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Analyzing correlates of the POOS of the Working Excessively Questionnaire (WEQ)

Abstract

This article presents the results of correlation studies on the Perceived Oppressiveness of the Organization Scale (POOS) of the Working Excessively Questionnaire (WEQ) - developed by Hornowska and Paluchowski (2007). POOS consists of items referring to a person's functioning within their work organization. Answers on this scale allow to point out the risk factors associated with workplace characteristics that may lead to work addiction. The aim of the study was to investigate the psychological correlates of the perceived oppressiveness of a workplace. We hypothesized that the POOS may be connected to constructs like locus of control, temperamental traits and self esteem. We also tested the demographic factors.

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Streszczenie

Artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań korelacyjnych nad skalą Spostrzegana Opresyjność Organizacji (SOO) Kwestionariusza Objawowego Nadmiernego Obciążania się Pracą (KONOP) opracowanego przez Hornowską i Paluchowskiego (2007). Skala SOO składa się z pozycji odnoszących się do funkcjonowania człowieka w ramach organizacji w której pracuje. Odpowiedzi na tej skali pozwalają wychwycić czynniki ryzyka związane z charakterystyką miejsca pracy, która może prowadzić do nadmiernego obciążania się pracą. Celem pracy było zbadanie psychologicznych korelatów postrzeganej opresyjności miejsca pracy. Założono, że spostrzegana opresyjność organizacji może być połączona z konstruktami takimi jak poczucie umiejscowienia kontroli, cechy temperamentu oraz samoocena. Zbadano również czynniki demograficzne.

The Working Excessively Questionnaire (WEQ) is an instrument measuring the excessive workload. The content of its items includes causes and risk factors, as well as potential consequences of this phenomenon. The final version of the questionnaire is a result of research carried out in the years 2001-2013 (Hornowska, Paluchowski, 2007, 2013; Paluchowski, Hornowska, 2003, 2013).

The instrument consists of 65 items. Based on the results of the factor analysis and the content of individual items we have proposed the following four scales of the Working Excessively Questionnaire:

- 1) Lack of Control Over Work Scale - LCWS
- 2) Perfectionist Working Style Scale - PWSS
- 3) General Beliefs About Work Scale - GBWS
- 4) Perceived Oppressiveness of the Organization Scale .

Perceived Oppressiveness of the Organization Scale

Perceived Oppressiveness of the Organization Scale consists of 12 items referring to a person's functioning within their work organization. The items comprising the scale focus on external causes, which can lead to excessive workload. Among other things, we have considered the relations with one's superiors, rules of the organization and its climate as organizational factors conducive to work addiction. Thus, answers on this scale allow us to point out the pathological characteristics of the workplace regardless of the content and character of the work.

Depending on the result, we can interpret the causes of excessive working differently – whether they are internal or more external in character, i.e. associated with the specifics of the organization.

During the previously conducted a content analysis of individual scales (see: Hornowska, Paluchowski, 2013), we have distinguished two clusters for the Perceived Oppressiveness of the Organization Scale (Figure 1):

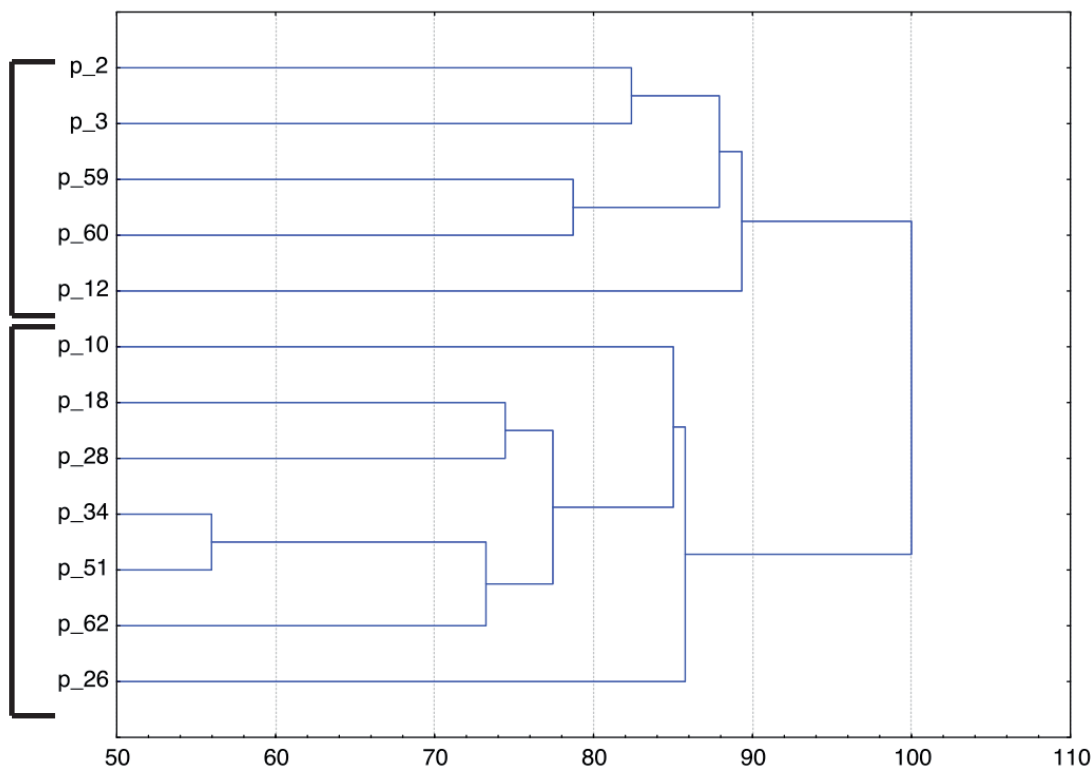


Figure 1. Horizontal Hierarchical Tree Plot of Euclidian Distances between items in Perceived Oppressiveness of the Organization Scale (linkage rule: unweighted pair-group method average)

- POOS_1 Perception of fairness in organization⁵
- POOS_2: Interpersonal injustice and workplace deviance

Individuals scoring high on the POOS perceive their organization as a place with unfavorable climate and unfair rules of cooperation and promotion. According to these individuals, relations in their workplace do not base on mutual trust and respect. In this case, it is the oppressiveness of the organization that induces individuals to work excessively and overtime.

⁵ Compared to the total score of the POOS, this sub-scale's items are reverse-scored.

In research carried out on a sample of 2658 individuals, the results of the POOS showed a satisfactory level of internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$). Correlations of individual items with the total score ranged between 0.23 and 0.5.

Hypotheses

In research on the correlates of the POOS of the WEQ questionnaire, we adopted the following hypotheses.

H.1 Individuals who perceive their work organization as oppressive are characterized by their external locus of control at work and a tendency to react with fear.

Locus of control is based on the perceived associations between one's actions and their consequences (Rotter, 1966). Individuals with an external locus of control demonstrate a sense that their life only marginally depends on their actions and decisions. On the other hand, individuals with an internal locus of control believe that their life successes and failures are directly attributable to their behavior. It can be expected that individuals who perceive their organization as oppressive, i.e. forcing some behaviors, will manifest an external locus of control at work because external factors have the strongest influence on their behavior. The evidence shows that this situation leads to many negative consequences, such as, for example, professional burnout or low work satisfaction (Wang, Bowling, Eschleman, 2010).

On one hand, the tendency to react with fear in difficult situations may be the result of the perception of the organization as oppressive, while on the other; it may induce the person to create a defensive perception of the organization as threatening (Burke, 2001a, 2001b). In the latter case, the initial cause may be the experience of anxiety and a frequent, inadequate reacting with fear. Thus, the belief about an oppressive character of the organization serves as a justification for one's not always rational fear reactions. Therefore, more than likely, individuals with a high perceived oppressiveness of the organization will declare more frequent reactions of fear in difficult situations, regardless of the causality of the phenomenon.

H.2 Individuals working in high positions perceive their workplace as less oppressive than individuals employed in low positions.

Work position directly influences the employee's functioning at work. It determines the scope of responsibilities, the number of subordinates and the rules of promotion. Working in the same organization as a manager or as a production

worker differs significantly. Therefore, we can expect that, depending on the occupied position, the perception of one's work organization will differ, both with regard to the climate and, for example, the distributive justice (Xi, Kan, 2007). This difference can also be associated with the perceived oppressiveness of the organization. More than likely, individuals employed in high positions will perceive their workplace as relatively less oppressive than individuals holding lower positions within the organizations who tend to perceive their employer as more threatening.

H.3 Individuals who evaluate the oppressiveness of their work organization as low, are characterized by defensive self-enhancement

Defensive self-enhancement is a tendency to present oneself in a self-aggrandizing way, in order to gain approval from one's environment. Overestimating one's abilities and competencies is in this case defensive in character, as it serves to maintain a positive self-image, despite the incoming negative information. In order to maintain a positive image of self in other people's eyes, individuals with a high tendency for defensive self-enhancement may often act submissively (O'Brien, Epstein, in: Fecenec, 2008, p. 23-24). Defensively self-enhancing individuals will treat submission to the organization's demands as a chance to present themselves favorably to their superiors and coworkers. On the other hand, having a tendency to concentrate on approval from others facilitates internal attribution of submissive behaviors – "it is not the organization which makes me work so much, it is me who wants to be liked and appreciated, so I will gladly submit". Therefore, it can be expected that individuals who do not perceive their organization as oppressive will demonstrate a stronger tendency towards defensive self-enhancement and towards seeking acceptance from their coworkers.

H.4 Individuals who evaluate the oppressiveness of their work organization as low are characterized by high sociability.

Inclination to seek social contacts can be defined both as a temperamental trait and as a personality trait. Sociability and its associated construct, extroversion, correlate positively with work satisfaction (Golińska, 2008) and organizational commitment (Bakker, Boyd, Dollard, Gillespie, Winefield, Stough, 2010). Concentration on interpersonal relations at work may cause some of the flaws in the characteristics of the organization to be compensated through satisfying interpersonal contacts at work. Therefore, it can be expected that sociable individuals, for whom the people surrounding them are important, will evaluate their employer less critically and will fail to notice many signs of pathology associated with their workplace.

Participants

A total of 252 individuals were tested, 76 of whom did not provide complete demographic data. There were 65.5% women and 34.5% men in the sample.

All used instruments were pen-and-paper based. They were arranged into sets. Each set consisted of a WEQ questionnaire and additional measures, which were matched with regard to the number of items, as well as time and cognitive effort required to complete them. This procedure was strictly followed to prevent any potential artifacts, stemming from the characteristics of the tested sample; each person was allocated their set randomly⁶.

Measures

Apart from the Working Excessively Questionnaire (WEQ), the study used the following measures.

Internal-External Locus of Control at Work Scale

Gliszczyńska's (1984, 1990) questionnaire measures locus of control, a construct introduced by J. Ratter (1966) and associated with a skill situation (internal locus of control) or a chance situation (external locus of control). Rotter's assumption "that the influence of generalized experiences decreases, as the number of experiences in a particular given situation increases" (Gliszczyńska, 1984) was the conceptual principle for the construction of the two scales. That is why locus of control associated with the work situation may differ from general locus of control. Scale consists of two sub-scales:

- (a) General Beliefs (GB)
- (b) Work Situation (WS)

GB scale consists of 12, and WS scale of 13 items. Every item contains 2 opposite statements that refer to Rotter's established predictions regarding a particular situation (WS) and a general situation (GB); both are based on life experience. Sub-scale score is computed by summing up points for every answer (0-12 for GB, 0-13 for WS) - answers are scored towards internal locus of control. In the study, we used raw score for both sub-scales.

High score on GB indicates beliefs that the world is righteous, understandable, easy, orderly, and simple. Low score indicate quite the opposite.

⁶ The sizes of the samples tested for individual hypotheses will differ, due to the followed procedure. They are presented in the description of the results.

Score on WS scale is associated with beliefs regarding self-efficacy at work. High score indicates that an individual perceives efficacy highly and shares an opinion that satisfactory results come from hard work. Low score is associated with an opinion that success does not arise from hard work; an individual has no influence on the organization, its climate or superiors' judgement, and that eventually results in person's submission to others.

Temperament Survey for Adults (EAS-TS)

A questionnaire developed by Arnold H. Buss and Robert Plomin, (1984) and adapted to Polish by Włodzimierz Oniszczenko (1997), measures temperament as a complex of genetically inherited traits, which may already manifest in early childhood. The instrument measures three basic traits: Emotionality (and its components - distress, fear, and anger), Activity and Sociability. Emotionality is linked to arousal of autonomic nervous system - responsiveness of sympathetic nervous system and the speed of inducing a physiological response, regardless of what emotion it applies to: distress, fear, anger. Activity is associated with behavior, physical energy and motor activities (on a continuum from stillness to energetic behavior). The components of activity are tempo (of activity - fast walking, running, speaking) and vigor (strength and intensity of reactions - loud laughter, loud walk, strong push while opening the door). Sociability is a tendency to seek contact with other people; it results in organizing activities that allow the individual to be surrounded by as many people as possible and to establish social interactions. A desire to be around people and avoid loneliness is the main motivation here.

Questionnaire consists of 5 scales:

- (a) Emotionality - distress
- (b) Emotionality - fear
- (c) Emotionality - anger
- (d) Activity
- (e) Sociability

Instrument contains 20 items (4 per each scale) concerning a person's behavior. Answers are scored from 1 to 5 (1- "totally disagree" 5 - "totally agree"), towards, and sometimes away from higher level of trait (in the latter case one should reverse the score). Scale score is computed by summing up points for every answer (from 4 to 20). We used raw score in the study, however, for diagnostic purposes one should convert it into the sten scale.

High score on the sub-scales of Emotionality is linked to high responsiveness of sympathetic nervous system and high speed of inducing physiological response to stimuli. Additionally, high score on E-D, E-F, or E-A scale indicates the tendency to respond with distress, fear, or anger in most situation. Low score indicates low emotional responsiveness.

High score on the Activity Scale indicates a high level of behavioral arousal (tempo and vigor) while performing daily activities. It can also indicate high need for tension release. Low score is linked to individuals who reduce their range and speed of activity.

High score on the Sociability Scale indicates a tendency to seek contact with others, strong perception of social reinforcements, and low tolerance to loneliness. Individuals with high sociability tend to seek stimulation. Low on the S scale is linked to stimulation avoidance.

Multidimensional Self-esteem Inventory – (MSEI)

MSEI was developed by E. J. O'Brien and S. Epstein (1988) and adapted to Polish by Fecenec (2008); it is a multidimensional questionnaire that measures self-esteem, understood here as evaluative, affectively saturated beliefs about oneself. It consists of 116 items in 11 scales (O'Brien, Epstein, 1988; Fecenec, 2008):

- Global Self-esteem Scale (10 items): global self-concept, constituting self-description on a meta-level

Components of self-esteem (eight particular areas):

- (a) Competence (10 items) – evaluation of one's skills and efficacy
- (b) Lovability (10 items) – evaluation of forming intimate relationships
- (c) Likability (10 items) – evaluation of being liked by others
- (d) Personal Power (10 items) – evaluation of one's ability to direct people and influence their behavior
- (e) Self-control (10 items) – evaluation of one's perseverance and ability to control impulses and emotions
- (f) Moral Self-Approval (10 items) – evaluation of the level of agreement between one's professed values and their application in life
- (g) Body Appearance (10 items) – evaluation of one's appearance and sexual attractiveness
- (h) Body Functioning (10 items) – evaluation of one's health and physical fitness

- (i) Identity Integration (10 items) – sense of coherence, having control over one’s life in different areas, and the effectiveness of self-esteem
- (j) Defensive Self-Enhancement (10 items) – tendency to worry excessively about one’s image in the society, combined with frequently presenting oneself in a self-aggrandizing way and seeking acceptance from others

Subject responds on a the five-point scale. Raw score is computed by summing up points for every answer. Fifty-seven items are reversed – result must be converted by the formula (1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1). In ten scales, score range from 10 to 50, in DSE scale minimal score is 16 and maximal is 80. In the study, we used raw score, however, for diagnostic purposes one should convert it into the sten scale.

High score on Global Self-Esteem Scale and in each component of Self-Esteem Scale indicates that individuals have positive feelings about their competencies. Low score suggests negative self-evaluation in all areas.

High score on Identity Integration Scale indicates consistent identity and a sense of control over life. Individuals with low scores have problems with defining their own identity, do not always know what they aim for and have difficulty with decision making.

High score on Defensive Self-Enhancement Scale indicates a tendency to seek social approval and show one’s self in a positive light. Low scores suggest that individuals do not succumb to social influence, are independence and show no tendency to defensive self-enhancement.

Results and discussion

H.1 Individuals who perceive their work organization as oppressive are characterized by external locus of control at work and a tendency to react with fear.

To verify the above hypothesis we calculated Pearson’s r correlation coefficients ($N=73$) between the results of the POOS of the WEQ questionnaire and the Work Situation Scale of the Internal-External Locus of Control at Work Scale, as well as the Emotionality-Fear Scale of the EAS temperament questionnaire.

For the Work Situation Scale, the correlation coefficient equaled $r = - 0.52$; $p < 0.01$. Therefore, high scores on the POOS are associated with low results on the Work Situation Scale. This indicates external locus of control within the work-related environment. Thus, individuals who perceive their work organization as oppressive show more external locus of control than individuals who perceive their

workplace as friendly and non-threatening. The obtained results seem to agree with the predictions - the climate and rules of the organization, as well as relationships with one's superiors and coworkers, are associated with a subjective sense of locus of control. Pathological characteristics of the workplace lead to the sense of external locus of control. This, in turn, can promote the development of pathology around the employees, inducing them towards, for example, counterproductive work behavior (Sprung, Steve, 2012). On the other hand, it could be said that the perception of one's workplace as friendly, with clear rules of cooperation, transparent paths of promotion and positive organizational climate leads to the development of internal locus of control, which is beneficial from the point of view of both the employer and the employee.

The correlation coefficient for the Emotionality-Fear of the EAS temperament questionnaire equaled $r = 0.34$; $p < 0.01$. This result indicates an association between the tendency to react with fear and the perception of one's workplace as oppressive. This association is positive in character – the greater the oppressiveness of the organization, the more frequent the avoidance or escape from the threatening situation and the experience of fear. Long-term feelings of fear at work lead to negative psychological and somatic consequences. For this reason, fear at work is undesirable. The oppressive character of the organization may cause feelings of fear. However, the causal relationship may also lean the other way, i.e. the oppressiveness of the organization may result from one's tendency to search for stimuli which may invoke fear. Thus, it becomes a justification for one's irrational anxieties and fears. Correlational studies do not allow a definite assertion whether it is the oppressiveness of the organization that increases the employees' tendency to react with fear in difficult situations, or whether individuals fearful by nature choose oppressive organizations as their workplace, or whether they might perceive all organizations they work in as threatening. However, we can say that the tendency to react with anxiety is associated with pathological characteristics of the workplace.

H.2 Individuals working in high positions perceive their workplace as less oppressive than individuals employed in low positions.

To test the hypothesis about the differences between the perceived oppressiveness of the organization and position the person occupies within it, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance ($N = 202$). The occupational position declared in the WEQ questionnaire was the grouping factor. We categorized individuals in managerial positions (e.g. directors, managers, masters), as well as individuals working as freelancers (e.g. architect, psychologist), employed in high positions. We assigned 69 individuals to this group. The remaining positions, which did not

involve directing people, were classified as low (this group included 133 individuals). The dependent variable in the variance analysis was the score of the POOS of the WEQ questionnaire.

The results of the ANOVA indicate a significant role of the occupational position in the perception of the oppressiveness of the organization – $F(1,200) = 7.13$; $p < 0.01$. Mean score on the POOS for individuals employed in high positions equaled 31.1, while for employees working in lower position it equaled 33.7. The obtained results agree with the predictions - depending on the occupied position in the workplace one perceives its oppressiveness differently. Individuals in managerial positions perceive fewer threats from the employer and evaluate the atmosphere and rules of the workplace higher. To individuals employed in lower positions, the employer seems more oppressive, and the relations at work seem based less on mutual respect and trust. It seems that a good illustration of this situation would be the saying: “where you stand depends on where you sit”.

H.3 Individuals who evaluate the oppressiveness of their work organization as low, are characterized by their defensive self-enhancement

In order to examine the above hypothesis, we calculated the Pearson’s r correlation coefficient ($N = 69$) between the results of the POOS of the WEQ questionnaire and the Defensive Self-Enhancement (DSE) Scale of the MSEI questionnaire. Statistical analysis indicated a lack of statistically significant correlations between the results of the POOS and the results of the DSE Scale $r = -0.22$; $p = 0.06$. Based on the further analysis, we calculated the correlation coefficients between the MSEI DSE Scale and the sub-scales POOS_1 - perception of fairness in the organization and POOS_2 - interpersonal injustice and workplace deviance. The following values were found: for the POOS_1 the correlation was found to be insignificant ($r = -0.16$; $p = 0.18$), while for the POOS_2 the relationship was found to be significant ($r = -0.27$; $p < 0.05$). The negative relationship indicates that individuals with tendencies towards defensive self-enhancement did not perceive their workplace as characterized by interpersonal injustice. They describe their workplace relations as friendly and full of trust and respect. Submissiveness associated with the tendency to present oneself in a favorable light results

Table 1. Correlation coefficients between POOS and Defensive Self-Enhancement Scale of MSEI questionnaire

		POOS	POOS_1	POOS_2
Defensive self-enhancement	Coefficients r	-0,22	-0,16	-0,27
	p values	0,06	0,18	0,03

in not seeing potential conflicts with superiors and coworkers as pathological or negatively impacting the quality of the workplace. On the other hand, it could be said that individuals with a lower tendency towards defensive self-enhancement declared experiencing injustice from their coworkers more often.

H.4 Individuals who evaluate the oppressiveness of their work organization as low are characterized by high sociability.

To test the hypothesis about the relationship between oppressiveness of the organization and sociability, we calculated Pearson's r correlation coefficient ($N = 73$) between the results of the POOS of the WEQ questionnaire and the Sociability Scale of the EAS temperament questionnaire.

The statistical analysis indicates a lack of a significant relationship between the measured variables ($r = -0.14$; $p = 0.22$). The results of the correlations were also found to be insignificant for two sub-scales - POOS_1 - perception of fairness in the organization and POOS_2 - interpersonal injustice and workplace deviance. They equaled respectively: $r = -0.10$; $p = 0.41$ for POOS_1 and $r = -0.13$; $p = 0.28$ for POOS_2. Therefore, we cannot state that the perceived oppressiveness of the organization is associated with a tendency to seek social interactions. However, this hypothesis seems worthy to be further verified and examined in other studies. The relationships between extroversion and a sense of the quality of work seem well documented by previous research.

Conclusion

Research on the correlates of the POOS of the WEQ questionnaire confirmed the hypothesis about external locus of control of individuals who perceive their work organization as oppressive. The employees do not see much of a relationship between their own actions and the results of those actions, due to their external locus of control. This situation may be discouraging and in the long-term may lead to negative consequences, both for the employee and the employer.

We have also shown that the more individuals perceive the employer as threatening, the higher their tendency is to react with fear in difficult situations. Together with an external locus of control, this paints a coherent picture of the workplace, in which the employee undertakes certain actions and does not necessarily perceive them as reasonable, and consequently in a problematic situation reacts with fear of failure.

We also confirmed the assumptions about the differences in the way individuals perceive oppressiveness of the organization according to their position. As the study has shown, pathological characteristics of the employer do not impact all

employees equally. They have the strongest impact on the employees in lower positions. Among individuals employed in managerial positions, declared feelings of threat from the employer are considerably lower. Therefore, we can assume that a promotion within an oppressive organization (if it is possible), constitutes not only a possibility to develop one's career and increase one's salary, but it is also an "escape" from the threatening organization.

The relationship between the perceived oppressiveness of the organization and the defensive self-enhancement was partially confirmed. We found no significant results for the total score of the POOS. Only the results of the POOS_2 sub-scale, which includes items describing interpersonal injustice and workplace deviance, were associated with seeking social approval. The relationship was in the predicted direction – individuals who defensively self-enhanced did not describe their work organization as oppressive. A submissive attitude, assumed in order to gain positive evaluation from one's coworkers, leads to perception of employer as not oppressive.

We found the results of the correlations between Sociability and all the POOS sub-scales to be insignificant. Thus, the collected data did not confirm the hypothesis. Therefore, it could be said that both individuals who seek social interactions and those who do not show such tendency perceive the oppressiveness of their work organization similarly.

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