Preference Analysis of Knowledge Domain for Organisational Learning – A Case of NLCIL

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Knowledge is omnipresent and in this technology world, knowledge acquisition, processing retention has become easier. While knowledge is easily accessible, preferences to the way of learning vary with individuals. Public Sector units in India have been leading the country on many fronts while a very few leading PSUs have taken right direction towards involving into technology disruption in adopting knowledge management efforts. NLCIL is one such company who have taken outstanding efforts in encouraging learning using knowledge management approaches and understanding the requirement of its employees. The paper is an attempt to conduct a preference analysis of learning needs among NLCIL employees in immediate context to work and elaborates the knowledge demands among executives. The paper comprehends the relation between demographic variables like age, gender, grade, department, and unit affecting the training preference of respondents. It is evident from the data that knowledge domain has an edge over the skill and behaviour domain when comprehended in relation to training preferences categorised underage, gender, grade, department, and unit.

Keywords: Knowledge, Preference analysis, Domain, Skill, Behavioural Competencies

1. Introduction

The world is facing numerous operational challenges governed by legislative, executive, and judicial bodies. The companies are now forced to adopt electronic work environment driven by paperwork and cost reduction mandates, with increased workloads and fewer personnel while focussing on implementing newer tech-driven communication channels (Talisayon, 2013). Knowledge management as an effort has gained more popularity over the years in PSUs due to the issues and advancements. Contrary there are very few leading PSUs have taken right direction towards involving into technology disruption in adopting knowledge management efforts.

Since childhood, there is an encouragement to gain knowledge and over the years rising competition has led to higher focus for parents on gaining knowledge since an early childhood. Though, there have been numerous debates on the ethical aspects of over emphasis on knowledge and education since early childhood yet, it cannot be denied that knowledge is base for an individual to shape his life. Knowledge is the foundation for the growth and development for any organisation; leading to the development of the country (Malhan & Gulati, 2003). A lot has been said about the term 'Knowledge' yet a great deal remains unquestioned. The whole life of an individual is too short to gain 'Knowledge'; similar is the situation of research on 'Knowledge Management' where a good deal remains to be studied (Sarkar, 2010). 'Knowledge' referred as 'Gyan' are the lessons one learns from not only theoretical inputs but also from experience in real life. Knowledge in an organization is the collection of expertise, experience and information that individuals and workgroups use during the execution of their tasks (Vasconcelos, Seixas, Lemos, 2005). It is produced and stored by individual minds or implicitly encoded and documented in organizational processes, services and systems. In an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the one sure source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge (Nonaka, 1991). As 'Knowledge' has turned to be the core competence, the demand for knowledgeable employees is imperative. The concept of organizational asset has varied tremendously with time and competition. The importance of intangible assets has amplified rapidly in knowledge society.

Enhancing organisational learning is a right approach to enhance knowledge capability in organisations. Organizational learning can be explained as a multifaceted three-staged activity mainly involving knowledge acquisition, dissemination and shared implementation. Argyris (1992) suggested that organizational learning occurs under two conditions firstly, when an organization achieves what is intended to, and secondly, when a mismatch between intentions and results are identified and rectified. Organizational learning is all about how individuals learn in organizations and the outcomes of the organisation learning can contribute to the development of a firm's resource-based capability (Armstrong, 2011).

In order to maximise the learning efforts it is essential that management creates a platform to communicate the learning opportunities available (Mishra, et al. 2013). It should also be attempted to let employees communicate upwards their comments and reactions to what is proposed and what will happen or what is actually happening in matters that affect them. In order to achieve the capability of the management and individual managers need to communicate to employees about terms and conditions of employment, what they are expected to do, learning and development opportunities, the objectives, strategies, policies and performance of the organization, and any proposed changes to conditions of employment, working arrangements and requirements, or the structure and policies of the organization. Understanding the expectations of the employees is a basic initiative which enables companies to improved engagement and development practices.

The paper is an attempt to understand the learning domain preferences of employees in undertaking development opportunities in their career. The study acts as a guiding beacon to learning and development professionals in understanding how employee

preferences vary with varied demographic variables like age, department, gender, grade etc. The study is confined to employees of NLCIL only.

Objectives: The objective of the paper is three folded. It is an attempt

- To conduct a preference analysis of learning needs in immediate context to work.
- To elaborate the knowledge demands among executives
- To comprehend the relation between demographic variables like Age, Gender, Grade, Department and Unit affecting the training preference of respondents.

2. Conceptual Background

Knowledge management (KM) is no more an unknown word to organizations and has grown up as a result of the complexity of business in modern days. KM is a managerial philosophy, which is perceivable in the practices of different organizations (Hannula, Kukko, Okkonen, 2003). KM has been expressed in numerous ways. It is not purely technology and nor is it a solution to be purchased in a box. It is a mindset - a philosophy of sharing, reshaping, and reusing information and knowledge, experience, and expertise contained in the organization. Knowledge mapping is also another popular term which gained its importance with the time and initiation of KM practices in organisations. Knowledge mapping is a tool used to identify the updated knowledge of employees with a cost effective approach using technology usually represented in form of graphs, tables databases etc. Mapping tasks are never complete; in order for maps to be useful, they must be updated and maintained. There have been numerous efforts in applying knowledge mapping in organizations. Studying the knowledge in the organisation is the initial effort to knowledge mapping and further management.

Knowledge is interpreted in varied forms. Davenport and Prusak, (1998) has clearly distinguished the concepts of data, information and knowledge and clarifies that it is broader, deeper, and richer than data or information. The KM approach views knowledge as the key asset of an organization among all others like land, infrastructure, brand etc. Knowledge in an organization is not just the experience, information or expertise embedded the individual conveying it. People for an organization are always an asset, but identifying right people is an incessant task. In organizations; Competence Management (CM) plays a major role in identifying the need for developing the right set of competencies in employees and also manage the required competent employees (Mishra et al, 2013). Organizations business objectives are now focused on building a workforce of high calibre, commitment and performance. KM approach not only develops activities to build knowledge but also accentuates on managing it efficiently.

The word knowledge can be interpreted in three ways. First, we use it to refer to a state of knowing, by which we also mean to be acquainted or familiar with, to be aware of, to recognize or apprehend facts, methods, principles, techniques and so on. This common usage corresponds to what is often referred to as "know about." Second, we use the word "knowledge" to refer to Senge, (1990) explains the capacity for action," an understanding or grasp of facts, methods, principles and techniques sufficient to apply them in the course of making things happen. This corresponds to "know how."

Third, we use the term "knowledge" to refer to codified, captured and accumulated facts, methods, principles, techniques and so on (Woods and Cortada, 2000).

Earlier works of Berio and Harzallah, (2005) explained that the knowledge and the competence of the employees in organizations are substantial success factors in the world-wide competition. Adequate opportunity to develop engages employees to achieve excellence. It is advocated that that if one is provided an opportunity to 'act rightly' i.e. if one is subjected to proper training, he will achieve excellence (Mallikarjunan, 2005). Lemanski and Overton, (2016), describe a new mapping tool that can be used to help in the design and evaluation of work-based elements within programmes or to evaluate whole programmes. Twomey (2002) studied the organization structure and its potential to transform organizational learning and thereby create a continuous acceleration of innovation. Hu, Wen and Yan, (2015) studied four indicators and three knowledge value components including labour value, technology value and utilization value and iterated that the consequences of measuring the performance of knowledge resources under value perspective supports managers to organize and arrange and improve the knowledge resources and sharing between different organisations.

It is in this backdrop the paper attempts to discuss the preferences of respondents from the organisation in valuing programs to knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies domain. Researchers have been questioning the pattern of developmental inputs in organisations and seek to separately understand the impact of knowledge-based, skill-based and behaviour- based program in organisation. Yet, hardly there is any heed given to the preference of employees in undertaking programs based on their understanding of knowledge-based, skill-based and behaviour- based essentials depending on the immediate requirement at their workplace. The preferences determine the inputs for the individual development leading to organisational learning. It is easy for researchers to segregate and convey the effectiveness of knowledge-based, skill-based and behaviour- based programs but it is more essential to understand the perspective of employees who are at the receivers' end of the programs.

Cognitive Affective and Psychomotor Domain of Learning - Bloom (1956) promoted higher forms of thinking in engaging in learning such as analysing and evaluating concepts, processes, procedures, and principles, rather than just remembering facts. There are three domains of learning are Cognitive domain includes mental skills (knowledge), Affective domain includes growth in feelings or emotional areas (attitude or self) and finally Psychomotor includes manual or physical skills (skills). Cognitive domain explains levels of knowledge, comprehension, application, synthesis, analysis, and evaluation indicating increasingly complex skills. In order to apply a concept, one must have knowledge of it and understand it (Gronlund, 1995). The affective domain highlights a feeling tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection, interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets or biases etc. (Krathwohl et al. 1964). The Psychomotor domain provides a means of identifying outcomes that involve fine, manual, and gross motor movements (Reilly and Oermann, 1985).

Figure 1 *The Study Model*

About NLCIL

As a practical data base case needs an organisation which implements efforts and is ready to share its effort and learning. NLC India Ltd (NLCIL) is one such organisation which is open to learning from the best practices and effort of the organisation. It is in this context NLCIL was chosen as a company to conduct the study and share its efforts. NLCIL incorporated in 1956, is a leading Public sector company engaged in Lignite mining and Lignite based Power Generation. NLCIL has been a forerunner in the country in the energy sector for 65 years. It is a profit making Navratna CPSU of Government of India (GoI). NLCIL views its business as an opportunity to set up mechanisms for sustainable socio-economic development of its operating regions and also for the Nation Building efforts. It is under the administrative control of Ministry of Coal.NLCIL has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with leading institutions with India to facilitate e-learning among employees and build knowledge capital across the organisation.

3. Research Methodology

The executives of NLCIL were provided around 700 topics to prioritise their training needs. Out of 700 topics, 300 topics were identified from knowledge domain, 200 topics from skill domain and 200 from behavioural competencies domain. The respondents were asked to make a choice of minimum three and maximum five topics from domains identified and prioritise it depending on the immediate need of it at the workplace. Preference mapping as a tool is popularly used in understanding product choices of customers in consumer research (Greenhoff and MacFie, 1994). Only data with complete demographic information and at least 3 priorities mentioned have been considered for the study. The total no. of complete responses studied is 3657.

The response rate of the data collected is 95%. Top 15 preferences have been studied along with Top 5 priorities separately have been considered initially to understand normal distribution and the data is found to be normally distributed. Correlations have been studied for all variables including Top 5 and Top 15 count of preferences to overall knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies domain.

Observation

As there was high cooperation from the organisation, almost all executives of the company responded to the formal need assessment questionnaire. Thus, the response rate of the questionnaire was 95%. A total of 4059observationswere collected as a part

of the training needs assessment preference data. Missing data reduces the representativeness of the sample and can therefore distort inferences about the population. Missing data was initially removed to obtain a clean data.

Note: There were 4 respondents who have not responded to 2nd preference yet responded the later options. Similarly, there are 2 respondents who have not responded to 3rd preference yet responded the later options. Such responded have been still considered for analysis.

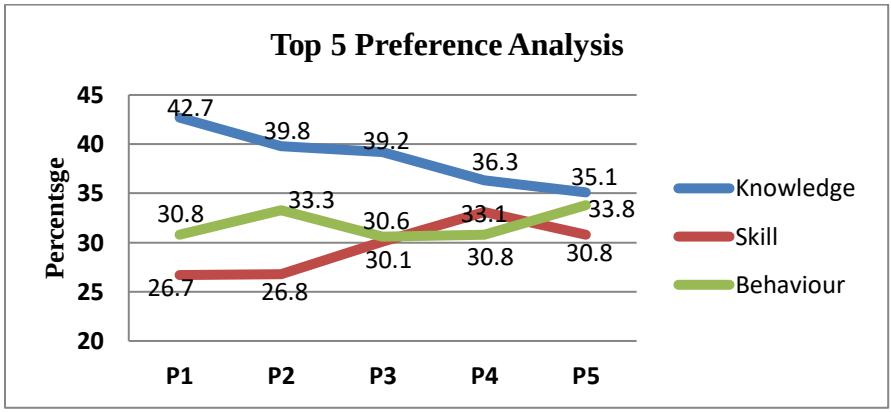

Figure 2 *Top 5 Preference Analysis*

Though a preference of as high as 15 options were provided yet it was observed that most respondent opted for maximum up to 5 preferences. Thus, the preference analysis was done considering top five preferences. An analysis of the Top 5 preferences reveals that knowledge domain is the most preferred. Behaviour domain does get moderate attention but the skill domain is the least preferred domain. This can be verified across the overall data including an analysis using demographic variable.

Table 1 *Preference Analysis based on Age*

Domains	Up to 35 years					36 – 50 years					51 years and above				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Knowledge	48.7	47.6	45.0	39.6	40.7	45.3	40.4	38.8	36.9	34.9	39.0	36.2	36.9	34.2	32.9
Skill	25.7	24.5	30.1	34.6	29.9	23.5	26.8	30.6	32.3	31.4	28.1	27.8	29.9	32.8	31.1
Behaviour	25.6	27.9	24.9	25.8	29.4	31.2	32.8	30.5	30.8	33.7	33.0	36.0	33.2	33.0	36.1

The above Table reflects the preference analysis based on age. The data pertaining to age group belonging to 35 years and below prioritised knowledge domain as primary in the first five priorities. This age group did not consider behavioural competencies and immediate priorities. The age group 36 to 50 years also preferred the knowledge domain as top five priorities. On the other hand a moderate percentage of people gave behaviour competencies as their second preference. In the case of

respondents aged 51 years and above still knowledge is the primary preference while behavioural competencies as the secondary preference.

Table 2 *Preference Analysis based on Gender*

Domains	Female					Male				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Knowledge	37.3	34.0	33.7	38.0	33.7	43.14	40.36	39.77	35.9	35.4
Skill	23.4	27.7	27.1	30.7	24.8	26.83	26.72	30.4	33.4	31.5
Behaviour	39.3	38.3	39.3	31.4	41.6	30.02	32.93	29.8	30.8	33.3

The gender-based data analysis demystifies that female respondents have prioritised behavioural competencies as primary preference and knowledge domain as secondary preference on the other hand, male respondents have preferred knowledge domain as primary preference while behavioural competencies as secondary.

Table 3 *Preference Analysis based on Grade*

Grade	Domains	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
S1 – S4	**Knowledge**	44.8	46.3	35.8	31.7	30.2
	Skill	22.0	21.6	29.5	36.6	34.3
	Behaviour	33.2	32.1	34.7	31.7	35.4
E1 – E3	**Knowledge**	47.1	48.7	48.9	42.1	39.7
	Skill	25.4	24.4	26.8	31.7	31.1
	Behaviour	27.5	26.9	24.4	26.2	29.1
E4 – E6	**Knowledge**	44.9	39.8	40.4	37.2	37.7
	Skill	24.7	26.4	30.7	31.5	27.9
	Behaviour	30.3	33.8	28.9	31.2	34.4
M1-M5	**Knowledge**	39.2	35.2	35.2	33.6	32.7
	Skill	28.8	28.9	31.3	34.1	31.9
	Behaviour	32.0	35.9	33.5	32.3	35.4

On analysing the data to the grade of employees it is evident that there is a varied response pattern to the supervisory cadre and to the senior management employees. The junior and the middle management cadre reflect similar thoughts to preference to knowledge and behavioural competencies domain. Whereas the senior management grade has an equal blend of preference to knowledge and behavioural domains to learning.

The unit based preference analysis reflects no different from results as top 3 preference stands knowledge based domains. The second most preferred domain stands behavioural domain except in the case of Projects unit which did reflect preference of skill domain.

Table 4 *Preference Analysis based on Units*

Departments	Domains	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Mines	**Knowledge**	41.7	35.4	34.7	32.1	30.4
	Skill	27.0	29.4	31.7	33.2	36.6
	Behaviour	31.3	35.2	33.6	34.7	33.0
Power	**Knowledge**	45.6	42.3	41.8	38.3	38.9
	Skill	25.5	25.7	31.5	33.4	26.1
	Behaviour	29.0	32.0	26.7	28.3	35.0
Projects	**Knowledge**	46.1	45.7	43.2	39.8	39.4
	Skill	25.8	27.9	28.4	33.4	28.8
	Behaviour	28.1	26.3	28.4	26.8	31.8
Services	**Knowledge**	37.9	38.5	39.6	36.0	34.3
	Skill	27.8	23.8	27.5	32.6	30.3
	Behaviour	34.3	37.8	32.9	31.3	35.5

Table 5 *Preference Analysis based on Discipline*

Discipline	Domains	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Mechanical	**Knowledge**	42.0	40.0	38.8	35.7	35.1
	Skill	27.1	28.3	29.9	33.0	30.0
	Behaviour	30.9	31.7	31.2	31.3	34.9
Electrical	**Knowledge**	38.4	36.0	38.8	37.1	34.5
	Skill	29.1	26.3	31.2	33.6	33.3
	Behaviour	32.5	37.6	30.0	29.3	32.2
Mining	**Knowledge**	49.3	41.8	35.2	29.8	36.8
	Skill	26.1	28.9	35.0	36.7	33.9
	Behaviour	24.6	29.2	29.8	33.5	29.3
HR	**Knowledge**	50.6	46.8	51.9	43.7	35.0
	Skill	19.0	18.4	21.5	22.8	22.9
	Behaviour	30.4	34.8	26.6	33.5	42.0
Finance	**Knowledge**	59.1	51.7	47.0	47.0	48.3
	Skill	20.8	28.9	25.5	26.8	27.5
	Behaviour	20.1	19.5	27.5	26.2	24.2
Others	**Knowledge**	40.9	39.1	38.4	34.9	33.4
	Skill	25.9	25.5	29.8	34.4	30.5
	Behaviour	33.2	35.4	31.8	30.6	36.1

Discipline of Finance and Mechanical has a 100 percent clear indication of knowledge based preference contrary to Electrical which has a higher preference to Skill based domain as a 2nd choice. Finance discipline on the other hand has given second preference to skill domain than behaviour likewise in case of HR, Mechanical and others. The mining discipline also has varied response to the second most preference being alternatively to both Skills and behavioural domains.

Table 6 *Preference to Knowledge*

Coefficients[a]						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.636	.107		24.597	.000
	Age	-.156	.029	-.109	-5.374	.000
	Discipline	.004	.011	.006	.335	.737
	Gender	-.241	.078	-.055	-3.065	.002
	Unit	.051	.018	.049	2.831	.005
	Grade	-.069	.025	-.056	-2.771	.006
a. Dependent Variable: Dom5						

Age, gender, unit and grade is a predictor of 'Preference of Knowledge'. Although the discipline of respondents is not a predictor of preference to knowledge. Even though the R2 value is very less yet the Durbin Watson value is 2.01 which explain that there is no auto correlation.

Table 7 *Preference to Skills*

Coefficients[a]						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.516	.091		16.739	.000
	Age	-.023	.025	-.019	-.937	.349
	Discipline	-.001	.009	-.001	-.071	.943
	Gender	-.095	.066	-.026	-1.436	.151
	Unit	-.042	.015	-.048	-2.719	.007
	Grade	.068	.021	.065	3.203	.001
a. Dependent Variable: CDom5						

Unit and Grade is a predictor of 'Preference to Skills'. While the Durbin Watson value is 2.03 which explain that there is no auto correlation.

Table 8 *Preference to Behavioural Competencies*

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.849	.089		9.512	.000
	Age	.178	.024	.148	7.336	.000
	Discipline	-.002	.009	-.005	-.262	.793
	Gender	.341	.065	.094	5.207	.000
	Unit	-.010	.015	-.012	-.683	.495
	Grade	-.001	.021	-.001	-.056	.956
a. Dependent Variable: Behav5						

It is evident that Age and Gender is a predictor of 'Preference to Behavioural competencies. On the other side it is clear that Discipline, Unit and Grade of respondents is not a predictor of preference to behavioural competencies. Even though the R2 value is very less yet the Durbin Watson value is 2.03 which explain that there is no auto correlation. At attempt has also been made to understand that whether there is a difference if all 15 preferences are considered compared to Top5. This was attempted to understand the factors which impact preference to knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies domain. Regression was run through to interpret significance.

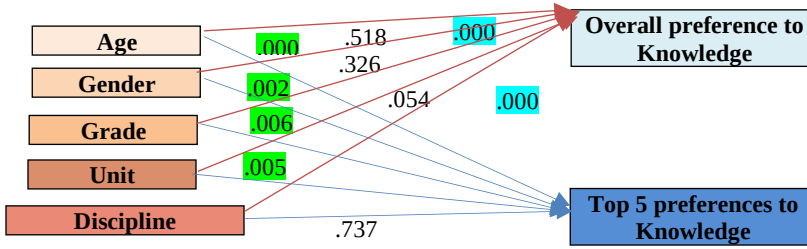

Figure 3 *The Knowledge Domain*

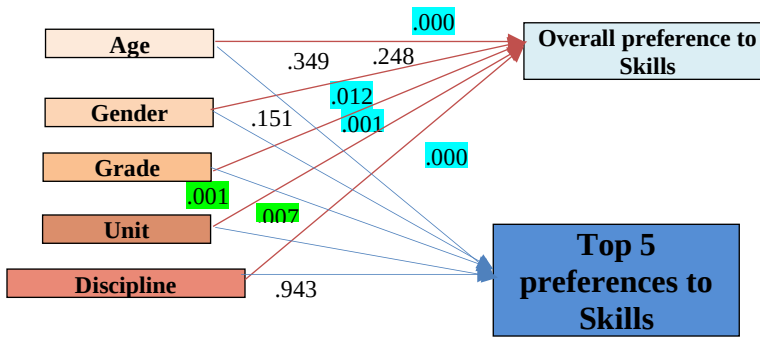

Figure 4 *The Skills Domain*

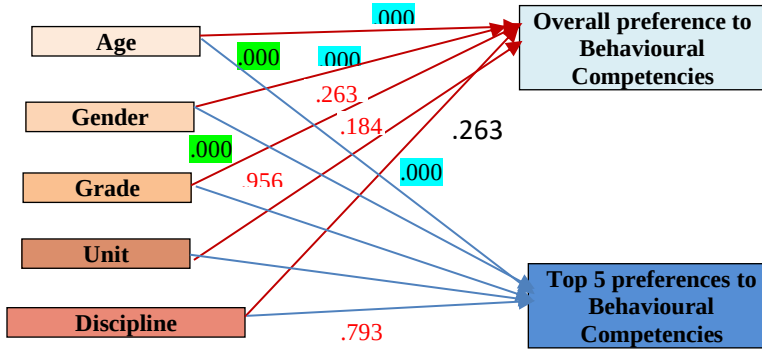

Figure 5 *The Behavioural Competencies Domain*

Table 9 *Interpretation to the Figure 3, 4, 5*

→	**Overall preferences**	**Significant**	**Non-Significant**
→	**Top five preferences**	**Significant**	**Non-Significant**

4. Conclusion

Employees can be a part of the organization only if they are 'assured growth' and growth can be as a foresaid based as 'Performance' of the individual in an organization. Human Resources Management adds value to the organization when it helps employees and organizations to improve their level of performance. Individual employees are as good as a customer to any organisation. Thus, it is essential to understand the preferences of employees. Learning preference based programs provide higher commitment from employees. The study thus shares the employee preference to learning by majorly understanding the preferences to knowledge, skills and behavioural competencies based domain.

It is quite evident from the data that there is an overall preference to knowledge based domain to learning comparatively to Skills and Behavioural domains. While the skills preference is comparatively lower than all. Knowledge based approach is inevitable and managing competencies is a technique to support it. Individual actions lead to overall enterprise performance thus the employees have been considered to be the foundation for applying KM approach and competency management helps the organization to build, develop, acquire and retain knowledge for the organizations.

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