

# Reduction in Force Manager Guide

Employee and Labor Relations  
2020



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**  
HUMAN RESOURCES



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## Introduction

Employee and Labor Relations (ELR), part of the Office of Human Resources, provides this information to assist managers of those affected by a reduction in force. We hope you find this to be a valuable tool as you work through the process with your staff.

This guide contains information to help you effectively manage employees facing a reduction in force. Included in the information is a list of questions an employee might ask a manager as well as questions a manager might ask ELR. In addition, there is contact information for managers and staff members and general guidelines on how to conduct the reduction in force meeting.

A reduction in force is a difficult time for everyone involved managers, affected staff members, and the rest of the unit. What you do as a manager will affect the way your staff members handle the situation. Communication and sensitivity are key elements at every stage of the reduction in force process. Staff members tend to look closely for signs that management is hiding information from them. Incorrect information, or a lack of information, breeds mistrust of management and dampens morale among those who are losing their jobs as well as those employees who remain in the unit. Those who are not losing their jobs fare better when they understand the unit's business goals and how they can help achieve them. Remember that you need to be cognizant of the entire unit's emotions. ELR is available to assist managers and human resource professionals leading up to and during the implementation of a reduction in force.

Following the reduction in force notification meeting at the unit level, ELR will provide services and information to the individual affected by the reduction in force. This includes consultation on employment services, benefit continuation, job search assistance (if needed), and referral to counseling. During the reduction in force meeting, individuals should be referred to ELR at 614-247-6947. At the same time, you should schedule regular follow-up meetings with the staff member(s). Make sure you are aware of their internal and external job search process. As their manager, you need to provide as much positive influence as you can. If at any time during the reduction in force you have questions and/or concerns, contact ELR at 614-247-6947.

## University Resources

### Benefits Services

1590 North High Street, Suite 300  
614-247-6947  
[hrconnection@osu.edu](mailto:hrconnection@osu.edu)

- Claims assistance
- Continuing benefits coverage
- Retirement information
- Unemployment process
- Financial counseling referral information available

### Employee and Labor Relations

1590 North High Street, Suite 300  
614-247-6947  
[hrconnection@osu.edu](mailto:hrconnection@osu.edu)

- Assistance in understanding reduction in force, layoff and severance program policies and procedures
- Explains processes of appeal and displacement, if applicable
- Information and assistance regarding employment policies, procedures, and campus employment opportunities
- Assistance in development of change management processes
- Assessing team development needs and assistance to increase team effectiveness

### University Online Career Site

[hr.osu.edu/careers](http://hr.osu.edu/careers)

- Listing of new and vacant positions that are available at the university
- Updated weekly
- Assistance with creating online application and email subscription available

### Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

700 Ackerman Road, Suite 580  
614-292-4700

- Short-term counseling and assessment for staff members dealing with the emotional stresses resulting from a change in job status, or who are concerned about a colleague who is experiencing a change
- Confidential counseling and referral services

## Implementation Guidelines

### Overview

Budget, reorganization, or other organizational transitions may require administrators, managers, and supervisors to consider alternative staffing measures, some of which may lead to a reduction in force. These decisions necessarily affect the unit in question. If they involve classified civil service staff, the decisions have broader implications for the unit and/or the university community. Because of the sensitive nature of a reduction in force, it is important to handle the process of separating staff with dignity and respect.

This document provides you with guidelines, resources, and services available to help you implement a reduction in force decision. To build collaboration and offer support, ELR is available to further assist you with planning. The guidelines outlined below are intended to supplement the Reduction in Force – Unclassified Staff Policy 9.15 and Reduction in Force Classified Civil Service Staff Policy 9.20 and as such should be used together.

### Management Planning and Considerations

It is your responsibility as an administrator, manager, HR professional or supervisor to carefully plan position reductions to balance business and human resource considerations, including appropriate treatment of individuals affected, impact on affirmative action objectives, and compliance with university policies.

First and foremost, consider all appropriate options before determining your need to actually reduce staff. These include, for example:

- ✓ Reassigning within the unit.
- ✓ Examining whether the FTEs of existing appointments can be reduced and if there are staff willing to voluntarily accept a reduced appointment.
- ✓ Understanding the order of layoff. In cases of multiple people performing similar duties and/or there is a need for multiple reductions, the manager must understand that the order of any layoff shall be determined first by certification status, then by a combination of the following elements: skills and abilities applicable to the unit's needs, documented performance, and length of university employment. An evaluation of these elements, to determine order of layoff, must be conducted in partnership with the ELR professional assigned to the unit prior to the submission of a Request for Reduction in Force.
- ✓ Reviewing all vacancies within and outside the impacted staff member's classification. In cases that a vacancy exists within the staff member's classification, the unit is required to place the staff member internally. Checking if alternative schedules are possible and seeking staff that may be interested in such arrangements. Some staff might be interested in part-time or reduced appointments, job sharing, or working the minimum allowed to bridge to retirement.
- ✓ Ensuring that you are aware of all policies impacting various staff appointments.

If you find it necessary to move forward with staff reductions, consider the following recommendations as you proceed with decisions and implementation planning:

- ✓ Identify critical business needs.
- ✓ Review individual positions in relationship to critical business needs.

### Implementation Procedures for Alternative Work Schedules

1. Assess the essential operational and productivity requirements of the unit.
2. Based on these requirements and the budgetary parameters, determine your staffing needs and the staffing changes that are necessary.
3. As you determine different staffing and scheduling opportunities, clearly communicate the various options to your staff so that expectations will not be raised inappropriately.
4. Talk with your staff to determine if anyone is interested in an alternative work arrangement. It is important to note that any reduction in FTE (appointed number of hours) for Classified Civil Service is considered a reduction and must be voluntary. An Unclassified position that is reduced below .75 FTE or multiple unclassified positions that will be reduced by any FTE require prior approval from ELR.

5. Develop a staffing plan that incorporates all voluntary staffing changes including reduced appointments and alternative schedules. Call ELR at 614-247-6947 for assistance on the operational feasibility of staffing alternatives and technical support in the design and implementation of alternative staffing plans.

### **Submitting a Reduction in Force Request**

You **must** consult with ELR **before** affected staff are notified. It is important to include your ELR Senior Representative in the planning phase before you make a formal request. Initiate this process by completing a Request for Reduction in Force form unless earlier consultation is required. When you have completed the form, forward it to your unit for approval. Upon completion by the unit, the Request for Reduction in Force form along with any additional justification must be submitted to the ELR. Preferably, the form should be submitted at least 4 weeks in advance of the date the staff member is to be notified of the reduction (60 days if multiple reductions/ reorganizations are to occur) to permit adequate time to review the request and to prepare required documents. As part of the approval process, ELR will review the request and discuss reassignment options.

### **Employee and Labor Relations Review Process**

The assigned ELR Sr. Representative will review the reason for abolishment, lack of funds, reorganization, or lack of work on the submitted request. The assigned ELR Sr. Representative will evaluate your request for rationale and completeness. Make sure you submit sufficient information and documentation with the request. ELR will consider the following in reviewing your request based on the reason identified for the abolishment:

- ✓ Have you developed a transition plan that incorporates the rationale for the abolishment, an individualized plan for the affected staff member, a review of the staff member's employment history and potential internal reassignment options (units are required to place internally if vacancies exist within the impacted staff member's classification)?
- ✓ Does your rationale explain:
  - Why this position is being abolished?
  - What type of work is being performed by the staff member in this position?
  - What will happen to the duties/functions of this position?
  - Who are the other staff members in the unit who perform same/similar duties? You must work with ELR and include a comparison of the staff members in your detailed plan. This comparison must include certification status, skills and abilities, documented performance, and length of university service. Any individual, performing same or similar duties, who is not certified in the classification, must be laid off first.
  - Are there contract and/or temporary and/or part-time staff members doing similar work? If so, how many?
  - Are there other positions available in the unit in which to place the staff member whose position will be abolished? Are there pending vacancies?
- ✓ Does your review of the staff member's history include:
  - The staff member's length of service with the university?
  - Whether or not the staff member is a bargaining unit member or Members-Only, covered by a labor agreement?
  - Whether this staff member was affected by a previous position abolishment?
  - Did the staff member have performance problems and if yes, how were they addressed (the last three annual performance reviews, if available, should accompany any reduction in force request). If not available, explain why not? If the individual is at the third level of corrective action, please submit the suspension letter.
  - Can the staff member's job skills be enhanced by additional training?
  - Is this staff member eligible for the Staff Severance Program?
- ✓ Does your transition plan address potential internal reassignment options?
- ✓ Does your individualized staff member plan include information outlining work to be performed by affected staff member until reassignment or displacement can occur? The work plan should include performance expectations and allow sufficient time during the workday for the staff member to conduct a job search.

After the request to abolish a CCS position has been approved, OHR prepares the letter of notification/lay-off and sends it, along with the CCS Displacement Rights Notification Form, to the manager or HR professional for subsequent issuance to the staff member. For unclassified positions, units must still receive approval from ELR, but can then process and issue the notification internally. For template letters please contact ELR. Keep in mind that this will be difficult news for the staff member to receive and that it is important that the letter be delivered immediately, and it is required that the letter is delivered in person to the affected staff member.

## **Communicating a Reduction in Force**

### **Preparations: What to Say**

Just as you need to prepare for a hiring interview, you need to get ready for a reduction in force meeting. Know what you want to say before you meet. Write down your thoughts. Rehearse once or twice what you will say and how you will say it (how you say it is very important, since this is an emotional situation). If you get stuck when preparing for the reduction in force meeting, contact your Employee and Labor Relations Sr. Representative. Below is a guideline for your use during your reduction in force meeting.

1. After the usual courtesies, get quickly to the point. Place the decision within the context of what is going on at the university and make a clean, clear statement about the decision that has been made. For example, "As you know, John, the university is facing severe budget cuts and every unit has been asked to reduce their budgets for next year. As a result, your position has been abolished." Do not be defensive or feel you must persuade the person that the action is justified. Just state your case with conviction and compassion.

However difficult this meeting may be for you, it is even harder for the staff member. Do not get on the topic of your needs, feelings, or problems. It is not helpful to say, "I know how you feel," because you don't. Even if you were once terminated, each person feels things differently and has a right to do so. However, do try to be sensitive to the feelings and emotions of the staff member both at the time of the reduction in force meeting and in the days to come.

2. People who are separated have a right and a need to know the reasons for the decision. Since separations due to a reduction in force take multiple factors into consideration it is important to stress that personality was not involved in the decision. Also, stay off the topic of criticizing the university or the State of Ohio. This is not a time to place blame on anyone.

The reason should be clear in your mind so you can make it clear to the staff member. For example, "We are going to have to eliminate the program you administer to stay within our budget." The situation is particularly difficult if the position you are abolishing is similar or has the same duties as other positions in the office.

For example, you might say to an employee, "After a review of individuals performing duties similar to those you perform, and taking the skills and abilities of those individuals related to our ongoing business needs, their documented performance, and length of service into consideration, your position was selected for reduction."

3. You should review the policies and procedures for reduction in force that can be found on the web at [hr.osu.edu/policies-forms](http://hr.osu.edu/policies-forms) (Policy 9.15 for Unclassified Professional Staff and Policy 9.20 for Classified Civil Service Staff). Since the staff member cannot absorb everything at once, it is necessary and courteous to provide some written materials at the meeting. We suggest that you use handouts related to continuing benefits, the unemployment process, and for referral to the Employee Assistance Program.

Quite often during a reduction in force, managers feel it is the appropriate time to evaluate a staff member's performance. In reality this is not the time. It is important to manage unsatisfactory performance issues separately from and prior to the reduction in force process. Staff performance problems must be addressed appropriately through performance management and corrective action.



Managers often assume that because staff members are not doing one job well they are unqualified to do other jobs. Through the performance management process, hopefully you have accurately assessed the staff member's skills and have a thorough understanding of their skills as well as their areas for development. With this insight, you should be equipped to guide the staff member to the appropriate internal open positions.

4. The reduction in force meeting may or may not be the best time to discuss a transition plan. Depending on the staff member's morale, you may want to discuss the arrangements for transferring their work at the first follow-up meeting. The staff member may need to transition some of their work immediately so they can focus their efforts on their job search.

You will also want to discuss with the staff member how they would like to have their news communicated to the remaining staff members. Be respectful of the staff member's feelings – they may want to tell their fellow teammates themselves.

Instead of overloading the staff members with information, stop here and schedule another meeting for the two of you (and possibly someone from ELR) to take place in the next two days. At this point, the staff member may experience shock and disbelief. Let them take 24-48 hours to absorb what is happening. At the initial follow-up meeting, the member may be more prepared to discuss next steps. Provide the staff member with information about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

If you are reducing a large number of staff at one time, a team of human resource professionals will be established to help staff and managers work through the process and better understand their options.

5. The next steps need to be clearly stated and it may be helpful to follow-up with a memo. Together with the staff member, develop his/her next steps. Depending on the point at which the meeting ends, next steps might simply be scheduling another meeting, providing the names of persons or offices to call, planning a get-together with colleagues, etc. If the person is extremely upset, make arrangements for someone to be with that person to accompany him/her to the necessary offices.
6. Your involvement should not end with the termination meeting. Find ways to show your continuing support for the terminated staff member. Please keep in touch and make yourself available in addition to following up on the parts of the separation or job abolishment process that you are responsible for.

Be sensitive also to the co-workers of the separated staff member. Communicate to these co-workers the job abolishment decisions and provide a process and time for them to discuss their feelings. They may be experiencing such feelings as guilt, embarrassment, and a lack of trust, suspicion, confusion, or shock. EAP is available to provide services to the teammates of the affected staff member(s) as well. You may want to refer them to the program or consider having a counselor in to facilitate a conversation.

### **Staff Member Responsibilities**

The affected staff member must be made aware that they have a critical role in the reduction in force process. If the staff member is eligible for the Staff Severance Program, they need to notify ELR of their intent to use the severance option by submitting a signed severance agreement. See Policy 2.40, Staff Severance Program for more information.

If a CCS staff member's preference is to remain at the university, the staff member is expected to report to work as usual until reassignment or displacement occurs. If no vacancies exist to support a reassignment, the staff member must also begin an internal job search. This process is initiated by contacting ELR. The affected staff member should prepare/update a resume and other materials and actively participate in the search process.

### **Displacement Process**

Classified Civil Service (CCS) staff may have displacement rights, also referred to as bumping rights. The Ohio Revised Code and The Ohio State University Rules for Classified Civil Service establish the order and procedures for displacement. CCS staff who have not met performance expectations in their last



three annual performance reviews, as indicated by an overall rating of “does not meet expectations,” or who are on major corrective action do not have displacement rights.

Because displacement is extremely disruptive to the workplace, and to minimize the impact of such disruption, it is the university’s intention that units, affected staff members, and the Office of Human Resources collaborate to identify alternative employment opportunities for individuals whose positions are abolished. This means that CCS staff whose positions are abolished must be assigned to any current or anticipated job vacancy, within their classification, in their unit.

If no available vacancy is found within the unit, the affected staff member shall be assigned to a university vacancy, within their jurisdiction and classification or a classification with same or similar duties. If no vacancy exists within the impacted staff member’s jurisdiction, the university will allow for 60 days to lapse before displacement occurs (to allow for a vacancy to surface or for the individual to identify a new position through their own job search). If a vacancy surfaces within this 60-day period, within the staff member’s classification, they will be placed into the vacant position. If no vacancy surfaces within the 60 day period, the staff member may be entitled to exercise his/her displacement rights and “bump” the staff member with the least number of retention points within their classification and jurisdiction.

Hiring units may not refuse to accept a placement to a vacancy without substantial and convincing evidence that the staff member is unqualified to perform the job duties of the position. In cases of displacement, hiring units cannot refuse as we are required by the CCS Rules to displace only that person with the least number of retention points.

**Additional Resources for Staff Impacted by a Reduction in Force:**

<b>Area of Responsibility</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Number</b>
COBRA	Benefits Processing	614-292-1050
Flexible Spending Accounts	Customer Service Center	614-292-1050
Life Insurance	Customer Service Center	614-292-1050
Payroll	Payroll Operations	614-292-2311
Retirement Plans OPERS ARP	Benefits Services	614-292-1050
Unemployment Compensation	Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS)	1-877-644-6562 1-888-642-8203 TTY

## Management Checklist for Reductions in Force

- Consult with ELR Senior Representative if a Reduction in Force is feasible.
- Has the employing unit completed the Request for Reduction in Force form and obtained approval per policies 9.15 and/or 9.20?
  - The Request for Reduction in Force form is available at [hr.osu.edu/policies-forms](http://hr.osu.edu/policies-forms)
- Upon approval, ELR will provide support for the unit at each step of the process.
- Consult with ELR on tools and templates available for the Reduction in Force as well as compiling the severance agreement.
- Schedule a time to meet with the affected employee. In preparation for the meeting gather the following:
  - Prepare written notification of the abolishment for unclassified staff or obtain classified civil service staff notification letter from OHR.
  - Obtain a copy of the appropriate RIF policy and share with affected employee. Be prepared to answer any questions related to RIF process or severance policy.
  - Obtain the severance agreement from ELR, which will include the total severance benefit.
    - Refer to policy 2.40 for severance program schedule
- Present written notification and severance program agreement to the staff member in person (supervisor and HR designee together). Please remember there are different timelines based on the classification.
  - Classified Civil Service staff: Eligible CCS staff have ten calendar days to decide whether they will choose displacement or severance. CCS staff will have twenty-one calendar days to sign and return the severance agreement.
  - Unclassified staff: Eligible unclassified staff must sign and return the severance agreement within twenty-one calendar days.
  - Provide staff member with EAP information.
- Did the staff member return the agreement?
  - If unclassified staff, retain the signed agreement in the employee's personnel file.
  - If classified civil service staff, ensure that the staff member notifies the OHR in writing of their desire to voluntarily participate in the severance program.
- Does the staff member have accrued vacation time?
  - If so, the staff member will be paid out their vacation time in accordance with the Paid Time Off Policy, 6.27.

## Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions are those most commonly asked by managers and staff. They are listed in the order of life cycle of a reduction in force decision. Initial questions address the decision-making process, then discuss issues surrounding conducting the reduction meeting, and end with questions regarding benefits and the staff severance program.

### Reduction in Force Guidelines

#### 1. What principles guide units in determining that a reduction in force is necessary?

Should a reduction in the force become necessary due to lack of funds, lack of work, reasons of economy, or reorganization for efficiency; the Office of Human Resources shall lay off employees and/or abolish positions. Position eliminations should be carefully planned to balance human resource considerations. These considerations include appropriate treatment of individuals affected, impact on affirmative action objectives, and compliance with university policies. ELR is available to discuss options and provide recommendations as part of the decision-making process. All reductions in force are subject to review and approval by ELR.

### Resources

#### 1. What support is available to the separated staff member?

OHR will provide services and information to the individual(s) as well as the manager. If necessary in cases of unclassified staff and with all Classified Civil Service staff, a Talent Management Consultant will meet with the staff member(s) to discuss the reduction in force process, the roles of those involved and the services provided by the university. Additional services include confidential counseling and referral to the University Faculty and Staff Assistance Program, claims processing, retirement information and continuing benefits coverage through Benefits Services.

#### 2. What is the Reduction in Force policy for classified civil service staff members?

See [hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/policy920.pdf](http://hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/policy920.pdf)

#### 3. What is the Reduction in Force policy for unclassified staff members?

See [hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/policy915.pdf](http://hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/policy915.pdf)

### Conducting the Reduction in Force meeting

#### 1. Who should lead and where should the reduction in force meeting take place?

The reduction in force meeting should be conducted privately by the manager, human resource professional, and the staff member. The meeting should be held at a time and place that is convenient and comfortable for all involved.

Choose an office or other space that is private, quiet, and free of distractions. Make sure the place you want to hold the meeting is available.

#### 2. If multiple positions are going to be abolished, should the initial reduction in force meeting be held in a group setting or on an individual basis?

An individual meeting usually seems more personalized and would most likely make the staff member feel more comfortable. As an alternative, the initial reduction in force meeting can be conducted on an individual basis but an HR team (Talent Management and Employee Relations Consultants) can conduct

the follow-up meeting. The HR team can help staff members work through the process and understand their options.

**3. What should I bring with me to the reduction in force meeting?**

You should bring a packet of information to give to the employee that includes: the reduction in force paperwork, the Displacement Right Election Form, the Reduction in Force guidelines for staff members, benefits brochures, EAP brochure, etc.

**4. Is there anyone else I should inform prior to the reduction in force meeting?**

Unit leadership; unit HRP; ELR and EAP especially if you anticipate a strong reaction from the employee(s); OSU Police if you have any concerns about the volatility of the employee or safety of others; and in extraordinary cases the Office of Legal Affairs and Media Relations.

**5. What should I communicate to the affected staff member(s)? What shouldn't I say?**

Just as you need to prepare for a hiring interview, you need to get ready for a reduction in force meeting. Know what you want to say before you meet. Write down your thoughts. Rehearse once or twice what you will say and how you will say it (how you communicate the message in many instances is more important than the message itself. Be sensitive and caring). If you get stuck when preparing for the reduction in force meeting, don't guess. Call ELR.

**6. Do I communicate anything differently if the staff member has lost their displacement rights due to performance issues?**

Communicating to a CCS staff member that they have no displacement rights will be difficult but made easier if performance has been managed along the way and the employee is aware of the concerns about their performance. If the employee's performance has been managed appropriately, the loss of displacement rights should not be a surprise to the employee. At this juncture, the employee must have been made aware at each corrective action stage of the potential of losing displacement rights. Prepare for the conversation as described in #5 above and consult with ELR about potential challenges or any concerns you have.

**7. How should I communicate the job abolishment to the rest of the team/unit?**

Communication to the co-workers is as important as the communication to the separated staff member(s). You will want to discuss with the staff member how they would like to have their news communicated to the remaining staff members. Be respectful of the staff members' feelings – they may want to tell their fellow teammates themselves. If you are communicating the job abolishment decision(s) to the team, be sensitive to their feelings/emotions. Provide a process and time for them to discuss their feelings. Be open and honest as to why this happened and if their positions are in jeopardy. Those who are not losing their jobs fare better when they understand the unit's business goals and how they can help achieve them. They too may be experiencing such feelings as guilt, embarrassment, lack of trust, suspicion, confusion, or shock. The Employee Assistance Program has counseling services available for Ohio State staff. You should also be prepared to discuss how the workload will be impacted and managed in the future. Determine and/or prioritize functions and identify any potential workload shifts ahead of time. If at all possible, involve the staff in these decisions.

**8. Obviously, this is a difficult and emotional time for the separated staff member(s) – but how will I feel?**

Implementing a reduction in force is perhaps one of the most emotionally difficult responsibilities for a manager and it's usually a very trying experience for the person being reduced as well. Responses to the reduction vary greatly. It is crucial to recognize, acknowledge, and be sensitive to the range of feelings that result from the job abolishment. The range of emotions likely to be experienced by managers is listed below:

- Guilt

- ❑ Compassion
- ❑ Resentment – why do I have to be put in this uncomfortable situation
- ❑ Anger – at upper management or whomever made this decision
- ❑ Fear – at having to face the affected staff member; fear of how the staff member will react

It is normal for managers to feel one or all of these emotions at some point during the reduction process. Although you don't want to suppress your feelings you do need to be careful how and where you express your emotions. For these reasons, it is important that you and unit leadership discuss the reasons for the reduction decisions and be aligned at the implementation stage. Remember, especially at times like this, your team will be looking to you for support, guidance, reassurance, and leadership. For further information regarding counseling services available at Ohio State, contact the Employee Assistance Program, 614-293-4700.

## **9. How do we determine next steps?**

Together with the staff member develop his/her next steps. Depending on the point at which your initial meeting ends, next steps might simply be scheduling another meeting, providing the names of persons or offices to call, planning a get-together with colleagues, etc. If necessary, provide the employee with the option to go home on the day of the announcement. Employees will need a reasonable time to process the decision and their options. Whatever the next steps may be, they need to be clearly stated and it may be helpful to follow-up with a memo (see the guideline on page 17 for documenting next steps).

### **Staff Severance Program**

Staff Severance Program information can be found online at:

**Policy:** [hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/policy240.pdf](http://hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/policy240.pdf)

**Frequently Asked Questions:** [hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/resources/240faq.pdf](http://hr.osu.edu/public/documents/policy/resources/240faq.pdf)