SERVICE QUALITY IN CONTRACT CATERING SERVICES AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN UNIVERSITIES NAIROBI CITY COUNTY KENYA.

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Abstract: The rapid growth and increase in contract catering services in universities in Kenya seek to lower costs and respond to the high level of competition. The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of service quality in contract catering services on customer satisfaction in universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study specifically sought to assess the influence of service quality in contract catering services on customer satisfaction in universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The target population was selected universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were adopted in selecting the target population of universities. The target population was segmented into two groups based on the category of the university, either public or private university. The sampling technique for management staff respondents was purposive sampling, while the students' respondents were calculated using the Cooper and Schindler formula. The study adopted an interview guide and questionnaire data collection instrument. Data were collected from 276 respondents, with multi-level random sampling of 270 students, of which 224 (63.82%) returned, and 45 contract catering managers, university directors of catering, and procurement managers, of which 33 (73.33%) responded. Expert review was used to pretest the questionnaire before the actual study. The study adopted Cronbach's alpha formula to test the reliability of the instrument, and coefficients ranging from 0.65 to 1 were considered adequate for data analysis. The study collected primary data, which was analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential analysis about the management and students' views and perceptions. Data were then reported in tables, bar graphs, and percentages, along with verbatim quotes. For inferential statistics, Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between the independent variable service quality and the dependent variable customer satisfaction of the study to test the hypotheses. Simple regression results revealed that at a 5% level of significance and 95% level of confidence, the tested variables had p-value confidence levels of 0.000 for service quality, which had a positive statistically significant relationship with customer satisfaction. The study concluded that the management of contract catering services influences customer satisfaction, where the positive independent variable, service quality, enhances customer satisfaction. The study recommends that university management requires further similar studies to be done in other universities and colleges in Kenya with the aim of evaluating the influence of service quality in contract catering services on customer satisfaction in universities. This should aim at establishing if similar challenges in the management of contract catering services are a replica in other institutions worldwide.

Keywords: Service Quality in Contract Catering Services and Customer Satisfaction

1.1 Introduction

The Service Quality (SQ) is the discrepancy between expected service and perceived service. Customer satisfaction is a crucial aspect of SQ measurement in service delivery, especially in businesses competing for customers, business differentiating services, and business strategizing (Farris et al, 2010). The goal for Contract Catering Services (CCS) is to ensure customer satisfaction to command the market and lead to high business performance. Deriving a standard quality concept in service delivery is challenging due to intangibility (Kucukaltan, 2007). The SQ can be described as a phenomenon considered within the context of customers' expectations and perceptions about the service offered (Yilmaz, 2011). Therefore, the same service is perceived as high quality by one customer
and low quality by another customer, implying SQ depends on the customer's perception (Kucukaltan, 2007).

Service Quality is measured by the direction and magnitude of the difference between customers' expectations and perceived performance (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). If the provided service does not meet or exceed customer expectations, then the SQ is perceived to be low; if it exceeds customer expectations, the SQ is perceived to be high (Akbaba & Kilinc, 2001).

The SQ Model scale is frequently used for the measurement of SQ in catering businesses (Kilic & Eleren, 2009). The management of CCS in universities is similar to the practices in the business industry regarding SQ, where customers place more importance on services.

According to Celik (2012), on the perception and satisfaction of students and administrative personnel in a university regarding the SQ provided, customers are satisfied with other service elements besides the sensory characteristics of the foods offered.

1.2 Problem statement

Contracting is a business strategy with the intention of cutting operating costs and focusing on core competencies. Despite the rationale for the introduction, implementation, and management of contract catering services (CCS) in the university, there are increasing concerns about the service provider's ability and sensitivity from management regarding complaints on service quality from customers. Studies on contracting conducted by many researchers, including the study by Deloitte Consulting (2008, 2010, 2014), state that 30% of those engaged in contract services are disappointed with the service offered, and 39% have terminated services with the service providers in organizations.

In Kenyan universities, Nyangau, Mburu, and Ogallah (2014) established that limited finances and a large number of students bring challenges in maintaining and improving SQ. Nyangau et al. (2014) affirm that there is a lack of management in contracting services in universities and that it requires training and the use of proper tools in implementation. Ogechi and Nyameino (2010) and Nyakabi (2016) assert that security and cleaning are the major activities contracted, while the least contracted service in public universities in Kenya is catering due to sensitivity associated with the service. Sang (2010) asserts that there are challenges like a negative attitude among staff, poor monitoring and evaluation, and failure by students to cooperate in public universities in Kenya. However, the studies affirm that there are advantages to contracting, including improving service quality, reducing the cost of services for the long term, acquiring expertise not available within the organization, and allowing management more time to focus on important things in the organization.

In the studies documented on contracting catering services in universities in Kenya, there has been no focus on the influence of quality service in contract catering services on customer satisfaction. Arising from this gap, it was important to carry out research on the influence of quality service in the management of contract catering services on customer satisfaction in universities in Nairobi County, Kenya, to bridge the knowledge gap.

1.4 Research Objective

1. To assess the influence of service quality in contract catering services on customer satisfaction in universities.

1.5 Research Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant relationship between service quality in contract catering services and customer satisfaction in universities.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a set of broad ideas borrowed from fields relevant to the study, expressed in variables (Thompson, 2012). The study's main variables are independent, moderating, and dependent, as presented in the conceptual framework Figure 1 as shown below.
The framework suggests that customer satisfaction depends on service quality in the management of Contract Catering Services in universities. The dependent variable in this study is customer satisfaction, while the independent variable is Service Quality in the management of Contract Catering Services. The study adopted the contractual theory by Luo (2002) as the study is based on contracted services, and every contracted service has the purpose of facilitating exchange and preventing opportunism, which is relevant in the management of contract services in universities. Meanwhile, the expectancy disconfirmation customer satisfaction theory by Oliver (1997) was adopted, expressing that a customer is either satisfied or dissatisfied as a result of a positive or negative difference between expectations and perceptions, which is also relevant in contracted catering services customer satisfaction.

2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

The contracting process is complex and involves many activities with managerial challenges; that is why theories have been developed to assist in understanding these activities. There are several theories that seek to explain the need for contracting services in various companies.

The study on the influence of the management of Contract Catering Services (CCS) on customer satisfaction in universities was based on contracting theories by Luo (2002), Anthi and Nikolaos (2014), and Balázs (2012). Additionally, the study drew from the Expectancy Disconfirmation customer satisfaction theory by Oliver (1997) and Florin and Sergiu (2014). The contracting theory covered the independent variable (Control of CCS), whereas the Disconfirmation theory covered the dependent variable (customer satisfaction).

2.1.2 Contractual theory.

Management of Contract Catering Services (CCS) was based on contractual theory (Luo, 2002; Anthi and Nikolaos, 2014; Balázs, 2012), which states that contract services provide a legally bound institutional framework in which each party’s rights, duties, and responsibilities are coded, and the goals, policies, and strategies underlying the arrangement are specific. Contracts emphasize gains, cooperation, and flexibility with the belief that the partner will share information and adopt desirable behaviors (Das & Kumar, 2010). Therefore, based on the theory, every contracted service has the purpose of facilitating exchange and preventing opportunism. This theory is applicable to the influence of management in CCS in universities at the implementation and evaluation stages.

2.1.2 Expectancy disconfirmation customer satisfaction theory

The theory postulates that satisfaction is related to the size and direction of the discrepancy between prior expectations and actual product performance (Oliver, 1997, and Florin & Sergiu, 2014). This implies that when product performance exceeds prior expectations, positive disconfirmation results, and this also leads to satisfaction. On the other hand, negative disconfirmation is the result of performance being lower than expected, leading to dissatisfaction.
Based on the disconfirmation theory of consumer satisfaction, it is hypothesized that there exists a significant positive relationship between disconfirmation and consumer satisfaction. According to this theory, a satisfied customer will recommend the product to others, engage in repeat purchases, and even try line extensions, implying that businesses must always be customer-oriented.

This model suggests that consumers buy services with pre-purchase expectations about the anticipated performance. The expectation level then becomes a standard against which the product is judged. If the outcome matches the expectation, confirmation occurs. Thus, a customer is either satisfied or dissatisfied as a result of a positive or negative difference between expectations and perceptions. This theory is applicable to the influence of management in CCS in universities, as students and staff are the customers who require services and will have positive or negative disconfirmation, which will lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

2.2 Literature review

For the University to change its focus and become more competitive, performance is a key driver to improving service quality (SQ). Further, its absence can act as a barrier to change and the deterioration of procurement performance in contracting strategy (Bititci et al., 2011). Measuring the performance of the contracting function yields benefits to organizations such as cost reduction, enhanced profitability, assured supplies, SQ improvements, and competitive advantage (Batenbuandrg & Versendaal, 2008).

A service provider that meets or exceeds expectations is considered to have high SQ, which can be considered in five dimensions that customers assess when evaluating service quality. These dimensions include:

- **Tangibles**: Physical features of the service, such as the appearance of the building, cleanliness of the facilities, and the appearance of the personnel.

- **Reliability and Responsiveness**: Reliability refers to the ability to provide the service as promised on a regular basis, and responsiveness involves responding to customers in a timely manner.

The call should be taken promptly and with a sense of urgency. Customer satisfaction in Contract Catering Services (CCS) in universities can be addressed by the use of SQ measurement techniques (Kucukaltan, 2007).

2.3 Customer satisfaction measurement

Customer satisfaction refers to the buyer's cognitive state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded for the sacrifice he has undergone. Customer satisfaction is an evaluation that the chosen alternative is consistent with prior beliefs with respect to that alternative (Gustafsson, Johnson & Roos, 2005). Further, it is asserted that customer satisfaction is probably a complex human process involving extensive cognitive, affective, and other undiscovered psychological and physiological dynamics.

According to Barsky and Nash (2003), customer satisfaction can be measured by expectations provided and the adapted degree used for benchmarking related experiences. However, this will not affect to an extended degree customers' expectations and, in turn, their consuming behavior. Further, Barsky and Nash (2003) allude that customer satisfaction can be measured by customer loyalty, which can be divided into loyalty behavior and loyalty attitudes. Loyalty behavior, also known as customer retention, accounts for the action of repeat purchases by consumers on a particular brand to which they associate themselves rather than switching to a competitor brand. Therefore, loyalty behavior is viewed to be directly related to sales and market share, with its measurement done by analyzing customers' sales transactions, revealing customer retention rates, and customer defection rates over varied time periods, as well as the lifetime value of each individual.

A satisfactory in-service experience enhances cumulative consumer satisfaction, which in turn enhances both attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2006). They suggest that a successful service provider tries to create and sustain high levels of consumer loyalty, which is the tangible and measurable outcome of attempts to sustain meaningful and profitable relationships with consumers.
According to Paul and Rana (2012), customers judge the quality in relation to price, which is why the perceptions, evaluation, and image of services have proved to be important factors underlying consumers’ experience of the quality of services provided. Orel and Kara (2014) concur and assert that service quality positively influences loyalty through the customer satisfaction path.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, which is preferred for gathering large-scale data at one point in time and explaining phenomena representing a wide population in various ways (Cohen, 2011). This design minimizes bias, saves money and time, and allows generalization of results to the population (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2008). It is applicable to understanding the influence of management of Contract Catering Services (CCS) on customer satisfaction in universities in Kenya, serving as a roadmap or plan to test the research objectives and hypotheses.

The study was conducted in Nairobi County, Kenya, chosen for its status as a large metropolitan city with the largest population of universities in Kenya. Nairobi’s universities vary in ownership and facilities, making it a good representation of universities in Kenya.

The population for this study comprised all universities in Nairobi County, Kenya, totaling 17 according to the Commission for Higher Education Directory (2012/2013). Given the small population size, a census approach was applied, as all respondents could be reached, and data could be collected without selecting a sample size.

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents in CCS management, including university Directors of Catering Services and CCS managers. For student respondents, Cooper and Schindler’s formula (2003) was used to calculate the sample size, resulting in 399 total students’ respondents, with approximately 23.5 students per university in Nairobi.

Questionnaires and an interview guide were employed to gather information. The questionnaire, administered to Directors of Catering, Contract Catering Managers, and students, allowed respondents adequate time to think about their responses, being focused and guided by the questions (Curvin & Slatter, 2002). The interview guide was administered to Procurement Managers for in-depth information.

Validity and reliability were ensured by basing questions on objectives and the conceptual framework, obtaining feedback from supervisors for content and face validity, and applying the Cronbach Alpha formula for reliability. The reliability coefficients for the three sets of questionnaires were satisfactory, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.866 for SQ instruments.

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21, with descriptive analysis and Pearson’s moment correlation employed to assess the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction in contract catering services in universities in Nairobi County, Kenya.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

An analytical report was presented consisting of the presentations, analysis, and discussion showing the findings in consideration of the objectives of the study. In this section, the findings of the study were presented and analyzed in the subsequent subsections.

4.2 Response rate

The response rate can be referred to as the sample proportion that took part in the study, filled, and returned questionnaires. In this study, the questionnaires were distributed to 270 university students, out of which 224 responses were received, translating into an 82.9% response rate. Questionnaires were also distributed to 15 contract catering services managers, out of which 10 responses were received, translating into a 66.66% response rate.
rate. Additionally, 15 University directors of catering were sampled, out of which 11 responses were received, translating into a 73.33% response rate. Finally, 15 university procurement managers were sampled, out of which 12 responses were received, translating to an 80% response rate. The results indicate a satisfactory return rate for data analysis procedures. In agreement, Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) articulate that a 50% return rate is adequate for data analysis, presentation, and discussions, while a return of 80% is satisfactory, as captured from the study’s response rate, which is more than 70% and can therefore be said to be satisfactory.

4.3 Respondents’ Demographic Data

The male students who participated in the study were 55% (122) and they were the majority. However, female students were 46% (102), representing the minority respondents. The study found that 63.6% (7) of the directors of catering services who participated in the study were male, while only 36.4% (4) were female managers. Additionally, the study found that 40% (4) of the CCS managers who participated in the study were male, and 60% (6) were female managers. This suggests that CCS is mostly run by male individuals, although there is inclusivity of both genders, indicating a balance in gender participation in the study on the influence of management of CCS. This finding aligns with Swar et al. (2010), who affirm that "cultural compatibility" is one of the factors influencing issues related to cooperation, trust, and mutual understanding in a contracting relationship. Cultural compatibility refers to the degree to which the customer and CCS provider can relate to each other's beliefs, values, behaviors, goals, and policies.

In the distribution of respondents by the number of years of professional experience the study found that 50% (6) of the catering managers had professional experience of over 4 years, 33% (4) had professional experience of 3 years, while 17% (2) had professional experience of two years. From the findings, it can be said that most of the contract catering managers had adequate experience, thus they could offer quality services to the satisfaction of customers.

The study also found that 18.2% (2) of the university director of catering had 2 years of professional experience in catering services, 27.3% (3) had 3 years, and 54.5% (6) had above years’ experience, presenting a similar distribution in the field of catering services. From the results, it can be said that directors had professional experience in CCS, thus they are deemed to be knowledgeable enough. This could help them in providing informed decisions and direction to CCS so that quality services could be achieved. This is in line with Karla (2011), who affirms that the success factors in contract services consist of access to appropriate creative solutions, expertise, planning, and flexible process management, and in this study, it captures the experience of the staff in CCS as appropriate and a priority.

4.4 Organizational information

The following subsequent sections analyzed and presented organizational data as per the responses presence of partially and fully contracted catering services from the selected Universities.

4.4.1 Partially and fully contracted catering services

Partially and fully contracted catering services

The respondents from the universities were asked to indicate whether their respective institutions had CCS on partially or on full-time terms. The results that 83% of the public universities partially contracted CCS, while only 17% (2) of the public universities fully contracted CCS. The result indicates that many public universities had partially contracted catering services. This aligns with Nyangau, Mbura, and Ogallah (2014), who stated that universities seasonally contracted services and release them when not required.

Regarding whether private universities fully contracted CCS, 85% (9) of the respondents were in the affirmative, while 15% (2) of the respondents said that their respective private universities partially contracted CCS. The results indicate that both private and public universities partially and fully contracted CCS in their institutions. This affirms that the most common strategies of contracting include total contracting, partial contracting, and multi-contracting, and therefore, universities need to decide which strategy and tactics of contracting to adopt
4.4.2 Service Quality in Contract Catering Services Descriptive analysis

The study sought to assess the service quality in contract catering services in universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. The majority of the respondents agreed to a great extent (33%, 74) and to a very great extent (20%, 45) that meals are served at the right temperature in the universities. It was also found that meals offered appeal to the palate, as represented by a simple majority of 33% (74) and 18% (40) of respondents who agreed to a great extent and very great extent, respectively. The study found that there was availability of a variety of meals and drinks, as supported by a majority of 34% (76) to a great extent and 20% (45) to a very great extent, whereas 19% said there was availability of variety meals and drinks to a very small extent. The findings were an indication that the services were of quality to a large extent. This concurs with Akbaba and Kilinc (2001), who stated that if the provided service does not meet or exceed the expectations of the customer, then the service quality is perceived to be low; if it exceeds the expectations, then the service quality is perceived to be high.

The study shows that student views are considered by CCS at 29% (65) and 17% (38) who agreed to a great extent and very great extent, respectively, while 20% (45) agreed that their views were considered by CCS to a very small extent. The results relate to Kihanya (2013), who found that the lack of stakeholders' involvement will be a key reason for project failure, creating unacceptable risks for contracting programs, hence making contracted operations difficult.

Again, the findings show that the dining room is clean to a great extent (34%, 76) and to a very great extent (13%, 29), while 24% (54) indicated it was to a very small extent. Further, the study revealed that contract catering staff were clean to a great extent (39%, 87) and to a very great extent (12%, 27), while 25% (56) agreed with the statement to a very small extent. Again, on average, 38% (85) and 12% (27) of respondents agreed to a great extent and very great extent, respectively, that the food service points are clean, while 21% (47) agreed to a small extent. This affirms what Akbaba and Kilinc (2001) found, that if the provided service does not meet or exceed the expectations of the customer, then the service quality is perceived to be low; if it exceeds the expectations, then the service quality is perceived to be high. In this case, the service met the expectations of many customers.

However, the study found that 35% (78), 24% (54), and 16% said that the dining rooms were crowded in the universities to a very small extent, a great extent, and some extent, respectively, while 18% (40) were not sure. The findings imply that the dining was crowded. It was also found that the dining rooms were noisy to a great extent (24%, 54), to a very small extent (32%, 72), to some extent (19%, 43), and to a very great extent (6%, 13), while 20% (45) of the respondents were not sure. The result is an indication that the dining rooms were noisy. The above findings resonate with Parasuraman et al. (1988), who found that the appearance of tools and equipment for catering services, appearance, and personnel attitude during the service provision greatly matters when it comes to customers' views on the service quality provided.

The study finally established that service quality offered meets and exceeds expectations, as supported by 36% (81) of respondents who agreed with the statement to a great extent while 13% (29) agreed to a very great extent. On the same statement, 21% (47) remained unsure, while 17% (38) agreed to a very small extent. This is supported by the SERVQUAL model, which indicates that there is a need for services to exceed expectations for the service quality to be perceived as high (Yilmaz, 2011). And from the interview, it was found that "it is rare to evaluate the contract catering services as it is not the core business of university goals."

4.4 Inferential analysis for Service Quality

To determine whether there is no service quality in contract catering services in universities, the study tested the strength of the relationship between service quality (SQ) in CCS and customer satisfaction in universities using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient analysis. Correlation was denoted as "R," and it took a range of values from -1 to +1. A value of 0 denoted that there was no association between the two variables. A value greater than +1 indicated a positive association; that is, as the value of one variable increased, so did the value of the other variable. A value less than -1 indicated a negative association; that is, as the value of one variable increased, the value of the other variable decreased. The results are presented in table below.
The correlation results above show that quality service is positively related to customer satisfaction with a Pearson correlation of 0.986, with a statistical significance of 0.000. This is because the statistical significance level is less than 0.01. The findings, therefore, imply that as service quality increases, so does customer satisfaction. In support, Parasuraman et al. (1988) built the SERVQUAL model and argue that the presence of service quality improves customer satisfaction.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS THE SERVICE QUALITY &CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Regarding the effect of SQ on customer satisfaction in CCS, the study established that: Meals were served at the right temperature, with 69% of respondents agreeing at very small extent, great extent, and very great extent; Meals offered appealed to the palate of the customers, with 68% of respondents agreeing at very small extent, great extent, and very great extent; There was availability of a variety of meals and drinks, with 68% of respondents agreeing at very small extent, great extent, and very great extent; Student views were considered by CCS, with 66% of respondents agreeing at very small extent, great extent, and very great extent; CCS staff were clean, with 76% of respondents agreeing at very small extent, great extent, and very great extent; The food service points were clean in the majority of the universities, with 71% of respondents agreeing at very small extent, great extent, and very great extent; The dining rooms in the universities were crowded, as indicated by 66% of respondents; The dining rooms in most universities were noisy, as indicated by 62% of respondents; and SQ offered met and exceeded expectations, with 66% of respondents agreeing at very small extent, great extent, and very great extent.

From the correlation results, it shows that quality service is positively related to customer satisfaction, with a Pearson correlation of 0.986 and a statistical significance of 0.000. This is because the statistical significance level is less than 0.01. The findings, therefore, imply that as SQ increases, so does customer satisfaction.

5.2 Conclusions

The study concludes that, despite the challenges identified, meals were served at the right temperature in the universities. Additionally, meals offered appealed to the palate of the customers, there was availability of a variety of meals and drinks in the universities, students’ views were considered by CCS team, and the dining rooms were clean. CCS staff were also perceived as clean, and the food service points were clean in the universities. Furthermore, the study found that the services’ quality offered met and exceeded expectations. However, despite the positive feedback from respondents on service, it was also concluded that the dining rooms in the universities were crowded and noisy.
6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

I. The CCS provider should be aware of the service quality (SQ) not only within their organization but also among competitors offering similar services. It is crucial to consider factors like pricing, advantages, and bidding competitions. Bidding competitions can significantly impact budgeting in catering firms, potentially leading to underpaid workers. This, in turn, may result in demotivation and lower service quality.

II. To enhance service quality, there is a need to motivate employees through better pay. Adequate compensation can lead to improved job satisfaction and performance, positively influencing the perception of customers towards the CCS Company. Motivated employees are more likely to deliver higher service quality, creating a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

III. The CCS provider should understand that maintaining a positive image requires more than just words and advertisements. Fulfilling promises made to customers during the contract is essential for building and sustaining a positive reputation. Consistent delivery on commitments contributes to long-term customer satisfaction.

IV. University Support: Universities should take an active role in ensuring that the catering department is well-equipped with facilities that guarantee service quality. Providing necessary resources and support will contribute to the overall enhancement of service quality and, consequently, customer satisfaction.

6.2 Further studies

The study recommends the following:

I. Extend Research Scope: Similar studies should be conducted at other universities and colleges in Kenya. This expansion aims to evaluate the role of CCS in universities' financial performance beyond Nairobi County, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the impact.

II. The study suggests conducting similar research in other African countries. This comparative analysis would investigate whether the challenges in managing CCS and their impact on customer satisfaction observed in Nairobi are replicated in institutions worldwide. This cross-cultural exploration can contribute to a broader perspective on the subject.

III. The study recommends incorporating alternative data collection methods, such as focus group sessions. These sessions can be designed to extract respondents' experiences and stress factors, providing a deeper insight into their genuine ideas and feelings regarding the topic under discussion. This diversified approach may yield richer and more nuanced findings.

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