

# COLLECTIVE IMPACT

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In a nutshell...*Collective Impact is the long term commitment by a group from different or similar sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem; using a structured form of collaboration.*

## Introduction

Conventionally the social sector has operated mainly on an approach known as *isolated impact* in its attempts to solve social problems. In an ever increasingly complex and interdependent world it became evident that this was not always the best way.

Coalitions, associations, co-operations or partnerships are not new, alliances for a particular purpose are also long-standing. Organisations have attempted to solve social problems by collaboration for decades; much of this effort produces little sustainable or evidenced results.

In the Winter 2011, Stanford Social Innovation Review, John Kania & Mark Kramer of FSG Consulting published an article which introduced their Collective Impact (CI) framework.

Their research revealed that successful impact typically had five conditions:-

- **Common Agenda**
- **Shared Measurement System**
- **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**
- **Continuous Communication**
- **Backbone Support Organisations**

They hypothesised that these conditions offered a more powerful and realistic paradigm for social progress than the prevailing model of isolated impact.

<b>Isolated Impact vs. Collective Impact</b>	
<b>Isolated Impact</b>	<b>Collective Impact</b>
Funders select individual grantees that offer the most promising solutions.	Funders and Implementers understand that social problems, and their solutions, arise from the interaction of many organisations within a larger system.
Non-profits work separately and compete to produce the greatest independent impact.	Progress depends on working toward the same goal and measuring the same things.
Evaluation attempts to isolate a particular organisation's impact.	Large scale impact depends on increasing cross-sector alignment and learning among many organisations.
Large scale change is assumed to depend on scaling a single organisation.	Corporate and government sectors are essential partners.
Corporate and government sectors are often disconnected from the efforts of foundations and non-profits.	Organisations actively coordinate their action and share lessons learned.

Following this publication a revolution occurred. Response to the article was remarkable;

countless community organisations, government agencies, philanthropics and socially responsible businesses embraced CI with the hope of achieving deep and durable impact.

In the 2012 Stanford Social Innovation Review, Fay Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer took an in-depth look at how organisations of all types were implementing the CI approach.

They introduced three pre-conditions which they suggest must be in place before the launch of a CI initiative:-

- An **Influential Champion**
- Adequate **financial resources**
- **Urgency for change**

The article also describes three distinct phases of establishment:

- Phase 1: Initiate Action - understand who is involved and what is currently underway, gather baseline data for a change case and initiate governance that includes the influential champion as above.
- Phase 2: Organise for Impact – this brings the 5 conditions of CI to life.
- Phase 3: Sustain Action and Impact – stakeholders’ actions are coordinated, progress is monitored and improvement is continuous.

The conditions of CI are further defined in the 2012 article.

Two steps are identified for setting a **Common Agenda**

- Creating Boundaries
- Developing the Strategic Action Framework

A **Shared Measurement System** was described in the first article, with web based technologies cited as an enabler; this is reiterated as a first step. The next step for participants is continuous improvement, refining their work based on learning.

## **Collective Impact Evaluation**

Our investigation led us to expert Mark Cabaj (2014), a Tamarack Institute associate. He refers to shared measurement as “tough but necessary”, he suggests:

- Use of a common set of community and programme indicators is important for Collective Impact.
- Shared measurement systems
  - Encourage local organisations to align their efforts on shared outcomes
  - Enables them to collectively track and evaluate their collective progress
  - Give ability to benchmark their results against others
  - Can lead to improvement in the quality and credibility of data
- A good shared measurement system is supported by
  - Skilled facilitators
  - A web-based data-system
  - Adequate financial resources
- There are three distinct models of shared measurement systems
  - Shared Measurement Platforms - a set of shared measures using web-based tools to collect, analyse and report on performance

- Comparative Performance Systems - report on the same measures using the same processes
- Adaptive Learning Systems - a systematic and facilitated process of evaluation, learning and planning

It can be a lengthy process to agree on a set of indicators that are shared and adequately reflect the important nuances of each participant's work. Problems on agreeing on shared measurement can be amplified by funders and policy organisations demanding that participants meet their individual requirements. If funders of CI are serious about organisations using shared measurement, they need to align their funding, administrative, and data requirements with other funders; whilst understanding that many activities and results of community change efforts cannot be quantified. CI initiatives require both hard and soft data to provide timely, rich and context sensitive feedback on what is being achieved. The benefits of developing workable shared measurement systems appear to significantly outweigh the costs and challenges of doing so. Many CI efforts stall, stagnate, or even implode because participants:

- Can't agree on which community activities and outcomes are important to target and track
- Fail to devise a way to measure and report on them
- Prove unwilling to use the feedback to inform their thinking and planning

## ***Implications for knowing and showing what has changed***

*We have to continuously ask ourselves if we are measuring what counts, or just counting what we can. "If consensus is reached (in building a common agenda) does it represent bold action or the least objectionable collective decision" (Carson, 2012, p. 3) and "... I worry that the relentless focus on short-term data can trap groups into doing the most measurable activities, not necessarily the right ones." (Schmitz, 2012, p.1)*

*Some of the most impactful things that are achieved exist within a person. "It's worth noting that sometimes initiatives ... are designed explicitly for private healing and not for assessment purposes and true community engagement respects this." (Woolcock, 2015, p. 5). This challenges us to think less about measurement and more about meaning.*

*Who is doing the measuring, is as important as what is being measured. "The Collective Impact core principle of 'shared measurement' is still largely left to university-based researchers to both determine and implement, flying in the face of letting the community itself gauge what is reasonable social return on investment." (Woolcock, 2015, p. 11)*

*"We are left wondering if our current measurement technologies can demonstrate some of the most important changes that come out of collaborative effort. ... collective impact has emphasized the structural, strategic and measurable, to succeed long-term, there must be more attention paid to the cultural." (Woolcock, 2015, p. 11)*

*As Holmgren puts it "even as we raise the flag of innovation to inspire us, we pledge allegiance to evidence-based practice, which in turn can limit innovative exploration." (Holmgren, 2015, p. 15). We need to ensure that our pursuit of "what works" does not come at the cost of "what could be".*

*Rigidity within our measurement approach may actually disguise from us what is unfolding before our eyes "Setting outcomes as rigid expressions of what is being pursued may be a barrier to understanding how impact actually unfolds." (Holmgren, 2015, p. 16)*

Whilst much can be found on this topic, the field of evaluation has struggled to develop concepts and methods that are useful in the complex work of community change. CI amplifies this challenge. Our investigation again led us to Mark Cabaj; he suggests there are 5 simple rules to consider when evaluating CI.

Rule 1: Use evaluation to enable – rather than limit – strategic learning.

- Plan evaluation that enables participants to learn and shift their strategy
- Embrace complexity, adaptive leadership, and a developmental approach
- Make CI partners - not external funders – the primary audience

Rule 2: Employ multiple designs for multiple use

- It is difficult to design a "one size fits all" model
- CI efforts require multiple processes employing a variety of methods
- Flexible evaluation designs are more likely to provide CI decision makers with the relevant, useable, and timely evaluative feedback they need to do their work properly.

Rule 3: Shared measurement if necessary, but not necessarily shared measurement

- settling on key outcomes and measures can sharpen thinking about what partners are trying to accomplish
- Five things to keep in mind while crafting a common data infrastructure. Shared Measurement:
  - is critical but not essential,
  - can limit strategic thinking
  - requires "systems change"
  - is time consuming and expensive
  - can get in the way of action

Rule 4: Seek out intended and unintended outcomes

- understand and capture all of the ripple effects of their activities.
- conventional evaluation thinking and methods have multiple blind spots when it comes to complex change efforts.

Rule 5: Seek out contribution – not attribution – to community changes

- contribution analysis is a central part of evaluation strategy using evidence
- participants need to sort out the contribution of their change efforts
- participants need to acknowledge that multiple factors are likely behind an observed change or changes and seek to understand the "real value" of the CI effort activities to the change

### ***Implications for adapting and innovating (in the direction of our purpose)***

- *We need to take a strategic learning approach which means using evaluation to help organisations or groups learn quickly from their work so they can learn from and adapt their strategies.*
- *It is essential that we do not narrowly focus on outcomes but also consider the implications of the wider system that we are working within "A robust learning and evaluation process is even more critical in community-wide change efforts" as " social innovators are trying to change the dynamic and complex systems that underlie social problems" (Cabaj and Weaver, 2016, p.7)*
- *Using the right evaluative approach within a strategic learning framework will ensure that the effort put into measurement is not wasted. "It also will be welcomed by evaluators who want to build measures for outcomes that matter - social innovators will use the feedback, rather than consign it to the shelf" (Cabaj and Weaver, 2016, p.8)*
- *"Strategy and evaluation are inextricably linked, and we view evaluation as a systematic inquiry based on data and evidence to facilitate intentional learning and continuous improvement" (Retrieved from [www.basalinitiatives.com/strategic-learning-evaluation](http://www.basalinitiatives.com/strategic-learning-evaluation))*
- *We need to be prepared to develop meaningful answers to the questions that our inquiry raises "To realize its full potential, evaluation for strategic learning requires sincere leadership commitment—beyond lip service—to learning and adaptation." (Williams, 2014, p.2)*

## **Critiques of Collective Impact**

Since the 2012 publication, considerable energy and resource has been poured into CI models and approaches around the world, resulting in a substantial body of knowledge and work surrounding the development and critique of the original model. These critiques are summarised below.

### CI is easy to implement poorly

A danger of following models can be the oversimplification or limited understanding of the effort required for successful implementation. Ironically, the simplicity that made CI so popular is often cited as its drawback.

- “The model in and of itself may not be exclusionary, but its implementation is ...” (Holmgren, 2015, p. 11)
- “... collective impact has emphasized the structural, strategic and measurable, to succeed long-term, there must be more attention paid to the cultural.” (Woolcock, 2015, p. 11)
- “We’ve seen that until there is an enabling environment that allows all stakeholders - nonprofits, corporations, foundations, philanthropists, media, and the government - to work together as a system towards one or more goals, collective impact remains elusive.” (Nundy & Chandler, 2015, p. 1)

### CI emphasises ‘cooperation’ and inhibits creativity and effectiveness

*Collective impact or coordinated blindness?* (Boumgarden & Branch, 2013) notes that a collective approach “is beneficial only when it centralises effectively and identifies the right solutions” (Boumgarden & Branch, 2013, p. 1). The assumption inherent within CI is that participating organisations are universally effective, or know the best approach to solving the challenges they work on. Boumgarden & Branch challenge this assumption, concluding that “a focus on “collective impact” over and above competition often results in coordinated but misdirected effort” and that “... the gap between collective impact and coordinated blindness is unfortunately small.” (Boumgarden & Branch, 2013, p. 1).

- “The collective impact approach actually limits collective wisdom” (Carson, 2012, p. 2)
- “Minority groups’ feedback and solutions get ignored” (Le, 2015)
- “we pledge allegiance to evidence-based practice, which in turn can limit innovative exploration.” (Holmgren, 2015, p. 15)
- “...the relentless focus on short-term data can trap groups into doing the most measurable activities, not necessarily the right ones.” (Schmitz, 2012)
- “we need an environment in which stakeholders can perform their individual roles optimally while also collaborating with each other effectively.” (Nundy & Chandler, 2015, p. 1)
- “If consensus is reached (in building a common agenda) does it represent bold action or the least objectionable collective decision” (Carson, 2012, p. 3)
- “does not include policy change and systems change as essential and intentional outcomes” (Wolff, 2016)

### CI excludes communities and reinforces power differentials

One of the most consistent and identifiable challenges and critiques of CI is the perpetuation of top-down solutions. “... many Collective Impact efforts are still all about institutions and

organisations doing things to communities, not with communities.” (Schmitz, 2012)

- “The big miss for me is a lack of mention of formative and ongoing public participation in large-scale change.” (Holmgren, 2015, p. 2)
- “Collective Impact does not set a priority of engaging those most affected by the issue in their collaborative impact processes.” (Wolff, 2016)
- “Groups should ask how truly inclusive their tables are and whether they are mitigating the natural power differentials between funders and grantees, large social service providers and small faith-based efforts so that there is trust and honesty as they work together on solutions.” (Schmitz, 2012)
- Collective Impact “Creates and maintains an ‘illusion of inclusion’...[and]...backbone organisations become gatekeepers of resources” (Le, 2015)

### CI kills direct service delivery

Although not inherent to CI, an increasingly common by-product of poorly-implemented CI has been well documented by Le: “Another frustration I’ve seen is funders shifting the funding priorities from direct service work to collective impact efforts and backbone organisations” (2013), and, “[Collective Impact] diverts funding away from direct services.” (Le, 2015)

The critique drastically simplified and summarised above can be synthesised into comment on the framing of the original five conditions for CI. They can be seen as functional and prescriptive, and that has been their common interpretation. Cabaj and Weaver (2016) addressed this shortfall with a proposed ‘upgrading’ of the five conditions. This approach was to move from a functional ‘management’ paradigm to a more aspirational ‘movement building’ paradigm. This upgrade introduces a new iteration of the five conditions of collective impact, one which draws on the world of software development for its name - *Collective Impact 3.0* (CI 3.0). This phrasing would logically retrospectively place Kania & Kramer (2011) as the codifiers of *Collective Impact 2.0* (CI 2.0), and the various collaborations that preceded this as CI 1.0.

## **Implications for leadership**

- As Schmitz, 2012 notes, leadership in collaboration “...will require dedicated engagement, patience, deliberation, debate and conflict.” A key leadership challenge is to give collaborations the time they require to achieve. This will involve careful management and messaging to Boards, funders, and agency hierarchies.
- During a roundtable on the topic of leadership in collaborations hosted by Stanford Social Innovation Review, leaders kept using the word “vulnerability” to describe what is needed among the collaborators. (Schmitz, 2012). This is not a term commonly associated with leadership and so there is a need for leaders who embark on a collaborative journey to acknowledge their limitations, be open to making mistakes, and reflect on their own contribution.
- Leaders also need to challenge themselves about the power differentials that exist in their efforts. “Groups should ask how truly inclusive their tables are and whether they are mitigating the natural power differentials between funders and grantees, large social service providers and small faith-based efforts so that there is trust and honesty as they work together on solutions.” (Schmitz, 2012)
- Leaders must also be prepared to assist their teams to work outside their normal boundaries. “For Collective Impact to work, we need to overcome our ingrained biases that segment roles and responsibilities in such a manner that, in effect, no one is responsible for the big picture.” (Holmgren, 2015, p. 3)
- Balancing the tension between risk and innovation and creating an environment of permissiveness is another key challenge. “Service providers may be less likely to offer up novel ideas in an environment where everyone wants a high chance of success at low risk.” (Holmgren, 2015, p. 16)
- Leaders need to be able to see beyond the limits of their own collaboration “... they must recognize their own limitations and what they are excluding from their agenda that others are acting on.” (Holmgren, 2015, p. 17)
- Finally leaders must embrace new technologies that allow them to communicate across a broad spectrum of stakeholders, and do so as efficiently as possible “I suggest that if we want to make time for Collective Impact, we must make time to learn how to communicate more fully, more comprehensively, and at a much faster rate than traditional methods allow and support.” (Holmgren, 2015, p. 18)

### Collective Impact 3.0

Shifting leadership paradigms introduces a new framing and language for each of the five conditions and sets a lens that, subject to meaningful interpretation, could address many of the critiques summarised above.

From	To
<b>The Leadership Paradigm</b>	
Management	Movement Building
<b>The Five Conditions</b>	
Common Agenda	Community Aspiration
Shared Measurement	Strategic Learning
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	High Leverage Activities
Continuous Communication	Inclusive Community Engagement
Backbone	Containers for Change

*Cabaj and Weaver, 2016*

### New Zealand Case Studies

We researched four New Zealand collaborative projects that are using the CI framework. Takitimu Ora, based in Hastings, is a Whanau Ora project aimed at ensuring that 'every child succeeds'. Shine Porirua has a similar goal of improving educational outcomes for young people in Porirua. The Ruapehu Whanau Transformation project aims to transform whanau in the Ruapehu Rohe across five key areas of education, employment, housing, health and social wellbeing. Together Hurunui grew from an MSD community research project and has as its goal that 'all people in Hurunui are valued and connected'.

It's interesting to note that three of the four projects used the CI model at the suggestion, and in some cases the requirement of funders. Te Pou Matakana, the North Island Whanau Ora commissioning agency required the two Whanau Ora projects to adopt the CI model. These two projects felt that they were already working intuitively in a collaborative way, but that CI provided a more rigorous framework with a focus on data collection and measurement of results to inform their work. (E. Mikaere-Most, Project Manager, Ruapehu Whanau Transformation, personal communication, May 10, 2017, & L. Ratapu, Project Manager, Takitimu Ora, personal communication, May 22 2017). Having a Maori world view with a focus on collectivism and a holistic approach may well have facilitated the use of the CI model.

Both Whanau Ora projects have also framed CI within a more meaningful Maori context. Takitimu Ora has applied the concept of a waka to illustrate the five conditions of CI and to reinforce the idea of journeying together towards a common goal. This can also be seen to be part of the strategic learning approach that they have taken to not only focus on outcomes but also consider how best to learn about how they are collaborating. The use of the waka gave them a language to explore this in more depth.

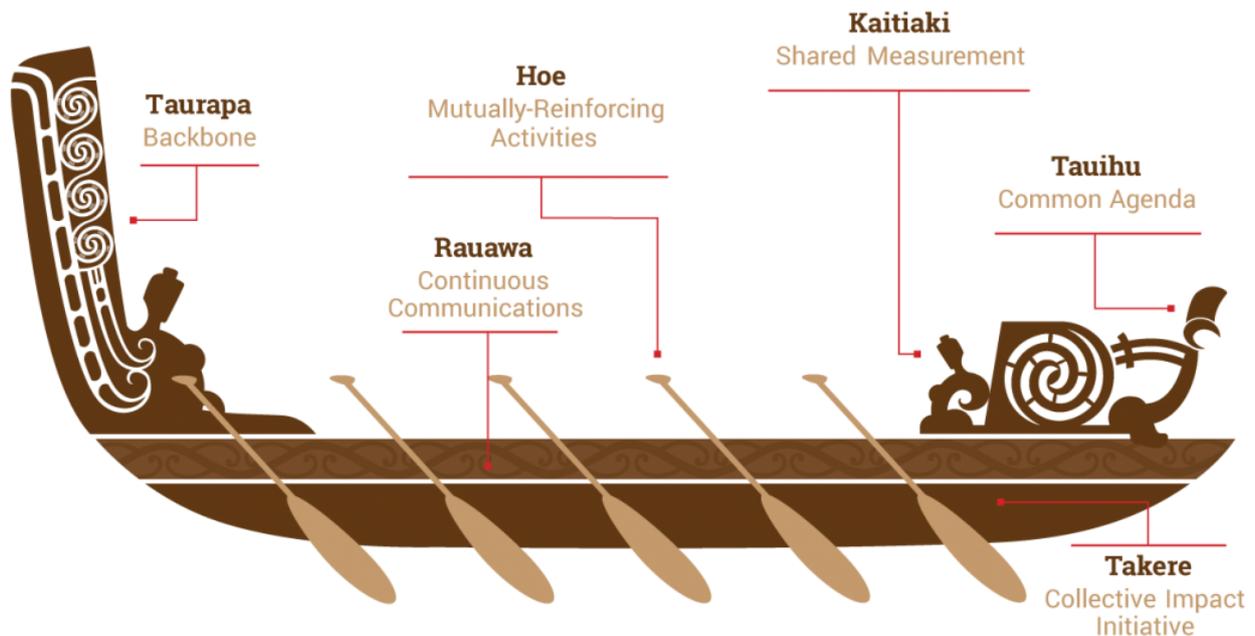


Image retrieved from [www.takitimuora.co.nz/our-vision/](http://www.takitimuora.co.nz/our-vision/)

Takitimu Ora have also applied the shared values of whanaungatanga (community engagement), amorangi (leadership), matauranga (knowledge) and rangatiratanga (Maori self determination) to their way of working, thereby adapting and extending the CI framework to meet their own needs (Retrieved from [www.takitimuora.co.nz/our-vision/](http://www.takitimuora.co.nz/our-vision/)). The Ruapehu Whanau Transformation project is supported by Iwi who have stated that they look to a 1,000-year horizon for their people and working backwards from the future they wanted to see (E. Mikaere-Most, personal communication, May 10 2017).

Aspects of CI 3.0 can be illustrated by our four New Zealand case studies. The Ruapehu Transformation Project used an inclusive community engagement approach right from the start to agree on community aspirations and develop their programme of action. They say that for change to be sustainable it must be led by the target group (E. Mikaere-Most, personal communication, May 10 2017). This concept was not part of the original CI framework and was noted as one of its limitations by Cabaj and Weaver (2016).

The Ruapehu Transformation Project related that 'Koro Ruapehu', the personalisation of the sacred mountain, has grounded their community change movement and given it meaning, brought participants together and given them an emotional connection (E. Mikaere-Most, personal communication, May 10 2017). This shows elements of community aspiration and movement building that illustrates the evolution of CI, but adds to this a deeper sense of Wairua that gives life to what they are working on.

The need for policy change at times to help achieve community outcomes is shown by Shine Porirua. Its literacy project has achieved highly successful outcomes and Shine is now trying to use these results to effect system change. Ironically, although the Ministry of Education has been a part of the collaboration, Shine's attempts to get it to adopt and implement its literacy programme more widely, including in teacher training, are a "work in progress" according to a spokesperson for Shine (M. Gillon, Chairperson, Shine Porirua, personal communication, June 3 2017).

## Reflection on the NZ context

Some interesting observations can be drawn from these New Zealand CI initiatives. For instance, Takitimu Ora and Together Hurunui both took a fairly visionary approach in the articulation of their common agenda - speaking about the outcomes they wish to achieve rather than the work they wish to do - this is in contrast with the more functional approach typically seen. What might have been the effect if they had focussed instead on simply building programmes in collaboration? Both Whanau Ora projects framed CI within a more meaningful Maori context, adapting and improving upon the standard CI 2.0 and surpassing aspects of CI 3.0 even. How might they have fared in the absence of this contextualisation? And what might have been the effect if each had been following CI 3.0 rather than 2.0 - would their struggles have been superceded?

What we are seeing in these New Zealand examples is a 'lifting of the head' towards a more aspirational framework for collective impact than has been seen before. The deep community engagement, visionary framing, and explicit cultural contextualisation are all good examples of thinking that is a step beyond CI 3.0. If the shift from the functional 'continuous communication' of CI 2.0 to the more aspirational 'inclusive community engagement' of CI 3.0 indicates a spectrum of sorts, what would exist beyond CI 3.0? Could it be that the next paradigm, CI 3.1, is 'horizon thinking' as used by Ruapehu Whanau Transformation? What other concepts might be adopted from Te Ao Maori? The opportunity that sits in front of us all as practitioners of CI in NZ is to explore the edges of this concept and beyond, and advance our own outcomes locally whilst assisting the global CI movement to learn and advance.

From	To	Where to?
<b>The Leadership Paradigm</b>		
Management (CI 2.0)	Movement Building (CI 3.0)	Horizon thinking (3.1 NZ)
<b>The Five Conditions</b>		
Common Agenda	Community Aspiration	<i>How might this emerge if we were to improve the model for NZ based on what we now know?</i>
Shared Measurement	Strategic Learning	
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	High Leverage Activities	
Continuous Communication	Inclusive Community Engagement	
Backbone	Containers for Change	

## CONCLUSION

New Zealand's unique bicultural setting provides an opportunity to advance our own collective practices, and inform and influence around the world as well. If we were to attempt to codify a CI 3.1 for NZ, would there be five conditions? Would they come from Te Ao Maori, modern pakeha New Zealand, or somewhere else entirely? How might we enable or even invite the most meaningful contributions from any individual in our increasingly connected global society, and ensure that we can all maximise our individual efforts as one collective?

- What is the impact of Wairuatanga on the binding vision of a collaboration?
- How has the use of Maori symbolism shaped the learning that comes from collaboration?
- What does the merging of co-operation and competition look like?
- If we embrace Kotahitanga who is engaging with whom?
- Does the history of Iwi organisations and their role as Kaitiaki provide a model for backbone organisations?

These are questions that we can all play a part in answering. As said so eloquently by Liz Weaver (2016) of the Tamarack Institute: "the success of the next generation of community change efforts depends, in part, on the willingness of CI participants not to settle for small revisions to the original version of the CI framework. Instead, they must take on the challenge to continually upgrade the approach based on ongoing learning of what it takes to truly transform communities. The CI approach is – and always will be – unfinished business; something that through practice, evolves and is continuously improved."

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