

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES (EAPS) AND QUALITY OF WORK LIFE IN A PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATION: BIOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES

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## Abstract

This study aims to determine biographical influences on facets of employee assistance programmes (EAPs) and the quality of work life of employees in a public sector organization. Employee perceptions were conducted via questionnaire distribution and the data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. A sample 85 employees was drawn using the stratified random sampling. Significant differences surfaced with the length of service and with the three components of the study, that is, the programme on stress-related problems, the programme on personal issues and, mentoring programmes. Also, a significant difference emerged for the programme for substance abuse and the highest educational level. The literature review and the results highlight a compelling need for quality of work life and for spearheading EAPs programmes effectively in organizations.

**Keywords:** Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), Quality of work life, Biographical Variables, Organizational Productivity

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## 1 Introduction

Today's organizational dilemmas relating to employee involvement and organizational performance includes participation and workplace commitment. Emerging trends such as, technological innovation, strategic management and quality of work life are compelling elements in the work environment. Organizations need to pay increasing attention to employees' stress related health problem which translates to financial cost (Johnson, Duxbury & Higgins, 1997; Frone, Russel, & Cooper, 1997 cited in Sinha, 2012). In a work environment, people seek self-realization, status, physical and mental stimulation, and socialization too.

Considering today's challenge of dynamism in today's work environment, lower absenteeism, reduced healthcare costs and productivity are the core focus. Hence, intervention programmes that are employer sponsored is the answer to this dilemma. Interventions, such as, the Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) identify obstacles, solve problems, manage both work stress and personal stress factors, amongst others. EAPs mitigate the impact of employee problems and helps employees to make lifestyle choices. These employer sponsored programmes/services are designed to assist organizations with performance and productivity and in identifying and solving personal issues of employees which include drug abuse, alcoholism, work life balance and HIV/AIDS (EAPS, 2010), as well as legal advice, parental issues, elderly care and

crisis situations, hence keeping the work ethic together. It is a health management intervention that has links with alcoholism rehabilitation, including treatment for substance dependency, addiction, therapy and counselling for personal problems, such as marital and financial problems, amongst others (Swanepoel, Erasmus & Schenk, 2010).

The rationale of EAPs is based on early identification and intervention; providing education and prevention, amongst others (Berridge, Cooper, & Highley-Marchington, 1997). EAPs are costly, yet beneficial in the long run with return on investment in instituting such programmes. Managerial functions include *inter alia*, identifying employees' behavioural problems and the appropriate usage of constructive criticism, (Roman & Blum, 1988). The effective utilization of employees skills and competences in a knowledge-based economy shows evidence of labour productivity and overall performance.

On the other hand, quality of work life (QWL) increases employee satisfaction and creates a sense of fulfilment for employees by keeping the organization intact with job satisfaction, increased productivity, growth and efficiency. A greater level of the quality of work life is essential to attract and retain workers (Sandrick, 2003); whereas Diener (2000) opines that the results of happily motivated employees is the priority for progressive organizations. In line with this, Rose, Beh, Uli and Idris (2006) assert that QWL is a way of life or a set of principles which ensures that individuals are reliable, accountable and proficient in

contributing positively to the organization. High quality work is respectable, meaningful, life-enhancing, worker-centred, and offers benefits to employers (Lowe, 2000). As employees enjoy their work, progress is often positive and motivated during performance. QWL is understood and observed in diverse ways with an approach of being rational around people, duties and organizations. This includes management and supervisory style; independence and self-sufficiency for decision making on the job; adequate physical surroundings; occupation safety; and significant tasks (Jayakumar & Kalaiselvi, 2012). Its distinctive fundamentals are (i) apprehension on the effect of workload on people as well as on organizational effectiveness, and (ii) the impression of contribution in organizational problem-solving and resolution making (Nadler & Lawler, 2001). Additionally, QWL is viewed from the perspective of happiness while others view it as an incentive (Mahapatra, 2011). Whilst work-family balance predicts well-being and the overall quality of life (Fisher, 2002; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003) the failure to achieve balance is associated with reduced job and life satisfaction (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). Flexible work policies addresses problems associated with long working days and excessive overtime and in both QWL and work life balance. QWL affects workers' overall sense of well-being and contentment, including ultimate worker productivity.

Getting along well with co-workers and having supportive managers contributes immensely to employees quality of work life. In addition, physical working factors such as, temperature, humidity, ventilation, illumination, and noise can have a significant impact on worker performance in terms of productivity, quality of output, and accidents. Whilst flexible work arrangement, such as, flexitime and telecommuting is a work structure which adjusts the time and place for employees, it enhances efficiency by scheduling activities to suit the employee (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003). Flexitime sets specific parameters by supervisory staff. Workers from other working environments have flexible schedules from a variety of locations and even share jobs (Edney, 2014). The arrangements are acceptable, beneficial especially for parents who have greater demands, hence needing time and energy to balance their numerous roles (Sinha, 2012). Flexible work arrangements blur the boundaries with work and family and increases conflict (Desrochers, Hilton, & Larwood, 2005 cited in Sinha, 2012) but in the long-run it is beneficial to both employers and employees as goals are met. An organized employee will have the know-how of time management too.

Whilst job redesign restructures the elements of a job, such as tasks, duties and responsibilities (Cappelli & Peter, 2008); it enhances the quality of work-life, cumulative organisational and employees productivity, thus creating a sense of belongingness, and creating a person-job fit (Neeresh, 2011). Job redesigning raises

the value of the position to the organisation, reduces individual and organisational risk leading to better organizational efficiency and improved outcomes from employees (Cappelli & Peter, 2008). According to Josephson (2014), the employer is obliged to make business decisions in a manner that demonstrates concern for and seeks to advance the welfare of employees. This includes treating employees respectfully, to pay them fairly and provide good working conditions. Gibb (2001) recommends that real HRM is expected to be capable of knowing the uppermost practice.

The findings of Gibb (2001) confirm that some organizations do not prioritize on best practice which involves the relationship of both employer and employee. When the relationship is mutual, the service delivery, thus showing growth and progress. Employees that are involved in the mentoring programme need to take cognizance of the organizational culture and ethics (Martins, 2000). Organizations have to validate the need for such mentoring programmes. Motives for a mentoring programme relate to the organization's goals and, mentors with effective skills need to be tasked with this function of indicating to employees the expectations of work and personal life.

In order for organizations to ensure that employee well-being is a priority in ensuring productivity and leading to excellent service delivery, a programme on personal issues is the key to also address financial problems, legal problems, marital issues and emotional well-being.

Some employers have opted for increasing their EAPs by extending services to family members. Such programmes which are known as Employee and Family Assistance Programmes (EFAPs) offer services to assist family members dealing with such issues. Job structure and the work environment can have an encouraging or discouraging effect on domestic life, whereas the traits of an employee's family condition can disturb the employee's approach towards his or her duties (Byron, 2005). With dependence, substance abuse can have ripple effects that impacts on peoples' lives. A programme for substance abuse is essential, considering alcoholism and drug abuse that affects people negatively, including their work performance and behaviour; and managerial staff must take note of confidential and privacy issues (Swanepoel *et al.* 2010). The author highlights that educational interventions and health awareness campaigns include substance warnings. These programmes are costly, yet it is an investment in the long-term. The majority of EAP professionals consider prevention to be an essential component and about one-third of EAPs already provide prevention-oriented services to employees and organizations (Bennett & Attridge, 2008). With focus on alcoholism and substance abuse programmes, the reward is promising in terms of producing recovery. It is beneficial with cost effectiveness and focus on performance, productivity and end results.

Occupational health has addressed work-related stress continuously (Swanepoel *et al.* 2010). External factors, such as, the fluctuating economy and globalization; and internal factors, such as hard driving supervisors and meeting deadlines are contributory factors. Absenteeism is prevalent due to stress, psychological matters (depression), peak-time traffic challenges and personal factors that infiltrate to the work environment (Swanepoel *et al.* 2010). Programmes for stress-related problems can assist physical and psychological health workers who are stressed. In order to be effective, this must transfer in time from treatment to prevention. Organizations are encouraged to ensure that programmes for stress related problems are implemented to overcome unnecessary stress that will affect employee performance.

HIV/AIDS programmes main focus is on both prevention and service strategies to large numbers of men and women of reproductive age in a uniquely accessible and structured environment (Dollar & Kraay, 2001). Corporate social responsibility reflects that whilst serving their business interest managers are obliged to protect the interests of society so that the quality of life is improved (Smit, 2007 cited in Swanepoel *et al.* 2010). Workplace programmes share information, influence attitudes, reinforce behaviour change and implement interventions with a captive audience. In addition to education programmes and creating awareness, an HIV/AIDs programme addressing critical issues on a continuous basis is essential to keep employees informed.

## 2 Objectives of the study

- To determine the influence of biographical variables (age, gender, race, length of service, position in company, highest education) on the quality of work life of employees in a public sector organization.
- To determine the influence of biographical variables (age, gender, race, length of service, position in company, highest education) on employee assistance programmes.
- To determine the extent to which the sub-dimensions of EAPs (programme for stress related problems, counselling programme for HIV/AIDS, programme for substance abuse, programme for family support and programme on personal issues) and the sub-dimensions of quality of work life (mentoring programmes, employer/worker relationships, physical working conditions, job redesign and flexible working arrangements) influences the key dimensions of the study.

## 3 Methodology

The study utilized a survey design.

## 3.1 Respondents

The population comprised of all employees in a public sector organization in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. The sample of 85 subjects (managers, supervisors and employees) was drawn using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure proportionate representation from the strata of the designated groups of interest. In terms of the composition, 3.5% consisted of managers, 11.8% were supervisors and 84.7% were employees. Of the total sample, 47.1% were male and 52.9% were female. In terms of age, 12.9% were under 25 years, 30.6% were between 25-34 years, 34.1% were between 35 and 44 years, and 22.4% were 45 years and above. In terms of race groups, 1.2% were White employees, 0% were Coloured, 4.7% were Indian and 94.1% were Black. Furthermore, 24.7% were 0-5 years in the organization, 44.7% were 6-10 years, 12.9% were 11-15 years, 13.0% were 16-20 years, and 4.7% were 21 years and over in this organization.

## 3.2 Measuring instrument

Data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire consisting of two sections. Section A constitutes the biographical data, which was measured using a nominal scale with pre-coded option categories. Section B comprised of 50 items relating to EAPs and quality of work life, and was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree/nor disagree (3), agree (4) to strongly agree (5).

### 3.2.1 Measures

The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. The overall alpha coefficient was 0.837 for EAPs indicating internal consistency and reliability; and also 0.889 for quality of work life, hence indicating internal consistency and reliability.

### 3.2.2 Statistical analysis

Percentages, mean analyses and standard deviations were utilized to determine biographical influences on EAPs and quality of work life. Inferential statistics included analysis of variance, Post-hoc Scheffe's test, t-test and reliability.

## 4 Results

Employees were required to respond to the items assessing EAPs and quality of work life using the 5 point Likert scale, which were analysed using descriptive statistics (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics: key dimensions of Employee Assistance Programmes and Quality of Work life

Dimension	Mean	95 % Confidence Interval		Variance	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound				
<b>Employee Assistance Programmes</b>							
Programme for stress related problems	2.995	2.862	3.129	0.385	0.6203	1.80	5.00
Counseling programme for HIV/AIDS	2.960	2.829	3.091	0.366	0.6054	1.60	5.00
Programme for substance abuse	3.506	3.366	3.646	0.422	0.6500	1.80	5.00
Programme for family support	3.080	2.972	3.188	0.250	0.4997	1.40	5.00
Programme on personal issues	2.859	2.736	2.982	0.326	0.5706	1.40	5.00
<b>Quality of Work life</b>							
Mentoring programmes	2.656	2.493	2.820	0.574	0.7576	1.00	5.00
Employer/worker relationships	2.807	2.629	2.985	0.684	0.8272	1.00	5.00
Physical working conditions	2.666	2.512	2.820	0.511	0.7147	1.00	5.00
Job redesign	3.021	2.915	3.127	0.242	0.4919	1.40	5.00
Flexible work arrangements	3.468	3.321	3.616	0.467	0.6835	2.00	5.00

Table 1 indicates that the dimensions relating to employee perceptions on employee assistance programmes in this organization are occurring at varying degrees. Based on mean analyses, the attainment of the dimensions of employee assistance programmes are as follows in descending order: programme for substance abuse (mean = 3.506), programme for family support (mean = 3.080), programme for stress related problems (mean = 2.995), counseling programme for HIV/AIDS (mean = 2.960) and, programme on personal issues (mean = 2.859).

Clearly, for each of the dimensions there is room for improvement as evidenced when the mean score value is compared against a maximum attainable score of 5. This implies that the sub-dimension of the programme for substance abuse require the least amount of attention as opposed to the programme on personal issues which require greater attention in this organization. Hence, employee perceptions of the programme for substance abuse in this organization are fairly high as little improvement is required in this area. However, very little improvement is required with the programme for family support. Furthermore, improvement is needed for the programmes for stress related problems and HIV/AIDS.

The dimensions relating to employee perceptions on the quality of work life in this organization are occurring at varying degrees. Based on mean analyses, the attainment of the dimensions of the

quality of work life are: flexible working arrangements (mean = 3.468), job redesign (mean = 3.021), employer/worker relationships (mean = 2.807), physical working conditions (mean = 2.666) and, mentoring programmes (mean = 2.656).

The results show that for each of the dimensions there is room for improvement when compared against a maximum attainable score of 5. The implication is that the sub-dimension of flexible working arrangements require the least amount of attention as opposed to the mentoring programme which require greater attention in this organization. Employee perceptions of flexible working arrangements are fairly high as little improvement is required in this area. However, little improvement is required with job redesign in comparison to employer/worker relationship and physical working conditions where greater improvement is required.

#### 4.1 Hypothesis 1

There is a significant difference in employees' perceptions varying in biographical profiles (age, gender, race, length of service, position in company, highest education) regarding each of the dimensions and sub dimensions of employee assistance programmes, respectively.

**Table 2.** Analysis of variance (ANOVA): Differences in perceptions of Employee Assistance Programmes based on biographical profile

Biographi-cal variables	Programme for stress related problems		Counseling programme for HIV/AIDS		Programme for substance abuse		Programme for family support		Programme on personal issues	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	f	p	F	P
Age		0.09		0.27		0.26		0.80		0.31
Gender		0.34		0.26		0.22		0.69		0.46
Race		0.72		0.79		0.71		0.61		0.31
Length of service		0.02*		0.11		0.24		0.91		0.27*
Position in company		0.63		0.40		0.99		0.84		0.94
Highest education		0.47		0.28		0.40*		0.43		0.29

Note: \*p<0.05

Table 2 indicates that there is a significant difference in staff perceptions on the programme for stress related problem dimension and also the programme on personal issues amongst employees varying in length of service at the 5% level of significance. In order to determine exactly where difference lie, the Post Hoc Scheffe's test was

conducted. Table 2 also indicates that there is a significant difference in staff perceptions on the programme for substance abuse amongst employees with the various levels of education. In order to determine where the differences lie, the Post Hoc Scheffe's test was conducted.

**Table 3.** Post Hoc Scheffe's Test: Employee Assistance Programmes

Sub-dimensions of Employee Assistance Programmes	Length of service	Mean	Standard Deviation
Programme for stress related problems	0-5 years	2.552	0.4557
	6-10 years	3.147	0.6554
	11-15 years	3.309	0.5009
	16-20 years	3.055	0.5803
	21 years and over	2.850	0.2517
Programme on personal issues	0-5 years	2.590	0.4358
	6-10 years	2.858	0.5787
	11-15 years	2.855	0.3698
	16-20 years	3.291	0.6833
	21 years and over	3.100	0.6633

Table 3 indicates that employees who were 11-15 years in the organization and 6-10 years have high perceptions on the effect of the programme for stress related problems, followed by those who were 16-20. Employees who were 21 years and over in the company have a low perception on the organisation for stress related problems negligibly followed by those who were 0-5 years in the company. Employees who were 16-20 years in the organisation and 21 years and over have high perceptions on the effect of the programme on personal issues. Employees who were 6-10 years in the organisation and those who were 11-15 years have low perceptions

on the programme on personal issues, negligibly followed by those who were 0-5 years in the company. The other biographical variables (age, gender, race, position in company and highest education) did not influence staff perceptions on the programme for stress related problems.

Furthermore, Table 4 indicates that employees who have diploma/certificate, matric and Standard 8 to 10 have high perceptions of the effect of the programme for substance abuse, followed by lower perceptions of those who have undergraduate degrees and post graduate degrees.

**Table 4.** Post Hoc Scheffe's Test: Employee Assistance Programmes

Sub-dimensions of Employee Assistance Programmes	Highest education	Mean	Standard Deviation
Programme for substance abuse	Std 8 to 10	3.400	0.5164
	Matric	3.495	0.7583
	Diploma/certificate	3.692	0.6175
	Undergrad Degree	3.280	0.6197
	Post grad Degree	3.000	0.5060

**Table 5.** T-test: Dimensions and sub-dimensions of Employee Assistance Programmes and Gender

Dimensions and Sub-dimensions of Employee Assistance Programmes	Equal Variances Assumed		
	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	p
Programme for stress related problems	-0.957	85	0.339
Counseling programme for HIV/AIDs	-1.115	85	0.265
Programme for substance abuse	-1.237	85	0.216
Programme for family support	-0.397	85	0.692
Programme on personal issues	-0.739	85	0.460

Note: \*p<0.05

Table 5 indicates that there is no significant difference in the dimension and sub dimension of employee assistance programmes between male and female groups at the 5% level of significance.

Hence, Hypothesis 1 may be partially accepted.

#### 4.2 Hypothesis 2

There is a significant difference in employees' perceptions varying in biographical profiles (age, gender, race, length of service, position in company, highest education) regarding each of the dimensions and sub dimensions of quality of work life, respectively.

**Table 6.** Analysis of variance (ANOVA): Differences in perceptions of Quality of Work life based on biographical profile

Biographical Variables	Mentoring programmes		Employer/worker relationships		Physical working conditions		Job redesign		Flexible working arrangements	
	F	P	F	P	F	p	f	p	F	p
Age		0.41		0.71		0.74		0.94		0.18
Gender		0.95		0.99		0.68		0.87		0.19
Race		0.44		0.34		0.29		0.92		0.90
Length of service		0.04*		0.48		0.50		0.85		0.15
Position in company		0.20		0.77		0.52		0.33		0.33
Highest education		0.67		0.80		0.31		0.71		0.74

Note: \*p<0.05

Table 6 indicates that there is a significant difference in staff perceptions on the mentoring programmes dimension and amongst employees varying in length of service at the 5% level of

significance. In order to determine exactly where difference lie, the Post Hoc Scheffe's test was conducted.

**Table 7.** Post Hoc Scheffe's Test: Quality of work life

Sub-dimension of Quality of work life	Length of service	Mean	Standard Deviation
Mentoring programmes	0-5 years	2.257	0.7460
	6-10 years	2.689	0.7348
	11-15 years	2.745	0.8395
	16-20 years	3.200	0.5138
	21 years and over	2.700	0.4761

Table 7 indicates that employees who were 16-20 years in the organization perceive the mentoring programmes, favourably followed by employees who are 11-15 years and 21 years and over, including

employees who are 6-10 years. Employees who are 0-5 years have poor perceptions on the mentoring programmes in this organization.

**Table 8.** T-test: Dimensions and sub-dimensions of Quality of work life and Gender

Dimensions and Sub-dimensions of quality of work life	Equal Variances Assumed		
	t-test for Equality of Means		
	T	Df	P
Mentoring programmes	-0.063	85	0.950
Employer/worker relationships	-1.289	85	0.198
Physical working conditions	-0.417	85	0.677
Job redesign	-0.162	85	0.871
Flexible working arrangements	-1.309	85	0.191

Note: \*p<0.05

Table 8 indicates that there is no significant difference in the dimension and sub-dimensions of quality of work life between male and female groups at the 5% level of significance.

Hence, Hypothesis 2 may be partially accepted

**Table 9.** Reliability

Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha
0.837

Table 9 indicates that items in the employee assistance programmes questionnaire have internal consistency and is very reliable.

**Table 10.** Reliability

Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha
0.889

Table 10 indicates that items in the quality of work life questionnaire have internal consistency and is very reliable.

## 5 Interpretation and recommendations

The demographics of the sample for the study were analyzed. Amongst the 85 participants, 40 (47.1%) were male and 45 (52.9%) were female; followed by 1 (1.2%) White employee, 0 (0.0%) Coloured employees, 4 (4.7%) Indian, and lastly 80 (94.1%) Black employees.

With regard to the sub-dimension of EAPs, the responses to the study indicate that there is a significant difference in the programme for stress-related problems and length of service. The responses in the study indicate that employees who are 11 to 15 years in the organization and 6 to 10 years have high perceptions of the effect of the programme for stress-related problems, followed by those who were 16 to 20 years. Employees who were 0 to 5 years in the company have low perceptions of the programme for stress-related problems, negligibly followed by those who were 21 years and over in the company. Elahi and Apooa (2011) state that individuals recognize themselves by their job or occupation as a job is the major focus of their energy, including recognition of

their period served. There is also a significant difference with the programme on personal issues and length of service. Employees who were 16 to 20 years in the organization and 21 years and over have high perceptions of the effect of the programme on personal issues. Employees who were 6 to 10 years in the organization and those who were 11 to 15 years have lower perceptions of the programme on personal issues, negligibly followed by those who were 0 to 5 years in the company. The study also indicates that there is a significant difference for the programme for substance abuse and the highest educational level. Employees who had diploma/certificate, matric and Standard 8 to 10 in the organization have high perceptions of the effect of the programme for substance abuse. This is followed by lower perceptions of employees who have undergraduate degrees and post graduate degrees relating to the programme for substance abuse. The view of the HR Council (2011) regarding programmes on personal issues and length of service is that employee recognition contributes to employees knowing that their hard work is valued.

The other biographical variables age, gender, race, and position in company did not influence staff perceptions on the other sub-dimensions of EAPs, that is, programme for stress related problems, counselling programme for HIV/AIDS, programme for substance abuse, programme for family support and programme on personal issues.

With regard to the quality of work life dimension, the responses indicate that there is a significant difference in mentoring programmes and length of service. The responses in the study indicate that employees who are 16 to 20 years in the organization perceive the mentoring programmes favourably, followed by employees who are 11 to 15 years and 21 years and over. Employees who are 6 to 10 years have low perceptions of the mentoring programme, negligibly followed by these employees who are 0 to 5 years in the organization. The view of the HR Colorado report (2010) regarding mentoring programmes and length of service is that mentoring programmes provide succession planning strategies, including motivating employees to recognize their

value in the organization, considering the period that they worked.

The other biographical variables age, gender, race, position in company and highest education did not influence staff perceptions on mentoring programmes, employer/worker relationships, physical working conditions, job redesign and flexible working arrangements.

Computations regarding t-tests were conducted to determine differences with male and female employees and no significant differences emerged with the dimensions of EAPs and quality of work life.

## 6 Conclusion

Today's public service organizations are pressured to provide efficient services and to balance the work-life demands amidst the turmoil that prevails. The significant differences show that employees' length of service surfaced with the programme on stress-related problems, the programme on personal issues and, mentoring programmes. Also, a significant difference emerged for the programme for substance abuse and the highest educational level. Clearly, employees years of service in the organization is fundamental when determining biographical data that relate to the key variables of the study. Return on investment and a better quality of life are critical components for any organization that needs to strengthen the workplace for the success of services, performance and end results.

## 7 Recommendations for future research

The results of the study outline a guide for management to create a work environment that is conducive for employee well-being. Future research embarking on a comparative nature of similar organizations may surface with the remaining biographical influences on EAPs and quality of work life. In the same light, a similar study can be conducted with other municipalities in the same region or at a national level.

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