A Self- Reflection on the Strategic Leadership

of the Incubating Leader

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Abstract

Strategic leaders must have technical skills to perform specialized tasks in the business areas,

possess upscale abilities to work well with other people, and retain conceptual skills to analyze

and solve complex problems. Strategic leaders act in ways that manage the tension between

success in daily task and success in the long term. This reflection paper presents the impact of

strategic leadership and the emergent role of the incubating leader on my journey as leader.

The researcher adds an overview and background of strategic leadership to underpin the self

reflection of leadership. After an assessment of strategy formation and strategy execution, the

discussion flows to methods to link the two. Afterward are the four types of strategic leadership

and the range of choices a leader faces in a simple, unified framework. An examination of the

incubating leader and how emergent strategy and participative execution underpins this

researcher's leadership style forms the nexus of this reflection study. A comparison of the

incubator and the accelerator business models follow. The paper develops a framework that can

serve as a basis for identifying best practices incubating leaders employ to empower and guide

the success of others. The paper shows how the services of the incubating leader correlate

strongly with the success of the protégé. Finally, through the reflection of the researcher's

journey as an incubating leader, other leaders and researchers are offered a model that

emphasizes the importance of strategic leadership.

Key words: reflection, incubating leadership, strategic, empowering, collaborating

A Self- Reflection on the Strategic Leadership of the Incubating Leader

This critical reflection focuses on the experiences of leadership whereby I suggest areas for my self- development. Reflection is anything but passive. Daskal (2017) argues that most leaders believe that to be successful they need to know all the elements of *how, what, when,* and *where*. However, I have found that the game changer comes when a leader knows the *who* because getting the foundational element of the *who* prepares you for the *how, what, when,* and *where- and even the* why. The first step to successful leadership is reflecting on oneself.

Conversely, self-reflection leads to insight, action, engagement, and emotional commitment. As I travel on the leadership journey, I witness how the plateaus that self-awareness and self-actualization are energized and enriched through a service- inspired purpose and strategy. In essence, insights gained throughout my life, and particularly as I pursue a doctoral degree in leadership, have led me to value the importance of encouraging and empowering leadership in others. Moreover, when a person desires to successfully lead a group of people, as a business owner, head of a ministry, or in any other capacity, it is imperative to have and to continuously develop the leadership skills essential to empowering and embracing others.

Some fundamental principles have driven my beliefs about leadership as a process. A contextual model of leadership embraces the role of leadership as a framing force of our individual and collective perceptions concerning the broader influential situational setting. This approach to understanding leadership employs a socio-cognitive approach, where social cognition explains both the perception and mental processing of social phenomena and the effects of social factors

on perception and mental processing (Mark, 2017). This paper chronicles the evolution of my

thinking on leadership through the course of my work experiences. A reflection on my journey of

thirty-six years of leading a company and nineteen years of leading a congregation frames the

dynamical process involving both formal and informal roles of leadership. The emerging

patterns and processes of leadership underpin an evolving understanding of leadership.

Summarily leadership is found not just in our work but in the world around us. There have been

peak events and low valleys through my career that have shaped my perspectives on leadership.

The essential quality that differentiates a leader from other people is the ability to think

strategically.

"Strategic Leadership is leading in ways that position a business for the future while

meeting current demands. It requires a different set of skills from operational leadership.

Strategic leadership requires us to think, act and influence others in ways that promote the

enduring success of the organization. The strategic leader is the individual who-

regardless of role, position, or title- intentionally takes advantage of opportunities to think

strategically, influence others toward a chosen course of action, and garner needed buy-in,

commitment, and advocacy" (Olson & Simerson, 2015, p. 52).

Strategic leaders have a multifaceted focus. They must establish and communicate a

compelling mission (the "what") and vision (the "where"), and then work with colleagues and

allies to (Olson & Simerson, 2015, p. 31). Strategic leadership requires us to think, act and

influence others in ways that promote the enduring success of the organization. Hughes and

Beatty (2005) opine three critical strengths of a strategic leader:

1. Strategic Thinking that involves taking a broad view, involving the right people,

   processing important information and perspectives, asking probing questions and

   facilitating conversations (pp. 43-44)

2. Strategic Acting that includes providing a balance of direction and autonomy,

   learning from actions and rewarding appropriate risk-taking (pp. 83-83),

3. Strategic Influence that involves inviting others into the strategic process, forging relationships

inside and outside the organization, navigating the political landscape (pp. 123-124).

From childhood, the thoughts of one day leading people to Christ as a foreign Missionary coupled

with the desire of teaching children and youth were constant companions. My goals were not shared with

others because I considered them unreachable desires of a young child. Maturing through the

developmental processes of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood found the insatiable urges to empower

others a constant objective. Satisfying the desire to empower others became the catalyst for planting

Sparks Christian Academy thirty-six years ago. To answer the call to Missions travels to Africa, Haiti, the

Yucatan Peninsula, the Bahamas, Egypt, Jerusalem, and the surrounding countries and various areas in

America became available. Nineteen years ago a platform to preach the gospel locally was manifest in

the opening of The Harvest Tabernacle International Ministries, Inc. I discovered that my life involved

empowering others to teach children and youth, to plant Christian churches and schools in the areas I

visited, and through my teaching the Bible to indigenous populations, to win others to Christ.

I considered myself a transformational leader or a servant-leader at best. The term "incubating

leadership" was new until I learned the characteristics of the incubating leader in the Strategic Planning

class taught by Dr. Teresa Reese Harvey, Professor Par Excellence. The collaborative and emergent

characteristics of the incubating leadership type reflect my leadership type. To derive a general strategy

of how a leader can best develop the theory of leadership which best works for their unique

circumstances, the situation in which the leader is involved dictates the strategy. The core of my

strategic approach involves: (1) defining goals for a specific situation, (2) defining potential leadership types, (3) identifying situational conditions, (4) matching a leadership style to the particular situation, and (5) determining the match between leadership style and the situation.

Focusing on leadership as driving strategy, relationships, and a dynamic that aligned a shared vision transcending personal self- interest; the definition also recognizes the collaborative dynamic that leader and follower share in participating in this vision - both share the benefits and risks in its pursuit. In our world of "us against them," my way or the highway, it is easy to get stuck within our conscious or unconscious biases. Traveling globally as a foreign missionary has aided me in working collaboratively cross-culturally. The best leaders know they do not have all the answers. They surround themselves with people different than themselves and encourage all to share. As I assessed the leaders around me, I found the best leaders value the diversity of thought, seek it, encourage it, and find ways to make decisions that reflect the voices of the stakeholders involved.

My stakeholders are the parents, the teaching staff, the vendors, the children, the governmental agencies, the community partners and the members of my congregation. Hill, Jones, and Schilling (2012) argue that "customers provide a company with its revenues and in exchange want high-quality, reliable products that represent value for money" (p. 29). Consequentially, I felt a fiduciary responsibility towards satisfying the expectations of the parents of Sparks Christian Academy based on the trust the parents placed on the services of my company. Concerning my congregation, the ability to fulfill this latter spiritual interpretation of responsibility is a constant source of inspiration to me as I lead and empower God's people. Engaging in direct and honest conversation with followers around outcomes that are important to

them and the organization provides an opportunity for the protégé's development, a tangible

factor associated with valuing and developing people.

Reflecting on the qualities that make people want to follow, the Kouzes and Posner

(2002) survey (The Leadership Practices Inventory) aided in my self-assessment. Kouzes and

Posner asked people which of a list of common characteristics of leaders, were, in their

experiences of being led by others, the seven top things they look for, admire and

would *willingly* follow. The results of the study showed that people preferred the following

characteristics, in order:

- Honest

- Forward-looking

- Competent

- Inspiring

- Intelligent

- Fair-minded

- Broad-minded

- Supportive

- Straightforward

- Dependable

- Cooperative

- Determined

- Imaginative

- Ambitious

- Courageous

- Caring

- Mature

- Loyal

- Self-controlled

- Independent

The main part of the book discusses the five actions that Kouzes and Posner identify as being

key for successful leadership:

- **Model the way**

Modeling means going first, living the behaviors you want others to adopt. This is leading

from the front. People will believe not what they hear leaders say but what they see leader

consistently do.

- **Inspire a shared vision**

   People are motivated most not by fear or reward, but by ideas that capture their imagination.
   Note that this is not so much about having a vision, but communicating it so effectively that others
   take it as their own.

- **Challenge the process**

Leaders thrive on and learn from adversity and difficult situations. They are early adopters of

innovation.

- **Enable others to act**

Encouragement and exhortation is not enough. People must feel able to act and then must have

the ability to put their ideas into action.

- **Encourage the heart**

People act best when they are passionate about what they are doing. Leaders unleash the enthusiasm of their followers this with stories and passions of their own. Some fundamental principles that have driven my beliefs about leadership as a process. Revisiting the precepts of the survey help stay grounded in leadership characteristics others want to follow.

Understanding the inner dynamic of shared vision was commensurate with the comparison of the traditional (directive) and the collaborative leadership styles of leadership. Daskal (2017) posits the collaborative style versus the traditional (directive) includes the following comparisons:

1. Power

Traditional Leaders: The traditional corporate approach to power is one of singular authority. Traditional leaders in the corporate world believe that their power derives from their position of authority. Old school corporate hierarchy often bestows power based on longevity with a secondary look at prior results. The longer you stay with your firm, the farther up the ladder you progress, the greater your power.

Collaborative Leaders: The new approach of collaborative leadership recognizes that power is greatest in a collective team. By encouraging equal participation across all levels, collaborative leaders allow solutions to develop from the best ideas of the group and take a team approach to problem solving.

2. Information

Traditional: Maintaining ownership of information is the hallmark of traditional leaders. From a power perspective, information is power. Releasing information on a "need to know" basis allows traditional leaders to maintain authority and control.

Collaborative: Open information sharing is the cornerstone of collaborative leadership. Getting

everyone on the same page in a project requires information sharing. Education also plays a role.

The more cross training available, the more creative approaches to problem solving can develop

and be implemented.

3. Idea Generation

Traditional: Traditional managers will occasionally entertain suggestions or be open to ideas

from their team. In a top down hierarchy, the decisions generally come from the executives at

the top of the food chain. Because information is closely held, management may know of

circumstances that drive the decision making process that may be withheld from team members.

Collaborative: The art of collaboration gives everyone on the team a voice. Leaders are generally

open to suggestions and ideas from their team and recognize that brainstorming and different

perspectives can bring unique insights.

4. Problem Solving

Traditional: In a traditional corporate culture, solutions are generally delivered to team members.

These decisions are made in the boardroom or the executive suite, approved and passed on.

Collaborative: In a collaborative environment, solutions are brainstormed among team members

and facilitated by management. Collaborative leaders recognize the power of a group approach to

problem solving.

5.   Resource Allocation

Traditional: The traditional approach to resource allocation is generally reactive. Resources are provided only when deemed necessary by upper management and often brought to a committee for approval prior to deployment. This process takes time and focus away from a project and can result in stress being placed on the team by forcing them to deal with issues or challenges without the necessary resources.

Collaborative: A collaborative environment is based on trust and resources may be delivered proactively. Team leaders will enable their teams to flourish by providing resources and allocating time, quickly. This allows projects to develop more rapidly, as employees have access to the corporate resources (time, money, materials) necessary to do their jobs efficiently.

6.   Rules and Responsibilities

Traditional: Traditional corporate culture relies on a series of rules, regulations and a hierarchy that force managers and team leaders to adhere to specific roles and responsibilities for both them and their teams. This can stifle the creative process and result in team members working in relative isolation as information and resources are shared and provided on a "needs" basis.

Collaborative: In a collaborative environment teams are encouraged to work together. Information, resources, knowledge, time and effort are shared. This allows roles and responsibilities to evolve and fluctuate based on the greater good.

7.   Resolving Issues

Traditional: In a traditional culture issues are often dealt with on an individual basis with no regard to the root cause of the problem. This keeps managers fighting fires instead of instituting beneficial change that could prevent issues from arising.

Collaborative: The basis of collaborative leadership is trust. Because team members are given more responsibility for their work, leaders are often more involved in the process. This means that as issues arise they are often dealt with swiftly. Collaborative leaders look for the root cause of conflict as it arises, and address solutions promptly to keep work moving forward.

8. Performance and Feedback

Traditional: Most traditional corporations practice a semi-annual or annual review process based on corporate policy. This can be detrimental to employee morale. If an employee has had a banner year, but in the last month missed a deadline or a project they were managing ran over budget, it can result in a negative performance review. This can damage morale and increase turnover as employees who feel they were unfairly judged may seek greener pastures elsewhere (2017, p. 116)

As I reflect on my life, I recall the people who crossed my path. People such as my father, my mother, my husband, and my brother to name a few. Although these people are no longer with me the impact they had on my life framed the leader that I am today. They helped to lay the foundation for this journey through their giving of themselves to others, their compassion for the downtrodden, their applause for my successes, their comforting me in my failures. Their impact on my life has worked out for my good and my growth.

Olson and Simerson (2015) summarize incubating leaders this way; "Incubating leaders do not view the successes of others as diminishing further successes for themselves. Instead,

incubating leaders take the opportunity to enable, encourage, and promote others along the way. Our research and interview findings validate that working for or with an incubating leader can be a unique and empowering experience. More than other types of leaders, incubating leaders put a disproportionate emphasis on bolstering the success of others. They are keen students of their environment; they demonstrate a disproportionate ability to see opportunity and to identify talent. This ability is important, as it informs where they invest themselves, making calculated bets that in any given period allocate their time and assets across multiple priorities and endeavors. They also make judgments about the degree to which they intervene in each endeavor, balancing their attention and their involvement to provide an appropriate level of guidance or resources to improve the likelihood of success at a given point in time. The best incubating leaders do this both with attention to timely intervention as well as an ability to create an overall, ongoing environment that promotes successful behavior and minimizes barriers" (pp. 98-99).

As I reflect on my key strengths, I assess them as the most important of the leader's many characteristics. My strengths are the real keys to the doors of opportunities as are the strengths of all leaders. Key strengths are the things that help the leader advance, and help the leader get through the rocky areas of life. My key strengths as an incubating leader are trustworthiness, transparency, authenticity, compassion, optimism or realism, commitment and loyalty, resiliency, self-confidence, sense of direction, self-control, and willingness to serve others.

Olson and Simerson (2015) suggests the key weaknesses of the collaborating style are that productivity suffers when the leader fails to imbue a strong sense of accountability among the group. Moreover, the leader might discourage independent work among group, while dependencies on the leader can increase. Further, the leader may miss out on finer technical and

practical details by focusing more on human relationships. Some incubating leaders could come across as self-promoting. Additionally, staff can experience burnout by trying to keep pace with leaders who over-exert themselves. Incubating leaders sometimes provide unclear directions.

Daskai (2017) opines that reputation matters, but character will always lead the way; it will be our character demonstrated over and over again, that will let others know who we are, and how our skills to our responsibilities and our passions for excellence leads in everything we do.

Over the years of leading others, I developed a personal brand of leadership that caused others to frame an opinion of my character. A personal brand is the total experience of the relationship others have with who you are and what you stand for as a leader. The personal brand also involves how you live every day regardless of the circumstances. Lopis (2014) posits that when you let your colleagues, the workplace culture, political dynamics in your organization, and or vendor and client relationships define your personal brand development, you are putting your reputation management in the hands of others. External factors influencing your personal brand development are important. However, the variables you choose to incorporate into your brand and how you manage it shape the leader that you become.   Therefore, one must be extremely mindful of those she aligns herself with and those she allows to enter into her domain. Ultimately, to build a solid reputation, move into a position of control (through greater self-awareness) to have a more positive influence over how others perceive the decisions made in the workplace daily. Similarly, my reputation among others aligns with the following similar characteristics (adapted from Olson & Simerson, 2015) of the incubating leader:

- Shares the Vision
- Well Respected
- A Problem Solver

- Is Selfless

- An Exceptional Listener

- Makes Others Comfortable

- Sees the Humor in *Madness*

- Owns Mistake

- Hold Others Accountable

Olson and Simerson (2015) suggest the following roles of the incubating leader:

1. Building Networks

   Open networks (connections between multiple groups made by a relatively small number of individuals, with relationships across otherwise separate social networks) from closed networks (connections made within a single group, in which many people share the same set of relationships). While closed networks are particularly effective at creating value through a focus on execution, open networks are uniquely capable of creating value through the discovery of new opportunities (pp. 89- 92).

2. Assessing Opportunities

   The best incubating leaders take a keen interest in any encounter that expands or challenges their perspective- either because it is fundamentally new or because some aspect of an otherwise typical encounter has some attribute that does not fit the mold. These anomalies are seen as promising curiosities, and they provide the opportunity to unearth additional (pp. 93-96).

3. Diversity their bets

   Furthermore, they recognize the risks that come with any one opportunity they choose to back. The potential for downside loss, be it financial loss or reputational risk, was

another consideration that encourages leaders to spread out their time and attention.

In the end, participating in a diverse range of endeavors is a virtuous cycle. The more

these leaders participate in a broad range of activities, the more they are able to see

and discriminate insights across that activity set. This serves to mitigate the

incubating leaders' risk associated with any one endeavor, while increasing the value

they can add to each protégé, given the insights born from the breadth of their

experience (p. 94).

4. Lend assets

Like any investment, the leaders are lending their assets, not giving them away, and they

expect a return. This may be monetary, or it may take less tangible forms. Many of these

leaders viewed goodwill as a valuable asset. Research supports their insight, as social capital

is proven to accrue to individuals who bridge networks and create value through those

connections (pp. 94-96).

5. Create support ecosystems

Whereas asset allocation focuses on solving for the individual endeavor or protégé, an

ecosystem view focuses on the total environment. The most effective leaders impact

the performance of their teams through how they share information, define incentives

that encourage or discourage specific behavior, and even shape the culture and

working environment of the team (pp. 96-98).

Being the person in charge does not automatically make you into the kind of leader

people will *want* to follow. Several steps identify leadership development as a learnable,

orderly process. Leadership is a learnable process that makes you a better leader the more you

work at it, and a great leader, *never* stops incubating their leadership development.

Step 1 - Building Trust

You start building trust of others in you by *respecting* those around you

You continue building trust by *acknowledging* both efforts and results.

You further build trust by being a *caring* leader.

You can cement the bond of trust by being a *nurturing* leader

Step 2 – Building Influence

You start building influence by *learning* — about your business, your team, and yourself. Learning is fundamental to building credibility, and when you have credibility, you achieve a state known as freedom of action.

The second influence building behavior is *assessing*. Leaders have to ask questions to assemble the facts needed for fair and objective decisions. They have to be continually measuring and monitoring what's going on.

You can firmly entrench your ability to influence by *guiding*. A good rule of thumb for a leader: 90% of what you say should be phrased in the form of a question. By adopting this simple construct, you will continually be *learning, guiding, and assessing* – and building your ability to influence.

Step 3 – Building Engagement

Building engagement, the last part of the recipe, starts by you, the leader, showing your own emotional involvement and commitment; by *doing* what you say you're going to do and leading by example. Doing requires the next engaging behavior—*deciding*. Before you *do* you have to *decide* what to do.

Deciding what to do requires the next leadership behavior, ***solving*** problems creatively. The future of an organization depends on its ability to develop strategy and tactics to help it succeed.

An essential input into problem solving is the organizations' priorities. Good leaders learn the value of ***prioritizing***—and holding to the priorities-the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

Priorities come from the vision you and your team creates and aspires towards. The ***visioning*** exercise creates the what—*and the why*. A powerful vision creates engagement—an emotional involvement and commitment.

Doing, deciding, solving, prioritizing, and visioning—these are the ingredients to building engagement.

Step 4 – Repeat often – The Constantly Incubating Leader

Leaders are constantly facing new individuals, challenges, or roles. They have to constantly work at the leadership recipe to stay fresh as a leader.

Incubating leaders are more unique than other leaders because of the impact they have on others. This impact includes:

1. Bolstering the success of others

2.Being keen students of the environment

 3. A disproportionate ability to see opportunity

4. Identifying talent

5. Investing in others

6. Promoting successful behaviors

Another insight into the skills of incubating leaders is the organizations designed

as incubators or accelerators. According to Hill, Jones, and Schilling, (2012) business incubation

is a business-support process that helps launch startup and fledgling companies by providing

entrepreneurs with an array of needed resources and services. Accelerators are an innovative

startup funding mechanism leveraged heavily in the tech sector. These programs use a selective

application process to target scalable, high-value, and high-growth startups. Accelerators help

entrepreneurs commercialize sometimes underdeveloped business ideas, helping startups to go

public, get acquired, or receive additional funding in a brief span of time. Seven key factors that

distinguish accelerators from incubators and other startup assistance organizations:

1. Accelerators have a competitive selection process based on finding startups that best fit the specific accelerator's business model and area of expertise.

2. Accelerators focus on a specific area of expertise in its staff, programs, and startups.

3. Accelerators predominantly invest in the seed and pre-seed stages of a company.

4. Accelerators invest for an equity stake in participating startups.

5. Accelerator programs are designed around specific cohorts of startups.

6. Accelerators are short fixed-term programs.

7. Accelerators treat social capital contributions and social networking as a primary part of their business model.

Due to the linkages between the incubating leader and the collaborative leader, the traits

of the collaborative leader deserves mention. Olson and Simerson (2015) suggest that

collaborative leaders view power and control different from other leaders. They see ways to give

power to others to further own goals. The traits of collaborative leaders include the following:

1. Focus on authentic leadership and eschew passive aggressiveness

2. Relentlessly pursue transparent decision-making

3. View resources as instruments of action, not as possessions

4. Codify the relationship between accountability and rewards (pp. 110-114).

Two collaborative leaders and their achievements come to mind, Nelson Mandela and Brian

Fitzpatrick. Their attributes are:

<p align="center">Nelson Mandela</p>

*   Created peaceful transitions in post-apartheid South Africa.

*   Collaborated with others and created a situation where people across the country were
    able to participate on their own terms

*   Created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

<p align="center">Brian Fitzpatrick.</p>

*   Created a change allowing users of Google products to manage their own information
    and data.

*   Advocated for the idea that he collaborate with all the product owners -like Gmail and
    photos- to make changes to the products that they owned.

*   Created a single, integrated tool called Google Takeout

Assessed together the characters of Mandela and Fitzpatrick highlighted the ability to

think strategically in a global context, articulate an inspiring vision across cultures, make wise

choices amid complexity and uncertainty, and build global networks. The collaborative leaders

of the future must harness the skills and knowledge of stakeholders to partner effectively across

global divides.

Conclusion

      I have touched on several aspects of the leadership process, which I have gleaned through my work experience. In summary, I have come to see leadership as a dynamic process that occurs in human organizations as leaders perceive emerging possibilities and choose to take action. My development is not dependent on the growth of any one organization or business but is aided by my strategic absorbent perspective towards knowledge. The willingness to engage in the dynamic process of leadership strongly connects to the leaders' internal states and engagement of the fundamentals of leadership strategy. The effectiveness of leadership may be impacted by the leader's influence on others, formal or informal status and authority to act, and disposition to embrace change.

      I look forward to developing these understandings further as I continue my doctoral studies. In general, all leaders see success through different lenses framed by the concepts, and actions learned by experiences or ingrained in them by other leaders. Effective leaders lead differently proving that there is no one-size-fits-all leadership model. Leadership then becomes a framing force of our individual and collective perceptions concerning the broader influential situational setting. To effectively influence others, leaders must understand the impact that they have on them. They should also understand the needs, styles and motivations of others. To apply strategic influencing skills to a challenge, the leader must ask, What will it look like if I succeed and what is my vision?

      Conversely, the two central questions of strategic leadership are how do the best leaders develop their strategy and how do effective leaders drive strategic change? In addition to these probing questions, the leader must also consider how the chosen solutions or approaches help or hinder the achievements of protégés goals and objectives. The incubating leader must consider how willing he is to let others shape his visions. To apply strategic influencing skills to a

challenge, the incubating leader operates in a way that integrates environmental requirements, stakeholder expectations, and personal ability. Leading by empowering others, the incubating leader drives others' success by their ability to assess situations and talent. Borrowing from the visionary leader, the incubating leaders are students of the environment, with a good sense of trends and opportunities.

I will continue to employ self-reflection, self-assessment and the others' criticism. As leaders take up the call to walk the pathway of leadership, I hope that the model presented and described in this reflection provides practical insights for present and emerging leaders as they seek to implement strategic leadership skills in their ministry followers, teams, and organizations.

Finally, the incubating leader acts in different ways from other strategic leaders by the essence of the way that the incubating leader spends her time, how much the leader gives to counterparts and the diversity and the range of their relationships and activities with counterparts. The true incubating leader remains the leader less often found among the strategic leadership types.

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