How women friendly are Indian Workplaces

a perception study of employees

Report on Pilot Survey
March 8, 2019

TALENTNOMICS INDIA
REIMAGINE WOMEN LEADERS GLOBALLY

ICRIER

ElleNOMICS

Executive Summary
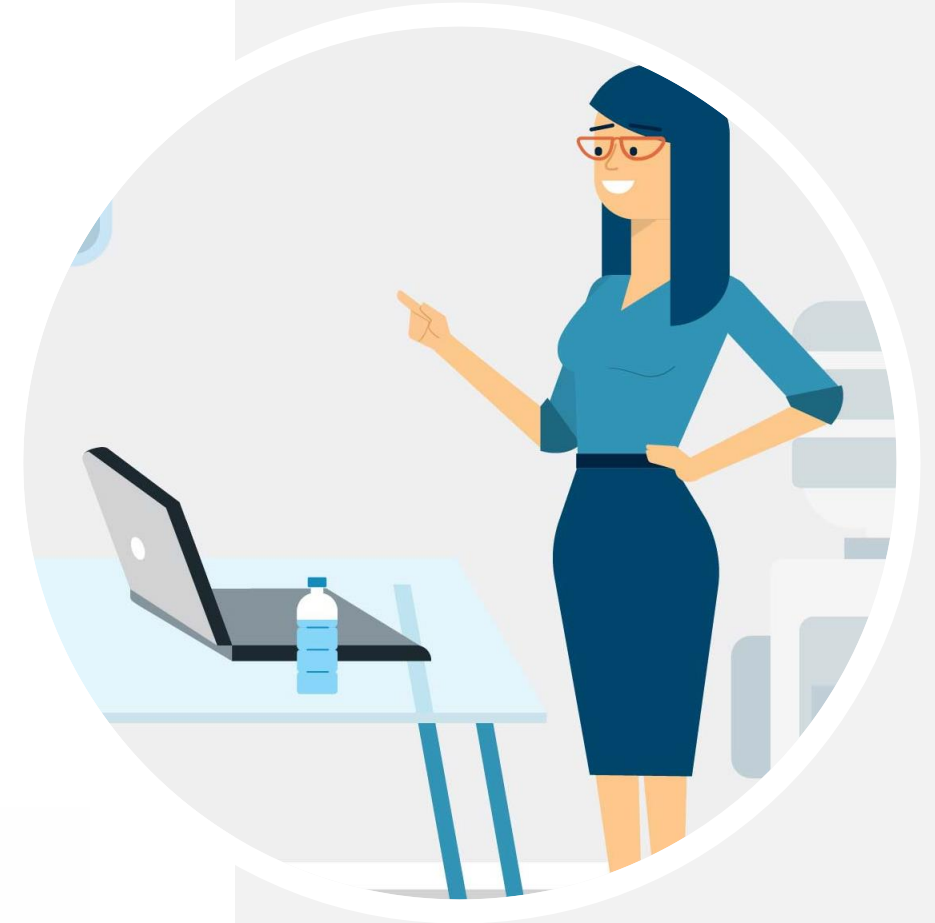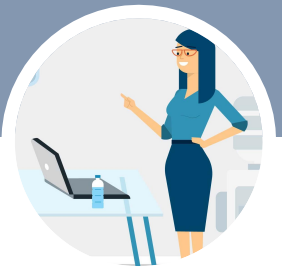
A perception survey of working women and men regarding the women friendliness of their workplaces found the following:

1. It is not just the private sector that is biased against women -Government departments, PSUs, non-profits and NGOs are no better
2. Leadership and top roles are perceived to be reserved for men
3. There is strong evidence of unconscious and invisible biases in workplaces – for e.g. against pregnant women, working mothers and victims of sexual harassment
4. Perceptions of men are different from women – they tend to think their workplaces are far more women friendly
5. Perceived definition of a "women-friendly" workplace has a very low threshold – people don't consider presence of biases against women or lack of female leadership as negatives
6. There is a case for all organisations to take feedback of employees to cull out the invisible biases
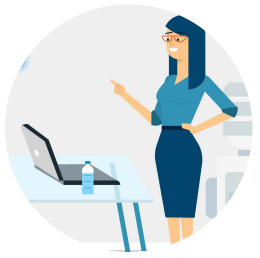
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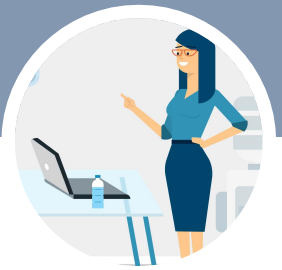
# Background: why a perception study?

Workplaces were traditionally designed for men, in terms of the infrastructure, culture and policies. But in recent years, there has been a spike in the interest among employers to build "women-friendly" workplaces, after several research studies showed the benefits of building diverse and inclusive teams[1]. Many organisations, particularly in the private sector, have taken conscious and proactive actions to provide incentives to attract and retain females in their talent pool[2].

Since India continues perform poorly in every evaluation of women in the workforce[3] - be it the rates of female labour force participation or proportion of women in leadership roles – one wonders whether the workplace incentives for women have had any impact at all?

[1] Why employing more women is goo for business, Ellenomics

[2] Top 100 Best Companies for Women to work in India in 2017 , People Matters

[3] Gender Gaps: How India ranks in the World, Ellenomics
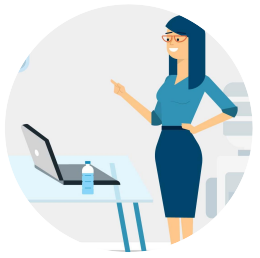
For India, we have very limited data to show how far organisations have evolved towards building an enabling environment for women to thrive in.

Grant Thornton's
Women in business: Beyond policy to progress, 2018[4] found:
- Women in leadership positions increased to 20% in 2018 from 14% in 2014,
- 64% of companies are adopting equal pay, and
- 55% are implementing non-discrimination policies for recruitment.

(Data taken from interviews of CEOs, MDs, Chairs and other senior decision-makers)

[4] www.grantthornton.es/en/insights/women-in-business-2018/women-in-business-beyond-policy-to-progress/

Working Mother Magazine and Avatar's Annual list of
100 "Best employers for women in India", 2018[5] found that in these 100 companies:

- Representation of women increased to 31% in 2018 from 25% in 2016
- They face only a 12% maternity attrition rate

But they say

"it is not an employee perception survey. No sampling of employees' likes and dislikes taking up precious time and involving subjectivity"

[5] https://www.avtariwin.com/best-companies

**In the US**, "Women in Workplace Study" by McKinsey and LeanIn.org[6]

used data provided by 279 companies and 64,000 employees found that:

"While companies have been reporting that they are highly committed to gender diversity, the commitment has not translated into meaningful progress.
Progress isn't just slow-it's stalled"
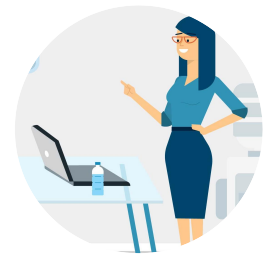
This shows that employers have gaps and "blind spots" in their understanding of incentives needed to attract, retain and promote women – that can be filled by taking employee-feedback

[6] https://womenintheworkplace.com/
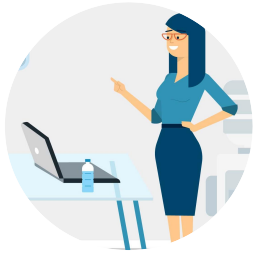
In a similar attempt, Talentnomics, ICRIER and Ellenomics have partnered to initiate a "perception survey of employees" in India

We don't have feedback from employees in the corporate sector

We have no formal data about the state of the public sector, Government, NGOs or non-profits

There are gaps and "blind spots" in our knowledge of the way specific needs of women are addressed by employers

The study is a first of its kind endeavour

to evaluate the state of women who go out to work in urban India

The objective is to gather perceptions from employees about friendliness of their workplaces for women, to add to the "employers' perspectives" on the subject.

What is the perception survey?

An anonymous, online, survey

View Questionnaire [here](#)

Across sectors

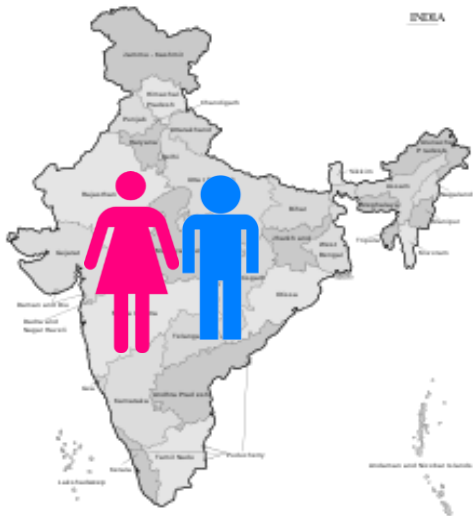Central or State Government

Non-Government or Non-profit

Private Sector (Indian)

Private Sector (MNC)
Public Sector (PSU) or State-owned

Start-up or small business

of Working women and men
Across India

Across industries

- ● Information Technology or Telecom
- ● Manufacturing
- ● Finance/Banking
- ● Education, Academia or Research
- ● Hotel, travel & Tourism
- ● Media and Journalism
- ● Medical and healthcare services
- ● Consulting and Advisory

- ● Fashion & Retail
- ● Films, television, radio and entertai…
- ● Social work
- ● Advertising and PR
- ● Architecture and interior design
- ● Other
- ● Information Technology
- ● Journalism and media

The survey has some interesting revelations

Most respondents perceive "More men than Women" at Senior Levels

Women hold very few top management or leadership positions in all sectors and industries, including in:

Government, non-profits & NGOs which are believed to be more women friendly

Organisations where there are more women at support, junior and middle levels

Fields like education and academia, social work or fashion and retail that are traditionally for women

% of Respondents who see more men than women		
Sector	Jr Level	Senior Level
Government	60	70
NGO/ Non-profit	18	60
Private Sector (Indian)	34	73
Private Sector (MNC)	35	77
Public Sector	33	81
Start-up or small business	27	81

2. There are strong, invisible biases against women

67% women
46% men
report observing at least one bias

Observed Biases	♀	♂
Pregnant Women get lesser responsibilities and opportunities	55%	48%
Mothers who leave on time from work are looked down upon	57%	30%
Women are often called aggressive, ambitious and outspoken	52%	25%
Women are paid lesser salary than men	40%	17%
Women's ideas are ignored in meetings	31%	16%
Senior management does not take action against men that offend female employees	31%	21%
Men are discouraged to take time off to look after family	28%	57%

But perception of men and women differs - fewer men observe or feel the discrimination

% of people of who report atleast one bias

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3. Definition of Women-friendliness needs to change
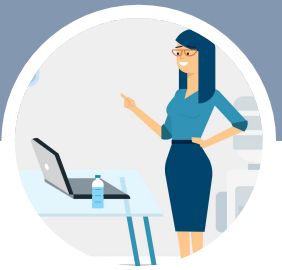
Many respondents, especially men, rate their workplaces as being very women-friendly, despite reporting that there are few women at top positions or observing forms of invisible bias.

Of the people who score their organisation higher than 7 (on a scale of 1-10) for women friendliness

65% Report more than 3 biases

35% Report less than 20% women in leadership

Feedback of many men shows that it is good enough if their organisation treats women employees as "family" or gives them physical comforts and a secure environment – **growing the career trajectories of women is not a necessity!**

"Sr management often refer to young female workers as "beta/beti" and are very protective of female staff; a male staff member invariably accompanies female member"

Women are given equal opportunity and independence. So they are equal, rather they are given flexibility wherever required.

Males who rate their company 10/10 on "women-friendliness but report having more men at every level in their organisations"
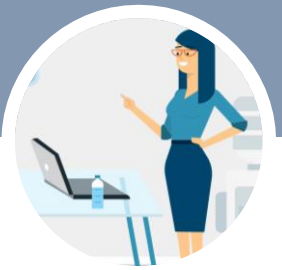
15% women **5%**

have faced sexual harassment

'can't say'

4% men **3%**

have faced sexual harassment

'can't say'

"Sexual harassment complaints seem to be dealt with in an opaque manner"

Female in a non-profit

71% Report that their organisations with 10+ employees have a committee to deal with sexual harassment

"I have faced a situation where a senior, married male made subtle moves to show that by being extra friendly with him, he would help me get more publications and projects and admission to PhD. By ignoring him I lost opportunities"

Female in non-profit sector

These anecdotes from Non-profit, Government and NGOs show that reported cases are not dealt with

BUT

10% say that the women are not comfortable filing complaints

Most organisations seem to comply with requirements of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act (2013) but in many cases the committee is just in name

"Sr officials gets scot free for their advances"

Male in an industry association

21% women and **10%** men report that **"senior management doesn't punish offending men"**

"One ..professor who was found and reported ….was suspended for just one term as penalty and continues to stay on …"

Male from a leading business school

"**P**regnant women are treated differently and given fewer responsibilities"

55% **say** 48%
women men

This could be a reason why women don't return to work after kids

Maternity Leave is OK..

Most organisations provide 6 months leave

38% respondents say there's extended *unpaid* leave, & 20% say there's extended *paid* leave

BUT

Post-maternity, not many organisations welcome women back with the needed support

Only 30 % organizations have satisfactory space for lactation & 37% have space for on-site creche

Nearly 60% women think that "mothers looked down upon if they LEAVE ON TIME! This includes those who say that their organisation provides flexi-work or work-from home opportunities

Only 45% respondent's say their organisation hires women with career breaks– 10% have formal restart programs

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6. Vital feedback comes from ex-employees …
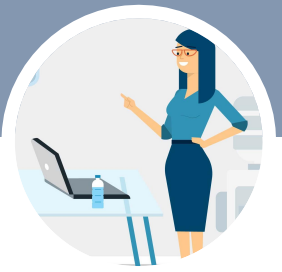
and candidates who
gave interviews

"I would like to tell about my previous media company. I quit the job because they did not allow me to leave early from work for few days when my wife had to travel in her new job and I needed to be with the kids. They made jokes about me in fact"

*"Not this but another company ***i gave an interview for long back when I wasn't married. The only interview qs they asked a lot was how I will handle my mother in law after getting married bcoz this job entails working late hours and many women have quit after marriage. I didn't get teh job bcoz I didn't give a great answer!"*
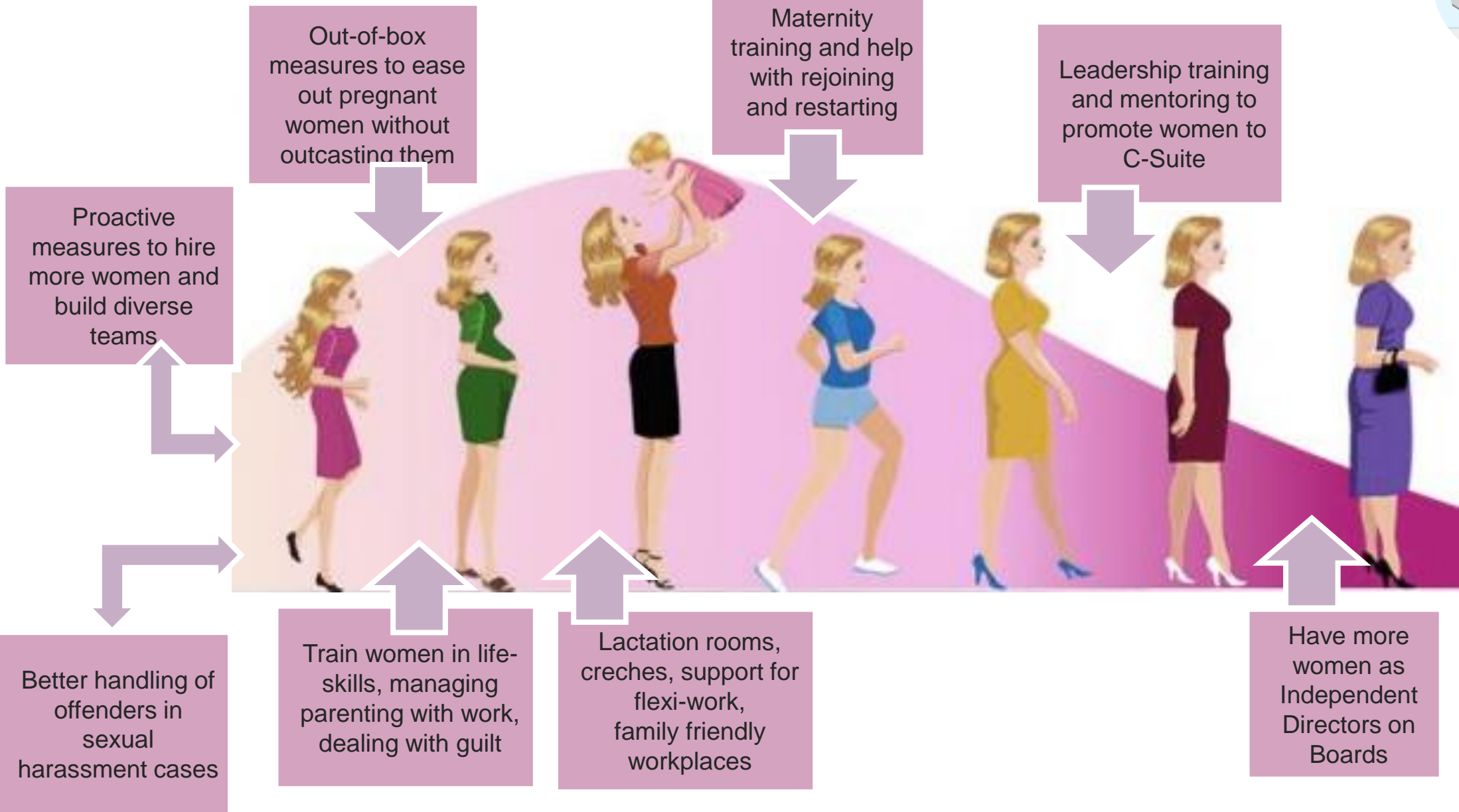
"This is feedback for a architect firm I used to work with . They are very sexist. Keeping ppl till late hours. Horrible location. If u don't join the drinks and jokes they spoil ur work and career"
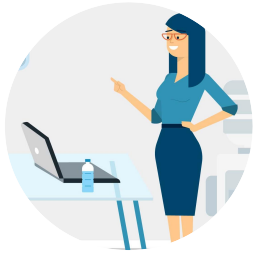
What's the key takeaway for employers?

Proactive measures to hire more women and build diverse teams

Out-of-box measures to ease out pregnant women without outcasting them

Maternity training and help with rejoining and restarting

Leadership training and mentoring to promote women to C-Suite

Better handling of offenders in sexual harassment cases

Train women in life-skills, managing parenting with work, dealing with guilt

Lactation rooms, creches, support for flexi-work, family friendly workplaces

Have more women as Independent Directors on Boards

These observations show that there is a strong possibility that the invisible forces of society's patriarchal mindsets have crept into the work cultures of every organisation and are preventing employers from retaining and promoting talented women in their workforce.

We, therefore, decided to bring out the results of our pilot study even before completing the full survey so that employers can become aware of the need to take employee feedback and even participate in our study by taking perception surveys internally.

Identifying and culling out the covert biases will help employers in the long run to reap benefits of a truly diverse workforce. This would be a real solution to the looming 'diversity and inclusion' challenge.
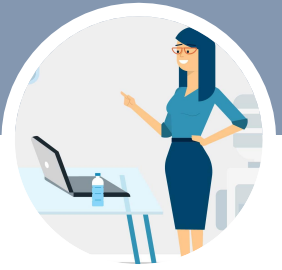
But this can not be a one-time exercise

because the process of change needs constant feedback!

We will do this perception survey every year

to track change

to influence change

If your organisation is interested in taking an
internal perception survey to gather feedback of employees

Please leave your details by clicking forms.talentnomicsindia.org

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