

McKinsey Global Survey results:

## The value of centered leadership

*The five key capabilities that make up centered leadership—used together—are important predictors of executives’ satisfaction with their leadership performance and their life overall.*

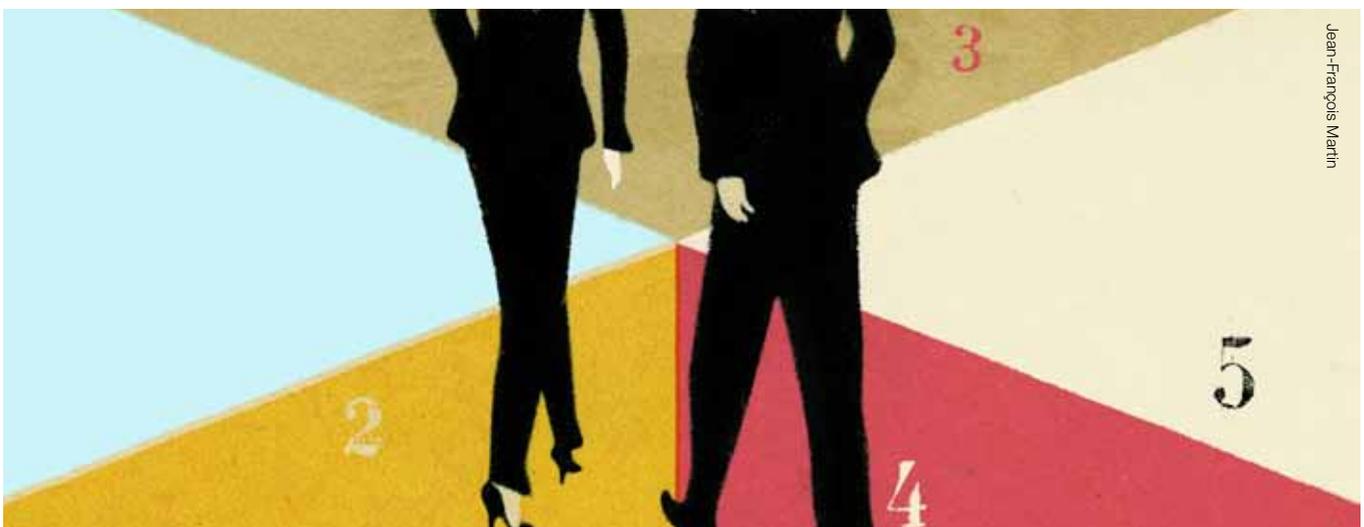
**Over the past six years,** McKinsey has developed a map of capabilities we call centered leadership. This concept has five dimensions: *meaning*, or finding your strengths and putting them to work in the service of a purpose that inspires you; *positive framing*, or adopting a more constructive way to view your world and convert even difficult situations into opportunities; *connecting*, or building a stronger sense of community and belonging; *engaging*, or pursuing opportunities disguised by risk; and *energizing*, or practicing ways to sustain your energy on a long leadership journey.

We began this work by interviewing female leaders around the world to identify the traits that characterize them.<sup>1</sup> In 2008, we began conducting quantitative research with women—and men—to test our findings. When preparing for this year’s effort, we posed two overarching questions: “Is centered leadership as good for men as it appears to be for women?” and “Do all five capabilities matter?” This survey yields a “yes” to both questions. Responses from around the world show just how well this model predicts personal and professional satisfaction for men and women. Notably, the results highlight distinct leadership characteristics found in both sexes that are somewhat different from traditional male traits.

Moreover, this survey underscores the impact when leaders embrace not just one or two but all five dimensions of centered leadership. As our 2009 survey also suggested,<sup>2</sup> finding meaning in one’s activities has the strongest impact on general satisfaction with one’s life, but the more dimensions that respondents say they have mastered, the more likely they are to rate themselves highly satisfied with their performance as leaders and with their lives generally.

<sup>1</sup> We have now conducted 145 interviews. Excerpts from many can be found on [mckinsey.com/women](http://mckinsey.com/women).

<sup>2</sup> Analysis based on the data published in Joanna Barsh and Aaron De Smet, “Centered leadership through the crisis: McKinsey Survey results,” [mckinseyquarterly.com](http://mckinseyquarterly.com), October 2009.



<sup>3</sup>The online survey was in the field from July 6 to 16, 2010, and received responses from 1,565 men and 933 women, representing the full range of regions, industries, tenures, and functional specialties. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with statements representing various dimensions of centered leadership, personal and professional satisfaction, and work performance and leadership.

<sup>4</sup>Joanna Barsh, Susie Cranston, and Rebecca A. Craske, "Centered leadership: How talented women thrive," mckinseyquarterly.com, September 2008.

We asked more than 2,000 executives a series of questions that gave us insight into their mastery of each dimension. In addition, we had respondents rate themselves on performance and leadership at work, as well as indicate how happy they are with their lives in general.<sup>3</sup>

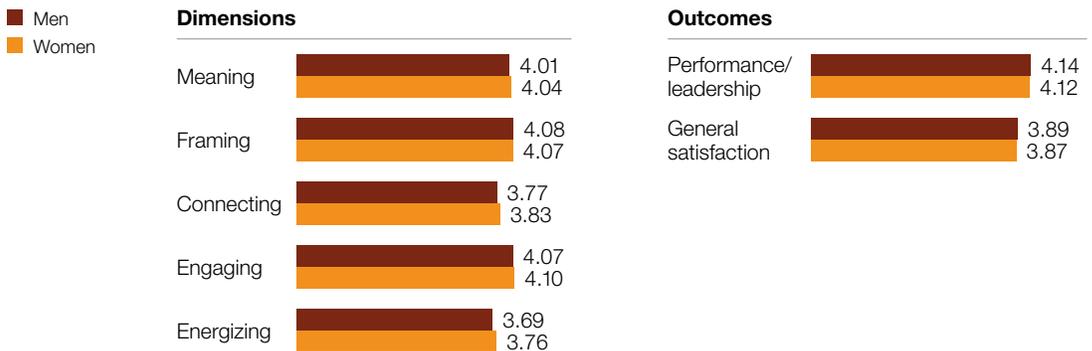
**How centered leadership makes a difference**

Originally, we developed the centered-leadership model based on strengths we identified among female leaders.<sup>4</sup> This survey, which underlines the work we've done since our initial research, shows that men as well as women can master centered leadership holistically and feel successful, in both their work performance and their lives (Exhibit 1).

For our purposes, respondents "master" each dimension when their answers put them in the top 20 percent of overall scores. We were pleased to see men *and* women in each group. In most dimensions, women do have an edge—their share of the top 20 percent is higher

Exhibit 1  
**Elements of centered leadership**

Net scores,<sup>1</sup> n = 2,177



<sup>1</sup>All results are mean scores calculated on a 5-point scale, where 5 is equal to "strongly agree."



than in the overall pool, suggesting that centered leadership remains geared to women’s strengths (Exhibit 2). The very high share of men who have mastered each dimension shows, however, that centered leadership is about not simply being a woman but also making use of mind-sets and behavior often considered feminine, such as being motivated by meaning at work (as opposed to pay or status) and seeking to forge community and collaboration.

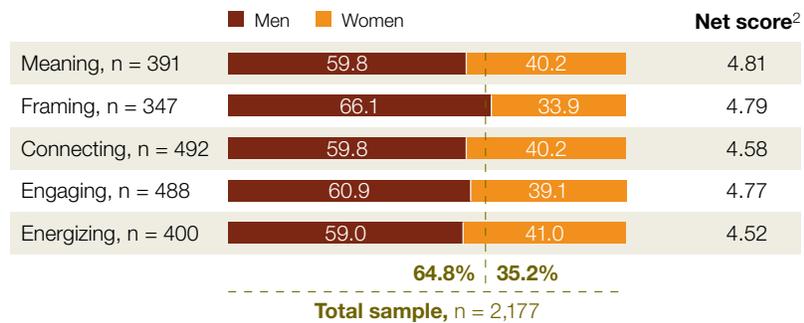
Executives’ mastery of centered leadership is related to their self-assessed performance as leaders and their satisfaction with life in general. Four of the five dimensions have a statistically significant positive effect on high scores for leadership and work performance,

Exhibit 2

### Masters of centered leadership

% of respondents

**Distribution of respondents who have mastered<sup>1</sup> each of the 5 dimensions, compared with the total weighted base of all respondents**



<sup>1</sup>“Mastery” comprises the highest 20% of respondents’ scores within each dimension.

<sup>2</sup>All scores are means and calculated on a 5-point scale, where 5 is equal to “strongly agree.”

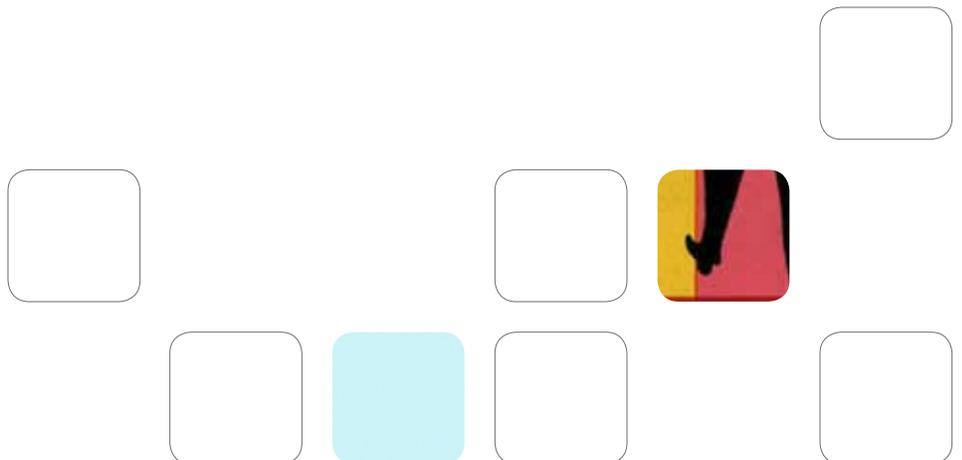
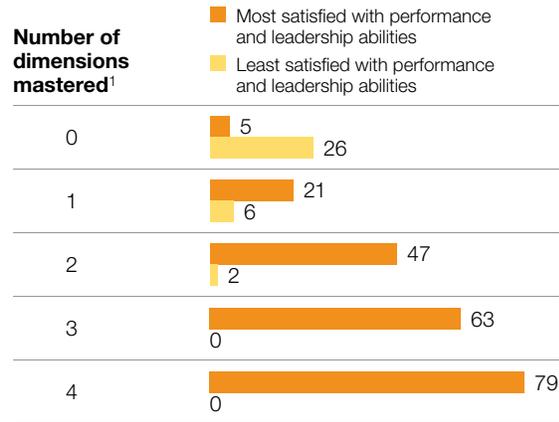


Exhibit 3

### Mastering performance and leadership

% of respondents, n = 2,177

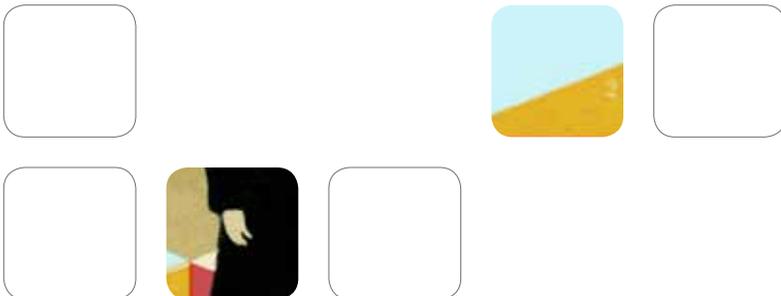


<sup>1</sup>“Mastery” comprises the highest 20% of respondents’ scores within each dimension.

and each dimension has about equal influence.<sup>5</sup> As the number of dimensions that respondents have mastered increases, so does the likelihood they will rate themselves highly in this area (Exhibit 3).

<sup>5</sup>The impact of energizing on leadership performance is meaningful but slightly negative: the higher respondents score on energizing, the less likely they are to score high on leadership. This is an area we plan to explore more in the future.

When we look at how respondents assess their general satisfaction, four dimensions matter again; this time, energizing replaces framing. Further, we discovered that finding meaning in one’s activities has the strongest impact on general satisfaction. In fact, meaning is five times more influential than either of the two closest dimensions: energizing and engaging.



As you might expect, some differences exist between men and women—but the differences are slight, and those that are statistically significant appear in only about a third of all the questions asked (Exhibit 4). Women outscore men on 10 of the 11.

Exhibit 4

### Getting to the same place differently

**Net differences, questions with significant divergences between male and female respondents' scores,<sup>1</sup> n = 2,177**

**Higher score**

**X.XX** Women

**X.XX** Men

Statement	Net Difference	Higher score
I actively build communities of people who give and get support from each other	0.16	3.76
I proactively ask senior people for opportunities that will help me develop	0.13	3.78
I actively find ways to help others and ways in which they can help me	0.12	4.26
I make sure I calm and prepare myself before going into situations where I may get upset or angry	0.12	4.07
My passion for what I do inspires others	0.11	4.08
I take time to reflect on what really matters most to me	0.11	4.12
I engage in activities that draw on my natural strengths	0.10	3.93
Every day, I consciously do things to keep myself energized	0.09	3.65
I have a noticeable energizing effect on others	0.08	3.94
I recognize and step beyond my fears so they don't keep me from seizing good opportunities	0.07	4.03
When I experience a mistake or failure, I quickly come up with a plan to recover	0.06	4.17

<sup>1</sup>All scores are means and calculated on a 5-point scale, where 5 is equal to "strongly agree."



The clear message, however, is that all five dimensions are important to how men and women rate their performance as leaders and their satisfaction with life overall. Indeed, the difference in these areas between respondents who have mastered all of an outcome's relevant dimensions and those who have mastered none is striking (Exhibit 5).

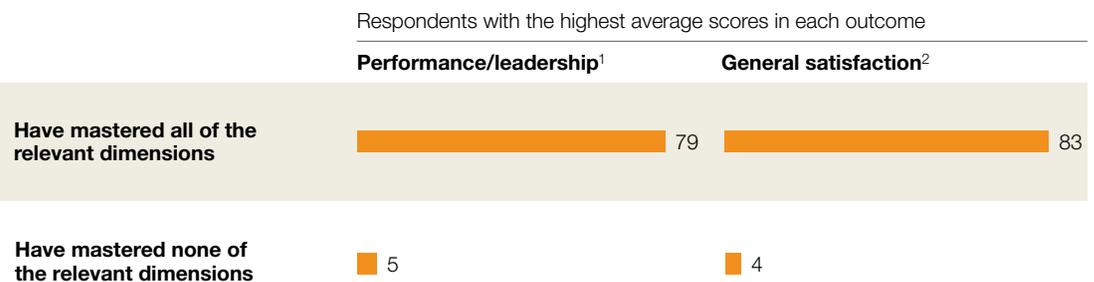
### Getting older matters—if you can afford to wait

Age brings skill, as the old saw reminds us. Across the five dimensions of centered leadership, respondents who are older than 50 have higher net scores than any other age group (Exhibit 6). Two other findings, though, are particularly notable. The first is that women's scores in each dimension tend to improve more than men's, which fits with our hypothesis that as women mature, they use their strengths more and more (something we focus on teaching future leaders). The second is the slump in energizing felt by men and women in their 30s—possibly a function of raising families just as work responsibilities accelerate. Men feel the bite more than women do, though for both, energizing drops more than any other dimension.

Exhibit 5

## The influence of dimensions

% of respondents



<sup>1</sup>For performance/leadership, the 4 dimensions that have a meaningful impact on outcome scores are, in order of descending influence, meaning, engaging, framing, and connecting; for "mastered all," n = 106; for "mastered none," n = 1,302.

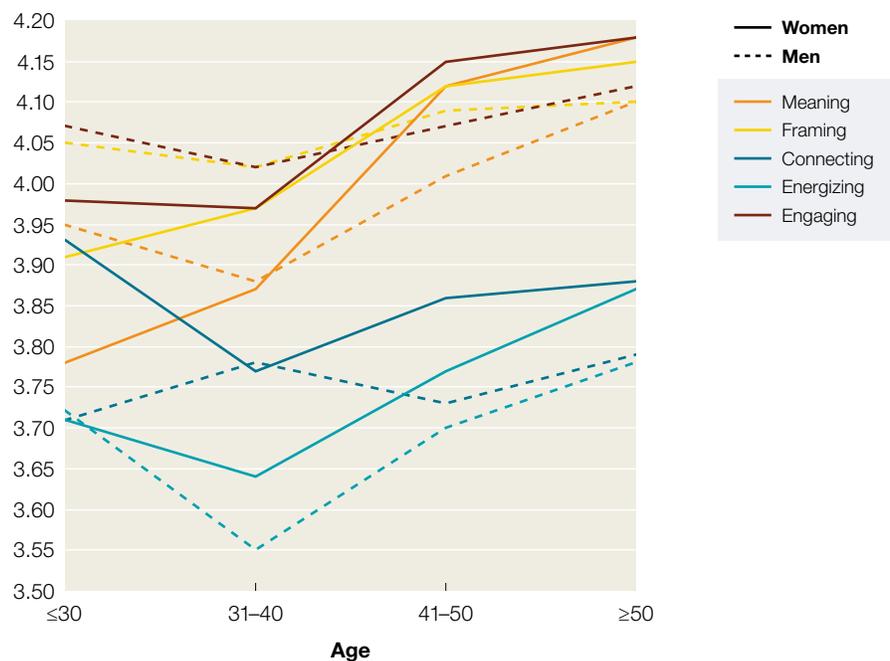
<sup>2</sup>For general satisfaction, the 4 dimensions that have a meaningful impact on outcome scores are, in order of descending influence, meaning, energizing, engaging, and connecting; for "mastered all," n = 103; for "mastered none," n = 1,258.



Exhibit 6

**How age and sex matter**

n = 2,177

**Net score<sup>1</sup> for dimensions, by sex**

<sup>1</sup>All scores are means and calculated on a 5-point scale, where 5 is equal to “strongly agree.”

**Looking ahead**

This is the third generation of our centered-leadership surveys, and we are still learning, questioning, and validating. We can suggest three areas in which our current research offers implications for organizations of all kinds and in which we are continuing to work ourselves:

- **Centered leadership equips leaders for leading change.** Among leaders who have mastered all five dimensions of centered leadership, 92 percent say they have the skills to lead through times of major change (versus 21 percent for those yet to master them). Since most executives are living through particularly turbulent economic times, a focus on centered leadership could benefit leaders significantly.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>For more on how CEOs of several major corporations have applied centered-leadership skills to lead their companies through change, see Joanna Barsh, Josephine Mogelof, and Caroline Webb, “How centered leaders achieve extraordinary results,” *mckinseyquarterly.com*, October 2010.

- **Big organizations can learn from small ones.** Across the board, executives at smaller organizations say they have mastered more dimensions of centered leadership and feel better about their work performance and overall satisfaction. These results suggest that larger organizations have much to learn from small ones on how to attract, motivate, and inspire their employees.
- **Future leaders are most at risk.** We have long believed that mastering centered leadership is most important for younger women and men who desire to lead, a belief these numbers underscore. The youngest respondents report the lowest scores in all dimensions except connecting. Given the correlation between higher scores and good outcomes, such as leadership effectiveness and general satisfaction, companies would benefit from undertaking the cultural transformation that centered leadership augurs. ▣

Contributors to the development and analysis of this survey include **Joanna Barsh**, a director in McKinsey's New York office; **Josephine Mogelof**, a consultant in the Los Angeles office; and **Caroline Webb**, a principal in the London office. Copyright © 2010 McKinsey & Company. All rights reserved.

The contributors would like to thank Aaron De Smet, a principal in McKinsey's Houston office; and Johanne Lavoie, a consultant in the Calgary office, for their extraordinary contributions to this work.

