Future of Work and Digital Management Journal

Article type:
Original Research

Article history:
Received 06 May 2026
Revised 26 June 2026
Accepted 12 August 2026
Published online 01 September 2026

Mahboubeh. Esmaeilpour[1], Reza. Verij Kazemi[1*], Mahnaz. Rahmati Kazaz[1], Davood. KiaKojouri[1]

1 Department of Management, Cha.C., Islamic Azad University, Chalus, Iran

Corresponding author email address:
rezakazemi@iau.ac.ir

How to cite this article:
Esmaeilpour, M., Verij Kazemi, R., Rahmati Kazaz, M., & KiaKojouri, D. (2026). Designing a Model of Dead Organizations in Iran's Public Sector. *Future of Work and Digital Management Journal, 4*(5), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.61838/fwdmj.410

© 2026 the authors. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

Designing a Model of Dead Organizations in Iran's Public Sector

ABSTRACT

Dead organizations in the public sector are organizations that, despite possessing formal structures, financial resources, and continuity of administrative operations, have lost their intellectual dynamism, creativity, and capacity for innovation. The present study aimed to design a model of dead organizations in Iran's public sector, with a focus on the death of creativity, innovation, and organizational dynamism. In terms of purpose, this study was applied, and in terms of methodology, it was descriptive–analytical. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis and the classical Delphi technique were employed across three consecutive rounds. The study population consisted of experts and scholars in the fields of public administration, strategic management, organizational behavior, and the national administrative system. Using purposive sampling based on relevant expertise and experience criteria, 15 individuals were selected as members of the expert panel. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and were coded using thematic analysis and classified into basic, organizing, and global themes. Subsequently, the extracted themes were evaluated during three rounds of the classical Delphi process in terms of importance, clarity, comprehensiveness, and relevance to the public-sector context. Following revisions, integration, and elimination of themes, the final research model was developed. The findings led to the identification of five global themes: institutionalized corruption and the diversion of resources away from creativity and idea generation; path dependence and resistance to innovation; cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of motivation, curiosity, and creative talent; managerial superiority illusion and closed-mindedness toward initiative and innovation; and learning avoidance, imitation orientation, and obstruction of knowledge flow. The results indicate that dead organizations in Iran's public sector can be explained through a set of institutional, managerial, behavioral, and learning-oriented mechanisms that weaken creativity, innovation, and organizational dynamism. The final research model can provide a conceptual framework for identifying and diagnosing dead organizations in Iran's public sector.

Keywords: dead organizations, Iran's public sector, thematic analysis, classical Delphi, organizational death, creativity and innovation.

Introduction

Organizations are generally conceptualized as dynamic social systems whose survival depends on their capacity to adapt, learn, renew resources, respond to environmental pressures, and continuously reconstruct their internal capabilities. However, the mere continuation of formal structures, administrative procedures, budgets, personnel systems, and reporting routines does not necessarily indicate organizational vitality. In many cases, organizations may remain legally and administratively active while progressively losing the intellectual, behavioral, and strategic capacities required for meaningful performance, innovation, and renewal. This distinction is particularly important in the public sector, where organizational continuity may be protected by law, governmental financing, institutional mandates, and political support, even when the organization has ceased to generate new ideas, learn from its environment, or respond effectively to emerging problems. Research on organizational decline has increasingly emphasized that deterioration is not always manifested in immediate

dissolution; rather, it may emerge as a gradual erosion of capabilities, legitimacy, learning, strategic responsiveness, and leadership effectiveness [1]. Studies of organizational mortality similarly demonstrate that organizational survival is influenced not only by resource availability but also by the quality of financial management, governance, and adaptive capacity [2, 3]. From this perspective, an organization may remain formally alive while becoming functionally inert, creating the conceptual basis for examining what may be described as a "dead organization."

The notion of organizational death has traditionally been associated with formal closure, bankruptcy, dissolution, termination of activities, or the disappearance of an organizational entity. Yet recent organizational research has complicated this binary distinction between life and death by demonstrating that organizational death can be socially, psychologically, and institutionally ambiguous. Organizations may continue to shape identities, relationships, memories, routines, and professional priorities even after formal termination, while organizations that remain formally active may exhibit symptoms conventionally associated with decline and death. Studies of post-death organizing, for example, show that organizational attachments, alumni networks, symbolic memories, and organizational "ghosts" can persist long after formal closure [4]. Likewise, research on lingering identity attachments and grief following organizational death has demonstrated that organizational identities may survive materially and psychologically beyond the end of formal organizational existence [5]. The revival of "revenant organizations" further illustrates that organizational death is not necessarily irreversible and that dormant identities, structures, or symbols may be reactivated under certain conditions [6]. Comparable insights can be found in research on the resurrection of dead brands, which demonstrates that entities perceived as commercially or institutionally obsolete can sometimes be revived through changes in meaning, positioning, and stakeholder engagement [7]. These perspectives suggest that organizational death should not be understood solely as a legal event but also as a condition involving the erosion of organizational vitality, identity, learning, creativity, and adaptive functioning.

This distinction is especially relevant to government organizations because public agencies are often institutionally protected from the conventional market mechanisms that eliminate ineffective private organizations. Central state bureaucracies can survive major performance failures, structural inefficiencies, declining legitimacy, and repeated reform initiatives because their continuity is linked to statutory responsibilities, political authority, and public financing. Cross-national evidence on central state bureaucracies demonstrates that organizations can exist in states "between life and death," experiencing substantial restructuring, absorption, reconfiguration, or loss of autonomy without necessarily disappearing altogether [8]. Public organizations may therefore persist despite deep internal dysfunction, making the diagnosis of organizational vitality particularly difficult. Government organizations are expected to implement public policies, allocate collective resources, provide services, coordinate institutional actors, and maintain public accountability. Their effectiveness depends not merely on the existence of administrative structures but on their capacity to renew processes, respond to societal needs, develop competencies, and adapt to new environmental challenges [9]. In the Iranian public sector, this issue acquires additional importance because administrative transformation has long been linked to concerns regarding organizational improvement, bureaucratic efficiency, institutional responsiveness, and the modernization of governmental structures [10]. From this standpoint, the concept of a dead organization can offer a potentially valuable analytical lens for identifying organizations that continue to operate administratively while losing their substantive capacity for innovation, creativity, learning, and transformation.

Organizational transformation constitutes one of the principal mechanisms through which organizations attempt to avoid stagnation and decline. Transformation involves more than incremental adjustment; it often requires fundamental changes in organizational structures, strategies, processes, technologies, cultures, and patterns of managerial behavior [11]. Failure to undertake such transformation can gradually weaken the alignment between the organization and its environment, producing strategic inertia, declining performance, and reduced institutional relevance. Research on organizational failure emphasizes that organizations frequently deteriorate because they fail to recognize the need for transformation, underestimate environmental change, or reproduce ineffective routines long after those routines have lost their functional value [12]. Conversely, organizational change is increasingly understood as a multidimensional process affected by structural design, leadership, organizational culture, stakeholder relations, and institutional context [13]. Contemporary studies also show that organizational restructuring, when combined with advanced digital technologies, can increase innovation by improving integration, responsiveness, information processing, and the coordination of organizational capabilities [14]. Similarly, digital transformation may strengthen organizational resilience by enabling organizations to adapt their routines, upgrade capabilities, and respond more rapidly to disruption [15]. Thus, organizations that systematically resist transformation and technological or structural renewal may progressively move toward functional stagnation even when formal continuity is maintained.

Resistance to change is therefore a central mechanism in understanding organizational decline and the emergence of organizational deadness. Change initiatives frequently encounter cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and structural resistance because organizational members perceive transformation as a threat to established roles, identities, interests, competencies, or power relations [16]. Resistance may also be deeply embedded in habitual organizational routines and psychological schemas that encourage individuals and managers to reproduce familiar patterns rather than experiment with uncertain alternatives [17]. Over time, this tendency can produce path dependence, in which historical decisions and entrenched routines constrain the organization's capacity to consider novel solutions. An organization may thus become increasingly committed to ineffective procedures merely because they are familiar, institutionally accepted, or politically safe. Such resistance is particularly destructive when organizational environments require innovation, experimentation, and rapid adjustment. Research on resilience emphasizes that the capacity to respond constructively to uncertainty and failure is critical for organizational renewal [18]. When failure is interpreted solely as a threat rather than as a source of learning, managers and employees may avoid experimentation, restrict creative risk-taking, and reinforce routines that preserve apparent stability. Consequently, an organization may maintain operational continuity while gradually losing the capacity to create, adapt, and regenerate itself.

Creativity and innovation are among the clearest indicators of organizational vitality because they allow organizations to generate new knowledge, redesign processes, solve emerging problems, and escape dysfunctional routines. Organizational structures that support autonomy, interaction, flexibility, and employee engagement can contribute to creativity and ultimately improve job performance [19]. In contrast, rigid and highly centralized structures can inhibit the exchange of ideas, constrain initiative, and reduce opportunities for experimentation. Organizational learning and innovation culture are similarly central to sustainable transformation because they create mechanisms through which organizations identify deficiencies, absorb external knowledge, develop new solutions, and institutionalize successful practices [20]. In public organizations, innovation is particularly dependent on leadership because managers influence whether experimentation is

encouraged, whether errors become learning opportunities, and whether employees feel able to challenge established assumptions [21]. Leadership can therefore either revitalize organizational creativity or contribute to its suppression. When managers systematically discourage independent thinking, perceive criticism as insubordination, and favor conformity over exploration, the organization may lose precisely those human capacities required for renewal. In this sense, the “death” of an organization may begin not with the loss of budgets or personnel but with the death of curiosity, initiative, questioning, and creative engagement among organizational members.

Leadership pathologies can intensify this process. One particularly relevant phenomenon is leadership hubris, in which managers develop exaggerated confidence in their own judgment, perceive themselves as superior to others, and become less receptive to alternative viewpoints. Research in public organizations indicates that leadership hubris can have substantial antecedents and consequences, influencing decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and organizational outcomes [22]. Such managerial superiority illusions may create cognitive closure by limiting the organization’s willingness to seek external knowledge, acknowledge errors, or learn from more successful organizations. In addition, public administrative systems may be affected by politicization, particularly where managerial selection, administrative decisions, and institutional priorities are shaped by political considerations rather than professional competence [23]. Politicization can weaken merit-based governance, distort organizational priorities, and reduce the autonomy required for administrative learning and innovation. At a broader institutional level, leadership and representation may also become politicized in ways that complicate revitalization efforts, as illustrated in research on leadership within international public institutions [24]. Therefore, the problem of organizational deadness cannot be reduced to technical inefficiency; it may be rooted in leadership cognition, power relations, politicized administration, and organizational cultures that systematically obstruct critical reflection and independent initiative.

The quality of human resource systems is equally important because organizational renewal depends on the selection, development, retention, and succession of competent employees and managers. Competency-based succession systems can strengthen organizational continuity by ensuring that future leaders possess the knowledge, capabilities, and behavioral characteristics required for organizational development [25]. In contrast, organizations that reward loyalty, conformity, personal proximity, or political alignment over competence may gradually weaken their human capital. Organizational cronyism is especially damaging because preferential treatment based on personal relationships can generate employee disidentification, psychological withdrawal, and reduced commitment [26]. When capable employees perceive that advancement is disconnected from competence and performance, they may disengage, self-censor, reduce discretionary effort, or leave the organization. Such dynamics contribute to the cultivation of mediocrity, whereby managers surround themselves with individuals who do not challenge established practices and who pose little threat to existing power structures. Over time, the elimination or marginalization of critical and creative employees can destroy organizational curiosity and suppress the generation of new ideas. This mechanism is particularly important for conceptualizing dead organizations because formal staffing levels may remain unchanged while the substantive quality of participation, motivation, and intellectual contribution deteriorates.

Corruption and the diversion of organizational resources constitute another mechanism through which organizations can lose vitality. When resources are allocated on the basis of personal interests, informal networks, rent-seeking, or favoritism rather than organizational missions, innovation and value creation are progressively marginalized. Cronyism not only

influences employee attitudes but also alters the distribution of opportunities, recognition, and access to organizational resources [26]. In public organizations, such patterns can become institutionalized when repeated informal practices are normalized and gradually embedded in decision-making routines. The organization may then preserve formal procedures while its real operational logic shifts toward protecting interests, distributing rents, and maintaining internal coalitions. This divergence between formal mission and actual practice can produce what may be described as mission erosion. Organizational resources continue to exist, but their capacity to support innovation, public value, and problem-solving is weakened. Studies of organizational decline repeatedly emphasize that leadership and governance mechanisms shape whether organizations respond constructively to deterioration or accelerate it through defensive behavior and short-term interest protection [1]. Accordingly, institutionalized corruption can be understood not merely as an ethical problem but as a mechanism that diverts resources away from creative and developmental functions and thereby contributes directly to organizational deadness.

Learning avoidance represents an additional and potentially decisive dimension of organizational death. Learning organizations continuously compare their practices with external standards, evaluate failures, engage with new knowledge, and adapt successful experiences to their own context. By contrast, stagnant organizations may become increasingly inward-looking and isolated from environmental signals. They may avoid benchmarking, ignore external evidence, reject comparative experience, and rely excessively on internal traditions. This creates information barriers that progressively disconnect the organization from new ideas and innovative practices. The consequences are cumulative: reduced external learning reinforces cognitive rigidity, which strengthens resistance to change, which in turn further limits opportunities for innovation. Organizational transformation research consistently emphasizes the importance of learning cultures in supporting change and innovation [20], while digital transformation studies demonstrate that access to new technologies and information can significantly enhance organizational adaptability and resilience [14, 15]. Therefore, the absence of learning should not be treated as a passive deficiency. It can actively reproduce stagnation by preventing organizations from recognizing their performance gaps or imagining alternative futures.

The psychological consequences of organizational decline also deserve attention because employees experience organizational deterioration not only as a structural phenomenon but as a change in meaning, identity, and work priorities. Evidence suggests that organizational death can influence employee priorities and that individual attachment patterns shape how people respond to perceived organizational endings [27]. Employees may disengage psychologically before an organization formally collapses, particularly when they perceive that their organization has lost direction, legitimacy, or developmental prospects. This psychological withdrawal is closely related to disidentification and reduced organizational attachment, especially in environments characterized by favoritism or cronyism [26]. The concept of organizational death therefore has both structural and psychological dimensions. At the structural level, the organization may lose adaptive capabilities, innovation mechanisms, and effective governance. At the psychological level, employees may lose curiosity, meaning, motivation, and willingness to contribute. These dimensions can reinforce one another: declining organizational vitality reduces employee engagement, while reduced engagement further weakens the organization’s capacity for renewal.

Taken together, the literature suggests that organizational death in the public sector should be viewed as a multidimensional process rather than a single terminal event. It may involve institutionalized corruption, mission erosion, leadership hubris, politicization, path dependence, resistance to change, suppression of creativity, ineffective human

resource practices, declining employee identification, learning avoidance, and obstruction of knowledge flows. At the same time, research on organizational revitalization demonstrates that deterioration is not necessarily irreversible. Organizations can be renewed through structural transformation, technological upgrading, innovation-oriented leadership, competency development, learning systems, and deliberate efforts to rebuild resilience [11, 13, 18]. Studies of organizational resurrection and post-death organizing similarly indicate that organizational identities and capabilities can sometimes be reconstructed after severe decline [4-7]. However, effective revitalization requires an accurate diagnosis of the mechanisms that have produced stagnation in the first place. Without such a diagnostic model, reform initiatives may remain superficial, focusing on structural charts, formal procedures, or temporary administrative interventions while leaving the deeper institutional, behavioral, and cognitive causes of organizational deadness unchanged.

Despite the growing body of research on organizational decline, mortality, transformation, resilience, leadership, innovation, and organizational change, there remains a conceptual gap in explaining organizations that persist formally while becoming functionally depleted. Existing studies often examine organizational mortality as closure or dissolution [2, 3], organizational transformation as a response to changing environments [12, 13], and innovation or resilience as mechanisms of renewal [14, 15]. Other studies focus on leadership, public-sector innovation, human resource competence, or administrative improvement as separate domains [10, 21, 25]. What remains less developed is an integrated conceptualization of organizational deadness that captures the simultaneous presence of formal continuity and substantive decline in creativity, innovation, learning, motivation, and adaptive capacity. This gap is particularly significant in the Iranian public sector, where organizations may continue to operate within stable institutional and budgetary frameworks even when their internal creative and learning mechanisms have become severely weakened. Accordingly, the present study aims to design and validate a model of dead organizations in Iran's public sector by identifying the institutional, managerial, behavioral, and learning-related mechanisms that contribute to the death of organizational creativity, innovation, and dynamism.

Methodology

In terms of purpose, this study was applied, and in terms of orientation and nature, it was descriptive–analytical with a qualitative approach. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was employed to identify, conceptualize, and extract the dimensions, components, and indicators of the phenomenon of dead organizations. The statistical population of this phase consisted of experts and scholars in public administration, strategic management, public policymaking, organizational behavior, and experienced senior managers within the national administrative system. Using judgmental purposive sampling and based on the principle of theoretical saturation, 15 qualified experts were selected as panel members. Eligibility criteria included holding a doctoral degree, having at least 15 years of scientific–research or senior-level executive management experience, and possessing specialized experience in the diagnosis and transformation of the administrative system.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Experts

Expert Code	Occupational / Organizational Position	Degree and Field of Study	Work Experience (Years)	Relevant Area of Expertise and Experience
E1	Associate Professor at a Public University	PhD in Public Administration (Policymaking)	19	Structural reform and diagnosis of governmental bureaucracy
E2	Full Professor at a Public University	PhD in Organizational Behavior Management	24	Organizational culture, behavioral inertia, and cognitive rigidity
E3	Associate Professor at a University	PhD in Human Resource Management	16	Human resource pathology and resistance to change
E4	Assistant Professor at a Public University	PhD in Strategic Management	13	Decline management, organizational life cycle, and strategic renewal
E5	Associate Professor at a University	PhD in Sociology of Organizations	18	Institutional theory and structural corruption in the public sector
E6	Deputy for Management Development and Resources at a Ministry	PhD in Public Administration	22	Process reengineering and regulations governing governmental structures
E7	Former Director General of Administrative Transformation and Productivity	Master's in Executive Management (EMBA)	26	Administrative system reform programs and national productivity
E8	Senior Consultant to the Administrative and Employment Organization	PhD in Systems Management	20	Organizational structure design and government agility
E9	Director General of Performance Management and Inspection	Master's in Public Administration	17	Monitoring organizational inefficiency and governmental oversight
E10	Head of the Administrative Modernization and Transformation Center	PhD in Public Administration (Decision-Making)	21	Leading modernization processes and organizational learning
E11	University Faculty Member	PhD in Public Administration (Development)	15	Public-sector policymaking and governance
E12	Senior Manager of State-Affiliated Companies	Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)	23	Crisis management, organizational stagnation, and structural reform
E13	Assistant Professor at the Institute for Management Studies	PhD in Organizational Behavior	12	Organizational indifference, innovation, and change management
E14	Strategic Transformation Consultant in the Public Sector	Master's in Industrial Management	19	Process diagnosis and organizational renewal
E15	Director General of Planning and Organizational Development	PhD in Strategic Management	18	Comprehensive planning and formulation of transformation strategies

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, and a network comprising basic, organizing, and global themes was developed through coding and thematic analysis. Subsequently, in order to screen and validate the findings and achieve systematic consensus, the fuzzy Delphi technique was implemented across three consecutive rounds. At each stage, the identified components were critically evaluated in terms of necessity, clarity, comprehensiveness, and compatibility with the public-sector context. By introducing revisions, integrating related elements, and eliminating items that failed to meet the statistical threshold, the final conceptual framework and model of dead organizations were formulated.

In the quantitative phase, structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), based on the partial least squares approach and using SMART-PLS 4 software, were employed to validate the model derived from the qualitative phase, test the hypotheses, and assess the fit of the relationships among the model constructs. The statistical population in this phase included managers, experts, and employees of selected executive agencies and governmental organizations across the country. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, a two-stage cluster–stratified sampling procedure was employed. In the first stage, the country was divided into five geographical regions—north, south, east, west, and center—and one province was randomly selected from each region. In the second stage, selected executive agencies and provincial governmental departments were identified within each province, and statistical samples were selected through simple random sampling. Based on Cochran's formula for an unlimited population, the required sample size was determined to be 384 participants. The quantitative data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire constructed on the

basis of the themes extracted during the qualitative phase and organized according to a five-point Likert scale. Face and content validity were assessed through consultation with members of the expert panel, while construct validity, including convergent and discriminant validity, together with the factor loadings of the items, was confirmed through structural equation modeling. Instrument reliability was also established through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). The results of confirmatory factor analysis and the model fit indices indicated satisfactory robustness of the measurement model and meaningful explanatory power regarding the dimensions, components, and mechanisms underlying the formation of dead organizations in Iran's public sector.

Findings and Results

In the first step of the qualitative phase, global, organizing, and basic themes were initially extracted using thematic analysis and expert interviews. In the second step, the Delphi process was conducted across three rounds to screen the extracted components and achieve expert consensus, resulting in the development of the preliminary research model. To screen the identified themes and items and ensure their importance and acceptability, the Delphi method was applied in three rounds. In all three rounds, the experts assessed the importance of the items, and the mean of their evaluations as well as the degree of disagreement among their views were examined. A summary of the results obtained from thematic analysis and the Delphi validation process is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Thematic Analysis and Delphi Results

Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme	Codes of Proposing Experts	Mean, Round 1	Mean, Round 2	Difference Between Experts' Opinions in Rounds 1 and 2	Mean, Round 3	Difference Between Experts' Opinions in Rounds 2 and 3
Institutionalized corruption and diversion of resources away from creativity and idea generation	Transformation of corruption into an organizational mechanism and routine practice	Embezzlement, document falsification, and misuse of resources as repetitive and accepted practices	E1, E5, E9	4.27	4.60	0.33	4.67	0.07
		Corruption extending beyond individual misconduct and becoming an organizational mechanism	E5, E9, E11, E12	3.80	4.33	0.53	4.47	0.13
		Pursuit of personal and group interests instead of allocating resources to innovation and new value creation	E2, E6, E7, E8, E10	4.13	4.40	0.27	4.47	0.07
		Normalization of corrupt behaviors such that creativity and innovative risk-taking are replaced by rent-seeking	E3, E13	3.33	4.20	0.87	4.33	0.13
	Organization serving individuals and internal groups instead of its creative mission	Prioritizing resources and opportunities for individual interests and close internal circles rather than innovative projects	E1, E2, E4, E7	4.20	4.53	0.33	4.67	0.13
		Marginalizing the core creative and innovative mission in favor of distributing benefits	E3, E10, E13	4.33	4.60	0.27	4.60	0.00
		Using organizational structures as instruments for distributing rents rather than platforms for idea creation	E4, E6, E8, E14	4.13	4.40	0.27	4.40	0.00
	Mission deviation and functional death of creativity (mission	Conversion of organizational resources into managers' personal resources and	E4, E12, E15	3.80	4.33	0.53	4.40	0.07

	deviation and erosion of the organization's creative identity)	disruption of resource flows toward innovation						
		Decision-making primarily aimed at preserving the status quo and existing positions rather than supporting new ideas	E1, E3, E5, E11	4.33	4.67	0.33	4.67	0.00
		Formal presence of all organizational elements—manager, employee, budget, regulations, and meetings—while the spirit of creativity and innovation has been depleted	E2, E3, E6, E9, E13	4.27	4.80	0.53	4.87	0.07
		Marginalization of the core mission and its transformation into a superficial shell devoid of creative dynamism	E2, E5	4.00	4.53	0.53	4.60	0.07
		Transformation of the organization into an environment in which creativity is effectively dead and only routines for preserving interests remain alive	E2, E10, E14	4.20	4.60	0.40	4.60	0.00
	Institutional deterioration and depletion of the organization's creative identity	Loss of identity, values, and the capacity to fulfill a creative and innovative mission	E1, E11, E15	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.47	0.07
		Transformation of organizational structure into a mechanism for distributing benefits instead of a platform for innovation	E8, E10, E14, E15	3.87	4.33	0.47	4.47	0.13
		Preservation of the institutional appearance while the internal institution becomes devoid of creativity and dynamism	E7, E12	3.87	4.40	0.53	4.47	0.07
	Impact of corruption on suppressing creative motivation and curiosity	Loss of individuals' motivation to propose new ideas because of the dominance of personal interests	E6, E7, E8, E10, E15	3.40	4.00	0.60	4.07	0.07
		Death of organizational curiosity because rent-seeking is prioritized over exploration and experimentation	E5, E9	3.80	4.60	0.80	4.60	0.00
		Transformation of the organization into an environment in which creativity is perceived as a threat	E1, E5, E11	4.13	4.60	0.47	4.60	0.00
		Disconnection between resources and genuine innovative activities	E2, E4, E7, E15	4.20	4.73	0.53	4.80	0.07
		Loss of individuals' motivation to propose and pursue new ideas because of the dominance of personal interests	—	—	4.53	4.53	4.67	0.13
		Death of organizational curiosity and the spirit of inquiry because rent-seeking is prioritized over exploration and experimentation	—	—	4.33	4.33	4.33	0.00
		Transformation of the organization into an environment devoid of creative energy and initiative in which creativity is perceived as a threat	—	—	4.60	4.60	4.60	0.00
Path dependence and resistance to innovation	Path dependence resulting from long-	Difficulty changing long-standing dysfunctional	E2, E3, E13	4.13	4.40	0.27	4.40	0.00

(fear of failure and risk-taking and resistance to innovation and transformational change)	standing dysfunctional routines	routines that have suppressed creativity						
		Organizational lock-in to repetitive and non-original paths	E6, E8, E14	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.40	0.00
		Structural resistance to new ideas because of the perceived costs of change	E4, E6, E7, E12	4.27	4.53	0.27	4.53	0.00
		Reproduction of the same non-creative patterns in decision-making and processes	E6, E8, E10, E14, E15	4.00	4.33	0.33	4.33	0.00
		Justification of the non-original status quo by referring to precedent and past experience	E3, E13	3.87	4.40	0.53	4.40	0.00
	Preserving the status quo as a priority and suppressing creative transformation	Prioritizing apparent stability over dynamism and the creation of new ideas (decisions primarily aimed at stabilizing the non-original status quo and avoiding innovation risk)	E3, E7, E8	3.87	4.20	0.33	4.20	0.00
		Transforming change into a threat rather than an opportunity for creative renewal	E2, E4, E10	4.27	4.47	0.20	4.53	0.07
	Transformation of structure into an instrument for reproducing creative stagnation	Using regulations and meetings to preserve non-original routines	E1, E9, E11, E13	3.87	4.40	0.53	4.53	0.13
		Weakening every mechanism capable of facilitating the flow of new ideas	E4, E12, E15	4.47	4.80	0.33	4.87	0.07
		Marginalizing proposals that challenge the status quo	E1, E10, E11	3.93	4.60	0.67	4.67	0.07
		Management focus on preserving positions rather than creating an environment for experimentation and innovation	E5, E8, E14, E15	4.53	4.93	0.40	5.00	0.07
Cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of creative talent (cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of motivation, curiosity, and creative talent)	Elimination of competent, critical, and creative individuals	Excluding talented, critical employees with new ideas	E6, E7, E10	4.13	4.53	0.40	4.67	0.13
		Promotion of incompetent and non-threatening individuals who do not pose a challenge to existing arrangements	E2, E4, E10, E12, E14	4.27	4.60	0.33	4.67	0.07
		Preference for compliant and aligned individuals over independent and creative people	E1, E5, E9, E12	4.07	4.40	0.33	4.40	0.00
		Strengthening aligned circles and eliminating those who challenge the status quo	E3, E5, E11	3.87	4.20	0.33	4.27	0.07
		Creating an environment in which creative individuals self-censor or leave the organization	E1, E6, E9, E15	4.20	4.53	0.33	4.53	0.00
	Promotion of individuals lacking independence and the capacity for creative change	Selecting individuals who lack the capability and willingness to generate innovative transformation	E4, E7, E12	3.87	4.33	0.47	4.33	0.00
		Preference for personal loyalty and obedience over	E2, E5, E10	4.00	4.33	0.33	4.33	0.00

		competence and independent creative judgment						
		Reinforcing dependency rather than cultivating curiosity and initiative	E2, E3, E9, E13	3.87	4.13	0.27	4.20	0.07
	Strengthening aligned and compliant individuals instead of fostering creativity	Prioritizing individuals who do not challenge managers' interests	E6, E8, E14	3.93	4.33	0.40	4.40	0.07
		Creating support networks based on alignment rather than creative competence	E4, E7, E8, E10, E14	4.20	4.60	0.40	4.60	0.00
		Weakening the culture of constructive criticism and innovative feedback	E3, E4, E6, E7	4.07	4.33	0.27	4.47	0.13
		Transforming the promotion system into an instrument of control and preservation of creative stagnation	E7, E8, E15	4.13	4.00	-0.13	4.00	0.00
	Consequences of mediocrity cultivation for the death of motivation and curiosity	Death of individuals' motivation to propose and pursue new ideas	E1, E3, E13	4.07	—	—	—	—
		Loss of organizational curiosity and the spirit of inquiry	E2, E3, E5, E9, E13	3.87	—	—	—	—
		Transformation of the organization into an environment devoid of creative energy and initiative	E2, E3, E11	4.13	—	—	—	—
Managerial superiority illusion and closed-mindedness toward initiative and innovation	Illusion of superiority in managerial diagnosis and solutions	Managers' belief that they possess the best diagnosis and solutions and therefore do not require external ideas	E9, E10, E14	4.07	4.40	0.33	4.47	0.07
		Perceived lack of need to learn from developing countries and successful global models	E1, E4, E11, E15	4.07	4.27	0.20	4.40	0.13
		Rejection of new and external ideas without serious examination	E8, E10, E14	4.07	4.13	0.07	4.13	0.00
		Reliance on limited internal experiences rather than openness to innovation	E1, E7, E12	4.27	4.33	0.07	4.33	0.00
	Resistance to feedback and new ideas	Ignoring or disparaging opinions and ideas originating outside the managerial circle	E6, E7, E8, E10	4.07	4.73	0.67	4.73	0.00
		Interpreting criticism and new proposals as threats rather than opportunities	E8, E10, E15	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.47	0.07
		Maintaining an image of superiority despite realities requiring innovation	E4, E14, E15	3.87	4.73	0.87	4.73	0.00
	Cognitive isolation of management and death of creative learning	Cognitive disconnection from successful global innovative models	E5, E6, E11	4.07	4.33	0.27	4.47	0.13
		Failure to perceive a need to update knowledge and creative skills	E2, E4, E10, E12, E13	4.27	4.53	0.27	4.53	0.00
		Interpreting past successes as evidence that innovation is unnecessary	E4, E7, E12, E15	3.80	4.47	0.67	4.47	0.00
		Ignoring the creativity gap between the organization and dynamic organizations	E2, E7, E13	3.67	4.20	0.53	4.20	0.00
		Transforming management into image preservation rather than creating a space for experimentation and creation	E1, E4, E11	3.80	4.33	0.53	4.40	0.07
Learning avoidance, imitation orientation, and	Organizational learning avoidance and reluctance to learn	Avoiding learning from others' experiences,	E8, E9, E14	4.07	4.40	0.33	4.53	0.13

obstruction of knowledge flow	from others' experiences	comparative studies, and successful global models						
		Disregard for external knowledge in solving problems and creating new ideas	E3, E10, E15	4.13	4.47	0.33	4.53	0.07
		Failure to use comparable experiences for creative renewal	E6, E8, E10, E14	3.73	4.33	0.60	4.33	0.00
		Preference for traditional and familiar methods over tested innovative approaches	E1, E4, E14	3.93	4.47	0.53	4.47	0.00
	Organizational isolation and disconnection from the innovative environment	Preventing effective interaction with the environment and the developing world	E7, E10, E11	3.73	4.33	0.60	4.40	0.07
		Failure to receive external ideas, innovations, and inspiration	E2, E4, E12, E13	4.33	4.73	0.40	4.73	0.00
		Creating informational and communication barriers that obstruct knowledge flow	E8, E9, E10, E14	4.27	4.33	0.07	4.40	0.07
		Restricting interactions to internal and aligned circles	E3, E5, E11	4.40	4.73	0.33	4.73	0.00
		Loss of sensitivity to environmental changes and innovative opportunities	E4, E12, E14, E15	4.27	4.67	0.40	4.73	0.07
	Inability and unwillingness to engage in creative benchmarking	Avoiding comparison with similar innovative experiences	E1, E5, E7	3.93	4.47	0.53	4.53	0.07
		Unwillingness to understand how others have creatively solved similar problems (avoidance of comparison with similar innovative experiences)	E2, E4, E13	4.00	4.40	0.40	4.40	0.00
		Interpreting benchmarking as a threat rather than an instrument for learning and inspiration	E1, E4, E7, E11	4.27	4.47	0.20	4.27	0.00
	Obstruction of knowledge flow and death of the spirit of learning	Absence of systematic mechanisms for the free flow of knowledge and ideas	E8, E10, E14	4.11	4.47	0.13	4.33	0.00
		Failure to convert external ideas into action and internal innovation	E6, E7, E8, E12	4.47	4.73	0.27	4.73	0.00
		Cultural resistance to intelligent benchmarking and creative adaptation	E2, E3, E5	3.67	4.40	0.73	4.47	0.07
		Continuation of non-original practices because of the absence of comparison and genuine learning	E7, E10, E15	4.13	4.67	0.53	4.67	0.00
	Effect of learning avoidance on the death of creativity and motivation	Death of organizational creativity and initiative because of disrupted knowledge flow (transformation of the organization into a static environment lacking a spirit of inquiry and innovation)	E2, E4, E8, E13	4.00	4.67	0.67	4.67	0.00
		Loss of motivation and curiosity due to the absence of inspiration and learning	E2, E11, E13	4.33	4.60	0.27	4.60	0.00
		Transformation of the organization into a static environment lacking a spirit of inquiry and innovation	E1, E2, E4, E10, E15	4.00	4.53	0.53	4.53	0.00

Following implementation of the Delphi rounds and collection of expert opinions, as presented in Table 2, the results of the three Delphi rounds indicated that all themes, organizing themes, and identified items in the model of environmental

entrepreneurial opportunities in the banking industry were approved by the experts. All 15 experts evaluated the proposed themes and items in each of the three Delphi rounds. The organizing theme “mission deviation and functional death of creativity” was merged with “institutional deterioration and depletion of the organization’s creative identity” and was renamed “mission deviation and erosion of the organization’s creative identity.” Furthermore, the experts considered the two organizing themes “the impact of corruption on suppressing creative motivation and curiosity” and “the consequences of mediocrity cultivation for the death of motivation and curiosity,” together with their corresponding basic themes, to represent the same conceptual direction. Accordingly, the second theme was integrated into the theme “the impact of corruption on suppressing creative motivation and curiosity,” and the basic themes were revised to: “loss of individuals’ motivation to propose and pursue new ideas because of the dominance of personal interests”; “death of organizational curiosity and the spirit of inquiry because rent-seeking is prioritized over exploration and experimentation”; and “transformation of the organization into an environment devoid of creative energy and initiative in which creativity is perceived as a threat.” The global theme “path dependence and resistance to innovation” was revised to “fear of failure and risk-taking and resistance to innovation and transformational change”; the global theme “cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of creative talent” was revised to “cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of motivation, curiosity, and creative talent”; the basic theme “prioritizing apparent stability over dynamism and the creation of new ideas” was revised to “decisions primarily aimed at stabilizing the non-original status quo and avoiding innovation risk”; the basic theme “unwillingness to understand how others have creatively solved similar problems” was revised to “avoidance of comparison with similar innovative experiences”; and the basic theme “death of organizational creativity and initiative because of disrupted knowledge flow” was revised to “transformation of the organization into a static environment lacking a spirit of inquiry and innovation.” Moreover, comparison of the experts’ mean evaluations between the second and third rounds showed only very minor changes, indicating a high level of stability and convergence in expert judgments.

Table 3

Kendall’s Coefficient of Concordance and Cronbach’s Alpha

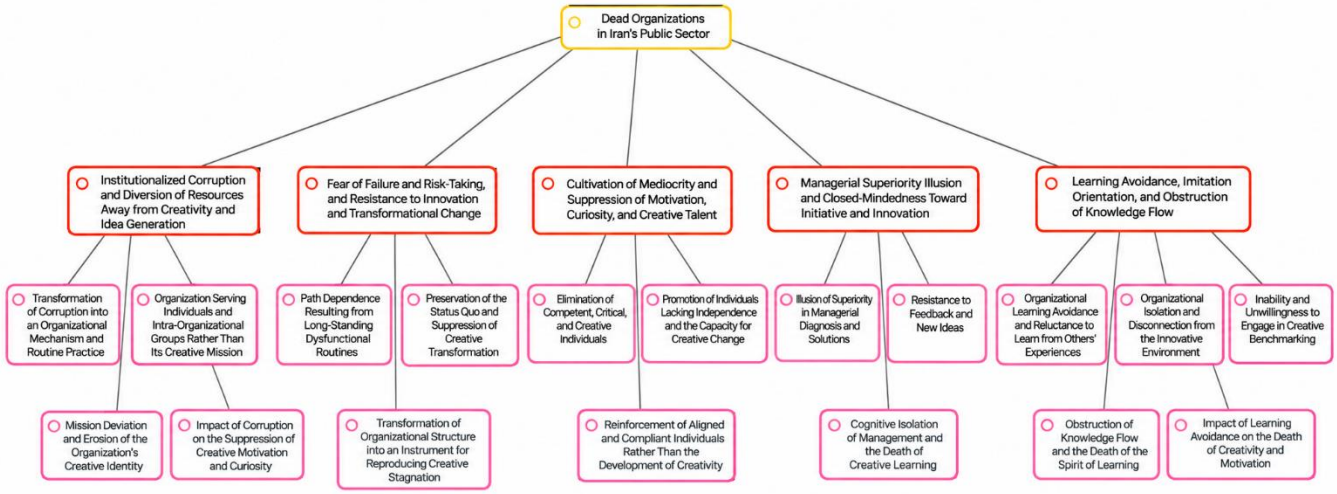
Stage	Number	Kendall’s W Coefficient of Concordance	Significance Level	Cronbach’s Alpha
First Stage	15	0.487	0.000	0.752
Second Stage	15	0.532	0.000	0.818
Third Stage	15	0.538	0.000	0.820

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that the degree of agreement among the experts in the second Delphi round increased compared with the first round. In addition, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients in both rounds were above 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability of the research instrument. Therefore, it can be concluded that the results obtained from the Delphi process demonstrated an appropriate level of agreement and reliability.

Accordingly, the final research model, developed using MAXQDA software and based on the extracted global, organizing, and basic themes, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Final Model of Dead Organizations in Iran's Governmental Organizations Based on Thematic Analysis and Expert Consensus



Overall, the findings derived from the thematic analysis of expert interviews and the Delphi process led to the identification and confirmation of the dimensions and components of dead organizations in Iran's governmental organizations. The results showed that organizational death in this study can be explained through a set of mechanisms associated with institutionalized corruption, path dependence and resistance to innovation, cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of creative talent, managerial superiority illusion, and the obstruction of learning and knowledge flow. Furthermore, the integration and revision of several themes during the Delphi process contributed to greater coherence in the conceptual structure of the model.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to design and validate a model of dead organizations in Iran's public sector by identifying the institutional, managerial, behavioral, and learning-related mechanisms through which organizational creativity, innovation, and dynamism are progressively weakened. The findings indicated that organizational deadness is not the consequence of a single dysfunctional condition, but rather the cumulative outcome of several mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Five overarching themes were identified: institutionalized corruption and diversion of resources away from creativity and idea generation; fear of failure, risk aversion, and resistance to innovation and transformational change; cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of motivation, curiosity, and creative talent; managerial superiority illusion and closed-mindedness toward initiative and innovation; and learning avoidance, imitation orientation, and obstruction of knowledge flow. The Delphi process further demonstrated a high degree of convergence among experts, as reflected in the increasing Kendall's W coefficients across the three rounds and the acceptable to strong Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The minimal changes between the second and third Delphi rounds also suggested that the conceptual structure of the model had reached a relatively stable form. Taken together, the results support the view that a dead organization may remain formally active while losing the substantive capacities that enable adaptation, creativity, learning, responsiveness, and renewal.

The first major finding concerned institutionalized corruption and the diversion of organizational resources away from creativity and idea generation. The results showed that corruption in dead organizations extends beyond isolated misconduct

and may become embedded in routines, resource allocation processes, and informal systems of influence. In such conditions, organizational resources are increasingly used to sustain personal or group interests rather than to support experimentation, innovation, or public value creation. This finding is consistent with research showing that dysfunctional informal relationships such as organizational cronyism can damage organizational identification, promote psychological withdrawal, and weaken employees' willingness to contribute beyond minimum formal expectations [26]. When employees perceive that access to opportunities and resources depends more on personal ties than competence or creativity, the motivational basis for innovation is undermined. This pattern also aligns with research on public-sector politicization, which suggests that administrative systems can become distorted when professional, merit-based criteria are displaced by political or relational considerations [23]. In this sense, corruption and cronyism are not merely ethical failures; they also create structural conditions in which innovative activity becomes less rewarding and, in some cases, risky for employees who challenge entrenched interests.

The identification of mission deviation and erosion of creative identity further extends this interpretation. The results indicated that dead organizations may retain managers, employees, budgets, procedures, meetings, and formal mandates while losing the internal meaning associated with their original mission. This condition resembles the distinction between formal survival and substantive organizational vitality discussed in the literature on organizational decline and mortality. Organizations can continue to exist legally and administratively while their adaptive and developmental capacities deteriorate [1]. Similarly, research on central bureaucracies has shown that public organizations can occupy an intermediate state between organizational life and death, particularly when formal structures persist despite significant changes in identity, purpose, or effectiveness [8]. The current findings therefore support a broader understanding of organizational death as functional depletion rather than only formal dissolution. This is particularly relevant in public administration, where legal mandates and public financing may sustain organizational existence even after the organization's internal capacity for renewal has substantially weakened.

The second major theme concerned fear of failure, risk aversion, and resistance to innovation and transformational change. The findings showed that dead organizations tend to become locked into long-standing routines, reproduce non-creative patterns, and use formal structures to defend existing arrangements rather than enable experimentation. This is strongly consistent with the literature on resistance to organizational change, which emphasizes that employees and managers often resist transformation when change threatens established roles, routines, competencies, or psychological security [16]. The current findings also align with the argument that deeply rooted cognitive schemas and habitual patterns can reinforce resistance and make organizations more likely to preserve familiar but ineffective practices [17]. In the present model, path dependence is especially important because it explains how historically accumulated routines can become self-reinforcing. Once an organization repeatedly relies on the same procedures, those procedures may acquire legitimacy merely because they are familiar, regardless of their effectiveness.

The finding that the status quo is often prioritized over creative transformation is also compatible with studies of organizational transformation. Fundamental transformation requires changes in structures, strategies, processes, and managerial assumptions rather than superficial administrative adjustments [11]. Organizations that are unwilling to undertake such changes may experience increasing misalignment with their environment. This interpretation is supported by research suggesting that organizations frequently fail because they do not recognize the depth of transformation required or

because they delay change until dysfunctional routines become deeply institutionalized [12]. The present study adds to this body of work by showing that resistance is not simply a barrier to successful change initiatives; in dead organizations, it may become a central organizing principle through which the entire system reproduces creative stagnation.

The third overarching theme was cultivation of mediocrity and suppression of motivation, curiosity, and creative talent. The findings indicated that dead organizations may systematically marginalize competent, critical, and independent employees while promoting compliant and non-threatening individuals. Such human resource practices can gradually weaken the organization's capacity for renewal because the very employees most capable of challenging routines and proposing alternatives are discouraged, excluded, or induced to leave. This finding corresponds with research on competency-based succession systems, which highlights the strategic importance of selecting and developing individuals on the basis of competence, capability, and developmental potential [25]. Where succession and promotion systems fail to reward competence, the organization may experience a progressive decline in leadership quality and innovation capacity. The current findings also align with the study of organizational cronyism by Xu and colleagues, which demonstrated that favoritism can foster disidentification and psychological withdrawal [26]. In a dead organization, such withdrawal may not always manifest as formal turnover; it may instead appear as self-censorship, reduced initiative, reluctance to propose ideas, and emotional disengagement.

The consequences of mediocrity cultivation for creativity are also supported by research linking organizational structure and creativity to employee performance. When organizational arrangements provide room for autonomy and creative expression, employees are more likely to contribute innovative ideas and perform effectively [19]. Conversely, when structures reward compliance and discourage independent judgment, creativity is likely to decline. The present findings therefore suggest that dead organizations are characterized not only by weak human resource systems but by a deeper anti-creative logic. In such systems, employees learn that creative initiative may not be rewarded and may even be perceived as threatening. Over time, this weakens curiosity, critical inquiry, and discretionary effort. The resulting decline in creativity is especially damaging because innovation depends on employees' willingness to question established assumptions and experiment with alternative approaches.

The fourth major finding involved managerial superiority illusion and closed-mindedness toward initiative and innovation. The results indicated that managers in dead organizations may believe that they already possess the best diagnosis and solutions, reject external ideas without serious evaluation, and interpret criticism as a threat. This finding is closely aligned with the emerging literature on leadership hubris in public organizations. Leadership hubris can generate overconfidence, reduce openness to alternative perspectives, and weaken the quality of managerial judgment [22]. The current results extend this understanding by showing that managerial superiority illusions can also produce an organizational learning deficit. When managers assume that they have little to learn from external actors, other organizations, or even internal critics, they reduce the organization's exposure to new knowledge and increase the likelihood of cognitive isolation.

This pattern is also consistent with broader evidence on leadership in public-sector innovation. Leadership has been shown to play a decisive role in shaping whether public organizations support experimentation, collaborative problem-solving, and innovation [21]. Leaders who encourage learning and experimentation can stimulate organizational adaptation, whereas leaders who suppress dissent and centralize interpretive authority can inhibit innovation. The present study therefore suggests that leadership pathology is one of the central mechanisms through which dead organizations reproduce

themselves. A closed-minded managerial system does not merely reduce the number of new ideas; it also shapes the organizational culture by signaling that questioning, feedback, and external comparison are unwelcome.

The fifth theme concerned learning avoidance, imitation orientation, and obstruction of knowledge flow. The results showed that dead organizations tend to avoid learning from external experience, restrict benchmarking, create informational barriers, and fail to convert external ideas into internal action. These findings are strongly supported by research emphasizing the role of learning and innovation culture in successful organizational transformation. Moslemi et al. showed that transformation strategies are closely related to the presence of learning-oriented and innovation-supportive cultures [20]. When such cultures are absent, organizations may become trapped in repetitive routines and lose the ability to interpret new information. The present findings also align with research on digital transformation and organizational resilience, which indicates that access to new technologies and knowledge flows can strengthen adaptive capacity and improve responsiveness to disruption [15]. Similarly, organizational restructuring and integration of advanced technologies can strengthen innovation by increasing coordination, information processing, and cross-functional learning [14].

The finding that benchmarking may be interpreted as a threat rather than a learning tool is especially important. Dynamic organizations use comparison to identify gaps, discover alternative practices, and generate ideas. Dead organizations, by contrast, may resist comparison because it threatens the internal narrative that current practices are adequate. This behavior is consistent with managerial superiority illusion and reinforces the interdependence of the themes identified in this study. Learning avoidance strengthens path dependence, path dependence reinforces resistance to innovation, and resistance to innovation gives greater power to managerial actors who defend the status quo. In this way, organizational deadness appears to function as a self-reinforcing system rather than as a set of isolated deficiencies.

The overall model is also consistent with literature on organizational decline and mortality. Financial and administrative continuity alone does not guarantee survival in a substantive organizational sense. Research by Park and colleagues has shown that organizational mortality is influenced by the quality of financial management and broader managerial capabilities [2, 3]. The current findings complement this perspective by suggesting that organizations may experience a form of functional mortality even before formal dissolution. In other words, the organization's legal or budgetary existence may continue while its internal processes of learning, innovation, and adaptation become progressively inactive.

The present findings can also be understood in light of research on post-death organizing. Studies have shown that organizational identities and attachments can persist after formal death, creating organizational "ghosts" and residual forms of social organization [4, 5]. Similarly, revenant organizations may be revived when historical identities and organizational meanings are reconstructed [6]. Research on dead brands has also demonstrated that entities perceived as obsolete can sometimes be revitalized under appropriate conditions [7]. These studies are relevant because they imply that organizational death is not always absolute or irreversible. The dead organizations identified in the present study may potentially be revitalized if their institutional, managerial, and learning mechanisms are deliberately reconfigured.

The possibility of revitalization is also supported by research on organizational change and resilience. Organizational change in nonprofit and public-interest contexts often requires deliberate restructuring of roles, processes, and stakeholder relationships [13]. Likewise, resilience research suggests that organizations can recover from decline when they develop adaptive responses to uncertainty and failure [18]. This corresponds with the present model, because each identified dimension can theoretically become a target for intervention. Institutionalized corruption can be addressed through

transparency and accountability; path dependence through process redesign and experimentation; mediocrity cultivation through competency-based staffing and succession systems; leadership hubris through feedback and distributed decision-making; and learning avoidance through benchmarking, external collaboration, and knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

The relevance of these findings to public-sector reform is further strengthened by research on organizational improvement in Iranian government organizations. Moradi et al. emphasized the importance of systematic organizational improvement in the Iranian public sector [10], while public management research has highlighted the importance of governance structures, administrative design, and managerial capacity for effective governmental performance [9]. The present study adds a diagnostic dimension to this literature by focusing not merely on improvement strategies but on the mechanisms through which organizations lose their capacity for improvement in the first place. This distinction is important because reform efforts that focus only on formal restructuring may fail if deeper cultural and behavioral mechanisms remain unchanged.

The findings also have implications for understanding employee responses to organizational decline. Yaakobi found that organizational death can alter employees' work priorities and that attachment-related processes shape their responses to decline [27]. This supports the present finding that dead organizations are associated with declining motivation, curiosity, and willingness to pursue new ideas. Employees working in dysfunctional environments may gradually shift from proactive engagement to psychological self-protection. Such a shift may be especially likely when employees perceive that innovation is risky, criticism is punished, and advancement depends more on conformity than merit.

Taken together, the results suggest that dead organizations in the Iranian public sector are best understood as formally surviving but substantively depleted systems in which corruption, resistance, mediocrity, leadership hubris, and learning avoidance interact to suppress renewal. This interpretation is consistent with the wider literature on organizational decline, mortality, transformation, leadership, resilience, and innovation [1, 8, 11, 16]. At the same time, the present study contributes a more integrated conceptualization by linking these mechanisms in a single model focused specifically on the death of organizational creativity, innovation, and dynamism in the public sector.

This study has several limitations. First, the qualitative phase relied on the perceptions and professional judgments of a purposively selected panel of experts, which may have introduced interpretive bias despite the use of theoretical saturation and multiple Delphi rounds. Second, although the expert panel included individuals with substantial academic and executive experience, the number of participants was limited and may not represent the full diversity of perspectives across all governmental sectors and administrative levels. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the study restricts the ability to capture how organizational deadness develops over time or how organizations move between decline, stagnation, and revitalization. Fourth, the model was developed specifically within the context of Iran's public sector, and its direct applicability to private-sector organizations, nonprofit organizations, or public administrations in other institutional settings should therefore be approached cautiously. Finally, because organizational deadness is a complex and potentially sensitive phenomenon, respondents may have been influenced by social desirability, organizational loyalty, or concerns about openly discussing corruption, favoritism, and managerial dysfunction.

Future research should examine the proposed model through longitudinal designs in order to investigate how the identified dimensions evolve over time and whether particular mechanisms precede others in the progression toward organizational deadness. Comparative studies across ministries, municipalities, state-owned enterprises, universities, and other public institutions could help determine whether the relative importance of the dimensions differs by organizational

type. Cross-national studies could also assess the extent to which the model is specific to the Iranian administrative context or reflects broader characteristics of bureaucratic organizations. Future quantitative research should test causal relationships among the major dimensions and examine potential mediators and moderators such as organizational culture, leadership style, psychological safety, administrative politicization, and digital maturity. It would also be valuable to develop a standardized diagnostic scale for organizational deadness and establish cut-off scores that distinguish healthy, declining, stagnant, and functionally dead organizations. In addition, future studies could investigate organizational revitalization by examining which interventions are most effective in reversing specific dimensions of deadness.

From a practical perspective, public-sector decision-makers should treat organizational deadness as a systemic governance problem rather than as a narrow performance issue. Anti-corruption and transparency mechanisms should be linked directly to innovation and resource-allocation systems so that organizational resources are redirected toward problem-solving and value creation. Recruitment, promotion, and succession systems should be redesigned around competence, independence of judgment, creativity, and demonstrated capacity for change rather than compliance or personal loyalty. Managers should be evaluated not only on administrative stability but also on their openness to feedback, support for experimentation, and ability to create psychological safety for critical and creative employees. Public organizations should institutionalize benchmarking, cross-organizational learning, after-action reviews, knowledge-sharing networks, and structured mechanisms for importing and adapting successful practices. Regular organizational health assessments should also be implemented to detect early signs of creative stagnation, learning avoidance, and employee withdrawal before they become deeply embedded. Most importantly, revitalization programs should address the interaction among corruption, resistance to change, mediocre leadership pipelines, managerial hubris, and blocked knowledge flows rather than attempting to reform these problems in isolation.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

References

[1] V. Bodolica and M. Spraggon, "Leadership in Times of Organizational Decline: A Literature Review of Antecedents, Consequences and Moderators," *International Journal of Organizational Analysis,* vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 415-435, 2021.

[2] Y. Park, J. Shon, and J. Lu, "Predicting Organizational Mortality: How Financial Management Matters," *Administration & Society,* vol. 54, pp. 828-856, 2021.

[3] Y. J. Park, J. Shon, and J. Lu, "Predicting Organizational Mortality: How Financial Management Matters," *Administration & Society,* vol. 54, no. 5, pp. 828-856, 2022.

[4] M. Power and P. Tuck, "The Firm that Would Not Die: Post-Death Organizing, Alumni Events, and Organization Ghosts," *SSRN Electronic Journal,* 2023.

[5] S. Sciarappa *et al.*, "Long Live the Past!: Exploring Lingering Attachments, Identity, and Grief in Post Death Organizing," presented at the Academy of Management Proceedings, 2023.

[6] S. Solomon and B. Mathias, "Back From the Dead: Exploring the Tension Between Imagination and Custodianship in Revenant Organizations," *Journal of Management,* vol. 51, pp. 1547-1585, 2023.

[7] K. Handique and S. Sarkar, "Brand Resurrection: A Study on Determinants of Reviving Dead Brands in a Emerging Economy," *International Journal of Management,* vol. 11, no. 12, 2021.

[8] B. J. Carroll, J. Bertels, C. Froio, S. Kuipers, L. Schulze-Gabrechten, and S. Viallet-Thévenin, "Between Life and Death: Organizational Change in Central State Bureaucracies in Cross-National Comparison," *International Review of Administrative Sciences,* vol. 88, no. 4, pp. 943-959, 2022.

[9] M. Marhana, N. Nurlina, S. Syamsu, and I. Hidayat, "Organization in Government Management in Development in Tirta Buana Village, Dapurang District," *Journal of Management and Administration Provision,* 2024, doi: 10.55885/jmap.v4i1.314.

[10] D. A. Moradi, R. Vaezi, and M. Amiri, "Presenting an Organizational Improvement Model in Iranian Government Organizations," (in Persian), *Studies of Organizational Improvement and Transformation,* vol. 33, no. 111, pp. 141-180, 2024.

[11] Y. Amiri, "Organizational Transformation with an Approach to Fundamental Changes in the Organization," presented at the 22nd International Conference on Research in Management, Economics and Development, 2024.

[12] G. Dastgir Omar, "Organizational Transformation and Why Organizations Fail," (in Persian), *Ghalib Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2022.

[13] H. Fehrenbach, M. Walk, and I. Greenspan, "Organizational Change in Nonprofit Organizations," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations,* 2024.

[14] S. Nour and A. Arbussà, "Driving Innovation through Organizational Restructuring and Integration of Advanced Digital Technologies: A Case Study of a World-Leading Manufacturing Company," *European Journal of Innovation Management,* 2024.

[15] R. Browder, S. Dwyer, and H. Koch, "Upgrading Adaptation: How Digital Transformation Promotes Organizational Resilience," *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal,* 2023.

[16] B. Pandey, D. S, S. Afreen, K. Sivaprasad, and K. Bhatti, "The Psychology of Change Management: Overcoming Resistance in Organizations," *International Journal of Environmental Sciences,* 2025.

[17] A. Lashkari, "Resistance to Organizational Change and Early Maladaptive Schemas: A Descriptive Article," presented at the 1st National Congress on Organizational Transformation, 2024.

[18] M. Sharifi, "From Failure to Resilience: A Conceptual Review of Entrepreneurial Responses to Uncertainty," presented at the 9th International Conference and 10th National Conference on New Findings in Management, Psychology and Accounting, 2025.

[19] S. Fatemeh-Soghra, "The Relationship between Organizational Structure and Job Performance Considering the Mediating Role of Creativity among Education Employees in Eastern Mazandaran Province," (in Persian), *Human Capital Empowerment,* vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 201-212, 2022.

[20] M. Moslemi, S. Akbarzadeh, and A. Sharifian, "Designing a Model of Organizational Transformation Strategies with Emphasis on Learning and Innovation Culture," (in Persian), *Intelligent Strategic Management,* vol. 3, no. 7, pp. 127-144, 2024.

[21] F. Sazzad, V. P. Rajan, and M. A. Demircioglu, "The Role of Leadership in Public Sector Innovation: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Management of COVID-19 in Asian Countries," *Frontiers in Public Health,* vol. 9, p. 743748, 2021.

[22] A. Nazarpouri, S. Salehabadi, and E. Manishdavi, "Understanding Leadership Hubris in Public Organizations and Its Consequences: Analysis of Antecedent and Consequent Factors Using Fuzzy Cognitive Mapping," (in Persian), *Sustainable Human Resource Management,* 2025.

[23] N. Khani, M. Bahrami, and S. Keshavarz, "Analysis of the Role of New Public Management in the Politicization of the Administrative System," 2025.

[24] A. Baturo and J. Gray, "Leaders in the United Nations General Assembly: Revitalization or Politicization?," *The Review of International Organizations,* vol. 19, pp. 721-752, 2024.

[25] M. Khodaparast, D. Kiakojouri, S. J. Mortazavi Amiri, and S. A. Jafari Kalarijani, "Analyzing the Dimensions and Components of the Developed Model of Competency-Based Successor Training in Education-Oriented Organizations with a Meta-Composite Approach," *Management and Educational Perspective,* vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 193-220, 2024, doi: 10.22034/jmep.2024.384659.1160.

[26] C. Xu, S. Shaheen, and M. W. Bari, "Organizational Cronyism and Employee Psychological Withdrawal Behavior: The Mediating Role of Disidentification and Moderating Effect of Employability," *BMC Psychology,* vol. 13, 2025, doi: 10.1186/s40359-025-03279-7.

[27] E. Yaakobi, "The Influence of Organizational Death on Work Priorities and the Moderating Role of Attachment Internal Working Models," *Current Psychology,* vol. 42, no. 7, pp. 5804-5818, 2023.