Measuring Impression Management in Male Leaders of Color

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Companies' survival depends on their ability to attract and maintain diverse leaders. This research examines the tactics used by male leaders of color to secure management positions. The Jones and Pittman's Impression Management Taxonomy (1982) was used to explore the impression management phenomenon and the constructs of self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication as they relate to gender and ethnicity. The statistical analysis was conducted on 240 valid responses where an exploratory factor analysis and a MANOVA provided insight on the variables' relationships. The findings convey Black/African–American and Latinos scored similarly in their use of supplication versus White male leaders, which indicates that male leaders of color are more likely to be modest in their approach. Additionally, to some extent, all ethnicities with the exception of Asians tended to use the intimidation tactic in the workplace. While diversity is a growing trend in the workplace, this study confirms that it is imperative to have healthy conversations about ethnicity and gender in professional settings.

Keywords: impression management, gender, ethnicity, leadership

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group towards a common goal" (Northouse, 2010, p. 3). Making a positive and lasting impression is a delicate balance. However, there are few factors that may influence a person's ability to achieve a leadership role or work toward upward mobility within an organization. As leaders work to make favorable impressions, there are five tactics used—self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, intimidation, and supplication—as defined by Jones and Pittman (1982). One may ask which of these five constructs are considered impression management techniques and are impression management tools preferred by one gender from another? Accordingly, Benton, Ceballos, and Burton (2020) completed exploratory research regarding the construct of Impression Management (IM) and its use among women leaders of color but determined there may be other factors that are favored by their gender counterparts that indicated a need to further explore this topic due to the limited research regarding IM. For these reasons, the authors seek to further explore the impact of

Impression Management and which of the five tactics developed by Jones and Pittman's Impression Management Taxonomy Scale (1982) male leaders of color choose to employ.

LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Culture and social norms provide the lens through which one considers his or her worldview. It is through those norms that one can determine the organizational climate and how he or she is fairing within his or her environment. Weighing those actions through both individual and collective norms helps categorize and determine whether there is a good fit within an organization and whether there is mutualistic relationship that will allow a collective win for all involved. Consequently, there are various actions and IM management tools that are either universally accepted or universally rejected traits (Iedema & Poppe, 1994). Behaviors such as honesty and authenticity are generally accepted, whereas abusive traits, such as intimidation, are universally rejected regardless the organizational setting or school of thought (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Iedema & Poppe, 1994; Sallot, 2002).

According to Benton et al. (2020), "Understanding that managing one's self-presentation could provide the ability of a person to learn and become accepted into the organization and promote mutual interests provides for advancement opportunities, which may be somewhat elusive to those from varying backgrounds" (p. 11). The appearance of professionalism and how it shapes the experiences in which a person of color is viewed in the organization has a profound effect on upward mobility. Therefore, men and women of color may alter their behaviors or use "code switching" to manage one's impression and thereby gain access to the tools needed for advancement (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 2). The need to be "perceived as a professional generates respect in one's field, status, power, and [provides] access to networks" (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 2). "Code switching" is one Impression Management style that focuses on how a person of color is viewed in an organization and takes into account the identity of said person, such as hair styles, colloquialisms, and clothing choices, and how that identity is altered to suit the mental construct of a professional accepted by the organization (McCluney et al., 2021).

There are other Impression Management styles that are applied across racial and ethnic backgrounds that African–Americans and other people of color employ to blend into the company's culture. Understanding the various Impression Management techniques utilized by male leaders of color seeking a leadership position could aid in determining which techniques are considered generally acceptable by an organization's upper management (Benton et al., 2020; Keeves, Westphal, & McDonald, 2017; McCluney et al., 2021). Thus, the researchers determined that behaviors of adulation on administration and colleagues were more rewarded, but not to the same degree as for people of color (McCluney et al., 2021; Stern & Westphal, 2010; Westphal & Stern, 2007).

Impression Management is a multi-component construct where five (5) variables complete the catalog (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). These components can be roughly divided into two groups, each with a distinct approach as to how a person seeks to join with his or her leader and/or colleague. The first category (individual) uses personal references back to the individual as the barometer. Self-promotion has the individual focusing on his or her skills, experiences, or accomplishments to establish him/her as an expert (Benton et al., 2020; Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Klotz & Yam et al., 2018). Conversely, supplication could be considered the polar opposite, where a person is using his, her, or their vulnerabilities to solicit aid from others (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Exemplification is a variable that is more centrist out of the variables and appears to be more individualistic in that a person will work toward showing he, she, or they are a devoted company employee and completing admirable work, almost at the expense of their personal health (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Jones & Pitman, 1982; Kacmar & Tucker, 2016).

According to Krieg, Ma, and Robinson (2018), most employees seek to make a good impression at work either through self-promotion, ingratiation, or going beyond the call-of-duty in order to appear dedicated. The authors sought to investigate the differences in Impression Management between Eastern and Western cultures. The countries examined were Japan, Korea and the United States. Additionally, the authors proposed that depending on geographical location employees are likely to change their workgroups.

Whether consciously aware or not, employees in this type of situation may work harder to increase their likeability. The commonly used tactics across all three countries were self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification. This study further illustrates how culture as well as ethnicity can impact social behavior within the workplace.

Despite the notion that individuals can point toward their own characteristics to garner the perceptions of others in the workplace, there is also a secondary category that focuses on others and could be another strategy to manage impressions. Ingratiation is another IM tool where complimenting and gratifying others is used to gain leaders' and colleagues' support (Eagly, 1987; Keeves et al., 2017; Stern & Westphal, 2010; Westphal & Stern, 2006). On the other hand, intimidation is used to exert one's personal power over another as well as to appear perilous so that submission is acquired (Benton et al., 2020; Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Harris, Gallagher, & Rossi, 2013; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Thus, Benton, Ceballos, and Burton (2020) proposed that the lack of empirical data and understanding surrounding Impression Management and male leaders of color needs further exploration.

Gender and Impression Management

Upward mobility and the ability to advance in one's career is something many self-proclaimed leaders aspire to achieve. Within various settings, one would have to agree that to gain promotions and advance their career, there needs to be a general acceptance by one's organizational superiors. On that account, individuals choose to shape how they are viewed in order to arrive at advance via the Impression Management construct (Benton et al., 2020; Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Westphal & Stern, 2007). The use of components for the construct could vary based on personal preferences, but research has shown that based on gender and ethnic composition, there may be components deemed more universally acceptable or favored based on a group (Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Eagly, 1987; Harris et al., 2013).

Researchers such as Abrams and Trusty (2004), Rudman (1998), and Singh et al. (2002) convey societal norms around gender and ethnicity that are readily accepted for males to display and vocalize their strengths and/or competence. More importantly, authenticity and sincerity are viewed as core concepts needed for advancement (Abrams & Trusty, 2004); therefore, aspects demonstrating exemplification may not seem as a dubious trait to use as a male leader of color.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Previous literature on Impression Management regarding women leaders of color led Benton, Ceballos, and Burton (2020) to examine the relationship between women leaders of color and Impression Management. Their previous study's limitations also paved the way to examine which of the five tactics from Jones and Pittman's Taxonomy Scale (1982) is preferred by male leaders of color. The research questions and hypotheses presented for this exploratory study include:

RQ1) Are there Impression Management techniques used by male leaders of color?

RQ2) Which Impression Management dimension is readily used by male leaders of color?

RQ3) Is there a significant relationship between any of the Impression Management tactics used by male leaders of color?

H1) Male leaders of color regularly employ Impression Management techniques.

H2) Male leaders of color are more likely to employ certain Impression Management tactics over others.

H0) There is no relationship between the measured Impression Management constructs.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

To understand the Impression Management techniques employed by male leaders of color across varying subgroup levels such as generation, socioeconomic status, and level of education obtained, the snowball sampling method was employed. Male leaders of color were intentionally targeted through social media networks. The process of snowball sampling is described as follows:

> Researchers reach out to a small number of initial contacts otherwise known as (seeds) who [that] fit the research criteria and are invited to become participants within the study. The agreeable participants are then asked to recruit or recommend other contacts within their network who [sic] fit the research criteria. Researchers use their social networks to establish initial links, with sampling momentum developing from these, capturing an increasing chain of participants. (Parker et al., 2019, p. 3).

Measures

To assess male leaders' use of Impression Management techniques, the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 28.0) was used to evaluate the responses to the Jones and Pittman Taxonomy Scale (1982). This self-assessment asked respondents to answer questions using a seven-point Likert scale that measured the five components (self-promotion, exemplification, ingratiation, intimidation, and supplication) of the Impression Management construct. Additional questions regarding respondents' background were added to capture their demographic information. Standard questions surrounding gender, age, race, income, etc. were also asked.

Cronbach's coefficient was employed to review the reliability and validity of the analyzed data (Hinkin, 1995; Pallant, 2010; Nunnally, 1978). The scale provided reliability scores of .655 across all variables, which falls close to the questionable range regarding the instrument's internal consistency (Hinkin, 1995; Pallant 2010). The scale questions operationalize the definitions and limitations of each construct (Bolino & Turnley, 1999) as demonstrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
SAMPLE QUESTION FOR EACH OF THE FIVE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT VARIABLES ASSESSED

Scale Variable	Sample Item
Self-promotion	"Talk proudly about your experience or education."
Exemplification	"Stay at work late so people will know you work hard."
Ingratiation	"Compliment your colleagues so they will see you as likeable."
Intimidation	"Deal strongly or aggressively with coworkers who interfere with your business."
Supplication	"Try to gain assistance or sympathy from people by appearing needy in some area."

Additional measures were used to test the variables both across each individual variable (exploratory factor analysis) as well as the variables combined into a composite construct to assess the impact via a Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA).

RESULTS

The researchers reviewed the interactions between African–American male leaders' and Impression Management. The exploratory study employed Bolino and Turnley's (1999) instrument, providing the measurements needed to understand the variables and the 242 valid responses out of 405 submissions. Of

the responses analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the demographics included African–American (59%), Caucasian (23%), Hispanic (13%), Asian (3%), and those listed as "Other" (2%). The frequencies associated with age (29% were 38–43 years), education (37% held a Master's degree), income (42% earned over $100k), work tenure (46% between 0 and 5 years), and industry (22% in education) helped the researchers gain an understanding of the general composition from which this population hails.

According to Benton, Ceballos, and Burton (2020), the Impression Management construct and how people of color employ various components within the leadership paradigm remain incomplete in understanding; hence, further exploratory factor analysis was employed. Additionally, the variables' relationships and correlations were examined (Pallant, 2010). Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices conveyed there was equal variance across the dependent variables (.655) (Pallant, 2010). Hence, one could assume there were no violations for the homogeneity of covariances. A MANOVA was conducted, and it was determined to examine the Pillai's Trace for robustness as it appeared as though there were unequal numbers or small samples among the ethnic groups. The analysis revealed Pillai's Trace = .124, $F (20, 944) = 153$, $p =. 064$, with a Partial Eta-squared of .031. As a result, the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis.

The Levene's Test found equal variances for most measures (ranging .058–.565), which reassures that the assumptions were not violated. However, one of the dependent variables was less than .05 (Intimidation, $p = 0.019$). For those reasons, on the Between-Subjects Effects, Intimidation was $F (4,273) = 2.84$, $p = .025$, with Partial Eta-squared = .046, $p = .025$ needed to have a significance of a .001 with the Bonferroni's adjustment, which did meet that criterion (Pallant, 2010). As a result, there was no significant difference between the groups. While exploring the Post Hoc Multiple Comparison Test to determine where the difference occurs for the groups, interesting points were discovered. For most of the Impression Management variables, most of the ethnic groups appeared to be in alignment except for Intimidation. Despite the fact there were no significant outcomes on the Intimidation component, the Tukey HSD indicates some interesting dynamics when the Asian and African–American ethnicities are crossed ($p = .055$) and when the Caucasian and Asian ethnicities are crossed ($p = .052$).

According to Pallant (2010), when implementing an exploratory factor analysis, specific criteria must be met to ensure the variables' relatability is at the correct strength. In reviewing the KMO and Bartlett's test, the study had the correct strength with .632 at significance of .000. All communalities ranged from .627 to .704 for all of the Impression Management factors. Moreover, on the correlation matrix, the variables were over .3, which indicates a moderate correlation between amongst the five tactics (Benton et al., 2020; Pallant, 2010) (Table 1).

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF INTERCORRELATIONS FOR AN EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS ON IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT COMPOSITE VARIABLES FOR SELF-PROMOTION, INGRATIATION, EXEMPLIFICATION, INTIMIDATION, AND SUPPLICATION

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. Supplication	---	-.014	.203	.363	.461
2. Self-promotion	-.014	---	.344	.206	.083
3. Ingratiation	.203	.344	---	.536	.150
4. Exemplification	.363	.206	.150	---	.361
5. Intimidation	.461	.083	.150	.361	---

Note: Intercorrelations for Impression Management was conducted on participants (n = 243) where Bolino and Turnley's (1999) scale was implemented. Add that dimensions are intercorrelated. Components are reflected as follows: 1 = Supplication, 2 = Self-promotion, 3 = Ingratiation, 4 = Exemplification, 5 = Intimidation.

TABLE 2
**SUMMARY OF THE TOTAL VARIANCE EXPLAINED FOR AN EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS**

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Square Loadings			Rotation Sums[a] of Squared Loadings Total
		% of Variance	Cum.%	Total	% of Variance	Cum.%	
1.	2.137	42.744	42.744	2.137	42.744	42.744	1.730
2.	1.204	24.078	66.822	1.204	24.078	66.822	1.611
3.	.734	14.678	81.500				
4.	.525	10.500	92.001				
5.	.400	7.999	100.000				

Note: Extraction Method used was Principal Component Analysis.
a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance. Components are reflected as follows: 1 = Self-promotion, 2 = Ingratiation, 3 = Exemplification, 4 = Intimidation, 5 = Supplication.

In addition, the total variances displayed the appropriateness of the factor analysis test because the eigenvalues ranged from 7.999 to 42.744, which were all valid (Table 2). Moreover, to determine the factors to assess, Pallant (2010) conveys researchers should review the scree plot. The scree plot details the components after the bend at 1 and 2 should be kept, which are components 3 through 5 (Figure 2) (Pallant, 2010).

FIGURE 2
SCREE PLOT OF THE COMPOSITE IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT VARIABLES CONDUCTED IN SPSS THAT DETAILS THE COMPONENTS ON INTEREST AND THEIR CORRESPONDING EIGENVALUES
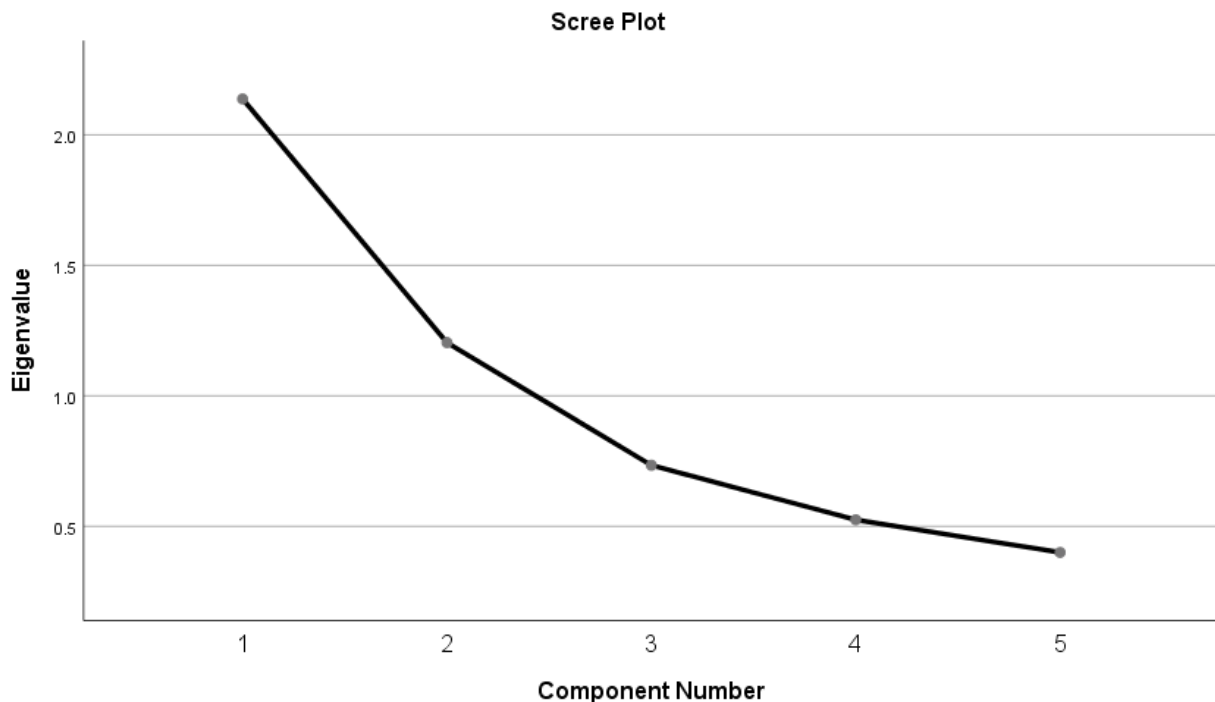
Additional review of the data was conducted to determine if there were differences in which an Impression Management technique may be favored by specific ethnicities. At first glance, it appeared as though there could be significance (.025) in regard to ethnicity and the use of intimidation as an IM practice, with a small effect size where the Partial Eta-squared was .046. However, to reduce the risk of a Type I error, the alpha level was adjusted to .01 to apply the Bonferroni principle (Pallant, 2010). Hence, there was no significant impact for this study.

FIGURE 3
HISTOGRAM DETAILING THE NORMALITY ASSOCIATED WITH THE SCALE

The mean, standard deviation, and number of participants are provided by ethnicity. The horizontal axis represents the numerical representation of how the respondents categorize their ethnicities where 2 = Asian, 3 = Black/African–American, 4 = Latino/Hispanic, 6 = White, 7 = Other.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The ability for a company to remain noble, relevant, and viable depends on its ability to attract and maintain diverse leaders. Consequently, this research suggests that male leaders of color, share similar experiences with women leaders of color (Benton, Ceballos, & Burton, 2020). It would benefit organizations in their attempts to understand the reasoning behind the behaviors exhibited by leaders of color as they climb the corporate ladder. (Kacmar & Tucker, 2016). This study explored how the Impression Management construct is used by male leaders of color as defined by the Jones and Pittman Taxonomy (1982).

While examining the five IM tactics (Jones & Pittman, 1982), it was discovered there were correlations between the variables. A weak positive correlation was found between Supplication and Ingratiation, which may exist due to the fact the more use of flattery the more a male leader could appear as humbly asking for something. Additionally, a moderate positive correlation was found between Self-promotion and Ingratiation, which implies that flattering oneself appears as self-promotion. Another moderate positive

correlation between Exemplification and Supplication was found, which could signify that the more the leader used someone as an example or point of reference the more he was found to be humble. Conversely, a weak positive correlation was found between Self-promotion and Exemplification, which could indicate that the more a leader used themselves as an example, the more they appeared to be self-promoting; however, this could also indicate that a leader was merely trying to share from their experience. A strong positive correlation between Exemplification and Ingratiation indicates that based on this dataset, flattery is used when using a peer as an example. A moderate positive correlation was found between Intimidation and Supplication, which could indicate that depending on the type of leader using supplication, it could be interpreted as intimidation versus humility or modesty. The MANOVA was used to examine the relationship between two or more dependent variables and it was determined that there was no significant difference after applying the Bonferroni adjustment (Pallant, 2010); hence, the researchers failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Despite the fact there was no significant difference, the study's exploratory nature and design signals the need for further statistical analysis regarding this phenomenon and how its life application impacts organizations (Benton et al., 2020). Examination of the participants' characteristics reveals that the majority of respondents have a graduate degree such as a Master's or Doctoral-type of degree followed by a Bachelor's degree. Ultimately, it is deduced but not generalized that men of color with a college education still appear unaware of how their actions are interpreted. For instance, where correlations between Intimidation along with Supplication or Ingratiation were found, while positive and significant at both the $p = .01$ and $p = .05$ levels, it appears that the use of supplication or ingratiation were interpreted as intimidation. This notion is interesting because when are reported to use ingratiation to find belonging (Benton, Ceballos, & Burton, 2020). According to a meta-analysis by Eagly et al. (2003), the possibility that women and men differ in their typical leadership behavior is important because a leader's own behavior is a major determinant of their effectiveness and chances for advancement.

With regard to variance between the five tactics and ethnicity, other ethnicities along with Black/African–American and Latinos scored similarly in their use of supplication versus White male leaders, suggesting that male leaders of color are more likely to humbly ask for something. Self-promotion is a tactic with little variance between all male leaders yet Black/African–Americans vary slightly more in their use of self-promotion. Asians and White male leaders had the most variance in comparison to Black/African–Americans, Latinos, and other ethnicities with regard to ingratiation, which means that perhaps flattery is not their preferred tactic. Latinos and White male leaders varied the most in the use of exemplification, which implies using someone as an example. By comparison, Blacks/African–Americans, Asians, and other ethnicities had little to no variance in their use of exemplification. Finally, all ethnicities seem to use intimidation to some extent with the exception of Asians. This finding leans toward the notion of Hypothesis 2, which states that male leaders are more likely to favor specific IM tactics over other tactics. It is imperative to have healthy conversations about ethnicity in the workplace as diversity, particularly in leadership, continues to increase. Consequently, this study aids in providing insights to approach difficult conversations surrounding color that are essential to advance as a society. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, this study is beneficial for leaders and managers in understanding why leaders of color resort to code switching to be viewed more favorably as a professional.

Limitations of Findings

As with any convenience sampling method, there is limited generalizability of the results (Pallant, 2010); however, this drawback is tempered by the ability to target the sample population needed to complete the study. There is also a risk of a Type II error due to the increased number of dependent variables, which reduces the analytical strength (Pallant, 2010). The study was limited to the connections and relationships among male leaders of color and, therefore, lacks diversity in terms of geographical locality, which is also a limitation (Benton et al., 2020). More notably, the majority of respondents were primarily Black/African–American, White, and Latino/Hispanic men; thus, there was inadequate representation of other ethnic groups to be able to generalize which Impression Management tactics were preferred by other men of color.

Also, assigned gender versus trans-males did not show to provide responses, which could serve as a limitation because the researchers acknowledge the transgender community.

Areas for Further Research

An area for further research would be a cross comparison statistical analysis between cis-gender individuals who identify as either women or men of color and their preferred tactics according to Jones and Pittman (1982). Also, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mindsets that could have impacted the participants and their ability to understand or implement IM behaviors due to the notion they may have implemented teleworking, and whether or not teleworking had an impact of which IM behaviors are used in either men or women leaders of color. Demographics on various generations were collected and could provide insight on how other elements beyond gender and race could impact how an organization functions out of the ideals associated with IM techniques that may be favored by a specific cohort. Collecting additional data and conducting a meta-analysis on various traits could assist also with expanding the understanding of communication and creating an impression that impacts the securing of leadership roles within an organization. Moreover, researchers could focus on locating and using other tools that measure the IM phenomenon by cis-gender individuals as well as "individuals that identify as transgender or gender fluid as well as all persons of color" (Benton, Ceballos, & Burton, 2020, p. 20).

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