Perspectives on sustainable learning and organizing

Nataša Rupčić
Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia

Introduction

The first issue of volume 32 starts with the special issue "Perspectives on sustainable learning and organizing – Part II" guest edited by Ann Svensson, Ulrika Lundh Snis and Irene Bernhard. The special issue features a variety of topics relating to learning and leadership in the learning process. For instance, Salles, Cavalcante, Villardi, & Pereira-Guizzo (2025) investigated multi-level learning in a knowledge-intensive public organization under exceptional and crisis conditions caused by lockdowns. Svensson & Aggestam (2025) investigated the role of digital applications in knowledge sharing in health care. Chatzipanagiotou, Mirijamdotter, & Mörtberg (2025) examined the work of library managers through the prism of their learning practices in the context of collaborative work when supported by technology or computational artifacts. Eriksson & Lycke (2025) examined the challenges of introducing the lifelong learning demanded by industry in higher education institutions that resulted in lessons for their organizational learning. Dellve, Jonsson, Arman, Gillberg, & Wikström (2025) investigated whether organizational learning programs strengthen basic needs in the workplace, which could contribute to the attractiveness of the workplace and prevent older employees from leaving prematurely. Zgrzywa-Ziemak, Walecka-Jankowska, & Zimmer (2025) examined the question of what type of leadership supports both organizational learning and business sustainability and found that distributed leadership serves this purpose well. Areskoug Josefsson & Lunde (2025) also emphasized the importance of leadership in the creation of learning content in the context of digital courses in higher education involving multiple stakeholders.

Multilevel learning of a knowledge-intensive public organization

Organizations learn at all levels – individual, team, organizational and interorganizational. However, these learning processes are interwoven and reinforce each other, leading to learning synergies. They have been studied under normal conditions, e.g. in the everyday life of profit and non-profit organizations. However, there is a lack of studies that focus on multilevel learning in crisis situations. Salles et al. (2025) filled this gap by investigating

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multilevel learning in a knowledge-intensive public organization under exceptional conditions imposed by lockdowns, which was a sudden crisis situation.

Knowledge-intensive organizations consist of highly qualified employees whose work is mainly intellectual in nature (Alvesson, 2001). It is also an organization that focuses on generating new knowledge that it uses to innovate and continuously adapt to the conditions of its environment. Their learning is mostly collaborative in nature, making them communities of learning and practice that build their resilience based on improving their learning capabilities and creating new knowledge to not only adapt to new situations but also to successfully overcome and learn from crises. Social interactions based on their strong social capital form the foundation of their work. They encourage their employees to engage in ongoing debates and dialogs with their colleagues that span multiple levels and contribute to shared sense-making and critical reflection. They strive for mature and lasting relationships that help them to master complex tasks, strengthen their learning skills and ensure that their work is meaningful and meets internal and external requirements.

The role of leadership in knowledge-intensive organizations is of utmost importance. Their role is to design the environment in a way that encourages ambidexterity, i.e. the use of existing knowledge and the development of new knowledge that could be conducive to innovation. But their role is also to fulfill the role of a servant of the organizational mission and employees by providing constant feedback and creating an environment where employees are autonomous and empowered and can freely express their ideas, but also have many opportunities for new learning and self-development (Bos-Neheles, Bondarouk, & Nijenhuis, 2017). However, effective leaders for knowledge-intensive organizations are hard to find. This is especially true for public organizations that face high levels of regulation and often conflicting environmental demands while operating in mechanistic, hierarchy-based organizational structures that disrupt the flow of knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, collective sense-making and critical reflection (Reus & Liu, 2004). Therefore, an important task of a leader in a knowledge-intensive public organization is to find ways to overcome structural constraints that hinder or prevent the development of social learning relationships; otherwise, their innovation and adaptation processes may also be impaired.

Salles et al. (2025) studied the multilevel learning process in an organization dedicated to the preservation of institutional memory, research, teaching, documentation and dissemination of the history of public health in Brazil during a crisis caused by lockdowns in which the workforce had to transition to remote working and telecommuting. The transition was abrupt and unexpected, requiring employees to adopt new behavioral routines and new technical skills. To this end, Salles et al. (2025) used the famous 4I model by Crossan, Lane, & White (1999). This model was useful because it allowed the authors to examine the learning and adaptation process from the individual level to the organizational level in terms of new practices and routines, but also to consider the interactive aspects of organizational change reflected in social relationships. Intuition is the first phase of the model and involves individual attempts to make sense of the new experience. This is followed by interpretation, first at the individual level and then at the group level, which involves shared sense-making and critical reflection and leads to a shared understanding. This is followed by action based on the shared understanding and building an identity, which is reflected in the integration phase that leads to the institutionalization or implementation of the new knowledge in the value creation process so that the new knowledge is reflected in the organizational systems, structures and practices or organizational routines.

The managers interviewed shared their views on learning in the crisis situation, which were reflected in the fact that they criticized but also embraced the crisis situation, questioned the practices of that time and experimented with new approaches. This meant that the

organization underwent a dynamic process of learning through practice and intuition, based on experimentation, improvisation and learning from experience, but also on critical reflection. The learning process was highly interactive and social in nature and included formal, nonformal and informal forms of learning and knowledge generation. This process was followed by the institutionalization of the newly acquired knowledge through documents and work routines, but also through the establishment of digital platforms and online processes, such as the one for selection. Although the process was challenging, it strengthened the relationships between the organizations and the internal social capital and left lasting positive results.

Role of technology in learning and knowledge sharing

It is well known that technological solutions such as information and communication systems are an important prerequisite for learning and knowledge management in organizations. Therefore, it is of academic and practical interest to investigate the possibilities of using different IT solutions, such as applications, for learning, knowledge sharing and knowledge management in different sectors and human activities. In issue 1, Svensson & Aggestam (2025) examined the role of digital applications in knowledge sharing in health care. Health care worldwide faces numerous challenges, such as staff shortages, budget constraints, increasing demand for medical services and demographic changes that particularly affect this demand. On the other hand, successful and effective health care depends primarily on the continuous learning of medical staff and the effective application of knowledge in the design of various health-care procedures and protocols. Collaboration and knowledge sharing are key to this process.

IT systems can effectively enable and promote learning and knowledge sharing. Because of the continuous feedback loop, these IT systems are also constantly updated and improved based on the experiences and needs of their users. Because of the vast amounts of user and log data, health care is highly digitized and new solutions are being developed and tested almost daily. However, it should be noted that for the effective implementation of IT systems, various technological, but also organizational and social, factors must be taken into account, which are also interconnected and intertwined, influencing each other and stimulating further adaptations to internal needs and external requirements. In other words, multiple stakeholders and their interactions need to be considered to design and create an effective information system that leads not only to the best possible health care but also to the discovery of the most efficient solutions, the integration of different stakeholders such as medical staff, patients, their families and regulators, as well as learning, knowledge sharing and the discovery of new knowledge.

In Issue 1, Svensson & Aggestam (2025) examined how digital applications facilitate knowledge sharing between different care providers and health-care professionals by conducting a qualitative action case study in a change laboratory where a digital app for wound care was used. This app was a knowledge repository used to support learning but also knowledge sharing about the most effective wound care. In this way, new knowledge could be fed into the system based on new insights and experiences, but also the reuse of knowledge for those who needed it. In this way, the application remained current, relevant and reliable over time. Its purpose was to provide support in assessing wounds and determining the appropriate treatment. This was made possible by two modules of the app – a knowledge library or repository of information on wound infections and tools for wound assessment and treatment selection.

The authors found that the digital app facilitated individual reflection, learning and knowledge sharing. Using the app stimulated collaborative sessions in which participants

discussed their experiences and shared knowledge that was valuable for inclusion in the application. The app itself also facilitated knowledge sharing between participants when using the app. This also enabled the identification of information and knowledge that could be included, updated or removed from the app. In this way, the app served as an effective knowledge management tool that enabled not only the storage and retrieval of knowledge but also the sharing and creation of knowledge. It is also important to note that any KM system primarily enables the retrieval and storage of explicit knowledge. However, when supported by knowledge sharing and collaboration, tacit knowledge is also shared, developed and created, allowing the full benefits of knowledge management to be realized. It is important to note that these processes should be supported by effective leadership that is responsible for shaping the learning culture.

Learning by using computational artifacts

The process of learning, also known as the process of acquiring knowledge, is deeply rooted in the environment in which it takes place. In other words, learning is often achieved *by doing* or performing certain activities, which lead to experiences and benefits that result from the learning curve. The process of knowledge acquisition is therefore linked to the situation, context and culture in which the knowledge is acquired, developed, used or shared (Weinert, Billert, de Gafenco, Janson, & Leimeister, 2023). Learning is therefore situational and work-integrated, which has opened the door for research into workplace learning. Workplace learning is essential in today's world because work is rarely repetitive, and workers are often faced with unpredictable situations and problems that cause ambiguity and require decision-making that is also usually shared and distributed across the workforce. In the past, at the beginning of the industrial age, when there was a strong division of labor between workers and managers, work was separated from learning because the work was mostly repetitive and required training before starting work.

Workplace learning or learning at work has become a process that is highly interactive, networked and intertwined because the work of organizational members is often also highly interactive, networked and intertwined. Therefore, workplace learning is often collaborative in nature. Workplace learning takes place through dialog, through finding meaning together and through discussing and shaping possible courses of action by overcoming obstacles. Workplace learning is therefore a very practical process that is social in nature and in which participants learn by working together, usually informally.

Learning in the workplace today is highly influenced by various information and communication technology tools. Digitalization has therefore greatly influenced work and learning as well as communication between organizational members. Almost all organizations use some form of computational artifacts or tools, such as programs, apps or robotic systems, that serve a specific purpose, e.g. communication, simulations, visualizations or collaboration. Computational artifacts should fit well into the work dynamic and enable interaction and collaboration between employees (Suchman, 2007).

In this special issue, Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2025) examined the learning practices of academic library managers in the context of their cooperative work supported by computational artifacts. Academic library managers set the library's goals and strategy, coordinate the work of library staff and ensure that the goals are achieved. Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2025) found that managers learn through collaboration, communication and coordination. Managers collaborate with each other to achieve desired goals and use computational artifacts to help them interact by using asynchronous and synchronous communication. They manage information and share it with others using tools such as email,

file sharing, collaborative viewing, video conferencing, etc. Sometimes they had problems with these tools because they did not meet their needs.

They also coordinate the work of their coworkers to achieve the set goals by communicating with them and dealing with unforeseen contingencies. They used computerized tools to archive documents, but also had experience in the management process. This enabled them to determine whether and to what extent the goals had been achieved and to communicate with others about the results. Even if managers are practiced in their work, their decision-making process is still a learning process for them. Computer-based artifacts are also very useful to support and mediate the decision-making process so that managers can learn.

However, the authors also noted that the managers sometimes felt overwhelmed and confused by computational artifacts, as they were learning objects that were not always well integrated into their work. Some of the tools were imposed on them by the university, and this fact did not leave them much freedom in choosing the system they preferred. For this reason, it is strongly recommended to discuss the choice of information and communication technology tools with the users and explain to them the advantages and disadvantages of the different systems and the training required to use them. Users should have the opportunity to choose their preferred system. The systems should also not change frequently, or in other words, they should not be changed without good reason. The fact that a new system is on the market is not a good enough reason and can lead to frustration and annoyance among users who adopt a mantra: – "Oh no, not another system […]"

Higher education institutions learning from the introduction of lifelong learning programs

Higher education institutions (HEIs) design their educational programs based on standardized knowledge, but also on research results. However, the process of redesigning study programs can be lengthy and subject to heavy regulation and does not always reflect the current needs of the environment, especially dynamic industries. On the other hand, the current rapid technological change, followed by other changing components, is continuously altering the industrial landscape, leading to a need for skills development and the learning of new skills. Because this need cannot be easily met by designing comprehensive degree programs, the introduction of lifelong learning programs seems to be the most effective solution. These programs tend to be short in duration, highly focused and targeted to a specific, often niche audience, and flexible in implementation. As new technologies are mostly developed in industry or in collaboration with academia, these programs are also designed and implemented with the involvement of external stakeholders who can provide first-hand expertise – practitioners, but also regulators. In this way, both academics and practitioners increase their knowledge and skills and keep up to date with current requirements and developments, adding value and resilience for both.

However, both sides are not without problems and challenges. Industry is struggling with a shortage of skilled labor, skills shortages and a lack of time to devote to both work and learning. Higher education institutions are not very agile when it comes to introducing new content and programs Because of structural and bureaucratic challenges. In addition, there are communication problems and barriers between higher education institutions and industry because of, among other things, different mentalities. For this reason, in Issue 1, Eriksson & Lycke (2025) explored the process of introducing agile and sustainable educational models that meet the skills needs of industry and lead to their own learning and change, or in other words, organizational learning. They explained a case of collaboration between a Swedish HEI and 50 external partners, mainly from the manufacturing industry, where they jointly

developed and calibrated an educational model that offered short courses for targeted skills development of practitioners.

Higher education institutions cannot simply offer educational content at random; they must be structured according to predetermined principles and meet bureaucratic requirements. This is a major challenge, as the program must fit undergraduate or postgraduate level and contain a certain number of European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) points. For this reason, educational institutions often try to incorporate new educational content into the regular educational program to avoid complications. However, this solution can also have disadvantages if this design does not match the possibilities of the target group. Industry practitioners, for example, work full time and cannot participate in regular educational programs. They are also unlikely to be interested in all the content that a program offers. They are also not interested in ECTS points. They prefer short courses that are flexible and can be offered in different formats that suit their desired pace and pedagogy. To meet their pedagogical needs, collaboration with external experts and practitioners is often highly desirable, as these individuals can most effectively impart practical knowledge on specific current topics and issues because of their experience and steep learning curve.

The Swedish HEI, as studied by Eriksson & Lycke (2025), attempted to meet all requirements by offering short courses run in collaboration with industry practitioners. These courses comprised 2.5 ECTS points and were categorized as master's-level courses in production engineering. They lasted five weeks and included four to five sessions on site or online. The master's level was chosen to indicate progression in practitioners' skills. This gave rise to the first bureaucratic problem, as many participants had no previous higher education. Therefore, a change had to be made in this respect. However, there was a general consensus within the institution that such educational initiatives are important for all involved. The higher education institution also benefits by making new contacts and finding new partners, a relationship that can also be expanded in the future with regard to new educational or research initiatives.

However, several problem areas were identified. The first was communication, as this project also involved significant marketing activities and many communication activities and attempts both internally and externally. Internal challenges included communication and reaching consensus on how many courses should be set up and offered and how. Externally, it was important to ensure that potential participants could find the information about the courses. It was frustrating chasing potential course participants by sending multiple emails. Help was needed from the communications department, but it was not clear which category these activities fell into: Education, Research or Collaboration, or the right marketing channels were difficult to find.

Flexibility was another problem. Educational institutions rely on long-term planning in accordance with regulations and legal requirements, which is in stark contrast to the dynamic evolution of industry and educational needs. Therefore, more flexibility was needed so that programs could go from idea to execution in a matter of months, rather than being ready a year or more before execution. The problem of individual perspective on both sides was also recognized. While practitioners need availability and support when they need it, for staff this could mean engaging outside of regular office hours and showing more flexibility, which would mean sacrifices in other areas of work and life. In addition, academic staff need results in the form of research publications if they want to pursue an academic career, while engagement in lifelong learning programs is not valued in this regard, which is not exactly inspiring for academics. In this way, the traditional academic process could also be hindered, as these engagements are very time-consuming and demanding in other ways. The fact that almost no support is available from the institutional systems also requires structural changes

in terms of administrative support, which is also costly for the institution, while these programs are offered for free.

This case demonstrates once again the importance of close communication and dialog between internal and external stakeholders, including regulators, as well as systemic and strategic thinking and action. If the mission of an educational institution is first and foremost to educate, then all educational requirements, including lifelong learning, should take this fact into account. The dialog should lead to the consensus that certain previously established mental models should be revised and changed and that such activities should be a regular part of educational, research and collaborative activities and their academic participants should be rewarded accordingly, including in terms of their career advancement opportunities. It is also clear that transformational leadership is needed at all levels to ensure congruence of interests and alignment of mutual requirements. It is therefore clear that all organizations – educational institutions, companies and public authorities – should develop according to the principles of the learning organization to ensure agility, adaptability and viability for all stakeholders.

Let us help them stay: learning programs to prevent leaving of seniors in strained sectors

The education and service sectors face increasing demands, but also the challenge of limited resources, lack of skills and support and a shortage of labor, which has earned them the term "strained sectors." This is reflected in increasing stress and burnout as well as high turnover rates, particularly among older workers who are looking for other options, including early retirement. Therefore, measures should be considered to increase the attractiveness of these jobs for all workers, but especially for older workers. In this context, Dellve et al. (2025) examined organizational learning programs offered to older workers in strained sectors and their impact on basic job needs, job attractiveness, intention to leave the job and retirement preferences. The idea is that if efforts are made to make work more meaningful, this would increase older workers' engagement and willingness to contribute to their work and retain their current position. These elements could also motivate younger people to choose and engage in these occupations.

Organizations can take various measures to achieve these goals: Implement programs to develop employee competencies, strengthen collaboration, work on career development and create a learning environment that fosters trust, safety and good interpersonal relationships. Meaningful work, organizational cohesion and high socialization appear to be of particular importance, as their absence has been identified as a factor contributing to turnover (Annell, Sverke, Gustavsson, & Lindfors, 2019) and earlier retirement (Jonsson, 2021). The perceived meaningfulness of a job also depends on the level of skills and competencies a person possesses. Therefore, participating in learning programs and acquiring new skills could contribute to perceiving work as meaningful, which could increase engagement and delay retirement in older workers. The fact that they can participate in learning programs could also improve their socialization, but also the perception of good working conditions.

As it is assumed that older workers possess greater levels of knowledge and skills but also a rich working experience, it is reasonable to implement greater empowerment in their work and provide them with greater autonomy and decisive power. This contributes to greater personal satisfaction and motivation and performance of older employees, again preventing their early departure, which is highly desired in strained sectors. Older workers also appreciate opportunities to share their knowledge and experience, which contributes to their sense of purpose, value and meaning. This is why their engagement in mentoring programs

regarding the development of younger employees is again of great value and contributes to their greater satisfaction and appreciation of their job position.

Dellve et al. (2025) found in their work that organizational learning programs are positively related to employees' competence, autonomy and relatedness with others. Autonomy at work was found to be related to perceptions of job attractiveness. On the other hand, relatedness with others was found to be positively related to job attractiveness. However, no correlations were found between these elements and retirement preferences. This could be because of the fact that the study was conducted in Sweden, which is known as a welfare society with pension benefits. This fact could also explain the fact that increased competence also increases the intention to leave the job. This means that while organizational learning programs can increase empowerment and enable individuals to obtain tasks more suited to their skill level, this does not change the fact that they are well aware that they are working in a strained sector, which means that the same problems of high work demands and limited resources persist, leading them to retire as soon as possible despite other favorable conditions. It is also questionable whether older workers perceive learning programs as an additional burden when faced with high work requirements and limited time. It is also known that older workers prefer to maintain their jobs for various reasons, one of which is declining learning ability. All this suggests that if society values education and social work, it should work toward creating better working conditions, i.e. reducing the workload and offering better remuneration, as these are the most important factors that can contribute to the attractiveness of these professions. Otherwise, learning programs are merely cosmetic measures that, while good, could contribute to even more stress and cause workers of all ages to leave the profession when the opportunity arises, one of them being retirement.

Leadership for sustainability

Leadership is always the key element of any effective organizational process. However, there are different types of leadership and different organizational outcomes that individuals want to achieve. Many organizations strive for the goal of business sustainability. When an organization commits to business sustainability, it means that it commits to activities that contribute to its sustainable development. Organizations engage in a learning process to create a sustainable business. For this reason, organizational learning can be seen as a tool or technology to achieve the goal of sustainable development. However, organizations must then also consider the economic, social and environmental aspects of their activities (Toma, 2012). The economic aspect refers to the aspects of quality, innovation, productivity and determining financial performance. The social aspect refers to relationships with stakeholders in terms of creating a healthy and vibrant working environment, but also commitment to customer satisfaction and a positive social contribution in the community. The environmental aspect refers to the impact of the company's activities on the environment, i.e. reducing the consumption of resources, reducing the generation of waste and the consumption of hazardous and toxic substances and ensuring that the company's products and services do not have a negative impact on the environment.

It is known that different types of leadership have a positive impact on learning in organizations. For example, leaders should be mentors, trainers and teachers who serve the organizational vision and their employees. For this reason, servant leadership is effective in learning organizations and for the process of organizational learning. Leaders should be authentic and demonstrate their true commitment to the organization's vision, mission and values. For this reason, authentic leadership is also very beneficial for learning organizations. Learning organizations are constantly adapting and sometimes undergo profound change.

They then question and change their mental models, which is then reflected in their goals and strategies. Sometimes, however, even more profound change is required, so organizations engage in triple-loop organizational learning and change their mission to achieve the goal of viability. For this reason, transformational leadership is also essential for an organization to survive and thrive while upholding the principles of the learning organization. Even though transformational leadership requires the presence of a strong leader with a strong vision, heroic leadership is not suitable for learning organizations as it assumes an almost passive role of employees who have to follow a single leader. Leadership should be shared with a high degree of employee participation to ensure close collaboration and interdependence between leader and followers.

Zgrzywa-Ziemak et al. (2025) examined in their paper what type of leadership is best suitable for organizations striving for the goal of sustainability and suggested that distributed leadership is best suited under complex and rapidly changing conditions. This notion suggests that leadership is a relational process situated within a broader system of relationships that serve to create meaning, suggesting that it is a shared process of influence (Ospina & Foldy, 2015; Mayrowetz, 2008). In this way, it contributes to the creation of a stimulating common vision that serves as an impetus for collective action to create and sustain new patterns of behavior and action. Distributed leadership therefore implicitly implies the importance of learning and knowledge sharing as the basis for any kind of sense-making, behavior and action.

Distributed leadership was measured by Zgrzywa-Ziemak (2019) based on several factors, such as transitivity of power or interdependence of organizational members in the leadership process, rather than depending on one person with the highest hierarchical position; supportive leadership behavior, where the leader creates the conditions for employees who are able and willing to take the power; and the culture that promotes trust, openness and mutual partnership. Sustainable leadership is also understood as ethical leadership that promotes collective engagement in addressing sustainability issues from an economic, social and environmental perspective. Zgrzywa-Ziemak et al. (2025) found that distributed leadership has a positive impact on organizational learning and business sustainability and recommend it to practitioners. However, all previously mentioned leadership styles should be blended to achieve superior performance of learning organizations in all previously mentioned categories.

Leadership in producing learning content

The creation and delivery of educational content often involve multiple stakeholders inside and outside the educational institution. The need to offer more flexibility also requires educational content to be offered online. As content is offered on many complex or wicked problems, collaboration is often required between educators, but also practitioners and sometimes those affected, such as patients. This is even more pronounced when the content is offered online, leading to more variety and flexibility and improving accessibility for both the content provider and content consumers or participants.

In Issue 1, Areskoug Josefsson & Lunde (2025) explored the process of co-producing digital sexual health courses in higher education in Norway as a large-scale digital collaboration project. This type of work is quite new in higher education, so exploring its success factors and challenges is valuable for practitioners. This project involved over 100 people from academia and practice from different backgrounds working together to design, produce and deliver digital learning content online. Although the academic environment by its nature tends to be collaborative with different stakeholders, this was a complex project with many challenges. The biggest challenge was the fact that courses were designed and

delivered online, for which there was a lack of knowledge about feasibility. Challenges such as the discrepancy of values, motivation to collaborate, conflicts of interest and various risks of a personal and professional nature were also identified. However, knowledge sharing between the participants and the joint development of skills was seen as a key success factor of this project. This was possible because a supportive learning environment was created in which all participants could contribute different knowledge, skills, resources, ideas and creativity and identify learning needs.

Key factors for project success are a supportive learning environment and leadership. A supportive learning environment requires good, open and clear communication, accompanied by trust and mutual support. However, as with any project, leadership is crucial. Leaders are responsible for coordinating the activities of all stakeholders and facilitating equal participation by all, balancing power dynamics, encouraging dialog and critical reflection, followed by joint sense-making and the development of possible solutions. It is important that leaders maintain a sense of trust and respect and provide regular feedback that encourages further learning and knowledge sharing. The authors suggest that such large-scale digital co-production projects in higher education require sensitive leadership that understands the dynamics and complexity of coproduction processes and is willing to learn and encourage mutual learning.

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