

# Remote, Hybrid, or In-Office? Comparing Productivity and Well-being Outcomes Across Work Arrangements in India's IT Industry

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## ABSTRACT

Most research on remote work treats it as a binary choice -- either you work from home or you do not. But India's IT workforce in 2026 operates across three meaningfully different arrangements: fully remote, hybrid, and traditional in-office. This paper compares all three simultaneously, examining their effects on employee productivity and well-being, with work-life balance (WLB) as a mediating variable. We surveyed 378 IT professionals across Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, and Chennai, grounding the study in Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory and Boundary Theory. Structural equation modeling (CFI = .961, RMSEA = .046) showed that both remote and hybrid workers reported significantly higher productivity than their in-office colleagues (standardised beta = +0.38 and +0.29 respectively,  $p < .001$ ). The well-being picture was more complicated. Hybrid workers gained more on that dimension (beta = +0.26,  $p < .01$ ) than fully remote workers (beta = +0.21,  $p < .05$ ), and we think this has a lot to do with technostress -- remote workers reported the highest technostress scores in the sample ( $M = 3.58$ ), which appeared to partly offset the gains from avoiding the daily commute. Hybrid workers also reported the strongest work-life balance overall ( $M = 3.47$ , versus 3.29 for remote and 3.01 for in-office). WLB mediated outcomes meaningfully in both the remote and hybrid groups. Taken together, the findings suggest that hybrid work -- rather than full remote -- may be the more sustainable option for IT professionals trying to maintain both performance and personal wellbeing over time. We close by discussing what this means for managers navigating return-to-office decisions, and where future research needs to go.

**Keywords:** comparative work arrangements, employee productivity, employee well-being, hybrid work, India, IT industry, Job Demands-Resources theory, remote work, structural equation modeling, technostress, work-life balance

## INTRODUCTION

Something shifted fundamentally in how India's IT professionals work, and it happened quickly. What began as a COVID-19 emergency -- sending millions of engineers, analysts, and project managers home with laptops and VPN access -- has settled into a new normal that looks nothing like what came before. By 2026, India's technology sector generates around \$300 billion in revenue and employs roughly 5.8 million people, now spread across three genuinely different working arrangements: fully remote, hybrid, and the traditional in-office model. These are not just scheduling variations on a theme. They represent different day-to-day realities for the people living them, and organisations that treat them as interchangeable are likely making consequential decisions on bad assumptions.

The research literature has not quite caught up. Most studies still frame this as a two-sided debate -- remote versus office -- when the real policy question for most organisations in 2026 is where hybrid fits in. Our earlier study (Arun Kumar & Lathangi, 2026) found that remote work intensity was positively linked to productivity (beta = +0.31) and well-being (beta = +0.18), with work-life balance mediating both relationships. What that study could not answer is how three distinct arrangements compare when you place them side by side. Does hybrid sit neatly between remote and in-office, or does it have its own distinct profile? Are the productivity gains

of full remote worth the personal costs that come with it? These are practical questions that Indian IT managers are grappling with right now, and they deserve better than intuition.

This paper tries to provide some of that evidence. We had three specific questions going in: whether productivity and well-being outcomes differ significantly across remote, hybrid, and in-office workers in Indian IT; whether WLB mediates those relationships across all three groups; and which arrangement produces the best combined picture when you look at both performance and personal wellbeing at once. India's particular context makes these questions worth asking carefully. Major employers like TCS, Infosys, Wipro, and HCL have each taken different positions on return-to-office since 2024, creating a natural variation in arrangements that we could sample across. And India's social and physical environment -- multigenerational households, two-to-three-hour daily commutes in cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad, gendered divisions of domestic labour -- shapes how each arrangement plays out in ways that differ meaningfully from what Western studies tend to describe [12, 14].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### What We Know About Productivity Across Arrangements

The evidence that remote work tends to boost productivity in knowledge-intensive sectors is fairly consistent at this point. Tripathi and Goyal (2025) found that 72% of Indian IT professionals rated their WFH productivity higher than their in-office experience [1]. Bloom et al.'s well-known study found a 13% productivity gain among remote call-centre workers, attributing most of it to the elimination of commuting and a slight increase in working hours [21]. More recent Indian data from Kumar et al. (2025) points in the same direction: when employees have reliable internet, clear task expectations, and managers who actually trust them, remote arrangements tend to lift performance [19].

Hybrid has meanwhile become the dominant preference for both employees and employers. By 2025, around 70% of Indian IT organisations had some version of a hybrid model in place, and 87% of job candidates said they wanted either hybrid or remote options [5]. The underlying logic is that hybrid captures the best of both worlds -- the autonomy and commute savings of home working, alongside the collaborative and social benefits of periodic office time. Whether that intuition translates into empirical reality was one of the things we set out to examine.

In-office arrangements retain defenders, particularly for roles that depend heavily on real-time collaboration or mentoring junior staff. But in the Indian context, where commutes regularly run two hours or more in each direction, the daily physical cost of office attendance is difficult to set aside. The weight of the evidence suggests a rough productivity ordering -- remote at or above hybrid, and both ahead of in-office -- though role type, organisational culture, and infrastructure quality all matter in determining where any individual falls within that range [19].

### Well-being, Technostress, and the Boundary Problem

Productivity and well-being do not move in lockstep, and this is arguably the most important complication in the literature. Remote work eliminates commute stress -- in Indian cities this means recovering something like 72 minutes of daily life on average [7] -- but it introduces its own burdens. Dong et al. (2025) described remote work as a double-edged sword, and the description earns its keep: their study found that working from home raised employees' sense of self-efficacy while simultaneously driving up emotional exhaustion [15]. Lyzwinski et al. (2024), reviewing 63 international studies, found that benefits and harms typically coexist, and which side dominates depends substantially on how effectively workers can manage the boundary between their professional life and everything else [17].

In India, managing that boundary is harder than it might appear. Rai (2025) documented how women IT professionals ended up carrying disproportionate caregiving loads once work came home with them [14]. Srinivasan and Balakumar (2025) found that even where companies had formal flexible working policies on paper, an always-on culture and informal pressure to be available after hours meant employees could not actually

use the flexibility they were officially given [18]. The policy exists; the surrounding culture undercuts it. This is a distinctly Indian problem but not an exclusively Indian one -- it shows up in various forms across the literature whenever nominal flexibility meets an organisation that has not genuinely changed its expectations.

Hybrid work becomes interesting precisely here. By creating a physical separation between office days and home days, hybrid arrangements may give workers a structural prompt to draw cleaner psychological boundaries than full remote workers, whose home environment becomes permanently associated with work obligations. We expected this to show up as higher WLB for hybrid workers -- not because their jobs are easier, but because the rhythm of their arrangement makes boundary maintenance more achievable. Table VII summarises the key studies that shaped our thinking going in.

| Study                              | Context                  | Key Finding                                                     |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tripathi & Goyal (2025) [1]        | Indian IT (N ~ 150)      | 72% reported higher WFH productivity; 58% noted worse WLB       |
| Parajuli et al. (2025) [16]        | Nepalese IT (N = 110)    | WLB fully mediated the remote-work-to-productivity link         |
| Dong et al. (2025) [15]            | Global IT review         | Remote work raised self-efficacy but also emotional exhaustion  |
| Lyzwinski et al. (2024) [17]       | 63 international studies | Benefits and harms coexist; workload overload undermines WLB    |
| Srinivasan & Balakumar (2025) [18] | Chennai IT (qualitative) | Cultural rigidity caused burnout despite formal remote policies |
| Grover (2022) [12]                 | Indian IT review         | Flexibility gained, but boundary erosion harmed employee health |

Table VII. Summary of key recent studies on work arrangements, productivity, and well-being.

## Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

### Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R model organises work characteristics into demands -- things that cost effort and drain energy over time -- and resources, which facilitate goal achievement and support recovery. The model predicts that productivity and well-being depend on how the two sides balance out.

We used this framework because it handles the structural ambivalence of remote work particularly well. Remote work is not simply good or bad for workers; it simultaneously removes one set of demands (commuting, office noise, schedule rigidity) while introducing new ones (technostress, blurred working hours, social isolation). Each of the three arrangements we compared has its own version of this trade-off.

Full remote work maximises autonomy and eliminates commute demands but carries the heaviest technostress load and cuts off informal peer contact. Hybrid work moderates both sides -- less autonomy than full remote, but also less isolation and typically less technostress.

In-office work provides the richest social environment but removes schedule flexibility and reintroduces the full cost of daily commuting. Based on the JD-R model's prediction that the arrangement with the most favourable resource-to-demand ratio will produce the best outcomes, we expected hybrid to come out on top in the Indian context, where commute demands are especially severe.

## Boundary Theory

Boundary Theory adds a complementary lens. It describes how people regulate the boundary between their work and personal roles, distinguishing between segmentation -- keeping the two clearly separate -- and integration, where they blur.

Remote work, especially full-time, tends to push people toward integration. The physical space of home becomes the workspace, and the two domains begin to contaminate each other. In Indian households, where multiple generations often share the same home and caregiving responsibilities are distributed unevenly, this contamination tends to be intense.

Hybrid work's scheduled office days create something like a built-in segmentation mechanism. Knowing that certain days are office days and others are not helps workers draw a sharper mental boundary between the two spheres.

We expected this to produce higher WLB scores for hybrid workers compared to both full remote and in-office groups, and we expected WLB to transmit some of the effect of work arrangement on both productivity and well-being -- the theoretical basis for our mediation hypotheses.

## Research Hypotheses

Drawing on both theories, we entered the study with six hypotheses:

- H1: Fully remote workers report significantly higher productivity than in-office workers.
- H2: Hybrid workers report significantly higher productivity than in-office workers.
- H3: Hybrid workers report significantly better well-being than fully remote workers.
- H4: Hybrid workers report significantly better work-life balance than both remote and in-office workers.
- H5: WLB significantly mediates the relationship between work arrangement and productivity.
- H6: WLB significantly mediates the relationship between work arrangement and well-being.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sample and Data Collection

We ran a cross-sectional survey between January and March 2026, targeting IT and ITES professionals who had been in their current work arrangement for at least six months. That minimum was deliberate -- we wanted settled experience, not the adjustment period that typically follows a transition. Participants were drawn from four cities: Bengaluru (42% of the final sample), Hyderabad (26%), Pune (19%), and Chennai (13%).

We stratified the sample by both work arrangement type and organisation size -- large enterprise, mid-tier, and startup -- to avoid it skewing toward any one kind of employer. Recruitment drew on HR contacts within companies, LinkedIn professional groups, and university alumni networks. After removing incomplete responses and multivariate outliers, 378 valid questionnaires remained.

Table I shows how the arrangement split in our sample compares to national figures for India's IT sector.

| Work Arrangement | % of Indian IT Workforce | Key Characteristic            | Source |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------|
| Fully Remote     | 12.7%                    | No office attendance required | [4]    |
| Hybrid           | 28.2%                    | Flexible split schedule       | [5]    |
| In-Office        | 59.1%                    | Daily office attendance       | [4,5]  |

Table I. Distribution of work arrangements in India's IT industry, FY 2025-26.

### Sample Profile

| Characteristic   | Category             | n   | %     |
|------------------|----------------------|-----|-------|
| Gender           | Male                 | 247 | 65.3% |
|                  | Female               | 131 | 34.7% |
| Marital Status   | Unmarried            | 228 | 60.3% |
|                  | Married              | 150 | 39.7% |
| Education        | Bachelor's or Higher | 361 | 95.5% |
|                  | Other                | 17  | 4.5%  |
| Experience (yrs) | 2 or fewer           | 114 | 30.2% |
|                  | 3 to 4               | 91  | 24.1% |
|                  | 5 or more            | 173 | 45.8% |
| Work Arrangement | Fully Remote         | 126 | 33.3% |
|                  | Hybrid               | 152 | 40.2% |
|                  | In-Office            | 100 | 26.5% |
| Income (annual)  | 10 LPA or below      | 352 | 93.1% |
|                  | Above 10 LPA         | 26  | 6.9%  |

Table III. Demographic profile of respondents (N = 378).

The sample leaned male (65%) and relatively junior -- roughly 54% had fewer than five years of experience. Most earned below 10 LPA, which reflects where the bulk of India's IT workforce sits at these experience levels. The split across work arrangements was reasonably balanced: 33% remote, 40% hybrid, 26% in-office, giving us adequate statistical power to make meaningful group comparisons.

## Measurement Instruments

We used four validated scales, summarised in Table II. We added a technostress measure adapted from Tarafdar et al. [20] that was not part of our first paper. Given what the literature consistently shows about remote workers carrying a heavier digital burden, it seemed important to capture this directly rather than leaving it as an unexplained residual.

| Construct              | No. of Items       | Scale Format                | Cronbach Alpha | Source                             |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Work Arrangement Type  | 1<br>(categorical) | Remote / Hybrid / In-Office | N/A            | Self-report                        |
| Perceived Productivity | 5                  | 5-point Likert              | .87            | Bloom et al.; Tripathi & Goyal [1] |
| Employee Well-being    | 5                  | WHO-5 Index                 | .83            | WHO [13]                           |
| Work-Life Balance      | 15                 | 5-point Likert              | .79            | Hayman [9]                         |
| Technostress           | 6                  | 5-point Likert              | .81            | Tarafdar et al. [20]               |

Table II. Measurement instruments and reliability estimates.

## Analytical Approach

We used a two-stage strategy. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 27 established that our measurement model held up -- that the items we intended to measure each construct actually loaded cleanly on the right factors. Second, structural equation modeling (SEM) tested the direct and mediated pathways. Work arrangement was entered as dummy variables with in-office as the reference group. Bootstrapped mediation tests using 5,000 resamples gave us 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effects through WLB. One-way ANOVA with Bonferroni post-hoc corrections provided straightforward group comparisons of means. Age, gender, tenure, and income were included as control variables; none reached significance.

## RESULTS

### Group Differences at a Glance

Before the SEM results, it is worth looking at the raw group means, because they already tell a fairly clear story. Table VI presents the descriptive statistics for each construct across the three arrangement groups.

| Construct    | Remote M (SD) | Hybrid M (SD) | In-Office M (SD) |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Productivity | 3.91 (0.77)   | 3.78 (0.82)   | 3.42 (0.91)      |
| Well-being   | 3.21 (0.69)   | 3.35 (0.74)   | 3.18 (0.78)      |

| Construct         | Remote M (SD) | Hybrid M (SD) | In-Office M (SD) |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Work-Life Balance | 3.29 (0.81)   | 3.47 (0.76)   | 3.01 (0.88)      |
| Technostress      | 3.58 (0.84)   | 3.12 (0.79)   | 2.71 (0.83)      |

Table VI. Descriptive statistics by work arrangement (N = 378).

One-way ANOVA confirmed that none of these differences were down to chance. Productivity [ $F(2, 375) = 18.43, p < .001$ ], WLB [ $F(2, 375) = 22.17, p < .001$ ], and technostress [ $F(2, 375) = 31.64, p < .001$ ] all differed significantly across groups. Well-being differences were smaller but still significant [ $F(2, 375) = 4.88, p < .05$ ]. Post-hoc tests showed that remote and hybrid workers both significantly outperformed in-office workers on productivity (both  $p < .001$ ). Hybrid workers led on WLB, ahead of both remote and in-office colleagues ( $p < .05$  for both comparisons). The technostress figure stood out: remote workers scored nearly a full point higher than in-office workers on this scale, and notably higher than hybrid workers too.

### Measurement Model Fit

The CFA results were reassuring. Standardised factor loadings ranged from .62 to .84, average variance extracted exceeded .50 for all constructs, and composite reliability cleared .70 across the board. Table IV shows the model fit indices.

| Fit Index        | Obtained Value | Recommended Threshold |
|------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Chi-squared / df | 1.91           | Below 3.0             |
| CFI              | 0.961          | Above 0.95            |
| TLI              | 0.956          | Above 0.95            |
| RMSEA            | 0.046          | Below 0.06            |
| SRMR             | 0.043          | Below 0.08            |

Table IV. Measurement and structural model fit indices (N = 378).

All indices fall within the thresholds the SEM literature recommends, and we were confident proceeding to the structural stage.

### Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Table V presents the standardised path coefficients from the full structural model. In-office workers serve as the reference category throughout.

| Path / Outcome                | Remote (beta) | Hybrid (beta) | In-Office | Significance |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|
| Productivity -- direct effect | +0.38***      | +0.29***      | Reference | $p < .001$   |
| Well-being -- direct effect   | +0.21*        | +0.26**       | Reference | $p < .05$    |

|                                 |          |          |           |            |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Arrangement to WLB              | +0.28**  | +0.31*** | Reference | $p < .01$  |
| WLB to Productivity             | +0.44*** | +0.44*** | +0.44***  | $p < .001$ |
| WLB to Well-being               | +0.49*** | +0.49*** | +0.49***  | $p < .001$ |
| Indirect via WLB (Productivity) | +0.123** | +0.136** | ---       | $p < .01$  |
| Indirect via WLB (Well-being)   | +0.137** | +0.152** | ---       | $p < .01$  |

Table V. Standardised SEM path coefficients (N = 378). \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Reference group = In-Office.

**H1 and H2 (Productivity):** Both remote (beta = +0.38,  $p < .001$ ) and hybrid workers (beta = +0.29,  $p < .001$ ) reported significantly higher productivity than in-office workers, supporting both hypotheses. The remote advantage was larger, consistent with what the commute-savings and autonomy arguments would predict.

**H3 (Well-being):** Hybrid workers gained more on well-being (beta = +0.26,  $p < .01$ ) than remote workers (beta = +0.21,  $p < .05$ ), supporting H3. The gap is modest but consistent with our expectation that the technostress burden of full remote partially offsets the gains from autonomy and commute elimination.

**H4 (Work-life balance):** Hybrid workers reported significantly better WLB than both in-office workers (beta = +0.31,  $p < .001$ ) and remote workers (mean difference = +0.18,  $p < .05$ ), supporting H4. This is arguably the most theoretically interesting finding in the paper. The alternating rhythm of hybrid work -- some days in the office, others at home -- appears to help workers maintain cleaner boundaries than constant remote working does.

**H5 and H6 (Mediation by WLB):** Bootstrapped tests confirmed that WLB mediated outcomes in both groups. For productivity, indirect effects were significant for remote (indirect beta = +0.123, 95% CI [0.064, 0.187]) and hybrid (indirect beta = +0.136, 95% CI [0.072, 0.203]), supporting H5. For well-being, indirect effects were similarly significant in both groups, supporting H6. Crucially, direct paths from work arrangement to outcomes remained significant after including WLB in the model, indicating partial rather than full mediation -- the arrangement carries its own direct effects beyond what WLB alone can explain.

## DISCUSSION

We expected hybrid work to perform well in this comparison, and it did. But how and why it performed well -- and where it fell short -- matters more than the simple ranking for anyone trying to translate these findings into practice.

Start with productivity. Remote workers came out on top there, and the mechanisms are not surprising: no commute, more control over the work environment, fewer in-office interruptions. These are real and consistent gains that show up across the literature, and our data confirms them in the Indian IT context. But productivity alone was never the whole story, and what happened on the well-being side is where things get more interesting.

Remote workers in our sample were significantly more burdened by technostress than either hybrid or in-office workers. This matters because technostress depletes the psychological resources that make sustained productive work possible over time. You can maintain high output while drawing down those reserves for months, but it is not a stable equilibrium. Several employees in our open-ended responses described exactly this pattern -- hitting targets consistently while feeling a quiet, accumulating exhaustion by the end of each week. The productivity numbers look fine until, at some point, they do not. Our cross-sectional design cannot catch that tipping point, but the technostress scores suggest it is not a hypothetical concern.

Hybrid workers avoided this particular trap more successfully. Their productivity gains were smaller than remote workers', but their well-being and WLB scores were stronger. The structured alternation of office and home days

appeared to give people a clearer psychological permission to actually disengage on home days -- something full remote workers, perpetually theoretically available, found harder to do in practice. This is what Boundary Theory predicts, and it showed up clearly in the data.

The in-office group's results were the least ambiguous of the three. On every outcome we measured -- productivity, well-being, work-life balance -- they came in last. In the Indian context, where commutes averaging over an hour each way impose a real and daily physical cost, this is not a surprising finding. We want to be careful not to overstate it: our instruments did not capture informal mentoring, spontaneous knowledge transfer, or the culture-reinforcing effects that in-office work sometimes provides. Those things may be real and they matter. But on what we actually measured, in-office arrangements consistently underperformed, and managers who mandate a return to the office without clear evidence that it benefits the work itself are making that trade-off on shaky empirical ground.

Practically, the message from these results is fairly direct. Hybrid work -- when accompanied by genuine boundary protection norms, reasonable expectations about off-hours availability, and actual flexibility rather than nominal flexibility -- looks like the most sustainable arrangement for Indian IT workers trying to sustain both performance and personal wellbeing. Simply labelling a policy hybrid while maintaining always-on culture is not a hybrid arrangement. It is remote work with a commute added on selected days. The label does not do the work; the surrounding norms and expectations do.

### Limitations and Future Research

We want to be candid about what this study cannot establish. The most significant limitation is the cross-sectional design. We captured a snapshot of 378 professionals at a single point in time, which means we can describe associations but not causation. It is entirely possible that employees who already had stronger boundary management skills or lower technostress susceptibility self-selected into hybrid arrangements, rather than hybrid arrangements producing these advantages. A longitudinal design tracking individuals through an actual arrangement change -- particularly a mandated return-to-office -- would be far more illuminating.

The sample is confined to IT and ITES workers in four Indian cities, and the 65% male composition reflects both the sector's demographics and a real limitation of our inference. Work-life dynamics look quite different for women managing caregiving alongside demanding tech careers, and our dataset does not give us the power to examine this adequately. A study focused specifically on women in Indian IT, and how work arrangement type intersects with caregiving burden, would address a genuine gap.

All four main constructs rely on self-report, which carries the usual risks around social desirability and common method variance. Future studies should triangulate with objective productivity data -- output logs, peer-rated performance, project completion records -- to check whether the self-perceived differences we found correspond to real differences in actual output. And future work should disaggregate the hybrid category, which in our study lumps together people who are in the office four days a week with those who come in once a fortnight. The intensity and predictability of office attendance almost certainly interacts with the boundary-regulation mechanisms we described, and treating all hybrid workers as a homogeneous group likely obscures important variation.

### CONCLUSION

The question of how people work best -- and how they stay well while doing it -- has become one of the more pressing strategic questions for India's IT sector. With close to six million professionals navigating a rapidly shifting landscape of work arrangements, and major employers still arguing about how much office attendance is actually necessary, the stakes of getting the answer wrong are not trivial.

What we found is that the arrangement matters, the effects are not uniform across outcomes, and the story is more complicated than either side of the remote-versus-office debate usually acknowledges. Full remote delivers the strongest productivity gain, but the technostress and boundary erosion costs are real enough that they show up in well-being and WLB scores -- costs that are easy to underestimate when you are only looking at output

metrics. In-office work, at least in the Indian context with its commute burden, consistently underperforms on every dimension we measured. Hybrid work lands in the most sustainable position: not the highest productivity, but a well-being and WLB profile that suggests people can maintain it without gradually running down their psychological reserves.

Work-life balance is the mechanism doing much of the work here -- not as a vague aspiration but as a concrete practice of maintaining meaningful separation between professional demands and the rest of life. Organisations that structurally support this, through clear offline norms and genuine schedule flexibility, will likely see better outcomes on both the performance and health dimensions. Those that offer hybrid as a label while preserving always-on expectations will probably not see those benefits, and may be getting the worst of both worlds.

This is the second paper in a line of research we intend to continue. The cross-sectional snapshot has its uses as a baseline, but longitudinal designs, mixed methods, and sector-specific studies are needed to build a fuller picture. We hope the findings here offer a useful starting point for both researchers and the practitioners making these decisions in real organisations right now.

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