

National Implications: A Professional Development Series for School Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The effective school leader is required to blend the “art” and “science” of instructional leadership and managerial expertise. The research team at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) has produced a ground breaking piece of research on the link between principal leadership and student achievement. The McREL organization has also developed a professional development series based on the research outlined in “School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results.” For organizations that want to assist principals in their professional development, this series and its application in the field holds great promise in assisting them to manage change, develop a purposeful community and to select the right focus for school change initiatives. The Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency in Eastern Iowa (MBAEA), in partnership with Western Illinois University, developed a two year series of professional development opportunities for 107 principals and central office staff in the service areas of eastern Iowa and western Illinois. This article outlines the preliminary results of the effectiveness of the Academy for the 2005-06 school year.

“Leadership – making happen what you believe in.”

Roland Barth (2001) succinctly defines leadership (p.446). School leaders at all levels, in every region of the country face a challenging list of duties, roles, responsibilities and demands every day that the school doors are open and, increasingly, in many of the hours the doors are shut. The effective school leader is required to blend the “art” and “science” of instructional leadership and managerial expertise. The research team at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) has produced a ground-breaking piece of research on the link between principal leadership and student achievement.

The McREL organization has also developed a professional development series based on the research outlined in “School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results.” For organizations that want to assist principals in their professional development, this series and its application in the field holds great promise in assisting them to manage change, develop a purposeful community and to select the right focus for school change initiatives. In addition, superintendents who supervise principals need to know which leadership responsibilities are in the forefront during change initiatives so as to better guide and support the building level administrator.

The Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency (MBAEA), in partnership with Western Illinois University, developed a two year series of professional development opportunities for 107 principals and central office staff in the service areas of eastern Iowa and western Illinois. The director of the General Education Division contracted with McREL to deliver the newly created sessions to inform the participants of McREL’s research findings from a meta-analysis conducted to answer the question, “What does the research tells us about school leadership?” The McREL professional development sessions for the first year were designed to apply this information to school practices by examining the concepts of Developing a Purposeful Community and Managing Change (Waters, McNulty, Grubb, Cameron, 2005). In addition, the MBEAE staff and professors from WIU developed a series of “implementation sessions” to provide participants with an opportunity to delve more deeply into the material and to discuss the opportunities for application within their buildings/districts. The current plan is to extend the series into a second year including a module on the Focus of Change and applications of the first year topics. The focus of this article is on the preliminary results and data gathered at the end of the first year of this series of workshops.

The Research

A meta-analysis refers to a technique of synthesizing a large amount of research quantitatively. “Meta-analysis allows researchers to form statistically based generalizations regarding research within a given field” (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2003, p.7). The research team at McREL examined 69 studies involving 2,802 schools, approximately 1.4 million students and 14, 00 teachers (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2003, p.7). The studies selected met the following conditions:

- Included K-12 students.
- Included U.S. schools or situations that mirrored U.S. schools.
- Examined directly or indirectly the relationship between the leadership of the building principal and student academic achievement.
- Academic achievement was measured by standardized achievement or state tests, or a composite of those.
- Effect sizes in correlation form were reported or could be computed. (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2003, p. 28).

The team computed the correlation between leadership behavior of the principal of the school and the average academic achievement of the students to be .25. The interpretation of the data would indicate that this effect size would represent an average principal in a school where the students ranked at the 50th percentile in achievement.

Interpretation of the this correlation, in terms of expected standard assessment passing rates for schools, depending on leadership effectiveness, would imply that schools with principals in the top half of all principals (based on leadership effectiveness) would have a 62.5% passing rate on the standardized assessment. In contrast, schools with lower half principal effectiveness would have a passing rate of 37% (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2003, p. 31).

In their book *School Leadership That Works*, Marzano, Waters, McNulty discuss some of the prominent theorists on leadership that guided the interpretation and application of the meta-analysis findings. This body of work includes examples of transformational and transactional leadership Burns (1978) Bass (1985) Leithwood and Avolio (1994). It includes applications of quality principles and team work from Deming (1986) and change agency from Sosik and Dionne (1997). Also included is situational leadership theory from a variety of sources by Hersey and Blanchard and others (1991, 1996, 2001) which outlined four dominant leadership “styles.” Instructional leadership theory developed by Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) and others, which has attained a high level of visibility over the years, was reviewed. Smith and Andrews (1989) identify four dimensions of instructional leadership: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence. Other foundational work included: Bennis (2003) on effective leadership; Block (2003) on leaders as social architects; Collins (2001) on leading organizations from “good to great”; Covey (1989) on seven behaviors which produce positive results in a variety of situations; Elmore (2000) on the critical role of understanding effective practices curriculum and instruction in school leadership; Fullan (1993) on the process of change and leadership for change; Heifetz and Linsky (1994) for adapting leadership behavior to the requirements of the situation; and Spillane et al. (2001, 2003) on the concept of distributed leadership (Marzano, Waters, McNulty, 2003, p. 13-23).

MBAEA’s approach to applying this data through professional development is congruent with the Iowa Professional Development Model and the best practice that supports that model. The model, based on the work of Joyce and Showers, espouses that the most productive professional development includes the application of the cycle of theory, demonstration, practice and coaching (Joyce and Showers, 2002). In addition, the National Association for Elementary School Principals (2001) report, *Leading Learning Communities*:

Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do, advocates that principals provide time for teachers (and themselves) for reflection, for investing in learning, connecting professional development to school learning goals, and to plan and work together. (Sparks, 2002, p. 7-3). Elmore (2000) reinforces this notion when he stated “People make these fundamental transitions by having many opportunities to be exposed to the idea, to argue them into their own normative belief systems, to practice the behaviors that go with these values, to observe others practicing these behaviors, and most importantly, to be successful at practicing in the presence of others...” (p. 31). The Educational Research Service publication *Professional Development for School Principals* states that effective staff development for administrators is “long term and planned, focused on student achievement, job-embedded, supportive of reflective practice and provides time to work, discuss, and problem solve with peers” (Sparks, 2000, pp. 8-3).

A strong element of the Balanced Leadership study is the proposition that principals will be more effective if they purposefully distribute leadership. The creation of a leadership team to assume or assist with some of the critical leadership responsibilities is valuable. As Fullan (2001) explains “The teacher in a collective culture who contributes to the success of peers is a leader; the mentor, the grade level coordinator, the department head, the local union representative are all leaders if they are working in a professional learning community” (p. 266). Furthermore, Elmore (2000) lists five principles of distributed leadership in schools:

1. The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role.
2. Instructional improvement requires continuous learning.
3. Learning requires modeling.
4. The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution.
5. The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity.

There is also a strong recommendation in the research for a “coaching” element in professional development for leaders. Alvarado (Sparks, 2000) states “You cannot change behaviors, change practice in organizations, without large scale coaching by people who know the content, who know how to do it, and who know how people learn” (p. 2).

In addition to the concept of coaching, personalization of professional practice is also an effective strategy for improving the experience. “Like artists, highly effective teachers and principals manage to combine experience, knowledge, and technique in imaginative ways to match personal capacities to the demand of their work” (Bredeson, 2003, p. 65).

Project Research Design

The design for the assessment of the effectiveness of the Balanced Leadership Professional Development Series was created to give the research team, and the sponsoring agency, information on the level of satisfaction of the participants with the material and

process of delivery. In addition, the research team was interested in how principals applied their new knowledge in change initiatives at the building level over time and if the principals detected any change in the level of student achievement.

Workshop Content:

McREL's Balanced Leadership: School Leadership That Works

Year 1 - Building Knowledge and Practice

1. Overview
2. Developing a Purposeful Community
3. Managing Change

Year 2 – Extending Knowledge and Refining Practice (TBA)

1. Application of The Research (ongoing)
2. Choosing the Right Focus
3. Measuring Progress

Local and State Activities – Participation Optional:

At the end of each school year, participants will be surveyed on topics of interest to meet state, district and building level needs. Individuals trained in the McREL Trainer of Trainers content will select, design and deliver professional development, collaboration sessions and other professional activities around those topics. Participants also will be able to discuss and gain deeper understanding of the Balanced Leadership research and application.

Research Questions:

1. How will the Balanced Leadership research and professional development affect the practices of participants (principals, assistant principals, deans and other building level administrators) in knowing: What to do to improve student learning; When to initiate change; How to initiate change; and Why initiate change?
2. Will the change initiatives selected by participants have a positive impact on the culture, practices and operation of the school?

3. Will the change initiatives selected by participants have a positive impact on the level of student achievement?

Measures:

1. The McREL 360 Survey (Waters et al., 2005) administered to faculty and supervisors (Optional).
2. Session satisfaction surveys.
3. Participant Action Plans reflecting building level plans/change initiatives.
4. Case Study interviews.
5. Building level student achievement

Year 1:

1. All participants will be encouraged to conduct a “baseline” 360 survey (which assesses the teachers and supervisor’s view of the change initiative) or alternative assessment in the building plan for Year 1. Data will be reported anonymously to the research team.
2. Participants may conduct at least one additional 360 survey at the end of Year 1.
3. Individual action plans will be reviewed and data collected on the types of building initiatives selected by participants. Student achievement scores will be included in the action plan report.
4. Session feedback will be collected on all McREL and local presentations.
5. Case study participants (15) will be randomly selected from the principals enrolled for the workshop. Interviews will be conducted to determine:
 - A. the origin of the building level (improvement initiative) plan,
 - B. the processes that will be used to deploy the plan
 - C. how the plan’s effectiveness will be measured at the building/district levels
 - D. how the Balanced Leadership content might assist in their planning.

They will report their current building level student achievement scores on standardized and criterion referenced assessments. (October, 2005)

6. The annual Principals Leadership Academy (PLA) program summative evaluation will be administered at the end of the year.

Year 2:

1. All participants will be encouraged to conduct a 360 survey on the building plan for Year 2. Data will be reported anonymously to the research team.
2. Individual action plans will be reviewed and data collected on the types of building initiatives selected by participants and modifications made from year 1 building plans. Student achievement scores will be included in the action plan report.
3. Session feedback will be collected on all McREL and local presentations.
4. The annual PLA program summative evaluation will be administered at the end of the year.
5. Post interviews on the 2005-06 questions will be conducted to enhance the data set.

Workshop Content Review

The School Leadership That Works: Professional Development Series consists of a series of ten 2-day sessions based on McREL's research on the effects of principal leadership on student achievement as published in *School Leadership That Works* (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005).

The primary outcomes of the workshops are to facilitate the participants'

- "Use of research-based practices to determine focus, lead change, and develop purposeful communities in order to improve student achievement and
- Increased personal and collective capacity to sustain continuous improvement efforts" (Waters, et al, 2005, p. 1)

The first year's workshops consist of three 2-day sessions that provide the participants an overview of the research, an understanding of purposeful communities, and the skills and knowledge to manage change.

Overview

The initial 2-day session focuses on an overview of the research on school leadership which links principals' leadership practices with student achievement. Participants increase their knowledge and skills regarding leadership practices and increase their awareness of their present level of functioning as compared to the twenty-one essential responsibilities identified through McREL's meta-analysis of the research.

Specific sections of the Overview sessions include:

- Developing an understanding of the meta-analytic research by McREL.
- Awareness of the effect of leadership on student achievement.
- Understanding the 21 leadership responsibilities and how to improve leadership practices.
- Awareness of the focus and magnitude of change.
- Developing an understanding of factor analysis as applied in the McREL research.
- Understanding of First-Order and Second-Order change.
- Awareness of the responsibilities positively and negatively correlated with second-order change.
- Sharing leadership as a component of balanced leadership.
- Increased awareness of the Balanced Leadership Framework™.

Purposeful Community

This two-day session focuses on developing a purposeful community. Participants will gain an understanding of the nature of a purposeful community, how to develop a purposeful community, how a purposeful community impacts student achievement, and the leadership responsibilities associated with a purposeful community.

Specific sections of the Purposeful Community section include:

- Increased background knowledge regarding purposeful community and its impact on student achievement.
- Awareness of the characteristics of accomplish purpose and producing outcomes that matter to all.
- Utilization of the World Café as an example of a holding environment.
- Development and use of tangible and intangible assets.
- Increased awareness of intangible assets and their role.
- Introduction to and practice in the development of agreed upon processes as a component of purposeful community.
- Knowledge of the concept of collective efficacy.
- Practice in the development of a purposeful community through role playing.

Managing Change

The focus of this 2-day session is on managing change through an increased awareness of change theory, learning and using tools for effectively leading change, and an increased knowledge of the responsibilities associated with leading change.

Specific sections of the Managing Change section include:

- Review of McREL's research and the change process.
- Awareness of the need to create demand in the change process.
- Knowledge of tools and activities to help create demand.
- Understanding of the role of implementation as a phase of the change process.
- Increased knowledge regarding the tool and actions that can be utilized in the implementation phase.
- Understanding of the monitor and evaluate phase of the change process.
- Knowledge of the phase of the change process that includes managing personal transitions.
- Awareness of tools and activities to manage personal transitions.

Throughout all of the sessions, participants reflected on their current practice and also on the actions they can take in the future to implement the skills and strategies presented in each section.

Implementation Review

Four implementation sessions were designed to provide principals collaboration time with their colleagues and ongoing support. The principals were grouped around similar initiatives and grade levels. Examples of the group initiatives were improved reading summarization and professional learning communities (PLC). Many of those working on PLCs had reading as the student achievement focus. A total of 27 participants took part in the implementation sessions: 24 principals, 2 curriculum coordinators, and 1 assistant superintendent. The implementation sessions were facilitated by two Western Illinois University professors and three Mississippi Bend Area Education staff members.

The implementation sessions were held on November 15, 2005, December 15, 2005, and January 19, 2006 from 8:30 to 12:30 after the October PLA session of Module 1: Overview of Balanced Leadership. The April 5, 2006 session followed after the February PLA session of Module 2: Purposeful Community. An implementation session was not held after the June session of Module 3: Managing Change.

Each Implementation session began with a welcome, review of the group norms, purpose of the implementation sessions, and a review of the day's agenda. The body of each implementation session began with and ended with the implementation log. The logging

process began by having the participants reflect upon their change initiative they chose to focus on for the year. After individual reflection, the principals entered into a structured conversation using a protocol to share. After the reflection period the principals went into a planning and discussion time. During this time, the facilitators shared and demonstrated tools to assist the principals in applying the knowledge they gained during the Balanced Leadership sessions to their chosen change initiatives. After approximately hour the principals returned to their implementation logs to write down what the next steps were for them in applying their knowledge to their change initiatives before the next implementation session. After a brief sharing out at their tables or with the large group, the group processed the implementation session with the facilitators. For the last 30 minutes of the session the Director of General Education, shared current information from the state or other relevant information.

The November 15th session focused in on the participant's change initiative and applying what they learned in the overview session and continue working with the tools started in the first session. The planning and discussion time focused on continuing to use the tools introduced in the Module 1: Overview of Balanced Leadership. Participants worked on the planning change diagram, Balanced Leadership change initiative form, and sharing leadership responsibilities chart. The participants were at various stages in their understanding and use of these tools. Facilitators were flexible in working with the participants wherever they were in the process. Participants worked together in assisting their colleagues in moving through the planning tools. The session ended with the Director talking about a new state initiative, Instructional Decision Making.

The December 15th session continued to focus in on their change initiatives, finishing the change diagram, completing the Balanced Leadership change initiative form and sharing the leadership responsibilities chart. The facilitators worked with the four groups of principals to explore and apply the knowledge more deeply to the documents above. The facilitators also introduced two tools from the National Staff Development Council's The Learning Principal publication. The tools introduced Conflict Resolution Style and Dare to Delegate Checklist (NSDC, 2005). A leadership style inventory was used during the session to help the principals more thoroughly complete the sharing responsibilities chart. Participants were also assisted in using Inspiration as an electronic planning tool.

A January 19th session reviewed the new tools introduced in the December 15th session. A demonstration and discussion occurred around the application of the tools in relation to the content of what the participants learned in the Balanced Leadership sessions and their chosen change initiative.

April 5th sessions focused on bringing the previous work together and preparing for the upcoming June Balanced Leadership sessions. The facilitators introduced an infinity diagram to help principals learn how to prioritize building activities.

Participants evaluated each session; evaluation comments revealed that the principals found the time working and sharing with colleagues very valuable to them as practitioners. One participant commented, "The work time was crucial. The activities led me right to changing my initiative." Participants frequently commented on the value of reflection and sharing with other principals from other districts through the use of the conversation protocol that was used at every session.

Preliminary Results

Research team member were involved in the development and deployment of the implementation sessions, which took place in between the MCREL sessions. They also monitored and responded to participant's action plans, which were submitted electronically, and reflections on the plan recorded periodically during the year. Through this activity, they were able to gain some insight into the participants' knowledge building and application activities with the Balanced Leadership content. A representative review of participants' action plans and his/or her application of the MCREL workshops and implementation sessions' content is included below. These three principals range widely in their years of experience and their involvement in the implementation sessions.

Participant Action Plan Reviews

Sample – Middle School Principal

Janice is a middle school principal of a large suburban middle school who was in her first year as principal after many years of being the assistant in the same building. Janice was eager to listen to and discuss the Balanced Leadership content with her middle level and high school colleagues at the implementation sessions. She was consistent in recording her efforts with the school improvement initiative of continuing implementation of (Eight Step) Focus lessons on ITBS skills for reading comprehension implemented in literature or language arts classes. Her major building goal was, "The percentage of increase for special education students will be proportionately higher each year for all eighth graders to reach 84% proficiency in reading comprehension by the end of the 05-06 school year."

She was frustrated at the beginning of the year as she shifted her thinking and efforts from the student centered role of the assistant to the executive role as the principal. She learned to rely more on her leadership team to do some of the important data collection and professional development activities; she learned to use her assistant principal and other support people more effectively and to communicate more clearly on the school improvement goals and strategies. As she stated in her Action Plan, "During our first large session on Balanced Leadership, I wrote in the margins of my notebook: "No matter how hard the principal tries, the four negatively correlated responsibilities will suffer. Teachers will say these things during second order change: 'Nobody's listening to us' and 'This isn't a fun place to work anymore.'" Little did I know back in September how true this would be!"

She also reflected on her action plan about half way through the school year, "I have worked on balancing leadership for student achievement in reading by allowing the study group to plan and implement professional development. This group has determined our focus in reading for next year. They have also given input on how to document implementation with

fidelity. I will ask the group for feedback on how to assess student learning of the strategies we are implementing.”

Sample – Elementary Principal

Linda is in her second year as an elementary principal in a rural community of 2200 residents. The district consists of Linda’s elementary school with an enrollment of about 250 students and a combined junior and senior high school. Linda’s improvement initiative was to implement professional learning communities (purposeful community) to increase student achievement in reading. The goal was to use the professional learning community model to learn and implement the Frayer Model to improve reading and vocabulary. She felt that for the initiative to be successful she would need to find time for teachers to observe one another and also to protect instructional and planning time.

Linda focused on the nine responsibilities from Balanced Leadership that were necessary to manage first order change and also looked for ways to distribute leadership throughout her leadership team. Linda, her supervisor and several staff members took McREL’s 360 survey and found that she and her supervisor perceived the change as second order but most of her staff perceived it as a first order change. This made her feel that the teachers could be pushed a little harder. She also discovered that the teachers rated her higher on most of the leadership responsibilities than she rated herself. Linda commented regarding this information, “The teachers scored me higher on each responsibility than I did, which makes me believe that they think I am a better leader than I thought.”

Based on her participation at the PLA Implementation Sessions where she interacted with principals from several different schools, she has modified the school’s professional development plan for next year. The new plan includes four meeting dates with teachers from three other school districts, which have similar goals for improvement of student achievement. Linda found the Affinity Diagram activity (presented in the Implementation Session) to be another valuable experience that she will utilize with her faculty next year. She feels that this activity will help her staff build individual efficacy--the individual belief that they can organize and execute action that makes a difference and that this will move them toward being an efficacious school.

Linda’s school met the goal of all staff using the Frayer Model and all groups scored about the state average in reading. The school did not achieve all of the achievement goals that were set, however there was growth at most grade levels.

Linda’s final analysis was that the learning about the 21 Balanced Leadership behaviors and the information about first and second order change were valuable to her as a second year principal.

Session Satisfaction

The summative evaluation of the Balanced Leadership, Principals Leadership Academy professional development series for 2005-06 is included in Table 1.

Table 1

Principals Leadership Academy Summative Evaluation 2005-06

PLA Question	Very true for me	Fairly true for me	Not very true for me	Not true for me at all	Not sure
1. had clear goals.	69.80	28.30	1.89	0.00	0.00
2. had clear expectations of results.	47.17	45.28	5.66	0.00	0.00
3. used content aligned with participants' needs.	39.62	50.94	7.55	0.00	0.00
4. used a variety of strategies, delivery systems, models and techniques to meet the needs of participants.	47.17	41.51	11.32	0.00	0.00
5. Included content and best practice based on research.	86.79	11.32	0.00	1.89	0.00
6. provided follow-up.	43.40	37.74	11.32	1.89	3.77
7. provided opportunities for participants to practice skills.	41.51	41.51	13.21	1.89	0.00
8. modeled mutual respect and collaboration.	79.25	20.75	0.00	0.00	0.00
9. collected data on an ongoing basis regarding content and delivery.	41.51	43.40	7.55	0.00	7.55
10. used data results to drive on-going planning cycle.	45.28	39.62	7.55	0.00	5.66
11. expected demonstrated links to improvement of teaching and learning as an end product.	35.85	52.83	5.66	1.89	3.77
12. increased my understanding of leadership responsibilities that result in improved learning for all.	67.92	22.64	5.66	0.00	3.77
13a. improved my understanding and ability to create a purposeful community.	54.72	37.74	5.66	00	1.89
13b. improved my understanding and ability to manage change within that community.	54.72	39.62	5.66	00	0.00
14. provided an opportunity for me to review and reflect on processes and strategies that are effective in improving student achievement.	56.60	35.85	5.66	00	1.89
15. increased knowledge base through interactions and problem solving with my colleagues.	58.49	39.62	0.00	00	0.00

The Principals Leadership Academy Implementation Sessions satisfaction data [mean scores of the four sessions] is included in Table 2.

Table 2

Principals Leadership Academy Implementation Sessions Average Participant Satisfaction

AEA Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The course content was of high quality	52.75	45.25	0.0	2.0
2. The material covered will assist me in improving instruction.	63.75	34.50	0.0	1.5
3. The ideas and skills presented will be immediately useful in improving student learning	48.75	49.25	0.0	2.0
4. The facilities were comfortable and conducive to a quality learning experience.	69.0	29.25	0.0	1.75

Implications

Preliminary results of the study, which at the end of year one, include the review of the self-reported results recorded on the electronic action plans; general session satisfaction data, and implementation session satisfaction are encouraging. The principals struggled with the understanding of the Balanced Leadership data and its implications at first, but many of them found avenues to apply the research and its application to administrative practice during year one.

Overall general satisfaction data for year one indicates acceptance of the material and the presentation of the McREL professional developers. McREL also conducted evaluation of the sessions using its own instrument but that data is not available to us. The satisfaction data for the implementation session is quite strong. During the sessions, the participants found the reinforcement of the Balanced Leadership information helpful but they especially appreciated the opportunity to discuss and share their progress on building change initiatives with their peers. One group of principals and the curriculum director from one district took the implementation one step further. The monthly district administrative meeting included discussion of topics related to the Balanced Leadership material and a member of the staff development team attended the meeting.

Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency and W.I.U. staff development team members also monitored each participant’s electronically submitted action plan throughout year one. The team offered comments, suggestions and answered questions as the workshop series unfolded. It was clear to the team that those principals who had chosen to participate in the implementation series integrated the new knowledge and applied it more thoroughly than the non-participants. This outcome reinforces the notion that feedback and coaching are critical in the adult learning process.

Areas of future study include more in-depth analysis of building applications of the research, the concept of distributed leadership, and the impact of the principal training and building level change initiatives on student achievement.

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