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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 as having 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, as being unable to manage the key actors with whom they interact.

As well, key actors from the North American sample were more likely to perceive the chair had more impact on the board than UK key actors. UK key actors were more likely to perceive the chair as having an 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.

In terms of what shapes the perception that people have of the impact of chairs, in both samples we found that distance from the Chair in terms of the respondent's position is a significant factor. Specifically, respondents such as staff and representatives of external stakeholders tended to perceive the chair's impact as less than those who were closer to him/her such as the CEO and board members. The other major finding with respect to what shapes perceptions of board chair effectiveness was the way respondents described the chair's personality. Specifically, the more chairs were seen as being *socially aware* and *purpose* motivated, the more they were perceived as having the characteristics of effective leadership within their organization.

Introduction

Herman and Heimovics (1990) were the first to describe the “board centered” leadership competencies of executive managers (e.g. providing information to the board, guiding the board on structure, encouraging the board to achieve goals, working with the chair to place members in rewarding and suitable roles etc.). The other major approach to understanding leadership in nonprofit organizations has been through analyzing the role of the board as a whole (e.g. Axelrod, 2005; Chait et al, 2005). The missing link in all this has been the leadership provided by the board chair.

In the 2007 research report “Leadership Perspectives”, Zarinpoush and Hall identify the major organizational challenges perceived by leaders¹ in Canada's nonprofit sector. One of the challenges highlighted was “leadership”. Unfortunately, they do not describe the complex nature of nonprofit leadership roles (e.g. at the level of the organization and board), and what constitutes effective leadership within nonprofits. Furthermore, they report a leadership effectiveness bias—specifically, “paid staff were perceived to be their organization's greatest strength” without any mention of the nature

¹ Leaders were defined “as individuals who have influence and impact in the sector. This definition recognizes that many individuals in the sector by authority and not just by action; they can be leaders because they express their vision and put this vision into action” (p. 4). Of the 32 leaders interviewed, it is unclear how many were responding as leaders of nonprofit boards (e.g. 13 were Executive Directors; 13 held dual leadership roles (e.g. CEO of the organization and board president), and it was unclear whether the two Vice Presidents (2) were positions of the board or organization. The same is true of the program directors (n=2), co-founder (n=1), and program manager (n=1).

and extent of their skills or qualifications whereas board members were perceived as an organizational strength only when they had “diversified skills and experience and understood the strategic needs of the nonprofit” (p. 10-11).

Our research into the leadership role and impact of board chairs suggests that people in this key position may have considerable impact on the effectiveness of nonprofits albeit indirectly through their impact on the leadership effectiveness of the chief executive, the board, and organization (see Harrison & Murray, 2007; 2008). Others studies have also shown chair impact is highly variable ranging from very little to very great and from highly beneficial to highly destructive (see Brown, 2004; Daily and Schwenk, 1998; Donaldson, 2003; Leblanc & Gillies, 2005; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999; Millisen, 2004; Mueller, Harvey & Howorth, 2003; Otto, 2003; Robinson & Elworthy, 1999; Stewart, 1991).

The position we take is that the role and impact of board chair leadership as well as the determinants of it is still poorly understood. This research is the first international empirical investigation comparing perceptions of Chair leadership, its impact, and what influences it. Drawing from UK and U.S. and Canadian samples of board chairs and the key actors they connect with, this paper will compare perceptions of Chair leadership within the following framework of questions:

1. To what extent do North American and UK Chairs and the key actors they connect with vary in their perceptions of the chair’s leadership behavior?
2. How do North American and UK Chairs and the key actors they connect with differ in their perceptions of the amount of impact Chairs have on nonprofit effectiveness at the CEO, board, and organization levels?
3. How do North American and UK Chairs and the key actors they connect with vary in their perceptions of the quality of the leadership relationship?
4. What factors influence perceptions of Chair leadership?

The paper begins with a description of the governance context in the U.K., U.S. and Canada followed by the research design, an overview of the findings, and a brief discussion of the findings within a conclusion.

Governance Context

United Kingdom

In recent decades the UK third sector has grown rapidly in size and significance. In part this growth has been stimulated by the contracting out of public services and the desires of government to see third sector organizations (TSOs) play a greater role in public service delivery (Reichart et al, 2008). The increasing significance of the sector and its growing reliance on public funds has also attracted increased scrutiny. Paralleling developments in other sectors, the spotlight has focused on governance arrangements and whether they are adequate to ensure that TSOs are effective, responsible and accountable for their actions. This has led to a growth in practical support and advice on governance – in the shape of new support services, training and consultancy, and the development of guides, codes of practice, self-assessment tools, advice lines, and web sites (see for example the work of the Charity Commission at www.charity-commission.gov.uk, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk, and the Charity Trustee Network at www.trusteenet.org.uk). However, despite these developments there is still concern that these improvements are patchy and that support services may not be reaching the majority of small TSOs.

North America

The same basic trends described as affecting the U.K. nonprofit world have been at work in the U.S. and Canada as well, though the response to them has been somewhat different. Long term, nationwide initiatives such as the Charity Commission in Britain, has not occurred in either the U.S. or Canada. In Canada, the Federal government did invest some \$90 million in a 2001 project known as the Voluntary Sector Initiative that produced much research into the nature of the sector and several broad “accords” between representatives of the sector and the federal government. Since that program ended in 2004, however, little more has happened with the result that there are still no nationwide, bodies addressing sector-wide issues with the national government. This said, there are a few such initiatives at the level of individual provinces though these are still in the formative stages and have not had any major impact as yet.

In the United States, a number of high profile public scandals in both the private and nonprofit sectors in the 1990s led to federal legislation to increase accountability and oversight of private corporations. Parts of the Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act of 2002 (or, as it is commonly known, *The Sarbanes Oxley Act*) have increased the “fiduciary” role and responsibilities of nonprofit boards with respect to accounting and auditing of financial documents as well as document retention practices, and whistle-blower protection for individuals who make claims of corruption.

With respect to the impact of these changes on board leadership, a 2003 study report from PricewaterhouseCoopers and the University of Delaware on US corporate boards of directors reported recognition of the need for board leadership in two areas:

1. The role of finance and audit committees and
2. The leadership of the board primarily by creating a separation between the CEO and Chair roles (These have frequently been combined in businesses though have usually always been separate in nonprofit organizations.)

In the corporate boards they studied, about “half had split the role of chair and CEO” because of the legislation. Others did not split the roles but created a new leadership position on the board (e.g. lead director) for the purpose of providing the board the power necessary to obtain the information it needs (p. 4).

While few nonprofits have combined the chair and CEO roles, Sarbanes Oxley has resulted in calls for improved leadership of nonprofit boards.

The trend toward inter-agency partnership and alliances in all three countries is what David Renz (2006) describes as a “reframing” of governance away from the traditional notion that only boards govern. Within the new context, governance shifts beyond the notion of a single board and organization to networks of relationships where “no one person or entity is in charge” (p. 2).

Even though there are some significant differences in the environmental context of the nonprofit sector in the three countries studied, the role of the Chair of the Board in all three is much the same. It is a volunteer leadership position which generally carries with it no unique formal authority other than the rulings Chairs can make when enforcing

constitutional Rules of Order during formal meetings of the board². Chairs can only have influence on decision-making, not the official power to decide.

Nonprofit Leadership and Nonprofit Effectiveness

Of the relatively small amount of literature on Chair leadership, most of it tends to emphasize the “task” role of the chair in facilitating board operations (e.g. gathering and disseminating information, mobilizing the board, delegating board work, managing board performance, evaluating CEO performance etc) (see Dorsey, 1992 for a comprehensive description of this role). The literature also emphasizes the Chair’s relationship with the board or the CEO, ignoring their leadership influence with other key actors (e.g. organizational staff and stakeholders).

As noted, the lack of literature on Chair leadership is not surprising given the chair position does not carry with it any formal authority; rather the chair is typically “first among equals” on the board with the authority for decision-making residing with the board as a whole or with the CEO (based on authority delegated to him/her by the board).

Conceptual Framework

Looking at the ways nonprofit Chairs can exert influence in nonprofit organizations, one can discern three critical relationships within which they play their roles:

1. With key actors on the board of directors (e.g. board officers and board members);
2. With the CEO; and
3. With staff and external stakeholders

They do this by engaging in *behaviors* unique to each relationship, hence it is important to explore them separately. However, it is also realized that they might have certain

² In the UK, we found cases where the chair has formal authority and the CE is a volunteer (e.g. primary health trusts) (see Gaughan, 2001).

leadership characteristics that are general to all settings in which the chair is active.

Since the chair leads through relationships with those with “direct-formal” authority (e.g. the board as a whole and the CEO) we refer to this kind of leadership as “indirect-informal” leadership (See conceptual framework in Figure 1 below).

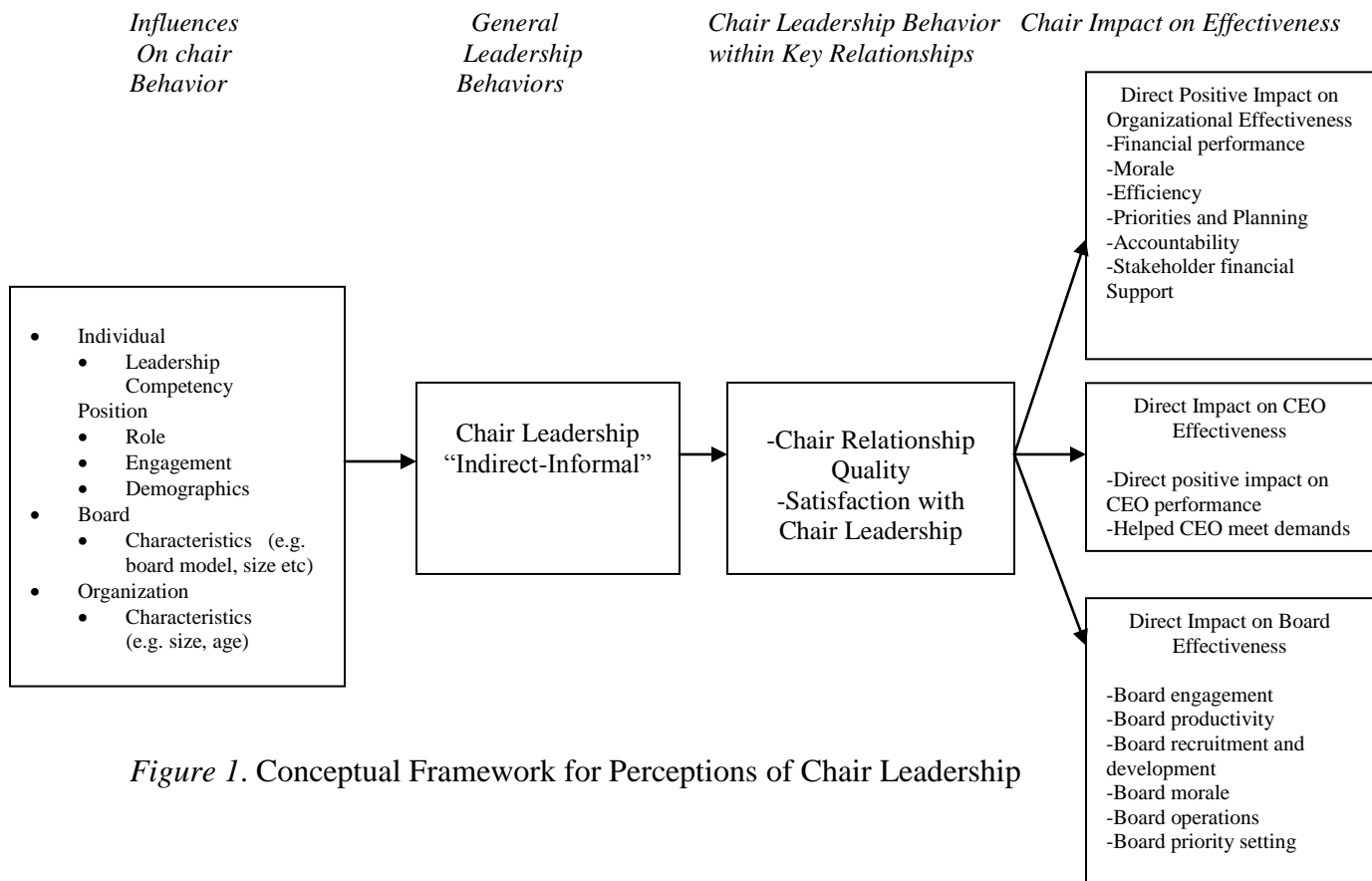


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Perceptions of Chair Leadership

As seen in Figure 1 above, the *Chair’s general leadership behaviors* combine to influence the quality of the *Chair’s relationships* (with key actors such as the CEO, board members, other staff and external stakeholders) and *satisfaction* with the *Chair’s* leadership. These, in turn, influence the perceptions of the *impact* the *Chair* is seen to have on the *effectiveness* of the CEO, the board and organization as a whole (though of course they would only be one set of influences among many others).

In addition to illustrating *Chair leadership and relationships* and their impact on *effectiveness*, the model also incorporates factors that might influence *Chair leadership behavior*. At the individual level, these include personality characteristics found to be associated with leadership competency. These are the constructs of emotional and

spiritual intelligence which were reported in our earlier research. We also included characteristics of the respondent (e.g. demographics, role, experience etc.), board characteristics, and features of the organization of which all actors are a part (e.g. size, age, etc.).

Research Design and Methodology

While earlier research explored perceptions of Chair leadership in North American nonprofits, this research compares these results against perceptions of chair leadership in a sample of UK voluntary sector organizations using an online survey questionnaire. While the UK survey contained many of the same measures of leadership behavior³, impact⁴ and influences⁵, the language was revised somewhat to fit the UK governance context.

The data from the North American sample come from the following four sources:

1. Subscribers of *The Nonprofit Quarterly* who responded to an email invitation to participate in the survey in an electronic newsletter in late October 2007 (referred to as NPQ).
2. Respondents that participated in a spring 2007 online survey who volunteered (their board and organization) to participate in a *follow-up study* investigation in February 2008 (referred to as 2007 follow-up).
3. Members of The Alliance for Nonprofit Excellence in *Memphis*, TN who responded to an email invitation (from the Alliance) to participate in the survey in February 2008 (referred to as MA).
4. Representatives of tax exempt 501 c (3) nonprofit organizations in WA (accessed through a Secretary of *Washington State* Charitable Solicitation email listing) who

³ Eight leadership behaviors found to be “true” of board chairs were included in the survey. These behaviors were also re-worked into a matrix type question type to increase ease of response.

⁴ Impacts at the board, organization and CEO level in the North American survey were included.

⁵ Two personality-based influences on leadership (e.g. emotional (EI) (Hay Acquisition Company, Goleman and Boyatzis, 1999) and spiritual intelligence (SI) (Beazley, 1997) were included in the survey along with questions related to background characteristics of responding individuals, their boards, and their organization.

responded to an email invitation to participate in the survey by the researchers in March 2008 (referred to as WS).

The data for the UK sample comes from the following sources:

1. Members of *The Charity Trustee Network*, who responded to an e-newsletter in February, 2009
2. Subscribers of *The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)* who responded to an e-newsletter in February 2009 and direct email invitation in April 2009 to participate in the survey. A link to the survey was also available on the NCVO website which would have attracted Chairs and key actors from the Citizen's Advice Bureau, a group of 400 plus members.

Findings

Table 1 shows the number of completed survey respondents within each of the four samples (total n = 647). Participants included n = 105 Chairs and n = 542 Key Actors made up mostly of CEOs (n = 276, 51%), board members (n = 138, 26%), and staff (n = 125, 23%). Response rates for surveys disseminated by third parties (e.g. NPQ and Memphis) were not calculated because it is unknown how many respondents received our invitation to participate in the survey. For the surveys we disseminated, response rates were calculated by dividing the number of usable responses by the total number of email invitations delivered to respondent email addresses. For the WS state group, we received 149 completed responses from 3579 delivered email invitations for a response rate of 4%. The response rate for the "follow-up" study was much higher. We received 74 completed responses from 212 electronic mail invitations for a response rate of 35%. This type of response is not surprising given that the follow-up group participated in our 2007 research and agreed to participate in any future research.

We are unable to report on the response rates for the UK samples as the survey was disseminated by third parties. What we can report is that 1700 members of *The Charity Trustee Network*, of which 400 are Chairs, received a link to our survey within an

e-newsletter in February 2009. Judging from the responses to the survey at this time (n=40), the response was low but reasonable for this type of promotion.

The survey was also promoted within another e-newsletter in early March by *The National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO)* to their membership of n = 5,000 Chief Executives (managers of voluntary organizations), staff, volunteers, and stakeholders. The bulk of the responses come from a direct email to the NCVO membership in early April 2009.

In total, 346 respondents logged on to the survey with 263 completing it (Chair, n = 72; Key actor, n = 191). Within the key actor group, the majority of responses come from trustees (n = 83), followed by chief executives (n=70), management team (n=23), staff (n=6), volunteers (n=3), consultants (n=4), and a stakeholder (n=1).

Interestingly, table 1 below shows a greater percentage of CEOs and staff responded to the survey in North America than in the UK where trustees dominated.

Table 1

Respondents

Sample Group/Respondent Type	North America		United Kingdom	
	Freq n	Percent %	Freq n	Percent %
Key Actors	542	100	191	100
Board Member/Trustee	141	26	83	44
Chief Executive/CEO	276	51	70	37
Other (staff, vol etc)	125	23	38	14
Chairs	102	100	72	100

Table 2 below shows a diversity of respondents representing the different organization sizes in the survey. The majority of respondents to the survey come from organizations in the one to ten million pound/dollar budget range. There are a larger percentage of UK respondents from small voluntary organizations with budget sizes less than 100,000 pounds. This finding is not surprising given that smaller voluntary organizations dominate the UK's third sector.

Table 2

Characteristics of Respondent Organizations (Chairs and Key Actors)

		Frequency	Percent
Less than \$100,000	North America	66	11
	United Kingdom	37	19
\$101,000 to 500,000	North America	191	30
	United Kingdom	51	25
\$501,001 to 1,000,000	North America	100	16
	United Kingdom	34	17
\$1,000,001 to 10,000,000	North America	220	35
	United Kingdom	55	27
Over \$10,000,000	North America	51	8
	United Kingdom	25	12
Total	United Kingdom	226	100
	North America	629	100

1. *To what extent do North American and UK Chairs and the key actors they connect with vary in their perceptions of the chair's leadership behavior?*

A number of questions in our survey asked respondents to rate the degree to which the Chair displayed certain characteristics of leadership that we derived from our earlier research and our review of the leadership literature that addresses this type of leadership. Using a four point scale where 1 is “false”, 2 is “more false than true”, 3 is “more true than false” and 4 is the perception that the characteristic is a “true” reflection of chair leadership, we found no significant differences between North American and UK key actor . Both agreed that the following seven characteristics were *more* true than not true of the leadership behavior of their Board Chairs:

- Does not distract the organization from its goals
- Makes people feel like a valuable member of the team
- Looks for and acknowledges the contributions of others

- Is fair and impartial
- Is open to new ideas and information
- Creates a safe climate where issues can be discussed
- Provides autonomy/independence for board/CEO

While we found perceptual similarities of board chair leadership characteristics, we also found one difference. UK key actors perceived the following leadership characteristic as *less* true of their chairs:

- Confronts and resolves inadequate performance in a respectful way

When we turn to the key actors' satisfaction with the performance of the chair, we find similarity between UK and North American samples with respect to the leadership characteristics. The more satisfied the key actor was with the chair's performance; the more they perceived the above noted leadership characteristics were "true" of their chair (see table 3 below for results).

There were perceptual differences between UK and North American samples when it comes to the specific area of the Chair's ability to manage inadequate performance. Specifically, UK key actors rated their Chairs significantly lower than North American key actors when it comes to their ability to manage inadequate performance in a respectful way.

Among those who perceived their chairs as ineffective leaders there were also some differences between UK and North American samples, In this case, key actors from the UK sample rated their Chairs significantly lower than key actors in the North American sample on the following leadership behaviors:

- Being fair and impartial
- Providing autonomy/independence for board/CEO

Table 3

Key Actor Satisfaction with Chair Leadership and Leadership Behaviors

<i>Key Actor Satisfaction with Chair Leadership</i>		United Kingdom			North America		
		N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Less 3.5	Does not Distract	46	3.07	1.01	211	2.90	1.11
	Safe Climate	46	2.41	1.21	208	2.66	1.04
	Part of Team	46	2.69	1.03	213	2.78	1.08
	Recognizes	46	2.83	.84	212	2.82	1.01
	Open to Ideas	46	2.87	.89	213	2.87	.99
	Fair	46	2.43	1.22	211	2.70	1.16
	Resolves Conflict	46	1.78	1.00	212	2.51	1.07
	Autonomy	46	2.15	1.09	212	2.72	1.08
More 3.5	Does not Distract	95	3.79	.61	327	3.77	.53
	Safe Climate	95	3.69	.45	321	3.72	.52
	Part of Team	95	3.75	.66	324	3.85	.41
	Recognizes	95	3.79	.42	325	3.69	.60
	Open to Ideas	95	3.77	.57	327	3.77	.49
	Fair	95	3.78	.72	327	3.74	.47
	Resolves Conflict	95	3.04	1.02	325	3.61	.74
	Autonomy	95	3.54	.87	328	3.66	.77

2. *How North American and UK Chairs and the key actors they connect with compare in their perceptions of the amount of impact Chairs have on nonprofit effectiveness at the CEO, board, and organization levels?*

Table 4 shows North American and UK chair and key actor perceptions of the Chair's impact on helping the CEO become more effective in the job, helping the board meet the demands of the governance function, and helping the organization as a whole in achieving its mission.

How Chairs Perceive Their Impact

Both UK and North American Chairs perceived they had the most impact on the board, second most on CEO, and least on the organization.

How Others Perceive Chair Impact

There were differences in perception of chair impact between the UK and North American key actor groups. While key actors from UK organizations perceived the chair had the least impact on the board (compared to impact on the CEO and organization as a whole,), North American key actors, like UK and North American Chairs, perceived they had the most impact on their boards.

When we break out our findings by respondent role, we find similarity across the UK and North American samples when it comes to the perceptions staff have of chair impact. Across samples, staff perceptions of chair impact are significantly lower than CEs/CEOs and board members.

When we compare the samples, UK board members give the chair more credit for “helping the CEO become more effective in his/her job” than North American board members do.

Table 4

Perception of Board Chair Impact

		United Kingdom			North America		
		N	Mean	SD/Sig	N	Mean	SD
CEO Impact				n.s.			
	Chair	72	4.67	1.86	96	4.82	
	Key Actor	146	4.39	2.0	533	4.18	
	CE	60	4.60		275	4.46	
	Board Member	57	4.60		130	3.94	
	Staff/Other	29	3.55		125	3.80	
Board Impact				p<,.001			
	Chair	72	5.25	.92	105	5.21	
	Key Actor	138	3.78	1.59	520	4.28	
	CE	57	4.12		269	4.42	
	Board Member	51	4.15		132	4.44	
	Staff/Other	25	3.10		116	3.71	

Organization Impact	United Kingdom			North America		
	N	Mean	SD/Sig	N	Mean	Sign
			p<.001			
Chair	72	4.89	1.37	104	4.94	
Key Actor	147	3.95	1.61	523	3.98	
CE	60	4.08		272	4.12	
Board Member	51	4.15		126	4.09	
Staff/Other	29	3.06		122	3.51	

Areas of Less Impact

Drilling down into the data further, we find UK Chairs perceived they had less impact on managing disagreements among board members.

North American chairs perceived they were having less impact on the financial support of key stakeholders.

The only difference between the NA and UK key actors is that in addition to the perception that the chair less effectively manages board member disagreements, UK board members and CEOs perceived less impact⁶ of the chair on board member engagement.

Areas of Greater Impact

While there were areas where Chairs were perceived to be below the moderate impact level, we find areas where they were perceived as having more than a moderate impact.

Perceived Impact of the Chair on the Board. There was similarity between North American board members and CEOs that Chairs were having more than a moderate direct impact on the following areas of *board* effectiveness:

- Clarifying the board's role;
- Influencing board morale;
- Increasing board efficiency;
- Board member engagement
- Fulfilling fiduciary responsibilities

⁶ they fell significantly below 4 on a 7 point scale

- Managing board meetings; and
- Helping the board meet its due diligence and oversight function (NA)

Compared to the North American results above, UK key actors perceived the chair had more than a moderate impact on the *board* in the following areas:

- Fulfilling fiduciary responsibilities (CE)
- Influencing board morale (CE)
- Managing board meetings (CE and board members);
- Increasing board efficiency (board members); and
- Ensuring the board had the information and reports it needs (board members)⁷

Perceived Impact on the Organization and CEO. When it came to perceptions of chair impact on the *organization*, we found similarity between North American and UK key actors (board members and CEs) that the Chair had more than a moderate impact on the priorities and planning *and* morale of the organization.

Vis a Vis the *CEO*, Chairs were perceived by UK key actors (CEs and board members) and North American CEOs as having a more than a moderate impact on helping them meet the demands of their job.

3. *How do North American and UK Chairs and the key actors they connect with vary in their perceptions of the quality of the leadership relationship?*

Since Chairs play out their roles within key relationships with board members, CEOs, staff, and stakeholders, we incorporated measures of the perceived quality of the Chair's working relationship with others within our survey instrument.

Table 5 below shows perceptions of the working relationship from chair and key actor respondent groups. Unsurprising, in both samples we find differences ($p < .05$) between staff perception of the quality of the working relationship with the chair and

⁷ Assessed in UK only

board members and CEOs. CEOs and board members were significantly more positive about their relationship with the Chair than “other” respondents (e.g. staff) ($p < .05$).

Table 5

Perception of Relationship Quality

5 Point Scale	United Kingdom			North America		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Chair Relationship						
Chair--CEO						
Chair	53	3.96	1.46	103	4.70	.90
CE	59	3.81	1.13	275	3.96	1.13
Chair—Board						
Chair	53	4.16	.72	65	4.07	.59
Board Member	53	3.92	.91			
Chair—Stakeholder						
Chair	53	3.32	1.29	64	3.78	1.22
Other	26	3.25	1.32	125	3.40	1.29

We find Chairs and CEs, board members, and other respondents in the UK sample on the same page so to speak with regard to assessments of their working relationship. In the North American sample, we find Chairs rated their working relationship with CEOs higher in quality than CEOs rated their relationship with the Chair.

4. *What factors influence perceptions of Chair leadership and Impact?*

To answer this question we included a number of factors in our survey that might account for differences in perceptions of Chair leadership behavior and impact. Some of these included characteristics related to the respondent, their role, the organization, and board, and perceptions of certain characteristics of the chair’s personality (e.g. emotional and spiritual intelligence). Only significant findings beyond the $p < .05$ level are reported.

Respondent Role. These variables included experience in their role, clarity that role, time spent interacting in the role with the Chair and board members, and the number of years of nonprofit leadership experience. The strongest findings across the North American and UK samples were:

- The more key actors interacted with the chair, the more positive the respondent's perception of the chair's leadership ($p < .05$);
- The more key actors interacted with the chair, the more impact the Chair is perceived to have on the organization, the board, and CEO ($p < .05$);
- The more chairs interacted with key actors, the more impact they perceived they had on the board, organization and CEO ($p < .05$); and
- The more clear the respondent was of their own role in the organization (e.g. as CEO, board member, or staff member), the more positive their perception of the chair's leadership and impact on board, organization, and CEO ($p < .05$).

Another significant finding comes from North American samples with respect to leadership experience.

- The more leadership experience outside of nonprofit organizations, the more impact the chair is perceived to have on the organization and CEO ($p < .05$);
- The more years of nonprofit leadership experience, the more the chair is perceived to be capable of leadership (characteristics in the survey), and the more impact they have on the board ($p < .05$); and
- The more years leadership experience the chair had, the more impact they perceived they had on the CEO ($p < .05$).

Organizational Characteristics. The more successful UK board members and staff perceive the organization is in achieving its mission, the more impact the chair is perceived to have on the board, organization, and CEO ($p < .001$).

For UK CEs, the younger the organization, the more impact the chair is perceived to have on the board ($p < .05$). Additionally, the more the CE reported an increase in the size of the annual budget, the more the CE reported the leadership characteristics were "true" of the chair ($p < .05$), the more impact the chair was perceived to have on the board, organization, and CE ($p < .05$). The less CE turnover, the more likely the chair was perceived to possess the characteristics of an effective leader ($p < .01$).

Similarly, the more the chair reported an increase in the annual budget, the more impact they perceived they had on the CEO ($p < .05$).

In the North American samples, chair impact is significantly and positively related to the perception of organizational success ($p < .001$). Simply put, the more successful the nonprofit is perceived, the more impact key actors perceive the chair has on the board, organization, and CEO. For staff and stakeholders, the larger the size of the organizational budget, the more impact the chair is perceived to have on the organization ($p < .05$).

Board Characteristics. While we did not assess board structures in the UK sample, the more North American key actors reported board “best practices” in place (e.g. carried out regular strategic planning, carried out assessments of the organization’s and CEO’s performance, had a formal orientation and development process for new board members, and a formal system that specifies the information and reports it wants of the organization), the more positive their perception of Chair leadership and its impact on the board, CEO and organization’s effectiveness ($p < .001$).

Again, a similar finding comes from the Chair sample. The more the Chair reported board “best practices” in place, the more impact the Chair perceived they had on the CEO and board ($p < .001$).

The type of board is another possible influence on the perception of Chair leadership and impact. The three types of boards we included in the study were:

1. “Working” types of boards where the board decides general policies and plans as well as operational decisions *and* carries out some of the work involved in implementing them.
2. A “Mixed-Model” type where the board decides the general policies and plans that guide the organization *and* has to make some of the day to day operating decisions.
3. “Governance-Only” type where the board decides the general policies and plans that guide the organization then delegate the implementation of them to an Executive Director (ED) or Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and tracks the results.

Perceptions of Key Actors. The results showed that North American key actors from working boards perceived their Chair had more impact on the organization than key actors from governance and mixed-model boards.

We find North American key actors from governance boards perceived their Chair had significantly more impact on the performance of the CEO and board than key actors from working or mixed-model boards.

In the UK key actor sample, board members from UK governance boards were the most likely to perceive their chair had a significant impact on the performance of the CEO than board members in mixed-model and working boards and CEs and staff members representing all types of boards.

Perceptions of Chairs. Consistent with the responses of key actors, North American Chairs from working boards perceived they had more impact on the organization than chairs from governance or mixed-model boards. The opposite was true in the UK results. Chairs from mixed-model and governance boards perceived they had more impact on their organization, board, and CEO than Chairs from working boards though the analysis was limited by the low number of working board respondents.

North American Chairs from governance boards, perceived they had significantly more impact on their CEO than Chairs from working or mixed-model boards. These findings are not surprising given that Chairs of working boards perform operational *and* governance functions while Chairs from governance boards work more informally *through* the CEO who has been delegated formal authority for operational matters so would not as likely be seen as having a direct impact on the organization.

Respondent Individual Characteristics. We found a significant positive relationship between North American and UK key actor perceived level of chair emotional⁸ and spiritual⁹ intelligence and chair leadership behavior, perceived quality of their relationship with the Chair, and the impact of the Chair on the CEO, board, and organization. Chairs' assessed level of spiritual and emotional intelligence is also significantly and positively related to organization and board impact ($p < .001$).

⁸ Emotional intelligence is a construct that consists of four dimensions: self and social awareness, relationship management and social awareness. These dimensions and their indicators are captured in the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory, which we were granted permission to include in our survey (Wolfe of the Haygroup, August 14th, 2007).

⁹ Spiritual Intelligence is a construct that consists of three dimensions: the definitive dimension of spirituality and correlated dimensions. These dimensions and their indicators come from the Spirituality Assessment Scale (Beazley, 1992) which we received permission to include in our survey.

When we took the analysis further to see which of the dimensions within EI and SI were significant influences of Chair Leadership, we find significant predictors within these constructs. It must be noted that the dimensions of SI changed with the UK survey. Specifically, the definitive dimension of spirituality (e.g. prays, believes in God etc.) was dropped for cultural reasons. The dimensions of SI included in the analysis that follows include *service* and *purpose* behaviors.

In the UK key actor sample we find the EI dimensions of *social awareness* and *relationship management* and the “*purpose*” (e.g. advancing the group’s purpose, cooperating with others for the good of the group, giving others credit for good, showing concern for the well-being of others, connecting to the group in ways that matter and values being consistent with actions) dimension of SI were the most significant predictors of chair leadership behavior ($p < .001$).

In the North American key actor sample it was the EI dimension of *social awareness* and the “*purpose*” dimension of SI¹⁰ that were significance predictors ($p < .001$) of this type of leadership.

For UK and North American Chairs, the *relationship management* dimension of EI was the significant predictor of this type of leadership ($p < .01$). In the UK chair sample, *self management* was another significant predictor ($p < .05$).

Conclusion

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

¹⁰ We had to substitute “believing in the greater good” for “values are consistent with actions” and “not blaming others for mistakes” for “connecting the group to what matters” because the latter measures were specific to the UK survey.

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 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. Simply put, the more the chair was perceived as being *socially aware* and *purpose* motivated, the more the chair facilitated leadership within their board and organization.

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