

**TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT: THE INTEGRATIVE
ROLE OF PROJECT MANAGERS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Project management with its triple focus on time, cost and quality performance is proving to be an efficient and flexible way to get tasks/activities done. There are a variety of environmental forces interacting in today's business world that contribute to the increased demand for good project management across all sectors. The harsh economic environment in Nigeria accentuated by frequent changes in monetary and fiscal policies has made ground more fertile for sound management of projects in organizations. However, project management cannot succeed unless a good project manager is at the controls. The paper advocates that to successfully manage a project, project managers must adroitly build a cooperative network of alliances among different stakeholders. The paper recommends that effectiveness project managers should have both business and technical expertise. Furthermore their selection and appointment should be made by the upper level management. This will reduce unproductive conflicts and enhance active participation of project team members.

INTRODUCTION

All of mankind's greatest accomplishments – from building the great pyramids to discovering a cure for polio and putting a man on the moon began as a project. It is nearly impossible to pick up a newspaper or business periodical and not find something about projects. Project management is no longer a special-need management. It is rapidly becoming a standard way of doing business (Gray and Larson, 2008:10). The future promises an increase in the importance and the role of projects in contributing to the strategic direction of organizations. Project management, with its triple focus on time, cost and performance is proving to be an efficient and flexible way to get things done. There are a variety of environmental forces interacting in today's business world that contribute to the increased demand for good project management across all industries and sectors. Project management appears to be ideally suited for a business environment requiring accountability, flexibility, innovation, speed and continuous improvement.

Nowadays, emphasis is on development of an integrated project management process that focuses all projects effort toward the strategic plan of the organization and reinforces mastery of both the project management tools/techniques and the interpersonal skills necessary to orchestrate successful project completion. For some organizations integrating projects with strategy will require reengineering the entire business management process. For others, integration will mean carefully establishing linkages among piecemeal systems already in existence and altering the focus to one of a total system. At the individual level for some professionals to become effective project managers will require augmenting their leadership and team-building skills with modern project planning and control methods. For others it will require complementing their administrative skills with the capacity to inspire and lead a divergent cast of professionals to project completion. But project management is more than just a set of tools; it is a result-oriented management style that places a premium on building collaborative relationships among a diverse cast of characters (Kerzner, 2003).

This paper shall attempt to explain who a project manager is, his/her characteristics, and the major functions of a project manager in a given project environment. The paper attempts to present the skills and attributes necessary for a project manager. It also examines essential elements necessary for building and sustaining cooperative network of relationships ideal for successful project completion. Finally it presents the traits and skills that facilitate project managers to perform effectively in project management environment.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Meaning of Project, Project Management and Project Manager

Imaga et al (2003:1) define a project as a scientifically evolved work plan devised to achieve a specific objective within a specified period of time. For Gray and Larson (2008:5) a project is a complex, non-routine, one-time effort limited by time, budget, resources and performance specifications designed to meet customer needs. While project has several definitions, a simple and relatively inclusive one is that a project is a sequence of tasks performed to achieve a unique goal within a specific time frame (Mingus 2002). Uniqueness is the key word. It's what separates projects from operations and what makes them more difficult to manage. To standardize further on the definition of the word, the project management institute (PMI) in its Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Guide defines a project as a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique project or service. Project management is the planning, organizing, directing and controlling of organization's resources for a relatively short term objective that has been established to complete specific goals and objectives (Kerzner 2002:4). For the Project Management Institute (P.M.I), project management is "the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities, in order to meet or exceed stakeholders' needs and expectations. It is designed to make better use of existing resources by getting work to flow horizontally as well as vertically within the project organization. The growth of application of sound project management principles has come about more through necessity than through desire. The economic environment in Nigeria and indeed other developing countries characterized by

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frequent changes in monetary and fiscal policies have made grounds more fertile for sound management of projects in organizations. Project management cannot succeed unless a good project manager is at the controls. A project manager is the individual responsible for the success of a project in terms of time, cost and technical performance (Ewurum et al, 2009:35). He provides the management and leadership necessary to bind the people and group from different departments and companies working on a project into one managerial organization and team. He is one central intelligence who is totally concerned about a project and is committed to its success. The project manager throughout the life cycle of the project is able to see the project as a whole and also able to see how the various parts fit together. He is kind of an "ombudsman" between the customer and the top management. The project manager is a manager and therefore performs all the functions of a manager particularly as regards the success of the project.

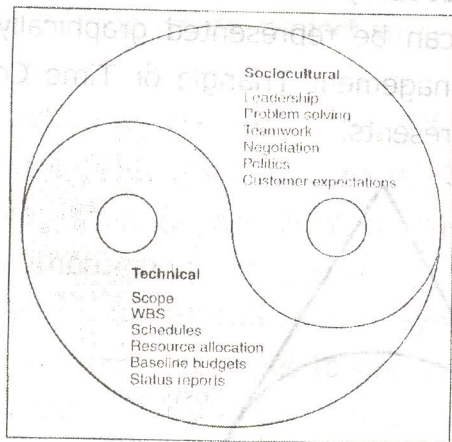


Fig. 1.0: The Technical and Sociocultural Dimensions of the Project Management Process.

Source: Gray C. F. and Larson, E.W (2008:15) New York: McGraw Hill.

As the diagram, figure 1.0 indicates the technical dimension represents the "science" of project management while the sociocultural dimension represents the "art" of managing a project. To succeed, the project manager must master the two aspects. Unfortunately, some project managers become

preoccupied with the planning and technical details of the project while some rely heavily on team dynamics and organizational politics. Could project managers balance their attention to both the technical and sociocultural dimensions of project management.

The two traditional measurements for project success are that the project be on time and within budgets. There are, however three additional measures of success that need to be considered:

- Were the project goals met (scope)
- Was the client satisfied? (Quality)
- Were there no casualties, either to the team or to the interrelationships? (Resources).

Unfortunately, many people concentrate so much on the first two-time and budget. They fail in the later three. While this may be good for the project managers and their organizations in the short term, in the long term it has a detrimental effect (Mingus, 2002:8). The interrelationships of these five measures of project success can be represented graphically in what is often referred to as the project management Triangle or Time Cost Scope Triangle (Fig. 2.0). The scope side represents

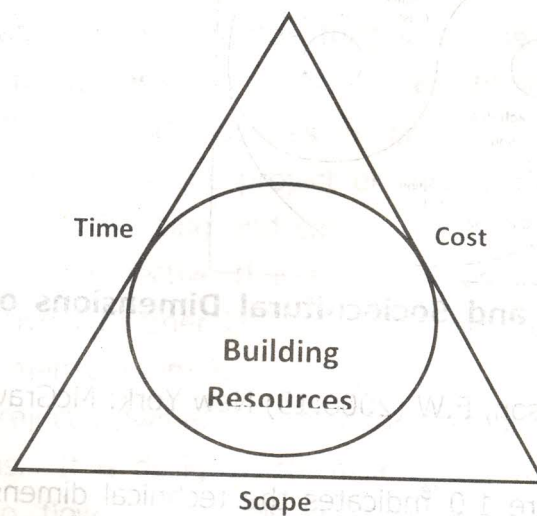


Fig. 2.0: Project Management Triangle

Source: Mingus, N. B. (2002:9): Teach Yourself Project Management in 24 hours, Madison: CWL Publishing.

The agreed upon project work and requirements, the cost side represents the total naira cost of the project and the time side represents the project duration. Inside the triangle, Resources refer to the people and equipment in use on the projects and Quality to how close the project is to satisfying client expectations. What the diagram portrays is that there is a relationship between the scope of a project, how long that project will take and how much it will cost. If the scope of a project is increased once estimates have been established for time and cost the only way to maintain the same relationship is also to increase time and/or cost.

Project and its Network of Stakeholders:

Traditionally, project management was viewed as the planning, scheduling and controlling of a project to meet the project's goals. While this is still a valid definition, it does not involve the critical human relations and project evaluation components that are generally performed during and after a project is completed. Without mincing words, project success depends on the cooperation of a wide range of individuals, many of whom do not directly report to project managers. Project stakeholders are people affected by the project (Mingus, 2002:47). They include the project sponsors, the team members and the clients. In government-related projects especially in Nigeria, stakeholders would also include the people authorizing spending such as president, governors, ministers, commissioner, legislators, council chairmen (mayors), and councilors and so on. It is beneficial for the project manager to understand the project stakeholders because they have vested interest in the outcome of the project. They will need to be informed about the feasibility of the project, may have a say in the project planning and approval and will want to receive up dates on the project status. For example a significant project whether it involves renovating a bridge, creating a new product or installing a new information system will likely involve in one way or another working with a number of different groups of stakeholders. First there is the core group of specialists assigned to complete the project. This group is likely to be supplemented at different times by professionals who work on specific segments of the project, second there are the

groups of people within the performing organization who are either directly or indirectly involved with the project. The most notable is the top management to whom the project manager is accountable. There are also other managers who provide resource and/or may be responsible for specific segments of the project, and administrative support services such as human resources, finance, etc. Depending on the nature of the project, there are a number of different groups outside the organization that influence the success of the project; the most important is the customer and/or client for which the project is designed (figure 3.0).

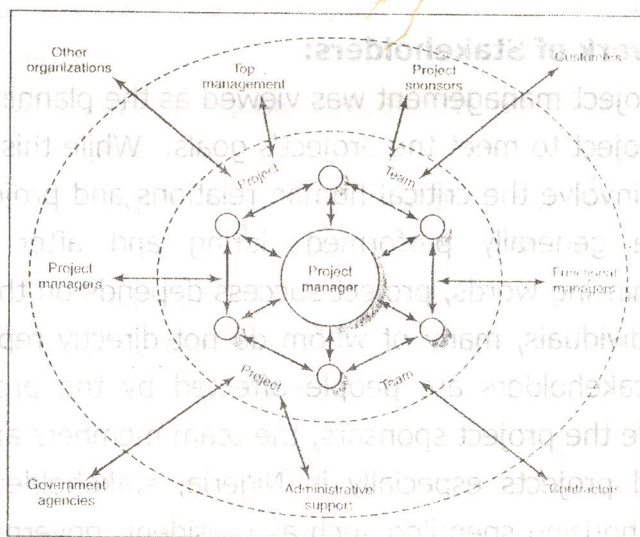


Figure 3.0: Network of Stakeholders

Each of these groups of individuals brings different expertise standards, priorities and agencies to the project. The sheer breath and complexity of the relationships that need to be managed distinguishes project management from regular management. Some project managers never break out of this vicious cycle. Others soon realize that authority does not equal influence and that being an effective project manager involves managing of a much more complex and expansive set of interface than they previously anticipated. They encounter a web of relationships that requires a much broader spectrum of influence than they felt was necessary or even possible.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROJECT MANAGER

Ultimately, the person with the greatest influence during the staffing phase of the project implementation is the project manager. The personal attributes and abilities of a project manager will either attract or deter highly desirable individuals. A project manager must be capable of evaluating risk and uncertainty. Other basic characteristics include:

Honesty and Integrity:

The project manager must exhibit honesty and integrity with his subordinates as well as line personnel thus fostering an atmosphere of trust. He or she should not make unfulfilled or often impossible promises such as immediate promotion for everyone if a follow-on contract is received. Honesty, integrity and an understanding of personnel problems can often eliminate many problems or conflicts that detract from the creation of a truly dedicated project environment.

Understanding of Project Technology and Business Management Principles:

Project managers should have both business management and technical expertise. They must understand the fundamental principles of management especially those involving the rapid development of temporary communication channels. Project managers should understand the technical implications of a problem, since they are ultimately responsible for all decision making. They may have a staff of professionals to assist them. However, many good technically oriented managers have failed because they have become too involved with the technical side of the project rather than the managerial side. There are several strong arguments for having a project manager who has more than just an understanding of the technology. Technical expertise is ideal, but it is not always possible because the individual tends to become a generalist and a general understanding without business management sense can become a major problem (Stewart, 1975:63).

Alertness and Quickness:

Because a project has a relatively short time duration, decision making must be rapid and effective. Therefore, managers must be alert and quick in their ability to receive "red flags" that can eventually lead to serious problems.

Versatility, Toughness and Energetic:

Project managers must demonstrate their versatility and toughness in order to keep subordinates dedicated to goal accomplishment. Executives (Top management) must realize that the project managers' objectives during staffing are to:

- Acquire the best available assets and try to improve them.
- Provide a good working environment for all personnel.
- Make sure that all resources are applied effectively and efficiently so that all constraints are conquered if possible.

Archibald (1976) defines a broader range of desired personal characteristics

- Flexibility and adaptability.
- Preference for initiative and leadership.
- Aggressiveness, confidence persuasiveness and verbal fluency.
- Ambition activity and forcefulness
- Effectiveness as a communicator and integrated with time, cost and human factors.
- Well organized and disciplined
- A generalist rather than a specialist
- Must be willing to devote time to planning and controlling.
- Willing to make decisions.
- Able to maintain a proper balance in the use of time.

SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT OF A PROJECT MANAGER

The most difficult decision facing upper-level management is the selection and appointment of the project managers. Some managers work best on long-

duration projects where decision-making can be slow; others may thrive on short duration projects that can result in a constant-pressure environment. Upper-level management must know the capabilities and shortcomings of their project managers. Martin (1976) has commented that project manager selection is an upper management responsibility. This is because a project manager is given license to cut across several organizational lines. Project management cannot succeed without good project managers. Thus if upper management sees fit to establish a project, it should certainly see fit to select a good man as its leader. Again a project manager is likely to achieve more if it is well known that he was selected and appointed by the upper-level management. Research consistently points out that project success is strongly influenced by the degree to which a project manager has the support of top management. Such support is reflected in and appropriate budget, responsiveness to unexpected needs and a clear signals to others in the organization of the importance of cooperation (Gray and Larson, 2008:326).

FUNCTIONS OF PROJECT MANAGERS

The functions of the project managers include, amongst others, the following:

- Participates with all responsible managers in developing the overall project objectives, strategies, budgets and schedules.
- Ensures the preparation of plans for all necessary project tasks to satisfy all concerned.
- Ensures the rapid and efficient start-up of the project.
- Ensures that all project activities are properly and realistically scheduled, budgeted, provided for, monitored and reported.
- Initiates action to remedy deficiencies and deviations noticed during execution and to monitor the execution of such actions.
- Ensures that payments are received for executed projects in accordance with the contractual terms.
- Arbitrates and resolves conflicts and differences between functional units

on specific project tasks.

- Maintains communication with higher management regarding problem areas and project status as well as initiates required decisions at higher organizational levels to achieve the project objectives.
- Performs or supervises the performance of all project planning, controlling, reporting, evaluation and direction functions.
- Conducts frequent, regular project evaluation and review meetings to identify current and future problems and initiates actions for their resolutions.
- Prepares and submits regular progress reports to higher management and to the customer if deemed necessary
- Ensures that all steps are taken to present all project deliverable items to the customer for acceptance and all project activities are closed out in an efficient and economic manner.
- Closely monitors close out activities including the disposal of surplus materials.

ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP NETWORKS

To successfully manage a project, a project manager must adroitly build a cooperative network among divergent stakeholders. Networks are mutually beneficial alliances that are generally governed by the law of reciprocity. The basic principle is that "one good deed deserves another and likewise, one bad deed deserves nd another (Baker, 1994). The primary way to gain cooperation is to provide resources and services for others in exchange for future resources and services. This is tantamount to the age-old maxim: "Quid pro quo (something for something)". Or in Nigeria's parlance: You scratch my back, I scratch yours". This means that the key premise holds true that in the final analysis "debit" and "credit" accounts must be balanced for cooperative relationships to work. Cohen and Bradford, (1990) describe the above exchange view of influence as "currencies" so if one wants to do business in a given environment for instance Nigeria, one should be prepared to use the appropriate currency and the

exchange rates can change over time as conditions change. These currencies are briefly discussed below:

Task-Related Currencies

This form of influence comes directly from the project manager's ability to contribute to others' accomplishing their work. The most significant form of this currency is the ability to respond to subordinates' requests for an additional manpower, money, or time to complete a segment of a project. This kind of currency is also evident in sharing resources with another project manager, functional manager who is in need. At a more personal level, it may simply mean providing direct assistance to a colleague in solving a technical problem. Also providing or recommending a colleague for promotion is another form of this currency.

Position-Related Currencies

This type of currency stems from the project manager's ability to enhance others' positions within their organizations. He can do this by giving subordinates challenging assignments that can aid their advancement by developing their skills and abilities. For instance being given a chance to prove yourself naturally generates a strong sense of gratitude.

Project managers confide that a key strategy useful for gaining the cooperation of professionals in other departments and organizations is figuring out how to make these people look good to their bosses. For example, a project manager worked with a subcontractor whose organization was heavily committed to total quality management (T Q M). The project manager made it a point in top-level briefing meetings to point out how quality improvement processes initiated by the subcontractor contributed to cost control and problem prevention. One of the strongest form of this currency is sharing contracts with other people. Helping individuals expand their own networks by introducing them to key people naturally engenders gratitude (Badaracco and Webb, 1995:25).

Inspiration-Related Currencies

This is perhaps the most powerful form of influence. Most inspirations derive from people's burning desire to make a difference and add meaning to their lives. Creating an existing, bold vision for a project can elicit extra-ordinary commitment. For instance, discovering a cure for a devastating disease, introducing a new social program that will help those in need or simply expanding a road via dualisation to reduce a major traffic bottleneck can provide opportunity for people to feel good about what they are doing and that they are making a difference. Just like the Enugu State government of Barr. S. I. Chime is currently doing on Agbani Road in Enugu State of Nigeria by dualizing a single lane road to decongest heavy traffic jam on the road.

Relationship-Related Currencies

These currencies have more to do with strengthening the relationship with someone that directly accomplishing the project tasks. The essence of this form of influence is forming a relationship that transcends normal professional boundaries and extends into the realm of friendship. Such relationships develop by giving personal and emotional backing. Picking people up when they are feeling down, boosting their confidence and providing encouragement naturally breed goodwill. Sharing a sense of humour and making difficult times fun is another form of this currency. Perhaps the most basic form of this currency is simply listening to other people (Kaplan, 1984:50). Psychologists suggest that most people have a strong desire to be understood and that relationships break down because the parties stop listening to each other.

Personal-Related Currencies

This deals with individual needs and an overriding sense of self-esteem. Some argue that self-esteem is a primary psychological need; the extent to which we can help others feel a sense of importance and personal worth will naturally generate goodwill. A project manager can enhance a colleague's sense of worth by sharing tasks that increases skills and abilities, delegating authority over work so that others experience ownership and allowing individuals to feel

comfortable stretching their abilities (Cabanis-Brewin, 1999:40). This form of currency can also be seen in sincere expressions of gratitude for the contribution of others. Care, however, must be exercised by project manager in expressing gratitude since it is easily abused when over used.

Effective project managers also find the time to regularly interact with many stakeholders. They keep in touch with suppliers, vendors, top management and other functional managers. In doing so they maintain visibility and familiarity with different parties, sustain friendships, discover opportunities to do favours, and understand the motives and needs of others. They remind people of commitments and champion the cause of their project. They also shape people's expectations (Kirk, 2000:60). Through frequent communication they alleviate people's concerns about the project, dispel rumours, warn people of potential problems and lay the ground work for dealing with set backs in a more effective manner.

Unless project managers take the initiative to build a network of supportive relationships, they are likely to see a manager or other stakeholder only when there is bad news or when they need a favour. Experienced project managers recognize the need to build relationships before they need them. They initiate contact with key stakeholders at times when there are no outstanding issues or problems and therefore no anxieties and suspicions. When one person views another as pleasant, credible and helpful based on past contact, he or she is much more likely to be responsive to requests for help and less confrontational when problems arise (Kouzes and Posner, 1993).

FACILITATING TRAITS AND SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE PROJECT MANAGERS

Many researchers and authors have generated list after list of skills and attributes necessary for an effective project manager (Peter, 2002:4; Pinto and Mantel, 1990). When reviewing these lists, one gets the impression that to be a successful project manager requires someone with super human powers. Without much ado, not everyone has the right stuff to be an effective project

manager. Nevertheless there are some facilitating traits and skills, that can be developed to perform the job. These are:

i. **Systems thinker:**

Project managers must be able to take a holistic rather than a reductionist approach to projects. Instead of breaking up a project into individual pieces (planning, budget) and managing it by understanding each part, a system perspective focuses on trying to understand how relevant project factors collectively interact to produce project outcome (Pinto and Steven, 1987). The key to success then becomes managing the interaction between different parts and not the parts themselves.

ii. **Personal Integrity:**

One problem new project managers experience is that it takes time to establish a sense of character and competency. Character and competency are often demonstrated when they are tested such as when difficult problems have to be solved. Before one can lead and manage others, one has to be able to lead and manage oneself. The way out is establishing a firm sense of who one is, what one stands for and how one behaves. This inner strength provides the buoyancy to endure the ups and downs of the project life cycle and the credibility essential to sustaining the trust of others.

iii. **Proactive:**

Good project managers take action before it is needed to prevent small concerns from escalating into major problems. They spend the majority of their time working within their sphere of influence to solve problems and not dwelling on things they have little control over. Effective project managers are not whiners.

iv. **High Emotional Intelligence (EQ):**

Project management is not for the meek. Project managers have to have command of their emotions and be able to respond to others constructively when

things get out of control. So emotional intelligence is the ability or skill to perceive, assess and manage the emotions of oneself and others (Bradberry and Graves, 2005).

v. General Business Perspective:

Because the primary role of a project manager is to integrate the contributions of different business and technical disciplines, it is important that project manager has a grasp of business fundamentals and how the different functional disciplines interact to contribute to a successful project outcome.

vi. Effective Time Management:

Time is the scarcest resource to a project manager. Project managers need to be able to budget their time wisely and quickly adjust their priorities. They need to balance their interactions and integrations so well that no one feels ignored.

vii. Skillful Politician

Project managers need to deal effectively with a wide network of stakeholders and win their support and get endorsement of their project. They need to sell the virtues of their project without compromising the truth.

viii. Optimist

Project managers have to display a can do attitude and spirit. They have to be able to find rays of sunlight in a dismal day and keep people's attention positive. A good sense of humour and a playful attitude are often a project manager's greatest asset and strength (Posner, 1987:53-55).

CONCLUSION

Good management brings about order and stability by formulating plans and objectives, designing structures and procedures, monitoring results against plans and taking corrective action when necessary. On the other hand, leadership involves recognizing and articulation of the need to significantly alter

the direction and operations of project, aligning people to the new direction and motivating them to work together to overcome hurdles produced by the change in the project environment. There is no one management style or formula for being an effective project manager. The world of project management is too complicated for formulas. One of the things that makes good project managers so valuable to an organization is that they have the ability to both manage and lead a project. In doing so they recognize the need to manage project interfaces and build a social network that allows them to find out what needs to be done and obtain the cooperation necessary to achieve it. Experienced project managers realize that "what goes around comes around" and try at all cost to avoid antagonizing players for quick success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. No two projects are exactly the same. Therefore for effective project management result each project must be recognized as a project by top management so that the project manager has the delegated authority necessary to enforce roles, procedures and standards for success.
2. Project managers should have both business and technical expertise. This will help them to understand the fundamental principles of management especially those involving the rapid development of temporary communication channels.
3. Project managers must be alert and quick in their ability to perceive "red flags" in the project environment that can eventually lead to serious problems.
4. Project management will not succeed without good project managers. The selection process should be done by the upper-level management. A project manager is far more likely to accomplish desired goals if it is obvious that he was appointed by the top management.
5. The project managers should be allowed to select most of their team members. Team building involves a whole spectrum of management skills necessary to identify, commit and integrate the various task groups from the traditional organization into a single project management system.

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- 6. Project managers should understand the interaction of organizational and behavioural elements in the project environment in order to build conducive condition to their team's motivational needs. This will greatly minimize unproductive conflicts and enhance active participation of team members.
- 7. Training programmes for project managers can enhance their efficiency and effectiveness in the project environment. Training programmes, that can improve their emotional intelligence, and political skills should be given.
- 8. Project managers should be taught stress and time management skills to empower and enhance their effectiveness and efficiency.



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