



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE HUMAN+ MODEL REDEFINING MASCULINITY THROUGH EMOTIONAL COURAGE, RECIPROCITY AND HUMANISTIC LEADERSHIP

Dr. Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria

President and Founder, Liderarte Factoría de Talento, President and Founder, University of Happiness and Well-Being, Madrid, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 17th June, 2026
Received in revised form
20th July, 2026
Accepted 27th August, 2026
Published online 30th September, 2026

Keywords:

New Masculinity; Masculinities; Human+ Model; Organizational well-Being; Humanistic Leadership; Emotional Courage; Reciprocity; Psychological Safety; Men's Mental Health.

*Corresponding author:

Dr. Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria

ABSTRACT

Masculinity is not a fixed biological script but a socially learned and context-sensitive way of interpreting strength, responsibility, emotion, work, care and authority. In many organizations, however, masculine credibility continues to be associated with emotional restriction, invulnerability, extreme self-reliance, competitive dominance and uninterrupted work devotion. These expectations may reward some men in the short term while generating hidden costs for men, women, teams and organizations: silence, delayed help-seeking, burnout, poor-quality relationships, exclusion and leadership cultures in which appearing strong becomes more important than acting wisely. This conceptual research paper develops the Human+ Model, a strengths-based framework for a new, plural and accountable masculinity in organizational life. The study uses an integrative review of scholarship on masculinities, men's mental health, leadership, psychological safety, workplace well-being and gender-transformative practice. It synthesizes this literature into eight mutually reinforcing dimensions: self-awareness, emotional literacy, conscious vulnerability, relational courage, reciprocity and care, purpose and ethical responsibility, integrated strength, and generative leadership. The model rejects both the idealization and the condemnation of masculinity. Instead, it distinguishes strength from domination, courage from emotional denial, autonomy from isolation, ambition from work addiction, and protection from control. The article presents a multilevel logic connecting individual identity, interpersonal behavior, team climate and organizational systems; formulates research propositions; proposes a Human+ Organizational Masculinity Index; and outlines practical interventions for leadership development and human-resource policy. The central argument is that healthier masculinities are not a concession that diminishes men. They are an expansion of human capacity. When men are permitted and expected to combine competence with care, authority with listening, and resilience with help-seeking, organizations gain more trustworthy leaders, safer teams and more sustainable performance.

Copyright©2026, Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria. 2026. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Dr. Ignacio Bonasa Alzuria. 2026. "The human+ model redefining masculinity through emotional courage, reciprocity and humanistic leadership". *International Journal of Current Research*, 18, (09), 38163-38172.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations have spent decades teaching people how to manage strategy, finance, technology and performance. They have invested far less effort in examining the invisible gender scripts through which authority is performed. One of the most persistent scripts tells men that credibility requires control, emotional distance, relentless availability and the capacity to endure without asking for help. These qualities can be mistaken for leadership because they produce an appearance of certainty. Yet certainty is not the same as judgment, silence is not the same as resilience, and domination is not the same as strength. The consequences are not confined to men. A workplace that rewards invulnerability teaches everyone to hide uncertainty. A culture that admires aggressive competition normalizes humiliation and discourages collaboration.

A leadership ideal built around uninterrupted work devotion penalizes caregivers and reproduces gender inequality. Masculinity therefore matters not because men are the only people who enact masculine norms, but because particular ideas about manhood can become embedded in systems of status, promotion, communication and decision-making. Contemporary scholarship increasingly treats masculinities as plural, relational and socially constructed rather than as a single essence shared by all men. Masculine identities vary across generation, culture, social class, sexuality, occupation and organizational setting. A man may reproduce dominance in one context and practice care in another. He may genuinely value equality while still fearing that emotional disclosure will reduce his authority. This tension is crucial: transformation rarely begins with perfect ideological clarity. It often begins when a person discovers that an inherited way of being strong has become too narrow for the life, relationships or leadership

responsibilities he now carries. The need is not to replace one rigid masculinity with another. Nor is it to portray men as defective, dangerous or emotionally incomplete. Deficit-only language can create defensiveness and overlook the constructive motives that often sit beneath traditional masculine practices: the desire to protect, provide, achieve, remain dependable and face adversity. The problem appears when these motives are expressed through inflexible rules - never show fear, never depend on others, win at all costs, equate worth with status, or treat care as secondary. A credible model of change must preserve agency and responsibility while expanding the emotional and relational repertoire available to men. This paper proposes the Human+ Model as such a framework. "Plus" does not mean superior to women, other men or other identities. It signifies addition: strength plus tenderness, autonomy plus interdependence, ambition plus meaning, courage plus emotional truth, authority plus accountability. The model describes a masculinity capable of holding apparent opposites without collapsing into caricature. It is designed for organizational contexts, where individual development alone is insufficient because norms are reinforced by incentives, role models, policies and everyday interactions. The article makes four contributions. First, it integrates research on masculinities with organizational well-being and leadership, fields that are often studied separately. Second, it advances an eight-dimensional conceptual model that converts broad aspirations such as "healthy masculinity" into observable capacities. Third, it offers multilevel propositions that can be tested empirically. Fourth, it translates the framework into organizational practices without presenting workshops as a substitute for structural change. The purpose is not to announce a finished theory but to provide a coherent, falsifiable and practically meaningful foundation for research and action.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

A central paradox frames this study. Traits conventionally coded as masculine - decisiveness, endurance, independence, competitiveness and courage - can support performance. The same traits become harmful when they harden into dominance, emotional suppression, isolation, compulsive work and reckless risk. Organizations often reward the visible benefit while externalizing the delayed cost. The leader who never admits uncertainty may initially appear commanding; later, the team discovers that bad news was suppressed. The employee who never requests support may be praised as reliable; later, exhaustion becomes absence, disengagement or crisis.

Research on masculinity contest cultures shows how workplaces can become arenas in which employees prove worth through toughness, status, stamina and the avoidance of weakness. Such cultures are associated with emotional exhaustion and harmful outcomes across gender groups. Research on men's health also indicates that restrictive norms can discourage help-seeking and encourage risk. Yet organizational responses commonly individualize the problem: resilience training is offered while workloads, promotion criteria and senior-leader behavior remain unchanged. The principal research question is: How can organizations support forms of masculinity that retain agency, courage and responsibility while reducing the personal and collective costs of rigidity, domination and emotional disconnection? Three subsidiary questions guide the review: (1) Which dimensions distinguish an expansive masculinity from a restrictive one in

organizational settings? (2) Through which individual, relational, team and system-level mechanisms might these dimensions influence well-being and leadership? (3) How can the proposed model be operationalized and tested without treating masculinity as a homogeneous male trait?

METHODOLOGICAL

This article adopts an integrative conceptual review. This approach is appropriate when a phenomenon spans several literatures and when the research objective is to develop a new framework rather than estimate a pooled effect. The review draws on scholarship concerning hegemonic and plural masculinities, gender-role conflict, masculinity contest cultures, men's mental health and help-seeking, emotional labor, psychological safety, servant and humanistic leadership, workplace well-being, inclusion and gender-transformative interventions. The conceptual process involved four analytical stages. First, recurring restrictive norms were identified: emotional restriction, invulnerability, self-reliance without interdependence, dominance, status competition and work devotion without boundaries. Second, the documented individual and organizational consequences of these norms were mapped, including stress, silence, reduced help-seeking, relationship strain, burnout, exclusion and impaired learning. Third, protective and transformative capacities were synthesized from adjacent research, including emotional literacy, self-compassion, relational openness, ethical purpose, reciprocity, psychological safety and inclusive leadership. Fourth, these capacities were organized into an eight-dimensional model and linked through multilevel propositions. The paper does not claim that all men endorse restrictive norms, that only men reproduce them, or that masculine identification is inherently harmful. It also does not present original participant data. Illustrative vignettes are explicitly used as conceptual examples rather than empirical evidence. The proposed dimensions and propositions should therefore be treated as a research agenda requiring qualitative refinement, measurement validation, longitudinal studies and cross-cultural testing.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Masculinities as plural, relational and contextual: The shift from "masculinity" in the singular to "masculinities" in the plural is more than a linguistic preference. It recognizes that ways of being a man are produced in relation to institutions, histories and other identities. Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity remains foundational because it explains how one culturally exalted pattern can legitimate male dominance even though relatively few men fully embody it. Later scholarship has emphasized hybridity, intersectionality, inclusive masculinities and the possibility of change.

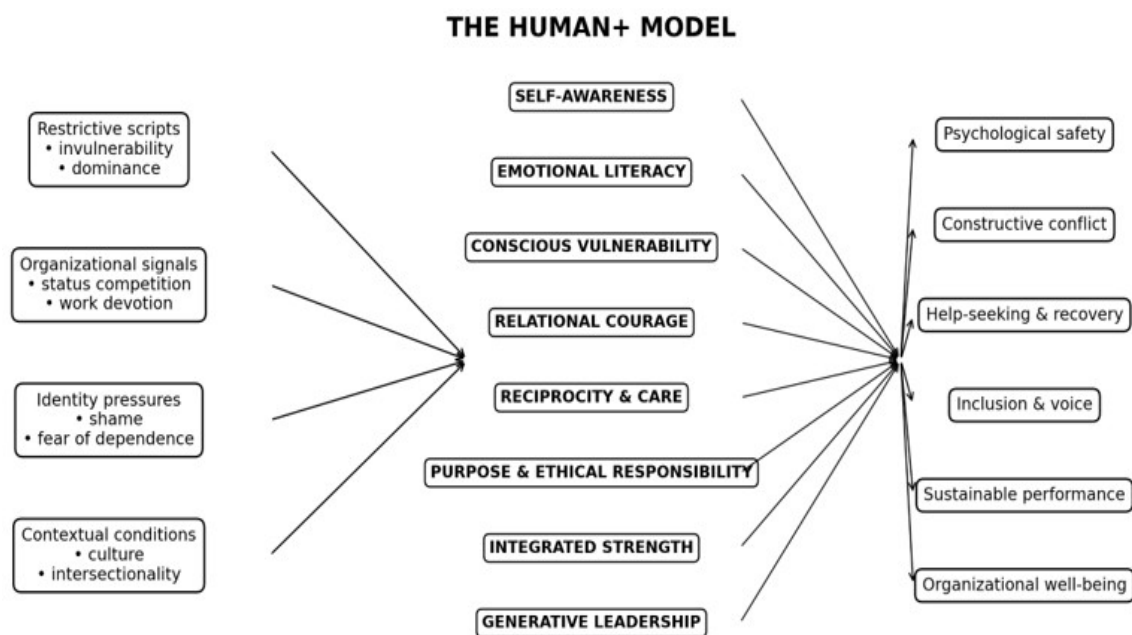
In organizations, masculinities are performed through ordinary practices: who interrupts whom, who is expected to travel without constraint, whose anger is interpreted as authority, who can disclose family needs without losing status, and whether asking for help is framed as maturity or weakness. These practices are local. The masculinity celebrated in an investment bank may differ from that in a hospital, school, military unit or social enterprise. Nevertheless, common patterns recur when status is attached to dominance, stamina, emotional control and competition.

Table 1. From restrictive scripts to Human+ capacities

Restrictive script	Hidden organizational cost	Human+ capacity	Observable alternative
Never show weakness	Concealed risk, delayed help-seeking	Conscious vulnerability	Names uncertainty and seeks timely support
Solve everything alone	Isolation, poor consultation	Reciprocity and care	Uses networks and offers mutual assistance
Win every contest	Conflict, exclusion, status anxiety	Relational courage	Challenges directly without humiliation
Work proves worth	Burnout, caregiving penalty	Purpose and ethical responsibility	Sets sustainable boundaries and values contribution
Control creates authority	Silence and low learning	Generative leadership	Shares voice, develops others and protects dissent
Emotion impairs judgment	Missing information, surface acting	Emotional literacy	Uses emotion as data without surrendering judgment
Strength means hardness	Rigidity and relational damage	Integrated strength	Adapts firmness, care, recovery and resolve
Identity is fixed	Defensiveness and stagnation	Self-awareness	Reflects on scripts and chooses behavior intentionally

Table 2. Multilevel mechanisms and organizational practices

Level	Core mechanism	Risk when neglected	Illustrative practice
Individual	Identity flexibility and emotional regulation	Defensiveness, suppression, isolation	Reflection, coaching, help-seeking skills
Interpersonal	Reciprocity, feedback and repair	Dominance, avoidance, relational rupture	Structured dialogue, mentoring, accountable apology
Team	Psychological safety and shared norms	Silence, contest culture, burnout	Leader inclusiveness, speaking-up routines, workload review
Organization	Status and incentive architecture	Symbolic change without behavioral change	Promotion criteria, leave use, flexible work, anti-harassment accountability



Note. The figure presents the proposed transformation pathway from restrictive scripts and organizational status signals to Human+ capacities and, through psychological and relational mechanisms, to well-being and sustainable organizational outcomes.

Figure 1. Human+ multilevel conceptual framework

A contextual perspective prevents two errors. The first is essentialism, which treats men as naturally less emotional, less caring or more dominant. The second is individual reductionism, which locates the problem entirely inside men while ignoring the systems that reward particular behavior. Men make choices, but they make them within reputational economies. A senior executive who openly acknowledges anxiety may be personally ready for change yet reasonably fear career consequences in a culture that interprets vulnerability as incompetence.

The costs of restrictive masculine norms: Restrictive masculine norms may affect health by encouraging stoicism, risk-taking and avoidance of professional support.

The World Health Organization has noted that rigid notions of masculinity can contribute to harmful health behavior and delayed care. Psychological research similarly links traditional norms with barriers to help-seeking. The mechanism is not simply that men do not experience distress; rather, distress may be interpreted as a threat to identity, and disclosure may be seen as social defeat. At work, the costs become collective. Emotional restriction can reduce accurate communication. Extreme self-reliance can prevent consultation. Dominance can silence dissent. Work devotion can normalize chronic overload. Risk-taking can be celebrated even when prudent challenge is needed. Martin's analysis of the "downsides of masculinity" is especially relevant: traits that appear to give

men advantages at work can simultaneously damage their psychological and relational well-being. Masculinity contest culture provides an organizational bridge between identity and climate. In such cultures, employees must continually demonstrate that they are tough, dominant, high-status and fully devoted to work. The contest is never definitively won, because credibility requires repeated proof. This produces insecurity beneath apparent confidence. Employees monitor one another for weakness, leaders escalate commitment signals, and mistakes become threats to identity rather than sources of learning.

Leadership prototypes and gendered authority: Leadership prototypes have historically been associated with agency, dominance and certainty. These associations benefit men as a group by making male authority appear more natural, but they also constrain men by narrowing the acceptable ways in which authority may be exercised. A leader who listens deeply, shares doubt or prioritizes care may be perceived as departing from the prototype, even when those behaviors improve decision quality and trust.

The objective is not to eliminate agency. Organizations need leaders who decide, protect standards, confront misconduct and act under pressure. The transformation lies in separating agency from domination. Decisiveness can coexist with consultation. Accountability can coexist with compassion. Courage can include speaking about fear rather than denying it. A leader's capacity to remain present with complexity is often more valuable than the performance of effortless certainty.

Psychological safety, emotional courage and well-being: Psychological safety refers to a shared belief that interpersonal risk-taking is possible without humiliation or punishment. It is especially relevant to masculinity because many transformative behaviors - admitting error, asking for assistance, naming emotion, challenging a powerful colleague - are interpersonal risks. A psychologically safe environment does not remove accountability. It makes truth-telling possible before problems become crises. Emotional courage is used in this paper to describe the willingness to perceive, name and communicate emotionally relevant information when doing so serves learning, relationship or ethical action. It is not unrestricted disclosure, emotional impulsivity or the transfer of responsibility to others. Mature vulnerability is bounded, purposeful and context-sensitive. It says, in effect: "This is what I am experiencing, this is what I know and do not know, and this is how I will remain responsible." Organizational well-being is similarly understood as more than individual happiness. It includes sustainable energy, meaningful work, relational quality, fairness, physical and psychological health, and the capacity to perform without systematically damaging people. Well-being and performance are not automatic opposites. Poorly designed performance systems may produce short-term output by consuming the human resources on which future performance depends.

THE HUMAN+ MODEL

The Human+ Model defines expansive masculinity as a flexible, ethical and relational capacity through which a person can exercise strength without domination, autonomy without isolation, ambition without self-erasure and vulnerability without abandoning responsibility. The model is relevant to men while remaining open to the fact that people of any gender

may enact or be affected by masculine organizational norms. It comprises eight dimensions.

- **Self-awareness.** The capacity to recognize one's inherited beliefs about manhood, identify triggers related to status or shame, and observe how these beliefs shape behavior. Self-awareness shifts masculinity from an unconscious script to a field of choice.
- **Emotional literacy.** The ability to distinguish, name and interpret emotions in oneself and others. Emotional literacy expands the information available for judgment; it does not replace analysis but enriches it.
- **Conscious vulnerability.** The willingness to acknowledge limits, uncertainty, mistakes and needs in a responsible and context-sensitive way. Conscious vulnerability rejects both emotional concealment and indiscriminate disclosure.
- **Relational courage.** The capacity to initiate difficult conversations, receive challenge without retaliation, repair harm and protect the dignity of others. It reframes courage as staying present in relationship rather than winning through force.
- **Reciprocity and care.** The recognition that human beings are interdependent and that giving, receiving, mentoring, caregiving and mutual support are compatible with strength. Reciprocity counters the belief that dependence is inherently humiliating.
- **Purpose and ethical responsibility.** The orientation of ambition toward contribution, stewardship and consequences. Purpose prevents success from being reduced to status accumulation and asks whom leadership serves.
- **Integrated strength.** The ability to combine firmness and tenderness, boundaries and empathy, endurance and recovery, autonomy and collaboration. Integrated strength is flexible rather than performative.
- **Generative leadership.** The practice of using authority to enlarge the agency, safety and capability of others. Generative leaders do not need followers to remain small in order to feel powerful.

THE EIGHT DIMENSIONS IN DEPTH

Self-awareness: seeing the script before performing it: Self-awareness begins with biography. Men learn masculinity through praise, correction, observation and exclusion. A boy may be admired for not crying, a young professional for accepting every assignment, and a manager for "taking control" when others hesitate. None of these moments alone determines identity, but together they can create an internal rulebook. Because the rules are familiar, they are often experienced as personality rather than social learning. In organizational life, status threats activate these scripts. A challenge in a meeting may be heard not as information but as disrespect. A need for support may be interpreted not as a practical fact but as evidence of inadequacy. Self-awareness creates a pause between threat and response. The leader can ask: What am I protecting - the quality of the decision, or my image as the person who already knows?

Human+ development therefore includes reflective practices that connect personal history with present behavior. Useful prompts include: Which emotions were permitted in my family? What did "a real man" mean in my professional environment? When do I become controlling, silent or

excessively self-reliant? Which people pay the price when I defend my status? Reflection becomes meaningful only when linked to observable choices and feedback.

Emotional literacy: expanding the data set: Emotional literacy is sometimes trivialized as learning a larger vocabulary for feelings. Its organizational value is more substantial. Emotions signal perceived threat, loss, injustice, attachment, opportunity and meaning. A manager who can distinguish irritation from shame is better positioned to avoid converting vulnerability into aggression. A team member who recognizes fear can separate a genuine risk signal from a reputational concern. Emotional literacy also improves interpersonal accuracy. Traditional masculine norms may encourage men to convert sadness into anger or anxiety into overwork because anger and action feel more permissible. The visible behavior can then be misread by colleagues. Naming the underlying experience reduces the need for defensive performance. This does not require every workplace to become a therapeutic setting. It requires leaders to understand that emotional information already shapes decisions, whether acknowledged or not.

A practical indicator of emotional literacy is not how frequently a person talks about emotion, but whether emotional knowledge changes behavior constructively. Can the leader recognize that a team's resistance contains fear of loss? Can he notice his own impatience before interrupting? Can he discuss disappointment without humiliating the person involved?

Conscious vulnerability: truth without abdication: Vulnerability has become a popular leadership term, but it is often presented without boundaries. Conscious vulnerability is neither confession as performance nor emotional unloading. It involves truthful acknowledgment of relevant limits combined with continued responsibility. "I do not yet know" is followed by a plan to learn. "I made the wrong decision" is followed by repair. "I am struggling" is followed by an appropriate request for support.

The organizational power of such behavior comes from modeling. When a senior man admits error without collapse, he weakens the association between masculinity and infallibility. Others gain permission to surface problems earlier. The leader also demonstrates that authority can survive contact with truth. Conversely, pseudo-vulnerability can manipulate: a leader may disclose emotion to gain sympathy while avoiding accountability. The Human+ criterion is whether disclosure increases clarity, responsibility and relational integrity. Conscious vulnerability is especially important in high-risk settings. Aviation, medicine, finance and public safety all depend on rapid reporting of uncertainty and error. A norm that protects masculine reputation at the cost of information quality is not merely psychologically unhealthy; it is operationally dangerous.

Relational courage: remaining present in difficulty: Conventional accounts of courage emphasize confrontation with external danger. Relational courage includes the willingness to stay in a conversation where one may feel ashamed, challenged or unable to control the outcome. It is visible when a manager listens to the impact of his behavior without immediately defending his intention, when a colleague interrupts sexist humor, or when a father negotiates caregiving responsibilities rather than assuming that career demands are

naturally decisive. Relational courage does not mean avoiding conflict. On the contrary, it supports clearer conflict because the goal is not to establish dominance. A Human+ leader can say no, address underperformance and defend standards while preserving dignity. This matters because organizations often oscillate between aggressive confrontation and conflict avoidance. Relational courage provides a third path: directness with respect. Repair is a core practice. Traditional masculine scripts may treat apology as loss of rank. Human+ masculinity treats accountable repair as evidence of inner stability. A credible apology names the behavior, recognizes impact, avoids self-exoneration and changes future conduct.

Reciprocity and care: strength that can receive: Many men are socialized to give through provision and protection while remaining uncomfortable receiving care. This asymmetry can appear generous but still preserve control. Reciprocity requires the capacity both to contribute and to depend. It recognizes that no leader, professional or family member is permanently self-sufficient. Care is not a soft supplement to serious work. It is the practical attention required to sustain people, relationships and systems. Mentoring, listening, checking workload, creating recovery, protecting ethical dissent and sharing domestic responsibility are forms of care. When care is feminized and devalued, women carry disproportionate burdens and men lose access to capacities necessary for mature leadership. Reciprocity also challenges transactional networking. The Human+ question is not only "What can this person do for me?" but "What relationship are we building, and how can capability circulate?" This orientation supports trust, social support and knowledge exchange.

Purpose and ethical responsibility: ambition in service of life: Ambition is not rejected by the Human+ Model. Achievement can express creativity, discipline and contribution. The problem arises when status becomes the primary measure of masculine worth. Then promotion, income and public recognition cease to be goals and become proof of existence. Failure is experienced not as an event but as exposure. Purpose offers a wider horizon. It asks what value is created, for whom, at what human and ecological cost, and what kind of person the pursuit is shaping. Ethical responsibility prevents purpose from becoming inspirational language detached from consequences. A leader may speak about transformation while exhausting employees; the Human+ test is whether means embody stated ends.

Purpose also creates space for plural life domains. A man's value need not depend entirely on paid work. Caregiving, friendship, citizenship, health, art, learning and community can be legitimate sources of identity. This reduces the existential load placed on career and supports more sustainable choices.

6.7 Integrated strength: flexible rather than hard. Integrated strength is the model's central synthesis. Restrictive masculinity often treats human qualities as opposites: strong or vulnerable, rational or emotional, independent or dependent, decisive or caring. Integrated strength replaces "either/or" with disciplined "both/and." A leader can feel fear and act courageously. He can empathize and maintain a boundary. He can endure difficulty and recognize when recovery is necessary.

Flexibility is not inconsistency. It is the capacity to select a response proportionate to reality rather than to a gender script. Hardness may be useful in a moment of emergency, but

disastrous as a permanent relational style. Tenderness may be essential in grief, but insufficient when misconduct requires decisive intervention. Integration expands the repertoire. This dimension also protects the model from becoming a demand that men simply adopt stereotypically feminine traits. The aim is not feminization or masculinization. It is humanization: access to the full range of capacities required for ethical life and effective work.

Generative leadership: authority that enlarges others:

Generative leadership is the organizational expression of Human+. It asks whether power is used to make others more capable, more truthful and more able to exercise agency. A dominating leader requires dependence; a generative leader builds competence. A status-defensive leader hoards visibility; a generative leader creates platforms for others. A controlling leader interprets disagreement as betrayal; a generative leader protects principled challenge.

Generativity changes the symbolic meaning of masculine success. Success is no longer measured only by personal ascent but by the quality of people, systems and possibilities left behind. This connects masculinity with stewardship across generations. It also offers senior men a constructive role in gender equality: not as rescuers or self-appointed heroes, but as accountable partners who change norms, sponsorship patterns and structures. Generative leadership requires institutional reinforcement. A leader cannot sustainably model inclusion if promotion systems reward only individual revenue, permanent availability and heroic crisis behavior. Organizations must align criteria, workload, leave, flexibility, succession and recognition with the capacities they claim to value.

THEORETICAL DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE HUMAN+ MODEL

The Human+ Model is related to, but not reducible to, several established perspectives. Hegemonic masculinity theory explains how culturally dominant forms of manhood legitimate hierarchy and organize relations among men and between genders. Human+ accepts this structural insight but adds a positive developmental architecture: it specifies capacities through which individuals and organizations may move away from rigidity without treating masculinity itself as irredeemable. Inclusive masculinity theory emphasizes the decline of homophobia and the expansion of emotional and relational possibilities among some groups of men. Human+ shares the expectation that masculinities can become more plural and less policed, but it places stronger emphasis on organizational authority, ethical responsibility and the institutional conditions that determine whether inclusive practices carry status or penalty.

Positive masculinity approaches identify constructive male strengths and seek to avoid deficit-only representations. Human+ is aligned with this strengths-based orientation, while adding a safeguard: traditionally valued strengths are not accepted uncritically. Courage, provision, achievement and protection become Human+ capacities only when they are disentangled from domination, control, self-erasure and unequal care. Authentic leadership contributes the value of self-awareness and congruence, yet authenticity alone is insufficient because inherited gender scripts can be enacted sincerely. A leader may be authentically dominant. Human+ therefore evaluates not only whether behavior expresses the

self, but whether that self is reflexive, accountable and capable of expanding the agency of others. Servant leadership and humanistic leadership foreground service, dignity and the common good. Human+ shares these ethical foundations but concentrates specifically on the masculine identity tensions that can obstruct them: fear of dependence, reputational vulnerability, status competition and the need to perform certainty. In this sense, Human+ is not a replacement leadership theory. It is a gender-responsive developmental framework that can deepen humanistic leadership practice.

The model's distinctive contribution is therefore fourfold: it is additive rather than repudiative; it defines masculinity through flexible capacities rather than fixed traits; it links identity to organizational systems; and it treats well-being, equality and sustainable performance as mutually reinforcing outcomes rather than separate agendas.

A MULTILEVEL ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Human+ Model operates across four levels. At the individual level, men interpret identity, emotion, status and responsibility. At the interpersonal level, these interpretations shape listening, conflict, help-seeking, caregiving and repair. At the team level, repeated interactions form climates of safety, competition, inclusion or silence. At the organizational level, policies and reward systems determine which behaviors carry status and material advantage. Change can begin at any level but becomes durable only when levels reinforce one another. An emotionally literate manager in a punitive culture may eventually conceal. A progressive parental-leave policy in a culture that mocks male caregivers may remain unused. A workshop on vulnerability in a system of impossible workloads can feel cynical. Conversely, policy, leadership modeling and peer norms can create a virtuous cycle in which healthier behavior becomes both possible and prestigious.

RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

Proposition 1: Greater Human+ self-awareness will be positively associated with identity flexibility and negatively associated with defensive responses to status threat.

Proposition 2: Emotional literacy will be positively associated with adaptive emotion regulation, relationship quality and early help-seeking, and negatively associated with surface acting and emotional exhaustion.

Proposition 3: Conscious vulnerability by formal leaders will predict team psychological safety when it is accompanied by competence, accountability and consistent protection of dissent.

Proposition 4: Relational courage will mediate the relationship between Human+ orientation and constructive conflict, such that disagreement becomes less personalized and more task-relevant.

Proposition 5: Reciprocity and care will be positively associated with social support, mentoring quality and work-family integration, particularly in cultures where male caregiving is visibly legitimized.

Proposition 6: Purpose and ethical responsibility will weaken the association between status-based masculine identity and workaholic behavior.

Proposition 7: Integrated strength will be associated with greater behavioral flexibility under pressure and lower reliance on dominance as a default leadership response.

Proposition 8: Generative leadership will positively predict employee voice, development and inclusion and negatively predict dependency-producing leadership.

Proposition 9: Masculinity contest culture will moderate the effects of individual Human+ capacities: positive effects will be weaker where organizational rewards continue to privilege toughness, dominance and total work devotion.

Proposition 10: Alignment among leader behavior, team norms and organizational systems will produce stronger and more sustained well-being outcomes than isolated individual training.

Mediating and moderating mechanisms: The propositions imply a mediated model rather than a simple direct-effects model. Human+ capacities are expected to influence outcomes principally through three proximal mechanisms: reduced identity defensiveness, increased emotional-information processing and improved relational risk-taking. These mechanisms should strengthen psychological safety, help-seeking, constructive conflict and voice, which in turn support well-being and sustainable performance. Four moderators are particularly important. First, masculinity contest culture may punish Human+ behavior and weaken its effects. Second, leader modeling may legitimize capacities such as help-seeking and caregiving. Third, policy-practice alignment may determine whether formal flexibility is genuinely safe to use. Fourth, cultural and intersectional context may change both the expression and social meaning of each dimension. Accordingly, the model predicts moderated mediation: individual capacities should have their strongest organizational effects when high-status leaders model them, systems reward them and local cultures do not impose a masculinity penalty. This formulation makes the framework empirically demanding and guards against the assumption that personal insight alone can overcome structural incentives.

TOWARD A HUMAN+ ORGANIZATIONAL MASCULINITY INDEX

Empirical development of the model requires measurement. A future Human+ Organizational Masculinity Index (HOMI) should not classify individuals as “good” or “bad” men. It should assess flexible capacities, perceived norms and system-level reinforcement. Development could proceed through qualitative interviews across cultures and occupations, item generation, expert review, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, tests of measurement invariance, and criterion validation against well-being, voice, burnout, inclusion and leadership outcomes. The index should contain at least three complementary forms. A self-report scale would assess personal capacities and perceived freedom to enact them. A team-climate scale would assess whether vulnerability, caregiving, dissent and help-seeking are respected. An organizational audit would examine policies and status signals: who uses parental leave, which behaviors are rewarded in promotion, whether senior leaders model boundaries, how misconduct is handled, and whether emotional control is confused with emotional absence.

Sample items might include: “I can acknowledge uncertainty without feeling that my authority disappears”; “Men in this team can ask for support without losing respect”; “Leaders here address underperformance without humiliation”; and “Employees who use caregiving flexibility have equal access to advancement.” Reverse-coded items could assess the belief that emotions reduce competence, that successful men should solve problems alone, or that long hours are evidence of commitment regardless of output. Validation must address social desirability. Participants may endorse progressive statements while behavior remains unchanged. Multi-source ratings, behavioral indicators and longitudinal designs are therefore essential. Researchers should also test whether Human+ capacities have different meanings across cultures and whether the framework adequately represents gay, bisexual, transgender, racialized, disabled, working-class and other men whose experiences do not fit dominant prototypes.

ORGANIZATIONAL APPLICATIONS

Leadership development: Leadership programs should move beyond generic encouragement to “be vulnerable.” Participants can examine gendered status triggers, practice naming uncertainty, receive feedback on interruption and defensiveness, and rehearse direct but dignifying conversations. Development should include real work experiments, such as asking for help on a strategic problem, publicly crediting a colleague, or setting a visible recovery boundary. Senior sponsorship matters because employees watch what high-status men do more closely than what values statements say. A chief executive who takes parental leave, discusses learning from therapy without prescribing it, admits a strategic mistake and protects a dissenting employee changes the reputational meaning of these behaviors.

Psychological safety and speaking up: Organizations can normalize short “uncertainty rounds” in decision meetings, where each participant names what may be missing. Leaders can respond to bad news with inquiry before judgment. After-action reviews can separate accountability from humiliation. These routines reduce the requirement that competence be performed as omniscience.

Psychological safety should not become comfort without standards. The Human+ approach combines voice with responsibility: employees are expected to raise concerns, and leaders are expected to respond without retaliation while still examining evidence and consequences.

Work, care and sustainable performance: Parental leave and flexible work are masculinity interventions when they change who is permitted to care. Policy availability is insufficient if men who use it lose advancement or are treated as less committed. Organizations should monitor uptake, career outcomes and manager behavior by gender. Workload systems should stop romanticizing heroic overwork. Sustainable performance can be reinforced through realistic staffing, recovery expectations, meeting discipline and evaluation based on contribution rather than visible exhaustion. Men should not need to damage health or family life to demonstrate belonging.

Mentoring, peer groups and dialogue: Men’s peer groups can provide spaces to examine inherited scripts, but they require skilled facilitation and clear ethical boundaries.

The purpose is not to recentre men in gender equality work or create grievance communities. It is to build accountability, emotional skill and partnership. Dialogue should connect personal experience with power and impact. Cross-gender learning is equally important. Men need to listen to women and gender-diverse colleagues without demanding education, reassurance or forgiveness. At the same time, transformation is more sustainable when men also challenge one another and share responsibility for changing male peer norms.

Human-resource systems: Promotion criteria should recognize inclusive leadership, development of others, ethical judgment and sustainable delivery. High revenue should not erase relational harm. Performance reviews can include evidence of speaking-up climate, talent growth, turnover patterns and team well-being. Misconduct processes must remain clear. A strengths-based approach to masculinity is not a reason to minimize harassment, discrimination or violence. Compassion and accountability are compatible. The Human+ Model supports firm boundaries precisely because relational dignity requires protection.

THREE ILLUSTRATIVE VIGNETTES

The following vignettes are fictional composites used to clarify the model. They are not empirical cases.

The invulnerable director

A commercial director is admired for certainty and endurance. He answers messages at midnight, interrupts hesitant colleagues and rarely changes his position in public. His team delivers results but hides problems until they are unavoidable. After a failed launch, he concludes that people lack courage. A Human+ analysis identifies a different mechanism: his performance of invulnerability makes early truth too costly. His developmental task is not to become passive. It is to model accountable uncertainty. In the next review he says: "I pushed us toward speed and did not make it safe to challenge the assumptions. I was wrong. Today I want the three strongest reasons this plan could fail." He remains responsible while changing the status economy of the room.

The dependable man who cannot receive: A middle manager is generous with colleagues and financially devoted to his family. He interprets these roles as proof that he is good. When anxiety and insomnia increase, he conceals them because he believes others depend on his stability. His care for others has become incompatible with receiving care. The Human+ shift reframes help-seeking as responsibility. He speaks with a professional, renegotiates workload and tells his partner that he is struggling. Dependability is no longer measured by silent endurance but by preserving his capacity to remain present over time.

The purpose-driven founder: An entrepreneur describes his company as a family and speaks passionately about purpose. Yet he expects unconditional availability and treats disagreement as lack of belief. His moral language intensifies rather than reduces control. Human+ purpose requires ethical congruence: the means of pursuing the mission must respect the people who carry it. He introduces protected dissent, transparent workload reviews and leadership evaluation by team members. Purpose becomes less heroic and more accountable. His authority does not disappear; it becomes generative.

HUMANIZATION WITHOUT ROMANTICIZATION: A humanized approach to masculinity must hold two truths. Many men suffer under restrictive norms, and men as a group can benefit from gendered power. Personal pain does not cancel structural privilege; structural analysis does not erase personal pain. Effective work avoids turning these truths into competing moral claims. Men may experience shame, loneliness, economic insecurity, violence, caregiving exclusion and pressure to provide. These experiences deserve attention in their own right, not only because healthier men may be less harmful to others. At the same time, interventions should not use male distress to discredit feminism or deny persistent inequality. The Human+ Model is explicitly compatible with gender equality because it challenges domination and expands care, voice and shared responsibility.

Language matters. The phrase "toxic masculinity" can name harmful norms, but it is sometimes heard as declaring masculinity or men toxic. A precise organizational vocabulary is more useful: emotional restriction, dominance, risk glorification, status threat, caregiving stigma and work-devotion norms. Precision supports accountability because people can identify behavior and systems rather than defend an entire identity. Humanization also means allowing imperfect transition. A man may understand equality intellectually while still struggling to disclose fear. He may take parental leave and feel guilty. He may apologize badly before learning to repair well. Organizations should expect learning while maintaining boundaries around harm. Transformation is neither indulgence nor public purification; it is repeated accountable practice.

DISCUSSION

Recent research strengthens the urgency of this argument. Work published in 2025 links masculine norms with men's internalizing symptoms, loneliness, mental-health barriers and the costs of organizational masculinity; other studies examine how toughness norms shape communication of workplace risk, how fathers' networks pursue work-care change, and how masculinity contest cultures affect identity and status. This emerging evidence suggests that masculinity is becoming a central organizational variable rather than a peripheral diversity topic. The Human+ Model advances a positive but non-naïve account of masculine transformation. Its central move is additive. Rather than instructing men to renounce strength, ambition, autonomy or courage, it asks these capacities to mature through relationship, ethics and flexibility. This is strategically important because change is more likely when people can recognize continuity with valued parts of identity. The model also shifts attention from traits to repertoires. The question is not whether a man is vulnerable or strong in the abstract, but whether he can access the response that reality requires. Rigidity is the problem. A leader who can only dominate is less capable, not more masculine. A professional who can never receive help is less autonomous because he is controlled by the fear of dependence. Organizationally, Human+ suggests that masculine transformation is a performance and governance issue. Silence impairs risk management. Work devotion can conceal poor design. Dominance reduces voice. Emotional disconnection weakens trust and adaptation. Healthier masculinities therefore contribute to well-being and may also improve learning, decision quality and long-term performance. The framework has boundaries. It should not be used to impose a universal

Western ideal of expressive masculinity. Emotional communication varies culturally, and quietness is not necessarily suppression. Nor should organizations compel personal disclosure. The relevant criterion is freedom and function: can people access support, communicate necessary information, care for others, challenge authority and maintain dignity without gendered penalty? The Human+ Model also requires dialogue with feminist, queer and intersectional scholarship. New masculinity initiatives can reproduce privilege if they celebrate men for behaviors long expected of women, recentre male voices or ignore race, class, sexuality and disability. Generative leadership demands humility about these risks and partnership with those affected.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should begin with qualitative studies that test whether the eight dimensions resonate across occupations and cultures. Interviews and focus groups can explore how men describe strength, care, authority, shame and help-seeking; how colleagues interpret Human+ behaviors; and which organizational conditions make change safe or costly. Scale development should then examine dimensionality, reliability and discriminant validity relative to existing measures of conformity to masculine norms, gender-role conflict, psychological safety, servant leadership and well-being. The model predicts overlap but not equivalence. Human+ is intended to measure constructive flexibility and multilevel enactment rather than only low endorsement of traditional norms. Longitudinal and intervention studies are necessary. Leadership programs could be evaluated against active controls using behavioral ratings, employee voice, leave uptake, burnout and team climate. Researchers should examine whether leader vulnerability produces benefits only when accompanied by competence and accountability, a condition emphasized conceptually but often neglected in popular discourse. Cross-level studies could test whether organizational masculinity contest culture suppresses the benefits of individual change. Natural experiments may arise when companies redesign parental leave, promotion criteria or working-time norms. Comparative research can identify when formal policy changes symbolic status and when informal penalties neutralize policy. Finally, research should examine unintended effects. Could Human+ language create a new ideal that men feel pressured to perform? Could emotionally articulate leaders use vulnerability strategically while retaining abusive power? Could organizations individualize structural inequality through coaching? These questions are not objections to the model; they are essential tests of its ethical integrity.

LIMITATIONS

This article is conceptual and does not provide original empirical validation. The eight dimensions are theoretically derived and may require revision after qualitative and psychometric research. The integrative scope favors synthesis over exhaustive systematic coverage, and relevant literature from languages other than English may be underrepresented.

The term Human+ is intentionally accessible but may appear broad. Its scientific value will depend on precise operationalization and evidence that it predicts outcomes beyond existing constructs. The framework also focuses on organizational life and should not be assumed to transfer unchanged to clinical, educational, family or community

contexts. Masculinities are culturally and intersectionally diverse. A model developed from international but predominantly Western organizational scholarship risks universalism. Future research must involve diverse men and colleagues in co-design, including those whose experiences are shaped by race, class, migration, sexuality, disability, age and precarious work.

CONCLUSION

The future of masculinity should not be framed as a choice between defending the past and condemning men. A more demanding possibility is available: to preserve courage, agency and responsibility while releasing them from domination, silence and emotional exile. The Human+ Model names this possibility through eight capacities that can be learned, practiced, measured and institutionally supported. For organizations, the question is concrete. Do men gain respect by hiding, controlling and overworking, or by telling the truth, developing others and acting with sustainable courage? Policies matter, but status signals matter more. Employees learn masculinity from what leaders reward, ridicule, tolerate and embody. A new masculinity is not a softer mask. It is a larger human repertoire. It allows a man to say “I do not know” without abandoning leadership, “I need help” without abandoning responsibility, “I was wrong” without abandoning dignity, and “I care” without surrendering strength. When such expressions become ordinary rather than exceptional, organizations become more truthful, equitable and alive. Human+ ultimately proposes a simple but demanding standard: power should not require disconnection from one’s own humanity or the humanity of others. Leadership with a soul begins when strength no longer needs someone else to become smaller. The future of leadership will not be defined by men becoming harder, nor by asking them to imitate a new stereotype of emotional perfection. It will be defined by more complete human beings: people able to combine courage with compassion, achievement with meaning, autonomy with reciprocity and authority with the moral obligation to enlarge others. Human+ proposes that masculinity reaches its most constructive expression not when it proves superiority, but when it becomes capable of relationship, truth and service.

DECLARATIONS

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: No external funding was received for this conceptual study.

Data availability: No original dataset was generated or analyzed.

Ethical approval: Not applicable; the article presents a conceptual review and contains no human-participant research.

Originality statement: This manuscript was developed as an original conceptual synthesis. All external ideas are attributed through citation; no empirical findings are represented as original data.

REFERENCES

American Psychological Association, Boys and Men Guidelines Group. (2018). APA guidelines for

- psychological practice with boys and men. American Psychological Association.
- Boettcher, N., Mitchell, J., Lashewicz, B., Jones, E., Wang, J., & Gundu, S. (2019). Men's work-related stress and mental health: Illustrating the workings of masculine role norms. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 13(2), 1-12.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829-859.
- Connor, S., Edvardsson, K., Fisher, C., & Spelten, E. (2021). Perceptions and interpretation of contemporary masculinities in Western culture: A systematic review. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 15(6), 1-17.
- Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383.
- Edmondson, A. C., & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 23-43.
- Ely, R. J., & Meyerson, D. E. (2010). An organizational approach to undoing gender: The unlikely case of offshore oil platforms. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30, 3-34.
- Gartzia, L., Pizarro, J., & Baniandr s, J. (2018). Emotional androgyny: A preventive factor of psychosocial risks at work? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2144.
- Gough, B., & Novikova, I. (2020). Mental health, men and culture: How do sociocultural constructions of masculinities relate to men's mental health help-seeking behaviour in the WHO European Region? WHO Regional Office for Europe.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist Press.
- Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692-724.
- Kimmel, M. S. (2008). Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity. In P. F. Murphy (Ed.), *Feminism and masculinities* (pp. 182-199). Oxford University Press.
- Mahalik, J. R., Good, G. E., & Englar-Carlson, M. (2003). Masculinity scripts, presenting concerns, and help seeking: Implications for practice and training. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 34(2), 123-131.
- Martin, A. E. (2025). The downsides of masculinity for men and organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 45, Article 100222.
- Messerschmidt, J. W. (2018). *Hegemonic masculinity: Formulation, reformulation, and amplification*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nembhard, I. M., & Edmondson, A. C. (2006). Making it safe: The effects of leader inclusiveness and professional status on psychological safety and improvement efforts. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(7), 941-966.
- Regina, J., Kouchaki, M., & Gino, F. (2022). Masculinity contest culture: Harmful for whom? An examination of emotional exhaustion. *Journal of Social Issues*, 78(3), 650-672.
- Schein, V. E. (1973). The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 57(2), 95-100.
- Vandello, J. A., & Bosson, J. K. (2013). Hard won and easily lost: A review and synthesis of theory and research on precarious manhood. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 14(2), 101-113.
- World Health Organization. (2019). *Breaking barriers: Towards more gender-responsive and equitable health systems*. World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization. (2021). *Gender and health*. World Health Organization.
- Wong, Y. J., Ho, M. H. R., Wang, S. Y., & Miller, I. S. K. (2017). Meta-analyses of the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and mental health-related outcomes. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(1), 80-93.
- APA Presidential Task Force on the Health and Well-Being of Boys and Men. (2025). *Rethinking masculinity to build healthier outcomes*. Monitor on Psychology.
- Balan, C., et al. (2025). Strategizing for gender change: The micro-politics of fathers' networks in organizations. *Human Relations*. Advance online publication.
- Hermansson, K., et al. (2025). Niceness or toughness? Gendered norms as regulators of employees' communication of workplace risks and problems. *Safety Science*. Advance online publication.
- Kray, L. J., et al. (2025). Psychological drivers of gender disparities in leadership. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. Advance online publication.
- Mancini, V. O., et al. (2025). Internalizing symptoms in men: The role of masculine norms and emotional functioning. *Sex Roles*. Advance online publication.
- Mansour, K., et al. (2025). The value of social networks for men: Concurrent and prospective associations with psychological well-being. *BMC Psychology*, 13.
- Mogano, N. T. H., et al. (2025). Effects of masculine culture on men's mental health. *BMC Psychology*, 13.
- Riemma, F., et al. (2025). Generational cohorts, organizational culture and men's approaches to work and care. *Gender, Work & Organization*. Advance online publication.
- Scotti Requena, S., et al. (2025). Does help-seeking mediate the relationship between masculine self-reliance and suicidal thoughts among men? *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*. Advance online publication.
- Taha, M., et al. (2026). Exploring masculinity, perceived public stigma and professional help-seeking. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. Advance online publication.
- Veldman, J., et al. (2026). Masculinity contest cultures lead to self-group distancing in women. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. Advance online publication.
- World Health Organization. (2025). *Practical approaches and case-based models for reaching men and boys with gender-responsive health services*. World Health Organization.
