



# Knowledge management: informing decisions to realise good governance

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**“...good governance...at the national and international levels are essential for sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger.”<sup>1</sup>**

## Introduction

Benefiting from good governance at the national level (and at any level) requires knowledge to infuse the practices and processes used to reach the decisions that will impact the daily lives of citizens as well as the development direction of their country.

Knowledge has always been a cornerstone of all decisions made. It is essential when we set out to achieve goals as individuals, communities, countries or regions, because decisions made are based on what is known at the time the action is taken. In order to make the best decisions possible it is necessary to ensure that those with the responsibility have or have access to the needed skills, experiences, understandings and values, when and where it is required, to do so. Knowledge management makes this possible.

*“A good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers.”  
- Plato<sup>2</sup>*

## Decision-making is governance

Governance refers to the act of governing, and therefore to the underlying processes of making and implementing decisions. Each day, those in decision-making positions are presented with sets of alternatives from which they must choose. With that choice there are certain actions that should be executed to ensure that the chosen alternative is implemented. Making the choice and following through on its implementation through supportive actions is governance.

The act of governing is not the exclusive domain of government. That responsibility is also shared with other spheres of society such as

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, “Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals” (A/65/L.1) [online], <http://www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010/pdf/mdg%20outcome%20document.pdf>, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Laches or courage* [online], Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1584/1584-h/1584-h.htm>, [31 July 2013], 2008.

communities, civil society, organizations and corporations. Even in the public sector, governance is not ascribed solely to senior decision-makers. It is applied to all levels; from choosing a service for implementation to deciding on policies and plans that would provide direction to the development of a whole country.

## The standard of good governance

Paying little attention to the wants and needs, fears and concerns of citizens, sectors, communities and other actors during the decision-making process could lead to ill-advised decisions, which in turn, result in weak governance with negative impacts on civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of citizens. Eventually it is the sustainable economic and social development of the country that is compromised, with attendant increase in social and economic challenges such as poverty, corruption and unemployment. It is therefore vital that government, communities and their citizens make the best decisions possible, and work towards achieving good governance.

*“For small developing post-colonial countries, effective public governance occurs when the outcomes of governance process, positively impact the polity, economy and, perhaps most importantly, the society.”*  
- Dr. Wendy C. Grenade<sup>3</sup>

Good governance is a standard that is achieved by institutions, such as a government, when they conduct their affairs and manage their resources in a manner that is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law.

It is about making the best decisions possible. When decision-makers in government choose between alternative options they have to consider not only their own wishes, but also the needs of the general citizenry, the wants of specific groups, sectors or communities, the current situation in the country, the environment, possible pitfalls, and the national development goals. It is

therefore not about just making good decisions, but making the best decision possible for all concerned.

*“Most discussions of decision making assume that only senior executives make decisions or that only senior executives' decisions matter. This is a dangerous mistake.”*  
- Peter Drucker<sup>4</sup>

It is also about enabling good decision-making processes. When a country is well-governed and lives by the characteristics of the standard, certain activities, such as elections, would have been implemented to ensure good governance.

It is easy enough for decision-makers to make use of these activities to obtain the opinion of all actors before an alternative is chosen. Without these structures or activities, decision-making processes might become one-sided, impairing the decisions made.

Achieving good governance lets us create societies, communities and countries that are well-governed, guarantees the rights of all people, and recognises and listens to their voices. Such countries are more likely to be successful in eradicating poverty, stopping violence, protecting the environment and achieving social and economic growth and development while better equipped to withstand economic and environmental shocks.

It is essential that countries pay attention to the quality of their institutions, political ideals and values, because without it good governance cannot be achieved.

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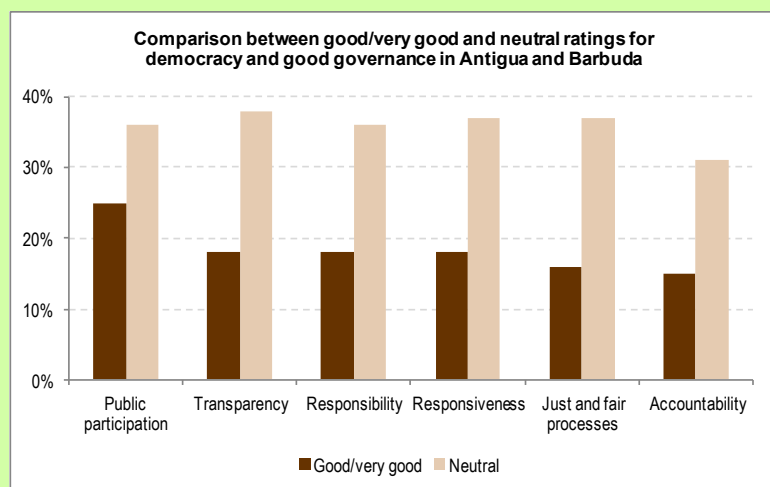
<sup>3</sup> Wendy C. Grenade, “Governance in the Caribbean: challenges and prospects”, *Commonwealth Governance Handbook 2012/13: Democracy, development and public administration*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London,, <http://www.commonwealthgovernance.org/assets/uploads/2012/10/Governance-in-the-Caribbean.pdf>, [31 July 2013], 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Peter F. Drucker, “What makes an effective executive”, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 82, No. 6, June, 2004.

## Good governance in the Caribbean

In 2009 the World Bank published the results of the World Governance Indicators, which gathered data on governance from hundreds of countries. Ten CARICOM countries, namely Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, were among those assessed. Data was gathered using existing surveys from businesses, non-governmental organizations, risk analysts and households.

Aruba and Barbados, consistently scored between 80 to 100 per cent in all categories, meaning that they were among the 20 per cent of best performing countries in the world. The Bahamas scored third best followed by Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago. Belize had the sixth highest score. Next was Suriname, consistently scoring between 40-50 per cent, followed by Jamaica and then Guyana and Haiti. Haiti's fell between 0 and 10 per cent.



Source: L. Huberts, "Good governance in the Caribbean: reflections on good governance, integrity and corruption in Caricom countries", document prepared for the First International Conference on Governance for Sustainable Development of Caribbean Small Island Developing States, Curaçao, 4-7 March, 2011.

good ratings for the administrative capacity of governments past and present, however less than 30 per cent of respondents, in both countries, indicated dissatisfaction with democratic structures. High percentages of neutral (average) rankings were also recorded, meaning the respondents did not find it poor or good.

Work is still needed to achieve good governance in the Caribbean, because even though democracy is found in all countries, the quality of the governance needs improvement.

The subregion could do more to ensure better participation of all communities and groups in decision-making. Leaders need to actively work towards achieving the goals of good governance through greater efforts in curbing corruption as well as in building the capacities of officials to enhance their decision-making.

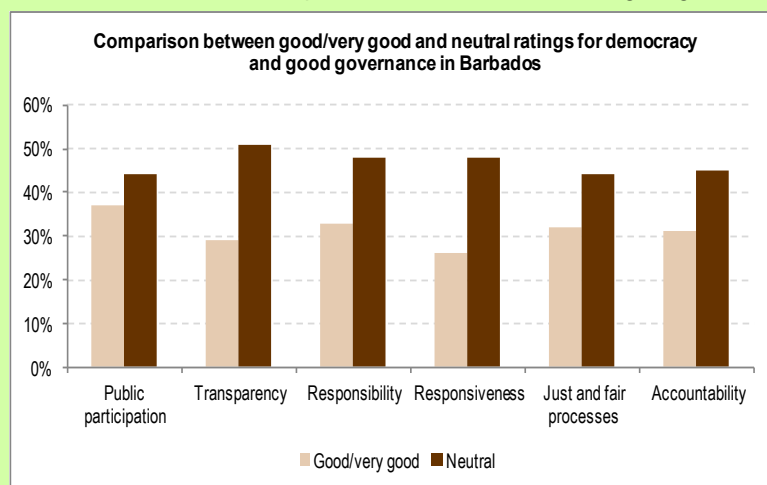
Source: L. Huberts, "Good governance in the Caribbean: reflections on good governance, integrity and corruption in Caricom countries", document prepared for the First International Conference on Governance for Sustainable Development of Caribbean Small Island Developing States, Curaçao, 4-7 March, 2011.

University of the West Indies (UWI) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "The case of Antigua and Barbuda and Barbados", Statistical Report for The UWI/UNDP Democratic Governance Capacity Development: Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Governance Assessments and Measurements (DGA) Project for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean", UNDP, 2012.

Although CARICOM countries have made strides towards achieving good governance, more needs to be done. This need was underscored in the 2012 democratic governance assessment conducted by the University of the West Indies and the United Nations Development Programme in Barbados and Antigua and Barbuda.

Democracy and good governance, focussing on the values of transparency, responsibility, public participation, responsiveness, accountability and the presence of just and fair processes displayed by both past and present governments where evaluated with ratings ranging from very poor to very good for each value.

The study found that, although in both countries, public participation received the highest good/very good rankings, respondents felt that governments have not yet fully cultivated the other values evaluated. Overall respondents found it difficult to give good/very



Source: L. Huberts, "Good governance in the Caribbean: reflections on good governance, integrity and corruption in Caricom countries", document prepared for the First International Conference on Governance for Sustainable Development of Caribbean Small Island Developing States, Curaçao, 4-7 March, 2011.

## Need for knowledge in decision-making

The process of decision-making is not easy, cannot be taken lightly, and should not be done haphazardly. The government as a decision-maker guides the economic and social development of the country and its citizens and, it is clear, should undertake to make the best decisions possible.

The opinion or input from those, the actors, that would be impacted by a decision has already been highlighted as an important part of good governance. This is not only because they are the citizens whose lives will be affected by the decisions made, but also because of the knowledge that they possess and could share to assist decision-makers in the choices that they have to make. However the skills, experiences, understandings and values of the decision-makers are equally important.

Knowledge is personal in nature, unique to each individual based on what they have been taught and have learned during the course of their lives.

### **Data ...**

*Facts, observations or statements, it is unorganized and unprocessed, and it has no context and therefore no meaning by itself.*

### **Knowledge ...**

*the understanding, skills, capabilities, experiences and values gained from data, information and learning. It is intangible and a valuable asset necessary in the solution of problems as it infuses analytical abilities.*

### **Information ...**

*Structured and organized data that has meaning obtained through a "relational connection" that makes it relevant for a specific purpose or context. It is meaningful, useful and relevant.*

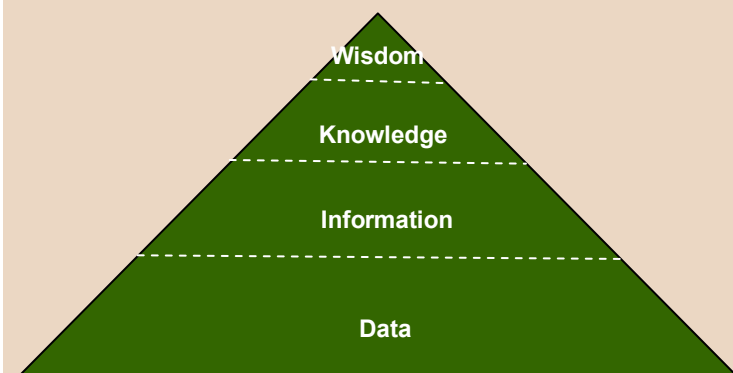
Solely basing decisions, that could affect the development of a whole country, on inherent knowledge could be risky. Therefore data (facts and figures) and information (analyses) are also essential, forming the basis for identifying the alternatives presented to decision-makers.

Together these three elements – data, information, knowledge – should inform decisions made by government that would result in courses of action geared towards achieving sustainable national development goals and enhancing the lives of citizens.

In order to present decision-makers with alternatives to choose from, they must first be identified. To this end experts are used, their knowledge can be invaluable to identify possible alternatives that can be presented, however the viability of an alternative must also be determined. For this they require data and information. Studies and research can be conducted to

## The relationship between data, information and knowledge

Little consensus exist on the definition of knowledge, information and data. A reason for this could possibly be that it is defined from the discipline that is studying it, such as library science, information management, communications theory, information systems and organization science. As the focus of these fields differ, so does each field's understanding of these concepts.



However, these concepts are related to each other, and that is that data becomes information, information becomes knowledge and knowledge gives rise to wisdom. Each term lays on the level directly below it. This relationship is often illustrated using a pyramid (on left), as this also makes it possible to show the progression from vast data, each time specialising until the wisdom from what has been learned is obtained.

It is however, important to remember that the lines between these terms (levels) are at best blurred, and that to a certain extent, as much as "mastering" of one leads to another, it is likely that the higher levels would imprint on the lower levels, leading to more data, information, and knowledge and greater wisdom. As the processes involved in moving from one level to another is also decidedly human in nature, the receiver of the data and information will decide what to categorise it as, based on the knowledge that they already possess.

Source: L. Denner, "Employing knowledge networks as tools for the development of Caribbean small island developing States" (LC/CAR/L.344) [online], ECLAC, Port of "Spain, <http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/1/48001/LCARTL344.pdf>, [31 July 2013], 2012.

obtain the necessary data and information by tapping into the knowledge of citizens through survey and interviews. This results in the identification of viable alternatives which should next be presented to decision-makers.

*“Knowledge has to be improved, challenged, and increased constantly, or it vanishes.”  
- Peter Drucker<sup>5</sup>*

Decision-makers must now choose the best option possible.

Accountable, transparent decision-makers will require the opinion of the actors that will be impacted after the decision. Now it is the turn of the decision-makers to turn to the citizenry or actors concerned, again they tap into the knowledge of the actors

Lastly the decision-makers tap into their own knowledge, weighing what they know against what they have learned, what they have read and what they want to achieve. There is no step during the decision-making process that does not require knowledge to ensure that the best option is chosen. In accessing and capturing knowledge, citizens participate in decisions impacting on their lives, government can be held accountable and is transparent. The need for knowledge in the decision-making process can enforce good governance throughout a country.

Knowledge gained becomes part of the institutional memory of the government that can be built on, added to and leveraged again, in similar or different contexts, at later opportunities when necessary. The vastness of data, information and knowledge available and the potential costliness of obtaining it, is important to manage this resource so that it will be available when and where is needed.

*“Knowledge management implementation requires a shift in philosophy for most organizations — not only in how people work, but more importantly in how they behave and interact with each other.”<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> “Lessons Learned from Peter Drucker” [online], Sources of insight, <http://sourcesofinsight.com/lessons-learned-from-peter-drucker/> [31 July 2013], September, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Jeff Angus, Jeetu Patel and Jennifer Harty, "Knowledge management: great concept...but what is it?" [online], InformationWeek, 16 March, <http://www.informationweek.com/673/73olkno.htm>, [31 July 2013], 1998.

## National consultations on constitutional reform in Trinidad and Tobago

In April 2004, at a regional symposium on local democracy and good governance held in Montego Bay, Jamaica, the public consultations held by the government was mentioned as an example of good governance practices in the Caribbean, as well as the use of mass media to communicate the outcomes of these consultations.

National consultations in Trinidad and Tobago have been held continuously over the years on a variety of issues, such as environmental protection and biodiversity, education, yachting and many more. The format is normally open meetings as well as meetings with sector specific stakeholders giving participants opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns with regard to the matter at hand.

In 2013 the Ministry of Legal Affairs held national consultations on constitutional reform. Again the Commission responsible held public meetings where citizens could voice their opinion on the draft constitution. Consultations with specific groups such as non-governmental organizations and businesses were also held.

Public meetings were not the only method use to obtain input from citizens. A website was created with links to online questionnaires that could be completed and submitted. The website also allowed for the writing of comments and the asking of questions. Quick polls were provided that could quickly gauge the opinion of citizens on important topics. A Facebook page and twitter feed was also set up, allowing for more and broader access to the citizenry.

Not only are these national consultations an example of good governance, but also provided decision-makers access to the knowledge held by citizens and groups on the rights that they would like to have as well as the vision they have for their country.

Employing different methods to access the knowledge of the citizens, such as information and communication technologies, public meetings and the option to enter written submissions allowed for a broader participation, therefore reaching more people than would be possible if only one method would have been chosen.

More knowledge, information and data were gathered than would have been with only one method of access. Using the knowledge gained would ensure that decision-makers deliver a constitution that truly reflects the ideals and wishes that citizens have for the type of country that they would like to live in.

The knowledge gained will also be valuable for specific policies, laws and regulations that will flow from constitutional reform.

Source: Commonwealth Secretariat, “Local democracy and good governance in the Caribbean: report of the Regional Symposium held in Montego Bay, Jamaica, April 2004”, London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005

Trinidad and Tobago, “National consultations on constitutional reform” [online], Port of Spain, Registrar General’s Department, <http://www.reformtheconstitution.com/> [31 July], 2013.

*“To be knowledge focused is to take the intangibles seriously, to see your organisation as if it consists of primarily the intangible assets and the flows of knowledge between them.”*  
*–Karl Erik Sveiby<sup>7</sup>*

## Managing knowledge

Managing knowledge is not an easy task. It is inherently part of all individuals, sectors, communities and organizations in a country. The role that knowledge plays in decision-making and the potential impact it has on the lives of all these carriers of knowledge and countries has made it necessary for governments to manage their knowledge and leverage it to further good governance so that they can effectively foster innovation and creativity geared towards development.

Knowledge management is a tool that when implemented enables the availability and accessibility of knowledge through its distinct, but interdependent processes and activities of creation, capture, storage and retrieval and transfer. Broadly the processes and activities surrounding knowledge management can be divided into those that enable and ensure the creation of knowledge and those that enable and ensure the sharing of knowledge. Creation processes ensure that new knowledge is available and sharing processes makes it transferable.

The success of knowledge management activities and processes depends on the goals, practices and culture of an organization, and on the willingness of its employees to change their mindsets, perceptions and ways they work. Some knowledge processes can be implemented within the current government structure and hierarchies, but to be truly successful fundamental changes, such as flatter hierarchies, are necessary to ensure greater fluidity of skills, experiences, understandings within government as well as between government and its citizenry.

Knowledge management is not just about creating and storing knowledge so that we can access it when and where it is needed, it also brings about fundamental changes in the way government processes are designed and executed, and the way national policies, plans and strategies are developed and implemented. Implementing knowledge management in government should have as goals:

- Building the capacities of people in and processes of the government so that they are effective and efficient in fulfilling their duty of governing;
- Improving products and services delivered to citizens in order to improve their quality of life and wellness; and
- Leveraging these capacities and skills, products and services, and processes, gained through the processes and activities of creation, transfer and application, to achieve national development goals.

There is no blueprint for implementing knowledge management, it cannot be achieved overnight and requires analysis and planning. Governments that aim to implement knowledge management practices normally learn from others that have done so already, but in the end, the final outcome and strategy will be tailor-made to the needs, wants, goals and budget of the implementing government.

Even though knowledge management might be a complex tool to implement, it is essential, because through it the skills, capacities, understandings and values will always be available and accessible in the government to inform decisions and ensuring that the best decisions possible are made.

*“Knowledge has become the key economic resource and the dominant—and perhaps even the only—source of competitive advantage.”*  
*–Peter Drucker<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> Eric K. Sveiby, “Knowledge management: the Viking way” [online], <http://www.sveiby.com/articles/vikings.htm>, [31 July 2013], 2001.

<sup>8</sup> P. Drucker, Post-Capitalist Society, Harper Business Dynamics, New York, 1993.

## ICT in knowledge management

The advent of information and communication technologies (ICT) has forever changed the ways that knowledge, information and data are stored, accessed and shared and therefore forms and integral part of decision-making processes and the road to achieve good governance. It should therefore be an important component of any knowledge management strategy that is developed and implemented by governments.

When discussing the implementation of knowledge management the conversation more often than not focuses on ICT solutions, applications and infrastructures. It is important to understand that ICT, although important, are not the main actors in knowledge management. Rather, ICT is there to support the knowledge processes employed. ICT provide for faster knowledge flows through systems, ensuring that it reaches its targets faster so that faster and effective decision-making is possible.

In the Caribbean, where the national boundaries are often characterised by multi-island classification, ICT is essential for effective knowledge management. The Internet, mobile technologies and the advent of faster connections and applications make it possible for governments to connect with citizens in large geographical areas and efficiently deliver products and services to them.

ICT not only makes the government accessible to people, but also make the knowledge, information and data held by citizens accessible for the national government. In the same way that the government uses ICT to deliver services it can use it to gather needed understandings, experiences and skills from citizens and other groups to inform their decision-making for good governance.

The use of ICT also enables the achievement of good governance as it encourages transparency and the effectiveness in the delivery of services and thus helps to combat corruption. Providing citizens with access to information from the government and participation in the government democratic governance and the protection of human rights can be furthered.

In order for ICT to be an effective underlying infrastructure for knowledge management and decision-making practices in government and a supporter in the achievement of good governance, its development and implementation should be carefully planned alongside the national development goals of a country. Dysfunctional ICT initiatives will only cause frustration for citizens and eventually harm the relationship between the citizenry and the government and impact negatively on good governance goals.

*"Too often, people think of knowledge management as a noun. They're mistaken: KM is a verb, a way of getting work done. You can't get it done without a lot of nouns, such as "people," "processes," "procedures" or "products." But the essence of KM isn't something you buy, it's something you make happen."*  
 –Jeff Angus, KM Magazine<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

All governments should strive to achieve good governance, as this will help in the eradication of poverty, combating corruption and ensuring that economic, social and environmental development goals are met, while improving the wellness of citizens.

In order to achieve good governance the best decisions possible should be taken. This is only possible when governments, citizens and communities have access to knowledge that can inform their decisions and actions. Knowledge management is a tool that can ensure the availability and accessibility of knowledge when and where it is needed, but it should be planned and integrated into the national strategies of a country to ensure success.

ICT is an enabler of knowledge management initiatives, and not knowledge management itself. The implementation thereof should therefore, be carefully considered and aligned with strategies and national development goals. This will ensure that ICT implementations are effective and efficient.

<sup>9</sup> European Translational Information and Knowledge Management Services (eTRIKS), "30 Quotes on Knowledge Management relevant to Translational Research" [online], <http://www.etriks.org/blog/30-quotes-on-knowledge-management-relevant-to-translational-research/>, [31 July 2013], February, 2013.

## Recommendations for the Caribbean

1. It is important to take stock of achievements in good governance and also to identify shortfalls. It is therefore necessary to put in place strategies to systematically measure and monitor good governance activities and implementations to ensure that data is available for future planning.

2. National governments and their policy makers should develop knowledge management strategies aligned to the needs of the public and in-line with national development goals so that knowledge is available when and where it is needed in the decision-making processes.

3. In order for knowledge management initiatives to be effective, capacity building programmes need to be developed and employed, to ensure that government officials and citizens can efficiently participate in national decision-making processes as well as deliver and make use of government products and services.

4. To ensure the optimal effectiveness of knowledge management current structures, hierarchies and processes within government should be evaluated and measured against the goals of decision-makers to determine if they are sufficient to ensure that knowledge flows effortlessly so that the best decisions possible can be made.

5. The importance of ICT necessitates the further development of infrastructure, such as broadband connectivity and mobile networks, to ensure that all citizens can be reached.

6. Subregional strategies, such as the 2010-2014 CARICOM eGovernment Strategy and the Regional Digital Development Strategy (RDDS) should be used as guidelines when developing government services and products to be deployed, but also when formulating policies and development goals, as it assists in achieving good governance.

7. The development and implementation of knowledge management systems and initiatives, such as Communities of Practice, knowledge networks and expert systems, dedicated to enabling the creation and transfer of knowledge should be included in strategies to achieve national development goals.

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