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Fake leadership influence on job burnout through intentions to leave among employees

Abstract

Research background and purpose: This study investigates the influence of fake leadership on employee job burnout, emphasizing the mediating role of intentions to leave. Fake leadership, characterized by leaders' intentional harmful behaviors masked under a facade of authenticity, has been linked to adverse organizational outcomes. Despite extensive literature on destructive leadership, the specific dynamics of fake leadership's impact on job burnout through intentions to leave remain underexplored. This paper aims to fill this gap by analyzing these relationships within the context of organizational behavior.

Design/methodology/approach: The research employs a quantitative approach using data from 285 organizations in Poland, gathered through the Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. Statistical analyses, including Pearson correlation and regression modeling with mediation, were conducted to evaluate relationships between variables. The study follows established methodologies to ensure data reliability and validity.

Findings: The results confirm that fake leadership significantly increases job burnout among employees, with intentions to leave serving as a partial mediator. The results analysis demonstrates strong positive relationships between fake leadership and job burnout, mediated by intentions to leave. These findings underscore the compounded negative impact of fake leadership on employees' well-being and organizational stability.

Value added and limitations: This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the nuanced effects of fake leadership, emphasizing its covert nature and its dual impact on individual and organizational outcomes. Practically, it underscores the importance of addressing toxic leadership behaviors and monitoring turnover intentions to mitigate burnout risks. Limitations include the non-representative sample and focus on a single geographic context (Poland), suggesting the need for broader replication across diverse settings.

Keywords: *fake leadership; intentions to leave; job burnout; organization*

JEL

Classification: M12, M14

Received: 2024-10-01; **Revised:** 2025-01-21; **Accepted:** 2025-02-25

1. Introduction

Leadership, understood as the process of a leader influencing employees to achieve a common goal and the success of the organization (House et al., 1999; Northouse, 2010), is still the focus of interest for both practitioners and management theorists. Nowadays, it is evident that the leader's attitudes and behaviors, including the way he or she makes decisions or his or her communication skills, influence the attitudes and behaviors of employees and the effectiveness of their work, which ultimately translates into the functioning of the organization as a whole and the results it produces and the goals it achieves.

It is natural to think of leadership in terms of a positive impact on the employee and the organization, in terms of shaping certain attitudes and behaviors of employees on the one hand and achieving the organization's shared goals on the other. These goals should guide leaders' actions now and in the future. Moreover, the achievement of common goals is a natural determinant of the effectiveness of leadership as a process in an organization. After all, Shackleton and Wale (2003) define leadership as "the process whereby an individual influences group members during the realization of group or organizational goals". The duality of leadership's impact in the form of direct influence on employees and indirect influence on the organization determines its crucial importance for both each and all members of the organization as a whole.

Nowadays, different leadership styles are also spoken about, which has to do with the search for the best possible - in the sense of the most effective - influence on the attitudes and behaviors of employees, and subsequently on the organization as a whole. The assumption here is that the application of a particular leadership style will result in the most effective impact on subordinate employees and, as a result, contribute as much as possible to the achievement of the organization's common goals. The issue of leadership styles and the recommendation of their application is still topical. Among the relatively new styles that are currently discussed in theory and applied in practice as those that enable organizational success in the short and long term, one can distinguish: authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005), transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), ethical leadership (Beck & Murphy, 1994), distributed leadership (Mehra et al., 2006), or charismatic leadership (Bass, 1985).

The issue of negative leadership styles, where leaders fail to positively influence employees or organizations, even when their intentions are aligned with organizational goals, lies at the intersection of discussions on the impact of leadership on employees and organizations, and debates about leadership styles (Schyns & Shilling, 2013; Mackey et al., 2021; Li et al., 2024). The destructive behaviors and characteristics of such leaders often undermine any good intentions, leading to counterproductive outcomes with negative consequences for both employees and organizations. However,

particularly dangerous is a scenario where a leader intentionally deceives employees by feigning commitment to shared organizational goals while secretly pursuing personal interests. In such cases, the very definition of leadership becomes questionable, as it resembles a dysfunctional organizational game with rules understood by few, or solely by the leader (cf. Pasiieczny, 2017). Such games are often viewed as behaviors aimed at securing personal interests at the expense of others (Cacciattolo, 2014). This deception is central to the concept of fake leadership (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024), characterized by illusion and the constant pretense of authenticity. Fake leaders conceal their true intentions and negative behaviors, portraying themselves as genuine leaders engaging in positive actions, while manipulating employees and the organization for personal gain.

So far, the negative impact of fake leadership on organizational reliability and job-related attitudes has been confirmed in one business context, showing the negative impact of this leadership style on organizational performance and reliability, and also on lowering work motivation, job satisfaction, work engagement, or organizational commitment (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024). However, other destructive leadership styles, similar to some extent, are well-known for their negative influence on employees, especially in the context of their performance and job-related attitudes (Schyns & Shilling, 2013; Mackey et al., 2021). However, a research gap can still be identified in the discussed area, concerning its influence on job burnout and intentions to leave among employees, which are not yet discussed in the context of fake leadership, and only discussed as the general concept in the context of other destructive leadership styles (Breevaart et al., 2014; Li et al., 2024). Hence, based on such considerations, it seems that in case of various destructive leadership impacts on job burnout, there is a need to underline the role of intentions to leave as one source, which strengthens it. In this context, the aim of the paper is to analyze the influence of fake leadership on job burnout and verify the role of employees' intentions to leave as the mediator of this relation, further increasing job burnout strengthened by fake leadership. The aim will be fulfilled by critical literature review, which will be the basis for hypothesis development. Next, empirical research will be conducted to verify the proposed hypotheses.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Fake Leadership

Fake leadership is characterized by leaders who engage in harmful behaviors towards employees and the organization while simultaneously portraying themselves as genuine, positive leaders (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024). This duality involves not just the intention

to harm but also the deliberate concealment of such intentions. While much of the leadership research has focused on the negative actions of leaders, less attention has been given to their efforts to hide these actions, maintaining a façade of authenticity. Schyns and Schilling (2013) noted that only a small proportion of destructive leadership behavior is clearly related to a leader's intent to cause harm. Duffy et al. (2002) pointed out that employees' perceptions of a leader's intentions play a key role in shaping how they view that leader. Often, unaware of bad intentions, employees may erroneously attribute positive intentions to these leaders. Schilling (2009) emphasized the importance of intentions in assessing leadership behavior, advocating the differentiation of leadership styles based on the presence or absence of harmful intentions - a concept further developed by Mackey et al. (2021). Most of the existing research ignores the aspect of leaders' intentions to hide their negative actions in order to maintain a positive public image, a gap that the concept of false leadership aims to fill (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

Fake leadership is defined by three core characteristics. First, these leaders display a wide array of behaviors focused on their personal goals (not the goals of organization as a whole), regardless of the harm to the organization or employees. Second, they possess a clear intent to engage in negative behaviors towards organization and employees. Third, they deliberately mask these intentions, appearing as authentic leaders who are seemingly dedicated to positive actions.

2.1.1. Fake Leadership: Traits and Characteristics

The roots of fake leadership can often be traced to the personal traits of the leader. Researchers like Thoroughgood et al. (2018) have explored why some leaders deliberately engage in harmful behaviors, proposing that some leaders may inherently possess negative traits that predispose them to such actions. These traits, which can include arrogance, lack of empathy, and integrity, often align with the dark triad of personality—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Fischer et al., 2021; Branson & Mara, 2020; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024). This dark personality profile enables leaders to prioritize their own interests over others, fostering a leadership style that is harmful and manipulative.

Other key characteristics of fake leaders include egocentrism, which is often linked to narcissism (Fischer et al., 2021). Narcissistic leaders tend to be self-absorbed and abusive, focusing solely on their personal goals while disregarding the contributions of others (Hogan et al., 1994; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Additionally, a lack of empathy is common among fake leaders, making it difficult for them to build positive relationships within their organizations (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006; Krasikova et al., 2013). Fragile high self-esteem is another trait, where leaders overcompensate for their insecurities by seeking validation and reacting negatively to criticism, often leading to harmful behaviors toward employees (Singh et al., 2018; Borton et al., 2012; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

Fake leaders are also characterized by a desire to win at all costs, often accompanied by a low sense of responsibility for the organization and its employees. They may take credit for others' successes and shift blame for their own failures (Colbert & Witt, 2009; Huang, 2019). Finally, insincerity and the ability to manipulate their image are central to fake leadership, as these leaders often engage in impression management to appear charismatic and just while hiding their true intentions (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Erickson et al., 2015).

2.1.2. Fake Leadership: Behaviors Towards Employees

Fake leadership manifests itself in various abusive behaviors directed at employees, which can range from subtle manipulations to deeply harmful actions. These behaviors represent the second dimension of fake leadership and are particularly significant as they directly affect employees' well-being and intentions to remain with the organization (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

One common tactic is connected to inducing and sustaining fear among employees as a means of control and manipulation (Guo et al., 2018). Fake leaders may use unpredictable and personal punishments to create a culture of fear, often linked to Machiavellian traits (Nossiter, 2008). Another tactic is humiliating employees, which can significantly lower morale and well-being through public criticism, mockery, and setting unrealistic expectations (Fisk, 2001; Walker & Knauer, 2011; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

Fake leaders also gather information about their employees, not for improvement but to manipulate and control them, further increasing fear and vulnerability (Mujtaba & Raposa, 2003). They may demean, marginalize, or degrade employees by isolating them or micromanaging their tasks, leading to feelings of exclusion and disempowerment (Pelletier, 2010; Kanwal et al., 2019). Exploiting employees is another common behavior, where fake leaders prioritize their own success over employees' well-being, often taking credit for their work or blaming them for failures (Matos, 2017; Namie, 2000; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

Additionally, fake leaders actively destroy employee relations, fostering divisiveness and undermining teamwork to maintain control (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Misleading and gaslighting employees are also prevalent tactics, where fake leaders manipulate employees into doubting their perceptions and judgments, furthering their control over them (Paige, 2019; Johnson et al., 2021).

2.1.3. Fake Leadership: Behavior Towards the Organization

Beyond individual employees, fake leadership also poses a significant threat to the organization as a whole. This third dimension of fake leadership involves behaviors

aimed at advancing the leader's personal agenda, often at the organization's expense (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

One key behavior is the manipulation of information, where fake leaders control the flow of information to maintain their power and manipulate others (Auvinen et al., 2013). They may lie, share selective information, or withhold crucial details to mislead others (Bass, 1998). Another behavior is the lack of communication and transparency, which hinders employees' ability to perform their duties effectively and understand the organization's direction (Street & Meister, 2004; Parris et al., 2016; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

Fickleness, or inconsistency, is another hallmark of fake leadership. These leaders often display unpredictable behavior, shifting priorities without explanation and creating confusion and instability within the organization (Branson & Marra, 2020). Finally, fake leaders actively work to destroy community within the organization, using tactics like favoritism, divisiveness, and fostering a culture of blame to weaken group cohesion and maintain control (Case & Maner, 2014; Gallagher & Burke, 1974; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024).

Overall, these destructive behaviors allow fake leaders to advance their personal agendas while undermining the organization's integrity and stability.

2.2. Fake leadership influence on job burnout

Defining leadership as a process of influencing others (and their activities) to achieve a common goal, denotes a leader in an organization to be a person who mobilizes employees and drives change for common good (Griffin, 1996; Northouse, 2010; Wills, 1994). The "driving change for common good" objective can be met by using positive leadership styles to motivate employees to behave in accordance with organizational goals and values. According to numerous studies, positive leadership styles, such as authentic leadership, ethical leadership, servant leadership or transformational leadership, directly or indirectly strengthen employees' performance (e.g. Abas et al., 2018; Aftab et al., 2023; Schwarz, 2016; Sürücü et al. 2022, Wei et al., 2016; Wong, 2013, Zehir et al., 2016). Positive leadership can also favorably affect employees' readiness to 'go above and beyond', i.e. strengthen their willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors. Studies show that authentic leadership positively relates to organizational citizenship behavior (e.g. Purwanto et al., 2021; Wei et al., 2016, Zehir et al., 2016). On the other hand, negative leadership style, such as destructive, ineffective or fake one, lead to opposite outcomes (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024; Pyc et al., 2017; Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Positive and negative leadership styles affect employees' behavior, and their attitudes, stress level, affectivity well-being and burnout (e.g. Shanafelt, 2015). A meta-analysis conducted by Schyns & Schilling shows that destructive leadership has a negative relationship with positive individual follower-related concepts (positive affectivity,

positive self-evaluation, life satisfaction, physical well-being) and a positive relationship with negative individual follower-related concepts (negative affectivity, stress, depression) (2013). Generally, leadership qualities impact employee's well-being, burnout, and satisfaction (Shanafelt, 2015). Russel (2014) reported that burnout perceived by police officers is negatively associated with transformational leadership. Research in the health sector and construction industry shows similar results of associating servant leadership and job burnout, namely servant leadership reduces job burnout (Ahmed et al., 2022; Alzghoul et al., 2013; Coetzer et al., 2017). The results of Hetland's study in IT sector also support the statement that the style of the leader influences employees' burnout and indicate that perception of negative leadership behaviors is even more important for burnout than perception of positive leadership styles. Passive-avoidant leadership style positively relates to two components of burnout: emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Hetland et al., 2008). In a cross-sector study in Ireland, O'Donoghue and colleagues proved that employee perceptions of abusive supervision are positively related to employee burnout (2016).

Contemporary research links positive leadership styles with positive employee outcomes (higher job performance, willingness to engage in organizational citizenship behavior, affectivity, well-being), and negative leadership styles with negative employee outcomes (lower job performance, ill-being, stress, burnout). Thus, we hypothesize that fake leader's negative characteristics, actions and intentions will influence employee's burnout:

H1: Fake leadership positively influences job burnout.

2.3. Fake leadership influence on job burnout through intention to leave

The undesirable effects of negative leadership on employees lead to lower level of outcomes that are advantageous for the organization and employees. Employees subjected to toxic leadership exhibit psychological, physical and behavioral stress symptoms (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016). Higher stress level among employees results in lower job satisfaction and lower level of organizational commitment, which leads to psychological detachment (Burris et al., 2008). In consequence, destructive (toxic) leadership styles positively correlate with high turnover and intention to leave among disengaged employees (Akca, 2017; Reyhanoglu & Akin 2022). Subject studies among healthcare employees show that abusive leadership significantly predicts intention to quit (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2016).

In case of fake leadership, behaviors that influence employees' intentions to leave are rooted in the hostile and manipulative environment these leaders create. A culture of fear, maintained through unpredictable punishments and public humiliation, erodes employees' sense of safety and self-worth (Guo et al., 2018; Fisk, 2001; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024). Additionally, fake leaders marginalize and micromanage employees,

isolating them and undermining their autonomy, which fosters feelings of exclusion and disempowerment (Pelletier, 2010; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024), causing them to look for other environment, which can help them regain their sense of worth. Exploitation, where leaders take credit for employees' successes or shift blame for failures, further exacerbates dissatisfaction and disengagement (Matos, 2017; Namie, 2000); Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024. By fostering divisiveness, destroying trust, and sabotaging teamwork, fake leaders leave employees feeling undervalued and unsupported, ultimately pushing them to seek healthier work environments (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

The analysis of the influence of negative leadership on intention to leave allows to formulate the following hypothesis:

H2a: Fake leadership is positively influencing intentions to leave among employees.

Dissatisfied employees who intend to leave often start to look for new employment opportunities (Akca, 2017). Job search is an autonomous, goal-oriented process (Wanberg et al., 2020). Job seekers engage in preparatory and active activities. The first group of activities includes preparations to be a strong candidate, while the latter is focused on concrete actions towards mobilizing the search and submitting applications (Blau, 1994). Effectiveness of the process depends on factors like job search skills, self-presentation, self-efficacy, effort, proactivity, persistence, and focus on quality of undertaken actions, while mobilizing social networks can play important role in the process. The experience of job search can be influenced by geographical region, economic conditions, job seekers' employment situation, and employer behaviors and preferences (Wanberg et al., 2020). Therefore, the final decision to stay or leave is preceded by benchmarking and identifying available job opportunities (Akca, 2017). The lack of clear time frame of this process, sense of uncertainty, and increased effort add to early predictors of burnout which are stress, overload, conflict of values, as well as deficiency in fairness, rewarding and sense of control (Maslach & Leiter, 2008).

In some cases, intentions to leave do not directly translate into concrete job seeking actions. This may happen due to the complexity of the job search process (for example in cases of low probability of finding another job at the same pay) or inability to work elsewhere (Jackson et al., 1986). Another possible cause of employee's passiveness in job searching may be their organizational commitment, especially normative organizational commitment, i.e. sense of obligation to the organization, or continuance commitment which occurs due to a lack of alternatives or leaving costs. Both types of commitment are distinguishable from the sense of desire to stay in the organization (affective commitment) (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Parfyonova, 2010). An employee who has an intention to leave but chooses to not pursue this desire due to various reasons starts to feel stressed out because of the perceived discrepancy between what they feel and what they do at work. Higher stress level at work may lead to emotional exhaustion, which is the central dimension of burnout. Emotional exhaustion may then lead to the second

dimension of job burnout: depersonalization, i.e. distancing oneself, becoming cynical and detached. Lastly, the third dimension – personal accomplishment – may occur. This dimension refers to feelings of ineffectiveness in the workplace regardless of the effort (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In the context of fake leadership, the above considerations can be concluded as the following hypothesis:

H2b: Intentions to leave among employees are positively influencing job burnout.

According to the Barriers Model of Abusive Supervision, there are many barriers that may prevent an employee from leaving an abusive leader: (1) Barriers within the abused follower (social identification, conservation values, implicit leadership theories, personality); (2) Barriers due to the abusive relationship (preventing employees from leaving, social isolation, coping with an abusive supervisor, impact of an abusive supervisor); (3) Barriers in the organizational context (organizational norms and values, corporate social responsibility, organizational policies and practices, team solidarity and support); (4) Barriers in the larger societal context (societal culture, the economy and the job market, the law) (Breevaart et al., 2022). Although negative leadership styles positively influence intentions to leave among employees, similar barriers may stop an employee from escaping a fake leader even for a long time, causing chronic stress leading to burnout.

Moreover, fake leadership itself significantly contributes to job burnout through a range of toxic behaviors that drain employees emotionally and mentally, which may cause an intention to leave to arise among them and when it is coupled with lack of ability to change job or insufficient drop in commitment enabling them to do so, it translates into job burnout. There are various fake leaders' behaviors that directly influence job burnout or enable the before-mentioned process. At the center, there are behaviors sustaining fear and uncertainty through manipulative tactics, which keeps employees in a constant state of stress, leading to chronic anxiety and exhaustion (Guo et al., 2018; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024). Moreover, humiliation and unrealistic expectations undermine confidence and create a sense of perpetual inadequacy (Fisk, 2001; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024), which remains a critical factor for job burnout. Fake leaders' exploitation of employees, coupled with their inability to provide genuine support or acknowledgment, exacerbates emotional fatigue and cynicism (Namie, 2000; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024). Furthermore, manipulative behaviors such as gaslighting and withholding crucial information force employees to question their judgments and expend additional mental energy to navigate a hostile and unclear work environment (Paige, 2019; Auvinen et al., 2013; Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024), leaving them burned out and unable to regain enough confidence and strength to properly execute their tasks. Together, these behaviors cultivate a toxic atmosphere that leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of

accomplishment—hallmarks of burnout. Building on this, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Fake leadership positively influences work burnout through intentions to leave among employees.

The Figure 1 presents the mediation model representing the hypotheses discussed above, which will be empirically verified in the further part of the article.

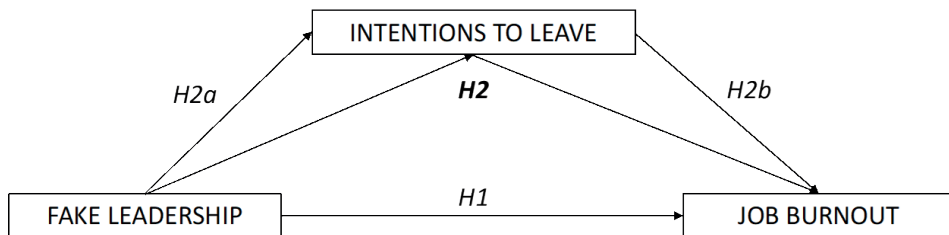


Figure 1. Fake leadership influence on job burnout through intentions to leave

Source: own work

3. Research methodology

To validate the proposed hypotheses, an empirical research study was conducted using the Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. The study targeted a purposefully selected sample of organizations operating in Poland in 2022, with geographical location being the sole limiting factor for inclusion. 285 organizations participated in the study, and Table 1 provides a description of the sample. The survey was filled in by middle-level managers, who responded to all questions in the survey (as they were concerning organization as a whole). Although the sample may not be considered representative, the study's inclusivity of diverse organizations allows for the formulation of meaningful conclusions. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index was calculated for each variable and model, consistently exceeding 0.7 in all cases. This calculation ensures that the sample size is sufficiently large and diverse to support the intended statistical analysis.

Table 1. **Sample overview**

		Size of employment			
		Less than 10	10-50 people	50-250 people	Above 250 people
primary source of revenue	production	11	16	26	17
	trade	8	28	23	13
	services	9	28	51	35
	education	0	5	12	3
Total:		28	77	112	68

Source: Bieñkowska & Tworek (2024)

3.1. Variables in the study

The following variables were used in the study: Fake Leadership, Intentions to leave and Job burnout.

Fake Leadership was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from I strongly disagree, to I strongly agree with a middle point: Neither agree, neither disagree) with three latent variables (14, 22 and 12 items each) concerning three dimensions of fake leadership – leaders characteristics, behaviors towards employees and behaviors towards organization (Bieñkowska & Tworek, 2024).

Intention to leave was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from I strongly disagree, to I strongly agree with a middle point: Neither agree, neither disagree) with 3 items concerning the intention to leave organization based on (Bothma & Roodt, 2013).

Job burnout was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from I strongly disagree, to I strongly agree with a middle point: Neither agree, neither disagree) with 3 items concerning the work burnout among employees based on (Afrahi et al., 2012).

To conduct the statistical analysis, the measurement scales utilized in the study underwent scrutiny and validation. The measurement scale for fake leadership had been previously established and validated through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), undergoing nomological validation as well (Bieñkowska & Tworek, 2024). The measurement scales for intraorganizational trust and intention to leave, being well-established in existing literature, were considered validated. Initially, it was confirmed that the collected data exhibited a normal distribution. Subsequently, an alpha Cronbach analysis was conducted as the second step, ensuring

that the values remained above 0.7 for all variables, in accordance with the criterion established by Drost (2011).

Moving on to the third step, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to present and validate the coherence and internal consistency of the measurement scales. In this instance, the values of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were examined, with all variables exceeding the threshold of 0.5. As the fourth step, discriminant validity was assessed to guarantee that latent variables representing distinct theoretical concepts were statistically different. The value of Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) test were below 0,9 (HTMT = 0,774), aligning with the criterion outlined by Hanseler et al. (2015). All statistical tests were conducted using IBM SPSS.

The detailed outcomes of these tests are comprehensively presented in Table 2, affirming that the selected variables are suitable for subsequent statistical analysis.

Table 2. **Variables overview**

Variable name	Variable name	Number of items	AVE	K-M-O	Alpha Cronbach	N
Fake Leadership	FL	3 (14, 22, 12)	0,951	0,757	0,974	285
Job burnout	Trust	3	0,813	0,777	0,897	285
Intention to leave	AL	3	0,717	0,867	0,865	285

Source: own work based on Bieńkowska & Tworek (2024)

3.2. Research results

To establish a mediation model, as outlined by Saks (2006), three conditions must be satisfied. Firstly, there should be a discernible relationship between the independent variable (fake leadership) and the mediator (intentions to leave). Secondly, a relationship must exist between the dependent variable (job burnout) and the mediator (intentions to leave). Thirdly, there must be a significant relationship between the independent variable (fake leadership) and the dependent variable (job burnout), and this relationship should either diminish (partial mediation) or become non-significant (full mediation) when introducing the mediator (intentions to leave).

To evaluate these conditions, a Pearson correlation analysis (r) was conducted between fake leadership, intention to leave, and work burnout. This analysis serves to verify the relations between these variables and assess whether they met the criteria for establishing a mediation model.

Table 3. Correlation analysis between analyzed variables

		Fake Leadership	Intention to leave	Job burnout
Fake leadership	w	1	.614	.822
	p		<.001	<.001
Intention to leave	r	.614	1	.764
	p	<.001		<.001
Job burnout	r	.822	.764	1
	p	<.001	<.001	

Source: own study

The results obtained and presented in Table 3 affirm a statistically significant and high correlation among all examined variables, namely fake leadership, intentions to leave and job burnout. Consequently, these findings provide the basis for proceeding with a more in-depth statistical analysis of the collected data to validate the regression model with mediator. To assess the mediation between variables, a linear regression analysis with a mediator was conducted, employing fake leadership as the independent variable and job burnout as the dependent variable. The role of intentions to leave was verified to determine its potential mediation within the model. The outcomes of this analysis are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the regression analysis with mediator

Mediator	coeff	p	Direct effect value	Indirect effect value	BootLLCI	BootULCI	R2
Fake leadership	0,566	0,001	0,566	0,280	0,475	0,656	0,747
Intentions to leave	0,498	0,001					

Source: own study

The regression model with the mediator demonstrates statistical significance ($F(2,260) = 383.848$, and corrected $R^2 = 0.747$). Additionally, intentions to leave emerges as a statistically significant mediator within the model ($p < 0.001$, coeff. = 0.498, se = 0.058). The mediating effect is also statistically significant, evident in Table 4 where both BootLLCI and ULCI exceed the value of 0. Hence, the obtained results confirm partial mediation. Notably, the indirect effect is positive, consistent with the correlation analysis, reinforcing that fake leadership exerts a positive influence on job burnout

by positively impacting intentions to leave. Consequently, these findings support the acceptance of all the hypotheses.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide substantial evidence that fake leadership exerts a significant and positive influence on job burnout among employees, with intentions to leave serving as a critical mediator of such relation. The results thus confirm, in a different way, the occurrence of the negative effects of using such a management style in an organization, as described by Bieńkowska and Tworek (2024).

The confirmation of the hypotheses presents an important theoretical contribution to the understanding of leadership dynamics, particularly within the domain of destructive leadership styles. The concept of fake leadership, characterized by leaders who engage in harmful behaviors while concealing their true intentions under a façade of authenticity, has been relatively underexplored in leadership literature. This study extends the discourse on destructive leadership by emphasizing the unique and insidious nature of fake leadership, which not only directly impacts employees' well-being but also triggers a chain reaction leading to increased intentions to leave and subsequent job burnout. In this way, attention is drawn to the destructive power of fake leadership not only for the organization (for which the departure of employees is not insignificant) and its employees (an example is the decrease in job-related attitudes, described earlier, which translates into a decrease in job performance (Bieńkowska & Tworek, 2024), but also for the individual, for whom job burnout can have disastrous consequences, because as an employee he or she is not able to do the job, and as a non-employee is not able to take up employment, which has a devastating effect on his or her psyche. The effects of job burnout are extensively discussed in the literature on the subject (e.g. Aumayr-Pintar et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2023; Jacobs, 2024)

In this context, there is unfortunately another theme of the intentional destruction of a person (non-employee) by a leader who uses fake leadership. In such a case, fake leadership and its accompanying attitudes and behaviors become a tool for the destructive action of one human being (non-leader) on another human being (non-employee). It seems, however, that such a dramatic course of application of fake leadership must then be accompanied by psychopathy or narcissism of the leader and, in fact, this is a problem in the field of psychology, not management. This does not change the fact that the occurrence of these combined phenomena in an organization cannot be ruled out.

Notwithstanding the above the positive correlation between fake leadership and job burnout aligns with existing studies on destructive leadership (e.g. Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Mackey et al., 2021), which have shown that negative leadership styles contribute to various adverse outcomes, including stress, emotional exhaustion, and decreased job

satisfaction. However, the identification of intentions to leave as a mediator enriches the theoretical considerations already in place by demonstrating how fake leadership indirectly exacerbates burnout. This mediation effect suggests that the mere presence of fake leadership may not be sufficient to cause burnout; rather, it is the ensuing psychological process, where employees contemplate leaving the organization, that intensifies their experience of burnout.

The practical implications of these findings are particularly relevant for organizations seeking to foster a healthy work environment. Fake leadership, as highlighted in this study, poses a serious threat to organizational stability and employee wellbeing. Managers and HR professionals must be vigilant in identifying and responding to the subtle but destructive behaviors associated with false leadership. This includes fostering a culture of transparency and accountability, where leaders are encouraged to align their actions with the values and goals of the organization, and any discrepancies between a leader's public persona and their private actions are addressed immediately.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of monitoring turnover intentions as a potential early indicator of wider organizational problems. As intent to leave is a precursor to burnout, organizations that actively track and respond to these signals can implement interventions before the situation escalates. This can include providing support systems such as counselling services, leadership training programs focusing on ethical and authentic leadership practices, and clear channels for employees to voice concerns about leadership behaviors without fear of reprisal. It should be also highlighted that there are ways, in which fake leadership can be detected by employees. Employees can detect fake leadership behaviors by observing inconsistencies between their leader's words and actions. Signs of fake leadership include frequent blame-shifting, lack of accountability, and failure to provide genuine support or empathy during challenging times. Employees should also watch for excessive self-promotion or prioritization of personal gains over team goals. Leaders who avoid transparent communication, dismiss constructive feedback, or fail to recognize team contributions may also lack authenticity. Encouraging employees to trust their instincts and engage in open dialogue with peers can help identify and address these behaviors constructively and limit their intentions to leave and job burnout.

5. Conclusions

The aim of the paper was to analyze the influence of fake leadership on work burnout among employees and verify the role of intentions to leave as the mediator of this relation, further increasing job burnout.

The study confirms the significant positive impact of fake leadership on job burnout, mediated by employees' intentions to leave. The findings emphasize the critical need

for organizations to recognize and address the covert nature of fake leadership to mitigate its harmful effects. By fostering authentic leadership and providing support for employees at risk of burnout, organizations can create a more resilient and healthy work environment.

The obtained results present an opportunity to contribute to the advancement of management sciences, particularly in the realm of leadership and its adverse impact on contemporary organizations. Furthermore, the findings offer practical implications, alerting managers to the potential negative influence of fake leaders within their organizations. Such leaders have the capacity to adversely affect employees, fostering job burnout by fueling intentions to leave. Unfortunately, they also have the potential to affect the human being, not the worker. Problems then arise that affect not only the working environment, but also the living environment, significantly reducing its quality.

While the empirical study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The study was based on a sample of 300 organizations operating in a specific business context (Poland), warranting replication across diverse samples to validate the results. Additionally, the non-representative nature of the sample calls for further replication. It is important to note that fake leadership, as a concept among destructive leadership styles, is still evolving, necessitating the verification of conclusions across various leadership styles.

These limitations also pave the way for future research directions. Exploring other factors constituting the mechanism of fake leadership's influence on employees' intentions to leave and job burnout becomes imperative. This includes identifying methods to mitigate such negative effects and sheds light on the ongoing evolution of the understanding of fake leadership within the broader context of leadership studies, especially when combined with a psychological context.

Authors' contribution

A.B.: article conception, theoretical content of the article, conducting the research, analysis and interpretation of results, draft manuscript preparation; **A.Z-K.:** theoretical content of the article, draft manuscript preparation. **K.T:** article conception, theoretical content of the article, research methods applied, conducting the research, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, draft manuscript preparation. **K.Ż:** theoretical content of the article, draft manuscript preparation.

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