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**“A Comparison of the Role and Impact of Board Chairs in United Kingdom and  
North American Nonprofit Organizations”**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this research was to answer questions about the similarities and differences in the perceptions people have of the leadership of Chairs and the impact of that leadership in a sample of North American and United Kingdom voluntary organizations. We also looked at what, in turn, might be influencing these perceptions.

In terms of the commonality of perceptions of chair leadership, Chairs that were seen as being focused on building high quality relationships with others were perceived by key actors as having high quality working relationships and a considerable impact on the effectiveness of the board, CEO, and organization. The least effective Chairs were those that were not seen as “team” players and, in the UK sample, being able to manage inadequate performance with the key actors with whom they interact.

In terms of perceptions of impact, in both samples, we found distance from the Chair in terms of respondent position matters in perceptions of Chair leadership. Specifically, “other” respondents (primarily staff and stakeholders) were the least

positive about the chair's leadership and impact. As for actual impact, key actors from the North American sample perceived more impact from the chair on the board than UK key actors. UK key actors perceived the chair's impact primarily in terms of *process* (managing board meeting) and *content* (providing information) rather than as a source of *inspiration* to boost board morale and board member engagement as was perceived by North American key actors.

As for what factors might be shaping the perceptions of our respondents about this type of leader, we found that chair personality matters. Specifically, the more the chair was perceived as being *socially aware* and *purpose* motivated, the more the chair was perceived as a "facilitator" of leadership within their organization.

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