



STRATEGIC UTILIZATION OF RECORDS IN THE MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR: DETERMINANTS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 26.06.2025

Revised date: 16.07.2025

Accepted date: 21.08.2025

Published date: 19.09.2025

To cite this document:

Aziz, M. A. A., Mahmood, M., Radzi, M. A. H. M., & Sawal, M. Z. M. (2025). Strategic Utilization of Records in The Malaysian Public Sector: Determinants and Implications. *Journal of Information System and Technology Management*, 10 (40), 230-242.

DOI: 10.35631/JISTM.1040016

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Abstract:

This conceptual paper explores the strategic use of records in the Malaysian public sector, emphasizing their role as vital assets for governance, transparency, and service delivery. It addresses the theoretical and empirical gaps in understanding how records users and records value influence the strategic use of records and examines the mediating role of records value. A systematic literature review approach was adopted to synthesize existing theories, models, and empirical studies related to records management and strategic use of records. The review followed four stages identification, screening, eligibility, and synthesis drawing on established frameworks such as the Life Cycle Concept of Records, Technology Acceptance Model, Sociotechnical System Theory, and Governance Recordkeeping Model. The review revealed limited empirical research on determinants and impacts of strategic records use, particularly in Malaysia. While previous studies examined aspects such as decision-making, good governance, and evidence provision, few integrated both user-related and value-based determinants within a comprehensive model. The proposed research framework identifies records user and records value as key predictors of strategic use of records, with records value also acting as a mediator. The study highlights the need for context-specific instruments that can measure determinants and predict outcomes of strategic records use in the Malaysian public sector. Implementing such tools can guide policy, improve accountability, and embed records

management into decision-making processes to enhance efficiency and sustainable governance. This paper advances theoretical understanding by linking user engagement and perceived value to strategic records use, while also proposing a mediating effect of records value. It offers a localized conceptual framework tailored to Malaysia's governance environment, providing a foundation for future empirical testing using quantitative methods.

Keywords:

Conceptual Paper, Malaysian Government, Public Records, Records Management

Introduction

Records are a strategic resource for any organisation especially for the public sector in day-to-day business. Records are regarded as one of the important sources due to their features of uniqueness, authenticity, reliability, usability, integrity, and flexibility. Records have become an important resource nowadays, especially in government sector and their absence will result in inefficiencies or failure in operating procedures. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines a record as "information created, received, and maintained as evidence and as an asset by an organization or person, in pursuit of legal obligations or in the transaction of business" (ISO 15489-1:2016, 2016). Records can take many forms, including paper documents, electronic files, photographs, maps, or audio-visual materials, and are maintained for their evidential and informational value (Shepherd & Yeo, 2003).

In Malaysia, the National Archives of Malaysia Act 2003 (Act 629) provides a statutory definition: a public record refers to "any record, regardless of form or medium, received or created in the course of the conduct of public affairs by any public office" (National Archives of Malaysia Act 2003, Section 2). This definition emphasizes the role of records in supporting governance, transparency, and legal accountability. Effective records management in Malaysia is not merely an administrative function but a strategic necessity that supports governance, accountability, and public service delivery. In the Malaysian public sector, well-managed records are essential for promoting transparency, professionalism, and efficiency, in line with the National Archives of Malaysia's Strategic Plan (2021–2025) and the My Government initiative on good governance (Mohd Noor, Ahmad, & Harun, 2023).

Records serve multiple values administrative, financial, operational, legal, and evidential making them a vital information asset for strategic decision-making and institutional memory (Haron & Tahir, 2024). This perspective positions records not just as historical archives but as active resources that drive policy formulation, enhance public trust, and enable performance assessment across government agencies. The transition to digital platforms has underscored the urgency of developing an Electronic Records and Information Management (ERIM) framework tailored to Malaysia's institutional and technological contexts. Generic frameworks often fail to meet the unique operational needs of Malaysian agencies, highlighting the need for localized standards and implementation strategies (Mazlan & Jusoh, 2014).

From a business standpoint, strategic records management also contributes to operational resilience. SME Corporation Malaysia, for example, emphasizes that effective records policies should incorporate systematic processes for information capture, storage planning, classification, retention, and disposal, while balancing confidentiality with public access and

aligning with international standards such as ISO 15489 (SME Corp Malaysia, 2020). By embedding records management into everyday operations, Malaysia can ensure that its records function not only as compliance tools but also as strategic assets for sustainable governance and socio-economic development.

Problem Statement

Public records are an important source of government knowledge and should be managed as a strategic resource. However, many challenges still exist in accessing, preserving, and managing these records (Katundu, 2002; Mnjama, 2004; World Bank & IRMT, 2000). In most government agencies, records management is not treated as a key management function, which limits efforts to improve efficiency, accountability, and service delivery.

In Malaysia, the government has established records management facilities, but public officers still face problems in creating, storing, and maintaining records (Irwan Kamaruddin, 2014). Records are crucial for decision-making and administration, but poor storage, lack of guidelines, and untrained staff often lead to records being lost or mismanaged (Abdulrahman, 2015). Without proper systems, institutions risk inefficiency and weak accountability.

Previous studies in Malaysia (Kasim, 2011) show that records management practices are not consistent across agencies. Many government bodies lack records professionals, and responsibilities are spread out among staff whose main role is not records management. This results in weak practices and limited awareness about the importance of records. Records have value beyond daily operations they serve as evidence, support decision-making, preserve institutional memory, and ensure accountability (McKemmish, 2005). Yet, little research has focused on how records are actually used as a strategic resource in government organisations, especially in Malaysia.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how public records are managed and used by Malaysian government officers, and whether they are effectively utilised as a strategic resource to support decision-making and good governance.

Literature Review

Theory Perspective

Studies on records management have encompassed several fields such as information systems (Mutero, 2014; Hawash, Al-Masri, & Al-Smadi, 2020; Mukred, Singh, & Safie, 2018; Asogwa, Ugwu, & Ugwuanyi, 2021; Issa & Wamukoya, 2018), health (Marutha, 2022; Anepo, 2019; Ainembabazi, 2018; Yunus, Abd Kadir, & Zulkifli, 2019), and information management (Netshakhuma, 2019; Asogwa et al., 2021; Demir, Gunes, & Cakmakkaya, 2018; Muhammad, Mannan, & Farashi, 2021; Netshakhuma, 2021; Kasim, 2011). However, from the perspective of records management, there is a dearth of research on the strategic use of records, particularly in the public sector.

Records management extends beyond basic usage and operational practices, encompassing multiple dimensions such as effort expectancy (ease of use), performance expectancy (usefulness), social influence, perceived power security, perceived value of records, and intention to use (Lewellen, 2015). Related work by Amo (2016) identifies dimensions such as awareness and knowledge, records-keeping continuum, compliance and good practices,

challenges and suggestions, and decision-making. However, previous studies (Amo, 2016; Lewellen, 2015) often focus on a single determinant related to the strategic use of records, such as decision-making or records value.

Furthermore, most studies incorporating strategic use of records have adopted a narrow conceptual focus, such as participation, without considering the impact of user involvement. Existing theoretical models rarely include records users and records value as predictors of the strategic use of records. To date, a conceptual model linking records users and records value to the strategic use of records has not been empirically tested.

Several theories related to the topic have been proposed, including the works of Amo (2016), Lewellen (2015), and Phiri (2016). However, these theories exhibit notable limitations:

- They primarily focus on elements of practice and recordkeeping.
- They do not identify determinants or factors leading to the strategic use of records.
- They largely omit the potential impacts of the strategic use of records, with the exception of Nyawamu's (2018) work.

Consequently, there exists a theoretical gap in understanding the determinants and impacts of the strategic use of records. This gap represents a lack of theoretical and practical knowledge, and addressing it will contribute significantly to developing new theoretical insights into the strategic use of records in the public sector context.

Empirical perspective

From an empirical perspective, there is a scarcity of research examining the strategic use of records in relation to its determinants and impacts. Based on the researcher's knowledge, only a limited number of studies have addressed this topic, including the works of Amo (2016), Lewellen (2015), and Phiri (2016). These studies incorporate certain elements associated with the strategic use of records—such as good governance, decision-making, evidence provision, and service efficiency—but do not offer a comprehensive framework linking determinants to impacts.

In terms of research settings, the majority of these studies were conducted outside of Malaysia, such as in the United Kingdom (Sebina, 2004), Nigeria (Akor & Udensi, 2013; Iwhiwhu, 2005), Tanzania (Ndenja-Sichalwe, Ngulube, & Stilwell, 2011), and Yemen (Mukred & Yusof, 2015). Within Malaysia, there are only a few studies incorporating elements of strategic use of records. For example, Abdullah et al. (2016) examined awareness of records management within the Ministry of Defence, while Irwan Kamaruddin (2014) explored records management practices and issues in the Prime Minister's Department.

Based on the existing literature, several empirical gaps can be identified:

- Limited examination of determinants and impacts — Existing research offers little discussion on how determinants influence the strategic use of records and what impacts result from such use. The relationship between these variables remains unexplored both theoretically and empirically.
- Absence of focus on Diplomatic Administrative Officers (PTD) — No prior study has specifically examined the strategic use of records among PTD officers in the Malaysian public sector. Previous studies have tended to focus on different populations within a limited number of ministries or departments.

Given these gaps, there is insufficient knowledge, understanding, and empirical evidence concerning the strategic use of records—especially in terms of its determinants and impacts—in the Malaysian public sector. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing a deeper understanding of how records can be leveraged as strategic assets to enhance governance, decision-making, and service delivery.

Practical Perspective

From a practical standpoint, several instruments have been developed by previous researchers to assess aspects of records management. For example, Lewellen (2015) developed a 54-item scale to measure users' intention to use an electronic recordkeeping system in public sector organizations. This instrument comprised six factors: effort expectancy (ease of use), performance expectancy (usefulness), social influence, perceived power security, perceived value of records, and intention to use. While effective in measuring user engagement, the instrument did not identify possible determinants or impacts of the strategic use of records. Furthermore, in terms of practical application, the public sector requires an instrument that can enhance the level of user engagement, not merely determine its current state.

Similarly, Amo (2016) developed an instrument to examine the effect of records management systems on decision-making in a hospital environment. The instrument contained 70 items structured into eight thematic areas: (1) demographic characteristics, (2) awareness and knowledge of records management, (3) records-keeping continuum, (4) compliance and good practices, (5) records management challenges, (6) suggestions for improvement, (7) decision-making processes, and (8) effects of the records management system on decisions. The findings indicated a significant relationship among constructs, showing that the adoption of an electronic records management system improved the accuracy of organizational decisions (Darwish, Zain, & Ahmad, 2014). This tool also enabled hospitals to measure the level of awareness on records management among staff.

However, several limitations exist with these instruments. First, Amo's (2016) instrument focused on decision-making but lacked key elements associated with the strategic use of records, such as good governance, evidence provision, and service efficiency. It did not address the underlying factors that could lead to strategic use. Second, the instrument was tested on respondents from a single hospital with similar demographic profiles, limiting its applicability to diverse demographic or geographic contexts. Taken together, both Lewellen's (2015) and Amo's (2016) instruments measure the current state of records management roles and practices but do not assess the determinants influencing the strategic use of records. Additionally, they are unable to predict the outcomes of strategic use. This lack of practical tools prevents public sector organizations from identifying the factors that influence—or hinder—the effective strategic use of records. Without such instruments, organizations face challenges in improving utilization of records as a strategic resource and justifying their practices based on empirical evidence from existing tools. Therefore, there is a clear need for research that develops usable, context-appropriate instruments capable of identifying determinants and predicting impacts of strategic use in the public sector.

Based on the issues highlighted above, previous research has largely focused on the importance of records, the challenges in records management, and the processes of managing records within organizations. However, there is a notable absence of studies examining how records are utilized as a strategic resource for organizational decision-making and governance—

particularly within the Malaysian context. Limited attention has been given to understanding how records can serve as an essential source of reference for government agencies in enhancing transparency, efficiency, and accountability. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how public records are managed and used among Malaysian government officers. By investigating the practices of records management in Malaysia's public sector, the research will provide valuable insights into whether records are effectively being leveraged as a strategic resource to support organizational objectives and public service delivery.

Underlying Theory

Numerous leading models and theories have influenced the field of records management. Modern records management extends beyond the traditional conceptualization of usage, encompassing multiple dimensions that address organizational, technological, and human factors. Consequently, this study draws upon similar topics and related fields to develop its theoretical foundation. Based on a review of prior literature, a theoretical framework was constructed, supported by the following key theories: the Life Cycle Concept of Records (IRMT, 1999), Sociotechnical System Theory (STS) (Bostrom & Heinen, 1977), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986), Individual Difference Theory (Motowidlo et al., 1997), and the Theory of Flow (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976).

The research also incorporates established models, including the Records Management Practice Model (Mwangi, 2017), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Yang, 2003), Records Continuum Model (Upward, 2005), Governance Record keeping Model (Phiri, 2016), Records Management Role in Organizational Administration Model (Nyawamu, 2018), Records Management Practices in Malaysia Model (Irwan, 2009), Information System Success Model (DeLone & McLean, 2003), and the Recordkeeping Metadata Model (Lewellen, 2015). For the purposes of this research, a second-order hypothesis was developed. This approach is justified by prior studies and theoretical frameworks in the records management domain. Employing a second-order hypothesis allows for parsimony, simplifying complex relationships among variables while retaining explanatory power. Furthermore, it facilitates the application of higher-order constructs in PLS-SEM, enabling researchers to explain their constructs through abstract dimensions and sub-dimensions. This categorization is essential to identify and explore the critical dimensions and factors influencing the strategic use of records.

Research Framework and Hypotheses Development

The essential model of the proposed research framework is from the context of records user and records value that significant effect on strategic use of records. The proposed research framework (see Figure 1) derived from the theory and model above and the development of hypotheses were justified based on a theoretical interpretation and refer to empirical finding from similar research areas (Irwan, 2009; Mwangi, 2017 and Yang, 2003).

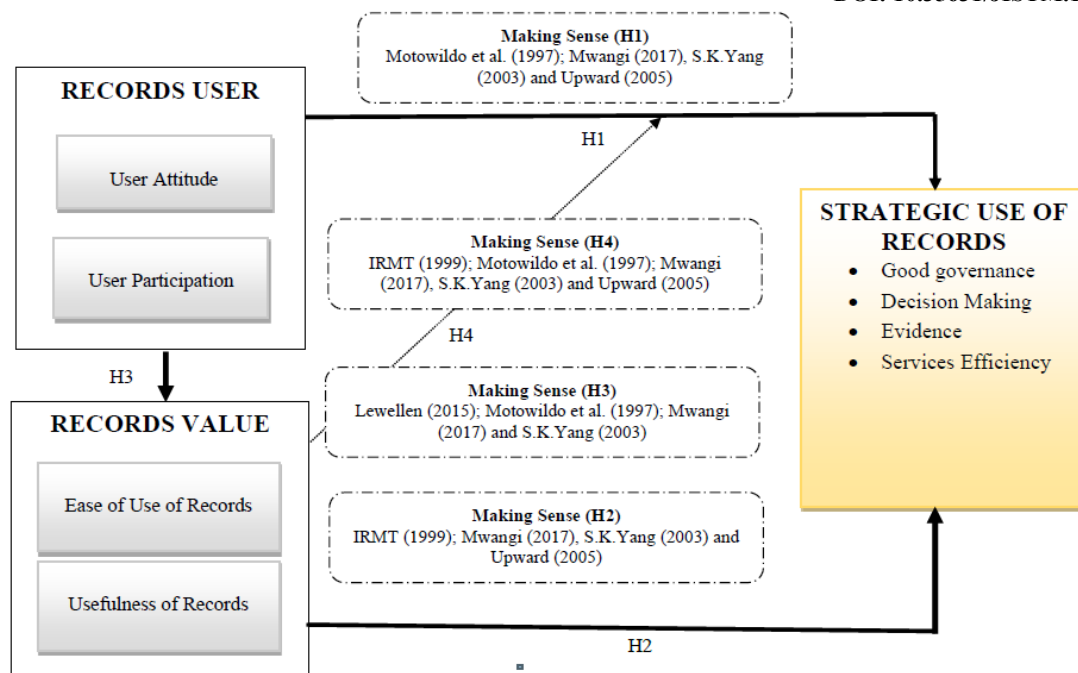


Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

Records User and Strategic Use of Records

The relationship between records user with strategic use of records is based on the theories of Motowildo et al. (1997). The theory posits that individual differences or personality are associated with changes in behavior, attitude and performance. Individual tends to stay within an environment that matches their personality traits. Moreover, individual differences lead to variability in knowledge, skill and habits, as well as subsequently influence the task and contextual performance. An individual will perform certain behaviour or attitude if they think that the behaviour or attitude will increase the like hood of achieving better performance, demonstrating the concept of user engagement within strategic use of records. Moreover, previous research of Mwangi (2017), S.K.Yang (2003) and Upward (2005) also confirmed the relationship between records user with strategic use of records. In this study, records user will use two variables: user attitude and user participation. Hence, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1. There is a significant relationship between Records User (RU) and Strategic Use of Records (SUR) in Malaysian Public Sector.

Records Value and Strategic Use of Records

The relationship between records user with strategic use of records is based on The Life cycle Concept of Records (IRMT, 1999) and Technology Acceptance Model (S.K.Yang, 2003). The perception of usefulness and ease of use of technology can be influenced by the quality of technology. The theories posit that the perception of output quality is expected to explain significant unique variance in perceived usefulness and ease of use. Usefulness is defined as the extent to which a person believes that the use of a particular technology (records) will enhance job performance (strategic use of records), while the ease of use is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using technology will be free from effort. In the context of this study, record users will use records when they find that records have various values and

features that facilitate each related matter in the organization. Hence, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H2. There is a significant relationship between Records Value (RV) and Strategic Use of Records (SUR) in Malaysian Public Sector.

Records User and Records Value

The relationship between records user with records value is based on the theories of Motowildo et al. (1997) and Technology Acceptance Model (S.K. Yang, 2003). The theories posit that performance or benefits depends on individual behaviour (strategic use of records). An engaged individual will act or respond to meet the need of the work. Moreover, the theories also suggest that performance and utilization of information or records depend on how well the supporting factors (ease of use and ease of usefulness) meet the characteristics of the individual task. In this study, records users will engage and use the records only if all determinants fit their preferences. Hence, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3. There is a significant relationship between Records User (RU) and Records Value (RV) in Strategic Use of Records (SUR) in Malaysian Public Sector.

Records Value as mediator

Allen (2017) stated that mediating variable is a variable that links the independent and the dependent variables, and whose existence explains the relationship between the other two variables. A mediating variable is also known as a mediator variable or an intervening variable. A mediator variable allows a researcher to hypothesize that the independent variable impacts the mediating variable, which in turn impacts the dependent variable. In other terms, a mediating variable is significant when a third variable influences the relationship between the predictor and the criterion variables. Without the mediator variable, the link between the independent and dependent variables would not exist.

The relationship Records Value as mediator between records user and Strategic use of records is based on The Life cycle Concept of Records (IRMT, 1999), Theory of individual Differences (Motowildo et al., 1997) and Recordkeeping Metadata Model (Lewellen, 2015). Individual differences or personality are linked to changes in behaviour, attitude, and performance, according to the theory. Individual differences influence task and contextual performance by resulting in variability in knowledge, skill, and habits. An individual will engage in a particular behaviour or attitude if they believe it will increase their chances of achieving better results, demonstrating the concept of user engagement in the context of strategic record management. Furthermore, records' value is concerned with a user's perceptions of the importance and utility of the record management process itself. It concentrates on the user's requirements and how they interpret the value of recorded documents. However, not all end users value records in the same way, and many end users may believe that formal storage of those documents and records is simply not worth the effort, preferring instead to rely on personal collections based on their own anticipated information needs. Individuals who place a higher value on records will believe that a records management system is a useful tool for capturing and managing documents so that they can be used for specific purposes in the future. Individuals who place a higher value on records will view the entire records management process as a worthwhile investment of their time and effort, increasing their desire to use the records. Hence, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4. Record Value (REV) mediates the relationship between Records User (RU) and Strategic Use of Records (SUR) in Malaysian Public Sector.

This study is designed to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical gaps in understanding the strategic use of records in the Malaysian public sector. By integrating perspectives from records management, technology adoption, sociotechnical systems, and organizational theory, the research develops a framework that positions records users and records value as key determinants of strategic use. The use of Administrative and Diplomatic Officers (PTD) as respondents ensures relevance, as they are directly involved in administration, policy-making, and decision-making. Through a quantitative approach and structural modeling, the study not only tests the hypothesized relationships but also contributes a context-specific instrument for evaluating the strategic use of records. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights and practical guidance for strengthening governance and efficiency through better records management in the public sector.

Methodology

This study will adopt a combination of exploratory, descriptive, and hypothesis-testing approaches. The exploratory aspect is necessary because limited research exists on the strategic use of records and the influence of contextual dimensions, while the descriptive approach allows the use of statistical tools to summarise and present the findings. Hypothesis testing will also be conducted as several hypotheses have been developed from the theoretical framework to examine the relationships between variables. The focus of the study is on testing correlations rather than causality, to determine the strength of the relationships between the identified variables.

The unit of analysis for this study is the individual, focusing specifically on Administrative and Diplomatic Officers (PTD) serving in ministries and departments within the Malaysian public sector. This group is considered appropriate as respondents because they are directly involved in administration, policy-making, and decision-making processes, which are central to the strategic use of records. Data will be collected through an online questionnaire distributed to PTD officers in their respective organisations. The respondents will consist of PTD officers ranging from grade M44 to JUSA, representing senior and top management levels who play significant roles in organisational administration and decision-making. Officers from twelve ministries and one department in Putrajaya will be invited to participate, providing a diverse representation of perspectives within the Malaysian public sector.

In terms of sampling, the study will employ a non-probability purposive sampling method. This approach has been selected because it allows the deliberate targeting of individuals who possess relevant knowledge and expertise for the research. Although non-probability sampling may introduce certain limitations such as potential bias and lack of generalisability, it is a practical and cost-effective method for reaching the intended group of respondents. Purposive sampling is widely recognised as suitable for studies that require participants with specific experience or professional responsibility, and in this study, PTD officers represent a group whose perspectives are central to the research objectives.

The research will adopt a quantitative method, using structured questionnaires as the data collection instrument. The data will be analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics and Smart-PLS to test hypotheses and examine the relationships among variables. This

combination of tools will provide both statistical summaries and advanced modelling to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the strategic use of records in the Malaysian public sector.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the strategic use of records in the Malaysian public sector. Specifically, it aims to examine the level of records being utilized as a strategic resource, determine whether records value and records users jointly predict their strategic use, and investigate whether records value mediates the relationship between records users and the strategic use of records. The importance of this study lies in positioning records as a cornerstone of effective governance, accountability, and service delivery. By highlighting the link between records value, users, and strategic use, the research will provide critical insights into how records can be managed not merely as administrative tools but as assets that support decision-making, transparency, and the protection of citizens' rights.

For the Malaysian public sector, the findings are expected to encourage the development of robust records management programs underpinned by clear policies, procedures, and standards. At the same time, the study emphasizes the need for training and capacity building to ensure that records managers, officers, and users have the skills and awareness to treat records as strategic resources. Strengthening these practices will ultimately enhance organizational performance and improve service delivery to the public. In addition, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on records management by empirically testing the relationship between records users, records value, and the strategic use of records. Its findings will not only enrich academic understanding but also provide actionable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. In conclusion, this research will play a dual role: advancing scholarly discourse on records management while offering practical strategies to improve governance and accountability in the Malaysian public sector. By recognizing and harnessing the strategic value of records, the public sector can strengthen transparency, efficiency, and trust in public administration.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to all the individuals and organizations especially the Faculty of Information Science, Universiti Teknologi MARA, that have contributed to the publication of this research paper.

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