

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MINDFULNESS IN ENHANCING WORKPLACE
PRODUCTIVITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN REMOTE WORK
ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

The abrupt transition to the distance working conditions, which this pandemic (inflicted by the coronavirus) spurred, was sufficient to alter the balance of the working conditions significantly, and necessitate the psychological sturdiness and interpersonal sensitivity. This paper focuses on the issue of how social mindfulness, i.e. the awareness and thoughtfulness of the needs and the views of other people, can enhance the workplace performance and the psychological health of remote employees. Based on the results of the qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews of 30 remote workers in different regions of the industry in Pakistan, the paper examines how social mindfulness is connected to team cohesion, communication efficacy, and individual welfare. The findings have illuminated the connection between socially consciousness practices such as being a good-hearted listener, empathetic, and respectful of others, and their positive association with increased productivity, lower levels of feelings of isolation and more job satisfaction. The study contributes to the existing literature that is currently emerging in the field of mindfulness in organizations by addressing the interpersonal dimension of mindfulness in virtual workplaces. Discussed are implications as far as organizational policy and future research are concerned.

Keywords: Social Mindfulness, Remote Work, Workplace Productivity, Psychological Well-Being, Virtual Teams, Empathy, Communication

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of remote working at the international scale as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has turned the traditional workplace structure upside down and necessitated the need to find new approaches and solutions to regulate and take care of workers (Barrero et al., 2021). With organizations getting comfortable in the process of work-methodology distribution, the cognitive, socially orientated aspects of work-remoteness has generated a growing scholarly concern. Among them, the idea of mindfulness, which was traditionally associated with the level of individual awareness and self-control, has received its extension in the sense of the interpersonal process, and gave birth to the concept of social mindfulness (Van Doesum et al., 2013). Social mindfulness is the attentiveness or consciousness in relation to the needs, wants and interests of other people in the social scenarios. In remote working conditions, when the face to face communication is decreased, and the interaction might be required to be conducted via digital means, it is the social mindfulness role that is more emphasized than the other ones.

The significance of social mindfulness in the workplace setting remotely is that it can be used to foster an environment of inclusive, non-disrespectful, and understanding communication that is vital to the unity of a team and team psychological well-being. Opposing the traditional mindfulness practice that is of an internal orientation, the social mindfulness emphasizes on the underlying relational potentials of the mindfulness, thereby contributing to a better working environment that is harmonious and productive (Ruedy and Schweitzer, 2010). The social mindfulness behaviors, including giving credit to others, respecting others who are not on your side and empathizing, may assist to prevent and mitigate conflict and enhance the collaboration of the team in virtual teams where non-verbal cues are often missing and the risk of miscommunication is always high.

Although the new literature on mindfulness in the organization has been introduced, empirical studies that examine the direct effect the social kind of mindfulness has in remote work setting are limited. Most existing studies have aimed at single mindfulness practices and their impact on reduction of stress, satisfaction in the workplace, and performance (Good et al., 2016). However, the interpersonal aspect of mindfulness and especially the role of mindfulness in the development of interpersonal team dynamics between individuals and psychological consequences in virtual environments have received relatively little attention. This difference becomes particularly relevant in developing countries such as Pakistan, where remote work is a relatively new concept and cultural dynamics may play an impressive part in the realization and influence of socially conscious behaviors.

The present study attempts to fill this void by examining how social mindfulness relates to workplace productivity and psychological well-being (in the context, remote working) among remote workers in Pakistan. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do remote workers perceive and practice social mindfulness in their daily interactions?
2. In what ways does social mindfulness contribute to workplace productivity in remote settings?
3. What is the relationship between social mindfulness and psychological well-being among remote employees?

By addressing the above questions, the study expands on the literature regarding organizational psychology and managing remote work, drawing attention to the

significance of relational mindfulness in the development of healthy and productive working virtual management environments. It also sheds practical insights for organizations looking to improve the well-being and performance of their employees in the exciting times of the remote work trend.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Mindfulness in Organizational Contexts

Mindfulness, rooted in contemplative traditions, has been increasingly integrated into organizational research due to its positive effects on employee well-being, decision-making, and performance (Brown et al., 2007). In workplace settings, mindfulness is typically defined as a state of non-judgmental awareness of the present moment, which enables individuals to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively to workplace stressors (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Numerous studies have demonstrated that individual mindfulness practices—such as meditation and mindful breathing—can reduce burnout, enhance focus, and improve job satisfaction among employees (Dane, 2011; Good et al., 2016).

However, while the benefits of intrapersonal mindfulness are well-documented, its interpersonal counterpart—social mindfulness—has received comparatively less attention in organizational literature. Social mindfulness goes beyond the concept of mindfulness for self, to awareness and consideration of others in social encounters (Van Doesum et al., 2013). It is understanding the needs, preferences and perspectives of others and altering one's behavior accordingly. In the remote work environment, where digital communication can contain a lack of the richness of face-to-face interaction, socially mindful behaviors like: in a remote environment conducting empathic listening, exhibiting respectful tone of communication, and using inclusive language are key to sustaining interpersonal connection and trust between employees.

2.2 Social Mindfulness: Conceptual Foundations

The concept of social mindfulness has been introduced originally by Van Doesum et al (2013) as a measure of prosocial applicability in social decision-making. Unlike traditional mindfulness, which focuses on intrapsychic self-regulation and internal awareness, social mindfulness focuses on the relational aspect of awareness. It is operationalized by means of behavior that shows respect for the independence and free will of others, as providing situations entailing choice (presenting options to others or allowing them to choose from a limited set) or to others' contributions to the process of joint consideration, for example.

Social mindfulness is an interpsychic construct that is strongly related to constructs that include emotional intelligence, empathy, and perspective taking, but truly differentiates itself by openly contextualizing activity within the interpersonal exchange in which this occurs (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). For example, a socially astute social coworker in a virtual meeting would pay enough attention to realize that a team member is being interrupted and intentionally open up time for the socially disconnected individual to speak. All of these actions not only promote inclusiveness but also lead to a psychologically safe work environment, which is an important component for team functionalism and innovation (Edmondson, 1999).

2.3 Remote Work and Psychological Well-Being

Due to the emergence of the remote work move, there are both chances and challenges to improving the wellbeing of the employees. On the one hand, remote work is more flexible to many employees, it lessens the burden of commuting, and it eases the more flexible work boundaries at the workplace (Gibbs et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it also represents such

pitfalls as social isolation, lack of demarcation between work and home and communication problems that harm psychological well-being (Wang et al., 2021).

A study conducted by Oakman (2020) has indicated that telecommuters will experience a lack of connection with their colleagues and organizations and may lead them to the feeling of low morale and stress. In the absence of informal contacts like walk by talk or going to drinks to create desk contacts, employees might be unable to create and maintain them. This gap in relationships may result into the loss of trust, noncooperation and even more damaging to productivity. Taking these issues into account, the idea of augmenting the utilization of socially conscious practices in digital settings may be a tempting defense against the negative consequences of remote employment.

2.4 Social Mindfulness and Team Dynamics

Social mindfulness is reported to be the focus of team processes, particularly where it needs to collaborate in terms of success, and mutual respect. In the research by Van Doesum et al. and research stint conducted by Van Doesum in 2019, researchers found that teams were more likely to demonstrate more high levels of social mindfulness and emphasized more levels of cooperation and demonstrated more equitable distribution of resources and proven higher performance. According to these findings, socially mindful behaviors are a contributor to a positive team climate, as it promotes fairness, desire to be an inclusive team, and support form of others.

When it concerns geographically separated teams when the natural and sometimes cultural differences between the members must be crossed, then socially conscious communication may assist in erasing the difference, as well as discovering the sense of identity. For instance, recognizing cultural holidays, using inclusive language, or checking up on a colleague's well-being or show respect and empathy to negotiate stronger interpersonal bonds. Such behaviors are of special significance in collectivist cultures such as that found in Pakistan where interpersonal harmony and group cohesion are highly valued (Hofstede, 2001).

2.5 Psychological Well-Being and Productivity in Remote Work

Psychological health and productivity at the workplace are interrelated concepts that are well understood in the organizational psychology. The more well-being employees have, the greater are the chances of their engagement, creativity and commitment to work (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). On the other hand, absenteeism, turnover, and poor performance may be caused by poor mental health, which is defined as stress, anxiety, or burnout (Harvey et al., 2017).

Psychological well-being is the first aspect that is especially difficult to sustain in remote work environments because of the absence of social support and the possibility of work-related stress to affect personal life. Social mindfulness, which brings about good interpersonal relations, can be a protective measure against these stressors. As an example, a socially mindful manager may consistently reach out to his or her team members, allow them an extension of the deadline, or show his recognition of a good performance- all of which can help employees feel important and appreciated to the organization, thus making them feel more optimistic and productive.

2.6 Cultural Considerations in the Pakistani Context

Pakistan is a collectivist culture and interpersonal relations and social harmony are entrenched in the cultural practices (Hofstede, 2001). Such a situation means that associating socially conscious practices, like treating others with respect, assistance, and non-confrontational behavior, is neither only welcome but frequently anticipated. These



cultural values may have an impact on the perception and practice of social mindfulness in Pakistani workplaces, even in remote locations.

Nonetheless, the quick transition to remote work in Pakistan with the lack of proper training or assistance has resulted in a lack of connections between the old standards of relationships and the new ones of digital communication. As an example, lack of non-verbal communication during virtual meetings can cause misunderstandings or rudeness which can result in straining relationships at the workplace. Therefore, promoting social mindfulness in Pakistani remote workplaces may require culturally sensitive interventions that align with local values and communication styles.

Despite the growing interest in mindfulness and remote work, few studies have specifically examined the role of social mindfulness in enhancing productivity and well-being in remote work environments. Moreover, most existing research has been conducted in Western contexts, with limited attention to cultural variations in the perception and practice of social mindfulness. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how social mindfulness is understood and enacted by remote workers in Pakistan, and how it influences their productivity and psychological well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, exploratory design to let social mindfulness surface in participants’ own words. Because the concept is under-studied in non-Western remote settings, open-ended methods were chosen to capture context-rich, participant-driven nuances.

Fieldwork took place across Pakistan, where COVID-19 normalized remote work in IT, education, finance, and customer service. To reflect varied socio-cultural influences, the sample spanned major cities (Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad) and smaller towns. Thirty remote workers were recruited through purposive sampling. All had worked remotely or hybrid for at least 12 months, collaborated regularly via virtual platforms, were aged 22–50, fluent in English or Urdu, and willing to give a one-hour interview. Participants were recruited through LinkedIn, professional WhatsApp groups, and university alumni networks. The final sample included:

Table

Sector	Participants	Gender Breakdown
IT/Tech	10	6 male, 4 female
Education	8	3 male, 5 female
Finance	5	3 male, 2 female
Customer Service	4	2 male, 2 female
Media/Content	3	1 male, 2 female

Efforts were made to ensure gender balance and sectoral diversity, though exact parity was not feasible due to availability constraints.

Data were gathered through semi-structured Zoom or Google Meet interviews that ran 45–70 minutes. A pilot-tested guide explored five fixed themes—what social mindfulness means remotely, times it was enacted, its effects on productivity and well-being, and what helps or hinders it online—while still allowing conversational freedom. The 30 sessions were audio-taped with permission; the interviews in Urdu were translated into English.

The IRB granted ethical clearance, and the participants signed the forms that contained information about the purpose of the study, protection of their anonymity and their right

to withdraw. All the materials were done under pseudonyms and records and transcripts were stored on password-secured devices only accessible to the research team.

Thematic analysis was implemented using the 6 steps of Braun and Clarke which include immersion, coding by line in NVivo 14 (theme development -e.g., empathetic listening, psychological safety), theme development (e.g., empathetic listening, psychological safety), theme refinement, final definitions, and write-up. A fifth of the data were coded independently by two researchers (Cohen 250.82); the discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Reflexive journaling helped prevent the cultural assumptions of the author, and the qualitative design, despite a small and self-selected sample, self-report bias, translation faces, and potential omission of low-connectivity employees provided an in-depth context that would inform subsequent quantitative studies.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis of the thirty interviews produced four overarching themes that capture how social mindfulness is experienced, enacted, and consequential in Pakistani remote-work teams. Each theme is presented with representative verbatim quotes (pseudonyms used), interpretive commentary, and cross-case patterns. The four themes are:

1. "I feel heard, therefore I speak" – Social mindfulness as a driver of psychological safety
2. "Slack is not a graveyard" – Timely, transparent, and inclusive digital communication
3. "Empathy over efficiency" – Re-prioritising work norms to protect well-being
4. "Mindfulness multiplied" – Reciprocity, modelling, and collective productivity

Theme 1: "I feel heard, therefore I speak" – Social mindfulness as a driver of psychological safety

Across sectors, participants described how subtle, socially mindful cues from managers or peers—such as pausing to ask, "Does anyone else want to add?" or paraphrasing a junior's idea—created a psychologically safe space that directly influenced their willingness to contribute and their overall mental health.

"In our Zoom stand-ups, my lead always waits five seconds before wrapping. Those five seconds make me feel I won't be cut off. I share bugs I would otherwise hide, and that saves us hours later."

— Aamir, 29, software engineer

Interviewees linked this safety to reduced social anxiety and lower fear of judgment, which in turn enhanced creative brainstorming and error reporting. A repeated observation was that camera-off meetings amplified the need for verbal acknowledgements; without eye-contact or nodding, explicit verbal mindfulness became the only available channel.

"When my camera is off, I rely on my TL saying 'Thanks, Sara, that's useful.' If she forgets, I wonder if my mic glitched. That tiny doubt lingers and affects my mood for the day."— Sara, 34, content strategist

Cross-case pattern: Teams that institutionalised "round-robin" check-ins or used reaction emojis liberally reported higher incident-reporting rates (IT) and fewer re-writes (media) because members felt safe to disclose mistakes early.

Link to well-being: Twelve respondents explicitly connected psychological safety to lower Sunday-night anxiety and better sleep quality, aligning with Edmondson's (1999) argument that safety is a precursor to mental health in knowledge work.

Theme 2: "Slack is not a graveyard" – Timely, transparent, and inclusive digital communication

Remote workers equated social mindfulness with responsiveness and signal clarity. Delayed replies or ambiguous "k" were read as signs of disregard, increasing rumination

("Did I offend?"). Conversely, acknowledging messages even when full answers were pending functioned as a micro-validation.

"I post a query at 10 a.m. If no one reacts by 2 p.m., my brain spins: 'Is my question dumb?' A thumbs-up emoji buys me calm."

— Farah, 27, financial analyst

Temporal mindfulness emerged as a sub-code: colleagues who disclosed their availability windows and respected others' offline hours were described as "mindful heroes," reducing burnout risk.

"My teammate in Karachi never schedules calls after 4 p.m. because he knows I fetch kids. That tiny act lowers my cortisol more than any wellness webinar."— Owais, 40, university lecturer

Inclusivity practices included:

- Summarising key decisions in chat after a call (helping late-joiners or those with patchy internet)
- Using gender-neutral Urdu greetings ("Assalam-o-Alaikum colleagues" instead of "brothers")
- Rotating meeting times to share the inconvenience of odd hours across time-zones

Productivity impact: Participants reported that clarity loops (quick acknowledgements, TL;DR summaries) reduced project rework by ~15% (estimate based on self-reported averages).

Theme 3: "Empathy over efficiency" – Re-prioritising work norms to protect well-being

A striking narrative, especially among team-leads, was the intentional slowing down of certain processes to accommodate personal crises—health issues, load-shedding, or socio-political unrest in Pakistan.

"During the floods, I told my writers 'Deadline is frozen; send me a meme instead.' We delivered two days late but retained every single writer. Retention saves us six weeks of onboarding yearly."

— Hina, 38, media manager

This empathic flexibility was framed not as charity but as strategic investment. Respondents cited lower turnover, fewer sick-days, and higher discretionary effort as returns.

"When my father was in ICU, my manager said 'Work can wait.' I ended up finishing the report from the hospital at 2 a.m. anyway—because I wanted to, not because I had to."

— Ali, 31, customer-success officer

Moderator observation: Empathy was most powerful when publicly narrated; leads sharing their own vulnerabilities modelled a culture where self-compassion became legitimate, countering the "always-on" glamour prevalent in tech startups.

Theme 4: "Mindfulness multiplied" – Reciprocity, modelling, and collective productivity

Social mindfulness was rarely described as a one-off act; instead, it spiralled through reciprocity norms. Participants who received mindful treatment reported paying it forward within hours.

"A senior once DM-ed me 'Great slide design!' I spent 20 minutes mentoring an intern the same day. That cascade felt natural."— Sana, 26, UX designer

Modelling by leadership amplified the effect. In teams where managers openly admitted mistakes ("I missed that KPI, not the team"), members were 3.2 times more likely (self-estimated) to own errors early, preventing escalation.

Quantified anecdotes:

- One IT squad introduced "Mindful Monday": five-minute gratitude shout-outs at sprint start. Over six months, cycle-time dropped 12% and Jira ticket re-openings fell 18%.
- A university department used "camera-optional but voice-affirming" policy; research output per faculty rose 0.4 papers/year, attributed to reduced Zoom fatigue and inclusive participation of female staff juggling care-work.

Collective efficacy was repeatedly tied to mindful rituals that made invisible labour visible (e.g., thanking the colleague who always prepares the agenda).

Synthesis Across Themes

Synthesis across themes create a dynamic loop where social mindfulness leads to psychological safety and empathic norms, which in turn enhance well-being and foster discretionary effort. This effort drives collective productivity, reinforcing a mindful culture. Notably, productivity gains are seen as a by-product rather than the main goal, aligning with self-determination theory, which suggests that fulfilling relatedness needs boosts autonomy and competence, ultimately enhancing performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a recursive cycle in which socially mindful micro-behaviours create psychologically safe digital spaces, enhance employee well-being, and ultimately improve collective productivity. In this section the results are interpreted through the lenses of conservation-of-resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and the emerging literature on virtual team effectiveness. Practical implications for Pakistani organisations and global remote-work policy are then outlined, followed by an appraisal of limitations and directions for future research.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

5.1.1 Social Mindfulness as a Relational Resource

Conservation-of-resources theory posits that individuals seek to obtain, retain, and protect resources that help them cope with stressors. In distributed teams, socio-emotional cues are scarce, so a timely acknowledgment or an inclusive turn-taking routine functions as a relational resource that prevents the depletion of emotional energy. Participants explicitly described how a single "thumbs-up" emoji saved them from rumination, thereby preserving cognitive bandwidth for core tasks. Extending Hobfoll's model, socially mindful acts can be conceptualised as micro-resources that have a disproportionate multiplier effect on both well-being and performance outcomes.

5.1.2 Satisfaction of Basic Psychological Needs

Self-determination theory argues that autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be satisfied for intrinsic motivation to flourish. Remote work can threaten relatedness because physical cues are minimal. The practice of paraphrasing a junior's idea or rotating meeting times to share inconvenience signals respect and belonging, directly satisfying the need for relatedness. Once this need is met, employees experience greater autonomy (freedom to speak up) and competence (confidence that their contributions matter), culminating in higher-quality output. Our data thus corroborate recent experimental work linking social mindfulness to need satisfaction and prosocial behaviour (Van Doesum et al., 2019).

5.1.3 Psychological Safety as a Mediating Mechanism

Consistent with Edmondson's (1999) seminal work, psychological safety emerged as the keystone variable translating social mindfulness into tangible benefits. What the current study adds is the granularity of cues that foster safety in virtual space: the five-second pause, the verbal affirmation for camera-off participants, the post-meeting summary that credits each speaker. These low-cost behaviours are especially critical in high-power-distance cultures like Pakistan where subordinates traditionally hesitate to voice disagreement (Hofstede, 2001). Social mindfulness thus flattens the authority gradient, enabling the error-sharing essential for innovation.

5.1.4 Reciprocity and Collective Efficacy

The spiral effect documented in Theme 4 aligns with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964): mindful treatment creates an obligation to reciprocate, generating a virtuous cycle of discretionary effort. The observation that productivity gains followed empathic flexibility supports recent critiques of "tight" cultures that over-emphasise efficiency (Gelfand et al., 2011). By slowing down to speed up, leaders cultivated a cooperative climate that ultimately surpassed the output of purely metric-driven teams.

5.2 Cultural Specificities in the Pakistani Context

Collectivist values intensify the salience of interpersonal harmony. Participants interpreted socially mindful acts not as optional niceties but as fulfilments of cultural duty (adab). Conversely, breaches such as ignoring a greeting were perceived as izzat (face-loss) threats, triggering disproportionate distress. This cultural lens suggests that interventions aimed at promoting social mindfulness in Pakistan should frame it as alignment with Islamic and indigenous ethical codes rather than an imported Western concept. For example, referencing the Prophet's practice of giving full attention to speakers (sama') can legitimise mindful listening in training modules.

5.3 Practical Implications

Leadership development should begin the moment someone becomes a manager. Embed three social-mindfulness micro-skills in every onboarding checklist: paraphrase what the other person just said, label the emotion you hear ("sounds frustrating"), and give explicit credit for ideas. After the classroom portion, have new leads silently shadow veteran managers who model mindful turn-taking on live calls, then debrief their own recorded calls for immediate feedback.

The same must be done with communication protocols and well-being policies. Establish a four-hour norm response window anemity: recognition of any message within the response window even when an answer will be delayed longer is to be given and meeting times to be rotating monthly and an inconvenience score to be published so that one can recognize that equity is being gauged. Instead of generic wellness webinars, make peer-nominated moments of mindfulness when employees present live on stage the actual examples of empathic support; in addition, have an empathic delay provision in all project charters that gives a right to have short-term, penalty-free extensions in case of a confirmed personal crisis. Lastly, adopt technology to enforce the culture: promote emoji response systems (= received, ✓ = completed) and install Slack bots that remind participants to reply to the suggestion made by others by sending a message that says Have you responded to the suggestion posted by X? in the thread that has no responses in over 24 hours.

This study makes three scholarly contributions: it is among the first to empirically tie social mindfulness to both well-being and productivity in remote South-Asian teams; it extends Van Doesum et al.'s (2019) lab findings by showing the effect survives in

naturalistic, high-stakes settings; and it indigenises the construct by demonstrating how collectivist, high-power-distance cultures amplify the impact of small relational cues. A sequential mediation model positions psychological safety and need satisfaction as the pathway through which mindfulness operates, offering a roadmap for future hypothesis-testing research. Yet the work is limited: $n = 30$ with purposive sampling, possible social-desirability bias (partly offset by critical incidents), self-reported productivity figures that were not triangulated with KPIs, and subtle emotional shifts that may have crept in during the translation of five Urdu interviews. Future studies should quantitatively validate a Pakistani Social Mindfulness Scale on larger, multi-industry samples; track teams for 12 months to establish causality; replicate the design in individualist cultures to test cultural moderation; run RCTs of low-cost nudges such as emoji protocols on objective outputs like code commits or sales; and explore the dark side—whether excessive or performative mindfulness can trigger emotional labour or authenticity strain.

6. Conclusion

The abrupt pivot to remote work has strained traditional relational fabrics, yet this study demonstrates that small, socially mindful gestures—a five-second pause, a thumbs-up emoji, a public credit line—can weave new threads of connection in digital spaces. By centre-staging the interpersonal dimension of mindfulness, the findings challenge organisations to move beyond individually focused wellness apps toward relationally centred practices that satisfy basic psychological needs, cultivate psychological safety, and ultimately unlock sustainable productivity. In the Pakistani context, such practices resonate deeply with cultural values of *adab* and *izzat*, offering a culturally anchored pathway to healthier, more effective virtual teams. Future research should scale these insights through mixed-method longitudinal designs and cross-cultural replications, ensuring that social mindfulness becomes a global standard rather than a contextual curiosity.

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