

# Versatile Leadership, LVI and Their Application in Škoda Auto a.s.

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The paper starts with a presentation of the versatile leadership model developed by Kaplan and Kaiser and of their 360° feedback tool Leadership Versatility® Index (LVI). Versatility can be generally defined as a mastery of opposites, as the ability to play multiple roles, even contradictory ones, without emphasizing some at the expense of others. The LVI has been designed to help managers understand their repertoire and how they can become more versatile leaders. It employs an innovative rating scale on which ideal score “0” is in the middle of it (the right amount), flanked by underdoing to the left (too little) and overdoing to the right (too much). The idea is to avoid the “more is better” design trap by providing a way for raters to indicate when managers go to counterproductive extremes. The LVI works with two-sided view of leadership based on two major pairs of opposites: directive vs. supportive leadership and execution vs. strategy. Interventions based on the LVI results help to overcome traditional behaviorism as they combine the outer work (behavioral change) with the inner work (personal change) of development. Application of the LVI on a sample of the managers from Škoda Auto a.s. and verification of its practical value represented the core of the ŠAVŠ IGA project MM/O7/02. The last part of the paper is devoted to a presentation of the findings from this project. The LVI has been found to be both original and a very useful 360° feedback tool which can be addressed to two general groups of clients: (1) experienced senior managers; and (2) young perspective managers in the beginning of their career.

*Keywords:* versatility, leadership, leadership versatility index, 360-degree feedback, curvilinear scale, personal development

## Introduction

Today's managers work is a complex world. Every decision can be a trade-off in an economy fraught with

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paradoxical demands: Companies we compete with in one arena may be our partners in another. Maximizing profits today often conflicts with investing in tomorrow. The need to produce can clash with concern for people and human limits. To be up to the task, managers must be equally complex in their leadership.

What does it mean to be a complex leader? It boils down to the ability to play multiple roles, even contradictory ones, without emphasizing some at the expense of others. Versatility, flexibility, agility—call it what you will, but effective leaders must wear many hats.

The Leadership Versatility Index<sup>®</sup> (LVI) is a 360° feedback tool designed to help managers understand their repertoire and how they can become more versatile leaders. The LVI is a next-generation assessment instrument. First, it employs an innovative rating scale. Second, the instrument is built on a conception of leadership that reflects the tensions and trade-offs in the world of management. By revealing how well-rounded managers are and where they are out of balance, this new approach lights up the development path. Based on more than 20 years of consulting to senior managers and over a decade of statistical research, the LVI is a step forward in assessment technology. In respect to these facts it was chosen as a promising potential complement and alternative to the assessment tools which have been used in Škoda Auto a.s. so far. Application of the LVI on a sample of the managers from Škoda Auto a.s. and verification of its practical value represented the core of the ŠAVŠ IGA project MM/O7/02.

### **Versatility and LVI**

When managers lack versatility, we often think of them as having a shortcoming, i.e., not very good at thinking strategically or holding people accountable or empowering their staff. They have a weakness. But versatility isn't just possessing the needed skills, it is also about using it to the right degree at the right time.

Many managers limit their versatility by going overboard in areas that come naturally to them. For example, some hard chargers push for results—to the point of burning people out. Many relational leaders are supportive—to the point of being too nice to be taken seriously. Some visionary leaders push the envelope, but their grand plans often defy successful implementation. That is how strength becomes weakness (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2006).

Versatility can be a more powerful concept when you pair skills and behaviors that look contradictory, yet in fact are complementary. Talking and listening are a good example, great communicators are good at both. Likewise, versatile managers can use opposing leadership behaviors with equal ease, for instance, stepping up to take charge and empowering others to lead, getting the work done and managing relationships, seeing the big picture and zooming in to grasp details.

Instead of being versatile many managers are lopsided. They lean one way by doing too much of one behavior and too little of the other. Thus we define versatility as having a full range of motion, able to freely use opposing leadership approaches, unrestricted by bias for one and a prejudice against the other (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2006).

This is a view of versatility as a mastery of opposites. It is rooted in the tension and trade-offs that make leadership a balancing act. Like the Taoist notion of “yin” and “yang”, the idea is that it takes two complementary elements to form the whole. Neither is complete without the other. The power of this view of versatility is that it

conforms to the realities of the management job, with its conflicting priorities and competing demands. Such a view of versatility was transformed into a new 360° feedback tool LVI.

Most of the existing 360°s use 5-point rating scales. Their problem is that they do not indicate when managers do something too much. Instead, they seem to assume that, “more is better” and imply that a high score is the best score. Furthermore, they do not tease apart overdoing it and underdoing it as distinct sources of ineffectiveness.

To remedy this problem a new rating scale (curvilinear scale) was developed. The ideal score of 0 is in the middle of it (the right amount), flanked by underdoing to the left (too little) and overdoing to the right (too much). Degrees of doing too little are represented by minus scores from –1 to –4; degrees of doing too much are represented by plus scores from +1 to +4 (see Figure 1). The idea is to avoid the “more is better” design trap by providing a way for raters to indicate when managers go to counterproductive extremes (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006; Lombardo & Eichinger, 2006).

← Too little ←				The right amount	→ Too much →			
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4

Figure 1. New rating scale.

The standard way to conceptualize leadership these days is with competency models: lists of skills, knowledge, behaviors, and abilities needed to perform a given role. Competency models are linear in that the dimensions are presented one at a time and in isolation. They do not reflect the dynamic relationships among the various dimensions. The versatile model of leadership is two-sided and is based on two major pairs of opposites: “self-assertive, directive” versus “inclusive, supportive” leadership and “short-term execution” versus “long-term strategy” (see Table 1). These two pairs are complementary themselves in that “self-assertive, directive” versus “inclusive, supportive” represent the interpersonal “How” of leadership while “short-term execution” versus “long-term strategy” represent the organizational “What” of leadership (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2005; Pavlica, Jarošová, & Kaiser, 2010).

At the center of the “directive versus supportive” distinction is “how” leaders exert social influence: top-down, where the leaders uses power and authority, compared to a more collaborative process of relating and drawing out the contributions others can make. Within the two general dimensions are three more specific pairs of sub-dimensions: (1) takes charge vs. empowers; (2) declares vs. listens; (3) pushes vs. supports.

The execution vs. strategy distinction considers “what” organizational needs leaders focus on. There are also three pairs of more specific sub-dimensions: (1) execution vs. direction; (2) efficiency vs growth; (3) order vs innovation (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006; Pavlica, Jarošová, & Kaiser, 2010).

Regardless to what is in vogue, effective leadership depends on all four of the directive, supportive, executive and strategic roles. At a minimum every manager needs to appreciate the value of each one. In the best case, managers become well rounded leaders by developing the wisdom to recognize when each is called for and the skill to perform it effectively.

Research inspired by Robert Quinn’s (1988) “Competing Values Framework”, which identifies four distinct orientations that are similar to LVI four dimensions, shows that the most effective leaders draw on each of these approaches without emphasizing some at the expense of others. Research with the LVI has confirmed the link

between versatility and effectiveness. Across nine independent samples covering over 1,100 managers, the versatility score predicted 50% of the differences in terms of overall effectiveness. That is, versatility as measured by the LVI accounts for half of what separates the most well-regarded leaders from the least well regarded leaders. It has been also found, that versatile leaders have employees with higher job satisfaction, commitment and group cohesion. Teams led by versatile managers are also more productive (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2007).

Table 1

*LVI Leadership Model*

<b><u>Self-assertive and Directive</u></b> Exercising power and authority to push for performance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Takes charge:</b> assuming authority by showing initiative and setting expectations.</li> <li>• <b>Declares/decides:</b> being decisive, taking a position and defending it.</li> <li>• <b>Pushes:</b> setting high expectations and holding people accountable for reaching them.</li> </ul>	<b><u>Inclusive and Supportive</u></b> Creating conditions for other people to be influential and contribute: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Empowers:</b> letting go and trusting people to decide how to do their work;</li> <li>• <b>Listens/includes:</b> being participative, seeking input and being open to influence;</li> <li>• <b>Supports:</b> tending to people's needs, showing empathy and encouragement.</li> </ul>
<b><u>Short-term Execution</u></b> Focusing the organization to get results in the near term: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Execution:</b> managing the details of implementation to produce results now;</li> <li>• <b>Efficiency:</b> conserving resources by cutting costs and selection of the goals;</li> <li>• <b>Order:</b> establishing stability through discipline, consistency and monitoring.</li> </ul>	<b><u>Long-term Strategy</u></b> Positioning the organization to be competitive in the future: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Direction:</b> planning ahead with a high-level view and broad perspective;</li> <li>• <b>Growth:</b> being aggressive to grow the business and expand capability;</li> <li>• <b>Innovation:</b> embracing change and encouraging creativity and new ideas.</li> </ul>

Research with the LVI also shows that truly well-rounded and versatile managers are in the minority. Versatility scores are percentages that can be interpreted like letter grades in school, where higher percentages indicate mastery: 90% A, 80% B, 70% C etc.. The average versatile score in Kaplan DeVries Inc. normative database (with ratings for 1 123 senior managers) is 81%, a low B (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2007). In fact, just over half of managers get B's and about 40% get lower than a B, while only 6% get an A (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Distribution of Versatility Scores*

Overall versatility	Percentage of managers
90%-100%	6.1%
80%-90%	54.4%
70%-80%	31%
60%-70%	7.5%
Below 60%	1%

There exist two possible general reasons explaining why do so many managers lack versatility. It may be that leadership is like any other skilled performance, it takes talent, years of practice, hard work and concentrated study to master. It also may be that a new paradigm of leadership is emerging to deal with increased complexity and a faster pace of change and this requires multifaceted managers like never before. Either way, the next question is how can managers expand their repertoire and become more versatile leaders. A key to the solution is an assessment tool that identifies how versatile the leader is now, including clear strengths, strengths overused, as well as shortcomings. This is precisely what LVI was designed to do.

### A Practical Psychology of Development

Much of modern management development is based on behaviorism. These approaches start and end with behavior: behavior-based assessment, behavior modeling, behavior-based performance coaching, and so forth. Of course, behavior is the bottom line when it comes to performance. Performance, however, isn't a matter of behavior alone, it is also the product of mindset and emotion (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Hogan, 2006).

Purely behavioral approach is often insufficient for realizing sustained performance improvements. When work on the behavioral level is supplemented with personal development of an inner nature, lasting change is more likely. The LVI is ideally suited for setting up both the outer work and the inner work of development.

The outer work of development involves directly changing behavior. In the case of something a manager does too little, the needed change is to do more. This may involve an element of coercion because manager must make himself do something he has neglected or avoided. In the case of "overkill", the needed change is to do less. This requires manager to ease up and be more selective. A requirement for the outer work is that the individual understands which behaviors need to change and how they need to change. The LVI makes clear prescriptions for these adjustments.

Direct attempts to change behavior may only go so far. For instance, managers receiving corrective feedback will sometimes say, "This isn't new. I have heard this before". The next question is, then why does the troublesome behavior persist. The reasons given may be things "out there" in the work environment, but more leverage may be "inside" the manager. Growing as a leader often hinges on growing as a person (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2006).

Personal development means that the path to improving one's leadership may require a thoughtful examination of basic beliefs and emotional investments. It can start with a few simple, ever so practical questions: Why do you do too much here—what compels you? Why do you do too little there—what holds you back? Experience shows that behind a lopsided leadership there often is:

**Crooked thinking.** Some managers have an incomplete and/or incorrect understanding of their job. They are aware of only one side of the "whole story"—they may believe in the need to achieve the results while overlooking the people side, for example.

**Faulty gauges.** Some managers have a trouble judging how much is too much. Just as a broken thermostat can overheat or chill a room, a faulty gauge can cause a leader to go overboard, or come up short.

**Polarized values.** Lopsided leadership often rests on polarized values, where one side is idealized and the other is devalued. On one hand, some managers can't imagine such a thing as too much of something they believe in. Consequently, they are liable to overdo it. On the other hand, they will often disparage the complementary approach.

**Fears.** There can be a fear on the part of overly directive individuals of not being powerful enough that produces the excess. And there can be a fear on the part of overly supportive managers, of becoming an exaggerated version of forcefulness, as if moving in that direction means being arrogant, rude or abrasive.

**Unrecognized strengths.** Some people may fail to appreciate their own strengths, either in terms of particular skill or one's capability in general. Underrating oneself can compel a manager to try too hard to compensate, underestimate, overdo. It can also prompt an individual to avoid certain tasks for fear of not performing well, underestimate, underdo.

Given the rarity of versatile managers and the intense personal (inner) work involved in becoming more versatile, it is natural to wonder if “the bar isn’t set too high for the leaders”. However, there are good organizational and personal reasons to think that versatility may indeed be a worthy goal. First, the directive, supportive, executive and strategic roles are not elective; they are organizational requirements. Second, versatility is associated with career success—the job histories of successful executives are characterized by a broad range of challenging assignments that lead to a broader perspective and wider repertoire. In contrast, a career based on exploiting a particular strength by repeatedly taking on similar assignments robs the individual of the opportunity to branch out and develop.

It is not sure, if every manager can become a totally versatile leader. It may be the case that versatility is a prized attribute of only the most accomplished leaders and is not attainable for some. At the same time, it is likely that most managers can increase their versatility to some degree. And the research linking versatility to important outcomes suggests that doing so will improve one’s effectiveness to some degree. Thus while total versatility may not be possible for all managers to achieve, it remains a worthy goal on which to set their sights.

### **LVI Project in Škoda Auto a.s.**

In respect to an innovative nature of the versatile model of leadership as well as taking into account a need to offer managers an assessment tool which could give them new insights into the area of their personal development, LVI has been chosen as a technique with a promising potential. The project started in October 2007 and has been designed for two years (Pavlica & Kaiser, 2008). Since October 2007 till May 2010 the following tasks were completed:

- Negotiations with Kaplan DeVries Inc., represented by R. B. Kaiser, about the use of the LVI in the project. An agreement has been signed defining the conditions for the LVI’s application in the project—the technique could be used exclusively in Škoda Auto case, Kaplan DeVries promised to provide the project team with consultations and assistance, all the steps had to be discussed in advance with R. B. Kaiser etc. (October 2007-December 2007);
- Translation and accommodation of the LVI for the purposes of the project. Here again many consultations with R.B. Kaiser were necessary (January 2008-April 2008);
- Selection of the sample. Based on consultations with the officials from the Human Resource Development department a group of 14 managers (1 female, 13 males) has been chosen for the project. All of them were participating in the programme, “managers 4 future” and represented individuals with a potential to get promoted to more senior positions (February-March, 2008);
- First round of the data collection (electronic version of the LVI was used), analysis of these data and preparation of the reports for the managers selected for the project (May 2008-October 2008);
- Feedback sessions. Two meetings with the respondents were organized during November 2008. All of them were given individual feedback in a form of coaching interview. The participants were assigned a task to elaborate and complete personal development plans focused on reaching versatility in the chosen areas;
- Second round of the meetings with respondents. In February 2009, all of the participants were individually contacted and coached again. The focus was on a control and overview of the personal development plans completion as well as on a discussion of the further directions of their efforts to change and improve. On a basis

of these interviews respondents elaborated second versions of the personal development plans;

- “Retest”—second round of the data collection by the means of LVI (May-June 2009). The sample as well as their raters remained the same;
- Analysis of the results and preparation of the reports from the second round of measurement (May 2009-November 2009);
- Final feedback interviews with the participants, analysis of the overall results from the project (February 2010-May 2010).

Following text presents the most interesting findings from the whole project, including the participants' and their superiors' perception of the LVI's methodology practical value.

### Overview of the Most Important Findings

#### Data About Rated Managers' Versatility

Questionnaire LVI evaluates managers' versatility on altogether 48 paired items. On a basis of these data, an overall versatility score can be calculated as well as the scores about managers' versatility on both dimensions of the underlying leadership model.

Project participants were rated twice (2008 and 2009) by the means of questionnaire LVI. During the time between these two measurements they were working on a completion of the personal development plans. One of our research objectives was to find out whether the personal development plans based on the feedback reflecting the LVI results help managers to increase their versatility and effectiveness of their leadership. As it can be seen in Table 3 the aggregated data (arithmetic means) about the versatility did not look very persuasively in this respect.

Table 3

*Average Versatility of the Rated Managers in 2008 and 2009*

	Škoda Auto a.s.		LVI Norms	
	Mean 08	Mean 09	Mean	SD
Overall versatility	79%	79%	80%	8%
Directive vs. Supportive	80%	79%	79%	9%
Execution vs. Strategy	79%	79%	81%	8%

According to these data there have occurred no significant changes in rated managers' overall and partial versatility. On the other hand it is possible to appreciate a fact that the data collected on the sample of the managers from Škoda Auto a.s. correspond to the LVI norms. In other words one can say that rated participants are on average approximately equally versatile like all managers rated by the LVI so far (a sample of more than 1,000 mostly US managers). Further, the arithmetic means as such represent very rough data which should be interpreted very carefully. In order to understand their actual meaning we need an information about a distribution of the values/scores from which they have been calculated. This was very important in our case as well. Whereas there have been identified no changes on average, it was possible to identify the changes on an individual level—overall versatility of the 8 managers increased (mild improvement), versatility of the 3 managers decreased (mild worsening) and overall versatility of the 2 managers remained the same (one manager dropped out from the project). In this respect, a participation on the project has influenced “our” managers in a relatively positive way.

### Changes in a Distribution of the Collected Answers Into Particular Categories

Whereas the “averages” presented in Table 3 did not work as a persuasive proof of the effectiveness of a feedback based on the LVI’s results, changes in a distribution of the collected answers into particular categories of the managerial behavior assessment (“too little”, “too much”, “right amount”) have offered us a different picture. Table 4 shows how many ratings altogether have fallen in the years 2008 and 2009 into particular categories.

Table 4

#### *Distribution of the Answers Into Categories of Behavior in the Years 2008 and 2009*

LVI dimension	“Too little” 08	“Too little” 09	“Right amount” 08	“Right amount” 09	“Too much” 08	“Too much” 09
Directive	14%	17%	50%	67%	36%	16%
Supportive	21%	8%	50%	58%	29%	34%
Execution	29%	17%	36%	58%	35%	25%
Strategy	21%	17%	43%	50%	36%	33%

The most persuasive were the changes within a category “right amount”. A total number of the assessments falling into this category has increased on all of the four poles of the underlying leadership model. The biggest differences between the years 2008 and 2009 were identified on the poles of “execution” (22%) and “directive” style (17%).

It was possible to identify positive changes also in terms of a decrease of the total number of the assessments falling into category “too little” (except of the pole “directive” style) and “too much” (except of the pole “supportive” style). These data demonstrate a fact that the feedback interviews based on the results of the LVI questionnaire as well as a completion of the subsequent personal development plans were effective and useful. Further, a comparison of the individual results for the years 2008 and 2009 led to a finding that the project participants have significantly improved on those particular LVI items they were focused on also in their personal development plans.

### Continuing Trends in the Areas of Excesses and Deficits

Despite of a fact that except of a supportive leadership dimension a total number of the excesses has decreased in 2009 it was possible to identify four items on which a majority of the ratings fell into a category “too much” in both years. In particular those were two items from a pole “directive” style—2f “Takes the initiative—seizes the opportunity to lead” (71% of all ratings in 2008 and 67% in 2009) and 4f “Steps in—gets personally involved when problems arise” (64% of all ratings in 2008 and 58% in 2009)—and two items from an “execution” pole—1o “Focuses on getting things done in the short-term—results oriented” (57% of all ratings in 2008 and 51% in 2009) and 8o “Seeks efficiencies—looks for ways to contain or reduce costs” (57% of all ratings in 2008 and even 67% in 2009).

A tendency too much/often personally participates on and influences a solution process of all working problems corresponds to the findings from our previous research (2005-2006, an application of the Vroom-Yeton’s contingency approach) in Škoda Auto a.s.. According to the data from that project most of the respondents (over 60 Czech managers from Škoda Auto a.s.) preferred autocratic leadership and decision-making approaches to participative ones.

An increase of the overall number of the assessments according to which managers tend to “Seek efficiencies” too much can be related to a current economic situation and a general demand to reduce the costs



and save the resources.

In the area of the deficits there was identified one item (from a “Supportive“ pole) on which a majority of the ratings fell into a category “too little” in both years—8e “Makes it easy to people to challenge his/her thinking—to push back” (71% of all ratings in 2008 and 67% in 2009). Also this trend corresponds to the findings from our previous research mentioned above.

### **Effectiveness of the Assessed Managers**

LVI questionnaire contains also items focused on an assessment of the managers’ effectiveness. Rated are both an overall effectiveness of a particular manager (maximum value is 10) and an effectiveness (productivity and vitality) of his/her team (maximum value is 4). The results from both rounds of measurement are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

#### *Effectiveness of the Rated Managers and Their Teams*

	Škoda Auto a.s.		LVI Norms	
	Average 2008	Average 2009	Average	SD
Overall effectiveness of a manager	7.82	7.93	7.80	1.00
Team productivity	3.85	3.85	3.76	0.41
Team vitality	3.88	3.94	3.69	0.43

According to these data both an overall effectiveness of the managers and a vitality (morale, engagement with work and group cohesiveness) of their teams have slightly increased. Team productivity (quantity and quality of output) remained the same. Also these findings demonstrate a practical value and positive impact of a feedback based on the LVI results.

### **Project and LVI Questionnaire in the Eyes of the Rated Managers and Their Superiors**

At the of the project we addressed rated managers and their bosses with a questionnaire focused on an evaluation of the whole action and and its practical contributions. We received data from 11 managers and 4 superiors.

The first item contained a ten-point scale measuring how much had a participation in the project contributed to an improvement of the rated managers’ behavior and personal development (1 = no contribution at all, 10 = very important contribution). Both managers (average 8.1) and their bosses (average 7.5) evaluated contribution as important and valuable. Managers were also asked to express a personal satisfaction with a quality of the received feedback and with a coaching process. Here an average value was 8.9 what means that their satisfaction was very high.

The rating scales were followed by an open question: “Specify, please, in which particular ways had the project contributed to an improvement of your (of your subordinate’s) behavior and development”. Among the responses formulated by the rated managers dominated (5 cases) a view, that “LVI offers an excellent and complex feedback from important people”. Within this was stressed a fact that received informations improved their orientation in and understanding of the social relations at work. Four managers highlighted an “opportunity to recognize their excesses” as very important and original help. There were presented also following specific contributions: “increase of my team’s effectiveness”; “better understanding of my weaknesses”; “attaining a ballance between different aspects of leadership”; “original and useful rating scale”.

The superiors pointed to the following contributions and positive changes in the behavior and work of their subordinates (rated managers): “his organizational skills has improved”; “he pays more attention to delegating what has enabled him to devote more time to planning and development”; “he controls his staff more often and more consistently”; “his emotional reactions have become more appropriate”.

Questionnaire contained also item focused on a description of the LVI’s method weaknesses and limitations. The collected critical comments were direct towards the general problems associated with 360° feedback (“it demands too much time”; “it is difficult to find and involve enough number of the evaluators”; “it is not suitable for the lower management” etc.) rather than towards the LVI method as such.

The final item of the questionnaire asked the managers and their superiors whether they would recommend to add the LVI on the list of the standard developmental techniques and tools used in Škoda Auto a.s.. The answer by all managers and superiors was “Yes”.

### Conclusion

It is possible to conclude that the LVI has been found to be both original and a very useful 360° feedback tool. In respect to this fact the authors of this paper will start to sell this technique on a Czech market this year. LVI can be addressed to two general groups of clients: (1) Experienced senior managers who have passed a number of the different “tests” and assessments during their career—the LVI can work as a fresh and interesting method here; (2) Young perspective managers in the beginning of their career—it has been proved that versatility correlates with a long term success in a managerial work. The readers who are interested in additional information about the LVI and versatile leadership can attend websites [www.versatileleader.com](http://www.versatileleader.com) and [www.kaplandevries.com](http://www.kaplandevries.com).

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