

A start-up tool for the collaborative monitoring and evaluation of ESD in RCEs

Open Framework for Evaluation of the Multistakeholder Initiatives in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

(This document was prepared by Zinaida Fadeeva and Rob O’Donoghue with support from the ESD team of UNU-IAS. It was developed on the bases of earlier publications¹ and work of RCEs form SADC region.)

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¹ The content of the document is derived from earlier developed materials, including http://www.rce-network.org/portal/sites/default/files/public_resource/01_UNU_10yearsBook_web.pdf, as well as work done by Southern African RCEs through pilot project in 2015.

I. How to use the document

The document is intended for use as a self-assessment process by multistakeholder education for sustainable development (ESD) communities, especially Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs). Being a result of long discussions and experiments by the RCEs in Africa, Asia and Europe, it brings together some of the key approaches to the evaluation of education for RCEs. These include **appreciative inquiry, developmental evaluation and value creation assessment** that have been integrated in an open-ended evaluation framework that can be adapted to build partner capacity to assess ESD programmes in RCEs.

We offer a number of the suggested start-up steps for the collaborative assessment of ESD activities where RCEs are responding to local concerns and aspirations towards sustainable regional development, including with reference to the Sustainable Development Goals. The suggested assessment steps and question-led evaluation processes are intended for use in appreciative ways during the dynamic development of RCEs as civic social movements of change. The document thus provides practical guidelines for assessment in ESD networks (section III) as well as principles and methodology for an approach to evaluation work that can be adapted for local needs and priorities.

RCE facilitators can use the information and the related presentations (provided as a separate document) to set the stage for strengthening evaluative work in RCEs. This includes:

- situating the evaluation in relation to local sustainable development priorities,
- demonstrating the practical logic of co-engaged evaluation, including its goals and
- a guide through step-by-step discussions presented in section II.3.

This stage setting will benefit the participants (especially new members of the RCE community) by scoping the concept behind RCEs, the history of individual RCE development and their initial ambitions (which can be found in the respective RCE application for acknowledgement by the Ubuntu Commission of the UN).

The initiating discussion stages for a collaborative evaluation process are presented in a way that enables step-by-step generation and recording of insights into RCE's work. However, RCEs might be able to change a sequence of discussion steps and/or modify questions for discussion to suit their particular realities and specific goals of their evaluation. For example, if an RCE wants to see its role as part of the global RCE community, it might focus on the discussion step 5 that deals with value-added through networking with the RCE Service Centre and other RCEs. If the question of sustainability of a given RCE's network and value added of the RCE's actions is the goal of evaluation, the suggested sequence of discussions – from 1 to 6 - would be appropriate.

When addressing the topic of each discussion, the participants might be given a sheet of paper with key questions (reflected in Boxes A-F) to record their own individual reflections. Alternatively, these questions could be discussed collectively in small working groups. Consequently, personal or groups' ideas could be brought together by a facilitator in a course of plenary conversation.

For the process of evaluation to be more productive, it is advisable for the participants to appoint an editorial team to work on an evaluative report that, where possible, includes case stories of value

creation through successful collective learning and action. In addition, it is critical to remember that in order to provide evidence-based results, the evaluation would have to rely on documents - RCE application, articles in the RCE bulletin, RCE publications, project documents, other publications, audiovisual materials, in addition to the shared views of the participants.

II. Emergent approach to evaluation

The combined and integrated evaluative approaches include a process of documentation of how an RCE had developed up to this point (constitutive evaluation), inquiry into the RCE's successes, coordination and collaborative learning (appreciative and developmental evaluation), and value creation assessment of the RCE's overall work.

Generating detailed baseline information, facilitating appreciative enquiries into RCE initiatives and deepening the analysis to strengthen the RCEs (Box 1) is seen as a strategic evaluation process that can be started internally and, ideally, can bring together key stakeholders to monitor and evaluate RCE practices in order to strengthen these.

It should be emphasized that while there are diverse ways of undertaking review processes such as these, their primary function is to develop the capacity of multi-stakeholder ESD initiatives to collectively learn about ongoing change practices with the goal to making them more effective.

Box 1. The approach used to structure this appreciative and developmental evaluation framework is focused on the three core areas:

1. The context in which the RCE has been created (See application for RCE acknowledgement)
2. The key activities and ESD practices that have been initiated by the RCE
3. The outcomes and impacts amongst those intended to benefit from a particular programme.

II.1 Goal of evaluation

The goals of evaluation are three-fold:

1. To collectively learn through an appreciative review of an RCE (**Evaluation Report**)
2. To improve transformative learning and sustainability (**Case Study evidence of value creation activities**)
3. To strengthen work of the RCEs as a networked community (**Capacity development training strategy**)

The **first goal** reflects the potential for appreciative assessment of the social learning processes of change. Such learning could be focused not only on the Sustainable Development Goals that the RCE

members collectively pursue in context, but also on the ways the RCE members and stakeholders work and learn together (governance and coordination).

The **second goal** relates to following appreciative evidence into the change-oriented learning activities (as defined by the RCE stakeholders) that have emerged in the RCEs. Here the articulation between positive appreciations and case evidence has a potential to stimulate not only improved change-orientated work in a local RCE contexts but also exchanges across the RCE community and with its global stakeholders. If the RCEs, as a networked learning community, are to be positioned as a regional/global player, evaluation evidence of social learning and change within and across RCEs would have to be available.

The **third goal** relates to evaluation work identifying where training might be initiated to strengthen RCE partners and the activities they are undertaking together. Here the training can involve workshops with both emerging expertise within the programme and expertise that can be brought in from outside.

II.2 Preparing for Integrated Evaluation

When inviting the stakeholders of the RCE to take part in evaluation, please remember that some of them who joined the RCE at the later stage or were not closely engaged in the initial consolidation of the RCE's actions. It might be good to provide them with basic information on the RCE development, its governance structure, key activities, and any work with the global RCE community. This information will also be presented at the beginning of the assessment meeting.

The RCEs participating in the assessments have found it useful to conduct short information gathering activity before the meeting. Such exercises do not need to be complex and their main purpose can be to trigger the thinking of the stakeholders before the meeting.



Please remember

Email communication and short phone interviews have proven to be effective means of gathering initial views

The facilitators might consider focusing on the following three questions:

- What do you see as the most successful initiatives or the RCEs?
- What did not work as well as you expected?
- What more could be done?

The data obtained through this pre-evaluation process serves as an essential resource for discussions, especially if some of the RCE partners are not able to attend. The key coordinating partners might also focus on collecting additional data, documents, articles, etc. prior to the meeting to feed them into the emerging evaluative discussions.

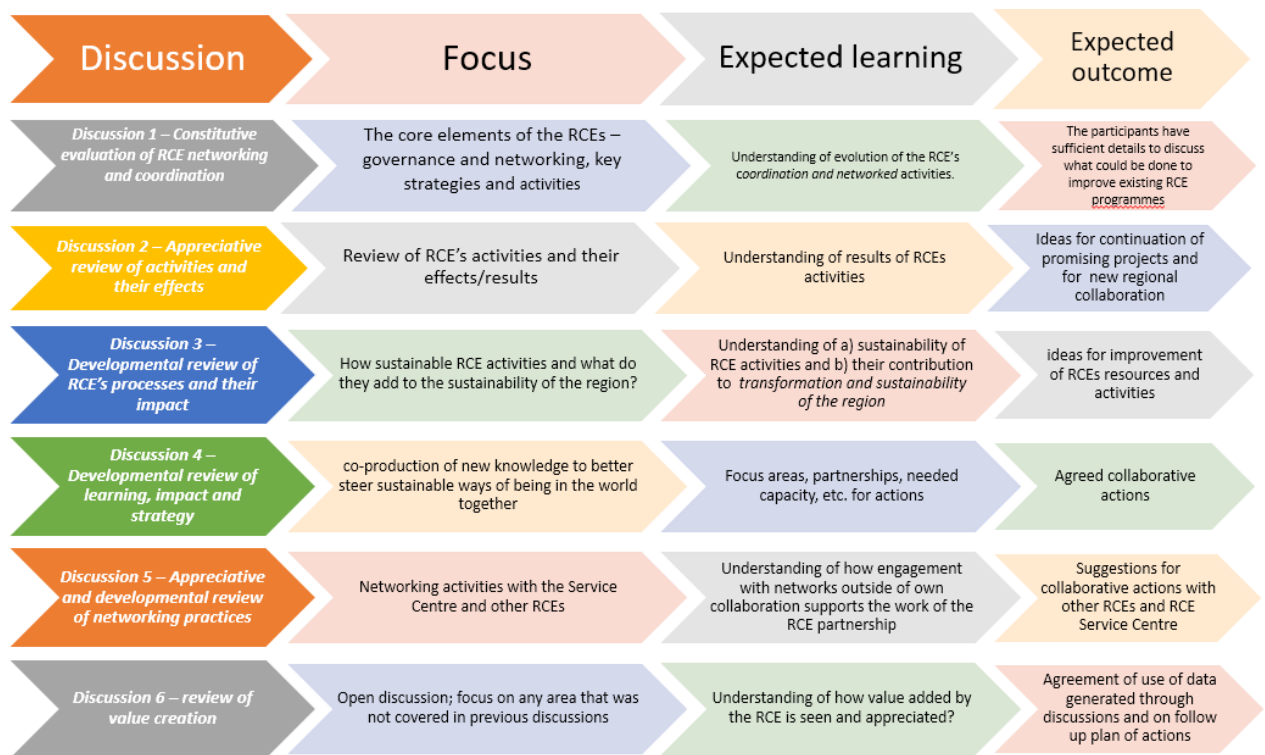
II. 3 Discussion steps of the Integrated Evaluation

The Integrated Evaluation (IE) draws on a range of evaluation traditions that can be adapted to differing needs and contexts. These include Constitutive, Appreciative and Developmental Evaluation, and Value Creation Assessment (please consider the literature reference section.).

Here, we suggest developing an evaluation process around five key areas (or sets of questions) that would help to assess:

- how the partnerships are coordinated and have grown,
- how strategic activities are being defined and evaluated,
- how flagship projects have evolved,
- how to strengthen RCEs own linkages and processes that are proving to be effective in enabling change in the region,
- how engagement with networks outside of the RCE supports the work of the partnership, and
- what value is being added by the RCE structures and their activities.

Figure 1. Steps of Evaluation




Discussion 1 – Constitutive evaluation of RCEs networking and coordination

This section is an introduction to a reflexive review through which the RCE journey comes to be mapped out for an appreciation of what has been achieved and what can be done to strengthen ESD activities.

The first part of the discussion is based on the *constitutive evaluation* approach, which is focused on assessing the core elements of the RCEs – governance and networking, key strategies and activities – all seen in dynamic development.

Any evaluation process should begin with a review of the initial point of the RCE journey and a broad progression of its development as a coordinated network of ESD partners. RCEs are dynamic organizations so it is important to document and assess (evaluate) how the existing structures have emerged and how coordination, membership and activities have changed over time. While significant for the core members, it is particularly critical for engaging new members of the multi-stakeholder community by giving them a sense of relations, decisions and preferences in the community.

 Please remember

- Data for evaluation comes from the discussion of the stakeholders as well as RCEs foundational documents, including application for RCE acknowledgement, descriptions of RCE project reports, scientific and popular articles written by and about the RCEs.
- The initiating documents for the establishment of the RCE will be a good place to start.

A. Constitutive overview of RCE in context

Question 1: RCE Coordination & networking

The RCE Journey: A review of how the RCE was constituted and is functioning to enable learning and change.

- 1.1 How did the RCE evolve?
- 1.2 How has the membership changed?
- 1.3 How are local issues being addressed?
- 1.4 What ESD initiatives have been undertaken?
- 1.5 a) What can be done to improve RCE work and b) how?

Reference appreciative comments to the available documents: RCE application, articles in the RCE bulletin, RCE publications, project documents, other publications, audio visual materials etc.


The questions for stakeholder discussions, examples of which are in Box A, should provide detailed insights into the processes and substance of the RCE *coordination and networked* activities. This will give participants enough detail for discussion on what could be done to improve existing RCE programmes. This discussion is centred on how the RCE has been structured and how its members have been deployed to begin to address their ESD work on certain local issues.

Members of the evaluation working group can first discuss the scope and focus of their activities and then elect to provide descriptive and appreciative

narratives on particular aspects of the programs that they have been most involved in.

Discussion 2 – Appreciative review of activities and their effects

Through this part of assessment, affirmation and appreciations are given about the work of individuals and organizations – members of the RCEs – based on their contribution to RCE activities. Valued projects, collaborative practices, and benefits of collective work become the focus of discussion, leading to identifying ways to improve these practices and their broader uptake.

 Please remember - In addition to the recorded results of the discussions, data for appreciative enquiry comes from many other sources, for example, accounts (through bilateral interviews and group discussions) of key players, recorded stories, written reflections of values, aspirations, wishes of the stakeholders as well as reports, and articles written by, with or about the RCE.

Drawing on the results of Discussion 1, and guided by the questions suggested in Box B, the partners of the RCE list their portfolio of activities and then discuss which of these activities have been the most successful and why.

B. Appreciative review of activities and effects

Question 2: **Activities & their effects**

- 2.1 How has the portfolio of activities of the RCEs evolved?
- 2.2 What have been the best/most successful RCE activities and why?
- 2.3 Give examples of how successful collaboration/decisionmaking is producing the effects that are being achieved?
- 2.4 How can activities be up-scaled and mainstreamed?
- 2.5 How could better work be achieved?
 - In the RCE? (inward looking)
 - In the region? (collaboration and outward looking)

From this opening it should be possible to begin to examine and discuss how the model of collaboration and decision-making is related to the achievement of the successes noted by the discussing partners. This provides a baseline for beginning to contemplate how the successes might best be built on to scale up and mainstream successful activities and thus build on and expand the RCE programme around its strengths.

The discussion concludes with a developmental question looking, on the one hand, on the activities and their effects and, on the other hand, exploring possible regional collaboration.

Discussion 3 – Appreciative and developmental review of processes and their impact – “how sustainable are your activities and what do they add to the sustainability of the region?”

C. Appreciative and developmental review of processes and their impact

Question 3: **Transformation & sustainability**

- 3.1 What **flagship initiatives** reflect the successes of the RCE?
- 3.2 Summarize the **scale of a) knowledge and b) practice transformation** apparent in these initiatives over a period of 12, 24, 36 months etc.
- 3.3 What has changed and how is the change evident?
- 3.4 What **resources and governance** have enabled success?
- 3.5 What, besides funding, can be done to **overcome barriers and sustain the work** of the RCE?

Discussion 3 scales up the appreciative review into the effects that are apparent in terms of transformation and sustainability.

‘Sustainability’ opens up in two forms for discussion:

- the sustainability of the RCE activities themselves and
- the contributions of RCE activities to sustainability in the region.

The third part of the assessment discussion opens the appreciative review into the effects of multi-stakeholder work *from the perspective of transformation and sustainability*.

The discussion starts with analysis of flagship initiatives, looking into critical factors of their success and how learning of these factors could become building blocks of widening success. Question two offers insight into how RCEs acquire knowledge, transmit it, and put this knowledge into practice. Any time scale can be used with the most important work being to deliberate what has changed and how the change is evident. Following this, the focus shifts to the probing of resources needed for the programme and its governance.

The concluding question is inspired by developmental approach to evaluation with the focus on actions needed to sustain activities of the RCEs and their effectiveness.

Discussion 4 – Developmental review of learning, impact and strategy

At this stage of the discussions, the RCE partners should have generated enough data in the end, and can now switch the focus to a continuing appreciative exploration on the more strategic activities.

D. Developmental review of learning, impact and strategy

Question 4: **Strategic areas & linkages**

- 4.1 What **strategic focus** areas, partnerships, activities have been key to the successes of the RCE?
- 4.2 What could be done to **improve learning and effectiveness** (e.g. partnerships, resourcing and scale)?
- 4.3 How can existing linkages, processes and programs be strengthened?
- 4.4 What new **strategic links and capacity development** could be explored?

Discussion 4, guided by questions suggested in Box D, will help to strengthen the RCE as a purposeful network of co-engaged activity in the co-production of new knowledge to better steer sustainability and of being in the world together.

The process starts with a focus on how what has been done and the way it has been done, has produced successes to build on. The next question asks what has been learned within the RCE to improve learning and the effectiveness of such initiatives. The discussion turns to a developmental focus on strengthening linkages and processes that are proving to be effective in enabling change.

A key process to deliberate at this stage in discussion is required capacity development training and how the existing materials could be used in an RCE based process of ESD capacity development.

Discussion 5 – Developmental review of networking practices – “how engagement with networks outside of own collaboration supports the work of the RCE partnership?”

E. Developmental review of networking practices

Question 5: **Global RCE Service Centre**

- 5.1 What have been the benefits of being acknowledged as an RCE?
- 5.2 How are you interacting with the RCE Service Centre?
- 5.3 How are you working with other RCEs and what are some of the activities, successes and challenges?
- 5.4 How has your RCE participated in regional and global RCE conferences and undertaken follow up activities?
- 5.5 How could regional and global RCE activities be improved to strengthen your RCE work?

On a regional and global scale the RCEs could come to function better together by interacting with each other and with UNU-IAS through the RCE Portal and services provided by the RCE Service Centre. Appreciative evidence on the benefits of being acknowledged as an RCE and in interacting with the RCE Service Centre can be usefully deliberated at this stage of the discussions.

The questions (in Box E) are primarily focused on appreciation of networking activities with the Service Centre and other regional RCEs.

Here the main area of interest is how RCEs are learning from each other, with ideas on how the regional and global networking processes can be strengthened.

F. Review of value creation impact

Question 6: Value creation assessment

Reviewing evidence of value creation

- 6.1 What were the most meaningful RCE activities discussed?
- 6.2 What potential values are the RCE activity producing?
- 6.3 What difference has this made that would not happen otherwise?
- 6.4 What difference has it made to the ability of the RCE to produce what matters through its ESD projects?
- 6.5 What new understandings of what produces value are becoming evident?

The concluding discussion is entirely open with the focus of deliberation being all forms of documentary evidence on RCE activities as well as on emerging ideas for collaboration. It is at this stage that participants should be asked if there are there any areas that have not been covered in previous evaluative deliberations.

Wenger (2011) describes how communities of practice produce value in their work cycles of activity. Value creation starts with a sense of something that is of immediate value that might be seen to have a wider potential for value creation. The aspiration to create value is then initiated through applied work that affirms and creates value, often producing

change that is realised in context and can involve a positive reframing of what is of value and worth achieving.

At this stage, participants should be encouraged to nominate an editorial team to compile the narrative data into an evaluative report. The team might also be able to identify opportunities for taking the appreciative evaluation process further and for making review processes such as this a part of their core activities in the RCE. Through the evaluative work that the RCE Service Centre supports them to do, it should also be possible to support the production of case stories of value creation through the successful learning and action that RCEs are involved in together.

III. Background – Development of evaluation in the multistakeholder networks

III.1 Assessing multistakeholder networks of the RCEs

A deliberative process of evaluation in multistakeholder ESD initiatives in RCEs emerged midway through the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable development (DESD). At the same time, the pressure to evaluate programs and impacts increased and a variety of stakeholders, including the RCEs themselves, wanted **to better assess and communicate the value of their ESD activities**.

The initial discussions that begun in 2007, pointed at two different approaches for consideration - participatory perspectives and more empirical (or impact assessment) approaches that privileged tangible measures of change. Gradually, however, it became clear that evaluation of complex locally situated long-term multistakeholder partnerships should be an open-ended participatory approach **based on the principles of co-engaged self-reflection with documented evidence of change**.

Evaluation strategies have taken several forms over the years. Several of these have been framed as constitutive processes, as a process of appreciative enquiry and as strategic evaluations of key concerns. These were articulated by different RCE working groups in 2013 and were used, in different combinations, by a pioneering group of RCEs in Asia Pacific closely linked to the preferences of the stakeholders and the needs and stage of development of the RCE engaged in the respective evaluation methods. While individual strategies are still being successfully used for more details please see http://www.rce-network.org/portal/sites/default/files/public_resource/01_UNU_10yearsBook_web.pdf), it was just a matter of time before a more coherent approach of working with a set of evaluations emerged, based on the previously tested strategies. This approach, developed as a **Toolkit for Multi-stakeholder Evaluation**, compiled and tested by a group of southern African RCEs, with a special attention on generating evaluative data to inform and strengthen learning in the RCEs.

III.2 Examples of evaluation strategies used by the RCEs

Constitutive evaluation is focused on the core elements of the RCEs and their functions as stated in their inception document, with a focus on **Governance, Scope of Collaboration, Research & Development, and Transformative Education**. While records and analysis of these data could take different forms, the foundational – constitutive – framework should be derived from the RCE principles and treated as a baseline. Examples of the questions that RCEs could ask during a constitutive evaluation include:

- How the coordination structure of the RCE supports its activities? How did this structure evolve from the one specified in the RCE application for acknowledgement? Who are the current facilitating partners of the RCE (RCE coordinator/Board of stakeholders/working committees? How did these changes affect the RCE?
- How has the number and composition of the RCEs partners changed?

- How did the portfolio of research/educational projects of the RCEs evolve? Which projects, that were listed in the RCE application or agreed shortly after acknowledgement, were continued and which evolved?

The RCEs that participated in constitutive evaluation stated the usefulness of the approach, especially for newly joined RCE stakeholders who were given a chance to learn how the RCE has evolved.

Evaluation based on appreciative inquiry (AI) focuses on the positive experiences of the RCE members in realizing ambitions stated in the RCE application and goals developed on the bases of the RCE vision after acknowledgement. This approach, as opposed to problem-based evaluation, “is based on the assumption that **questions and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams** are themselves transformational” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom (2003, p. 1). Consequently, the questions asked during AI do not focus on the problems but on the positive aspects of the RCE activities. Below are examples of the questions the RCEs could be asking in a course of AI:

- What, in your view, are the best/most successful collective projects of the RCE? What are the reasons for your appreciation of these projects?
- How can we do more of such/ or similar actions?
- What was example of successful collaboration/decision making/dialogue/ongoing exchange? Would you suggest any of these to be repeated/replicated in other areas of activities/in relation to other challenges? (Please elaborate.)
- What are your/our wishes for the work of the RCE/region?

An appreciative process enables a project team to collect positive perspectives and experiences that are the useful for discussion of the organization and activities in relation to the needs and expectations of those involved. Working with these questions, the project partners could try to determine ‘patterns of success’.

Strategic evaluation focuses on the RCE actions that help to further advance work of the RCEs. To move beyond focus on “immediate cases in the here and now” and to develop a longer-term perspective of the RCE actions. Such evaluation aims at understanding of the *social learning towards change* potential for various RCE’s actions. An evaluation could include an **assessment of the RCE context of risk and the emerging scope and impact of the activities** being undertaken within the RCE. Examples of the questions the RCEs could be asking in a course of strategic evaluation:

- What are the changes that have taken place as a result of the RCE’s actions, in what areas (e.g. scope and scale of activities, type of collaborative engagements, role of partners) over a period of 12 months? 24 months? 36 months? etc.
- What type of knowledge exchange in relevant areas for the respective RCE or region took place? How much has this taken place (over 12, 24 or 36 months)? Evidence should support these observations.
- What are the flagship projects that can be used to illustrate the success of the RCEs?
- How high is the budget spent for human resources in the illustrative projects as well as in the RCE’s governance structure?

- What are the critical factors that influence the success of the key RCE activities or even impede their success?
- What are the successful activities of the RCE that could be expanded? How will they contribute to the sustainability of the region and the RCE?

The constitutive and strategic evaluation can significantly overlap. It happens when the initially stated goals and actions of the RCE continue to be its strategic direction. Reflections across originating ambitions, the appreciative experiences of participants and emerging strategic trajectories can be critical for informing decisions of the RCE.

IV. Additional evaluation tools, materials and references for further reading

More approaches to evaluation - in addition to this start-up work on evaluation, contextual evaluation with the SDGs can be added and then this work can be expanded to back casting to contextually map out pathways to future sustainability. The guidance to such evaluation will be provided in separate documents.

For more insights into the approach and the example of using the hybrid evaluation in RCE Makana and Rural Eastern Cape please see O'Donoghue, R. & Fadeeva, Z. (2014). *Enhancing Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in Action*. In Multistakeholder Learning and Action: Ten Years of Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development. (Eds). UNU-IAS, Tokyo, Japan. Pg. 161-178 -

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Suggested reading

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