

**HAVE YOU SIGNED IT IN BLOOD!?  
THE FAUST SYNDROME AS A NEW CONCEPT FOR  
UNDERSTANDING TOXIC WORK RELATIONS,  
EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE AND HEALTH**

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**Abstract**

The main objectives of this research are to promote a new conceptual framework for understanding toxic work environments, called the Faust Syndrome (FS), to build a questionnaire for assessment of its manifestations at work, and to explore the potential effects of FS occurrence on employees' work performance and their psychophysical health. After the analysis of the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ) psychometric properties (Study 1;  $N_1 = 331$ ), FSQ was utilised to explore the frequency of FS in private and public organisations in Serbia, to examine the significance of demographics for the perception of FS (Study 2;  $N_2 = 560$ ), and to investigate relationships of FS frequency at work and indicators of employees' work performance and health (Study 3;  $N_1+N_2 = 891$ ). The results reveal a sound five-factor latent structure (referred to as Loyalty to the patron, Subversive organisational behaviour, Manipulation of the decision-making process, Intimidation and exclusion (Ostracism), and Negative attitudes towards colleagues). The results have also shown satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha = .94$ ), homogeneity (MIC= .43), factorial invariance of the FSQ-2 measurement model, and meaningful associations of five FS facets with diminished contextual work performance, and with more symptoms of fear and anxiety, fatigue, and physical health disorders. Based on these findings we conclude that the Faust Syndrome represents a fruitful concept for understanding how clientelism introduced into work relationships might negatively affect employees' work performance and their psychophysical health.

**Key words:** Faust Syndrome, toxic work relationships, work performance, psychophysical health, employees.

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## ДА ЛИ СТЕ ПОТПИСАЛИ СВОЈОМ КРВЉУ!? ФАУСТОВСКИ СИНДРОМ КАО НОВИ КОНЦЕПТ У РАЗУМЕВАЊУ ТОКСИЧНИХ РАДНИХ ОДНОСА, РАДНОГ ПОСТИГНУЋА И ЗДРАВЉА УПОСЛЕНИКА

### Апстракт

Главни циљеви овог истраживања су промовисање новог концептуалног оквира за разумевање токсичног радног окружења, названог Фаустовски синдром (ФС), конструисање упитника за процену учесталости његових манифестација на послу и истраживање потенцијалних ефеката фреквенције ФС на радни учинак и на психо-физичко здравље запослених. Након анализе психометријских својстава упитника Фаустовског синдрома (FSQ) (Студија 1;  $H_1 = 331$ ), FSQ је коришћен за истраживање учесталости ФС у приватним и јавним организацијама у Србији, за испитивање значаја демографских карактеристика за перцепцију ФС (Студија 2;  $H_2 = 560$ ), као и за анализу односа учесталости ФС на послу и индикатора радног учинка и здравља запослених (Студија 3;  $H_1+H_2 = 891$ ). Резултати указују на чврсту пето-факторску латентну структуру упитника FSQ називану лојалност патрону, субверзивно организацијско понашање, манипулација процесом доношења одлука, застрашивање и искључење (остракизам) и негативни ставови према колегама. FSQ је показао задовољавајућу поузданост ( $\alpha = .94$ ), хомогеност (MIC = .43), факторску инваријатност мernог модела FSQ - 2, те значајне повезаности пет аспеката ФС са смањеним контекстуалним радним учинком и са израженијим симптомима страхова и анксиозности, умора и поремећаја физичког здравља. На основу ових налаза закључујемо да Фаустовски синдром представља плодотворан концепт за разумевање ситуација у којима је клијентелизам уведен у радне односе и да овакви односи на раду вероватно негативно утичу на контекстуални радни учинак упосленика, као и на њихово психо-физичко здравље.

**Кључне речи:** Фаустовски синдром, токсични радни односи, радни учинак, психо-физичко здравље, запослени.

### INTRODUCTION

A toxic work environment exists if an organisation tolerates a “*persistent and repetitive pattern of abuse, harassment or discrimination over time that is ignored, allowed to exist and/or supported by the employer and no adequate steps are taken to correct the situation*” (Shain, 2009, p. 45). This environment “*permits workplace stressors to reach a critical dose and hence have detrimental effects on workers’ well-being*” (McCulloch, 2016, p. 10). The consequences of toxic work environments are numerous and they range from psychological distress such as anxiety disorder (e.g., Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007) or depression (e.g., Flynn, 1999; Kimura, 2003; Reed, 2004), to decreased self-esteem (e.g., Pelletier, 2010) and physical health (e.g., Brown, 2004). Work toxicity also leads to deteriorated work capacity in forms of a high absenteeism, turnover and overall productivity losses (e.g., Anjum et al., 2018; Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Ghosh et al., 2011; Larasati & Prajogo, 2022; Wang et al., 2020).

Previous studies also reveal gender differences in the perception of toxic work environments. Women tend to view it as a result of rigid rules and strict behaviour of organisational members, whereas men are more likely to see it as a consequence of work-role events and relations with colleagues (Kasalak, 2019). Singh and Sengupta (2017) also discovered that women more often than men report different forms of toxicity in leaders' behaviours. The same authors revealed significant differences among educational groups, concluding that post graduates perceive significantly higher toxicity in leaders than graduates. Similarly, Fedorova (2020) identifies differences such as women noticing, more often than men, that their leader is unethical, offending or aggressive. She also finds gender differences in perception of men being blamed more by their leaders for their own failures, and that leaders take credits for the results of their subordinates.

Even though there are many empirical studies of the toxic environment's effects, there are just a few attempts to explain why such contexts occur and why they become tolerated. They look for toxic exchanges with leaders, conflicts with colleagues and customers, poor structure of work processes, as well as for the type of organisational culture as sources of workplace toxicity. The most researched source is a toxic leader described as a malevolent, self-interested and controlling individual prone to abuse of power, work role and his/her subordinates. Toxic leaders create fear and insecurity, and then use subordinates and available resources for their own benefit (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard 2007). Based on the employees' experiences with toxic leaders, Pelletier (2010) identified eight dimensions of their behaviour: attack on subordinate's self-esteem, lack of integrity, being abusive, social exclusion, divisiveness, promoting inequity, threat to followers' security, *laissez-faire*, and disengagement. The consequences of a toxic leadership include employees' retaliatory behaviour such as withholding help when needed, giving misleading information, and work sabotage (Tripp & Bies, 2009). In this research, we explore workplace toxicity in relation to abusive leadership behaviour by developing a specific scale designed to capture employees' trade-offs and the compromises they make to ethical standards in order to maintain their positions, and to secure their career success.

At the individual level, it was found that abusive leadership, harassment, bullying and ostracism are associated with low job satisfaction (Erdal & Budak, 2021; Tepper, 2000), with lower supervision and work commitment (Kılıç & Günsel, 2019), unnecessary stress, burnout, depression, anxiety, turnover intentions, and low satisfaction with the supervisor (Akca, 2017; Rasool et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2008). Conflict with co-workers and customers can also create a toxic environment including distress, dejection, gossiping (Brown, 2004), intimidation, threats, and bullying (Ghosh et al., 2011). A poor organisation of the work process can significantly contribute to establishing a toxic work environment by being a continuous source of

distress due to inadequate supervision (Chamberlain & Hodson, 2010), work overload, intrusion of work into employee's personal life (Frost, 2003), and a lack of resources (Reed, 2004). Finally, the organisational culture represents the context in which toxicity occurs after repetition, reinforcement, and the feeling that toxic behaviours already contaminated the space and that organisation lacks mechanisms of control of such behaviour (Wilson, 2014). Organisations can contribute to work toxicities by either supporting abusive behaviour (e.g., 'macho' culture; McClure, 1996) or by preventing remedial programs from being developed because, for example, the existence of organisation in times of financial crises has absolute priority, not the quality of work relations (Kimura, 2003). All these conditions must prevail unresolved for a long time in an organisation, marking a cumulative effect of toxins (stressors) on employees' well-being and their work capacities (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Hodgson, 2004).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Work Toxicity – Conceptual Frameworks*

Despite plenty of research that analyses factors of work toxicity, there are just a few attempts to explain the roots and dynamics of such a phenomenon. Here we describe two of them and offer a new perspective. According to Harder et al. (2016), a toxic work environment occurs "when employees experience a breach in their psychological contract and bring negative emotions into the workplace" (p. 208). Components that lead to a breach in the psychological contract are organisational principles (such as strong profit driven orientation, work pace and poor HR management), work conditions (such as long working hours, contractual employment, high demands), and interpersonal conflicts (with leaders, managers, and co-workers). Breaching a psychological contract brings about reduced trust, intention to leave, and reduced work performance and sense of duty. This, in turn, produces negative/counterproductive emotions such as anger, disgust and contempt, and builds them into organisational culture. While healthy organisations are people-oriented, and based on reciprocal relations and mutual respect, toxic organisations are strongly profit-oriented, with a fast work pace, and a view of their employees as production costs rather than their most precious asset. These organisational conditions create a toxic work environment in which conflicts grow to frequent bullying practices tearing apart an organisation's profitability, as well as employees' productivity and their health. Harder (2016) recommends that organisations switch to people-oriented business, and intervene through programs that would establish trust, reciprocity, mutual respect, and care.

McCulloch (2016) considers a toxic work environment to be a systemic phenomenon and finds empirical evidence that it develops from

*“higher pressure to produce, more abusive supervision, lower civility, less voice, and less involvement”* (p. 95). The emotional consequences of work toxicity are lower organisational commitment, low job satisfaction, and low intention to stay. Higher toxicity also predicts behavioural neglect and withdrawal from work, as well as high anxiety, stress, and exhaustion. She emphasises that abusive leadership in the profit-driven organisation is the strongest predictor of employees’ appraisal of their work environment as toxic. Before we develop our ideas on this statement further and propose a new approach to a toxic work environment, we will describe some instruments developed to measure employees’ perception of work toxicity.

#### *Measures of Work Toxicity*

Here we will present several measures of the toxic work environment focused on the employees’ toxic leadership perception. Schmidt (2008) was among first researchers who explored the concept of toxic leadership behaviour, detecting its five dimensions: Abusive supervision, Authoritarian leadership, Narcissism, Self-promotion, Unprofessional behaviours, and Unpredictability. He developed and evaluated a 30-item instrument named Toxic Leadership Scale (TLS). Pelletier (2012) offered an 18-item perception of toxic leader behaviour scale (PTLS) asking employees to evaluate the psychological distress resulting from different forms of abusive leadership behaviour such as threat to employee’s self-esteem, the level of psychological distress (being upset by leader’s behaviour), as well as the effects of the ideology of divisiveness on the level of psychological safety (Pelletier, 2010, p. 417).

Celebi et al. (2015) modified Schmidt’s scale (2008) applying to it the four dimensions of a toxic leader: Inappreciativeness, Self-seeking, Selfishness, and Negative mental state. This characterises the toxic leader as someone who has a “*condescending attitude against employees*,” who is taking care of his/her best interest only, underestimating employees’ resources and efforts, and who affects the atmosphere at work by his/her negative mood, emotions, and inconsistent behaviours (p. 38).

#### *The Faust Syndrome: a New Conceptual Framework for Toxic Work Relations*

Based on earlier conceptualisations and findings, we offer a new model that builds up on the abusive leadership as a main driving force in creating and maintaining the toxic work environment. The main mechanism employed by abusive leaders is to create a hostile environment in which, due to induced subversive behaviour towards their own organisation, followers develop feelings of helplessness and insecurity. Since they lost organisational protection and employment security, they started acting subversively against their own organisation. Therefore, they seek bargain-

ing in order to attain security and protection from the leader within his/her toxic clique. A key event is establishing a psychological contract between the abusive leader and his/her followers in the form of asymmetric relationship, as they exist between patron and client. In this relationship, followers (clients) want security and protection, while the patron uses everything he/she can take from a client to fulfil his/her egotistic goals. This is evocative of the contract signed between Faust and Mephistopheles, as described in Goethe's play, wherein Faust asks for Mephistopheles' help to get and enjoy all the pleasures of this world while giving away everything in return (i.e., his soul). Therefore, we named this kind of work relationship the Faust Syndrome. It represents a consent to an imaginary psychological contract in which the employee (client), due to induced helplessness and insecurity in his/her organisation surrenders his/her fate into the hands of an abusive leader (patron, corruptor). This leader is influential and prone to abuse his power and, in order to achieve his/her particular objectives, he/she creates toxic relationships among his/her subordinates. We propose eight features that this syndrome of toxic work relationships is comprised of: employees' negative attitudes towards the organisation, manager's promotion of external regulation of work behaviour, hostile communication style, employees' negative work motivation, in- and out- group relations (including ostracism), manipulation with the decision-making process, vulgar ethical egoism promoted by all, and manager's cynical view of a common employee's qualities. Some of these features serve patrons as aid to replace an employee's loyalty to the organisation, some of them to establish and maintain client-patron relationships, and some to impose his/her particular interest.

The main objective of this research is to assess the psychometric properties of the proposed Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ), and to explore the relationship of its dimensions with the indicators of employees' work performance and their psychophysical health. The factor structure and psychometric properties of the questionnaire will be assessed using principal component and confirmatory factor analyses (PCA, CFA) (Study 1). Then, by using the previously refined and tested SQ, the effects of employees' demographics on their work relations quality perception will be analysed (Study 2). Finally, in order to evaluate the predictive validity of FSQ, the employees' perception of the Faust Syndrome frequency in their organisations will be correlated with measures of their economic and contextual work performance, as well as with the indicators of employees' psychophysical health (Study 3). This research will test the following six hypotheses:

H1 – FSQ poses acceptable psychometric properties, including satisfying internal consistency, conceptually meaningful latent structure, predictive validity for work performance and health, and factorial invariance of its measurement model across independent subsamples of employees.

H2 – There are gender differences in the Faust Syndrome perception because female employees are more sensitive to and report toxic work relations more frequently.

H3 – The level of education is a factor of the Faust Syndrome perception, in that more educated employees report toxic work relationships more frequently.

H4 – Private companies, compared to state-owned organisations, invest more in work ethics and, therefore, their employees report Faust Syndrome indicators as less frequent.

H5 – The perception of Faust Syndrome manifestations at work as more frequent is negatively associated with measures of work performance.

H6 – The more frequent Faust Syndrome manifestations at work are negatively associated with employees' psychophysical health.

#### *THE PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF THE PROPOSED FAUST SYNDROME QUESTIONNAIRE (FSQ)*

##### *Study 1*

In the Study 1 we aim to analyse a latent structure of 46 individual measures of the Faust Syndrome, and to evaluate the internal consistency and homogeneity of FSQ and its subscales.

**Participants and procedure.** To achieve the research goals in Study 1, 331 employees were recruited for an at-hand sample of employees from private and state-owned companies in the Republic of Serbia. After signing a digital informed consent form, participants (aged 20 – 89 years,  $M = 38.72$ ,  $SD = 12.97$ , from 0.5 to 42 years of service,  $M = 12.93$ ,  $SD = 10.86$ , 65% women, 17.5% were managers, and 47.4% with B.A. diploma or higher) completed the questionnaires. Data was collected online, anonymously via Google Forms during March 2021.

**Instruments.** The survey in Study 1 included an invitation and informed consent form for participants, the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ; Majstorović, 2021;  $\alpha = .97$ ), and a brief demographic survey. The Faust Syndrome Questionnaire was composed of 46 items representing the eight previously proposed indicators of toxic work relationships - employees' negative attitudes towards the organisation, manager's promotion of external regulation of work behaviour, hostile communication style, employees' negative work motivation, in- and out- group relations (including intimidation and ostracism for out-group members), manipulation with the decision-making process by all, vulgar ethical egoism promoted by all, and manager's cynical view of the common employee (e.g., 'Some leaders intimidate others to get what they want' as a measure of an indicator named 'Intimidation and Exclusion - Ostracism'). In the previous research, a five-factor solution was obtained using EFA (Majstorović, 2021). Participants

were asked to estimate the frequency of these forms of toxic behaviours and work relations at their work place using the following 4-point Likert scale: 1 - 'No, it never happens'; 2 - 'Yes, it happens but rare'; 3 - 'Yes, it happens often'; 4 - 'Yes, it happens very frequently' (without a neutral point).

**Data analysis procedures.** In order to evaluate the factorial validity of FSQ (46 items) and FSQ-2 (20 items), EFA and CFA were employed. The criteria used for the extraction of components were G-K criterion  $\lambda \geq 1$ , Catell's Scree Plot, and satisfactory fit of the FSQ measurement model. The reliability of the instruments and subscales was assessed by Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and omega ( $\Omega$ ), while the homogeneity of subscales was assessed by using the mean of inter-item correlations (MIC). Data analyses were conducted by IBM SPSS Statistics v.23, and lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in RStudio (RStudio Team, 2020).

**Results.** It was found that the main assumptions for PCA were met since the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .964 (larger than .6), and the p-value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was .00 (smaller than .05). The Univariate Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality revealed that distributions of all items deviate from the normal distribution, although these distortions were not extreme. The average item skewness was  $Sk = .393$  within the range from .004 to 1.242. Average item kurtosis was  $Ku = -.685$  within the range from -.032 to -1.325.

The dimensionality and structure of the questionnaire was examined by using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Promax rotation. Based on the G-K criterion and Scree test five components were retained from the pool of 44 items of the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (two items were excluded due to their high specificity) and rotated in the Promax position (Appendix A).

To reduce the length of the questionnaire, and following the results of the previous study, four items with the highest loadings on their five home components were retained and their common meaning was interpreted. The first component was named *Loyalty to patron* (e.g., "My colleagues always demonstrate the desire to be protected by someone"), the second *Subversive organizational behaviour* (e.g., "My co-workers question the correctness of management decisions."), the third was named *Manipulation of the decision-making process* (e.g., "When we organise voting, some people are deliberately prevented from participating in it."), the fourth *Intimidation and exclusion – ostracism* (e.g., "Those who do not agree with the will of the leader experience fierce criticism and organised actions against them."), and the fifth factor was labelled *Negative attitudes towards colleagues* (e.g., "Gossip and slander are an integral part of our relationships."). This factorial solution explained 52.8% of a total variance within the space of 44 Faustian syndrome measures.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using a robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLR). In line with the theoretical frame-

work and the results of PCA (Majstorović, 2021), three models of 20-items FSQ were compared: (1) a five-factor model with correlated factors; (2) an indirect hierarchical model (Higher-order factor model); and (3) a direct hierarchical model (Bi-factor model). Correlations within five factors in the first model ranged from 0.64 to 0.84, indicating one dimension of Faust Syndrome defined as higher-order factor or as a general factor of toxic work relations. The bi-factor structure, which includes specific factors with zero intercorrelations and one general factor with zero correlations with specific ones (Reise et al., 2010), was examined as well.

The results showed that, based on all the parameters for goodness of fit, all three proposed models fit the data well. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993) and the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; Jöreskog & Sörbom 1981) should have a maximum cut-off value of .08, while a good fit is  $<.05$ . On the other hand, the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) need to be at least .90 to indicate an acceptable fit, while values above .95 represent a good fit. Furthermore, models with lower Akaike Information Criterion (AIC; Akaike, 1987) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC, Schwarz, 1978) are better than those with higher values. Then the models were compared with  $\Delta\text{CFI}$  (the cut-off is .01; Chen, 2007),  $\Delta\text{RMSEA}$  (the cut-off is .015; Chen, 2007), and  $\Delta\chi^2$ . The Five-factor model and Higher-order factor model are significantly different according to criterion  $\Delta\chi^2$  ( $p < .05$ ), while their differences from the Bi-factor model are significant according to criteria  $\Delta\chi^2$  ( $p < .001$ ),  $\Delta\text{CFI} (> .01)$ , and  $\Delta\text{RMSEA} (= .015)$  (Table 1).

*Table 1. Fit indicators of proposed models*

	$\chi^2 (df)$	AIC	BIC	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Five-factor model	428.545*** (160)	13930.288	14120.394	.059 (.051-.066)	.049	.936	.924
Higher-order factor model	446.078*** (165)	13937.821	14108.917	.059 (.052-.067)	.050	.933	.923
Bi-factor model	290.664*** (150)	13812.406	14040.534	.044 (.035-.053)	.038	.966	.957

*Note.* \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Then, we analysed the factor loadings of all items utilising the common cut-off criterion of 0.30 for loading size (Table 2). Although the bi-factor model showed the best data fit, some loadings on specific factors were small, while items 45 and 18 had a negative residual variance estimate, indicating model misspecification (Chen et al., 2001). On the other hand, all indirect hierarchical model factor loadings were good. According to these findings, we concluded that the indirect hierarchical model was more acceptable and interpretable than the bi-factor model.

Table 2. Standardised factor loadings, reliability, and homogeneity

	Bi-factor model		Higher-order factor model		$\alpha$	$\Omega$	MIC
	S-factor loadings	G-factor loadings	First-order factor loadings	Second-order factor loadings			
<i>Loyalty to patron</i>							
Item 32	<b>.326</b>	<b>.734</b>	<b>.881</b>				
Item 38	<b>.330</b>	<b>.633</b>	<b>.744</b>		.853	.862	.590
Item 39	<b>.629</b>	<b>.703</b>	<b>.872</b>				
Item 40	<b>.357</b>	<b>.536</b>	<b>.655</b>				
<i>Subversive organizational behavior</i>							
Item 1	<b>.498</b>	<b>.304</b>	<b>.505</b>		.728	.710	.401
Item 3	<b>.586</b>	<b>.400</b>	<b>.614</b>				
Item 6	<b>.397</b>	<b>.473</b>	<b>.632</b>				
Item 9	<b>.355</b>	<b>.597</b>	<b>.749</b>				
<i>Manipulation of the decision-making process</i>							
Item 25	.113	<b>.716</b>	<b>.748</b>		.790	.790	.493
Item 31	.210	<b>.622</b>	<b>.673</b>				
Item 42	.223	<b>.640</b>	<b>.717</b>				
Item 45	<b>.932</b>	<b>.526</b>	<b>.654</b>				
<i>Intimidation and exclusion</i>							
Item 18	<b>.726</b>	<b>.738</b>	<b>.863</b>		.891	.901	.671
Item 19	<b>.327</b>	<b>.778</b>	<b>.874</b>				
Item 20	.153	<b>.728</b>	<b>.740</b>				
Item 24	.071	<b>.819</b>	<b>.815</b>				
<i>Negative attitudes towards colleagues</i>							
Item 22	.208	<b>.662</b>	<b>.698</b>		.850	.846	.586
Item 26	<b>.327</b>	<b>.649</b>	<b>.728</b>				
Item 29	.101	<b>.828</b>	<b>.835</b>				
Item 37	<b>.623</b>	<b>.694</b>	<b>.790</b>				
<i>FSQ</i>							
					.938	.935	.430

Note. Loadings that are larger than .30 are shown in boldface.

Thus, the structure distinctly corresponds to the five facets of FSQ - *Loyalty to patron*, *Subversive organisational behaviour*, *Manipulation of the decision-making process*, *Intimidation and exclusion (Ostracism)*, and *Negative attitudes towards colleagues*. The FSQ has very good reliability (.94), and satisfactory homogeneity (.43). Furthermore, the reliability of the subscales ranged from .73 to .89, measured by Alpha, and from .71 to .90, measured by Omega, while the homogeneity of the subscales, measured by MIC, ranged from .40 to .67. The subscale *Subversive organisational behaviour* had the lowest coefficient of all three measures, and the

subscale *Intimidation and exclusion (Ostracism)* had the highest. These results indicate a good internal consistency of all subscales, as well as FSQ as a whole.

**Discussion.** The aim of Study 1 was to analyse the dimensionality and latent structure of the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ), the internal consistency and homogeneity of the FSQ as a whole, along with its subscales. As the main result, we find support for the model with five components that were labelled as: *Loyalty to the patron*, *Subversive organisational behaviour*, *Manipulation of the decision-making process*, *Intimidation and exclusion (Ostracism)*, and *Negative attitudes towards colleagues*. The underlying factorial structure of FSQ describes the essence of the Faust Syndrome concept, which is grounded in displaced employees' loyalty from an organisation to a toxic leader. This shift motivates employees to act subversively toward their organisation, and to remain loyal to the individual leading the opposition against the organisation's management and practices. To reinforce this loyalty, a toxic leader frames the organisation as a hostile environment that threatens employees' interests and status. This leader utilises a variety of means of manipulation in the organisational decision-making process to protect these interests and to promote himself or herself as the true and only protector worthy of being loyal to. For example, a toxic leader can make connections with higher management, or find and exploit the weak points in laws and regulations. Other tactics that a toxic leader may use would be to practice pressure and intimidation, and to boost negative attitudes among loyal followers against all free-minded colleagues. This structure emanates Schmidt's (2008) and Celebi et al. (2015) findings on the following characteristics of a toxic leader: abusive supervision, authoritarian leadership, narcissism, inappreciativeness, negative mental state and self-promotion.

Each of these five FSQ dimensions is represented by a subscale composed of four items with the highest loadings on their home factor. The analyses of reliability and homogeneity revealed that FSQ and its short subscales represented a good instrument, with satisfactory internal consistency and acceptable average inter-item correlations.

*FACTORIAL INVARIANCE OF THE FSQ-2 AND EMPLOYEES'  
DEMOGRAPHICS AS FACTORS OF TOXIC WORK RELATIONS  
PERCEPTION*

*Study 2*

The main objectives of this study are to analyse the factorial invariance of the FSQ-2 measurement model across samples from Study 1 and 2, and to evaluate the significance of demographics such as gender, level

of education, and private/public sector for employees' perceptions of toxic work relations in their organisations.

**Participants and procedure.** In order to investigate the FSQ-2 measurement model invariance, 331 individuals in Study 1 and 560 in Study 2 were recruited in an at-hand samples of employees from private and state-owned companies in the Republic of Serbia. After signing a digital informed consent form, participants (aged 18 – 69 years,  $M = 38.84$ ,  $SD = 12.01$ ; from .5 to 40 years of service,  $M = 13.94$ ,  $SD = 10.88$ ; 58% were women; 40.9% completed elementary and high school, 42.3% were with college or bachelor's degree, and 16.8% with Master's or PhD degree; 62.5% were employees from private companies) completed a questionnaire. Data was collected anonymously via online Google Forms during May 2021.

**Instruments.** The applied instruments were the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ-2;  $\alpha = .97$ ), reduced in Study 1 to 20 items and five factors (*Appendix B*), together with a short demographic questionnaire. As in Study 1, FSQ was administered to detect the frequency of indicators of the five toxic work relationships dimensions labelled as *Loyalty to patron*, *Subversive organisational behaviour*, *Manipulation of the decision-making process*, *Intimidation and exclusion-Ostracism*, and *Negative attitudes towards colleagues*.

**Data analysis procedures.** For measurement invariance across samples (group 1, sample  $N = 331$ ; group 2, sample  $N = 560$ ), configural, metric, and scalar invariance were tested by conducting a multi-group CFA with stepwise method (Brown, 2006) using lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in RStudio (RStudio Team, 2020). The models were compared with  $\Delta CFI$  (the cut-off is .01, Chen, 2007),  $\Delta RMSEA$  (the cut-off is .015, Chen, 2007), and  $\Delta \chi^2$ .

To analyse the differences in the perception of the Faust Syndrome, gender and educational groups of employees were formed while organisations were divided in two groups – private and state-owned. The T-test and univariate ANOVA were applied, including Bonferroni and LSD post-hoc testing. Data analyses were conducted by the IBM SPSS v. 23 program.

**Results.** The results of the measurement model invariance are shown in Table 3. Configural, metric, and scalar invariance were tested, assuming equal factor structure, equal factor loadings, and equity constraints on both loadings and item intercepts among two samples.

Table 3. Measurement invariance of the FSQ higher-order factor model

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	AIC	BIC	RMSEA (90% CI)	SRMR	CFI	TLI	$\Delta \chi^2$
Configural	1123.985*** (330)	37855.768	38478.773	.061 (.057-.065)	.049	.929	.919	
Metric	1144.431*** (349)	37838.215	38370.165	.059 (.055-.064)	.054	.929	.923	18.319
Scalar	1161.988*** (363)	37827.772	38292.629	.059 (.054-.063)	.054	.928	.925	16.381

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $\Delta CFI < .01$ ;  $\Delta RMSEA < .015$

It can be noticed that the FSQ-2 achieved full scalar invariance across two independent samples of employees. Changes in CFI and RMSEA were smaller than the originally proposed change (e.g. Chen, 2007), while the changes in Chi-square were not significant.

The results of the Student's T-test for independent samples provided information about potential gender ( $N_{(male)} = 235$ ;  $N_{(female)} = 325$ ) and state/private sector ( $N_{(state)} = 210$ ;  $N_{(private)} = 350$ ) differences in the perception of the Faust Syndrome (Graph 1).

Although gender differences were not significant, results showed that there is a visible tendency among female employees to report more on toxic work relations. On the other hand, it is clear that employees in state-owned organisations had a significantly higher perception of all five Faust Syndrome dimensions than employees in privately owned organisations: *Loyalty to Patron* ( $t(558) = 5.358, p < .001$ ), *Subversive Behaviour* ( $t(558) = 2.621, p < .001$ ), *System Manipulation* ( $t(558) = 4.820, p < .001$ ), *Ostracism* ( $t(558) = 4.655, p < .001$ ), *Negative Attitude* ( $t(558) = 4.952, p < .001$ ), and *Faust Syndrome Total* ( $t(558) = 5.329, p < .001$ ). Also, we can notice that, regardless of gender and the type of ownership, employees' perception of system manipulation and ostracism was the lowest, while loyalty to a patron was the most perceived indicator of the Faust Syndrome.

The results of ANOVA provided information about potential educational differences in the perception of Faust Syndrome dimensions. These differences were not significant in the perception of general *Faust Syndrome* ( $F(2,557) = 2.288, p > .05$ ), *Loyalty to Patron* ( $F(2,557) = 1.104, p > .05$ ), *Subversive Behaviour* ( $F(2,557) = 1.168, p > .05$ ), *System Manipulation* ( $F(2,557) = 2.476, p > .05$ ), and *Ostracism* ( $F(2,557) = 1.065, p > .05$ ). However, there is a significant difference in the perception of *Negative Attitudes* towards colleagues ( $F(2,557) = 4.058, p = .018$ ). According to the LSD and Bonferroni post-hoc tests, employees with elementary and high school had perceived negative attitudes towards colleagues more frequently than employees with Bachelor's, Masters' or PhD degrees.

**Discussion.** In Study 2, we wanted to investigate the factorial invariance of the FSQ-2 measurement model, as well as the impact of employees' demographics on their Faust Syndrome perception. Therefore, we tested hypotheses H1 (invariance), H2 (expected gender differences), H3 (expected educational differences), and H4 (expected significant effect of private/state-owned organization type). Our findings mostly confirmed our hypotheses and they are corroborated with the results of previous studies. FSQ-2 achieved full configural, metric, and scalar invariance across two independent samples of employees, indicating that latent structure is the same, the items' loadings on their home factors are the same and, since the intercepts are the same, the FSQ status of two groups of employees is comparable. In addition, FSQ-2 demonstrated very good psychometric properties. H1 is confirmed.

In terms of demographic factors, we did not find significant gender differences, but we did find a tendency among female employees reporting systematically more on almost all FS dimensions (Fedorova, 2020). These tentative differences are explained by stronger females' tendencies to value work relationships in terms of social and emotional support in situations of stress (e.g., Morrison, 2009). Since social and emotional support is lost if toxic relationships are frequent in an organisation, this makes female employees more prone to noticing the deteriorated quality of the work relationships. H2 was tentatively confirmed, but more research in the local population is needed.

However, when it comes to the differences among educational groups, our findings suggest that employees with an elementary or high school education perceive FS indicators in their organisations more often than their more educated colleagues. This is not consistent with previous findings from studies with IT employees in India, where more educated employees reported toxic leadership to a greater degree (Singh & Sengupta, 2017). Since other findings on this issue are not available, we can only assume that Serbian employees with a lower level of education report more on the Faust Syndrome in their organisations because they are probably more affected by toxic work relations than their more educated colleagues. H3 is not confirmed, since employees with a lower level of education report the Faust Syndrome as a more frequent phenomenon.

Finally, we find that there is a significant effect of organisational ownership structure. It is clear that employees from state-owned organisations report all FS dimensions as more frequent than employees from the private sector. Our understanding of this finding is that the private sector generally is more flexible, innovative, and has higher turnover rate than the public one. Also, private companies develop more regulations and invest more in work ethics, which leads to a higher quality of work relationships. H4 is confirmed.

### *EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTION OF THE FAUST SYNDROME AS A FACTOR OF THEIR WORK PERFORMANCE AND PSYCHOPHYSICAL HEALTH*

#### *Study 3*

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the significance of the Faust Syndrome perception for the two most important outcomes: employees' work performance and their psychophysical health.

**Participants and procedure.** Using the battery of surveys, two independent samples of 891 individuals in total were recruited from the population of employees in private and state-owned companies in the Republic of Serbia ( $N = 560$ ; Sample 1;  $N = 331$ ; Sample 2). After signing a digital

informed consent form, participants (aged 20–89 years,  $M = 38.72$ ,  $SD = 12.97$ , from 0.5 to 42 years of service,  $M = 12.93$ ,  $SD = 10.86$ , 65% women) completed all questionnaires. Data was collected anonymously via Google Forms during the spring of 2021.

**Instruments.** The survey battery in Study 3 included an invitation and informed consent form for participants, the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ-2;  $\alpha = .97$ ), the Psychophysical health scale (SPFZ-1; Majstorović et al., 2017;  $\alpha = .92$ ), the Work Performance Questionnaire (URAP-1, Majstorović, N. & Todorović, N, 2023;  $\alpha = .94$ ), and a short demographics questionnaire. The previously reduced Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ 2) was composed of 20 items as individual measures of toxic work relationships. Participants were asked to estimate the frequency of toxic work relationships using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 'No, it never happens' to 'Yes, it happens very frequently' (without a neutral point). Psychophysical health was assessed by a 23-item self-report survey, where employees estimated the frequency of symptoms in five domains such as physical health disorders, fear and anxiety, depression reactions, social behaviour disorders and fatigue (4-point scale from 'Never happens' to 'It happens almost daily'). Higher scores indicate poorer health; that is, more frequent symptoms indicate poorer general health or disorders of a particular aspect of health. Employees were also asked to evaluate their own work performance on a 30-item questionnaire (e.g., 'For the quantity of my work, I can say that...') using a 5-point Likert scale: '1 - it needs to be improved to a great extent', '2—it needs to be improved to some extent', '3—it is satisfying', '4—it is good', '5 - it is excellent' (without a neutral point).

**Data analysis procedures.** Since all data was collected by a single method, Harman's analysis (one-factor principal axis analysis) was performed (as suggested by Harman, 1960; Podsakoff et al., 2003) to test the impact of a common method bias on majority of data variance obtained by all items from FSQ-2 and URAP-1 (in Sample 1), and FSQ-2 and SPFZ-2 (in Sample 2). The reliability of the instruments and subscales was assessed by Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ), while the homogeneity of subscales was assessed by using the mean of inter-item correlations (MIC). The main relations among the Faust Syndrome dimensions, work performance and health indicators were analysed by bivariate correlations and by Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA). All data analyses were conducted by IBM SPSS Statistics 23.

**Results.** The results from Study 3 will be presented in a descriptive form and by the outcomes of the analyses of relations among measures of the Faust Syndrome in the organisational work environment, on one side, and employees' work performance and health indicators, on the other. Harman's single-factor test was performed to analyse the influence of common method bias, revealing at least five unrotated dimensions, with the first one explaining 23.8% of the variance of FSQ-2 and URAP -1 items, and 29.5% of the variance of FSQ-2 and SPFZ-2 items. This is less than the common method factor cut-off value of 50% percent (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Ei-

chorn, 2014), indicating that common method bias does not represent a serious threat to the findings of the present study.

The mean values in Table 4 indicate that employees estimate the economic value they produce at the workplace as well as their own contextual efficiency as close to 'good'. Their own interpersonal competencies are slightly above 'good' (4.11), while they estimate their leadership skills, with the lowest average mark, as 'satisfactory' (3.22). None of these work performance indicators were estimated as '*it needs to be improved to some extent*' or '*it needs to be improved to a great extent*'. Also, we can see in Table 4 that the homogeneity of the two instruments, as well as the internal consistency coefficients of both instruments and their subscales, are all acceptable.

*Table 4. Descriptive characteristics of work performance and Faust Syndrome dimensions (N = 560; Sample 1)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range	<i>a</i>	<i>MIC</i>
Work Performance Total	3.97	.66	-.62	.82	4.00	.75	.51
Productivity	3.98	.70	-.59	.55	4.00	.77	.53
Work Performance Quality	3.86	.66	-.53	.49	4.00	.65	.39
Leadership	3.22	.72	-.14	-.05	4.00	.58	.32
Communication Competencies	3.78	.70	-.62	.64	4.00	.66	.40
Admin. Competencies	3.61	.75	-.42	.09	4.00	.66	.40
Effort	3.92	.79	-.67	.22	4.00	.80	.57
Interpersonal Competencies	4.11	.65	-.82	1.23	4.00	.74	.49
Job Knowledge	3.75	.81	-.54	-.10	4.00	.81	.58
Respect for Rules and Authority	3.68	.70	-.47	.30	4.00	.60	.35
Economic value	3.92	.62	-.54	.72	4.00	.90	.43
Contextual efficiency	3.73	.55	-.49	.74	4.00	.86	.29
Faust Syndrome Total	1.94	.64	.75	-.01	2.90	.94	.45
Loyalty to Patron	2.28	.84	.29	-.82	3.00	.86	.60
Subversive Behaviour	2.19	.69	.37	-.45	3.00	.77	.45
System Manipulation	1.49	.66	1.64	2.20	3.00	.80	.51
Ostracism	1.70	.78	1.20	.73	3.00	.87	.63
Negative Attitude	2.05	.80	.59	-.46	3.00	.86	.61

*Note.* *M* - mean value, *SD* - standard deviation,  
*a* - alpha coefficient of internal consistency, *MIC* - mean inter-item correlation.

As we can see from Table 5, the employees' perceptions of *System Manipulation* and *Ostracism* had the lowest frequency, while *Loyalty to Patron* and *Subversive Behaviour* were the most perceived manifestations of the Faust Syndrome.

*Table 5. Descriptive characteristics of employees' health and Faust Syndrome dimensions (N = 331; Sample 2)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range	<i>a</i>	<i>MIC</i>
Health Total	1.85	.49	.83	.15	2.17	.91	.32
Physical health disorder	2.17	.67	.67	.21	3.00	.63	.37
Fear and anxiety	1.89	.64	.92	.09	2.75	.76	.43
Depressive reactions	1.69	.53	1.03	.74	2.50	.80	.34
Fatigue	2.12	.79	.52	-.50	3.00	.79	.55
Social behaviour disorder	1.73	.48	.73	.35	2.40	.61	.25
Faust Syndrome Total	1.98	.61	.59	-.47	2.75	.94	.43
Loyalty to Patron	2.32	.80	.08	-.91	3.00	.85	.59
Subversive Behaviour	2.23	.67	.31	-.68	2.75	.73	.40
System Manipulation	1.50	.61	1.35	.92	2.50	.79	.49
Ostracism	1.77	.82	.99	.00	3.00	.89	.67
Negative Attitude	2.08	.77	.52	-.45	3.00	.85	.59

*Note.* *M* - mean value, *SD* - standard deviation,  
*a* - alpha coefficient of internal consistency, *MIC* - mean inter-item correlation.

Generally speaking, the results clearly indicate that a higher frequency of the Faust Syndrome in an organisation is associated to employees' lower satisfaction with their own contextual work efficiency (e.g., leadership skills). The most consistent correlations of FS dimensions were with the insufficiencies regarding Respect for rules and authority, Leadership, Communication competencies, Interpersonal competencies, and effort. Low productivity significantly correlates with frequent *System Manipulation*, including distortion of organisational decision-making system and corruption. Unsatisfactory Work performance quality and Job knowledge are linked to *Negative Attitudes* towards colleagues, while certain insufficiencies in Administrative competencies are associated with the frequent presence of *Loyalty to Patron* and also with *Negative Attitudes* towards colleagues. It seems that frequent Faust Syndrome in an organisation negatively affects employees' loyalty, as demonstrated by the prediction of a lower Respect for rules and authority in an organisation. The results also indicate that the economic value of employees' contributions is independent from the frequency of Faust syndrome indicators. The most frequent symptoms of the health disorder were those related to employees' physical health and fatigue (Table 6).

The results of Multiple Regression Analysis using the Enter method showed that Faust Syndrome dimensions explained 6% of contextual efficiency, while the prediction of an economic value was not significant (Table 7). Only models that explain leadership, communication competencies, effort, and interpersonal competencies, as facets of a *contextual efficiency* were significant. *Negative Attitudes towards Colleagues* as one specific FS dimension had a significant partial contribution to the prediction of these dimensions of work performance.

*Table 6. Correlations of work performance and Faust Syndrome dimensions (N = 560; Sample 1)*

Variable	Faust Syndrome Total	Loyalty to Patron	Subversive Behaviour	System Manipulation	Ostracism	Negative Attitude
Work Performance Total	-.08	-.04	-.03	-.11**	-.07	-.09*
Productivity	-.06	-.03	-.02	-.10*	-.06	-.07
Work Performance	-.06	-.03	-.01	-.06	-.05	-.09*
Quality						
Leadership	-.20**	-.19**	-.15**	-.09*	-.14**	-.26**
Communication	-.17**	-.14**	-.10*	-.15**	-.15**	-.18**
Competencies						
Admin. Competencies	-.09*	-.10*	-.01	-.04	-.06	-.13**
Effort	-.13**	-.09*	-.10*	-.10*	-.11*	-.15**
Interpersonal	-.21**	-.16**	-.09*	-.20**	-.16**	-.28**
Competencies						
Job Knowledge	-.07	-.05	-.05	-.05	-.02	-.11*
Respect for Rules and Authority	-.26**	-.19**	-.26**	-.22**	-.24**	-.21**
Economic value	-.07	-.03	-.01	-.09*	-.06	-.09*
Contextual efficiency	-.19**	-.16**	-.12**	-.14**	-.14**	-.24**

Note. \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05.

*Table 7. Multiple regression analysis of work performance and Faust Syndrome dimensions (N = 560; Sample 1)*

Predictors	Criteria					
	Work Performance Total	Productivity	Work Performance Quality	Leadership	Commun. Competencies	Admin. Competencies
Loyalty to Patron	$\beta$	.11	.11	.10	-.01	.05
Subversive Behaviour	$\beta$	.03	.04	.06	-.04	.01
System Manipulation	$\beta$	-.15*	-.14*	-.03	.15*	-.06
Ostracism	$\beta$	.03	.01	-.01	.01	-.04
Negative Attitudes	$\beta$	-.12	-.10	-.17*	-.34**	-.16*
	R <sup>2</sup>	.02	.02	.01	.08	.04
	$\Delta R^2$	.01	.01	.01	.07	.03
	F <sub>(5,325)</sub>	2.18	1.84	1.56	9.90**	4.06**
		Effort	Interpersonal Competencies	Job Knowledge	Respect for Rules and Authority	Economic value
						Contextual efficiency
Loyalty to Patron	$\beta$	.08	.18*	.05	.03	.12
Subversive Behaviour	$\beta$	-.04	.08	-.03	-.17**	.05
System Manipulation	$\beta$	-.01	-.14*	-.05	-.06	-.10
Ostracism	$\beta$	-.00	.06	.14	-.09	.00
Negative Attitudes	$\beta$	-.18*	-.41**	-.19**	-.04	-.14
	R <sup>2</sup>	.03	.10	.02	.08	.02
	$\Delta R^2$	.02	.09	.01	.07	.01
	F <sub>(5,325)</sub>	2.90**	11.89**	2.19	9.87**	1.78
						7.14**

Note. \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05.

Pearson product-moment coefficient was also performed to analyse relations between FS dimensions and psycho-physical health indicators (Table 8). The results revealed that the perception of higher frequency of Faust Syndrome was significantly and meaningfully correlated with the frequency of employees' health disorder symptoms. More specifically, *Negative Attitudes towards Colleagues* and *Ostracism* had the highest coefficients of correlation with employees' general health status. All dimensions of Faust Syndrome had the highest correlations with the frequency of symptoms such as fear and anxiety, and employees' depressive reactions.

*Table 8. Correlations of employees' health and Faust Syndrome dimensions (N = 331; Sample 2)*

Variable	Health Total	Physical health disorder	Fear and anxiety	Depressive reactions	Fatigue	Social behaviour disorder
Faust Syndrome Total	.44	.35	.40	.40	.32	.33
Loyalty to Patron	.36	.29	.34	.31	.26	.30
Subversive Behaviour	.31	.24	.24	.30	.20	.26
System Manipulation	.33	.25	.32	.32	.21	.24
Ostracism	.40	.31	.37	.36	.30	.30
Negative Attitude	.42	.35	.40	.37	.33	.29

*Note.* All coefficients are significant ( $p < .001$ ).

The results of Multiple Regression Analysis using the Enter method (Table 9) showed that Faust Syndrome dimensions explained 20% of employees' health (12-18% for specific dimensions of health). All models were significant, although none of the beta coefficients were significant in explaining Depressive reactions or Social behaviour disorder. *Negative Attitudes towards Colleagues* and *Ostracism* had a significant partial contribution to the prediction of total employees' health and fatigue, while *Negative Attitude towards Colleagues* was also a significant predictor of Physical health disorder and Fear and anxiety.

*Table 9. Multiple regression analysis of employees' health and Faust Syndrome dimensions (N = 331; Sample 2)*

Predictors	Criteria					
	Health Total	Physical health disorder	Fear and anxiety	Depressive reactions	Fatigue	Social behaviour disorder
Loyalty to Patron	$\beta$	.07	.05	.06	.02	.03
Subversive Behaviour	$\beta$	.07	.05	-.01	.11	.01
System Manipulation	$\beta$	-.03	-.07	-.01	.04	-.13
Ostracism	$\beta$	.18*	.13	.17	.15	.18*
Negative Attitudes	$\beta$	.23**	.24**	.25**	.16	.26**
	$R^2$	.20	.14	.18	.16	.12
	$\Delta R^2$	.19	.12	.16	.15	.10
	$F_{(5,325)}$	16.38**	10.12**	13.98**	12.58**	9.13**
						8.57**

*Note.* \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ .

These results revealed that *Negative Attitudes towards Colleagues* were the most significant predictor of both outcomes – contextual work performance and psychophysical health (H5 and H6 confirmed).

**Discussion.** In this study, we wanted to further explore FSQ in order to analyse the significance of this specific type of toxic work relationships, named Faust Syndrome, for employees' work performance and their psychophysical health. We assumed that the existence of the Faust Syndrome was not just a matter of work relations quality, but that it also represented a significant factor in organisational behaviours such as work performance and employees' health (H5, H6). Our findings largely confirmed these assumptions, suggesting that Faust Syndrome probably contributed to a lower employees' contextual efficiency and to more frequent symptoms of psycho-physical health disorders. First of all, employees from Faustian organisations reported lower satisfaction with their own leadership, communication and interpersonal skills. It seems that two features of the Faust Syndrome in an organisation - negative attitudes towards colleagues and loyalty to a local patron, affect these skills the most. This could be understood as the top-down and peers' communication becoming too complex and too demanding if the Faust Syndrome contaminates the social environment in an organisation. This condition is likely the result of a toxic leader's influence, as they seek a centralised, self-directed communication network rather than a more equitable one. The results of previous studies are in line with this interpretation. For example, Kılıç and Günsel (2019) find that toxic leaders spread negative emotions throughout the organisation, causing managers to diminish their supervision and organisational commitment. Therefore, employees and managers who may, in these circumstances, demonstrate a lower level of work engagement may also estimate their social skills as being insufficient in order to work or manage properly.

In terms of employees' health, our findings indicate that negative attitudes towards colleagues probably contribute to more symptoms of poor general health, especially to fatigue, fear and anxiety, and to the symptoms of physical health disorders. Ostracism, as one specific facet of the Faust Syndrome, seems to predict employees' more frequent complaints on fatigue. Our findings about toxic environment health consequences are also in line with previous studies, such as those on employees' anxiety (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007) or on their physical health disorders (Brown, 2004).

#### *GENERAL DISCUSSION*

In this paper we wanted to promote a new concept of a toxic work environment – a new instrument for its detection, and to investigate if this concept interacts with measures of work performance and with employees' health in a meaningful way. This new concept is labelled as Faust Syndrome (FS) and defined, based on our findings, as a condition of work re-

lationships characterised by five dimensions: *Loyalty to Patron, Subversive Organisational Behaviour, Manipulation of the Decision-Making Process, Intimidation and Exclusion-Ostracism, and Negative Attitudes towards Colleagues* (Study 1). This structure corresponds with some facets of a toxic work climate when the toxic leader is the primary factor of the work relationships quality (e.g., Schmidt, 2008; Pelletier, 2010; Cellebi et al., 2015). The advantage of the Faust Syndrome over other toxic work environment concepts is that it emphasises employees' loyalty to their organisation being replaced by their loyalty to a patron, and to the clientelistic exchange model as a 'natural' form of work relationships. Through displaced loyalty and by the culture of clientelism, we can easily explain why employees behave subversively towards their own organisation, why they become involved in the manipulation of the decision-making process, why they establish negative attitudes towards their colleagues, and why they participate in intimidation and ostracism practices. By highlighting the Faust Syndrome over the general concept of the toxic work environment, we wanted to bring to the front employees' sacrifice of personal integrity in pursuit of gain within the workplace setting. With this concept, we wanted to extend the existing body of knowledge on negative workplace behaviours in Serbia (e.g. Vukelić et al., 2018), as well as to underscore the importance of studying the causes of toxic work environments, and its consequences on the well-being of employees. Beyond large corporations, exposure to a toxic work climate could be especially detrimental for professionals working with sensitive populations, where maintaining personal well-being could be essential for preserving the quality of service (e.g. Jerkić Rajić et al., 2023).

After applying an evaluated version of the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire, we wanted to investigate the significance of employees' demographics such as gender, education, and organisational ownership structure for the Faust Syndrome perception. We have found that female employees, less educated employees and employees from state-owned organisations report all FS dimensions as more frequent in their work environment (Study 2).

Finally, we confirmed the assumptions that the Faust Syndrome probably contributes to diminished employees' contextual work efficiency and their psychophysical health. Our findings indicate that if the Faust Syndrome contaminates the organisational environment, the top-down communication and peers' communication becomes too complex, probably due to a toxic leader's intention to create a self-directed instead of a more equitable communication network. Therefore, managers and subordinates may estimate their social skills as insufficient in order to work or to manage properly. Our findings also indicate that the dimensions of the Faust Syndrome establish meaningful associations with health indicators. Namely, negative attitudes towards colleagues probably contribute to more symp-

toms of poor general health, especially to fatigue symptoms, symptoms of fear and anxiety, and symptoms of physical health disorders. Ostracism, as another dimension of the Faust Syndrome, may contribute to increased reports of fatigue among employees. (Study 3).

### CONCLUSION

In this paper, we promote a new concept of toxic work relations called the Faust Syndrome, the Faust Syndrome Questionnaire, and our first findings on the relations of this Syndrome with work performance and employees' health. Here are three main conclusions:

1. The Faust Syndrome is characterised by employees' loyalty to a toxic leader (patron) rather than to the organisation itself, which probably fosters subversive behaviour toward the organisation, the manipulation of its processes, negative attitudes toward colleagues, and ostracism practices.
2. The Faust Syndrome Questionnaire (FSQ) demonstrated a meaningful five-factor structure; configural, metric, and scalar invariance across two independent samples of employees; and satisfactory psychometric properties.
3. Two of the five Faust Syndrome dimensions (Ostracism and Negative attitudes towards colleagues) establish meaningful relationships with employees' lower contextual efficiency as an indicator of work performance, and with more frequent symptoms of fear and anxiety, fatigue, and physical health disorders as facets of employees' psychophysical health measured in this research.

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**ДА ЛИ СТЕ ПОТПИСАЛИ СВОЈОМ КРВЉУ!?  
ФАУСТОВСКИ СИНДРОМ КАО НОВИ КОНЦЕПТ У  
РАЗУМЕВАЊУ ТОКСИЧНИХ РАДНИХ ОДНОСА,  
РАДНОГ ПОСТИГНУЋА И ЗДРАВЉА УПОСЛЕНИКА**

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**Резиме**

Ово истраживање је предузето са циљем провере новог концепта токсичног радног окружења, названог Фаустовски синдром (ФС), евалуације упитника за процену учесталости његових манифестација на послу (FSQ) као и анализе потенцијалних ефеката учесталости ФС на радни учинак и на психо-физичко здравље запослених. Подаци прикупљени на укупно 891 упосленика из приватних и јавних организација у Републици Србији указују на чврсту пето-факторску латентну структуру упитника FSQ (именована као лојалност патрону, субверзивно организацијско понашање, манипулација процесом доношења одлука, острракизам и негативни ставови према колегама), задовољавајућу поузданост ( $\alpha = .94$ ), хомогеност (МИЦ = .43) и факторску инваријатност мерног модела редукованог упитника (FSQ – 2). Нађено је и да ове димензије ФС значајно корелирају са смањеним контекстуалним радним учинком запослених као и са израженијим симптомима страха и анксиозности, умора и поремећаја њиховог физичког здравља. Закључено је да клијентелизам уведен у радне односе, представљен овде као Фаустовски синдром, вероватно негативно утиче на контекстуални радни учинак запослених, као и на њихово психо-физичко здравље.

*Appendix A*  
*Promax rotated components loadings*  
*(values below .30 suppressed for clarity)*

		Factor				
		1	2	3	4	5
f38		,951				-,305
f39	C1	,928				
f40		,797				
f27		,724				
f32		,672				
f8		,650				
f36		,584				
f15		,561				
f35		,558				
f44		,538				
f14		,524				
f11		,515				
f28		,510				
f34		,445				
f13		,388	,385			
f3			,735			
f1	C2		,691			
f6			,632			
f9			,507			
f7			,458			,417
f4			,456			
f2			,441			,381
f5			,426	,355		
f10		,382	,416			
f12		,316	,416			
f33						
f45				,673		
f42			C3	,537		
f46		,294		,423		
f31				,388		
f25				,382		
f21				,359		
f30						
f18					,869	
f19			C4		,855	
f24					,613	
f20					,474	
f17		,327			,442	
f16		,303			,396	
f37		,384				,521
f41r				C5		,509
f26		,291				,505
f22						,467
f29					,352	,428

*Note.* Five rotated components accounted for 52.8% of total variance

*Appendix B*  
*The Faust Syndrome Questionnaire*  
*(Version with 20 items designed in Study 2)*  
**FAUST (FSQ-2)**

This questionnaire contains descriptions of some negative actions of individuals and groups as well as some negative forms of working relationships in the organization. Please rate how common such actions and working relationships are in your organization. Please answer by choosing one of the numbers next to each statement that best describes the frequency of such actions and relationships.

The numbers have the following meaning:

- 1 – no, that didn't happen
- 2 – it happens, but rarely
- 3 – it happens often
- 4 – yes, it happens very often

1. My co-workers question the correctness of the management's decisions.	1 2 3 4
2. Some systems of supervision and work control are called into question.	1 2 3 4
3. Some individuals specifically deal with organizational regulations in order to exploit their shortcomings.	1 2 3 4
4. Some groups show disrespect for the organization.	1 2 3 4
5. We also talk in the language of threats and blackmail.	1 2 3 4
6. Some leaders intimidate others to get what they want.	1 2 3 4
7. Here we have individuals that most avoid, because they fear for their job security if they communicate with them.	1 2 3 4
8. Informal communication with colleagues is artificial and somewhat bizarre.	1 2 3 4
9. Those who disagree with the leader's will experience fierce criticism and organized actions against them.	1 2 3 4
10. I hear from my colleagues that others "can only be our enemies".	1 2 3 4
11. Gossip and slander are part of our relationships.	1 2 3 4
12. Malice in relations with dissenters.	1 2 3 4
13. When we organize a vote, some are deliberately prevented from participating in it.	1 2 3 4
14. I have the impression that many people vote the way some leader expects them to, and not the way they really think.	1 2 3 4
15. We are suspicious and distrustful of each other.	1 2 3 4
16. Colleagues work harder to get noticed, not because they really want to work harder.	1 2 3 4
17. Some always vote the way their leader votes, regardless of any argument.	1 2 3 4
18. Colleagues show a desire to always have someone to protect them in front of others.	1 2 3 4
19. Corruption.	1 2 3 4
20. Minutes of meetings are falsified in order to achieve something at a higher level.	1 2 3 4