



**J O H N S O N
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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY
U R E G I N A  U S A S K

Learning From Failure

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, you will be able to:

- recognize failure as a natural human and organizational condition;
- acknowledge that failure is sometimes good, sometimes bad, but always an opportunity to learn;
- describe the meaning of 'fail forward fast'; and,
- identify and create the necessary conditions in an organization for surfacing and exploiting failure in order to learn and grow.



Workshop Agenda

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Is failure best hidden/buried? Why focus on what didn't work?
- 3) Examples of failure – in the private and public sector
- 4) The case for unearthing failure and acknowledging failure to promote learning, innovation and growth.
- 5) Select tools for facing the inevitable
 - 1) Small test of change (PDCA)
 - 2) Fail forward fast
 - 3) Risk Management
- 6) Concluding Discussion



Why should we shine a spotlight on failure?





Failure in Context



Pick your Pilot



5/22/2024



PRESENTATION TITLE

“

I have not failed. I've just found
10,000 ways that won't work.

Thomas A. Edison

”

“

If things are not failing, you are
not innovating enough.

Elon Musk

”

“

My Cabinet colleagues have a big appetite for change, but not much stomach for it.

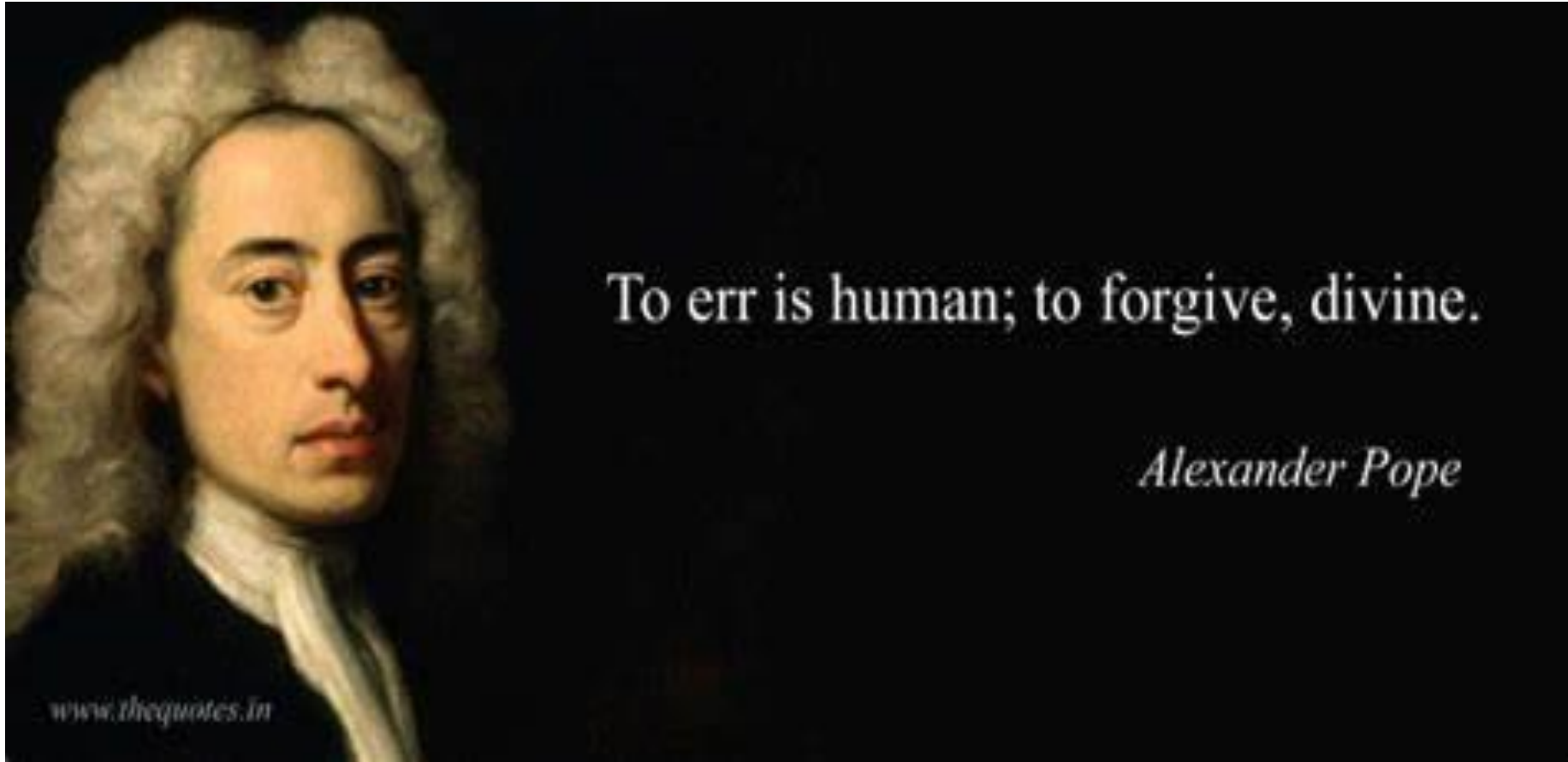
Anonymous Cabinet Minister,
Government of Saskatchewan

”



Examples of Failure





Boeing 737 Max



A technical system failure was the proximate cause of the disasters, which cost billions of dollars in losses to Boeing and the airlines, and, much more tragically, the lives of 346 passengers and crew. Founded in 1916, Boeing remains one of the world's most renowned engineering companies.

Maple Leaf Foods

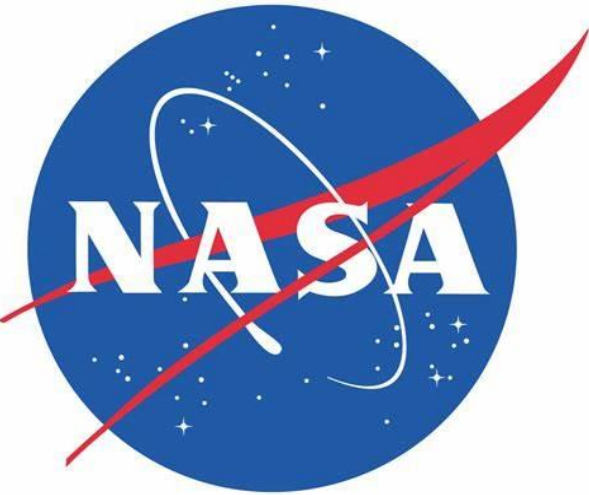


Maple Leaf Foods is open and candid about a tragedy that occurred in 2008 after *Listeria monocytogenes* contaminated products took the lives of 23 people.

Space Shuttle Challenger

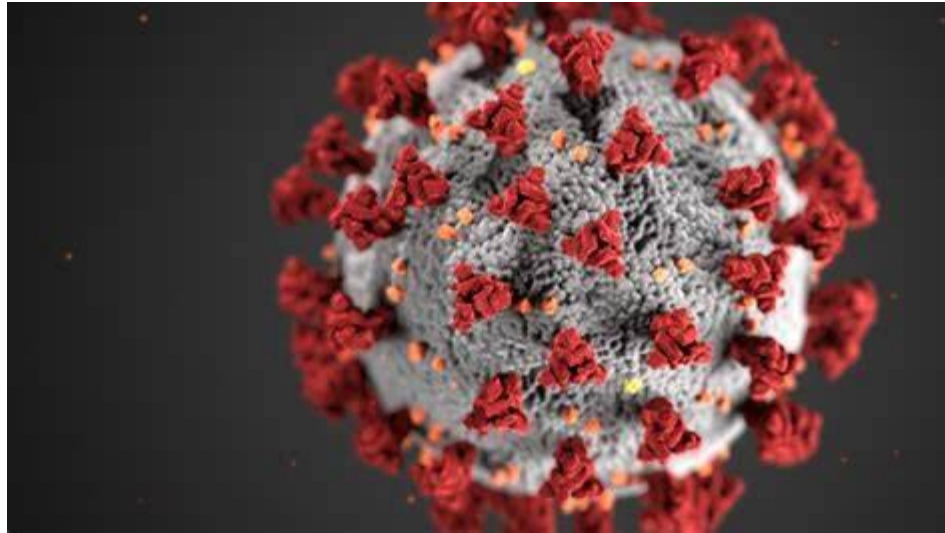


Challenger disaster, explosion of the U.S. [space shuttle](#) orbiter [Challenger](#), shortly after its launch from [Cape Canaveral, Florida](#), on January 28, 1986, which claimed the lives of seven astronauts.



Lessons Learned

COVID 19



Learning from Failure

- In 1953 at the Rocket Chemical Company, Norm Larsen and two colleagues were trying to develop a water-displacing, rust-prevention coating for use in the aerospace industry
- Their attempts failed 39 times, but because they were persistent and learned from their failures, their 40th attempt was successful, giving them the name for the new product: WD-40



Learning from Failure

- By 1985, Coca-Cola had been losing market share to diet soft drinks and other beverages.
- Blind taste tests suggested that consumers preferred the sweeter taste of Pepsi, so the Coca-Cola recipe was reformulated and named “New Coke”
- New Coke was seen as a major failure, and within three months the company reintroduced the original formula as “Coca-Cola Classic”, resulting in a significant sales boost

Fail Forward Fast

- The Phoenix pay system is a payroll processing system for Canadian federal government employees, first introduced in 2009
- The system intended to replace Canada's 40-year old system with a new, cost-saving “automated, off-the-shelf commercial system”
- By July 2018, Phoenix had caused pay problems to close to 80% of the federal government's 290,000 public servants through underpayments, over-payments, and non-payments
- What could have been done differently?

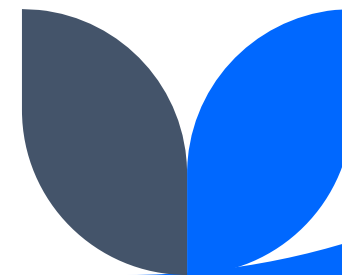
Astro Teller: The unexpected benefit of celebrating failure – TED Talk

- https://www.ted.com/talks/astro_teller_the_unexpected_benefit_of_celebrating_failure?language=en
- “If there’s an Achilles heel in one of our projects, we want to know it now, up front, not way down the road.”
- “Discovering a major flaw in a project doesn’t always mean that it ends the project. Sometimes it actually gets us on a more productive path.”



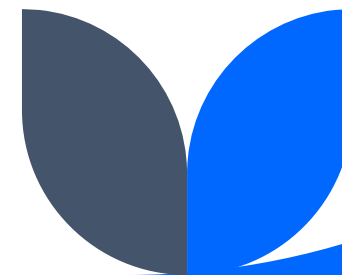
Amy C. Edmondson: Strategies for Learning from Failure

- <https://hbr.org/2011/04/strategies-for-learning-from-failure>
- The blame game
- Mistakes fall into three broad categories: preventable, complexity-related, and intelligent
- All organizations learn from failure through three essential activities: detection, analysis, and experimentation
- “Too often, pilots are conducted under optimal conditions rather than representative ones. Thus they can’t show what won’t work.”



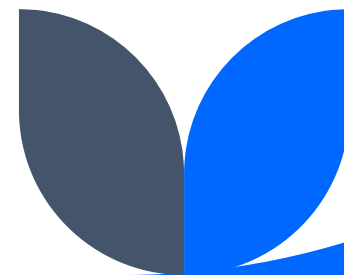
Amy C. Edmondson: Learn from Failure – Harvard Business Review

- <https://hbr.org/video/2226539841001/learn-from-failure>
- This video interview accompanies Amy C. Edmondson's article – Strategies for Learning from Failure
- The 2003 Columbia shuttle disaster could have been avoided



Bill Taylor: How Coca-Cola, Netflix, and Amazon Learn from Failure – Harvard Business Review

- <https://hbr.org/2017/11/how-coca-cola-netflix-and-amazon-learn-from-failure>
- “If you’re not prepared to fail, you’re not prepared to learn”
- “There is no learning without failing, there are no successes without setbacks”



Brian Goldman: Doctors make mistakes. Can we talk about that?

– TEDx Talk

- https://www.ted.com/talks/brian_goldman_doctors_make_mistakes_can_we_talk_about_that?language=en
- “If I can’t come clean and talk about my mistakes... how can I share it with my colleagues? How can I teach them about what I did so that they don’t do the same thing?”
- “Errors are absolutely ubiquitous. We work in a system where errors happen every day.”



Tools in the toolkit

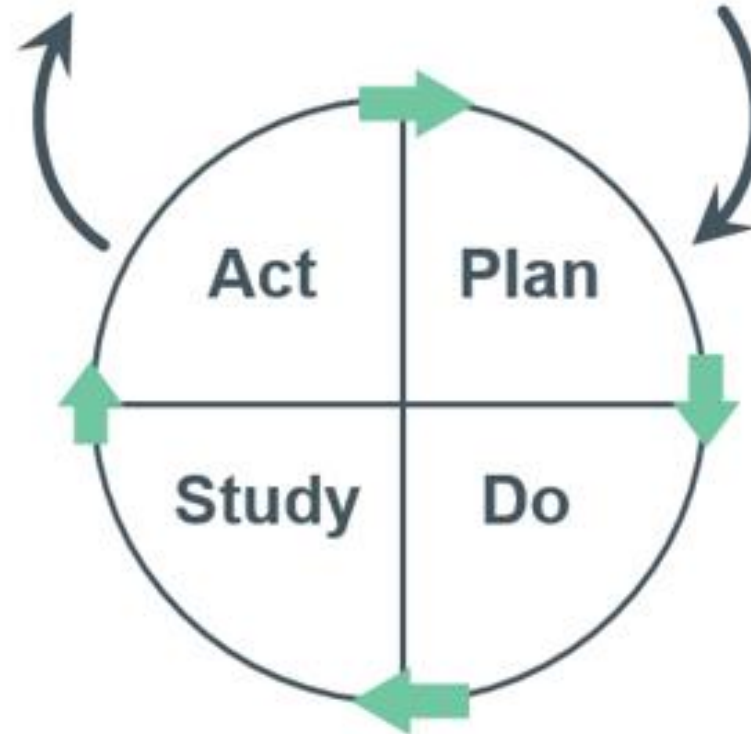
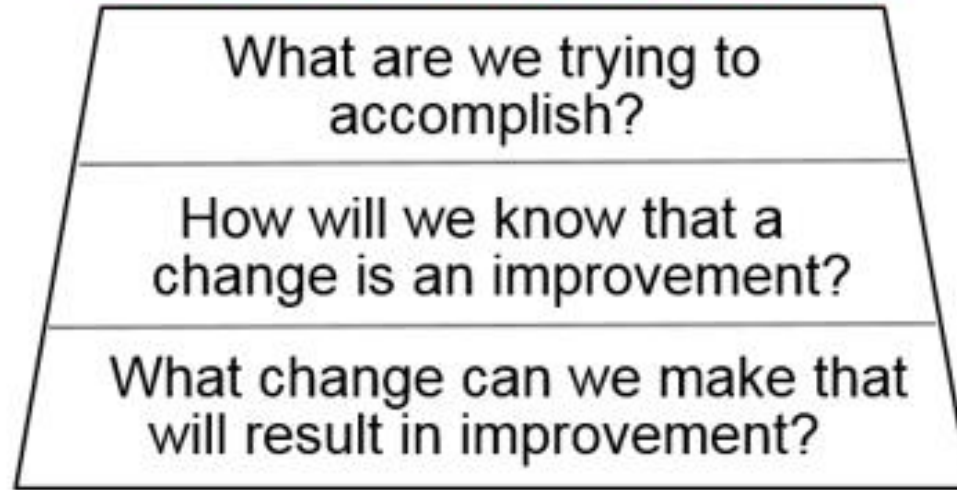


Kinds of Risk



- Effectiveness - your goals may not be met
- Unintended - the stuff you didn't know
- Financial - costs may exceed expectations
- Political - acceptance may be lower than expected or opposition higher than expected
- Reputational - your brand may be damaged

Model for Improvement





Old Growth



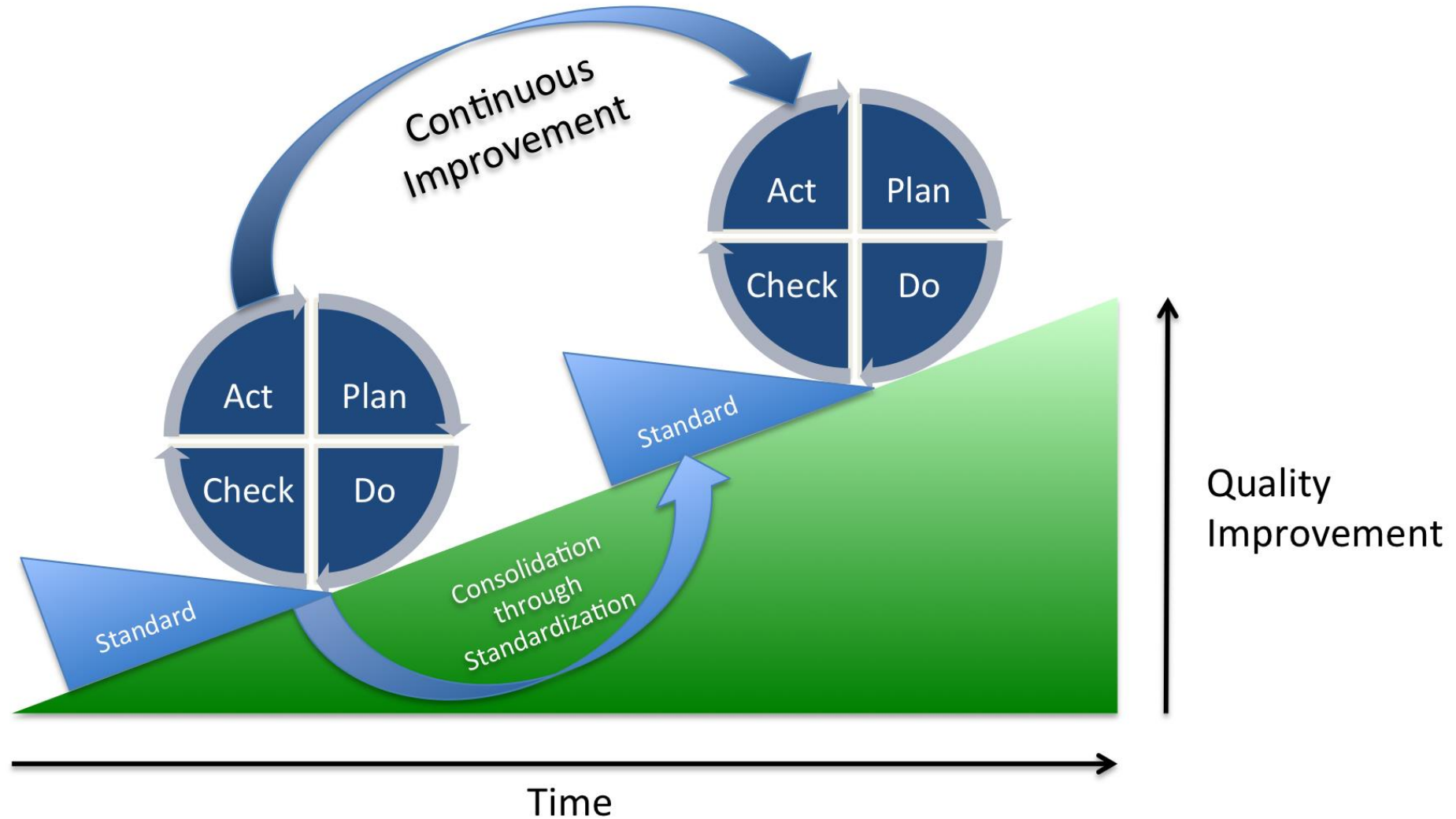
Crisis



Renewal



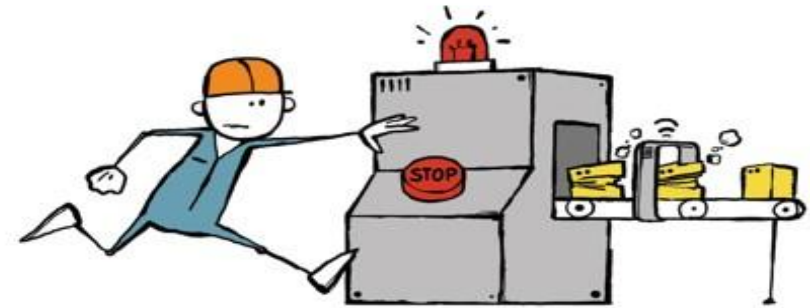
Iterative Cycles



Stopping the line is a matter of...

Culture

Does your culture reward stopping the line?
Does it happen on a regular basis?
Is it "Standard Work" to stop the line?
Do **you** stop the line?
What change in **culture** is required to ensure stopping the line and its benefits?



Conclusion



Thank You

JSGS would like to acknowledge a number of sources that have contributed to this workshop content and have been noted in the presentation.



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References