

## PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

### Public Service Motivation And Nonprofit Organizations: Is There A Valid Relationship Between The Two?

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## ABSTRACT

The theoretical construct of Public Service Motivation (PSM) had been associated heavily with public sector in public management scholarship. More recently, the scholarship has shifted the PSM's association with nonprofit sector. However, the categorization of nonprofit sector in the United States consist of highly diversified organizations, all of whom may not be serving community with the true motive required and measured by public service motivation. This conceptual paper invites future scholars to investigate the relationship of conceptual definition of PSM with motives of employees working in all types of nonprofit sector especially the private foundations. In addition to this, nonprofit sector has no uniform structure and management style in international settings. There is a need to study whether PSM correlates with nonprofit sector in its true sense.

## INTRODUCTION

Public service motivation has been associated heavily with the public sector, because it is assumed that public service provides people ample opportunities to serve the public needs (Perry & Wise, 1990; Perry 1996). More recently, the research on public service motivation seemed to shift its focus towards the nonprofit sector (Houston, 2005; Clerkin, Paynter, & Taylor, 2008). Various studies have found out that employees' altruistic and community service oriented tendencies are found to be higher in nonprofit sector as compared with public and private sectors (Houston, 2005). Although, it is generally believed that people working for nonprofit sector join this occupation because they have high desires to serve community, however, the assumption of linking PSM with nonprofit sector can be misleading based on the diversified structural composition of the nonprofit sector in the United States. This paper has focused mainly upon the US context due to two reasons; 1) the construct of PSM was originated and investigated the most in the US settings, and 2) the nonprofit sector in the US has been recognized as the well established and legally registered voluntary organizations. These organizations work with various categorizations under the section 501 (c ) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code (Foundations Directory, 2006).

This paper investigates whether PSM can be related with the nonprofit sector just based on the assumption that nonprofit sector serves community better without realizing that the participants of nonprofit sector may or may not have true motives highly correlated with the motives and dimensions identified in the PSM construct. Recent studies suggest that people volunteer because of their values and most importantly the perceived net benefits from participation (Wilson, 2000). However, as Brown (1999) argued, because intrinsic motivators are difficult to measure, most studies underestimate the personal gains that volunteers get from stating their needs. Nonprofit sector is comprised of a large number of diversified organizations serving for different goals, yet the goals may not necessarily be purely humanitarian. Public service motivation, on the other hand, is primarily based upon "public serving" ethos and hence, public and nonprofit sectors are considered as the most valid platforms for people to fulfill their desires to serve public.

Theoretically, however, there is a need to determine the core association between public service motivation and nonprofit sector which has gained an untested popularity based on the underlying assumptions made about the nonprofit community. This paper examines the core questions related with the concept, structural composition and generalizability issues related with the nonprofit sector that might be explored further in order to strengthen its relationship with public service motivation which may turn out to be a significant association.

This paper has five sections. The first section gives the theoretical foundation of the construct of public service motivation. The next section describes the structural formation of the nonprofit sector with emphasis upon the corporate nonprofit sector as a special category of nonprofit sector in the United States in order to determine the conceptual connection of PSM with overall nonprofit sector. It then describes the differences between corporate social responsibility in private sector and public service motivation in the public sector with an attempt to see the differences in the true motives of community services of the representatives of these two sectors. Finally, it explains the international differences in defining and structuring the nonprofit sector and its implications of connecting this with PSM. The concluding remarks are given at the end to provide an overview of the whole paper and state the future research implications.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Public Service Motivation (PSM) is defined as “an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations (Perry & Wise, 1990). The early constructs for PSM were often one dimensional and limited in scope; intrinsic rewards were generally made operational as “a desire to engage in meaningful public service”, whereas extrinsic rewards were represented by measures such as pay, promotions, and other external motivators (Rainey, 1982). Most of the initial research on this area associated public service motivation with service via governmental institutions (Perry & Wise, 1990), but later research on the subject involved civic service volunteering as well (Houston, 2005; Clerkin et al., 2008). Some scholars contend that PSM is more than the motivational difference between the ‘sectors’ and note that many individuals in non profit and private sector organizations also have strong motives to perform public service (Brewer & Seldon, 1998)

## DEFINING PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION

Several scholars have defined public service motivation differently. Some scholars define it as a “motivational force that induces individuals to perform meaningful public service i.e. public, community, and social service” (Brewer & Seldon, 1998); some describe it as a “general altruistic motivation to serve the interests of a community of people, a state, a nation or humankind (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999); and some describe this as “the belief, values and attitudes that go beyond self-interest and organizational interest, that concern the interest of a larger political entity and that motivate individuals to act accordingly whenever appropriate” (Vandenabeele, 2007).

## PSM AND THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

Despite the widespread agreement on the association of PSM with nonprofit sector, suggestions for research on PSM in the nonprofit sector appear to have not been very encouraging. Early studies did not include nonprofits but the scope of PSM has been expanded for the explicit purpose of incorporating nonprofit sector workers (Perry, 2000) and volunteers (Perry, Coursey, Brudney, & Littlepage, 2008). The emerging literature also focuses on similarities in service ethics between public and nonprofit managers (Wittmer, 1991). Tschirhart (1998) found out that volunteers become committed to specific organizations as an expression of PSM.

The links between PSM and stipended and unpaid volunteers are being studied as well (Tschirhart, 1998). Houston (2005) explicitly connected PSM to volunteering and donating behavior finding that workers in the nonprofit and public sectors were more likely than private sector employees to volunteer time and donate blood. In fact, Houston found that nonprofit workers were more likely to volunteer than their public sector counterparts. Subsequently, Perry et al. (2008) examined PSM in individuals that are not employed as professional public administrators. Using validated PSM measures, Perry and his coauthors further strengthened the link between volunteering and PSM by finding evidence that formal and informal volunteering is positively related to higher levels of PSM.

Despite some works, cited above, have contributed to the domain of public service motivation's association with the nonprofit sector, the findings have not convinced readers as how these studies have defined and incorporated nonprofit sector for their findings. In the recent work, Perry and Hondegheem (2008) pointed out that "the meaning of public service motivation varies across disciplines and fields, but its definition has a common focus on motives and action in the public domain that are intended to do good for others and shape the well-being of society." When we talk about nonprofit sector, we undertake a huge employment sector with various sub categorizations and I suspect that public service motivation conceptually fits well with all categorizations of nonprofit sector. Since public service motivation is primarily concerned with serving the public, doing good for others and "shaping the well being of society," it is imperative to understand what purpose various nonprofits serve.

There are various types of nonprofits such as independent nonprofits, public serving nonprofits, religious congregations and private foundations etc. In business/private sector huge business corporations initiate their foundations in the name of community services or more formal term 'corporate social responsibility'. According to the classification of nonprofit organizations, such foundations fall under the category of

“Funding Intermediaries” or “Umbrella” fundraising organizations- a special subclass of public-serving nonprofit organizations- (discussed in detail in the next section; Salamon, 1999). But do we really believe that the sole purpose of their social performance is aligned with serving the public needs? Isn’t the underlying motive behind initiating large scale foundations is having huge tax deductions and building soft image in the community to further boost their market shares? Can we still categorize the motives of people working for private foundations as public service motivation? I do not know the answer but this need to be explored further.

Public service motivation is gaining prominence not only in public management but also the business administration scholarship. As mentioned earlier, employees of the nonprofit sector have been marked with having highest alignment with public service motivation. The research in this area is still between infancy and growth stage. Before we explore this issue by digging further into PSM’s relevance with the nonprofit sector, we need to understand the operationalization of nonprofit sector instead of using this as a proxy for serving community. Only after understanding the motives of people working in various nonprofit organizations we would be able to connect this sector with PSM construct.

The following section describes the various categorizations of nonprofits and the purpose behind their existence.

#### *Corporate (private) Foundations as a Category of Nonprofit Organizations in the US*

Salamon (1999) divided the nonprofit sector into two broad categories: those that primarily serve the public and those that primarily serve the organization’s members. Public-serving non profit organization has various subclasses. A major subclass of public-serving organizations is comprised of “funding intermediaries,” or “umbrella” fundraising organizations- those whose principal mission is to channel financial support to other nonprofit organizations” (Salamon, 2001). The role of these intermediaries is to “help generate---- private funding, to manage it once it is accumulated, and to make it available for use by other organizations in the sector” (Salamon, 2001). Included in the roster of funding intermediaries are foundations and federated funders, such as United Way and Jewish federations.

There are 61,810 foundations operating in the United States including independent foundations, corporate foundations, community foundations and operating foundations. Operating foundations are classified by the IRS as private foundations but function as both grant makers and operators of charitable programs, particularly research, social welfare, or other charitable programs (Foundations Directory, 2006).

A second group of funding intermediaries consists of organizations such as United Ways. These organizations typically solicit contributions from corporations and

individuals with the promise to allocate the bulk of these donations to member charities, all of which required to be accountable to the intermediary through financial reports and community-based planning.

Member serving organizations are business leagues that are granted federal tax-exempt status under Section 501 (c) (6) of the Internal Revenue Code. The most common form of business league is the trade association, “a nonprofit, cooperative, voluntarily-joined, organization of business competitors designed to assist members and its industry in dealing with mutual business problems” (Hopkins, 1992, p. 582). The IRS defines a business league as “an association of persons having some common business interest, the purpose of which is to promote that common interest and not to engage in a regular business of a kind ordinarily carried on for profit. Trade associations and professional associations are considered business leagues” (Internal Revenue Service, 2003). They include Chambers of Commerce, boards of trade, real estate boards, and other organizations formed to promote business interests and “devoted to the improvement of business conditions of one or more lines of business as distinguished from the performance of particular services for individual persons” (Internal Revenue Service, 2003).

#### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS AND PUBLIC CHARITIES

Public charities and private foundations are both granted tax-exempt status under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. However, Section 509(a) differentiates organizations that receive their income from a broad range of public sources from those organizations that receive their income principally from one, or a limited number of sources plus investment income (Kramer & Sykes, 2001). Private foundations pay a federal tax on net investment income, must meet a minimum annual threshold for making distributions of their assets to charities, and are flatly prohibited from lobbying. To be considered a public charity rather than a private foundation, an organization must pass a public support test enforced by the IRS.

Nonprofits that don't fit neatly into the public-serving or member serving category are the 375,000 religious congregations, about 80% of which do not register with the IRS or file a 990 federal annual tax return because there is no requirement to do so (Ott, 2001, p. 35)

There are other classifications of nonprofit sector proposed by different scholars. Henry Hansman (1987) has typologized nonprofits into four types, depending upon their primary source of income (from either sales or donations) and their governing structure (a board consisting of members who do or don't directly benefit from the organizations services any more than anyone else in the community). His four types are: donative and

mutual, donative and entrepreneurial, commercial and mutual, and commercial and entrepreneurial. Micheal O'Neill has proposed differentiating the nonprofit sector into nine subsectors: religious, private education and research, health care, arts and culture, social services, advocacy and legal services, international assistance, foundations and corporate funders, and mutual benefit organizations (Ott, 2001, p. 5)

#### CONCEPTUALIZING NONPROFIT SECTOR CONNECTION WITH PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION

Clerkin et al., (2008) attempted to connect PSM with the nonprofit organizations in a way to enhance the scope of PSM by treating volunteering or donating as a consequence of PSM rather than as its antecedent. Before describing PSM as dependent or independent variable, isn't it necessary to decide whether these two can be connected conceptually. Undoubtedly, organizations are driven by the people that work for and support them. In order to understand what motivates individuals to join and participate meaningfully in nonprofit organizational activities, Clerkin et al. (2008) tried to propose PSM as a promising theory that can answer this question.

As previously mentioned, Perry & Wise (1990) defined PSM as an "individual predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organization." In defining PSM, Perry and Wise (1996) identified three types of incentives that describe the differences in how individuals are motivated towards public service. Accordingly, rational (i.e., involvement in public service is the best way to pursue a particular policy objective), affective (i.e., an emotional attachment to a particular interest group or cause drives participation), and normative (i.e., interest arises out of duty or desire to "give back") motives characterize PSM. To measure PSM, Perry (1996) developed a set of questions to capture attitudes associated with public service. His four dimensions corresponding to rational, affective and normative motivational bases are: (a) attraction to policy making (rational), (b) commitment to the public interest (normative), (c) compassion (affective), and (d) self-sacrifice (affective).

Clerkin et al. (2008) quoted Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, & Haugen's (1998) categorization of volunteering motivations that include both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. They argue that six personal and social factors are served by volunteering. This includes (a) the expression of values, (b) developing an understanding of the world and environment of skills necessary for external environments, (c) enhancing psychological growth, (d) developing career goals and skills, (e) engaging in social activities, and (f) protecting or mitigating the personal need to reduce guilt as well as to address social problems (Clary et al., 1998). Besides some other demographic variables Clerkin et al. (2008) wanted to add PSM as a representation of a psychological

need for constructive civic engagement, to the list of possible motivators for donating and volunteering.

Whether PSM can be added in the list of motivating factors for volunteering activities determined by Clary et al. (1998) is not the issue. The real issue is whether the PSM construct's face validity fits well with the motives identified for volunteering activities. How would we justify the rational motive of policy making in the non profit sector? Similarly, how would the career development motive for volunteering activities be justified with PSM as PSM has been found to be negatively related with organizational tenure (Moynihan & Pandey, 2007)? There is need to study this relationship's validity in PSM literature.

*Proposition 1: Can PSM, which represents the psychological need for constructive civic engagement, be added to the list of possible motivators for donating and volunteering (nonprofit sector)?*

*Proposition 2- Would the motivation to serve public remain high or constant while staying with the nonprofit sector or it declines with the passage of time?*

#### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE MOTIVATION

It is generally assumed that a corporation's purpose is to maximize returns to its shareholders, and thus, only people can have social responsibilities whereas corporations are only responsible to their shareholders and not to society as a whole (Friedman, 1970). It is nevertheless accepted that corporations should obey the laws of the countries within which they work. It is also assumed that corporations have no other obligations to society. Some people perceive corporate social responsibility or CSR as incongruent with the very nature and purpose of business, and indeed a hindrance to free trade (Friedman, 1970).

The approach similar to CSR is Creating Shared Value (CSV). CSV received global attention when Porter and Kramer (2006) presented their insights and relevant examples of companies that have developed deep linkages between their business strategies and corporate social responsibility. A business needs a healthy, educated workforce, sustainable resources and adept government to compete effectively. For society to thrive, profitable and competitive businesses must be developed and supported to create income, wealth, tax revenues, and opportunities for philanthropy. However, many approaches to CSV pit businesses against society, emphasizing the costs and limitations of compliance with externally imposed social and environmental standards. CSV acknowledges trade-offs between short-term profitability and social or

environmental goals, but focuses more on the opportunities for competitive advantage from building a social value proposition into corporate strategy.

As mentioned previously, the classification of nonprofit sector into various categories identifies private foundations as a separate category which is developed as a result of initiating social welfare programs. However, these programs are primarily serving the corporate missions of the organization and fulfill social responsibilities as secondary roles in order to accomplish the main business or commercial goals. The scale and nature of the benefits of CSR for an organization can vary depending upon the nature of the enterprise, and are difficult to quantify. However, there is a large body of literature encouraging businesses to adopt measures beyond financial ones (Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003). The definition of CSR used within an organization can vary from the strict “stakeholder impacts” definition used by many CSR advocates and will often include charitable efforts and volunteering.

There are various corporate objectives in business sector for initiating volunteering programs. What we need to conceptualize is whether their motives correspond with the rational, affective and normative motives identified for PSM (Perry, 1996). Managing risk is a central part of many corporate strategies. Reputation that takes decades to build up can be ruined in hours through incidents such as corruption scandals or environmental accidents. Building genuine culture of “doing the right thing” can offset these risks (Kytte & Ruggie, 2005). Similarly, in crowded market places, companies strive for a unique selling position that can separate them from competition in the minds of consumers. CSR can play a significant role in building customer loyalty based on distinctive ethical values. Business service organizations can benefit too from building a reputation for integrity and best practices (Paluszek, 2005).

Some critics believe that CSR programs are undertaken by companies such as McDonalds to distract public from ethical questions posed by their core operations. They argued that some corporations start CSR programs for the commercial benefit they enjoy through raising their reputation with public or with government. They suggested that corporations which exist solely to maximize profits are unable to advance the interests of society as a whole (McKibben, 2006). Another concern is when companies claim to promote CSR and be committed to volunteer activities whilst simultaneously engaging in harmful business practices. For example, since the 1970s, the McDonald’s Corporation’s association with Ronald McDonald House has been viewed as CSR and relationship marketing.

Discussing the corporate objectives of private firms for initiating volunteering or community service does not necessarily mean that employees working in these private foundations would also have same motives. But it is important to discern the working behaviors and public serving motives of employees working in private foundations and

independent or public foundations. Critics concerned with corporate hypocrisy and insincerity generally suggest that better governmental and international regulation and enforcement, rather than voluntary measures, are necessary to ensure that companies behave in a socially responsible manner. Do corporate objectives have some impact upon the intentions of people joining the nonprofits or volunteering instincts of employees working in nonprofits – are the questions that need to be explored further.

*Proposition 3- Does corporate social responsibility in private sector and public service motivation in public sector affect employees' intentions to serve public in the same way?*

### International Differences in Relating Public Service Motivation and Nonprofit Sector

Although most of the literature on public service motivation, or related concepts such as public service ethos, is still mainly focusing on the United States and the United Kingdom, research is being extended to new geographic contexts such as Western Europe (Castaing, 2006; Steijn, 2006; Vandenabeele & Hondeghem, 2004), Southern Europe (Camilleri, 2006 & 2007; Cerase & Farinella, 2006), and Australia (Taylor, 2007). The concept is also found in Asia, which highlights the universal character of the topic (Choi, 2004; Kim, 2005; Turner & Halligan, 1999).

The American dominance in the study of topic is reflected in the empirical measures used. Not only are the instruments difficult to translate and validate, but more importantly, the factorial structure of the measurement instrument sometimes differs across countries (Castaing, 2006; Vandenabeele & Hondeghem, 2004). The values associated with public service motivation are different across regional settings (Norris, 2003), causing the measurement of PSM to differ. Therefore, although a great deal of congruence in public values exist internationally (Raadschelders, 2003), some dimensions of public service motivation will be more prominent in some countries than they are in other countries.

It is also important to understand the structural composition of nonprofits in other societies. In international context, nonprofit organizations are broadly defined as those organizations that focused essentially on providers of social-welfare services such as education, health and social services. No such consensus exists at the present time, however, about the scope, nature and composition of the set of institutions that composes the non-profit sector cross-nationally (James, 2006, p. 90). There is even dispute over whether the definition should be restricted to “institutions” or “organizations” at all, or extended as well to embrace spontaneous citizen activity in the “public space.” In nineteenth century America, voluntarism and associational life evolved as a compromise between individualism and collective responsibility (Anheier &

Seibel, 2001). In other countries even with similar level of economic development, important differences exist in the nature of what we call the “nonprofit sector.” Taking Europe as an example we have the following.

The French notion of “economic sociale” emphasizes mutualism and communal economy. It groups nonprofit associations together with cooperatives and mutual organizations, thus combining social participation, unity, and mutuality as a contrast to the capitalist or for profit economy (Archambault, 1998). The Italian notion of associationalism is seen as a countervailing force against both church and state powers at the local level (Barbetta, 1997). The Swedish model of nonprofit consists of broadly based social movements whose demands are picked up by the state and incorporated into social legislation (Lundstrom & Wijkstrom, 1997). The British tradition of charity and voluntary action, which delineates a sphere of private institutions and individual social responsibilities run parallel to those of the state (Kendall & Knapp, 1996). Even more striking differences split the social, cultural, religious and economic contexts of nonprofit sector realities among developing nations. Thus, the tribal traditions of Africa differ markedly from the plantation culture of much of Latin America, and individualistic Hinduism differs strikingly from the communal and service-oriented philosophy of Islam (Anheier & Salamon, 1998b; Landim, 1998; Kandil, 1998).

The growing disagreements on the field have also led to the confusion between the form and function of managing organizations and people in those organizations in the field internationally such as placing service to its members or to the community ahead of profit, autonomous management, democratic decision making process and the primacy of people and work over capital in distribution of revenues (Defourney, Develtere, & Fonteneau, 1999). What this demonstrates is the importance of sensitivity to the different traditions, patterns and cultures of nonprofits and philanthropy. While there may be “nonprofit organizations” and “nonprofit sectors” through out the world, they nonetheless exist in very different contexts and are linked to distinct histories, cultures, and political traditions (Anheier & Salamon, 2006, p. 91).

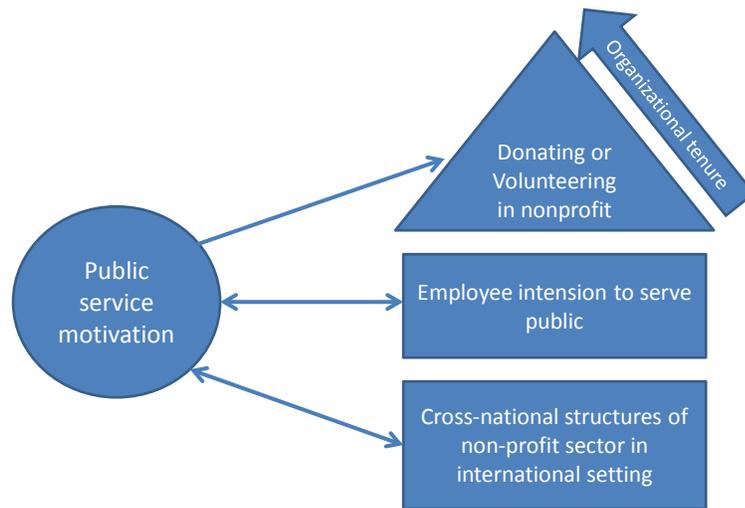
Coming back to the theoretical issues there are numbers of issues which are important when comparing PSM across countries. First, there are different perspectives on PSM. Second, international comparison of a value laden concept such as public service motivation requires understanding of the international variability of values, especially public administration values, upon which public service motivation is based. Finally, the relationship between public service motivation and public service is considered in a global context (Vandenabeele & Van de Walle, 2008). Comparing PSM internationally is further complicated by our limited knowledge of public values (Jorgensen & Bozeman, 2007), national administrative cultures (Hajnal, 2003; Loughlin, 1994), and differences in public perceptions of the public sector (Van de Walle et al, in

press). This requires my next proposition for exploring the relationship of PSM with the varying structures of nonprofit in international setting.

*Proposition 4: How the relationship of PSM with varying cross-national structures of nonprofit sector differs in international setting.*

Discussion

Public service motivation has been associated heavily with the public sector, because it is assumed that public service provides people ample opportunities to serve the public needs (Perry & Wise, 1990; Perry, 1996). More recently, the research on public service motivation seemed to shift its focus heavily towards the nonprofit sector (Houston, 2005; Clerkin et al., 2008). Various studies found out that employees’ altruistic and community service oriented tendencies are found to be higher in nonprofit sector as compared with public sector (Houston, 2005). Although, there is no denying the fact that people working for nonprofit sector join this occupation because they have high desires to serve community, however, the assumption of linking PSM with nonprofit sector can be misleading based on the diversified structural composition of the nonprofit sector in the United States.



**Conceptual model for the relationship of Public service motivation and nonprofit organizations**

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on the motives of employees working for these organizations as merely serving the community.

The brief literature review concerning corporate social responsibility indicates that private foundations, in particular, work for motives which are apparently linked with community services but in reality are more inclined towards achieving corporate goals.

Similarly nonprofit sector has different conceptions, purposes and management styles in different countries. Based on this, can we associate PSM with nonprofit sector as a whole without gaining consensus what is defined in PSM and how it can be linked with nonprofit sector in national and international settings. This conceptual paper aims at inviting scholars to explore further the causal mechanisms and valid associations of nonprofit sector with public service motivation concept and construct in future.

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