

Citation: Khamas, H. A., Dalvi, M. R., Abbas, Z. M., & Sadeghi, M. (2024). Designing a Shadow Leadership Model in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. *Digital Transformation and Administration Innovation*, 2(2), 10-21.

Received: date: 2024-02-05

Revised: date: 2024-03-12

Accepted: date: 2024-03-22

Published: date: 2024-04-01



Designing a Shadow Leadership Model in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources

Hayder Abdulrahman Khamas¹, Mohammad Reza Dalvi^{2*}, Zaki Muhammad Abbas³, Mehrdad Sadeghi⁴

1. PhD Candidate, Department of Management, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

2. Associate Professor, Department of Management, Dehaghan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Dehaghan Iran

3. Assistant Professor, Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research, Al Furat Al Awsat Technological University, Iraq

4. Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran

*Correspondence: drdalvi2016@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to explore the mechanisms, conditions, and consequences of shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, developing a comprehensive model to understand its structural and functional components. This research employs a qualitative approach using grounded theory methodology, incorporating in-depth interviews with 18 experts, including behavioral science academics, faculty members, and water resource professionals. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions of shadow leadership within the ministry. Thematic analysis and open, axial, and selective coding techniques were used to extract key themes, with Atlas.ti software facilitating data organization and interpretation. The paradigmatic model of Strauss and Corbin was used to structure the findings, examining causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening variables, strategic actions, and consequences of shadow leadership. The study identifies shadow power as the core phenomenon, characterized by covert influence, informal leadership networks, and hidden decision-making mechanisms. The emergence of shadow leadership is driven by political instability, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and external pressures, reinforced by media influence, ideological power, and stakeholder expectations. Intervening conditions, such as political partisanship and cognitive dissonance, shape leadership strategies, which include network building, strategic alliances, and psychological influence. The consequences of shadow leadership manifest in both positive and negative ways, affecting leadership efficiency, governance transparency, political stability, and organizational control. Shadow leadership operates as a parallel system of influence, simultaneously compensating for bureaucratic inefficiencies and reinforcing power concentration and governance opacity. Understanding its dynamics is essential for enhancing transparency, ethical leadership, and institutional reform in government institutions.

Keywords: Shadow leadership, informal power, governance, political influence, qualitative study, Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, organizational control, leadership transparency, strategic alliances.

1. Introduction

Leadership, as a complex and multifaceted construct, has evolved over time to encompass various dimensions, including ethical leadership, transformational leadership, and, more recently, shadow leadership. The concept of shadow leadership, emerging from psychological and organizational theories, highlights the hidden and often unacknowledged influences that operate alongside formal leadership structures. Shadow leadership is not merely an absence of leadership or a subordinate role;



rather, it involves parallel power dynamics, informal authority, and an unseen network of influence that shapes decision-making processes within an organization (Evans & Jovanović, 2016). In the context of Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, shadow leadership plays a crucial role in governance, political negotiations, and administrative control, ultimately impacting organizational effectiveness, employee morale, and policy implementation.

The foundation of shadow leadership can be traced back to Jungian psychology, particularly Carl Jung's concept of the shadow archetype, which refers to the hidden and often suppressed aspects of an individual's personality that influence their behavior (Allen, 2020). Jungian theory posits that individuals and organizations have conscious and unconscious dimensions, with the shadow embodying the repressed traits that manifest in covert actions, informal alliances, and unspoken power struggles (Alho, 2020). In organizational contexts, shadow leadership emerges when informal power structures develop alongside or within formal hierarchies, influencing key decisions, institutional culture, and political maneuvering (Chappell et al., 2019). This phenomenon has significant implications for political institutions and government ministries, where bureaucratic inefficiencies and political entanglements create an environment conducive to shadow leadership (de Haan, 2016).

Shadow leadership is particularly relevant in government institutions where power dynamics, factionalism, and informal decision-making play an essential role in governance (Steinecke, 2022). In Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, where resource management is a critical issue amid political instability and regional conflicts, shadow leadership can shape policy implementation and administrative strategies, either facilitating or hindering institutional development. The existence of shadow leaders—individuals who exert influence behind the scenes without holding official leadership positions—raises concerns about transparency, accountability, and ethical governance (Walker & Watkins, 2020).

In this regard, ethical leadership has been widely studied in the context of formal leadership structures, with research highlighting its role in fostering organizational trust, employee satisfaction, and institutional integrity (Alho, 2020; Bandeh Moradi & Zangoei Pour Motlaq, 2022; Gamil et al., 2022). Ethical leadership is defined by principles of justice, transparency, and responsibility, where leaders act in the best interest of stakeholders and uphold moral standards (Mahmoud, 2023). However, shadow leadership often operates outside the boundaries of ethical leadership, employing covert strategies, informal alliances, and hidden power mechanisms to influence decision-making (Noori et al., 2023). This dichotomy between ethical leadership and shadow leadership underscores the need to examine how shadow leadership affects governance structures and whether it serves as a necessary counterbalance to bureaucratic inefficiencies or a disruptive force that undermines institutional integrity (Soltani-Fard et al., 2023).

A critical aspect of shadow leadership is its intersection with power mechanisms and organizational culture. Traditional theories of leadership emphasize hierarchical structures and formal authority, but shadow leadership introduces an alternative power dynamic where influence is exerted informally, often through covert negotiations and implicit control (Rezaeian et al., 2022). In the Ministry of Water Resources, where policy decisions are subject to both internal bureaucratic constraints and external political pressures, shadow leadership plays a dual role—it can either compensate for institutional inefficiencies by facilitating decision-making outside formal channels or contribute to systemic corruption by bypassing accountability mechanisms (Freysson, 2020). This study seeks to delineate the conditions under which shadow leadership enhances or undermines governance structures, providing empirical insights into its impact on administrative effectiveness and policy outcomes.

From a political perspective, shadow leadership can be linked to shadow governance, where informal networks of power influence decision-making processes beyond the official state apparatus (Hallinger, 2018). In Iraq, where political factions, tribal affiliations, and external influences play a significant role in shaping governance structures, shadow leadership operates at multiple levels, affecting not only ministerial decisions but also broader political negotiations (Ali Mohammadi et al., 2021; Gamil et al., 2022). The phenomenon of shadow leadership is also reflected in global political trends, where shadow figures—such as political advisors, lobbyists, and informal power brokers—shape governmental policies without holding formal positions (Cunliffe, 2023). In the European Parliament, for example, shadow rapporteurs influence legislative



amendments and policy outcomes despite not holding formal leadership roles (Steinecke, 2022). This international perspective underscores the importance of studying shadow leadership as a critical component of political decision-making and administrative governance.

Another key element in understanding shadow leadership is its psychological and behavioral implications. Studies suggest that leaders operating in the shadows often exhibit narcissistic tendencies, manipulation tactics, and an inclination toward secrecy and control (Bullemore Campbell, 2024; Parsakia et al., 2023). The psychological burden of shadow leadership can lead to stress, burnout, and ethical dilemmas, particularly in high-stakes environments where leaders must navigate competing interests and hidden power struggles (Zwingmann et al., 2016). Furthermore, shadow leadership can contribute to a toxic work environment, where employees feel pressured to conform to informal power structures rather than merit-based leadership principles (Walker & Watkins, 2020). By analyzing the psychological dimensions of shadow leadership, this study aims to explore how informal power influences organizational behavior and employee well-being.

In light of these theoretical foundations, this study seeks to develop a comprehensive model of shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. By applying a qualitative approach, the research will explore the mechanisms, conditions, and consequences of shadow leadership within the ministry, providing a nuanced understanding of how informal power operates in government institutions. The study will contribute to both theoretical and practical knowledge, offering insights for policymakers, organizational leaders, and scholars interested in leadership dynamics, political governance, and administrative reform. Ultimately, this research will address the following question:

- What are the core components of shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources?

2. Methods and Materials

This study is applied-developmental in nature, aiming to design and present a model for shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources through a qualitative approach. Given the exploratory nature of the research, a qualitative methodology was adopted, relying on the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The study focuses on developing a conceptual framework that explains the dimensions and mechanisms of shadow leadership within the context of water resource management in Iraq.

The study population consists of experts familiar with the research domain, including academic specialists in behavioral sciences and faculty members, as well as water resource experts. A total of 18 individuals with expertise in these fields were selected as the research sample. These participants were chosen based on their theoretical knowledge and practical experience in leadership dynamics and water resource management. The selection process followed a purposive sampling method, ensuring that participants possessed relevant expertise to contribute valuable insights to the study.

To gather the necessary qualitative data, in-depth interviews were conducted with academic experts and water resource professionals. The interview method was selected due to its strong capability in eliciting detailed perspectives and real insights from participants. The interview sessions provided a setting where the researcher could engage with participants in real-world conditions, facilitating open discussions on the key research questions. Given the depth and complexity of the subject matter, semi-structured interviews were utilized to allow for flexibility in exploring emerging themes while maintaining a structured framework for discussion.

The collected data were analyzed using the grounded theory approach, following an inductive-qualitative strategy. The data analysis process involved three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These stages facilitated the systematic extraction of key themes and relationships relevant to shadow leadership. To enhance the validity and reliability of the coding process, text mining techniques were also employed. The final outcome of this analysis was a grounded theoretical model that enables the conceptualization and explanation of shadow leadership within Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. The Atlas.ti software was used to assist in coding, categorization, and theory development, ensuring a rigorous and structured approach to data analysis.

3. Findings and Results

The primary objective of this study is to propose a model for shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. Based on the qualitative data analysis, the central category identified is shadow leadership, which includes two key dimensions:



shadow power and leader characteristics. Once this core category was established, the next step involved linking other relevant categories to it. This process was conducted using the paradigmatic model developed by Strauss and Corbin, which consists of the core category (phenomenon), causal conditions, intervening conditions, contextual conditions, strategies, and consequences. According to Strauss and Corbin, applying this model enables researchers to systematically interpret and connect data. The development of causal, intervening, and contextual conditions, as well as the associated strategies and consequences, is elaborated below.

Causal conditions refer to the events or circumstances that lead to the emergence or expansion of a particular phenomenon. In this study, based on participant perspectives, the core themes identified under causal conditions include power challenges, the requirements of shadow power, social challenges of power, environmental challenges, and governmental shortcomings. These themes were then grouped under the broader category of causal conditions.

The analysis of power challenges reveals that political expediency plays a significant role in maintaining the status quo, with political leaders demonstrating a tendency to intervene in decision-making processes. Instability in political and legal frameworks has further contributed to the fluidity of leadership structures, while political conflicts have escalated due to the increasing rate of policy changes, the rise of populist parties, and a lack of emotional commitment to organizational leadership. Additionally, pressures from influential political institutions have exacerbated inefficiencies in the managerial system. The following table illustrates the core categories under causal conditions.

Table 1. Axial Coding of Qualitative Data (Causal Conditions)

Axial Coding	Secondary Coding	Open Coding
Power Challenges	Political Expediency	Tendency to maintain the status quo Political leaders' expediency Political interventions Political and legal instability
	Political Conflict	Increasing rate of policy changes Rise of populist parties Lack of emotional commitment to organizational leaders Pressure from power institutions Managerial inefficiency
Shadow Power Requirements	Political Power	Governance vision development Increasing transparency Dependence on state affiliations Utilizing legal power benefits Adopting new strategies
	Social Power	Independent decision-making Strengthening stakeholder participation Challenging the status quo Need for social trust Strengthening trust-based interactions Exercising influence over power mechanisms
Social Challenges of Power	Social Ambiguity	Low social hope Fear of economic stagnation Personal attacks Fear of silence and retreat of opponents Persistent social divisions Information uncertainty
	Negative Social Capital	Lack of formal protest mechanisms Emotional framing of issues Popularization of social issues Public dissatisfaction with ministries Declining social capital
Environmental Challenges	Environmental Variability	Political party identification Continuous environmental changes Rapid shifts in external elements Sense of powerlessness in driving change High diversity in environmental changes Environmental stress and anxiety
	Policy Change	Conditions of instability and uncertainty



Governmental Shortcomings	Political Conflict	Political adaptation strategies for environmental change Inadequate government actions Deficiencies in public services Failure to acknowledge existing realities Institutional conflicts of interest Ineffective privatization Lack of cooperation among power holders
	Political Behavior	Conspiracy theories Tendency toward conformity Struggles for power Political violence Unstable decision-making

These findings provide a structured understanding of the factors contributing to shadow leadership within Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. The interplay between political, social, and environmental conditions has shaped the mechanisms through which shadow leadership emerges and operates within the ministry. By analyzing these elements, the study establishes a foundation for developing a theoretical model that explains the dynamics of shadow leadership and its implications for governance in the water resources sector.

The core phenomenon is a frequently recurring category influenced by causal factors and serves as the central theme in the paradigmatic model, shaping the strategies within it. Based on the qualitative data analysis, the central phenomenon identified in this study is shadow power, which manifests through specific power-related features and leadership requirements. The table below presents the axial coding of qualitative data related to the core phenomenon.

Table 2. Axial Coding of Qualitative Data (Core Phenomenon)

Axial Coding	Secondary Coding	Open Coding
Shadow Power	Power Characteristics	Covert mobilization and organization Illegal political behaviors Potential influence on decisions Competition over interests Destructive political behaviors Lack of transparency in party and factional information Distortion of social expectations
	Leadership Requirements	Party competition Intention to influence and control representatives' performance Sectarianism in elections Political information

The contextual conditions refer to the specific characteristics and circumstances surrounding the phenomenon, shaping the environment in which actions and reactions occur. These contextual elements create the setting within which shadow leadership strategies are implemented. The contextual conditions identified in this study include governmental convergence, networked power, media power, ideological social influence, and information flow manipulation. Each of these aspects influences the formation and reinforcement of shadow leadership dynamics in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources.

The governmental convergence aspect highlights the alignment of opposition forces and internal cohesion within the government structure. Opposition support and reinforcement of listening groups have contributed to greater political engagement. Simultaneously, shared cultural beliefs and convergent ideological power have promoted internal solidarity and a push toward unity in unstable environments.

Table 3. Axial Coding of Qualitative Data (Contextual Conditions)

Axial Coding	Secondary Coding	Open Coding
Governmental Convergence	Opposition Convergence	Support for dissenting voices Strengthening listening groups
	Internal Cohesion	Shared cultural beliefs Power of convergent perspectives Efforts toward unity in unstable environments Strengthening intra-group cohesion
Networked Power	Active Networking	Formation of activist and supporter networks Reproduction of polarization in elections



Media Power	Dominance of Virtual Space	Establishment of support networks
		Social inequalities and informational gaps
		Creation of informational division
Ideological Social Influence	Active Influence	Manipulation of public sentiment through digital platforms
		Emergence of new media channels
		Strength of digital media tools and content
		Engagement in competitive political arenas
		Capturing public emotions
		Managing rumors and public opinion
		Delegitimization of elected officials
		Distortion of awareness
		Explicit criticism of opposing political factions
		Stability of ideological elements
Information Flow Manipulation	Strategic Flow	Strengthening ideological identities
		Intensification of public polarization
		Normative political ideologies
		Discrimination in information access
		Public opinion management
		Dependence on rumors
		Growth of emotional polarization
		Populist secrecy

These findings illustrate how contextual conditions significantly influence the emergence and consolidation of shadow leadership within Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. The dynamics of political convergence, media influence, ideological persuasion, and networked power all contribute to shaping the strategies employed within shadow leadership structures. By understanding these contextual factors, the study provides deeper insights into the mechanisms through which shadow leadership exerts influence over governance and decision-making processes in the ministry.

The intervening conditions refer to the structural factors that influence the phenomenon and impact the strategies of action and reaction. These conditions either facilitate or constrain the implementation of strategies within a specific context. In this study, intervening conditions such as critics' management, stakeholder expectations, and party identity play a key role in shaping the mechanisms of shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources.

The management of critics is a central theme in the study, highlighting the strategies used to control opposition and dissenting voices. Critical awareness among opposition groups is shaped by increasing public literacy and making reconciliation with critics appear unrealistic. Simultaneously, cognitive dissonance and the spiral of silence are engineered to marginalize dissenting voices.

Table 4. Axial Coding of Qualitative Data (Intervening Conditions)

Axial Coding	Secondary Coding	Open Coding
Critics' Management	Critical Awareness	Self-interest of opposition groups
		Critical remarks
		Rising public literacy
		Making reconciliation with critics seem unimaginable
	Opposition Engineering	Creation of cognitive dissonance
		Establishing a spiral of silence for critics
		The presence of strong emotions among individuals
		Introduction of new opportunities and ideas by critics
		Formation of new norms and expectations
		Establishment of stakeholder expectation mechanisms
Stakeholder Expectations	Stakeholder Power	Pressure from strategic stakeholder groups
		Sharing new ideas
		Political visualization of the future
	Future Visioning	Positive perception of in-group members
		Grouping of in-group and out-group members
Party Identity	Political Self-Centrism	Hostility toward external groups
		Pretending or favoring in-group interests
		Rise of political sectarianism
		Persistent party alignment
	Political Commitment	Highlighting the dark side of political participation



Attempts to polarize politics
 Support for specific cultural symbols
 Directing efforts toward party interests
 Lack of transparency in party information
 Strengthening emotional party loyalties
 Emphasis on group identity markers
 Political control
 Competition in the political field

These intervening conditions shape the pathways through which shadow leadership develops and operates. By controlling the narrative through critics' management, meeting stakeholder expectations strategically, and reinforcing party identity, shadow leadership influences decision-making and power structures within the ministry.

Strategies refer to purposeful actions and reactions aimed at controlling, managing, and responding to the studied phenomenon. These strategies emerge in response to both contextual and intervening conditions and are influenced by facilitators and constraints. In the case of shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, the identified strategies include social development, professional development, media transformation, and fear-based cultural strategies.

Social development strategies focus on enhancing political motivation and fostering collective demand for accountability. These strategies encourage revolutionary movements, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance the management of social capital. Political optimism is promoted through the expansion of councils and social institutions, drawing in marginalized groups, and increasing political participation within organizations.

Table 5. Axial Coding of Qualitative Data (Strategic Conditions)

Axial Coding	Secondary Coding	Open Coding
Social Development	Political Motivation	Strengthening public demand for accountability
		Encouraging revolutionary movements
		Preserving social solidarity
		Managing social capital
	Political Optimism	Expanding councils and social institutions
		Creating a desirable future vision
		Attracting marginalized groups
		Strengthening the process of political organizational development
Professional Development	Elitism	Enhancing inter-institutional trust
		Rotation of political elites
		Effective and inspiring leadership
		Support for elite theorists
	Professional Conduct	Understanding the qualifications of human capital
		Improving administrative health
		Enhancing decision-making transparency
		Media Transformation
Sharing critical information		
Media immunization of society		
Democratization of emotions		
Political Media Literacy	Interactive polling	
	Media literacy for parties and political organizations	
	Engaging in the competitor's arena	
	Taking positions on controversial issues	
Fear-Based Cultural Strategy	Fear of Ambiguity	Psychological hostage-taking
		Fear and humiliation tactics
		Stressful work-life situations
		Management of social stressors
	Negative Emotion	Emotional bias
		Reinforcement of negative emotions
		Avoidance-based blame
		Conflict management in organizations

These strategies highlight how shadow leadership sustains itself through social mobilization, elite dominance, media influence, and fear-based tactics. By shaping the political and administrative landscape through these mechanisms, shadow



leadership structures gain resilience and adaptability, reinforcing their control within the Ministry of Water Resources. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the strategic dimensions of shadow leadership and its implications for governance and institutional dynamics.

Consequences are the outcomes resulting from the applied strategies. They encompass both intended and unintended effects, manifesting as events or developments that may be positive or negative, explicit or implicit, and immediate or long-term. Some consequences that emerge at a given point in time may later transform into conditions that shape future actions and reactions. In the case of shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, the key consequences identified include interaction development, leadership efficiency, participation, controllability, and leadership performance improvement.

One of the most significant outcomes observed is the development of interactions within the organizational and political landscape. This is characterized by a stable interaction framework, which fosters an increased level of engagement and trust-based relationships. The presence of common interests among different stakeholders promotes the acceptance of collaborative interactions and a better understanding of shared benefits, further reinforcing social and political cohesion.

Table 6. Axial Coding of Qualitative Data (Consequences)

Axial Coding	Secondary Coding	Open Coding
Interaction Development	Stable Interaction	Increased level of interaction Strengthening trust-based engagement
	Common Interests	Acceptance of the necessity for collaboration Recognition of mutual benefits
Leadership Efficiency	Leader's Power	Ability to manage complexities Balancing structural power dynamics
	Effective Leadership	Political and ideological influence Increased efficiency of governance and leadership systems
Participation	Social Responsibility	Voluntary expression of ideas Strengthening a sense of responsibility
	Psychological Security	Reinforcement of security perceptions Enhancement of hope and optimism
Controllability	Political Control	Authority in decision-making Strict self-regulation Synergizing humility-based indicators Authoritarian leadership style Power distance increase
	Presence Awareness	Fear among subordinates Obedience and compliance with leadership directives Strengthening in-group loyalty
Leadership Performance Improvement	Effective Performance	Increased transparency Stability in decision-making Enhancement of hopefulness Strengthening power networks Improvement in organizational awareness Increased leadership popularity Expansion of leadership influence
	Aligned Followers	Reduction of perceptual dissonance Development of a shared vision Increased follower adherence

These findings highlight the multifaceted impact of shadow leadership within Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources. On the one hand, it fosters stronger political interactions, enhances leadership effectiveness, and encourages participation. However, it also promotes authoritarian control mechanisms, power distance, and a climate of fear among subordinates. Additionally, leadership performance improves in terms of transparency, decision stability, and strategic influence, further solidifying the role of shadow leadership in governance.

This analysis provides a structured understanding of how shadow leadership shapes organizational and political structures, offering insights into its long-term implications for governance and institutional stability within the ministry.

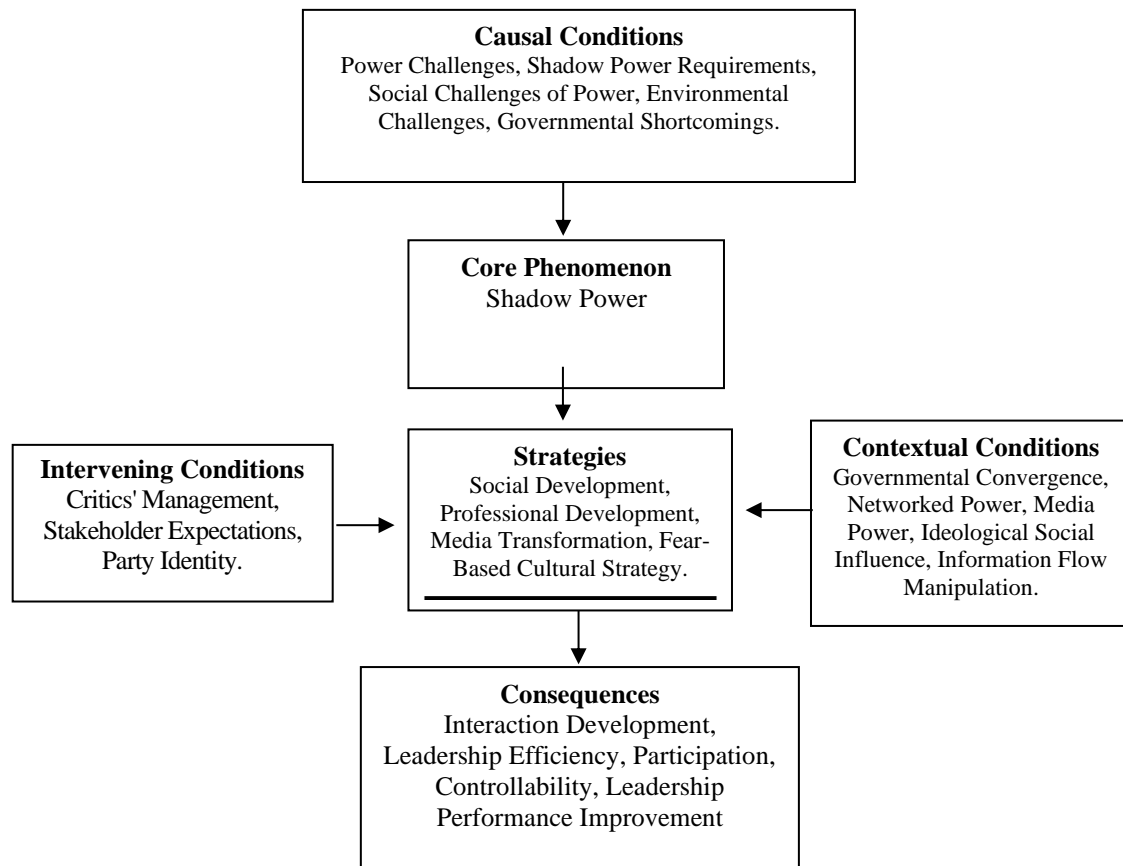


Figure 1. Final Model of The Study

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a detailed understanding of shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, offering insights into its emergence, mechanisms, and consequences. The core phenomenon identified in this study is shadow power, which includes hidden networks of influence, informal decision-making processes, and covert leadership strategies that shape governance and policy outcomes. The results indicate that shadow leadership is driven by various causal conditions, including political instability, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and informal power struggles, which create a fertile ground for alternative leadership structures. Additionally, the study highlights the role of contextual conditions, such as media influence, governmental convergence, and ideological power, in reinforcing shadow leadership mechanisms. Intervening conditions, such as stakeholder expectations and political partisanship, further shape the strategies employed by shadow leaders, which include network building, strategic political maneuvering, and leveraging hidden influence. The outcomes of shadow leadership manifest in both positive and negative ways, influencing leadership effectiveness, participation, governance transparency, and organizational stability.

One of the key findings of this study is the dual nature of shadow leadership, which can either serve as a corrective mechanism for bureaucratic inefficiencies or exacerbate corruption and political manipulation. On one hand, shadow leadership enables decision-making in highly bureaucratic environments where rigid hierarchies slow down administrative processes. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the role of informal leadership in facilitating organizational efficiency and decision-making agility (Evans & Jovanović, 2016). On the other hand, shadow leadership can contribute to power concentration, a lack of transparency, and the suppression of dissenting voices, reinforcing autocratic tendencies within institutions (Walker & Watkins, 2020). This complexity underscores the importance of understanding shadow leadership not simply as a deviation from formal leadership but as a parallel system that operates within and alongside official structures (Chappell et al., 2019).

The study also reveals that power dynamics in shadow leadership are shaped by both political and psychological factors. The results indicate that shadow leaders leverage political instability and governmental shortcomings to consolidate informal



influence, which is consistent with research on how political crises create opportunities for informal leadership structures to emerge (Steinecke, 2022). The psychological dimension of shadow leadership is evident in the way leaders maintain control through fear, secrecy, and psychological manipulation, reflecting findings on the dark side of leadership and its impact on employee well-being and organizational culture (Bullemore Campbell, 2024). This aligns with Jungian perspectives on the shadow archetype, which emphasize the hidden, repressed aspects of leadership that influence behavior at both individual and collective levels (Perry & Tower, 2023).

Another significant finding is the role of media in shaping shadow leadership strategies. The results suggest that shadow leaders utilize media tools, digital platforms, and information control to manipulate public opinion and strengthen their influence. This finding is supported by research on how modern leadership is increasingly mediated through digital communication, where informal power brokers use media to shape political and organizational narratives (Hallinger, 2018). Moreover, the study highlights the importance of ideological narratives in sustaining shadow leadership, showing that leaders often rely on identity politics and ideological polarization to secure their position. This is consistent with studies demonstrating how political and ideological framing contribute to the persistence of informal power structures in governance (Cunliffe, 2023).

The results also indicate that stakeholder expectations and political partisanship play a crucial role in reinforcing shadow leadership. The study finds that stakeholders—ranging from government officials to political elites—actively participate in shaping and legitimizing shadow leadership structures. This is aligned with research emphasizing the reciprocal nature of power, where leaders and stakeholders engage in mutual influence processes that determine leadership sustainability (Avolio et al., 2022). Furthermore, the findings suggest that political partisanship deepens shadow leadership mechanisms by fostering an "us vs. them" mentality, which consolidates power within specific political factions. This reflects prior studies on how partisan alignment influences leadership decisions and governance dynamics (Rangriz & Khomehchi, 2021).

An important aspect of shadow leadership revealed in this study is its impact on governance effectiveness and institutional control. The findings suggest that shadow leadership can enhance control mechanisms, ensuring organizational stability and continuity in times of crisis. This supports research showing that informal leadership networks often compensate for institutional gaps, ensuring decision-making continuity (Rezaeian et al., 2022). However, the study also highlights the negative implications of shadow leadership, particularly in fostering authoritarian governance, reducing accountability, and increasing power concentration. This aligns with research on how shadow governance structures contribute to political corruption and institutional inefficiencies (Dehdast, 2022).

One of the most critical consequences identified in this study is the impact of shadow leadership on leadership performance and employee behavior. The findings reveal that shadow leaders enhance decision-making authority and strategic control, but at the cost of transparency and inclusivity. Employees often experience psychological insecurity, fear, and reduced autonomy, as shadow leadership relies on hierarchical dominance and power distance. These findings align with previous studies on how informal leadership structures can create workplace stress, limit participation, and reinforce authoritarian leadership models (Zwingmann et al., 2016). Moreover, the study indicates that followers of shadow leaders tend to align with the leader's vision, reducing cognitive dissonance and reinforcing ideological loyalty, which is consistent with research on how leader-follower dynamics shape perceptions of authority and legitimacy (Ali Mohammadi et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to a comprehensive understanding of shadow leadership as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The study confirms that shadow leadership is deeply embedded in the political and organizational structures of government institutions, influencing governance, decision-making, and institutional stability. By integrating perspectives from political science, psychology, and organizational studies, this research provides a holistic view of how shadow leadership operates, its mechanisms of influence, and its long-term implications for governance and leadership.

While this study provides valuable insights into shadow leadership in Iraq's Ministry of Water Resources, it is subject to certain limitations. First, the study primarily relies on qualitative data, which, while rich in depth, may lack generalizability to other governmental institutions or contexts. The findings reflect the specific political, cultural, and bureaucratic environment of Iraq, which may differ from leadership dynamics in other regions. Second, the study's reliance on expert interviews may introduce response biases, as participants may shape their narratives based on personal experiences or organizational positions.



Additionally, the study does not incorporate quantitative measures to systematically assess the extent of shadow leadership's influence on institutional performance.

Future research should consider employing a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data to enhance the robustness of findings. Surveys, experiments, or network analysis methods could provide empirical validation of shadow leadership structures and their impact on governance performance. Additionally, future studies should expand the scope of research beyond a single ministry, comparing shadow leadership dynamics across different government institutions to assess variations in leadership influence. Moreover, examining the role of digital transformation and artificial intelligence in shaping shadow leadership strategies could provide insights into how modern technologies impact informal power structures in governance.

For policymakers and government administrators, enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms is crucial in mitigating the negative effects of shadow leadership. Establishing clear governance frameworks, oversight mechanisms, and institutional checks and balances can help prevent power concentration and hidden influence. Additionally, fostering a culture of ethical leadership and participatory decision-making can reduce the need for shadow leadership structures, ensuring that leadership is based on merit and democratic principles. Training programs focused on ethical leadership, governance reforms, and organizational transparency could further strengthen institutional integrity and reduce reliance on informal power networks.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

Acknowledgments

Authors thank all participants who participate in this study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding/Financial Support

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

References

- Alho, P. (2020). *A Jungian Theory of Mind: Individuality, lost, gained, and transcended*. https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/177125/alho_paivi.pdf
- Ali Mohammadi, S., Salehi, M., Ahmadi, E., & Amirian Zadeh, M. (2021). Development and Evaluation of an Ethical Leadership Model in the Fars Province Education Organization: A Mixed Approach. *Journal of Management in Educational Organizations*, 10(2), 13-50. <https://journalieaa.ir/article-1-217-en.html>
- Allen, C. (2020). *Carl Jung*. <https://doi.org/10.15760/pdxopen-25>
- Avolio, B. J., Keng-Highberger, F. T., Lord, R. G., Hannah, S. T., Schaubroeck, J. M., & Kozlowski, S. W. (2022). How leader and follower prototypical and antitypical attributes influence ratings of transformational leadership in an extreme context. *Human Relations*, 75(3), 441-474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726720958040>
- Bandeh Moradi, S., & Zangoei Pour Motlaq, Z. (2022). Meta-Synthesis of the Role of Ethical Leadership in Education. *Applied Educational Leadership*. https://pbeo.uma.ac.ir/article_2498.html?lang=en
- Bullemore Campbell, J. (2024). Unveiling the Shadow: Theorizing the Impact of Narcissistic Leadership on Sales Teams. *International Review of Management and Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.32479/irmm.15991>
- Chappell, S., Cooper, E., & Trippe, G. (2019). Shadow work for leadership development. *Journal of Management Development*, 38(5), 326-335. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-08-2018-0216>
- Cunliffe, R. (2023). The Tories are split into three camps and a shadow leadership contest is under way. *New Statesman*, 152(5746), 19-20. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk-politics/2023/12/the-tories-are-split-into-three-camps-and-a-shadow-leadership-contest-is-under-way>
- de Haan, E. (2016). The leadership shadow: How to recognise and avoid derailment, hubris and overdrive. *Leadership*, 12(4), 504-512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715015572526>
- Dehdast, N. (2022). Examination and Identification of Power Components in Organizations (With an Emphasis on Leadership Power). *Afaq-e Oloum-e Ensani (Horizons of Human Sciences)*, 62(6), 1-17. <https://en.civilica.com/doc/1879942/>



- Evans, M., & Jovanović, M. (2016). Shadow leadership. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology* (pp. 275-293). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Freysson, E. (2020). *The hidden side of the soul: how the shadow archetype relates to human evil* <https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/37608/1/The%20Hidden%20Side%20of%20the%20Soul%20-%20Eli%20Freysson.pdf>
- Gamil, T., Fanos, N., & Ameen, M. (2022). The Role of Ethical Leadership in the Work Environment to Empower Workers by Applying to Private Institutes of the Ministry of Higher Education. *Journal of Environmental Science*, 51(12), 19-34. https://jes.journals.ekb.eg/article_301572.html
- Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(1), 5-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670652>
- Mahmoud, A. N. (2023). The Impact of Ethical Leadership on Educational Excellence Among Kindergarten Teachers in Public Schools Affiliated with the Ministry of Education in Jordan. *Dirasat: Educational Sciences*, 50(2), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.35516/edu.v50i2.4686>
- Noori, S. R., Malekzadeh, G., Rahimnia, F., & Khorakian, A. (2023). Explanation of Ethical Leadership Components in the Defense Industries Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Qualitative Approach. *Public Management Research*, 16(59), 31-58. https://jmr.usb.ac.ir/article_7681.html?lang=en
- Parsakia, K., Kazemi, S., & Saberi, S. (2023). Strategic Management of Technology in Psychology: Implications for Decision-Making. *Health Nexus*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.hn.1.3.12>
- Perry, C., & Tower, R. E. (2023). Jung's Shadow Concept: The Hidden Light and Darkness Within Ourselves. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003255819>
- Rangriz, H., & Khomehchi, H. (2021). Meta-Analysis of the Consequences of Ethical Leadership. *Ethics in Science and Technology*, 17(2), 51-55. <https://ethicsjournal.ir/article-1-2666-en.html>
- Rezaeian, A., Abedi-Jafari, H., Lotfi, A., & Yousefi, M. (2022). Typology of Power and Mechanisms of Leader Influence from the Perspective of the Quran. *Quran and Science Studies*, 12(6), 8-40. https://journals.miu.ac.ir/article_7926.html?lang=en
- Soltani-Fard, A. R., Mohammaddavoodi, A. H., & Qorchiian, N. (2023). Presenting a Model for Enhancing Ethical Leadership in the Central Management of the Ministry of Education. *Educational Leadership and Management*, 17(1), 30-57. https://journals.iau.ir/article_701995.html
- Steinecke, D. (2022). Shadows as leaders? The amendment success of shadow rapporteurs in the European Parliament. *European Union Politics*, 23(4), 700-720. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165221121739>
- Walker, S., & Watkins, D. (2020). Shadows of leadership: The lived experiences of oppressed followers of toxic leaders. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.33423/jlae.v17i2.2872>
- Zwingmann, I., Wolf, S., & Richter, P. (2016). Every light has its shadow: A longitudinal study of transformational leadership and leaders' emotional exhaustion. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 46(1), 19-33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12352>

