Principal Managerial Leadership in Managing Professional Learning Communities in Elementary Schools

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Abstract:

This study examines the critical role of principals in managing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to enhance teacher professional development and improve the quality of education in elementary schools. This study used a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The results indicate that principals play a dynamic managerial role in the success of PLCs through comprehensive management functions, including planning, organizing, mobilizing, and controlling (POAC). Specifically, principals conduct in-depth needs analyses based on educational data, strategically plan and organize resources, and actively engage teachers in collaborative activities that foster a culture of participatory learning. Furthermore, regular reflection and data-driven evaluation ensure that the learning community remains aligned with school goals, leading to measurable improvements in teaching practices and student learning outcomes. This study highlights the importance of principal leadership in overcoming challenges such as resistance to change and limited integration of digital platforms. This study contributes to the literature by emphasizing the importance of principals' managerial skills in effectively managing PLCs to achieve sustainable education reform. Practical implications suggest that principals need to focus on data-driven planning, resource optimization, and ongoing teacher engagement to strengthen PLCs in schools.

Keywords: *Professional Learning Community, Leadership, Teacher Professional Development*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran penting kepala sekolah dalam mengelola Komunitas Pembelajaran Profesional (KPP) untuk meningkatkan pengembangan profesional guru dan memperbaiki kualitas pendidikan di sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah memainkan peran manajerial yang dinamis dalam keberhasilan KPP melalui fungsi manajemen yang komprehensif, meliputi perencanaan, pengorganisasian, penggerakan, dan pengendalian (POAC). Secara khusus, kepala sekolah melakukan analisis kebutuhan secara mendalam berdasarkan data pendidikan, merencanakan dan mengorganisir sumber daya secara strategis, serta melibatkan guru secara aktif dalam kegiatan kolaboratif yang mendorong budaya pembelajaran partisipatif. Selain itu, refleksi rutin dan evaluasi berbasis data memastikan bahwa komunitas pembelajaran tetap selaras dengan tujuan sekolah, yang mengarah pada perbaikan yang terukur dalam praktik pengajaran dan hasil belajar siswa. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya kepemimpinan

kepala sekolah dalam mengatasi tantangan seperti resistensi terhadap perubahan dan terbatasnya integrasi platform digital. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada literatur dengan menekankan pentingnya kemampuan manajerial kepala sekolah dalam mengelola KPP secara efektif untuk mencapai reformasi pendidikan yang berkelanjutan. Implikasi praktisnya menunjukkan bahwa kepala sekolah perlu fokus pada perencanaan berbasis data, optimalisasi sumber daya, dan keterlibatan guru secara berkelanjutan untuk memperkuat KPP di sekolah.

Kata Kunci: *Komunitas Pembelajaran Profesional, Kepemimpinan, Pengembangan Profesional Guru*

INTRODUCTION

In implementing the Independent Curriculum, learning communities serve as a strategic foundation for enhancing teacher competence, fostering instructional innovation, and strengthening students' character development. A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a group of educators and educational personnel who collaboratively and continuously engage in collective learning, with clear, measurable goals, to improve instructional quality and positively impact student learning outcomes (Sujatmiko, 2023). Consistent with this view, Hudson (2024) and Ahn, J. Flores, D. Welton, & Hackmann (2025) describe PLCs as structured collaborative spaces that enable professionals to expand their knowledge, refine pedagogical practices, and address shared challenges in everyday professional contexts. The institutional importance of learning communities is further reinforced through the Circular Letter of the Director General of Teachers and Education Personnel of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 4263/B/HK.04.01/2023, which mandates the optimization of school-based learning communities centered on student learning through inquiry cycles. In addition, the regulation emphasizes the necessity of continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, aligned with advances in science, technology, and the arts, and encourages schools to schedule regular teacher learning days as part of collaborative professional practice. From both theoretical and regulatory perspectives, PLCs are positioned as a central mechanism for improving instructional quality and sustaining teacher professionalism within ongoing educational reform.

Despite the strong theoretical foundations and policy mandates supporting PLC implementation, their realization at the school level has not consistently aligned with these expectations. While PLCs and CPD are conceptually framed as systematic and sustainable collaborative processes, empirical evidence indicates that not all schools have successfully established or managed learning communities in meaningful and sustained ways. This discrepancy highlights a critical gap between normative frameworks and actual practice, particularly in the managerial execution of CPD activities. One pivotal factor influencing this gap is the school principal's role as an educational manager. According to the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Number 7 of 2025, principals are designated as leaders and managers

of educational units, responsible for cultivating a conducive school climate, including fostering a collaborative learning culture through learning communities. From a management perspective, this role encompasses the core functions of planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC), as articulated by Asni (2025) and Hartono et al. (2023). However, in-depth empirical studies examining how principals enact these managerial functions in managing PLC-based CPD remain limited. This gap suggests that the primary issue lies not in the absence of policy or conceptual clarity regarding PLCs, but in how principals' managerial practices are operationalized to bridge the divide between regulatory intentions and the practical realities of improving instructional quality in schools.

A growing body of research has examined the development and impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in schools. Previous studies have shown that PLCs play a significant role in strengthening school capacity and improving educational quality through collaborative professional development (Khasawneh et al., 2023; Ni et al., 2023). Other research emphasizes the characteristics of effective PLCs, including shared vision, collaboration, and reflective practice, as key factors in improving teaching and learning processes (Lee & Ip, 2023; Yu & Chao, 2023). Several studies also report that PLCs positively influence teacher professional development and instructional improvement (Liu & Yin, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). In addition, learning communities implemented through lesson study models have been found to improve instructional quality and collaborative learning practices (Li et al., 2023; Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). Although these studies clearly demonstrate the importance of PLCs, they generally position principals as facilitators rather than as managerial leaders who systematically manage learning communities.

More recent studies have begun to address leadership and management aspects within PLC implementation; however, significant gaps remain. Research on data-driven learning community management highlights limitations in the use of data rather than in-depth examination of leadership practices (Rabelo, Rodrigues, Nobre, Isotani, & Zárate, 2024; Sarıkaya, 2023). Other studies stress the importance of principal support for sustaining learning communities but do not explain how principals carry out managerial functions such as planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (Baco et al., 2025; To et al., 2023). Similarly, studies discussing challenges and opportunities in managing teacher learning communities acknowledge leadership influence without explicitly positioning the principal as the central managerial actor (Grimm, 2024; Setyasari et al., 2025). Overall, the existing literature has not sufficiently explored the comprehensive managerial role of principals in learning communities, thereby creating a clear research gap that this study seeks to address.

Based on identified gaps between theory and practice, this study aims to examine the principal's role as a manager in supervising and developing a learning community at SD Negeri Temperak. The central research question guiding this study is: How does the principal perform the managerial functions—planning, organizing, mobilizing, and controlling (POAC)—to

manage the school learning community, support teacher professional development, and improve the quality of learning? This question directs the investigation toward understanding the practical enactment of managerial leadership within the context of learning community implementation.

This study is grounded in the argument that the effectiveness and sustainability of learning communities are strongly influenced by the principal's ability to perform managerial functions systematically and integratively. Principals who strategically plan learning community activities, efficiently organize resources, mobilize teachers through motivation and collaboration, and continuously monitor and evaluate implementation are more likely to foster strong professional learning cultures. Such managerial leadership is expected to enhance teacher collaboration, improve instructional practices, and ultimately improve student learning outcomes. Conversely, the absence of structured managerial leadership may limit the impact of learning communities, even when supportive policies and collaborative intentions are present.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study Design to examine the school principal's managerial role in fostering a learning community in a real-life educational context. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding social phenomena in natural settings, in a comprehensive and in-depth manner (Chasokela, 2025; Lim, 2025). In line with this perspective, Ivey (2023) and Lim (2025) assert that qualitative research is conducted to investigate natural phenomena, in which the researcher serves as the primary instrument for interpreting meaning and understanding complex social processes. The case study Design was selected because it allows for an intensive and contextual exploration of managerial practices, particularly planning, organizing, mobilizing, and controlling (POAC), which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative generalization.

The unit of analysis in this study was a school-based learning community, treated as an institutional and organizational case. The research was conducted at SD Negeri Temperak, Sarang District, Rembang Regency, which serves as a model school for the development of learning communities with professional assistance from the Balai Besar Guru Penggerak (BBGP). The material objects of analysis included learning community activities, the principal's managerial practices, institutional programs related to professional development, and supporting artifacts such as meeting agendas, work programs, supervision reports, and school policy documents. This setting was selected because it represents an active learning community within an independent curriculum framework.

The sources of information in this study comprised key informants who were directly involved in the learning community. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance and depth of information. They included the school principal as the primary subject, along with four teachers who held strategic roles: the BOS treasurer, the school operator, the head of the

learning community, and members of the learning community. Data were collected through multiple techniques, including in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guides, participatory observations of learning community meetings and supervisory practices, and documentation studies. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Data analysis followed an interactive, qualitative analysis process consisting of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying relevant information related to the principal's managerial role. Data were then presented in narrative descriptions, tables, and matrices to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved interpreting patterns and meanings related to the implementation of managerial functions in managing the learning community. To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were applied, including triangulation across data sources, member checking to validate interpretations, prolonged engagement to enhance contextual understanding, and maintaining an audit trail to ensure transparency and reliability throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
The Principal's Role in Managing Learning Community Planning

The principal systematically implements learning community management planning, beginning with a needs analysis based on educational data. This process is conducted by the principal together with a small team consisting of experienced teachers from the learning committee, using the education report card as the basis for decision-making. The 2024 education report card indicates a decline in learning quality, prompting the principal to adopt a problem-based, priority-oriented planning approach. As stated by the principal (KS), "For learning needs analysis, I review the education report card to identify areas that need improvement and determine our priorities," ensuring that planning is grounded in actual school needs rather than general assumptions.

The needs analysis identified several key factors contributing to the decline in learning quality, including decreased classroom management (14.92), psychological support (7.76), and instructional methods (2.71). These findings became the foundation for determining the primary focus of the learning community programs. The principal positioned teacher competence enhancement as the strategic objective of the planning process, particularly by strengthening instructional methods that directly influence the quality of teaching and learning. This was emphasized by KS, who stated, "Our goal is to improve teacher competence, especially in instructional methods, and the target is all teachers." Setting inclusive targets reflects a planning approach that aims to reach all teachers without exception, thereby promoting equitable and sustainable improvements in learning quality.
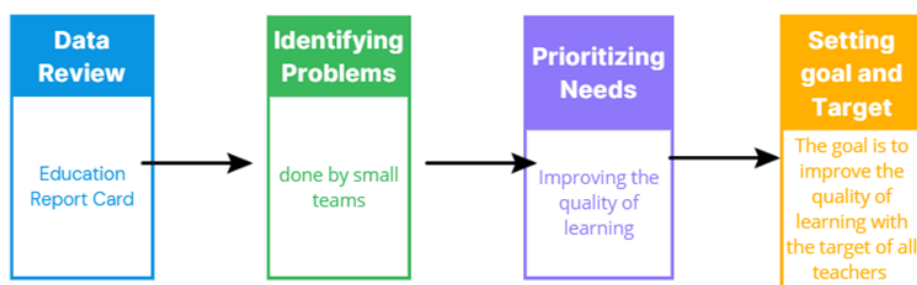
Figure 1. Learning Needs Analizing Process

At the operational planning stage, the principal and the small team collaboratively prepared the learning community work program by considering implementation effectiveness and program sustainability. Activity scheduling was designed to be flexible, avoiding disruptions to instructional time or teachers' professional obligations, with BOS Performance funds serving as the primary financial resource. KS explained, "We develop the schedule and budget with the small team, adjusting to teachers' available time, not always on Saturdays because it may conflict with KKG activities." This approach demonstrates realistic and adaptive planning aligned with contextual conditions, reflecting the principal's managerial competence in managing time and resources effectively.

In addition to program and budget planning, the principal also designed the learning community structure through a participatory approach involving all teachers and educational staff, including school support staff. Internal resources were optimized by appointing competent teachers as facilitators and by utilizing school facilities, such as laptops and projectors, to support activities. As noted by Teacher PG1, "Facilitators rotate among senior teachers and are supported by the school supervisor, which makes the activities run effectively." This collaborative and resource-based planning illustrates that the principal's managerial role extends beyond administrative functions to encompass strategic planning that is organized, participatory, and systematically oriented toward improving instructional quality.

Organizing the Learning Community

At the organizing stage, the principal demonstrated strong managerial leadership by involving all school stakeholders in establishing the learning community's structure. This process began with meetings among teachers and educational staff to design the learning community's organizational structure collaboratively. The principal stated, "In arranging the learning community structure, I held meetings with the teachers; everyone was involved, including the school caretaker who was assigned documentation duties," indicating an inclusive and participatory organizing process. The management structure was formed through deliberation to appoint a chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and other administrators. This was confirmed by PG1 and supported by PG2, who stated, "Alhamdulillah, everything is well organized; there is a chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and others." The official decision document formalized the

ESGIPER learning community management structure by listing all management members, thereby providing a clear basis for the division of roles and responsibilities.

In addition to organizing the structure, the principal strategically managed supporting resources to ensure the effective implementation of learning community activities. School facilities, such as laptops and projectors, were used to support collaborative learning. The principal (KS) explained, "We already have laptops and projectors, which I use; the main facilitators are teachers from the learning committee, myself, other experienced teachers, and the school supervisor." This statement was reinforced by PG1, who noted, "Facilitators are selected in rotation from capable teachers, including senior teachers and the supervisor to strengthen the material," with activities funded through BOS resources. PG2 further emphasized that the availability of facilities such as projectors and laptops greatly facilitated the smooth implementation of learning community activities. This systematic organization of human and material resources reflects the principal's capacity to coordinate the school's internal potential to support the sustainability and effectiveness of the learning community.

Actuating the Learning Community

At the actuating stage, the principal performs a managerial role as both a facilitator and a driving force, actively motivating teachers and fostering a participatory, supportive, and collaborative climate within the learning community. The principal promotes collaborative and sharing-based approaches to encourage active teacher participation in learning community activities. This was emphasized by the principal (KS), who stated, "We use collaboration and sharing methods so that teachers participate actively." Such an approach creates a professional learning environment that is non-hierarchical and encourages openness, collective reflection, and peer learning among teachers. Teacher PG3 reinforced this by noting, "Discussions take place in an informal and comfortable atmosphere, which increases teacher participation," indicating that the principal's actuating style successfully builds trust and psychological safety within the learning community.

Beyond motivation, the principal also drives the implementation of learning community outcomes through direct classroom academic supervision. This supervision serves as a mechanism to evaluate whether the outcomes of learning community discussions are translated into actual teaching practices. As stated by KS, "I observe directly; if the results are applied in the classroom, that means it is successful," demonstrating that actuating extends beyond facilitation to include ensuring practical application and instructional change. By linking learning community activities with classroom supervision, the principal ensures that the actuating process remains focused on improving teaching quality and sustaining meaningful instructional improvement.

Controlling Learning Community Management

At the controlling stage, the principal performs managerial functions by systematically monitoring and evaluating the learning community's implementation and impact. Supervision is conducted by measuring learning outcomes through classroom observations and analyzing the education report card as key indicators of program effectiveness. These data are used to assess the extent to which learning community activities contribute to improvements in teaching practices and learning outcomes. As the principal stated, "After a year of reflection, we know whether this community is beneficial or merely ceremonial," indicating that control is oriented not only to program implementation but also to the meaningful impact of learning community activities.

In addition to data-based measurement, the principal incorporates collective reflection as an integral component of continuous control. Reflection sessions are conducted with teachers to evaluate strengths, identify weaknesses, and determine areas for improvement in learning community implementation. This reflective process serves as the basis for corrective actions and program refinement in subsequent cycles, ensuring that controlling functions as a mechanism for continuous quality improvement. PG3 reinforced this outcome by stating, "Improvements in learning quality are visible in the education report card," suggesting that the principal's controlling practices effectively link learning community activities with measurable improvements in educational quality.

Managerial Implications of Principal Leadership in Education

Managerial leadership in education plays a crucial role in guiding schools toward continuous improvement. At Temperak Public Elementary School, visible improvements in the education card report data demonstrate the successful implementation of leadership based on the POAC (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, Controlling) framework.

Table 1. Temperak State Elementary School Education Report Card Data

Dimension	Year 2024	Year 2025
Literacy	83.33	86.21
Numeracy	73.33	79.31
Learning Quality	59.93	65.00
Ikilim Inklusivitas	45.95	55.00

Based on the data presented in Table 1, improvements are evident across all dimensions of the education report card from 2024 to 2025, particularly in literacy, numeracy, learning quality, and inclusive climate. These improvements indicate the effectiveness of the principal's managerial role, implemented through the POAC framework, including data-driven planning, collaborative resource allocation, participatory and supportive implementation, and systematic control through evaluation and reflection. By utilizing the education report card as a key control instrument, the principal ensured that learning

community activities were not merely administrative routines but contributed directly to measurable improvements in school quality.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including limitations in face-to-face activities without digital media integration and resistance from some teachers to changes in instructional methods. To address these challenges, the principal has prepared strategic follow-up actions focusing on digital development and strengthening teacher motivation, as stated, "We will develop it on social media and digital platforms to make it more widespread and self-training certification for teachers." Overall, the management of the learning community at SD Negeri Temperak demonstrates a coherent and effective integration of the POAC functions, supported by formal policies outlined in the Decree and the allocation of BOS Performance funds. These efforts foster a sustainable professional learning culture characterized by precise task distribution, active participation of all educators, and continuous capacity building through adequate learning resources and competent internal and external facilitators.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that school principals play a strategic and multidimensional role in sustaining learning communities through core managerial functions—planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling. Grounded in instructional and transformational leadership theory, the principal functions not merely as an administrative manager but also as a learning leader who articulates vision, fosters collaboration, and cultivates a culture of reflection and knowledge sharing among teachers. Liu & Hallinger (2024) and Sholeh et al. (2023) emphasize that the success of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is highly dependent on principals' capacity to design collaborative structures, allocate resources, and continuously monitor teacher learning activities. The scheduling of activities that considers teachers' workloads, the utilization of facilities such as laptops and projectors, and the involvement of internal resource persons and school supervisors illustrate participatory planning practices aligned with Grimm (2024) and Lash et al. (2024) assertion that effective PLC leadership must actively engage teachers in all stages of professional learning. Thus, the principal's managerial role integrates educational vision, teacher empowerment, and systematic control of collaborative learning processes to achieve sustainable improvements in educational quality.

At the planning stage, the principal exercises managerial leadership by conducting a learning needs analysis using education report card data, with a small team comprising the principal and two experienced teachers. According to (Elugbaju et al., 2024; Safitra et al., 2023), planning involves determining future goals and identifying the stages required to achieve them, which aligns with Ming et al. (2024) theory of strategic educational planning that emphasizes data-based decision-making for organizational effectiveness. Interview findings indicate that the principal relied on education report card data showing a decline in learning quality, marked by a red rating, to define improvement priorities.

This decline prompted a focus on strengthening teacher competence, particularly in instructional methods, with all teachers targeted as participants in the learning community. Collaborative preparation of work programs that consider teachers' workloads reflects participatory planning theory (Mockler & Stacey, 2024; Stacey et al., 2023), which argues that planning effectiveness increases with stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, the use of learning resources and supporting facilities, alongside internal and external resource persons, illustrates adaptive emphasizing flexibility and responsiveness to contextual needs. This approach is consistent with Liu and Hallinger's (2024) findings that data-driven instructional leadership and collaborative planning positively influence PLC effectiveness.

In terms of organizing, the structured division of tasks established through collective meetings involving all teachers and education staff—including school guards—and formalized through a Decree appointing the chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and members, reflects established organizational theory. Organizing involves determining work units, dividing tasks, delegating authority, and establishing a formal framework to ensure efficiency. Additionally, Beveridge & Höllerer (2023) and Ertsås & Irgens (2023) highlight that developing organizational knowledge in schools requires collaborative structures, inclusive participation, and collective capacity for shared learning and action. The inclusive deliberation process and consensus-based task allocation observed at SD Negeri Temperak demonstrate that organizing extended beyond formal structuring to build a professional community characterized by shared responsibility and active collaboration.

The actuating function is evident in the principal's efforts to mobilize teachers through regular socialization of monthly and special meetings, facilitation of collaborative discussions, and encouragement of practice sharing. These practices align with the theoretical frameworks of Communities of Practice (CoP) and Professional Learning Communities (PLC), which posit that teacher professional learning emerges from social participation, sustained interaction, shared norms, and collective reflection (Cai et al., 2022). Research shows that professional community dimensions—such as shared responsibility, collaboration, and reflective dialogue—enhance teacher self-efficacy, which in turn mediates work engagement and teaching quality. Ikhsan (2023) emphasizes that actuating involves motivating organizational members to willingly strive toward shared objectives in alignment with planning and organizing efforts. Moreover, Galdames-Calderón (2023) underscores that principals who apply distributed leadership and actively promote teacher learning communities significantly contribute to professional development and school improvement. In the context of SD Negeri Temperak, the principal's facilitative and persuasive leadership has fostered an environment in which teachers actively share practices, engage in participatory dialogue, and strengthen professional relationships, thereby reflecting a practical application of CoP/PLC theory.

Finally, the controlling stage is implemented through academic supervision, classroom observation, analysis of education report card data, annual reflection, and verbal feedback provided by the principal. Mockler (as cited in Jeka & Indriyani, 2024) defines control as a systematic process of setting

standards, designing feedback mechanisms, comparing actual performance with planned objectives, identifying deviations, and taking corrective actions to ensure effective and efficient use of resources. The control practices at SD Negeri Temperak can be interpreted through data-driven decision-making, instructional supervision, and reflective practice frameworks. Empirical studies indicate that integrating report card data with classroom evidence enhances intervention accuracy (Botvin et al., 2023; Kaspi & Venkatraman, 2023), while academic supervision accompanied by constructive feedback improves teaching practices (Altınok, 2024). Furthermore, structured collective reflection strengthens continuous professional learning and facilitates practice change (Machost & Stains, 2023). Although formal success indicators are not yet fully documented, integrating standardized metrics with developmental supervision and systematic reflection is likely to enhance evaluation validity and accelerate instructional improvement. Despite positive impacts, challenges remain, including limited face-to-face activities, suboptimal use of digital platforms, and resistance from some teachers toward instructional change. To address these issues, the principal plans to expand digital engagement through social media and learning platforms, promote self-training and certification, and cultivate a lifelong learning mindset as a future-oriented strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the principal of SD Negeri Temperak plays an active and strategic role in managing the learning community through integrated managerial functions: planning based on analysis of educational report card data; resource organization and flexible scheduling; implementation that encourages teacher participation and collaboration; and control through reflective supervision and evaluation. The important lesson is that the success of the learning community depends heavily on the principal's leadership, which optimizes resources, fosters an open climate, and adapts implementation to teachers' needs.

Scientifically, this study strengthens the theory of educational management by affirming the role of school principals as a key driver of teacher professional development through learning communities. However, the study's limitations include the lack of formal documentation of success indicators, the use of suboptimal digital platforms, and resistance among some teachers to change. This research encourages increased data-driven leadership training and strengthened technology integration as critical steps toward the sustainability and impact of learning communities in the future.

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