



LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

A RESEARCH REPORT BY OPP Ltd.

JULY 2002

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

OPP commissioned this research to discover people's views on leadership. Specifically, the research set out to:

- explore whether people are satisfied with the quality of leaders in their organisations and in the UK overall
- identify the leadership qualities that people regard as essential
- determine whether people believe it is possible to teach leadership skills
- determine whether people think men are better leaders than women

OPP's sample comprised over 1000 working people across the UK. Eighty per cent of respondents work full time, 20 per cent work part time. Interviewees were aged between 18 and 65 and there is an even gender split.

Interviews were conducted during July. Quantitative results are supported by qualitative statements from respondents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The research supports the emerging trend towards ‘persuasive leadership’, where leaders need to use a range of influencing tactics: some of the best convey clarity of direction and reassure individuals that they are safe and secure; some of the worst include pushing too hard and creating uncertainty and fear.”

Dr Robert McHenry, founder and chairman of OPP.

Leaders in the UK are facing new challenges as organisations evolve faster than ever. This report suggests many leaders are failing under the pressure: just four people in 10 are satisfied with the quality of leadership in their organisation, while only a quarter believe that leadership in the UK has improved over the past 10 years.

At the heart of the problem is the failure of leaders to live up to employee expectations. The majority of respondents believe trust is the most essential leadership quality, yet less than a quarter regard this as their boss’s greatest attribute. Such gaps between reality and expectation are creating dissatisfaction among workers, who want leaders with good people skills rather than the more traditional ‘command and control’ style of leadership.

Leaders who are entrepreneurial and risk taking are the least popular among UK employees, reflecting a move towards more ‘safer leadership’ in today’s volatile business climate.

However, the report suggests that there are means of overcoming the current shortfalls in leadership. The majority of people believe that leadership skills should be taught, and most would like to have learnt leadership skills at an earlier age.

‘Leadership is a balance between born leadership skills and acquired skills – getting the balance right produces good leaders.’

MAIN FINDINGS

Hampered by a lack of trust, UK leaders are failing to live up to employees' expectations

- Only four in 10 respondents are satisfied with the quality of leadership in their organisations.
- Trust is key to good leadership, with 69 per cent of respondents believing this to be an absolutely essential quality. Yet only a fifth of respondents believe that trust is their boss's strongest quality.
- Other important qualities include being a good communicator, decisive and motivational.
- There is a clear mismatch between employees' expectations of leadership and what they actually experience, leading to widespread dissatisfaction in the workplace.

The UK is lagging behind other nations

- Only a third of respondents think the UK produces leaders who are good enough to compete with their international counterparts.
- Nearly four out of 10 believe the quality of leadership in the UK has declined during the past 10 years.

Enthusiasm for learning leadership skills

- Ninety-five per cent of respondents think that leadership skills should be taught.
- Three-quarters wish they had been offered the opportunity to learn such skills.

Male and female leaders equally capable but social stereotypes still exist

- The majority of respondents believe men and women make equally good leaders.
- However, among those who express a gender preference, three-quarters believe that men are better leaders.
- Younger people are most likely to think the best leaders are male.

EXPLORING THE FINDINGS

DISSATISFACTION WITH LEADERSHIP IN ORGANISATIONS

'The least impressive thing about UK business is the uncertainty about how to lead and how to be led. Too many bosses confuse it with authority.'

There is widespread dissatisfaction with UK bosses. Only four out of 10 people are satisfied with the quality of leaders in their organisations.

Older respondents, men and those living in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are the least happy. Thirty-nine per cent of 35 to 44 year-olds are dissatisfied with their bosses compared with a quarter (25 per cent) of 18-25 year-olds. Meanwhile, nearly half (46 per cent) of UK respondents not living in England are dissatisfied with the quality of leadership in their workplace.

Table 'How satisfied are you with the quality of leaders in your organisation?'

	All	Age				Gender	
		18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45+	Male	Female
Dissatisfied	35%	25%	38%	39%	35%	39%	32%
Neutral	24%	26%	24%	24%	22%	22%	26%
Satisfied	41%	49%	39%	38%	43%	39%	43%

'Our industry is suffering badly from lack of leadership: people get ignored and badly treated. There is no leadership – only figures are important. Businesses don't think strategically or long term.'

'Most companies in the UK don't have very good bosses. There is little accountability as those directors who lead companies downhill seem to move on elsewhere quite easily.'

UK LEADERS UNFIT TO COMPETE

'We do not seem to be natural leaders in this country when compared with other countries...'

'Leadership in the UK is not as good as it should be...'

Over four in 10 respondents (42 per cent) believe the UK lacks quality leaders who can compete on the global stage. Older people are more negative, with 55 per cent of those over 45 believing this to be the case.

Table: 'Do you think the UK produces enough good leaders to compete with other leading industrialised nations?'

	All	Age			
		18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45+
Yes	35%	40%	37%	33%	32%
No	42%	36%	37%	46%	55%
Don't know	22%	25%	26%	21%	13%

Meanwhile, nearly four out of 10 respondents (38 per cent) believe the quality of leadership in the UK has declined in the last 10 years, rising to 43 per cent among male respondents. This view also strengthens with age.

Table: 'In your opinion, has the quality of leaders in this country got better or worse in the last 10 years?'

	All	Age			
		18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45+
Better	27%	35%	27%	27%	20%
Stayed the same	35%	36%	40%	32%	26%
Worse	38%	29%	33%	41%	54%

'Leaders should take responsibility for their actions, whether positive or negative. Many leaders in this country are too eager to blame others for their own failings and receive too much money despite their failures.'

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEADER?

'Leaders should be more trustworthy and accountable. They should know when to leave their posts rather than hanging onto their positions...'

Trust is rated as the most essential leadership quality, with over two thirds of respondents (69 per cent) regarding it as absolutely essential. Other qualities, such as being a good communicator, decisive and motivational also feature highly, suggesting employees value bosses with good people skills.

Meanwhile, qualities traditionally associated with people who lead organisations – being visionary, strategic and drivers of change – are considered less important. Being entrepreneurial or a risk taker rank bottom of a list of 12 qualities, suggesting employees are craving 'safe leadership'; i.e., leaders who make them feel included and cared for.

Table: 'How important are the following leadership qualities?'

	Absolutely essential
Trust	69%
Good communicator	64%
Decisive	54%
Motivational	47%
Inspirational	40%
People focused	36%
Visionary	28%
Strategic	25%
Driver of change	17%
Charismatic	16%
Entrepreneurial	9%
A risk taker	7%

'Due to the poor quality of leadership and management in this country, the workforce is confused with regard to the needs of the company over the employee's own needs. This confusion results in lack of motivation, direction and desire for the company to succeed, and with it go the fortunes of employees and shareholders...'

MISMATCH BETWEEN REALITY AND EXPECTATION

'It is becoming harder to trust leaders... as it is rare to find any leader who is prepared to be open and honest. There are too many hidden agendas.'

While trust is regarded as a key leadership quality, many employees do not believe this to be their boss's strongest attribute, leading to a mismatch between what people want from a leader and what they actually experience.

Less than a quarter of respondents (22 per cent) believe that their boss's strongest quality is being trustworthy, representing a considerable gap when compared with the 69 per cent who regard trust as essential. Where trust is cited as a boss's weakest quality, only two out of 10 people are satisfied with their leadership capabilities.

Employees' levels of dissatisfaction are highest where a boss's greatest strength is perceived to be being entrepreneurial or a risk taker.

Table: Satisfaction levels ranked against boss's weakest qualities

Boss's weakest quality	Overall satisfaction with the quality of leadership				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Trustworthy	8.3%	11.1%	19.4%	30.6%	30.6%
A good communicator	3.2%	27.3%	27.9%	30.5%	11.0%
Decisive	8.7%	34.8%	27.5%	20.3%	8.7%
Motivational	2.7%	24.3%	27.0%	31.1%	14.9%
Inspirational	6.6%	28.9%	25.0%	28.9%	10.5%
People focused	8.3%	23.4%	19.3%	33.8%	15.2%
Visionary	9.5%	38.1%	22.2%	23.8%	6.3%
Strategic	11.4%	34.1%	22.7%	25.0%	6.8%
A driver of change	14.0%	38.6%	29.8%	10.5%	7.0%
Charismatic	7.0%	40.0%	36.0%	15.0%	2.0%
Entrepreneurial	14.3%	38.6%	20.0%	17.1%	10.0%
A risk taker	24.7%	36.0%	16.0%	16.0%	7.3%

SUPPORT FOR LEADERSHIP TRAINING

'Too often in organisations here, people get to a certain level and then are expected to lead and manage people without being given any training.'

'If there were more people who knew about leadership skills, people would be happier in their work.'

'Leadership is about training and having the ability and skills to go with it.'

The majority of respondents (95 per cent) believe leadership skills should be taught, with 75 per cent regretting that they had not had the opportunity to develop their skills at an earlier age. Only one in six disagrees.

Support for leadership training is greatest among older employees. Eighty per cent of those aged 45 or above regret not having been taught these skills, compared with 77 per cent of 35 to 44 year olds and 70 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds.

Tables: Learning leadership skills

'Should leadership skills be taught?'	
Good/very good idea	71%
OK idea	24%
Bad/very bad idea	5%

'Would you like to have been taught leadership skills?'					
	All	Age			
		18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45+
Yes	75%	70%	72%	77%	80%
No	16%	17%	17%	15%	15%
Don't know	9%	13%	11%	8%	5%

'There is a lack of training in this area (leadership), which is why we rely too much on imported management.'

'It's a balance between born leadership skills and acquired skills – getting the balance right produces good leaders.'

WOMEN'S INFLUENCE AS LEADERS LIMITED

'We do not encourage women to take a leadership role enough in this country.'

'My boss is a woman and the best boss I have ever had. Yet my last boss was a woman and was the worse boss I have ever had. Great bosses have in-built abilities that seem to come through whether they are male or female.'

While the majority of respondents believe that men and women make equally good leaders (67 per cent), three quarters of those who state a gender preference think male leaders are superior. However, it is not only men who rate male leaders more highly. Among those women who express a preference, the majority (60 per cent) agree that their opposite sex are better leaders.

The research also suggests that attitudes towards female leaders are not changing, with younger respondents more inclined towards male leaders than older respondents.

Table: 'Do you think that men or women make the best leaders?'

	All	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	18 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45+
Men	25%	35%	16%	33%	24%	19%	30%
Women	8%	4%	11%	9%	7%	9%	6%
Rate both equally	67%	61%	73%	57%	69%	72%	65%

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

'We have good leaders in that they know how to play the media game. But when all is said and done, few of them deliver when it counts.'

'The leadership in the current government is appalling, in fact, it is non-existent. Leadership is about leading people and doing what is in their best interest overall, not leadership that makes you popular.'

Richard Branson is overwhelmingly the respondents' top choice for boss, with 31 per cent wishing he could run their organisation. His nearest contenders are Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates and Sven Goran-Eriksson, who each receive three per cent.

British political leaders, however, fail miserably: Margaret Thatcher is a more popular leader than Tony Blair, who received just two per cent of the votes (the same as Mo Mowlam). On the other hand, Iain Duncan-Smith does not make an appearance in a list that sees Gordon Brown and Ken Livingstone tie with David Beckham on one per cent, and David Blunkett beating Charles Kennedy and William Hague.

Campaigning entrepreneurs Stelios Haji-loannou, Anita Roddick and Sir Bob Geldof are also highly rated.

Table: 'Which well known person would you choose to run your organisation?'

Personality (unprompted answers)	Proportion of vote
Sir Richard Branson	31%
Don't know	5%
Nelson Mandela	3%
Sven Goran-Eriksson	3%
Bill Gates	3%
Margaret Thatcher	3%
Mo Mowlam	2%
Tony Blair	2%
My current boss	2%
Sir John Harvey-Jones	2%