

An Overview: Twenty Years of Flexible Working Arrangements

Sharifah Rahama Amirul¹ and Sharija Che Shaari²

¹Faculty of Business Economic & Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu Sabah
sra@ums.edu.my*

²Faculty of Business Economic & Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu Sabah
sharija@ums.edu.my

(*) Corresponding author

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Abstract

This study aims to provide an overview of the field of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) study in the last two decades, starting from the year 2000 until the year 2020. This paper is greater of importance because there is currently a dearth of comprehensive overview of available evidence on FWAs studies. Thus, we utilised secondary data from the Proquest database to succinctly review the progress of FWAs studies. In reviewing our corpus of data, we developed a systematic scanning and clustering review (SSCR) to summarise the extent to which the FWAs studies have been conducted or available in the existing literature. SSCR is a relatively new rapid method for locating specific information in a wide-range and lengthy literature selection and then clustering the information based on inherent similarity. We overviewed the FWAs literature by using SSCR to address and understand the current state in FWAs studies as well as identify the existing FWAs research gap, which has not been adequately studied. Through SSCR, we analysed at least 6.5 million documents to provide an overview of the FWA's research trends for the past two decades. We feature the most concentrated scopes and clusters within the field of FWAs, as well as the topics for future study.

Keywords: Flexible working arrangements (FWAs), Systematic Scanning and Clustering Review

1. Introduction

Flexible working arrangements (FWAs) have long been implemented in the developed countries, and developing countries that are beginning to make changes toward more flexible works are expanding. FWAs have primarily been made possible by advancing technology (Burgmann, 2012; Richardson & Mckenna, 2014). The provision of technology in organisations gives employees greater opportunities for flexibility in scheduling, as well as a say in where and when they work (with the possibility of working from home, meaning primary caregivers such as parents can work and take care of their children simultaneously) (Andrejic, 2017). With recent technological advances enabling cellular connectivity at affordable prices, working away from the office as a telecommuter has become increasingly available to employees worldwide (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015).

The core concept of an FWA is that an employee can negotiate with their employer to develop flexibility with their work hours (Amirul et al., 2020; Barney & Elias, 2010; Caillier, 2018; Coenen & Kok, 2014) while still fulfilling their usual tasks and responsibilities (Groen, van Triest, Coers, & Wtenweerde, 2018). Shaari and Amirul (2020) asserted that the forms of FWAs can be categorised into five categories namely flexitime saving account (flexitime

arrangements, time saving account arrangements), workload flexibility (parttime job, job sharing, contingent work), flexibility of place (work from home, teleworking, virtual working) and alternative work schedule (staggered work hours arrangement, compressed workweek arrangement).

The context of work is changing precipitously due to the forces of technology, society, demography and globalisation, with the most recent pandemic crisis of covid-19 are creating more challenges and opportunities. An overview of the research trend in FWAs is required in order to comprehend the entire research setting in FWAs. To address and better understand the FWAs context clearly, it is critical to take steps back and look at what has happened so far in FWAs research and how this might affect future research.

FWAs have been studied by a range of researchers from many related disciplines. The overwhelming consensus has been that FWAs are beneficial to both employees and employers, with FWAs having a positive effect on work-life balance and both the health and happiness of employees, as well as on efficiency and productivity in the workplace (e.g. Barney & Elias, 2010; Caillier, 2018; Coenen & Kok, 2014; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; Kossek et al., 2010; Lee & Hong, 2011; Ollo-lopez & Bayo-moriones, 2010; Richardson & Mckenna, 2014). Despite the wealth of benefits that have been attributed to FWA, Amirul et al. (2020) recent seminal work highlighted that the flexible working strategy for building on its strengths is yet to be well-captured in the current literature of FWA studies. This is also highlighted by others scholars (Burgmann, 2012; Thompson, 2019).

As far as this review is concerned, it appears as though no reviews have been conducted on how FWAs research has evolved over the last two decades. This gap will be clearly indicated by reviewing the trend of FWAs studies. In addition, a more broad review presented in this study will address important highlights in FWAs studies for example what are the hottest topics in FWAs? What has been overdone in the literature review thus far? What areas lack focus or are understudied? Since this paper aims to review the FWAs studies that have been done in two decades (2000 to 2020). This paper is significant because it provides a clear picture of FWAs-related field studies' current state and identifies the existing FWAs research gap, which has not been adequately studied. To oversee the extent to which FWAs studies have evolved in existing literature for the past twenty years, we developed a systematic scanning and clustering review (SSCR) to summarise the findings.

2. A Systematic Scanning and Clustering Review (SSCR)

This study utilised secondary data from the Proquest database to provide comprehensive coverage for scholarly journals, working papers and dataset. It also includes a database of newspapers and reports with millions of pages of digitised historical primary sources with at least more than 450,000 ebooks (Proquest, 2020). To have a comprehensive overview of FWAs-related studies conducted over the last two decades, the paper conducted a systematic scanning and clustering review (SSCR) to determine the extent to which FWAs studies have been conducted or are available in the existing literature.

SSCR is different from a systematic review (SR). Generally, SR answers a focused research question. Therefore SR should set clear questions which direct the review into its objectives. Contrarily with SSCR, it has no specific questions but rather to cover all research topic thoroughly from the selected database. For example, SR on FWAs may focus on specific areas of FWAs studies, such as business performance. However, SSCR will cover any related

topic from FWAs studies such as business performance, regulation, wage, leadership, work-life balance, the pros and cons of FWAs and etcetera.

SR and SSCR have their respective advantages. For example, SR critically analyses specific research topics and has the advantage of producing more in-depth data or information. Unlike SSCR, it may not be able to scrutinise each topic in-depth, but the benefit of SSCR is that it can address the current state in FWAs studies and identify research gaps in FWAs, which have not been sufficiently researched. At the same time, SSCR also gives an overview of some of the research topic within FWAs studies is way ahead or overdone, and recommend which niches should be considered for future research in FWAs. There are 5 phases of SSCR applied in this paper as follows:

First Phase: Develop reviews conditions

In this initial stage, we outline our search boundary by addressing specific requirement or information needed. The source or literature used in this paper is limited to the last twenty years, starting from 2000 until 2020. The search includes five types of documents such as peer-reviewed journal, books, articles, thesis, and book chapters. We exclude magazine and newspapers from our study's scope as we aim to focus on research papers.

Second Phase: Determine and scanning of keyword(s) in an online search engine or electronic databases.

To begin with, it is essential to determine the right keyword(s) search as the scanning and reviewing of available sources will be formed around this keyword(s). In this paper, the search keywords are “flexible work” and “flexible working” in tandem with our research objective. The keywords search allows researchers to discover extensive searching for related sources and literature.

Third Phase: Keyword(s) chain sentences – Specific search

In this phase, the keyword will be scanned and thoroughly searched, and then it will be broken down into a more significant chain of sentences or its immediate context. For example, FWAs frequently related to work-life balance, performance, satisfaction etc.

Fourth Phase: Clustering Information

All available sources related to the keyword(s) will be clustered accordingly.

For example, the keyword of this study is FWAs, and from the systematic scanning, several closely related terms were found and sorted into similar group or cluster.

Fifth Phase: Reporting Result

In this final phase, we present all information by summarising the main point and prepare some discussion, conclusion, and recommendation.

3. Analysis and Findings

By utilising secondary data from the Proquest database, the keywords searched yielded more than 6.9 million online documents related to flexible work and flexible working. We only

considered peer-reviewed journal, theses, non-peer-reviewed articles (i.e. website articles, perspectives and opinion articles, resource report, etc), books, and book chapters for further analysis. Therefore, our final documents only include a total of 6.5 million documents illustrated in Figure 1.

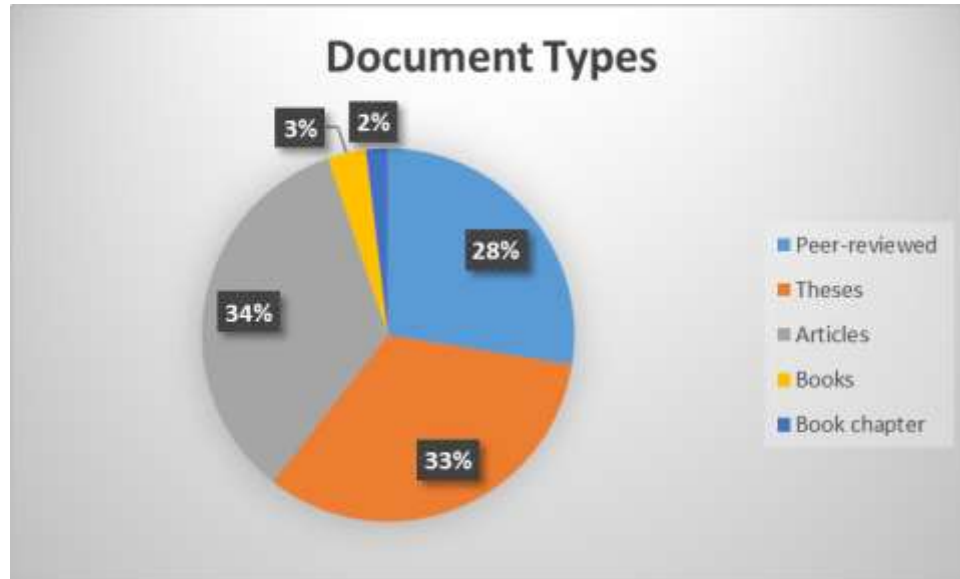


Figure 1: Document Types

The Figure 1 shows the breakdown on the types of documents included in our analysis. The majority of documents (34%, 2.2 million) come from articles representing non-peer reviewed articles that comprise various reports, news articles, perspectives, and opinions related to our subject matter. This is followed by theses with 33% (2.1 million) out of the total documents.

The result indicates that FWA has attracted most of researchers, academics, or students around the world to embark on their research or studies in this field. The third-highest number of documents in our corpus of data is the peer-reviewed article (28%, 1.8 million). In comparison, books and books chapter included were 217,585 and 124,117, which make up 3% and 2% respectively out of the entire documents.

Scopes of Study Focused in FWA

We provide further insight on the scopes of studies being focused in FWA for the past 20 years in the following Table 1 Table, which indicates the fifteen most conducted scopes of study in FWAs. Work environment has been the highest and popular scope of study in FWAs for the past twenty years. It with 448 101 peer-reviewed journals, 377 784 thesis, 557 012 articles, 31 010 books and 25 606 book chapters written on this subject.

Table 1: Number of FWAs Studies from 2000 to 2020

No		Peer-reviewed Journal	Theses	Articles	Books	Book chapter
<i>Scopes of Study Focused in FWA</i>						
1	Gender	144,972	196,263	159,714	15,013	9,756
2	Leadership	116,091	163,206	163,524	14,773	9,529
3	Family policy	123,542	198,370	151,655	19,411	9,111
4	Employee right	46,676	79,035	78,791	8,127	3,822
5	Wages	44,031	47,601	57,852	9,306	4,521
6	Work environment	448,101	377,784	557,012	31,010	25,606
7	Labor costs	95,761	123,884	131,018	18,490	8,760
8	Labor laws and legislation	25,310	41,322	32,902	9,424	2,200
9	Age and employment	88,252	140,754	105,886	15,565	6,869
10	Older people	99,886	185,498	124,331	16,866	8,441
11	Communication	282,186	286,914	342,252	24,878	18,346
12	Globalization	59,694	49,744	69,102	10,795	5,529
13	Pandemic	5,826	5,246	10,495	897	198
14	Healthcare workers	11,827	23,809	14,408	2,505	615
15	Stress	208,678	240,744	236,234	20,525	10,814
<i>Advantages of FWAs</i>						
1	Work life balance	140,014	232,672	185,127	23,873	10,892
2	Job satisfaction	54,062	126,040	68,631	9,336	3,743
3	Career development	86,142	189,437	114,818	15,151	7,083
4	Retention	78,831	117,907	101,608	7,361	3,456
5	Motivation	28,104	63,203	33,725	5,001	2,055
6	Equality	89,009	148,292	103,330	14,662	5,451
7	Performance	460,742	346,014	571,135	29,195	22,292
8	Employee well-being	75,802	85,424	118,487	8,460	5,582
<i>Disadvantages of FWAs</i>						
1	Intensification	18,530	24,949	20,064	4,057	1,258
2	Stigma	23,842	49,551	27,332	3,453	1,467
3	Overload	21,201	39,938	25,218	3,266	1,257
4	Work disruption	67,961	120,302	82,673	9,383	2,917
5	Social isolation	71,902	180,489	80,519	13,728	5,069

Advantages of FWA

Table 1 also shows the number of FWAs studies in terms of its advantages and disadvantages. Performance has been the advantage that has produced the most literature with 460 742 peer-reviewed journals, 346 014 thesis, 571 135 articles, 29 195 books and 22 292 book chapters on the subject in the past twenty years. It is followed by work-life balance with 140 014 peer-

reviewed journals, 232 672 thesis, 185 127 articles, 23 873 books and 10 892 book chapters written on it.

Career development has been the subject of 86 142 peer-reviewed journals, 189 437 thesis, 114 818 articles, 15 151 books and 7 083 book chapters. Equality is an advantage that has had a similar amount of papers written on with of 89 008 peer-reviewed journals, 148 292 thesis, 103 330 articles, 14 662 books and 5 451 book chapters. Retention has been the subject of 78 831 peer-reviewed journals, 117 907 thesis, 101 608 articles, 7 361 books and 3 456 book chapters. 75 802 peer-reviewed journals, 85 424 thesis, 118 487 articles, 8 460 books and 5 582 book chapters have been written on employee well-being. On the subject of job satisfaction, 54 062 peer-reviewed journals, 126 040 thesis, 68 631 articles, 9 336 books and 3 743 book chapters have been written in the past twenty years. The advantage with the least literature on is motivation with 28 104 peer-reviewed journals, 63 203 thesis, 33 725 articles, 5 001 books and 2 055 book chapters written on this subject.

Disadvantages of FWAs

Social isolation has been the disadvantage that has produced the most literature with 71 902 peer-reviewed journals, 180 489 thesis, 80 519 articles, 13 728 books and 5 069 book chapters on the subject in the past twenty years. It is followed by work disruption with 67 961 peer-reviewed journals, 120 302 thesis, 82 673 articles, 9 383 books and 2 917 book chapters written on it.

Stigma has been the subject of 23 842 peer-reviewed journals, 49 551 thesis, 27 332 articles, 3 453 books and 1 467 book chapters. 21 201 peer-reviewed journals, 39 938 thesis, 25 218 articles, 3 266 books and 1 257 book chapters were written on the subject of overload.

The disadvantage with the least literature on is intensification with 18 530 peer-reviewed journals, 24 949 thesis, 20 064 articles, 4 057 books and 1 258 book chapters written on this subject.

4. Discussions

This paper briefly summarised the topics related to flexible work that have been studied and given attention over the period of twenty years, starting from in 1990 and up to August 2020. Work environment was the most conducted scopes of study in FWA, which centred on the job setting that includes psychological and physical elements. These elements primarily impact employee's wellbeing, workplace relationship, performance, and productivity. Numerous studies can be found between FWAs and work environment. Pressures from an increasingly competitive work environment lead to conflicting priorities for employers and governments, creating considerable stress for employees trying to manage work with family responsibilities (O'Brien, 2013). Sandholtz et al. (2002) noted, some changes in work environments and job expectations are related to negative outcomes in employee performance and work satisfaction (Reynolds & Aletraris, 2007), family life (Stevens, Kiger, & Riley, 2006), and personal life (Costa, Sartori, & Akerstedt, 2006). Taking into account the current state of the world plagued by the current COVID-19 pandemic, the implementation of FWAs has been accelerated and expanded, as the government-enforced lockdown and movement restrictions have compelled almost all businesses

to adopt FWAs. This will open up research agendas that will consider aspects of the work environment and FWAs during the crisis.

Most parts of FWAs studies also centred on communication, existing literature tends to focus on favouring FWAs through open and clear communication and communication effects in managing FWAs or flexible work design (Amirul, 2020; Mcalpine, 2018; Douglas, 2018; Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015). Communication is critical because it plays such a significant part in FWAs. The process could be derailed if there is a failure of communication. For flexible working to be a positive experience for all people involved, two-way trust must be established. An effective communication will be required to build trust, both for the purposes of managing the transition and developing good working arrangements for the long term. It is anticipated that the interest in communication within FWAs studies will be a significant focus in the implementation and enhancement of FWAs.

Gender was once becoming a hot topic in FWAs, and still in the conversation of FWAs studies (e.g. Glauber, 2011; Kim & Gong, 2017; Olsen et al., 2017; Brewer, 2000; Thornton & Bagust, 2007). Developed countries that have long been implementing FWAs now have shifted into more broad focus in utilising the benefits of FWAs for both employees and employers. For developing countries that have just begun to adopt FWAs may still be lingering around gender issues, such as the needs of women still becoming major conversation in FWAs.

FWAs studies from the scope of family policies was dominated by family concerns on harmonising work-life balance or work-life family conflict (e.g. Caligiuri & Poelmans, 2008; Allen et al., 2013; Milner, 2010). Another scope within FWAs is focusing on accommodating the needs of older people (e.g. Choi et al., 2018; Morelock et al., 2017; Koc-Menard, 2009; Ameriks, 2017). There is a closed link between FWAs and family. These include work-life balance, the need for working parents, the need to care for sick family members, and the needs of the elderly who still need to work are all key topics of discussion and lead into the needs of the FWAs.

Leadership has also becoming one of popular scope of FWAs studies, empowerment, supervisory and the roles of leadership in managing FWAs (e.g Amirul, 2020; Coun, 2018; Griffith et al., 2018; Marabella & Lambert, 2016). FWAs are leadership challenges because leader's primary responsibility is to maximise both individual and organisational performance. Despite the substantial benefits of FWAs to the business and its people, what prevents leaders and managers from embracing flexible working in their organisation is still a pressing concern in FWAs studies. On the other hand, how leaders should engage to ensure the success of FWAs adoption is another area of concern in the field of FWAs leadership studies.

For globalisation studies in FWAs, it focuses on the global trend that lead to the higher demand of FWAs such as technological advances, socio-demographic changes, business operation globally (e.g Cannon and Elford, 2017; Burgmann, 2012; Thompson, 2008; Lake, 2013). Capability Jane's recent UK research demonstrates a substantial demand for flexible working: 92 percent of Millennials rank flexibility as a high priority when job hunting, while 80 percent of women and 52 percent of men want flexibility in their future employment.

Flexible work also has been study from the context of wage reservation or wage gap (e.g Chen et al., 2019; Fuller & Hirst, 2018; University of Colombia, 2018; Weeden, 2005). Fuller and Hirsh's (2018) recent study focuses on how flexible work arrangements affect motherhood wage penalties for women in different situations or their academic background. Although theories of work-life facilitation argue that FWAs ease motherhood penalties the application of flexibility policies may may have the unintended consequence of encouraging stigma and bias

towards mothers. Fuller and Hirsh's (2018) found that flexible work hours typically reduce mothers' disadvantage, particularly for those with a university education, and that working from home also reduces wage gaps for most educational women.

Another scope from FWAs studies have also been scrutinised from the legal perspective of study for example right to request FWAs (e.g Dancaster et al, 2014; Hallgren, 2018; Levy & Kuretzky, 2020; Griffith & Tengnah, 2010, Dean et al., 2018; Bird & Brown, 2018). Another aspect from legal perspective from the FWAs context is the GIG workers issues. The recent spate of well-publicised tribunal and court decisions on alleged employer exploitation of gig economy workers has become be the topic of substantial research by employment lawyers, however this remain relatively underexplored from other pertinent legal and inter-disciplinary perspectives (Moore, 2018).

More recently, due to pandemic crisis of covid-19, FWAs studies from the pandemic context has significantly increased (e.g Wong, 2020; Mansfield, 2020; Sedayu et al., 2020) and it is expected to be increased because FWAs are one of mechanism for business to keep operated during this pandemic crisis. When re-associated with the Covid-19 pandemic that has afflicted the world since late 2019, the enforcement of movement restrictions has made most businesses technologies dependent on making sure businesses continue to operate and facilitate FWAs. This has accelerated the pace of digitalisation.

The review of this paper highlighted eight most FWAs advantages that have been proven in an existing literature, these include improve performance (e.g Virick, Da Silva and Arrington 2010; De Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; Baptiste, 2008; Chen, 2015; Anell & Hartmann, 2007; Hayman, 2009; Thomson, 2008, Amirul, 2020), harmonising work-life balance (Casper & Harris, 2008; Grover & Crooker , 1995; William et.al., 2018; Hayman, 2009; Amirul, 2020; Lewis, 2008; Dizaho, 2017), career development (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008; Mohd Rasdi, 2019), promoting equality (Peters & Blomme, 2019; Shire & Imai, 2000) improving retention within organisation (Amirul, 2020; Beauregard & Herny, 2009; Menezes & Kelliher, 2011; Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004). FWAs has also been proven to improve employees well-being (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2017; García-Cabrera, Lucia-Casademunt, Cuéllar-Molina, & Padilla-Angulo, 2018; Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015), increase job satisfaction (Afrianty, Burgess, & Issa, 2015; Cloutier, Felusiak, Hill, & Pemberton-Jones, 2015; Rawashdeh, 2016) and enhancing motivation (Anderson & Kelliher, 2009; Atkinson & Hall, 2011; Dizaho, 2017)

The review of this paper also provides some highlights from existing literature that focused on the disadvantage of the impact of FWA. These include social isolation (Wratny & Ludera-Ruszel, 2020; Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015). Work disruption (Lambert, 2016; Batt & Valcour, 2003; Yuile et al., 2012), stigma issue when the flexibility only offered to specific group of people such as women or couple with children (Galea, Houkes, & Rijk, 2014). In addition to stigma issue, it also led to physical absence from the workplace resulting in social stigmatisation. In the same vein, current literature has also highlighted the darkness of FWAs can include work overload (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Wong & Ko, 2009; Russell et al., 2007) and intensification, in which some FWAs can lead the employee to increase efforts during certain periods of time (Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015; Ab Wahab & Tatoglu, 2020).

The advantages of FWA outweighed the disadvantages. However, despite the fact that the benefits of FWAs dominated than its drawbacks, the substantial and extensive quantity of research into FWAs' disadvantage should not be overlooked. Scholars (Amirul et al., 2020; Burgmann, 2012; Thompson, 2019) have noted that the FWA's strategy for capitalising on its

strengths has not yet been adequately articulated. Therefore it is unsurprising that despite of FWAs advantages prevail over its disadvantages, many managers or leaders are still reluctant from embracing flexible working in their organisation. Since the study found that the FWAs strategy is still under research, the study recommended that future research should place a greater emphasis on FWAs strategy since it is crucial to making decisions, conducting the right operations, and developing a strategic action plan is vital for FWAs. A solid plan will help the organisation lay the groundwork for long-term growth and success in FWAs, which are critically needed.

5. Conclusion

This study produces reliable conclusions and is capable of conveying a great deal of information in a straightforward manner, as well as providing for the comparison and contrast of information from diverse studies. We analysed at least 6.5 million documents from five categories, peer-reviewed articles, theses, non-peer reviewed articles, books, and chapters in the books to provide an overview of FWA's research trends for the past two decades. This paper has an important methodological contribution as we developed a systematic scanning and clustering review (SSCR) to detail how FWAs studies have evolved in existing literature over the past two decades. SSCR is a rapid method for locating specific information or key research interests and then clustering or grouping them on the basis of some inherent similarity. It's very useful as a preview to a wide-range of literature with a lengthy selection. Through SSCR, we provide discussion on the research areas being focused by scholars, researchers, and others whereby we uncovered that there are fifteen most conducted scopes of study in FWAs (see Table 1). Besides, we provide insight on the advantages and disadvantages pertinent to FWA. Last but not least, we present our discussion which recapitulate our findings and that we deliberately highlight our review in related to FWA. We believed that this study offers an overview which could be based upon by various interested party to look upon more interesting and unexplored issues related to FWA. Hence, this study may serve as a catalyst for those interested in conducting research in this field. There is a limitation in this paper, in which we don't focus on high impact peer-reviewed journals such as the Web of Science and Scopus, which may if included add more values to our analysis. Future study can be conducted by including such databases to further enhance our findings.

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