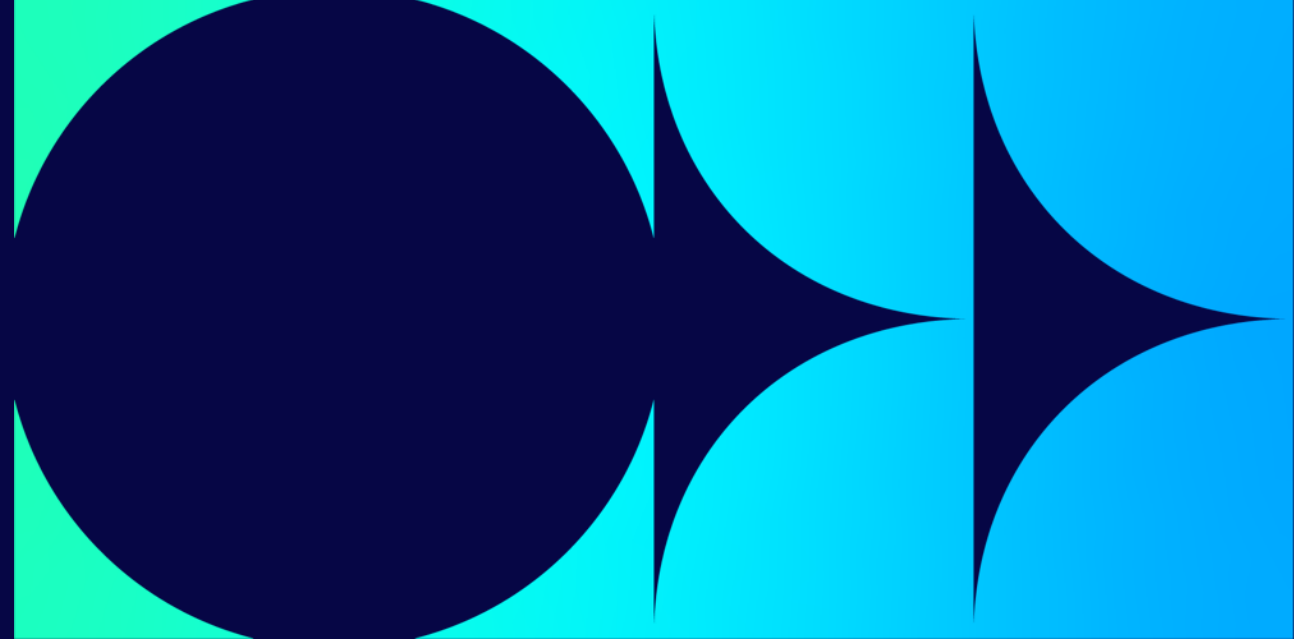


# Towards a Cross-institutional Community of Practice of Communities of Practice (CoP of CoPs)

Anne Gambles – OU STiP CoP Lead  
Senior Manager, Change and Agility

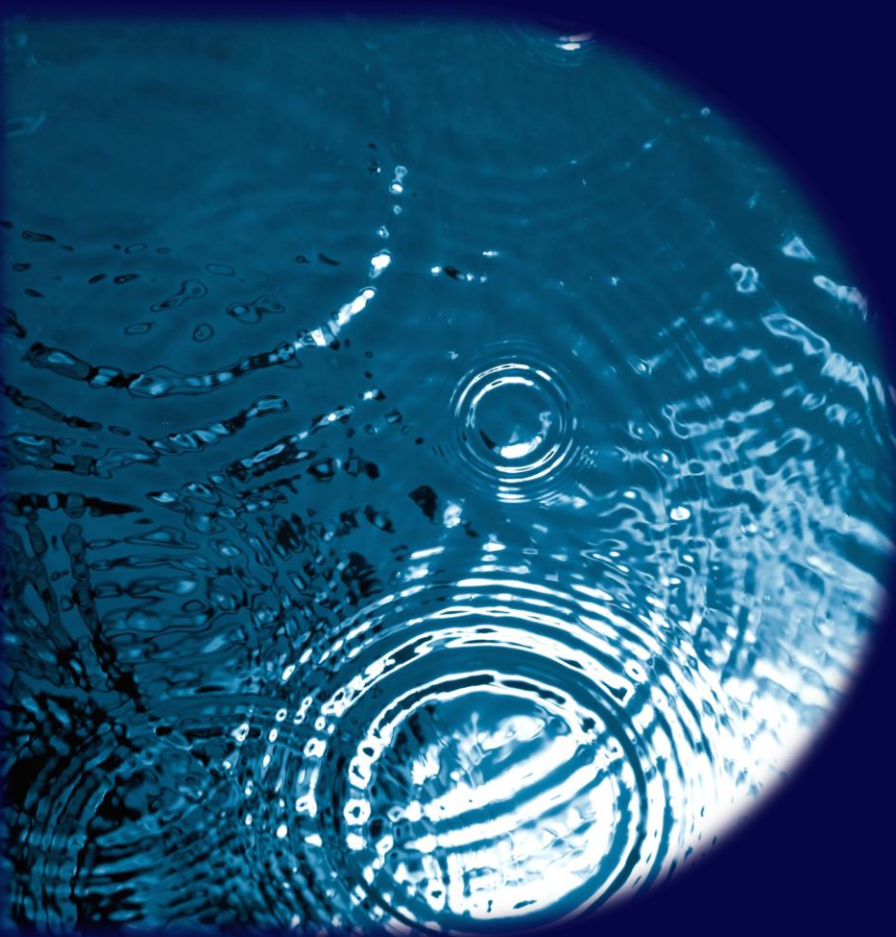


SciO Virtual Open Meeting  
2026-05-18



# Growing Systems Thinking in Practice at The OU

...through a long-lived systemic co-inquiry



- How might Communities of Practice extend their learning beyond organisational boundaries?
- What happens when Communities of Practice try to learn with and from each other across organisational boundaries?

# OU STiP CoP – What is it?

- A long-lived systemic co-inquiry:
  - How might we grow systems thinking in practice, together?
- STiP CoP:
  - Community of practice
  - Object of our co-inquiry
  - A living case-study

# Who we are...



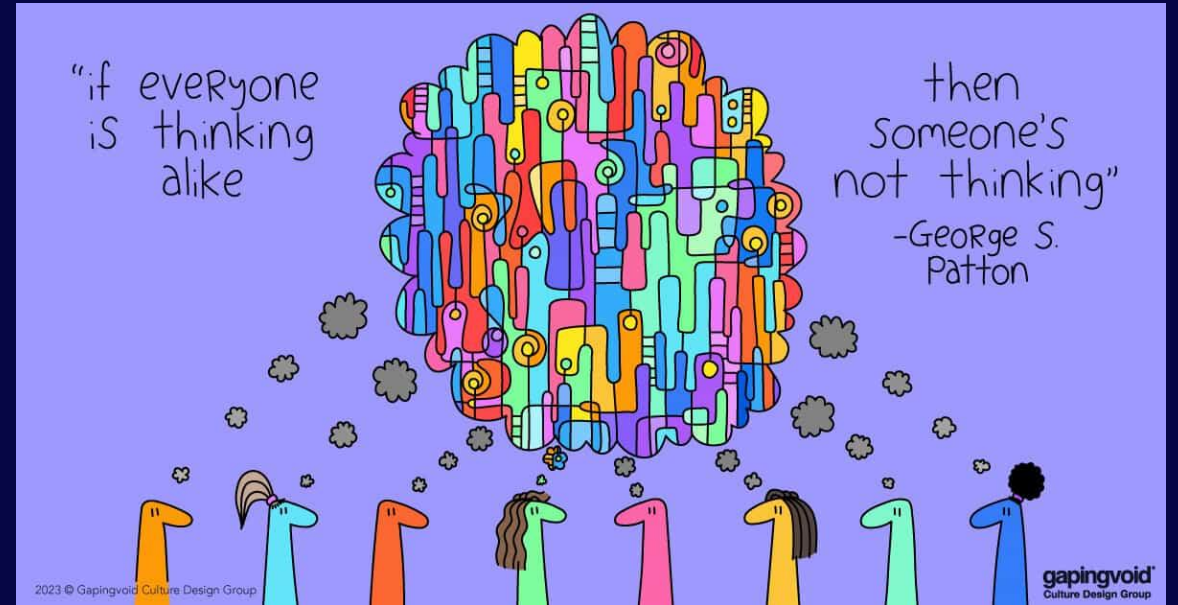
## **An ensemble of >200 OU STiP CoP members**

– united by curiosity, systemic sensibilities\*, and enthusiasm for making sense of complexity

\***Systemic Sensibilities** – our natural ability to notice how things connect, step back for the bigger picture, and keep asking questions to understand the sources of influence shaping a situation.

# OU STiP CoP – How does it work?

- A safe, reflective space
- Transdisciplinary
- Practice-based
- Use of STiP to grow STiP



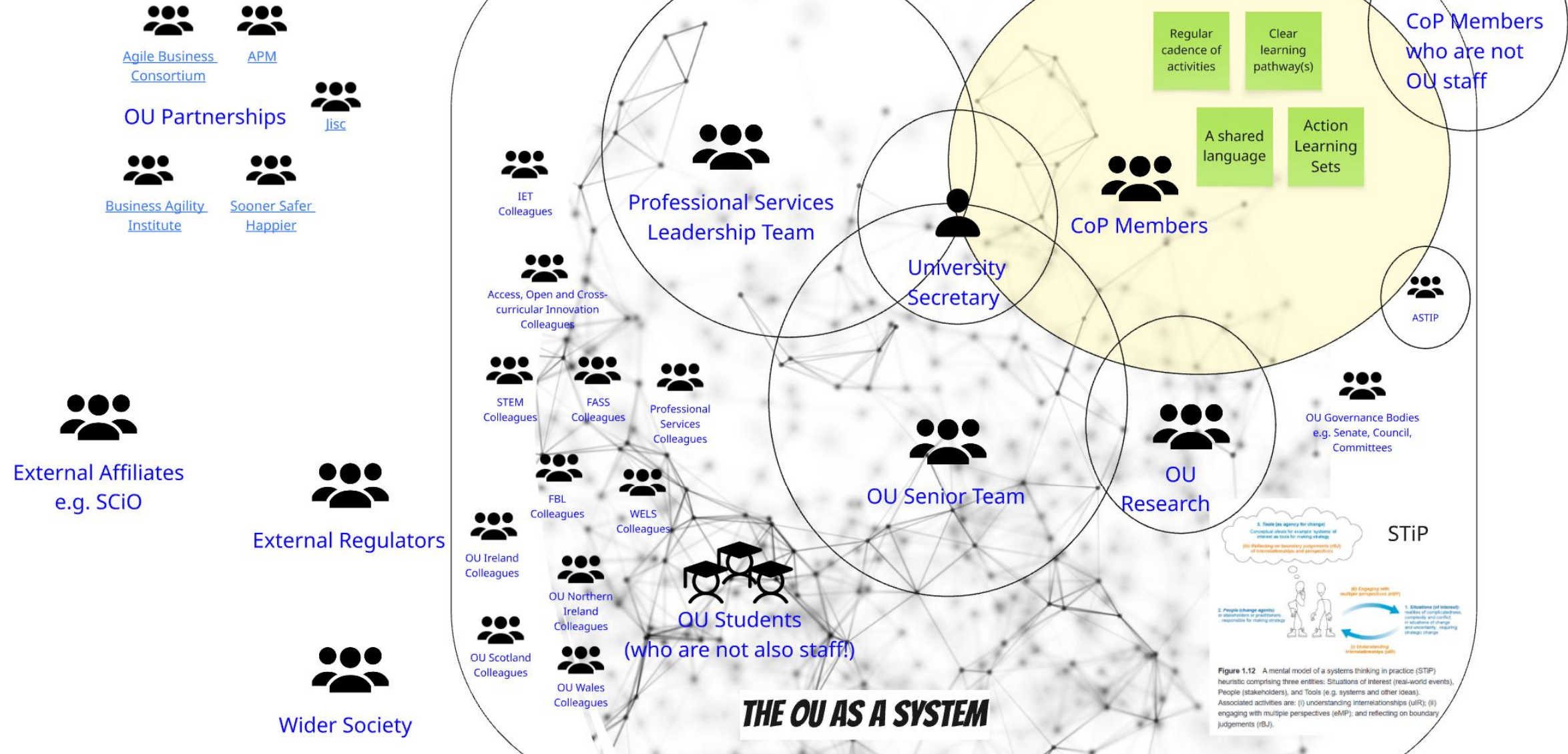
# SSM – Finding out about the situation: Rich Picture(s)

OU STiP CoP and our key stakeholders in the context of the wider university and society



V0.18 May 2026

STiP CoP and key stakeholders in context of the wider university and society



# Intended outcomes

A *growing* network of practitioners willing to deal with complex challenges, collaboratively develop their STiP within The Open University, and beyond

Colleagues more able to view the University as a system

Colleagues more able to instinctively think and work across functional boundaries



Continuous improvement that delivers what matters to our beneficiaries

A common language to describe our working environment, and how it performs

Organisational agility and learning, towards creating sustainable change

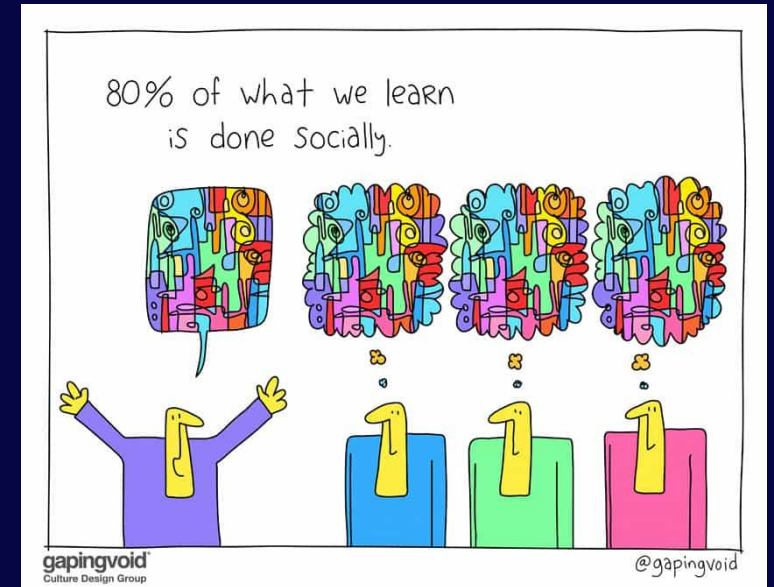
# OU STiP CoP – How is it evolving?

- Iterative learning journey
- Soft Systems Methodology
  - Finding out about the situation
    - ✓ Rich pictures
    - ✓ PQR and CATWOE analysis
    - ✓ Creation of a Root Definition
  - Development of artefacts
    - ✓ STiP CoP Handbook
    - ✓ Past Events and Activities/Resources lists
  - Reflecting on the journey
    - ✓ Mid year review
    - ✓ End of year review



# OU STiP CoP – What are we learning?

1. Developing systemic capability
2. Learning through shared practice
3. STiP CoP as a relational learning environment



*'Thank you for letting me quietly digest and think and learn.'*

# OU STiP CoP – Limitations and Tensions

- Impact uneven across boundaries
- Systems thinking in pockets
- Organisational constraints limit spread

## Tensions:

- local depth vs system-wide reach
- developing capability vs diffusion across boundaries
- building systemic capability vs systemic influence

# An emerging question

- What happens when Communities of Practice try to learn with and from each other across organisational boundaries?



# Towards a CoP of CoPs

- An emerging direction / co-inquiry hypothesis
- What might a CoP of CoPs enable?
  - Connection between CoPs – sharing perspectives and learnings
  - Sharing practice and experience – artefacts, stories, patterns
  - Capability and collaboration beyond a single organisation / context
- Tensions
  - autonomy vs coordination
  - coherence vs diversity
  - energy vs overhead

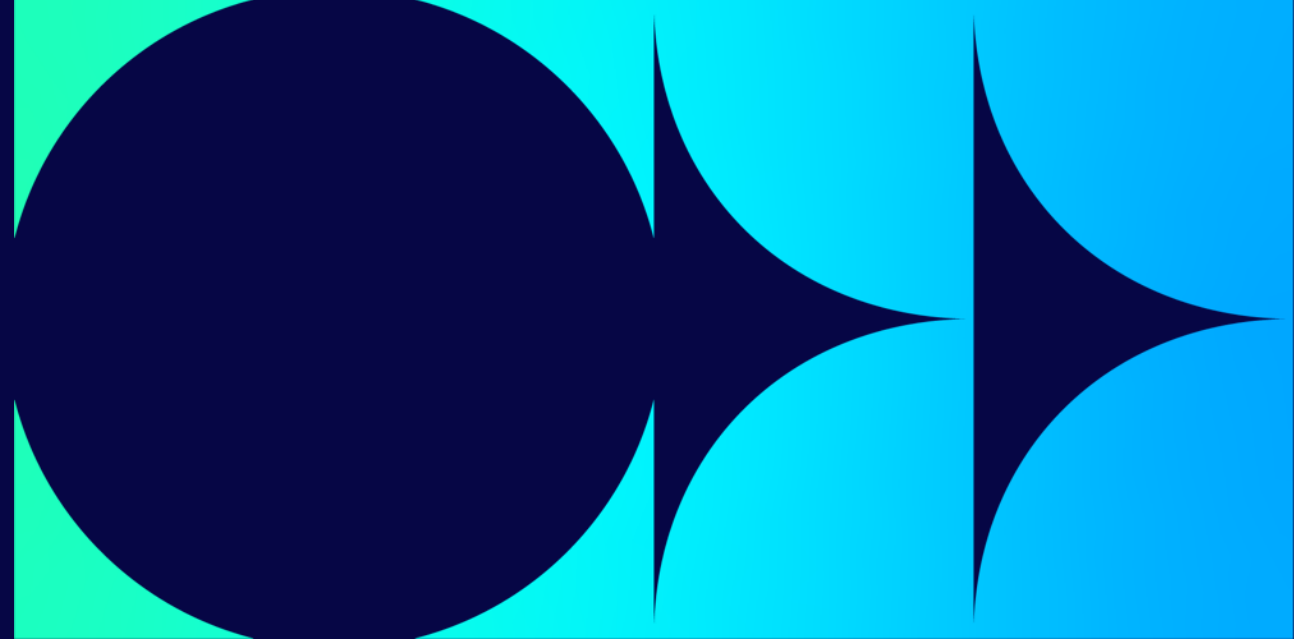
# Thoughts and Questions?

# Towards a Cross-institutional Community of Practice of Communities of Practice (CoP of CoPs)

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Senior Manager, Change and Agility



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# Engage with Systems Thinking at the OU...

**Systems Thinking Hub**

Welcome! Check out our fantastic range of FREE resources on systems thinking in practice.

**What is Systems Thinking in Practice Hub about?**

What is the Systems Thinking in Practice hub and who is it for? Find out in this hub with regular content in this short...

**Why was the Systems Thinking in Practice hub created?**

**Systems thinking in practice**

Systems thinking in practice is an exciting and emerging management discipline, providing tools to think strategically and challenge your approach to complex situations. The Open University has over 40 years' experience, leadership and international recognition in the field of systems thinking.

[Find out more](#)

**What can you study with the OU?**

As an early pioneer of the subject, our qualifications in systems thinking in practice have broken new ground in how to teach systems ideas, and have been studied by more than 30,000 people. We offer the following qualifications:

- [Postgraduate Certificate in Systems Thinking in Practice](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Systems Thinking in Practice](#)
- [MSc in Systems Thinking in Practice](#)

[Request a prospectus](#)

**Study Systems Thinking in Practice at The OU:**  
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**OpenLearn ST Hub:**  
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[Understanding Systems Thinking in Practice \(STiP\)](#)  
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