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Developing an online hub to support teachers making adjustments for students with special needs:

Needs and features

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Background

- Study examined how schools made decisions about implementing adjustments for students with different needs in mainstream classrooms
- Results indicated:
  - Schools tried anything they knew about
  - Schools rarely rejected strategies
  - Relied a great deal on teacher assistants
  - Monitoring was informal and often not linked to specific goals
  - Teachers/school leaders struggled to identify whether strategies had an evidence base.
  - Teachers/school leaders struggled to negotiate conflicting information from outside sources
  - Teachers/school leaders struggled to access information to address issues within context of school classrooms.

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What is Wrong with Existing Clearinghouses?

- Focus on specific diagnostic categories and not school oriented
- Organised by specific interventions (e.g., PRT) rather than issues of concern to schools (e.g., how to develop social skills)
- Focus exclusively on research rather than classroom application
- Interventions may be ineffective unless more basic issues are first considered

Aim and Difference

- Develop a decision-making hub to aid schools in determining relevant adjustments for students with a range of needs
- Allows teachers to start with issue and work backgrounds
- Provide evidence base
- Provide information that is relevant and accessible within mainstream classroom contexts
- Incorporate focus on multi-tiered systems of support

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Project Design

- Four Phases
  - Phase 1
    - collect data on issues, current resource use, resource preferences;
    - develop design
  - Phase 2 – Develop online Adjustment Decision Making and Implementation Tool
  - Phase 3 – Preliminary trial, feedback and revise
  - Phase 4 - Final trial, feedback, final revision

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Phase 1 - Participants

- 6 schools
  - 2 high school; 4 primary
  - 4 urban; 2 rural
  - 18 staff including class teachers, learning support teachers and executive leaders
- 11 Assistant Principals Learning Support

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Data Collection

Initial Data Collection

- 4 Focus Groups –Primary Schools (including 1 rural)
- 1 Focus Group – Secondary School
- 1 Interview – Secondary School
- 3 Focus Groups – APLS
- 3 Interviews – APLS

- Followup Data Collection
  - 6 Interviews - APLS

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Questions Asked

1. Can you discuss the key areas where yourself or your school have difficulty in developing adjustments for students with additional learning and support needs?
2. What are the main tasks that SLSO (school learning support officers) carry out?
   - In the classroom?
   - Outside the classroom e.g. playground
3. What, if any, issues do schools experience in the use of SLSOs
4. What sources, if any do schools currently use to identify strategies?
   - What are the strengths of using these sources?
   - What are the limitations of using these sources?
5. How do you determine the match between strategies and student needs?
6. How do you monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies for students?
7. What specific features would you like to see incorporated in our online hub.

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Areas of difficulty in developing adjustments

- Four key areas
  - Completing work independently
  - Managing teaching to support students at different skill levels
  - Use of teacher assistants
  - Challenging behaviours
- Disruptive behaviours
- Non-compliance
- Completion of work
- Emotional/self-regulation
- Aggression (verbal and physical)
- Absconding

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Areas of difficulty in developing adjustments

- Few specific issues related to adjustments nominated without prompting.
- Lack of specific information about student issues – issues discussed very generally (e.g. behaviour)
- Frequent discussion of issues in supporting students including lack of time, funding, and resources
- Difference in perception of school staff and APLS
  - APLS identified behaviour as primary reason school staff sought assistance, but felt that core issues were really those involving effective teaching and need for Tier 1 supports
  - School staff discussed being overwhelmed with paperwork and lack of resources

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Use of Teacher Aides

Current Roles

- 1:1 assistance
  - Supervision
  - Managing
  - Keeping tabs on
- Small recordkeeping
- Making resources
- Vague assistance

Issues

- Schools perceived
  - Not enough TAs
  - Organisational issues (e.g. scheduling)
- APLS perceived
  - Ineffective use of TAs
  - TAs used as adjustment
- We identified
  - Lack of direction/goals
  - Lack of monitoring

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Other Influences – Decision-making

Matched strategy to student need

- Trial and error
- Previous experience
- Other people

Monitoring

- Very informal
- Monitoring of adjustments
- No monitoring

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Resources

Often Used

- Websites
- People
- Other

Limitations

- Navigation
- Too much information
- Limited links – have to go look for tools described
- Links to research
- Implementation examples
- Department website
  - Difficulty searching – often googled to find things
  - Not enough concrete information or practical ideas

Resources

Desired hub features

- Tier 1 interventions
- Examples including videos
- Take home resources or strategies
- Decision tree and categorization of strategies
- Description of strategies and list of options/strategies
- Links to relevant people/resources –
- ideas and resources to implement in one place
- Evidence base

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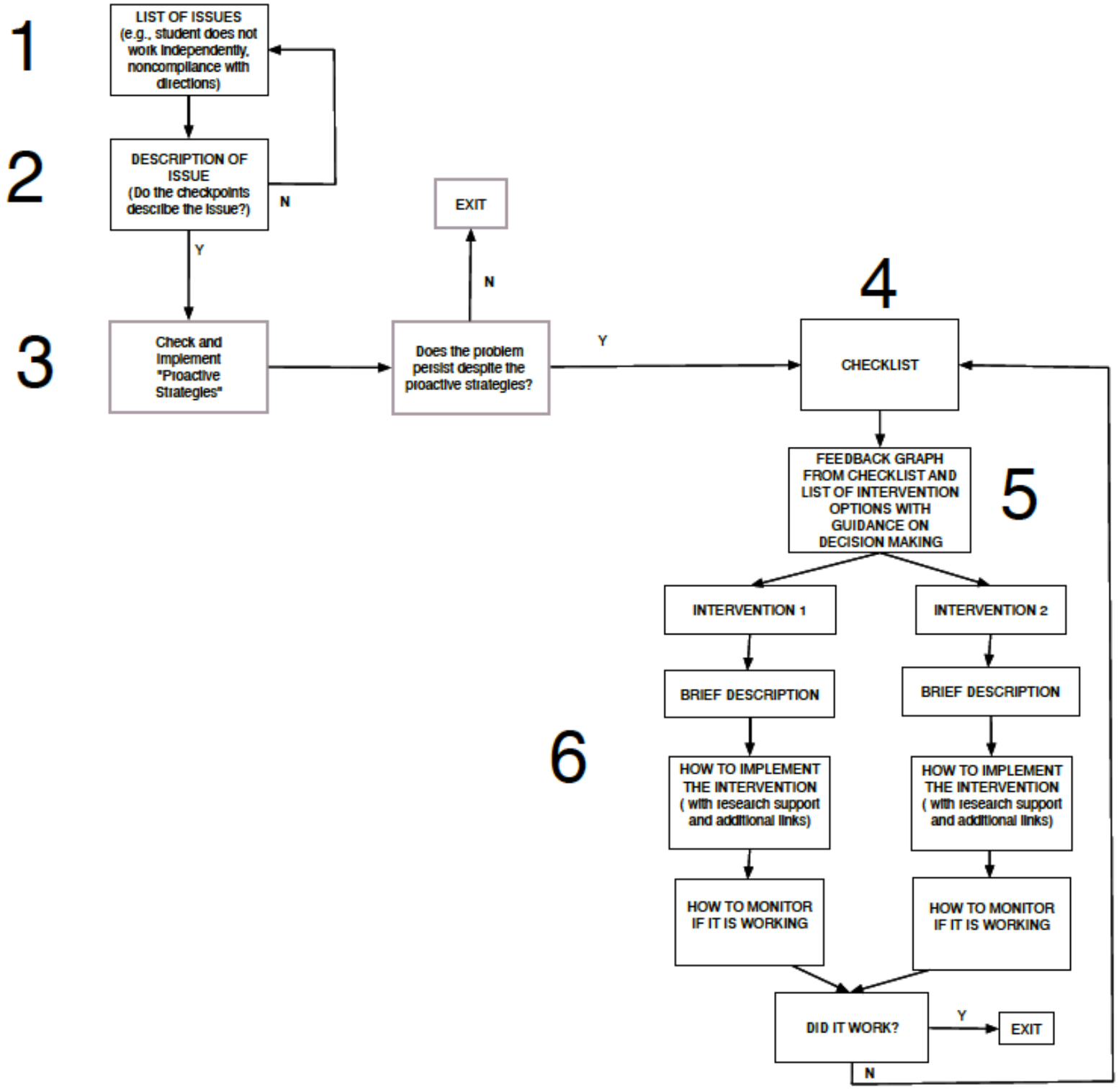
Adjustment Decision Making and Implementation Tool



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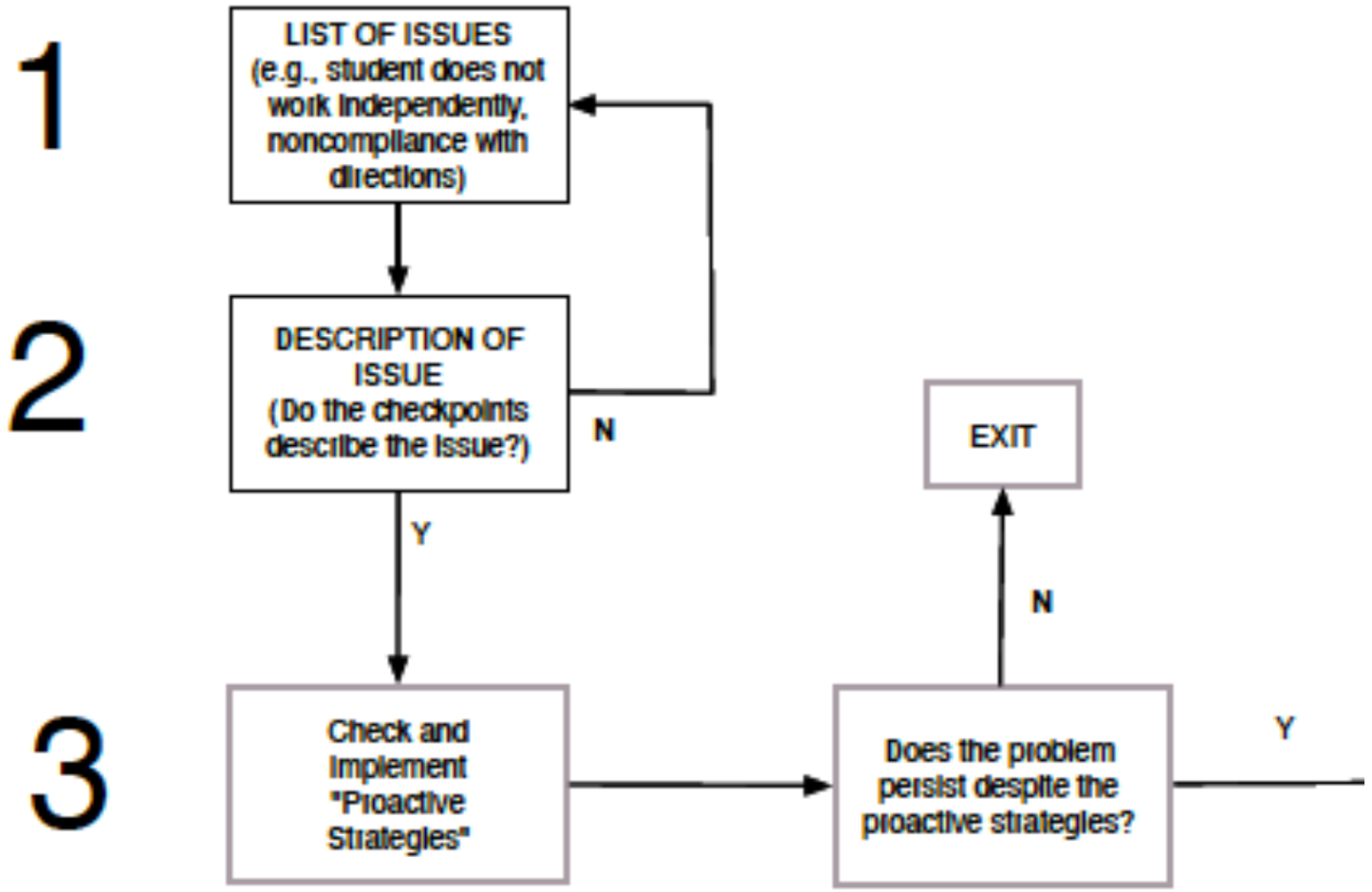
Adjustment Decision Making and Implementation Tool



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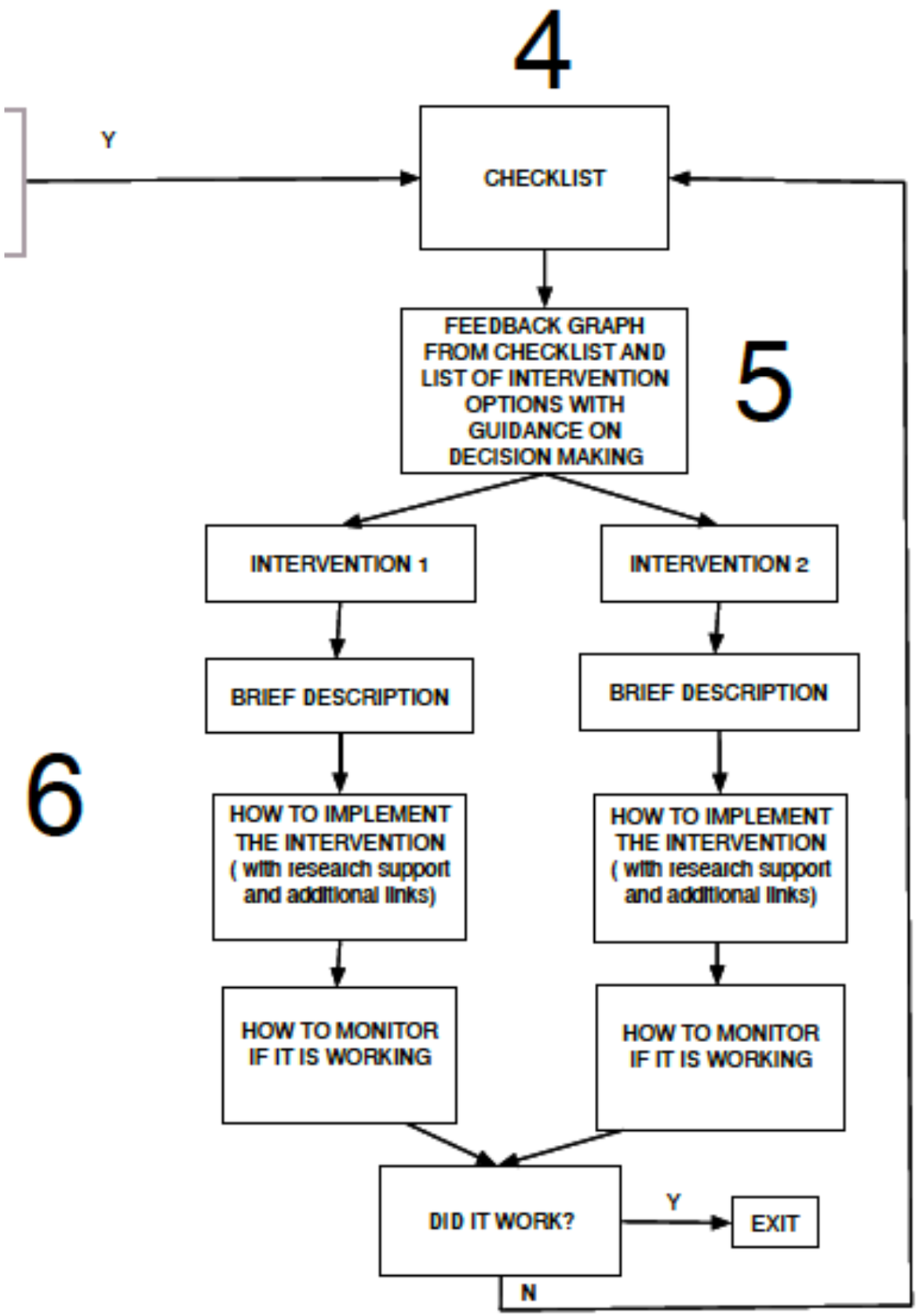

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Focus on Four Issues

- Independent Task Completion
- Managing curriculum/instruction for students at different skill levels
- Effective use of teacher assistants
- Managing challenging behaviours

Key Elements

- Descriptions of issues
- Decision tree (process)
- Proactive strategies to address some underlying issues
- Use of checklist to assess current strategies and link to specific ideas
- Focus on strategies for group before strategies for individual (multi-tiered system of supports)
- Questions to check if worked, and if not, next steps

Key Elements - Strategies

- Description
- Steps to implement
  - Set goal
  - Plan strategy
- Examples of implementation
- Guidelines for evaluation
- Review of research and evidence-base
- References

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Questions

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