
Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Contemporary Workplaces in Japan

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This paper first provides an overview of trends in recent research on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), OCB classifications and similar concepts, and the influence that OCB has on workplaces, and then recognizes the positive effect that OCB has on employees and organizations as a whole. The number of academic articles concerning OCB is steadily increasing. This paper notes that contextual performance, service-oriented behaviors, and innovation-promotive behaviors are concepts similar to OCB. It confirms that the positive influences of OCB extend not only to the behaviors of individual employees but also to the overall performance of the organization. It then mentions the environment surrounding contemporary workplaces in Japan, and points out that the manifestation of OCB has been negatively influenced by the performance-based pay systems that many Japanese corporations have adopted since the 1990s. It further notes the possibility that OCB will not take place under performance-based pay systems because employees tend to focus on their own performance. Finally, it discusses HRM strategies for the future under which OCB will be promoted in Japanese workplaces. The author presents “security of justice” in the organization and heightening employees’ empowerment as key measures.

I. Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Its Influence on Workplaces

One day, the author conducted a search of the keywords “inconsiderate employees” on Yahoo! JAPAN. This search produced approximately 4,420,000 hits. Among them were posts like this:

I am a female permanent employee in my 40s.

Partly due to the poor economic times, temporary agency workers are now handling reception and general affairs jobs instead of permanent employees at my workplace. These women arrive in the office just before work starts and leave as soon as it’s finishing time.

In this age, I don’t think we should expect temporary agency workers to serve tea or clean floors. But these women don’t care a bit if their desks or work areas are covered with dust. And they eat up all of the snacks that receptionists receive from customers, without sharing any with us. It drives me up the wall.

When I try to say something to them, they respond with something irrelevant like “Tell the temporary agency” or “What is this, power harassment?”

If they’ve got time to shoot the breeze in the staff kitchen or restroom, then I want

them to also spend time working hard.¹

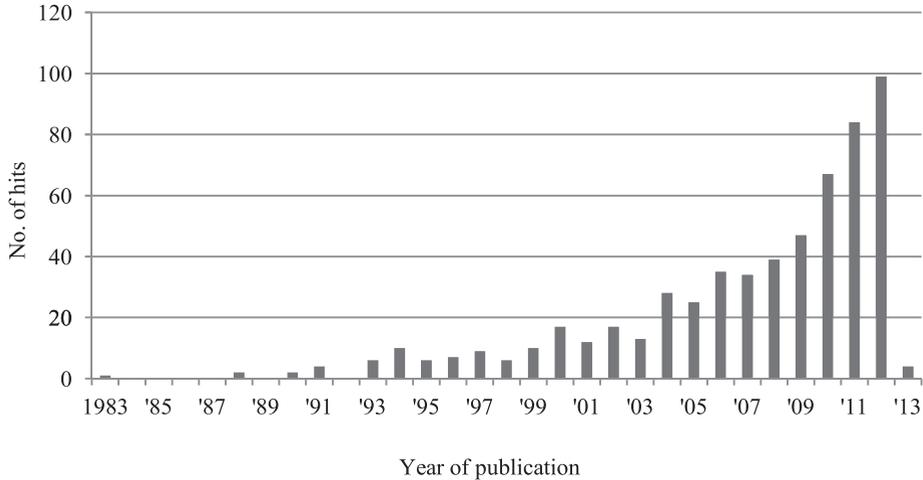
The author has not presented the above post simply as a humorous example of situations found in Japanese organizations. Instead, it is a paradoxical example of a topic that the author wishes to discuss here.

Generally speaking, in any organization or workplace, there are always some jobs that have not been assigned to any particular person. In the workplace, “unexpected events” happen all the time, and jobs that were unforeseen and roles that do not belong to any individual are constantly being generated. Indeed, it would be impossible to cover all activities necessary to execute the actual work of a workplace in a formal organizational chart or regulations on division of jobs (i.e., by allocating jobs to all employees in the manner of “this person will do this job, and that job will be handled by someone else”). Traditionally, it has been standard practice in Japanese workplaces for individual employees to take the initiative in handling unallocated jobs whenever they arise, even when such jobs are outside their own scope of responsibility. This was partly due to the understanding that “unallocated work” will increase before anyone realizes it and come to interfere with smooth operations, eventually causing everything to shut down like a machine running without lubricant. In the past, Japanese employees actively (and quite naturally) filled “gaps” in jobs to prevent such a situation from occurring. However, in the workplaces of contemporary Japan, employees no longer take on jobs that are outside their own responsibilities. This is because, even if they were to take on such a job, the fact that they did so will not be counted as part of their own work performance. So what happened to the employee-initiated extra-role behaviors that were once so commonplace in Japanese workplaces?

1. What Is Organizational Citizenship Behavior?

Katz and Kahn (1966) were the first to make note of autonomous work behavior by employees in an organization or workplace. However, it was Organ (1988) who arranged such behavior into a concrete form and viewed it as “organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).” Subsequently, Organ and his colleagues defined OCB as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie 2006). One requirement of OCB is that it not be covered by employees’ work descriptions and regulations (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Hui 1993). Signifying so-called “extra-role behavior,” this is behavior that has great significance for workplaces and organizations. It is precisely because of this significance that OCB has been the subject of considerable academic research in North America and other regions that has produced numerous academic results. The following takes a brief look at research trends here.

¹ Posted by “Mikarin” on Yomiuri Online’s “Hatsugen Komachi” site, November 11, 2009, <http://komachi.yomiuri.co.jp/t/2009/1111/275175.htm?o=0> [accessed January 21, 2013].



Note: Result of a search by ProQuest, January 21, 2013.

Figure 1. Number of Papers with “Organizational Citizenship Behavior” in the Title

(1) Trends in Academic Research on OCB

Using the academic data database ProQuest, the author conducted a search of academic papers containing the phrase “organizational citizenship behavior” in the title.² This search produced 588 hits when only papers falling under the category of “Scholarly Journals” were extracted (Figure 1).³ Looking at the search results, it is apparent that the number of papers is showing a distinctive upward trend (particularly from around 2000). This suggests that OCB continues to be viewed with importance as a research topic in the realms of organizational psychology and organizational behavior.

A number of elements comprising OCB (i.e., behavioral patterns) have been proposed in much of the research concerning OCB conducted thus far. According to Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006), the classifications of OCB appearing in many OCB-related papers vary greatly; in fact, they find 40 types having different names in use.⁴ Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006) summarized these classifications to define OCB’s structural elements in terms of seven dimensions: namely, they are: “helping” (i.e., acting to help a specific individual, such as a colleague, boss, or client), “compliance” (contribution the work team, department, or organization), “sportsmanship” (choosing not to protest unfairness or show dissatisfaction to the organization or manager), “civic virtue” (readiness to participate responsibly and constructively in the political and governing processes of the

² Date of search: January 21, 2013.

³ In addition, the author conducted a search of titles containing “organizational citizenship behavior” using another academic database called EBSCO host. This search produced 688 hits when limited to “academic journals” and “peer-reviewed papers.” (Date of search: January 21, 2013).

⁴ For more details, see the Appendix of Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006).

organization), “organizational loyalty” (showing pride in one’s organization to people who are not members of that organization), “self-development” (taking autonomous steps to expand skills and knowledge pertaining to one’s own work), and “individual initiative” (almost all behaviors that go beyond what is necessary to resolve or avoid problems). An OCB scale for Japanese workplaces was devised by Tanaka (2002, 2004). This scale is comprised of five subscales; namely “interpersonal help,” “conscientiousness,” “concentration on the job,” “supporting the organization,” and “cleanliness.”

(2) Concepts Similar to OCB

As was mentioned above, while there are various classifications within OCB, there are also many concepts that are similar to OCB. Here, the author will examine a concept that, while covering roughly the same concrete behaviors as OCB, approaches these behaviors from a different standpoint, and concepts that maintain the basic foundation of OCB but with a more focused behavioral target.

(i) Contextual Performance

Of the structural concepts that resemble OCB, the most important is “contextual performance.” Put forth by Borman and Motowidlo (1997), contextual performance serves as a counterpart to “task performance.” In the case of task performance, the core focus is on jobs in the workplace. On the other hand, while contextual performance is similar to task performance in that it refers to job-related activity, its focus is on activity that supports a broader organizational, social, and psychological environment so that core jobs can function, rather than on activities that contribute to core jobs. Five categories are presented with regard to specific activities in contextual performance (Borman and Motowidlo 1997). These are: (a) persisting with extra enthusiasm or effort as necessary to complete own task performance successfully; (b) volunteering to carry out task performance that are not formally part of the job; (c) helping and cooperating with others; (d) following organizational rules and procedures even when personally inconvenient; and (e) endorsing, supporting, and defending organizational objectives. The differences between OCB and contextual performance lie in the quality of their definitions. Basic differences can be summed up as follows:

- While OCB is premised on extra-role behavior as well as behavior that is undertaken voluntarily by the employee, contextual performance does not require these conditions.
- While OCB refers to voluntary behavior for which the acting employee does not demand compensation, contextual performance’s definition does not rule out compensation for behavior.

What the above means is that, in terms of their definitions, the assumption is made that no reward or compensation will be provided in the case of OCB. However, in the case of contextual performance, the possibility that monetary payment (or, if not monetary, a comparable form of compensation) will be provided for relevant work behavior exists, and

thus the possibility that said behavior will have an influence on human resources measurement and evaluation also exists.

(ii) Service-Oriented Behavior

This refers to the extra-role behaviors of employees who come into direct contact with clients or customers (Bettencourt, Gwinner, and Meuter 2001). Specifically, it points to behaviors that include responding to references concerning product services from other companies or providing industry-related information to customers. It is also called “customer-oriented behavior.”

(iii) Innovation-Promotive Behavior

The voluntary taking of various helping behaviors within an organization is intended not only to maintain the status of the organization by supporting the organization’s members but also to improve the organization. Morrison and Phelps (1999) were the first to focus on behaviors to reform an organization with a stronger intention to change than found in OCB. They called voluntary and constructive behaviors to bring about change in an organization’s functions (i.e., in the form of efforts to improve work execution) “taking charge.” Takaishi and Furukawa (2009) defined voluntary behavior by employees that contribute to organizational innovation in Japan as “innovation-promotive behavior.” Specifically, they hypothesized that such behavior falls into four behavioral groups: (a) problem finding and solving: action to make improvements or reforms based on awareness of problems vis-à-vis an existing job or workplace; (b) gathering of important information: action to gather information necessary to instigate or promote innovation; (c) “customer first” behavior: action that places the highest priority on customer satisfaction; and (d) suggestion and recommendation: action of suggesting and recommending changes that should be made to organizational frameworks, regulations, and policies to people nearby.

2. Organizational Citizenship Behavior’s Influence on Workplaces

(1) OCB’s Influence on Employee Performance Evaluation

Looking at the results of past research, it is apparent that employees who are open to OCB are, in general, actively involved in their own work and almost always have little desire to resign and low unjustified absenteeism (Podsakoff et al. 2009). They also tend to score highly in performance evaluations. Podsakoff et al. (2000) point out that, based on past research, OCB raises the productivity of colleagues and managers and increases ability to adapt to organizational changes. Moreover, according to meta-analysis of OCB research by Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006), while objective performance accounted for just 9.5% of the variance in employees’ performance evaluations, employees’ OCB uniquely accounted for 42.9% of the variance. If the results of past research are considered, it is apparent that workplace managers place emphasis on the degree to which employees engaged in OCB (regardless of whether it was intentional or not) when evaluating their work per-

formance. Moreover, the results suggest that the degree to which employees engaged in OCB has a greater influence on performance evaluations by managers than employees' objective performance.⁵

(2) OCB's Influence on Organizational Performance

Does employees' OCB have a positive effect on the workplace or organization as a whole? Based on the results of past research, the answer is clearly "yes." Meta-analysis by Podsakoff *et al.* (2009) shows a rather high coefficient of correlation between OCB and overall organizational performance ($r_c=.43$). Moreover, according to meta-analysis by Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006), OCB accounted for about 20% of the variance in quantitative corporate performance indicators, more than 19% of the variance in qualitative corporate performance indicators, about 25% of the variance in financial efficiency indicators, and about 38% of the variance in customer satisfaction (customer dissatisfaction). Given these results, there is no question that various organization-wide performance indicators show a tendency to rise when their employees engage in more OCB.

II. Circumstances Surrounding Workplaces in Japan and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

As was mentioned earlier, research on OCB has been conducted in the United States and other countries from the end of the 1980s. However, it is thought that many of the ideas found in OCB were traditionally established in Japan's workplaces. Nonetheless, a considerable amount of time passed before OCB appeared in Japanese research on organizational psychology and organizational behavior theory. It is thought that Nishida (1997) was the first to study OCB in Japan; however, this study came some 10 years after Organ (1988). It can be postulated that a reason for this delay in Japanese study of OCB is that, in Japanese workplaces up until the 1990s, the fact that employees voluntarily did what was best for their organization was taken for granted. As a result, behavior of this kind escaped being made a topic of research, let alone being given a name such as "organizational citizenship behavior." However, as is mentioned in the foreword (*Nihon no dokusha no minasan he* [To readers in Japan]) of the Japanese version of Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2006), it is unquestionable that the management policies of Japanese companies' (known as so-called "Japanese-style management") provided hints that led to the OCB concept's birth. The following is a somewhat lengthy quotation from the foreword of Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie (2007):

In fact, I must say something somewhat ironic about this. That is, when I first became interested in OCB, much of what I was thinking was strongly influenced by what I

⁵ It should be noted, however, that a report that does not find any influence on employees' salaries also exists (Podsakoff *et al.* 2009).

had heard and learned about Japanese-style management. (Omission) I believed that because Japan's traditional management style recognized the importance of OCB and avoided work practices that hinder OCB, Japanese companies were able to actualize work effectiveness to a degree that made them formidable competitors for American companies in the global business environment. In other words, I thought that Japanese managers already understood OCB, and so my interest was primarily oriented toward writing about the essential nature, antecedent factors, and results of OCB for American managers (Organ, Podsakoff, and MacKenzie 2007, i).

However, in actuality, it is apparent that those who had the least understanding of the essential nature of OCB were Japanese managers and researchers of organizational behavior in Japan. With the benefit of hindsight, this is truly ironic. So then, why did the OCB that was supposedly firmly established in Japan's workplaces evaporate (as in the manner described by the website post presented at the beginning of this paper)?

1. The Arrival of Performance-Based Pay Systems in Japan's Workplaces

A look at economic indicators from the 1990s to the present day—i.e., the so-called “lost decade” (or perhaps “lost two decades”)—shows that Japan's economy has experienced repeated bad and good times. However, there can be no doubt that many employees in Japan's workplaces have, quite unfortunately, never felt the “good” times. The results of a survey conducted by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2008) show that employees of Japan's workplaces do not feel that their treatment and compensation as employees have improved.⁶ One symbol of the circumstances surrounding Japanese workplaces since the 1990s that is worth particular mention is the appearance of performance-based pay systems.

(1) What Are the Characteristics of the Performance-Based Approach?

According to Kamagata (2009), characteristics of the performance-based approach as it is applied in Japan can be summarized into following four points: It (a) looks at performance (or effort or action in the course of the process of performance) in terms of results; (b) looks at the results of individual employees; (c) expresses results in terms of wage differences; and (d) makes evaluations based on short-term results. Moreover, Morishima (2006) argues that performance-based personnel policies in Japan tend to emphasize manifested abilities vis-à-vis jobs and short-term performance more than ever before.

(2) How Do Employees View Performance Based-Pay Systems?

Many Japanese companies have introduced performance-based pay systems. It is

⁶ For example, respondents answered that the situation was worse than before for “clarity of evaluation criteria,” “reward for effort,” and “acceptability of evaluations” (The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training 2008).

likely that one major reason they did so was to motivate employees with a more understandable and acceptable employee evaluation and reward system. This way of thinking almost certainly remains prevalent among Japanese managers even today.⁷ However, performance-based pay systems do not always work for Japanese employees in the way that their managers intend. In fact, they can have results that are quite opposite to what was intended. For example, according to an analysis by Ohtake and Karato (2003), simply introducing a performance-based pay system in Japan did not have an effect on employees' incentive to work. Furthermore, according to Tsuzaki, Kurata, and Arai (2008), employees in Japanese organizations experience a growing sense of unfairness and distrust when evaluation criteria or system changes are not clearly explained to them, or when results alone are demanded but employees are not given the freedom they need to improve their results.

(3) A "Tendency toward Individualization" among Employees

The results of a survey by Tsuzaki, Kurata, and Arai (2008) show a "tendency toward individualization" as one characteristic of employee attitudes during Japan's Heisei recession from the 1990s. This tendency appears in two different forms. Specifically, one is a tendency toward individualization based on a confrontational stance vis-à-vis management that is accompanied by distrust of the company (for example, thinking "I have come to place myself ahead of the company"). And the other is a tendency toward individualization based on a desire to independently protect one's own employment through various means but which is not accompanied by distrust of the company (for example, thinking "I am going to ensure my employment by raising my skills to a point where I'll be employable anywhere"). An analysis by Tsuzaki, Kurata, and Arai (2008) suggests that the introduction of personnel rating systems to control personnel costs, greater mobility of human resources (i.e., the dismissal of people close to employees), and policies that emphasize individual performance in promotion or advancement are reinforcing the tendency toward individualization.

2. Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Japan under Performance-Based Pay Systems

Naturally, performance-based pay systems encourage employees to maximize their devotion to their official jobs. At the same time, however, it should not be surprising that employees working under a performance-based approach that emphasizes manifested ability, short-term performance, and individual performance will turn their focus to their own performance. If, as described above, Japanese employees' thinking with regard to their jobs is "tending toward individualism," then is it not natural that they will think only about doing their own jobs in their current circumstances, and not have time to consider the future of

⁷ In a survey by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2004), the most common reasons Japanese companies gave for introducing a performance-based reward system were "to motivate employees" (77.8%) and "to raise acceptance of the evaluation and reward system" (59.8%).

their company or good conditions of their colleagues or the workplace as a whole?

Furthermore, generally speaking, this kind of pay system often clearly establishes behaviors and results that receive rewards. Given this, as Deckop, Mangel, and Cirka (1999) point out, employees under a performance-based pay system can lose motivation to take on behaviors for which they will not receive clear rewards (i.e., OCB).

Considering the above, there can be no doubt that, under a performance-based payment system, the amount of effort employees devote to OCB ultimately declines. It is moreover certain that their interest in OCB naturally wanes as a result.

III. What Can Be Done to Promote Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Contemporary Workplaces in Japan?

1. What Promotes Organizational Citizenship Behavior?

Spitzmuller, Van Dyne, and Ilies (2008) identify the following as factors that determine OCB: agreeableness and conscientiousness as dispositional aspects of personality, employees' job satisfaction, organizational justice, organizational commitment, and positive feeling. In other words, OCB is facilitated when employees have (a) strong agreeableness and conscientiousness as personality traits, (b) high job satisfaction, (c) view the organization's systems and procedures as fair, (d) a feeling of attachment with their organization, and (e) a positive feeling.

So conversely, are there any factors that hinder the manifestation of OCB? A meta-analysis of factors that regulate OCB by Eatough et al. (2011) indicated that OCB decreases significantly when employees feel that the jobs allocated to them are excessive or when role conflict in the execution of jobs (i.e., when an employee must handle different jobs at the same time) occurs. This suggests that the manifestation of OCB is hindered in the absence of efforts to clarify to some extent the jobs and roles allocated to employees in the workplace and avoid placing excessive workload on them. In other words, although OCB in itself is the "voluntary performance of work that is not allocated to any particular person," situations in which employees do not know what their jobs are (i.e., do not know what jobs they should handle or the extent of their responsibilities) cause them considerable stress that ultimately hinders OCB's manifestation.

2. What Can Be Done to Promote Organizational Citizenship Behavior?

If, indeed, there is a causal relationship between particular personality traits (for example, agreeableness or conscientiousness) and OCB, testing for such traits during recruitment exams may prove useful as a means by which Japanese organizations can promote OCB. However, because quite a few examinees falsely report their traits during personality tests, there are apprehensions concerning the post-hiring predictive validity of such tests.⁸

⁸ For this reason, one approach could be to establish a "lie scale" and then conduct personality

Although it is possible to check examinees' personalities during job interviews, this method is largely dependent upon the interviewing skills and "discerning eye" of the interviewer. Research that attempted to incorporate questions on OCB into mock job interviews with university undergraduates (Podsakoff et al. 2011) found that the more interviewees spoke about OCB, the higher they scored in their evaluations. However, many problems must be resolved before such apprehensions can be put to practical use.

At the same time, if it is true that employees in contemporary workplaces in Japan are dissatisfied with performance-based pay systems because they view them as unfair, then improvements must be made. This is because, given that the results of previously mentioned past research on OCB showed that fairness in the organization promotes OCB, it can be concluded conversely that a spreading feeling of unfairness among employees will gradually erode the manifestation of OCB in the workplace. If Japanese managers wish to continue using performance-based pay systems that are centered on target management, they must first bring "security of justice" to their evaluation systems. Doing this will require securing fairness (so-called procedural justice) in the evaluation process. More specifically, as Morishima (2006) points out, it is likely that measures that (a) avoid generating a sense that personnel systems are being pushed onto employees by involving labor unions and management from the system restructuring phase, and (b) provide training for not only evaluators but also those undergoing evaluation will be required.

The following practical research in Japan provides suggestions for concrete measures. Research by Haneishi (2009) showed that, when a certain company in Japan's Tohoku region began clean-up activities in order to enliven its workplaces and contribute to the community, employees' OCB gradually increased as the community's appreciation of their activities grew, and as a result the entire company's performance improved. This demonstrated that engaging in company-wide clean-up activities resulted in improved OCB among employees. Most likely, what is important here is that the company's managers took the lead in the activities and set an example, rather than pushing the activities on their employees. Yaffe and Kark (2011) showed that the more workplace leaders practice OCB, the more OCB improves not only among individual employees but also throughout the entire organization. Thus, it can be concluded that OCB is not something that managers should order, but rather something for which they should set an example by practicing it themselves.

3. What Should Be Done in Terms of Human Resources Management?

It is the author's view that, even more than securing organizational justice in the workplace, it is a high degree of empowerment among individual employees that holds the key to the manifestation of OCB. Here, "empowerment" is defined as "the delegation of increased decision-making powers to individuals or groups in a society or organization" (VandenBos 2007, 328). In other words, empowerment can be understood as the degree to

tests that detect false responses.

which an employee believes he can fulfill his jobs by utilizing his own abilities, and the degree to which he can actively reflect this belief on his behavior. According to Alge et al. (2006) and Choi (2007), employees with a higher degree of empowerment engaged in more OCB at both the individual and workplace levels.

However, employee empowerment can hardly be secured if employees suffer anxiety because their long-term employment is not guaranteed. As Choi (2007) argued, the influence employee empowerment has on OCB is limited to a mediating effect, and workplace environments that foster empowerment (e.g., supportive leadership by superiors, an atmosphere that encourages workplace innovation, a firmly shared “vision” for the organization, etc.) must be established.

IV. Epilogue

If Japan’s workplaces become full of “inconsiderate employees,” no one will take on the many “jobs that do not belong to any particular person” that exist in workplaces. If that were to happen, workplaces would begin creaking like a machine running without lubricant, and soon nothing would function like it is supposed to. Just the thought of such a situation is terrifying. However, in reality, things have yet to reach such a dreadful state in the contemporary workplaces of Japan. This is because there are still many members of Japanese organizations who voluntarily take on jobs that were not allocated to them to some extent.

As this paper has discussed, in considering the results of past research on OCB, it becomes clear that employees’ OCB will have a positive ripple effect on Japanese workplaces and organizations, and that OCB will be an essential part of contemporary corporate activity. The author believes that even “inconsiderate employees” will voluntarily take an interest in OCB if they see some value in the jobs of their workplace. However, this may not be the case if, as this paper discussed, the situation surrounding Japanese workplaces continues to “individualize” employees.

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