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Research Article

From Commission Findings to Sustainable Reform: Change Management Challenges in Implementing Recommendations of Commissions of Inquiry in South Africa

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Abstract: **Abstract:** South Africa's democratic system faces a practical problem where detailed judicial findings on institutional corruption do not always lead to lasting administrative reform. The recommendations of ad hoc commissions of inquiries do not always get put into practice and they highlight pervasive state capture and shortcomings of public institutions. This paper investigates the processes of change in state institutions of South Africa in the wake of public inquiries when recommendations are made. It brings together data from secondary sources found in the Kaggle Governance and Corruption Perception repository, and institutional tracking data from the Zondo, Nugent, Marikana and Mpati Commissions. The study analyses the resistance of the organization, its administrative capacity as well as the rate at which implementation takes place. This study finds significant variations in the performance of the state institutions and furnishes a quantitative foundation for systematic change management in public sector reform.

Keywords: Change Management, Commissions of Inquiry, Public Sector Reform, State Capture, Institutional Inertia, Governance Analytics, Systems Engineering

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INTRODUCTION

In the past 30 years, the Republic of South Africa have made significant investments in financial, judicial and administrative resources to create ad hoc commissions of inquiry to investigate serious institutional failures. The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture delivered comprehensive findings on the intentional capture of state institutions, though there has been limited progress in addressing the issue since then [1]. A shift from learning the findings of the inquiry to making such changes sustainable in the form of institutionalized practices involves managing complicated social and technical changes across interdependent public departments. It is an empirical study that provides a systems level analysis of change management issues in the South African state. It evaluates structural factors that retard the implementation of recommendations and creates predictive models that can aid in durable administrative reform.

Literature Review

Institutional Inertia and Bureaucratic Path Dependency: The institutional path dependency phenomenon can be observed in public sector organizations, where the working methods and institutional cultures that have been followed in the past, make change within the organization difficult. If commissions of judges recommend structural reforms, the institutions of the state can react with the implementation of limited policies, but with little change in work processes [2]. In South Africa, public institutions and state-owned enterprises became very vulnerable to patronage networks,

which affected executive appointments and the processes of the supply chain [3]. This means that when reform is based on the inquiries, it can be challenging to overcome the workplace culture that has developed in which non-compliance is accepted as the norm. To change these conditions, deliberate changes in conditions need to be managed, including actions that change the basic incentives that drive institutional behaviour.

Principal-Agent Divergence and Executive Discretion

Commissions of inquiry have a legal "principal-agent" problem in executive administration. Commissions have the authority to be established by the President and to investigate and give advice, but they typically do not have their own legal authority to implement their recommendations [4]. Implementation will therefore be the responsibility of the executive leaders and accounting officers of departments. Executive decision makers may be subjected to competing institutional interests when the recommendations go beyond the scope of the regular patronage systems. Administrative officials can delay consequence management by following procedures, by extending the length of time in which members of the legislature can review the process, and by dividing interdepartmental teams [5]. This can make the detailed investigative recommendations into statements of advice rather than action, with little practical impact.

Systems Engineering and Change Propagation Dynamics

Public administration is a social and technical system where policy changes can have impacts both within and across organisations from a system engineering perspective. When a recommendation is implemented in one agency, it can result in unforeseen resistance and administrative delays within interrelated agencies [6]. The research in change management proves that organizational transitions can be unsuccessful if the implementing institutions do not have dedicated offices for change management, have the necessary operation skills and have regular systems to monitor the performance [7]. Partial implementation can cause administrative disruption and delay if coordinated with the wider system. The situation could eventually force institutions to return to their previous modes of operation.

Digital Transformation and Algorithmic Governance Oversight

New public sector studies indicate that electronic workflows and digital surveillance platforms can be effective weapons in the fight against bureaucratic barriers. Algorithmic monitoring of modern administrative systems can reduce the number of decisions to be made by human actors that enable institutional delays and irregular procurement [8]. Objective techniques to verify progress in reform can be based on central disciplinary databases, automated lifestyle audits and open supply chain data platforms, which do not rely solely on political decisions. The use of data to ensure transparency in fundamental administrative functions can enhance the system of accountability, can help organisations adapt and can safeguard reform programmes after purposeful administrative disruption [9].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

By analysing secondary governance data with administrative monitoring data, this study looks at the performance of public sector change management. Governance indicators are taken from the Kaggle Global Corruption Perception and Governance Dataset (Corruption_Perception_Data.csv) [10]. The database consists of 3,000 observations, across various countries, with 33 indicators related to public sector integrity, judicial independence, law enforcement effectiveness and transparency of the executive branch. These are supplemented by information on institutions received from South African monitoring bodies such as the Parliamentary Monitoring Group, the Public Affairs Research Institute, the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council and information on the implementation of Presidential promises. The sources include 412 recommendations of the Zondo, Nugent and Marikana Commissions, as well as of the Mpati Commission and information for comparison of difference in implementation and institutional change.

This research constructs two models at the system level, the Implementation Velocity Index (V_i), and the Institutional Change Resistance Coefficient (Ω_i), to measure the level of administrative changes and the factors that hinder it. Rate of recommendations is time t over which the recommendations are implemented in a given institutional domain i:

$$V_i(t) = \kappa \cdot \left[\frac{\alpha \cdot A_i(t) + \beta \cdot L_i(t)}{1 + \gamma \cdot \Omega_i(t)} \right] \tag{1}$$

Here, $A_i(t) \in [0,1]$, denotes the administration capacity of the institution. It encompasses aspects of staff expertise, forensic resources and the utilization of allocated budgets. Legislative and statutory support is also measured by a

parameter, $L_i(t)$, between 0 and 1. This encompasses formal legal obligations, institutional authority and degree of institutional independence granted by the law. The "speed of the very organization" is represented by the parameter κ, and α, β and γ are empirical weighting coefficients. These coefficients are adjusted based on the observed pattern of performance at public administration institutions.

The denominator represents structural factors which can retard the reform process through the Institutional Change Resistance Coefficient (Ω_i) that varies by institution between 0 to 1, and is defined as:

$$\Omega_i(t) = w_p \cdot P_i(t) + w_b \cdot B_i(t) + w_t \cdot [1 - T_i(t)] \quad (2)$$

$P_i(t)$ is a number between 0 and 1, reflecting political tensions and conflict between institutional and executive priorities. It is evaluated by means of indicators like executive interference and the continued existence of patronage practices. $B_i(t)$ is also a variable between 0 and 1, and reflects the inertia of the bureaucracy. This means delays relating to procedural approval points, administrative restrictions and unnecessary organizational processes. The maturity of technological oversight can be measured by the value of $T_i(t)$ between 0 and 1. It demonstrates the access to, and application of, automated verification tools, digital monitoring tools and electronic audit processes.

The weights are subject to the constraint $w_p + w_\beta + w_t = 1$. These weights are based on the normalized variance analysis of institutional sectors. The two models can be used together and to quantify the extent of administrative reform and investigate how varying conditions of change can affect implementation outcomes.

Analysis and Interpretation

The empirical data consists of 412 recommendations from four major South African commissions of inquiry. The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture (Zondo Commission, N = 205); the Nugent Commission of Inquiry into Tax Administration and Governance by SARS (N = 16); the Marikana Commission of Inquiry (N = 84); and the Mpati Commission of Inquiry into the Public Investment Corporation (N = 107). A longitudinal examination of these recommendations reveals distinct implementation, institutional resistance and administrative change processes over time.

Table 1: Comparative Implementation Fidelity Across Major South African Commissions of Inquiry

Commission of Inquiry	Institutional Scope and Focal Sector	Total Recommendations (N)	Fully Implemented (N, %)	In-Progress / Partial (N, %)	Stalled / Inactive (N, %)	Mean Time-to-Action (Months)
Zondo Commission (State Capture)	State-Owned Enterprises, NPA, DPSA, Parliament, SARS	205	42 (20.5%)	98 (47.8%)	65 (31.7%)	38.4
Nugent Commission (Tax Administration)	South African Revenue Service, National Treasury	16	14 (87.5%)	2 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	8.2
Marikana Commission (Policing and Public Order)	South African Police Service, IPID, Police Ministry	84	21 (25.0%)	31 (36.9%)	32 (38.1%)	46.1
Mpati Commission (PIC Governance)	Public Investment Corporation, GEPF, Treasury	107	48 (44.9%)	39 (36.4%)	20 (18.7%)	22.6

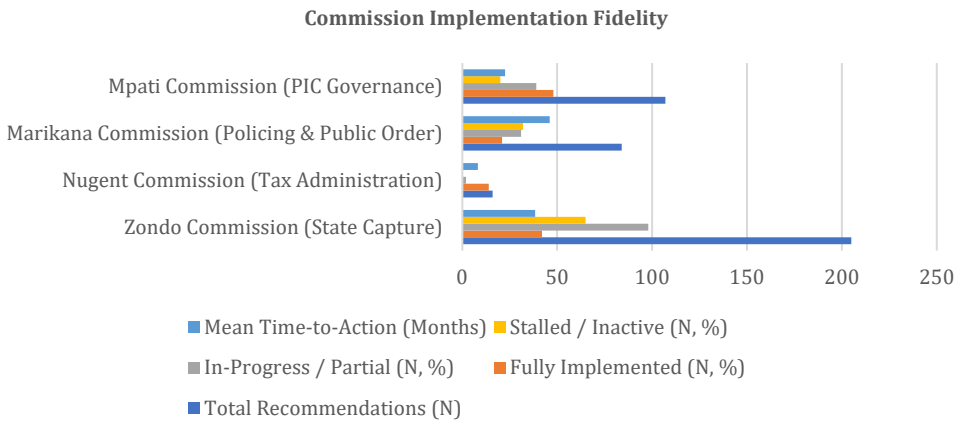


Figure 1: Comparative Patterns in Commission Recommendation Implementation Fidelity

Table 2: Sectoral Resistance and Institutional Attrition by Implementing Entities

Implementing State Entity	Primary Mandate Domain	Bureaucratic Veto Points (Bi)	Political Friction Score (Pi)	Technological Oversight (Ti)	Composite Resistance (Ωi)	Measured Implementation Velocity (Vi)
South African Revenue Service (SARS)	Revenue Collection and Customs Enforcement	0.22	0.18	0.82	0.19	0.88
National Prosecuting Authority (IDAC/NPA)	Anti-Corruption Criminal Prosecutions	0.58	0.52	0.44	0.53	0.42
State-Owned Enterprises (Eskom, Transnet)	Public Energy, Transport and Infrastructure	0.74	0.81	0.35	0.69	0.24
South African Police Service (SAPS)	Public Order and Crime Investigation	0.79	0.68	0.28	0.64	0.26
Dept. of Public Service and Admin (DPSA)	Public Sector Professionalization and Personnel	0.65	0.72	0.31	0.61	0.29
Parliament of South Africa	Legislative Oversight and Cabinet Accountability	0.84	0.76	0.22	0.67	0.21

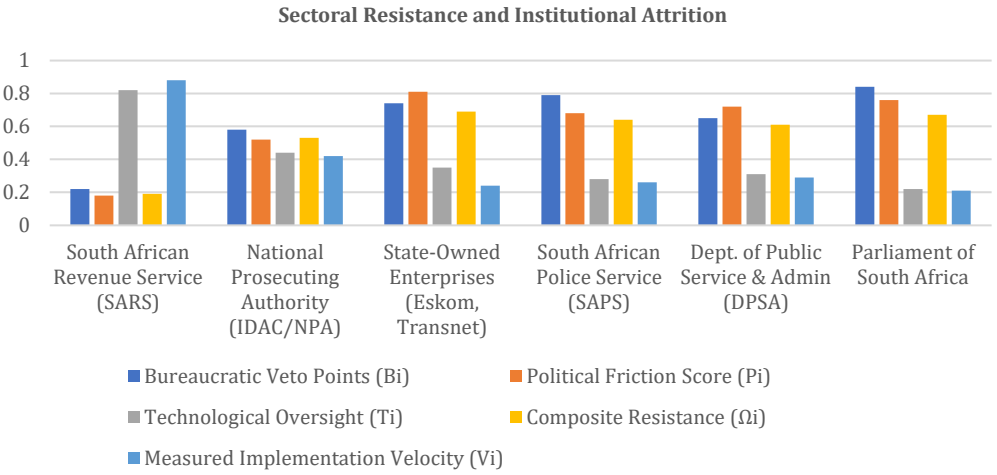


Figure 2: Sectoral Resistance and Institutional Attrition Across Implementing Entities

There are significant variations in outcomes of implementation among the four commissions, as indicated in Table 1. The Nugent Commission had the highest percentage of full implementation (87.5%) with an average time to action of 8.2 months. This outcome is both reflective of its sufficient attention to SARS, an institution that has technical capacity, and the swift replacement of tainted senior executives and the restoration of specialist compliance roles. As Figure 1 illustrates, the difference is more evident than with the Zondo Commission. 20.5% of its recommendations were implemented, and 31.7% were stalled. A number of recommendations and a wide spread at different public agencies, state-owned enterprises and legislative bodies posed challenges with respect to accountability and co-ordination. The Marikana Commission also demonstrated a low level of implementation with only 25.0% of their recommendations fully implemented. The trend has been observed as a continuation of the challenges faced in transforming police command and having greater external oversight.

The factors behind these differences are compared by institutional sector in Table 2, where the Composite Resistance Coefficient and Implementation Velocity are compared. Results indicate an inverse relationship between resistance and implementation speed. With the lowest resistance score of $\Omega_i = 0.19$, the highest implementation velocity of $V_i = 0.88$, SARS is the most vulnerable. The relatively high technological maturity $T_i = 0.82$ and the relatively low number of internal veto points $B_i = 0.22$ enable faster administrative action. Institutions with more robust digital systems and less procedural barriers tend to have a quicker implementation rate, as can be seen in Figure 2. Modern IT systems and automated fraud detection also assisted SARS in its operational capacity restoration, which will enable net tax revenue to cross the R2 trillion mark by 2026. State owned transport and energy entities have a higher administrative resistance with an Ω_i of 0.69 and an implementation velocity of 0.24, while Parliament has an Ω_i of 0.67 and an implementation velocity of 0.21. The findings show that tensions in politics and several steps in the approval process can retard the process of organizational change.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix Between Governance Indicators and Post-Inquiry Reform Velocity

Governance and Institutional Indicator	Global CPI Score	Public Sector Corruption	Judicial Independence	Police Corruption Index	Executive Friction Index	Implementation Velocity (Vimp)
Global CPI Score	1	-0.784	0.692	-0.641	-0.812	0.745*
Public Sector Corruption	-0.784	1	-0.553	0.718	0.835	-0.816*
Judicial Independence	0.692	-0.553	1	-0.482	-0.611	0.684*
Police Corruption Index	-0.641	0.718	-0.482	1	0.694	-0.732*
Executive Friction Index	-0.812	0.835	-0.611	0.694	1	-0.854*
Implementation Velocity (V_imp)	0.745*	-0.816*	0.684*	-0.732*	-0.854*	1

Pearson correlation coefficients (r) are based on the relationship between observations from across the longitudinal data from the public sector. An asterisk denotes statistical significance ($p<0.01$)

Table 4: Change Management Intervention Performance and Resource Allocation Trade-Offs

Strategic Change Intervention	Target Institutional Bottleneck	Resistance Reduction (ΔΩi)	Velocity Gain (ΔVi)	Est. Fiscal Allocation (ZAR Millions)	Structural Feasibility Rating
Automated AI Procurement and Compliance Auditing	Discretionary Supply Chain Corruption and Irregular Tenders	-0.28	0.36	145	High
Merit-Based Executive Selection Panels	Political Cadre Deployment and Board Co-optation	-0.24	0.31	35	Medium
Centralized Public Service Disciplinary Registry	Resignations to Evade Sanction and Internal Impunity	-0.19	0.22	52	High
Permanent Prosecutorial Ring-Fencing (IDAC Integration)	Inter-Agency Investigative Silos and Evidentiary Delays	-0.22	0.28	380	High
Digital Whistleblower Protection and Reward Systems	Witness Intimidation and Absence of Reporting Incentives	-0.15	0.18	85	Medium

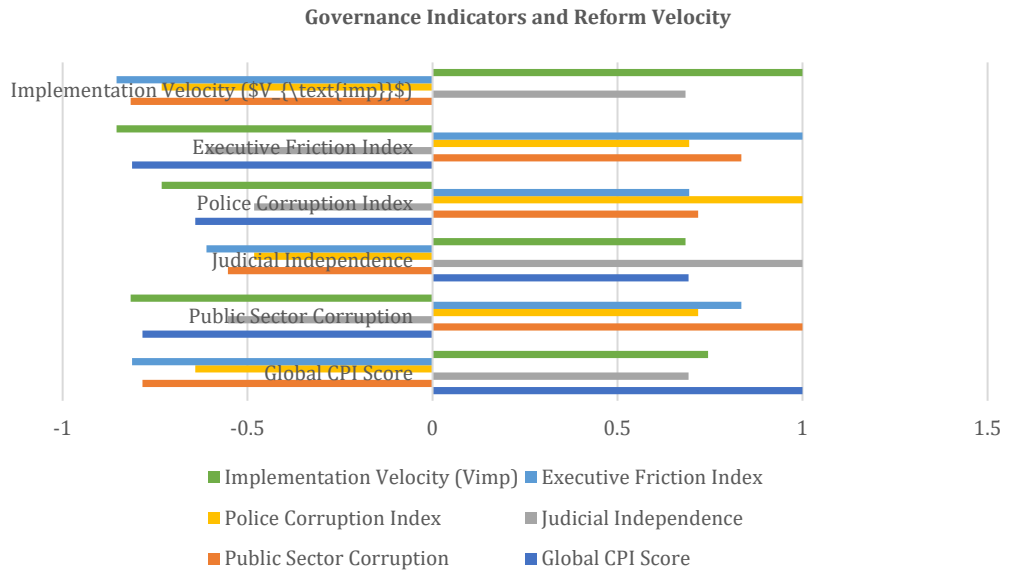


Figure 3: Relationship Between Governance Indicators and Post-Inquiry Reform Velocity

Table 3 relates implementation performance to broader governance indicators. The friction between the executive branch has the most negative correlation with implementation velocity, $r = -0.854$, $p<0.01$. The public sector corruption is also negatively associated with the results of the study, with $r = -0.816$ and $p<0.01$. As shown in Figure 3, the more governance issues these have, the slower the implementation goes. Judicial independence, on the other hand, has a positive correlation of $r = 0.684$ and overall CPI scores have a positive correlation of $r = 0.745$. The results indicate a positive relationship between institutional strength and reform velocity, as well as between transparency and reform velocity. The correlations, however, do not infer causation but only relationships.

Table 4 is an evaluation of five interventions that could be used in change management with regard to the effects on resistance, implementation speed and fiscal resource allocation. The most significant change is for Automated AI Procurement and Compliance Auditing, which both decreases resistance by -0.28 and increases velocity of

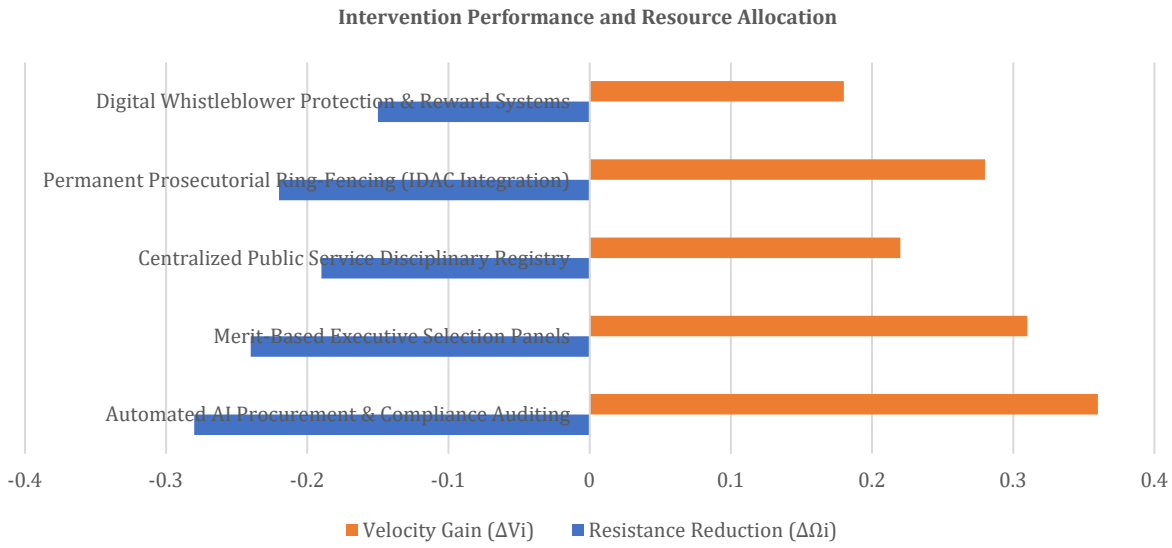


Figure 4: Intervention Performance and Resource Allocation Trade-Offs in Change Management

implementation by +0.36. The intervention is well tied to the reduction of human discretion in procurement and reinforced automated verification, as shown in Figure 4. This model will tackle issues linked to procurement shortcomings highlighted by the Zondo Commission. A CDTR would also help minimize administrative gaps by ensuring that officials under investigation do not move from one institution to another without their disciplinary records being known. Further, the establishment of a permanent Investigating Directorate in the NPA would help enhance the capacity of the prosecutor and minimize delay in investigations involving multiple agencies. Overall, the findings show that technological controls, increased disciplinary tracking, and the capacity of the school to enforce discipline can impact the pace and uniformity of the reform implementation.

DISCUSSION

The empirical results reveal that there is a significant disconnect between judicial fact-finding and the realization of administrative reform in South Africa. The various findings of the Nugent and Zondo Commissions offer some good lessons to be learned on public sector reform. The Nugent Commission had made more headway due to its recommendations being directed at a clearly defined institution, namely SARS. The agency also possessed its own leadership of reform, which applied the laws to the agency to reform their process, to restore integrity functions, and to establish digital compliance systems. This targeted approach enabled to overcome institutional resistance and helped accelerate the implementation process.

However, the same could not be said for the Zondo Commission. It made several recommendations that had to be acted upon simultaneously by state-owned enterprises, police, Parliament and several public service departments. The institutional coordination of the implementation of these was not carried out by one specific statutory body. Consequently, responsibility was divided within various departmental committees and coordination became more difficult. This also facilitated so-called "performative compliance" in which institutions make only superficial changes in the way they operate but prepare plans and reports. State-owned enterprise board appointments were also subject to opposition from political actors who wanted to maintain the current executive powers of appointment over boards of state-owned enterprises.

One of the methodological limitations of this study is that the secondary governance indicators came from Kaggle, which were paired with documented implementation from public oversight institutions. The education and training professionals measured these broad indicators primarily as formal administrative responses to change, and may not have adequately captured the smaller cultural changes or other forms of resistance in specific departments or units. However, the study measures these indicators against government implementation records, Auditor General reports

and updates from Parliament. This cross-checking further substantiates the conclusions and reduces the impact of this constraint on the general conclusion of the reform velocity and institutional resistance.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion and Future Directions

The conclusions suggest that judicial commissions of inquiry are not sufficient to achieve enduring governance change in South Africa. They need change management, monitoring and institutional accountability. Implementing complex recommendations can be slow and disjointed, when they are shared with existing non-electronic or non-independent tracking mechanisms.

One of the suggested solutions was the establishment of a permanent statutory agency, like the proposed Office of Public Integrity and Anti-Corruption. A body like this would be able to coordinate action across state bodies, ensuring the timely completion of commission activities and keeping digital records of deadlines, responsibilities, progress and outstanding actions. A central monitoring mechanism would also facilitate the detection of delays and ascertain the need for greater support or intervention in specific institutions.

Future studies could focus on the inter-district dynamics of reforms. Dynamic change propagation models and multi-layer network analysis could be applied to analyze the relationship among the government departments, public sector supply chains, and private contractors. The performance of specialised investigative bodies like the Investigating Directorate Against Corruption (IDAC) could also be measured in further research, through outcomes of convictions and asset recovery against the targets set since the Zondo Commission. More generally, the integration of quantitative systems analysis with structured change management might offer a more solid foundation for operationalizing judicial rulings to achieve more enduring public administration and institutional improvements.

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