

Fake leadership and fake news undermining the “want” dimension of organizational recovery

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Abstract

Purpose – Organizational dark sides disrupt organizational functioning and may escalate into organizational destruction, creating a need for organizational recovery. They disturb the organizational status quo, constituting organizational change in themselves by introducing new conditions for an organizational functioning and triggering the internal crisis arising from these conditions. These disruptions create a need for an organizational response in the form of organizational recovery, which represents organizational change in its classical sense. In light of this, the study has two purposes: to examine the mechanisms through which both (1) fake leadership (FL) and (2) fake news (FN) influence organizational recovery.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on the readiness theory of organization and integrating insights from dynamic capabilities theory, organizational change theory (including theory of organizational readiness for change), social exchange theory and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) research, a model was proposed showing that FL and FN impair recovery by eroding intra-organizational trust, weakening OCB and disrupting the enabler of resources use. The models were verified using survey data collected in 2025 from 312 managers in Poland and analyzed with regression and path analysis (SPSS AMOS).

Findings – Both FL and FN were confirmed to exert significant negative effects on organizational recovery through assumed mechanism.

Originality/value – The study contributes by empirically validating the “want” dimension as a critical recovery mechanism, demonstrating how organizational dark sides can paralyze recovery even when capability capacity remains available. This research shows that FN and FL significantly weaken an organization’s willingness to activate resources and recovery capabilities. Furthermore, by damaging intraorganizational trust and OCB, dark sides block the possibility of organizational change, which is organizational recovery.

Keywords Organizational dark side, Organizational recovery, Fake leadership, Fake news, Intra-organizational trust, Organizational citizenship behavior, Readiness theory of organization, Dynamic capabilities

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

Organizational dark sides are increasingly becoming a subject of interest in both management theory and practice. They significantly impact the functioning of organizations; yet their conscious use is usually intentionally concealed (cf. [Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2024](#); [Pinto et al., 2020](#); [Chatterjee et al., 2023](#); [Boddy, 2006](#)). They are used to achieve goals that fall outside the paradigm of praxeological and rational action. Additionally, they do not promote organizational effectiveness or job performance and build intra-organizational trust nor do they improve employee well-being. Rather, they serve to incite fear and anxiety ([Wirawan, 2023](#)), provoke conflict ([Ahmed et al., 2025](#)) spread disinformation ([Pinto et al., 2020](#)) and ultimately disrupt the functioning of the organization

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and lead to organizational destruction (Bieńkowska *et al.*, 2025, 2026). Then, they disrupt the organization's status quo by, on the one hand, being an intentional organizational change in itself in the form of new conditions for the organization's functioning and the cause of an internal crisis triggered by these conditions (Hughes, 2022) and, on the other hand, by necessitating an organizational response in the form of organizational recovery, which is an organizational change in its classical sense (Lewin, 1947). Thus, organizational dark sides are not unintentional mistakes by managers or employees, resulting, for example, from insufficient competencies or changes occurring in the organizational environment. It's important to emphasize that they are actions consciously undertaken within the organization. Therefore, conscious use and intentional concealment of this fact distinguish the dark sides of an organization from natural and unintentional disruptions to its functioning and from the natural necessity of organizational recovery.

The fact that modern organizations find themselves in situations where organizational recovery becomes necessary is nothing unusual. Modern organizations operate in an ultra-dynamic, even turbulent, environment that inherently causes intraorganizational disruptions, potentially leading to intra-organizational crisis situations or crises (Zapłata, 2025; Zakrzewska-Bielawska, 2008) that may threaten the continued existence of the organization. Internal organizational failures, independent of the environment, can also disrupt the organization's operational rhythm and expose it to the risk of loss of continuity. Therefore, operating in circumstances of essentially permanent disruption, an organization may experience organizational destruction (Bieńkowska *et al.*, 2025, 2026) on a smaller or larger scale. Then, a natural need for organizational recovery arises, understood as the reconstruction (in a process-based approach) of the organization's resources, its dynamic capabilities and the potential to utilize them to unlock the organization's ability to achieve its goals. Organizational recovery is the process by which an organization regains its operational capacity, stability and resources after a disruption or crisis. It is the phase of transition from a critical state to the restoration of normal operations, often involving adaptation and learning, which allows the organization to become more resilient to future shocks (Smith and Elliot, 2007). Effective organizational recovery requires more than the technical restoration of assets; it demands significant changes – a phased transition from crisis-induced paralysis back to functional stability (Allen and Toder, 2004). Within this theoretical framework, the recovery process is inherently dependent on the organization's institutional capacity to mobilize collective intent, a dimension that becomes critically vulnerable when the “want” sphere is compromised (Huff *et al.*, 1992). Organizational recovery therefore addresses both the “can” sphere, that is resources and dynamic capabilities, and the “want” sphere, that is the ability to utilize them, in accordance with the organization readiness theory by Bieńkowska and Tworek (2025b). However, the mechanisms of organizational recovery differ in both spheres.

Of course, the situation is much more difficult when there are dark sides of organization and/or management operating within the organization. In such cases, dark sides not only intensify the process of organizational destruction (cf. Bieńkowska *et al.*, 2025, 2026) but also hinder or prevent organizational recovery (see: Hughes, 2022). Organizational dark sides prevent the organization's reconstruction by destroying the resources at its disposal, dynamic capabilities and the potential to activate them. Again, the impact of dark sides differs between the “can” and “want” spheres of organizational recovery.

In this context, this study will analyze the “want” of organizational recovery, triggered by the dark sides of the organization and/or management, and the counterproductive actions of fake leadership (FL) and fake news (FN), which impact the organization's potential to organizational change and leverage its resources and dynamic capabilities. Therefore, the study will address two objectives:

- (1) examining the mechanism of FL's influence on organizational recovery in the “want” sphere.

- (2) examining the mechanism of FN' influence on organizational recovery in the “want” sphere.

To date, the literature has not explained the impact of these dark sides on organizational recovery, although their impact on organizational functioning (Pinto *et al.*, 2020) and even organizational destruction (Linstead *et al.*, 2014) has been suggested. Therefore, the authors of this study will attempt to fill this identified research gap. This study is part of the research project devoted to organizational recovery and organizational dark sides in contemporary organizations.

2. Organizational recovery model on the base of enhanced theory of organization

The mechanism of organizational recovery is conceptually situated within the broader architectures of organizational crisis management and resilience. Comprehensive crisis management models establish that post-disruption recovery is not merely a technical or financial restructuring phase but a highly volatile socio-political process requiring collective alignment, psychological safety and systemic re-engagement (Pearson and Clair, 1998; Coombs, 2014). This relates directly to organizational resilience, which represents an organization's latent capacity to absorb strain, maintain systemic functioning and structurally adapt to turbulent shifts (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007; Linnenluecke, 2017).

However, as emphasized by Lengnick-Hall *et al.* (2011), possessing a structural or resource-based capacity for resilience does not automatically guarantee its realization. This boundary condition highlights the value of the readiness theory of organization (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b), which extends the traditional resource-based approach to management (Mahoney and Pandian, 1992) and the dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, 2018).

The justification for including this theory is the importance of readiness in the theory of change management, which is still emphasized in the literature [cf. theory of organizational readiness for change (Weiner, 2020; Holt *et al.*, 2007)]. While macro-level resilience and crisis management literature outline what a stable post-crisis state requires, readiness theory provides the micro-foundational details needed to explain how that recovery is behaviorally initiated. Grounded in Weiner's (2020) distinction between two cognitive-motivational pillars – change commitment and change efficacy – it allows us to decouple the resource-driven capacity to recover (the “can” dimension) from the behavioral, trust-driven willingness to execute that recovery (the “want” dimension). Specifically, this theory assumes that in order to function, achieve its goals and, as a result, gain a competitive advantage, an organization requires not only appropriate resources (i.e. human, financial, technological, knowledge) and dynamic capabilities necessary to allocate these resources in line with changes taking place in the environment but also the potential to activate them (enabler), which – as a critical condition – will allow the organization to use these resources and dynamic capabilities. While resources and dynamic capabilities determine the category of “can” – without them, an organization cannot function and achieve its goals, an enabler belongs to the category of “want” – if there is no motivation, willingness to make an effort, the organization will not be able to use the resources and dynamic capabilities at its disposal (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b; Holt *et al.*, 2007).

According to the readiness theory of organization, organizational destruction can be considered as a loss (deprivation) of an organization's resources, its dynamic capabilities or the potential to use them, while organizational recovery means the reconstruction change of an organization's resources, its dynamic capabilities and the potential to use them to unlock the organization's ability to achieve its assumed goals. Both categories therefore refer to the spheres of “can” and “want”. It is important to note that the organizational recovery category is a consequence of organizational destruction, meaning that the organization must first experience organizational destruction before it can make a decision and begin organizational reconstruction at the appropriate moment. This is therefore – as written earlier – a phase of

change and transition from a critical state to the restoration of normal activity, often involving adaptation and learning. At the same time, the mechanism of both organizational destruction and organizational recovery depends on the factor that triggers the destruction and, consequently, necessitates reconstruction.

According to the readiness theory of the organization (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b), the mechanism of organizational recovery is fundamentally grounded in the dimension of “want” – the organization’s potential to activate the resources that are at its disposal, defined as the enabler. Consistent with the dynamic capabilities view, the mere possession of resources is insufficient for recovery. As argued by Teece (2007), it is the ability to mobilize resources at times of turbulence and uncertainty that drives adaptation and recovery. Moreover, as articulated by Holt *et al.* (2007), readiness for organizational change represents a multi-dimensional cognitive and emotional state reflecting employees’ motivation, willingness and perceived capability to execute change, therefore informing the “want” dimension. Consequently, the greater the potential to utilize available organizational resources and trigger dynamic capabilities, the greater the organizational recovery capacity (Helfat and Peteraf, 2003; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). However, in the context of the organizational dark side (in particular, FL and FN manifestations), this recovery mechanism is critically dependent on intra-organizational trust (Meyer *et al.*, 1993). Research reveals that the destruction of this trust is the primary consequence and often the main goal of both FL (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2024; Bieńkowska *et al.*, 2025, 2026) and FN (Obadā and Dabija, 2022). Thus, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000) emerges as a pivotal intermediary element. Intra-organizational trust works as a prerequisite of the OCB. When the dark side of leadership erodes trust, it, in turn, leads to the diminishing of the OCB. This decline in the OCB is crucial for further organizational recovery as it works as a trigger for the enabler. Without employees’ voluntary cooperation and extra effort inherent in OCB, the operation of the enabler is disrupted and the effective activation of the resources required for organizational recovery is blocked.

The conceptual model, designed to resemble these relations, includes the violating organizational status quo – organizational dark side (manifested by FL and FN), intra-organizational trust, OCB, enabler and organizational recovery (see Figure 1).

3. Organizational dark-side influence on organizational recovery

3.1 Fake leadership influence on organizational recovery

FL is one of the types, representing the destructive leadership taxonomies as defined by Einarsen *et al.* (2007). Further research has thoroughly explored dimensions such as abusive supervision, defined as sustained displays of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Tepper,

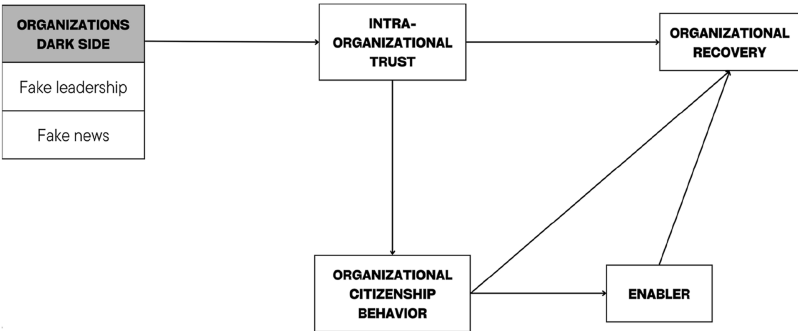


Figure 1. Conceptual model. Source(s): Authors’ own work

2000, 2007). However, according to Bieńkowska and Tworek (2024), FL has distinctive characteristics that significantly differentiate it from others. The authors include the existence of a full spectrum of traits and behaviors focused on a particular goal, a focus on negative behaviors directed against employees and the organization, and the imitation of the actions of an authentic leader, deliberately misleading all stakeholders (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2024). While abusive supervisors are overtly hostile, fake leaders deploy a superficial facade of authentic or transformational leadership – often mirroring what literature describes as pseudo-transformational leadership (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). Such leaders in an organization project an outward commitment to collective organizational goals while simultaneously executing self-serving actions, manipulating organizational communication and leveraging misinformation to protect their personal positioning. As a result, this type of leadership in an organization causes many negative consequences, disrupting the proper functioning of the organization and threatening long-term market success (Bieńkowska *et al.*, 2025, 2026; Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025a).

The growing body of literature in this area has led to the conclusion that leadership has a crucial positive influence on enabling recovery (Hannah *et al.*, 2009; Heifetz *et al.*, 2009; Markey *et al.*, 2021). On the one hand, a leader has a number of opportunities to strengthen the organization from within by emphasizing the vision, fostering a supportive organizational culture, undertaking team-building activities, creating an atmosphere of respect and support at work and transparent communication. On the other hand, they can represent the organization externally, responding in accordance with the organization's interests when interacting with other entities participating in exchanges. They should not only recognize and capitalize on opportunities but also respond to emerging threats (Bhat and Saba, 2025). Unfortunately, research confirms that destructive leadership can substantially limit or even fully prevent organizational recovery and therefore prevents change that would restore organizational balance (Hughes, 2022; Zaghmout and Balogun, 2025). The same effect can be observed in the case of FL. A fake leader exhibits behaviors that are contrary to what can positively impact organizational recovery. They pursue a policy of intimidation toward employees, destroy formal and informal structures and behave in a harmful manner. They behave deceptively toward external entities, pursuing their own goals rather than acting to the benefit of the organization (Bieńkowska *et al.*, 2025, 2026). Previous research also clearly proves that FL leads to organizational destruction understood as the process of organizational degradation, resulting in its weakening and eventual collapse (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025a), which in fact is in itself an action that prevents organizational recovery.

On the basis of the foregoing considerations, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H1a. There is negative influence of fake leadership on organizational recovery.

3.2 Fake news influence on organizational recovery

FN is perceived as “content published on the Internet that aesthetically resembles actual legitimate mainstream news content, but that is fabricated or extremely inaccurate” (Pennycook and Rand, 2021, p. 389). In an organizational context, FN is not merely a factual error; rather, it functions as a form of intentional or organic corporate disinformation and destructive rumor propagation that destabilizes the workplace information ecosystem (DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007). It is certainly created consciously to deceive the recipient (Farhoudinia *et al.*, 2025). Although misleading information is not a new phenomenon, the growth of information transmission, particularly social media (which offer little control over the accuracy of content), has created a new threat to organizations. FN can harm organizations on many levels, and organizations do not appear to be well-prepared to detect or manage the consequences of such an influx of information (Kropf *et al.*, 2023). These risks increase in times of disruption or recovery phase, when

employees, being under conditions of high cognitive overload, tend to rely on fast, intuitive processing rather than active analytical consideration (Pennycook and Rand, 2021). Studies have highlighted numerous adverse consequences that can occur when an organization becomes the subject of FN: damaging brand, image and stakeholder trust, disrupting operations, supply chains and business continuity (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2023; Kim and Lim, 2026). Furthermore, the impact of FN on employees appears to be significant. AalThani and Palei (2024) indicate that the occurrence of this phenomenon negatively impacts workforce morale and productivity. In turn, Malhotra and colleagues (2025) emphasize that this approach destroys trust and communication between individuals and leads to increased confusion. As highlighted by Broda and Strömbäck (2024), misinformation and FN do not merely represent incorrect data; they actively restructure individuals' attitudes, fuel skepticism and degrade the psychological safety required for collaborative action. Consequently, when external disinformation penetrates organizational boundaries, it directly reduces the collective willingness (the "want") and psychological readiness (Pennycook and Rand, 2021) to proactively engage in recovery initiatives. On the one hand, all these negative consequences – like FN – affect organizational destruction, which indirectly inhibits the possibilities of organizational recovery. On the other hand, FN lead to systematic confusion, fracture employee alignment and directly block the possibility of organizational recovery (Schraeder and Hoover, 2010).

The above findings allow for the development of the following hypothesis:

H1b. There is negative influence of fake news on organizational recovery.

4. Organizational dark-side-mediated influence on organizational recovery

4.1 Intra-organizational trust

Intra-organizational trust can be defined as the willingness of the employees to be vulnerable to the actions of the organization expecting the latter to take actions important to the trustors (Meyer *et al.*, 1993) as well as positive expectations individuals have about the intent and behaviors of multiple organizational members based on organizational roles, relationships, experiences and interdependencies (Ockley-Zalabak *et al.*, 2000). The basic theories to understand the mechanism of direct mediation of the organizational dark side on the organizational recovery through trust is the social exchange theory (SET) and the normative theory.

Organizational recovery, according to the theory of organizational change, requires non-standard operations and additional contribution and efforts on behalf of the employees to regain strength and market position. SET defines trust as a critical component of social behavior and social exchange process between organizations and employees, where consistent, successful interactions lead to job satisfaction (Liu *et al.*, 2025) and therefore ensure employee engagement (Franken *et al.*, 2023) and their willingness to contribute to organizational recovery. When the workforce is confident in the fairness of the organization and can trust it in protecting their interests and keeping promises and commitments, these prerequisites build a strong foundation of the organizational recovery process. In turn, normative theories emphasize on the necessity of enhancing organizational commitment which will consequently lead to the discretionary effort of employees required for organizational recovery (McAllister, 1995; Gould-Williams, 2003).

When affected by intentional FL or/and (as a consequence) exposed to FN, the employees will view the organization as lacking benevolence ("it doesn't care about us and doesn't look after our interests") and integrity ("it doesn't value truth and fairness"). As explained by the SET (Blau, 1964b; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), the intraorganizational trust will experience transactional breakdown and employees will

no longer be willing to contribute extra efforts and demonstrate excessive commitment needed for recovery due to the absence of the respective commitment on behalf of the organization. Simultaneously, from the perspective of the normative theory, this breach of trust represents the violation of the moral contract. FL and fake information dissolve the normative legitimacy of the management, severing employees' moral obligations to the firm (Meyer *et al.*, 1993). As a result, employees feel free from their moral commitments and do not feel any further duty to stay and help the organization in its recovery process because the moral basis for such obligation has been destroyed (Robinson and Morrison, 2000).

Based on the above, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

- H2. Intra-organizational trust mediates the relation between the organizational dark side (which among others, are manifested through fake leadership and fake news) and organizational recovery.

4.2 Organizational citizenship behavior

OCB refers to employees' discretionary, extra-role behaviors that are not formalized in the official job description and reward system but are essential for effective functioning of the organization (Malingumu *et al.*, 2016; Ha and Moon, 2023). Such behaviors might include helping colleagues or being loyal to the organization. In times of turbulence and change, OCB would take a form of willingness to contribute to recovery efforts beyond formal roles, sacrificing personal interests for collective goals and motivating and helping others for the joint benefit (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). In the context of organizational readiness theory (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b), OCB serves as a primary behavioral manifestation of the "want" dimension – the willingness of employees to contribute their resources and demonstrate beyond what is required. However, ineffective leadership, as that of producing false images of authenticity and spreading false information, is proved to have a negative influence on organizational health (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025a), thus creating a toxic environment and lowering morale and engagement. Research shows that such lack of authenticity in leadership has a negative influence on both trust and OCB (Joseph and Winston, 2005). Employees who recognize the discrepancies between the narrative and the reality and distinguish the signals of the organizational dark side may develop a desire to withdraw from the recovery activities rather than engage. In line with the social learning theory, employees will follow the role model of the leaders and emulate the "dark sides" themselves (Brown *et al.*, 2005; Mawritz *et al.*, 2012) instinctively conserving their personal resources and not willing to perform extra roles as a form of defense mechanism.

While FL and FN have a direct negative influence on OCB, they also do so indirectly by destroying the necessary condition for the "want" dimension – intra-organizational trust. Multiple studies confirm that trust is the primary driver of OCB (Joseph and Winston, 2005; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Kim and Park, 2019). Willingness to contribute extra effort is associated with higher risks and employees must trust that with commitment will not be exploited or ignored. As noted by Jain (2016), when trust is violated, employees are less likely to engage in OCB, which can further intensify the organizational recovery difficulties.

Outlined relations allow us to formulate the following hypothesis:

- H3. Intra-organizational trust and organizational citizenship behavior mediate the relation between the organizational dark side (which, among others, are manifested through fake leadership and fake news) and organizational recovery.

4.3 Potential enabler of organizational resources and capabilities

As stated before, organizational dark sides undermine recovery by disabling the organization's capacity to translate resources and capabilities into action, that is by weakening the enabler. In

readiness theory, the enabler represents the organization's *activation condition*: the potential to mobilize and coordinate existing resources and dynamic capabilities toward purposeful reconstruction (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b). This aligns with the dynamic capabilities view that resource endowment alone is insufficient and recovery depends on whether capabilities can be *orchestrated and deployed* under turbulence (Teece, 2007; Helfat and Peteraf, 2003; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). Dark-side manifestations such as FL and FN erode this activation condition by first damaging intra-organizational trust, seen as willingness to accept vulnerability based on expectations of integrity and benevolence (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). From a social exchange perspective, trust is a prerequisite for discretionary contribution: when employees perceive deception, intimidation or manipulation, exchange relationships deteriorate and cooperative engagement declines (Blau, 1964a; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Trust erosion then reduces OCB, the voluntary, extra-role effort that becomes especially critical during recovery when organizations require coordination, helping behavior and collective problem solving beyond formal job descriptions (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Lower OCB is not merely an outcome; it removes the behavioral “fuel” that allows the organization to activate its capabilities, thereby weakening the enabler and limiting the conversion of retained resources into recovery action (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b). Moreover, when organizational actors observe dark-side cues, social learning processes may normalize withdrawal and defensive self-protection, further reducing discretionary effort and undermining activation (Brown *et al.*, 2005; Mawritz *et al.*, 2012). In combination, organizational dark sides impair recovery primarily through a willingness mechanism in which reduced trust diminishes OCB, which in turn disrupts the enabler required to mobilize resources and capabilities for organizational recovery (Schraeder and Hoover, 2010). Based on the above, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

- H4. Intra-organizational trust, organizational citizenship behavior and enabler mediate the relation between the organizational dark side (which among others, are manifested through fake leadership and fake news) and organizational recovery.

5. Empirical research

5.1 Data collection

We used structured empirical research to verify the formulated hypothesis, related to the “want” perspective of the organization's readiness for recovery. To collect data, an online questionnaire was developed and tested on an expert panel of 25 respondents. We further utilized the revised questionnaire published on SurveyMonkey to collect data through the computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) method using a purchased panel of respondents. The participants provided their written consent for participation, and the data collection and research implementation process was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Wrocław University of Science and Technology (decision no 25–26, dated: 24/03/2025).

All data were collected in 2025 and resulted in 312 valid responses from managers of organizations operating in Poland. All managers had enough information to provide responses about the organization as a whole. The complete description of the sample is given in Table 1.

Despite the fact that the sample is not statistically representative, its size and diversity allow for drawing meaningful insights. Because the objective of this study was theory verification rather than estimation of population parameters, statistical representativeness was not a prerequisite. Following recommendations for covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM), the sample size and heterogeneity were considered sufficient for testing the hypothesized structural relationships, while the generalizability of the findings remains naturally limited and is acknowledged in the limitations section.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Size of the organization	Number of organizations	Share (%)
Micro (below 10 employees)	39	12.5
Small (10–50)	106	34.0
Medium (50–250)	111	35.6
Large (above 250)	56	17.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>312</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source(s): Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b

5.2 Variables description

The questionnaire included variables that measured two forms of organizational dark side – FL and FN, organizational recovery, intra-organizational trust, OCB and enabler. All items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale with 1 meaning “strongly disagree” and 5 – “strongly agree”. Below is the description of the specific items constructing the respective variables: The study employed four constructs, each measured on a five-point Likert scale:

FL is a three-item scale developed by Bieńkowska and Tworek (2024) and includes self-centeredness, hypersensitivity to criticism, intimidation, manipulation, arbitrary decision-making and erosion of community through fear and isolation.

FN is a three-item scale that evaluates how the occurrence of information manipulation is perceived in the organization. The scale was adopted based on Hussain *et al.* (2019) and includes questions about the fabrication of the information, providing misleading information or publishing unverified information always implying each time with non-virtuous intentions (e.g. to harm certain entities or get personal benefits).

Organizational recovery (RECOV) is a 10-item scale that reflects the organization’s ability to regain stability and functionality following a crisis. This scale assesses employees’ perceptions of how effectively an organization and its leadership respond to a crisis and manage the recovery process. It captures key dimensions such as leadership accountability, communication clarity, fairness, organizational transparency, problem identification, corrective action and employee re-engagement. Items reflect the extent to which the organization demonstrates decisive leadership, implements meaningful change, communicates openly and fosters a renewed sense of community and purpose during recovery efforts.

Enabler (ENABLE) was treated as observed variable, including one item assessing the organization’s potential to activate and mobilize its internal resources and capabilities. It captures the critical link between possessing assets and being able to translate them into coordinated, purposeful action (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b).

Intra-organizational trust (TRUST) is a three-item scale, reduced and adopted from the Gould-Williams’s (2003) systems trust scale to represent employees’ confidence in their organization and its leaders. The scale measures how employees perceive organizational fairness, its ability to deliver on its promises and commitments, and trust in leaders to act in the best interests of the employees.

OCB is a four-item scale, constructed based on Podsakoff *et al.*’s (2000) summary of the OCB concept and adopted to resemble the organizational recovery context. It captures managers’ assessment of employees’ organizational citizenship behaviors observed within the organization. It includes willingness to contribute to recovery efforts, personal sacrifice for collective goals, sincere effort to enhance performance and readiness to help and motivate others.

To validate the measurement model, an in-depth variable analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS. The process involved multiple steps to ensure reliability, validity and overall robustness of the construct.

First, data normality was examined through descriptive statistics (skewness and kurtosis) and formal normality tests. The results confirmed that the data distribution met the assumption required for parametric analysis. Next, internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed. All constructs demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2009) (see Table 2).

To examine the underlying structure of the constructs, exploratory factor analysis was performed. The analysis confirmed construct validity, with all factor loading above 0.8 and average variance extracted values surpassing the 0.5 benchmark (see Table 2), indicating both internal consistency and convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The adequacy of the sample for factor analysis was supported by Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) values above 0.5 across all constructs. Discriminant validity was also tested using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, with all values remaining below the conservative threshold of 0.65, confirming that the construct measured distinct concepts (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

To mitigate the risk of common method bias, both statistical and procedural controls were applied. Harman's single factor test revealed that the first factor accounted for only 41% of the variance – below the 50% threshold typically considered problematic (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Additionally, the data collection strategies were applied (different scale formats, varied item phrasing and guaranteed respondent anonymity) to further reduce the likelihood of bias.

5.3 Research results

To test the proposed hypothesis and the model of “want” dimension of the underlying readiness theory of organization (Bieńkowska and Tworek, 2025b), a path analysis was conducted using SPSS AMOS. Prior to this, linear regression analysis was performed in IBM SPSS to verify the two key assumptions: (1) the independent variable significantly influences the dependant variable when controlling for organizational characteristics (based on Leavitt's model), and (2) no multicollinearity is present, confirmed by variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 0.5 (Midi and Bagheri, 2010).

The obtained regression model (see Table 3) was statistically significant with R^2 of 0.517, adjusted R^2 of 0.423 and $F(5, 305) = 38.971, p < 0.001$. VIF values confirmed the absence of multicollinearity. Notably, both FL and FN emerged as significant predictors of organizational recovery, even after accounting for external variables.

Thus, the above conditions were met, allowing us to proceed with the path analysis. The regression analysis confirmed the existence of statistically significant direct effects and absence of multicollinearity. Subsequently, covariance-based structural regression (AMOS) was used to test the theoretically specified serial mediation model.

Path analysis was further conducted using SPSS AMOS. The mechanism of the influence of the organizational dark side on its recovery was checked through two separate models – one triggered by FL and the other by FN. Trust, OCB and enabler were included in both models as mediators.

Table 2. Variables analysis

	No. of items	Min	Max	Cronbach's alpha	AVE
ENABLE	1	1.00	5.00	Observed variable	
RECOV	10	1.00	5.00		0.658
TRUST	3	1.00	5.00		0.784
OCB	5	1.00	5.00		0.751
FL	3	1.00	5.00		0.823
FN	3	1.00	5.00		0.797

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 3. Regression model overview

Model	Standardized		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>		
(Constant)	1.720	0.234		7.346
FL	−0.186	0.066	−0.200	−2.801
FN	−0.295	0.067	−0.317	−4.407
The organization's environment is constantly and unpredictably changing	0.210	0.064	0.184	3.274
The organization offers a lot of different products or services	0.161	0.068	0.134	2.347
The manufacturing process is routine, tasks are repeatable	0.283	0.073	0.234	3.853
Most employees have a higher degree of education	0.269	0.060	0.227	4.518

Source(s): Authors' own work

The obtained model for FL was statistically significant, with $\chi^2(4) = 13.965$, $p < 0.001$, and demonstrated a good fit to the data: Comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.992, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.980 [recommended threshold of 0.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1999)] and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.090 with *p*-value for testing close fit (PCLOSE) = 0.001 [recommended threshold of 0.10 (Hopwood and Donnellan, 2010)]. Comparable values were also obtained for the FN model. It was statistically significant, with $\chi^2(4) = 14.848$, $p < 0.001$, and demonstrated an excellent fit to the data: CFI = 0.992, TLI = 0.979 and RMSEA = 0.093 with PCLOSE = 0.001.

All relations in both models were statistically significant (see Table 4). As shown in Figure 2 and detailed in Table 4, the structural relationships between trust, OCB, enabler and recovery demonstrated stability across both models (path coefficients being of the same value). This indicates that while the specific manifestation of the dark side leading to distrust may vary, the mechanism of how trust diminishing prevents recovery remains consistent. Consequently, Figure 2 displays the specific impact of both FL and FN, followed by the same path coefficients for the shared organizational recovery mechanism.

To verify the suggested willingness dimension (“want”) of the organizational recovery mechanism within the readiness theory of the organization, we analyzed indirect effects (see Table 5). Results confirmed the mediating role of trust, OCB and enabler in the relationship between both FL/FN and organizational recovery. Almost all the effects within the model were positive ($B > 0.0$), besides FL and FN influences, which shows the negative influence of the FL on organizational recovery (both direct and indirect).

Table 4. Regression weights for both models – FL and FN

Structural path	Fake leadership (FL) <i>Estimate (SE)</i>	Fake news (FN) <i>Estimates (SE)</i>
<i>Dark side</i>		
TRUST < — FL/FN	−0.269*** (0.051)	−0.286*** (0.051)
<i>Organizational recovery mechanism</i>		
OCB < — TRUST	0.804*** (0.034)	0.804*** (0.034)
ENABLE < — OCB	0.867*** (0.042)	0.867*** (0.042)
RECOV < — OCB	0.514*** (0.040)	0.514*** (0.040)
RECOV < — TRUST	0.245*** (0.033)	0.245*** (0.033)
RECOV < — ENABLE	0.210*** (0.027)	0.210*** (0.027)

Note(s): *** means $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

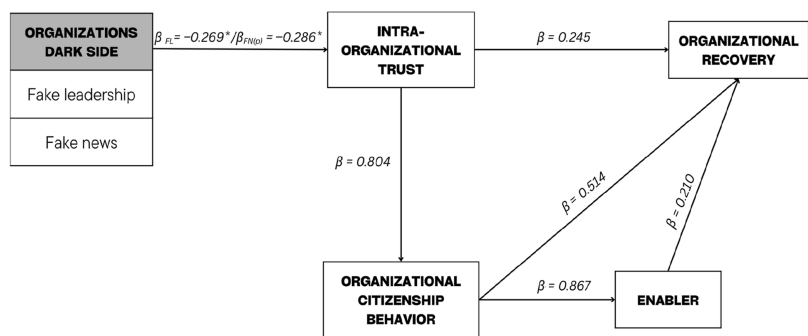


Figure 2. Final research model. **Source(s):** Authors’ own work. * β_{FL} is the path coefficient for fake leadership model, β_{FN} is for fake news model. Note: Coefficients for the downstream path (trust > OCB > Enabler > Recovery) were robust across both models and are displayed once

The results allow to accept the propose set of hypotheses, including [H1](#), [H2](#), [H3](#) and [H4](#).

6. Discussion

The findings of this study deepen the understanding of how organizational dark sides interfere with recovery processes by demonstrating that their most destructive impact occurs within the “want” dimension of organizational functioning. Building on the results presented above, the study shows that FL and FN do not only generate operational disruption or technical barriers but fundamentally weaken the organization’s willingness to activate its existing resources and capabilities for recovery. This partially confirms the findings of [Huff et al. \(1992\)](#), who argued that strategic renewal is often blocked by psychological inertia rather than a lack of physical assets. In this sense, the key managerial challenge shifts from the question of whether recovery is structurally possible to whether the organization remains willing to undertake recovery efforts at all.

The results indicate that organizational dark sides block recovery primarily by eroding intra-organizational trust and undermining OCB. This pattern, true for both dark sides of organization, represents functional equivalence rather than construct equivalence. Trust emerges as the central mechanism linking FL and FN with diminished willingness to act. This is consistent with the meta-analytic findings of [Dirks and Ferrin \(2002\)](#), which establish trust

Table 5. Indirect effects of both models – FL and FN

Structural path	Fake leadership (FL) <i>Indirect effect</i>	Fake news (FN) <i>Indirect effect</i>
<i>Impact of the organizational dark side</i>		
OCB < — TRUST < — FL/FN	−0.216***	−0.230***
Enabler < — OCB < — TRUST < — FL/FN	−0.187***	−0.199***
Recovery < — Enabler < — OCB < — TRUST < — FL/FN	−0.216***	−0.230***
<i>Internal effects</i>		
Enabler < — OCB < — TRUST	0.697***	0.697***
Recovery < — Enabler < — OCB < — TRUST	0.560***	0.560***
Recovery < — Enabler < — OCB	0.182***	0.182***
Note(s): Values represent the standardized indirect effects. Significance is indicated by *** ($p < 0.001$)		
Source(s): Authors’ own work		

as the critical mediator between leadership behavior and employee commitment. When employees perceive manipulation, intimidation or the deliberate distortion of information, they withdraw discretionary effort, limit cooperation and disengage from recovery-oriented activities. As a result, even when resources and dynamic capabilities remain available, their activation becomes unlikely. OCB therefore functions as the primary behavioral manifestation of the “want” dimension: once trust is weakened, OCB declines negatively influencing organization ability to enable resources, and the organization loses the collective engagement required for recovery. This extends the work of [Carmeli and Schaubroeck \(2008\)](#) by demonstrating that behavioral engagement is the primary casualty of organizational dark sides during crises.

These findings confirm the readiness theory of organization ([Biełkowska and Tworek, 2025b](#)) by empirically confirming that recovery depends not only on the possession of resources and capabilities (“can”) but also on the organization’s willingness to mobilize them (“want”). At the same time, the results extend the application of the theory of organizational readiness to the area of organizational recovery – so far this theory has been proven in the area of organizational performance. The study demonstrates that this willingness can be deliberately undermined by dark-side managerial practices and internal information manipulation. Consequently, lack of possibility for organizational recovery is caused by dark sides operating not only through resource depletion but through the disabling of motivational and relational conditions necessary for recovery.

Furthermore, this study extend [Allen and Toder’s \(2004\)](#) model of organizational recovery by identifying “fake” leadership and information manipulation as critical inhibitors of the recovery trajectory. While the original model outlines the structural stages of return, this study demonstrates that organizational “dark sides” paralyze the process at its inception by systematically disabling the motivational conditions – the “want” dimension – required to move through these stages. Consequently, recovery is shown to be as much a psychological and relational restoration as it is a structural one.

From a managerial perspective, the results highlight that rebuilding capacity alone is insufficient for effective recovery. Organizations affected by FL or FN must first restore trust, transparency and credibility in order to rebuild employees; willingness to engage in recovery efforts. Without restoring the “want” dimension, expressed through trust, OCB and ability to enable resources, formal recovery initiatives may remain ineffective despite the availability of resources and capabilities.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the erosion of willingness to act constitutes a central mechanism through which organizational dark sides prevent recovery. Understanding and managing the “want” dimension therefore becomes a critical condition for sustaining organizational resilience and enabling successful reconstruction in contemporary organizations.

This study makes three main contributions. First, it advances organizational recovery research by empirically demonstrating that recovery depends not only on the organization’s resources and dynamic capabilities (“can”) but also on the underexplored “want” dimension, understood as the willingness and capacity to activate them. In this way, it also contributes to organizational change theory by isolating how organizational dark sides (FL and FN) undermine change commitment (“want” dimension). We argue that while an organization may retain its structural assets and technical competencies (high change efficacy), FL behaviors and systematic disinformation reduce intra-organizational trust, thereby destroying the psychological commitment needed for successful recovery. Second, it extends the literature on organizational dark sides by demonstrating a clear pattern of *equifinality* inside the “want” dimension of organizational recovery. Our separate modeling shows that these two fundamentally different dark sides follow an identical mechanism of negative influence. Specifically, whether the destructive force is rooted in the manipulative behavior of authority figures (FL) or false information circulating within the organization (FN), both pathways independently destroy intra-organizational trust in the same way further weakening OCB and

disabling the enabler needed to mobilize existing organizational potential. By proving that both separate dark sides follow this exact path, this study moves beyond the intuitive assumption that negative factors simply cause bad outcomes. Instead, using the example of organizational recovery, it uncovers a highly predictable sequence of behavioral failure inherent to the “want” sphere, showing exactly how they disrupt or even prevent the implementation of change within an organization. Third, by integrating readiness theory of organization with insights from dynamic capabilities, organizational change and social exchange perspectives, the study offers and validates a serial mediation model that explains how dark-side practices block recovery even when formal organizational capacity remains available. Fourth, the study reinforces the current knowledge on FN – an aspect that has taken on new significance in the modern world with the intensification of information transmission. Previous considerations related to this construct have focused primarily on social issues, where both the consequences of its dissemination and methods for counteracting its negative effects are widely discussed – among other important dimensions. However, there are few reports on the spread of FN in the context of organizational management. This research, therefore, demonstrates the mechanisms by which FN can impact organizational recovery, intraorganizational trust and OCB.

To translate these findings into actionable management practice, organizations must implement concrete structural and behavioral solutions against FL and internal disinformation. Firstly, because fake leaders successfully manipulate traditional top-down metrics, organizations should implement mandatory skip-level reviews and anonymous 360-degree upward feedback architectures. HR departments must screen for structural misalignments between a manager’s self-reported performance and the psychological safety metrics of their subordinates. Furthermore, leadership talent development should integrate psychometric assessments that evaluate behavioral integrity and authentic leadership traits rather than relying on charismatic performance. Secondly, to protect collective OCB and trust from erosion during recovery, organizations should establish whistleblowing channels that operate outside standard reporting lines. This ensures that employees can flag fake leaders without fear of retaliation. Thirdly, organizations facing recovery must tackle FN and corporate disinformation by moving away from top-down static newsletters. Instead, they should introduce real-time, transparent internal fact-checking repositories or open communication forums on enterprise networks, alongside comprehensive media-literacy training for managers to identify and halt destructive rumors before they damage unit-level trust.

7. Conclusions

This study has two purposes: to examine the mechanisms by which both FL and FN influence organizational recovery in the sense of organizational change. These relationships are grounded in the “want” dimension, meaning the ability to utilize resources and dynamic capabilities, consistent with organizational readiness theory. Both goals were achieved through a critical literature review and empirical research. This allowed us to fill a research gap: the previously unexplained impact of these dark sides on organizational recovery. The results indicated not only the existence of serial mediation between these two variables through organizational trust and OCB but also the inclusion of a potential enabler in this model.

While this study presents a contribution to both theoretical and practical areas of management, it also has limitations. First, the research sample is limited to Poland, providing a single-country perspective on the mechanism being studied. While this geographic restriction may limit immediate generalizability to Western or stable institutional contexts, Poland offers a compelling environment for examining dark-side organizational behaviors. As a leading transition economy in Central and Eastern Europe, the Polish business landscape operates under unique socio-cultural and institutional conditions, including specific media

vulnerabilities to regional disinformation and distinct changes in organizational trust. Second, the questionnaires were completed exclusively by managers knowledgeable about the organization as a whole. Finally, the study was conducted cross-sectionally. These limitations could be addressed through future research. It would be worthwhile to conduct research in other countries, also taking into account the specific solutions in those countries. Furthermore, it seems advisable to consider the perspectives not only of managers but also of employees and organizational characteristics. Finally, conducting longitudinal research would be beneficial.

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