

# Seeing the Shadow—The Importance of Depth Psychology in Leadership: An Interview with David A. Laveman & Bonnie Bright for Depth Insights™

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In this written interview, Depth Insights™ host Bonnie Bright interviews David A. Laveman, who brings depth psychology insights into the business world to help executives and organizations to raise the bar on performance and deliver breakthrough business results.

Here Dave shares how depth psychology plays a role in leadership, a critical aspect inside and outside the corporate world today.

**BB:** Why is Leadership an area that Depth Psychology should care about?

**DAL:** The answer is fairly practical. It begins by looking squarely at the conditions we live in as part of a global economy and international community. These conditions – broadly characterized by ecological fragility, interconnectivity,



democratization of information and overall accelerated “change”—are inescapable. The implications of these changes are always surprising us. Consider for instance the dramatic rapidity of regional political change popularly known as the “Arab Spring.” Or the ecological dangers triggered by the Japanese Tsunami. In terms of Depth Psychology, I’m reminded of the rather provocative title of archetypal psychologist James Hillman’s (1992) dialogue with Michael Ventura, [\*We’ve Had 100 Years Of Therapy And The World Has Gotten Worse\*](#). It is a polemic against the insular nature of psychotherapy and the fact that “personal growth” doesn’t

necessarily lead one into active involvement with the world. Hillman notes that while it may be good to have a deeper understanding of how our psyche works, that alone doesn't ensure that we find out about the way the world works.

Hillman in this same polemic further notes that personal growth often involves "loss"; the loss of inflations, the loss of illusions. However, often those who are widely known as "leaders" are vested with vast institutional powers, which encourages all sorts of narcissistic display. Is this a loss of illusion and inflation – or just the opposite? From Hillman's view psychotherapy as it is currently practiced, tends to "internalize emotions." He then aptly points out that the word emotion comes from the Latin *ex movere* which means "to move out" and that "emotions connect to the world" (p. 11). Following this thread of reasoning, my assertion is rather basic: by applying the insights gained from a hundred years of exploring the unconscious, to the world populated by institutional leaders, we are ensuring that those with the most power to affect the things that affect our lives—our environment, our economy, our safety—are alert to the powerful forces that exist in the psyche, especially the mostly unconscious complexes, and skillful in converting insight into engagement.

We've seen enough of the damage done by leaders who have no idea what inner demons they are projecting onto the social landscape. Given the explosion of technological innovation and its inexpensive and uncontrolled dissemination, the stakes in the second decade of the 21st century couldn't be higher. It is time for those who have spent decades investigating the nature of the psyche to be far more actively engaged with the "leaders" of all institutions, but especially those of business and government. This engagement needs to happen "on the court" where the game of leadership which is played out in everyday decisions, relationships and initiatives.

This void is now being filled by a thriving leadership development and coaching industry. Unfortunately many of these practitioners know little about the dynamics of the unconscious, how to work with shadow projections on an individual and organizational level and how to recognize archetypal patterns. The emphasis is on conscious mastery, skill building, and behavior modification. These are all useful but not sufficiently effective in creating the "transformational" change that is both promoted by their practitioners and more importantly truly needed by the institutional power centers to become centers of a renewed global culture.

**BB:** First, I love that you are connecting leadership to the very significant (and growing) cultural and ecological issues going on our planet. Crises of all kinds seem to be becoming commonplace.

As these increase as they are likely to do, we are going to have such a tremendous need for far greater leadership than ever before. It's so important that the leaders who emerge moving forward have that understanding of emotion, shadow, archetypal patterns at play—all the "depth" aspects that depth psychology is so concerned with.

Meanwhile, I agree with you and James Hillman that there is an aspect of leadership that cannot be dismissed or denied: active involvement with the world. How can anyone calling themselves a leader rely on learning without experience in order to make difficult decisions or offer solutions and strategies to solve critical issues? It reminds me of something Jung said: "Anyone who wants to know the human mind will learn next to nothing from experimental psychology. He would be better advised to put away his scholar's gown, bid farewell to his study, and wander with human heart through the world. There, in the horrors of prisons, lunatic asylums and hospitals, in drab suburban pubs, in brothels and gambling—hells, in the salons of the elegant, the Stock Exchanges, Socialist meetings, churches, revivalist gatherings and ecstatic sects, through love and hate, through the experience of passion in every form in his own body, he would reap richer stores of knowledge than textbooks a foot thick could give him, and he will know how to doctor the sick with real knowledge of the human soul." ("New Paths in Psychology." In CW 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychology. p. 409).

Many of us would consider the types of places Jung refers to as places to avoid, not wanting to expose ourselves to the dirtier, darker, or volatile aspects of humanity. But true leaders need to be able to hold all of it without revulsion or judgment. It's so important not to sweep the shadow side of our culture and our humanity under the rug for we are likely to sweep our own shadow right under their with it. Again, I'm reminded of Jung who said "The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate." (Christ, A Symbol of the Self, para. 126, Collected Works 9, Pt 2.)

One example of this might be when someone who very vocally promotes his extreme fundamentalist views about fidelity in marriage and ends up being the person who gets caught in an extramarital affair. Can you point to any contemporary examples of how certain leaders either are or aren't able to embrace the shadow and/or seem to be possessed by shadow or archetypal patterns or images that are playing out? (I should point out that a given archetype isn't necessarily good or bad, of course, but it's in the imbalance at play when someone is possessed by it and doesn't know it). In those examples, what could those individuals have done differently, or what are some ways leaders might begin to learn to recognize the unconscious shadow?

**DAL:** These are BIG question with endless implications. First before we dive into examples, it's worth keeping in mind that as we move into concrete, fact-based situations what remains implicit in the background are our assumptions and already-provided classifications. For instance, most corporate senior leaders and consultants believe they know what is good and what is not. And if they expressed too much doubt, this could easily be seen as signs of weakness. Of course, with a little thought, what is beneficial and destructive needs qualification: do we mean short or long term good? Do we mean that which is strictly beneficial to the commercial interests of the business, or do we mean what is beneficial to the larger ecosystem upon which is our common ground? We can get very philosophical about all this. What I want to remain present as I cite examples are the relative, context bound nature of any given situation.

Take for instance, the values of an enterprise so often espoused by leaders, HR professionals, and consultants. Many revolve around three themes: a respect and concern for the individual; the responsibility to be a good corporate citizen; and the importance of being a leading innovator that improves people's health and quality of life. However as noble as these espoused values are, they are often at odds with the values in action—in other words, the values that the corporation lives every day. In that case the values in action are those of "efficiency," "doing more with less," and above all, "growth." These are what rule the day.

To be clear, I am not necessarily speaking against these latter values, but rather to the “gap” between the espoused values and those that are in action on an everyday basis. It is in this gap – between these two poles—where the corporate “shadow” lurks.

A critical value that Depth Psychology can bring into the corporate world is to generate a broad and deep awareness among its leaders the true nature of the shadow. In common language, the “dark side”

and “blindspots” to which we are all prone, is often thought of as being synonymous with the shadow in common language. The fundamental nature of the “shadow” that has direct relevance to corporate leaders is this: the shadow does not reveal itself as such, but rather, is often externalized on to a troubling aspect of the environment “out there” and thus it tends to be either denied all together or addressed with simply rational “problem solving” behavior. Because the shadow exists in the nature of the psyche and is secondarily projected to the external world, its recognition requires leaders to tolerate the psychic tension and a searching introspection. However externalization is typically the rule rather than the exception, with the result often being entrenched “us vs. them” boundaries and a continuous search for scapegoats.



**BB:** You’ve just offered a compelling description of the status quo, not only in organizations but for individuals as well. This notion that we externalize things is very significant. Executives, coaches and those working in organizations often get training on “problem solving”—and of course step one is to identify the problem. But when the actual problem is incorrectly assigned or the issues underlying the problem are not identified, how can it truly be worked with

authentically and solved? It is critical to look at the systemic nature and constantly inquire into what is invisible, hidden, unspoken, or marginalized. This is where the real issues lie, and leaders that have the capacity to recognize it truly have the opportunity to lead, and those who fail to look can quickly move (and move the organization) into dangerous territory, wouldn't you say?

**DAL:** Yes, one example I observed first hand illustrates the real consequences associated with an ignorance of the shadow, and the exponential effects of this ignorance when it takes place in leaders vested with significant institutional power to determine the fate of companies that provide meaningful employment and direct significant natural and economics resources. A private equity firm had just paid billions of dollars to acquire a very profitable sub-division of a major Fortune 100 Global Company. They hired a highly seasoned senior executive to be the CEO of the newly acquired sub-division. This CEO excelled in communication skills, and came from an allied industry (but a different sub-sector) after a successful career as CEO of his former company. His mandate by the new owners was simple: dramatically reduce costs and prepare the business to be resold in a 3-5 year timeframe for three times its original cost. To make this CEO's life easier, he was allowed to move the corporate office 3,000 miles away to be closer to his home, and of course was given major financial incentives if the owners met their financial goals.

The private equity buyer was expert in financial engineering and understood precisely what was needed in those terms. The CEO was an expert in cost-take-out and in communicating effectively with his executive team and the company at large. Neither of these key power players were expert in the sub-sector in which they were now invested. For that, they relied on existing senior managers in the acquired company who had spent their careers working with the mechanics of their particular market sub-sector. The leadership team, headed by the new CEO with final decision making authority, made rational sense, but here is where the dynamics of the shadow—unrecognized as such—began to show itself.

At the time of the acquisition, the sub-sector market was beginning to show early signs of a precipitous decline. A senior long-term executive, highly knowledgeable about the sector and widely respected within the company (pre-acquisition), saw the trends developing a year before they became widely apparent. He tried to warn the CEO of an impending disaster and presented a business plan to mitigate the effects of the anticipated full-blown market meltdown. The CEO, whose generous incentives from his patrons and persuasive optimism was not at all open to this executive's views and would not hear out his analysis of the early warning signs already present, nor listen to a mitigation plan. More, this executive was promptly labeled by the CEO as a

pessimist naysayer and subsequently put in the proverbial “doghouse” for not being a “team player.”

This example is illustrative because it is not at all unusual in the annals of corporate leadership. The business situation was admittedly ambiguous at the time the executive in question was formulating his point of view. One could marshal arguments for the market to resume its frothy days and that was, by far, the preferred future that the owners, the CEO, and the majority of the leadership wanted to see happen. All stood to make a lot of money if it did, including the executive in question. The eventual outcome was unfortunate, especially for the 2000+ employees who found employment there. The market deteriorated just as the executive who was completely rebuked and disregarded anticipated, and the company lost a critical 18 months to sell assets when there were still many buyers interested in their acquisition. The company ultimately refused an offer from a major Fortune 50 company to double their acquisition price, and eventually had to seek bankruptcy protection. Most employees lost their jobs, and more, senior managers who were given opportunities to be co-investors with the new owners lost all of their investment.

The official story of the demise was that the company was caught up (like so many others) in the dramatic deterioration of the their sub-sector. In other words, they were relatively innocent victims of uniformly unseen circumstances. However an understanding of the operations of the shadow provide another view. As a factor of the psyche, not the circumstance, it was never collectively inquired into, though privately some executives acknowledged the role it played. The shadow in this situation expressed itself in the following ways: first, greed. The owners, the CEO and the leadership team were already wealthy by any measure of comparison. Second, hubris: the owners and the CEO’s previous success caused them to overestimate their powers to predict the future. Finally, denial: They failed to make the necessary distinctions between success through financial engineering and knowledge of the larger sector market vs. the more precise knowledge needed to run the company effectively in sub-sector market.

**BB:** Unfortunately, those three factors, greed, hubris, and denial, seem to be part of a recognizable pattern in many organizations that collapse. It is indicative of the culture we live in in so many ways, one in which values capitalism, growth, monetary gain, and puts profit above people so often—and it has to in order to maintain the pattern of corporate growth that has been so established for decades, if not centuries. I can imagine it must be really hard for an individual who takes on a new leadership role with lots of good intentions and promises to actually adhere

to his or her ideas and principles without caving to those three things. What do you think about that, and how does a leader actually go about implementing his or her ideas in a depth-centered way without giving over to the status quo?

**DAL:** The leadership cult popular in today's business elevates circumstance over psyche; rationality over imagination and externalization over introspection. In short, the reality of the tangible, empirically-observable *outer* world takes clear precedence over the cloud-like realities of the psyche. This also has obvious implications in not recognizing deeply embedded archetypal patterns. The consequences here are also multiple, but suffice it to say that organizations are constantly interested in "change management." Over the past two decades as the pace of external change has accelerated, the need to *transform* rather than merely "change" has given rise to a large network of "transformation" consultants, and Human Resources specialists. However transformation programs rarely achieve a true organizational metamorphosis but rather often devolve into a sub-optimized, energy depleting exercise. A possible reason for this is lack of understanding of archetypal realities and how this has a significant impact on the organizational world.

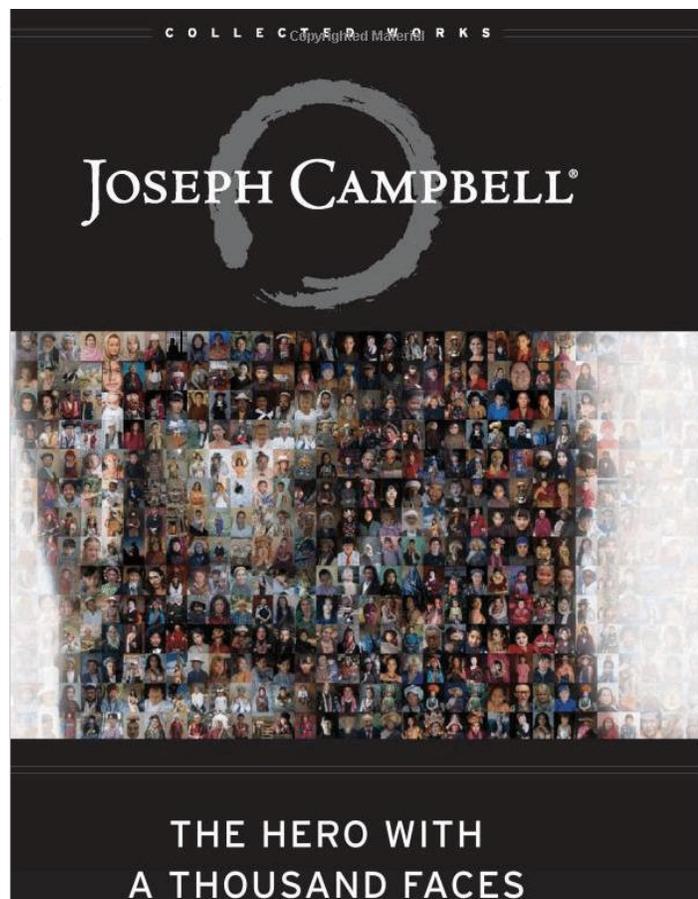
**BB:** "Archetypal realities" is an interesting term. How do you define that, and how would you say deeply embedded archetypal patterns play a role in the process of developing more effective organizational design and interventions?

**DAL:** When it comes to archetypal realities in a business context, I would define it as those background patterns of perception and images on the level of the psyche and cultural values and reflexive behaviors on the level of the organization. Because they exert influence from the background they are often unconscious, and operate independent of the ego. They tap into large stores of energy, which can be expressed positively (as in the collective effort to put a man on the moon) or negatively (as in the collapse of checks and balances that aggravated the 2008 financial meltdown). Without an archetypal perspective, leaders resort to making decisions through an over-emphasis on rational analysis, data gathering, and trend analysis. Take the example of the Change Management discipline noted above. As a differentiated discipline that has been around for at least two decades, it has developed a set of tools and approaches to help companies change – that is move from business model A to model B.

A good example of this is the change forced upon the Utility industry in the face of deregulation; or the change forced upon military contractors in the face of significant government budget cuts.

Change programs are approached rationally. Thus a first step is to develop a 'case for change', supported by facts and a tight logic thread about why change is necessary. Then there are the objectives which the change will accomplish and why it is good for the company and its employees and finally there are elaborate plans which include the commitments to new model made by senior management, the cascading communication plans, the phased releases of manageable bites, the training of "change agents", the mitigation strategies (to handle fallout), and the periodic course corrections to address changing circumstances. There is nothing wrong with any of this—its just totally insufficient to address the escalating rate of change, the disruption caused by continual new technologies and the complexity of a global economy. The result is that much corporate energy, human toil and financial expense go to programs that do produce change, but often yield only a fraction of what's needed. This leaves the organization exhausted where whatever is left over of discretionary effort is focused on short-term survival. The archetypal underpinnings that are orchestrating the forms, their narratives, and accompanying interventions are neither acknowledged nor addressed.

A well-known example of an archetypal reality is "the hero's journey." Mythologist Joseph Campbell in his landmark study, "[The Hero With A Thousand Faces](#)" identified the archetypal hero's journey as circular process that moves one to go forth from a settled existence, journey into unexplored territory in order to win new powers that can be brought back for the benefit of the community (p. 245). It begins when the Hero hears a "call" to adventure. In corporate terms this would mean create a compelling vision of possible future. The archetypal pattern then requires the hero to cross over the threshold of the known world where one encounters "the shadow presence which guards the passage" (p. 245). In corporate terms this means creating the necessary resources in the form of executive sponsorship, budget, and a team of change agents that will guide the change process.



Now the change agenda is public and the engagement with the significant forces of status quo are in earnest. Campbell identifies this part of the journey as unfamiliar, where one encounters “strangely intimate forces some of which threaten him (tests) and some of which give magical aid (helpers).” In my experience, this where organizations are least prepared and over-rely on only what’s in the change management “toolkit.” This often gets translated into more and better change education, contingency planning, and communications. The helpers that show up are not mined for their potential commitment. The tests that accompany them are often interpreted in terms of self-protection and blind resistance to change. The missing realization that archetypal powers are at work as a company struggles to bring into being a new order of reality, leave those who are advocates of the transformation at a severe disadvantage. Without an archetypal perspective they are left with only their own efforts and superficially literal interpretations of challenge they face. This undermines their confidence and leaves them ill prepared for the next predictable phase of the journey to authentic transformative change.

Before the sustained benefits of a successful transformation can be realized the corporation must pass through the “supreme ordeal” (p. 246). In corporate terms this can show up in many forms. Common are major opposition by a key power center, acquisition by a new owner who has no stake in the transformation, the old culture ignoring the change without consequences. The compromise made at this point often dooms the possibility of authentic transformative change and settles for half measures. In corporate terms, leadership points to real but fairly incremental changes to justify a premature declaration of victory and most importantly to move on to the next “urgent” issue of the day. The result after too numerous outcomes like this, is that employees have become highly skeptical of new change initiatives, take on a ‘wait and see’ attitude which inadvertently becomes ensures that there was never a real desire for transformation in the first place.

It is easy to point a finger at business leadership for being too wedded to their collective views of change based on standard organizational psychology, change management and overarching pressures to produce financial results while the hoped-for transformation is under way. However I think it more productive to challenge those who are committed to the perspectives of Depth Psychology to take it out of the highly ritualized and controlled academic and psychotherapeutic environments, and test its merits to create meaningful change with the business institutions that for better or worse dictate the pace and direction of today’s world. This engagement will force depth psychology to endure tensions previously avoided and engage businesses to reevaluate the role of the soul and psyche in the renewal of our world.

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**David A. Laveman** works with clients to raise the bar on performance and deliver breakthrough business results. He synthesizes practical understanding of business realities with in-depth insight into human and team behavior, and partners with companies and executives to build capabilities, enhance leadership skills, and generate transformational change. Dave's background and his knowledge of cutting-edge research inform his down-to-earth approach to optimizing executive performance and driving bottom-line results.

Dave's career has been distinguished by significant pioneering in the areas of organizational and cultural transformation, breakthrough performance, leadership development and coaching, public-private partnering, and multi-company alliances. He has presented innovative thinking on leadership, transformational change and breakthrough management at The Wharton School, The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, The Society of Information Management, The GMAC Annual Senior Management Meeting, and The Executive Concours. Dave's thinking on culture, strategy, and paradigms have been cited by Forbes and Harvard Business Review.

Previous to founding Laveman & Associates, Dave served as officer, senior executive, or partner at CSC Index, Accenture, and The Concours Group. He co-founded the Praemia Group and The Pharmaceutical Performance Institute.

Dave is an accomplished chess player whose competitive success has appeared in The New York Times. He holds graduate degrees from Columbia University and Pacifica Graduate Institute.

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Depth Insights™ provides media, content, and education for the greater depth psychology community, including written and audio interviews and the semi-annual peer reviewed publication, Depth Insights scholarly eZine.

Depth Psychology Alliance™, the world's first online academic community for those who are active and interested in the fields of Depth and Jungian Psychologies in 2010—a dynamic organization that surpassed 2,000 members in January 2013. The Alliance is a hub for finding

*depth psych-related events, blogs, videos, articles and for discussion, learning and connecting with likeminded others.*

*Depth Psychology List™ is a premier destination to find or list depth psychology oriented therapists and practitioners by location or type of services offered.*

## **About Bonnie Bright**

Bonnie Bright is the principle and founder of Depth Insights which offers a semi-annual scholarly eZine, radio podcasts, and educational webinars. She holds M.A. degrees in Psychology from Sonoma State University and in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, CA, where she also completed her Ph.D. She founded Depth Psychology Alliance, the world's first free online academic community for those who are active and interested in the fields of Depth and Jungian Psychologies in 2010 and DepthPsychologyList.com, a directory to find or list depth-oriented therapists and practitioners by location or services.