

INTRAPRENEURSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION: THE WEST AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of intrapreneurship in driving workforce transformation across West African organizations. Drawing on empirical data from Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire, we investigate how intrapreneurial practices influence employee engagement, organizational innovation, and competitive positioning in emerging markets. Through a mixed-methods approach involving 387 employees and 42 organizational leaders, we identify contextual factors unique to West Africa that either enable or constrain intrapreneurial behavior. Our findings reveal that organizations fostering intrapreneurial cultures experience 43% higher employee retention, 31% greater innovation output, and improved adaptability to market disruptions. However, hierarchical organizational structures, risk-averse cultures, and limited resource allocation present significant barriers. We propose a contextualized framework for

cultivating intrapreneurship in West African workplaces and discuss implications for human resource development, organizational strategy, and economic growth in the region.

Keywords: intrapreneurship, workforce transformation, West Africa, organizational innovation, employee engagement, emerging markets

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

West Africa stands at a critical juncture in its economic development trajectory. With a youthful population, 60% under age 25, and rapid technological adoption, the region possesses enormous potential for economic transformation (African Development Bank, 2023). Yet unemployment and underemployment remain persistent challenges, with youth unemployment rates exceeding 30% in several countries. Traditional employment models struggle to absorb this demographic dividend, necessitating innovative approaches to workforce development and organizational capacity building.

Intrapreneurship, defined as entrepreneurial behavior within established organizations, offers a promising pathway for harnessing this potential. Unlike traditional hierarchical work arrangements, intrapreneurship empowers employees to identify opportunities, develop innovative solutions, and drive organizational change from within. This approach aligns with broader workforce transformation imperatives: developing adaptive capabilities, fostering innovation cultures, and creating meaningful work experiences that retain talent.

Despite growing interest in intrapreneurship globally, research remains heavily concentrated in Western contexts. The unique socio-economic, cultural, and institutional landscape of West Africa demands contextualized inquiry. How do intrapreneurial practices manifest in environments characterized by different power distance indices, collectivist orientations, and resource constraints? What organizational practices enable or inhibit intrapreneurial behavior in West African settings? These questions form the foundation of this investigation.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

1. Examine the prevalence and characteristics of intrapreneurial practices in West African organizations
2. Identify contextual enablers and barriers to intrapreneurship in the region

3. Assess the relationship between intrapreneurial cultures and workforce transformation outcomes
4. Develop a contextualized framework for fostering intrapreneurship in West African workplaces

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical application. Theoretically, it extends intrapreneurship literature beyond Western contexts, revealing how cultural and institutional factors shape entrepreneurial behavior within organizations. Practically, it provides actionable insights for organizational leaders, policymakers, and human resource practitioners seeking to unlock workforce potential and drive sustainable competitive advantage in West African markets.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Intrapreneurship

Intrapreneurship emerged as a distinct concept in the 1980s, when Gifford Pinchot III coined the term to describe employees who take hands-on responsibility for creating innovation within organizations (Pinchot, G., III. (1985)). The concept builds on Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship but situates innovative behavior within existing organizational structures rather than new venture creation. (Schumpeter, J. A. (1934)).

Contemporary scholarship identifies several core dimensions of intrapreneurship: autonomy, innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness, and competitive aggressiveness. Intrapreneurs typically exhibit high internal locus of control, tolerance for ambiguity, and achievement orientation. Crucially, intrapreneurship represents both individual behavior and organizational capability, it requires not only motivated employees but also supportive organizational systems.

2.2 Workforce Transformation in Emerging Markets

Workforce transformation encompasses fundamental changes in how work is organized, performed, and valued within organizations. In emerging markets, transformation pressures arise from multiple sources: globalization, technological disruption, demographic shifts, and evolving employee expectations. West African organizations face particular transformation imperatives related to formalization, digitalization, and capability development.

The literature suggests that successful workforce transformation requires simultaneous attention to structures (organizational design, work processes), capabilities (skills, knowledge), and culture (values, behaviors). Intrapreneurship potentially addresses all three dimensions by empowering employees to redesign work processes, develop new capabilities through experimentation, and shift organizational cultures toward innovation and ownership.

2.3 Cultural and Institutional Context of West Africa

West African business environments exhibit distinctive characteristics that shape organizational behavior. Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework reveals generally high power distance, strong collectivist orientations, and moderate uncertainty avoidance across the region. These cultural patterns influence workplace relationships, decision-making processes, and attitudes toward innovation and risk.

Institutional factors further contextualize intrapreneurial potential. Many West African organizations operate in environments characterized by institutional voids, gaps in regulatory systems, capital markets, and professional services that exist in more developed economies. While such voids create challenges, they may also create opportunities for intrapreneurial problem-solving and institutional entrepreneurship.

Family-owned businesses dominate the organizational landscape in much of West Africa. These structures often feature centralized decision-making and succession challenges but may also enable rapid decision-making and long-term orientation that could support intrapreneurial initiatives.

2.4 Research Gaps

Existing literature on intrapreneurship in African contexts remains limited and fragmented. Studies focus predominantly on South African organizations, with minimal attention to West African experiences. Cross-cultural research on intrapreneurship has primarily compared Western and Asian contexts, leaving African organizational dynamics underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by providing systematic investigation of intrapreneurship in West African settings.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Integrated Model of Intrapreneurship

We adopt an integrated theoretical framework drawing on three complementary perspectives: social cognitive theory, organizational support theory, and institutional theory.

Social cognitive theory explains intrapreneurial behavior through reciprocal interactions between personal factors (self-efficacy, outcome expectations), behavioral factors (skills, experience), and environmental factors (organizational support, resources). This framework helps explain individual variation in intrapreneurial engagement.

Organizational support theory posits that employees develop beliefs about the extent to which their organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing. Perceived organizational support influences employees' willingness to engage in discretionary behaviors like intrapreneurship that involve personal risk and effort beyond formal role requirements.

Institutional theory examines how normative, regulative, and cultural-cognitive institutions shape organizational practices. This lens is particularly relevant for understanding how West African institutional contexts enable or constrain intrapreneurial behavior.

Recent scholarship has refined and expanded these theoretical foundations. Huang, Lin, and Hsieh (2021) propose a holistic framework integrating individual enablers (self-efficacy, entrepreneurial orientation, work engagement), organizational enablers (management support, work autonomy, reward systems, organizational structure), and facilitating mechanisms (training, time allocation, collaborative platforms). Their model emphasizes the interconnected nature of these factors and the dynamic cultivation process required for intrapreneurship.

Santana et al. (2025) advance a process-based model identifying mechanisms and preconditions for intrapreneurial behavior. Their research demonstrates that organizational factors (resource availability, supportive structures, reward systems) enable intrapreneurial intentions, while autonomy acts as a critical potentializer converting intentions into actual behavior. This highlights the importance of both creating conditions for intrapreneurship and providing sufficient autonomy for employees to act on their entrepreneurial impulses.

For emerging markets, Öztürk and Arun (2025) introduce nudge theory as a complementary framework, arguing that organizational choice architecture can subtly guide employees toward intrapreneurial behavior. Their conceptual model proposes conditions under which nudge techniques are effective: agent awareness, leadership credibility, meaningful work perception, and prior nudging experience. This framework offers practical implications for resource-constrained West African organizations seeking cost-effective interventions.

The comprehensive literature review by Hernandez-Perlines, Ariza-Montes, and Blanco-Gonzalez-Tejero (2022) synthesizes intrapreneurship research across 428 studies, identifying key

dimensions (innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking), critical antecedents (organizational climate, leadership, autonomy), and outcomes (innovation performance, competitive advantage, organizational renewal). Their analysis reveals significant research gaps regarding contextual factors in non-Western settings, particularly Africa, which this study addresses.

Applying these frameworks to the West African context requires attention to cultural and institutional specificities. Research by Madzikova and Nani (2020) on Zimbabwean manufacturing firms and Schachtebeck et al. (2019) on South African SMEs demonstrates that intrapreneurial dimensions manifest differently in African contexts, with collective orientation and relational dynamics playing more prominent roles than in individualistic Western settings. This study builds on these insights while extending investigation to West African countries where research remains limited.

3.2 Research Hypotheses

Based on this framework, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Organizations with higher levels of intrapreneurial culture demonstrate greater workforce transformation outcomes (employee engagement, retention, innovation capacity).

H2: Organizational support factors (management support, resource availability, reward systems) positively influence intrapreneurial behavior in West African organizations.

H3: Cultural factors (power distance, uncertainty avoidance) moderate the relationship between organizational support and intrapreneurial behavior.

H4: Organizations that adapt intrapreneurial practices to local institutional contexts achieve better outcomes than those implementing standardized approaches.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a concurrent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews and case studies. This approach enables both breadth of understanding across organizations and depth of insight into contextual dynamics.

4.2 Sample and Data Collection

Quantitative Phase: We surveyed 387 employees and 42 organizational leaders across 42 organizations in four West African countries: Nigeria (n=168), Ghana (n=112), Senegal (n=63), and Côte d'Ivoire (n=44). Organizations represented diverse sectors including technology, financial services, manufacturing, telecommunications, and professional services. Sampling employed stratified random selection to ensure representation across organization size, ownership structure, and geographic location.

Qualitative Phase: We conducted semi-structured interviews with 48 participants, including intrapreneurs, middle managers, senior executives, and human resource professionals. Additionally, we developed four in-depth organizational case studies selected to represent exemplary intrapreneurial practices. Interview duration averaged 65 minutes, with all sessions recorded and transcribed.

4.3 Measures

Intrapreneurial Behavior: We adapted Stull and Singh's Intrapreneurship Scale, measuring dimensions of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking. The scale demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.89$). Stull, M., & Singh, J. (2005).

Organizational Support: We measured perceived organizational support using Eisenberger's Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS), supplemented with items specific to intrapreneurship support (resource availability, autonomy, time allocation). Eisenberger, R., Huntington, R., Hutchison, S., & Sowa, D. (1986).

Workforce Transformation Outcomes: We assessed multiple outcome dimensions including employee engagement (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale), innovation output (number of implemented employee ideas, new products/services), employee retention (actual and intended turnover), and organizational agility (adapted from Worley and Lawler's agility scale). Worley, C. G., & Lawler, E. E., III. (2010).

Cultural Dimensions: We incorporated Hofstede's VSM-13 items measuring power distance and uncertainty avoidance at the individual level.

Control Variables: We controlled for organization size, sector, ownership structure, employee demographics, and country.

4.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using hierarchical regression analysis and structural equation modeling to test hypothesized relationships. We examined moderation effects through interaction terms and conducted multi-group analysis across countries.

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase process. Two researchers independently coded transcripts, with inter-rater reliability assessed through Cohen's kappa ($\kappa = 0.83$). We employed NVivo software to facilitate systematic analysis and pattern identification. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

This research received approval from institutional review boards at participating universities. All participants provided informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Organizations are identified using pseudonyms in reporting findings.

5. Findings

5.1 Prevalence of Intrapreneurial Practices

Our survey revealed considerable variation in intrapreneurial activity across West African organizations. Approximately 34% of organizations demonstrated strong intrapreneurial cultures, characterized by systematic approaches to employee idea generation, resource allocation for innovation projects, and recognition systems for intrapreneurial contributions. Another 41% showed moderate intrapreneurial activity, typically limited to specific departments or ad hoc initiatives. The remaining 25% exhibited minimal intrapreneurial practices.

Technology and financial services sectors showed highest intrapreneurial intensity, while manufacturing and traditional service sectors lagged. Notably, organization age correlated negatively with intrapreneurship ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$), with organizations established within the past 15 years showing significantly higher intrapreneurial activity.

5.2 Relationship Between Intrapreneurship and Workforce Transformation

Hypothesis 1 received strong support. Organizations with high intrapreneurial cultures demonstrated markedly superior workforce transformation outcomes:

- **Employee Engagement:** High-intrapreneurship organizations scored 38% higher on work engagement measures ($M = 4.82$ vs. 3.49 on 6-point scale, $p < 0.001$)
- **Retention:** These organizations experienced 43% lower voluntary turnover rates (12.3% vs. 21.6% annually)
- **Innovation Capacity:** Organizations with strong intrapreneurial cultures implemented an average of 8.7 employee-generated innovations annually compared to 1.3 in low-intrapreneurship organizations

- **Organizational Agility:** High-intrapreneurship organizations scored significantly higher on agility measures, particularly in market responsiveness and strategic flexibility dimensions

Regression analysis confirmed that intrapreneurial culture predicted workforce transformation outcomes even after controlling for organization size, sector, and country ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.34$).

5.3 Organizational Enablers and Barriers

Enablers:

Our findings strongly supported Hypothesis 2. Three organizational factors emerged as critical enablers of intrapreneurial behavior:

1. **Management Support and Role Modeling:** Employees whose managers actively championed innovation, protected experimental projects from premature evaluation, and demonstrated entrepreneurial behavior themselves showed 2.3 times higher intrapreneurial engagement. As one Nigerian technology manager explained: "When my CEO started our weekly innovation hour and participated himself, it sent a clear message that new ideas weren't just tolerated but expected from everyone."
2. **Resource Availability:** Access to discretionary time, modest budgets for experimentation, and technical resources significantly predicted intrapreneurial activity ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). Organizations implementing "innovation time" policies (allowing 10-15% of work time for exploratory projects) showed particularly strong results.
3. **Recognition and Reward Systems:** Both intrinsic recognition (public acknowledgment, project ownership) and extrinsic rewards (bonuses, profit-sharing from successful innovations) positively influenced intrapreneurial behavior. Notably, intrinsic recognition showed stronger effects in our West African sample than typically reported in Western studies.

Barriers:

Several barriers consistently emerged across our data:

1. **Hierarchical Decision-Making:** Centralized authority structures inhibited intrapreneurship, particularly in family-owned businesses and public sector organizations. Employees reported reluctance to propose ideas when approval required multiple hierarchical levels or when previous initiatives were overridden without explanation.

2. **Risk-Averse Cultures:** Fear of failure significantly dampened intrapreneurial behavior. Many organizations punished failed experiments, creating what one Ghanaian participant termed "innovation lip service", public endorsement of innovation coupled with implicit punishment of unsuccessful attempts.
3. **Resource Constraints:** While expected in emerging markets, limited financial resources created genuine constraints on intrapreneurial activity. However, qualitative data revealed that resource constraints were sometimes overstated, masking deeper issues of resource allocation priorities.
4. **Short-Term Performance Pressure:** Particularly in organizations facing competitive pressures or financial challenges, short-term performance demands crowded out longer-term innovation investments. Several participants described how intrapreneurial projects were abandoned during difficult quarters.

5.4 Cultural Moderators

Hypothesis 3 received partial support. Power distance significantly moderated the relationship between organizational support and intrapreneurial behavior ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < 0.01$). In high power distance contexts, even organizations providing formal support structures saw limited intrapreneurial activity when authority remained centralized. This suggests that structural support alone proves insufficient without corresponding changes in power dynamics and decision-making processes.

Surprisingly, uncertainty avoidance showed weaker moderation effects than anticipated ($\beta = -0.12$, $p > 0.05$). Qualitative analysis suggested a more nuanced relationship: while high uncertainty avoidance individuals initially resisted innovation activities, supportive organizational systems and incremental approaches to innovation could overcome these tendencies.

5.5 Contextual Adaptation

Hypothesis 4 was strongly supported through our case study analysis. Organizations that adapted intrapreneurial practices to local contexts achieved superior outcomes compared to those implementing standardized Western models.

Case Example: TechHub Lagos

TechHub Lagos, a Nigerian technology services company, initially implemented a standardized innovation program modeled on Silicon Valley practices, including hackathons, venture funding competitions, and individual rewards. Results proved disappointing, with limited participation and few viable innovations.

After consultation with employees, leadership redesigned the program to align with local cultural preferences: team-based rather than individual competitions, mentorship from senior leaders, phased project development with stage-gate approvals, and communal celebration of successes. Within 18 months, employee participation tripled, and the company implemented 12 employee-generated innovations that generated significant revenue.

As the HR Director explained: "We learned that copying practices without understanding our people's values and motivations was counterproductive. Innovation doesn't have to look the same everywhere to be effective."

Adaptation Strategies:

Successful organizations employed several contextual adaptation strategies:

- **Collective vs. Individual Orientation:** Emphasizing team-based innovation over individual heroics, aligning with collectivist cultural values
- **Hierarchical Respect:** Maintaining respect for authority while creating legitimate channels for bottom-up innovation, such as innovation councils including senior leadership
- **Incremental Implementation:** Starting with pilot programs in receptive departments before organization-wide rollout
- **Storytelling and Role Models:** Leveraging local success stories and culturally resonant communication approaches rather than abstract innovation concepts

5.6 Cross-Country Variations

While similarities outweighed differences across the four countries studied, some notable variations emerged:

- **Nigeria** showed highest intrapreneurial intensity, possibly reflecting its dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem and competitive business environment
- **Senegal** demonstrated strongest preference for collective innovation approaches
- **Ghana** exhibited particularly strong effects of management role modeling on employee intrapreneurial behavior
- **Côte d'Ivoire** showed greatest sensitivity to resource availability, possibly reflecting relatively earlier stage of economic development

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study extends intrapreneurship theory in several important ways. First, it demonstrates that core relationships between organizational support and intrapreneurial behavior identified in Western contexts hold in West African settings, suggesting some universality in intrapreneurship dynamics. However, the strength and nature of these relationships vary based on cultural and institutional factors, confirming the need for contextualized theoretical models.

Second, our findings highlight the particular importance of management role modeling in high power distance contexts. While management support matters universally, leaders who personally demonstrate entrepreneurial behavior appear especially critical in hierarchical environments where employees look to authority figures for behavioral cues.

Third, we reveal how resource constraints, often viewed purely as barriers, can actually stimulate creative intrapreneurship when organizations reframe limitations as challenges to overcome rather than excuses for inaction. This aligns with effectuation theory from entrepreneurship literature but extends it to the intrapreneurial context.

6.2 Practical Implications

For Organizational Leaders:

Organizations seeking to cultivate intrapreneurship in West African contexts should:

1. **Start with Cultural Diagnosis:** Assess existing organizational culture, power dynamics, and risk orientation before designing intrapreneurial systems
2. **Lead by Example:** Senior leaders must visibly engage in entrepreneurial behavior, protect experimental projects, and tolerate intelligent failures
3. **Create Safe-to-Fail Spaces:** Establish clear boundaries within which experimentation is encouraged and failure carries no career penalties
4. **Allocate Resources Strategically:** Even modest resource allocations (time, budget, expertise) can enable significant intrapreneurial activity when targeted effectively
5. **Adapt Rather Than Adopt:** Customize intrapreneurial practices to align with local cultural values, particularly around collectivism and authority relationships
6. **Celebrate Progress:** Recognize both successful innovations and valuable learning from failed experiments

For Human Resource Practitioners:

HR professionals play critical roles in enabling intrapreneurship through:

- Recruitment and selection processes that identify intrapreneurial potential
- Training and development programs that build innovation capabilities
- Performance management systems that evaluate and reward intrapreneurial contributions
- Career pathways that provide advancement opportunities for intrapreneurs
- Organizational development initiatives that reshape cultures toward innovation

For Policymakers:

Government and development agencies can support intrapreneurship ecosystems through:

- Incentive programs for organizations implementing employee innovation systems
- Training initiatives building innovation management capabilities
- Regulatory frameworks that reduce barriers to organizational experimentation
- Public sector intrapreneurship programs that model best practices

6.3 A Contextualized Framework for West African Intrapreneurship

Based on our findings, we propose a framework for cultivating intrapreneurship in West African organizations comprising five interconnected elements:

1. Cultural Foundation

- Assess and understand existing organizational culture
- Identify cultural strengths that support intrapreneurship (e.g., communal problem-solving, adaptability)
- Design culturally congruent approaches (team-based, respectful of hierarchy)

2. Leadership Commitment

- Secure visible support from senior leadership
- Develop management capabilities in coaching intrapreneurial behavior
- Create accountability mechanisms ensuring leadership follow-through

3. Enabling Structures

- Establish formal systems for idea generation and evaluation
- Allocate protected resources (time, budget, expertise)
- Create legitimate pathways for bottom-up innovation within hierarchical frameworks

4. Supportive Climate

- Develop psychological safety allowing experimentation
- Implement fair and transparent evaluation processes
- Build celebration rituals recognizing innovation efforts and outcomes

5. Capability Development

- Provide training in innovation methods, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial thinking
- Create mentorship relationships connecting intrapreneurs with experienced leaders
- Facilitate cross-functional collaboration and knowledge sharing

This framework emphasizes adaptation over adoption, recognizing that effective intrapreneurship must align with local contexts while maintaining core principles of employee empowerment, experimentation, and value creation.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, our cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Longitudinal research tracking organizations over time would strengthen understanding of causal relationships and temporal dynamics. Second, while we studied four countries, West Africa comprises 16 nations with considerable diversity. Future research should extend to additional countries and explore intra-regional variations more systematically.

Third, our sample emphasized formal sector organizations with at least 50 employees. Small and medium enterprises represent the majority of West African businesses, and their intrapreneurial dynamics may differ substantially. Fourth, social desirability bias may have influenced self-report measures, though our mixed-methods approach provides some protection through data triangulation.

Future research should investigate several questions our study raises:

- How do intrapreneurial capabilities develop over time within individuals and organizations?
- What role do external ecosystem factors (infrastructure, education systems, capital availability) play in enabling organizational intrapreneurship?
- How does intrapreneurship contribute to broader socio-economic development beyond organizational performance?
- What are the boundary conditions of intrapreneurship, under what circumstances might alternative approaches prove more effective?
- How do digital technologies reshape intrapreneurial possibilities in resource-constrained environments?

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that intrapreneurship can serve as a powerful catalyst for workforce transformation in West African organizations, driving employee engagement, retention, innovation capacity, and organizational agility. However, realizing this potential requires contextual understanding and adaptation. Organizations must design intrapreneurial systems that honor cultural values around collectivism and hierarchy while creating legitimate space for employee initiative and experimentation.

The findings challenge deficit narratives that view West African organizational contexts primarily through the lens of constraints and limitations. While resource challenges and institutional voids exist, our research reveals considerable creativity, adaptability, and entrepreneurial energy within West African workforces. The question is not whether intrapreneurship can thrive in West Africa, but how organizations can effectively harness and channel this potential.

As West Africa navigates complex transformation challenges, demographic pressures, technological disruption, global integration, intrapreneurship offers a pathway to organizational competitiveness and meaningful work. By empowering employees as innovation partners rather than passive executors, organizations can tap into diverse perspectives, accelerate adaptation, and build more resilient enterprises.

The transformation journey requires commitment, patience, and learning. Organizations must be willing to experiment with approaches, learn from failures, and continuously adapt. Those that successfully cultivate intrapreneurial cultures will position themselves to thrive in increasingly dynamic markets while contributing to broader economic development by demonstrating new models of organizational effectiveness.

Ultimately, intrapreneurship represents more than a management practice, it reflects a fundamental belief in human potential and organizational possibility. In regions with young, ambitious populations seeking meaningful opportunities, few investments offer greater returns than unlocking the entrepreneurial energy within existing organizations. This study provides evidence and guidance for organizations ready to embark on that journey.

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