

Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity Development of Municipalities in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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ABSTRACT The purpose of the study was to assess the monitoring and evaluation capacity development in local municipalities in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. The research method included the case study and the mixed method approach. The study found that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity development is perceived to positively impact staff motivation, training and placement; allocation of resources; and stakeholder participation. The results of the study are relevant to the National, Provincial and the Municipal Councils in exercising their oversight roles to capacitate municipalities to plan, implement and manage M&E systems to ensure an accountable and responsive local government. This study is significant as it provides a platform for the three spheres of government to address the current M&E capacity development gaps and to collectively develop an evidence-based national M&E capacity development strategy. The paper proposes further detailed research be undertaken for M&E capacity needs analysis in each municipality to ensure the developmental mandates are achieved.

INTRODUCTION

Local government has to operate in very demanding, dynamic and complex environments where the peoples' demands are increasing, technology is advancing while funding is becoming scarce. The results of capacity enhancement efforts in the public sector of developing countries have been disappointing due to the complex and problematic political and institutional environments in which these interventions take place. Consequently, the local economic development policies implemented by the State do not always guarantee successful outcomes and impacts unless there is adequate capacity to plan, implement and manage the policy, program or project. To enhance the success rate of the interventions, the fundamental objective of capacity building in Local Government should be to ensure that the municipal officials have the required knowledge of the policies and regulatory obligations; the necessary competencies; and sufficient human and financial resources to manage performance. Despite experiencing human and financial constraints, there is increasing pressure on local government in South Africa to improve both their service delivery and evaluation systems capacities.

Objectives of the Study

The regular reports of service delivery protests around South Africa have highlighted the challenges faced by local municipalities to fulfil their developmental mandate. This could also be attributed to the lack of the evaluation capacity skills of the public sector officials that has led to the political and administrative mismanagement of public funds and the inability to provide the basic services to the communities. Local municipalities in developmental states regularly experience a shortage of technical and financial resources, thus increasing the need to improve their monitoring and evaluation systems and capacities (Lennie 2015).

The main purpose of this paper is to evaluate the state of M&E capacity development in Local Government in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The objectives of the study are to assess the extent of resource provision and the impact of M&E capacity development on stakeholder participation; and provision of resources and staff for M&E. Finally, recommendations are made to enhance M&E capacity development in municipalities. This study is significant as it aims to identify the resources available for M&E activities and the impact of M&E on service delivery. There is therefore an urgent need for political,

operational and social capacity development in local municipalities.

Conceptualising Capacity and Capacity Development

Wetterberg et al. (2015) citing Brinkerhoff and Morgan (2010) comments that the simplicity of the terms capacity and capacity development masks their complexity, thus leading to many definitions for capacity and various approaches to develop capacity. Williams (2010) defines capacity as the ability to perform tasks and produce outputs, to define and solve problems and make informed choices effectively, efficiently and sustainably. Similarly, Davids (2011) citing Kaplan (1999) defines capacity as the ability of the institution to function as a resilient, strategic and autonomous entity. However, from a reform perspective, Polidano (2000) and Morgan et al. (2010) defines capacity as the ability of an organisation to act effectively on a sustained basis in pursuit of its objectives.

In an effort to gain better insight into understanding capacity, Fritzen (2007) presents three categories of capacities that are critical for developmental outcomes in the public sector, namely, political, operational and social capacities. Political capacity refers to the political will to conceptualise, implement and sustain a developmental initiative and includes, inter alia, political power; competition; and political representation. Operational capacity involves the current technical skills and capabilities; information systems; resource allocation systems; and organisational learning and adaptation. Social capacity refers to the ability of civic society and external agencies to engage in the governance system.

In view of the above conception of capacity, capacity development should be understood as the process of change, both intentional and emergent, by which people and organisations create and strengthen their capabilities, over time, to successfully undertake their tasks and achieve the set goals (Morgan et al. 2010). Wetterberg et al. (2015) defines capacity development as a process of change that enhances the capabilities of the organisation to improve its performance. Schiavo-Campo (2005) confirms that capacity building is a change process by noting that it is more than training interventions, and it requires simultaneous changes in the institutional; M&E

strategy; information and communication technology; and human capacity to ensure a successful outcome.

In order to bring about the above changes, Brinkerhoff and Morgan (2010) propose a systems approach to capacity development by defining capacity as the ability to achieve a desired collective purpose and identified the multidimensionality of capacity with its five capabilities in terms of the ability of the stakeholders. These abilities require the participants to commit and engage; carry out the various tasks; relate and attract support; adapt and self-renew; and balance diversity and coherence. A further complexity in developing capacity is that it is a latent concept and only emerges as the task progresses. For example, the need for writing capacity development could only be accurately diagnosed once an individual has submitted some written work. Therefore, due to the above complexities of both capacity and capacity development confirms that the reductionist approach to monitoring and evaluation capacity and capacity development is inadequate as capacity only becomes evident after the actions of the participants. In view of the above, this paper conceptualises capacity as the potential of individuals and teams in local municipalities to accomplish their tasks synergistically with the political, operational and social domains to achieve a common goal.

Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD)

Evaluation capacity aids in strengthening the program's ability to objectively measure its performance, initiate improvements when required and provide sponsors with evidence of effective fiscal stewardship (Akintobi et al. 2012). In addition, the demand for ECD has increased due to the need for participatory systems and complexity based approaches to evaluate developmental policies, programs and projects (Lennie 2015). As a result, ECD is now recognised as an important aid to sound governance and achieving high levels of public sector performance (Mackay 2006). Schiavo-Campo (2005) concurs that ECD builds sound governance and improves accountability relationships by improving transparency; building a performance culture; and supporting the Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWMES). According to Horton (2002), few capacity development ini-

tiatives have been systemically evaluated and its success has been limited to the focus on the technical factors while the critical social and political factors have been ignored. This is evidenced by the high number of service delivery protests indicating the communities' dissatisfaction with the local municipalities providing services in relation to their specific socio-economic circumstances. Therefore, evaluation capacity development is critical in local government as the socio-economic developmental projects require improved individual and group evaluation capabilities for achieving the targeted service delivery outcomes through the use of technology and evaluation skills and competencies.

State Capacity

South Africa is currently experiencing an unprecedented rise in civil protests due to the dissatisfaction with poor service delivery; poor economic growth; high levels of unemployment and poverty; and political violence. The Auditor General Report (2015) noted that only 51 out of 284 municipalities achieved a clean audit and the total irregular expenditure incurred by the municipalities totalled 3.6 billion rands for the 2013-2014 financial year. In addition, the Project Consolidate and the Local Government Turn-around Strategy interventions introduced by government to improve the performance of the municipalities did not yield the desired outcomes. The reasons for the failure included the lack of financial and human resources; lack of skills; and institutional development to efficiently and effectively utilise the available human, financial and capital resources. All this suggests that the state and the municipalities in particular, are not adequately capacitated to evaluate their performances relating to service delivery.

According to Poladino (2000), state capacity includes despotic power; policy capacity; and infrastructure power. Despotic power is the ability to take decisions without consideration of the non-state actors and to promote self-interest, while policy capacity is the ability to develop evidence-based policies in collaboration with other state organisations. On the other hand, infrastructure power (or implementation authority) is the ability of the state to ensure that its decisions are complied with. For a developmental state such as South Africa, a weak despotic power and strong infrastructure power is re-

quired since local government should work with, rather than against, civil society while focusing on achieving the country's developmental mandates.

An adequately capacitated local municipality requires competent officials to collaborate with all stakeholders; collect data for evidence-based policy development and good governance. Despite the great importance being given to capacity development, inadequate attention has been provided for understanding capacity development in different organisational and local social contexts, thus resulting in poor evaluation outcomes (Land et al. 2009). For example, a small rural area local municipality with minimal finances and skills would have different capacity development needs compared to a financially sustainable metropolitan municipality. A "one size fits all" capacity development approach would not adequately address the unique capacity needs of each municipality and service delivery outcomes would be adversely affected.

Evaluation Capacity Building in Local Government

According to Ijeoma (2015) the changing demands for more and better services by the citizens imply that municipalities must strive to continuously enhance their processes and systems to comply with the Batho Pele principles for service delivery. However, local government, as the service delivery agent of national government, is unable to facilitate and enhance development of the local communities due to corruption, mismanagement and maladministration (Madumo 2015). Cloete (2002) further posits that the implementation problems plaguing local government is caused by inexperienced and uncommitted administrators and political office bearers; organisation culture that protects self-interest; corruption and nepotism; outdated structures, processes and technologies; lack of funding; and environmental conditions beyond its control. In addition, capacity challenges faced by municipalities are inter alia low staffing levels; staff having irrelevant or no qualifications and experiences; poor councillor capacity; provision of basic service; and the poor quality of the Integrated Development Plans (NCBFLG). Van Heerden (2009) comments that public officials are not sufficiently knowledgeable to implement the new constitutional principles, re-

sulting in poor service delivery due to them not understanding that they are employed to serve the public.

In this regard, Schacter (2000) explains that the current local capacity dilemma is not only the cause but also a consequence of poor governance and failed approaches to governance support. Davids (2011) comments that operational effectiveness and efficiency for service delivery is directly influenced by the level of the organisations' capacity. Against the above background there is an urgent need to capacitate and institutionalise evaluation capacity development at the national, provincial and local spheres of government.

Institutionalising Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity Development in Municipalities

Lennie (2015) recommends that ECD should be implemented in a wider context of reviewing the organisational culture rather than implementing it as an isolated interventionist (training) tool. However, the current reductionist approach to monitor and evaluate capacity using the logical framework approach which focuses on the linear relationship amongst the inputs, activities and outputs may limit the value of monitoring and evaluation. To overcome this challenge, the multi-dimensionality of capacity to produce developmental results; create sound relationships; ability to self-organise and act; create coherence and direction; the ability to learn and adapt to changing circumstances over time. Brinkerhoff and Morgan (2010) also advocate that due to the multi-dimensionality of capacity, the reductionist approach to monitoring and evaluating capacity would not result in sound capacity development strategies and interventions. Therefore, the adaptive complex system thinking approach is required to obtain full knowledge of the interventions, including unexpected results or insights through the implementation of participatory ECD. This could only be achieved by using the correct evaluation capacity development tools that also considers the unique socio-economic contexts of the communities.

The main tools used for capacity development are information sharing, training, facilitation, mentoring, networking and providing feedback for learning purposes (Horton 2002). Factors that enable capacity development are an external environment that is conducive to

change; senior managers provide leadership for the change; existence of a coalition group for the change process; innovations are encouraged in the institution; adequate resources are available; and adequate management of the capacity development process (Horton 2002 citing Huberman and Miles 1984). Additional strategic approaches to monitor and evaluate capacity development suggested by Brinkerhoff and Morgan (2010) are the project or program perspective and incrementalism and emergence. The former approach could utilise the project and program management tools and the latter considers the adaptiveness and flexibility in implementation. The enabling factors for the project or program approach are shared consensus, resource availability, clearly defined objectives, senior management control, and a focus on results. However, Chaplowe (2008) proposes that the cultivation of M&E skills takes time and patience and therefore capacity building should identify the tasks and skills required for the management of data and analysis; undertake a skills assessment of all stakeholders; complete a training needs analysis; build local capacity and encourage staff to provide informal training through on-the-job guidance and feedback. Vallejo and Wehn (2016) warn that evaluating capacity development interventions are complex since the pre-determined outputs are both directly and indirectly affected by the changes in the implementation processes and in the external environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the case study approach and mixed method design that incorporated both the quantitative (predominant) and qualitative approaches (Leedy and Ormond 2010). Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilised. Primary data was collected by mailing a questionnaire to all the municipal managers in KwaZulu-Natal and by conducting semi-structured interviews with municipal employees involved in performance management functions. Secondary data was sourced from books, journals, internet, legislation, government reports, policy documents and newspaper papers. Interpretive validity and reliability was achieved by using both mailed questionnaires and structured interviews. The KwaZulu-Natal Province has one metropolitan region, 50 local municipalities

and 10 district municipalities. The sample included the 50 municipalities in the B category, 10 district municipalities in the C category and one metropole in the A category.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were posted and e-mailed to each of the municipal manager's offices. Follow-ups were made telephonically and by e-mail. Once the completed questionnaires were received, interviews were scheduled with municipal officials employed either in the M&E or performance management department. The researcher travelled to the municipalities and interviewed the nominated officials. The raw data from the completed questionnaires was coded and entered into the SPSS software program in a compatible format. The results are presented in the form of graphs. Data from the structured interviews was coded and captured. A content analysis was conducted for each question and captured in a grid format.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the interrelatedness and interdependence of the issues, the findings of both Tables 1 and 2 are discussed under training, placement and motivation of staff; provision of resources and stakeholder participation.

Training, Placement and Motivation of Staff

Approximately one third of the municipalities have M&E specialists (32%) and 52 percent

respondents have dedicated M&E staff (Table 1). According to Table 2, the respondents agreed that the impact of M&E capacity development would be effective to enhance motivation of staff (72%); training of staff (80%); and placement of staff (80%).

Porter and Goldman (2013) argue that while monitoring dominates over evaluation, the demand for more evidence-based policy making has created an increase for evaluations to be undertaken. This has led to governments establishing specialised monitoring and evaluation departments and resourcing them with staff and equipment. However, the Report on the Audit of Reporting Requirements and Departmental Monitoring and Evaluation System within Central and Provincial Government (PSC 2007) notes the level of research and analytical skills within departments differ resulting in different results from the interpretation of same data. There is little evidence that departments are consistently using research and statistical information within reports as inputs to decision-making. To operate in the complex local government environment, the M&E system requires both generic and specialist M&E skills. Generic skills include the understanding of basic concepts, process, decision making and problem solving skills. Specialist skills include statistical analysis, choosing the correct evaluation methods and dealing with multi-party perspectives and conflicts. Kusek and Rist (2004) confirm that developing countries lack technically trained staff to measure inputs, activities and outputs and to undertake statistical analysis of the data. The value of high-quality statistical information is rec-

Table 1: Resources dedicated to monitoring and evaluation functions in the Municipalities

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | Cumulative percent |
|-----------------------------|---------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| <i>M & E Specialist</i> | Yes | 8 | 32.0 | 32.0 | 32.0 |
| | No | 17 | 68.0 | 68.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| <i>Staff</i> | Yes | 13 | 52.0 | 54.2 | 54.2 |
| | No | 11 | 44.0 | 45.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 24 | 96.0 | 100.0 | |
| | Missing | 1 | 4.0 | | |
| <i>Computers</i> | Yes | 16 | 64.0 | 64.0 | 64.0 |
| | No | 9 | 36.0 | 36.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| <i>Budget</i> | Yes | 9 | 36.0 | 36.0 | 36.0 |
| | No | 16 | 64.0 | 64.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

ognised within departments, yet there is a lack of capacity in terms of report-writing skills, research, management and the use of such statistical information. This adversely affects the demand and reliability of the M&E system and the reports presented to the various stakeholders. In their study on evaluating evaluation capacity building Akintobi et al. (2012) found that ongoing training and engagement with the various stakeholders enhanced the quality of the evaluation and the outcomes of the healthcare programs.

Schacter (2000) also notes that the training programs to raise the skills of existing M&E personnel have produced disappointing results. Lennie 2015 (citing Bayley 2010; Kuzmin 2010) posits that while training is important, the once-off workshops and short-term development of staff produces superficial results and does not aid in building sustainable evaluation capacity in organisations. In relating to leadership and management capacity development, Fitzgerald (2015) suggests that a paradigmatic shift is required where the horizontal development is replaced by vertical development that includes “growing the mind in terms of adaptability; self-awareness; collaboration and network-thinking”.

In an effort to overcome these challenges, the Treasury (2007) proposed that a basic M&E capacity initiative should include the integration of M&E functions within the areas of responsibility, set-up and manage an M&E system, and produce results from the M&E system. The National Capacity Building Framework for Local Government (NCBFLG) Report (2008) highlights that one of the lessons from the implementation of capacity building programs is that monitoring of the processes and outputs is taking place but very little impact evaluation is undertaken. Nealer (2007) recommends continuous professional leadership training for administrative and political leadership; merging the provincial sphere of government with the national and local sphere of government; improve coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders; undertake more effective long term strategic planning; and improve customer care and access to buildings and services for the communities. Due to the growing importance of monitoring and evaluation, practitioners should capacitate themselves by joining the monitoring and evaluation networks and associations and attend M&E programs offered by higher education institutions (Basheka and Byamugisha 2015).

Provision of Resources

Thirty-six percent of the municipalities have budgets dedicated for M&E functions and nearly two-thirds (64%) of the respondents have access to computers for M&E functions (Table 1).

Eighty-eight percent of the respondents felt that monitoring and evaluation capacity development impact would be effective for the provision of resources (Table 2). The result highlights that accessibility to funding and equipment are limited thus adversely affecting staff to effectively engage with M&E tasks. In their study on evaluation capacity building, Akintobi et al. (2012) also found that accurate data, technical advisors and access to technology were critical resources for the successful evaluation of the programs.

Majority of the respondents (88%) perceive that engaging with M&E activities would aid in improving the availability and accessibility to funds and equipment. This implies that the respondents are aware of M&E being a performance management tool which could positively influence the acquisition of the essential resources for undertaking program evaluations. As the available financial and human resources to provide services decrease and the demands of the public for more and better services increase, the local municipality has to improve its performance by doing more with less (Presidency 2009). A well-resourced M & E system can also identify and assign the different tasks to the politicians and administrators to promote a participatory environment for the delivery of services. However, the lack of effective separation would lead to a continued deterioration of service delivery and compliance to the relevant regulations and legislation.

Participation of Stakeholders

Sixty-eight percent of the respondents agreed that M&E capacity development would effectively impact on stakeholder participation (Table 2). An effective participatory M&E system should engage key stakeholders to improve the rate of success, ownership and sustainability. Lennie et al. (2015) posits that openness to learning, good communication systems and critical analysis of the activities is required for the effective participation of stakeholders in a developmental environment. Bourgeois, Whynot

Table 2: Impact of monitoring and evaluation capacity development

| | | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Valid percent</i> | <i>Cumulative percent</i> |
|-------------------------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Valid | Not effective | 2 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 8.0 |
| | Unsure | 3 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 20.0 |
| Placement of competent staff | Effective | 20 | 80.0 | 80.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid | Not effective | 1 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| | Unsure | 4 | 16.0 | 16.0 | 20.0 |
| Training of staff | Effective | 20 | 80.0 | 80.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid | Not effective | 2 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 8.0 |
| | Unsure | 1 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 12.0 |
| Provision of resources | Effective | 22 | 88.0 | 88.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid | Not effective | 1 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| | Unsure | 6 | 24.0 | 24.0 | 28.0 |
| Motivation of staff | Effective | 18 | 72.0 | 72.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| Valid | Not effective | 2 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 8.0 |
| | Unsure | 6 | 24.0 | 24.0 | 32.0 |
| Participation of stakeholders | Effective | 17 | 68.0 | 68.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 25 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

and Theriault (2015) found that evaluation capacity is higher in organisations that have developed systemic mechanisms to institute an evaluation culture. An evaluation culture could be implemented through establishing a learning organisation that critically reviews their systems; processes; outputs; relations with staff and external stakeholders; and reporting structures. However, Vallejo and Wehn (2016) warn that poor stakeholder management could encourage stakeholders to prematurely exit the program that could hamper progress of the program.

Mccarthy (2000) recommends the following guidelines to strengthen the Local Government M&E capacity, namely, there should be a national recognition of the importance of M&E at Local Government level and it must be supported by providing the necessary resources for ECD; managers at the municipalities must be given incentives for the formulation, implementation and management of effective M&E systems; performance indicators must be developed at the local sphere and then aligned to the Provincial and National spheres of government; due to major capacity constraints within Local Government, an incremental approach must be adopted to institutionalise M&E; and M&E systems would not achieve the desired results if the management ethos and local governance is absent.

Qualitative Data from Interviews

According to the interviewees, the introduction of M&E would create greater focus on community engagement in the budgeting process, job creation and better trained staff who are mindful of the need to improve efficiency. Skills and competency gaps would be identified and the corrective action be implemented through greater involvement of staff in the decision-making process. With regard to performance management, M&E capacity development would give staff a better understanding of the M&E functions in relation to the current performance management systems. Of concern was the repeated requests by the province and other state departments for the same information which limited their time in doing actual M&E tasks. Participants were concerned that the system was implemented to take punitive measures against their individual performances and tasks were undertaken due to "malicious compliance". Akitobi et al. (2012) confirms that the challenges facing evaluation practice is the fear of negative interpretation of the evaluation results and the lack of confidence in the accuracy of the evaluation results. Therefore evaluation capacity development is critical to building positive perceptions around the role, need and impact for performance M&E.

CONCLUSION

A globally competitive developmental state requires capacity in policy, infrastructure and despotic power with strong interactions with civil society and a weak disposition to develop policies that reflect self-interest. Within this context capacity is considered as the ability of an organisation to achieve its set objectives while capacity development relates to building the ability of individuals, groups and the organisation to enhance the achievement of the goals. Both the state and local government operate in a complex environment and are currently unable to effectively deliver on their developmental mandates due to the shortage of skills, resources and the simultaneous increase in the citizens' demand for more and better services.

While evaluation capacity development enhances governance, it has not received the necessary attention due to the focus on the technological factors rather than the political and social factors, thus limiting the value of M&E interventions. Many municipalities do not have the required level of M&E specialist skills, staff, budget and computers dedicated to M&E tasks and this could affect their capacity to successfully perform their tasks. Interestingly, participants acknowledged that the impact of M&E capacity development could enhance staff training, motivation, placement, provision of services and stakeholder participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Monitoring and evaluation systems do enhance capacity development but require a strategic and systemic approach to build a learning organisation culture. Strong support from the national and provincial spheres of government, a dedicated, accountable and competent staff complement; and effective performance management systems need to be implemented for the evaluation capacity development interventions to become effective. Further, a more detailed study has to be conducted to ascertain the exact nature of M&E activities currently undertaken and the accurate resources availability in each municipality. The municipal council, Provincial and National Government should thereafter develop a unique program of action for M&E capacity development for each municipality.

It is further recommended that municipalities be capacitated to plan, implement and manage an M&E system by engaging with M&E capacity development as a long-term intervention. A systems approach coupled with participatory performance M&E should be initiated through effective engagement of all stakeholders. Monitoring and evaluation capacity development programs should adopt an incremental approach for M&E capacity development that considers the local socio-economic contexts and individual capabilities. Therefore, an institutional self-assessment should be undertaken by each municipality to establish the current levels of financial, equipment and human resources capacities and capabilities for the effective management of service delivery programs.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There is a dearth of information in respect of systemic municipal-wide monitoring and evaluation capacity development systems in South Africa. Other limitations of the study were that M&E systems are not fully implemented in municipalities resulting in the respondents having limited knowledge of the technical aspects of M&E, and municipalities that did not submit the questionnaires within the available time had to be excluded. The study found there was a high correlation between the seniority of the interviewee in the municipality and the quality of the information provided. Notwithstanding these limitations, the report reflects a fairly informed picture of the M&E landscape within the Local Government sphere in KwaZulu-Natal.

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