



THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO OPERATIONS: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES



Edited by
Commander Dave Woycheshin, PhD
& Miriam de Graaff

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THE DUTCH APPROACH: LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Miriam C. de Graaff, MSc

Lieutenant-Colonel Yvonne C.J. Schroeder

*Karla H.M. Boeijen-Mennen, MSc**

INTRODUCTION

First, whether you like it or not, international cooperation is a fact. It is reality. International cooperation follows directly from our shrinking defence budgets. Being a small country with a reduced budget, you are soon faced with the reality of having to get rid of capabilities that you actually need. This creates dependence on partners. But there is also a more positive reason why we should aim for more cooperation, and this is operational reality. We can spend a long time talking about cooperation here, but to our junior leadership, that is just everyday reality.¹

The Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Army stated the above about cooperation with non-military parties in 2012. Since the Lisbon Summit of 2010, NATO has underlined the necessity of cooperation between political, civilian and military parties in the so-called “comprehensive approach”. For the Dutch forces, this means that during deployment they will be cooperating with other parties, like police (which occurred in the policing mission in Kunduz, Afghanistan), other government departments and non-governmental organizations. However, at home in the Netherlands this cooperation is an everyday reality, since teams are becoming more and more multidisciplinary and fluid.

Leadership is a topic of interest in literature and academic research. However, this research is surprisingly silent on leadership in multidisciplinary teams in contrast to single-culture team research.² Until now team research

* The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Royal Netherlands Army or the Netherlands Ministry of Defence.

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focused on leadership within commercial and profit-oriented organizations. Moreover, multidisciplinary leadership in a governmental or non-profit sector has not yet been fully elaborated. In the military, leadership within multidisciplinary teams is an increasingly important issue for three reasons.

First, commanding officers are sent abroad for peace missions and humanitarian relief operations carried out by multidisciplinary and even multinational teams, as alluded to in the opening quote by the Dutch Commander in Chief.

The second reason for interest in multidisciplinary leadership is due to strategic choices made by the Ministry of Defence over the past years. National safety tasks are becoming more important in the employment of military resources. In 2011, the military carried out over 2000 national tasks related to homeland security.³ In 2012 the military was asked for assistance about three times a week.⁴ Over 15,000 servicemen are occupied 24/7 with taskings such as surveillance, security services to the royal household, police assistance, explosive clearance, border control, and security at sea and in the air. In these teams, servicemen need to cooperate with other operational teams, for example, from the police.

The third reason for the increasing attention to multidisciplinary cooperation can be explained by the cut-backs in all Dutch governmental departments (also mentioned by the Commander in Chief). All departments are forced to intensify their cooperation, not only on an operational level, but also on the strategic and political levels. During operations abroad servicemen are confronted with political and humanitarian focused organizations and with armed forces from other nations. During national operations, servicemen cooperate in teams with members from organizations such as law enforcement, border control and the police. Consequently, under such circumstances servicemen are already participating in multidisciplinary teams as leaders or as subordinates.

In this chapter we focus on leadership in multidisciplinary and multinational teams. What makes multinational teams even more complex is the existence of different cultures, which can hinder communication and cause different preferences in leadership behaviour. Gerstner and Day⁵ presented evidence that diverse leadership prototypes, with different traits, exist across countries. They concluded that, “those traits considered to be most (as well as moderately and least) characteristic of business leaders varied by culture”. Brodbeck and colleagues⁶ research about prototypical leadership styles in Europe found similar results.

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It is relevant to take notice of leadership in multidisciplinary teams. This way of operating will probably become more important in the coming years due to the increasingly complex assignments for the military, globalization, financial cutbacks and reorganizations in Dutch governmental departments. Moreover, leadership lessons drawn from traditional war fighting missions are not always applicable to leadership in a multidisciplinary team. The reason for this is that there are important differences between these multidisciplinary teams and traditional combat units⁷:

1. lack of familiarity, i.e., the members of these operational teams do not necessarily know each other;
2. different working procedures;
3. different Rules of Engagement and legal permissions.

These differences pose a challenge to the leader of such teams: how to reach the goal when there is actually no real “team” to work with? The leader needs to cope with the fact that the team has not yet gone through the maturation stages of team-development⁸, therefore team characteristics that are valuable in complex situations, such as trust and loyalty, may be lacking.

The goal of this chapter is to provide insight into leadership in multidisciplinary teams. In order to do so, we conducted interviews with leaders and members of Dutch multidisciplinary teams that operate on a regular basis in different lines of operations in the military. In this chapter, we describe the most relevant lessons members of these teams have learned, using the perspectives of both leaders and subordinates. Before addressing the leadership lessons learned from multidisciplinary operations, we briefly describe the background of multidisciplinary operations in the Netherlands. We also describe the strategic choices that were made in recent years, resulting in the so-called “Dutch Approach”. We will focus on leading teams dealing with: 1) national disaster relief, 2) intercultural differences in the Caribbean Coast Guard and UN observer missions, and 3) countering organized crime. We conclude the chapter by giving practical recommendations for improving military leadership in multidisciplinary teams.

STRATEGIC CHOICES IN THE DUTCH MILITARY

In 2010, the Dutch Defence organization conducted a prospective study to examine the opportunities for defence in relation to global and national development.⁹ This study formed the foundation for the “military strategic

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vision”. Among other things, this vision states that increased attention will be paid to the defence organization’s assistance operations and cyber-activities (both nationally and internationally).¹⁰ Internal and external security are increasingly intertwined. These developments have practical implications for the work and training of Dutch soldiers.¹¹

Out of these explorations four policy options emerged. The first policy option focused on *protecting* national, NATO and EU interests. In this option, the Defence organization focuses more on national tasks in addition to the already existing partnerships in the civil domain (such as police and customs). Operations in this option are especially defensive and reactive. Operations far beyond national borders (such as in Asia or Africa) only take place when the Kingdom of the Netherlands and its interests are at risk. The second policy option emphasized *intervention*. This involves maintaining, and when necessary, enforcing international law and defending the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In this option, it is vital for the Armed Forces to seek military technological superiority, which allows rapid intervention in crisis situations (whether individuals, groups or nations are concerned). The third policy option involved establishing security abroad, i.e., *stabilization*. Unlike the second option, the Dutch defence organization provides assistance to security organizations in fragile states and regions (so-called “post-conflict areas”). It may involve training missions, observation missions or providing a “buffer zone”, however proactive actions and interventions are not carried out in this option even though the scope of operations is not limited to the homeland.

The fourth policy option focused on preserving the *operational capability* or *multi-deployability* of the Armed Forces. This means that the forces can be flexibly deployed in any manner mentioned in the first three options. This option is an extension of the policy adhered to after the fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1990s. In cooperation with allies, diverse tasks are performed. Ultimately, this option was chosen as the leading policy¹² and was brought into practice in 2010. Bringing this policy of multi-deployability into practice requires a considerable amount of direct and indirect cooperation with other nations, governments, and security services. This type of operation confronts the military leader with new leadership challenges.

THE DUTCH APPROACH

When addressing the comprehensive approach in the Dutch military context, the so-called “Dutch Approach” must be discussed. The Dutch forces broadly applied this approach in Afghanistan’s Uruzgan province. Even

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though internationally the comprehensive approach was put into practice in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, the Dutch approach of dealing with COIN impressed international partners worldwide. The Dutch approach is a method built on the Dutch philosophy that winning the hearts and minds of the local population contributes more to security than using force and violence.¹³ Therefore, the use of force is a last resort. Even though other western countries also make use of COIN strategies, the Dutch approach differs by making “cultural awareness” the main feature in all actions. The Dutch approach astonished the coalition forces in Afghanistan to some extent: the British newspaper *The Times*, for example, stated that the Dutch “aim to beat *Taliban* by inviting them round to tea” in a “Qala-like compound” (Qala is Pashtu for house)¹⁴, whereas their British colleagues hide out in their forts.¹⁵

The Dutch approach has its origin in policing. The Moluccan train hostage incident in 1977 was the first time the military used “talking” as an intervention instead of repressive actions and force. The plan was to talk until the Moluccan hijackers would surrender. This plan was carried out effectively, leading to international praise. Even though people were killed and injured during the event, the “talking” strategy presumably prevented a worse outcome.¹⁶ Thus, the Dutch approach was born. For the Dutch servicemen in modern day military operations, this means that respectful interaction with the local population and the insurgents is most important. Therefore, the Dutch troops encourage friendly contact and interactions by making themselves accessible (e.g. by building compounds that resemble Afghan houses, by going bare-headed and by driving in so-called “soft-top-vehicles”). Although this accessibility builds trust, it makes the Dutch troops vulnerable to their surroundings. Since 2006, the Dutch approach has been official policy. This requires aligning politics, security and development, forcing the three responsible Ministries, Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Development, to cooperate.¹⁷

LESSONS DRAWN FROM REAL-LIFE MILITARY EXPERIENCES

In order to gain insight in the challenges and situations leaders of multidisciplinary teams confront, we selected six Dutch teams in which both civil and military parties operate. The teams are those that, despite their fluid make up, are formed and operational on a regular basis and follow the fourth strategic policy option of the “multi-deployability” of the Armed Forces. For the purpose of this chapter we interviewed several commanding officers who led such teams in order to distinguish the demands of this type of leadership. The

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following paragraphs examine lessons drawn from real-life military experiences in multidisciplinary operations.

TRUST, RESPECT AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

It is important to gain trust of your team-members, regardless of their cultural background. As a leader you need to respect the fact that other traditions, communication styles and working procedures are present. In the Caribbean¹⁸ for example, people are more verbal than in the Netherlands, asking a question and getting the answer you long for takes more time than in the Netherlands. You need to show interest in the other party and make some small-talk before saying what you want, for the Dutch this is quite a challenge since we are (even for the European continent) very direct.

In order to make sure cooperation flourishes you have to show trust in your subordinates from the first time you meet them by giving them “space” to operate in the manner they believe which is appropriate. Things may not go the way you think to be “normal”, but when the goals are reached... then, what’s the big deal? You need to let go of the arrogance to think that the way WE do things is THE best way.

*Commander of the Caribbean Coast Guard
of the Royal Netherlands Navy*

INNOVATION, COMMON INTENT AND COMMON LANGUAGE

In the National Coordination Centre [for] Disaster and Crisis different parties participate in several multidisciplinary sections. The well-known military hierarchy is almost not present in these teams. This is both positive and negative. Positive in that this way of cooperation creates a “safe” working environment, consequently leading to actually getting feedback on your performance. So, critical points of improvement in the process or the interpersonal relation are discussed and people receive respectful feedback. Moreover, new initiatives are stimulated. For example, we now use social media in order to discuss ongoing matters in the projects we are involved in. Those media work faster than the traditional media, and that is useful for our business. Stimulating new ideas is something we can use more in our “traditional” organization. A negative consequence of this kind of cooperation is that there is a lack of vigour, there are so many interests at stake that a decision is not always made in time. It is therefore important to

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create a common language (you really need to understand the other even when your background and jargon are different) and shared vision about the end state (you need to know what direction we're aiming for, otherwise no decisions are made).

Representative of the Royal Netherlands Air Force in the National Coordination Centre Disaster & Crisis Team

ADAPTATION AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

You have to face the fact that sometimes the cultural differences are too large to overcome. Especially as a woman. You cannot change different cultural perspectives on women's rights in only a few months' time. You need to adapt, make sure that you create a workable environment, for yourself and the other. Constant awareness of the mission goal and questioning what behaviour is most effective to reach this goal is vital in these situations. You need to acknowledge that your own principles are not always met. Holding on to your own principles or even pushing them through will not be as effective as you could be when adapting to local cultural norms.

Representative of the Royal Netherlands Air Force as a UN Observer in Sudan

FAMILIARITY, PROFESSIONALISM AND EQUALITY

Our department/unit is occupied with special interventions. For example in case of terrorist attacks or hijacking activities: the so-called "hot-interventions". Our teams consist of members from the Military Police, the Marine Corps and SWAT [Special Weapons and Tactics] teams. These three organizations are alike, but still, there are differences in culture and working-procedures. What is absolutely vital in our operations is trust, after all: there is much at stake when we intervene. In order to establish trust familiarity needs to be created. A team matures through shared experiences (e.g. interventions), sleeping in the same room in severe circumstances, training and discussing differences and conflict situations. Moreover, in our line of business professionalism is absolutely necessary. This means that we need to know our personal strengths and faults/weaknesses and that we need to be clear about them to our team-members. You can never say you will do something you can't possibly do; then you put your colleagues at risk! On the other hand, this means that we need to be a professional team in which expertise means more than rank. We

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have to accept from each other that in a certain situation the corporal is the expert. The higher ranking officer has to listen to and act on the advice of the corporal.

Commander of a Unit of the Brigade Special Security Operations

DIALOGUE, SETTLE AGREEMENT AND CLEAR RESPONSIBILITIES

Our unit is specialized in Advanced Search, this means we can find things no one else can. This specialization mainly developed because of our deployment experience in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, due to the presence of IEDs [improvised explosive devices] and booby-traps. In our homeland, we support police and the justice department in counter-organized-crime interventions. The tasks we perform are similar to those in the mission area, the context however differs substantially. Where being deployed means thousands of miles away from home, we are now operating in our own backyard, so to speak, with the local media following every move. Our expertise is our greatest strength, but is also a pitfall. After all, we know what our capabilities are, but in the Netherlands we (the military) are not in command. We need to follow the instructions of our partners, e.g. the police, even when we have to cooperate with teams we have never met before. Therefore, it is my duty as a commander to restrain the eagerness of my men, since it is not “our call” to make decisions. A wrong decision made by one of my men can have major consequences for our entire organization. So it is important to keep communicating, to settle agreement with our partners, my own commanding officers, and my subordinates. We all need to know what my platoon can and cannot do.

Commander of an Army Advanced Military Search Platoon

RESILIENCE, UNDERSTANDING, RESPECT AND HELICOPTER VIEW

Since The Hague is the ministerial capital and the residence of the International Criminal Court of the Netherlands, teams consisting of differing departments (such as police and defence) are formed on a regular basis. Multidisciplinary teams are, for example, constituted when a coronation of our King (or Queen), or a funeral of a member of the Royal Family has to be strategically thought out and planned.

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Thus, these are not operational teams, but more strategic planning groups. It is vital to acknowledge that every department brings its own goals, procedures and culture. We all have our own “scripts” about how to act in the event, however they are all from only one perspective: thus we need to integrate these perspectives by taking a helicopter view. Dilemmas are part of our daily routine, so you need to acknowledge that you cannot arrange everything beforehand: a checklist always proves incomplete. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for these teams to trust in the professionalism of the differing departments, and to train the operational elements in adaptability and resilience instead of solely in fixed drills and procedures.

Assistant Head Commander Fire Department The Hague

SOME THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP IN MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Even though the stories, the work-contexts, and even the preference of personal leadership style differ between the leaders who were interviewed, there appears to be a common thread in these cases. All servicemen agree that “social skills” are vital under such complex circumstance. They discuss communication skills (since reaching an agreement is necessary in reaching the goals), cultural awareness and features of group-dynamics (such as respect and familiarity). Interestingly, these are also the main features of the Dutch Approach: in order to be effective, you need to understand and be respectful towards all parties in the context, even the “enemy”. Moreover, in multidisciplinary teams a high level of team maturation¹⁹ seems desirable. However, due to time pressure and the short period of time that such units are operational this condition is not always met. The military leader needs to balance between the level of maturation that is a precondition for operating under such circumstances and the level that is actually attainable.

A recent study conducted within operational units on missions, the Combined Arms Teams, showed that within military units trust is extremely important for cooperation and mission completion. This was especially relevant when units are tailor-made and consist of members from different arms of service (so-called “joint operations”).²⁰ Therefore, it seems logical that trust is similarly necessary for civil-military cooperation, where cultures differ even more and “agendas” might be quite different.

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Another element that appears in almost all of these stories seems quite obvious and logical. All servicemen state that the leader needs adaptability to appropriately deal with the complexity of multidisciplinary teams. Thus, as a consequence, leaders need to adapt their leadership style to the cognitive level, emotional well-being, and needs of the individual team members, the team as a whole, and to the context in which they are working as a leader. It is a mistake to enforce your rules as leader (i.e., your culture behaviours, your protocols) to your team without compromise. There does not seem to be one “best way” in leadership, even though this is suggested by management and leadership gurus. This lesson is in line with the actualized leadership philosophy of the Dutch defence organization.

The new Dutch leadership philosophy will be announced and implemented in the summer of 2013. As part of this new philosophy, the slogan “Being, Doing, Learning: That is what leadership is about, now and in the future”²¹ was formulated. Under this philosophy, leaders have characterizing features and values, they *are* a leader. Leaders are not black boxes that can be filled with skills and ‘tricks’: they bring their own personality and experience. It is through the leader’s attitude and behaviour that the values of the Dutch defence organization are demonstrated. Leaders *do*: they act, take the lead, and adapt their behaviour to the context and environment. As a leader, different skills are required in order to be effective. They need to fulfill the role of a leader, a manager, a coach and an expert.²² Leaders need to be aware of their preference in leadership style and need to be able to switch between roles depending on the situation. Sometimes declaring protocols is important, in other situations social skills must dominate. In addition, leaders of the armed forces need to learn constantly.²³ Only adapting to the situation and being flexible would be too reactive. Leadership is about adapting and learning. The key feature for learning is the capacity to reflect on one’s self, the team and the context.

Leaders need to gain experience with the complexity of multidisciplinary teams. To be successful leaders in complex situations, such as during operations in multidisciplinary teams, they also need to learn from the experiences of others. We offer four practical recommendations – in line with the Dutch military leadership philosophy – that can contribute to the further development of leadership competency in complex multidisciplinary operations.

Dutch Leadership Philosophy 2013

Being. Doing. Learning.

That is what leadership is about, now and in the future.

Deployable for peace and security anywhere and at all times. Doing a good job, connecting with your personnel, while continuously striving to improve the organization: this all requires customized leadership. Both in the peacetime organization and during deployments. Especially in today's society. The work of the Defence organization is becoming increasingly complex and uncertain, and is requiring more and more cooperation with other parties. In addition, the way people work nowadays and the new generation of personnel call for a different emphasis in leadership. To an increasing extent, we are electing to inspire rather than monitor, to listen rather than speak and to unite rather than persuade.

Today's leaders have both character and skills. They are able to adjust their style of leadership quickly, effectively and consciously to the requirements of any given situation. They are also aware of the limitations of their particular leadership style and they continue to learn, both from their own experiences and from others.

Character forms the basis for good leadership in the Defence organization. You need a robust personality. It requires honesty, responsibility, courage and the will to serve. But these characteristics alone are not enough. You have to do these things in practice too, based on your knowledge and skills. In your dealings with other people as well as in your own tasks. Your role is not only that of a leader — your men and women need you to be a coach and a manager as well. And you set an example when it comes to getting the job done properly: you are a professional.

Your task is to improve the effectiveness of your unit continuously. On the one hand by taking a good look at yourself, and on the other hand by using feedback from other people to your advantage. For yourself, for your team and for the wider context. If as a leader you continue to learn from your own experiences and from others, you will not only successfully contribute to the mission of the Defence organization, you will also improve the Defence organization itself.

In other words, DO your task and LEARN, but above all... BE a leader!

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1. Learning together

A problem stated by most of the interviewees is the lack of time to share experiences with other commanders and teams. It is often not clear who has recent relevant experience. Typically, when the next operation is presenting itself, there is no time for reflection on previous operations. The defence organization needs to embrace a learning culture, in which feedback is shared and challenges are confronted instead of being considered as a threat. In order to contribute to this learning culture, leaders who have faced challenges should be encouraged to pass on their newly learned lessons by informing other leaders in a network. The organization should recommend that their commanders spend time in consultation with their predecessor and leaders in comparable situations about the lessons learned, in order to share both positive and negative lessons.

2. Reflection in times of complexity

Almost all interviewees agreed that since the complexity of operations demands a lot of the military leaders, they need to be able to communicate well. Moreover, they need to be able to reflect upon their own behaviour. Therefore, we suggest personal coaching and other tools for personal development should be further developed. Becoming conscious of one's own preferred leadership style, one's strengths and weaknesses as a leader and being able to switch between leadership styles in an effective way (with the help of reflection and dialogue) can be stimulated through education and other training opportunities. The leadership philosophy states:

The work of the Defence organization is becoming increasingly complex and uncertain, and is requiring more and more cooperation with other parties. In addition, the way people work nowadays and the new generation of personnel call for a different emphasis in leadership. To an increasing extent, we are electing to inspire rather than monitor, to listen rather than speak and to unite rather than persuade.²⁴

3. Team coaching

The interviewees considered trust to be a vital feature for operating in multidisciplinary teams. Team coaching is a tool that can be of great use, especially in teams with members who have little familiarity with each other. Team coaching focuses on enhancing communication and cooperation within a team. For teams that are combined ad hoc, for example, in UN Monitoring missions, team coaching might be an effective tool to overcome internal miscommunication and conflict escalation.

4. Cultural Awareness

Teams may only exist for a short period of time or may be stood up within only a few hours or days. In these cases, team coaching is not suitable. However, a better understanding of the other parties is still desired in such teams. Cultural Awareness Training is used for units that are sent abroad for military missions. For example, when a unit is sent to Afghanistan, its commander is advised to implement cultural awareness training into the pre-deployment training. However, due to time pressures, cultural awareness training is often not conducted. We suggest the organization focus more on this “soft side” of operations. Cultural awareness training is not only relevant in missions abroad. We suggest executing comparable sessions even when the other parties seem quite similar, such as is the case in cooperation between police and military.

Being a leader is not simple, heroic, or sometimes even nice. However, leadership is most needed in complex situations to create unity and to create a team. This is especially important when different parties who are not familiar with each other need to cooperate and the stakes are high. Team performance can be greater than the sum of the contribution of individual team members. Former Commander in Chief General Peter van Uhm stated in his speech on 4 May 2013 (Dutch Remembrance Day): “Not from the focus of ‘I’ and ‘them’, but from ‘we’, will good things arise. History has taught us that. We need to remember, we need to keep dialoging, with ourselves and with each other.”²⁵

ENDNOTES

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4. Ibid.
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7. In these Combat Units, different elements of the Armed Forces can take part, for example, infantry, engineering and medics. This type of operation can be considered multidisciplinary,

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however, we consider this type of cooperation as “joint”, meaning the units are part of the same “mother-organization”. Therefore, we leave this type of unit out of consideration and focus on units in which elements from different organizations are forced to cooperate.

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14. The Dutch compound was made out of mud walls and designed to resemble traditional Afghan architecture.
15. Moeler, 2009.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Since the 1950s, the Kingdom of the Netherlands is organized as constituent countries, comprising three countries in the Caribbean (the former colonies Curacao, Bonaire and Sint-Maarten) and one in Europe (the Netherlands proper).
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