What Would Today's World Leaders Score on the Lauve Wellbeing Leadership Scale? Applying an evidence-based framework to the leaders shaping our world.

We live in an era of intense scrutiny of leadership. Social media amplifies every decision; polls measure approval hourly; careers are built and destroyed on a single speech. Yet for all this attention, we rarely apply genuine rigour to the question of what good leadership actually looks like.

Published in Physics, Behavioural Sciences & Psychology, and Education

Nov 01, 2026



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Explore the Research



Springer Nature Switzerland

Physical Education and Wellbeing

This book explores how physical education (PE) can be best enacted in schools in order to optimize children's well-being.

The Lauve Wellbeing Leadership Scale (LWLS), grounded in three decades of global research, offers a different perspective [1]. Rather than measuring political success or personal popularity, the LWLS asks: does this leader genuinely create the conditions for community flourishing? Does their practice reflect deeply held values — or is it largely performative?

This question, it turns out, is surprisingly difficult for many of today's most prominent leaders to answer well.

What the LWLS Measures

The LWLS is a rubric-based assessment instrument comprising seven domains and 22 indicators, each rated on a four-point developmental continuum from 1 (Surface) to 4 (Deep-Transformative) [1]. The seven domains assess:

1. **Values Leadership** — articulating, modelling, and enacting the nine OECD universal competencies
2. **Community Building and Belonging** — creating genuine inclusion and psychological safety
3. **Metacognition and Reflective Leadership** — systematic reflection and continuous learning
4. **Social-Emotional Intelligence** — empathy, self-regulation, and crisis community leadership
5. **Physical and Holistic Wellbeing Advocacy** — championing the physical dimension of health
6. **Purposeful and Spiritual Leadership** — a clear, ethical, values-centred vision
7. **Transformative Partnership and Sustainable Governance** — accountable, multi-stakeholder governance aligned with global frameworks including the UN SDGs

A leader's total score falls into one of four profiles: Surface-Level Leader (0–25%), Developing Leader (26–50%), Implementing Leader (51–75%), or Deep-Transformative Leader (76–100%). The critical distinction throughout is between surface and deep: the research identifies four enabling conditions — genuine leadership commitment, collective understanding, consistent

enactment, and contextual adaptation — that separate transformative leadership from what the scale calls "tokenistic display" [1].

So where might some of today's most recognised world leaders sit?







Jacinda Ardern — The Empathetic Implementing Leader

Few modern leaders have attracted more scholarly attention through the lens of empathy-centred leadership than Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's Prime Minister from 2017 to 2023. Her response to the Christchurch mosque attacks — physically present, emotionally available, and immediately action-oriented — represents what the LWLS would score at or near Level 4 in Domain 4 (Social-Emotional Intelligence): deeply attuned emotional responses that provided a genuine psychological anchor for a traumatised community [1].



Her "Wellbeing Budget" demonstrated committed Domain 6 (Purposeful Leadership) practice — articulating a clear values-centred vision that transcended conventional economic measures and connected individual contributions to collective purpose. Domain 2 (Community Building) also reflected deep practice: her politics of genuine inclusion was embedded in policy, not merely rhetoric.

Where the LWLS would identify development priorities: Domain 5 (Physical and Holistic Wellbeing Advocacy) received comparatively limited explicit focus, and the demands of coalition governance occasionally constrained the consistency of enactment that characterises Level 4 performance. A likely profile — a strong Implementing Leader across most domains, with Social-Emotional Intelligence and Purposeful Leadership approaching Deep-Transformative level.

Nelson Mandela — The Deep-Transformative Standard

If the LWLS had a benchmark case, it would be difficult to look past Nelson Mandela. His capacity to articulate and embody the nine universal competencies — forgiveness, collaboration, empathy, persistence, trust — was

not rhetorical. It was demonstrated under conditions of extraordinary personal cost, across decades.



Domain 1 (Values Leadership) at its deepest level describes a leader whose entire community understands, articulates, and embodies the values in their own practice [1]. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission stands as one of the most extraordinary examples of this in contemporary political history. Domain 6 (Purposeful Leadership) at Level 4 describes a leader who articulates a transformative vision that transcends individual interests and inspires collective action — Mandela's legacy is self-evidencing.

Developmental areas might include Domain 7's emphasis on monitoring, accountability, and adaptive governance systems — areas where post-apartheid institutional development remained incomplete despite visionary leadership. Overall, however, Mandela represents the closest approximation to the Deep-Transformative profile that contemporary political history offers: a leader in whom values, community, purpose, and emotional intelligence were genuinely and simultaneously enacted.

Angela Merkel — The Metacognitive Governance Leader

Angela Merkel's 16-year chancellorship provides a compelling case study in Domains 3 and 7. Her reputation for methodical, evidence-based decision-making — interrogating problems with scientific precision before acting — reflects what the LWLS describes as high-Level Domain 3 (Metacognition): systematic personal reflection consistently informing major decisions [1]. Her governance of the European Union through successive crises demonstrated sustained strength in Domain 7 (Transformative Partnership and Governance):

navigating complex multi-stakeholder environments while maintaining alignment with broader European frameworks.



Where critics and the LWLS would likely agree: Domain 6 (Purposeful Leadership) represents Merkel's most notable developmental gap. She was frequently described as skilled at managing existing conditions rather than inspiring collective movement toward a transformative vision — what the LWLS identifies as a Level 2–3 pattern: clear values, but purpose not consistently connecting individual contributions to a compelling, shared future [1]. Metacognition and governance strength without compelling purpose is a pattern the LWLS was specifically designed to identify.

Volodymyr Zelensky — The Crisis Leader

Zelensky's presidency since February 2022 presents one of the most extraordinary crisis leadership case studies of the twenty-first century. His Domain 4 (Social-Emotional Intelligence) performance — remaining in Kyiv, delivering nightly video addresses, maintaining psychological connectedness for millions of citizens — aligns closely with what the LWLS describes in Indicator 4.4: embedding safety, calm, efficacy, connectedness, and hope into community leadership through acute crisis [1].



Domain 6 (Purposeful Leadership) has been consistently deep: his purpose is unambiguous, his communication compelling, his persistence under geopolitical resistance extraordinary. The LWLS describes Level 4 in this domain as demonstrating "passionate leadership — a deep-rooted belief in better opportunities, communicated with clarity and conviction, sustaining momentum even in the face of institutional resistance" [1] — a description that could have been written from observation of Zelensky's conduct since the Russian invasion.

Development priorities under the LWLS would centre on Domain 7 (governance accountability systems) and Domain 3 (institutional mechanisms for collective reflection) — areas understandably constrained by active conflict rather than absence of intent. A likely profile: a strong Implementing Leader, with Purposeful Leadership and Social-Emotional Intelligence at or near Deep-Transformative.

The Pattern We See Too Often

The LWLS is equally valuable for identifying the "surface-level leader" — the leader whose values are announced in speeches, embedded in mission statements, and largely absent from practice [1]. Many contemporary political figures demonstrate strong Domain 1 scores on values articulation: compelling rhetoric, clear ideological framing, confident communication. Yet the same leaders often score poorly on Domain 2 (genuine inclusion and belonging), Domain 3 (reflective learning and willingness to adapt), Domain 4 (emotional self-regulation), and Domain 7 (transparent accountability to measurable outcomes).

The LWLS draws a precise distinction between the performing leader — whose values live on display boards and at press conferences — and the implementing or transformative leader, whose values are embedded in every decision, structure, and relationship. This gap between articulated and enacted values is not merely a political phenomenon: research across the LWLS framework confirms it appears consistently across sporting, educational, civic, and institutional leadership contexts [1].

What This Tells Us About Leadership Today

Applying the LWLS to world leaders reveals something instructive: strong performance in one or two domains is not sufficient for transformative impact. Mandela's profile approached Deep-Transformative because his values were enacted across multiple domains simultaneously. Ardern's extraordinary strength in empathy and purpose produced remarkable outcomes, but the sustained systemic transformation that the scale describes requires equivalent depth across Domains 3 and 7.

The LWLS research suggests the gap between surface and deep leadership is not primarily a question of intelligence, resources, or policy platform. It is a question of genuine commitment — and whether all four enabling conditions for transformation are truly in place [1]. That is a useful mirror for any leader willing to look into it.

About the Research

The Lauve Wellbeing Leadership Scale (LWLS) is developed by Dr Timothy Lynch, grounded in the Lauve Wellbeing framework — LAUVE standing for Learning Approach Using Values Education — a 30-year programme of research across six countries. The scale assesses community leadership across seven domains through a four-point rubric and is designed for application in sporting, political, civic, educational, and institutional leadership contexts. Access the scale and accompanying resources at:

https://www.lauvewellbeing.com/scale

Conflict of Interest Declaration: Timothy Lynch is the founder of Lauve Wellbeing.



Lauve Wellbeing Leadership Scale (LWLS)

Quick Reference I 7 Domains I 22 Indicators I Max Score 88

Lynch (2016, 2022, 2024, 2026) I November 2026

SEVEN DOMAINS & 22 INDICATORS

	Domain	Indicators (each scored 1–4)
D1	Values Leadership	1.1 Values Articulation & Communication 1.2 Values Modelling & Embodiment 1.3 Values Integration & Enactment
D2	Community Building and Belonging	2.1 Inclusive Environment Creation 2.2 Authentic Partnership Development 2.3 Belonging Assessment & Responsiveness
D3	Metacognition and Reflective Leadership	3.1 Personal Reflective Practice 3.2 Metacognitive Culture Development 3.3 Learning-to-Learn Facilitation
D4	Social-Emotional Intelligence	4.1 Empathy & Emotional Awareness 4.2 Self-Regulation & Emotional Modelling 4.3 Collaborative & Respectful Relationships 4.4 Crisis Community Leadership & Psychological Recovery
D5	Physical and Holistic Wellbeing Advocacy	5.1 Physical Dimension Recognition 5.2 Movement & Physical Activity Integration 5.3 Holistic Health Advocacy
D6	Purposeful and Spiritual Leadership	6.1 Purpose Articulation & Alignment 6.2 Meaning-Making & Connection 6.3 Ethical & Values-Centred Decision-Making
D7	Transformative Partnership and Sustainable Governance	7.1 Strategic Partnership & Resource Mobilisation 7.2 Monitoring, Accountability & Adaptive Learning Systems 7.3 Contextual Intelligence & Governance

SCORING & LEADERSHIP PROFILES

SCORING FORMULA

Each indicator: 1 (Surface) → 4 (Deep-Transformative)

Raw Score = Sum of all 22 indicator scores

Minimum: 22 I Maximum: 88

LWLS % = (Raw Score ÷ 88) × 100

LWLS %	Leadership Profile
0–25%	Surface-Level Leader
26–50%	Developing Leader
51–75%	Implementing Leader
76–100%	Deep-Transformative Leader

References

[1] Lynch, T. (2026). Lauve Wellbeing Leadership Scale (LWLS): A rubric-based instrument for assessing community leadership through the lens of holistic wellbeing. [Publication details to be confirmed upon journal assignment.] https://www.lauvewellbeing.com/scale