Business Intelligence Competency Centers:

Creating a successful business intelligence strategy with SAS®

SAS®
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Introduction

Business intelligence is reaching more and more constituents inside and outside of your organization. Information demands, data volumes and audience populations are growing and will continue to grow exponentially. As the demand increases so does the imperative for a sound strategy that meets your short-term needs and provides the foundation to meet your long-term vision.

Current spending is changing focus from products that help control costs to those that can help grow the business. A strategic planning assumption from Gartner say that “by 2009, more than 60 percent of global 2000 companies and government agencies with cross-enterprise, strategic BI initiatives will have formed BI Competency Centers.”

In order to overcome these common issues, more and more organizations are forming a Business Intelligence Competency Center. This more holistic approach to business intelligence encompasses more than just the technology – it is part of an overall information strategy.

As stated by Bill Hostmann, Gartner research vice president, “BI deployments combine compelling business needs and complex technologies. The greatest burdens to BI success – by far – are shaped by organizational dynamics, including fragmented buying centers, multiple product vendors, multiple business drivers and a drive to standardize and consolidate at every level. There needs to be some sort of culture, leadership, skills and methodologies in place for establishing an overall BI architecture, a BI portfolio and a set of BI standards – and a way to manage that program across the company. That’s the role of the competency center.”

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1Gartner BI Summit, February 2006: BI Competency Centers: From ‘Should We? To ‘How Should We?’
The case for a Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC)

A Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC) is a permanent and formal organizational structure, staffed internally by individuals from the business and IT, with defined tasks, roles, responsibilities and processes, supporting and promoting the effective use of business intelligence to drive the business strategy.

Based on a recent survey performed by BetterManagement.com, organizations with a Business Intelligence Competency Center see the following benefits:

- Increased usage of business intelligence (say 74 percent).
- Increased business user satisfaction (say 48 percent).
- Better understanding of the value of BI (say 45 percent).
- Increased decision-making speed (say 45 percent).
- Decreased staff costs (say 26 percent).
- Decreased software costs (say 24 percent).

A BICC provides a central location for driving and supporting your organization’s overall information delivery strategy. It enables your organization to coordinate and complement existing efforts, while reducing redundancy and increasing effectiveness. The centralization of these efforts ensures that information and best practices are communicated and shared through the entire organization so that everyone can benefit from successes and lessons learned.

The BICC is instrumental in enabling knowledge transfer and enhancing analytic skills. The BICC can coach and train business users to empower them with new skills that drive innovation and discovery. It also is instrumental in turning analysis into action and ensuring greater information consumption and higher levels of ROI.

Operating a BICC enables your organization to:

- Preserve and exploit the full value of technology investments.
- Consolidate business and analytic intelligence processes and initiatives.
- React faster to business changes.
- Reduce overall risk of implementation projects and project realization.
- Support business users in fully understanding data and acting properly on analyses.
- Ensure that BI knowledge is shared throughout the enterprise.
Most organizations are tasked with doing more with fewer resources. A BICC provides an optimal solution for meeting the increasing demands of business users with fewer support staff and provides a forum for repeatable results, best practices and collaboration across your organization. This ensures that your successes can be documented, measured and monitored for optimal performance. By streamlining operations, organizations can reduce overhead and information silos while increasing effectiveness.

**Strategic implementation of BI**

There are many different opinions on what makes an intelligent enterprise as companies apply different ways of using and processing information. For-profit organizations use information to achieve a set of common goals – more customers, increased revenues and reduced expenses. Staying competitive and meeting the pressure of regulatory compliance requires that information sources and business and analytic intelligence be accessed and used by a growing number of information consumers across the enterprise for making critical business decisions, on all organizational levels and in various business functions. Therefore, investing in information infrastructure and software solutions is certainly an important part of the intelligent enterprise.

Increasingly however, organizations are realizing that there is more to BI than simply employing technology. There is a need for a comprehensive, strategic approach to BI that addresses technology as well as people, processes and organizational culture. A lack of strategy will result in inconsistent BI deployments, difficulties in managing, implementing and supporting BI initiatives that span multiple departments, and a lack of standardization of methodologies, definitions, processes, tools and technologies as well as insufficient use of critical BI skills across the enterprise.

Establishing and driving a BI strategy should be a cross-enterprise endeavor with a central unit being “in charge of BI.” Otherwise, BI initiatives run the risk of producing ever-new silos of information. This “central unit,” often referred to as Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC), should be staffed with individuals from both IT and the business.
Common questions to consider when implementing a BI strategy include:

- Who knows where to find the information? Where is it hidden? Is it in several places?
- Who helps to interpret it? What was done last time? How effective was the action? Are there other recommendations?
- Who ensures that each business decision taken is backed up by the correct information?
- Who analyzes information needs, and who develops and executes a BI strategy to fulfill them?
- Who prioritizes, conducts and monitors BI projects?
- Who develops, maintains and rolls out BI standards regarding methodologies, definitions, processes, tools and technologies that are observed by the entire organization?

More and more organizations are deciding to task a Business Intelligence Competency Center with planning and prioritizing BI initiatives, as well as with defining what is required to support the interpretation and strategic use of information for improved decision making and maximized results. This coordination and communication are essential to maximize efficiency and increase effectiveness.

The Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC)

Some functions and service areas of a BICC that should be considered include:

Business Intelligence Program

The Business Intelligence Program function is the cornerstone of the Business Intelligence Competency Center. It oversees and coordinates all of the activities of the BICC and is the interface to the business units. Specifically, the Business Intelligence Program function is involved in defining the BI objectives and strategy and tracks the success of that strategy over time. It ensures that the BI strategy is executed and that it supports the organization's overall business strategy.

Here, business users can get advice and coaching on how to use BI analyses and interpret the results. The BI Program function also acts as the project office for all BI-related projects. It keeps the organization abreast of new BI trends and technologies, and explains how the organization could benefit from them. Furthermore, it is responsible for sharing BI knowledge and best practices throughout the organization.
Data Stewardship

The Data Stewardship function takes care of administering technical metadata and ensures its alignment with business metadata. It is responsible for data standards, data quality and data governance.

Support

The Support function acts as the second-level support for technical and business-related BI questions. The assumption is that first-level support would be handled by the general Service Desk in the organization. The BICC Support function clarifies the BI problem messages, analyzes the problem in detail and gets back to the user with the solution. If the problem cannot be solved in-house, it will be passed to the software vendor.

BI Delivery

The BI Delivery function takes care of the applications for delivery and distribution of information throughout the applications’ entire life cycle, including their design, development, testing and maintenance. These applications comprise reporting, business logic and portals; in other words, all applications that transform the data residing in the data warehouse or other business intelligence storage areas into business intelligence.

Data Acquisition

The Data Acquisition function handles the back-end-related BI activities. It takes care of data integration and data store development, testing and maintenance, as well as the overall warehouse design and integration projects.

Advanced Analytics

The Advanced Analytics function specializes in statistical analysis, modeling, optimization techniques, forecasting and data mining. It handles complex analytical requests coming from the business units.
Training

The Training function trains business users in BI concepts and applications. It coaches them by providing answers to their BI questions. It also takes care of any BI product-specific trainings and certifications for project teams or business users.

Vendor Contracts Management

The Vendor Contracts Management function handles all the license and contract-related issues, such as user licenses, product evaluations, software distribution, and service level agreements with BI vendors. The function also acts as an interface to the organization’s purchase and legal departments.

Organizational implications of the Business Intelligence Competency Center

The mandate for a cross-functional team is clear. It must have representatives from both IT and the business. It must have executive sponsorship to be successful. Its size, organizational structure and funding will all be dependent on your organization and situation.

Central Business Intelligence Competency Center
There are various ways of organizing a BICC. A BICC can function as a separate central organization unit providing BI services to the different departments within the organization. It also can be a division of an existing business unit, or even a “virtual” BICC team consisting of staff from departments of several corporate units and/or companies.

The advantages of a virtual BICC are obvious: no new organizational infrastructure, no new staff members and no larger budget. Considering these advantages, it is clear that organizations might prefer a “virtual” to a fully-staffed BICC. A move to a functional unit would mean an internal reorganization and shifting of budgets.

Regardless of the structure of the organization, the BICC should have executive sponsorship, reporting to the C-level, i.e. the CIO or COO. The aim must be the alignment of business intelligence goals across various functional areas in support of the company strategy.
Funding the BICC

In many cases, the BICC can support its own funding through the cost savings realized by eliminating redundant tools or reducing the overhead of expensive support and maintenance contracts. As the BICC becomes more strategic, it becomes more difficult to quantify its intrinsic value. How can you measure better decision making? Many BICCs demonstrate tangible and intangible benefits and continue to deliver greater value from BI investments.

Other funding alternatives include:

- **Listing costs as overheads** – then all departments can use the BI services. The disadvantage of this approach is that the economic value of the BICC is not transparent and it runs the risk of being under-appreciated.

- **An internal billing system** where the users are charged for help given on each project and analysis. This model is a “fair” share of costs because heavy users pay more than light users. It is easier to quantify, but can limit the growth and use of the BICC, and ultimately its success, if users are inhibited by this model.

- **A subscription-based billing model** can reduce the barriers for users. It assigns costs across each user group based on projected usage of the BICC. The downside to this approach is getting agreement up front.
Setting up and ensuring ongoing support

The first step in implementing a Business Intelligence Competency Center is to understand your organization’s needs and how those can be optimally supported within your organization. Consequently, no two BICCs may be exactly the same.

**Phases to Set up a Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC)**


- **Planning**: Define BICC objectives and mandate. Build business case. Decide on functional areas to be addressed and required roles and skills. Develop change management plan.

- **Implementation**: Assign roles to people. Train and induct BICC staff. Execute change management plan. Prepare work environment. Do kick off.

- **BICC in Operation**: Run first project. Review project and BICC functions. Sell BICC for new projects. If required adjust BICC scope and area of responsibility.

*Figure 1: Steps for setting up a BI Competency Center*

**Initialization: Orientation**

The first phase is about understanding the BICC concept and determining how it could move your organization forward. What is the primary goal? How should the BICC support the organization? What, on a high level, would it be tasked with? Who would be the sponsor? What would be the implications for the organization if a BICC were to be set up?

Based on that information, an initial cost/benefit analysis for the creation of a BICC should be done. While not all details for a cost/benefit analysis will be known at this early stage, it is useful to collect any known costs or benefits now to decide if the setup of a BICC should be pursued or not.
The funding model for the BICC should be discussed as well. It needs to be understood which funding model best suits the organization and its current culture. In this discussion, it is important to remember that putting a charge on the BICC's services should not deter business users.

**Initialization: Business Intelligence Strategy Assessment**

In this phase, initialization continues. An assessment of how information is currently used in the organization, and of how it should be used in the future, needs to be made. How the gap between the current and the desired state should be bridged needs to become part of a business intelligence (BI) roadmap. This roadmap outlines the strategy that the BICC should drive and support. All current and future BI projects should fit with this strategy. In addition to the roadmap, which outlines the mid- to long-term strategy, an action plan should be put together with the immediate actions to be taken.

**Planning**

During this phase, a detailed plan for setting up the BICC is put together. Based on the BI strategy assessment, the mandate and objectives of the BICC should be agreed on. It needs to be decided how the BICC fits into the organizational structure and how it is funded. The performance metrics for the BICC need to be agreed.

The initial cost/benefit analysis performed during the Initialization phase should now be elaborated in detail and a formal business case should be built.

The BI roadmap will also determine the functional areas that the BICC is supposed to cover. It needs to be decided how those functions will be staffed and where the BICC reports within the organization. The cooperation with other business units and external providers needs to be defined.

**Organizational Change Management**

If the BICC constitutes its own organizational unit, this will result in people changing roles and responsibilities and have management implications as well. To implement these changes smoothly it will be required to have a well-planned organizational change management approach. Therefore, both the Planning and the Implementation phases should be supported by a thorough change management plan.
Implementation

In this phase, the BICC team will be appointed, trained, and inducted to their jobs. Their work environment will be set up and they will define the smaller details of cooperation within the BICC, with other departments and external providers. The system to monitor the BICC’s key performance indicators (KPIs) will be set up now. The kick off and information on the BICC’s first project are communicated to the rest of the organization.

Operation

Starting with the first project, reviewing and evaluating the concrete benefits of the BICC are a must. Criteria to measure the BICC’s success should be established early in the planning phase and implemented as part of the BICC setup. Only when the BICC can prove its benefits will it be seen as an integral part of the intelligent enterprise and recognized for its achievements. A periodic review will also determine whether the responsibilities and scope of the BICC should be adjusted.

Future directions

While a BICC is an excellent forum for addressing many tactical issues efficiently and effectively, it is imperative not to lose sight of the strategic value of a BICC. It is easy to be tactical. The results are easily quantifiable and there is a never-ending list of problems to be solved and issues to tackle. Too often, however, organizations get focused on the details and can quickly lose sight of their vision.

The most valuable BICC implementations, by design, balance both the tactical needs of today with a strategy and vision for the future. The importance of a strategy is clear – without one there is no way of understanding where your organization is headed. How will your information needs change? How can you optimize performance? However, the rigor in which a BI strategy is articulated and supported is often a crucial missing element. This BI strategy is the underpinning and foundation for the BICC – it provides the vision that you are building towards and the filter for solving today’s issues with an eye towards tomorrow.

The BICC will be tasked with defining your BI strategy. This will require a flexible and robust approach that reflects the vision of your organization. It will affect such areas as managing assets, products, processes and people. Focusing on strategy instead of solely on performance will help an organization understand the long-term value and importance of the decisions being made today. It will require a long-term vision and understanding of both the business and technical implications of the decisions.
As with any strategy, your BI will continue to evolve and change over time. As part of their charter, the BICC will continue to evaluate and make any necessary adjustments to ensure they are meeting their goals and objectives. The BICC will also have a unique vantage point to make recommendations and offer new insights for consideration. It may also be a sounding board for innovative ventures where it is easy to mitigate risk and learn from experience.

Bridging the gap

Technology is only one piece of the puzzle. In order to have a successful BI implementation it is also important to understand how your organization uses information. The BICC can be an excellent vehicle for articulating and executing your information goals and objectives.

As the leader in business intelligence, SAS has developed the Information Evolution Model\(^2\) to aid companies in assessing how they use information to drive business. The model outlines how information is managed and utilized as a corporate asset. It enables organizations to objectively evaluate their use of information and accurately lay out a roadmap for improvements that optimize business returns. For more information, please refer to the SAS White Paper, Five Steps to Evolving into an Intelligent, High-Performance Enterprise, downloadable from [www.sas.com/software/iem/](http://www.sas.com/software/iem/).

In order to reap the benefits of information evolution, companies must gain insight to better align strategies and identify critical relationships and gaps along four key company dimensions – human capital, knowledge processes, culture and infrastructure. The BICC provides an ideal place to navigate and align all of these critical dimensions to ensure optimal results.

The Information Evolution Model provides a framework for companies to evaluate themselves relative to these dimensions. It also offers action plans that can be tailored to each company's unique characteristics. By understanding and improving alignment within these critical dimensions, companies can maximize the value and impact of information as a strategic corporate asset to gain competitive advantage.

By understanding your current information delivery environment and processes, you can establish a vision for using information more effectively by understanding your desired information delivery strategy, goals and requirements.

The end result is an effective, efficient and structured path toward optimum alignment of information delivery capabilities to strategic business needs, taking advantage of the best in business intelligence technologies. It provides the strategic roadmap for the BICC, outlining the BI approach it is to drive and support. SAS uses the Information Evolution Model as a basis for helping you define this strategic roadmap.

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\(^2\) Patent pending
Case study: Insurance, South Africa

Mutual & Federal defines business intelligence strategy

This case concerns Mutual & Federal (M&F), one of the leading insurance companies in South Africa. M&F provides insurance services to the personal, commercial, and corporate markets. It operates in the marketplace through professional brokers who are able to offer clients personal service and advice when purchasing policies and practical assistance in the event of a claim.

In 2003, M&F together with SAS embarked on a strategic program that was tasked to implement an enterprise-wide management information solution using the SAS Insurance Intelligence Solution. Ownership for this initiative was held at top executive level. A project management board met every month to monitor progress on this strategic program. The board members were all individuals from the general management team representing the business units of the organization.

The first deliverable consisted of implementing analytical solutions. During the first phase of the project, M&F realized that in order to make its focus on creating both the infrastructure for reporting and the environment for building a strategic business intelligence (BI) program operational in the organization, it would need to have a structure that would provide a sustainable environment for advocating the use of BI.

The primary objective for the BI department is to achieve “one single version of the truth” across all reporting mechanisms by transforming data into knowledge, which will enable decision makers to make effective and informed decisions. In order to achieve this objective, the pooling of business, information technology (IT), and analytical skills into one department is essential. This central department will ensure that the development and implementation of standardized BI processes is achieved across the enterprise. This department is responsible for providing training and end user support and will provide the expertise when advanced analytics, data acquisition, and warehousing development functions are required.

SAS was instrumental in helping M&F define its BI strategy and set up the BI department. A management consulting firm was also involved to address the organizational change management aspects that went along with the creation of the BI department.

How SAS can help ensure a successful BI strategy

For almost three decades, SAS has been helping customers drive business strategies that evolve information from operational knowledge to creative intelligence for innovative decision making. Within our project engagements we have amassed a great deal of information on the issues organizations face with information delivery and how they have solved those issues within their organization.
Therefore, SAS offers the best resources for assessing and recommending the strategies and directions for your BICC. Our hands-on experience – drawn from more than 1,500 professional consultants worldwide – provides your organization with a proven path to success. This expertise ensures that every engagement follows proven best practices, uses time-tested methodologies, delivers tangible results and provides useful, actionable business intelligence to turn your strategies into a true competitive advantage.

The following section describes some of the services and support that SAS could bring to bear in support of establishing your center.

**Figure 2: The BI Competency Center interacting with the business units and SAS**

**Business and industry expertise**

SAS has a number of its own professionals with years of experience in applying business intelligence and analytics to specific industry domains as well as strong partnerships.

SAS uses a consultative approach derived from practical field experience and SAS solution, concept and method knowledge to provide management advice and assistance. The consultative approach is based on workshops, interviews and collaborations to identify your specific business needs, challenges and critical success factors to recommend a set of alternative options. As a further step, the SAS professionals are able to collaborate with your business units and financial managers to produce business cases to identify the cost benefit return on investment or payback periods.

SAS partnerships include alliances with global, regional and local companies that have expertise in formulating business strategies and performing change management consulting. These organizations are able to use their consultative methodologies and practices, coupled with an understanding of SAS software and solutions, to provide management advice, guidance and recommendations on how BI may have a positive business impact on increasing the organization’s competitive position, attaining compliance, improving corporate governance or reducing costs.
Business Intelligence Competency Centers: Creating a successful strategy

**BI strategy consulting**

**Information Evolution Assessment**

The SAS Information Evolution Assessment helps you to define an enhanced BI strategy with a prioritized roadmap for deployment. The assessment provides a vision for maximizing the value and impact of information to improve decision making. It offers an interactive business setting where SAS consultants, who are experts in information delivery, work with you to develop an organization-wide strategy to evolve your use of information for decision making. The assessment leverages the Information Evolution Model as the strategic framework and basis of measurement for understanding the maturity of your organization’s information delivery capabilities.

**BICC services**

SAS, together with partners, offers a wide range of services to provide advice on how to set up and run a Business Intelligence Competency Center. The services introduce your organization to the Business Intelligence Competency Center concept, discuss how it could provide value to your organization, and go through the considerations for setting up, staffing and running a BICC. They also include determining the BI strategy of your organization and working through the setup phase for a BICC from start to finish. We work closely with partners to address your organizational change management requirements and share best practices in the area of competency centers from our experience.

**Implementation consulting**

For 29 years, SAS has been helping our customers – including 96 of the top 100 companies on the 2005 Fortune 500 List – implement business intelligence solutions that deliver the complete vision to learn from the past, monitor and communicate the present, and gain insight into the future. Engaging SAS consultants can accelerate your ability to tap into the full power of SAS technology and reap maximum returns throughout the life of your investment.

SAS has partnerships with Alliance and implementation partners on a global, regional and local levels. These partnerships provide hundreds of highly experienced and qualified individuals and companies that can provide implementation services and support.

**Training Needs Analysis**

SAS Training Needs Analysis examines the current knowledge of your team with regard to your business and job and/or project roles and analyzes the difference between actual and desired competence. The objective is to recommend appropriate action and ways of ensuring and evaluating the effectiveness of the training.
Comprehensive and customizable training offering

SAS offers more than 150 courses that deliver up-to-date content. Certified SAS instructors are regularly assessed for their instructional quality. Multiple delivery methods meet your time, budget and education needs, including public and on-site training, as well as interactive live-Web classes and e-learning products that deliver on-demand training at your convenience.

The SAS Business Knowledge Series Program provides in-depth courses developed by industry experts. Each course is designed to provide organizations with knowledge in the latest business developments. Covering a broad range of topics from business theory and methodology to implementation strategies using SAS, the Business Knowledge Series Program will introduce you to new ways of looking at your organization.

Certification program

As the world leader in software and services that drive the intelligent enterprise, SAS is committed to providing your company with the competitive advantage that certification brings. Designed to recognize users who exhibit an advanced understanding of SAS software, the SAS Certified Professional Program makes it easy to identify experts who have the skills and knowledge to optimize the power of SAS.

SAS Publishing

SAS Publishing offers a variety of products and services for SAS users, including online and hard-copy documentation geared to all levels of SAS users. In the Online Bookstore you can browse descriptions, view table of contents and sample code, and place orders using the shopping cart feature. The bookstore is updated daily to provide you with the most current information about our books.

SAS Press provides a library of books written by SAS users, for SAS users. SAS Learning Edition is a personal learning version of SAS with instruction paced for the beginner.

Online SAS Documentation provides both an HTML-based online library with features such as full-text search across titles, a master index, expanding and contracting table of contents, as well as printer-friendly PDF versions of the documentation. Most titles appear in both formats.

Self-paced e-learning provides you with immediate access to expert SAS training directly from your desktop at your convenience.
Internal marketing and users group support

SAS encourages users to become active in user group activities and SAS helps to establish and nurture such groups. Various user groups offer excellent user conferences around the world. Whether you’re a seasoned SAS software user with experiences to share or a newcomer who’d like to interact with other users, a users group is an excellent way to help you get the most value from your investment.

Support

SAS Technical Support offers powerful online self-help services that give the BICC support staff access to answers regarding many technical problems and questions. This will make for quicker and easier resolution of problems.

SAS assists the BICC with establishing a powerful support procedure in-house, to use SAS online services and to cooperate with SAS Technical Support resources effectively. The results should be a higher return of investment from SAS BI solutions.

Conclusion

According to a 2005 survey from BetterManagement, 60 percent of the respondents say they never, rarely or only sometimes get the information they need to make effective business decisions. Those with intelligent enterprises want to make sure that everyone throughout the organization is making fact-based decisions to mitigate risk and maximize performance.

Evolving the intelligent enterprise is a complex task that requires promoting and supporting the use of information for decision making at all corporate levels. A central structure for defining, executing and supporting the BI strategy ensures the robustness and reliability of the information infrastructure and, at the same time, enables heterogeneous groups of information consumers to use information in a coordinated way to achieve company goals.

Information is one of the most valuable assets of your organization. Capitalize on your investment in your infrastructure, people and processes by developing and operating a highly-effective BI support organization for your entire enterprise.

Additional information can be found in Business Intelligence Competency Centers: A Team Approach to Maximizing Competitive Advantage. This book will show you how to turn your organization’s data into actionable knowledge through the Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC) – your one true source of information.

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3 BetterManagement Survey, “How do you plan for Business Intelligence?” February/March 2005
Contact

Please contact your local SAS office for more information regarding a Business Intelligence Competency Center. [www.sas.com/offices](http://www.sas.com/offices)

About SAS

SAS is the market leader in providing a new generation of business intelligence software and services that create true enterprise intelligence. SAS solutions are used at more than 40,000 sites, including 96 of the top 100 companies on the FORTUNE Global 500®, to develop more profitable relationships with customers and suppliers; to enable better, more accurate and informed decisions; and to drive organizations forward. SAS is the only vendor that completely integrates leading data warehousing, analytics and traditional BI applications to create intelligence from massive amounts of data. For nearly three decades, SAS has been giving customers around the world *The Power to Know*®.