COMPARISON OF THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES OF AKHISM SYSTEM WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL: THE CASE OF TURKEY *
TÜRKİYE'DE AHİLİK SİSTEMİNİN İLKELERİ VE UYGULAMALARININ PSİKOLOJİK SERMAYE İLE KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI: TÜRKİYE ÖRNEĞİ

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Sefer Darıcı
Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, Cumhuriyet Sosyal Bilimler Meslek Yüksekokulu, Pazarlama ve Reklamcılık Bölümü
sdarici@cumhuriyet.edu.tr

ORCID ID
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3630-4511

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Serdar Çöp
İstanbul Gelişim Üniversitesi, Uygulamalı Bilimler Yüksekokulu
scop@gelisim.edu.tr

ORCID ID
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1101-5676

Abstract

Today, organizations implement strategies for human development and integrate them with business life. The positive development of human beings, which is an integral part of organizations, contributes to businesses and indirectly to society. In this respect, positive psychology is one of the important building blocks applied to the development of human resources and businesses. Akhism System is traditionally known for many years in Turkey, business-oriented, positive psychology, and philosophy of life. Akhism, which has deep roots from the past, integrates business life and personal life with its unique philosophy. Akhism system is a structure that aims to develop and mature the individual by referring to the belief system and thus social change with both his life and his business life. The concept of psychological capital, arising from the positive psychology school, is a positive and human-oriented approach in organizations. There is no study comparing the Akhism system with psychological capital has been encountered in the literature. In this study, the content, principles, and practices of the Akhism system were compared with the main elements of psychological capital that self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience. In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out in Turkey's Sivas province with eight small business managers who were said to implement the Akhism system. The findings were analyzed by the interpretive phenomenological analysis method and it was concluded that the Akhism System is similar to the psychological capital elements in terms of content, teaching, and practices and is still practiced traditionally today. The principles and practices of the Akhism System, which have continued from the past to the present, constitute a great resource in terms of psychological capital. It is thought that the principles and practical experience of Akhism System will contribute to organizations in terms of psychological capital.

Keywords: Psychological Capital, Akhism, Organizational Behavior, Positive Psychology, Enterprise

Öz

Günümüzde kuruluşlar insani kalkınma için stratejiler uygular ve bunları iş hayatına entegre eder. Örgütlerin ayrılmaz bir parçası olan insanların olumlu gelişimi işletmelere ve dolaylı olarak topluma katkıda bulunur. Bu bağlamda, pozitif psikoloji insan kaynaklarının ve işletmelerin gelişimine uygulanan önemli yapı taşlarından biridir. Ahilik Sistemi geleneksel olarak Türkiye'de uzun yıllardır, iş odaklı, pozitif psikoloji ve yaşam felsefesi olarak bilinmektedir. Geçmişten derin köklere sahip olan Ahilik, iş hayatını ve kişisel hayatı kendine özgü felsefesi ile bütünleştirir. Ahilik sistemi, inanç sistemine ve dolayısıyla hem yaşamı hem de iş yaşamı ile toplumsal değişimi ifade ederek bireyi geliştirmeyi ve olgunlaştırmayı amaçlayan bir yapıdır. Pozitif psikoloji okulundan doğan psikolojik sermaye kavramı, örgütlerde olumlu ve insan odaklı bir yaklaşımdır. Bu çalışmada, Ahilik sisteminin içeriği, ilkeleri ve uygulamaları, öz-yeterlik, iyimserlik, umut ve dayanıklılık gibi psikolojik sermayenin ana unsurları ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Ayrıca Türkiye'nin Sivas ilinde Ahilik sistemini bildiğini ve uyguladığını söyleyen 8 küçük işletme yöneticisi ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bulgular yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz yöntemi ile analiz edilmiş ve Ahilik Sisteminin içerik, öğretim ve uygulamalar açısından psikolojik sermaye öğelerine benzediği ve günümüzde hala geleneksel olarak uygulandığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Geçmişten günümüze devam eden Ahilik Sisteminin ilke ve uygulamaları, psikolojik sermaye açısından büyük bir kaynak oluşturmaktadır. Ahilik Sisteminin ilkelerinin ve pratik deneyiminin, örgütlere psikolojik sermaye açısından katkıda bulunabileceği düşünülmektedir.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** Psikolojik Sermaye, Ahilik, Organizasyonel Davranış, Pozitif Psikoloji, İşletme*

1.Introduction

Companies that try to survive within the global competition system have started to give more importance to people-oriented strategies. While the concepts of physical capital, economic capital, and technological capital were prioritized in terms of competition, concepts such as human capital and social capital began to gain importance. Companies have realized that important of the human being to survive in the global market. Findings from different disciplines about human behavior, the reasons for the behavior and possible clues in the future are important not only scientifically but also for companies. One of the prominent concepts in this context is psychological capital.

Psychological capital is one of the most important elements of Positive Organizational Behavior, which is the reflection of Positive Psychology to organizations. The concept of Psychological Capital, which expresses the individual's positive psychological development, contributes to better understanding and improving the value of human in organizations and its importance is increasing day by day. The concept of psychological capital is accepted in addition to the known types of capital (economic, human and social capital, etc.) and is explained by the characteristics of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience.

In this study, the principles of the akhism system, their approach to human beings, their teachings and training are compared with the features and applications of the concept of psychological capital. Four main characteristics of psychological capital, self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience; value in the system of akhism has been associated with concepts and practices.

2.Positive Psychology and Psychological Capital

Positive Psychology was put forward by a group of researchers led by Martin Seligman as a reaction to the science of psychology that was engaged in only pathological, negative, and wrong aspects of individuals (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Luthans, 2002). Positive Psychology is defined by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000: 5) as follows: "The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experience: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past), hope and optimism (for the future), and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic."

Positive Psychology is based on the idea of the restoration and transformation of the negative aspects of human psychology and the construction of the positive qualities of human beings (Wright, 2003). In this respect, it aims to identify and improve the problematic as well as to reveal and improve the good. It helps individuals to connect to life and improve in the period from birth to death and uses scientific methods in doing so (Peterson, 2000).

Positive psychology is reflected in organizations like the Positive Organization School and Positive Organizational Behavior. The positive organizational school is concerned with concepts that have not yet been shown to be related to performance and character traits such as compassion and virtue. Positive organizational behavior, on the other hand, examines the concepts related to performance and which can develop depending on the condition (Luthans, Youssef and Avolio, 2007). Positive Organizational Behavior; "the study and application of positively oriented hıman resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002: 698). The concept of psychological capital, which emerged from researches on the impact of positive psychology on organizations, focuses on the strengths rather than the powerless and weak aspects of the person and occupies an important place in Positive Organizational Behavior.

The concept of capital as commercial means all commodities that can be converted into capital and money required for the establishment and execution of a business. On the other hand, psychological capital refers to a psychological situation that goes beyond intellectual capital to gain the competitive advantage of organizations in a globalizing world and where the focus is on positivity (Çetin and Basım, 2012).

There are four main components of psychological capital developed in the literature by Luthans et al. (2007: 3) : "

- having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks;
- making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future;
- persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed
- when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success"

3. Akhism System, Values and Principles

The word Akhism is written in Turkish as 'Ahilik'. The word 'ahi' in Arabic means 'brother' (Mahmud, 1995: 90). It is derived from the word 'Akı' which means 'generous' in Turkish (Demirbilek, 2004: 283; Köksal, 2008: 49). Akhism as a set of values is a whole that guides people not only in the work environment but at every stage of their lives.

Akhism was established and developed by Nasruddin Ahi Mahmut Evran (death 1280). It is the organization of tradesmen and craftsmen which enables them to trained professionals and developed morally of the Turks who lived in Anatolia, Balkans, and Turkestan from 13th to 19th century. Akhism, originally from Khorasan origin, is the name of an organization based on rules that enable the Turkmen people living in Anatolia during the Seljuk and Ottoman periods to grow up in various professional fields such as art, trade, and economy.

Akhism is a big organization that has established its organization in almost all cities in Anatolia. Although the Akhism institution is seen as an economic-oriented non-governmental organization consisting of artisans and craftsmen, it is spreading throughout life in terms of its activities and principles and the area it covers. The social and economic peace, trust and profit that the Akhism institution brings to the society is based on a number of principles.

There are many rules in the Akhism system. Some of these rules are summarized by Ülger and Ülger (2005: 50) as follows: "

1. having a good temper and good morals;
2. being truthful and trustworthy both in personal and business life;
3. telling the truth without hesitation; avoiding hatred and envy;
4. being faithful to the contract, to the promise and to love;
5. acting in generosity, treating others with respect and honour;
6. helping neighbours;
7. staying away from conceit and prejudice;
8. being fair and just;
9. not expecting return for any goodness, working with sincerity and a smiling face for the people;
10. showing goodness to even those who act in evil;
11. giving importance to friendship, never forgetting a friend and the brotherhood;
12. protecting and taking care of the ones under the servitor;
13. giving by being satisfied with the less and thanking for the plenty;
14. avoiding wicked talk and behaviour;
15. educating oneself, gaining new abilities;
16. being knowledgeable and using this knowledge for the benefit of society;
17. keeping in peace with society; and
18. treating people in the way that you want to be treated."

4. Research

This research has been carried out in a phenomenological pattern that includes evaluating individuals' perceptions and opinions according to their experiences and environment by adopting a qualitative approach (Creswell et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This research was carried out in Turkey's Sivas province is limited to eight small business managers who declared that they knew and implemented the Akhism System.

4.1. Participants

The selection of the study group was based on the fact that the participants had experienced all aspects of the studied phenomenon in accordance with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Method. (Creswell, 2013). In line with the research problem, the participants were selected with criterion sampling among purposeful sampling methods. For this reason, 47 business managers were contacted and were asked whether they knew the Akhism system and whether they implemented it in their business. 21 business managers said that "I know and implemented", 16 business managers said that "I heard but I don't know exactly", 10 business managers said that "I don't know and I don't implement". Eight of the 21 business executives who stated that they knew and implemented Akhism principles in the business agreed to interview.

        In order to prevent any prejudice and commercial loss due to the events they explained, the participants requested that the company name, address information and their own information not be given. Without these, they confirmed that there was no harm in using other parts of the interview and demographic information as data. For this reason, the names of the participants were coded and the name and address information of the enterprises they worked as managers were not used.

        Demographic information such as gender, age, graduation and the type of enterprises are given in the table below.

Table 1. Participant data

Participant	Gender	Age	Graduation	Enterprise
Participant 1	Male	41	High School	Cafe
Participant 2	Male	36	University	Otel
Participant 3	Male	32	University	Otel
Participant 4	Female	30	High School	Cafe
Participant 5	Female	46	University	Restaurant
Participant 6	Female	45	High School	Restaurant
Participant 7	Male	39	High School	Ski resort
Participant 8	Male	57	Technical College	Clothing store

4.2. Data collecting

        The research data consists of in-depth interviews with the participants and field notes. An in-depth interview with each participant lasted 1 hour approximately. Interviews were conducted at different intervals between April 2018 and September 2018 for reasons such as contacting participants and waiting for the decision to participate or not. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, the native language of the participants. The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers. All interviews took note by two researchers.

        During the interviews, efforts were made to leave the participants flexible. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were asked to participants according to the flow of the interview. For example, questions such as personnel selection, training of personnel, communication within the organization, relations with customers, different positive or negative events, positive sides, problems and how they solve them are asked.

4.3. Analysis

        In this study, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen because it is one of the qualitative research methods that allow participants to transfer their experiences freely. This analysis method allows the researcher to discover the personal perceptions of the participants and their meaning. Subjective experiences and ideas about the environment in which the event took place are important. (Smith & Osborn, 2004: 229-254)

        Both researchers read the interview minutes twice and coded them independently. The researchers then subdivided these codes into categories each other independently. Afterward, these sub-categories were compared with each other by the researchers and themes were created. The same process was repeated by an independent researcher and compared to our themes and decided on the final themes.

        The main themes were then classified and interpreted in relation to the four main components of psychological capital: self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience. While explaining each category, excerpts

were made from the statements of the participants during the interview. There are no grammatical corrections in the quotations of participants.

5.Findings

The findings were categorized into four main components of psychological capital: self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience.

5.1.Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is one of the factors influencing human behavior and is expressed by Bandura (1994) as a belief that it can initiate an action that can be effective on what is happening around the person and continue until the result is obtained. An individual who uses his / her cognitive resources and motivation to control the events around him (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998: 66) develops a belief that he/she can solve problems and achieve success.

The belief that the individual develops is an element that affects both the problems and the performance. Cognitively, an individual's belief that something can accomplish challenging tasks or overcome a problem makes him prepared for the situation. When an individual encounter the same or similar problem or needs to perform, the level of anxiety will be different from that of other individuals.

> *"Customers with different food preferences and tastes come to our restaurant. Some customers like our food, others don't. We always ask our disliked customers what we are lacking and what is our fault. Some say salt, some say pepper. We're taking notes. Both the facial expression and what he/she was said. The customer we ask about what we are lacking is definitely coming back again. This time we try to prepare the meal as he wants. Our waitress says "God willing, this time has been as you wish" when giving dinner. Today, most of the restaurant's permanent customers are those who say they did not like our food before." (Participant 5)*

According to Luthans, individuals with self-efficacy have five basic characteristics (Luthans et al., 2007):

- They set high goals for themselves and demand challenging tasks.
- They overcome difficult tasks and develop themselves.
- They motivate themselves.
- They make efforts to achieve their goals.
- They patience when they face difficulties.

When we compare the Akhism to five basic features of self-efficacy that explained by Luthans, it is seen that they do their job in the first place and adhere to the rules meticulously until the end of their lives. Akhism culture covers not only the economic and commercial life but also the society in general. In Akhism education system, on-the-job (practice) training goes integrated with non-job training (theoretical). The person is given the opportunity to experience what he has learned in theory. This allows one to combine theory and practice to prepare for future tasks.

> *"I was only 15 when I started working. I was an apprentice. I never forget my anxiety and excitement on the first day. When my master first saw me, 'Son, if you are patient, you will eat bread. Don't worry, you will learn everything in time.' I was patient and learned everything in this business over time. I retired. Whenever an apprentice comes, I remember my master's words and I say similar things." (Participant 8)*

In Akhism culture, there are grading practices such as road ancestor and road brotherhood ceremony, road ownership ceremony, mastery ceremony. These applications motivate the people in the system and prepare to reach a higher level and be better. The person sets higher goals for himself and tries to maintain this within the philosophy of Akhism that will last for a lifetime. Acting with the philosophy of doing every task properly, the person in the Akhism System motivates himself with this kind of practices and appreciation from his master.

> *"Sometimes I was asking myself that 'Can I succeed in this job?". Then when the job was over, I said, 'Look, see? I did it. Others will end and I will succeed'. I realized later that my friends gave me easy jobs because I was new at work. May God be pleased with them. When I succeeded, my*

determination to work increased. If my friends didn't do it, maybe I would have quit."
(Participant 7)

An individual in the Akhism System knows that patience is the key to success and is aware of the fact that it has to complete maturation periods. He is also aware that his patience and endeavor are not merely features that should be shown for rewarding purposes but is essential to achieving happiness in his worldly and other life. The individual who keeps secrets knows that he should behave sincerely and sincerely, knows the importance of features such as being friendly, giving confidence and loyalty.

5.2.Hope

Hope is defined as the motive and path that leads the individual to action for their purposes (Snyder, 1994, 2002) and is one of the factors that determine human behavior. Hope, the purpose-oriented plan and expresses a motivating situation in this way (Peterson et al., 2003). Hope is an element that motivates individuals to achieve their goals. It can also be said that the hope for achieving the goal is one that activates one's imagination. When people develop a hope that their goals will be realized in their cognitive world, their behavior may also change in this direction.

The expectation level is important for the existence of hope and the increase in its level. The content, degree of motivation and belief in the prospect of realization are the factors that allow hope to be observed as a behavioral outcome.

"I was a housewife before. The rents on the main street were very expensive and I was only able to keep this store in a back street. Most of the students could not make home meals and I wanted to make them clean and cheap food. In the evening, I prepared meals in my own house and brought them to my restaurant. I wanted the interior of my restaurant to be like home comfort. I didn't make much money in the first months. But I always had hope. I imagined my shop would be filled with customers. We had tea, coffee and long chats with our customers after dinner. Although I have many problems, I did not reflect on my customers. I didn't even get money from most students without money. People loved me very much. My customers now tell me, 'We didn't come to the restaurant to eat. We came to see you'. Thank God. I also saw that my restaurant was full of customers". (Participant 6)

In the Akhism system, it can be said that there is an expectation to gain the respect of the customers, the master, the environment, the society and the consent of God, and the hope developed over it has a similar structure. Many examples can be given within Akhism System such as to be benign and beautiful morality, to be honest in his contracts, to be loyal in his word and his love, to respond with goodness to evil and self-ignorance, to be sincere in his beliefs and worship.

5.3.Optimism

In terms of positive psychological capital, optimism is not only an estimation of the future but also includes the fact that events are based on various reasons (Akçay, 2011). There is a tendency to link behaviors to a certain cause in humans. According to Seligman (2005), this way of explaining behaviors depends on whether individuals are optimistic or pessimistic. Individuals with an optimistic point of view compared the other individuals with a positive point of view and positive views of the future.

"Many foreign guests come to our hotel from abroad. It can be from different nationalities and religions. We had a client with a hard temper and facial expression. He wasn't much smiling person. His situation attracted attention who other hotel staff too. But the structure and character of each person are different. When I talked to my friends, I told that 'You shouldn't be biased against our customer'. After work was over, I was heading home. I saw our customer on the way. The car he rented had made malfunction and was left on the road. The place where the vehicle malfunctions were far from the city center and without street lighting. Our customer did not speak Turkish. I stopped my vehicle immediately. When he saw me, our customer was smiled. I called the tow truck and then left him and his wife back to the hotel. I was also interested in check-out the next day. They were very happy. Thanks again and again. Then they came again. And we talked about our old memory. I won a good friend".(Participant 2)

Likewise, It can be said that a positive perspective and an optimistic orientation towards the future are based on the principles of Akhism System. For example; In his work and life, to avoid grudge, jealousy and gossip, to show love to children, to be respectful to the elders, to conceal flaws, to mistakes forgive, not to face mistakes, to visit friends and relatives, being always in good neighborliness, being patient with the oppression and ignorance of the neighbor, tolerating the human being created by the God, always looking for mistakes and imperfections in their own self, patience and endurance for the troubles and evils.

"Craftsmen friends know each other here. We help each other as much as we can in funerals, weddings or emergencies. Everybody gives help as much as possible. Nobody knows who gave how much. Then the oldest artisan among us takes the money and delivers it to our friend in need. It happened to us, too. I lost my grandma in a car accident. In the same accident, my nephew, my sister-in-law, my brother was seriously injured. Our shop was closed for 3 weeks. All the artisan friends came to the hospital and help to our other needs. They helped me a lot with the money they collected. This solidarity between tradesmen is like informal insurance". *(Participant 1)*

5.4.Resilience

The concept of resilience, which can be expressed as a qualification/ability to cope with an important problem or risk, change, and distress that individuals may encounter, is also reflected in individuals' social, cognitive and psychological characteristics (Stewart, Reid & Mangham, 1997; Kutanis & Yıldız, 2014). People need to be able to flexibly respond to changing situations, uncertainty, difficulties, and problems adjust themselves, adapt and produce solutions (Luthans, 2005).

Resilience, which is also related to individuals' self-efficacy, optimism, and hopes, is also directly proportional to one's past experiences and desire and determination to solve problems. Individuals who are able to adapt easily to psychological situations and make internal control fast; they are more successful in overcoming environmental changes, unexpected events, unforeseen situations, and momentary developments.

"There are many free training programs in our country. Especially for women. I did not have the opportunity to be a student at university. But I attend courses and improve myself academically. I encourage my staff to attend the courses. We even go together. We received certified training such as first aid training, sign language, and diction. A family came to my cafe. Their children had lollipops candy in their hands. When the family was eating, the child suddenly coughed. We immediately informed the ambulance. Sugar locked the kid's trachea. There was no time. By Heimlich maneuvering, we pushed hard on his stomach to get the sugar out. At that time, the mother and father panicked. Due to the training we received, my staff and I were very calm. After the happened, we realized once again how important education is. We still follow and participate in different pieces of training". *(Participant 4)*

One of the most important features of Akhism is that it is an educational institution. Intensive vocational training by the masters and foremen in Akhism enables the apprentice, who has been trained for about 5-7 years (Mahiroğulları, 2008), to witness the events, demands, problems, negative or positive situations. The apprentice who is trained on the job also learns how masters and foremen behave in situational cases, how to use word and body language, and how to solve problems. Through apprentice training, the individual learns by observing and develops cognition in his/her mastery about how to behave in similar situations, what he/she should do or should not do. In addition, apprentice-foremen-mastery transitions and other ceremonies also mean that the competence of the individual is approved and accepted by the group and society. Within the Akhism system, it carries the expectations and hopes of the individual to the future by reinforcing them with the requirements of religious belief. Within the Akhism System, patience is accepted one of the important principles against difficulties. The apprentice aware of these difficulties and thought that these difficulties are an exam. He also knows the moral and material support that the Akhism System will give him/her in any trouble situation. All of these are important factors for the development of psychological resilience/endurance in the individual.

"Patience is very important in our profession. Sometimes the customer tries clothes for hours. And he/she even could be leaves the shop without buying any product. Sometimes he/she comes back after a while and buy it. The young staff who start working here can be very impatient when they first start to work. We tell them to watch especially the old and experienced staff. Because the customer can understand that you are tired of your body language. He/she might think you don't want to take care of him/her. So patience is very important no matter what. The theoretical knowledge they have learned at school is important, but it is more important to contact the customer face to face. If there is a problem that we encounter that day, we evaluate it sometimes in short and sometimes long periods when we meeting. This is very useful for us. Errors are diminishing. We're still learning". (Participant 8)

6. Conclusion

Positive psychology increases its impact and importance day by day. Psychological capital in Positive Organizational Behavior focuses on one's strengths rather than one's weaknesses. The four main features of psychological capital; It is explained by self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience and contributes to better understanding and improving the value of human beings in organizations.

In this study, it was found that the framework, content, and applications of the concept of psychological capital and the framework, content, and applications of the Akhism System have parallel characteristics. Despite the historical/cultural/linguistic reasonable differences in the way of expression, the essence of the concept of Akhism and the essence of psychological capital coincide with each other. In fact, it can be said that the characteristics of psychological capital such as optimism and hope exist more clearly in the Akhism System, both in principle and in practice. Turkey's cultural and traditional differences and susceptibility to Akhism System has an impact on the success of psychological capital.

Akhisim System, which has been implemented in the past and still continues, should be examined better. Considering the current limitations of this study, further studies can be done with a larger sample and the similarities and differences between the Akhism System and psychological capital can be revealed more clearly. This study is expected to contribute to the possible future researches in terms of psychology, organizational behavior and other disciplines.

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