



RESEARCH REPORT

# Integrated Leadership

The Pathway to Transforming  
Healthcare and Healing the World

UNLOCKING  EVE

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## CO-FOUNDER PERSPECTIVE

The world is in polycrisis. Never have we wrestled with a series of such complex, interconnected challenges: environmental, health, financial, humanitarian, and refugee crises, to name just a few.

To accelerate progress at the rapid pace the world needs, we must address the core issue: leadership. Despite the world's evolving complexities, we're *still* relying on an outdated leadership model that restricts perspective, diversity, and potential.

The Unlocking Eve Foundation is pioneering a new leadership paradigm that reframes our understanding of effective leadership, challenging entrenched norms and shifting the status quo. Our goal is both ambitious and essential: to empower 100 million integrated leaders by 2030, advancing a new profile of leadership excellence and accelerating the advancement of women into leadership positions in healthcare by 50%.

### Our Journey Began in Healthcare

Our journey began in the realm of healthcare. As seasoned healthcare leaders, we recognized an opportunity amid the turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the world grappled with healthcare inequities and crashing financial markets, a select group of countries bucked the trend. They achieved significantly lower mortality rates (approximately 40%) and experienced less severe economic damage. It was widely noted that many of these countries were led by women<sup>1,2</sup>.

However, we were clear their success was not due to their gender. These leaders demonstrated mastery in accessing and integrating a unique blend of characteristics—what we term “directive and decisive” (often labeled as “masculine”) attributes and “care and connection” (often termed “feminine”). They fully harnessed their “integrated capacities” as leaders, and the positive impact was undeniable: fewer deaths, stronger economies. We refer to this expanded capacity as integrated leadership. We firmly believe that this capacity is intrinsic and accessible to all humans, and what is needed and wanted in the world today.

### From Insight Into Action: Emerging Data and Shifting Leadership Norms

Our real-world insights related to the power of integrated leadership were further substantiated by existing data. Leadership Circle's database of more than 300,000 leaders around the world revealed that effective leaders balance “achieving” and “relating” traits. Inspired by this work, plus our shared values with Leadership Circle, we are



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thrilled to enter into a strategic collaboration. This white paper is the first in a series of research, showcasing the exponential impact of integrated leadership on people and systems.

## **Why Is This Work Crucial?**

We're challenging a deep-rooted, traditional leadership model that is systemically hard-wired within individuals, businesses, institutions, and society at large. This traditional model limits everyone individually and collectively. It prevents people from utilizing their full potential to drive effectiveness. It limits the perspective and diversity needed to tackle today's challenges. It reinforces systemic inequalities in communities and society as a whole. It leads to poor outcomes across the board.

With a powerful body of empirical evidence, grounded in today's context, we aim to disrupt this norm, catalyse vital conversations and take action for better outcomes.

## **Join Us To Help Leaders Everywhere—Be the Change**

The Unlocking Eve Foundation is dedicated to challenging outdated leadership norms and catalyzing a paradigm shift. We believe the world needs integrated leadership to become the norm—at scale, depth, and speed. Learn more at [unlockingeve.org](https://unlockingeve.org).

We seek partners who share our vision of equipping leaders to address today's complex challenges with effective and integrated leadership. Whether you're eager to participate in research, explore partnership, or make a meaningful contribution to support our mission, we encourage you to get in touch.

Together, we can unlock the power of leaders and transform the world.

<sup>1</sup> Leading the Fight Against the Pandemic: Does Gender 'Really' Matter?  
Supriya Garikipati and Uma Kambhampati, University of Liverpool, University of Reading

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.socialeurope.eu/women-in-power-its-a-matter-of-life-and-death>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Context

The traditional models of thought and leadership that we have relied upon are ill-equipped to address the intricacy and complexity we encounter today.

Recent research has suggested the presence of a female leadership advantage. By exploring the leadership qualities of female leaders, we begin to understand how to unlock leadership potential by focusing on what makes them successful.

Our research demonstrates that leadership effectiveness is not just limited to natural skills within female leaders; it can be cultivated by any leader, making leaders of any gender more successful.

### Purpose

This paper provides a new paradigm of leadership for the 21st century—integrated leadership—and outlines the critical role of incorporating both stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics to deliver superior leadership and business outcomes.

### Findings

Based on the leadership profiles of more than 300,000 leaders from around the globe, we find that women leaders are rated on average as more effective. Most importantly, regardless of gender, balanced leaders are significantly more effective than leaders who over-rely on either stereotypically masculine (task) or feminine (people) characteristics.

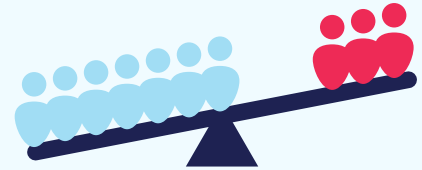
### Conclusion

When leaders unlock their combined potential to achieve positive healthcare outcomes, they can harness the power of diverse attributes, resulting in a more effective, inclusive, and transformative leadership style.

Focusing on this new integrated approach has other benefits beyond just creating better leadership. It also serves to close the gender gap and elevate more successful leaders inside and outside of healthcare.

## HIGHLIGHTS

1. There is still a prevalent gender inequity gap in top leadership positions.

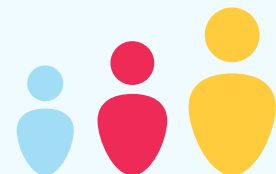


Over 70% of hospital staff are women, but only 25% are represented at the most senior levels of leadership.

2. On average, women leaders are rated as more effective than male leaders.



3. Regardless of gender, leaders who incorporate both traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics are 24% more effective than non-integrated leaders.



# RE-IMAGINING LEADERSHIP FOR A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

## The importance of leadership in a time of crisis

Effective leadership plays a critical role in the success of organizations and shaping organizational cultures. Great leaders provide direction and alignment between teams and organizational strategy. They articulate a compelling vision that can inspire and motivate, boost morale, and encourage peak performance, even when faced with daunting challenges.

Today, leaders are facing the most complex challenges in the world, such as COVID-19, climate change, and rapid social and technological transformations. The traits and behaviors of leaders have a profound influence on whether organizations and countries sink or swim during these times. Most recently, the coronavirus pandemic placed an extraordinary demand on leaders and businesses around the world. The extreme magnitude and scale of the outbreak resulted in overwhelming uncertainty and unpredictability, which made it difficult for business leaders to react effectively.

## Healthcare: A case study in need of attention

Leaders are still managing the fallout of the pandemic across industries and countries. Healthcare, in particular, saw the loss of more than 500,000 workers per month during the pandemic. The numbers show that women workers left healthcare in droves as they were faced with poor leadership, lack of support, and dangerous working conditions. More than 1 million positions left by women still have not been filled. Senior healthcare leaders are still struggling to recruit and retain a discontent workforce.

According to the World Health Organization, there is a global shortage of more than 7 million healthcare workers, which could rise to nearly 13 million by 2035<sup>1</sup>. Confidence in leadership has dropped to the lowest level in a decade<sup>2</sup>. Leaders are increasingly feeling ill-equipped to lead the organizations of the future<sup>3</sup>. It's clear that something needs to change if we are to forge a more promising path forward.

### In 2022 during COVID-19, healthcare saw:



A **loss of more than 500,000** workers per month.



A **350% increase** in worker **strikes** from 2021.



**85%** of COVID-19 decision-making groups were **predominately male**.



**15,000,000**

World Economic Forum anticipates a global healthcare worker **shortage of 15 million by 2030**.

**257 YEARS**

The World Economic Forum estimates it will take **257 years to close the gender gap** at work.



## Why current leadership paradigms need to change

The traditional models of thought and leadership that we have relied upon are ill-equipped to address the intricacy and complexity we encounter today. They are providing inadequate guidance in the face of the complex challenges posed by global transformations.

***“We all feel it: Something is out of balance in our communities, our organizations, and our world. To navigate these challenging times, a new model of leadership is emerging. And nowhere is the need more evident than in securing the health of the world’s citizens.”***

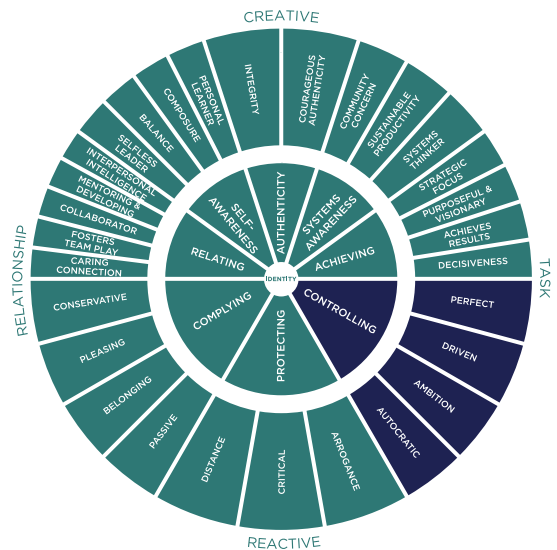
— Eva McLellan and Kaye Vitug, Co-Founders, Unlocking Eve

For a long time, organizations have prioritized the development of “task-focused” leaders who embody competition, achievement, and assertiveness, which are seen as “traditionally masculine” characteristics. Even in industries dominated by women, such as healthcare, the established norms for leadership were defined decades ago and have seen little change since then.

The value placed on task-focused leaders has favored the development of hierarchical leadership structures. On the one hand, these structures have brought predictability, stability, and a clear line of authority for organizations<sup>4</sup>. Yet, the overemphasis on top-down, command-and-control leadership structures can also stifle innovation, flexibility, and collaboration if left unchecked<sup>5</sup>.

Top-down leadership structures are particularly present in healthcare organizations and are often associated with poorer healthcare outcomes. For instance, leaders in these settings hold more influence in groups, so nurses and patients often end up going along with the leader in the room, stifling collaboration and any challenge to the status quo<sup>6</sup>.

Based on our research (research by Leadership Circle<sup>7</sup>), overreliance on task-focused characteristics, regardless of a leader’s gender, can lead to a controlling leadership style. While task-oriented leadership helps drive results and accomplish tasks, it also can put leaders at risk of taking up power at the expense of others, limiting teamwork, and dissolving trust. Our research finds that high degrees of controlling—associated with the Reactive (negative) side of a task-focused style—are negatively correlated with leadership effectiveness (-.41) and business outcomes (-.21).



	Business Performance Index	Leadership Effectiveness Scale
Controlling	-0.21	-0.41

This finding is particularly important for leaders today, who face huge amounts of complexity. They must make decisions quickly with limited information about problems that cannot be properly understood or solved by just one person. In healthcare, the cost of ineffective decision-making isn't simply profitability, it's people's lives. Leadership requires a more flexible approach that embraces shared decision-making, communication, and empathy for the needs of workers and service users.

## THE FEMININE LEADERSHIP ADVANTAGE: THE FIRST PARADIGM SHIFT

### The feminine advantage has been well documented in business

In a rapidly evolving business landscape, the conversation around leadership effectiveness is taking a new turn. While traditional models of leadership were often characterized by “command-and-control” structures, there is a growing consensus that the demands of the modern workplace require a different skill set—one that many argue favors “people-focused” traits, typically associated with female leaders.

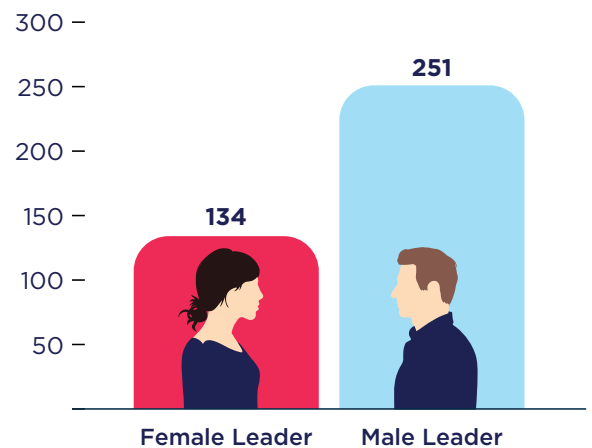
As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, certain female leaders were found to achieve better outcomes for their countries in terms of mortality and economic impact. In 2020, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control released data illustrating that countries led by women had six times fewer COVID-19-related deaths than countries led by men<sup>8</sup>.

Researchers attributed that women global leaders placed a greater value on people's lives and well-being, and brought together communities by providing a vision of a better post-COVID-19

world, thus mitigating the impact of the virus. These findings have stimulated further questions about the people-focused characteristics often associated with female leaders, such as empathy, communication, and relationship-building, and how they lead to superior outcomes.

Compelling research by the International Labor Organization of 12,940 enterprises in more than 70 countries found that women's representation in executive roles was seen to significantly improve financial

Average COVID-19 Deaths Per Million\*



\*on day 150, five months after outbreak defined as when deaths per million hit 0.1.

Source: Our World in Data



ILO found that when there were more female leaders in organizations, this led to:



Increased profitability and productivity



Enhanced ability to attract and retain talent



Greater creativity, innovation, and openness



performance, innovation, and productivity<sup>9</sup>. It has been suggested that, should equal participation of women in healthcare be achieved, global human capital wealth would increase by 22%<sup>10</sup>.

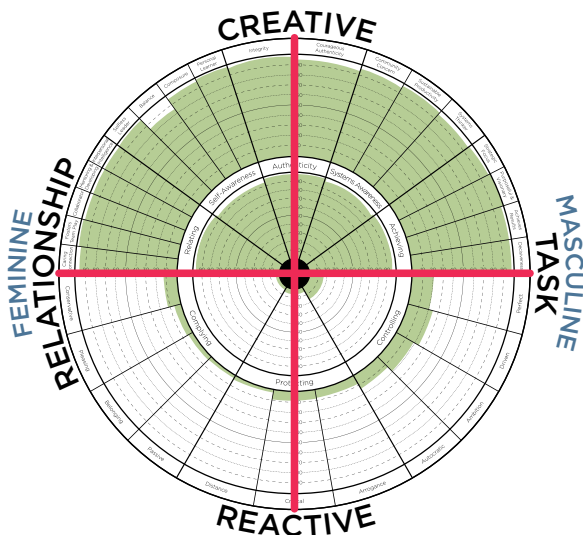
Research shows that in healthcare settings, “feminine” transformational leadership styles have become most influential and important. Research has now demonstrated the many benefits of using a people-focused approach to leadership<sup>11</sup>. These qualities are seen as essential for working with the emotional management of patients and staff members working in high-stress environments, which is the key need to worker engagement, even in the face of funding shortfalls and increased worker discontent.

## Decoupling leadership from gender

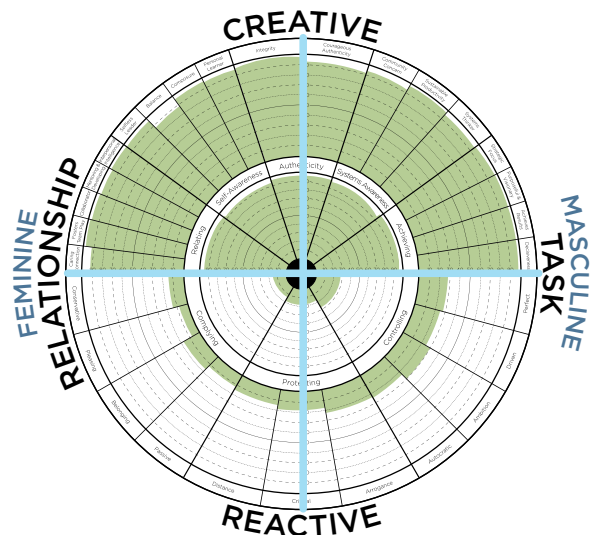
There is an undeniable trend emerging in which women leaders are consistently demonstrating higher effectiveness across various industries. The inception of Unlocking Eve stemmed from our curiosity and desire to explore and comprehend this feminine advantage, given our real-world experience in healthcare and business. Our aim is to delve deeper into how capacities and traits traditionally labeled as “feminine” provide a robust foundation for comprehending the potential of leadership—making leaders of any gender more successful. In doing so, our research seeks to disrupt the stereotype of leadership and gender, while simultaneously increasing awareness of the entrenched stereotypes.

To further explore this, our research (research by Leadership Circle<sup>12</sup>), examined the leadership profiles of more than 130,000 leaders in 196 countries. We looked at the profiles of the most effective leaders in our database to see the characteristics and behaviors they were showing. The profile is divided into two dimensions. First, the Creative-Reactive dimension (vertical) refers to (Creative) characteristics that are positively related to business outcomes and (Reactive) characteristics that are negatively related. Second, the Relationship-Task dimension (horizontal) refers to characteristics focused on developing people and connections (Relationship; stereotypically feminine characteristics) or achieving results and tasks (Task; stereotypically masculine characteristics).

**Profiles of Aggregate Most Effective Female Leaders**



**Profiles of Aggregate Most Effective Male Leaders**



We found that, regardless of gender, the most effective leaders were more balanced in task-focused skills and relational, people skills. We also noticed that these leaders showed a pattern of having high Creative orientation, with few Reactive characteristics.

In essence, leaders need to draw on a portfolio of behaviors and skills to be most effective. Leaders who harness both ends of this leadership spectrum demonstrate both an aura of authority and a compassionate gentleness. These leaders recognize that they cannot be successful alone. Instead, they empower people and share decision-making with others who possess varied views and diverse perspectives. At the same time, they provide the drive and vision to achieve results and transform organizations.

There is a pressing need to evolve beyond outdated leadership paradigms that overemphasize one side of the leadership spectrum. Leadership is not a trait; it is a learnable and teachable skill that can be harnessed and utilized for better business outcomes and a healed world.

## **INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP: THE NEW 21ST-CENTURY LEADERSHIP PARADIGM**

### **The integrated leadership hypothesis**

***“Informed by over 25 years of combined healthcare experience, one thing is clear: We urgently need a new blueprint that challenges leadership norms and unleashes a diverse wave of leaders prepared to confront our complex challenges. At Unlocking Eve, we are dedicated to evolving a new model we call ‘integrated leadership,’ uniting the feminine and masculine, accessible to all, and enabling all leaders to harness their full human potential.”***

**— Eva McLellan and Kaye Vitug, Co-Founders, Unlocking Eve**

The integrated leadership hypothesis asserts that the integration of traditionally attributed “masculine” and “feminine” leadership characteristics are universally accessible in all individuals, and this expanded range is closely and positively associated with both business and healthcare outcomes.

Over the past year, we (at Unlocking Eve) have been piloting this hypothesis with more than 200 leaders in eight countries to better understand real-world experience in today's context, and the results are promising and confirmatory. The aim of this research is to challenge organizations to rethink outdated leadership paradigms by reshaping conventional norms of effective leadership. We believe that part of creating a new standard of extraordinary leadership is found in the ability of all leaders to straddle this balance and integration, and to appreciate the infinitely rich continuum between them.

Therefore, **integrated leadership** represents a holistic approach to leadership, one that recognizes and embraces both task- and people-focused qualities inherent in all leaders. When leaders unlock their combined potential to achieve positive healthcare outcomes, they can harness the power of diverse attributes, resulting in more range accessible to them and, ultimately, a more effective, inclusive, and transformative leadership style.

This unlocking process happens through the “Power of Two”: rooted in the integration of these dual characteristics within self (intra), in between others (inter), and into the world (beyond).

The healthcare sector, which has traditionally overvalued task-focused leadership characteristics, has an opportunity to recognize the value of leaders with both people- and task-focused leadership characteristics. By illuminating the connection between integrated leadership and performance, we advocate for more inclusive practices that embrace diversity and make room for more female leaders, helping close the gender inequities found in most organizations<sup>13, 14</sup>.

## THE FIRST STEP: EVIDENCE FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP

### Insights from Leadership Circle

#### *Results from leaders across industries*

Using Leadership Circle's extensive database of more than 300,000 leaders from around the world, our research investigated the integrated leadership hypothesis. The results of this study illuminate the pivotal role of integrated leadership and its profound impact on leadership effectiveness.

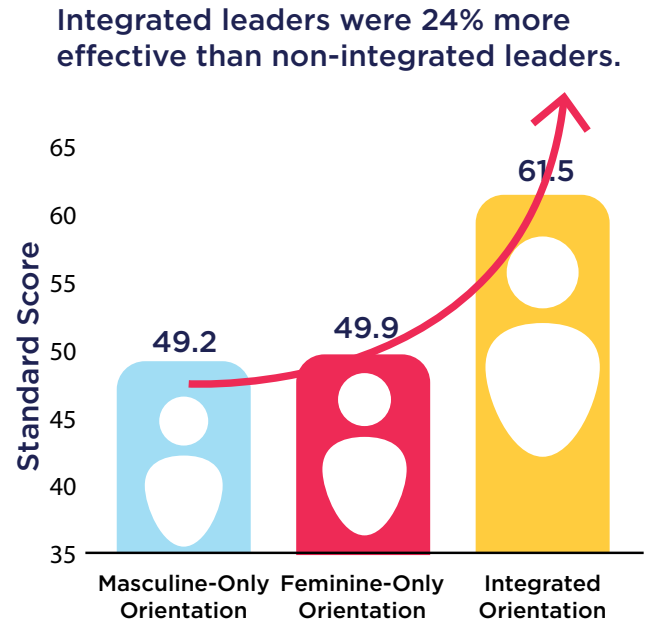
Leaders were categorized into three distinct groups, each containing both male and female leaders, including:

- Leaders whose predominate characteristics were masculine.
- Leaders whose predominate characteristics were feminine.
- Leaders who exhibited frequent characteristics that were both feminine and masculine (balanced leaders).

We then looked at the level of leadership effectiveness rated by those working closely with these leaders (e.g., bosses, peers, and direct reports) to see if there were differences in the performance of these three groups.

Three key insights emerged:

1. Balanced leaders are 24% more effective than leaders who lead predominantly from a traditionally masculine-only or feminine-only leadership approach.
2. Males make up 75% of the masculine-only approach and females make up 60% of the feminine-only approach. Balanced leaders were equally distributed between female and male leaders.
3. Leaders who performed low on masculine-only and feminine-only leadership were the least effective. They were 41% less effective than balanced leaders, and 27% less effective than leaders with high masculine-only or feminine-only approaches.



### *Results from leaders within the healthcare industry*

To further explore the relationship between integrated leadership and leadership effectiveness, we specifically looked at the data from the healthcare industry.

We found the same overall pattern that integrated leaders were equally effective. However, there were some differences in how healthcare leaders were showing up compared to leaders in other industries.

- Integrated leaders were 10% less prevalent in the healthcare industry.
- Healthcare leaders were twice as likely to adopt a masculine-only leadership orientation.
- Within the integrated leadership group, only 44% of leaders were male, compared with 50% in other industries.

Taken together, these findings emphasize the substantial advantages of integrated leadership and its positive impact on leadership effectiveness across industries. While gender-based leadership stereotypes persist, especially in the healthcare sector, recognizing and fostering integrated leadership skills can lead to more effectiveness.

## **The perspective of an integrated leader**

To gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and nuances of leadership, we conducted interviews with integrated leaders who have achieved remarkable success in their respective fields. Through these interviews, we explored how leaders combine traditionally masculine and feminine leadership characteristics, adapt to changing business contexts, and how they have developed along their journey toward leadership excellence.

We asked an integrated leader who is an assistant professor, renowned physician, and public health specialist in the field of medicine where her success comes from and what it was about the integrated leadership hypothesis that resonated with her. This leader stated that working in medicine was often dominated by a hyper-masculine approach and way of working, which often overlooked the feminine perspective.

***“Studying, training, and working in medicine is colonial. As a doctor, you are taught to embody a very masculine energy: hair back, no earrings, to command in a certain way, and to show no emotion. There is a total disregard for the feminine, emotional, intuitive, and artistic mind.”***

This leader pointed out that the field of medicine often adopts a hierarchical and rigid system in which certain expectations and norms are imposed. The criticism centers around the idea that to be a doctor, you are expected to conform to a traditional and stereotypically masculine image (hair back, commanding). There is a perceived lack of value or recognition for qualities that are traditionally associated with femininity (emotional intelligence, intuition). The implication is that prioritizing these qualities limits diversity and potentially hinders more holistic and integrated healthcare practices.

This leader continued to explain that the overreliance on masculine qualities in healthcare also has distorted the way patients are treated and evaluated. They argued that there is a disconnect between the outcomes that stakeholders and service users are concerned with, which can reduce overall healthcare effectiveness.

***“From a healthcare standpoint, it’s always about the hard outcomes, but what is lacking is indicators of people’s experience, like patient safety.”***

***“When patients are disrespected or they don’t feel safe, it dehumanizes them. Safety is directly related to mortality and can even lead to patients withholding information, and even delaying or even not taking their medication.”***

This leader suggested that the primary focus of healthcare has been on tangible and quantifiable outcomes. These “hard outcomes” are undoubtedly crucial. However, the statement draws attention to an often-underestimated aspect of healthcare: the patient experience. Neglecting this human element can result in dehumanization within the healthcare system, which can be detrimental both to patients and healthcare professionals themselves.

This leader further advocates that the duality of bringing both masculine and feminine qualities into their leadership makes their work more intentional and successful. This enables them to have a diversity of thought and broader perspective so this leader can understand the lived experiences of their patients and workers—the ability to look at problems in new and creative ways so they can excel as a leader.

In essence, this leader calls for a more integrated approach to healthcare. They suggest that in addition to striving for clinical excellence, healthcare providers and institutions should place a strong emphasis on empathy, communication, and creating an environment where patients feel safe and valued. Ultimately, they suggested that this not only enhances the quality of care but also contributes to better health outcomes and a more compassionate and patient-centered healthcare system.

## **OUR NEXT STEPS**

### **Integration and the journey ahead**

The evidence is clear, we need to shift our thinking about what makes a leader effective. Our results suggest that an integrated and balanced approach to leadership—one that embraces the entire portfolio of skills, characteristics, and values at play—underpins a new standard for leadership excellence that is necessary to transform organizations and industries.

High-quality research is a crucial part of our mission to create a new profile of integrated leadership. Unlocking Eve and Leadership Circle have engaged in a strategic research partnership in the pursuit of transforming leadership and organizations. Together, we have just begun to unpack the qualities that make integrated leaders so effective in their roles. Through rigorous research methods, we seek to understand the underlying causes of current ineffective leadership and identify positive models, examples, and case studies. By analyzing and codifying this information, we aim to develop solutions and tools that can change the way leaders see themselves, operate, and define leadership.

The next step in our research is to focus on developing integrated leaders and the skills that are needed to develop superior performance outcomes. After, we seek a new way to evaluate, train, and reward leaders who are more in line with an integrated 21st-century leadership paradigm.

We believe that learning to deploy this kind of integrated leadership in context of your current leadership challenges will significantly increase your impact and outcomes. While it will take a village to effect change to the extent that we aim to, we know that change starts with one person... so let it begin with you.

## About the research team

### Unlocking Eve

The Unlocking Eve Foundation, co-founded by healthcare leaders Eva McLellan and Kaye Vitug, was born from the unwavering belief that enabling new models of balanced and integrated leadership is essential to transform healthcare and heal the world. At the heart of their work is a dual mission: to advance a new profile of leadership excellence and to accelerate women's advancement in healthcare leadership by 50%. Unlocking Eve aims to impact 100 million lives by 2030 through thought leadership, compelling research, transformative tools, and high-impact partnerships for system change. [Learn more about our mission.](#)

### Leadership Circle

At Leadership Circle, we believe every leader is capable of becoming extraordinary. We've designed our solutions to help leaders thrive and re-invent themselves and their organizations amid volatile, ever-changing conditions. We've built our assessments upon the Universal Model of Leadership, which integrates the field of leadership, and our global community consists of best-in-class leadership coaches and consultants. Together, our data-backed tools and extensive network of experts help individual leaders, teams, and organizations lead effectively around the globe. [Read more about the Leadership Circle and our tools for assessing leadership effectiveness.](#)



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