# WORK-LIFE BALANCE TO DECREASE WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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#### Abstract

This study aims to review the support of work-life balance and work-from-home to work-family conflict. The research method was conducted through a survey of 110 employees from several cities in Indonesia. The Data obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed with the Structural Equation Modeling approach. The analysis tool used in this research is Lisrel. The research results found that work-from-home has an effect on work-life balance, and work-life balance can decrease work-family conflict. Furthermore, work-from-home is not able to directly decrease work-family conflict. The research found that work-family conflict can be indirectly controlled by work-from-home through the mediation of work-life balance. The importance of work-life balance in mediating work-from-home and work-family conflict raises a mediation model that is a mediation model of work-life balance to decrease work-family conflict. This information is useful for companies in evaluating work-family conflict through the implementation of work-from-home.

**Keywords**: work-from-home; work-life balance; work-family conflict; covid-19; pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

Conflict is not avoidable and always exists in every context of human interaction and human life (Maitlo et al., 2012). The conflict that happens between work matters and family life is a topic widely researched in organizational behavior, where work-family conflict (WFC) becomes the most accessible research (Netemeyer et al., 1996). The work and family roles conflict has spawned the interest of a rising number of work and family scholars (Frone & Russel, 1992). Interference between work and family is encountered by many workforces (Schieman et al., 2009) when they work in family time that will negatively impact the quality of family life (Peters et al., 2009). Responsibilities to work and families carried out at work time will cause conflicts (Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019). Work and family role overlap occurs when work is carried out. Therefore, this research is necessary to evaluate the implementation of Work-from-Home (WFH) and its effect on WFC.

Pandemic Covid-19 is occurring around the world, especially in Indonesia, and affects on dynamics of work. Social distancing is enforced to reduce the spread of viruses during a pandemic (Faherty et al., 2019). The pandemic makes governments decide to lock down and adopt WFH (Thamrin et al., 2022). The company also assigns employees to conduct WFH. In some countries, WFH has been practiced by many companies (Dizaho et al., 2017), and even 20% of workers have switched to WFH (Gareis, 2002).

Work remotely or work that is not done at the job site is usually a way out when the work is not possible to do in the office (Mungkasa, 2020). This telework occurred in Indonesia, where the WFH became a new work arrangement undertaken by most companies due to pandemic Covid-19 which began in early March 2020. Employees in Indonesia do not commonly do WFH. 93.6% of respondents stated that WFH has just been implemented in their companies during the pandemic. WFH is a novel experience for numerous working professionals (Singha & Deemed, 2021).WFH during a pandemic becomes a new activity that causes changes in routine and the dynamics of work. WFH is being held until the pandemic is believed to have passed, allowing offices to reopen and return to normal (Thamrin et al., 2022).

There are three common forms of telework that are home-based telework, center-based telework, and mobile-based telework (Drobnjak & Jereb, 2007). Home-based telework is known as WFH. WFH is paid work mostly done at home and usually lasts at least 20 hours a week (Crosbie & Moore, 2004).

WFH, flextime, and part-time work are forms of flexible work most widely done by employees, whereas WFH is work that is regularly done from home-based for entirely working times or some part of them (Tipping et al., 2012). WFH has long been implemented by many companies (Dizaho et al., 2017) and has already been applied and researched in several countries such as the Netherlands (Peters et al., 2009), the United Kingdom (Crosbie & Moore, 2004), and Australia (Zenkteler et al., 2019). WFH can be an alternative to be applied in the public sector, large companies, and other work sectors where employees are responsible for their work (Felstead et al., 2002).

How to achieve the work and life balance has become a concern academically and politically, where WFH is proposed as a way to improve WLB (Crosbie & Moore, 2004). WFH becomes an effective strategic approach to achieving WLB (Dizaho et al., 2017). Besides, WFH has also been proposed as part of a family-friendly policy (Moore, 2006). In previous research was said that WFH has a close correlation with the WLB (Peters et al., 2009), (Tipping et al., 2012), (Irfan & Azmi, 2015), (Dizaho et al., 2017).

WFH has positive impacts such as sufficient family time, increased WLB, and more comfortable in managing family and child conditions; and has also negative impacts such as decreased salary received, reduced interaction with coworkers, blurred boundaries between work and home, and increased workload (Tipping et al., 2012). The purpose of WFH is to reduce WFC (Dizaho et al., 2017). Earlier research also states that WFH relates to WFC (Peters et al., 2009), (Allen et al., 2013). The indicators for assessing WFH are the place of work, use of ICT, duration of telework, dan teleworker's connection to the employer (Drobnjak & Jereb, 2007), (Sullivan, 2003), (Haddon & Brynin, 2005), (Garrett & Danziger, 2007).

WFH which is implemented without good planning will cause an impact on work patterns, work outcomes, and employee life balance. WFH conducted during the pandemic in Indonesia which is carried out quickly, suddenly, and massively is a reason to make WFH an essential and interesting topic to be examined in this research, and whether will be a new trend or policy in the future that needs to be considered for the government and companies.

Working in family time will cause a troublesome effect on the level of family life (Peters et al., 2009). The adverse effects that occur in the life of family and work have become an exciting topic in previous research, particularly about the influence of WFH on WFC (S. Geurts et al., 2002). WFH can bring about a decrease in WFC quantities (Peters et al., 2009), or vice versa WFH will increase WFC due to employees' inability to balance different roles relating to work and family (Maruyama et al., 2009). WFH during a pandemic can be tested, to whether it will cause the WFC or lower the WFC.

WFC is a common occurrence in today's economies (Khalid, 2021). The conflict between family life and work is a widely researched topic in organizational behavior study (Netemeyer et al., 1996). Employees will perceive conflict when they combine work and family life which potentially cause stress, unhappiness, and health disorder (Peters et al., 2009). Failure to achieve work-family balance will increase WFC (Eng et al., 2010).

The WFC theory is described as a type of conflict between roles in which pressure from one position makes fulfilling another position more difficult (Khalid, 2021), (J. H. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Daily, the adult is involved in maintaining family duties and maintaining employment activities which cause a conflict between job and family life (Tuffour et al., 2021). In earlier studies, it was mentioned that WFC has correlated with WLB (Dizaho et al., 2017), (Atif Sheikh et al., 2018). The higher the WFC experienced by employees, the lower the employees' satisfaction with their WLB (Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019). Many companies have not implemented appropriate strategies for decreasing WFC and increasing (Dizaho et al., 2017). The company must support and help employees in managing their work and life so that it can reduce WFC and increase WLB (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016).

WFC is also related to WFH, where in previous studies it was explained that WFH negatively impacts WFC (Peters et al., 2009). The assessment is often evaluated from WFC is related to time-based conflict, strain-based conflict dan behavior-based conflict (J. H. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). However, this study only assesses two dimensions, time-based conflict dan strain-based conflict (Eng et al., 2010), (S. A. E. Geurts et al., 2005).

In addition to the relation between the WFH and WFC, as shown above, WFH also affects employees' Work-Life-Balance (WLB) effectively (Maruyama et al., 2009). It is also the main focus of previous research about the potential influence of WFH on WLB (Moore, 2006). It was stated in previous studies that employees whose majority of working hours were performed with WFH would increase WLB than employees running their job in the workplace (Maruyama et al., 2009). WFH becomes vital in handling and achieving WLB (Dizaho et al., 2017). WLB and WFH are frequently discussed among lawmakers and business leaders (Felstead et al., 2002). Also, the government has to campaign the benefits of flexible work for workers in achieving WLB (Tipping et al., 2012) and also suggest to the company that WLB can be achieved by WFH (Crosbie & Moore, 2004). The company should also implement this flexible work policy to achieve the WLB of workers (Allen, 2001), (Susan, 2003). The effectiveness of WFH implementation during the pandemic in Indonesia needs to be examined in creating WLB and maintaining the productivity of employees.

Family life and work-life are important for a human being (Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019). The balance between family life, personal life, and work-life becomes crucial to consider (Byron, 2005), (Eby et al., 2005). It needs an attempt to stabilize work life and personal life (Crosbie & Moore, 2004). An essential element in getting a balance between family life and work-life is WLB (Dizaho et al., 2017). WLB is a related issue to the work environment (Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019) and has been a concern for almost all sectors (Irfan & Azmi, 2015). WLB is a critical corporate response aimed at reducing employee worry and stress while also improving staff performance (Medina & Prieto, 2022).

WLB is a major concern for all employees, regardless of their age, gender, degree of education, family structure, or occupation (Yu et al., 2022). WLB is a concept that includes two-sided priorities between work and life, where WLB can be achieved if individuals can meet all work and family needs (Irfan & Azmi, 2015). If the involvement among work life, personal life, and family life reaches balance, it can be said that employees will have an engagement balance which is one aspect of WLB (Puspitasari & Ratnaningsih, 2019). WLB is also defined as a personal involvement and contentment in his or her role at work and in the family (Jeffrey H. Greenhaus et al., 2003).

WLB provides benefits for employees, including increasing leisure and family time, reducing boredom, improving psychological and emotional health, and reducing WFC (Dizaho et al., 2017). The failure to achieve WLB will increase WFC (Eng et al., 2010). The previous study also states that WLB showed a strong negative influence on WFC (Atif Sheikh et al., 2018). WLB can be assessed from three criteria, namely time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance (Jeffrey H. Greenhaus et al., 2003), (Hudson, 2005).

The balance between family life and work is crucial (Byron, 2005), (Eby et al., 2005) because family and work are two important things in life (Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019). WLB is a concern related to the workplace (Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019) and has gained attention in many sectors (Irfan & Azmi, 2015). WLB is an essential element in maintaining and achieving the balance between work and individual life (Dizaho et al., 2017), so it takes special attention to reach the WLB (Crosbie & Moore, 2004). The failure at achieving WLB can lead to a rise in WFC (Eng et al., 2010). The higher WFC experienced by employees, the lower the employees' satisfaction with their WLB (Owolabi & Ajibose, 2019). Companies should be able to implement appropriate strategies to minimize WFC and reach WLB (Dizaho et al., 2017), help employees and support them in overcoming conflicts that occur when managing their work and other lives (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016). Effective company support will cause a positive reaction from employees, so hopefully will be able to decrease WFC and increase WLB (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016).

Reviewing the previous study, it is assumed that WFH has an impact on WLB. Besides, it is also assumed that WFH has a negative impact on WFC, as well as the support the correlation between WLB and WFC. The focus of this research is to examine WFH during the pandemic in Indonesia will affect the WLB and WFC of employees. Many factors can affect the WFC. It should get attention from the company as well as the government as a policymaker, so that employee life balance can be achieved. Reviewing the phenomenon of WFC related to WLB and WFH, this research focuses on studying the effect of WFH and WLB on WFC, through the testing of the mediation model from WLB.

## **METHODS**

The method of research used in this study is the experiment survey. The population of this study is workers from several cities in Indonesia. The survey was conducted on workers who experienced WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic period. The samples were taken by random technique sampling. Because this is experiment research, then the number of samples was conducted based on the study needs. The number of samples was determined as many as 110 respondents distributed in several cities in Indonesia.

The research variables measured in this study focus on organizational behavior, namely WFH, WLB dan WFC. The data were obtained through questionnaires given to employees that had been determined their research instrument based on each research variable. The respondent's answer was measured with the Likert scale approach, with the score "1" for strongly disagree and the score "5" for strongly agree with statements in the research instruments. Each variable was measured by different dimensions. WFH was assessed by place of work, use of ICT, duration of telework, and teleworker's connection to the employer. WLB was assessed by time balance, involvement, balance dan satisfaction balance. At the same time, WFC was assessed by dimension time-based conflict dan strain-based conflict.

The research used three variables, namely WFH, WLB, and WFC which were processed through the Structural Equation Modeling approach for reviewing the mediation model, as well as using the Lisrel as the analysis tool. The design of the research hypothesis consisted of three hypotheses and the research model (Figure 1). H1 WFH had an impact on the improvement of WLB. H2 WLB had an impact on the decrease of WFC. H3 WFH had an impact on the decrease of WFC.



Figure 1. Research Model

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between WFH, WLB, and WFC. Each variable is defined by its measurement and conducted testing with the structural equation modeling approach. The data were randomly taken from as many as 110 respondents, namely employees who experienced WFH. The data is then processed through the Lisrel analysis tool to test research based on the previous model in Figure 1. However, before explaining the results of the research model, goodness of fit was previously tested as the fit statistics criteria of the research. The goodness of fit statistics was performed by evaluating the criteria of Chi-Square, dan Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Hooper et al., 2008; Schumacker & Lomax, 2010).

Table 1. The Goodness-of-Fit Statistics Result

Criteria of Goodness	Cut off Value	Model Test Result	Result
Chi-Square	p-value > 0,05	1,00 > 0,05	Good
RMSEA	$\leq$ 0,08	$0,000 \le 0,08$	Good

The results of the goodness of fit evaluation are shown in Table 1 above. The value of Chi-Square (p-value) is 1,00. The model test result is p-value (1,00) > 0,05. This value meets the requirement so that the results are on the "good" criteria. The value of RMSEA is 0,000. The model test result is RMSEA value  $(0,000) \le 0,08$ . This value also meets the requirement, so that the results on the "good" criteria.

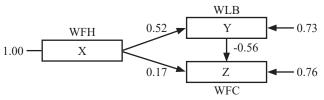


Figure 2. Correlation Values

The results of the model testing that show the correlation values are presented in Figure 2 above. The findings of this research show that WFH has a good relationship with WLB, which is known as a correlation value of 0.52. WFH has a relationship with WFC with a correlation value of 0.17. However, WLB seems to have an inverse relationship with WFC, with a correlation value of -0.56.

Then the test results of Loading Factors are delivered for the three variables, namely Figure 3 for WFH, Figure 4 for WLB, and Figure 5 for WFC.

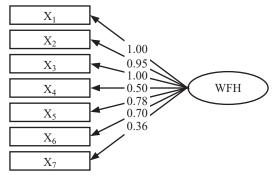


Figure 3. Loading Factors of WFH

WFH consists of four indicators which are developed into seven statements in the questionnaire shown by loading factor values  $X_1$  to  $X_7$ . The findings of this research are presented in Figure 3, that there are two main criteria of WFH, namely The Place of Work  $(X_1)$  and The Use of ICT  $(X_3)$ . These results are based on the highest loading factor value of The Place of Work (1.00) and The Use of ICT (1.00).

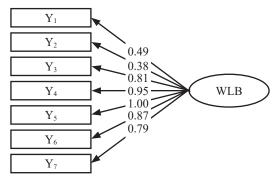


Figure 4. Loading Factors of WLB

WLB consists of three indicators which are developed into seven statements in the questionnaire shown by loading factor values  $Y_1$  to  $Y_7$ . The findings of this research presented in Figure 4, that there is one main criterion of WLB, namely Satisfaction Balance ( $Y_5$ ). This result is based on the highest loading factor value of Satisfaction Balance (1.00).

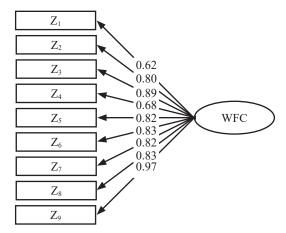


Figure 5. Loading Factors of WFC

WFC consists of two indicators which are developed into nine statements in the questionnaire shown by loading factor values  $Z_1$  to  $Z_9$ . The findings of this research are presented in Figure 5, that there is one main criterion of WFC, namely Strain-based Conflict ( $Z_9$ ). This result is based on the highest loading factor value of Strain-based Conflict (0.97).

The research hypothesis was tested, in which the model test results data for the t-values are presented in Table 2.

No.	Hypotheses	t-value	Result
$H_1$	WFH (X) to WLB (Y)	6,25	Significant
$\mathrm{H}_2$	WLB (Y) to WFC (Z)	-5,71	Significant
$H_3$	WFH $(X)$ to WFC $(Z)$	1.74	Insignificant

Table 2. The Goodness-of-Fit Statistics Result

The hypothesis test result found that two hypotheses were accepted both  $H_1$  and  $H_2$ , namely the significant impact of WFH on WLB, and WLB on WFC. While the hypothesis result for  $H_3$  was not accepted, that is, there was no significant impact directly from WFH on WFC. These test results are based on the comparison of t-value > 1.96. The findings result of this research was that WLB was able to mediate the relationship between WFH and WFC. It was also found that there was a significant negative impact of WLB on WFC.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

WFH is flexible work done by employees, carried out regularly from home, whether it is part or all of their working hours. WFH was implemented by the companies to employees because of an emergency to support social distancing during the pandemic Covid-19 period in Indonesia. This sudden and unplanned implementation was suspected of having an impact on the employee's WLB. In general, indicators of WFH which are carried out by employees are contained in four criteria, namely the place of work, use of ICT, duration of telework, and teleworker's connection to the employer. These four indicators are developed into seven statements in the questionnaire. The interesting fact based on the findings of this research presented in Figure 3, is that there are two main criteria of WFH, namely The Place of Work and The Use of ICT. These results are based on the highest loading factor value of The place of work (1.00) and The use of ICT (1.00).

The place of work relates to the work location used in WFH. The implementation of WFH is mostly carried out at home. In addition, WFH can also be done in a co-working space, in a consumer or client's place, or other places designated by the company such as hotels or meeting rooms. The use of ICT relates to the use of ICT devices in WFH. The company should provide adequate ICT devices to support the implementation of WFH. The use of this ICT device is very useful for employees in communicating with companies, colleagues, and consumers and sending work results. In addition, the most frequent work activities carried out during WFH are teleconferences, so the use of ICT devices and the internet is the dominant factor in supporting the implementation of WFH. The statement is reasonable considering that the two criteria are closely related to the effectiveness of WFH implementation so that the WFH indicator has a characteristic in place of work and the use of ICT. These two dominant factors should be concerned with doing WFH effectively.

Several indicators of WFH ultimately have an impact on employee behavior, one of which relates to WLB. Based on the research findings seen in Figure 2, it is said that WFH has a correlation value with WLB of 0.52. The results of this research are confirmed by the first hypothesis test (H1) summarized in Table 2, which is known as the significant relationship between WFH and WLB. The result explains that the higher the effectiveness of WFH implementation considered by employees, the better in influencing WLB employees if the impact of WFH is increased by 27% on the increase of WLB. Based on previous studies, it appears to have similarities that WLB is the employee's behavior that can be controlled by WFH (Peters et al., 2009), (Tipping et al., 2012), (Irfan & Azmi, 2015), (Dizaho et al., 2017). This finding improves previous research so that it becomes a further recommendation for the implementation of WFH regarding employees' WLB. It is seen the importance of WLB that is controlled by WFH in decreasing the WFC factor. Effective implementation of WFH by focusing on those two dominant factors outlined above, The Place of Work which is appropriate, and The adequate Use of ICT will be able to increase employee WLB.

This research aims to decrease the WFC level when practicing WFH during the pandemic Covid-19. Based on the findings of the research presented that WFC can be controlled by WLB (Figure 2). It is clear from the correlation value of WLB on the decrease in WFC by -0.56. If it is improved, it appears that WLB can reduce the WFC by 31.3%. The results of this study are confirmed by the second hypothesis test that is shown in Table 2, which is said to be significantly related to WLB in decreasing WFC. Surely the findings of this study are in line with earlier research, which has been conveyed mainly in the organizational behavior that WFC is a behavior that is sourced from WLB (Eng et al., 2010), (Atif Sheikh et al., 2018). It seems clear that part of this study is similar to previous findings and tends to improve. So, it becomes a recommendation for companies to give much more attention to the WLB of workers, where the dominant factor of this WLB is Satisfaction Balance, which is a feeling of satisfaction with the balance between work and family life. This can be done by the company by providing sufficient WFH facilities so that employees feel comfortable doing WFH which in the end can reduce the WFC level through the increase of WLB.

Another interesting finding from this research is the existence of support from WFH for improving WLB. Also, it has been found the impact of WLB on WFC. So, WFH has an indirect effect on decreasing WFC. It has been stated in the previous research, that there is a relationship between WFH to employee WFC (Dizaho et al., 2017), (Peters et al., 2009), (Allen et al., 2013), (Wu & Chen, 2014). Based on a study of WLB, it can be summarized that WLB can be a suitable mediation between WFH and WFC. This finding has benefits for the organizational behavior study, where it is known the ability of WFH which is practiced by employees during pandemic Covid-19 can provide good chances for changes of WFC directly or indirectly.

Another finding of this study is the relationship of WFH with WFC. Based on data shown in Figure 2, explains that WFH does have a relationship with WFC. However, after being evaluated based on the result of the hypothesis test (Table 2), it appears that the WFH relationship is not significant or WFH does not have a significant impact on WFC. So, it can be investigated that WFC cannot be directly evaluated through WFH. It seems clear that this research is not similar to earlier research (Dizaho et al., 2017), (Peters et al., 2009), (Allen

et al., 2013), where the prior study explains that WFH negatively impacts WFC. The happens differently because there may be a difference in time or period of research. It means that in general, WFH does have an impact on WFC, but it is not the same case for WFH that is carried out in an emergency during the pandemic. It needs support from other factors, as in this study, the ability of WLB becomes a mediation between WFH and WFC. It means that WLB can indirectly reduce the negative of WFC.

This final finding acknowledges that the proposed research model needs to be changed by explaining the importance of the mediation of WLB in the relationship between WFH and WFC. WFC has at least two dimensions that need to be addressed, namely The Time-based Conflict which is the problem that occurs while working during family hours, and The Strain-based Conflict which is the occurrence of conflicts of tension or disharmony between family life and work. The dominant factor that needs to be paid the main attention to is The Strain-based Conflict, which is the amount of time spent on work that should be used with family. Companies should pay attention to the balanced time for employees between work and family life during WFH.

In this research, the study has explained the relationship between WFH and WLB in WFC, and the research novelty is the concept of mediation from WLB to support the relationship between WFH and WFC. Surely this finding can be important information for companies that employ employees and governments that protect workers' rights to increase WLB and decrease the WFC of workers during WFH. For the next research, it is necessary to pay attention to employee behavior related to the level of WFC. Many factors can be studied related to WFC, including the implementation of family-friendly policies for instance time-spatial flexibility (Peters et al., 2009), parental leave, paid leave, job sharing, subsidized child care, dan WFH itself (Budd & Mumford, 2006).

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study has the main objective of evaluating WFC through support from WLB and the implementation of WFH during the pandemic. The study was conducted on employees in several cities in Indonesia who carried out WFH during the pandemic period. The research findings are the relationship between WFH and WLB. Meanwhile, WLB affects negatively the increase of WFC. The core finding of the research is that WLB can be an appropriate mediation between WFH in decreasing the level of WFC indirectly. The information found in this study is undoubtedly useful for companies in evaluating the implementation of WFH during the pandemic to be able to control the WFC of employees indirectly. Companies can also consider a new policy regarding WFH implementation in the future. Besides, the results of this research can be used as a study for the government in determining policies that support the protection, welfare, and rights of workers. Society, both employees, and business owners can consider WFH as a new and positive trend in the future.

This study explores the extent of the influence of WFH implementation during the covid-19 pandemic on WFC by using the WLB variable as a mediation variable. However, this research has some limitations so it can be a useful recommendation for further research. First, this study still uses the same approach to measuring WFH levels from previous studies conducted by Drobnjak & Jereb, (2007), Sullivan, (2003), Haddon & Brynin (2005), and Garrett & Danziger, (2007). The indicators for assessing WFH are the place of work, use of ICT, duration of telework, and teleworker's connection to the employer. Similarly, the assessment evaluated from WLB related to time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance also still adopts the measurement of previous research conducted by Jeffrey H. Greenhaus et al. (2003) and Hudson (2005).

Second, The assessment which often evaluates WFC is related to three indicators: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict dan behavior-based conflict based on previous studies used by (J. H. Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), but this study as explained in the section covering the research method only assesses two dimensions, namely time-based conflict dan strain-based conflict, adopting the measurement of research conducted by (Eng et al., 2010) and (S. A. E. Geurts et al., 2005).

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