

This abstract is for the Responsible Leadership Psychology Workshop.

Losing your self: How managerial persona & shadow pressures kill responsible leadership

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Abstract

A fragile Jungian self of an individual is vulnerable to external conformity pressures particularly in tightly knit, well-established organizations. If a person is suddenly thrown into a stormy managerial role from her previously quiet specialist position, the challenges inserted by the collective persona and shadow of the organization can kill her wishes to be a responsible leader. If she insists on making decisions and acting according to her internalized values, the pressures from both above and below in hierarchy can destroy her health. Her values may be in stark conflict with the values of her superiors and other directors, the organizational culture and the values of those subordinates who have internalized them. She may be denied the right to do “the right thing” and forced through formal procedural decisions to do “the wrong thing”. While she could hold true to her self in her specialist job as a professional, the new managerial role may demand her to present a polished image of herself, her unit and the whole organization (persona) and at the same time act unethically behind the scenes (shadow). This paper presents a case study of a responsible specialist turned into an unwilling manager who lost her self under the managerial persona and shadow pressures of the organization – and of her survival attempts. How responsible is an individual? How far should she go: blow the whistle on the whole well-adjusted, respected organization and never get another job? Or just quit? Is responsible leadership possible in an organization whose ego is in the powerful grip of its unconscious persona and shadow? What is the role of an individual, organizational and societal unconscious in striving for responsible leadership? Can an organization become aware of its persona and shadow to such an extent that it could develop into an enlightened self?