



EXTENSIONNET

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THEME - EMERGENCE OF THEORY THROUGH CRITICAL PRACTICE

From the Chair

Terry Makin

This edition of ExtensionNet is themed around the development of theory in extension practice. "There is nothing as practical as a good theory" is a quotation that I like and is particularly relevant.

One of the first tasks carried out by APEN was to process the results of a survey of extension professionals and to consider the extension environment and the changes taking place (see *ExtensionNet* Vol 3 No 2). My most outstanding insight in this exercise was how extension practice had rarely been informed by extension theory and that this was a fundamental reason for the way extension was perceived. It seemed, that historically in Australia, extension had been mostly learned on the job as practical experience. Extension officers learned like farmers, from "looking over the fence/desk". My own experience as a producer was of an experienced extension officer, who on leaving, asked me to assist to train the new graduate replacement.

I believe this lack of attention and valuing of extension theory to support our practice is one reason for what has previously been a lack of recognition of the importance of extension as a discipline and profession. Funding, academic status and publication have tended to focus on production research.

The formation of APEN, the range of post graduate courses, the increasing number of people with explicit extension education, and the growing body of theory being developed by reflecting critically on our practice are all contributing to the growing recognition and valuing of the importance of extension in assisting change processes to deliver real outcomes to industries and communities.

I believe that developing extension theory by critically reflecting on our practice is of fundamental importance to the development of extension practice and the furthering of the profession.



Terry Makin, Inaugural President

It is with a sense of fulfilment that I advise you of my intention to stand down as the President of APEN at the AGM in December. I have been in the chair of APEN since its inception, 3 years ago, at the International Conference at Surfers Paradise. I believe that it is now time for others to continue the development of APEN, bringing new ideas and energies to the position and organisation. This is probably one of the most important projects that I have been involved in.

APEN is steadily growing in members, strength and awareness of practitioners needs and an ability to fulfil those needs. The international conference next year, which the conference committee has well underway, including major sponsorship by NSW Land and Water Conservation, will provide a major focus and image raising vehicle for APEN. I believe that as extension develops and the number of providers, both public and private grow, APEN's role will continue to grow in importance.

I thank you for the opportunity to assist you in developing APEN. ♦

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THEME - EMERGENCE OF THEORY THROUGH CRITICAL PRACTICE

Elwin Turnbull

For this edition *Dr. Bob Fisher* (an anthropologist involved in community forestry) has provided the introductory comments about the articles. We have presented articles which explore the theoretical basis of the extension profession, we hope they give you some leads in challenging your own framework for extension.

Dr. Bob Fisher

It is common nowadays to attack "traditional" agricultural extension because it has been dominated by a model in which new knowledge is created by research and transferred to farmers by extensionists. Significantly, much of the attack on formal extension theory has been mounted by extension practitioners who actually engage in genuine communication with farmers

and take into account the context when recommending new technologies.

A second limitation in extension theory has been the dominance of the "communication of interventions" approach which assumes that a technical innovation is communicated to the client population and that adoption depends on certain characteristics of the adopters who are classified in five categories including "innovators" at one end and "laggards" at the other. The problem with this theory is that it doesn't really explain why people are in one category or another, except that willingness to innovate seems to be seen as essentially a characteristic of the *personality* of the adopter. Sociological and anthropological studies of agricultural change tend to suggest that farmers are likely to be innovators because they are relatively wealthy and can afford inputs and can take risks. Alternatively people may avoid changing technology because necessary labour is not available. In

other words, the emphasis is on more systemic factors.

The articles in this issue reflect an emerging sophistication in the way extensionists are exploring or could explore, the context in which innovations take place, both in terms of the particular farming system (Kaine and Lees) and in the wider social and economic context (Lawrence). This is not to say that the papers represent a consensus about the way extension should be practised. Kaine and Lees recognise the need for sensitivity to context, but propose an approach which is much more structured than proposed by Pinheiro, Pearson and Ison. The latter paper reflects the contemporary emphasis on genuine two-way communication and participative learning involving both farmers and extensionists. What is most evident in this issue of the newsletter is the sense that emerging extension theory is being created largely through the active involvement of critical practitioners. ❖

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PUBLIC SECTOR EXTENSION IN QUEENSLAND

Public sector extension in Queensland is alive and well if the recent South Queensland Extension Forum is any indication. The Forum entitled "Sharing Ideas, Experience and Outcomes" was attended by 195 South Queensland extension staff and managers from the Department of Primary Industries and the Department of Natural Resources.

The aim of the forum was to support the continuous improvement of professionalism and service delivery of extension activities related to agriculture and resource management, with an emphasis on South Queensland. This was done through:

1. Recognising and sharing achievements, knowledge and networks in extension. Individual officers and teams reported on 67 extension projects which documented major achievements due to the application of modern approaches to extension.



John Childs
Executive Director (Research, Innovation and Extension) DPI

2. Developing the vision and direction of extension. Interactive discussion sessions identified and prioritised the issues and goals for improving extension professionalism.
3. Building morale and teamwork. Action plans for future activities were developed by both individuals and work teams.
4. Exploring issues that will set directions for 2000 and beyond.

The Forum was supported by seven independent observers who critiqued the extension services using a SWOT analysis. The observers included a farmer from Goondiwindi, a private sector agribusiness operator, an officer from the Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment, a fourth year Agricultural Science student, the manager of Telstra rural services and

lecturers from the University of Queensland and the Dalby Agricultural College. The insights offered by these observers were a great way to highlight attributes and issues of which the people involved in the extension services may be unaware.

Overall, the Forum reinforced the major advancements made in knowledge and

use of modern extension methodologies and in extension practices and achievements over the past three years. It also emphasised the importance of gatherings of extension staff in learning and strengthening teams and networks in improving performance potential and in personal development. ♦

PATTERNS IN INNOVATION -An analysis of the adoption of practices in beef cattle breeding

G.W.Kaine and J.W.Lees

University of New England

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RIDC, MRC AND VICTORIAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Introduction

Under the traditional model of agricultural extension, it was assumed that:

- a) Researchers generated knowledge
- b) Extension workers packaged and transferred that knowledge to progressive farmers
- c) The knowledge was then spread through the agricultural community through demonstration of the benefits by progressive farmers.

As farming has become more sophisticated, it has become increasingly clear that this model of information transfer does not reflect the reality. Recent studies have recognised that information originates from a variety of sources and that the process of information exchange may begin at many points in the agricultural information system.

This suggests a system based on a synergistic network structure which links researchers, extension workers and the agricultural community, which allows for multi-directional flows of information and can provide insights into its sources. However, the authors suggest that a limitation of the traditional system is not redressed by the network model in that it does not explicitly allow for the possibility that new information is not equally valuable to all farmers.

The assumption that new information is equally valuable will be valid only to the extent that new ideas apply across all farming "contexts". ("Context" is defined as "the resources, practices and technologies currently used by a farmer in production and the key attributes of the farmer such as his or her business and farming aspirations and objectives"). If production contexts differ from farm to farm, but an innovation can only be applied in particular contexts, then the value of that innovation will vary across farms. If the fit between the existing context and the innovation is high, the chances of successfully adopting the innovation are high, and vice versa.

The authors believe that, on the basis of work done by Crouch (1981), the range of contexts which are suited to the adoption of more advanced innovations becomes increasingly restricted as technological sophistication increases and farm development proceeds. The implication of this is that the key to successful technology transfer is the establishment of networks involving homogeneous groups of farmers with a similarity of interests, both between themselves and with extension workers and researchers. Conversely, differences in contexts may create barriers to extension.

Objectives Of The Study

With the above background, the principal aims of the study were:

- a) To classify farms into groups on the basis of differences in context
- b) To determine whether the rate of adoption of an innovation differed across these groups

This involved the following specific objectives:

1. Identifying a set of practices and technologies that are functionally related to the adoption of a particular innovation

2. Classifying farms into groups on the basis of the set of practices and technologies identified
3. Determining whether or not the frequency of adoption of the innovation is statistically different between groups.

Conduct Of The Study

In order to conduct the study, a relatively recent innovation in the management of reproduction of beef cattle was selected i.e. the confined calving of heifers and cows. Analysis was undertaken from the responses of beef producers in southern Australia to a mailed survey which was developed in conjunction with Beef Cattle Extension Officers in the Victorian Department of Agriculture.

The herd management practices that are considered to be precursors to the successful implementation of confined calving were described. Discriminant analysis was then used to verify that:

- a) The presence, or absence, of these practices in the operation of a beef herd did in fact influence the period over which heifers and cows were calved.
- b) The period over which the calving of heifers and cows occurred was significantly related to producer attitudes towards confined calving and the management practices they followed.

Identification Of "Context" For Confined Calving

Management practices that influence confined calving, together with producer beliefs about its' importance on profitability, were used to classify producers into groups. Five groups emerged as follows:

1. Believed confined calving was very important and had adopted all the necessary practices
2. Believed it was unimportant and had adopted none of the practices
3. Believed it was important and were

calving heifers at two years but had not adopted pregnancy testing, rigorous culling or weighing prior to joining. (This group was classified as dysfunctional and calving rates within this group were relatively low)

4. Had adopted the practices but were not convinced of the importance of confined calving

5. Were convinced of the importance of confined calving but had not adopted the practices.

Similar results were achieved with respect to confined calving of cows.

Implications of The Results

The results have implications for facilitating the adoption of agricultural innovation and accelerating the process of farm development

By classifying farms into groups based on the context in which production occurs, a basis is obtained for identifying farms for which the relevance of an innovation is similar. Such groups could be used to facilitate the process of developing networks of agricultural knowledge. Segments can be identified in which the potential for innovation is high i.e. where the fit between the existing production context and the innovation is high. There will also be

segments where the potential for innovation is low, where, for example, the techniques that are the precursors to successful adoption of a particular innovation have not been introduced. In this situation, the segment may be best served in the first instance by promoting the adoption of the necessary techniques. Low potential for innovation may also indicate the need to focus or change management objectives.

The findings support the notion that the process of farm development involves the systematic adoption of innovations and raises the possibility that this process should be viewed as multidimensional and involving distinctly different stages. The implication is that the approach used can identify development paths. Once a classification system has been developed, enterprises can be readily classified on a few easily identifiable characteristics. This means, extension officers would not need to obtain a large amount of detail in order to classify enterprises into segments; i.e. beef enterprises could be classified on the basis of a few simple questions concerning pregnancy testing, culling, joining ages and the perceived importance of confined calving.

The results have significance for the evaluation of extension programs. Extension administrators are often required to nominate the adoption level of proposed programs. However, there is not a generally accepted method which enables them to analyse the market and make reliable estimates. The methods developed in the study represent a significant advance which will reduce the reliance on "best guesses" in assessing extension outcomes. Further, the method could be used by extension organisations and farm advisory services to assist in forming priorities for the allocation of organisational resources.

Conclusion

The results of the study are consistent with, and support, Crouch's original finding that:

... maximisation of economic performance will only result from adoption of practices in a logical and ordered sequence. The choice of practices depends on the stage of development of the farm at a given time and depends on (their) relevance, as perceived by the farmer, to continuing development. ♦

Agricultural Extension: the Place for Sociology

Geoffrey Lawrence

Rural Social and Economic Research Centre, Central Queensland University

It will not be greatly revealing to suggest to extension officers that one of the important limitations of traditional agricultural extension is that it is based upon an outdated paradigm. It is now widely understood that the 'top down' model is deficient in at least three major ways: it assumes a 'trickle down' of information - which does not automatically, or even necessarily, occur; it is based on the flawed view that all producers want - and will readily adopt - innovations which improve output, productivity or efficiency; and it ignores or marginalises the knowledge base of local producers.

It is one thing to criticise the older model and to highlight its deficiencies, yet another to suggest how extension services might be improved. One way forward is, however, to periodise and contextualise extension practice. Tony Dunn of Charles Sturt University has (among others) sought to do this. He suggests that since the Second World War, three extension approaches have been used and that a fourth is evolving (see Table 1).

We can use Dunn's categorisation to understand contemporary changes within farming and extension. Following the Second World War there was an unleashing of new technologies in Australian agriculture. Europe was still on quite severe food rationing, Japan was being rebuilt, and the agriculture within the advanced nations was sluggish. Here, Australian producers took advantage of the opportunities to sell abroad, encouraged by governments which were quite willing to underwrite agricultural expansion. Ideologies of population decentralisation and 'development' helped to ensure that what we might now regard as 'simple' farming innovations were generalised throughout the farming community. Extension assisted farmers to learn how to apply new technologies. It was a State-lead and State-funded activity, one which endorsed the massive changes from horses to tractors - and its equivalent in management practices.



Table 1: Changes in Australian Farming and Extension

Years	Farming Era	Source of Change	Extension Approach	Special Features
1950-70	Improved husbandry and economics	Research/extension and private sector marketing	Productivity and efficiency, working with farmers	Mechanisation and technology from WW11 is applied in a period of economic growth
1970-80	Intensive, chemical farming	Private sector and extension/research	'Working for' and 'selling to' farmers	Private sector marketing becomes a dominant extension force
1980-90	Farming systems holistic approaches	Private sector and 'industry driven' research and extension	'Working with' farmers	Farmers seek information from many sources and take responsibility in solving their own problems
Post 1990	Sustainable, multipurpose land use	Integrated farmer, private sector and government research and extension	Community-based approaches (including Landcare and other schemes)	Community and environmental groups lobby successfully to influence land use

Source: Adapted from Dunn, T (1990) Family Farming and Extension, in Alston, M. (eds.) *Family Farming: Australia and New Zealand*, Key Papers No. 2, Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga: 101-119.

The chemical era of advanced agriculture was one premised upon the selling of agribusiness inputs to rural producers who were required, above all else, to increase their output as a means of offsetting terms of trade decline. They adopted the 'latest' technologies with great relish. Here, extension in both its public and private forms uncritically 'sold' farmers the technical means to increase yields, improve animal nutrition, and control diseases. More than at any time before, extension was viewed as the handmaiden of agribusiness; selling the products of transnational capital to boost production and to ensure Australian farmers remained internationally competitive in relation to those who, in other nations, were enthusiastically adopting the same technologies. This was the high point of 'productivist' agriculture, one based upon the premise that the more advanced the technology, the better. The typical extension agent was trained in agricultural science so that biology, chemistry and physics could be combined agronomically to enhance the productivity of plants and animals. Extension provided technical solutions to what were considered technical problems.

The farm crisis of the 1980s and its manifestations - farm debt, overproduction, ill health of family-farm members, increasing levels of farm work, falling commodity prices and bankruptcies - dealt a body blow to traditional extension. Farmers became increasingly suspicious about the extension message. Many recognised that the very products and strategies which were being 'sold' to them to improve their economic circumstances were, instead, undermining their ability to survive in farming. At the same time, an emerging Green movement began to turn its attention from rainforests to resource management. Agriculture was implicated in the downstream pollution of waterways and in the destruction of soils and wildlife. Extension moved from a preoccupation with technical solutions, to an understanding of the entire farming system, including the downstream effects of applying chemicals and other products of science. There was an attempt to link the personal motives and goals of farm operators with the methods of farming and to develop a multi sector analysis to understand complex relationships between the social system and agro-ecology (see Squires, 1991). It was recognised that farmers' interests and beliefs needed to be understood as a basis for rational change in agriculture. What remained unchanged was the desire by State governments, through their extension agencies, to improve (almost exclusively) the output and efficiency of agriculture.

The situation in the 1990s is very different. The productivist goals of the past have been challenged by those of sustainability. The very existence of farming in some areas of Australia is being questioned. The continued production of farm goods for an unknown market (and under conditions of deteriorating terms of trade) is being attacked as environmentally damaging and economically undesirable in a post modern world of niche marketing and of increasingly discerning, 'green', consumers. Agricultural lands once considered the exclusive province of farmers and graziers are now viewed as local catchment areas whose future is in the hands of the non farming, as much as the farming, community. The aim is to assist communities to manage resources in a more sustainable manner. Governments have moved away from older forms of one-on-one extension

and have embraced such approaches as Landcare and Total Catchment Management. The role of the extension agent is changing to that of group facilitator.

The new extension agent is one who must understand power relations instead of power machinery. The successful new extension agent is likely to be one who recognises community interests, group dynamics and gender relations ahead of insect pests, soil types and pasture grasses. The question is: to what extent is the extension-agent-as-agronomist being transformed into the extension-agent-as-facilitator? The answer to that question will vary, of course, from State to State. In Queensland the development of the PAM model (see Frank and Chamala, 1992) as well as the action learning (Local Best Practice) model of Clark would appear to be well under way: Queensland does appear to be the leader in terms of new forms of group-based extension. The problem remains, however, that few extension officers have received - or are receiving - formal training in sociology.

Sociology attempts to do many things. But the most important, in relation to extension, is to understand processes of community action and interaction. It can provide a basis for recognising social power relations, group 'norms' and values, how certain attitudes lead to particular forms of behaviour, and how agricultural problems are 'socially constructed'. It provides insights into the motives of different social actors under different social conditions. It provides theories which assist in the recognition, or interpretation, of the actions of governments, of environmental groups, and of other politically-motivated actors. By identifying the mechanisms for bringing about change (and the social structures which block change) it can empower social actors. It can, in its more critical/structural form (see Lawrence, 1987; Friedland, et al., 1991; Bonanno, et al., 1994), provide powerful explanations for such things as the impact of GATT policies, the reluctance of EC countries to embrace free trade, and of the wider causes of environmental degradation. It can assess the likely outcomes of NFF or government policy, as well as the form and extent of social deprivation in farming and rural communities (see Share et al., 1993).

At the moment the formal training of agricultural extension officers in Australia is largely devoid of sociology. Most officers are, in other words, not trained to understand the very communities and community structures with which they must now deal. If sustainability is to be achieved in Australia, and group-based extension is viewed as the key to its promotion, then sociology would seem to have an important, if as yet unrecognised, role to play (see Vanclay and Lawrence, forthcoming). Central Queensland University is one of few Australian universities which, through its undergraduate teaching and post graduate research, is seeking to make a small contribution by providing a grounding for students in the sociology of agriculture.

References (contact Elwin Turnbull at University of Western Sydney or Rosemary Currie at the APEN Secretariat)

A Farming Systems Research /Extension (FSR/E) Model Under way in Santa Catarina, Brazil : A Critical Analysis ¹

S. L. G. Pinheiro ², C. J. Pearson ³ and R. L. Ison ³
1-Research sponsored by the Brazilian Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).
2- The University of Sydney.
3- The Open University, UK.

A multi-disciplinary FSR/E project led by the states' agricultural research and extension enterprise (EPAGRI) is under way in Santa Catarina, south Brazil. It is based on the cyclic farmer-first and-last model and local experience of failures with the traditional reductionist, disciplinary and product-oriented approach. However, reflection on the processes undertaken indicate that the project is strongly embedded within the transmission of technology (TOT) paradigm. In this paper we reflect on an alternative participatory paradigm, based on the constructivist theory of communication. This analysis is the basis for a research which contrasts some of the outcomes from the existing project with those from a participatory project in the same farming systems. The current project involves basically four phases (table 1). The Diagnostic phase arose from the need for "experts" (mainly researchers) to know how the farmers organise and manage their farming systems and better understand the environment in which they interact. This

step has been based on the collection of secondary (census) data, closed questionnaires and formal interviews. The Typology phase was included with the aim to show that farmers are not homogeneous and technologies are not neutral. The classification was based only in quantitative methods (cluster analysis) according to farmers' physical and financial resources. In addition, there was a trend to "package" farmers in specific groups in order to facilitate the transference of pre-determined technologies. The Monitoring phase provides a better understanding of the stochastic and dynamic aspects of typical farming systems monitored through a year or two. Experts control the activities: there is a focus on physical, biological, economic and financial issues, and a search for what is "wrong" and what should be changed (from outsiders' viewpoint). Although this phase started very much like farmers and farming systems being "watched and studied in a cage", in practice this has been the stage in which the interaction between experts and farmers have been most intensive. In some occasions farmers' participation have changed from passive observers to active collaborators, and the systematic process of visiting communities and talking to farmers provides for outsiders a real opportunity to better understand, reflect about and interact within the systems.

In the Development phase, a few “interventions” have been tried (on-farm and outside the farm gate) in order to improve the performance of the farming systems. The interventions reflect the influence of the TOT approach, in which experts decide, control and take responsibility for most of the actions.

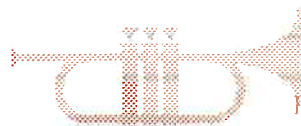
On reflection, the FSR/E model under way in Santa Catarina (and most of the other existing FSR/E models), although representing a reaction against the TOT approach, is in fact functioning as complement of TOT: the basic

theoretical framework still remains. As a consequence, the results of such models are making little difference. It is necessary to consider a new paradigm which brings different meanings for metaphors such as communication, participation, knowledge, information, reality, learning, research, extension and development. Using the Santa Catarina experience as example, table 1 summarises the main features in each phase of the current model and suggest alternatives under a constructivist communication approach. ♦

Table 1 - The FSR/E Model Under way In Santa Catarina, Brazil, And An Alternative Under A Constructivist Communication Approach

CURRENT MODEL	AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL
<p>DIAGNOSTIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Search for objectivity/single reality (reductionism). - Data collection with focus on quantitative information. - Problem identification and prescribed solutions (under outsiders’ interpretations). - Focus on closed questionnaires followed by formal interviews (what people do). - Predominance of “rapid rural tourism”. 	<p>CONTEXT UNDERSTANDING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Built a “richer picture” of the context. - Focus on dialogue and exchange of qualitative information. - Problem formulation, agenda setting, seek opportunities for action/improvements under farmers’ responsibility. - Participative methods like PRA, semi-structure and focus-group interviewing (how people make-sense of what they do).
<p>TPOLOGY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of homogeneous groups (“types”) of farming systems. - Quantitative analysis based on farmers’ physical and financial resource levels. 	<p>GROUP ORGANISATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of groups of farmers with “common enthusiasm for action”. - Qualitative analysis based on farmers’ needs, objectives, attitudes and theories.
<p>MONITORING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Farming systems selected and monitored by experts (with farmers’ agreement). - Focus on physical, biological, economic and financial aspects (what is happening). - Seek for what is “wrong” (from experts’ view). - Data gathering and information giving viewed as distinct process. - Experts remains outside the system, deciding and controlling most actions. Farmers “participate” as passive observers. 	<p>SYSTEMS UNDERSTANDING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Farming systems selected and studied in conjunction with farmers and experts. - Focus on anthropological, behavioural and cultural aspects (why is it happening). - Search for improvements (from farmers’ view). - Farmers’ experience and perspective’s are valued and information is shared (not only transferred). - Experts reflect/interact within the systems, facilitating a network of conversations.
<p>DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Central source” of knowledge and power (top-down approach) - Participation is a project-goal. - Research “on” things and “on” people (output-oriented). - Learning, problem-solving and research viewed as distinct process. - Most of the interference/actions based on experts interpretations. Focus mainly in on-farm issues (productivity). - On-farm experimentation usually designed and controlled by experts. Farmers “participate” more as collaborators. - Predominance of conventional research and extension activities (field-days, traditional trials, etc.) 	<p>PARTICIPATIVE ACTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge and information are socially constructed and power is shared. - Participation is viewed as a process, broaden informal and participative activities (story-telling, community theatre...). - Research “with” people (client-oriented). Research, technology and development result from a co-operative process of inquiry by the “learning community”. Farmers set their own agenda and priorities of action. This may include issues beyond the farm gate (marketing, political...). - Responsibilities for action are shared between farmers and experts. - Experts act as facilitators of the “community of learners”.

**Calling for NOMINATIONS for the positions of:
APEN President and APEN Treasurer.**



For nomination forms contact Rosemary at the Secretariat, (060) 245 349 or Fax 561 967
Nominations to be with the Secretariat 7 days before the AGM (See page 8)

APEN Internet News		<i>More info? Contact Rosemary agrilogic@albury.net.au</i>	
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