Enabling Strategies for Viable Futures

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Introduction

This is a provisional working checklist of possible courses of action in response to the challenges of the future. It refers primarily to other documents on this site where the arguments are elaborated. The concern here, with respect to the future, might perhaps best be framed by two well-known quotes:

Albert Einstein: To repeat the same thing over and over again, and yet to expect a different result, this is a form of insanity.

George Santayana: Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it

The preoccupation here is not with mega-projects and initiatives, many of which are on the table, but with the possibility of enabling other modes of framing the challenges and the possibilities for actions with multiplier effects. The strategic emphasis is on low cost experiments with a self-reflexive, self-critical bias -- learning from what has not worked and benefitting from modes of thinking that may have been ignored.

The challenges of humanity call for skills and attitudes more closely analogous to those of the extremes of mountaineering exploits -- perhaps to be compared with climbing the North Face of the Eiger (Eigerwand). These contrast with any conventional assumptions of normality and business as usual. The latter tend to imply, as a caricature, that all is required is to be suitably outfitted, comfortably seated and appropriately animated -- at a safe distance from those risks, but with an enhanced view of them in the expectation of some fatal happening (armed with a cocktail of stimulants should such not eventuate) (Norms in the Global Struggle against Extremism, 2005).

Within such a metaphor, the question is what are the “holds” required to navigate the hazards inhibiting identification of viable strategic responses? The brief sections of this document are intended as indications of such “holds”.

The range of papers cited here is clustered to emphasize the futures perspective of the title. A more general clustering of Research Themes and Papers is also provided on this site. A previous exercise for the Global Governance Group (Governing Civilization through Civilizing Governance: global challenge for a turbulent future, 2008) also cited a range of these papers, clustered in terms of the
Transcending Agreement vs Disagreement

The primary mode of negotiation and strategic development over past decades has been determined by the need for agreement, reconciliation and conflict resolution -- namely the elimination or minimization of disagreement in a commitment to harmonization and normalization. This has not prevented the continuing emergence of disagreement and its disruptive consequences for initiatives dependent for their stability and viability on its absence.

Given the possibility that universal agreement on any issue may not be forthcoming (or desirable), and that any degree of compromise may not be adequate to the challenge, there is a strong case for investigating the possible integrity of structures based on some form of "disagreement". Given that the importance of "harmony" is stressed in pursuing any strategy, it is appropriate to note that no effort is ever invested in learning from the discipline that has traditionally provided the most insight into harmony and has notably explored many ways to creatively reconcile "concord" and "discord".

- Using Disagreements for Superordinate Frame Configuration, 1992
- Higher Orders of Inter-sectoral "Consensus": clarification of formal possibilities, 1991
- Liberation of Integration, Universality and Concord -- through pattern, oscillation, harmony and embodiment, 1980
- Some Clues to Social Harmony from Music, 1993
- Groupware Configurations of Challenge and Harmony - an alternative approach to "alternative organization", 1979
- see also: Documents relating to Criticism, bias and dissent
- see also: Documents relating to Polarization, dilemmas, duality
- see also: Documents relating to Comprehension and communicability
Enabling possibilities beyond "project logic"

There have been a multitude of creative projects over decades, from global to local, which do not appear to have been responding sufficiently, or sufficiently rapidly, to the complex of existing and emergent problems. Whilst a rocket may appear to be well-designed, may indeed climb gracefully into the sky in an arc as planned, but unless it reaches escape velocity it can only fall and cause damage (as with military rockets). There is therefore a case for exploring whether the "project logic", by which they are characterized as professional, effectively inhibits recognition of opportunities that have not been adequately explored. The specific question is whether there are other modes of knowing and organization which may be more appropriate to the challenges or to those who are called upon to respond to them.

Arguments and possibilities in this respect are articulated in:

- Knowledge Gardening through Music: patterns of coherence for future African management as an alternative to Project Logic, 2000
- Systems of Categories Distinguishing Cultural Biases, 1993
- Development through Alternation, 1983
- Beyond the Matrix: becoming other wise, 2007
- see also: Documents relating to Alternation, dynamics, movement

Configuring globally: patterning the resolutique

The elaboration of strategies consistent with sets of values considered fundamental is curiously dependent on the use of particular structural metaphors, notably "pillars" (as with the EU), "poles" (as in bipolar or multipolar), and "stakes" (as in "stakeholders") Emphasis is then placed on "sides", as in opposing sides. Given the rich panoply of architectural and structural possibilities, there is a case for exploring new ways of configuring structural elements, notably to ensure more robust structures of greater integrity -- better able to incorporate different strategic orientations.

Arguments and possibilities are articulated in:

- In Quest of a Strategic Pattern Language: a new architecture of values, 2008
- Configuring Globally and Contending Locally: shaping the global network of local bargains by decoding and mapping Earth Summit inter-sectoral issues, 1992
- Polyhedral Empowerment of Networks through Symmetry: psycho-social implications for organization and global governance, 2008
- see also: Documents relating to Configurations and Patterns

Engaging with complexity

There are many exciting academic explorations of complexity and chaos which are in principle of significance to engaging effectively with the complexity of an increasingly chaotic society. Seemingly very little of this insight has been rendered relevant to these challenges -- with the ironic exception of the Gaussian copula (Recipe for Disaster: the formula that killed Wall Street, Wired, 23 February 2009). Especially relevant is the challenge of recognizing the dynamics of game-playing processes which destabilize so many conventionally organized strategic initiatives that assume, or ignore, the absence of such complexity.

Arguments and possibilities are articulated in:

- Sustainability through the Dynamics of Strategic Dilemmas -- in the light of the coherence and visual form of the Mandelbrot set, 2005
- Potential Psychosocial Significance of Monstrous Moonshine: an exceptional form of symmetry as a Rosetta stone for cognitive frameworks, 2007
- Imagining the Real Challenge and Realizing the Imaginal Pathway of Sustainable Transformation, 2007
- Human Values as Strange Attractors, 1993
- see also: Documents relating to Systems, Complexity, Loops, Maths
- see also: Documents relating to Comprehension and Communicability

Re-enchanting engagement through metaphorical enrichment

There is widespread recognition of the increasing complexity of the challenges. Curiously the strategic challenge of navigating the emerging environment is almost universally defined in terms of visual metaphors ("vision", "foresight", "prevision", "envisage", "focus", etc.). No consideration is given to the constraints this may impose and the potential relevance of non-visual metaphors (sound, smell, taste, feel, etc). This is potentially vital in a world where other modes are acquiring considerable importance, or may be vital to constituencies it is hoped to engage. Of particular interest is the possibility that such considerations may offer more integrative approaches to an otherwise fragmented social strategic context:

These possibilities are explored in:

- Strategic Challenge of Polysensorial Knowledge: bringing the "elephant" into "focus", 2008
- In Quest of Mnemonic Catalysts -- for comprehension of complex psychosocial dynamics, 2007
- Meta-challenges of the Future for Networking through Think-tanks, 2005
- "Tank-thoughts" from "Think-tanks": metaphors constraining development of global governance, 2003
In Quest of Uncommon Ground: beyond impoverished metaphor and the impotence of words of power, 1997
Developing a Metaphorical Language for the Future, 1994
Metaphor as an Unexplored Catalytic Language for Global Governance, 1993
Metaphors as Transdisciplinary Vehicles of the Future, 1991
Through Metaphor to a Sustainable Ecology of Development Policies, 1989
see also: Documents relating to Metaphor for governance
see also: Documents relating to Existential Engagement and Embodiment

Reframing strategic articulation to embody dynamic engagement

It is extraordinary, in a world of that extols the merits of innovation, that collective declarations of intent have attracted no thought as to whether their structure is appropriate to engagement with the complexity and dynamics of the challenges. Some as with the Lisbon Reform Treaty are of several hundred pages in length and are inherently unmemorable. They are an incitement to boredom and apathy -- as the level of interest in them indicates. It is readily forgotten the kinds of biases built into preferences for information presentation by different cultures, with the dominant western cultures focused primarily on texts compatible with the legal backgrounds of their leadership, as recently noted (Selection bias in politics: there was a lawyer, an engineer and a politician... The Economist, 16 April 2009). A striking contrast is offered by the election of Jacob Zuma as President of South Africa -- notably, according to many, because he dances. An unusual western contrast is offered by the German Research Institute for Applied Knowledge Processing (FAW), under the direction of Franz Josef Radermacher, who reinforced an articulation of the challenge of responding to complex social problems by the use of a set of 12 songs in The Globalization Saga: Balance or Destruction, 2004 -- as the CD accompaniment to a book (Balance or Destruction: ecosocial market economy as the key to global sustainable development, 2004).

The question that merits exploration is the organization of key strategic insights to enhance their memorability, coherence, vital systemic feedback loops between their elements, as well their capacity to engage in the epic challenges to which they claim to respond.

- Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity? 2009
- Reframing the EU Reform Process -- through Song, 2008
- A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?, 2006
- Animating the Representation of Europe
- Structuring Mnemonic Encoding of Development Plans and Ethical Charters using Musical Leitmotivs
- Poetry-making and Policy-making: arranging a Marriage between Beauty and the Beast, 1993
- Aesthetics of Governance in the Year 2490, 1990
- see also: Documents relating to Declarations, principles, guidelines
- see also: Documents relating to Experimental declarations

Uncovering systemic challenges: uncertainty, unknowns, the unsaid and the unexpected

The global strategic challenge is increasingly framed in terms of the vital need to focus on a handful of critical problems framed -- unquestionably -- as the greatest threat to the future of humanity. This simplistic framing is necessarily encouraged by several factors noted above, including binary logic and the bias in favour of single factor explanations, information overload, etc. Global policy lurches spasmodically from crisis to crisis (terrorism, climate change, financial collapse, unemployment, food shortages, etc) effectively ignoring the systemic interrelationship of the issues, except as a means of justifying incapacity to act effectively on any one of them. This suggests the need for more fruitful systemic insights, especially if there is the possibility that the focus on any one crisis may in effect be inadvertently (or deliberately) concealing the need to focus on a more fundamental emergent crisis -- a focus on surrogates with an exaggerated emphasis on their critical nature and a lack of systemic perspective. There is a need to reframe and work creatively with disagreement, ignorance, negativity, uncertainty, and complexity -- possibly through paradoxical and negative strategies.

- Considering All the Strategic Options: whilst ignoring alternatives and disclaiming cognitive protectionism, 2009
- Systemic Crises as Keys to Systemic Remedies: a metaphorical Rosetta Stone for future strategy?, 2008
- Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect, 2008
- Liberating Provocations: use of negative and paradoxical strategies, 2005
- Promoting a Singular Global Threat -- Terrorism Strategy of choice for world governance, 2002
- Communicating with Aliens: Designing a Team for Alien Encounter, 2000

Reorganizing knowledge and unfreezing categories

A fundamental question is whether the organization of knowledge is adequate to the cognitive challenge of responding to complexity and the turbulent future expected. A particular issue is the nature of the integration of the knowledge and whether it enables integrative approaches that are amenable to comprehension and widespread communication. Any adequate integration potentially also needs to take account of the variety of modes of knowing which may be vital to its credibility in different cultural contexts.

- Framing the Global Future by Ignoring Alternatives: unfreezing categories as a vital necessity, 2009
- Systems of Categories Distinguishing Cultural Biases, 1993
- Functional Classification in an Integrative Matrix of Human Prooccupations, 1982
- see also: Documents relating to Diversity, variety, typology

Mining civilizational knowledge and wisdom

In the light of the arguments of Susantha Goonatilake (Towards a Global Science: mining civilizational knowledge, 1999) regarding the potential strategic advantages associated with the mindsets and metaphors of other cultures -- and especially with the rapid rise to prominence of the Chinese and Indian cultures -- a strong case can be made for exploring the complementary implications of those modes of understanding for governance of the future. It is however also extraordinary that so little effort is made to use innovations in knowledge management techniques to organize, and render accessible, what is held to be the wisdom of all cultures (even their essence) however it is succinctly expressed through aphorisms, etc.

- Remedies to Global Crisis: "Allopathic" or "Homeopathic"? Metaphorical complementarity of "conventional" and "alternative" models, 2009
- Enhancing the Quality of Knowing through Integration of East-West metaphors, 2000
- Transformation Metaphors derived experimentally from the Chinese Book of Changes (I Ching) for sustainable dialogue, vision, conferencing, policy, network, community and lifestyle, 1997
- see also: Documents relating to Patterns of I Ching / Tao te Ching
- see also: Documents relating to Human Values and Wisdom

Challenge of faith-based governance

Whether it be issues of overpopulation, human rights, or ethics, it is clear that the different religions will continue to impact on the governance of society, notably through violent conflict as a result of their unresolved theological differences. It is appropriate to recognize that "faith" may take somewhat comparable forms, as illustrated by the "belief" system of science -- or the curious assumption that citizens should continue to have "faith" in their governments following the financial crisis of 2008. In principle all such beliefs highlight the importance of modes of insight that transcend the mundane.

- Future Challenge of Faith-based Governance, 2003
- Resolving the Challenge of Faith-based Terrorism, 2005
- Thinking in Terror: refocusing the interreligious challenge from "Thinking after Terror", 2005
- Guidelines for Critical Dialogue between Worldviews, 2006
- Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth, 2007
- Credibility Crunch engendered by Hope-mongering, 2008
- Tuning a Periodic Table of Religions, Epistemologies and Spirituality: including the sciences and other belief systems, 2007
- Learnings for the Future of Inter-Faith Dialogue, 1993
- Towards Spiritual Concord: Report of the First World Congress towards Spiritual Concord, 1992
- see also: Documents relating to Faith, Religion and Spirituality

Dialogue mapping and transformative conferencing

It is a characteristic of social change initiatives that they involve extensive speeches, dialogues and texts, in a "linear" mode, with very little effort to identify and hold the points and arguments made in any coherent context -- such that subsequent interventions can build precisely on the configuration of what has gone before, or challenge it appropriately. In a sense, ensuring the apparent originality, novelty and positive assessment of any new initiative is dependent on ignoring what has gone before or deprecating its relevance and the learnings it may offer. Basically, whether within a gathering, or between gatherings, there is very little effort at insight capture.

Possibilities in this respect are currently a focus of the Global Sensemaking network, but the arguments and indiciations of potentials have been variously made in the following:

Why are conferences so ineffectual and without consequences and yet so positive about their achievements ***

- Strategic Jousting through Poetic Wrestling: aesthetic reframing of the clash of civilizations, 2009
- Complementary Knowledge Analysis / Mapping Process, 2006
- Preliminary NetMap Studies of Databases on Questions, World Problems, Global Strategies, and Values, 2006
- Future Generation through Global Conversation: in quest of collective well-being through conversation in the present moment, 1997
- Transformative Conferencing: problems and possibilities on the new frontier of high-risk gatherings concerning social development, 1984
- see also: Documents relating to Dialogue and Transformative Conferencing
- see also: Documents relating to Visualization, presentation, mapping

Democratic feedback processes and civilizing governance
Much is made of the fundamental importance of "democratic" processes and consultation. Almost no attention is given to the increasingly problematic process of ensuring viable communication of concern, interest or intent from the electorate to decision-makers -- although concerns are repeatedly expressed about the apathy of voters. There is a strong case for simulating the quantitative challenges of such communication between (hundreds of) millions of voters and several hundred decision-makers -- in a situation in which the latter are subject to ever-increasing information overload. Given such constraints, any such simulation could usefully also take account of the publicized efforts to consult multitudes and invite feedback from them -- when such is the difficulty of processing such feedback that any claims to effective consultation lend themselves to accusations of "misleading the public" and even to "fraudulent trading practices".

Consideration of these challenges and opportunities for circumventing them are articulated in:

- **Considering All the Strategic Options: whilst ignoring alternatives and disclaiming cognitive protectionism**, 2009
- **Governing Civilization through Civilizing Governance Global challenge for a turbulent future**, 2008
- **Coherent Policy-making Beyond the Information Barrier: circumventing dependence on access, classification, penetration, dissemination, property, surveillance, interpretation, misinformation, and credibility**, 1999
- see also: **Documents relating to Civil society**
- see also: **Documents relating to Governance, democracy, participation, access**

**Eliciting insight: Wiki-Solutions**

In addition to the insights emerging from dialogues, it is extraordinary how little effort is made to gather and interrelate the insights regarding solutions to the challenges faced by humanity. It is characteristic that the primary model for such a possibility should now be open directory projects such as Wikipedia, developed independently -- without any capacity to acknowledge their significance by fragmented mainstream governmental or academic institutions. A precursor in this respect is the online Global Strategies and Solutions Project which profiled some 32,000 strategic options advocated or initiated by international constituencies -- as well as indicating the network of some 263,000 relationships between those strategies (complementing similar databases on the problems they addressed and the organizations involved).

There is clearly a case for developing an open directory "Wiki-Solutions" facility to enable proposals from any source to be held, improved, criticized and interrelated without engaging in premature closure and exclusion of such ideas on the basis of particular academic, ideological or political biases. The irony of the currently impoverished official strategic response is that it is from that mindset that judgments are authoritatively made to preclude ensuring the visibility of options that might constitute viable alternatives, whether in isolation or in combination.


**Enabling experiments with alternatives**

There may always have been efforts to explore alternative approaches to employment and community organization. There have been many experiments in intentional community. But despite current government interest in sustainable community, there has been no effort to recognize such social experiments as meriting investigation as options in their own right -- to whatever degree they succeeded or failed. Indeed it has been found convenient to associate all such experiments with questionable belief systems that are readily condemned as cultist and associated, at least potentially, with suicidal disasters -- as though disaster and risk were not potentially associated with the best of modern technology. At a time of considerable unemployment, it is curious that "jobs" have effectively been commodified within a framework that is unable to deliver them in sufficient quantity, suggesting the need for rethinking the very notion of "employment".

- **Social Experiments and Sects: beyond category manipulation by advocates and opponents**, 1997
- **Renaissance Zones: experimenting with the intentional significance of the Damanhur community**, 2003
- **Being Employed by the Future: reframing the immediate challenge of sustainable community**, 1996
- **Gardening Sustainable Psychocommunities: recognizing the psycho-social integrities of the future**, 1995
- **Sustainable Occupation beyond the "Economic" Rationale**, 1998
- see also: **Documents relating to Experiments and Case Studies**

**Simulation, play and dematerialization**

Nothing need be said about the explosion of the web and its possibilities -- except that official strategic responses to such potential have tended to suffer a lag of 10-15 years. Policy-makers tend to learn of such facilities, if they do, from their younger children. There is a strong case for using these possibilities to simulate a wide range of strategic alternatives, beyond the officially deprecated experiments for the Club of Rome in 1972 (Graham Turner, *A Comparison of the Limits to Growth with Thirty Years of Reality*, CSIRO 2007). Of particular significance is a degree of psychological shift in centre of gravity into virtual worlds -- reflecting the economics of dematerialization -- with an unusual emphasis on the dynamics of play. Yet to be developed is a form of game-playing which enables the emergence of new and subtler styles of psycho-social organization and strategy.

- **Humour and Play-Fullness Essential integrative processes in governance, religion and transdisciplinarity**, 2005
- **Playfully Changing the Prevailing Climate of Opinion: climate change as focal metaphor of effective global governance**, 2005
- **Imaginal Education: game playing, science fiction, language, art and world-making**, 2003
- **Simulating a Global Brain -- using networks of international organizations, world problems, strategies, and values**, 2001

**Monitoring strategic initiatives**
As noted above with respect to insight capture, it is extraordinary the lack of formal monitoring of major strategic initiatives, including the (summit) gatherings in which they are formulated. It is difficult to locate formal assessments of the dynamics and outcome of events like the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), or its follow-up the Rio+10 Earth Summit (Johannesburg, 2002). The same may be said of many gatherings and initiatives, the meetings of the G7/8 Group, the regular conferences of the UN (or its Special Agencies), or the annual World Economic Forum and the annual World Social Forum. This is also the case with potentially more ambitious gatherings such as the Parliament of the World's Religions or the World Wisdom Alliance. Evaluations tend to be merely anecdotal and unofficial, thus inhibiting learning and improvement. Future events are then based on the absence of critical feedback -- necessarily framed as "negative" at a time of perceived need to "draw a line" and "move on" by ignoring the past and its potential learnings.

There is therefore a strong case for formal monitoring of potentially insightful events, notably those interrelating a diversity of perspectives articulated by people who may well have a long track record of participation in such events and problematic exposure to each other.

- Epistemological Challenge of Cognitive Body Odour: exploring the underside of dialogue, 2006
- Dialogue Challenges towards the Year 3000: comments on the Humanity 3000 Symposium, 2000
- Collective Learning from Calls for Global Action, 1981
- Checklist of Nasty Methodological Questions -- regarding development analyses and initiatives, 1981
- Cooperation and its Failures (From the 1960s through the 1980s): 12 Metaphors towards understanding the dilemma for the 1990s, 1988
- Enabling Creative Response to Extraordinary Crises, 2001
- Evaluating synthesis initiatives and their sustaining dialogues: Possible questions as a guide to criteria of evaluation of any synthesis initiative, 2000

Self-reflexivity and mirroring

Conference of the Birds, or Mount Analogue

- Self-reflexive Challenges of Integrative Futures, 2008
- Self-reflective Embodiment of Transdisciplinary Integration, 2008
- Stepping into, or through, the Mirror: embodying alternative scenario patterns, 2008
- Consciously Self-reflexive Global Initiatives: Renaissance zones, complex adaptive systems, and third order organizations, 2007
- My Reflecting Mirror World: making my World Summit on Sustainable Development worthwhile, 2002
- Looking in the Mirror -- at Josef Fritzl ? Global conditions on reflection, 2009
- GPID Self-conscientization and in-project demonstration, 1978
- see also: Documents relating to Human Development and Self-reflection

Conclusions

The preoccupation above is primarily with enabling the emergence of better questions rather than in seeking closure -- necessarily premature -- on better answers. It is not the capacity to engender answers that is in question but their adequacy to the emerging challenges. There is also a concern that the nature of the preoccupation with answers -- effectively engendering an "answer economy" -- is precluding more critical thinking on the systemic challenges of increasing complexity. This is best characterized in well-known phrases such as that of Myron Tribus "There is a simple answer to every question and it is usually wrong" or that variously attributed to Will Rogers and H.L Mencken 'There is a simple solution to every problem - and it is always wrong'. This has been variously paraphrased, for example: "For every human problem there is a solution that is quick, simple, inexpensive -- and wrong".

The challenge implied by questions has been variously explored, notably in relation to the complexity sciences:

- Question Avoidance, Evasion, Aversion and Phobia why we are unable to escape from traps, 2006
- Conformality of 7 WH-questions to 7 Elementary Catastrophes: an exploration of potential psychosocial implications, 2006
- Generating a Million Questions from UIA Databases: Problems, Strategies, Values, 2006
- Preliminary Netmap Studies of Databases on Questions, World Problems, Global Strategies, and Values, 2006
- Enabling a Living Library reconciling "free voices" and "intellectual propriety", 2006
- see also: Documents relating to Quests, Questions and Answers

A question framework highlights challenges for the future such as:

- what is to be learnt from past initiatives to articulate solutions for the future -- initiatives such as Club of Rome, Club of Budapest, dropping knowledge, FFF, WFC, WFS, WFSF, Union of Intelligible Associations?
- by whom is such learning to be achieved and how?
- who is to be expected to respond to such learnings and how is communication with them to be ensured: participants, international organizations, local communities? (Emergence of a Global Misleadership Council: misleading as vital to governance of the future? 2007)
- what processes tend to undermine collective learning and the emergence of collective intelligence: uncertainty, the "unsaid": political taboos, intercultural communication issues, interdisciplinary communication issues, interpersonal communication issues,
failure to learn from previous initiatives, low threshold of achievement satisfaction, failing to respond to larger challenge, complementary processes of "demonisation" and "self-evangelisation"; failure to engage with those from whom agreement is not expected?

- how can the capacity be enhanced to process and interrelate disparate categories of information reflecting the preoccupation of disparate constituencies?
- how can tendencies to premature closure be constrained with regard to on strategic options and solutions -- as reinforced by group think, silo thinking, tunnel vision, etc?
- how can the capacity be enhanced to benefit from alternative modes of knowing (Posey, Susantha)?
- how can self-reflexivity be enhanced, notably with respect to collective initiatives of a third order (in cybernetic terms)?
- how can the multiplicity of argument threads be woven into an integrative pattern enabling credible action?

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