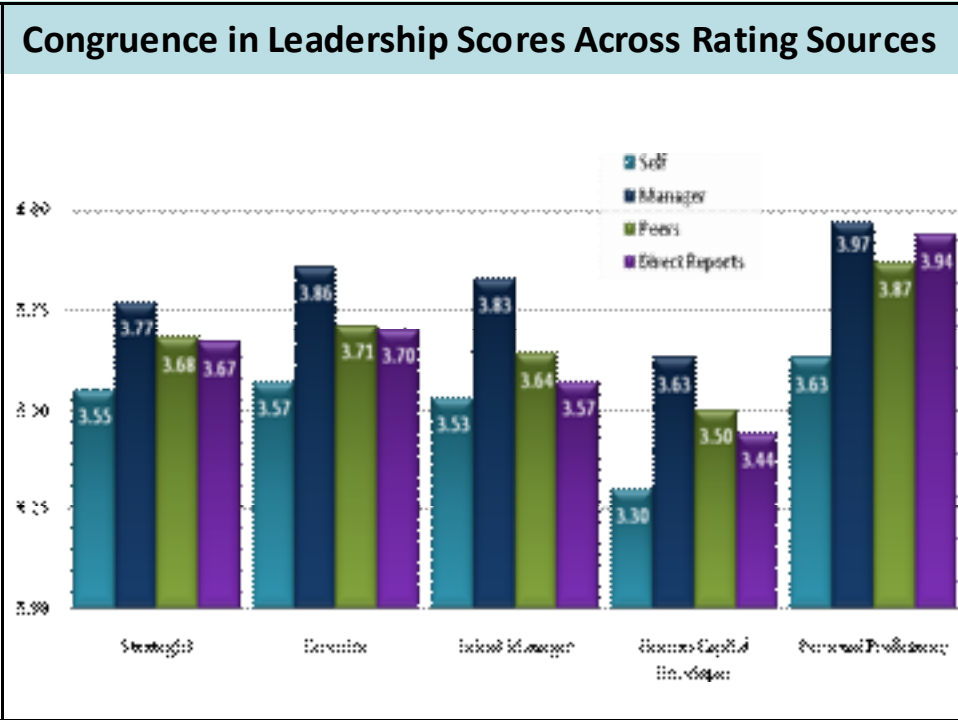




Top 5 Strengths (overall)

TOP STRENGTHS	SCORE	DOMAIN
1) Demonstrate Learning Agility	4.17	Personal Proficiency
2) Balance Work and Non-Work demands (including delegation)	4.00	Personal Proficiency
3) Tolerate Stress & Resilience	3.86	Personal Proficiency
4) Self Knowledge	3.86	Personal Proficiency
5) Deliver Results	3.85	Personal Proficiency

Top 5 Development Needs		
TOP DEVELOPMENT NEEDS	SCORE	DOMAIN
1) Map the Workforce	3.26	Human Capital Developer
2) Align organisational & employee expectations	3.40	Human Capital Developer
3) Help People Manage Their Careers	3.51	Human Capital Developer
4) Communication	3.55	Talent Manager
5) Practice Clear Thinking	3.57	Personal Proficiency



Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context (a)

- Content analysis methodology to analyse and thematically organise the **618** qualitative comments regarding factors affecting leadership in CS
- These included
 - peer to peer comments about constraints at same grade
 - comments by direct reports
 - comments by managers
- 7 key emerging themes



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 1. Leadership & Risk

Leadership & Risk: balance between risk-taking, maintaining the status quo and facilitating innovation and creativity

- *“it is important to safeguard the integrity of public sector organisations by ensuring suitable processes, but the public service process may sometimes get more emphasis in terms of risk mitigation than outcomes” APO*
- *“the public service tends to have more emphasis on risk mitigation than outcomes and thus a lack of scope for innovative thinking prevails” APO*



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context:

1. Leadership & Risk

- *“public sector organisations operate in a highly risk averse environment, dictated by demands of public accountability and the media focus. This permeates organisational culture and impedes capacity to offer freedoms and latitude to individuals to pursue new approaches and adopt responsive service innovations”.*
ASG



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context:

2. Rigidity of Organisation, Structure & Process

Rigidity and inflexibility: structure of the public sector and its bureaucratic form is seen as a significant sector specific factor adversely impacting leadership effectiveness

- *“the structures and restrictions of government, as distinct from the private sector, often times limits options, time taken to change and require outmoded channels to be maintained and result in the inability to readily invest 'profits' (aka savings/extra exchequer returns) in new or experimental ventures”.* ASG



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 2. Rigidity of organisation, Structure & Process

- *“the rigid Industrial Relations structure hinders flexibility” PO*
- *“inability to use carrot and stick effectively “ PO*
- *“The tools available to managers to motivate staff are limited. There are very limited sanctions available, and capacity to reward is severely constrained too” ASG*



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 3. Political System Influence

Political Influence: constraining to leadership effectiveness and achievement of results

- *“the interaction with the political system is of relevance and is a factor which does of course influence effective leadership in the public sector” PO*
- *“political environment in which the public servant operates can dilute the impact of leadership e.g. initiatives which might have been led strongly could be removed from the political agenda with a change of Government or Minister” AS*



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 3. Political System Influence

- *“our public service needs to become more business-like and to deliver public goals more quickly. The highest levels of our public service need to rediscover the capacity to influence government policy through their ministers. It is not enough merely to 'give the minister what he wants'. Who fashions and pursues long-term national goals? No one!” AS*



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 4. Culture

Public sector culture affects leadership and need for new leadership culture driven by top management

- *“unless the public service employee has support from the top, it is hard for the next level of management to change the attitude of a public sector organisation. This applies both in its attitude to its external stakeholders and its internal staff” ASG*
- *“effective leaders in the public sector in the future will be the ones who operate from a platform of openness, accountability, empowerment and ‘considered self-interest’ and work solely from a position of ‘leading by example’” PO*



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 5. Recruitment, Selection & Promotion Constraints

R, S & P constraints: restrict managers to effectively select, manage and develop staff

- *“there needs to be more delegation of human resource practices, responsibilities and recruitment of staff from the Centralised Personnel Unit to the Regional Management Team”* ASG
- *“a more appropriate system of selection and promoting personnel needs to be developed. This could involve psychological assessments of a person’s values, attitudes, commitment, beliefs, thinking patterns etc. This allied with assessing academic qualifications, achievements, experience etc. would be more likely to identify the Leaders of Tomorrow that are required”* PO



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 5. Recruitment, Selection & Promotion Constraints

- *“many public sector employees have experience/qualifications that are either not utilised or are under utilised. Leaders need to be able to identify these people and place them in positions where their talents may be used for the benefit of the organisation”* APO
- *“within the Civil Service, one is allocated resources and there is often little scope to have all the staff/skills required assigned to a Division as the better people are generally recognised within the organisation and are highly sought and competed for”* ASG



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 6. Resource to Cope with Demands

Much reference to challenge of cutbacks, employment control framework and resource constraints

- *“Currently leaders in the Civil Service in particular are having to do more and more with fewer people and less money. This will stretch people’s time and energy”* PO
- *“The sudden decapitation of leadership through the incentivised retirement scheme and threats to our pensions has led to increased workload for all and many staff having to learn new areas of work without the hitherto reasonably smooth transfer of work and corporate knowledge”* APO
- *“Moratorium on recruitment and promotions is affecting development of future leaders as talented people will leave and necessary new blood is not entering the public sector”* APO



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Leading in the Public/Civil Service Context: 7. Lack of Systems that Enforce Accountability

Perceived lack of systems to enforce accountability in public and civil service context – esp staff performance

- *“civil service culture whereby the requirement to deliver by managers is not paramount/obligatory. Real accountability is still not in evidence in most Government Departments”* PO
- *“there is currently a lack of effective processes to allow managers apply appropriate sanctions where staff fail to meet performance targets”* PO



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Conclusions & Recommendations (a)

- Change in the civil service largely rests with incumbent senior managers – thus leadership capability critical
- Highest rated leadership dimension is personal proficiency (stress management, learning agility, integrity, energy, commitment)
- Lowest rated domain is human capital developer (long term staffing perspective)
 - EO to PO appointment process – inflexibility in terms of matching competence to requirements as panel based
- Notwithstanding the existence of certain public & civil service sector context factors and constraints, our study finds that there is a clear acknowledgement and understanding of the need for change among senior civil service leaders



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Conclusions & Recommendations (b)

- Need for a more effective performance management system
 - “carrot and stick” to motivate, maintain and address employee performance
 - the authority and adequate control mechanisms to effect real change – perceived to be absent at present
- Sense that risk taking, creativity and innovation are stifled and discouraged among the study respondents
 - Conservative and risk averse
 - Need more innovation and creativity



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Conclusions & Recommendations (c)

- Human capital development
 - Among mid management levels – building next generation talent
 - Move from short-term HR issues to longer-term planning
 - Greater focus on specialist skills rather than generalist
- Senior management leadership development
 - Leadership effectiveness **can** be developed and enhanced
 - Education, experience, mentoring, coaching, job assignments etc.
- *“Better systems for identifying and nurturing talent focusing on the top management cadre are required. More structured career planning and mobility through a Senior Public Service is essential in making progress here generally”*. Assistant Secretary General



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