

Strategies for combating fake leadership in Higher Education Institutions (STOP-FL)

Project objective

The STOP-FL project focuses on identifying and verifying effective strategies to combat the destructive influence of fake leadership in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Fake leadership refers to a leadership style in which individuals intentionally maintain the appearance of authenticity while pursuing harmful goals that undermine both employees and the organization. The main objective of the project is to develop and empirically test strategies that can protect both employees and institutions from the consequences of such leadership, particularly regarding job performance, organizational reliability, and institutional stability.

Description of the research

1. **Development of theoretical models:** The project will develop theoretical models explaining how fake leadership affects HEIs, considering outcomes such as reduced job performance, weakened organizational reliability, and increased organizational destruction.
2. **Identification of mitigation strategies:** Based on literature review and expert consultations, the project will identify strategies that can limit the negative effects of fake leadership. These include organizational-level strategies (e.g., strong academic values, transparent election procedures, ethical authority figures) and individual-level strategies (e.g., forming alliances, seeking support, following procedures strictly).
3. **Empirical research:** A large-scale survey will be conducted among HEI employees from various countries to ensure the diversity and relevance of the collected data.
4. **Statistical verification:** Using advanced statistical methods (Partial Least Squares and Structural Equation Modelling), the project will test the theoretical models and verify the effectiveness of the proposed mitigation strategies.

Reasons for undertaking the research topic

Although leadership pathologies in HEIs are increasingly recognized, most studies still focus on positive leadership influence. Very little attention is given to leadership, which is harmful, intentional and manipulative – such as fake leadership – an especially dangerous form of destructive leadership. Moreover, there is a lack of research on practical strategies to combat its negative effects for both employees and institutions as a whole. The STOP-FL project addresses this research gap by offering a systemic and empirically grounded approach to understanding and mitigating the consequences of fake leadership in academia.

Key expected outcomes

The project is expected to produce both theoretical and practical outcomes, including:

- Identification of effective organizational and individual strategies that mitigate the negative effects of fake leadership in HEIs.
- Development and verification of comprehensive models describing how fake leadership impacts institutions and their employees.
- Practical recommendations for improving institutional resilience and protecting staff from toxic leadership environments.

The findings of the STOP-FL project will contribute to the development of management sciences by offering new insights into the field of organizational behavior and human resources management, especially concerning leadership. It will also help create healthier academic workplaces and support HEIs in combating the existence of fake leadership within their institutions and HEIs.