

# The Leadership Archetype: A Jungian Analysis of Similarities between Modern Leadership Theory and the Abraham Myth in the Judaic–Christian Tradition

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**ABSTRACT.** Archetypal psychology suggests the possibility of a leadership archetype representing the unconscious preferences of human beings as a species about the appropriate relationships between leaders and followers. Mythological analysis compared God's leadership in the Abraham myth with modern visionary, ethical and situational leadership to find similarities reflecting continuities in human thinking about leadership over as long as 3600 years. God's leadership behavior is very modern except that God is generally more relationship oriented. The leadership archetype that emerges is of a leader that develops his/her follower by reliably maintaining a vision, behaving according to firm ethical values even when it weakens the leader's authority, accepting suffering when the follower is unreliable, and always forgiving even when the follower behaves with hubris in an attempt to overthrow the leader. If God's leadership principles were mandatory in management, many dysfunctional leaders would be disqualified and many of the negative consequences of poor leadership might be averted.

**KEY WORDS:** archetypal psychology, archetype, Jung, leadership, visionary ethical situational forgiveness, God, Abraham, myth, narrative analysis, mythological analysis

## Introduction

Over the past 75 years, the leadership literature has become a morass of competing theories. Each one has argued its own unique perspective about what makes leaders successful. As newer theories have

developed, older perspectives have continued unabated. There are trait, behavioral, situational, and attribution theories. There are visionary, ethical, charismatic, and transactional versus transformational leaderships. There are more – too many even to name. While a few attempts have been made to combine approaches, visionary with ethical for example, most have been offered as complete explanations that superseded the others. The purpose of this paper was to use archetypal psychology (Hopcke, 1999) to suggest a “ideal form” (Bostock, 1999) of leadership by identifying a set of unifying principles underlying many of the competing descriptions of leadership in the literature. Jung's archetypal psychology (Jung, 1977b) is for collective behavior what personality psychology is for individual behavior. It identifies inherited unconscious patterns of behavior called archetypes that are characteristic of humans as a species and that have developed as a result of human evolution (Campbell, 1991; Stevens, 1993). The concept of archetype seems to have originated with Nietzsche (1986) who spoke of humans reasoning in their dreams by accessing earlier states of human culture and passing through the whole thought of earlier humanity. Jung (1977b) popularized the concept arguing on the basis of dream analysis that the individual human psyche contained a collective unconscious containing behavioral predispositions, similar to the instincts of nonhuman animals, activated on a situational basis. In recent years, archetypal psychology has received empirical support from ethological and sociobiological research showing that humans inherit many of the mental and behavioral patterns that have been considered learned (Satinover, 1995; Stevens, 2003;

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