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The theoretical framework of this article is based on the description of occupational role stress by Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, and Snoek (1964) and Beehr (1987). The present study is an examination of six role stressors: role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, underutilization of skills, resource inadequacy, and nonparticipation. One mid-western high school's music department in the United States, consisting of four music teachers, served as the study's focus. Data were collected as field notes from observations, transcripts from interviews, and document analysis. While role ambiguity and nonparticipation issues were not of great concern among the participants, issues related to role conflicts, role overloads, underutilization of skills, and resource inadequacy were substantial. The burden of tedious administrative responsibilities (underutilization of skills), the constant need for music education advocacy (role overload), conflicts between personal and professional roles (role conflict), and tension created by scheduling conflicts due to the increasingly busy schedules of students (resource inadequacy) were among the most significant stressors.

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Role Stress in the Professional Life of the School Music Teacher: A Collective Case Study

People often perceive the expectations of their jobs based on what others communicate to them (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek, 1964). These are the expectations that people within organizational systems communicate to each other about the definition of jobs and roles. Job descriptions are formed by these interactions. A lack of congruence between expectations can create conflict and tension. Occupational stress researchers have categorized this as a conflict between expectations, or a role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964). Role stress can create job dissatisfaction and occupational stress (e.g., Jenkins & Calhoun, 1991; Thompson, McNamara, & Hoyle, 1997), anxiety (e.g., Capel, 1992), lack of commitment (e.g., Billingsley &

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Cross, 1992), insecurities and feelings of futility (e.g., Amey, 1990), emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (e.g., Crane & Iwanicki, 1986), and a propensity to leave the profession of teaching (e.g., Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Gonzalez, 1995).

Occupations in which people hold positions between organizations or systems, called "boundary positions" (Kahn et al., 1964), are more susceptible to role conflicts (e.g., Fisher & Gitelson, 1983; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). For example, teachers who also coach competitive athletic teams often struggle with role conflicts due, in part, to their boundary positioning between the academic and athletic world (e.g., Figone, 1994). Like the teacher-coach, the school music teacher also tecters between different worlds. There are those who believe the school music teacher is first and foremost a director of performing ensembles, while others believe the school music teacher should be most concerned with the academic pursuit of music education in the classroom.

Investigators in several studies have looked at the occupational stress-related issues of the school music teacher, but few specifically address role stress as a contributing factor. Results of these studies reveal that school music teachers who are dissatisfied with their professional life report feeling undervalued as teachers (e.g., Nimmo, 1986) due to a perceived lack of support from their administration (e.g., Krueger, 2000), students (e.g., Heston et al., 1986), or parents and other teachers (e.g., Gordon, 2000). This lack of support often results in insufficient salary and resources to accomplish the overwhelming amount of work required of the music teacher (see Nimmo, 1986; Krueger, 2000; Gordon, 2000).

The findings from these studies more than adequately describe the "what" of stress in the school music teacher's work life, but what remains is the question of "why?" For example, although association with uncooperative or negative people might be stressful, the statement needs further explanation to truly understand what is at issue. Why is it stressful? Obviously the informants perceive the negative attitudes and behaviors, but is their perception clouded by the incongruence of their beliefs to the realities of the position? Role theory provides us with another lens to view these sources of discontent in order to better understand why they are stressful for the school music teacher, and to investigate the underlying elements and sources of the stress.

This study focuses on six role stressors that, according to researchers, affect job satisfaction: role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, underutilization of skills, resource inadequacy, and non-participation. Role conflict occurs when two or more contradictory role messages (expectations) are sent to the focal person that result in psychological conflict. Role ambiguity stress is a result of both information deficiency and unpredictability. Role overload happens when the quantity and wide variety of different roles expected of the focal person is overwhelming to the point that no one role can be performed satisfactorily. Underutilization-of-skills-related tension

occurs when the expectations of the focal person do not allow him/her to use his/her unique skills and abilities—a type of role underload. Resource inadequacy stress occurs when the focal person is forced to try to “make things work” without the necessary tools and resources. Nonparticipation role stress occurs due to the focal person’s not being included in decisions affecting his/her role expectations. The purpose of this study was to shed light on school music teacher role stress, on the complicated lives of school music teachers, and to help practitioners, as well as policymakers and school administrators, better understand the role-related issues that can lead to teacher attrition, dissatisfaction with career, ineffectiveness, and stress in the workplace.

METHOD

A collective case study of one high school’s music department in the midwestern United States, consisting of four music teachers, served as the focus. The collective case study is a study consisting of several cases in order to examine a “phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). In this study, the researcher looked both at the individual professional lives of four music teachers and the combined experience they all share.

Site selection was primarily based on three criteria: (1) access to the site and subjects; (2) a high school music department that offered band, choir, and orchestra; and (3) a site that had well-established programs. Observations took place throughout the school’s fall academic semester (August 2001–January 2002) in both formal and informal situations. In addition to carrying out these daily observations, I interviewed each focal subject twice. School policy publications (e.g., student handbooks, teacher handbooks, job descriptions, mission statements), documents sent to students and parents, and concert programs were also collected for analysis.

All transcripts from recorded interviews, field notes from observations, and documents were analyzed using various coding techniques. Internal codes for this study included the six role stressors. Data were used to generate detailed descriptions of the site, the individuals, and the context. For clarity and accuracy, interview transcripts and field notes were made available to the individual subjects for their review. A balance was gained by the use of multiple subjects, observations, and document analysis. Triangulation of this data was essential to finding this balance.

PROFILES

Site: Lakeview Glen High School

Lakeview Glen High School (LGHS) is in the city of Lakeview, a small urban community of approximately 8,000 people in the midwestern United States.¹ It is surrounded on all sides by the state’s capital city, which has a population of over 208,000. LGHS has a stu-

dent enrollment of about 800 students. The school operates on an eight-period day: four periods in the morning, lunch, then four periods in the afternoon. Each period lasts 47 minutes. Although located within a larger city, LGHS more closely resembles a typical upper-middle-class suburban school.

Case 1: Lisa Nevoga (Choir): "Striving for Excellence"

In 11 years, Lisa's program has grown quite noticeably. Lisa's philosophy has shaped what is now a large performance-based operation. Lisa believes that her primary goal as vocal music teacher at LGHS is to provide experiences for her students to be the "best that they can be." She has an unrelenting desire for excellence in herself, her students, and her program. Lisa has more than 200 students involved in her program, split among four traditional concert-repertoire choirs that meet during the school day. In addition, Lisa offers two show choirs and two madrigal ensembles that meet either before or after school. Lisa is also responsible for the annual spring musical production. Of the four music teachers at LGHS, she is the only one who is completely full-time at the high school only. The remaining three periods of the day are spent either fulfilling administrative responsibilities, planning, or teaching lessons.

Lisa expects her students to give their best effort at all times. At the core of Lisa's own professional and educational philosophy is a drive for what she calls "excellence." When speaking to her students during rehearsal, she occasionally mentions previous 'star' students, choirs, and performances for the students to work to try to equal or excel.

This drive for excellence, combined with trying to give her students a wide variety of choral music, propelled Lisa to expand her program by adding additional groups and significantly raising the expectations for performance. For example, the show-choir program grew from having only a few local community performances to being a highly competitive organization that participates in numerous show-choir competitions. As a result, members of the show choir attend mandatory camps, need to participate in several fund-raising opportunities, rehearse several hours each week outside the school day, and perform at numerous competitions around the state. Lisa uses competition as a motivation for her students to excel. She believes that through competition her students are better motivated to strive for "excellence."

Lisa's main tension as a teacher is the struggle between her drive for success and excellence in her choir program and her role as mother to her three young children. Her increasingly busy schedule at school often results in her children being either baby-sat or with her and her husband during late evening and weekend rehearsals. Lisa seems to be coming to a crossroads in her professional life in balancing the needs of her family and the needs of her choir program. However, she refuses to settle for less with her choir program in fear of diminishing the experience she desires for her students. She

claims that she is overworked and understaffed in her position, but she states that it is mostly her own fault. Due to the success of her program, she has increased the choir membership from 120 to nearly 200 students over the past 11 years and has also greatly expanded the extracurricular offerings. This has resulted in work being much more demanding of her time.

Case 2: Don Turner (Band): “Ex-Workaholic”

Don Turner has been teaching in the Lakeview Glen school district for 30 years. Don shares the high school’s instrumental music program with another director, Pete Dunn. It is a unique situation in that both Don and Pete team-teach at the middle school and high school, but each has his own primary responsibilities. Don helps out at the middle school by teaching some lessons, but spends most of his time at the high school either teaching or managing the instrumental music program. While Pete is primarily responsible for the 8th- and 9th-grade bands, Don heads the 10th- and 11–12th-grade bands. There are roughly 60 students in each high school band. The three high school bands rehearse in the afternoon during back-to-back periods. This allows both Don and Pete to be available at the middle school in the morning. In addition to directing the concert bands during the school day, Don and Pete are also both responsible for an extracurricular jazz program, consisting of three jazz ensembles that meet before and after school.

Like most high school band programs, service functions can be a significant part of the curriculum. Don and Pete share these responsibilities. In the fall, all three high school bands combine into one noncompetitive marching band that primarily performs at home varsity football games and local parades. The band is able to rehearse as a whole only on the day of a performance. Although Don accepts this situation, it presents a unique set of challenges. Whenever he needs to assemble all the bands for a rehearsal, Don has to take students out of their regularly scheduled classes, which puts a strain on relations with teachers in other subjects.

Maintaining a balance between professional and personal roles is something that Don has struggled with throughout his career. Don discloses that he was once a “workaholic.” Like many young directors, he pushed himself and the program to see how far it could go. Through the years, this unrelenting drive eventually gave way to a feeling of futility. The demands of an active band program that was straining his personal life resulted in him “stepping back” a bit in his professional life. Don’s wife, keenly aware of his compulsion to stay at work through the evening, registered Don for tennis lessons in order to force him to leave work at a reasonable time each day. This gradually helped Don develop more of a balance between his personal and professional life. Don states that he is “burned out” and that he “doesn’t care anymore,” but I observed him repeatedly working nearly nonstop from the minute he arrived at school (well before the con-

tracted time) to the minute he left (typically well after the contracted time). In addition, he spends time at home on department chair duties so he does not have to spend school time doing them. While at school, Don spends most of his time teaching, preparing for the next class, or fulfilling administrative functions. Since he spends no more than 9 hours working at school each day, Don says that he feels he is not giving as much as he should.

Case 3: Pete Dunn (Band): “Putting out Fires”

Pete’s educational philosophy somewhat mirrors Don’s in that he believes his primary responsibility as a teacher is to help students become socially responsible adults. In addition, Pete feels an important aspect of his teaching is to try to maximize his students’ potential and give them everything they need to be independent musicians.

Pete and Don’s philosophy differs from Lisa’s in that they do not want to specifically focus on the high-achieving students. Pete states that the high-achieving student does not need his attention as much as the less-talented student because the talented student usually has additional opportunities outside school (e.g., private teachers, youth orchestras, etc.). Pete chooses to focus on the extrinsic goals of helping all his students become responsible adults through the lessons they learn by negotiating the responsibilities of membership in a musical ensemble. In contrast, Lisa seems to focus her energies on creating the “star” performer and the “excellent” performance.

Pete’s philanthropic educational philosophy is evident through his self-imposed role as music education advocate within the school. Pete was very active in thwarting an effort by the administration at LGHS to implement a four-period schedule that he believed would negatively affect the music program. Pete calls this type of activity “putting out fires.” From talking with parents and students who are having problems to the ongoing role of music advocate within the school district, Pete spends much of his time trying to keep the music program from being negatively affected by outside influences. A significant stressor for Pete is that the time he must devote to “putting out fires” interrupts and conflicts with his planning and teaching time.

Pete, like his colleagues, has difficulty at times juggling the demands of his role as a school music teacher and his role as a husband and father to three young children. Pete seems to care deeply about his students and what is best for their future, even at the expense of his music program or his family life. Some of his greatest joys in teaching are the connections that he makes with his students.

Case 4: Chris Davis (Orchestra): “Building a Program”

At Lakeview Glen, Chris is responsible for one high school orchestra of about 60 students that meets first period, and three orchestras at the middle school (grades 6–8). Although he has a desk in the high school music office, he is rarely seen there. Most of his teaching

responsibilities are at the middle school. Like Lisa, Chris has greatly developed the orchestra program throughout his time at LG, and is now lobbying the school board to add more staffing. Chris focused much of his effort over the past 8 years in trying to build the program, and is now beginning to reap the rewards. He looks forward to when he no longer needs to be as preoccupied with recruiting efforts. Chris's main goal is to provide a learning experience for his students to grow not only as musicians, but also as intelligent consumers of music and life-long supporters of the arts.

Chris is now in his ninth year at Lakeview Glen and very much enjoys his job. Out of all four of the subjects for this study, Chris seems to exhibit and report the least amount of tension and stress. Chris does, however, have a very busy schedule, since he is a parent, husband, teacher, and performer. Chris feels tension in his life juggling the different responsibilities and time commitments each role demands. Chris also feels frustrated when he senses being disconnected with his students and colleagues. He says that he feels this when he is too busy to meet with them informally, when having to rush from one function to another, and when he does not have enough time to meet their needs.

FINDINGS

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity was not a significant stressor for the subjects. This is inconsistent with other role ambiguity occupational stress studies. One subject's answer to a role ambiguity-related question points to one reason why all four teachers did not exhibit tension from role ambiguity: "That sounds like a young teacher to me" (Lisa, 12/4/01, p. 7).

Role Conflict

All four teachers exhibited varying (and significant) levels of stress from inter-role conflicts (two or more incompatible roles) between personal and professional roles—specifically that of parent/spouse versus music director. In particular, Lisa suffers greatly from a conflict between what she perceives as the traditional expectations of motherhood and the expectations of being a director of a very active choir program. This conflict most often finds Lisa neglecting her family responsibilities for the needs of her program. It also results in Lisa feeling she is shortchanging her career's expectations by not being able to attend conferences and workshops. Lisa, who says that she already feels guilty for not being home enough with her family, finds it very difficult to make time for these events because it will take more time away from her family and choir program.

Lisa also says that she feels inter-role conflicts as she deals with the administrative tasks of her very active performance-based curriculum. Whether the task is organizing fund-raising for her program or handling ticket orders for performances, Lisa says that these admin-

istrative expectations conflict with teaching. In addition, the program's active performance schedule does not allow her to address individual needs during the full choir rehearsals. This creates another inter-role conflict for Lisa: To meet the expectations of her performance curriculum, she often has to shortchange the individual needs of students.

Pete's main role conflict lies between his roles as an educator and a director of bands. As a director, it is expected that he will demand high levels of performance from the ensembles—the product is the goal. The expectations of being an educator direct Pete to care for each of the students and to use the group experience as an educational vehicle. In the latter case, the process is as important as (if not more important than) the product.

Like Pete, Don also exhibits tension at times between his roles as director and educator. On one hand, he would like to produce performing ensembles of a high caliber to build a program of stature. On the other hand, his educational philosophy tugs at this drive and questions the overall effect that building such a program would have on those involved. Is the effort worth the price? Rather than just producing a high-performance band program, Don believes his role as an educator is, in part, to make sure his students are able to have many different experiences without being overcommitted to just one area.

Although Don's core philosophical belief is that teachers should produce well-rounded students who have a variety of experiences, he believes that teaching a theory class (something that contributes to this well-roundedness) conflicts with his role as a band director. However, instead of Don feeling tension from his role as a director of bands dominating his role as a music teacher, he says that he feels tension from his role as a music teacher dominating his role as a director of bands (or band teacher). It seems, for Don, that tension is reduced when a balance is achieved between the two roles—a balance specified by Don's beliefs.

Chris's main stressor is an inter-role conflict over his need to increase student involvement in orchestra. To increase student enrollment (and activity) in the orchestra program, Chris believes that he needs to continually maintain a "fun" experience for his students while also working to present high-quality performances to the public so he can attract new students to the program. To do this, he needs to rehearse effectively and efficiently. Chris feels frustration because he would like to rehearse more effectively by isolating smaller sections of the music during rehearsal. However, because of students' immaturity and their need for a "fun" experience, Chris senses that he must keep the whole group playing whenever possible. This results in tension for Chris: While he wants to provide a positive experience for his students, he realizes that he needs to rehearse the ensemble for concerts. Sometimes fulfilling one role makes it very difficult to fulfill the other—at least with younger students who are more interested in the social aspect of orchestra than in preparing a

work for performance.

Meeting the demands of teaching, directing performing ensembles, and maintaining a personal life apart from the responsibilities of work proves quite challenging for these teachers. Sometimes this tension does not come necessarily from a conflict of roles, but from the sheer number of different responsibilities that creates a sense of being overwhelmed. It is not a conflict between roles, but a sense that no role can be fulfilled satisfactorily due to being "spread too thin." This is called role overload.

Role Overload

Beyond various role conflicts and an overall sense of inadequate resources, role overload was the next most significant stressor for all four subjects. The sense of role overload, for these teachers, had a great deal to do with resource inadequacy issues, particularly inadequate staffing.

Lisa's situation is complicated by the fact that she is a parent of three children, something that often conflicts with the demands of her teaching position. Lisa feels that she is at a greater risk of role overload stress due, in part, to being a working parent. Lisa's overall occupational stress seems to be intimately linked to this role overload. Lisa blames herself for her misery due to her insatiable drive to produce "excellent" musical experiences for her students. She would, in fact, rather resign her position at Lakeview Glen than do less with her program.

Pete says that much of his tension comes from a feeling that his students are suffering because he is not able to meet their needs due to his being pulled in too many different directions. Pete's sense of role overload in part comes from the tension he feels when he doesn't have enough time to accomplish various administrative tasks. This tension is especially acute for this music teacher, who must constantly be on guard for policy and administrative changes that could negatively affect his program.

Like Pete, Chris also says that he feels more role overload tension than anything else, but Chris's tension is more similar to Lisa's experience of personal and professional roles combined making an almost intolerable existence at times. In addition to having children and a spouse, Chris is also a professional musician and performs with several different groups. This additional role further complicates his life. However, his colleague Don is not affected as much from role overload as he is from having to fulfill unwanted roles—something more associated with tension due to underutilization of skills.

Underutilization of Skills

The subjects of this study experienced tension often when having to fulfill unwanted, unimportant, or tedious tasks that took time away from their desired activities—especially performing tasks that in

their view should be under the responsibility of other nonteaching personnel (e.g., administrative staff, custodians). In fact, performing tasks they felt were not best using their skills as professional educators greatly contributed to their role-overload tension. Time spent on low-skill tasks interfered with carrying out more professional roles, such as teaching, planning, and student assessment.

As an example, Lisa found herself having to spend a significant amount of time fund-raising. This contributed to a sense of role-overload stress. She not only felt stress from spending precious time performing the role of fund-raising manager (something she felt was not a good use of her time), but she also felt a residual stress from not being able to use that time on other more meaningful tasks.

Don spends much of his time fulfilling administrative roles—something he would rather not have to do (even though he is the departmental chair). During marching band season, Don often spends his time preparing the practice field for rehearsal—something he thinks the custodial/grounds maintenance staff should do. Much of Don's time is also spent making sure schedules do not conflict between his after-school programs and other school activities. Don often takes the initiative to resolve potential problems.

Pete describes his underutilization-of-skills tension coming from a lack of adequate planning time. Pete feels that because he is not able to adequately plan for a rehearsal, he is not using his skills as a teacher to the fullest—simply because he has not had time to plan. Pete's underutilization-of-skills tension seems to come from not being able to adequately plan for a rehearsal (due to role overload). Pete feels that he is underutilizing his skills in rehearsal because he does not have adequate time to prepare.

Of the four subjects, Chris exhibited the least amount of tension in this area. He attributes this to his lack of cocurricular ensembles to manage and administer, unlike his colleagues. Chris spends most of his time at the middle school, which might account for more time teaching and less administration. Chris feels most of his tension comes from being understaffed and having to split his time between two schools—issues more related to role overload and inadequate resources.

Resource Inadequacy

When we think of an inadequacy of resources, we often think of a lack of funding-related resources—such as facilities, supplies, equipment, or staffing. I was surprised to find that the subjects of this study believed (for the most part) that they have adequate resources—or at least have what resources they expect as public-school employees; they realize and accept the limitations of funding that comes with working in a publicly financed system. However, they say that they feel tension related to the resource inadequacies of appropriate staffing in their programs (which significantly relates to their sense of role overload), and in dealing with the most important resource for their success: stu-

dents. All four subjects experience tension in their professional lives from their need to maintain and build student enrollment in their programs, schedule rehearsals and performances that take place outside of the school day, and juggle the expectations of their program with what their students can offer in time, abilities, talents, and commitment.

Chris is concerned with maintaining and increasing student enrollment in orchestra. He would like to eventually provide a full symphony orchestra experience (with an ensemble that includes strings, winds, brass) for his students, but he is not able to offer it because there are not enough qualified students.

Much of Pete and Don's stress comes from having to be active advocates for their program and lobbyists for the music department. Pete was an active participant in opposing a change to a block schedule at LGHS. He felt that such a schedule would decrease student enrollment in band. He feared that his most important resource—students—would be significantly affected.

Lisa is the least affected by a resource inadequacy relating to students. Because the choir program is the most active in the music department, the other programs schedule activities around Lisa's schedule. Also, Lisa can be more selective with students for these groups due to the numbers of students they attract—there are more students than spots available. Although Lisa does not seem to experience student-resource-inadequacy tension, she does, however, feel that her program is understaffed.

Lisa and Chris both report feeling understaffed in their programs. Both have lobbied the administration and school board repeatedly to add teaching positions to alleviate the problems associated with increased student load. All four teachers report that adding a secretarial position solely dedicated to the music department would greatly help them be less overworked.

Nonparticipation

Like role ambiguity, another area where all four subjects report low stress is in the area of nonparticipation. Although the participants believe they control their own program's destiny, they also show concern about not having enough power over appropriate funding allocations for their programs. Quite possibly one of the reasons that these teachers do not experience tension over nonparticipation is that they are all active advocates for their programs. Because of their seniority, they have political clout within the school culture. As is true with many successful music programs, they also have significant support from parents.

DISCUSSION

Many of the different role stressors are closely related and often seem to overlap. For example, much of the reported role overload the subjects report experiencing is related to resource inadequacy

(e.g., a lack of adequate staffing). If more staff were available in each music program, the overload for each teacher would be lessened. Another overlap is between role overload and underutilization of skills. The findings suggest similarities and connections between the stress associated with too many responsibilities and stress caused from responsibilities that are unwanted or tedious.

The subjects of this study seem to be more influenced by their own musical and educational experiences and other music teachers whom they respect and admire than by people outside the music field (e.g., administration, community members, parents). The subjects report that they themselves are to blame for any tension or stress they endure, since they are the sole determiners of the expectations and roles of their position. This could account for tensions they experience when their view of what their music program should look like (based on influence from outside the culture of their community and school) collides with the system that their community and school provide in which to operate their programs.

The experiences that these teachers want for their students are based largely on the experiences that they once had as students. Conflict and tension can result from the teachers' trying to transplant these curricular ideas (from an external system) into the LGHS school culture without first considering the fit of the two different systems. Often, stress comes from the incongruence of the teacher's expectations and beliefs versus what the system allows. These teachers try to operate programs that are not necessarily designed to reach the level of involvement their expectations demand. This results in teachers who feel overwhelmed when they try to meet their expectations, or unworthy if they "pull back" and try to reside within the confines of the system. "Pulling back" is not an option for Lisa; she does not want to lessen the experience for her students by scaling back her program. Don, Pete, and Chris want to provide high-quality experiences for their students, but not at the price of both the teacher and students being overwhelmed.

Findings from this study suggest further research is needed to explore significant issues for these subjects. Praxis-oriented research should be conducted to help circumvent music teacher role stress created by fulfilling the role of music educator. Communication is the best weapon in the battle of incompatible role expectations. Teachers need to understand that each music program is, to some extent, confined by the system that surrounds it. Each program has its own limitations and possibilities based in no small part on the culture of the school and community in which it operates. Practitioners need to be involved in research that seeks to define that culture.

NOTE

1. All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the teachers surveyed.

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