

Leadership shadow model: what is it and how can I cast a positive leadership shadow?

Everyone has heard the phrase ‘lead by example’, but what does this mean? And why is it important? A shadow leader is a type of leader who has an influential management style, which can significantly impact the attitudes and morale of people within their team. This article discusses what a leadership shadow is, the impact that your leadership shadow can have on your employees, and how you can work to cast a positive leadership shadow.

What is a leadership shadow?

Shadow leaders have influential management styles. This means that their actions and behaviours can significantly impact the teams they lead and their morale.

Your leadership shadow is comprised of four main components: what you say, how you act, how you measure, and what you prioritise. Understanding the shadow that you cast as a leader forms an important part of becoming a better and more influential leader, as the shadow you cast undoubtedly affects the culture that is created in the workplace.

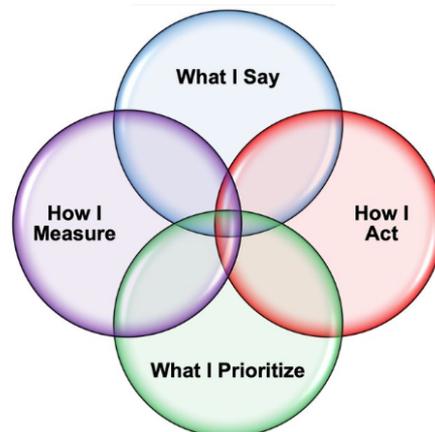


Image 1: Diagram of the leadership shadow model¹

What impact can your leadership shadow have on employees?

Having a positive leadership shadow can positively affect employees. Firstly, it can boost morale, so employees will feel more confident and optimistic coming to work and are more likely to find meaning in the work that they are doing.

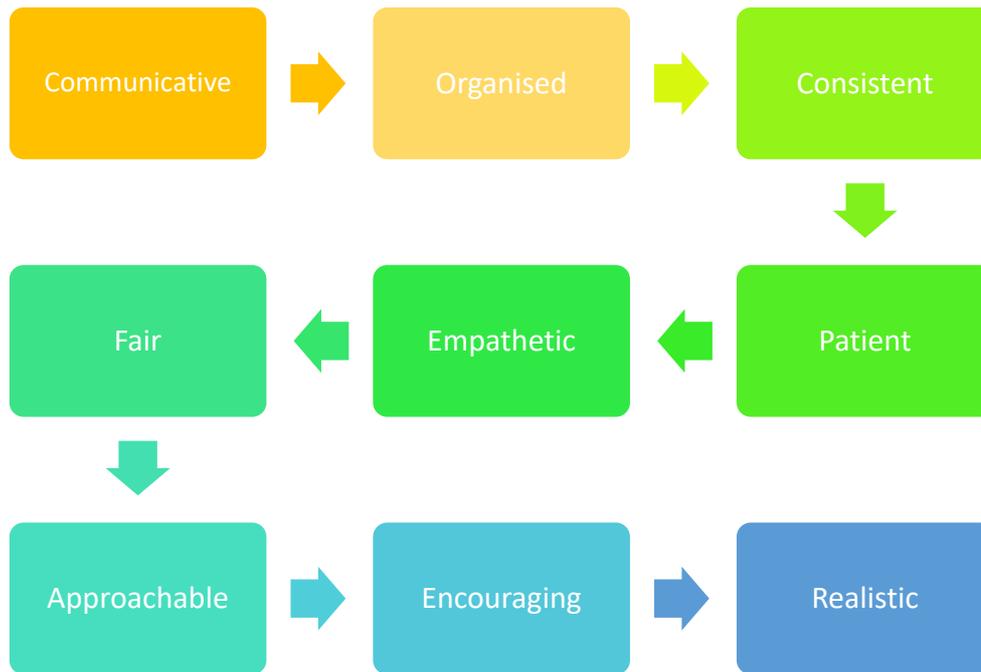
It can also increase productivity and motivation, which can lead to a more efficient workforce, who are more likely to meet targets and complete work to a high standard.

¹ Leadership shadow, <https://www.thefivecoatconsultinggroup.com/the-coronavirus-crisis/leadership-shadow>

Finally, having a leader who casts a positive leadership shadow can create a more cohesive team unit, enabling people to work better together and in an environment where they feel safe and free to be themselves.

What are the qualities of a shadow leader?²³

A shadow leader possesses many qualities that demonstrate their management style and allows them to have a positive influence on their teams. Here are a few of these qualities and what they might mean in a leadership context:



- **Communicative** – keep employees in the loop, don't make decisions without them, listen to them when they voice their opinions or concerns and take them on board.
- **Organised** – remain organised and have the resources they need to succeed.
- **Consistent** – consistency is key, employees need to be comfortable and confident that they won't face a different reaction depending on the situation, and that they can trust their manager to respond in a positive way.
- **Patient** – do not get frustrated quickly in stressful situations, remain calm and help employees solve problems rather than getting frustrated.
- **Empathetic** – understand employee experiences, what might affect them at work, and how they may be supported.
- **Fair** – be inclusive of all their employees, regardless of any of their differences. Approach things from an objective perspective.
- **Approachable** – create a safe environment where employees can talk to their manager about problems or concerns without worrying about repercussions.

² Indeed (2022), 21 Shadow Leader Traits (and how they can make you a good leader), <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/shadow-leader-traits>

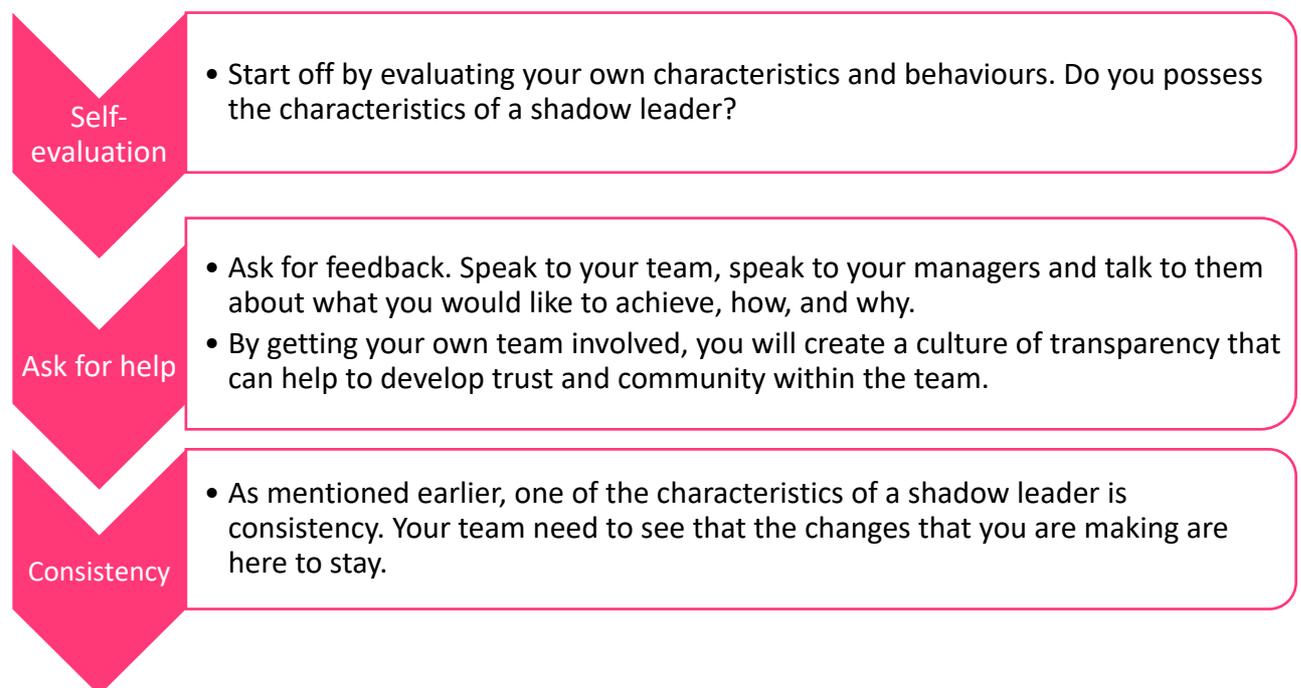
³ Seven Institute (NO YEAR), <https://www.seveninstitute.co.uk/courses/leadership-and-management/20-qualities-of-shadow-leader.html>

- **Encouraging** – encourage employees, highlight their skills and successes, and boost their confidence in their work.
- **Realistic** – don't put unrealistic expectations on your employees or unreasonably increase their workload.

How can you cast a positive leadership shadow?⁴⁵

Now that you know the potential impact of having a positive leadership shadow, you may be wondering how to improve yours.

To work on casting your own positive leadership shadow, you can start with the following steps:



⁴ Intact Teams (2021), Your leadership shadow – why it is important to create it with intention, <https://www.intactteams.com/your-leadership-shadow-why-it-is-important-to-create-it-with-intention/>

⁵ Indeed (2023), What is a leadership shadow? (With steps to improve it), <https://au.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/leadership-shadow>