

WORKPLACE LEARNING AND EMPLOYEE BURNOUT IN FOODS AND BEVERAGES MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between workplace learning and employee burnout. The study examined ten foods and beverages manufacturing companies, and a population and sample size of three hundred (300) was obtained through purposive sampling technique. The Pearson product moment correlation was employed as the analytical tool in testing the formulated hypotheses. The study revealed that workplace learning correlates significantly and negatively to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment and physical burnout. Following these findings, the study concluded that workplace learning negatively and significantly correlates employee burnout as demonstrated in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State. The study recommended that, foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State should improve employees' skills through the conduction of effective training needs assessment and analyze skills gaps so as to set clear goals and align them with business strategy as these will decrease employees' burnout.

Keywords: Depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, employee burnout, physical burnout, reduced personal accomplishment, and workplace learning

Introduction

In this fast-paced economy, resulting from changes in the business world and increased levels of competition due to globalization, organisations continually seek better ways to improve workers' performances and productivity. This has made organizations to increasingly recognize the strategic importance of addressing issues that decreases their competitive edge, such as employee burnout, work-life balance, and employee cynicism (Schaufeli & Taris, 2023). "Employee burnout is a significant concern in contemporary organizational settings due to its impact on employee well-being, organizational performance, and overall workplace dynamics" (Maslach & Leiter, 2023, p.12). Similarly, Tuckey and Dollard (2022) noted that burnout within the workforce results in decreased productivity, higher levels of absenteeism, and increased turnover rates, and these outcomes negatively affect organizational efficiency and increases the costs associated to hiring and training new employees. Bakker and Demerouti (2022, p.22) define "employee burnout as a persistent negative state of mental and physical exhaustion resulting from prolonged stress at work, that is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment". On this background, Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2023)

argued that organizations with high levels of employee burnout are more likely incur higher healthcare costs due to increased medical claims related to stress and mental health challenges, which will hamper the organisations' financial capability. Similarly, Robinson and Judge (2023) noted that persistent burnout may not only increase the financial burden of an organization, but might contribute to a negative organizational culture, such as lack of trust in leadership, poor employee morale, and a toxic work environment that can promote dissatisfaction, poor work dedication and high levels of cynicism. Owing to the importance of understanding employee burnout, it behoves around organizational strategists to seek means of eliminating employee burnout.

Reducing employee burnout is crucial for maintaining a healthy and productive workforce (Parker & Axtell, 2022). Furthermore, they maintained that activities such as providing employees with greater control over their work and decision-making processes can improve job satisfaction and reduce feelings of helplessness associated with burnout. Adjusting workloads to manageable levels and ensuring employees have adequate resources, and encouraging employees to maintain a healthy work-life balance through flexible working arrangements (Greenhaus & Allen, 2022) are means of cushioning the burnout effect within an organization. Since employee burnout results from activities around the job, mastery of the job may be an important factor in tackling burnout issues. One major concept that helps in work mastery is workplace learning. Billet (2023) described workplace learning as the process through which employees gain new knowledge and skills in the context of their work activities, and it helps them build work experiences and interactions. Noe (2023) argued that workplace learning continually provides opportunities that help employees stay current with industry developments and improve their job performance. Similarly, Tannenbaum and Yukl (2023) noted that workplace learning contributes significantly to improved employee engagement and retention, which are associated to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. According to Argote and Miron-Spektor (2023), organisations that invest and promote learning culture are more likely to innovate and grow, as the workers continuously develop new ideas and solutions. It was on this premise that Kraiger and Ford (2023), argued that workplace learning helps organizations mitigate legal and operational risks through proper training and up-to-date knowledge. Investing in workplace learning helps organizations enhance the skills and competencies of their workforce, and this is crucial for staying competitive in a rapidly evolving business environment (Okunoye, & Gbadegesin, 2023). According to Adeoye and Adebayo (2023), organizations that prioritize workplace learning through activities such as employee training are better positioned to compete in the global market by fostering a skilled and adaptable workforce.

Following the discussions, it could be seen that little or none of these literatures has considered the relationship between workplace learning and employee burnout. Hinging on this gap, this paper will examine how workplace learning relates to employee burnout as seen in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, physical burnout and reduced personal accomplishment in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State. In order to fill this gap, the paper developed a conceptual framework, research questions, and hypotheses that will guide the study. We developed the following questions as a guide for this research: what is the relationship between workplace learning and emotional exhaustion of employees in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State? how does workplace learning relate to depersonalization (cynicism) of employees in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State? what is the relationship between workplace learning and reduced personal accomplishment of employees in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State? how does workplace learning relate to employee physical burnout in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State?

Literature Review

Workplace Learning

Nieuwenhuis and Wiersma (2019, p12) described “workplace learning as the acquisition of knowledge and skills that occur through practical engagement and problem-solving within the workplace, emphasizing experiential learning and adaptation”. Workplace learning is described as a process where individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes through engagement in their work tasks and interactions within their work environment (Tynjala, 2020). Workplace learning involves the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills in the context of work, which often includes reflecting on and adapting to practical experiences to enhance both personal and organizational effectiveness (Boud, & Middleton, 2019). Workplace learning is described as the process by which employees acquire skills and knowledge through structured and unstructured activities within their work environment, aimed at improving job performance and personal development, while addressing local challenges and opportunities (Ohunyemi, 2022). Adebayo (2023) defined workplace learning as the acquisition of skills and competencies by employees through various learning methods including on-the-job training, mentoring, and informal interactions, which contribute to their professional growth and organizational productivity. Ali and Umar (2021) defined workplace learning to encapsulate the continuous learning processes employees engage in within their work environment to develop new skills, adapt to evolving job requirements, and address specific industry needs through both formal and informal channels. Workplace learning is characterized by the integration of formal training programs and on-the-job experiences that are designed to enhance employees' skills, knowledge, and overall job performance while considering the unique socio-economic context of the country (Ojo, 2020).

Employee Burnout

Adedokun, Olawale and Ojo (2022) define employee burnout as a psychological syndrome that involves emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, stemming from chronic work stress, and they highlight that in Nigeria, factors like job insecurity, long working hours, and poor organizational support contribute significantly to burnout. Okeke and Onu (2023) describe burnout as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress at work, and it emphasize the unique aspects of work environments, such as high job demands and inadequate support systems, which exacerbate burnout. Adebayo and Olanrewaju (2021) identified that burnout is a multi-dimensional construct involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, and their research focuses on how organizational culture and socio-economic conditions contribute to these dimensions. Maslach and Leiter (2023) define burnout as a psychological syndrome resulting from prolonged and intense job stress, characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Measures of Employee Burnout

Emotional Exhaustion

Maslach and Leiter (2023) define emotional exhaustion as the feeling of being emotionally overextended and drained by one's work, and it is characterized by a sense of depletion of emotional resources, where individuals feel they have nothing left to give. Schaufeli and Taris (2022) describe emotional exhaustion as a state of being emotionally worn out, where individuals feel drained and fatigued from their work and it reflects a lack of emotional energy and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the demands of one's job. Ezeani and Okafor (2021) describe emotional exhaustion as a psychological state where employees feel persistently drained and emotionally depleted due to ongoing stress and lack of support in the workplace, and they point out that Nigerian workers frequently experience emotional exhaustion due to high job demands and poor organizational climates.

Depersonalization (Cynicism)

Schaufeli and Bakker (2023) describe employee depersonalization as a form of emotional detachment where employees feel estranged from their work and colleagues, leading to a sense of being reduced to a mere cog in the organizational machine. According to Maslach and Leiter (2022), employee depersonalization involves a shift from a personal to a more impersonal approach in interactions with others at work, and this can manifest as treating clients or coworkers in a detached manner, which can exacerbate feelings of burnout. Kahn (2021) defines depersonalization as a psychological state where employees disconnect from their work and colleagues, leading to a reduction in personal investment and a sense of being just a functionary in the workplace.

Reduced Personal Accomplishment

Adeyemo and Ojo (2018) define reduced personal accomplishment as the perceived inadequacy and ineffectiveness in job performance among Nigerian workers. They explore how these feelings contribute to overall burnout and job dissatisfaction. Oluwaseun and Olayinka (2019, p9) described “reduced personal accomplishment in the Nigerian context as a significant aspect of burnout, characterized by a decline in perceived job efficacy and achievement”. Iroegbu and Alabi (2021) address reduced personal accomplishment as a feeling of diminished effectiveness and success in one’s job role among Nigerian employees. Nwankwo and Nwaorgu (2022) define reduced personal accomplishment as a reduced sense of personal effectiveness and job satisfaction. They explore the implications of this feeling for employee well-being and organizational performance in Nigeria. Labrague, McEnroe–Petitte, Leocadio, Van Bogaert, and Cato (2017) define reduced personal accomplishment as a perception of ineffectiveness and failure at work, particularly among healthcare professionals. This feeling of inefficacy can lead to lower job satisfaction and increased stress.

Physical Burnout

Ojo and Yusuf (2023) conceptualize physical burnout as an acute state of physical exhaustion resulting from continuous occupational stress, leading to diminished health and reduced ability to perform job responsibilities effectively. Idris and Adebisi (2022) describe physical burnout as a form of intense fatigue and exhaustion caused by ongoing work stress, resulting in a significant reduction in physical capacity and job performance. Akinwale and Odunsi (2021) define physical burnout as a state of severe physical exhaustion that emerges from enduring and high-intensity work stressors, which compromises physical health and leads to significant declines in job performance and productivity. Ogunbameru et al. (2023) describe physical burnout as an extreme state of exhaustion that results from continuous exposure to high levels of stress in the workplace, leading to severe physical and emotional fatigue, and reduced work efficiency. Adeyemo and Afolabi (2022) define physical burnout as a condition characterized by profound fatigue and depletion of physical resources due to excessive work demands and prolonged stress, which negatively impacts both physical health and job performance.

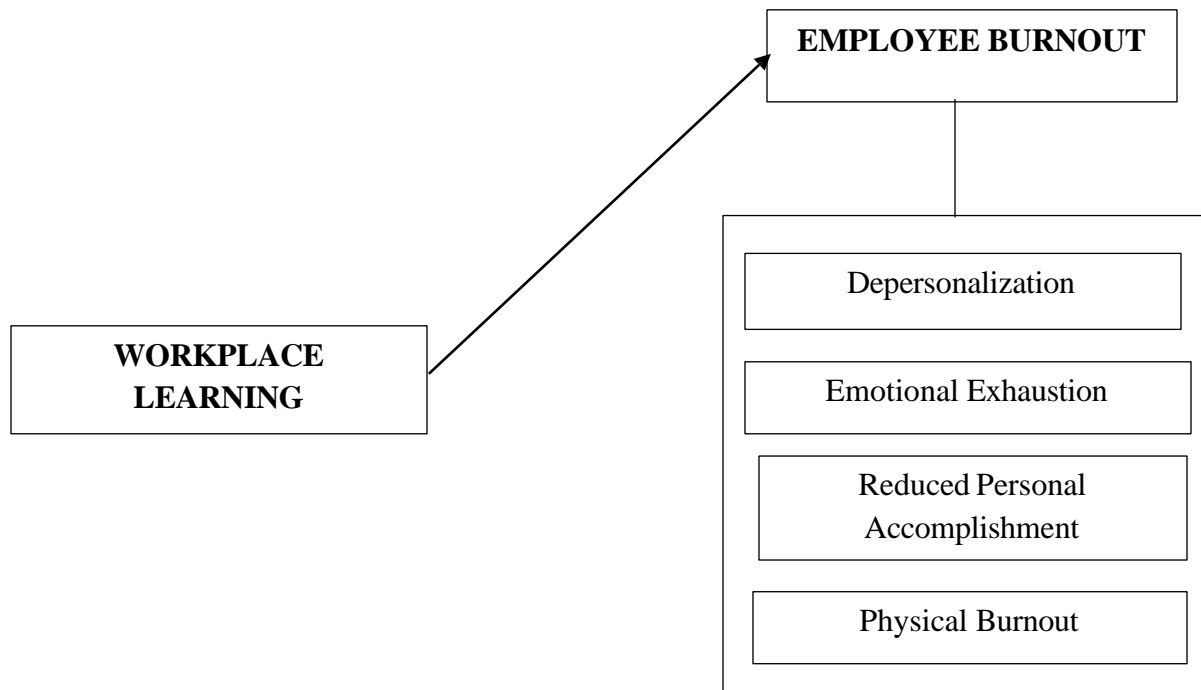


Fig. 1: Researcher’s Conceptualization, 2024. Conceptual Framework for the relationship between workplace learning and employee burnout.

Workplace Learning and Employee Burnout

According to Yang and Chen (2021), organizations that provide robust learning and development opportunities can mitigate burnout by fostering a supportive work environment. Employees who engage in regular training and skill development are less likely to experience burnout because these opportunities help them cope with job demands more effectively and feel more engaged with their work. While workplace learning can be beneficial, Lee and Kim (2023) highlight that poorly designed or excessively demanding training programs can contribute to burnout. If learning initiatives are perceived as additional burdens or are poorly managed, they may exacerbate stress rather than alleviate it. Ibrahim et al. (2023) explore how various types of training programs affect burnout among Nigerian public sector workers. They find that training programs that focus on skill enhancement and personal development are associated with lower levels of burnout. However, they also note that poorly designed or overly intensive training programs can lead to increased stress if they add to the employees' workload without adequate support. The following hypotheses were formulated specifically for this study:

- Ho₁:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and emotional exhaustion of employees in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.
- Ho₂:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and depersonalization (cynicism) of employees in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.
- Ho₃:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and reduced personal accomplishment of employees in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.
- Ho₄:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and employee physical burnout in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.

Methodology

In this study, the survey research design was adopted. “Survey research involves collecting data from a sample of individuals using structured questionnaire, and is commonly used to gather data on attitudes, opinions, and behaviors” (Wilson & Adams, 2024, p.12). The population of this study, will cut across employees from foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State. It is 300 and includes employees of all cadre. The study will be limited to only ten foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study. From the ten companies, the researcher purposively selected thirty (30) employees from each company. This amounted to a population of three hundred (300) respondents.

Table 1: The population distribution

S/N	Names of Companies	Population
1	International Breweries (Pabod Breweries)	30
2	White Diamond Salt Limited	30
3	Royal Salt (Producers of Mr. Chef)	30
4	Port Harcourt Flour Mills Limited	30
5	Dufil Prima Foods Ltd. (Makers of Indomie noodles)	30
6	Olam Nigeria	30
7	Bua Group (Sugar Subsidiary)	30
8	Nigerian Bottling Company (Makers of Coca Cola)	30
9	NASCON Allied Industries Ltd.	30
10	Rossy Endeavors Ltd.	30
		300

Source: Field Data, 2024.

Owing to the fact that the population was purposively obtained, and it was a representation of the foods and beverages industry in Rivers State, the researcher adopted the population as the sample size (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The research obtained its data from the primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data for this study was gathered and the research questionnaire. Simple and direct questions were used throughout the questionnaire, and complicated ones were avoided. The 5-point Likert scale is used to quantify the study's variables, including the predictor and criterion variables (5 being very high, 4 being high, 3 being moderate, 2 being low, and 1 being extremely low). The criterion variable, which is employee burnout was operationalized in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment and physical burnout was measured against the predictor variable, which is workplace learning. These variables had a total of 25 items. Data collected was coded, keyed in the computer and analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was the adopted inferential statistics which was used to test the formulated hypotheses.

Analysis and Discussion

Decision Rule:

Table 2: Description on Range of correlation Pearson values and the corresponding level of association

Range of Pearson value with positive and negative sign values	Strength of Association
± 0.80 – 0.99	Very Strong
± 0.60 – 0.79	Strong
± 0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
± 0.20 – 0.39	Weak
± 0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak

Source: Adopted from Ahaiauzu & Asawo, 2016, Advance Social Research Methods

The values of Pearson with a positive (+) sign indicate a positive link, whereas those with a negative (-) sign suggest an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. The direction of association between the two variables is thus explained by the sign of the Pearson value. The aforementioned table serves as our yardstick for assessing the degree of correlation between the dimensions' and measures' understudied variables. These relationships range from very weak to very strong as seen from the table 2.

Table 3: Table showing correlation between workplace learning and the measures of employee burnout.

		W Learning	Exhaustion	Depersonal	Physical B	RP Accompl
W Learning	Pearson Correlation	1	-.763**	-.817**	-.749**	-.740**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Exhaustion	Pearson Correlation	-.763**	1	.900**	.945**	.764**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Depersonal	Pearson Correlation	-.817**	.900**	1	.881**	.741**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Physical B	Pearson Correlation	-.749**	.945**	.881**	1	.673**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
RP Accompl	Pearson Correlation	-.740**	.764**	.741**	.673**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	300	300	300	300	300

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data, 2024

- Ho₁:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and employee emotional exhaustion in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.
With a Pearson value of -0.763, and probability value of 0.000, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Therefore "workplace learning and employee emotional exhaustion in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State" are strongly and inversely related.
- Ho₂:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and employee depersonalization (cynicism) in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.
With a Pearson value of -0.817 and a probability value of 0.000, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. According to this, "workplace learning and employee depersonalization (cynicism) in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State" are very strongly and inversely related.
- Ho₃:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and employee reduced personal accomplishment in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.
With a Pearson value of -0.749 and a probability value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. According to this, "workplace learning and employee reduced personal accomplishment in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State" is strongly and inversely related.
- Ho₄:** There is no significant relationship between workplace learning and employee physical burnout in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.
With a Pearson value of -0.740, and probability value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is accepted. According to this, "workplace learning and employee physical

burnout in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State" are strongly and inversely related.

Relationship between workplace learning and employee emotional exhaustion.

Some studies suggest that workplace learning can mitigate emotional exhaustion. For example, training and development opportunities provide employees with the skills and knowledge to manage job demands more effectively (Lee & Kim, 2023, Wang & Lee, 2024). This empowerment can lead to increased self-efficacy and reduced feelings of stress and exhaustion. While workplace learning has the potential to reduce emotional exhaustion through skill enhancement and self-efficacy, it can also contribute to stress if not managed effectively. The key to leveraging workplace learning to mitigate emotional exhaustion lies in designing supportive and well-structured learning environments that align with employees' needs and roles. Thus, this research infers that workplace learning reduces employee emotional exhaustion in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State.

Relationship between workplace learning and employee depersonalization (cynicism).

Workplace learning has been increasingly recognized for its potential to enhance employee well-being and job satisfaction. According to Beusaert, Segers, and Gijsselaers (2019), workplace learning opportunities can contribute to employees' professional growth and job satisfaction, which may reduce feelings of depersonalisation. Learning experiences that are relevant and aligned with career goals can foster a sense of competence and accomplishment, counteracting the feelings of detachment and alienation that characterize depersonalisation (Beusaert et al., 2019). Additionally, Schweyer (2022) highlights that structured learning programs and professional development can enhance employees' engagement by providing them with the skills and knowledge to feel more connected to their roles and responsibilities. This enhanced engagement can serve as a buffer against depersonalisation, a phenomenon where employees may feel disconnected from their work and, consequently, from their sense of self. Therefore, this research infers that workplace learning is a prerequisite for cushioning employee depersonalization (cynicism).

Relationship between workplace learning and employee reduced personal accomplishments.

Workplace learning is generally associated with enhanced personal accomplishments when it aligns with employees' professional goals and aspirations. According to Kyndt and Baert (2021), effective learning opportunities contribute to employees' skill development, which can lead to a greater sense of achievement and personal accomplishment. When employees acquire new skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to their roles, they often experience increased job satisfaction and a stronger sense of personal achievement (Kyndt & Baert, 2021). Furthermore, learning programs that are well-integrated with career development paths can reinforce employees' sense of accomplishment. As noted by Beusaert, Segers, and Gijsselaers (2019), employees who perceive a clear link between their learning activities and career advancement are more likely to feel a sense of accomplishment. These employees view learning as a tool for achieving their career goals, which enhances their overall sense of professional achievement and satisfaction. Thus, this research infers that workplace learning promotes employee's personal accomplishments.

Relationship between workplace learning and employee physical burnout.

Workplace learning, when implemented effectively, can have a positive impact on reducing physical burnout. Research suggests that relevant and well-structured learning opportunities can lead to enhanced job satisfaction and reduced stress. For instance, Ojo, Adeniji, and Obasan (2022) found that employees who engage in continuous professional development perceive their jobs as more rewarding and less stressful. This, in turn, can contribute to reduced physical burnout, as employees feel more competent and supported in their roles. Additionally, Adebayo and Olawale (2023) highlight that training programs that align with employees' career goals and provide clear pathways for advancement can help mitigate stress and fatigue. Employees who view learning as a tool for achieving their professional aspirations may

experience less physical burnout because they feel more engaged and less overwhelmed by their responsibilities. Thus, this research infers that workplace learning reduces employee physical burnout.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Following the findings on the relationship between workplace learning and employee burnout in foods and beverages manufacturing companies in Rivers State, Nigeria, it affirmed that workplace learning substantially helps in combating employee burnout. This position was deduced from the observed correlation between workplace learning and the measures of employee burnout. In conclusion, while workplace learning has the potential to alleviate burnout and enhance job satisfaction, its impact largely depends on how learning opportunities are designed and implemented. Organizations must adopt a strategic approach to workplace learning, balancing its demands with support and resources, to ensure it contributes positively to employee well-being rather than exacerbating burnout.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends that foods and beverages manufacturing companies should align work trainings for skills development with employees' needs and career goals as these will decrease employees' emotional exhaustion. They should implement supportive learning environments as this will reduce employees' depersonalization and cynicism within the organisation. They should balance learning demands with it job responsibilities as these will improve employee personal accomplishments. Fostering a positive organizational culture is necessary as this will reduce employee physical burnout.

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